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Reflective Creativity in Hamar Divination

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Abstract

The article gives an insight into the reflective creativity that characterises the various forms of divination found in Hamar. This is to encourage us not to abandon but rather cultivate our ability to think reflectively, analogically, symbolically or, more broadly, rhetorically in order to persuade ourselves and others of what may be the right ways to act in the critical and particularly daunting situations that we are facing now, and to which we will have to respond in the future.

Keywords: Divination; Hamar; Ethiopia; Rhetoric culture; Magic

Introduction

Marco Bassi, our editor, invited me to contribute to the present compendium «to address the environmental apocalyptic prospective» and not to abandon hope because with the help of appropriate theories we may still find ways out of our current predicaments. «Our aim is», he wrote, «to show the relevance of the bi-directional correlation between theory and applied, or engaged, anthropology». Feeling that this needed a booster, he added the powerful chiasmus: «Just as theory informs policy-making and action, action and engagement informs theory».

As I trust that also a widening of non-theoretical knowledge may be helpful, and that we may learn from attractive – largely self-explanatory (!) – examples of culture specific thought and action, I will try to give an insight into the reflective creativity that characterises the various forms of divination found in Hamar. This is to encourage us not to abandon but rather cultivate our ability to think reflectively, analogically, symbolically or, more broadly, rhetorically in order to persuade ourselves and others of what may be the right ways to act in the critical and particularly daunting situations that we are facing now, and to which we will have to respond in the future. Most importantly, we may learn from Hamar ethnography how divinatory discourse is a powerful social remedy in times of uncertainty, anxiety, and feelings of helplessness. It is, as Michael Carrithers would say, a response to the vicissitudes of life, which «test the nature and limits of cultural resources and call up inventive answers demonstrating the very nature of both culture and the human imagination» (Carrithers 2009: 1).

The basic working assumptions of this essay are those of rhetoric culture theory as outlined in the Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Anthropology:

> Rhetoric culture theory is defined by working assumptions about human communication that can guide textual, ethnographic, and theoretical research. The most basic assumption is that the human species may be better understood, not as inherently rational, but in respect to its use of speech… (which) now is given its due as a protean capability that includes but goes beyond rationality to permeate every aspect of experience (Hariman et al. 2022: 3).

Also important are "pattern" theory as developed by Ruth Benedict in Patterns of Culture (1934), and "habitus" theory as proposed by Pierre Bourdieu in Outline of a Theory of Practice (1977). Following Mary Hilton (2006), I have called the "pattern" or "habitus" that I explore: "reflective creativity".

The complexities and dynamics of generation, regeneration and social transformation, I argue, are best understood with the help of Stephen Tyler's I-C-P model (Tyler 1978), which explicates how human discourse is neither fully free nor fully determined. Rather, it is constrained by intention (what we have in mind), convention (the established means of communication that we may use) and performance (how we communicate). These components of discourse are simultaneously cause and effect and interact reflexively as both constraints and *telos* (Tyler and Strecker 2009).

Below I will focus on some of the prospective and retrospective modes of social discourse among the Hamar (southern Ethiopia) that aim at generating culture specific modes of action at critical junctures in social life, as well as regenerating and re-strengthening the social fabric. Of particular interest is the way in which the nexus between intention, convention and performance is brought into public attention by various forms of divination. Here the community reflects, as it were, on jointly shared intentions, conventions and ways of performance. Some forms of divination (those concerning war or hunting) emphasise prospection while others (those concerning sickness, death, and drought) emphasize retrospection. Both orientations are however always present. An intrinsic element of divination is the heightened awareness of human frailty (the I in Tyler's model), the shortcomings of social conventions (the C in Tyler's model), as well as the question of appropriate action (the P in Tyler's model).

The general framework and the detailed ethnography of Hamar "reflective creativity" that I offer give answers to the first part of the present volume's thematic, i.e. of how people whose lives are shaped by culture specific contexts are both agents and patients of processes that involve generation, regeneration and social transformation. The second part of the thematic, i.e. policy making, is not directly addressed, but I trust that policy makers will be able to make good use of both, the theoretical orientation and the empirical cases that I provide.

Divination as part of Hamar egalitarian society

To begin, let me quote at length from an earlier publication on 'Political discourse in an egalitarian society' which will provide some basic information about Hamar society as well as a description of the reflexive and also 'shielding' function which divination has in the political practice of the Hamar.

The Hamar belong to those "tribes without rulers" (Middleton and Tait 1958) which have non-centralized political systems and live without formal laws or punishments, without great distinctions of wealth, without social class, without nobility, chiefs or kings. They have hereditary ritual leaders (*bitta*). They also select political spokesmen (*ayo*), leaders for war (*djilo*), guardians for grazing land (*kogo*) and for cultivated land (*gudili*), but the basic agents of politics are the married men (*donza*). Conceptually they are likened to a grass, which has roots that spread like a web on the ground (*zarsi*).

The peoples of East Africa are known for their great competence in oratory. Among those who practice a significant amount of pastoralism, occasions of public oratory are often associated with the consumption of an animal or animals. In Hamar this institution, called *osh*, may be held at different levels of social inclusiveness. It may involve only a small neighborhood, i.e., several adjacent settlement areas (*gurda*); it may involve a larger part or the whole of a territorial segment (*tsinti*); it may involve several territorial segments or parts of them; or it may even involve the whole of Hamar country (*Hamar pe*). But even though there will be differences in size, duration, general tenor, seriousness of matters etc., the general pattern of the *osh* remains largely the same, and it is this pattern which I explore in what follows below.

Hamar political discourse may be seen as a process that moves repeatedly through four related stages each of which has its own mode of communication. The political process rotates in a never-ending spiral from informal conversation to divination to oratory to blessing and cursing. When the usual routine of Hamar herding, farming, hunting, gathering etc., is threatened by sickness, drought, internal or external conflict etc., the political process sets into motion. First responses happen on an individual level. People ponder quietly over the seriousness of the affair and individually look for signs in nature, clouds, stars, sounds of animals and children etc., which help them to interpret what is happening. Also, during the early morning hours and in the evenings at the homesteads and the cattle camps, and during the day in the fields and at the water holes, people begin to exchange views about the problems at hand.

Once a problem has reached such proportions that the elders decide that public decisions are necessary, they call the married men (*donza*) of the locality to a public meeting (*osh*). Such a call is always preceded by the search for an animal, which will have to be slaughtered in order to feed the men who attend the meeting. Without such an animal (ox, sheep or goat) no public meeting can be held. When a man has been found who agrees to provide the animal, the elders will be informed about the appointed day and the place where the meeting will take place. As the men arrive, they first settle down in the shade of a tree, relax and then enter into informal conversations. This is how the proper political discourse begins. Such informal conversations are always part and parcel of a public meeting and are clearly a customarily proscribed form of action. The most manifest element of the informal conversations is the exchange of news, which allows for a better evaluation of the problem for which the men have been called to the *osh*.

First the more junior men who are present will speak, especially when they have been witnesses to events and are well informed about details of the current problems. Later, when the facts have been told and discussed in detail, the more senior men, especially the spokesmen who have come, enter the conversation. Typically they will relate historical events, which have been in some way like the present situation and can act as precedents and models for how to cope with the current issues. In a more hidden way the informal conversations provide a forum for social and cultural criticism, the articulation of social values and, most importantly, the formation of social consensus. Here at the informal conversations people speak their minds and argue with one another. Also they can speak at length for there is usually lots of time at hand and people are willing to listen to one another.

If the problem, which is facing a particular locality of Hamar or the country at large, is really threatening, a divination will be held. This happens when the informal conversations are finished. The men move to another shade tree where a diviner has settled down to throw sandals in order to ask questions related to the existing problem and how it may be solved. He asks his questions either directly or in form of propositions, which the sandals may either confirm or reject, depending on the way they fall to the ground. Thus he may say, «we move the herds and the rain will fall», and then the silent answer of the sandals will be yes or no.

On the first and manifest level, Hamar divination acts as a means by which the elders focus on the most difficult aspects of their political decisions. While the diviner throws the sandals, the men sit around him, watch and ask him to pose the questions, which interest them. In this way the diviner does not act all on his own but is to a large extent the medium of others. In the last resort, however, neither he nor the other men matter. Only the sandals "speak" and provide information on which the elders will act. The political implication of this, I think, is obvious: through divination the *donza* achieve an absolution from their responsibility, because it is not they but a third party – the sandals – that is deciding the matter.

The process of divination shares some characteristics with the informal conversations in that it provides an opportunity for the men to air their views and articulate social fears. In fact the latter is more

prominent here, because the men may ask the diviner critically to examine the behavior of others under the pretext that it may be the cause for the existing problem. Thus the divination does not only serve as a shield behind which one escapes responsibilities, it also acts as a way to find scapegoats and allows for accusations which are so indirect that the accusers need not fear any retribution by the accused (Strecker 2010).

Magic: a mode of reflection and action in Hamar

We can only fully understand Hamar modes of reflection and action in the light of their complex magical modes of thought. To substantiate this point I quote directly from my field notes:

> Kolmo's magic: We are sitting in Kairambe's house and Alma tells me how clever old Kolmo is. Kolmo cannot hear well anymore. In fact he is almost deaf. But, as Alma says, in his heart Kolmo 'knots up' thoughts and then goes on to put them into action. One often finds out only much later how clever his seemingly strange actions really are. Here Alma's story begins:
> A long time ago, Kolmo came to Alma's house when they were drinking coffee. After the coffee was finished, Kolmo asked Alma's wife Hailanda for some butter. In Hamar culture it is quite unusual for a man to make such a request, and Alma and Hailanda were surprised. Nevertheless, Hailanda gave Kolmo the butter, which he had demanded.
> As he tells the story, Alma imitates how Kolmo quickly grabbed the butter when it was given, and how he greedily rubbed it on his forehead, his legs and other parts of his body. «Then, Alma says, Kolmo departed, and laughingly he adds: I never asked him why he wanted the butter and why he rubbed it on himself». Again he laughs and repeats: «I never asked him, I never asked him».

Alma ends his story here, but my friend Woro spells out the essential part for me, the part, which an outsider typically cannot understand: «Kolmo acted very cleverly. At that time, Alma's homestead was rich with cattle, goats and sheep. Look how rich Kolmo has now become and how few heads of cattle are left in Alma's cattle enclosure». So Alma's «I never have asked him» meant:

> I did not need to ask him what his seemingly crazy action meant, for I slowly came to realize it. Kolmo rubbed himself with a part (or effect) of my herds, and in this way the wealth moved over to him. He robbed the animals very cleverly from me. His thought is deep, and his actions which may at first look odd later reveal themselves to be very meaningful, – and magical.

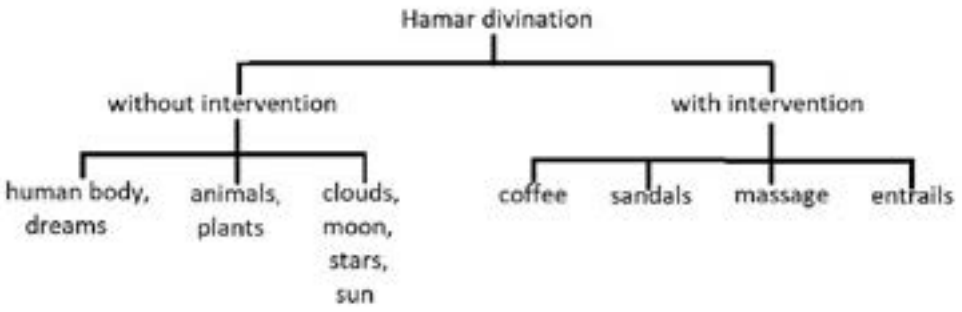
In my notebook I went on to generalize from the story of Kolmo's magic. I quote here only some of my attempts to understand what was going on:

> Kolmo's seemingly crazy actions have a magical aim and are the result of his analogical thinking. I envisage Kolmo as he contemplated several possible means by which to increase his wealth. There are the obvious ones used by everyone in the society, such as to drive your herds to the right pastures and wells, keep the enclosures clean, go raiding etc., and there are the less obvious ones such as to ask a diviner or, as in the case of Kolmo, rub yourself with the butter from the cow of a rich man. I think that a kind of self-persuasion must have taken place before Kolmo acted in that 'strange', 'odd' or 'crazy' way which later turned out to be magical. He must have 'discovered' and persuaded himself that by taking a part of Alma's herd he eventually also could take over the whole.
> Interestingly, no one knows whether Kolmo really ever intended to act magically when he rubbed himself with butter. But as Alma's laughter and Woro's comment show, people are convinced that Kolmo acquired his wealth by means of magic, and they all share the same way of thinking. They believe that they can further their aims by acting analogically. At the root of this

> lies the practice of thinking and speaking metaphorically. People know from experience that analogy is a useful cognitive tool. And in my view it makes sense that in societies like Hamar metonymy and synecdoche should abound... (29.9.1985).

The abundance of divination in Hamar

In order to provide an overview of the manifold forms of divination in Hamar I present here a tentative scheme, which divides into types where people simply watch certain features of the world in and around them, and types were they intervene and handle certain substances or objects:



Human body

Among the Hamar there are a number of customary premonitions or 'superstitions' coming from body experiences. Interestingly, the body seems to tell people something when, for a moment, they loose control over it. To a certain extent this occurs already when someone sneezes and (customarily) calls out the name of a hunting friend who comes to his mind because of the sneeze, or when someone yawns and then (customarily) asks who might be mentioning his name right now (because he would not be yawning, if there was not someone mentioning his name somewhere). But the most striking case is the twitching (*rukuma*) of a part of the body as in the following example of the twitching eyebrow:

> Lukusse sits next to me and rubs his left eyebrow. It has been twitching since yesterday and he asks Choke what it might bring that his eyes will see. "Meat, of course', says Choke, 'from Galabu'. If it had been the right eye the meat would have been from a family of the Binnas moiety. Often I have heard people refer to the twitching of a part of their body and always the interpretation has had to do with a premonition of food, that is, of meat. When your legs twitch you will soon participate in a public assembly where an ox will be slaughtered and you may rub your legs with the chime of the stomach. If your buttocks twitch you will sit at a public meeting and eat...etc." (from a notebook).

Dreaming

This is also an instance where a person is not in control of bodily functions, and it makes sense that the Hamar find dreams (*haama*) telling. Dreams do not only provide them with individual premo-

nitions, they also are used systematically as a form of divination. I have never talked in any detail to a Hamar diviner who makes use of dreams, but I have some texts where people mention the use of dreams for divination. In one of them, Baldambe relates how the son of Bacho, a diviner from the territorial segment of Assile, has dreamt that the Hamar should rise and attack their neighbors, the Ulde (Arbore). Even though some other details may remain obscure, I think that the text brings out very clearly that Bacho's son used his dreams to influence the Hamar. Interestingly, the text also shows that different forms of divination (dreaming and throwing the sandals) may be combined in an attempt to give detailed instructions of how to act in the future.
The dreams of Bacho's son (19.1.1974):

> He, the son of Bacho had said: «Rise, this month, the rain is with it, the cow is a female cow, the goat is a female goat, the people can be eradicated during this month like pulling out the 'mula-za' tree'. After he said this, the raid was planned and the string arrived here». «Eh, what has he said?» Some was his head (i.e. some he had dreamt), some were his sandals (i.e. he divined by throwing sandals): 'Before, the pregnant woman with only one eye, with only one eye. Before, when I stopped you from attacking the Ulde, then she was pregnant. Now she has given birth and her son has learnt to walk and is walking outside. If you don't get up this month and spear the country, having killed this woman, then you will not be in your country kindling fires'. That is what the son of Bacho said..." (Strecker 1979: 10-11).

It seems that the dream gives the first divinatory impulse, and then the sandals are thrown to explore further details. At least this transpires from what Baldambe says, both in the text quoted above and in the following short remark: «He who has consulted the sandal oracle is Djagi Bacho. He threw the sandals by himself after he dreamt that he should do so» (Strecker 1979: 190).

Animals

As already mentioned above, divination begins already with intuition and premonitions. People decipher their environment and draw from it conclusions about the future. For example, every evening, the Hamar herdsmen watch their animals return home. If the animals linger and don't want to enter the homesteads, then the Hamar say this means that they did not have enough to eat, that the pastures are getting poor and that therefore hard times are ahead of them etc. But, as I have already indicated above, predictions are often carried over into other domains where they are not as plausible and not easily checked. Here are two examples, which illustrate how animals foretell the future:
The woodpecker (2.9.1971): Choke tells me that the woodpecker (*gogama*) gives many signals which mean different things to the hunter:
1. "Kat-kat-kat" (slow) means that there is nothing bad on the way you are going and that you will kill an animal before the evening comes.
2. "Kik-kik-kik-kik" (very fast) means you will not kill an animal because they have been warned by other animals of your approach and have run away.
3. "Kik-kik-kik-kik" (very fast) can also mean that you should not follow a buffalo or lion which you have wounded because otherwise the enraged animal will kill you".
The baboon (1.10.1985):"We meet several baboons (gaia) on our way to Kadja. Silently they swing through the trees. Baldambe is worried. Why do they keep quiet? Do they know of some bad news ahead of us? Things are well when you meet them on your way and they greet you with a shout. This is their 'nagaia' (saying that things are well). We catch up with the girls Duka and Waya who are witing for us in the shade of a tree. "Have the baboons greeted you?", askes Baldambe. "Yes, they called", says Duka. So our spirits rise and we continue our journey. An hour later we come to the area of Ade where Tsasi and Ginonda have their fields. We drink coffee with them and hear that Bajjemba's first wife has died, and that she was buried the day before yesterday. Upon this Baldam-

be points out to me that the baboons were right after all. And he and Duka remember now that the baboons who greeted us lived on the other side of the Kaeske river. That is, Baldo, the area west of the river was well, but the area east of the river was not.

Clouds

As part of their wish to escape feelings of anxiety and helplessness, the Hamar like to observe the sky and other natural phenomena to tell themselves as well as others what it divines about the future. Clouds, stars, the moon, the sun etc. all may carry meaning, especially when one watches them at dawn or dusk. Here is an example of how my friends Baldambe and Kairambe read the clouds on the eastern horizon when the Hamar had gone on a raid to Ulde (Arbore) east of Hamar on the 21.1.1974. In my notebook I wrote:

> Even before sunrise I am up and about and armed with my tape recorder, for I know that Baldambe and Choke will be watching the early morning sky to decipher what it augurs about the raid. Baldambe points to the sky and asserts that the Hamar have attacked because the sky over Ulde is white and the clouds are dispersed. The raiding party would still be sitting and talking if the clouds were dense and rounded. Such clouds indicate a public meeting.

And here follow parts of my conversation with Baldambe and Choke:

> Ethnographer: The sky, the sky, what does it tell? Baldambe: Friend, see over there, the white which was lying there, the white which is lying across, across, across, across. Here above us it leads over there, it lies across. We don't know what it means. Here above us the clouds lead over there, and there they bar the way. Friend, friend (he points excitedly towards the clouds) see the very small white cloud over there which has slipped into the middle of the sky. Ethnographer: "Hm". Baldambe: "You see. Woooo, that cloud bars our way. Again, see here, the small straight one. It bars the way of all those who have not yet crossed beneath it. It stops all of us who have stayed behind. Look how the clouds have been put up as if to stop us. Later they will grow even bigger and bar the way more powerfully…
> Ethnographer: Do the clouds say that the raiders have attacked already?
> Baldambe: Well, if the raiders were still meeting and talking there would be a black cloud. A black cloud, dark like a rain cloud. Now they have got up and are already on their way. Ethnographer: Why? Baldambe: Look at the brightness, friend. At the clearness. That is dust, dust only. The white over there, that is dust. That is men running, the cattle that are running. Over there, the white. Ethnographer: It means that the cattle are running? Baldambe: It means that the people are running, dull-dull. If the people were still meeting and talking, if they were all gathered together, there would be a black, round cloud, a black, round cloud, a black round cloud. It would stay there all day. Choke: And when the raiders are on their way, the clouds show us their footprints: ba-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta, white and spreading out like my hand (points towards Ulde, spreading his fingers). That's how the clouds form…
> Baldambe: This, this which looks red, it is the smoke of the guns. Choke: Isn't it all clearly revealed up there in the sky?.... Baldambe: Look at the sky: see how it is clearly laid down…. look how the sky knows all this… Their (the people's) hearts are full of worry, they sit and watch, look. Let all this get lost! Come, let's drink coffee! (Strecker 1979: 32-35).

Moon and stars

While the clouds speak of particular events involving particular people, the moon speaks about more general conditions affecting all the people living in a region. Typically the moon indicates whether there will be rain in the future. Here are a few examples:

> We look at the new moon. Its sickle is thin and lies almost horizontal. Above the thin bright 'bowl' of the new moon the grey heap of the moon is slightly visible. This picture means to the Hamar that this month will bring rain, for the moon looks like a cloud and the bright bowl beneath it will catch its rain. Who was it who first impressed his fellow countrymen with this cogent equation? Whoever it was, he must have laughed with delight inside when he turned this metaphorical likeness into a causal prediction (Strecker 1988: 198-199).

The tilted moon:

> We are at the height of the dry season and I speak with Surra and Baldambe about their celestial knowledge, and how they can make predictions for the future by watching the moon (*arphi*). They tell me:
> 1. If the moon moves towards Maale and Ari, that is to the north, then this predicts rain, a rainy season with much rain.
> 2. If the moon moves towards Gabare and Galeba, that is south, then a rather dry and hot rainy season will follow.
> 3. If the sickle of the new moon lies horizontally (*deri*) and at the same time is positioned far south, that is towards Galeba country, then this means lack of rain (*boana*). The moon is like a bowl, which does not spill its content, i.e. the rain.
> 4. If the new moon is tilted to the left (*workata tigada*) then there will be rain, the content of the bowl will spill on the earth, i.e. the rain will fall.
> Baldambe adds to this that you can also predict the future by the way in which the moon 'talks' and 'argues' with the planets and other stars. He gives the example of Jupiter and the moon: If Jupiter (*esine angi*) and the moon stand close and parallel together (i.e. parallel to the horizon), this predicts death, possibly even the death of one of the ritual leaders (*bitta*)of Hamar. If the moon and Jupiter stay for a long time parallel to each other but keep a certain distance, this means there will be fighting, there will be war in the country. But if Jupiter passes the new moon quickly and at a distance, then this predicts that there will be no quarrels, no death and only well-being".

Thus the stars, especially the planets, carry a lot of meaning, and the way they relate to each other always influences the fate of people. I could supply countless further examples, but for brevity's sake the instances mentioned above must suffice.

The sun

Like with so many other phenomena, which the Hamar use for prediction, it is never quite clear whether the sun only tells of something or whether it also brings or causes that of which it tells. Ideally, the Hamar observe the sun as it rises in the early morning and as it is setting in the evening. Sometimes people live in such a location that they have only a good view of the western horizon and therefore make most of their observations in the evening, sometimes people live at places where they have only a good view of the eastern horizon and consequently make their main observations in the morning, but the best is, of course, to live in places from where one can see both horizons equally well. The ups and downs, the mountains and valleys on the horizon serve as landmarks against which one can check the position of the sun and can follow its course as it moves southwards or northwards according to the time of the year. In addition to mountains on the far horizon, people sometimes use also rocks and trees, which are near by.

There are two questions, which the Hamar typically raise in relation to the sun: Firstly, how long does the sun 'rest' in its 'hole' or 'house' when it has reached the southernmost point of its journey? If the sun reaches its southernmost point and then stays in its 'hole' for several successive days, then this means that things are well, that there will be sufficient rain and a rich season in the future. If the sun reaches her 'hole' and immediately returns north again, then this is a bad sign which speaks of drought, disease and son on.

Secondly, does the sun reach its 'hole' properly? If it reaches its 'hole' or even travels further south than it usually does, this means that there will be sufficient rain, but if it returns before it has even entered its 'hole', then this spells disaster. I have often taken part in discussions about whether the sun was reaching, had reached or had failed to reach its southernmost point, but I never witnessed any discussions about its precise return from its northern travels. I think this has to do with the coming of the dry season in December and the impending shortage of food associated with it. In December people are full of anxieties! In June, when the sun reaches its northernmost point, things are different. Then the first crop of sorghum is ripe or is ripening and people are less concerned with the future than with the present. Even if the harvest is poor, anxieties are now much less than in December, and therefore the need to divine the sky is now much weaker.

Coffee divination

I now turn to types of divination which are not confined to observing the environment but involve some intervention and the manipulation of substances, objects, body parts and the like. Let us first look at coffee divination:

If possible, the Hamar like to drink coffee (*bunno*) in the morning as well as in the evening. The coffee is mainly water with a few beans of coffee floating in it, and it is drunk out of large bowls made from gourds. In the past, I have spent many hours drinking coffee with my Hamar friends, and always before I drank I found it fascinating to watch the dark little lake at the bottom of my bowl. From this experience I can understand that the Hamar have found it tempting to use the coffee as a medium for divination. But coffee divination is in fact rare in Hamar and it is more or less accidental that I have relatively detailed field notes about one case. I like to quote this case from my notebook because it speaks not only of the technique of coffee divination but also of the spirit in which coffee divination generally is conducted in Hamar:

> 5.10.1975, Shada, a man from the clan of *Misha*, has already several times at moments of crisis consulted the coffee in his bowl to find the causes of sickness afflicting someone in the homestead of Berimba's sons. Now Shalombe is badly ill and Baldambe has called Shada to consult the coffee. Here I note down a few of the facets of the divination: The first which I find striking is that Shada speaks very clearly as he interprets the coffee in his bowl. At times his voice narrates rhythmically and almost sings. Many of his phrases sound stereotyped, but at the same time there is undoubtedly much personal freedom in the performance. His gestures are manifold and much of their meaning escapes me. Yet I understand at least a few of the gestures.
>
> (1) At times he shakes the bowl after a longer examination of the coffee. By shaking he extinguishes the present pattern of the coffee and creates a new image, which provides new information. (2) With his forefinger he taps the ground around the bowl, which he has placed on the cowhide in front of him. It looks as if he is trying to activate the immediate environment of the bowl. (3) With movements of his right hand he tries to establish a connection between the coffee bowl and sick Shalombe who sits right of him. (4) He snaps his fingers and points towards the coffee in short, quick gestures. Intuitively I feel that he is trying to catch the attention of the coffee by bringing movement into its environment. (5) He moves the bowl away from himself and then slowly draws it straight back to himself, letting the gourd touch the ground while he moves it. (6) He slowly draws invisible lines across the coffee, almost like a matrix through which he watches the mirror below. (7) He tips the bowl slowly from one side to the other and dives with his head into the bowl to examine it especially closely. (8) He claps at the outside surface of the bowl, obviously in an attempt to 'wake up' the coffee and make it speak to him in an articulate way.
>
> Despite of all this drama I have the impression that the liquid and the patterns, which form on its surface are after all not of such great practical importance. Shada looks at the coffee, but then, one of his eyes is totally blind and the other does not seem to see much either. What counts is his

> contemplative attitude towards the coffee and by holding the bowl in his hands the coffee speaks almost through him. I had expected him to examine the coffee first closely and then slowly come up with a few statements, fragments of questions and answers, rather like in the sandal oracle. Instead, he seems to listen into himself. While holding the coffee bowl, he begins to sum up matters concerning the illness of Shalombe and then the coffee speaks to him, intervenes and corrects his line of thought and stops him from drawing wrong conclusions.

Sandal divination

To consult the sandals is such an important and critical business that people rarely speak directly about it. Instead of saying, «I am going to hit the sandals (*dunguri kano i da ye'e*)» or «I am going to cause the sandals to be hit (*dunguri kanso i da ye'e*)» they use euphemisms like for example the following: (1) «I am going to lift up the leaves (*kalbe dashphoide i da ye'e*)», which means that you are going to consult the sandals. (2) «I am going to clean (literally 'sweep') my hand (*an i da sasee*)». This expression is related to the fact that the diviner asks all those who attend the divination to stretch out a hand and touches it with the sandals before he begins the divination. (3) «I am going to have my skin touched (*zara issa i yedade*)». Here, one type of divination is substituted by another. That is, the expression refers to the divination, which involves the touching or rather massaging of someone's skin. Often children or women go to a diviner and have a part of their body (arm, belly) massaged in order to find out certain matters. So when one wants to speak of one's wish to consult the sandals but does not want to say this directly but in a weaker form (i.e. euphemistically) one says that one is going to have one's skin touched.

There are many accounts of the different contexts in which sandal divination may occur in Hamar (see Lydall and Strecker 1979a, 1979b, and Strecker 1979), but no full description of any single case of throwing the sandals has been published as yet. Therefore I quote here from my notebook:

> (27.3.1983) A month ago, in Dambaiti down at the dry river bed of the Pere the fields were planted. Since then the sorghum has grown a little, but now the elders (*donza*) are worried about two tings: the rains may fail and sickness may befall the crop. In order to find out what to do about these two worries they sent for a diviner (*moara*) to consult the sandals on their behalf. The diviner came last night and was treated well with coffee, milk and sorghum food. His name is Wadu, son of Orgo from the settlement of Mukoio and the clan Adasa.
>
> Last night it was asked where the sandals should be thrown. Baldambe answered that they should be thrown under an old acacia tree, which provides the best shade for such an occasion. The diviner has already thrown the sandals here once before and has found that the place is good. The tree is one of well-being and good fortune (*barjo*) and under it the sandals will speak well and tell the truth. Generally, the place where the sandals are thrown is important, and here are some examples of where divination may take place: (1) For family and domestic affairs the sandals should be thrown on the cleanly swept place (*boaka*) in front of the homestead. (2) If the herds, that is sheep, goats and cattle, are concerned the divination should take place in the cattle enclosure (*dele*). (3) If the people of the neighbourhood (*zarsi*) are concerned, then a place like the acacia tree outside the Berimba homestead should be chosen. (4) For hunting and raiding one should consult the sandals outside of the settlement in the bush.

After the herds have left for grazing and all the main domestic tasks of the morning have been completed, the men of Dambaiti are free and ready to join the sandal divination, and Wadu goes over to the acacia tree where the ground has been swept clean and a cow hide has been put down for him. When Wadu sits down on the cowhide, he faces the East where the sun rises and where we can see Darramaega, the mountain homeland of the Hamar. Right of him sit old Labuko, Kolmo, Baldambe and myself, and left and in front of him are Dirmi, Laesho, Kairambe, Dube, Gele, Goiti and Woro. No outsider is allowed to participate and old Walle Lokarimoi and a few guests from Ande are especially told that they should leave after the

morning coffee because the sandal session is none of their business. Even Baldambe's brother Lukusse who lives at another settlement does not take part although he listens from behind the tree.
Before he begins to throw the sandals, Wadu asks Kolmo to give tobacco to each of us. We receive the tobacca with our left hand and then pass it on to the diviner. The sandals are lying on the cleanly swept space in front of Wadu, parallel and facing him. This means "face me", "look at me". Wadu then sprinkles the tobacco around the sandals, holding the bulk of the tobacco in his left and sprinkling it on the ground with his right hand. With this he tries to satisfy the dead spirits of the forefathers and makes sure that they do not influence the divination negatively.
After this, Wadu begins to call '*barjo*'. He uses his hands to wave the rain towards us, and calls out "let the rain fall" (*domo ko hanshee*) very articulately. Then he asks Baldambe to also call '*barjo*' (for texts on the contexts, form and function of calling '*barjo*' see Lydall and Strecker 1979a, 1979b; Strecker 1979, 2010).
When in this way favourable conditions have been created, Wadu begins to throw the sandals. He holds them in his right hand and in such a way that the sandal on the top points towards him and the one on the bottom points away from him. This means that the sandal on the top should talk to him and the sandal at the bottom should speak to the listeners…
He beats the pair of sandals on the ground twice, then holding them high in the air lets them clap once against each other and then throws them down quite violently. He does this in such a way that the sandal which was on the top when he held them comes to lie below. This sandal almost invariably comes to stay on the ground with its face down while the other jumps up into the air and then comes down with its face either up or down and pointing in any direction. The sandal which is first above and then lies below with its face down, – this is you, is your cow hide on which you rest, is your homestead. The other, which 'leaps' tells you what will be the matter with you.
Wadu at first keeps throwing the sandals repeatedly and quietly. Everyone watches and no one says a word. After a while he starts making silent small gestures following the figurations of the sandals with his fingers and also measuring their distance to each other. Little by little he begins to talk. In a high pitched but at the same time hushed voice he begins to raise questions and to make statements:

> The rain will fall tomorrow.
> Is there war?
> Is there sickness?
> People will go on a trading expedition.
> Rain, dark as the night!

The question or statement comes first and then he throws the sandals, and the sandals give the answer to the question or comment on the statement.
We hear the first clear answers concerning the questions for which we have called the diviner when Wadu mentions the plants, which we should select and throw away in the bush. The plants are *tsatsa* and *chooko*. Wadu divines that the parasites, which may threaten the sorghum should be placed between the leaves of a *chooko* plant which should be bound up with the bark of a *tsatsa* plant. This bundle should then be placed into an old coffee pot which in turn should be thrown away on a path leaving the settlement in the direction of Ari country, that is towards the north from where originally the sorghum is said to have come.
For quite a while, Wadu keeps asking the sandals which family might have the pot that should be thrown away. Eventually the sandals point to Daina's homestead, but Daina's son Gele says that they don't have any pot. So Wadu continues throwing the sandals, and as he does so, he asks us several questions. When he hears that Issare, a young woman who recently has established her own household, is present in Dambaiti, he asks the sandals about her, and they reveal that Issare's coffee pot is causing the rains to fail.

Once Wadu has found out how to protect the crop and has identified the obstacle that has prevented the rain from coming, he says quite boldly that the rain will begin to fall the day after tomorrow. He adds that the settlement of Dambaiti should be sealed off by a *kuura*, a bundle of protective plants placed on the paths that lead to the village. The plants are *wolkanti*, *ardo*, *wurri*, and *choko* (which has already been mentioned above). They all belong to a family of bitter plants that may kill parasites or at least drive them away.

Reading the entrails

In Hamar, like in so many other places, divination by means of entrails is closely associated with sacrifice. In fact, sacrifice and divination combine and form a conceptual whole. One can see this already very clearly in the terminology which the Hamar use to refer to the event where an animal is slaughtered and its entrails are consulted: Firstly, they may conceptually focus on the tool of sacrifice and call the occasion *alpha*, which ordinarily means 'knife' but here signifies the sacrificial knife by which the animal gets stabbed to death. Secondly, they may focus on the medium of divination, that is the intestines which get removed from the belly of the sacrificial animal and call the event *rukunti masha*. *Rukunti* means intestines or entrails and *masha* means to slaughter, and it includes the skinning and butchering of an animal. Thirdly, they may focus on the recipient of the sacrifice and speak of *imba masha*, which means 'father-slaughter'. The 'father' may be any dead relative of up to three ascending generations, but it has remained unclear to me whether the Hamar think here of a slaughter "for", "of", or "with" the father, or possibly of something else.

Occasionally an '*alpha*' may be necessitated by some acute problem facing the Hamar, for example sickness or war, but the proto-type of the '*alpha*' occurs several years after the death of the head of a family and is later repeated after an interval of so and so many years. At an '*alpha*', all the members of the family are called to come to the homestead of the deceased and all the herds of the family are driven into the goat and cattle enclosures of the homestead.

Then the oldest son, that is the oldest male member of the sibling group, slaughters a goat at the gate of the goat enclosure. The details are as follows: Early in the morning, just after sunrise, the oldest son puts on a sheep skin which he wears over his shoulders, and then departs for the bush where he collects some leaves of a very green and soft creeper plant called *gali* (ipomoea spathulata). The Hamar liken the heart-shaped leaves to the cowhides on which they rest and sleep. In the most general sense, *gali* refers to wellbeing. Thus it is 'well-being' which the person who does the sacrifice brings when later he puts the *gali* leaves down at the gateway of the goat enclosure. The wellbeing is meant for the '*maeshi*', the dead spirits who have come to the gateway for the occasion of the sacrifice. According to Hamar belief, the deceased may be physically dead, but spiritually they remain alive for several generations and are concerned with the internal affairs of the homestead.

After he has deposited the *gali* leaves at the gateway, the sacrificer enters the goat enclosure and selects a goat for sacrifice. Before he uses the knife, the sacrificer picks up a *gali* leaf and symbolically stabs the animal four times with it. After this, he pushes the knife through the throat deep into the chest of the goat aiming for the heart. When the animal falls to the ground, it is important to note on which side it falls. The right side is considered a bad omen, the left side a good one. Once the goat has died, it is skinned and the intestines are removed and put into a bowl. This bowl is then handed to a *moara*, a man who has proved himself to be good at the art of divining.

During their lives, many men in Hamar try to achieve some competence in reading the entrails, but only some of them perform the art so successfully that they become known as specialists and are called *moara*. Such a *moara*, or sometimes several *moara*, must be present at an '*alpha*'. In fact, the

moara will be specially invited and only once he has agreed to come and has named the day of his arrival, the 'alpha' is allowed to go ahead.
The sacrificer himself hands the bowl with the intestines to the diviner. The *moara* then takes the intestines and, turning the bowl upside down, spreads them over the back of the bowl in such a way, that the intestines look like a Hamar homestead built on top of a hill.
High up and at the center is the colon labyrinth, which signifies the house of the homestead. Behind it lie the large intestines, which represent the granary, and below the colon labyrinth stretches the membrane connecting the intestines. The even and smooth surface of the membrane is likened by the Hamar to the even and flat ground of the animal enclosures, which adjoin the houses of the homestead. At the bottom and at fringe of the membrane lie the small intestines. Their winding and meandering path is said to represent the fences of the homestead.
The diviner uses "yes" and "no" answers:

> Is it a goat that I see here? – Yes.
> Is the goat female? – No.
> Is the goat male? – Yes.
> Is the goat yellow? – No.
> Is the goat white? – Yes… etc.

In this way the audience hears what the diviner sees, and the onlookers experience together a movement from question to answer, from guessing to certitude.
The divination is not a very sombre affair throughout. On the contrary, after an always very serious opening, the divination often takes a humorous turn. Although people believe that the intestines contain some truth, which is vitally important for them, they do not believe any particular divination completely. The diviners are prone to make mistakes. In this every one agrees. Diviners may even falsely pretend to 'see' things while in fact they are seeing nothing. Or they may hide things from people, especially when they see death and suffering in the intestines. Then they say that everything is all right while it is not. Knowing of this deception, people joke a lot and tease one another. The *moara* is not less humorous and ironic than the audience. His special strategy is to point out that the dead spirits, the *maesh*', are themselves mischievous. They «cause me to speak a lie» the *moara* says, «and only slowly tell me what they really want».
Now, what precisely is the diviner looking for? He is looking for dangers and their remedies. The remedies consist of finding the dead spirits ('*maeshi*') which one should placate by offering them an animal as sacrifice. The sacrifices are necessary because ultimately all the danger which one may detect in the intestines of a sacrificial animal are sent by the dead. The dead threaten the living in order to demand animals. They want to be 'fed'. If the living forget them, they send suffering, even death.

Conclusion

Do people actually need to believe in order to practice divination? Tyler's I-C-P model tells us that they need not believe in what they proclaim. They may believe something other than what they say they believe. In fact, they may believe nothing at all, and yet may participate in the flow of communication, which we call divination or more broadly religion.
Generally one can say that *homo sapiens* or rather *homo rhetoricus* (Kopperschmidt 2000) is in a peculiar dilemma: he knows too much and knows too little. This was already well expressed by Evans-Pritchard, when he summed up one part of Henry Bergson's theory of religion:

> If intelligence has its advantages it also has its disadvantages. Unlike animals, man can foresee the difficulties before him and has doubts and fears about his ability to overcome them. Yet

> action is imperative. Above all he knows that he must die. This realization of helplessness inhibits action and imperils life." Having made this interesting point, Bergson went on to say that religion is not a product of fear but "an assurance, an insurance against fear" (Evans-Pritchard 1965:116). This in turn goes well with the theory of helplessness and pattern matching explicated by the zoologist Valerius Geist, which says that, "Animals strive to live in an environment predictable to themselves (1978:27).

Humans also fall under this law. If they find life continually unpredictable, if they continually do not know how to cope, they suffer stress, and then disease and death. If on the other hand they cope successfully, and know they will cope successfully in the future, they experience emotional harmony, which in turn strengthens their whole organism. To sum up: As continued unpredictability leads to a feeling of helplessness and imperils life one would expect people to develop forms of reflection – including divination – which help them to establish stable behaviour patterns in as many domains and situations of their lives as possible.

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