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Awra Amba,

a current experiment of utopian socialism

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Summary

This is a review of the available literature on the Ethiopian utopian community of Awra Amba, i.e. mainly of four master reports and secondly of news reports and accounts. It allows us to show the troubled historic evolution of this community founded in 1972 by a small group of illiterate peasants around one of them. Then, we present the values – honesty, equality, solidarity, rationalism – which are founding the community and are at the heart of its pattern of living. Next we present the social organization of this village of 400 inhabitants, through its institutions, economic activities, gender equality, especially at work, marriage, solidarity between members and especially with the elders, children activities, funeral and management of internal conflicts. Finally, we look in depth at education, which is a priority for the community, and at the relationships with neighbouring communities, authorities and generally Ethiopians, as well as foreigners. In conclusion, we focus on some dangers for the future development of this experiment full of lessons.

አጭር መግለጫ

አውራ አምባ፣ ወቅታዊው ኅብረተ ሰብአዊ አንዋንዋር።።

ይህ ጥናት ኢትዮጵያ ውስጥ የሚገኘው ምሾታዊው አውራ አምባ ኅብርተ ሰብን በሚመለከት ተጽፈው የሚገኙትን ልዩ ልዩ ጽሁፎች ፥ ማለትም በተለይ አራት የማስተሬት ምርምሮችንና በተጨማሪም የተለያዩ ዘገባዎችንና ምስክሮችን ያቀነባበረ ነው ። ይህም በ1972 ዓ/ም በጥቂት አርሶ አደሮች የተጠነሰሰውን የአውራ አምባ ኅብርተ ሰብን ታሪካዊ ሂደት ለማብራራት ይረዳል ። በመቀጠል የአውራ አምባን ባህልና ዋና መሠረት የሆኑትን ፥ ማለትም ሀቀኝነት እኩልነት ትብብርና አስተዋፅኦትን እናቀርባለን ። ከዚያም በኋላ ይህ 400 ነዋሪ ያለው መንደር ኅብርተ ሰቡን በምን አይነት መልኩ እንዳቀናጀ የምናሳየው ፥ ተቋማቱን፣ የኢኮኖሚ እንቅስቃሴውን፣ ሴቶችና ወንዶች በተለይ በሥራ መስክ ላይ የሚያሳዩትን እኩልነት፣ የጋብቻ ስርአቱን፣ የኅብርተ ሰቡን ትብብርና ለአዛውንቶች የሚሰጠውን ልዩ እንክብካቤ፣ የልጆችን ሥራና ግዴታ፣ የቀብር ሥርአቱንና በኅብረ ሰቡ ውስጥ የሚከሰተውን ችግር አፈታት እየገለጽን ይሆናል ። በመጨረሻም ለኅብርተ ሰቡ አንጋፋ ለሆነው ለትምህርትና ፥ እንዲሁም አካባቢያቸው ከሚገኙት ብሔረ ሰቦች ከባለሥልጣናትም ሆነ ባጠቃላይ ከኢትዮጵያን ጋርና ከውጭ ሀገር ዜጎች ጋር ላላቸው ግንኙነት ልዩ የሆነ ትኩረት እንሰጠዋለን ። በመደምደሚያም ይህ ከፍተኛ ትምህርት የሚሰጥ አኗኗር ፥ በሂደቱ ላይ ሊደርስበት የሚችለውን አንድ አንድ ችግር እንጠቁማለን ።

Résumé

Awra Amba, une expérience actuelle de socialisme utopique.

Cette étude est une synthèse de la littérature disponible sur la communauté idéale éthiopienne d'Awra Amba, c'est-à-dire essentiellement de quatre rapports de master et secondairement de reportages et témoignages. Cela permet de rapporter l'évolution historique tourmentée de cette communauté créée en 1972 par un petit groupe de paysans analphabètes autour de l'un des leurs. Nous présentons ensuite les valeurs – honnêteté, égalité, solidarité, rationalisme – qui fondent la communauté et sont au cœur de son mode de vie. Puis nous présentons l'organisation sociale de ce village de 400 habitants, à travers ses institutions, ses activités économiques, l'égalité des sexes notamment dans le travail, le mariage, la solidarité entre membres et notamment envers les plus vieux, les activités des enfants, les funérailles et la gestion des conflits internes. Enfin nous portons une attention particulière à l'éducation qui est une priorité pour la communauté, ainsi qu'aux relations avec les communautés voisines, les autorités et les Éthiopiens en général, ainsi qu'avec les étrangers. Nous pointons en conclusion quelques risques pour le développement futur de cette expérience riche d'enseignements.

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Executive summary

In line with the long list of experiments of utopian socialism, Awra Amba is a community in the Amhara Region (Ethiopia) built on humanist values, which are implemented through its life style.

This study is a review of the available literature on this community, i.e. mainly of four Ethiopian master reports (Atnafu, 2005; Yirga, 2007; Yassin, 2008; Mekonnen, 2009) and secondly of Ethiopian and foreign news reports and accounts between 2006 and 2012. In a first step, we present our own methodology, i.e. the sources we used from a critical methodological point of view, then the numerous data collected, allowing us to draw a quite accurate picture of this original experiment. We try then to compare it quite systematically to the Amhara society.

The community was founded by Zumra Nuru in 1972. From his first years, this visionary from poor peasant origin rebelled against injustice, ill-treatment and dishonesty he was observing in his own family and around him in the traditional Amhara society, patriarchal and believing in God. He travelled in the region in order to find people sharing its ideas. Finally, he gathered around twenty people who established the peasant community of Awra Amba on around fifty hectares. But the neighbours were outraged by the fact that the men, women and children of Awra Amba had the same rights, and by the absence of religion in the community. A disturbed period followed with jail for the leader and exile at several hundred kilometres for several years. The community started again in 1993 on its present location and began to expand.

The data given by the various authors allow us to reconstruct the evolution of its population, going through a minimum of less than twenty people during exile to more than 400 now. We compare its composition per sex and age bracket with the neighbouring rural population of South Gondar. We describe the different administrative structures to which belongs Awra Amba, in terms of main geographical, demographical and economic characteristics.

In Awra Amba people share a strong culture and ideals, which differentiate them from the Amhara society and the neighbouring villages, and above all they shared common values: To live in Awra Amba means to share and to defend these values. The main values cited by the various authors are honesty, equality and especially gender equality, solidarity between human beings, work and absence of religion or rationalism. We examine each of these values as concept, in the way they are supported by the Awra Amba community according to the literature.

Then we present the various aspects of the social organisation of the community, which is especially developed: the community structures, the economic activities, then the social relationships, through the gender equality at work, marriage, divorce and family household design, the specific and original situation of children, solidarity with the most fragile, funeral, and finally the management of internal conflicts.

In terms of institutions, Awra Amba is organized in two structures: the community which gathers all the inhabitants who share same values and life style, and the work cooperative involving three quarters of the community members. The main decisions of the cooperative are discussed and decided in general assembly of members, which elects the members of about fifteen committees; these committees are implementing the general assembly decisions and managing collectively the various types of activities of the village. Women account for 44 % of the committee members, who can be dismissed at any time.

The economy of Awra Amba is partially agricultural, but the available lands are much smaller than those in the region: between 0.2 and 0.4 ha/household at Awra Amba according to the author, but 2.1 ha/household in the region. The main agricultural productions are *tef*, maize (or sorghum) and beans, as well as products from a small livestock. The yields are higher than regional ones by around

25 %. As they cannot live only from agriculture due to soil poverty and scarcity, they diversified their activities with weaving, milling and trade. These activities are conducted mainly within the cooperative, except weaving, of which an important part is made by each family at home and is privately managed.

These activities provide an average income per inhabitant, which seems slightly higher than the regional one, but data provided are not very clear, sometimes contradictory. The food needs of the inhabitants seem nevertheless fully covered all over the year, while two thirds of Amhara peasants cover their food need for nine month a year only.

Then we examine the participation to the different agricultural, artisan and household tasks of women and men, as well as girls and kids. These tasks are mainly distributed according to capacities of each one and not according to the sex. The survey data provided show that there is equality between couple members as producers, as consumers, and in terms of task and work responsibility and of family responsibility.

Marriage is managed by the future spouses, their parents having no role, unlike the traditional Amhara rule. The studies give us quite accurate statistics on marriage age, we compare to regional ones. It appears that there is no early marriage in Awra Amba, the young women getting married usually between 19 and 22, the young men between 20 and 25, while in the regional rural population, 5 % of boys and 8 % of girls between 10 and 14 are already married. The couples have an average of one child less than the neighbouring ones of the region. A couple may divorce without formality by mutual consent, their property being shared equally.

The solidarity and the mutual respect between Awra Amba members are especially implemented for children. They have three tasks well differentiated: go to school, play, and contribute to community work. Their participation to household and firstly agriculture tasks is nevertheless very low, but all are going to school as long as possible according to their capacities and are encouraged to study after school. The solidarity is also implemented through a system of support of women near delivery, ill and elderly.

Contrary to the rural Amhara society where funeral ceremonies are attended by a lot of people with spectacular weeping, they are attended in Awra Amba only by some people for a very short period (a few hours). These funeral rites correspond to the social and cultural system of Awra Amba, whose members do not believe in a life after the death and privilege the life on Earth.

Finally, to manage the conflicts within the couples and between members of the community, several permanent bodies have been implemented. They seem very efficient to facilitate dialogue and manage conflicts in a wise manner.

Then, we study in detail the education within the community, because it is especially important for them. The learning processes are always directed to the promotion of the group's interest, as well as of their own. Awra Amba implemented a self-help or mutual education system, for adults and mainly for the young children who do not go to school and for school children when not at school. This education is provided by older students and adults from the village, especially through a kindergarten and a library with many technical books.

All the children who are old enough are going to school. They are very active in social and ethic activities at school, very good in group discussions, very studious, but not very open to the students from other villages. The teachers find them more hardworking, more ethical and more cooperative than the children from neighbouring villages. Therefore, the education level of Awra Amba members, all from peasant origin, is far higher than the one of the rural communities of the region, with relatively few differences between men and women.

We look finally at the relationships of the community with the neighbouring communities, characterized by suspicion: Awra Amba people are perceived by their neighbours as a suspicious,

secretive, cruel, lazy, pagan deviant cast group, while the Awra Amba members do not meet often their neighbours. This suspicion is due to the large cultural differences and to the past, seriously antagonistic between both groups. It would be very lightened today. On the other hand, the relationships with regional and Ethiopian authorities are excellent, Awra Amba welcoming a lot of visitors and being cited as an example very often. But the community is not very interested in external experiments.

In conclusion, we try to show how this experiment actually contributes to the struggles for empowerment, in line with the communities of utopian socialism, who aim at creating ideal communities here and now. It takes part in the present movement of revival of the countries and citizens called " underdeveloped " in the past. Therefore, Awra Amba is by many aspects a living example for the neighbouring communities, for Ethiopia, and further for the empowerment of citizens and peoples, whichever their development level, including in Europe. This utopian community could nevertheless be exposed to some risks dangerous for its stability. It is especially endogamy, non opening to the world, heterogeneity and sclerosis through myth. Finally, we suggest some research topics able to improve the understanding of this experiment, and maybe to support it.

The original version of this report is published in French.

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አውራ አምባ፣ ወቅታዊው ኅብረተ ሰብአዊ አንዋንዋር።።

በበኅብረትና በእኩልነት ለመኖር ሲደረጉ ከቆዩት ሙከራዎች ሁሉ፣ ኢትዮጵያ የሚገኘው አውራ አምባ ተብሎ የሚሰየመውና በአማራው ክፍለ ሀገር ውስጥ የሚገኘው ህብረተ ሰብ በእኩልነትና በኅብረተሰብአዊነት ላይ የተመሰረተ ነው ።

ይህ ጽሁፍ፣ ስለ ኅብር ሰቡ የተጻፉትን ልዩ ልዩ ጥናቶችን ፣ ማለትም አራት የማስተሬት የምርምርም ዘገባዎችን (አጥናፉ 2005 ፣ ይርጋ 2007 ፣ ያሲን 2008 ፣ መኮንን 2009) ያቀነባበረ ሲሆን ፣ በተጨማሪም የሀገር ውስጥና የውጭ ሀገር የጋዜጣ ዘገባዎችንና ምስክሮችን ያካትታል ። በመጀመሪያ የራሳችንን አቀራረብና አመለካከት ፣ ማለትም የተመሮከዝንባቸውን የተለያዩ ምንጮችን የግል አስተያየትና ትችታችንን እያከልን እናቀርባለን ፣ አዚያም ከተለያየ አቅጣጫ የሰበሰብናቸውና የንደዚህ አይነቱን የአንዋንዋር ዘዴ በትክክል እንድናቀርብ ያገዙንን መረጃዎች እነዘረዝራለን ። ይህም ሲሆን አመቺ በሆነ ጊዜ ሁሉ አካባቢው ካለው የአማራ ኅብረተሰብ ጋር ለማስተያየት እንሞክራለን ።

ኅብር ሰቡ የተጠነሰሰው በዙማ ኑሩ በ1972 ዓ/ም ነው። ገና በጨግለኑቱ፣ ይህ ደሀ የባላገር ልጅ አርቆ አስተዋይ በመሆኑ ፣ አካባቢውም ሆነ እቤተሰቡ ውስጥ የተመለከታቸው ጎጂና ከህቅ የራቁ ድርጊቶችን በመቃወም ለእኩልነት ይታገል ጀመረ ። በክፍለ ሀገሩም እየዞረ ሀሳቡን የሚደግፉ ሰዎችን መፈለግ ጀመረ ። በመጨረሻም፣ ወደ ሃያ የሚጠጉ ሰዎችን ሰብስቦ ፣ የአውራ አምባ ህብረ ሰብን በህምሳ ኤክታር ላይ ያቅዋቁማሉ ። ይሁን ብንጂ፣ ከአካባቢው ነዋሪዎች ከፍ ያለ ቅዋሜ ይደርስባቸዋል ። ምክንያቱም የአውራ አምባ ህብረ ሰብ ከህይማኖት ነፃ ከመሆኑም በላይ ፣ የሴትና ወንድ እኩልነትንም ሆነ የልጆችን መብት የሚያስከብር በመሆኑ ። ከዚያም በኢተዮጵያ ውስጥ የተከሰተው ለውጥ ህብረ ሰቡን ከመበታተኑም በላይ ፣ ዋና መሪውን እስር ቤት በማስገባትና ለብዙ ዓመታት ርቀው በስደተኝነት እንዲኖሩ ያስገድዳቸዋል ። በ1993 ዓ/ም ህብረ ሰቡ ተመልሶ አሁን የሚገኝበት ቦታ ላይ ከንደገና ይደራጀል ።

በተለያዩ ደራሲያን የመዘገቡትን ቁጥር ስንመለከት የአውራ አምባ ህብረ ሰብ ሲጀመርና በስደት ጊዜ ከሃያ በታች የነበረው በአሁኑ ወቅት ከአራት መቶ በላይ መሆኑን ያስገነዝባል ። አቀነባበራቸውን በያታና በእድሜ አካባቢው ከሚገኘው ከደቡብ ጎንደር ህዝብ ጋር እናስተያያለን ። ከዚያም በኢትዮጵያ ውስጥ የአውራ አምባ ኅብረ ሰብ ምን አይነት ቦታ እንደያዘ እናሳይና ፣ በቦት አቀማመጥ በህዝብ ቁጥርና በኢኮኖሚ ረገድ ያለውን ልዩነት እናመለክታለን ።

የአውራ አምባ በባህልና በአስተሳሰብ አንድነት የሰፈነበት መንደር ሲሆን ፣ አካባቢው ከሚገኘው የአማራ ብኄረ ሰብ በጣም የተለየ ነው ። በመጀመሪያ ኅብረ ሰቡ ብዙ ዕሴቶች አሉት ፣ በአውራ አምባ መኖር ማለት ዕሴቶቹን ማክበርና ማስከበር ነው ። የተለያዩ ደራሲያን የጠቀሱአቸው ዕሴቶች በርካታ ቢሆኑም ፣ ዋንዎቹን በተደጋጋሚ የሚጠቀሱት ህቀኖነት፣ እኩልነት በተለይም የሴትና ወንድ እኩልነት፣ ኅብረተሰብአዊነት፣ ሥራና የህይማኖት አለመኖር ናቸው ። ይህንኑ የአውራ አምባ ኅብረተሰብ እንዴት እንደሚያከብርና እንደሚያስከብር በቅድመ ተከተል ደራሲያን የመዘገቡት ጽሁፍ ላይ በመመርኮዝ እናብራራለን ።

በመቀጠልም የኅብረ ሰቡን የረቀቀ አቀነባበር እናሳያለን ። በቅድሚያ የኅብረ ሰቡን ግንባታና የኢኮኖሚ እንቅስቃሴ እንመዘግብና ከዚያ የኅብረ ሰቡን የአንዋንዋር ስልት በሚመለከት የሚከተሉትን እንዘረዝራለን ። ይኸውም በሥራ መስክ ላይ ያለውን የሴቶችና ወንዶችን እኩልነት ፣ ጋብቻና ፍችን በሚመለከት ፣ ለልጆች የሚሰጠው የተወሰነና ልዩ ቦታ ፣ ከአቅም ደካሞች ጋር ያለው ትብብር ፣ የቀብር ሥርአትና በመጨረሻም በኅብረ ሰቡ ውስጥ የሚከሰተውን ችግር አፈታት ይሆናል።

የአውራ አምባን አደረጃጀት በሚመለከት፣ ኅብረ ሰቡ በሁለት ይዋቀራል ። አንደኛው አጠቃላዩ ተከባብሮና ተደጋግፎ የሚኖረው ኅብረ ሰብ ሲሆን ፣ ሁለተኛው በሥራ መስክ ተሳትፎ የሚያደርገው የኅብረ ሰቡ ሦስት አራተኝ ነዋሪ ይሆናል ። የኅብረ ሥራ ማህበሩ ዋና ዋና ውሳኔዎች በአጠቃላይ ጉባዔው ይወሰናሉ ። ይህ ጉባዔ የሚመርጣቸው ኮሚቴዎች በየመስካቸው የተለያየውን ሥራ ጉባዔው በወሰነው መሰረት በህብረት ያካሂዳሉም ይቆጣጠራሉም ። 44 % የኮሚቴው አባላት ሴቶች ናቸው ፣ አሰፈላጊ በሆነ ጊዜም ይቫራሉ ።

የአውራ አምባ ማህበር ኤኮኖሚ በከፊል ግብርና ነው ። ይሁን እንጂ ያላቸው የእርሻ መሬት ከአካባቢው መሬት ጋር ሲነጻጸር በጣም አነስተኛ ነው ፣ ከተለያዩ ጽሁፎች እንደምንረዳው ፣ የአውራ አምባ ነዋሪዎች በቤተሰብ ከ0,2 እስከ 0,4 ሄክታር ሲኖራቸው ፣ የአካባቢው በቤተሰብ 2,1 ሄክታር ይኖረዋል ። ዋናው የእርሻ ምርት ጤፍ ቦቆሎ ማሽላና ቦሎቄ ሲሆን በተጨማሪም አነስተኛ የከብት እርባታም ይገኝበታል ። ውጤታቸው ከአካባቢው በአንድ አራተኛ ከፍ ይላል ። ይሁን እንጂ ምርታቸው ለፍጆታቸው ሰለማይበቃ ወደ ተለያዩ እንድ ሸማኔ የወፍጮና ንግድ መስክ ተሰማርተዋል ። ባብዛኛው ሥራው የሚካሀደው በኅብር ሥራ ማህበሩ ውስጥ ነው ፣ ነገር ግን ዋናውን የሽመና ሥራ እያንዳንዱ በቤቱ ስለሚሠራ የግል ሥራ ሆኖ ይገኛል ።

እኒህ የተለያዩ የገቢ ምንጮች ለኅብረ ሰቡ ካካባቢው የተሻለ ገቢ የሚያስገኝ ቢመስልም ፣ የተመዘገበው ቁጥር አስተማማኝ ካለመሆኑም በላይ አንዳንድ ቦታ ላይ ተቃራኒ ሆኖ ይታያል ። ሆኖም የነዋሪው የእለት ምግብ አመቱን ሙሉ የተማላ ይመስላል ። አካባቢው ያለው አማራው አርሶ አደር ግን የሚሸፍነው ባመት የዘጠኝ ወር ቀለቡን ብቻ ነው ።

ከዚህ በመቀጠል እያንዳንዱ የኅብረ ሰብ አባል በተለያየው የሥራ መድረክ ላይ የሚያደርገውን አስተዋጽዎ እናብራራለን ። ባብዛኛው

የሥራው ክፍፍያ የሚደረገው በዖታ ሳይሆን በችሎታ ብቻ ነው። እስካሁን የተካሄደው ጥናት እንደሚያመለክተው ፥ ባልና ሚስት በምርትም ሆነ በማንኛውም ሀላፊነት ላይ እኩል ናቸው።

ጋብቻ የሠርገኞቹ ጉዳይ ነው ። ቤተሰቦቻቸውን የሚመለከት ነገር ምንም የለም ። የተመዘገበው እስታቲስቲክስ ግልጽ አድርጎ የአውራ አምባ ወጣቶች በልጅነት እድሜአቸው ለጋብቻ እንድማይዳረጉ ያሳያል ። ባብዛኛው ሴቶቹ ከ 19 እስከ 20 ዓመታቸው ሲያገቡ ፥ ወንድቹ ደግሞ ከ20 እስከ 25 ባለው እድሜአቸው ያገባሉ ። በክፍለ ሀገር የሚገኘው አርሶ አደር ህዝብ ግን ፥ ከ10 እስከ 14 ዓመት ካላቸው ልጅች መሀል ከወንድቹ 5 % ፥ ከሴቶቹ 8 % የሚሆነው በጋብቻ ኑሮ ተረማርተው ይገኛሉ ። በወሊድም ቢሆን የአውራ አምባ ቤተሰብ ውስጥ የልጅ ብዛት ከሌላው በቁጥር አንድ ይቀንሳል ። መፋታትም ቢኖር ፥ በስምምነት ከመካሄዱም በላይ ባልና ሚስት ንብረታቸውን በእኩል ይካፈላሉ ።

መተባበርና መከባበርን ልጆች በተለይ እንዲገነዘቡት ግዴታቸው በሶስት ይከፈላል ፥ ይኸውም ትምህርት ቤት መሄድ ፥ መጫወትና የጎብረት ሥራ ማህበሩን በሥራ ማገዝ ። ይሁን ብንጂ በቤት ሥራም ሆነ በእርሻ ሥራ ተሳትፎአቸው በጣም አነስተኛ ነው ። ሁሉም ለረዥም ዓመታት ትምህርት ቤት ይሄዳሉ ፥ ከትምህርት ቤትም ውጪ ጥናታቸውን እንዲከታተሉ ይጋበዛሉ ። የጎብረ ሰቡ ትብብር በወሊድ ላይ ያሉ ሴቶችንም ሆነ በሽተኞችንና አዛውንቶችን ይንከባከባል ።

የቀብር ሥነስርአትን በሚመለከትም ፥ የአውራ አምባ ጎብረ ሰብ እንደአማራው በለቅሶና ሀዘን ብዙ ሀይልና ጊዜ አያጠፋም ፥ የነወሰኑ ሰውች ተመድበው በተወሰነ ጊዜ ሥርአቱን ያካሂዳሉ ። የአውራ አምባ ጎብረ ሰብ ባህል ፥ ከሞቱ በኃላ ህይወት አለ ብሎ ስለማያምን የምድርን ኑሮ ያበልጣል ።

በባልና ሚስትም ሆነ በጎብረተሰቡ መሀል የሚከሰተውን ችግር ለማቃለል የተወከሉት የተለያዩ የፍርድ ኮሚቴዎች ስኬታማ ውጤት ያስገኛሉ ።

በመቀጠል ፥ የአውራ አምባ ጎብረተ ሰብ ልዩ የሆነ አመለካከት የሚሰጠውን የትምህርት ስነ ሥርአት በዝርዝር እናብራሪለን ። ትምህርት ጎብረተ ሰቡን ወደ ፊት ሰማስኬድ ብቻ ሳይሆን እያንዳዱን ግለሰብ ከፍ የሚያደርግ ነው ። በመጀመሪያ አውራ አምባ ራስን በራስ ማስተማር የሚቻልበትን ሁናቴ ለአዋቂዎች ብቻ ሳይሆን በተለይ ትምህርት ላልጀመሩ ለታዳጊ ልጆችና ለሌሎቹም ከትምህርት ቤት ውጪ አመቻችቶአል ። ይህ ትምህርት የሚካሀደው በእድሜ ጠና ባሉ ወጣቶችና በሰፈሩ አዋቂዎች ሲሀን ፥ የህግናት መዋያና የተመላ መጽሐፍት ቤትን ያካተተ ነው።

ለትምህርት የደረሱ ልጆች ሁሉ ይማራሉ ። ንቁና አጥኚ ከመሆናቸውም በላይ ፥ የስብሰባ መድረክ ላይ ሀሳባቸውን ለመስጠት አያፍሩም ፥ ነገር ግን ከሌላ መንደር ልጆትች ጋር እምብዛም አይገናኙም ። አስተማሪዎቹም የአውራ አምባ ተማሪዎች ከሌሎቹ በጣም የላቁ ተጣጣሪና ተባባሪ መሆናቸውን ይመሰክሩላቸዋል ። በዚህም ምክንያት የንምህርት ደረጃቸው ከሌሎቹ በጣም ከፍ ያለ ከመሆኑም በላይ ፥ በሴቶችና ወንዶች መሀልም ብዙ ልዩነት አይታይም ።

ከዚህ በመቀጠል የምናተኩረው የአውራ አምባ አባላት ከአካባቢአቸው ነዋሪዎች ጋር ያላቸውን ጥርጣሬ የተመላበት ግኙኝነት ላይ ይሆናል ። የአውራ አምባ ነዋሪ በአካባቢው ህዝብ አቅጣጫውን እንድሳተ ሚስጥረኛ ጨካኝ ሰነፍና ሀይማኖተ ቢስ ሆኖ ይታያል ፥ የአውራ አምባ ጎብረሰብም ከጎረቤቶቹ ጋር ቅርበት የለውም። ይህ ጥርጣሬ የተከሰተው በሁለቱ መሀል ከፍተኛ የባህል ልዩነት በመኖሩና ፥ ቀደም ሲል መፍትሄ ያላገኘው አሰከፊ ያለመግባባት ነው ። በዛሬው ወቅት ችግሩ ቀዝቀዝ ያለ ይመስላል ። በሌላ በኩል ደግሞ አውራ አምባ ከክፍለ ሀገሩና ከኢትዮጵያ ባለሥልጣናት ጋር ያለው ግንኙነት በጣም የላቀ ነው ። አውራ አምባ ብዙ እንግዶችን ያስተናግዳል ፥ በብዙ ቦታም እንደ ምሳሌ ይጠራል ።

በመደምደሚያ ማሳየት የምንሞክረው ፥ በአለም ላይ የሕልም እንጀራ መስሎ የሚታየው የሰዎች በእኩልነትና በክብር ተዋዶ የመኖርን ስሜት በመከተል ፥ ይህ አመለካከት የሰው ልጅ ለነግሉ ለሚያደርገው ትግል አስተዋጽዎ እንዳለው ነው ። እየተገነቡ ያሉ ፥ ኃላ ቀር የሚባሉት ሀገሮች ላይ ለሚደረገው ግንባታ ጭማሪ ያመጣል ። ሰለሆነም አውራ አምባ በብዙ መልኩ ፥ ለአካባቢውም ሆነ ለኢትዮጵያ፥ ከዚያም አልፎ ለአውሮፓና ለመላው ዓለም ለሚደረገው የነጻነት እንቅስቃሴ ምሳሌ ሆኖ ሊጠቀስ ይችላል ። ይሁን እንጂ ፥ ይህ አስደናቂ ጎብረተሰብ ዘለቄታማ ለመሆን ብዙ ችግሮችን መወጣት ይኖርበት ይሆናል። በተለይም ከጎብረተሰቡ ውጪ ጋብቻ ስለማይፈጸምና ከክስሳቸው ውጪ ካለው ብሄረሰብ ጋር ግንኙነት ስለሌላቸው ። በመጨረሻ ይህንን የኑሮ ስልት የበለጠ ለመረዳትና ብሎም ለማስፋፋት ይረዳ ዘንድ አንዳንድ ለጥናት የሚሆኑ ነጥቦችን ለማሳየት እንሞክራለን ።

የዚህ ዘገባ ዋና ጎትመት በፈረንሳይኛ ነው ።

Synthèse

Awra Amba, une expérience actuelle de socialisme utopique.

Dans la longue lignée des expériences de socialisme utopique, le village éthiopien d'Awra Amba est une communauté de la Région Amhara construite sur les valeurs humanistes qu'elle met en œuvre à travers son mode de vie.

Cette étude est une synthèse de la littérature disponible sur cette communauté, c'est-à-dire essentiellement de quatre rapports de masters éthiopiens (Atnafu, 2005 ; Yirga, 2007 ; Yassin, 2008 ; Mekonnen, 2009) et secondairement de reportages et témoignages éthiopiens et étrangers entre 2006 et 2012. Nous présentons tout d'abord notre propre méthode, c'est-à-dire les sources que nous avons utilisées avec un regard méthodologique critique, puis le mode de présentation des nombreuses données recueillies qui nous permettent de tracer une peinture assez précise de cette expérience originale, que nous tentons de comparer assez systématiquement à la société rurale amhara.

La communauté a été fondée par Zumra Nuru en 1972. Dès son jeune âge, ce visionnaire d'origine paysanne pauvre se rebella contre l'injustice, les mauvais traitements et la malhonnêteté qu'il voyait dans sa propre famille et autour de lui dans la société amhara traditionnelle patriarcale et croyante. Il voyage dans la région pour trouver des gens qui partagent ses idées. Finalement il réunit une vingtaine de personnes qui fondent la communauté de paysans d'Awra Amba sur une cinquantaine d'hectares. Mais les voisins sont scandalisés par l'égalité entre les sexes, les droits des enfants et leur absence de religion. S'ensuit une période troublée pour la communauté, mêlant prison pour son leader et exil à plusieurs centaines de kilomètres pendant plusieurs années. La communauté redémarre finalement en 1993 sur son site actuel et se développe.

Les chiffres indiqués par les différents auteurs permettent de reconstituer l'évolution de sa population qui passe par un minimum de moins de vingt personnes pendant la période d'exil à plus de 400 actuellement. Nous comparons sa composition par sexe et par tranche d'âge avec la population rurale voisine du Sud Gondar. Nous situons ensuite Awra Amba au sein des différentes structures administratives éthiopiennes, dont on présente les principales caractéristiques géographiques, démographiques et économiques.

Awra Amba est un village très fortement uni par une culture et des idéaux, qui le distinguent de la société amhara et des villages environnants. C'est d'abord une communauté qui partage des valeurs : vivre à Awra Amba signifie partager et défendre ces valeurs. Les principales valeurs citées par les différents auteurs sont assez variées, mais nous les regroupons finalement en honnêteté, égalité et notamment égalité des sexes, solidarité des êtres humains, travail et absence de religion ou rationalisme. Nous détaillons chacune de ces valeurs sur le plan conceptuel telles que les défend la communauté d'Awra Amba, d'après les différents auteurs.

Nous présentons ensuite sous ses différents aspects l'organisation sociale de la communauté, qui est particulièrement élaborée : il s'agit des structures de la communauté, de ses activités économiques, puis des relations sociales, à travers l'égalité des sexes dans le travail, le mariage, le divorce et la construction du foyer familial, la place spécifique et originale des enfants, la solidarité avec les plus fragiles, les funérailles, et enfin les modes de gestion des conflits internes à la communauté.

En termes d'institutions, Awra Amba est organisé en deux structures : la communauté, qui regroupe l'ensemble des habitants qui partagent des valeurs et un mode vie, et la coopérative de travail qui regroupe les trois quarts des membres de la communauté. Les décisions les plus importantes pour la coopérative sont discutées et décidées en assemblée générale des coopérateurs, qui élit les membres d'une quinzaine de comités ; ceux-ci mettent en application les décisions des assemblées générales et gèrent collectivement les différents volets de l'activité du village. Les femmes comptent pour 44 %

des membres des comités, qui sont révocables à tout moment.

L'économie d'Awra Amba est partiellement agricole, mais les surfaces disponibles sont très inférieures à ce qu'elles sont dans la région : de 0,2 à 0,4 ha/foyer à Awra Amba selon les auteurs, pour 2,1 ha/foyer dans la région. Les principales productions agricoles sont le *teff*, le maïs (ou le sorgho) et les haricots secs, ainsi que les produits issus d'un petit cheptel. Les rendements sont supérieurs aux rendements régionaux d'environ un quart. Ne pouvant vivre uniquement de l'agriculture étant données la pauvreté et la rareté du sol, ils se sont diversifiés vers le tissage, la meunerie et le commerce. Ces activités sont menées pour l'essentiel au sein de la coopérative, sauf le tissage dont une part importante se fait au domicile de chacun et appartient au domaine privé.

Ces activités fournissent un revenu moyen par habitant qui semble légèrement supérieur à celui de la région, mais les chiffres fournis ne sont pas très clairs, voire contradictoires. Les besoins alimentaires des habitants semblent néanmoins entièrement couverts tout au long de l'année, alors que les deux tiers des paysans amharas ne couvrent leurs besoins alimentaires que neuf mois sur douze.

Nous détaillons ensuite la participation aux différentes tâches agricoles, artisanales et ménagères des femmes et des hommes, ainsi que des jeunes, filles et garçons. Pour l'essentiel, ces tâches sont réparties selon les capacités de chacun et non selon son sexe. Les données d'enquête rassemblées montrent qu'il y a égalité dans le couple comme producteurs, comme consommateurs, comme responsables des tâches et travaux et comme responsables de la famille.

Le mariage est l'affaire des futurs époux, leurs parents n'ayant aucun rôle, contrairement à la norme amhara traditionnelle. Les études nous donnent des statistiques assez précises de l'âge du mariage que nous comparons aux statistiques régionales. Il apparaît qu'il n'y a pas de mariage précoce à Awra Amba, les jeunes femmes se mariant généralement entre 19 et 22 ans, et les jeunes hommes entre 20 et 25 ans, alors que dans la population rurale régionale, 5 % des garçons et 8 % des filles de 10 à 14 ans sont déjà mariés. Les couples ont en moyenne un enfant de moins que chez leurs voisins de la région. Le divorce se fait sans formalité par consentement mutuel, les biens des époux étant partagés à égalité.

La solidarité et le respect mutuel entre membres d'Awra Amba sont notamment mis en œuvre vis-à-vis des enfants : ils ont trois devoirs bien distincts : aller à l'école, jouer, et aider au travail de la communauté. Leur participation aux tâches ménagères et surtout agricoles est cependant très faible, mais tous vont à l'école le plus longtemps possible selon leurs capacités et sont encouragés à l'étude en dehors de l'école. La solidarité passe aussi par un système de prise en charge des femmes proches de l'accouchement, des malades et des personnes âgées.

Contrairement au cas de la société rurale amhara où les funérailles sont l'occasion de grands rassemblements des proches accompagnées de lamentations spectaculaires, elles ne mobilisent à Awra Amba que quelques personnes pendant quelques heures. Ces rites mortuaires correspondent au système social et culturel d'Awra Amba, dont les membres ne croient guère à la vie après la mort et privilégient la vie sur terre.

Enfin, pour gérer les conflits au sein des couples et entre membres de la communauté, plusieurs instances permanentes ont été mises en place qui semblent très efficaces pour rétablir le dialogue et gérer les conflits avec sagesse.

Nous étudions ensuite en détail l'éducation au sein de la communauté, car celle-ci y attache une importance particulière. L'éducation est tout autant orientée vers la promotion du groupe que vers la promotion de l'individu. Awra Amba a mis en place tout d'abord un système d'auto éducation ou d'éducation mutuelle, pour les adultes, et surtout pour les jeunes enfants qui ne vont pas encore en primaire et les écoliers en dehors de l'école. Cette éducation est assurée par des élèves plus âgés et par des adultes du village, avec notamment une école maternelle et une bibliothèque bien fournie en ouvrages techniques.

Tous les enfants en âge de l'être sont scolarisés. Ils sont très actifs dans les clubs sociaux et éthiques

de l'école, très à l'aise dans les discussions de groupe, très studieux, mais assez peu ouverts aux élèves des autres villages. Les enseignants les trouvent plus travailleurs, plus éthiques et plus coopératifs que les enfants des villages environnants. En conséquence, le niveau d'éducation des membres de la communauté d'Awra Amba, tous d'origine paysanne, est nettement supérieur à celui des communautés rurales de la région, avec relativement peu de différences entre les sexes.

Nous étudions enfin les relations de la communauté avec les communautés voisines, caractérisées par la méfiance : Awra Amba est perçu par ses voisins comme une caste déviante, suspecte, secrète, cruelle, paresseuse et païenne, tandis que les membres d'Awra Amba ne fréquentent guère leurs voisins. Cette méfiance est due aux différences de culture considérables et au passé gravement conflictuel entre les deux groupes. Elle serait très atténuée aujourd'hui. En revanche, les relations avec les autorités régionales et éthiopiennes sont excellentes, Awra Amba accueillant de très nombreux visiteurs et étant cité en exemple très fréquemment. Par contre, la communauté n'est guère intéressée par les expériences extérieures.

En conclusion, nous tentons de montrer en quoi cette expérience participe aux luttes d'émancipation, dans la lignée des communautés dites de socialisme utopique qui visent à la création de communautés idéales ici et maintenant. C'est une pierre de plus dans le mouvement actuel de renaissance des pays et des citoyens que l'on disait « sous-développés ». Awra Amba est donc par de nombreux aspects un exemple vivant pour les communautés voisines, pour l'Éthiopie, et au-delà pour l'émancipation des citoyens et des peuples, quel que soit leur niveau de développement, y compris en Europe. Cette communauté utopique pourrait cependant devoir faire face à des risques dangereux pour sa pérennité. Il s'agit notamment de l'endogamie, de la non ouverture au monde, de l'hétérogénéité et de la sclérose par le mythe. Enfin nous suggérons quelques pistes de recherche qui permettraient de mieux comprendre cette expérience, et peut-être de la favoriser.

L’original de ce rapport est publié en français.

Introduction

The Ethiopian village of Awra Amba is a well-established community with a truly extraordinary life style, especially in terms of equality between men and women, community spirit, absence of religion, honesty, hard work, and democracy. A ferment for emancipation.

Awra Amba is therefore in line with the long list of utopian communities like the Adamites from Bohemia in the 15th century, the Jesuit mission in Paraguay 1609-1768, Robert Owen's model factories in the 1820s in Great Britain and the United States, the Guise Familistère in France, founded by the industrialist Jean-Baptiste Godin, which ran from 1849 to 1968 and employed over 2000 workers at the end of the 19th century, the La Reunion phalanstery in Texas, 1853-1875, which was a large farm up to 5000 hectares, the Icaria communities in the US in the second half of the 19th century, and finally the hippy communities in the 1960-70s, or the Auroville adventure in India, which has attracted around 2000 people since 1968.

In Africa, social organisations similar to Awra Amba exist or have partially existed in numerous villages or small closed communities. That way in Algeria with the Mozabits, Kabyles (Nait, 2006), East-Algerian Chaouis or Touaregs in the Sahara. They are autonomous societies or societies who deliberately isolated themselves from their community of origin like the Mozabits. We'll see Awra Amba was also constructed in reaction to its society of origin, but is still part of it.

As far as the potential for emancipation of the experiment is concerned – especially in terms of solidarity – Awra Amba is close to the minimum wage program set up in the village of Otjivero, Namibia. The basic monthly wage of about ten Euros for each citizen incredibly improved the conditions of its thousand residents by stimulating production and demand: The percentage of people living under the poverty threshold has been reduced from 79 to 37 %. Before the experiment, about half the children suffered from malnutrition, today there are less than 10 %; 60% completed elementary schools; today there are 90 %. And the crime rate has gone down (Shindondola-Mote, 2009; Schwab, 2010).

Each of these past or present projects has its own specificities, and none of them are identical to Awra Amba. But the founding idea is the same: against the surrounding society or independent of it, to build a community which is organised according to its own rules, and which puts some of Awra Amba's values into practice. Local Society's hostility is never far off, and in many cases this has put a stop to the experiment. Assuring the continuation of the project is often difficult - a lot of experiments in utopian socialism haven't lasted more than 2 or 3 years, and the idea of spreading their influence elsewhere is only a dream. But these experiments are still examples for all present and future societies, and have an educative function, since they provide a wealth of lessons concerning the emancipation of peoples and of citizens.

The aim of this study is to collect and present as far as possible information on Awra Amba from available accounts, reports and studies, because this experiment seems us deserving, for Ethiopian naturally – but Awra Amba is there still well known, for Africans and for Westerners – who have access to very few documents as far as we know. Our aim is not only to accumulate data, but also to make a critical synthesis (in the scientific meaning), which allows to emphasize the contradictions of sources and the possible fields where few information.

We present firstly our own method – the way we have worked, and then we place Awra Amba in time and geography. We present later the main values they refer to, then the social organisation of the village, with a specific analysis of education. Finally we mention the external relations of the community, before look in conclusion at the lessons and risks for the future of this community some decades old.

This report is originally written in French, and then translated into English: We are sorry for the quality of the translation.

1. Method

This work is a synthesis of the available data on the Awra Amba community. These data come mainly from the literature, especially academic one, we present below in a critical way because it is the basis of our work.

1.1. Sources

We used six main sources:

- The set of thirteen documents available on the web in 2010 in French and English, of which we had already made a synthesis (Joumard, 2010a): They were four articles by journalists between 2006 and 2009, two video reports by journalists in 2009, texts of Ethiopian consultant and regional civil servant resp. in 2003 and 2009, texts of an international and an Ethiopian NGO, and accounts of three visitors from 2006 to 2009.
- A survey on the spot from 13 to 17 April, 2010, giving us the opportunity to present a first synthesis on Awra Amba (Joumard, 2010b) by verifying and completing information available on the web.
- The 2005 master report in anthropology of Solomon Atnafu (Atnafu, 2005) dealing with the changes in gender roles and values in Awra Amba in comparison with the surrounding Amhara society. This survey of very good scientific level was based on a field survey in March 2005. This one consisted on the one hand of a semi-structured questionnaire conducted with 12 community members (6 men and 6 women) and 16 people from 8 neighbouring communities. On the other hand, a structured questionnaire was conducted with 80 household heads (among 96 existing), of which half were women. In addition, the leader of the community described his life. Finally, 6 focus groups were interviewed. These groups were made up 5 to 7 people with an average of 3 women, and consisted of household heads of the community (men and women), members of the management bodies of the community, and members of neighbouring communities. The amount of interviewed persons was therefore considerable, without doubt nearby 145. According to its authors (p. 3), it was the first research study on Awra Amba.
- The 2007 master report in education sciences of Abebaw Yirga (Yirga, 2007), dealing with the cross-cultural experience of the Awra Amba children, based on a 45 day field survey, whose date is not given, but we can place approximately around April, 2007, as the report was published in July, 2007. About fifteen people were interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire. They were community members (the leader and founder, two members of the reception committee), a non specified number of members of three neighbouring villages (Dej Mesk, Jib Gudguad, and Maksegn) whose children were going to the same school than the Awra Amba children, two staff members of this Arba Amba school where did go at this time the community children, two out of its students from the first and second cycle, resp. 14 and 18 years old and coming from the community, as well as three other students of this school of similar age and coming from neighbouring villages. Three focus groups from the community were also interviewed: two out of them were made up 9 people, the last one 8. The number of interviewed people was therefore quite limited, nearby 40, i.e. 3 to 4 times lower than in the first study by Atnafu. The respondents verified the interview transcriptions.
- The 2008 master report in cooperative sciences of Seid Mohamed Yassin (Yassin, 2008), dealing with the contribution of Awra Amba to rural development, based on a field survey whose neither duration nor date are given, but we can place approximately around December,

2007, as the report was published in March, 2008. This survey has used a questionnaire with open and closed questions, conducted with 88 community members (53 men and 35 women). 12 community members, including the founder, were in addition interviewed more in depth. Finally, several focus groups were organized, each of them of 6 to 8 people, coming from the community or the neighbouring ones. The number of interviewed people was therefore very high, without doubt nearby 130.

- The 2009 master report in peace sciences of Merhatsidk Mekonnen Abayneh (Mekonnen, 2009), dealing with the mediation methods of family disputes in Awra Amba, based on a field survey in November 2008 (p. 13), whose duration was not given, but apparently one month at the most. This survey consisted especially in an interview of 9 young adults of both sexes, married and with one or several children, the three members of the grievance-handling and mediating committee of the village, the community leader and founder, and 8 members of legal and social bodies of the *woreda* (equivalent to a department) of Fogera and of the *kebele* (equivalent to a commune) of Woji-Arba-Amba (p. 71 and 93-94). The number of interviewed people was therefore quite limited (21 people).

In addition to these main sources, we consider the article of a news agency (IPS, 2010), a website of Awra Amba (Awraamba, nd), and the accounts of à French woman in 2011 and 2012 (Crespo, 2011; 2012).

1.2. Source criticism

The language is without doubt a potential source of mistake, since the huge majority of the members of Awra Amba and neighbouring communities speak only Amharic and not English; only some of them speak English, but in a rough way. But the English of teachers and regional authorities is of good level. The authors who conducted surveys whose synthesis is given here are partly Ethiopian and then speak Amharic; It is the case of around half of about fifteen journalists, professionals or visitors whose synthesis we had made, and it is above all the case of the four master students who give us most of the information. The information collected by sources not speaking Amharic might be badly understood, and badly interpreted. Otherwise, documents we use are all in English, except for three of them in French. It is especially the case of Ethiopian sources, whose English is not the mother language and who can master it more or less. It is difficult to know that, especially for the master students, the professors in charge of them usually correcting the English of the texts of their students. Some reports are nevertheless written in hesitating English, as sometimes this one by Yassin. The languages are therefore problematic for most of work sources.

Some of the research studies we synthesize here do not obey the standards of scientific research:

- The indication of sources providing transparency: many references written in his text by Yassin (2008) are not given in the literature list;
- Ethic respect: Mekonnen (2009) mentions the names of private people he interviewed and reproduce very personal data which are not made anonymous; Yassin (2008) copies in full paragraphs of Atnafu (2005) without quoting him;
- The balanced synthesis of existing literature where the author can't deduce own conclusion without solid basis of references from: In his initial bibliographical synthesis on very wide subjects like development, globalisation, environment or knowledge, Yassin (2008) lists peremptory and decisive claims;
- The non induction of responses through questions asked to interviewed people: Yassin (2008) administers a questionnaire quite badly built, as many questions induce the response: for instance, the question "Do you believe that individual rights are respected in the community? 1.Yes 2.No" induces rather a positive response (Yassin, 2008, p. 163);
- The logic which induces the conclusions of a study are based on the study itself: A part of

final conclusions of Mekonnen (2009) are not deduced from the data really presented in the text body and are not presented as personal viewpoints of the author.

This violation of the scientific standards is not a formal question, but an indicator of the scientific quality sometimes questionable of the studies, these standards being a part of the scientific method ensuring the quality of the results. In this regard, studies of Atnafu and Yirga seem outstanding.

Some studies intend to measure through survey behaviours, but only measure the perception of their behaviours by the interviewed people: for instance, the question "Are you beneficiary of mass media? 1.Yes 2.No" (Yassin, 2008, p. 93) cannot in any way assess the degree to which the interviewed people have real access to mass media and the degree to which they are beneficiary of them – it should for that purpose have asked for instance a closed question about the frequency of access to different mass media; This question only measures each one opinion on his own information, which gives an interesting information, but somewhat less reliable and notably vague. The relatively limited resources of the studies did not allow without doubt more comprehensive research. This relative weakness is especially present in Yassin (2008).

Finally, as usually, neither the journalist reports, nor the personal accounts give generally their work method, which does not allow assessing their quality.

1.3. Work method

The four main sources coming from master studies have each a subject very well documented, but at the same time give a lot of other information on a wide variety of subjects. On given points, data can be contradictory; in that case, we present the different versions.

In all the cases, we try to indicate accurately the source of the information given, for transparency. It leads to very numerous references. In order to make the text lighter, the four sources the most often cited are cited by using the following abbreviations: Jo10b instead of Joumard (2010b), At05 instead of Atnafu (2005), Yi07 instead of Yirga (2007), Ya08 instead of Yassin (2008) and Me09 instead of Mekonnen (2009)[1].

With a few exceptions, we do not put the text parts copied from the different references between quotation marks in order to make the reading easier. Nevertheless, most of the report merely repeats data and information coming from the literature: a paragraph including a reference can generally be attributed to this reference, even we have modified the wording.

We express also own opinions of the author of this report, either through an independent paragraph without reference, or through text elements clearly attributed to the author by expressions like "In our opinion...". Pictures and figures are from the author, unless otherwise specified.

The demonstration of contradictory versions according to authors as well as our own thoughts lead us to ask precise questions, more or less important, to which it is useful in our opinion to answer in the future. These questions are listed in Annex by order appearing in the text body, and they are referenced in the text body when appropriate.

Moreover, the social transformations introduced in Awra Amba cannot be understood without reference to the Ethiopian society and more precisely to the Amhara society which Awra Amba is part of and where it comes from. We try therefore to present for that reason at the beginning of each subject the situation in the traditional Amhara society, before focussing on the situation in Awra Amba.

[1] The number after "/" indicates the page ; Therefore, Yassin (2008/45) or Ya08/45 indicates the reference Yassin (2008), page 45.

2. Background history and geographical situation

The members of the Awra Amba community come from different peasant communities of Amhara region.

The founding of the community is closely linked to the history of its founder, Zumra Nuru. We present its numerous episodes, before describing the population and the geographical situation.

2.1. A visionary and difficult start

Awra Amba does not keep written records of its history according to Me09/54: we can only rely therefore on the memory of people, through the different written references quoted. It is only since 2007 or 2008 that the community preserves rudimentary records of the sessions of one out of its committees (the grievance-handling and mediating one) (Me09/68).

Zumra Nuru Mohammad (Picture 1) is the founder of this community whose principles he laid down. He was born on August 23, 1946 according to At05/29 and Ya08/63, but on August 21, 1947 according to Jo10b/1 or Crespo (2012) (he does not know necessarily his precise birth date – Question 1 in Annex), in Simada (around 90 km as the crow flies southeast of Awra Amba, in South Gondar zone). His mother Tirusew Kasaye was also born in Simada where his parents met and got married. His father Nuru Muhammad was born in Ambaa Mariam, in Tenta *woreda* in South Wollo zone (Debub Wollo in Amharic) of the Amhara region (At05/29), around 170 km as the crow flies southeast of Awra Amba.

Picture 1: Zumra Nuru, founder and leader of Awra Amba, in April 2010. Behind him, his armed guard.

In 1950, when he was 3 years old, his parents moved to Yesho Michael in Este *woreda*, about fifty kilometres south-southeast of Awra Amba. Zumra explains to At05/29 that his Christian maternal grandmother was from this Este *woreda*, whereas his paternal grandmother, also Christian, was from Simada *woreda*.

Sent to work in the fields rather than to school, that was lacking according to Me09/31, illiterate

(later in life he learned to sign and write a few words, but is unable to read a newspaper or a book), the episodes he recounts were the source of his inspiration. From the age of four, he allegedly (we are sceptical) started wondering about the unfairness of the gender inequality, the maltreatment of the elderly, labour exploitation, cruel punishment of children, and dishonest dealings among people.

When he was a child, nobody can answer properly his questions on the reasons of such behaviours. His extraordinary behaviour being considered abnormal, his family and his neighbours considered him not surprisingly to be mentally ill, not only because of his support of equality between men and women but also because of his opposition to institutionalized religion, in a very religious, traditional and patriarchal Ethiopian society (Habtamu, 2009; Me09/32).

"When I was child, I was furious about what I saw around me," says Zumra Nuru. "I found it unfair that while my mother helped my father to sow and harvest, he never helped her in the home. I swore to myself that I would change things when grew up" (France 24, 2009). "My both parents spent the whole day in the farm but when they came back home, it was time for my father to rest but never for my mother. After she has been through the same tiring day as my father, she had to do everything at home. She was expected to cook, clean the house, wash my father's feet with warm water and serve the traditional meal. On the top of that, when my mother could not do all that on time, my father abused, insulted and sometimes beat her. I just wondered why this had to happen to my mother, as if she had extra strength or something. But I realized later that this was not an isolated event that only happened in our house, rather it was happening in all families" (France 24, 2009; Habtamu, 2009; Me09/31).

He still remembers today one of the first times he questioned the established rules, when his mother accused him of eating Christian meat at their Christian neighbours. Zumra asked her why he was not allowed to eat meat while the meat was similar to the meat they have at home. She answered, "Muslims are not allowed to eat Christian meat and vice-versa", snatched the meat from him and gave it to the chicken. He was not at all satisfied with the arguments of his mother and went on to ask questions: why, how, when and from where does come this difference in food, since we are all human beings and the meat comes from our animals (Halpern, 2007; Ya08/63; Habtamu, 2009)?

At 13, preoccupied by the unfair distribution of household duties and responsibilities between husbands and wives and between brothers and sisters (Me09/31), he was more or less thrown out of his family house (Crespo, 2011). Yassin (2008/63) thinks it is the age when Zumra developed his ideas after understanding the negative impacts of the traditional culture. He lived during five years in different places of Amhara region: Debre Markos (Gojam), Simada (South Gondar), Sedie Muja (Gayent, South Gondar), Feres Bete (Gojam), in the Fogera and Dera *woredas* (South Gondar), Belessa (North Gondar) and Dessie (Wollo), therefore within a distance of 250 km from Awra Amba. He was mainly weaver and helped the poor. "I travelled to find people who would accept my ideas", he said (Halpern, 2007; Habtamu, 2009).

At the age of 18, therefore in 1964, he came back to the village of his parents and asked his family to arrange marriage for him (Ya08/66). That's the way he married Zeyda (or Zubayeda acc. to Ya08/66) Muhammad, with whom he lived more than thirty years in happiness according to At05/29. Nevertheless, a representative of the community said us the first four wives of Zumra had divorced before a year, mainly because his circle considered him abnormal; Crespo (2012) confirms his first wife Zeyda divorced for this reason. According to this same source, Zumra would have married again Nane, with whom he still lives (Question 2 in Annex).

Like the other young men of the area, he was farmer and had to help his family (At05/29). At 19, a quarrel arose with his immediate family members, since he used his income for helping the poor and the elderly in the village (Me09/33). He became a wandering preacher of his own ideals, travelling for sharing his ideas and finding supporters. During the dry season, he went to the neighbouring villages of Yesho Michael, Shimie Mariam or Kechin-Wonz Kidane-Mihret to spread his message of brotherhood, respect for women, protection of children as well as special care for the aged and the

disabled people (Me09/33). In 1965/66, he went to a village called Michael Debire (Libo Kemkem *woreda*) and lived in a place called Demuna Chalema (Wudo *kebele*).

In 1966, he met in Sinko (Fogera *woreda*, Alem Ber *kebele*), nearly ten kilometres east of Awra Amba, a group of people who were followers of the so-called Alahim (or Alhaim acc. to Ya08/6) Muslim sect and lived here. The leader of this sect was Sheik Seid Hassen according to At05/30, who interviewed three sons of the leader in Amed Ber (officially called Alem Ber according to Yi07/71). The sect is distinguished from other Muslim traditions for its liberalism and does not practice the main institutions of Islam such as fasting and prayer. It defends ideals such as honesty, brotherhood, equality of rights between men and women. Yassin (2008/6) even presents Sheik Seid Hassen as the grandfather of Awra Amba. The Alahim sect should represent today around 200 people in Alem Ber and in surrounding villages of Awra Amba (At05/30).

Zumra met often members of the sect. In 1972, he moved with his family from Yesho-Michael (Este *woreda*) to Wudo (Demmuna Chalema *kebele*), near to Sinko, then finally to Sinko, where Seid was living (At05/30).

It should be noted, however, that according to Me09/33, although the visible role the Muslim faith of his ascendants and contemporaries played in the first years of his ideal, Zumra vehemently denies that, because he considers the social reality had opened his eyes and not any ideology or religion. Zumra blames incidentally Atnafu for having produced a defamatory study in 2005, especially about religion (Yi07/43; Crespo, 2012) (Question 3 in Annex).

In parallel, the founders of Awra Amba were without doubt influenced by the new socialist ideas introduced in Ethiopia in the late 1960's and the early 1970's, especially through the cooperative movement (At05/98).

In our opinion, to consider that his thought was inspired at the same time by the fundamental values of religions – he claims today, by Alahim ideals and by the observation of the behaviours of his fellow citizens does not lessen the visionary nature of Zumra.

His long quest for a village capable of welcoming his ideas was finally satisfied in Awra Amba, where he lives today. He found here a group of people in agreement with him and ready to give him permanently a home for creating heaven on Earth. After ten years of occasional visits to the area and several short stays with them, he decided to settle here in 1972 (Ya08/61; Me09/34; Jo10b/2) (Question 4 and Question 5 in Annex). The community had at this time 66 households according to Ya08/61 & 67 or Me09/5 & 34, but only 66 people according to Jo10b/2 (Question 6 in Annex) with 60 ha (Ya08/61) or about fifty hectares (Jo10b/2) of land. Yirga (2007/47) writes on the contrary, by quoting Zumra, the community was then only a communities of values meeting persons living in different places (Question 7 in Annex). Crespo (2011) reports also, by quoting Zumra, people around him wanted to kill him because they thought he was in contradiction with religion and tradition.

At the beginning, the community was very small and therefore very tight-knit. Zumra explains the agricultural produce was stored in a common store, the cooking was done in a common kitchen, and meals were eaten in a common plate (At05/74).

In 1984 Seid and his followers tried to federate into a religious association. But their neighbours, Muslim or Christian peasants, considered them as deviants or atheists. They denounced to Derg, the government of that time, the members of the sect as supporters of the Ethiopian people revolutionary party (EPRP), which was anti-Derg party at that time. Hence the Derg interrupted the creation of this association. Seid died in 1985 at the Gondar prison (At05/74).

Zumra tried to bring together his followers into an egalitarian community, i.e. a cooperative (so-called 'union' by references) (At05/30; Yi07/47), but the people of the neighbouring villages, outraged by the fact that the men, women and children of Awra Amba had the same rights, and by the absence of religion in the community, denounced it as opposed to the power. Then the Derg stopped this project and required they found a primary-level multi-purpose farmers' cooperative that

was created in February 1986 by the 19 remaining members under the name "Awra-amba Community Cooperatives' Association". Such a cooperative paid his members in proportion to their work and not in an egalitarian way as did want Zumra and his followers (Me09/35; Awraamba, nd). The relations deteriorated however and Zumra was thrown in jail on September 5, 1986 without charge and without trial, before being released after six months, on February 30, 1987 (Question 8 in Annex). During these episodes, the community declined from 66 to 19 people, whom no one is able to read or write.

In the final days of the Derg regime, when they heard that Zumra could be jailed, even that people from the nearby villages were planning to massacre them, Zumra and his thirteen followers left their homes in the middle of the night on February 28, 1988 (or 1989: Question 9 in Annex) and walked to Bonga, avoiding settlements, in six weeks, or in only a week by using also vehicles according to sources (Crespo, 2011; 2012). Bonga is a quiet small town near Jimma (south-west of Addis Ababa), at 560 km as the crow flies from Awra Amba; they spend here five years. However, Mekonnen (2009/35) points out that the community delegated twelve out of its members to go with Zumra, in order to make the travel easier and safer, and therefore that a part of the community stayed in the village; Crespo (2012) points out that less than twenty people left, but that about thirty died during the travel (Question 10 in Annex).

After the change of government in 1991, as the members of the community, reduced to about thirty people (Jo10b), had difficulties in integrating Bonga society especially due to the difficult local language – Kaffitcho, they came back to Awra Amba (Crespo, 2012). Zumra came back firstly in 1993 with about ten people to prepare the settlement. But people of the village who were not members of the community were opposed to this comeback for reasons of way of life, but also of competition for land usage (Me09/36), because the community land had been taken by those people who were against their life style. The members of Zumra community struggled fiercely to get their land back and they finally succeeded by contacting the local media, which put pressure on the authorities (Calvino, 2009). They have managed to get back only 17.5 hectares of land out of the original fifty or sixty – not enough to feed their growing community. However, Atnafu (2005/28) and Yassin (2008/51) point out a surface of 43 ha by quoting non published data by ORDA (nd) (Question 11 in Annex). Most of other members, about sixty, came back from Bonga six months later, in 1994 (Awraamba, nd) (or 1995: Question 12 in Annex), for establishing the present community of Awra Amba.

The community size from 1988 to 1995 is therefore quite varying according to authors.

The difficult situation with the neighbours explains that the leader and founder of Awra Amba needs round-the-clock protection by an armed guard due to decades of hatred and death threats (Tervo, 2009) – see Picture 1 – and that during the night the village is guarded by villagers by rotation in four guardhouses, an unusual phenomenon in Ethiopia (Jo10b/2).

No sooner was Zumra back, he reconstructed the community dismantled during his absence. Diverse buildings were built with local materials, especially the small school, the first weaving machines, and then mills (Crespo, 2011; 2012). Local government and NGOs supported him in terms of food, agricultural equipment, rehabilitation and construction of infrastructural and social facilities (Me09/36).

The status of the community was however not clear around 2000: a simple union of local farmers and handicraftsmen, as the government considered them to be, or a wider entity responsible for cultural renewal and fighting for its official recognition, as the community understood. The community sent a petition in that direction to the head of the regional government. The director of the Regional cooperatives' promotion agency, Ayenew Belay, assured that the confusion ended when the community was officially registered in 2006 as a Multipurpose cooperative of farmers and handicraftsmen, enlarged to business activities in 2007 (in 1999 and 2000 according to the Ethiopian calendar) (Me09/36).

2.2. Community population

The Awra Amba population comes mainly from different peasant communities of the Amhara region and is from various cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds, although the majority are of Muslim origin (At05/28). The majority of the founders were originally born, brought up and lived in and around Woji-Arba-Amba *kebele*, and especially in both neighbouring *woredas* of Fogera and Libokemkem (Me09/30).

The community members are registered in an ad hoc book (Me09/37), some authors have looked at (Question 13 in Annex). The population had at the beginning of 2011 121 households or 439 people (Crespo, 2011). According to data recorded by the different authors, it was hardly increasing since 2006, after a large increase since its re-foundation in 1993-94: see Figure 1 and Table 1. According to At05/82, any person sharing and respecting the values and principles of the community can join it at the time of his survey. But afterwards, the community considered there was not enough space to work and was not able to welcome those people who would have liked to join (Halpern, 2007; Habtamu, 2009; Jo10b). Therefore, some community members live in other locations.

Atnafu (2005/32-36) studied in detail the composition of the population per sex, marital status, number of children per household. We present the main results below.

In the 364 people population, in 2005, there were slightly more women than men (51.1 % women): see Figure 2. This is due to the women from 70 years, very clearly more numerous than the men (9 against 2). The number of women and men was globally balanced for the younger than 51, but the younger than 20 were very clearly rather male than female (55 % male), in a more distinct manner than in the rural population of South Gondar (CSA, 2007/77).

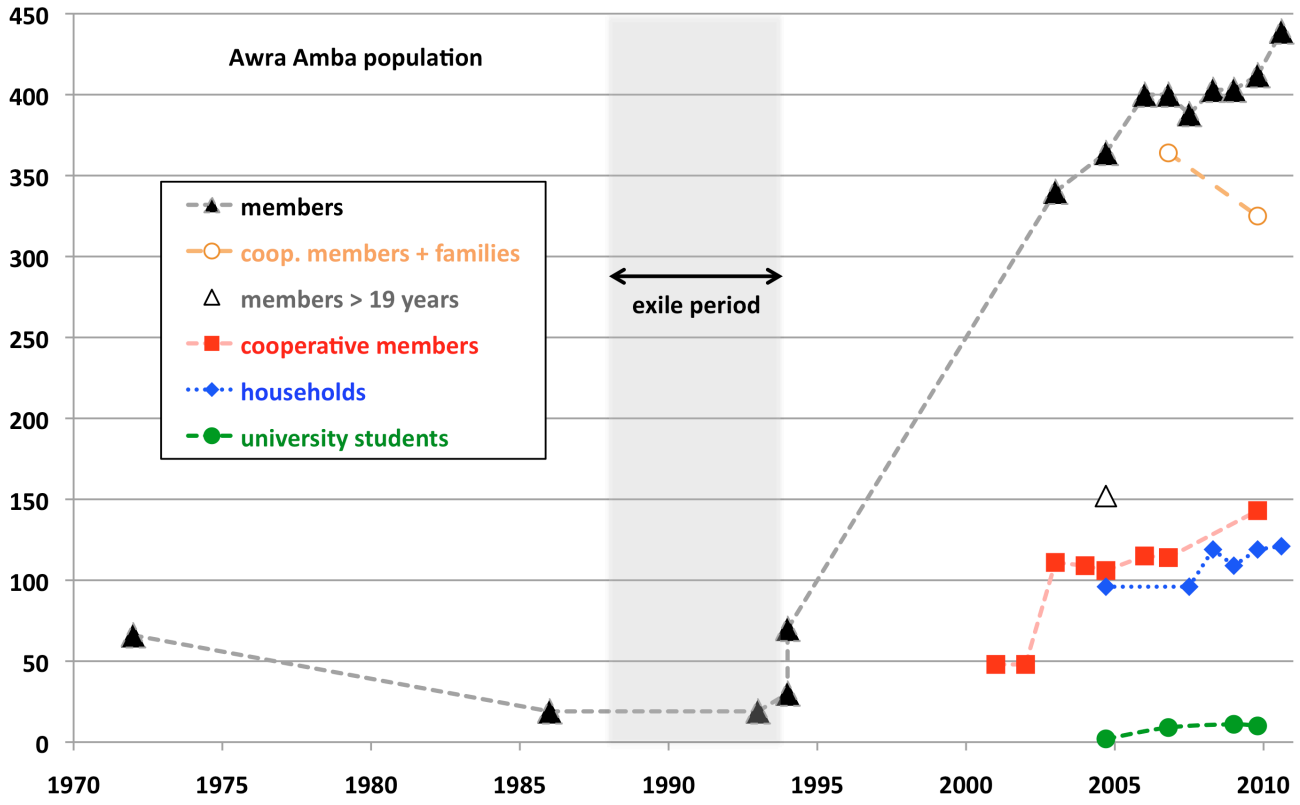


Figure 1: Evolution of the Awra Amba population – data in Table 1 and for the students in section 5.3. The limits of the exile period vary according to the authors.

Year	Author (except figures in blue in last column)	Households	Members	Members > 19	Union members and their families	Union members *(Ya08/108)*
1972	Joumard, 2010b/2		66			
1986	awraamba, nd		16			
1993	Joumard, 2010b/2		19			
1994	Joumard, 2010b/2		30			
1994	Crespo, 2012		70			
2001						*48*
2002						*48*
2003	Melles, 2003		340			*111*
2004						*109*
2005	Atnafu, 2005/31	96	364	152		*106*
2006	Mamo, 2006		400			*115*
2007	Yirga, 2007/47		400		364	*114*
2007	Yassin, 2008/82	96	388			
2008	Mekonnen, 2009/14	119	403			
2009	Habtamu, 2009	109	403			
2010	Joumard, 2010b/2 & 5	119	412		325	143
2011	Crespo, 2011	121	439			

Table 1: Population data according to the literature. Drawing in Figure 1.

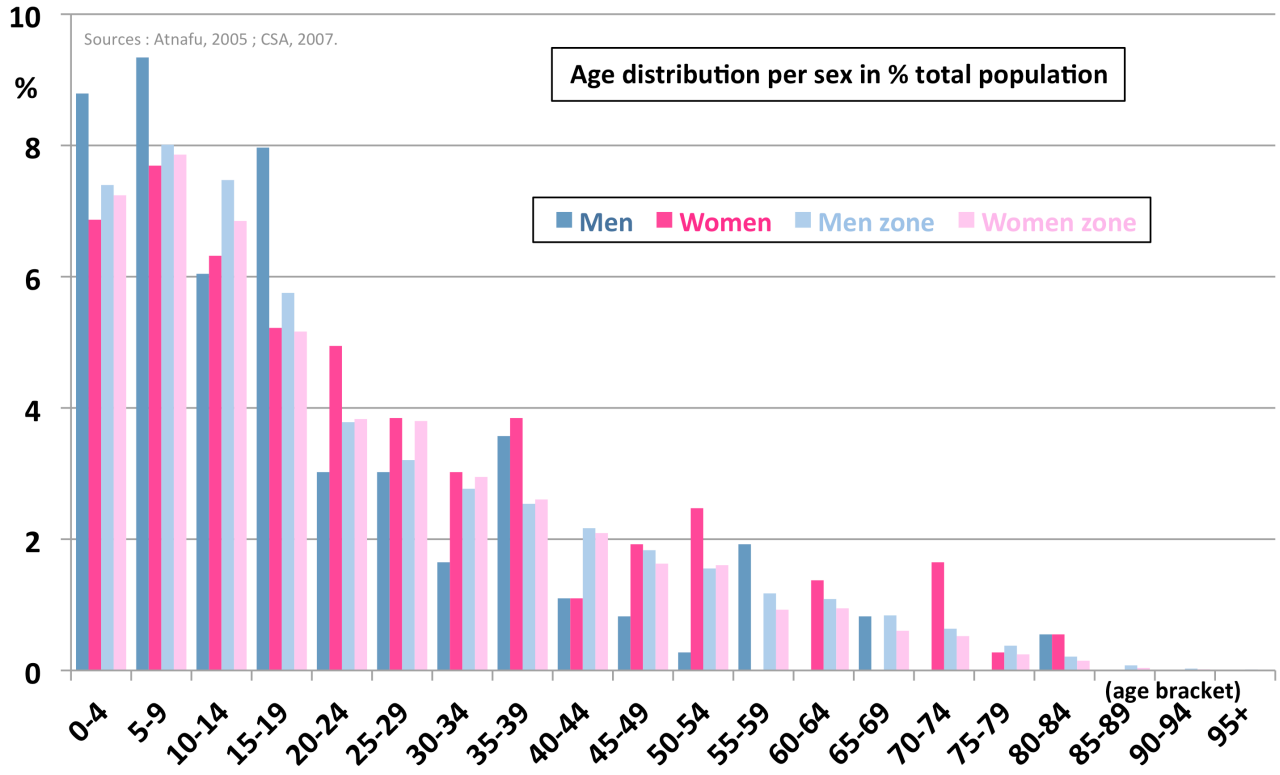


Figure 2: Age distribution per sex of the Awra Amba population in 2005 according to data by Atnafu (2005/32) and of the rural population of the South Gondar zone in 2007 (CSA, 2007/77).

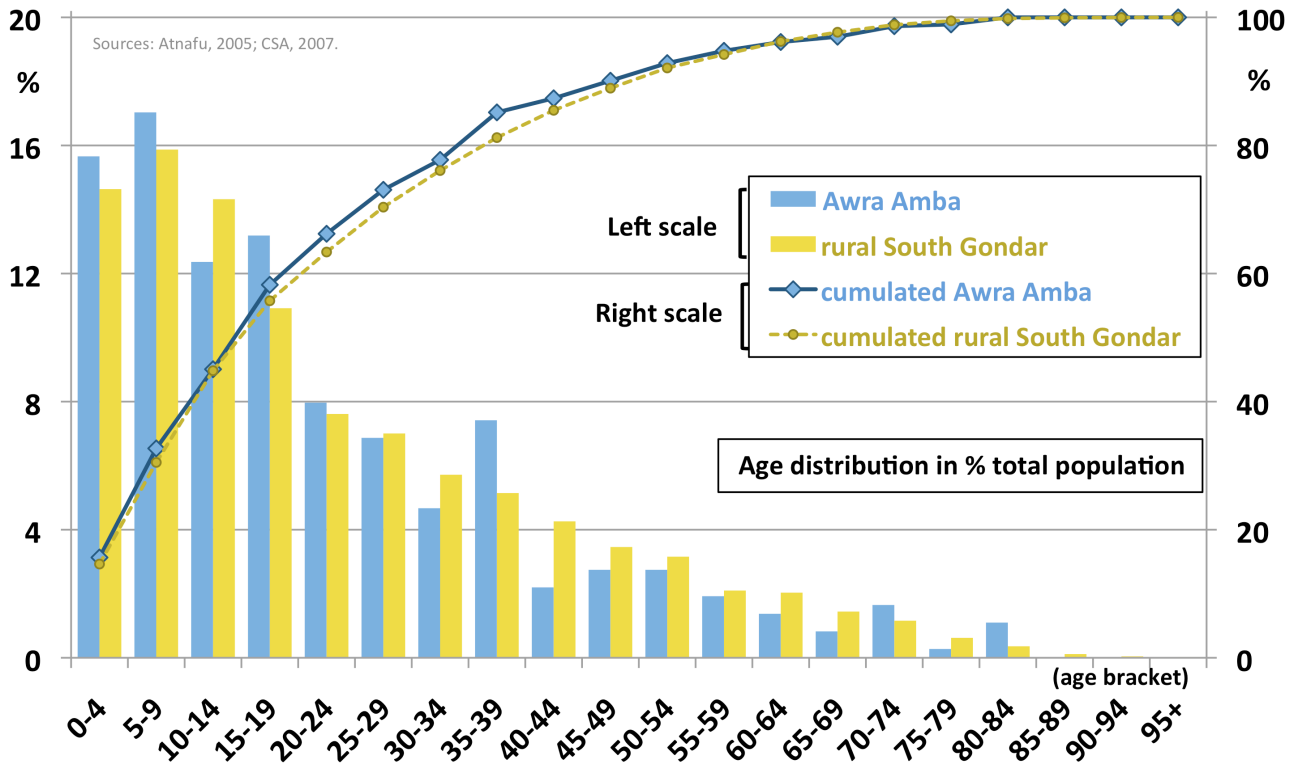


Figure 3: Age distribution of the 2005 Awra Amba population according to data from Atnafu (2005/32) and of the rural population of the South Gondar zone in 2007 (CSA, 2007/77), and cumulated distributions.

The population increase was interrupted during the exile period (1988-1993), especially because no marriage happened during these years (At05/33). It appears in Figure 3, where the 10-14 children are not a lot, compensated by more children younger than 10, in comparison to rural population of South Gondar. The age distribution shows also a quite abrupt decrease after 19 years. Globally, the population of Awra Amba contains more children and adults younger than 40 than the rural population of South Gondar, less people between 40 and 70 and a bit more people older than 70.

2.3. Geographical situation

Awra Amba is a very small community. We place it quickly in the different administrative and geographical structures, from the biggest, Ethiopia, to the smallest, the community itself, giving some characteristics of each.

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia is located in the Horn of Africa (Figure 4). It is a landlocked country, bordered by Somalia to the southeast, Sudan to the west, South Sudan to the southwest, Kenya to the south, Djibouti to the east and Eritrea to the north. The country has 91 millions of inhabitants and occupies 1 127 000 km^2, i.e. nearly two times France. Its altitude varies from -120 m to 4 543 m. It combines high plateaus (especially the central plateau between 1 800 and 3 000 m high), steep mountains and canyons, volcanic areas, savannah, desert regions and green high plains. It is a federal republic divided into nine regional states (including Amhara region) and two chartered cities (the capital city Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa).

From a socio-economic perspective, Ethiopia has a Human development index (which mixes indicators of national wealth, education and health) among the lowest in the world, but also an ecological footprint (which mixes indicators of non-renewable energy consumption, greenhouse gas emission and land take) very low, making it a less developed but very "ecological" country (see Figure 5). Yassin (2008/2) emphasizes the increasing pandemics, reducing the workforce needed by

subsistence agriculture. However, Ethiopia experiences a strong economic growth for over a decade, close to 10 % a year, one of the highest even the highest among the African non-oil-producing countries.

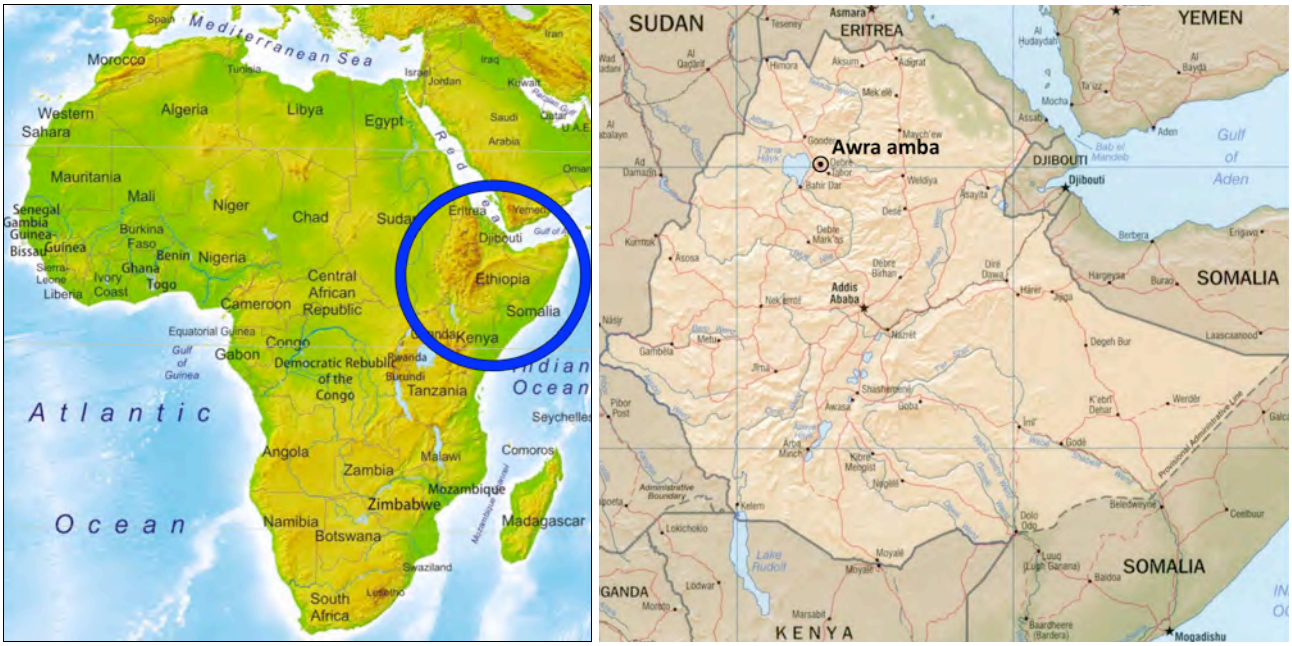


Figure 4: Ethiopia in Africa and Awra Amba position in Ethiopia.

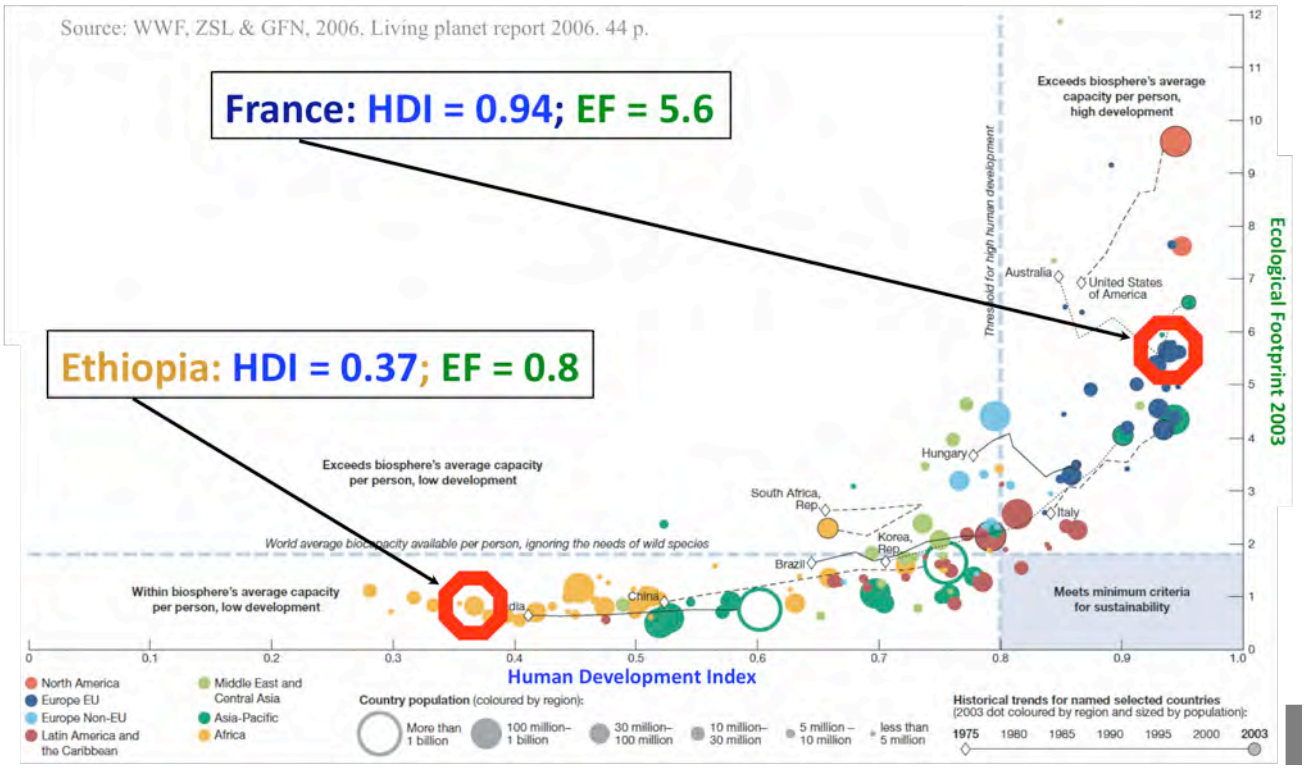


Figure 5: Human development index HDI (horizontal axis) and ecological footprint EF (vertical axis) in 2003 for Ethiopia among world countries (WWF, ZSL & GFN, 2006).

The Amhara Region, whose official name is Amhara National Regional State, is situated north west of the country. It had 17.2 millions of inhabitants in 2007 (CSA, 2007) for a surface of 159 000 km^2, the capital city being Bahar Dar along Tana Lake. Amharas form the greater part of the population

(91.5 %), whose mother language is Amharic at 93 %, and which is Ethiopian Orthodox at 82.5 % and Muslim at 17.2 % (CSA, 2007). In 2004, 4 % of the inhabitants had access to electricity, 49 % of all eligible children were enrolled in primary school, and 9 % in secondary schools (World Bank, 2004). For 2007-2009, Unicef (2012) gives an enrolment rate in primary education significantly higher, 84 %. The Amhara region is divided into eleven administrative zones (equivalent to provinces), including the South Gondar zone, themselves divided into 105 *woredas* (equivalent to districts): see Figure 6.

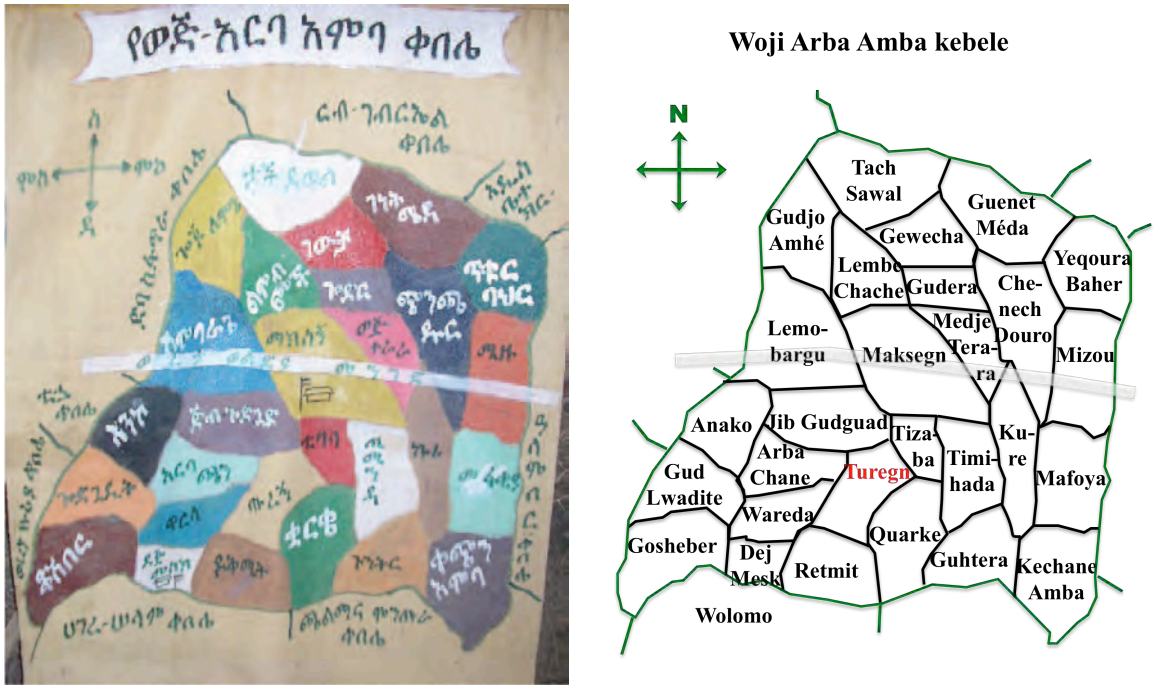
Figure 6: Division of the Amhara Region into 11 administrative zones and 105 woredas*, and position of Awra Amba.*

The Amhara region comprises volcanic high plateaus, quite similar to the French Velay and Auvergne, but warmer, as can be seen on Picture 2. 81 % of the cultivated lands produced cereals in 2001 (mainly *tef* and sorghum), 12.5 % pulses (faba bean, chickpea and field pea) and 6.5 % oil seeds (CSA, 2001).

Tef is a cereal specific to Ethiopia looking like millet and used for making *injera*, basic food and often only dish of the meal. Injera is a kind of wide crêpe, often served with a spicy sauce with dried vegetables and sometimes a little meat.

The South Gondar zone (Debub Gondar) is located along the Tana Lake, on the eastern shore; its capital city is Debre Tabor, it is divided into 9 *woredas*, including the Fogera *woreda*.

Picture 2: Landscape of Amhara region in South of Bahar Dar, typical of volcanic areas.



Picture 3: Map of the Woji-Arba-Amba kebele *where is Awra Amba (Turegn), as posted in Arba Amba school (Yirga, 2007/116) and transliteration of the map.*

The Fogera *woreda* or district (see Figure 7 and Figure 8) covers an area of 1174 km^2, and is made with 76 % plains, 11 % hills and 13 % undulated lands. According to the 2007 census (CSA, 2007), this *woreda* had 228 000 inhabitants, whose 89 % were living in rural areas and are farmers; they were Orthodox at 95.8 % and Muslim at 3.6 %. According to (Wereda Rural Development Office and ORDA (nd), unpublished documents, cited by At05/25), the population growth was 3 % a year between 1994 and 2005, and 92 % of the people obtained their livelihood from mixed farming where 29 % of the inhabitants had no oxen, which is a means of production and an indicator of wealth status. The average land holding size of household is estimated to be 2.1 ha, where 1.4 ha is for cropland and 0.7 ha is for grazing. Crops provide 65 % of the annual household income, the livestock 35 %, 0,5 % being obtained from the sale of trees, wood and crop residue. The small town of Woreta is the capital city of this *woreda*. The later is divided into 29 *kebeles* (25 rural and 4 urban ones), equivalent to a rural or urban district.

The 668 ha sub-watershed where Awra Amba is located has an average elevation of 2050 m (1900-

2200 m) and is occupied by crops at 88 %, by grass (22 ha) and forest at 3 % each, and by homesteads at 6 %. The major crops that grow in the area are *tef*, millet, *nuge*, maize, beans and peas (ORDA, nd, cited by At05/26-27). Precipitation is about 1440 mm water a year according to ORDA, but between 1200 and 1250 mm acc. to ILRI and MoA (2005). The people suffer malaria, worsened by poor feeding conditions (At05/99).

One of the *kebeles* of the Fogera *woreda* is Woji-Arba-Amba one (Me09/4) (or Arba-Amba acc. to Yi07; or Wojeina-Arvamba acc. to At05/28; or Wej Arba Amba acc. to CSA, 2007/325: Question 14 in Annex), which administers Awra Amba as well as the villages (*gotoch*) of Maksegn, Dej Mesk, Jib Gudguad: see Picture 3. Maksegn is the village where are located the primary school used by Awra Amba children till 2009 and the market where the Awra Amba inhabitants buy and sell (Yi07/62). This *kebele* had 8 908 inhabitants in 2007 (CSA, 2007/325), and more than 10 000 in 2008 according to Me09/76, which seems surprising in comparison with CSA figure.

The village of Awra Amba is a part of this kebele. It is located 13.7 km far from Woreta, 68 km from Bahar Dar, and 630 km from Addis Ababa (Me09/75): see Figure 7 and Figure 8. To go here, you have to leave the sealed Bahar Dar - Gondar road and around one kilometre after Woreta drive eight to ten kilometres over a road sealed in 2010 in the direction of Debre Tabor and then a 2-kilometre track to the South, paved by Awra-Amba community (At05/28). The location of the village is called Turigne or Turegn (At05/28; Yi07/46), Thuregne or Taika acc. to Me09/4 & 29 (Question 15 in Annex): see Picture 4.

Picture 4: Territory of The Awra Amba community, with at middle-distance, on the right of the boscage and in the front of the village, the weaving workshop.

The village of Awra Amba borders the villages of Quarke to the south, Tizaba (or Tizab) and Maksegn to the east, Arba Chane to the west, and Jib Gudguad to the north west (At05/28; Yi07/44).

According to ORDA (nd, cited by At05/28 and repeated by Ya08/50), the total land area of the community is 43 ha, including 28.2 ha cultivated land, 11 ha grass, 1.3 ha protected as bush, and 2.5 ha settlement. The village of Awra Amba would have thus half of the grass of the sub-watershed of Awra Amba, which is 16 times wider, which is surprising (Question 11 in Annex). However, according to Ya08/97 and Jo10b/2, the surface of the community would be only 17.5 ha, including 10.2 ha crops where fallowing is not practiced and fertility medium. The site has a good vegetation cover, especially Acacia and Eucalyptus, which are very common in the Awra Amba area. But deforestation remains a challenge (Ya08/50).

This small surface area gives a population density around four times higher than in the surroundings: 930 inh./km^2 in 2007, while it is 247 inh./km^2 in Fogera *woreda* according to the census of the same year (CSA, 2007) – these densities being in 2005 respectively 847 and 181 inh./km^2 according to At05/39. The density of the community would be even 2286 inh./km^2 if we accept a surface area of 17.5 ha.

We have to remember the inaccuracy of the figures of surface area of the community, globally and per use.

Figure 7: Position of Awra Amba between Bahar Dar, Tana Lake and Debre Tabor, in Amhara region.

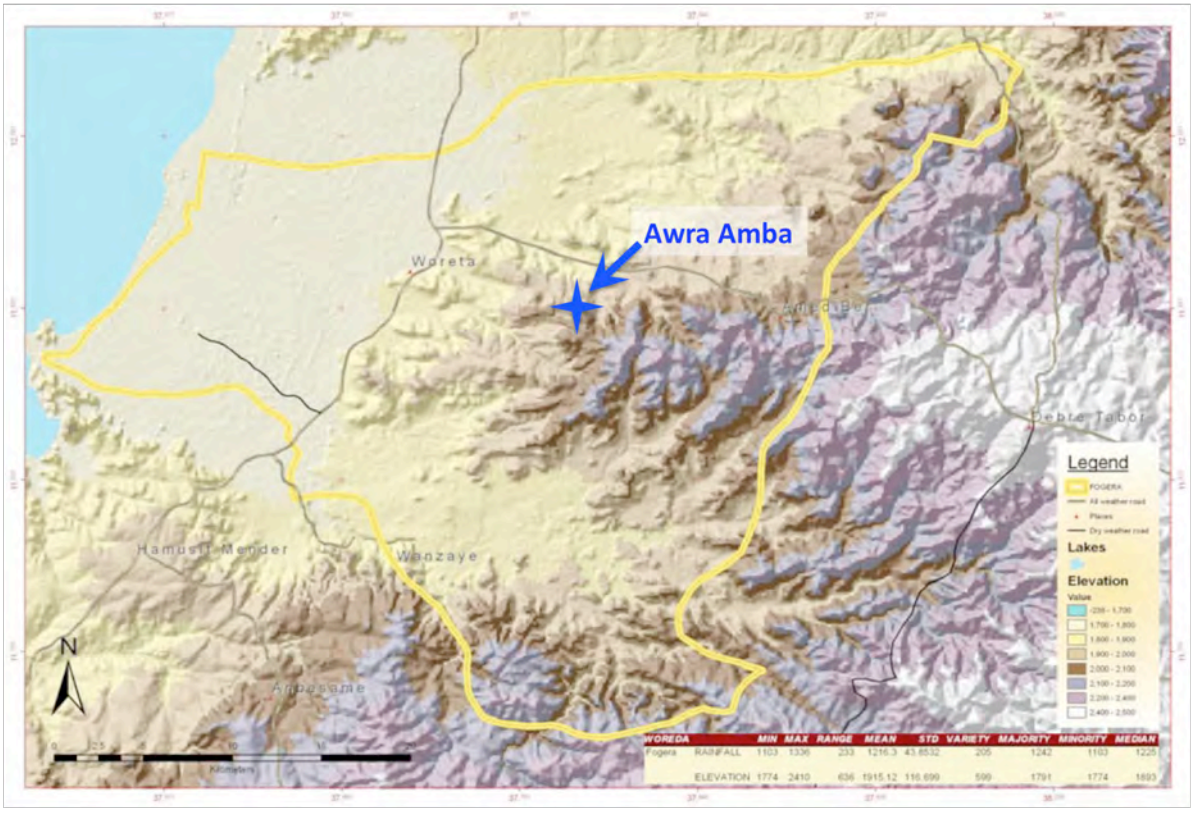


Figure 8: Relief, altitude and limits of the woreda *of Fogera with position of Awra Amba, acc. to ILRI and MoA (2005).*

According to Yi07/44-47, the initial place name seems to be Arba Amba. Inhabited in the past by

Muslims, they gave the name of Arba Ambiya, *Arba* meaning 40, *Ambiya* meaning blessed and prophet. The name Awra Amba has been given by the present Awra Amba community. However, Zumra seems build a myth around the name of Awra Amba, by explaining it was the original name linked to the presence of an animal, and, contradictory, it was the name given by visitors and then used by the community.

Awra Amba is sometimes written Awramba or Awura Amba. The community can be contacted by phone (+251 (0)58 231 0108), and the cooperative by post (Awra Amba association, PO Box 36, Woreta, Ethiopia).

3. Values and principles

Any society has a system of values – a set of ideas, concepts and behaviours in relation – to which it is strongly committed. The term of culture refers rather to a set of knowledge allowing individuals and groups to assert and interpret the values, beliefs, customs and behaviours, which distinguish them from other groups or societies (Ndura, 2004/10). The values or the culture of a society are never unchanging, but evolve over generations, especially to adapt to a new environment.

Yassin (2008/78) considers the Ethiopian society rigid and few open to new ideas and new behaviours likely enriching it. For Awra Amba, the Amhara rural society is static and does not leave any freedom to individuals whose role is defined very precisely, while the freedom of each individual enriches all (Ya08/69-70).

Awra Amba is a village strongly united by a culture and ideals, which make them very different from the Amhara society and the surrounding villages. It is firstly a community sharing values: to live in Awra Amba means to share and to defend these values (At05/48). The community does recognise explicitly the notion of value, considered as a rule, an idea, a standard, or a guiding principle in life (Ya08/83). Thus, to be allowed to be member of the community, one must complete a probationary observation period and respect an ethic and a life style fully in agreement with the values and principles of the community (Crespo, 2011).

The community members feel themselves different from other and better, because of a determination to build a new life (At05/58); according to their parents, the children have a high opinion of themselves and of their own ability to improve their situation. They are always asked to come with new ideas and to make concrete proposals, to learn only reading and writing being considered a waste of time (Ya08/76 & 92).

Prestige is acquired by who works consciously and applies in daily life the values of the community. The daily behaviour is therefore the criterion of each one's status (At05/9).

Atnafu (2005/57-58), Yassin (2008/83) and Mekonnen (2009/5) address each first of all the Awra Amba values in a specific section: the list is given in Table 2. These three attempts to structure the community values are not very coherent between them. We tried, however, to synthesize them into four main values: honesty, solidarity (or brotherhood), human rights (or equality), and reason reduced to refusal of dependence (or addiction) and of festivities.

Furthermore, all authors list community values along their texts, which is much richer than the above structuring attempts. For a better understanding of these values, it is useful to look at the questions of the founder when he was teenager, as reported by Ya08/65 & 78:

- Why don’t women have rights to choose their partners as men do?
- Why don’t women equally participate and decide on issues that concern their family and their life?
- Why don’t women have equal access to education, health and other opportunities?
- Why don’t mothers get proper respect?
- Why are people creating differences in religion by giving different names to God while God is one irrespective of names given to him by different languages?
- Why are people considering differences of colour among human beings while we are of the same stock and the difference is the same as difference between white and black cats?
- Why are ostracized skin scraper, weavers, and blacksmiths, amongst other, regardless of the importance of their professions?

Atnafu (2005/57-58)	Yassin (2008/83)	Mekonnen (2009/5)	Synthesis
Intellectual honesty (/ lying)	Honesty (/ theft, lying)		Honesty
Loyalty to his people			
Purity of thought, words and deeds			
	Human rights	Gender equality	Human rights
		Dignity	
		Individual rights	
Brotherhood	Peace		Solidarity
Solidarity	Solidarity		
	Non dependence (/addiction)		Rationalism
	Reason (/ emotions not base on reasons)		
Courage	Rigorist (/ civil and religious festivities)	Tolerance	

Table 2: Essential values of Awra Amba as defined by three authors, categorized in four groups, with antonyms between brackets.

- Why are people envying each other, disliking each other on the pretext of religion or other differences, while the essence of all religions is the value of humanity?
- Why attach so much importance to the world after the death nobody can't be sure, at the expense of the practical world, whose fate could undoubtedly be shaped by the cumulative effort of human beings?
- Why are people fighting to have a comfortable world after the death? Can't we create a heaven in this world?
- Why to build mosques and churches, which are the field of God, while God is everywhere, in heart, soul, eyes, etc?
- Why are old people not given due regard regardless of their considerable contribution to the society?
- Why is the culture of the society rigid and conservative without allowing individuals and especially children to think freely and to go in their own to the extent that it is reasonable?
- Why do religions define days to work and days on which people of that particular religion should not work? Why do the latter eat in these days? Do people suffering from poverty and hunger should take rest and abandon fields and other activities?

This author proposes finally a new list of the fundamental values of Awra Amba: peace, love and respect between human beings (men, women, children and aged) (Ya08/130).

These values are either explicit – claimed by the community, or implicit – not claimed as such but we can deduce from the analysis of the behaviours. We describe in detail in the following paragraphs what we define as the main values, from Table 2, from explicit values presented solely in the literature on Awra Amba, and from values implicit to behaviours. They are finally honesty, equality, solidarity and rationalism.

The explicit rules are written in a document in Amharic of about twenty pages, the Communal Statute, a version of which was signed in 2007 (Me09/40). Even if Zumra is without doubt their inspirer, they were chosen by the community: Zumra believes that the decisions cannot and must not be imposed by a person or a structure, but discussed in depth and taken by those who are concerned,

in an atmosphere of mutual respect (Ya08/68).

3.1. Honesty

"I saw people hurting, killing, and stealing each other. I knew that we, as persons, were doing something to other that we would hate if it would happen to us. How do we differ from animals if we don't think and behave humanly?" said Zumra according to Habtamu (2009).

Honesty is one of the main values of the Awra Amba community. Stealing and lying have no place in Awra Amba, as begging: they are absolute rules (At05/50 & 66; Ya08/74). Ennat-Ayighegne Thasew, member of the Chamber of the social justice of the *kebele,* envies their habit of telling the truth and emphasizes they do hate straight lies and strongly condemn theft (Me09/71). There is no theft in Awra Amba, and children do not beg – almost unimaginable in a country where begging is widespread (Calvino, 2008). Nevertheless, houses are all locked in order to be protected against outsiders (many people from the neighbouring villages come to Awra Amba for the mill, the shop or the café) (Jo10b).

3.2. Equality

Awra Amba is above all known for its principle of gender equality. But equality is claimed not only between men and women, but also between adults and children, and more generally between human beings.

3.2.1. Gender equality

While sex differences are physical, gender differences are socially constructed. The latter are social or cultural interpretations of sex differences, the roles assigned to or expected from each sex in a specific society.

In Ethiopia, even the roles assigned to each sex vary from a region to another, girls are educated during their childhood to be obedient, submissive, shy, virginal and imaginative [2]. Women are then suffering from socio-cultural and economic discrimination and have fewer opportunities compared to men for personal growth, education and employment (Ya08/37 & 77). Gender and age are the chief parameters concerning work: baking *injera*, fetching water are left only to females; ploughing, hunting, slaughtering are works left only to males (Yi07/58). Women and the youngest do most of the work. Among Amhara peasants, the wife is too busy in the morning to sit down for a regular breakfast; she has breakfast while doing her various works: preparing and baking *injera*, preparing the local beer (*tela*), spinning cotton, collecting dung for fuel, sweeping rubbish of the floor, carrying water from the spring, weaving straw baskets of mats. If the peasant is working in a distant farm field, his wife carries lunch out to him. Otherwise, she risks being beaten with a stick. If he is not far away he come for lunch, they eat together at home. After dinner, the peasant asks often his wife or his children to wash his feet, while other wash themselves (At05/45). In Ethiopia 15 years ago, a husband was still authorized to "discipline" his wife (France 24, 2009). The woman's schedule is today only lightened, not radically altered. Except for a possible trip to church with her husband Sunday morning before breakfast, woman's hours are still confining to the home compounds and its obligations. In the wealthier families, where one or several servants are in charge of the hardest works, woman must still be passive and reserved. Women are beaten as a matter of cause for mistakes in their work (At05/45-46).

The status women enjoyed in traditional Amhara society is therefore to be at home and her main

[2] Sentence attributed to (Ministry of Economic Development and Cooperation – MEDaC, 1999) by Ya08/76, who does not give the reference.

work is to serve her husband and her children (Levine, 1965; At05/80).

The situation is radically different in Awra Amba. The community was indeed founded on the rejection of the patriarchal authority of men and the subordination of women (At05/78).

According to article 5 of the Communal Statute, activities have not to be based on sex and children are encouraged to participate in any activity, depending on their age (Me09/29). Work, functions and responsibilities are assigned based on ability rather than sex or age (Yi07/91). It is a social rule and a personal behaviour.

Sexual division of work is therefore minimal. Both men and women share the work in the kitchen and other traditional female occupations. They both share also the outside work and more generally all traditional male occupations (At05/97). Both the mother and father share equal responsibility of their family and of their young children (Yi07/60). No one has authority over another, and economic decisions are on mutual consent (At05/39). There is role reciprocity: men stay at home and women work outside, and vice-versa. There are no gender-based games (Yi07/60). Only pregnancy and breast-feeding are the exclusive domains of women, because they are linked to a physical reality and not to a social choice.

Awra Amba is therefore a community where men care for children, cook and spin, and where women plough and weave. Men and women perform all these tasks side by side, while in Ethiopia (and elsewhere…), these occupations are assigned to the other sex.

Atnafu (2005/15) sees the origin of this value in the Koran, which, according to some citations, should give equal responsibilities to women and men. He is however unaware of texts in contradiction with equality, such as the inheritance inequality in the Koran, giving two times more to the man, and the sayings of the prophet, where divorce is pronounced by the man or a judge, but not by the wife, or forbids the woman to occupy the highest position (queen). The affirmation of Atnafu is therefore very surprising.

We analyse in detail the actuality of gender equality in Awra Amba in section 4.3 page 49.

3.2.2. Equality between children and adults

In Amhara region, children are considered inferior to adults because they are governed by ignorance and passion. An Amhara proverb says even "infants and cattle are the same" (At05/46 & 91). After 2 or 3 years, children come to be looked on as servants, most of actions of which are ordered. At the age of 4 or 5, children are given simple chores, such as shooing chickens from grain drying in the sun or collecting bits of firewood. Somewhat older children are expected to protect the crops against animals and to herd cattle, till they are 12 years old for boys (At05/46 & 87).

While all these childhood tasks are shared by both sexes, the Amhara girls begin to do distinctively female work at about 6 or 7. It is also common practices that at around 10 years the Amhara girls leave the shepherd's work once and for all and spend all their time about the house. They learn gradually all the arts of the housewife. By the age of 12 or 13 they knows enough to manage a home by themselves and are expected to be married (At05/46 & 87).

When they reach 10 or 11 the boys take part in all adult tasks, as ploughing. By the age of 14 or so earlier, they are able to replace their father in all his activities. Very shortly, they work and manage alone a small part of father's land; when they have saved enough grain, they are considered ready to get married and strike out on their own (At05/87).

In Ethiopia, half of the children between the age of 10 and 14 were economically active according to 1994 census (CSA, 1994). They should be more than 42 % in 1995 according to Basu (1999), and should be still 40 % in 2010 according to Ya08/42.

Yassin (2008/77) reports that the chores given to girls from age of 5 and above are well beyond their

physical capacity and preclude them attending school. Since they are also forced to marry early, they become pregnant too early, they have pregnancies too close together, with not only a risk of death during delivery but also a risk of death for children.

For Awra Amba, “children’s rights are not respected in the Ethiopian society as they should be. Too often, children are made to do jobs that take no account of what they can really do" (Habtamu, 2009).

In the community, the children respect their elders and the elders do the same to the children; there is no discrimination based on age, but only based on capacity (Yi07/53).

3.2.3. Equality of humans

According to Ya08/26 & 38-41, in Ethiopia, in the past, many groups like smiths, tanners, potters, woodworkers or weavers have been despised and ostracized, being denied access to land and livestock and restricted to their craft activities. At the same time, in some cases they are feared and considered to have links with evil forces, especially the smiths. They can therefore be considered to have a dual status: economically oppressed, and ritually powerful. To describe them as castes is therefore quite simplistic.

It is important to remember that the traditional Ethiopian society tends to isolate given groups, which are not well considered, not according to their behaviour or their personal value, but according to their trade.

On the contrary, an essential value of Awra Amba is equality, which obliges to respect the differences of religion, colour, race, ethnic group, job specification, physical or intellectual capacity, etc, each human being member of humanity (Ya08/68). The usual hierarchy, which leads to aspire to move up the social ladder, is replaced by aspiring to social equality through social cooperation and gender equality (At05/49; Ya08/73). There is no polarization on the community members into those who command and those who obey (At05/53), since the social recognition is not linked to the social position or to the job, but to the daily respect of the community values. Then, in order to prevent any attempt of some ones to seize power over all – any subordination, all committees should be held for a maximum of 2 or 3 years (see section 4.1) (At05/56).

This value of humanity and brotherhood is extended to universal brotherhood. Black or white, all are equal. When Zumra is asked about ethnic affiliations, he simply says, “we belong to every ethnic group, not one or the other" (Habtamu, 2009). For this reason, foreign visitors pay the same rates as their Ethiopian counterparts, which is rarely the case in Ethiopia (Jo10b/6).

3.3. Solidarity

"In Ethiopian society, the less fortunate and the old do not have anyone to take care of them. They may not even have anything to eat or anywhere to live. But the young and the stronger ones have a good time and don’t have time to look after the less fortunate ones", said Zumra (Habtamu, 2009).

On the contrary, solidarity is claimed in Awra Amba. "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs" is its practical translation (At05/53). This principle is in opposition on the one hand to the capitalist notion and on the other hand to the socialist notion that prevailed in Ethiopia under the former Derg regime, both pushing to the individual performance, while Awra Amba pushes to the collective performance through the respect of the common values.

The ownership of the means of production and of the production right-fully belongs to the entire cooperative, except household properties and activities. The government through its land redistribution policy allocates the land. But in practice, neither individuals, nor families enjoy it individually, because enjoyment is collective: the community members work collectively on the land and they equally share the produce from the land, although they do not contribute to it equally for capacity reasons. It allows those who are landless to live and reinforces solidarity (At05/51 & 53)

(Question 16 in Annex). These rules are valid for other activities like weaving, milling, etc.

More generally, every member of The Awra Amba community is responsible for the welfare of every other member and for the welfare of Awra Amba as a whole, just as the community is responsible for the welfare of each individual. No one has to fear old age, illness, lack of food, shelter or clothing, as long as Awra Amba can provide these requirements. Awra Amba constitutes in fact a single family. A woman of 55: "We all here are brothers and sisters bound by ties of common values and principles." The group is not only the mean to meet everyone's needs, it is an objective itself: the interests of individuals are subordinated to the interests of the group. The emphasis on the value of the group leads to the desire to have the best public facilities and services (schools, health, infrastructures, workshops, etc.) (At05/57 & 59).

Equality and solidarity between community members do not allow to tolerate habits, beliefs and traditional practices harmful for individuals, like early marriage, female genital mutilation, wife sharing – *warsa*, tonsillectomy, extraction of milk teeth, consumption of drugs like alcohol, khat or coffee, physical punishments or verbal condemnations of children (awraamba, nd; Ya08/71; Me09/76). Zumra fought excision of young girls, a traditional practice that was almost universal twenty years ago in Ethiopia. It has since been outlawed, but is still commonly practised. Evolution on this subject has been gradual in Awra Amba, but there have not been any excisions for 25 years (Jo10b/4).

Moreover, some behaviour are deemed dangerous for peaceful coexistence of people and therefore prohibited, like theft, lie, prostitution, waste of time and resources, gossip, corruption, crime and provocative behaviours (Ya08/85).

3.4. Rationalism

Rationalism is not an explicit value of the community, without doubt through lack of awareness of the concept. But for us, it seems to be what characterizes best the connection with the religions, even with the work, as well as with the consciousness that humans are the only responsible of their situation and that they have to build their life. This rationalism can even go as far as the rigorism.

3.4.1. God is everywhere... and nowhere

The rural Ethiopian communities consider life as a stage that could prepare them selves to life after death. The real world is understood as a temporary period, where everyone suffers, where poverty and hunger are considered as hardships towards eternal life and therefore positively accepted. In a people where all these beliefs are so deeply rooted, values and attitudes have not the objective to improve the life on Earth. It leads to fatalism for the life on Earth and makes unthinkable even the concept of development, and of course any development (Ya08/26-27).

On the contrary, the members of Awra Amba think that we are responsible of the quality of our existence and of the existence of our descendants, and that everyone has to look for improving what exists – life on Earth – rather than a hope of future life; his own efforts do allow the development.

They don't believe that a supernatural power protects them from accidents, diseases and enemies. They don't believe in a divine power allowing and sending hardships; they only believe in an all-powerful God whose ultimate goal is creating a world where social justice prevails, and which has only helping or supporting roles – like a government (Yi07/48; Ya08/72-73, 75 & 84-85). Religions not allowing to work during several days a month, these religious rituals are considered to use unnecessarily working time (Yi07/57).

Moreover, the Awra Amba members and first of all Zumra notice all religions base their basic principles on human beings and tell people to love and respect each other, help each other and create a peaceful world. But they notice also that only to give different names to God leads people killing

each other, destroying their environment and therefore acting in fundamental contradiction with rules of their religion and of all religions. (Ya08/69).

The Awra Amba members, from various religious backgrounds, although the majority are of Muslim origin, believe only in one creator of all things, like Muslims and Christians. If human beings believe in the existence of one creator, they should call him only "creator" (Yi07/56). Humankind has been therefore created from an initial couple (Yi07/50): so, the evolution of species is not recognized.

Therefore, the Awra Amba community does not follow any religion, and they believe in honesty and love for all human beings. Zumra says: "God is everywhere around us and in us. There is no need to shut him in a church or in a mosque. We don't give him a name, because that is the way to divide humans. We don't believe in life after death, as we have no proof of that. We build our paradise in this life, by working and showing solidarity to others." Timbwalel, the community guide, says: "we have no Bible, but we put into practice the main principles we found in the holy books: no theory, but practice" (Jo10b/5), expressed also by Zumra (Crespo, 2011): "we are practical, we need peace, we build it. We need to help each other, we do."

Therefore, there is no religious rite, and practically no religious belief except the existence of one creator. The fundamental values of all religions are nevertheless especially present and above all implemented (Jo10b/5).

Moreover, Awra Amba is in favour of freedom of behaviour and thought for everyone, while in the surrounding communities, each one has a rigid role defined by his community (Ya08/70). The community members express their willingness to live with followers of other religions as long as they accept behaviours other than their own (Yi07/57): it is very close to secularism. However, there are no such followers in Awra Amba, because of their potential isolation according to Yi07/57.

As Awra Amba inhabitants perceive their culture as a religion, and for facilitating comparison with surrounding communities, Yirga (2007/58) calls religion their culture. In our opinion, it is a fundamental mistake (recognized anyway later by Yirga), because the Awra Amba culture does not refer to supernatural forces, they try to influence by rites or behaviours. If they refer to a god creator, it has no part in the welfare of present or future generations, of which they are alone responsible: the future of humankind belongs only to men and women; therefore to recognize an original creator is entirely of secondary importance.

Therefore, in our opinion, The Awra Amba community has a very rational behaviour, which makes rationalism another main value of the community, although on the face of it they don't know the word.

3.4.2. Work

According to a socioeconomic survey conducted in 2003 in the Amhara region, more than half of the insufficient rainfall areas have at least 156 holidays and then non work days a year, i.e. 43 % non work days (Ya08/73).

At the same time, we have seen some trades are ostracized; but more globally, craftsmen have traditionally a lower status and are sometimes considered as sub-human. They are not slaves, but they have fewer rights, intercourse with them is limited, they cannot enter houses except on special occasion, food is served to them from leaves or broken vessels, even meeting commoners on the roads they had to kneel and look the other way, etc. (Haberland, 1978/131). The Amhara society depreciates therefore craftsmen and manual occupations, which is not in favour of diversification of peasants towards craft activities (At05/49; Ya08/28). For instance, craftsmen producing cotton clothes are despised (At05/73).

On the contrary, Awra Amba considers work as a moral value, even the most important one, "the essence of life" as said by a community member (At05/48; Ya08/73). Work is an answer to poverty, but it is first of all a means of accomplishment and to be involved in the community welfare, a

fundamental need rather than a means to meet his needs (At05/48). It is not absolutely compulsory – and therefore alienating, but voluntary, made for its own benefit and for the community good. To work within its capacity is a moral duty. Everyone is engaged in work assigned to him or what he think is good for the community (Yi07/54). The person who neglects his work responsibilities or who is inefficient in his work does not get the respect of his followers. Absence from work, even for good cause, brings even to feeling of guilt (At05/50, 51 & 55).

The value of work – any work, for all – is contradictory with traditional values such as division of work based on sex, patriarchal authority, subjugation of women and observance of public holydays according to religious rules, whose irrationality is so highlighted (At05/49). It is then one of the ways for criticising religious rites and obscurantism, in favour of a more rational approach of existence: it makes work a value close to rationalism.

Therefore, every adult community member must work, with exception of the infirm elderly, the ill and the women close to childbirth. All works are equally valued and no task is attributed according to sex or age considerations as such, but only according to personal capacities (At05/50). Except the New Year, which is in Ethiopia the 11th of September – or the 12th September in Leap Years, the Awra Amba members do work every day and therefore do not observe any other public or religious holidays (Ya08/73; Calvino, 2009).

All members of the cooperative spend five days a week doing communal work, with nine hours a day, till 5 pm (At05/80). The community members spend in addition one day a week helping the elderly, the ill and the needy and for maintenance. It is "development day", on Tuesday. Everyone is free to work for themselves outside these working days. The villagers can spend the seventh day of the week as they please. Usually, they go to market, wash and clean, or collect wood. This day off is Wednesday the first week and Saturday the next week (Jo10b/6).

All in all, then, the Awra Amba inhabitants work a lot: work is an essential value of the community, considered as a mid and long term investment.

3.4.3. Rigorism?

The extreme emphasis of work, for all adults and all over the year, leaves little room for leisure and pleasure: life is a too serious thing for privilege immediate pleasures. It is therefore a quite austere community, where besides euphoriants like coffee or alcohol, there is little room for gambling or dancing, neither for sex outside marriage (At05/42 & 58). There is no coffee ceremony as it is regarded as a waste of time and a stage for backbiting (Yi07/52), while this rather long ceremony is important in Ethiopia, whose national drink it is. It is for the foreigner, especially, a great experience of sensuous pleasure.

This rigorism does not seem to apply to children, who have the right to play and do play, sing and dance.

Moreover, the studied literature does not show that effort is valued through the value of work: it is nowhere explicitly mentioned. However it is questionable to what extent work and effort are associated.

This rigorism, tinged with puritanism and asceticism, is maybe better understood when we know that, for some neighbours, Awra Amba has the picture of a community where all is collective property, including women and children (Ya08/118). The value of work and the rigorism are therefore also means to give a good picture of the community: we can imagine even more harsh criticism of neighbours confronted with a community which wouldn't observe any religious rites, work few and party...

4. Social organisation

We describe here the main aspects of the Awra Amba community: the structures of the community, its economic activities, then its social relationships, through gender equality, equality in work, what deals with family (marriage, divorce, and family household building), the specific and original position of children, the solidarity with the weakest, the funeral, and finally the management modes of the conflicts internal within the community.

This is essentially the social capital of the community: a set of values, behaviours and modes of social organisation of which that capital is composed, which play a key role in the successful development of Awra Amba (Ya08/136).

4.1. Institutions

Awra Amba is organised into two structures (Yi07/47; Jo10b/5):

- The community, which contains especially all inhabitants of the village, who share values and a life style. It was created in 1972. This community is in fact split into those who live in Awra Amba and who really follow the common rules (439 persons at the beginning of 2011), and external members living elsewhere (Bahar Dar, Addis Ababa etc) who participate to one or two meetings with local members, and who form a sort of supporting and advising network. Zumra considers all those who share the Awra Amba values can be members of the community, irrespective of where they live.
- The cooperative or union, founded in 1986 by an original core group of 19 people and which always increased to reach 143 adult members in 2010 (81 women and 62 men, i.e. with their children 325 people). It is a work and life collective, within the community. 87 community members are therefore not members of the cooperative in 2010; among them, adults work independently, usually weaving at home. We can assess the number of these adults to more than thirty according to figures of Table 1 and age distribution of Figure 3. The cooperative did not accept any new member in 2010 due to the lack of work opportunity.

According to the chief guide interviewed by Yi07/47, to be member of the community does not allow to participate in the community tasks, to share any benefit of the community or to have access to all cooperative services; only the cooperative members are really organised, as confirmed by Crespo (2012). What about the community members living in Awra Amba and who do not belong to the cooperative, in terms of participation to local tasks, which many committees described below deal with: are they excluded from any community decision? Their situation is not clear (Question 17 in Annex).

Like any association, the cooperative comprises a general assembly of the membership, an executive management, a secretariat and an auditing section (article 11 of the 1999 Communal Statute) (Me09/40).

The most important decisions – the annual income distribution, the planning and expansion of economic activities, the election of committees – are debated and voted by adults over the age of 18 in general assemblies (At05/60): these general strategic assemblies are held once a year (At05/60; Ya08/115; Jo10b/9), or about four times a year as necessary according to Crespo (2012), whereas it seems that less important general assemblies – also so-called development days – are held once a week (At05/60) (Question 18 in Annex). These weekly development days are held on Tuesday under a big tree in the village centre, each participant spinning at the same time (Picture 5). This choice of Tuesday and the habit of spinning cotton started when Zumra's former wife lost her daughter: the

inhabitants met a Tuesday to express their sister/brotherhood and friendship by collectively spinning cotton; the meeting place and the programme of spinning cotton continued to finance a social security fund. The children to be sent to study in city, the gender equality, the elderly and the seriously sick in the community and any day-to-day questions are subjects of such meetings (At05/60).

Picture 5: Meeting under the big tree in the village centre, together with spinning, a Tuesday in April 2010.

The cooperative members elect a number of committees, which implement the decisions of general assemblies and manage collectively many aspects of the activity. These committees are defined in the Communal Statute. It seems they are since 2007 thirteen committees elected every three years in general assembly by a show of hands (At05/60-64; Ya08/114; Jo10b/9):

- The development committee, supervising the twelve others; it administers the most relevant economic issues and especially the long-term plans;
- The education committee, which manages the education and the socialization of children before high school or university. It runs especially the community kindergarten, the relations with the neighbouring public school and the involvement of the community in extra lessons in this school (Question 19 in Annex);
- The patient care committee taking care of the sick and of pregnant women;
- The elderly care committee in charge of the elderly;
- The sanitation committee, which is responsible for cleaning the communal parts of the village, encourages everyone to keep their own home clean and helps those unable to do so;
- The under-development committee responsible for the poorest;
- The problem solving committee in charge of the critical individual economic problems;
- The work assignment committee, which assigns every day a job to each member within the cooperative;
- The complaint hearing committee, which deals with the disputes between members, the police being called on only as a last resort;
- The security committee in charge of the village's security, to prevent theft and assault;

- The lost money handling committee, which manages lost property and returns it to its owner;
- The reception committee, which is in charge of contacts with visitors. It employed a chief guide, Timbwalel, and a second guide, Amane, both 22 in 2010. The first one studied up to the 11th level, the second one up to the 12th (completion of secondary education) (Jo10b/9); in 2012, it employs two full-time guides, Nane, Zumra's wife, and Burtukan (Crespo, 2012). Visitors pay admission fees of 5 birrs, equivalent to 0.20 Euro in 2010 (Crespo, 2011);
- The by law preparation committee which prepares future rules and regulations of the community; they are decided by the general assembly.

According to At05/61, there were in 2005 fifteen and not thirteen committees, like in 2008 according to Me09/40 (Question 20 in Annex). One of the above thirteen committees did not exist (the under-development committee), but three other ones did exist:

- The controlling committee for development committee, which controls this one and reports to the general assembly; it seems that the development committee and its controlling committee have been brought together later;
- The weekly development committee, which implements day after day the decisions of the development committee;
- The controlling committee for weekly development committee, which controls this one and reports to the development committee and the general assembly.

As the committee members change after each election, each cooperative member should in theory participate to a committee. However, only a small number of Awra Amba members have the skills required to be chairperson, secretary, or treasurer of a committee. They have to be able to read and write and to have some management skill, and to have access to relevant contacts in the regional capital. Therefore, 12 to 15 persons share the main responsibilities, i.e. about 10 % of the cooperative adults. The committee members enjoy no special privileges and receive no material reward. Their power is limited because the key decisions are taken, not by them, but by the general assembly of the cooperative members, and because they are subject at any time to its power of recall (At05/58; Ya08/114-115; Me09/55). It should be underlined that the founder Zumra is member of both development and reception committees (Jo10b/9).

According to figures of At05/62, each of the 15 committees (in 2005) brings together 3 to 5 people (1 to 4 men and 0 to 3 women), except the by law preparation committee, which amounts to 15 people (8 men and 7 women): see Table 3. The average number of members is 4.5, and 3.8 when this particular committee is excluded. Because women share the household responsibility with men, they take responsibility in the community (At05/85): they account for 44 % of committee members, which is lower than the 60 % of women in the population over 19 years, and even than the 51 % of women in the general population for all ages, that same year 2005. Only 6 committees among 15 have a women's participation equal to or slightly greater than the weight of women in the adult population, but 3 committees have a women's participation more than two times lower than their weight in the adult population. Women are especially very much absent in the main committee, the development one, and in the weekly development committee, where they account in both cases only for one member among five. They are not especially present in committees dealing with *a priori* female issues like education, care, elderly or sanitation. Women are leading some of the committees (Ya08/79).

According to the community leaders we have contacted, in 2010, the development committee amounted for 10 members, including 5 under 30 years, one between 30 and 35 years and 4 over 35 years, including Zumra; 5 among the 15 members of the by law preparation committee were under 35 years; 3 among the 5 cooperative leaders were under 30 years. The continuity seems therefore assured.

These committees meet at least once a year and vote by a show of hands (Jo10b/9).

Committee	Men	Women	Total
Development	4	1	5
Controlling development committee	1	2	3
Weekly development	4	1	5
Controlling weekly development committee	1	2	3
Education	3	2	5
Patients care	2	3	5
Elderly care	3	2	5
Sanitation	2	1	3
Problem solving	1	2	3
Work assignment	1	2	3
Complaint hearing	1	2	3
Security	3	0	3
Lost money handling	2	1	3
Reception	2	2	4
By law preparation	8	7	15
Total	38	30	68

Table 3: Participation to the fifteen 2005 committees (Atnafu, 2005/62). Colours indicate the egalitarian (in blue), or very low participation (in red) of women.

4.2. Economic activities

According to Ya08/2 and 126, the Ethiopian are familiar with collective and cooperative work, in agriculture (*Debo*, *Wenfel*), trade, army, as well as for many social events (*Idir*, *Equb*). In addition, in the recent past, the cooperatives were encouraged by the government for improving the economy of the communities. However, the Awra Amba cooperative has not been created at the initiative of an external authority, but at the initiative of the cooperative members themselves.

The economy of Awra Amba is partially an agricultural economy, following the alternately dry and wet seasons: the agricultural work is more important during the wet season, the cooperative taking over during the dry season mainly through weaving.

The cultivated area is 10.23 ha according to Ya08/97 (much more – 28.2 – according to At05/28), and is not irrigated (At05/38). It gives a cultivated area per household of 0.11 or 0.29 ha, which is much lower than the average figure of the *woreda* of 1.4 ha. When the areas of grassland are included, we get a surface farmed per Awra Amba household of about 0.16 ha or 0.41 ha, whereas the figure for the *woreda* is 2.1 ha: Awra Amba is far to be able to live from its land. Its cereal production per inhabitant was anyway in 2006 39 kg/inh/year, when the standard is 225 kg/inh/year in wheat (Ya08/103).

	Surface (ha)	Production (q)	Yield (q/ha)
Tef	5.75	32	5.6
Maize	3.73	118	31.6
Beans (*bollokie*)	0.75	5	6.7
Total	10.23	155	15.1

Table 4: Farming production and yield of the cooperative in 2006, acc. to Yassin (2008/98).

The main productions are sorghum (or maize: the author mentions sorghum in the text and maize in

the table: Question 21 in Annex), *tef* and beans (*boloqie*): see Table 4. Maize (or sorghum) has a much higher yield per hectare than the other crops. The average yield – for all crops – is higher by 14 % than the Ethiopian yield, which is 13.3 q/ha, and by 26 % than the regional yield, which is 12.0 q/ha (Ya08/102).

The community owned 18 zebus, 1 donkey, 1 mule and 44 hens in 2005 (At05/39), and in 2008 16 male zebus, 11 female ones, 1 donkey and 4 sheep among others (Ya08/120), which were not kept close to the houses according to At05/39, or which stayed in their stables most of the time and are fed here according to Crespo (2012). Therefore, it seems the livestock increased in three years. A barn has been financed by the USA (Jo10b/7).

The peasants plough their land with a wood mouldboard plough drawn by two zebus (Picture 6 and Picture 7). Surprisingly, several fields have not been cleared of stones, as the Picture 7 shows, which should considerably increase the work involved in ploughing and maintenance, and greatly reduce their productivity. The cooperative considers clearing the stones would take too much work according to Jo10b/8, or it is a usual way to combat rain and wind erosion according to Crespo (2012). Finally, unlike the rest of Ethiopia, Awra Amba inhabitants use saws and not only axes to cut eucalyptus for timber or firewood.

Picture 6: Ploughman with his plough and his yoke leaving for fields.

Picture 7: Ploughing, in April 2010.

As they cannot live on agriculture alone, given the poverty and the scarcity of the soil, they have

diversified into weaving, milling and trade. The cooperative owned in 2010 a weaving workshop, a mill, shops and an Isuzu truck (Jo10b/7).

A first mill was donated in 2002 by the regional government through the Amhara Development Association, and since then the cooperative has continued to develop this activity. In 2010 it owned six electric mills for *tef*, maize and sorghum from the village and from neighbouring farmers (Jo10b/7): see Picture 8. Three new mills were added at the beginning 2012, one for *tef*, the second for maize and the last for husking rice (Crespo, 2012). "Neighbouring farmers prefer to use our mills because they trust us not to cheat them", according to one of the villagers (Halpern, 2007): it allows the clients to drop their grain off in morning and to get the flour back in evening, rather than to wait on the spot the flour to be ready as it is the case somewhere else; a second reason is the price, lower than in the neighbouring mills: 0.20 birr per kilo of flour, instead of 0.25 to 0.30 (Crespo, 2012).

The community owned also a breezeblock spinning and weaving workshop with corrugated iron roof (Picture 4 on page 29). The building was paid for in 2007 by the Netherlands and the Ethiopian government (ESRDF) (Ya08/120), as well as five steel looms (Picture 8). The cooperative acquired also eight steel looms and six wood looms. All these looms are operated by hand. The cooperative would like to have electric machines, which are less tiring (Jo10b/7). Spinning is considered an easy job, and is done in the same building. The village produces shirts, dresses, skirts, tablecloths, scarves, hats, towels, blankets and other garments (Mamo, 2006), sold on site, in their shops of Woreta and Alem Ber, and on markets. The main customers of the cooperative products are the merchants, visitors, farmers and weavers from the neighbouring *kebeles* (Ya08/109).

Picture 8: Cooperative: mill (notice the cross on the breast of the young man under the mill, which points at him as neighbour), and steel loom (pict. C. Crespo).

The cooperative owns also several shops – the main grocery shop of the village, two small shops in the village, and two shops in the neighbouring cities of Woreta and Alem Ber (Jo10b/7), and the coffee shop of the village. The grocery shops of the village serve the residents of Awra Amba and neighbouring villages (Picture 9). The coffee shop is the heart of the village where people meet, gossip and debate about every day things as well as big philosophical matters (Tervo, 2009). It does not serve coffee neither alcohol, which are considered addictive and a threat to mental well-being, but a lot of tea and soft drinks. The prices are 1 birr for a drink and 4 birrs for a dish.

The Isuzu truck, recently purchased, is used for the supply of raw cotton in Addis Ababa, for the transport of finished products, and for the neighbouring villages against payment (Crespo, 2011).

Finally, the cooperative has a guest house equipped with toilets (a simple but clean room costs

20 birrs), and built and rents a house to teachers and another to schoolboys coming from far away (Crespo, 2011; 2012).

Picture 9: The village square, with on the left the big tree for meetings and in centre the grocery shop; The village the grocery shop in January 2011 (pict. C. Crespo).

Globally, handcraft (spinning and weaving) is the main occupation for almost everyone (98 %), farming the second occupation for 94 % of interviewed people, and trade the third occupation for 74 % of interviewed people (Ya08/99). Mekonnen (2009/38) states that subsistence agriculture constitutes the main source of income, whereas for Jo10b/7, weaving is the main source of income of the cooperative, followed by trade, then milling, finally the truck. The share of the various sources of income is therefore not very clear (Question 22 in Annex).

Picture 10: Small house, exceptionally round, with its private loom, in 2010.

Mekonnen (2009/38) mentions also other activities such as beekeeping and the production of energy-saving stoves and other household utensils, using local materials and local technology. Weaving of traditional clothes known as *shemma* is also practised by all with a family loom (Picture 10) and provides a significant source of income during the dry season; every family gives 11 birrs a year for its supply of cotton (Crespo, 2011). The families raise in addition hens, grow a few vegetables; some produce honey; others have a zebu in the herd of the village and sell the milk in the coffee shop.

Since 2011-2012, the cooperative experimented cultures on compost with the help of Oromo specialists (0.5 m^2 mini-gardens, vegetables on the sides of compost bags) and egg-laying hens with advice of the government, whose food was bought (Crespo, 2012).

What are the incomes from these different activities?

Atnafu (2005/82) states an annual income per cooperative member of 134 birrs for farming and 180 birrs for weaving, without doubt in 2004. In addition, weaving on a private traditional loom at home yields 120 birrs per family and per year. For a couple of cooperative members, it would give about 750 birrs a year, around 75 Euros.

According to Jo10b/5, the annual income of a cooperative member was in 2009 3000 birrs, 168 Euros. This income was increasing, but was yet lower than those of the neighbouring farmers.

Yassin (2008/104) lastly states an income of 1005 birrs per year and per person, around 70 Euros at the average exchange rate for 2008. This income was higher than the regional average income, which was 840 birrs per person. However, the report does not clearly state if it is an income per inhabitant or per adult, neither if the average income concerns only the inhabitants of the rural zones. This same author gives the average annual income per household in 2006 per source type and gender of the head of household, but does not specify the number of adults per household: it does not allow comparing these figures to the other evaluations. It allows nevertheless evaluating the overall incomes per source (subject to error of interpretation of the table of Ya08/107 whose units are not clear):

- 69 % for the cooperative,
- 12 % for the private craft,
- 10 % for the annual crops,
- 8 % from credit,
- 1 % from beekeeping.

The average annual income per household was then 3417 birrs, around 270 Euros: it was close to the figure we give for 2009, but much higher than estimated by Atnafu.

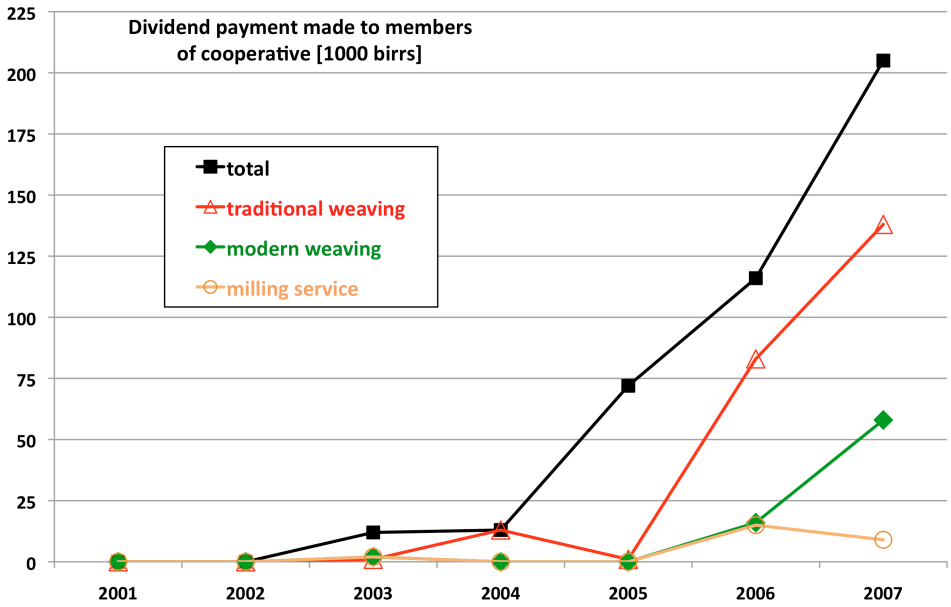


Figure 9: Trend of dividend payment made yearly to members of cooperative from different activities, in thousand of birrs, acc. to Yassin (2008/108).

All these figures seem therefore inconsistent and questionable. Moreover, we have to take into account the collective income which provides for welfare, education and village management, as well as the value of the services made voluntarily by the members (help elderly etc.), which are not included in the personal incomes, but which contribute a lot to the well-being of the population, and which are, to a very great extent, specific to Awra Amba.

Yassin (2008/108) shows furthermore the evolution of the incomes distributed to all cooperative members from 2001 to 2007, but coming only from weaving and milling: see Figure 9. In 2007, the traditional weaving corresponded to around 67 % of the whole activity of the cooperative, the modern weaving to around 28 %, and the milling to around 5 %. The weaving activity only started really in 2006.

Finally, the members of the Awra Amba community assure their food needs are fully covered all along the year, whereas two thirds of the Amhara peasants cover their food needs only for nine months a year, 2.5 million people being affected by chronic food insecurity, and 3 million are hungry almost every year (among 19 million inhabitants) (Ya08/96 and 101).

The community remains nevertheless poor. Some young members have left it, without doubt for economic reasons (At05/84).

4.3. Equality between men and women at work

As stated by At05/2, all societies practice at least some division of work between men and women. Williams (1993) states that women or men who do not comply with this division of work are suspected not to be "real women" or "real men". The movie of Stine (2012/52-54') gives for instance an illustration of that in the lower Omo Valley in southeast Ethiopia.

In Ethiopia, women work more than men: the women work in average more than 13 hours a day, but the men less than 13 hours a day (Habtamu et al., 2004/47 and 57).

In Awra Amba, woman's inferior position in the economy was abolished by destroying the traditional division of work based on sex (At05/81). Women contribute to the expenditure of their household on an equal footing with men, and fulfil their own economic needs without depending on their husband; they have full control over their income (At05/83; Ya08/105). A woman of 40 years said (At05/81): "I participate in the economic activities of the community on the same level as my husband. I share equally as my husband. We both equally support our family without depending on one another."

Picture 11: Female and male water carriers back from spring, in 2010.

Of course, women are not battered for mistakes in their work (At05/80). Here women rights are respected, whereas in the rest of this poor country, traditions and traditional practices are followed, not the law. Melkenesh Seid, one of the women living in Awra Amba is happy with this situation. She said: "Being a member of Awra Amba means I am respected within the family and treated as an equal. I am able to claim my rights and if I am no longer happy in my marriage, I know than if I divorce, I get 50 % of our property." (France 24, 2009)

This gender equality is general and starts at the youngest age. We have seen there are no gender-based games (Yi07/60); at school, the Awra Amba male students prepare tea and so show to other students this kind of work is not restricted to females (Yi07/79).

However, is the equality real?

Atnafu (2005/76-80) measured during his survey the participation of men and women, and of kids and girls, to household and farming chores, through declaration of people.

	Adults			Children			Children / adults
	Women (%)	Men (%)	Women/ men	Girls (%)	Kids (%)	Girls / kids	
Sample (person number)	*80*	*80*		*80*	*80*		
Fetching water	98	69	1.42	31	19	1.67	0.30
Collecting fire wood	44	99	0.44	6	19	0.33	0.18
Cooking food	99	71	1.39	9	4	2.33	0.07
Taking care of animals	99	99	1.00	19	19	1.00	0.19
Caring for small kids	100	99	1.01	81	69	1.18	0.75
Bringing goods to market	98	99	0.99	9	14	0.64	0.11
Washing clothes	88	94	0.93	19	16	1.15	0.19
Cotton clearing	99	81	1.22	31	29	1.09	0.33
Spinning	96	88	1.10	19	13	1.50	0.17
Non weighted average	91	89	1.06	25	22	1.21	0.26

Table 5: Participation rate in % to different household chores according to sex and age acc. to data by Atnafu (2005/76). Colours show the most inegalitarian cases.

The nine identified household chores were equally shared between the sexes, except six of them, presented below by decreasing order of difference between the sexes (see Table 5):

- Collecting fire wood: men were responsible of that 2.3 times more often than women, kids 3 time more than girls; the reason given for this was that men want to protect females from any problem they might face outside the village (At05/75);
- Cooking food: women cooked 39 % more than men, girls 2.3 times more than kids,
- Fetching water: women did that 42 % more than men, and girls 67 % more than kids (see Picture 11),
- Bringing goods to market: girls did that 57 % more than kids, but children rarely made this activity,
- Spinning: girls did that 50 % more than kids, but children also rarely made this activity,
- Cotton clearing: women did that 22 % more than men.

The difference is very noticeable for collecting fire wood, noticeable for cooking and fetching water, and low for the three last chores. The few chores made mainly by women do not have lower status than the traditionally male chores (At05/80). The average participation is slightly higher for women than for men (91 and 89 %), and for girls than for kids (25 and 22 %): but without knowing the weight of each of these chores, it is difficult to give a real meaning to these figures.

The eight identified farmer tasks are on average done by men 25 % more than by women (see Table 6). The difference is quite constant between sexes, except for two tasks, which require without doubt the most physical strength:

- Ploughing: done seven times more by men than by women,
- Threshing: done two times more by men than by women.

However, men as much as women weed the land. In the peak season of agricultural work women often ask other members of the family (and especially to their older children) to watch their children and feed them while they work in the fields (At05/78).

	Adults			Children (%)	Children / adults
	Women (%)	Men (%)	Women / men		
Sample (person number)	*80*	*80*		*80*	
Land cleaning	99	100	0.99	21	0.21
Ploughing	15	100	0.15	0	0
Sowing	99	98	1.01	0	0
Weeding	99	100	0.99	9	0.09
Harvesting	94	99	0.95	11	0.12
Transporting the harvest	94	99	0.95	0	0
Threshing	51	98	0.53	6	0.08
Storing	94	98	0.96	4	0.04
Non weighted average	80	99	0.82	6	0.07

Table 6: Participation rate in % to different agricultural activities according to sex and age acc. to data by Atnafu (2005/77). Colours show the most inegalitarian cases.

These results are apparently answers to a questionnaire and not counts of the tasks done really by men and women. A limited count we have done in 2010 (Jo10b/4) showed that:

- For the traditionally female tasks, out of 51 people carrying water from the spring (and therefore carrying about fifteen kilograms), 35 were still women (2.2 times more than men), that out of ten spinners in the cooperative, eight were women (4 times more than men), and out of fourteen spinners during the development day on the village square, twelve were women (6 times more than men);
- For the traditionally male trades, out of eleven weavers in the cooperative, eight were men (2.7 times more than women), and the five ploughmen we saw were all men.

These figures measured on very small samples and therefore few representative show a greater difference in the tasks per sex than the difference measured by declarative survey by Atnafu.

Furthermore, 4 % of the male heads of house hold have no access to media (radios, newspapers), but 14 % of the female ones according to Ya08/93: we could have here a slight inequality between the sexes, but this conclusion must be put into perspective because of the small sample and the non taking into account of other possibly explanatory factors.

Gender equality in the various tasks seems therefore not fully reached, but we also have to consider that the tasks are also attributed according to capacity: spinning is an easy task, ploughing is physically very difficult, some tasks more dangerous for women. In comparison with the allocation of the tasks according to the sex in the Amhara society, a large part of the objectives seems to be reached, which is considerable.

We can therefore say there is equality in couple as producers, as consumers, as responsible of tasks and works and as responsible of the family, although Mekonnen (2009/45) considers it is without doubt exaggerated.

Symbolically, as long as the father lives, he is considered as the head of the family. This is due partially to the automatic acknowledgement by the neighbours and related people external to Awra Amba of the father as the head of the house hold (At05/39-40). But the head of the house hold does not play really the role of a head... Father's name is the middle or parent name of children (Yi07/60).

4.4. Family

The family is one of the pillars of the social organisation. We describe it below through marriage, divorce and homestead building.

4.4.1. Marriage

Traditionally the boy has not even known what his bride looks like until the wedding itself (Levine, 1965/101). This practice is still prevalent in the rural areas of the region. The parents play an important role in the choice of the partner of their son or daughter and carefully inspect the families of potential partners of their child. Once the marriage is decided, the two families enter in competition in preparing costly feasts for the occasion, in order to show their social status. The boy who dares to choose a wife on his own commits an offense for which the father has the moral right to curse and disinherit him. Marriage is regarded as a bond between families, not between individuals (At05/46-47).

In the Amhara region, the median age of the first marriage was 15.2 years for women aged 20 to 24 in 2005, slightly higher than 14 years for women aged 25 to 44, and 13.6 years for women aged 45 to 49. Girls marry therefore very early, especially in comparison with other Ethiopian peoples like Oromos, to the south, who marry around 3 years later (EDH, nd). Early marriage is especially frequent in the rural zones according to a study quoted by Ya08/80. As immediate effect, girls drop automatically out of school. In the longer term, psychological problems occur because of their loneliness, whereas they should be at school and play with their friends (IPS, 2010). In 2005, Ethiopia recognized early marriage harms young girls, and set the minimum age of marriage at 18 years (IPS, 2010).

The median age for the start of sexual relations of women is slightly higher than the median age of the first marriage: it highlights the importance of virginity for the girls. Finally, 22 % of the men are polygamous (CSA, 2006).

In Awra Amba, marriage is the business of the young people, without the parents playing any role according to At05/41 & 79 and Yi07/48, with little or no intervention from ascendants or close relatives according to Me09/38. Nearly 98 % of the adults interviewed by Ya08/80 assert marriages are established by the agreement of the partners, without any interference of their families. Yirga (2007/48) states moreover, quoting Zumra, the families should approve the union of their children in view of the formalities. It appears therefore that interference of families is the exception, the parents being only informed about the union of their children, who are financially and materially responsible for their couple (Yi07/49). The community approves the marriage after three to five older people have verified the minimal age of the young people and their agreement (awraamba, nd).

The couple's parents can give them gifts (At05/41; Yi07/49). But the dowry system and other property arrangements have been abolished. There is no wedding ceremony, contrary to Amhara custom (At05/81), because it is considered as a waste of resources. The community members also never participate in wedding ceremonies of other communities (Yi07/49). The prestige of a wife does not depend on the social status of her husband (wealth, leadership, membership of a management committee of the community, education).

The groom and the bride both live either with the groom's parents or the bride's parents, until they have built their own house (At05/41).

Over the last 25 years, the taboo of incest, which prohibits any consanguine marriage till the 7th generation in the Amhara region, has been eased to 4 or 5 generations, in order to deal with the lack of opportunities of exogamous partners according to At05/41: the people from outside the community are little attracted by a life in the community whose culture is very different, and the neighbouring communities ban any marriage with an Awra Amba member. Zumra stated (Yi07/50)

that "the community members can go and marry the outsider. The outsider also can come and marry a community member, but he should live our life; otherwise good bye." Only 5 couples of the village out of 47 have a partner coming from outside, i.e. 10 %.

The minimum age of marriage has been discussed within the community and set at 19 for girls and 20 for men (Yi07/49; Jo10b) – 22 according to Crespo (2011) (Question 23 in Annex). Minors do not have the right to marry and are punishable by severe penalties according to the communal status (Me09/38). The single or divorced women are not disliked, as it is the case elsewhere (Ya08/79). Finally, polygamy is discredited, thanks to the principle of gender equality (Me09/38) and does not exist apparently (Question 24 in Annex).

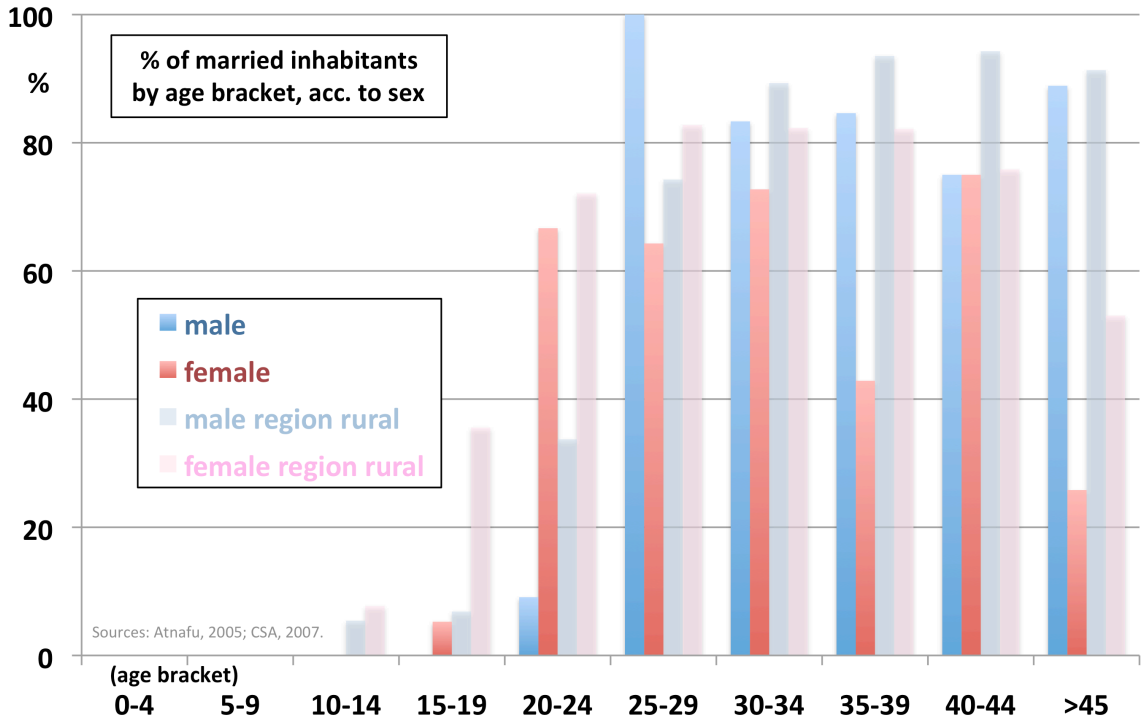


Figure 10: Marital status by age and sex in 2005 in Awra Amba acc. to data by Atnafu (2005/35), and comparison with 2007 census for the rural kebeles *of Amhara region (CSA, 2007/178).*

According to the detailed and comprehensive survey conducted by At05/35, out of 367 persons counted (and no more 364 as indicated in the text and the census per age and sex), there was no man married before age 20, only one girl being married between 15 and 19 years of age. Only 9 % of men aged 20-24 were married, but 67 % of women. 75 % of men over 19 were married, but only 50 % of women. Over 24 years, these figures were 88 and 46 % respectively (cf. Figure 10); but all people over 24 years were or have been married. According to At05/34, young women marry usually between the ages of 19 and 22, and young men between the ages of 20 and 25. These figures show large differences with the rural population of the Amhara region of 2007 (CSA, 2007/178: see Figure 10), where 5 % of boys and 8 % of girls aged 10-14 are already married, and respectively 34 and 36 % between 15 and 19 years, whereas these figures are null or very low in Awra Amba. 34 % of boys of the Amhara region are married before age 25, whereas they are only 9 % in Awra Amba. Another difference concerns the older and especially women: while 92 % of men and 64 % of women over 34 are married in the regional population, they are no more than 86 and 35 % in Awra Amba. There are therefore in Awra Amba a much larger proportion of alone women, divorced or widowed. Several men have been remarried with younger women after exile, after widowhood or separation, but rarely with a young girl (At05/37 et 42).

Women are systematically younger than their husbands, the difference in age being between 0 and 27

years, with an average of 7.5 years and a median of 5.4 years (50 % of couples have a difference in age lower or higher than 5.4 years): see Figure 11.

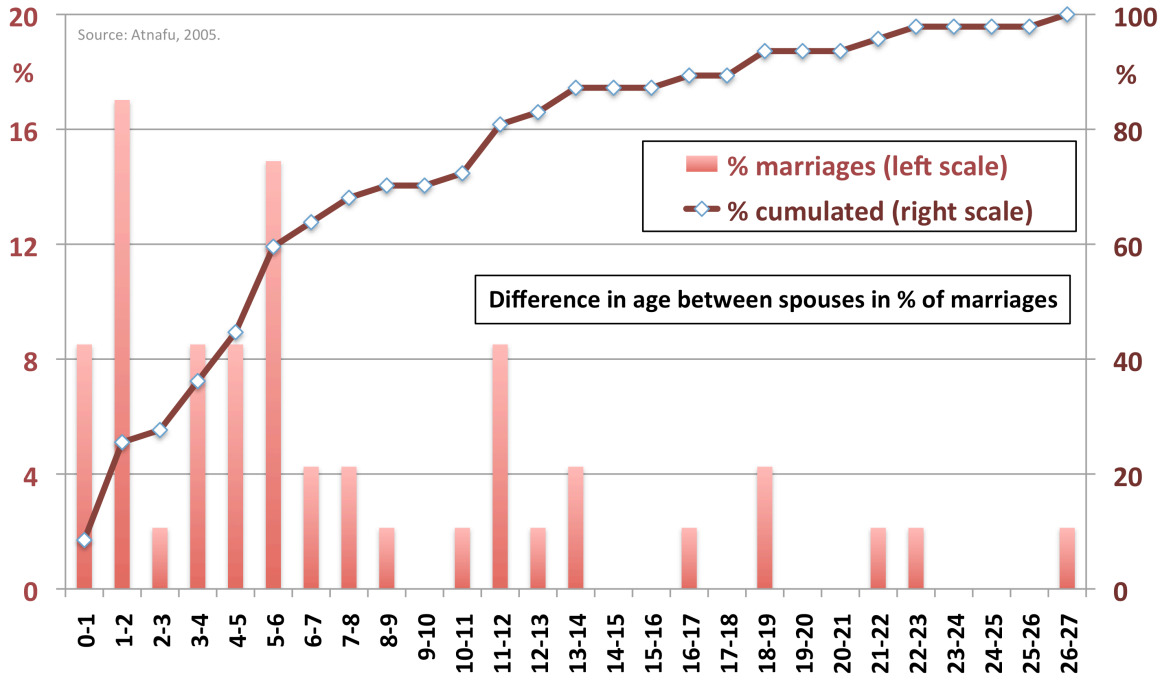


Figure 11: Difference in age of married people in 2005, acc. to data by Atnafu (2005/36).

Again according to At05, the 47 couples had between 0 and 7 children, with an average of 3.1 children per couple and a median of 3.3 (see Figure 12), while the Ethiopian average was 4.2 in 2010 (Unicef, 2012). The community had also 49 single parents (widowed, separated or divorced), which had 1 to 7 children, i.e. 2.3 children on average (with a median of 2.5 children). The main cause of this situation was the death of the spouse (57 % of the cases).

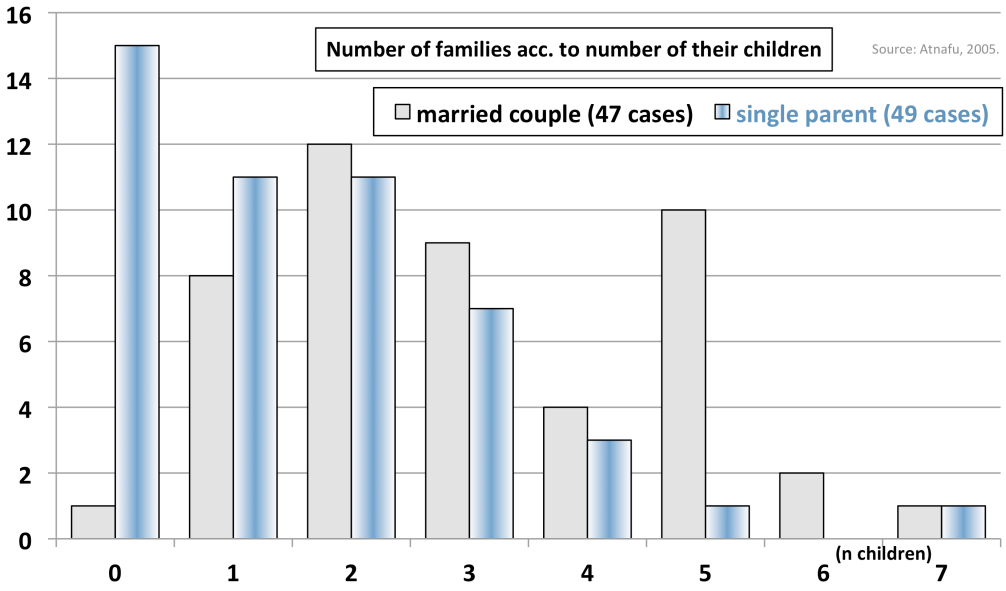


Figure 12: Distribution of married couples and single parents according to their number of living children, in 2005, acc. to data by Atnafu (2005/33-34).

A family in Awra Amba only includes the husband and wife and the children if they exist, while it is usually broader in the Amhara region (Me09/45). The average size of household is therefore smaller

(3.7 persons instead 5.2) according to Ya08/95. It was 3.8 persons in 2005 (At05/33-34) and 3.4 persons in 2008 (Me09/37), to compare to the figures from the 2007 census: 4.5 and 4.4 persons per household in the rural *kebeles* of Amhara region and in the Fogera *woreda* respectively (CSA, 2007/317 & 325). There is therefore around one person less per household in Awra Amba.

Married women have an inalienable right to contraception (natural as well as artificial ones) without the knowledge of their husbands if necessary, an all are aware of contraception (awraamba, nd; Ya08/77 & 82) (Question 25 in Annex). Contraception is anyway widely used in Ethiopia. The community considers that a woman older than 45 should no longer have children. Nevertheless, the community does not demand the right to abortion, illegal but openly discussed in Ethiopia. They think that abortion remains a private affair, always possible in a private clinic in town (Jo10b).

Premarital sex and sex outside marriage should be forbidden (Jo10b). It seems rather according to (At05/42 & 79) they are now disapproved without being openly criticized; the limited number of potential partners, given the difficulty of marriages outside the community, could explain partially this situation (Question 26 in Annex). Finally, prostitution is prohibited (Ya08/85).

Rape is of course forbidden, and a boy accused of rape can be banned from the community or have to wait for a long years to get married (At05/42). Atnafu thinks the most important control mechanism over the sexual life before marriage is a rigorous self-discipline based on the values and principles of the community.

4.4.2. Divorce

It is easy a spouse to obtain a divorce, that is moreover frequent in Ethiopia, although it goes still often against the tradition in some rural areas (France 24, 2009). A couple may divorce without formalities by mutual consent (At05/42). Nevertheless, divorce must be justified to be allowed by the community: the acceptable reasons are among others sexual incompatibility, sterility, laziness, existence of repeated disagreements, and violating rights of the partner. According to a survey among the heads of households, these reasons are also the reasons of divorce at 35, 32, 17, 15 and 2 % respectively (Ya08/81-82). In 5 years, only one people, a woman, filed for divorce in a court of law (Me09/54).

Young children remain with their mother, while older children choose with whom they wish to live (Crespo, 2012). The property of the couple is shared equally (At05/42).

A widow can remarry any time, which is not the case in the traditional Amhara society (At05/42).

The frequency of divorce has lowered and they are now quite rare. Atnafu (2005/79) explains that by the geographic stability of the community members, unlike the former exile period, and by the growing opposition in principle to divorce among the former Awra Amba children now adults.

4.4.3. Homestead

Levine (1965/56) states the traditional Amhara peasant homestead consists of from one to six small round structures, built of wattle and capped with conical thatched roofs. The richest homesteads have one building for eating and sleeping, one for animals, one for grain storage, one as a kitchen, and one for guests, while for many peasants all these functions are met by a single large building. The homestead is for both parents and their unmarried children, possibly a young married son or daughter and a young relative. The wealthier the peasant, the more relatives and servants will be found in the homestead (At05/44-45).

In Awra Amba, family houses have wattle-and-daub walls and a roof made of thatch and more and more of iron sheeting (see Picture 12). Unlike Amhara houses, they are rectangular. The house of the founder and leader is larger than others (At05/37). The community members usually build themselves collectively the houses and the other collective structures. Both men and women do the planning and most of the manual work. They prepare the material first and then bring them to the

construction site. Beams, rafters and centre poles are hewn or cut from trees by the men. Branches of trees are collected and cut to desired lengths for wattles as the work progresses. Both men and women carry water for making the mixture of mud and manure, which is daubed on the wattles by both also (At05/38).

Picture 12: Village houses; Stove and furniture specific to the community.

Household furniture and fixtures include a bed with mosquito net, chairs made of frames of boughs of trees crossed with strips of leather, made at home. Most houses have a leather bench built into the wall for use in sitting and sleeping (At05/37; Ya08/89). They are equipped with a stove and similar furniture in all houses (see Picture 12), and often with a private weaving machine. The stove is a closed model specific to the village, designed by Zumra in 1979. It is raised off the ground to prevent young children being burnt accidentally and has a chimney, which evacuates the smoke (this is not always the case in Ethiopia). The chimney has a bend in it, on which water can be boiled, and which also enables it to be cleaned. Energy consumption for cooking is half as high as elsewhere according to the German cooperation (GTZ). Each house is also equipped with a kitchen dresser made of wood and mud (Mamo, 2006; Jo10b/8).

Houses and furniture are built from the same material as every African village has: mud. The difference is that they are built attractively, while bearing energy saving in mind, and also the need for furniture which can be made of the same mud, not limiting the design to just the basic roof and walls (Bat-Gil, 2009).

Each household has a Turkish toilet on a cesspool. These toilets are grouped together, and are located 50-100 meters outside the village (Jo10b/8). The village has some rubbish containers, which is most unusual in Ethiopia, in which the rubbish is burnt outside the village. Unlike the neighbouring villages, the houses and the village are very clean, which limits the infectious diseases like malaria (Ya08/89). The maintenance is done by all inhabitants of the village, under the control of the sanitation committee of the cooperative (Crespo, 2012).

Water is available at four taps; it is not clear if it is suitable for drinking or not (Crespo, 2011; 2012) (Question 27 in Annex). It is free at the old manual pump, whose well has been initially dug by the community and then deepened with the help of Finland (Awraamba, nd; Yi07/44), and has to be paid for at the taps installed by the State and connected to a diesel pump (Jo10b/9). The community had in January 2011 the project, uncompleted in 2012, to install a system for sewage disposal (Crespo, 2011; 2012).

The village has electricity. The grain mill operates partly on electricity and each house of the village has a light bulb to light; each family paid in 2011 1 birr the corresponding annual consumption, and more if it thought to have more consumed (Crespo, 2011); in 2012, each household is equipped with

an electric meter according to the village guides (Crespo, 2012).

The family houses and all their supplies belong to the families and are managed by them (At05/52).

4.5. Mutual respect and solidarity

Solidarity is expressed between all the community members, in mutual respect. It is especially the case of children, who are respected by adults, but also of adults in a disadvantageous position.

4.5.1. Children in Awra Amba

Children are respected in their bodies: no initiation rite, no corporal or severe punishment, no insults or injuries, no public humiliation, unlike the behaviour of neighbouring traditional communities (Me09/51; Crespo, 2011). In case of disobedience, the case is discussed in fortnightly family conference (see section 4.5.2), but children are quite never in situation of resistance or hostility towards adults (At05/44).

Children have three very distinct duties: go to school, play, and help the community in its work (Crespo, 2011), since "our sons and daughters have the right to education and to play". In most of the collective games, boys and girls play together; they are singing and dancing also together when the heat of the day is over (At05/44).

Both boys and girls begin to help in their houses from the age of 6 to 8 (At05/75). According to the survey of At05/76, children participate nevertheless 4 times less than adults to household tasks (see the ratio of average participations of children and adults in last column of Table 5 page 50). They care especially for young children, and deal very few with cooking, bringing products to market and spinning.

According this same survey, children participate still less to farmer tasks, on average 15 times less than adults (see last columns of Table 6 page 51). They participate mainly to land cleaning.

Atnafu (2005/75 & 93) explains this low participation of children to the various tasks by the reason that parents are very permissive and make few, if any, demands to their children thanks to their age and because they are going to school. Education to the value of work does not therefore come by the way of obligation to participate actively to adult tasks, but by the way to go to school: the child is not considered as a reduced adult, but as involved in specific activities: play, go to school, and help the work.

Children are not sent off alone for wood gathering for instance; adults do not let their children out of their sight. When the children go to school, located far from the village until 2009, or come back, they make queue with the younger in front, in order to be protected by the older (At05/43; Yi07/80). Girls and boys take part in the household chores almost close to parity (see section 4.3), participate equally to school activities and get equal parental treatment in all aspects (At05/93).

All children attend school as long as possible according to their capacity and are encouraged to continue studying after they come home from school (Jo10b/6). "Being educated means respect and help each other in order to create brotherhood", said Zumra (Sisay, 2007).

At05/88-89 states a characteristic of Awra Amba, noticed unanimously by all observers, is the attachment of parents to their children. No sacrifice is too great for their children, who enjoy better living conditions than their parents (food, clothes, rest). The children and their parents have intense relationship. The children are always encouraged to express their feelings and complain to parents (At05/88-89).

Both parents exercise parental authority jointly, and equally (Me09/47). Children education is nevertheless strict, because, according to Zumra, "when parents are permissive with a child, he lays it on a bit thick" (Crespo, 2011).

4.5.2. Fortnightly family meeting

The evening meal taken with the family is an opportunity to discuss together problems encountered. Each member of the family has his own day to address his personal questions and discuss his problems (Crespo, 2011).

Family meetings (or family members' conferences) are held moreover every two weeks at the same time in all households. During one hour, all activities stop, except spinning cotton and clearing cottonseed. This hour is devoted exclusively to the children, which makes of these family meetings a key element of the education of children. It gives for instance the opportunity to discuss with a child who quarrelled with another child or who disobeyed a community rule like the absolute ban to lie or steal, what shall have been reported to his parents (At05/89).

These family meetings are internal within each family and should not be mistaken for family conferences, which get several families together and are rather exceptional (see section 4.7) (Question 28 in Annex).

4.5.3. Solidarity between generations

New mothers get three months maternity leave (one month before delivery, two months after) (Jo10b/6). After the birth, a lamb can be killed for her by her husband and if it is not possible by the community, and she will be helped by two women for one month (awraamba, nd).

Later, a member of the community looks after the welfare of all the young children whose parents are working (Mamo, 2006).

If the parents die, the orphan is taken care of by the community until he reaches the age of 18, then is free to stay or leave (Crespo, 2011).

The sick are treated in a small infirmary the community completed in 2007, and in a new building built in 2009 by the State. The infirmary had in 2010 a full time male nurse, paid by the community and not born in the community. He lived in the village and was available 24 hours a day (Jo10b/6). In 2011, a nurse born in the community came every day, but lived in Woreta and was paid by Bahar Dar Region (Crespo, 2011); in 2012, this same nurse lives in the village and is paid by the cooperative (Crespo, 2012).

The infirmary is open to everyone. It is equipped for antenatal care, birth control and the first aid (Jo10b/6) and has to be paid (Crespo, 2011).

The elderly are traditionally treated with respect in the Amhara culture, within their extended family. But, for economic reasons, because of the destruction of the solidarity mechanism and the decline of the extended family, the elderly are increasingly vulnerable, the mosques and churches being sometimes the only ones to give them a shelter (Ya08/86).

In Awra Amba, according to Yi07/53 and Me09/45, the elderly or the people with disabilities who are no longer able to work at all are not only respected, but the community takes on their expenditure in accordance with articles 5 and 6 of the communal status, because they are considered to have contributed through their work to the well-being not only of their family, but of the whole community. However, Atnafu (2005/40) states old dependent parents are always supported by their children and may choose with which one of their children they prefer to live, the community taking on the expenditure of the elderly without family (Question 29 in Annex).

The elderly are housed in a separate building (Picture 13), where they are fed three times a day, washed (volunteers give them three baths a week) and receive free medical care, 24 hours a day (Mamo, 2006; Halpern, 2007; Calvino, 2009). Each one pays to the community a fee for elderly (Crespo, 2011). "The elderly are everybody’s elderly, they are part of the family". At first a small building with two or three beds was reserved for their use. This was replaced by a new one with

twelve small individual rooms, which are maintained by the community. In 2005 four to six elderly lived here (At05/57); in 2010 eight of these rooms were used by people between the ages of 75 and 90, two of them being outsiders to the community. The community no longer took old people from outside due to lack of means (Jo10b/6). The situation has not changed in 2012 (Crespo, 20112).

Picture 13: Bedrooms for elderly, in 2010.

4.6. Funeral ceremonies

In most Ethiopian societies, funeral ceremonies (as weddings) give the opportunity relatives coming sometimes from far away to gather, to share their experiences and to build some common (Yi07/52). In the Amhara region, the family and the close relatives of a deceased orthodox person are many crying and wailing in the house of the deceased; when the keening rises to its peak, some beat their bodies and throw themselves into the ground around the bed of the deceased. In parallel, the body of the deceased is prepared to make easier the new existence of the soul and its journey to another world. Wailing continues and gets louder in the church. After the burial, the family, the friends and neighbours can stay several days with the close relatives of the deceased, in a tent beside the house, women crying and wailing intensively. On the third day, before sunrise, family members and relatives go to the churchyard, offering food and drink and keening. The participation to these ceremonies is a sign of respect towards the deceased: to fail to attend the ceremonies without important reasons, it is placing himself outside the community, and being possibly ex-communicated or sanctioned by the community. To cry and to wail show the attachment to the deceased. Some ones can cut short the hair, wear black clothes, women can remove their ornaments, not apply butter or oil on their hair during the whole period of bereavement (At05/67-68).

The Muslim communities close to Awra Amba perform very similar ceremonies, the main difference being that women do not take part in burial; otherwise they would become sterile. Wailing is moreover less bitter than among the Orthodox, and occurs only on three occasions: when the soul is separated from the body, when the corpse is taken out of the house for burial, and when the body is buried. Orthodox priests advice for that matter these same restrictions of wailing, which must not be "exaggerated".

For every case, a funeral attending by many people is regarded as the most respectable ceremony (At05/68-69).

The behaviour within the Awra Amba community is completely different. Following the death of a community member, only a 'reasonable' number of people attend the funerals (Question 30 in Annex). The number varies according to the age of the deceased person: if it is a child, they are around three or four people; if it is an adult, around six or seven people. The rest of the people remain at home until the people attending the burial are back (Yi07/51). According to Zumra quoted

by At05/70, only 4 or 5 men bury the deceased, while others work normally. There is therefore no important gathering of relatives, nor wailing, which are compared to salt on a wound (Yi07/63). The body is simply wrapped in a new shroud and then buried (At05/70). There is no funeral ceremony, because "if we have something to tell to someone, it must be done in his lifetime", and everyone, including the close relatives of the deceased, go back to their daily routines (Yi07/51; Ya08/86; Jo10b/5). The mourning lasts at most until the evening. People gather in the evening in the house of the deceased person to play, joke and discuss, while they are spinning cotton (At05/70).

The refusal of any mourning rite with the relatives after the burial is very severely judged by the neighbours of Awra Amba, which judge that absolutely inhuman. So, a women living in the neighbouring village of Jib Gudguad says to Yi07/63: "To express our sympathy and so that our friend does not think about the dead person again and again, we have to be with him at least for some time or some days. This is a part of our culture that I am proud of. Contrary to what they think [in Awra Amba], we are not going here to get something to eat, nor to rest. They are really very weak in this regard."

These burial rites correspond to the social and cultural system of Awra Amba, whose members do not believe to a life after death and privilege the life on Earth, for instance by taking great care to the sick and the elderly. The mourning of the deceased by its very close relatives is furthered according to Awra Amba members by the daily work, which starts again immediately after the death rather than – in the surrounding communities – by long funerals, which show gradually to the close relatives that the deceased no longer belongs to the society (At05/71). If it is understandable the neighbours judge inhuman the behaviour of the inhabitants of Awra Amba – in relation with their own practices and beliefs, there is no firm evidence that the death of a close relative is felt more strongly in Awra Amba than elsewhere without proper investigation (Question 31 in Annex).

For the death of someone they know in the surrounding, the members of the Awra Amba community attend the funerals because they believe it is a duty, but afterwards, they don't go the home of the family like other communities (Yi07/51).

In Awra Amba, all children inherit equally from their parents, and the community inherits in the absence of close family (At05/40).

4.7. Management of conflicts internal to the community

Awra Amba is first a large family whose members are very close each other. For instance, Atnafu (2005/39-40) states families build their houses side by side, come and go, work together; the 96 households of the village at this time share four wooden mortars and five grinding stones. The adults care for and nurse each other's children. All avoid disturbing their neighbours by self-control and silence.

The inherent dignity and well-being of every person, the equality between men and women, the due protection of and respect for children, the care for the elderly and the disabled people, the elimination of socio-economic, cultural and religious barriers, which create an artificial division between humans, are thought to constitute the real foundations of peace, justice and social harmony within the community (Me09/78). The source of the conflicts is for Awra Amba the lack of consideration for others not to treat others as we wish to be treated (Me09/42).

Moreover, in case of conflict, the Awra Amba community developed a set of rules and mechanisms, which are mechanisms of conflict resolution.

Those who quarrel are firstly invited to resolve their dispute between themselves (Me09/44). Family and interpersonal conflicts are then managed internally by the community through a family conference, an inter-spousal advisory cell, and a complaint hearing committee, which is one of the committees of the cooperative (see section 4.1 page 41). They are very simple and flexible

institutions, which are involved very early. The conciliation committees are nevertheless not at all specific to Awra Amba, but exist in all traditional communities. What are specific to Awra Amba are their wisdom and their ability to detect tensions as soon as possible (Me09/25-26 and 71-79).

A family conference is organised by two or three neighbours, which gathers all their families, including adults and children. (Me09/44) Family conferences are very fair and not aggressive – between spouses as between parents and children, and give a great role to 13-14 year old children, who can chair these conferences (Me09/81). It is apparently something else than the fortnight family meeting, which is internal to each family we are talking about section 4.5.2 (Question 28 in Annex).

The inter-spousal advisory cell is institutionalized to help very early to solve tensions within couples (Me09/79) (Question 32 in Annex).

The complaint hearing committee (or grievance-handling and mediating committee) or *quireta-semie* has been established without doubt from the beginnings of the community to prevent potential conflicts (Me09/55). It consists of two or three persons known for their integrity and good reputation, elected by the general assembly every two or three years. Each member can be removed at any time if inappropriate. They were in 2009 a 32-year-old chairwoman (6th and last wife of Zumra) and two 29-year-old men, therefore young people, without any special training. Former members still take more or less part in the committee, whose mediation may not be imposed to any person. This committee has no coercive power, but above all a role of persuasion, and tries to re-establish dialogue (Me09/55-58). It has functioned three times in two years (Me09/65).

Thanks to these mechanisms, the Awra Amba members seek justice quite never through the public external system. They prefer wisdom and internal dialogue than formal involvement of external bodies (Me09/72). Out of 10 families interviewed by Mekonnen, three, in five years, came to the complaint hearing committee, and only one couple went to court to divorce (Me09/79-80).

Concerning conflicts between a person and the community, if a member is beginning to break the community rules, it will be known very quickly in this village where everyone knows everyone else. Other members discuss first with him to put him back on the right track. This collective criticism is very efficient. If he does not change his behaviour, he finds himself socially isolated, which provides him grounds for reflection. He can finally be excluded from the community (banned), which is seldom (At05/65), even has never happened before (Jo10b/4). Atnafu (2005/65) is nevertheless doubtful of the possibility to eliminate aggressive behaviours in a society. It obliges to manage such conflicts, because banishment is maybe not always possible.

5. Education

Awra Amba has paid specific attention to education. It is seen as a key factor of development, not as a simple way to improve his livelihoods like in the neighbouring communities (Ya08/92). It is geared towards promoting the group, as well as individual (At05/94).

So children must help each other: every child is responsible for the welfare of every other child and for the welfare of the community children as a whole. Therefore, children help each other in their studies, care for each other when they go to school and come back, and when they are at school (At05/94).

Before looking at the relationship of the community with the public education system, we focus above on an education tool specific to the community: self-help education. Finally, we will assess the education level of the community, which is a consequence of that and is much higher than the regional one.

5.1. Self-help education

Awra Amba had created first a self-education or peer education system. At the beginning, this system has been implemented to allow women and parents in general to work outside their home without having to care for their young children; then, it became an excellent tool of education for all community members and of transmission of community values. Children able to walk, those aged 4 or 5, students of primary school between school and meals as well as illiterate adults are encouraged to enter this education system by older young people who have finished primary or secondary school (At05/90-91; Yi07/60-62).

Children have first a free play period before breakfast. After breakfast and after lunch, their activities are collective and supervised by an older young people. Therefore, children are not left to their own devices, but are watched, which allows to inform parents about what do their children, and the parents to follow up on, even to correct their children's education when they are together during lunchtime and during the evening (At05/91).

The community had built firstly a small school in the centre of the village (Crespo, 2012): 64 adults have this way learned to read and write on the spot through internal training (At05/61), which corresponds to the number of people who are only able to read and write (in 2005). The need of adult learning is still important: 97 % of the household heads think they are in great need for learning, especially in modern weaving and spinning, in general mechanics and wrought-iron, and in joinery (Ya08/100). Since 2011, night school is given to adults in this small school; it is foreseen to open at the expense of the cooperative night school for adults in the public primary school as soon as it will have electricity (Crespo, 2012).

This school has been then converted into a nursery school – or kindergarten, where a woman from the community welcomes every day children from 8am to 9am and from 2pm to 3pm (see Picture 14). Beyond basic teaching, much education deals with values, standards and principles shared by the community. At the beginning of each day, children sing a song stating their commitment to follow the principles of the community (Yi07/61 & 92). Children repeat at any time slogans reflecting the values of the community (At05/93): "Children do not steal! Children do not lie! Children do not insult others! Children do respect people! Children do enjoy working! Etc." This education makes children more ethical, more respectful of others, better speaker (Yi07/94). Children are motivated to read and raise issues, in order to be creative, innovative and capable of building a better world through their individual and collective efforts (Ya08/92).

The nursery school is open to all, but welcomes only children from the village (Yi07/61; Crespo, 2012). That is not surprising according to Yi07/61, because the parents from the neighbouring villages do not want their children to be educated according to the Awra Amba principles.

All children would go to nursery school between the ages of 3 and 7 (Jo10b/6), even from the age of 2 (Crespo, 2011) until the age of 5 or 6 (Yi07/4). However, it should be in 2010 around 15 children for each year of age, when we take into account the 119 children under 10 recorded by Atnafu in 2005 and the increase of the population from 364 to 412 people in 5 years; Yirga (2007/73) states however that only 6 children entered the first level of school in 2006-2007. Therefore, it should be around 45 children between the ages of 3 and 5, around 75 children between the ages of 3 and 7 and around 90 children between the ages of 2 and 7; these figures are much higher than the number of children – about 20 – present in the nursery school a day of April 2010 according to Jo10b/6, as two years later (Crespo, 2012) (see Picture 14). It is therefore clear that children are far to go to nursery school every day, or that all children go to this school (Question 33 in Annex).

Picture 14: Kindergarten a Thursday afternoon in April 2010.

Moreover, the community planned in January 2011 to create a care service for the very young children under two, who today accompany their parents to work in the fields or in the weaving workshop, which is very noisy and whose many machines are not protected; this service is still not created in 2012 (Crespo, 2011; 2012).

According to Yi07/94, the peer education and especially the kindergarten encourage ethnocentrism of children: children receive an education, to his mind, too centred on the community values and principles, which makes them reluctant to discover other cultures (Yi07/ii). However, if the values, principles and behaviours of the Awra Amba community are considered by Awra Amba children (and adults) much higher than those of the traditional Amhara society, the reverse could also be true, when looking at many examples of distrust of Awra Amba by neighbours and especially by the children, reported by different authors. We do not see how the Awra Amba community could survive in a hostile environment without asserting its values and educating its children while respecting its values. Nevertheless, other cultures are very far to be limited to the culture of neighbouring communities, even to the Amhara culture. If one of the goals of the kindergarten is to help children to remove from their family cocoon and to open to a more complex environment (Kendal, 1983), the Awra Amba kindergarten could, even ignoring hostile close cultures, open up to the world. Yirga asserts it is not the case (Question 34 in Annex).

The community built its first library in 1997, no longer used but preserved as witness of the past. A

new library opened in August 2007 (see Picture 15). Yassin (2008/93) indicates a third library, of medium size. The 1997 library is built, as most of the houses are, with wood and mud, its benches and tables are made of stone, wood and mud, covered with plastic. There is no electricity in the library (in 2010), which is open from 5 p.m. till dusk. Run by a librarian, the books are referred to on site by the scholars and students of the village, and practically never by adults, who "have no time for reading", we were told. This absence of reading by adults contrasts with the impression given by Ya08/93 of wide access of community members to world cultures through the library, "manifestation of their love of wisdom".

The library had in 2010 around 500 books, of which more than 90 % concerned languages and natural sciences: there was hardly any literature, and practically no social sciences. Zumra considers that technology is the most important subject and gives a lot of importance to practice: culture, social and human problems are learnt in the community itself and especially from him, whereas technology can only come from the outside. This almost exclusive fascination for the hard sciences and technology seems to be quite unusual in Ethiopia (Jo10b/6).

Picture 15: The new library in April 2010.

Finally, the community has since 2012 a quite big room equipped with some chairs, so-called museum. On the walls there are some large sheets on which are written some principles of the founder and of Awra Amba. It is used as a meeting room (Crespo, 2012).

5.2. Public school

In Ethiopia, the primary education enrolment ratio is 84 % in 2007-2009 according to Unicef (2012), although education is not compulsory (Ya08/43).

The public primary school where went Awra Amba children till 2009 was located at Maksegn, one of the villages of the *kebele* of which Awra Amba is part (Question 35 in Annex). 18 teachers, including 10 women, taught here around 1600 students of whom 75-80 were from Awra Amba (Yi07/72 & 86). Since September 2009, an eleven-classroom school (level 1 to 8) has been opened near the village (Picture 16). Since September 2011, two new classrooms opened, corresponding to level 9 to 10 (Crespo, 2012). It corresponds to a primary school (first cycle, level 1 to 4), a middle school (second cycle, level 5 to 8) according to Yi07/8, and a secondary school (level 9 to 11, this last level should open in September 2012).

According to the 1994 Education and training policy of Ethiopia, first cycle is a primary education that comprises grades 1 through 4 and gives basic education.

Picture 16: The Awra Amba public school in April 2010.

There were in level 1 to 8 in April 2008 613 students aged 7-16 (from the age of 5 or 6 according to Yi07/4 – Question 36 in Annex), including 164 from Awra Amba. They have one hour of preparation and four teaching hours a day from Monday to Friday, from 7am to noon or from 12.30 to 17.45. In March 2012, these same levels 1 to 8 are attended by 764 students, whereas levels 9 and 10 are attended among others by 13 children from Awra Amba (Crespo, 2012). The Awra Amba school has been growing rapidly in the number of students enrolled (by 25 % in two years), which would be due to its higher level than its neighbours according to community members (Crespo, 2012).

In the first cycle, each class has a single teacher, whereas in the higher levels, a teacher teaches several classes, probably per subject (Yi07/74). Curricula are produced by the Amhara region (Yi07/84). According to our survey on site in 2010, teachers earn on average 973 birrs a month, i.e. 54 Euros, with a pension of 50 % at age 60 approximately. Pay goes from 35 Euros a month for a teacher with one year of training after level 10, to 71 Euros for those who completed the first four years of university. Most of the teachers came from Amhara region and some from Harar region, about a thousand kilometres away.

The students from Awra Amba are admitted in grade one at the age of six or seven, after having attended the village kindergarten, whereas students from neighbouring villages can attend school for the first time at the age of 14, even later (Yi07/73-74). The school gives an entrance exam to the new students, and they can enter directly grade two to five according to their level: because they have attended either the church school, or the Awra Amba kindergarten, or an alternative three-year education programme (Yi07/89-90). Moving from one cycle to another is not made at a fixed age, but according to the level (Crespo, 2012). Yirga (2007, 89-90) thinks the Awra Amba children have the privilege compared to children from neighbouring communities of being able to skip the first grades without having really attended school: it is in our opinion more the result of the progressive behaviour of the Awra Amba community facing children and education, rather than an undue privilege.

The Awra Amba children are more hard-working than others: the attendance rate is 100 % for the community children, but only 90 % for the other students according to the head master, Mohamed Alemie, 29 (Jo10b/7). Before going to school, they gather in the village centre under the authority of a member of the education committee (Yi07/80): see Picture 17. They are the first to arrive – grouped – at school, and the last to leave – in line, 10-15 minute after others. These grouped journeys – the smaller in front – is the expression of their solidarity: "if we do not help each other, we are not different from animals". But at the same time, it forbids chance encounters with young neighbours and therefore to interact with them (Yi07/81-82).

Picture 17: Gathering of children under the authority of an adult in the village centre before going to school, in April 2010.

In addition the children from Awra Amba study, in 2010, in the state school four hours a morning on Saturday and Sunday for lesson review and exercises. For that the teachers are directly paid by the community (400 birrs a month, i.e. 22 Euros) (Jo10b/7).

School is free, but materials, notebooks and books will be charged for and are bought by the community (Crespo, 2011). The Awra Amba community has better relations with the school than other communities: some of its members have been invited by the school to give a speech on ethics and other aspects of their experience, but it is not the case of other communities (Yi07/88).

The village students are very active in social and ethical clubs of the school, and very comfortable with the group discussions. They are hard working, preferring to study, or to play and to discuss between them than to play with others. They consider themselves as members of a same family and avoid criticizing their community in front of the others. They are not very open to students from other villages, which for that matter do not appreciate them and avoid mixing with them, especially during the two first years, because of their assumed lack of religion. However, the relations improve over time (Yi07/72-79 & 87).

The teachers appreciate the Awra Amba students, finding them more hardworking, more ethical and more cooperative than others; they cite them often as an example (Yi07/74-75 et 86). According to these teachers, they are better than others in first and second grade, because they benefited by kindergarten, but afterwards they are at the same level (Yi07/72). On the contrary, the head master had assured us that the students from Awra Amba succeed more than others (Jo10b/7) (Question 37 in Annex).

Yirga (2007/93) is worried the Awra Amba community to be sometimes given as an example over the curriculum, introducing so a discrimination between children from the various communities. It is apparently also an issue among teachers. But isn't normal to take as example the social advances, since they are really social advances? Yirga's criticism can be understood implicitly as a disagreement with some values of the community – especially the lack of religion, rather than an educational disagreement.

5.3. Educational level

We have the results of two surveys on the educational level of Awra Amba members, presented Figure 13. The first survey has been conducted among the whole population of the village in 2005 (At05/63), but it does not allow differentiating adults and children: however, 45 % of the population are aged under 15 (49 % of men and 41 % of women), and 58 % are aged under 20. 52 % of the population are unable to read and write. Among people able at least to read and write, men are

slightly more educated than women, the difference being only between 1 and 2 %. Two men and two women have a baccalaureate degree, a woman a bachelor degree and two men a master degree.

The second survey concerns only the heads of household in 2008 (Ya08/91), i.e. 53 men and 34 women. It is therefore more representative of adults. 85 % of heads of household are literate, whereas 30 % of adults only are literate in Ethiopia in 2005-2010, i.e. 18 % of women and 42 % of men (Unicef, 2012). In Awra Amba, the rate of literate women is clearly lower than that of men, but still remains high (68 against 96 %), 38 % of women being only able to read and write (against 57 % of men), the difference between women and men being slightly lower at the higher levels (29 against 40 %).

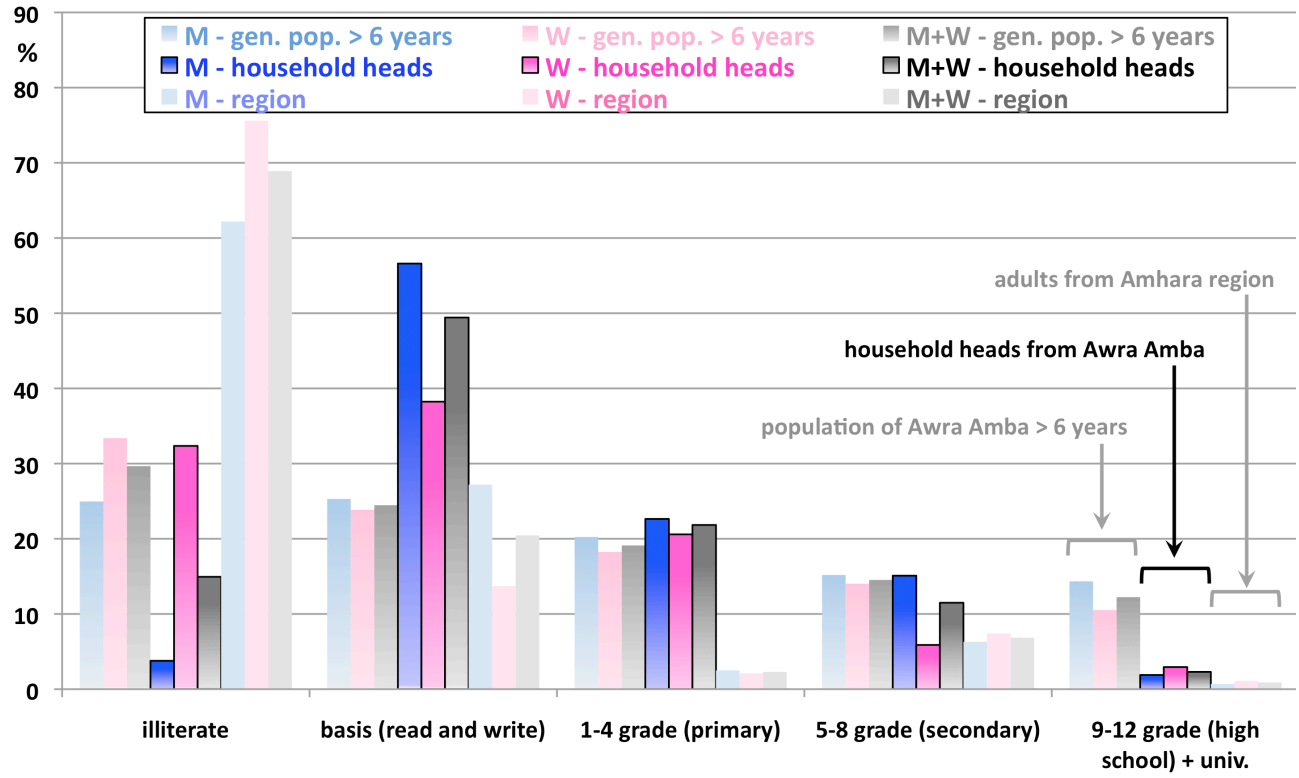


Figure 13: Distribution in % of educational level by sex in general population of Awra Amba from 7 years (Atnafu, 2005/63), among household heads of Awra Amba (Yassin, 2008/91) and among the adult population of Amhara region (CSA, 2006).

The comparison of the distributions of educational level in general population and among heads of household, i.e. of the results of both surveys, shows the higher illiteracy rate in general population, where are of course the 22 % of population under 7. When we leave out these younger people, which did not yet completed the first grade of primary school and therefore when we consider only the population, which could be literate (see Figure 13), the illiteracy rate falls to 30 %. Those, who are only able to read and write, are only 25 %, i.e. about two times less than among the heads of household. Those who attended beyond the 4th grade of primary school, i.e. the middle school and above, are far higher in number than among the heads of household. It shows well the clearly better educational level of young people in comparison with adults.

In 2005, two children from the community were university students (At05/63). In 2007, they graduated from university, while nine others were attending university in different parts of the country (Sisay, 2007). In 2009, there were respectively five and eleven (Habtamu, 2009), and in 2010 seven and ten (Jo10b). University students receive State scholarships. Two out of these seven graduates are health officers (between nurse and doctor), one is an agricultural technician, four are teachers (one at the faculty of medicine, one in short post-secondary school courses, one is the

headmaster of the state school in the village, and one is a teacher). Most of these people, four men and three women, live in the region.

Compared to the results of the 2005 census of Amhara region (CSA, 2006), these figures show an illiteracy rate around 3 times lower in Awra Amba and from 2 to 10 times more adults of primary, middle level or after: see Figure 13.

6. External relations

The relations are day-to-day relations with neighbouring communities, either through school students or through neighbours, clients of the café, the shop or the mill. Relations with Ethiopians living far away are conducted on the one hand through the administrative and trade relations within the Amhara region, on the other hand through the activist exchanges, either the participation of Zumra or other Awra Amba members to radio and television broadcasts, or conferences in different public structures, or through the visit in the village of very many isolated people and above all of groups. Awra Amba received so 1700 visitors from 2003 to May 2005 (At05/7), 1300 visitors more until the end of 2007 (Ya08/141), and 6000 in 2009 (Jo10b/10), which would be considerably greater than during the former years: it is probably 6000 visitors until 2009, i.e. 3000 since the end of 2007 (Question 38 in Annex). These figures are quite considerable for a small village. Among these visitors, some foreigners, either tourists, or working in Ethiopia or journalists.

6.1. Relations with neighbouring communities

The women of the village rarely wear traditional clothes, unlike women of the neighbouring villages: it shows without doubt a refusal to accept the traditional customs, as well as the distance of community members with the behaviours of their neighbours. Awra Amba is perceived by its neighbours as a deviant, suspicious, secret, cruel, lazy and pagan caste (At05/66):

- Deviant and suspicious, because it has definitely a culture and behaviours very different from the traditional Amhara society: this assessment is mainly supported by neighbouring Muslims and by old Orthodox Christians;
- Secret, because its members do not mix with their neighbours, as detailed below;
- Cruel, because they do not go with the relatives of the deceased during funerals (see section 4.6) and are not crying and wailing after the death of a relative;
- The use of the term lazy is connected to the infringement by men of the traditional sharing of duties: they are not without doubt real men. This assessment is nevertheless not general, since many others characterize them as hard working, especially the Orthodox neighbours and the relatively poor neighbours (At05/66 & 71);
- Pagan, because the community does not respect any of the religious Muslim or Orthodox rites.

The lack of religion and above all of respect of religious rites raises obviously a serious problem for the members of neighbouring communities, for which their observance is essential (Yi07/66-68 & 77). For Me09/74, it is the fundamental reason, which leads to distrust for any innovation coming from Awra Amba. It could explain that the Muslim neighbours are more severe with the community members than the Orthodox neighbours, most of the inhabitants of the village having a Muslim background and having in some way recanted their faith. But in addition, it makes difficult the relations between children from Awra Amba and children from other communities in the shared school: during their games, how to play with children, who are unable swearing by God that such a thing or such a word is exact? How to play with children who have no religion?

The assessment of the neighbours is therefore strongly negative. It was built over the history of creation of Awra Amba, characterized by the hostility of neighbours for reasons of culture and land sharing. The stabilisation of the community, its success, its external recognition, the daily contact of its members have probably mitigated this ostracism, as reported by Yi07/62: the cross-cultural relationships seem better when compared with previous years (Yi09/92), religion and funerals remaining the black spots (Yi07/63). The media and political success of Awra Amba fuels obviously

the jealousy of its neighbours as evidenced by several interviews of neighbours reported by Yi07/66-70. The neighbours trust nevertheless the inhabitants of Awra Amba, given the absolute ban of stealing and lie in their community (At05/66).

Hostility is surely the greatest against Zumra, who is not free to move outside the Awra Amba site, to discuss with students of a nearby primary school for instance, because it would create troubles. Zumra thinks they still have no peace with those people who initiated the conflict between Awra Amba and other communities (Yi07/64). Therefore, he still needs round-the-clock protection by an armed guard when he moves in the village (Me09/80) (see Picture 1 page 19).

Faced with the ostracism and the hostility they are subjected from the conservative surrounding society, Muslim or Orthodox, the members of the Awra Amba community remained themselves far from others. For instance, when they go to the Maksegn market, they don't drink tea at the tearooms like others (At05/66); the students from Awra Amba do not play with others and never went to the Maksegn café like others to drink tea or *tela* – the local beer (Yi07/77 & 83); they did not invite their neighbours, do not try to convince them and do not visit them (Yi07/71-72); in case of death, they do not participate in the mourning ceremonies (see section 4.6); finally, they are few open to marriages with non-members of the village because they require the respect of their rules (Yi07/50-51).

They strengthened their internal solidarity and the respect of their rules (Ya08/138). It is conceivable that the cohesion and the coherence of the community members allowed them to counter the hostility of their neighbours. The awareness to build a new life, a paradise on Earth, leads them to believe they are different and better than others, probably with some pride as Yi07/72 thinks.

The Awra Amba community wishes to address disputes through rational discussions, without conflict, through a non-violent and pacifist attitude. They consider those who do not respect them and want to fight with them as ignorant people, they have to convince that the differences are the essence of humanity (Ya08/117). In 2012, Awra Amba considers that its relations with the neighbours are now entirely satisfactory and that gossip practically disappeared; for that matter, children of Awra Amba and children of neighbours play football together in the evening (Crespo, 2012).

6.2. Relations with authorities and Ethiopians

The Awra Amba community first came to the nation's awareness when Zumra Nuru gave an interview on national television around 2006. Since then, numerous camera crews have visited the village. They are not alone. Government officials, members of parliament, sheikhs and priests from the whole Amhara region and from elsewhere, and local and foreign non-governmental organization workers have made the trip using the road (not tarred till 2009) to see the success of the community for themselves (Halpern, 2007). Many school buses arrive every month (Picture 18). In 2009 (or until 2009: see above) the village received six thousand Ethiopian visitors and also a handful of Westerners. The village has constructed a hostel for visitors, who must first of all describe the purpose of their visit (Mamo, 2006). Although many visits are quite short (around two hours), welcome takes a lot of time (two full time persons in 2012) according to Crespo (2012).

The community of Awra Amba planned in January 2011 to equip an existing room for a computer and Internet access, and to buy a minibus for transporting villagers and visitors from and to Woreta, which should make the recognition of the community even easier. These projects are not completed in 2012 (Crespo, 2011; 2012).

Its founder is also invited to share his experience in different universities throughout the country. Thus he was invited six times in 2009: twice to Addis Ababa and Bahar Dar, once to Awasa and Mekele. He was also invited to neighbouring Kenya, but was not able to attend through lack of finance (moreover, speaking only Amharic, he would have had to be accompanied) (Jo10b/10).

Picture 18: Zumra teaching Ethiopian visitors (April 2010).

Today the village is credited with being "an extraordinary initiative within a traditional and conservative society", "with triggering amazing change in the Amhara region", and as being "a good example for other Ethiopian communities – and even beyond Ethiopia – because of its gender equality, its work ethic, and its social security system" (Halpern, 2007).

Thus the Amhara Regional Office of Women's Affairs brings Awra Amba members to other communities of the region in support of its plan for gender equality. "To ask inhabitants of Awra Amba to talk about their lives has proved to be far more efficient than awareness-raising campaigns of the office aiming at changing attitudes of other communities in terms of share of work between sexes", said Zelalem, public relations office manager (IPS, 2010).

Moreover, relations are far to be excellent with all authorities. Thus, some development experts at local or regional level do not understand why inhabitants of Awra Amba refuse to participate in certain programmes – whose some rules conflict with their values, and regard this refusal on a totally wrong manner (At05/56). Awra Amba runs therefore counter not only to values and behaviours of neighbouring peasant communities, but also to some 'modern' rules of Ethiopian authorities. The lack of religion and the criticism of religions, which practises Awra Amba, seem also difficult to accept in Ethiopia. Thus Yirga (2007/91) thinks "the ways they treat religion and religious related issues [is] unpleasant".

The community has long hoped to found brother communities elsewhere, but this has been possible apparently only recently. Prominent representatives of Awi – a greater rural community in northwest Ethiopia – visited Awra Amba in 2007 and since should have created a replica of this ideal society. Awi community seems to be located in the administrative zone of Agew Awi if the Amhara region, about a hundred kilometres southwest of Bahar Dar (see Figure 6 page 27). On their own initiative, Awi inhabitants respect the same values, including work, and are now reaping the benefits (IPS, 2010). But this news important for Awra Amba is not yet confirmed (Question 39 in Annex).

Community members try to promote their values and their experiences, but seem not very receptive to others, although Zumra affirms his community is open to positive external experiences but ignores the negative ones: they do not try to share experiences of their numerous visitors (Yi07/69-70) and children are reluctant in learning other cultures (Yi07/92). A parallel may be drawn between this behaviour and their lack of interest for literature and social and human sciences (see section 5.1).

6.3. Relations with foreigners

International relations are much less developed.

Awra Amba received the visits of quite many foreigners, as some of the references we used show. They are some tourists, journalists, activists or NGO workers, official representatives of countries: Finland, the Netherlands and the USA have financed respectively a well, the weaving workshop, and a barn, whereas Austria financed the study of Atnafu (2005/I).

The community knows very little about the rest of the world, despite the presence of university graduates. The lack of openness on literature and on works in the social and human sciences may contribute to that. Zumra admits that he knows nothing about what exists outside Ethiopia. But he is ready to explain his ideas everywhere, and eager to present them himself. Zumra talks about him: "I have an idea I want to spread all over the world. It is the idea of peace, which is essential for all people, and the idea of the prosperity of human kind. We are all brothers and sisters. We are all from the same generation, women are our sisters, and men are our brothers." (Jo10b/10)

After reaching its first objective – peace and brotherhood in the community, Awra Amba's goal is now to make his model for society known all over the world, and to spread it everywhere, beyond the frontiers of Ethiopia (France 24, 2009; Habtamu, 2009; Tervo, 2009).

Conclusion

Awra Amba has developed by attacking both the power of religion and the patriarchal power, during a severe fight. This fight is part of the fight of all those deprived of power and gaining power step by step by attacking the structure of existing power, religious and patriarchal in this case. Thus, the Awra Amba community participates to the transformation of the society, to the empowerment of men and women.

The fight and the community are founded on values such as honesty, equality, solidarity, rationalism – which include gender equality, respect of children and the elderly, work, peace and harmony. These values have been those of the social movement inspired by socialist and libertarian theories worldwide for several centuries. They could seem simple and naïve since they are not very original for Westerner. They have nonetheless modified a community from top to bottom, in one of the poorest and most isolated countries of the world. All the community members are well fed and housed, whatever their age, while there is a large number of homeless people and beggars in Ethiopia. It makes Awra Amba an exemplary society for all those defending these values worldwide, values their own societies are very far to comply with, although these values are usually written on top of their respective constitutions. Therefore, Awra Amba is through many aspects a living example for the neighbouring communities, for Ethiopia, and beyond for the empowerment of citizens and peoples, whatever their level of development, including in Europe.

The most innovative and original aspect is without any doubt the importance given to honesty, explicitly proclaimed and applied. Although this value belongs to the moral basis of all societies, it is not often claimed by the social and political movements and even less implemented in the political life.

The critical thinking is fundamental, since it allowed the founder and his followers to challenge the social organization of their society and to track its contradictions (especially between the humanist values claimed by religions and the social organization they support). It is always claimed, in order to allow each one to make proposals aimed at improving the situation.

The Awra Amba experiment is part of the revival of what we called the Third world at the beginning of the 21st century. It is to some extent the twilight of the era president H. Truman ushered in 1949, by characterizing for the first time the inhabitants of half of the world as "underdeveloped", i.e. poor, pauper, malnourished, sick, primitive; according to this ideology of development, their fulfilment and their prosperity should be identified to the economic growth produced by Western investments (Truman, 1949). Since, and especially since the beginning of this century, many countries of Latin America not only became widely emancipated from the control of their big Northern neighbour, but also above all enriched our toolbox of concepts by adapting to the ongoing issues some of the traditional Indian concepts. We think for instance of the "good living" or *sumak kawsay* of Bolivia's constitution, the meeting point between human rights and nature rights, but also between ecology and economy. The revival of the so-called underdeveloped countries is also observed through the rise of the power of many of them, and not only of big countries like China, India, Brazil or South Africa.

More modestly, the Awra Amba experiment contributes to this movement.

The Awra Amba experiment was especially built on the refusal of constraints imposed by religions, which are in contradiction with well-being and harmony and often with the values they claim. From that perspective, it is close to the secular even atheistic movement, which is a fundamental component of socialist or libertarian movements. This component is not much claimed today, in Western societies already largely atheistic. We observe even in many countries the comeback of religious utopia, putting the society to a large extent under the influence of revealed truths –

supernatural, and under the constraint to prepare his life beyond life. Awra Amba appears as a refreshing alternative, offering a utopia on Earth.

The Awra Amba experiment does not aim at transforming the Ethiopian society through a political revolution, nor through a reformist top down action. It aims at creating, through the initiative of citizens, a counter-society, an ideal community which transforms effectively a small part of the society into a "paradise on Earth" as said by the community. Children rights, education, gender equality and simply equality, lack of religion, honesty, brotherhood, solidarity are not only claimed but also implemented. These values play a central role, as well as the permanent reminder of their objective: peace and harmony between humans. They are not only guidelines guiding the action, but everyone's lifestyles and behaviours are in line with them. The behaviour changes are first of all thought and implemented at the lowest level, i.e. of the people, the family and the village. In addition Awra Amba is very far from the cultural and religious Ethiopian standards; it is marginalised and looked upon as social deviants by neighbouring communities, but cited as an example by the authorities. It is therefore both a counter-society and maybe an image of the future Ethiopian society. Therefore, it is really an experiment of utopian socialism, in line with Robert Owen in Great Britain or Saint-Simon and Charles Fourier in France, of which we gave some examples in the introduction among hundreds since the 19th century. It stands also out from most social movements, because it is a movement that aims not mainly to convince, but acts and builds a new society.

The transformations made within the community are not the result of an initiative from the national government, regional authorities, NGOs or an Ethiopian citizen movement, neither of an external movement of thought – an imported development theory for instance, but an initiative of the Awra Amba community members themselves (Ya08/121). Therefore, the Awra Amba experiment represents an eminently democratic process. According to Jacques Rancière (2005), "the democracy is the power of those who have no special title for exercising power, i.e. of all". It is a political system, where sovereignty resides in all the citizens, the power stemming from their collective will (an analysis of the concept of democracy is given in Joumard, 2011, p. 128-133). Awra Amba is the building by a set of citizens of their power on their own life, irrespective of their sex, their age, their activities, and their skills. They are moreover "ordinary" citizens, nobodies, illiterate people who took their future in their hands. It is therefore a very accomplished experiment of democracy.

This adventure was initiated by an almost illiterate farmer, who had never read any of the classics on emancipation, but who met apparently a very small community of very liberal Muslims and had been without doubt influenced by the socialist ideas of the 60s and 70s. The other founders were also illiterate and the community remains a peasant and craftsmen community, not much in contact with written work. It could change with the young generation quite well educated.

Like all ideal communities, which appeared in the course of history, Awra Amba was built in a hostile environment. Its beginning was quite violent, in a State with revolutions, famines and wars with neighbours. All utopian communities died or have evolved so deeply that they did not anymore comply with their initial project (like Auroville in India today for instance). The question of the sustainability of Awra Amba is therefore a crucial issue.

Challenges or risks for the future

In our opinion, the situation in Awra Amba presents a number of risks for its survival or its development. We see four challenges or risks for the future: endogamy, lack of openness to the world, heterogeneity, and ossification through the myth.

Endogamy

The withdrawal of the inhabitants into their small community is liable to lead to degeneration or breakup. After a very strong growth, the community has been experiencing a limited growth since 2006, and seems de facto relatively closed to outside persons. The reasons are the lack of space, that

limits strongly the arrival of new members in agreement with its values, and its culture widely opposed to the values of neighbouring communities, what prevents or limits strongly the arrival of new members little convinced by the approach. A solution would be to expand somewhere else, but the success is not guaranteed.

Withdrawal, lack of openness to the world

In our opinion, the connection of Awra Amba with other societies is problematic. The community was built around a true spiritual leader in conflict with the traditional Amhara society. It found most of its cultural and ideological corpus from within – and firstly from its leader. Its immersion in a nearby environment at the other end of the spectrum of values and very aggressive, at least at its beginning, has the consequence it inherits a situation of violent conflict with its nearby neighbours; it is therefore nor open to these communities, neither inclined to influence them.

The situation is different with the rest of the Amhara region, Awra Amba attempts to influence by advertising as far as possible its experiment, with the help of many authorities. However, the connection seems one-to-one: it appears nowhere in the studies on Awra Amba that this community tries to learn from Ethiopian experiments. The lack of interest for the knowledge in the human and social sciences as for the Ethiopian literature strengthens this impression. It seems even clearer as regards foreign countries: if Zumra wishes to spread his message all over the world, he is apparently not waiting for anything from foreign experiments, except for technological inputs and material supports.

The initial antagonistic situation and the wealth of its creativity could convince the community that there is nothing positive to be gained from the outside world in the social or human field. Relationships with the neighbours are understandable, but the lack of interest in the possible inputs from more distant societies indicates a poor intellectual openness and a withdrawal. It prevents the community from benefiting of the knowledge accumulated elsewhere and potentially useful for it.

But Awra Amba is part of Ethiopia and belongs to today's world, and is therefore submitted to its ideological influences. It succeeded till now in resisting these influences through its own strengths. Will it be the same tomorrow? In our opinion, Awra Amba would benefit from getting closer to social and political movements, which share the same ideals and the same values worldwide, and from being aware of their analyses. It should make their culture stronger in order to resist to the adverse influences. If the community founders have been able to analyse the traditional Amhara society, they know perfectly, we don't see how, alone, they can understand the world dominant consumerist and neoliberal culture, which crushed many *a priori* sound cultures in the world. We doubt the Awra Amba community can acquire by its own, spontaneously, all the tools needed to understand and then fight opponents they do not know, or its culture is strong enough to oppose them.

The emphasis given to education and the high number of young people with a high-quality training, including through university, should further this intellectual openness to the world.

Heterogeneity

The Awra Amba community is very united through the geographical proximity of its members, a common past, and shared values. Moreover, over time, the two first elements – proximity and past – will loosen: on the one hand, the number increase will transform a small community of around a hundred adults, where everyone knows everyone, into a larger group more widely dispersed geographically; on the other hand, the consciousness of having shared great hardships – in the last quarter of the 20th century – will fade slowly with the renewal of generations. Some elements important for the cohesion of the group will therefore disappear, at least partially, leading to the group weakening.

In addition, most of the today's Awra Amba members have chosen to live here, because they agree

with the community values and lifestyle. They fully participate to the institutions and their behaviours comply with the values they defend (At05/64). In the future, it will not be necessarily the case, either if the decision to live here is not recent, or if the members are born in the village: the agreement could be less strong. If today the rare people who disagree leave deliberately the community or are thrown out, will it be even possible if they are more? Won't the children of the current members be perfectly legitimate to stay in their village of origin, regardless of their behaviour?

But in our opinion, Awra Amba did not develop any reflexion and mechanisms to deal with the heterogeneity of its members, except the expulsion.

Ossification through the myth

Zumra, the founder and leader, is almost seen as a prophet, an extraordinary man revered by the community, and whose heroic childhood deeds have no doubt been slightly embellished. So, from the age of four, he allegedly started wondering about unfairness, maltreatment or dishonesty; Atnafu (2005/1) even talks about Zumra's age of three or four years as an historical step in his vision of an ideal society. In our opinion, all that seems rather astonishing and close to a myth.

Simultaneously, adults and children idolize Zumra according to Me09/73, which worries him for the future (Me09/80): the death of such a charismatic and influential leader, without any visible successor, poses severe problems to the community.

This behaviour could be compared to religious veneration, a widespread phenomenon in the Ethiopian culture. We consider that this attitude is quite dangerous as it is in complete contradiction with the values advocated by the Awra Amba community, which reject veneration of the past or of an elsewhere and look toward the future. The future transformation of Zumra into a secular prophet whose more or less presumed behaviours are more worshiped than the values, and the transformation of an emancipatory project into an uncriticizable myth, leading to ossification, are really liable to happen. The flexible, open, and inventive nature of this running utopia would disappear to the benefit of an almost religious veneration in total opposition with the today project. This raises the question of the values of Awra Amba – which should be maintained as these are essential, and of the behaviours and policies which are the translations of these values at any one time – and which can change. The risk is to abandon critical thinking, which alone will allow the descendants to possibly challenge the social organisation of Awra Amba in order to stay true to their values.

Research items

Several research topics could allow improving the present knowledge we presented in this report:

- Study in detail the history of the community. We have seen that a lot of items are not accurate, even contradictory. Since there are very few written and therefore sustainable sources available, it is urgent to interview the stakeholders still alive. In addition, as most of the historical data provided by the different authors come from Zumra interviews, it is necessary to widen the set of internal witnesses to all of those still living, in order to compare the points of view. Moreover, number of stakeholders and witnesses are external to the community, for instance the people who met the founders of the community in the Amhara region and during the exile, the political or economic leaders with which the community has been in contact, or the neighbours in the neighbouring communities. The first aim is to establish a chronology as accurate as possible; the second aim is to compare the points of view of the various stakeholders and the reasons given to their actions.
- Compare the experiment of Awra Amba with the worldwide experiments of utopian socialism, most of them have been listed in the introduction. What are the common features? What is the originality of the Awra Amba community? What can learn Awra Amba from the other

experiments?

- Most of the values of Awra Amba are not precisely defined (only in a few words), even essential for their lifestyle. It would be useful to study more deeply the values founding the community, by comparing them to the values founding societies and social projects in Africa, in the developing countries as in the developed ones. Because the values are fundamental in the success of Awra Amba, a research into this field could maybe make the values of the community richer.
- Study the agricultural techniques to be potentially applied in Awra Amba in order to improve their food production and at the same time to protect their abiotic resources. Even if not being a specialist in this field, we can say that Awra Amba did not make a lot of progress, and surely did not focus on the agricultural techniques, except the present experiments of non-soil farming. A lot of experiments of organic agriculture in the developing countries, including in Ethiopia, could be undoubtedly very useful.

Annex: Small uncertainties

The precise questions arisen along the text are grouped here. We give the first page of the numbered paragraph where they arise. Their importance is indicated by a number of "*". More general questions, which are potential research items, are not included here, but presented in conclusion.

Question 1*: What is the birth date of Zumra? (Section 2.1 page 19)

Question 2*: What was the marital status of Zumra along his life? (Section 2.1 page 19)

Question 3***: What does think Awra Amba about the role of Islam in its culture? (Section 2.1 page 19)

Question 4****: When the community settled in Awra Amba, how land has been allocated to them? Was the land allocated before to others? (Section 2.1 page 19)

Question 5****: When the community settled in Awra Amba, did the village exist already? Were there some people, who did not enter the community? What did they become? (Section 2.1 page 19)

Question 6**: How many people were in the community in 1972, on how many hectares? (Section 2.1 page 19)

Question 7**: In 1972, did the community settle in Awra Amba or was it dispersed? (Section 2.1 page 19)

Question 8*: On what date was Zumra released from jail according to Ethiopian calendar? (Section 2.1 page 19)

Question 9**: On what date according to Ethiopian calendar did Zumra and his followers leave to Bonga (1988 or 1989 according to Gregorian calendar)? (Section 2.1 page 19)

Question 10**: Did the whole community leave Awra Amba to Bonga, or have some members been sent to go with Zumra? How many people did go with Zumra? How many died during the journey? (Section 2.1 page 19)

Question 11***: What is the surface of the community in 1995: 17.5 or 43 ha? To what does correspond 43 ha? What is the surface of grassland? (Section 2.1 page 19 and section 2.3 page 25)

Question 12*: When did 60 people come back from exile? (Section 2.1 page 19)

Question 13**: What is the evolution of Awra Amba population according to the member registration book? (Section 2.2 page 23)

Question 14*: What is the name of the *kebele* where is located Awra Amba? Woji-Arba-Amba, Arba-Amba, Wojeina-Arvamba, or Wej Arba Amba? (Section 2.3 page 25)

Question 15*: Is 'Taika' the name of the place where is located the village, like Turegn? (Section 2.3 page 25)

Question 16***: Legally, how is allocated the ownership of land to such or such people? (Section 3.3 page 37)

Question 17****: Which structures are open to inhabitants, who are not cooperative members? Which structures are specific of the community of the whole set of inhabitants of the village? How inhabitants of the village who are not cooperative members do participate to the management of the village? (Section 4.1 page 41)

Question 18***: What is the role of weekly development days? Are they general assemblies where

all cooperative members (or inhabitants of the village) are invited? How frequent are the general assemblies, which decide the main affairs? (Section 4.1 page 41)

Question 19**: Are there committees managing activities of non-cooperative members? (Section 4.1 page 41)

Question 20***: What was the evolution of the number and of the list of committees? (Section 4.1 page 41)

Question 21*: Do they produce maize, sorghum, or both? (Section 4.2 page 44)

Question 22**: How long do they spend for the different activities (agriculture, spinning and weaving, milling, trade, others)? What are the corresponding incomes? (Section 4.2 page 44)

Question 23**: Is the minimum age of marriage for men 20 or 22? (Section 4.4.1 page 52)

Question 24**: Are there or were there polygamists in Awra Amba? (Section 4.4.1 page 52)

Question 25***: Is contraception also a right for non-married girls and women? (Section 4.4.1 page 52)

Question 26**: How is seen sex outside marriage? (Section 4.4.1 page 52)

Question 27**: Is tap water suitable for drinking or not? (Section 4.4.3 page 55)

Question 28**: Verify the difference between a family conference which gathers 2 or 3 families in case of problem, and a meeting internal within each family every two weeks. (Section 4.5.2 page 58 and section 4.7 page 60)

Question 29**: Do the old dependent parents live with their children or in the elderly house? (Section 4.5.3 page 58)

Question 30***: In Awra Amba, when does occur the burial of a deceased? Do have women and men specific roles in funerals? (Section 4.6 page 59)

Question 31***: What is the impact of mourning practices on the relatives, in Awra Amba in comparison with neighbouring communities? (Section 4.6 page 59)

Question 32*: How does run the Inter-spousal Consultative Cell? (Section 4.7 page 60)

Question 33*: What is the percentage of community children who attend the kindergarten, according to their age? How often do they attend the kindergarten? (Section 5.1 page 63)

Question 34***: To what extent kindergarten education and self-help education are open on the world? (Section 5.1 page 63)

Question 35*: At what distance is the village of Maksegn from Awra Amba? (Section 5.2 page 65)

Question 36**: At what age do children attend the primary school, by differentiating children from Awra Amba and other ones? (Section 5.2 page 65)

Question 37**: Are Awra Amba students better than other ones? (Section 5.2 page 65)

Question 38*: What is the evolution of visitors along the years? (Section 6 page 68)

Question 39****: Is there a brother community? Where? With how many people? Is it Awi? (Section 6.2 page 72)

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