

Metaphors of the Moguji: self-defining othering in Kara political speech

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Stereotypes and images are not immaterial mental constructs or ephemeral discursive elements, but social instruments used in discursive contestations. To illustrate this, my text revolves around a specific event, throughout which strong symbolic images were invoked, notably by members of two ethnic categories about members of a third one.² The objects of this joint imagination were allowed neither to object to this vivid othering, nor were they granted the right to use any images they might have held of the other two, and I draw out the underlying conditions which allow such lopsided relationships to emerge and be sustained. ‘Images of self and other’ which we encounter in the world, are hardly innocent, superficial judgments, or that common bugbear, ‘mere rhetoric,’ or ‘only discourse’ – often, they are direct functions of systems of domination and subordination, and as such warrant our full ethnographic and analytical attention. As ‘group relations’ are not as such accessible to our observation, one cannot afford to *not* assess what work images are made to do in observable interaction, especially as they shape and naturalize power relationships (see Meyer 2008: 152 for the methodological argument). With this, I now briefly introduce the Kara, their country and their neighbors, as some such context is necessary for the material I present in the main part of this text.

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2 As will become more clear in later parts of the text, in the analysis of interethnic dynamics in southern Ethiopia I distinguish between ethnic categories and ethnic groups, the first referring to a cognitive model of “kinds of people” (see Brubaker et al. 2002 for an extended discussion), and the second referring to tribal political organization. This differentiation is more fully explored, both conceptually and empirically, in my PhD thesis (Girke 2008b).

Kara, Moguji and Nyangatom

The villages of the Kara are found along a stretch of the lower Omo River which runs nearly straight from North to South. The three large settlements (Labuk, Dus, and Korcho) and a number of small ones are all located close to the river, as cultivation of sorghum on its banks provides the basis of the Kara's livelihood. Today, the largely agriculturalist Kara only live on the eastern shore; constant warfare and encroachment by their western neighbors, the Nyangatom, led them to abandon the settlements they had on the other bank. Still, whenever conditions are sufficiently peaceful, they try and cultivate their riverbank farms on both sides, able to produce a year's supply of sorghum in about five months of labor.

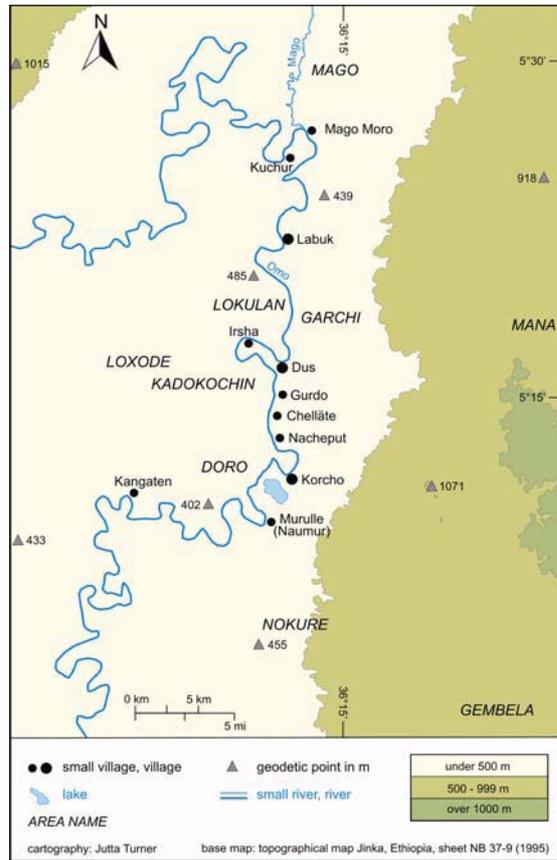


Fig. 1:
A map of Kara settlements

When I use just the term ‘Kara’ here, I use it generically, as a reference to all the people who live in Kara country and who are acknowledged as belonging there. Such acknowledgement is easily assessable, because there are only around 1,500 Kara, who have rather full knowledge of one another. Among these, upon closer inspection of kinship, ritual rules, and narratives of origins, one finds a surprisingly large number of social categories which can usefully be called ethnic: first and foremost, ritually as well as numerically, there are the ‘true Kara,’ whose ancestors probably reached the Omo Valley early in the nineteenth century. They are the major land-owners, and generally dominate politically. While they never act as wife-givers for men not categorized as ‘true Kara,’ true Kara men are strikingly eligible to marry women from the other ethnic categories. They often do so, at least as second or third wives, and mostly from the other ethnic categories which are also counted among the Kara: the Bogudo, the Gomba, and the Nyangatom-Kara. While this practice has been in decline in recent years, many ‘true’ Kara men even marry women from neighboring, politically separate groups – but never from the Moguji, who also live with the other ethnic categories as part of one larger Kara polity. Even casual sexual contact is proscribed, and multiple other restrictions on interaction (such as commensality, joint tool/object use, etc.) serve to reinforce the basic principle that while “we are all Kara,” as is sometimes proclaimed in political speech, the Moguji are the one ethnic category within Kara which always – while partly co-residential – stands a bit apart, and well below. Arguably, the position of the Moguji in the totality which is Kara is largely defined by their relationship to the ‘true’ Kara (rather than the Gomba and Bogudo) and vice versa, so in the following I will exclude the other ethnic categories of the population from the debate: in most cases, they tacitly follow the ‘true’ Kara’s lead. It needs to be pointed out that there is no native word which references the category ‘true Kara’: this denomination is mine, and it serves to underline that the polity Kara (often called Karo by outsiders) is made up of people of a number of ethnic categories, under the clear but rarely explicitly voiced control of the true Kara. Some Kara, it turns out, are more equal than others.

In oral tradition, the histories of true Kara and Moguji, however, are inextricably entwined. As I present a comprehensive analysis elsewhere (Girke 2008b), a condensed version must suffice here. Its cornerstones are the following: the arrival story of the true Kara (who were ‘late-comers’ to the Lower Omo, compare Kopytoff 1989) and their subsequent occupation of all available farmland, the discursive quotidian othering of the Moguji by the Kara, and the recent political events of what I call the ‘schism,’ as well as the administrative reorganization of the region.

I will address each in turn, as these aspects of the (true) Kara-Moguji relation always refer to one another.

The true Kara reached the Omo Valley from the hill ranges to the East, as the (with some certainty untrue) story goes (see Girke 2008b). Following a truant bull, they found the river – and not only that, they (seeing with their agriculturalist’s eye) found that the fertile riverbanks were completely unused. In fact, the people they met there, who called themselves the Moguji, neither knew what fields were, nor were they familiar with domesticated cattle!³ Note that this narrative very fundamentally establishes that the late-comers, the true Kara, were cultivators reaching an uncultivated area, which was not appropriately used by the Moguji. The latter were only interested in gathering fish from the river, but neither bred animals nor farmed the land. This again is largely in tune with how Kopytoff (1989: 25ff) describes a typical story with which the occupation of an area is justified in the African context. The story ends, in most tellings, with the true Kara requesting the Moguji to assist them in staking out claims, as each Kara took possession of a given stretch of the riverbank. This ritual act, which was supposedly still carried out within living memory whenever there was a disagreement between true Kara as to the exact boundaries of their plots, highlights the ancestral connection of the Moguji to the land. At the same time, by turning them into numinous arbiters of land disputes, it removes them from the competition itself (compare Bailey 1978): while true Kara, Bogudo, and Gomba all can own land plots, the Moguji were forced into clientelist positions if they wanted to secure their livelihood. Of course, despite Kara (and sometimes Moguji) claims, the Moguji are no mere fishermen/apiculturalist/hunters and gatherers, who would technically not really ‘need’ fields, but do cultivate sorghum themselves, wherever they can get access to a riverbank plot or some inundated flats further inland (compare Matsuda 1996).

Still, the image of the Moguji as the non-cultivators (neither herders nor farmers), as non-productive people who just lived off the land without transforming it, sticks until today. Their relation to the true Kara is in many ways comparable to the relation between Kwegu and Mursi (see Turton 2002) or Kenyan (agro-)pastoralists and the variously denominated Dorobo groups (see Cronk 1989; Galaty 1979, 1982) the Moguji are the Kara’s “mirror in the forest” (Kenny 1981). This

3 The story of this migration, and the leaving-behind of the Bashada it involves (compare Epple 2010), is not central for the purposes of this chapter. In fact, while a full telling of the narrative would include it, due to the current political circumstances in Kara, no great emphasis is laid on the “travel” part – all narrative attention instead focuses on the arrival in the valley. David Turton (personal correspondence) notes that the Mursi also hold that they followed some bulls to the river, but in fact claim that they learned agriculture on the floodbanks from the Kwegu, a population similar to the Moguji. This shift accords with the Mursi’s stronger pastoralist ideology.

is particularly marked by the way in which they are talked about by the Kara, talk often heavy with metaphors. These largely evoke alleged (and often narratively perpetuated) aspects of their lives which are (in the symbolic universe of the Lower Omo) rather uncouth, unwholesome, and generally more appropriate for animals of the forest than for human beings. These metaphorical constructions mostly concern livelihood (they eat fish, compare Almagor 1997), ways of procreation (they have hardly any birth-related rituals), and (inter-)personal conduct (they are loud and violent), and in each case insinuate insufficient sophistication and the lack of any signs that the Moguji attempt to better their lot.

Take note that Kenny's metaphor of the mirror is to be taken quite literally – the Moguji provide a contrast which brings out in sharp relief the value the true Kara place on their own way of life. To talk about them as uncultivated and non-cultivating inhabitants of the forest, sharing more features with animals than with human beings, while simultaneously refusing commensality and sexual relations with them, goes a long way towards establishing an unimpeachable moral and ritual superiority. This is then adduced as the fitting legitimation for the Kara's mythical take-over of the riverbanks. This again accords well with the model proposed by Kopytoff (1989: 27). Still, the metaphorization of the Moguji as 'animal-like' does not preclude amicable interpersonal relationships. Kara and Moguji live and farm side by side, and are age-mates, hunting friends, and members in the same clans.⁴ Most social practices and rituals of the true Kara that the Moguji are excluded from are also barred to the other local ethnic categories.

With an eye on terminology, I would suggest that the Moguji can be said to have been dominated by the true Kara, in that the Kara have been able to exploit the labor of the Moguji (who had no farmland of their own) and maintain unidirectional patron-client relationships over decades, and to impose a definition of the situation which justifies their control over the means of production, i.e. the fertile riverbanks and livestock. The Moguji also used to perform a number of negatively valued ritual services for the Kara, which all served to cement their position as a group which was removed from political contest (see Turton 2002 for the assessment of a comparable situation in a nearby place). As far as I can tell, these rituals have fallen entirely by the wayside in the latter half of the twentieth century.

In the early 1990s, though, this apparently rather stable situation was disrupted by a series of events which I call 'the schism.' Tensions arose between the

4 Clanship, here, is obviously not based on joint descent only. While the specifics remain unclear, I assume that at some point in the past Moguji were inducted into their respective true Kara patrons' clans. Kara clans – unlike among many of their neighbors – do not commonly trace their origin back to a neighboring group either.

Kara and the Moguji, and some cases of violence between members of these two categories occurred. Many Moguji, spectacularly outnumbered in Kara country proper, moved away – either northwards, to the Moguji settlement at Kuchur (see fig. 1), or straight across the river towards the Nyangatom, where Kara rarely ventured in these days.

It is still difficult to trace the exact reasons or triggers for what occurred. It was the Japanese researcher Matsuda who first wrote about the schism (1994, 2002) from the perspective of the Moguji. He explained it in terms of the larger picture on the Lower Omo, that is, by pointing to shifts in the balance of power. After the Nyangatom were the first group to acquire automatic weapons, and after their display of their newfound power by massacring around 600 Mursi in one horrible raid,⁵ it fell to all the neighboring groups to show that they were still capable of action. This development, according to Matsuda, offered a new option for allegiance to the Moguji, to escape from the increasingly felt “annexation” (by the Kara) and instead submit themselves to a seemingly more egalitarian “assimilation” (by the Nyangatom). In Matsuda’s analysis, this shift seems motivated by growing frustration on the side of the Moguji, who in a sense politicized their position: allying themselves with the Nyangatom, they became contenders for the resources of the Omo Valley. Whether their relationship with the Nyangatom would indeed turn out more egalitarian in that sense was beside the point: just to break with the Kara was already a powerful assertion of their agency, one of the first decisions ‘the Moguji’ had taken in a long time. Among the Kara, they had been too dispersed and too individually attached to their respective Kara patrons to act much in a corporate way. In a manner of speaking, only by removing themselves from co-residence with the (other) Kara could a number of people categorized as Moguji become ‘the Moguji,’ as a collectivity endowed with agency. Indeed, it is one of the features of the way the true Kara dominate the territorial-political group that they deny that the different ethnic categories had any but ritual significance. That is, to ignore the taboos which separate them is less rendered in moral terms than in terms of prudence – if one ate together, one would surely fall ill. The status quo, in this claim, is beneficial for all, and any provocations and challenges of it are dangerous subversions.

5 See Turton (1994) for an account of the events, and (2003) for his struggle with this for South Omo unprecedented act of violence. But he also indicates that in the struggles between Mursi and Aari, the acquisition of automatic rifles by the Mursi did not lead to higher casualties among the Aari. Similarly, I can report from the Kara-Nyangatom warfare that automatic rifles on both sides seem to discourage people from open battles, and from attempts to slaughter entire villages, which had been done in the 1970s with little more than spears, knives, and ancient bolt-action rifles.

The schism, then, is a manifestation of the Moguji as a seeming whole managing to challenge this fundamental claim, this ‘basic lie’ (see Bailey 2003) of the Kara. Whether strategically (as Matsuda claims) or through a contingent conjunction of circumstances, many of them defied the true Kara, in the process weakening formerly defining ritual practices, in that the services they provided to the true Kara fell by the wayside. This process found a culmination in the early 1990s (Matsuda 2002: 173, 182) with the establishment of a *kebele* for Kuchur, a small administrative unit which was first a section of the Kuraz *woreda* (a district, here comprising Nyangatom and Dassanech), and since 2006 a section of the Nyangatom *woreda* when the older district was administratively divided.

Up until today, this incident is troubling for the true Kara. Especially being entangled in violent conflicts with the Nyangatom over the last few years, the position of the Moguji – many of whom know Kara country intimately, and could very easily act as spies and infiltrators – is a recurrent topic of concern when war rears its ugly head.

However, despite their numerical inferiority, the Kara have been able to by and large hold their own against the Nyangatom, and – since 2003 at least – have actually inflicted more casualties on them than vice versa. On both sides, though, people would much rather live in peace: many Kara elders grew up on the other side of the Omo River, speak fluent Nyangatom, and cultivate an extreme fondness for Nyangatom culture. When Kara and Nyangatom managed to meet in peace, the mutual cordiality always seemed to me much more pronounced than in Kara’s interaction with members of yet other ethnic groups. Matsuda saw the Moguji exploiting the rift between Kara and Nyangatom – so where does this leave the Moguji once Kara and Nyangatom reconcile? In the terms of this volume, what impact do the actions of the Moguji have on the image of them held and propagated by Kara and/or Nyangatom? This question is the focus of the rest of this paper. I will answer it by exemplar, certainly neither exhaustively nor with any claim to permanent validity, but in a way which still shows the structural predicament of the Moguji, and how imagery enables, manifests, and aggravates othering and domination.

Blaming the third: a meeting in southern Kara

On October 2, 2006, I attended a meeting (a so-called *osb*, see Strecker 1976 for a discussion of such speech events in Hamar), as the Kara from Korcho were host-

ing a group of Nyangatom of the Ngikumama section.⁶ This was a short while after Kara and Nyangatom had performed a peace ritual at Kibbish in Nyangatom territory (see Girke 2008a), where they had formally laid to rest the “spear” (i.e. war) which had troubled them for nearly a year. This day’s occasion now was a display of rapprochement, and a demonstration of mutual good will. A goat was slaughtered, the elders sat down behind a long sickle-shape of leafy branches on which the dripping hunks of meat were laid out, and a number of spokesmen from either side got up in turn, cursed war and illness, called forth rain and fertility, and proceeded to discuss the current situation of the land.

As the very jovial *osb* went on, one topic came to dominate the discussion: a specific Moguji man had started operating as a trader between the two groups, commuting between Korcho and an area known as Doro on the other side of the Omo River. When war broke out, Kara who were seeking ammunition were too afraid to cross the river, so the trader took their money and *arake* liquor, and used this to buy bullets for them in Nyangatom. He, as a Moguji whom people knew well, could freely cross between the front lines. It turned out that he had made a very good cut from his activities: he was able to purchase two rifles from his gains over one year, which was decried as excessive profit for such brokerage. This, then, was framed as typical Moguji behavior, and all around condemned, as one speaker after the next added their comments to the layers of oratory.

While addressing this case, before a mixed audience of Kara, Nyangatom, and some Moguji even, the metaphorical constructions linking Moguji to birds and hyenas, two symbolically problematic animals, as they are destroyers of crops and flocks respectively, were resoundingly prominent.

This sounds not surprising at first, as I have discussed earlier how Moguji are often likened to animals. However, I suggest that the metaphors encountered in the speeches transcribed below reflect the political relations between true Kara and the renegade Moguji ever since the schism, and are accordingly temporally restricted, explicitly situational and political. They found their occasion in a very specific place, at a very specific time, as will become clear when following the transcript below. This metaphor, then, is not to be hastily conflated with the ritual metaphor ‘Moguji are animals’ presented above, which is used to legitimate the Kara’s con-

6 The Kara call them “Kumama.” Of all the Nyangatom sections, this is the one which was described to me as most conciliatory and close by the Kara (see Tornay 1979: 100). The section is relatively small, and has been reticent in joining others in their attempts to besiege Kara land. Significantly, the Kumama are the peace-makers on the side of the Nyangatom when it comes to the Kara, the ones to perform the rituals which ceremonially end a state of war. Having riverbank fields of their own, they are probably also less motivated to displace the Kara.

quest of the Omo Valley, even though the source domain draws on animals in both cases. Consider the following sequential excerpts, taken from the *osb* on the hilltop of Korcho. I provide some explanatory notes in between the transcripts:⁷

Nyangatom elder 1:

1	Now you, Kara, you and I are the same.
2	Loxorio, and Lammah, I have heard from Loxorio that we are one village.
3	In this village, there should be no bad talk.
4	You Nyangatom boys, that bad talk, have you heard it? That bad talk from over there, I don't like it.

Notes:

In 1, the word “Kara” was used in the specific singular (i.e. *karta* in Kara language). It is common to refer to social categories in this form, emphasizing the unity of interest, the agency and accountability of the group, and the ontological identity of its members.

In 2, Loxorio is the *bitti*, the ritual leader of Labuk (the northern part of Kara). Due to their own ritual power, the Kumama are described as being related to the Kara *bitti*. Lammah was a very famous Kara elder, renowned for his exemplarily skillful and morally upright handling of affairs, both internal and external.⁸

In 2 and 3, “village,” *moro*, also stands for a patriline, indicating a claim of kinship and intimacy.

Kara elder 1:

5	We have opened up a new road: Ekiri, one, Bonko, two, Lecheria, three. We have given them canoes.
6	At Kolua, they will pick up the people, and help them exchange their goods.
7	Those three shall watch over the goods, and thus they shall not disappear.
8	And our wealth will return to us.

⁷ Except for the last speech by “Kara elder 2,” all speeches at the Korcho *osb* which I present here were made in the Nyangatom language, which I do not understand. In March 2008, I invited Kara friends to the South Omo Museum and Research Center (SORC) in the zonal capital Jinka to listen to the recordings, help me in translating from the Nyangatom, and discuss with me the context of the speeches. Thus, the excerpts presented here have been translated twice, from Nyangatom to Kara to English. The linguistic competence of the Kara involved is unassailable.

⁸ Serge Tornay has confirmed in personal communication that the ritual status of the Ngikumama (whom the Kara call Kumama) is significant: they are likely “foreigners” within Nyangatom, an “offshoot of the Kumam of Uganda,” and provide essential services also within the generation-set transition process.

9	This practice of asking for a profit in facilitating trade, I have refused it.
10	The Nyangatom shall go all the way to Korcho, ...
11	... also the Kara, when he says, I want to go to Doro, he shall go, no-one will rob him of his goods.
12	You Moguji, this bad talk, you, between the Kara and the Nyangatom, what sort of place are you in?
13	Are you Nyangatom, are you Kara? I and the Nyangatom, when we have fought, ...
14	... we reconcile, stab each other's goats, and wash our hands clean of the bad talk.
15	Have you heard how we washed our hands recently in Kibbish?
16	Even if we have spilled blood, we wash our hands later.
17	You Moguji, this gossip, this bad talk, where is your father?
18	My father, once, he bought fields with his gun, with cattle, with goats.
19	Where is your bondfriend, Moguji?
20	For what do you start this bad talk? The bad talk had been washed away.
21	I can handle my fields, my father's gun-fields, my father's goat-fields.
22	Are you also people? You are birds! You sit on trees! Where do you come from?
23	You used to be Kara. I – look at me, I am in my father's land.
24	The bad talk, it shall meet me in my land.
25	Are you also people? You are birds, sitting in trees. With you I don't discuss.
26	The discussion of before, is it not in your belly?
27	Slowly, after this meeting, you need to understand our debate.
28	What has made you drunk?
29	If there is talk from you, leave us and the Nyangatom alone when we are together.
30	If you have anything to discuss, discuss it with me.
31	You are dirt. I don't consider you.
32	Was your house there before, was there your field?
33	Did you raise goats, cattle, buy a gun, did you erect a house, a grain store, did you lay out a hide?
34	This is me, look.
35	Now, you have refused me, and even more, there you didn't cultivate fields.
36	Now you are back, and again that bad talk surfaces.
37	Think of this, being between the Nyangatom and me. We have made peace.
38	But you, having poured back in between us, you rumor-mongers, you instigators!
39	Now from within the Nyangatom, a problem has come back. What is that? That is you.

Notes:

In 5, three men are named, a Nyangatom-Kara, a trusted Moguji elder from Kara, and a true Kara elder with very good relations to many Nyangatom. These had been selected by the Kara and given the task of ferrying people seeking to visit the other side across the Omo without asking for compensation.

In 6, “Kolua” is a site on the Omo River, different from the anchorage C. had used.

In 14, the speaker points out that Moguji have no specific rituals to make peace, as they do not act in war or peace as an autonomous group. The Kara have specific peace-making ritual procedures for each of the neighboring groups. As a rule, Moguji might join attacks when invited by other groups, but lack the ritual and numerical capacity to wage war on their own.

In 18 and 21, the fact that the Moguji own no fields, and cannot even acquire them, is used to disparage their way of life – a stance which, as Serge Tornay notes, echoes the “primitivist myths” which abound about the inhabitants of South Omo and which are most revoltingly peddled in coffee-table books (see Tornay 2009; compare LaTosky in this volume).

In 19, the question after the bondfriend, the *bel*, insinuates that Moguji have no bondfriends, no true friends who acknowledge them as autonomous equals, as the institution exists elsewhere (see Girke 2010). Rather, in this view from Kara, Moguji are seen as something like “natural clients.” Among the Nyangatom, bondfriends are called *lo-paakang* (also used for an inner-tribal friend). Serge Tornay reports that – identical to how the Kara would see it – Nyangatom owe their bondfriends protection and hospitality. “Even in an open fight between ‘enemies,’ if a warrior recognizes a bondfriend, or the son of a bondfriend of his father, he will protect that person from any injury” (personal communication).

In 22, a bird metaphor is first used: birds have no proper home, no place where they belong, no place which is their own.

In 23, the allusion is to the schism (see above); the accusation is that the Moguji have renounced both kinship (*āda*) and amity (*ādamo*).⁹

In 32–5, the reference is again to the schism, and the claim is that even having shifted loyalties, the Moguji had not been productive. Even worse, someone who does not cultivate is by necessity amoral, a thief.

In 33, the pointlessness of a non-productive existence is emphasized.

In 34, this sharp comment provides the counterpoint to 33, as it depicts the Kara as the ones who cultivate and better their lot.

9 These two terms are comprehensively discussed elsewhere (Girke 2008b).

Nyangatom elder 2:

40	Those traders, those who eat the goods of people.
41	Those who with their cleverness eat the goods of people, they shall die.
42	You Nyangatom, this one man, from there he eats the Kara, from here he eats the Nyangatom.
43	This man who eats people, do you stand for it? That is weakness.
44	He is alone, he eats there, he eats here, how dare he see a profit? Does he help me in my need?
45	This is something bad. It is good that this discussion was started.
46	That one, he is a hyena. It will go bad. If we chase him away, it will all turn good.
47	This is bad; to eat here and there, this is not right.
48	If this happens again, we now know it and it will go badly for him.
49	Those who eat from the trader's road, they shall stop.
50	Those others, who talk [other Nyangatom], some have eaten such profits before.
51	Those who ate through their cleverness, for free, they have all died.
52	That Moguji, he will also die, he will die. He who eats for free, will die.
53	Before, land was given to people.
54	Lokuta... Alko gave it to him, saying, 'eat.'
55	So to C., who has given this land to him?
56	Having grown up here, he is now close with me, the Kumama. I have now seen.
57	Now, I say, you Kara, leave him alone, I will track him.
58	T., before, X. and the elder brother of Y., ... T. is now Kapung.
59	They enter here, they enter there, and they enter there.
60	Now they are Kapung.

Notes:

In 40, the term "eat" (*itsa*) is first use. It stands for seeking (illicit) profit in general, but the resonance with carrion-eating and amoral gluttony is strong.

In 41 and 52, the curses issued are of consequence, since the spiritual power of the Ngikumama is said to be efficacious.

In 41, the use of *paxalmamo*, "cleverness," was one of the few times when I encountered it as a negative. Usually, cleverness is an extremely praiseworthy attribute.

In 42, the reference to indiscriminate carrion-consumption is powerful.

In 43, "weakness" was rendered as *malgintamo* in Kara, which is both incapacity of body and the opposite of cleverness, and often refers to deficits in decisiveness to boot.

In 44, "alone" indicates that traders such as C. do not respect the bonds of friendship or kinship.

In 46, the metaphor of “hyena,” the despised destroyer of small stock, and a carrion-eater, supplements the image of the birds which eat without sowing.

In 47, it is suggested that people like C. profit from others’ generosity, yet hold no loyalty either way.

In 51, “for free” was rendered as *sümm* in Kara, indicating a lack of appropriate compensation or effort.

In 54, the reference is to the proper way of dealing with one another: a Kara invites a Nyangatom to use one of his fields for farming, and nobody encroaches on others’ property uninvited.

In 55, C. has not been “given land,” and yet he prospers; this is not proper.

In 58–60, the reference is to some Moguji who display considerable shiftiness, in that they even switch allegiances between the different Nyangatom sections, one of which is “Kapung.”

Nyangatom elder 1:

61	You Nyangatom, those Moguji, their way of being, is it good? You children, look at this talk!
62	I am the <i>bitti</i> of the land.
63	I alone fix the land. You, bring him back.
64	For me, his way of being is bad, the one who is called Moguji. What is he doing?
65	He has no one place, he enters here and there.
66	Not like this! I don’t like it.
67	At the place where the cattle come to drink, there shall be no bad talk.
68	Everything shall be as good as it used to be.
69	The Nyangatom, if he will, shall go seek his kin.
70	The Kara, alike.

Notes:

In 61 and 64, “way of being” was expressed as *denta* in Kara, as close a term for “life,” “existence” as the language has to offer, but also “livelihood.”

In 61–3, the speaker indicates that he would support efforts by “children,” i.e., young and active men, to see to it that activities such as C.’s would be stopped.

In 67, the “place where the cattle come to drink” is also the place where conversations between Kara and Nyangatom across the river are mostly held, and also where most sniper attacks take place; thus, a very important place which needs care and protection.

In 69, the term *äda* was used for “kin,” and indicates a bondfriend or another such intimate, interpersonal relation.

Kara elder 2:

71	Hey, Lo., and those others ... what do they do?
72	What's going on here?
73	How have they turned into eaters of the field?
74	Is there any food left?
75	<i>Dikka.</i>
76	Those Moguji, those from over there.
77	I will take hold of them, bind them, and beat them.
78	At the place where the cattle drink, the Moguji, those buying ones, they will waste your things!
79	He doesn't know! He has laid down the bullets to buy Birr, and doesn't know that the other is eating.
80	For what do they impoverish us?
81	This talk doesn't stop!
82	This guy with his <i>serkserk</i> hat, how can he lead the people here?
83	Those who finish us, it is they.
84	The Kara ask, what is this? Is there anything bad from the Kara now?
85	We hear at night the <i>pilpil</i> of this other guy on the other side, telling lies.

Notes:

In 71, "Lo." refers to a Moguji elder who had left Kara in the past, and now had come with the visiting Nyangatom. He was also sitting among them during this speech.

In 75, *dikka* refers to people who have never eaten enough; the suggestion is that Moguji are greedy and without moderation.

In 77, the reference is to an event after the schism, when some Moguji wanted to return to Kara without acknowledging that they had initially transgressed. They were caught, bound and beaten, and only then allowed to settle in Kara again, which they promptly refused, instead returning to the Nyangatom for good. These are the same people who had been mentioned in 58–60.

In 79, the example is of a Nyangatom man who wants to "buy money" with his bullets, but does not know the exchange rate which the Moguji middle-man uses, and who is cheated as a consequence.

In 82 and 85, the speaker uses ideophones to issue some personal insults which had my Kara friends laughing out loud when re-listening to the recording: *serkserk* points to a particularly inept angle at which Lo. was wearing his hat, and *pilpil* mocks the chronic coughing of another well-known Moguji, here accused of rumor-mongering.

In 84, he claims that despite the gossip spread by Moguji, the Kara will keep the peace.

The meeting ended shortly hereafter – first, the elders moved into the shade, as the sun had been rising, and a bit later they, both Kara hosts and Nyangatom guests, dispersed into various households throughout Korcho.

These excerpts indicate the depth and convolutedness of the situation, as many old grievances are brought up, and one also notices the high degree of familiarity among the attendants, as everyone recognizes the names of individuals used, and everybody is assumed to ‘get’ the allusions to specific events. The blaming of the Moguji is explicit and direct, face-threatening even, especially considering that some Moguji elders were sitting there with the Kara and Nyangatom. Over the rest of my text, I want to discuss these speeches from three perspectives: 1) in regard to the metaphor “Moguji are birds and hyenas” which recurred throughout the meeting, 2) in regard to the greater political situation obtaining along the Lower Omo at the time, and 3) in regard to the question of images of self and other, as it is revealed here.

The metaphorical imagination

So what emerges from this discourse in the way of figuration? First and foremost, the denial of a proper home, a place and land of their own for the Moguji stands out. They are not likened to domestic animals, but they still congregate around human habitats. This is connected to the complaints of “eating here, eating there” – not only does the culprit “eat in two places,” but he also “eats the bodies” of the hosts, i.e., is parasitical and bent on destruction in both places. Also, in being present in both places, and not even that reliably (see the “Kapung” remark in 58 and 60), puts the Moguji in the situation where they can easily spread rumors and destabilize the relations – nobody on either side can falsify their claims. As the maligned trader C. exemplifies, in the understanding of Kara and Nyangatom, the Moguji profited from the mutual distrust, as they came to hold the monopoly on trade. Thus, they supplanted the ‘proper’ relations between households and individuals, who should be able to transact without a middleman who profits from their needs.

Beyond simply feeding off the misfortune of others (see Sapir 1977: 30 on vultures in metaphor), they cause it in the first place, not only by being instigators and middle-men, but by also being voracious and greedy, never being content with what they have received. This serves to evoke the behavior patterns of hyenas (see line 46), who are especially adept at slaughtering large numbers of sheep due to the panic response of the latter: they tend to stick together, whereas goats scatter. Having thus killed more sheep than they can eat, the hyenas will then hide the torn-up carcasses which they did not manage to devour. Put in terms of intentional behavior, they not only steal, but they also despoil the order of things seemingly out of spite.

The alleged tendency of the Moguji to act clandestinely was dwelled upon as well: like weak and cowardly animals they do not do their killing themselves, but feast on the carrion provided by others, on the carcasses of animals (i.e., other people) which they – and this is significant – could not have killed themselves.

Here, both hyena and birds were mentioned explicitly, where “birds” is an open term in metaphoric usage: vultures are evoked, but also the swarms of smaller birds which threaten to destroy the harvest along the riverbank every year. Neither of these two possible interpretations needs to be specified, as the term “birds” sustains both in parallel. They provide striking images: one through the vulture’s unwholesome livelihood and connection to death and malignancy, the other through the endless and pointless battles they occasion when people try to protect the fruits of the fields, the recognized basis of all Kara livelihood.¹⁰ While the word *kuutso*, ‘vulture,’ was not specifically spoken during the Korcho *osh*, the euphemistic use of generic term for specific species is common in Kara. I have heard the word used for Moguji on other occasions.¹¹

The speakers, then, both used literal metaphors, and through the cumulative impact of the imagery used they jointly construct a “conceptual metaphor” (Lakoff/Johnson 2003). What does this mean? Conceptual metaphors derive their power precisely from being not literal. Instead, they trigger thought processes on the part of the ‘victim,’ the one exposed to a metaphor, who basically takes over all the cognitive work of meaning inference and intention attribution from such a powerfully suggestive claims as that Moguji are (like) birds. We are “compelled [...] to consider each term in relationship to the other” (Sapir 1977: 9). The speakers, in turn, build up the conceptual metaphor by highlighting specific aspects of this image – having no home, eating without sowing, etc. This is a cumulative process, rhetorical *repetitio*, which works especially well since the underlying narratives are so familiar to the audience. Accordingly, from among the various forms the “work of metaphor” takes, I understand the use of tropological figuration here to be rather a “Proclamation of That” or a “Prescription of This” than a “Persuasion of You” (Crocker 1977: 38). Neither was the metaphor used during the meet-

10 Galaty’s discussion of “avian imagination” among the Maasai also brings up the interstitial position of birds between human (agropastoralist) society and the animal kingdom (1998: 229f).

11 Writing this, I am called back to my early days in Kara. Sitting in the village square one unidentifiable evening and chatting quietly, one age-mate asked me, “tell us, you have read many books, do you know where the vulture lives? We always see it, but we have never seen his house.” (‘Nest’ translates literally as ‘birdhouse.’) I dutifully replied that I assumed vultures lived in the mountains, in inaccessible places; that this bird ranged far and wide in its search for food. I was asked that same question a few months later, in a similar setting, and again the questioner was a young true Kara. Now, sitting behind my desk, I wonder whether I was the stooge who provided the correct answer to the ambiguous prompt provided by the questioner, namely, that “vultures” (Moguji) do not live in Kara land but only come there to feed. I cannot resolve this suspicion either way. I do not recall any Moguji being present, nor that either of these incidents took place in close temporal proximity to a debate on Moguji. Both might have been the case, but as I had not yet encountered the ‘Moguji are vultures’ metaphor, I was oblivious to possible tropic dynamics. This is the power of metaphoric allusion – it is difficult to pin down, and easy to deny.

ing in Korcho new to the audience, not Nyangatom, not Kara, not Moguji, nor was there any need to be circumspect – despite the fact that Moguji were present. No new meaning-interpretation was forced; the idiom of the unproductive, opportunistic, unsocial animal was simply recalled as a vivid image of the Moguji, one that reduced this other, who stood accused, to a few appropriate traits. This is what Fernandez calls a “performative metaphor,” which expresses the speaker’s feelings or to “declare his intentions vis-à-vis the subject” (1977: 104).

In summary, this principally familiar (but often dormant) trope was activated by connecting it to the recent political upheavals. The result was a strong situational condemnation and ostracism of the Moguji, opposing them to both Kara and Nyangatom who *have* a home, who *are* productive, who are *not* opportunistic, and who fight their *own* battles and make up afterwards. This connection of metaphorical othering with simultaneous political rapprochement (between Kara and Nyangatom) and scapegoating (of the Moguji) is further analyzed in the next section.

The political situation on the Lower Omo in 2006

I argue that the speeches, with their imagery and their other claims analyzed in depth, reveal a great deal about the dynamic interrelations of the three groups directly involved. To unravel the drama, I start by asking the most basic question: what was at stake?

First of all, the meeting at Korcho, like most *osh*, was not an occasion at which anything was decided, or where the events took any surprising turns. Participants were by and large very familiar with one another (note the specificity of the many allusions), and the formal peace ceremony had been performed some weeks before. Kara and Nyangatom had thus agreed to stop killing each other, and publicly assured one another that they would respectively strive for amity and cooperation. The meeting in Korcho was also in principle devoted to the latter purpose. But why did speakers belabor the subject of the Moguji so emphatically? And who was the audience at whom these speeches were directed?

In a nutshell: the Moguji were put in their place. That place, then, is exactly the place they had among the Kara, as a politically muted category of people, who irrespective of the schism and their subsequent shift of alliance (and residence) to the Nyangatom could not lay claim to the same kind of corporate autonomy as Kara and Nyangatom – and respected elders from both groups told them so, in not unclear terms. Kara and Nyangatom, even as they fight and make up and fight

again, have in some sense acknowledged each other's right to act, their ontological agency. The audience, I suggest, was twofold. On the one hand, the Moguji were reminded that their ambiguous status would neither go away, nor be rendered unproblematic. To be Moguji, they were told, was to be betwixt and between, and simply to try and ally themselves with the Nyangatom would not remove that stigma. On the other, the Kara and Nyangatom assured each other that neither of them had been influenced by the supposedly poisonous words of the Moguji. This of course entailed the mutual reassurance that neither considered the Moguji as equals who were entitled to an opinion and a similar degree of agency as they themselves granted each other (lines 29f). Jointly disparaging the Moguji gave them a third party to blame for their own failures to keep the peace. The Moguji's act of cutting their ties to the Kara, it was made clear, even as it gave them some traction with the Nyangatom, did not garner them the respect or acknowledgement they might have wished for.

But is this all that was at stake? Recognition of the Moguji as equals, as acknowledged actors on the narrative stages of South Omo? I think that indeed this was the main prize, as it seems to be the precondition for even being granted the right to join the competition over other resources. It is no secret that there are some among the Moguji who have started propagating the claim that the riverbanks of the Omo rightfully still ought to be theirs. How people react to this claim is revealing.

Some months after the meeting in Korcho, representatives of the three groups again met (this time in Hamar territory). When the debates turned to the issue of the occupation of the western riverbank by the Nyangatom, which was hotly contested by the Kara, a Moguji speaker got up and stated that he did not understand the discussion, because the Kara never had any fields in the first place: in the past, the only inhabitants of the Omo Valley were the (by now nearly extinct) Murle (see Tornay 1981), they, the Moguji themselves, and the baboons of the forest. This was a calculated provocation, which took a stab at the great 'saving lie' at the heart of the Kara; and unsurprisingly, he was shouted down and threatened by the Kara who were present. Interestingly, I was told that neither the Nyangatom nor the NGO workers who had facilitated the meeting supported the man's claims, or even maintained his right to be heard.

At Korcho, no Moguji spoke either. There was not even an attempt to contest the images of the Moguji which were used by Kara and Nyangatom, and no alternative imagery was suggested. Again, any attempt to do so would have met strong resistance, and probably would even have engendered reprisals; still, it is worthwhile to reflect on whether such counter-images even exist, and what they would

entail. To go a step further even: what might be the Moguji's images of the true Kara, or the Nyangatom, and of themselves?

Whose images of self and other?

To preempt my conclusion: the example of the Kara, Moguji and Nyangatom shows that one cannot assume images of self and other to be evenly and mutually constructed. My ethnographic material gives no indication that any alternative images other than those proclaimed by Kara and Nyangatom have any great currency in the discursive and narrative conceptions of the relationships between them. To clarify: I mean to say that the Moguji cannot openly present such a loaded image of the true Kara or the Nyangatom comparable to the ones the true Kara (or the Nyangatom) hold of the Moguji. I also suspect – uncomfortably – that there might not be a self-image that the Moguji might hold which would fundamentally contest the ascriptions others impose on them. This refers back to the nature of images and stereotypes: they have most relevance as they are voiced, and assented to by any audience. Anthropologically interesting images of self and other do not exist in people's minds only. Instead, they are expressed to achieve something in the world. Collective representations, to use an old term, must be collective and represented, that is, they need to be communicated, and they need to be endorsed. Moguji do not seem to have that option in the same way true Kara and Nyangatom do.

So even if we could unearth a Scottian “hidden transcript,” a certain way the Moguji spoke about their relationship to the Kara amongst one another when there was no Kara around, the difference to the epistemic status of the Kara's image of them is marked.¹² The image ‘Moguji are birds and hyenas’ can be voiced by Kara with impunity, simply as there seems to be no practical alternative, no real option for the Moguji to be free from domination by one group or the other, Kara or Nyangatom. This is even true for individuals, who would have to migrate far indeed in order not to be treated as ritually problematic lacklands. Ironically, the most convenient way for Moguji to escape the harsher forms of othering might be to accept their position within the Kara (or Nyangatom, as the case may be), and let go all aspirations of autonomy.

12 It is also not surprising that Moguji identify with the alleged Moguji ‘cause’ to highly variable degrees – I have met many who quite plausibly expressed happiness and pride regarding the position they hold in Kara. An incidence of false consciousness, or a genuine and deliberate choice?

In the previous section, I discussed the question of group autonomy and corporate agency. Here, I expand this view to not only encompass the right to – for example – wage war or make peace as a corporate group, or to occupy and ‘own’ arable land (in local notions, not according to state law), but also to the practice of imagination.

In this sense, the domination of the Moguji is of a pernicious kind, in that it denies them the capacity to voice alternative visions of their position in the world.¹³ James Scott asserts that subordinates do not suffer from an “inability to *imagine* a counterfactual order. They do imagine both the reversal and the negation of their domination” (1990: 81, his emphasis; see also discussion in Lukes 2005: 128). I find it relevant to add that this imagination has rarely found a social outlet, and in that, it differs from the imaginations held by Kara of the Moguji, which constantly find rhetorical space.¹⁴ Another puzzle piece is the initially mentioned fact that there is no local term to refer to the category of people whom I call the ‘true Kara.’ To speak about only the true Kara one would have to use the term “Kara,” and then either invest some rhetorical effort to make clear that not the entire polity (including Gomba and Moguji, etc.) is meant, or one would have to explain further, which is awkward and a “bald on-record,” as politeness theory would have it (see Strecker 1988), attack on the social order and its saving lies. I do not think that this is a coincidence: for the dominant ‘true Kara’ it is one of the bases of their power that already by name the entire polity is identified with them, and it is so much easier to single out the other ethnicities than them.

As can be gleaned from the speeches held at the Korcho *osb*, the undesirable position of the Moguji is subscribed to by both the rock (Kara) and the hard place (Nyangatom), neither of whom acknowledge the former as their equal. Matsuda (1994) has made the following distinction between choices open to the Moguji: “annexation” by the Kara and “assimilation” by the Nyangatom, and one could certainly point to differences between the ways in which the Moguji are incorporated by the Kara and by the Nyangatom which reflect this distinction. But the one

13 David Turton (personal correspondence) remarks that this should be considered a natural feature of domination, understood as a kind of social relation in which the subordinate believes that they actually profit from their own subjection. I am not sure about what people believe; I can only deal with what they publically voice.

14 I desist from making any more farreaching claims as to the (double?) consciousness of the Moguji; as Lukes reminds us earnestly in his discussion of the third, consciousness-forming dimension of power, “[s]ince Mill there have, of course, been many attempts to open up the ‘black box’ of what Mill here calls ‘the formation of character’ and others have come to call ‘socialization,’ ‘internalization’ and ‘incorporation,’ in ways that promise to illuminate the mechanisms of domination” (2005: 139). Precisely these mechanisms cannot be explored here, as I accept the methodological limits imposed by that very black box.

continuity, the one aspect which the Moguji could not escape, not even by triggering the schism and by shifting allegiance towards the Nyangatom was the fact that they are still conceptualized as a non-entity, an ethnic category but not an ethnic group, if you will, as they are not allowed to develop a corresponding autonomous political organization.

As it turns out, to inquire into images of self and other is to open up issues of discursive hegemony, power, and domination – and this is not only true for the social scientist who researches such a situation, but also very much for the Kara, Moguji, and Nyangatom themselves, who all realize quite clearly that some people have the power to name and to define others publicly, and some do not. Every attempt to proclaim one's image of an other is an attempt to assert one's power vis-à-vis that other, and each successful attempt constitutes a step towards actually 'feeling' the agency which springs from one's assertion of self, whether as an individual or as an assembly of people categorized the same way, among whom "groupness" (Brubaker et al. 2002) becomes more and more felt.

At any rate, the story of the Kara, Moguji, and Nyangatom is not over yet. Moguji have been seeking recognition by state structures as well, and are increasingly finding it under the Ethiopian policy of ethnic federalism (see Matsuda 2002), and despite the massive transformations of the Lower Omo Valley due to dam building and the introduction of foreign-owned commercial farms, it is too early to assume that the warfare in the Lower Omo Valley has subsided for good. I do not expect that entangled lives of Kara and Moguji will be disentangled, for better or for worse, anytime soon. As the second meeting revealed, briefly discussed above, some Moguji were testing the rhetorical waters and trying to find a space from which to speak as a group, to speak as a collective actor of consequence.

The Moguji, being the Kara's "mirror in the forest," are in many ways important for the Kara. As individuals, as I mentioned above, they are neighbors and friends, and as I tried to make clear at the beginning of this text, what it is to be Kara can hardly be explained without reference to the Moguji. This leads me to the conclusion that in all their one-sidedness and their crude bias, the true Kara's images of self depend on their images of other, and vice versa; just as the othering of the Moguji justifies the denial of their autonomy it also assigns them a stable place within the political unit which is Kara. True Kara and Moguji are not two independent groups or categories which one could just separate, neither conceptually, nor pragmatically – both have emerged in mutual constitution, probably over the last 200 years or more. Their entanglement cannot be seen normatively, as a deficient, dysfunctional, and deplorable way of being; they are who they are because they are entangled. The imagery I have discussed bears witness to that: in

daily life, Moguji are depicted as pathetically unsophisticated brutes by the Kara, not in an aggressive, but in a rather benevolent paternalistic way. It is only when this benevolent paternalism is contested, when attempts are made to sever the ties that oblige – the Kara being obliged to care, the Moguji being obliged not to make a fuss over their marginalization – that the imagery takes on the dark taint that comes up again and again in the speeches made in Korcho. This serves to show that what truly is at stake here, when the Moguji try to assert their autonomy, are not the images of self and other, but the demarcation of self and other, and at the end of the day, the very definition of what is Kara.

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