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The Individual and Social Self

An American and African Illustration of Differences

John Hamer

The purpose of the article is to seek to understand the difference between and emphasis on individualism or social belonging and some of its consequences in America, as compared with an African community where the focus is on identity with social attachment. My hypothesis is that there is a broad difference in how an African from birth is oriented in terms of security toward the community, though not completely at the expense of the self. By contrast, the American is directed toward self-realization, with the community as a means rather than a base for a shared sense of security.

This approach suggests very different orientations toward the community and the nation state that may explain the failure of the latter in Africa (Hamer 2007; Comaroff and Comaroff 2004). If the African associates authority and security with the community of birth, his/her social connectedness will be directed differently than that of the American who sees social interaction at any group level as an opportunity for self-attainment, rather than a greater degree of security. For the latter the nation state becomes a kind of referee to see that the individual shows a modicum of social responsibility.

To explain this difference I propose two hypotheses. One is that societies stressing self-realization in child rearing processes are likely to require hierarchical social control because of the difficulty of gaining compromise and consensus at the community level. A second is that societies stressing normative conformity in childhood are likely to experience less difficulty in obtaining compromise and consensus and have less need for hierarchical social control. Therefore, the American sociocultural system should conform to the first hypothesis while African peoples fit more appropriately into the second. I use the Sidāmo people of the Horn of northeastern Africa to represent the latter.

The American Self

Historically there has developed an exaggerated stereotype of the individualistic American as being

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totally egocentric. This has arisen out of Enlightenment thinking about freedom and individual choice so firmly grounded in the Constitution. There is, however, some empirical basis for this belief. Thus, the French scholar and traveler, de Toqueville, in his visit to America in 1831 suggested equality and individualism were visible in all the social activities he observed (1952: 3, 297 f., 302–304, 410 f.). He concluded that this was in keeping with the thinking of Enlightenment philosophers. According to his observations it created a situation in which one man's opinion was as adequate as another's. He feared that this could conduct to a form of skepticism and cynicism leading to a goal of materialistic well-being, with less concern about prosperity for all. Dickens also noticed this lack of social commitment in his discussion of Protestantism, which he believed was based completely on dissent, without any concern for a consensus on beliefs (1961: 282 f.).

Nevertheless, it seems that prior to the American Revolution many parents had not embarked upon training their children in individualism (Mintz and Kellogg 1988: 47–49). Parents were, however, being encouraged to train them to be independently able to make vocational choices as well as seek out their own friends and spouses. It was said that children should no longer be simply required to submit to authority. As a consequence of this new way of thinking, embodied in the freedom and independence portions of the Constitution, by the nineteenth century there was increasing promotion and acceptance of the importance of individualism.

The Constitution also places stress upon the importance of a moral and religious obligation to participate in governance (Bellah et al. 1985: 142–144). By the late twentieth century, however, this obligation has been largely eroded and, as individuals have chosen to withdraw, it has become difficult to sustain public life. Putnam, for example, found in a survey of 24,000 persons who kept diaries between 1992–99 that time spent in religious worship and visiting friends declined by twenty percent (2000: 107). In further widespread sampling across the United States there were indications of a general decline since the 1960s in political participation, community associations, and churches (Putnam 2000: 27, 32–147). He has suggested that this is a dramatic movement away from social interaction with others to the privacy of the household, electronic entertainment, and obsession with the continuous news of warfare. The latter especially has created a skepticism, cynicism, and emphasis on individualistic life style among youth in the last half of the twentieth century (Putnam 247–276). At the same time training for self-sufficient independence in childhood has become mostly preparation for leaving home, ignoring family, and community affiliation (Bellah et al. 1985: 57 f., 150). Bellah and his researchers have found a contradiction between this desire for individualism and a muted sense of wishing to be a part of community since "compromise is strictly fatal" (1985: 150).

With this increasing withdrawal of youth Etzioni mentions a developing fear among their parents of a "moral reawakening" (1998: 41–45). There is a concern that a new form of "Puritanism" will be imposed through a fear of punishment, since it will be difficult to establish a consensus of support within the population. In the same volume the philosopher Charles Taylor notes that politicians absorb much interest among Americans, but have little success in establishing consensus because individuals demand "all or nothing," "right or wrong" which makes it difficult to establish any form of agreement (Bellah et al. 1985: 47–54).

There is also some argument against this negative view of individualism in America as well as whether it has been too vaguely defined. Bellah has gone so far as to suggest that communalism based on consensus as to beliefs and values is most appropriate in small communities, whereas individualism is more acceptable in urban-industrial societies (1998: 15–17). Nevertheless, he qualifies this assertion with the necessity for moral fairness and cooperation rather than basing social interaction only on contract. He characterizes this form of sociocentricism as based upon "reflective consensus."

Further concern about the meaning of individualism has recently been discussed by Strauss (2007) in terms of the connection between choice and the self. She claims that individualistic choice is often jointly determined and controlled, which she refers to as "conjoint agency." Moreover, when individuals find that they have made wrong choices, there is a tendency to blame uncontrollable "social forces." As a consequence persons often use nonindividualistic explanation to avoid blame of self. She claims that this fits a "late capitalist phenomenon of fear of loss of control."

Parenting and Self-Sufficiency

Despite the above caveats, today the importance of individualism is accepted by so many as to be thought a part of human nature and basis to American culture (Harkness, Super and Keefer 1992:

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169–171). As Harkness et al. suggest, American parents attempt to change destructive and disturbing behavior in youth so that it becomes a cultural value associated with independence. Their findings are part of a study in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where they found child rearing practices to be based on parental reflections of their own up-bringing and opinions as well as knowledge acquired from so-called "experts" about child behavior and development. Always their ideas and practices are directed toward the ideal of promoting "independence" in the child (Harkness et al. 1992: 176 f.).

In a more detailed study of working and middle-class children in the boroughs of Manhattan and Queens, the psychologist Kusserow found parents of the former tended to foster a "hard protective individualism" in their children (2004: 169 f.). Neither group excluded "sociocentric values" since both show some empathy toward the other (2004: 171, 174 f.). Moreover, both groups may change these early defensive or expansive individualist stances in later life. Still the parents believe they are eliminating outer class antagonisms in the child to get at the true inner self. By contrast, Kusserow shows how Japanese mothers place emphasis on discipline in seeking to develop respect for the feeling of others (2004: 186).

In discussing training differences in terms of egocentrism and socicentrism it is important to consider how American parents managed the issue of dependency in early childhood. In the 1970s, Beatrice Whiting discussed the conflict between dependency and achievement encouragement in American children (1978: 218, n. 1). She found that even in seeking dependence in early life they were encouraged to demand help and attention from others as well as rewarded for "seeking out." In a later article Weisner suggests that in America the dependency conflict was so severe that it became psychologically difficult for individuals to participate in the larger community (2001: 277). This was because children spent so much time in conjugal settings using family members to satisfy their dependency needs. As a consequence Weisner and his associates, in studying families living collectively, found the social difficult to sustain (2001: 283). Some parents even left the collective because they resented others disciplining their children. And though parents in these counterculture groups supported changes in family life styles and politics, many individualistic ideals from the mainstream middle class still prevailed (2001: 290 f.).

With so much emphasis upon the individual and the family, lack of community participation, and commitment, there remains the problem of social control within the larger society. The Japanese anthropologist Watanabe in a recent study of the family in Boston has suggested that it is difficult for modern Americans to visualize the "social whole" (2005: 193). This forces the individual to search for personal security by protecting privacy and rights to freedom. The lack of social connectedness between individuals leads to increasing emphasis on legal and bureaucratic procedures. He cites as an example the legal empowerment of small children to sue their own parents. And an increasing ambiguity of moral values and obligations makes it easy to adopt temporarily to others and take on varying social roles, so long as one can maintain individual "wants and inner impulses" (Watanabe 2005: 198 f.). This makes it increasingly difficult to maintain trust within the family when there is so little in the outside community. This in turn discourages Americans from considering child rearing as a "social enterprise" (Watanabe 2005: 200 f.). By contrast, Landsman, in discussing the modern problem of women and work outside the home, privileges the role of government in providing formal legislation in developing support for working mothers (1995). She illustrates the difficulties of this endeavor in a meeting convened to decide on how the legislation should be formulated. Despite numerous individualistic opinions, there was a consensus that any proposal for government intervention should not threaten individual economic interest (1995: 37). Moreover, her conclusion that child care is increasingly a community rather than a family problem is countered by individualistic commitments that make it difficult to reach a consensus on community involvement.

Cooperation and consensus is even more of a problem in the case of family break-up. The historian Coontz has considered this issue in terms of motherhood without husband support (1997: 117 f.). In the past there was the assumption that if a marriage occurred, children would always be cared for. Now, however, when a divorce occurs in contemporary America, a parent or parents may walk away and assume the state will resolve the issue of responsibility. This leads Coontz to the conclusion that the family is no longer able to control the child rearing process, which must be extended to persons outside the household.

Lipsitz has taken the meaning of politico-economic control of the individual to a logical conclusion (2001: 17). He suggests that such control tends to portray the state rather than the family as the new basis for social inclusiveness.

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The Contrast

African people represent a striking contrast of sociocentrism to the egocentrism of Americans. The generally widespread emphasis on conformity to norms by the former helps develop a sense of compromise and desire in maintaining community harmony. This eliminates the need for a bureaucratized hierarchy of controls. To illustrate this difference between Africans and Americans, I will focus on my period of field research from the mid-1960s to the early 1980s among the Sidāma in the Horn of Africa.[1]

To begin it will be necessary to briefly describe the vital community institutions of gerontocracy such as the elders' councils (*songo*) and the generational class system (*lua*), which impact both the old and changing socioeconomic relations. Then I wish to describe the child rearing practices that give precedence to social commitment over individualism. All of this information is based upon the day-to-day interaction between elders and children, and formal observation of the latter in a play school organized by Irene Hamer in a rural hamlet. Then I will relate these observations to projective storytelling provided by a small sample of Sidāmo youth.

The Sidāma are a Cushitic speaking people on the edge of the Rift Valley (Hamer 1987: 12–20). Their basic economy consists of ensete (*wese*) gardening and cattle herding, supplemented by a variety of tubers and vegetables.[2] By the 1950s they had become seriously involved in the cultivation of coffee as a cash crop. The people live in scattered hamlets (*kača*) surrounded by gardens and pastures for the cattle. Several hamlets constitute a neighborhood (*olau*), which provides a means for mobilizing sizeable labor groups for house building, trail and pond maintenance, as well as performing important rituals. The 1980 census lists the population as over two million persons concentrated at 240 per square mile (*Population and Housing Census Commission* 1984).

As a gerontocracy the authority of the elders is supreme. Collectively they are divided into a series of exogamous patriclans (*gurri*) each under a largely symbolic chief (Hamer 1987: 28–30, 79–129). These clans are linked by a generational class system (*lua*). Each class consists of preinitiates, initiates, and elders, with different agnatic and affinal ties but bound together through ritual and politico-economic functions. These groups are not graded into age divisions as in many age-graded systems but into five classes each with the aforementioned divisions. Classes move in a circular direction, changing every seven years, with each group headed by a leader known as the *gaden*. He is chosen by the elders and healers, who can cure illnesses as well as predict the future, who seek out a man of physical perfection, oratorical ability, and wisdom. The principle role of the *gaden* is that of peacemaker in settling disputes within his class and wherever he is called in Sidāmoland, because elders in council have failed to arrange settlement.

Within each class there is a complentarity between elders and youth. It is a relationship in which the knowledge, wisdom, and wealth of the former are gradually passed on to the latter in exchange for their labor, respect, and community protection. The father-son bonding provides a model of authority and circumspect benevolence, which is the ideal for the whole *lua* system. The linkage is structured so as to portray the elders as either real or foster fathers so that the son is initiated into the class that follows his father's after the latter is promoted to elder hood. Until then the son is a preinitiate in a third *lua* class. The latter's son will follow the sequence in two other classes than that of his father. As a consequence an individual becomes linked to all the classes in the system on the father-foster father basis (for a more detailed summary see Hamer 1996: 532–542).

This elaborate system becomes a structural means for settling disputes and making public policy in elders' councils (*songo*) at the hamlet, neighborhood, and clan levels. For all councils the class (*lua*) leaders (*gaden*) and at the clan level the chief (*mote*) may intervene in policy-making and dispute settlement, but final judgment must be left to consensus of the elders. Decisions may be appealed from lower to higher councils. If, however, a complainant believes his case to be sufficiently complex, he may go immediately to the highest ranking council and the elders will decide to accept or reject his plea. In the latter

1 Other researchers have identified the Sidāma with differing terms (Cerulli 1956; Brøgger 1986; Vecchiato 1993). Following my research assistant Betana Hotesso, I use the term Sidāma as a general appellation of the people, Sidāmo as an adjective and Sidančo for the individual. The most intense field research was done in 1964–65 and in 1973. This was followed by a short visit to Ethiopia in 1984. In all of this endeavor I am grateful for assistance from Irene Hamer and Betana Hotesso. The Ford Foundation and Canada Council made the field research possible.

2 *Ensete* is like a banana plant that produces a nonedible fruit. The trunk and root are cultivated as the food staple which has a high caloric content and is highly drought resistant (Smeds 1955: 38; Olmstead 1974: 150)

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event they will send the complainant to a lower ranking council.

Every effort is made in the deliberations of a council to maintain dignity through ritual interspersed with metaphorical and moralistic tales calculated to remind participants of the moral code. The term of the code, *halālu*, may be translated as "the true way of life" and within the context of debates and discussions is a reminder of the requirement to tell the truth (Hamer 1996: 526–30). *Halālu* also refers to community harmony in terms of mutuality, avoidance of greed, expressing good will to others, and generous hospitality. The meaning of *halālu* has been extended under modernism in the forbidding of taking money or possessions under false pretenses and the failure to repay debts.

The moral code is used to remind complainants that what has happened will be determined by evidence. If they have been shown to have done wrong, they should admit same and ask forgiveness of the council. Punitiveness by the latter is avoided, however, in favor of restoring community harmony. Thus, if a guilty person admits to breaking the norms, they may even request a reduction of the punishment fine. It will invariably be reduced and/or the supplicant excused. But to deny wrongdoing in the face of evidence will result in the elder's curse, to the effect that the Creator (Māgano) will bring disaster on the recalcitrant, his household, and his cattle.[3] On rare occasions the elders may impose ostracism (sīra), requiring community members to avoid the sanctioned person on all social occasions until the wrongdoing has been confessed. And if a dispute creates community dissension, continuous efforts will be made to reconcile the disputants.

Modernization and the advent of the cash economy have, of course, impacted the lives of the Sidāma. By the 1950s, coffee was becoming the principle export of Ethiopia and Sidāmoland was one of the major growth areas. Simultaneously Emperor Haile Sellassie was attempting to modernize Ethiopia in remote areas by permitting Protestant missionaries to proselytize, if they agreed to provide Western-style education and health facilities. In seeking converts they placed emphasis not only on the spiritual but the importance of hard work and saving. They encouraged the new converts to work together in house building, gardening, and the acquisition of money. At the same time the government formed a Coffee Marketing Board and encouraged peasant farmers to form self-help groups. They also provided Western educated youth to assist in the process (Hamer 1987: 183–217). Gradually non-Christians began to join the work groups and with government encouragement to engage in projects such as road improvements, building schools, cooperative stores, and gristmills. As a result people began to see that they could improve their standard of living by doing most of the work themselves. The work groups soon became self-help associations known as *mahabar*.

The new pursuit of cash and self-help improvements was, however, far from a complete break with the old way of life. Regulative executive committees were essentially a reinterpretation of elders' councils composed of elders and occasional educated Sidāmo youth. They settled disputes and made policy according to traditional beliefs about consensus and lenient sanctioning practices. Moreover, since they considered these groups as belonging to the Sidāma there was no compunction about calling government advisers to account. And though some members were dissatisfied because of lack of quick returns, the vast majority considered the association more important than self-gain. Some of this cohesiveness was undoubtedly fostered by local merchants who were descendants of the Amhara conquerors who had come in the late nineteenth century. They resented the probability of financial losses as the Sidāma began to provide their own means for improving living standards.

To join the *mahabar* an individual was required to purchase a share and this was what led some, after a time, to complain that they were not receiving sufficient return. For example, the cost of joining had not provided an increase in the price they obtained for the sale of their coffee to the *mahabar* cooperative. This way of thinking was clearly associated with greater concern for personal gain than community benefit. Still the vast majority remained enthusiastic about working together to change their quality of life.

A second problem was the opposite of self-interest, involving too close ties with kinsmen in authority on the executive committee. Several *mahabar* failures were observed by the anthropologist as attributable to treasurers giving unauthorized loans to close kin who were members. It was a result of emotional social ties to kin being more important than the efficient performance of the association and the well-being of all the members

3 Women and children do not participate in the councils. Instead their grievances are taken to an elder who is obligated to bring their complaints before the council. As a consequence women and children are able to participate at least indirectly in community decision making.

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(Hamer 1982). But for the majority of members the desire for self gain or over responsiveness to social obligation was balanced by a sense of reciprocal responsibility and a belief that working together would lead to the improvement in living standards for all.

All of the above is indicative of the sociocentrism of Sidāma communities. As indicated, there is no means of eliminating excessive individualistic ambitions that threaten others. Nevertheless, the concern is so great for overcoming the consequences of disharmony, failure of reaching consensus and compromise, that there is a strong belief institutional reminders and mild sanctions can maintain commitment. Therefore, it is important to consider how this is established from the beginning of the life process.

Growing Up in Sidāmoland

After birth the child remains close to the body of the mother always having access to the breast. During this time it begins gradually to sit up, crawl about, and then to stand and walk. In this toddler stage the child is rewarded with praise for staying away from dangerous places like the fire, the cattle kraal and learning to deposit bodily waste in a designated place. Further, he/she is encouraged to talk which eases the problem of toilet training and defining places of danger. Meanwhile the mother continues to breast feed until pregnant again, usually one or two years after a previous birth. At weaning the child may be sent to an in-law or the mother will place an unpleasant substance on the breast when hunger is expressed, and then give cow's milk and solids. Feeding is always provided when hunger is expressed, but if the toddler continues to seek attention the mother, or her surrogate, is likely to strike with a small stick and send the child away. She usually attributes the latter form of response to attention seeking. It is believed that reward of crying and "carrying on" only encourages dependency, which makes it difficult for the adult to complete her household tasks. Hence the struggle for attention is considered superfluous and unnecessary. So when it occurs, the toddler is sent off to play with other children until about age six, when he/she is considered mature enough to perform household chores and herd the grazing cattle. Still, the child remains under the observation of adults in the hamlet, and because of social proximity and interaction with neighbors all children are considered as if they were their own.

Adults and children within the household and neighborhood often playfully encourage discipline through teasing. For example, a child may initially be encouraged to be disobedient, perhaps by being presented with a desirable morsel of food and then having it suddenly removed. If the response is a temper tantrum, punishment follows (Hamer 1987: 52).

Early in life both sexes begin to understand the meaning of differing stages of development from childhood to adulthood but express little interest in moving on (Hamer 1996: 531). When, for example, my wife and I questioned several young boys about this issue, the answers were surprising. Unlike Western children, who are often engrossed with imaginings about what they will become as adults, the Sidāmo boys claimed to be satisfied with their roles as children. Given the prestige and power of elders we had thought they would be anxious to imagine the assumption of such positions. Their explanation was that they should prefer to postpone such exalted status because "elders will soon be dead."

In an attempt to discover the way preadolescent and adolescent boys imagine the consequences of their early life experiences, in 1964–65 and in 1973 my wife and I sampled a small group of nineteen boys (Hamer and Hamer 2005). We used sentence completion and projective picture tests developed by us to fit the local cultural context. The goal was to collect the imagined stories at two different time periods in the life cycle. From these we abstracted values to determine how imaginings changed concerning hope, fear, greed, grief, transcendence, jealousy, unhappiness, and anger. Each youth was found to create a central character about which their presumed actions and thoughts of others evolved. The highest frequency of responses were hope and fear, with a noticeable shift over eight years from fear to hope. In early childhood 74% of the initial responses were of this nature, but 69% changed from fear to hope in the course of the story. For example, in the beginning of one story a boy feared that a parent would be angry for his having ignored instructions and been careless about allowing cattle to get into the garden. Fear changes to hope when the parents decide to excuse his mistake. Nevertheless, in 31% of the stories there was no change in the tale sequence of fear and the child received the conventional punishment of being beaten with a stick.

So even in preadolescence there is a developing sense of what ultimately is the basis of authority and responsibility in the community. That is a

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fear of punishment by the elders that can be modified by hope for leniency if one admits wrongdoing.

In 1973, all but one of the nineteen young adults had experienced a least two to six years of schooling, so we used drawings of various local social situations to elicit responses. Only three of the sixteen youths who had originally shown the fear-hope sequence showed any fear. It is interesting that two of the respondents did not project emotions but gave culturally conventional appraisals of the pictures. Perhaps significant is the fact that two of the three fear respondents were married, but without children. Their projections showed concern about health, isolation from others, fear of hunger, or loneliness of a wife without children. This fits with a cultural concern about the importance of child labor in the household, garden, and cattle grazing. Beyond these early experiences importance is attached to having sons and daughters. The latter make it possible to acquire the bride wealth that will enable the sons to marry. For it is after marriage of a son that a father can look forward with a sense of honor and security to the continuity of his lineage.

The absence of greed as an emotion fits well with the sociocentric orientation in that not one of the nineteen showed any such response at either time period. This would seem to fit the privileging of generosity in the code of *halālu* as opposed to the personal accumulation of wealth.

There were only two stories depicting jealousy, both from 1973, perhaps because it is associated with sorcery and is greatly feared. One depicts envy of a particularly well-built house of a neighbor. The individual wishes to build one that is superior, but in the end admits that the quality of the endeavor will be dependent on the opinions of all the neighbors.

As to grief, three lads in 1965 show anxiety and sadness for the death of fathers, which is gradually assuaged by the realization they will survive, because they have learned from their fathers to farm and take care of cattle. In 1973, two young men develop stories based on the grief of women supporting a friend mourning the death of a relative. Both tales imply the importance of community support in times of personal calamity. Similarly, but within the household, six 1965 tales involve both unhappiness and anger concerning problems with siblings and a parent. In the end the unhappiness is overcome, when the problems are mediated by other siblings.

It is likely that some of these stories are influenced by folktales told by parents and other adults to children. Very often these tales emphasize the importance of rules and restraint as well as generosity, truth, and avoidance of greed that are part of the moral code of *halālu*. Adults recognize that children are likely to deviate from the moral norms, hence the importance of encouraging emotional commitment through stimulation of the imagination in the drama of a mythical tale told by a respected personage.

Transcendent imaginings in the stories change in frequency from two in 1965 to five in 1973. We define transcendent responses as attempting to rise above prescribed beliefs and values into an imaginative world of alternative possibilities. In essence it involves a form of "romantic imagination partially grounded in culture and the unique intentions of the individual" (Hamer and Hamer 2005). In this case, it is a form of individualism that is close to that of imaginative American self-centeredness. In late twentieth-century Sidāmoland it has become a part of the modernization process, which contrasts old and new values about wealth. In five of these seven stories the traditional association of generous wealth distribution is replaced by personal accumulation. Alternatively life is no longer conceived as finite, but through the concept of resurrection becomes eternal depending on individual choice between good and evil.

Two of the 19 young men in 1973 rather crudely turn the taboos on theft and aspects of communal living upside down. In one tale two men steal property and livestock and live alone in the forest eating only meat, rather than the prescribed food staple ensete (*wese*). The other narrative involves a father and son who ignore the sharing norm by stealing cattle and money, then hiding both in their household. Since their theft is not discovered they do not fear being punished by the elders.

Another two transcendental narratives are told by a lad in 1965 and a young man in 1973, both having experienced some primary education. In the 1965 episode a young boy, despite his father's admonitions, goes to work for a wealthy merchant. With the money obtained he then goes on to complete secondary school and obtain a government job. Thus he ignores conventional authority and perhaps naively assumes ease of wage employment. In the 1960s, it was generally assumed that the best employment for youth was with the government. All of this was to change by the late 1970s. In another tale a young man who has just completed the eighth grade develops a story, after being presented a blank card, by imagining a desert. The desert is intersected by a river from which he creates an irrigation system,

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which will transform the land into a bounteous area bringing prosperity to all the people.

All of these transcendental stories have to do with moving beyond the old values of gaining prestige through redistributing wealth, following the authority of the elders, even ignoring food norms, for the sake of gaining wealth or power. What does this say about individualism as opposed to sociocentrism? As I have argued elsewhere, it does not follow that the former is simply replacing the later (Hamer 2008). This is because the Sidāma like many, if not all, other peoples are subject to ambivalence. Thus in the stories of these youths there is a noticeable mixture of hope and resentful discouragement. Ambivalence creates a duality perspective toward authority and control, which is a mixture of both submission and rebellion, as illustrated in the mixed hope and fear projections. Community awareness of this phenomenon is institutionalized by permitting young men to participate with elders in council debates but not to make decisions.

The advent of modernization and a cash economy has posed a different problem for ambivalence. This is especially visible in regard to individual desire for personal gain. There is also the problem of elder relatives controlling land resources, which often conflicts with the cash goals of modern youth. But the pressures of early training and experience, as well as the realities of individual economic failure, lead most young men to realize that living standards can be improved only through cooperation, rather than individual accumulation. The majority come to realize that they cannot control their individual destinies by not contributing their labor and simply accumulating money in the short run, ignoring property boundaries and failing to repay loans. To follow self-interest in the desire for personal control will at best provide only temporary success and antagonize the community.[4]

Summary and Conclusions

It will be tempting to visualize the individualism and government regulation of same as an inevitable social evolutionary phenomenon. That is to say, it could be argued that the last fifty years of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were a time of rural American subsistence, when community interaction and social interdependency were almost as important as among the contemporary Sidāmo people. Nevertheless, there are vast environmental differences between the Eastern Horn of Africa and North America as to resource potential, population concentration, and culture, both in the past and present.

Moreover, the visions of immigrants to America from other cultures, seeking the imagined wealth of the emerging industrial era did not fit the previously idealized view of the homogeneous rural community. Their potential as ambitious, cheap labor would eventually attract the small community-oriented people and absorb them into the emerging industrial urban centers. African peoples in general have not and are unlikely to experience such a massive migration of outsiders who might destroy the sociocentrism of their communities. This is not to ignore the importance of ambiguity between self-centered power and community responsibility among the Sidāma.

The ideology of egocentrism that already existed in America has only been increased by the erosion of the socially oriented rural communities of preindustrial America. Consequently the problems of the central government in seeking to maintain the idea of community have increased. This is illustrated by the American women, seeking government support for working mothers, having difficulty in reaching consensus on the nature of desirable assistance. They can only agree that such support should not threaten individual economic interest. By contrast, the Sidāma seek to minimize self-interest in accepting government assistance to help in improving the standard of living for all. In doing so they are able to create a consensus with only a few dissenters opting out of participation.

The basis for this difference between Africans and Americans can be seen as grounded in early childhood experiences. It is noteworthy that American infants and toddlers when demanding help for dependency needs are encouraged to manipulate positive responses from adults. Indeed it seems they spend so much time in the conjugal setting that it becomes difficult for them to participate in the outside community. Consequently, compared to Sidāma youngsters, they develop less of a sense of social responsibility tending to blame social conflicts on uncontrollable social forces. Their Sidāmo counterparts are encouraged to take care of themselves after weaning, but to respond positively to the demands of authority. The latter is encouraged through the teasing technique which

4 In 1973 I found only one prominent personage who had been involved in the movement and helped establish one of the first real *mahabar* communities. He began, however, to appropriate money from the health dispensary, several stores, and other community services. This led to his ultimate ostracism from the community.

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helps develop self-control. Parents and other siblings are supported in this process by neighbors in all community households. Nevertheless, sociocentric behavior is not excluded in different class segments of American society. There is often the encouragement to empathize with others and recognize that all social interaction cannot be based on gaining personal advantage over the other. This is so even though the choice of the individual is considered necessarily superior to that of the other.

The consequences of Sidāmo early training are supported by the imaginary stories told by a small sample of boys and young men. Their tales indicate that fear of punishment by those in authority is tempered by hope for leniency, which is not only forthcoming from parents, but in later life from the community of elders who are symbolically portrayed as fathers and foster fathers in the generational class system (*lua*). Emotions such as greed and jealousy are virtually absent from the responses of these youths. However, with the increasing influence of modernization and the cash economy a few begin to show concern about wealth accumulation.

Finally, one cannot accept Sidāmo sociocentrism as a way of life without problems. In the attempt to emphasize reciprocal responsibility in self-help associations excessive kinship commitments have been shown as counterproductive. The necessary planning and management of associations require a degree of individualism previously unknown in Sidāmoland.[5]

This leads back to the initial hypotheses concerning the differences and consequences of egocentric as compared with the sociocentric behavior in different sociocultural systems. As in all such conjectures empirical research shows the necessity to account for change and variation. Though there is evidence of a predominant individualism in America, it is not without some degree of social consciousness. This runs counter to exclusivity of self-interest, but one cannot ignore a degree of social empathy if one is to live and associate with others. A similar problem exists regarding the social connectedness emphasized by the Sidāma in regard to authority and consensual harmony. In their case the ambivalence of human agency cannot be dismissed, especially in the process of change.

5 This problem is not yet a major issue for the rural Sidāma who have only small marketing towns. But one finds sociocentrism to be an issue among youth in large cities such as Jimma, well to the south of Sidāmoland (Mains 2007). The term *yilumnta* meaning "shame based on what others think" provides a hidden social regulator on the lives of young men. For them individual incentives such as money or paid labor are less important than interpersonal relationships with elders who provide protection and guidance for subordinates.

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Reviewing the Flores Hobbit Chronicles

Robert G. Bednarik

Two books[1] are of particular relevance to *Anthropos* because they both deal with the most recent continuation of the work begun by Dr. Theodor Verhoeven – nearly all of which has been published in this journal several decades ago. Verhoeven was the first to *report* Stegodon remains in Wallacea, and then, at Flores, their co-occurrence with Lower Palaeolithic stone tools (Bednarik 1997). He was not, however, the first to *discover* the bones of these pachyderms and other ancient animals; they had been recovered by local villagers for a long time, who had even created stories to explain their presence (Bednarik 2000). Nor did Verhoeven claim otherwise, although it would be true to say that he was the first to recognize the stone tools.

The same admirable scholarly restraint and humility are not evident in the first of these two books, the most recent continuation of the Flores saga. It presents a very well written account of Professor Mike Morwood's archaeological investigations on two Indonesian islands, but especially on Flores, including the discovery of the remains of very small humans dubbed "Hobbits," and the ensuing controversy. Presentation is thorough, comprehensive, and has the appearance of a factual, blow-by-blow account of events, but Morwood's memory is selective. The descriptions of incidents this reviewer has witnessed are so partial and the book so replete with errors of fact that the veracity of the rest of it must be questioned. Nevertheless, even Morwood's own version depicts him as distrustful, self-centred, and biased, and creates the impression that he himself prompted most of the problems now haunting him.

Essentially, he initially joined a project by a group of Dutch and Indonesian researchers led by the late Professor Paul Sondaar, after this reviewer criticized Australian archaeologists for being uniformly ignorant about Verhoeven's finds – presumably because they had been published almost exclusively in German. Morwood then took over the quest (the Dutch complained bitterly in a Dutch newspaper), convinced the Indonesian au-

1 Morwood, Mike J., and Penny van Oosterzee: A New Human. The Startling Discovery and Strange Story of the "Hobbits" of Flores, Indonesia. New York: HarperCollins, 2007. 256 pp. ISBN 978-0-06-089908-0. Price: $ 25.95.
Henneberg, Maciej, and John Schofield: The Hobbit Trap. Money, Fame, Science, and the Discovery of a "New Species." Kent Town: Wakefield Press, 2008. 159 pp. ISBN 978-1-86254-791-9. Price: $ 24.95.

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