Reconstructing Haberland reconstructing the Wolaitta: writing the history and society of a former Ethiopian Kingdom

Abbink, J.

RECONSTRUCTING HABERLAND RECONSTRUCTING THE WOLAITTA: WRITING THE HISTORY AND SOCIETY OF A FORMER ETHIOPIAN KINGDOM

JON ABBINK
AFRICAN STUDIES CENTER, LEIDEN

I

In this paper I take up the methodological issue of combining archived fieldwork notes and contemporary field data in the reconstruction of the recent history of Wolaitta, a former kingdom in southern Ethiopia.[1] The old fieldwork data, archived and little known since the 1960s, consist of the notes of the German Ethiopianist ethnologist Eike Haberland (1924-1992), while the field data are based on my intermittent fieldwork in Wolaitta since 2001.[2] In ongoing research on this subject, I intend to write an historical ethnography of Wolaitta, by combining a study of the methods and interpretive strategies of Haberland as ethnographer and product of his time, with new research. The effort may also allow us to see how his 'facts' and explanations fit with current concerns in anthropology and African studies. As the subject of this paper will eventually be elaborated into a book, I aim to be brief here and illustrate the value and challenge of such a reconstruction effort.

The study also is meant to contribute to understanding the dynamics of regional identity in today's Ethiopia, which has been struggling with a very problematic implementation of ethnicity-based federal policies since 1991.[3] A study of a corpus of ethnography gathered in the heyday of Ger-

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[1] My preferred (phonetic) spelling is "Wolaitta". In existing literature "Wolayta," "Welaita," "Wälayta," and "Wolaita" are often used.
[2] See Siegfried Seyfarth's obituary: "Eike Haberland 1924-1992," *Paideuma* 38(1992), iii-xxii. Also "Eike Haberland" in Siegbert Uhlig, ed., *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* 2 (Wiesbaden, 2005).
[3] The literature about the subject is voluminous. For an introduction see Christopher Clapham, "Ethiopian and the Challenge of Diversity," *Africa Insight* 34(2004), 50-55.

man field ethnology (1950s-1960s), in conjunction with present-day research, may highlight processes of identity formation among the Wolaitta, who today in 2005 count some 1.5 million people, with perhaps an additional 80,000 living outside the Wolaitta borders elsewhere in Ethiopia, and having various shades of identification with their country and traditions of origin.[4]

One of my questions here is why Haberland, despite his large corpus of notes on Wolaitta, never succeeded in writing his monograph on this people, a work which he already in the late 1950s announced as "forthcoming." This delay is quite surprising because Haberland was an accomplished writer on Ethiopia with some formidable titles to his name.[5] Moreover, he saw the Wolaitta case as very important in the wider cultural history of Ethiopia.[6]

Eike Haberland was a long-time director of the Frobenius Institute in Frankfurt/Main and taught at University of Frankfurt. He studied at the universities of Tübingen, Mainz, and Frankfurt, where he received his doctorate in 1950. The same year, he was part of a German research team, carrying out more than two years of fieldwork in southern Ethiopia. He later also did research in New Guinea and in Burkina Faso. Haberland became an influential, sometimes controversial, figure in postwar German ethnology—professor of ethnology at Frankfurt University, an active organizer of scholarly meetings and conferences, and a supervisor of an important number of both German and African Ph.D. students. His work presented fundamentally new data and insights on southern Ethiopia and has inspired many scholars and generated critical debate. Haberland's international impact in Ethiopian and African studies was, however, limited partly by his specific ethnohistorical approach and by the fact that he published almost exclusively in German.

II

About 110 years ago, the kingdom of Wolaitta, a small but prosperous state with an independent royal tradition (sacral kingship), was conquered

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[4]Cf. Sabine Planel, "Du Wolayta à l'Éthiopie," *Annales d'Éthiopie* 19(2003), 43-72. Outmigration from the region is increasing due to land scarcity and lack of employment.
[5]See Eike Haberland, *Galla Süd-Äthiopiens* (Stuttgart, 1963); idem., *Untersuchungen zum Äthiopischen Königtum* (Wiesbaden, 1965) idem., *Hierarchie und Kaste. Zur Geschichte und politischen Struktur der Dizi in Südwest Äthiopien* (Stuttgart, 1993) and idem., (with Siegfried Seyfarth) *Die Yimar am Oberen Korowori (Neuguinea)*, (Wiesbaden, 1974).
[6]He also noted that he ". . . had one of the happiest times of his life in Wolayta," with "friendly people and good conversation partners." (Haberland Nachlass, Box Wolayta, file 10).

Map of Southern Ethiopia
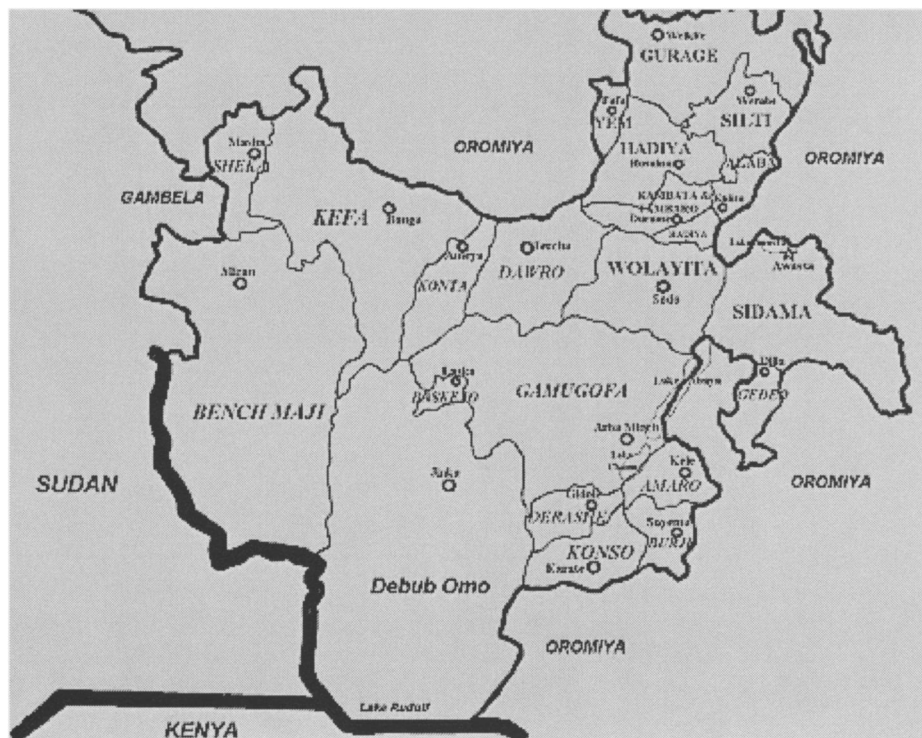
in a rather destructive campaign by the armed forces of the imperial Ethiopian state and politically incorporated.[7] Its political structure was dismantled and its last king was exiled to Addis Ababa in 1894. But the region's identity, as expressed in language, political status, cultural traditions, memories of clan and family lines, and social hierarchy did not disappear. Wolaitta is still a distinct region in southern Ethiopia, currently with the status of an administrative "zone" within the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional National State.[8] It is the most densely populated area of rural Ethiopia, in some rural parts reaching at least 664 people per square kilometer.[9]

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[7]For a unique eyewitness account see Jacques Vanderheym, *Une expédition avec le Négus Ménélik* (Paris, 1896).
[8]The official name of one of the nine regional states of federal Ethiopia. See also Map 1 below.
[9]This was in Damot Gale district; see Finance and Economic Development Department Wolayta Zone, Wolayta Zone Socio-Economic Profile, (Soddo, 2003), 17. In the last thirty years, the population of the Wolaitta region has more than doubled.

Since 1991, when the Ethio-communist regime of military leader
Mengistu Haile-Mariam, in power since 1977, was toppled by a coalition
of ethnonationalist insurgent forces (the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary
Democratic Front or EPRDF, still in power), Ethiopia has been carrying
out a political experiment using ethnolinguistic identity as a politically rel-
evant basis for politics and state administration. Local autonomy is envis-
aged for the various ethnic groups, distinguished mainly by language and
focused on a rural home area. They are to be developed within a multi-
ethnic federalist structure. This new post-1991 political dispensation has
led to the ethnicization of national political discourse, the internalization
by the population of ethnic identity extending well beyond the linguistic-
cultural sphere, and intense politicking and resource competition within
the federal structure.

Wolaitta has been no exception. It has been a separate zone only since
early 2000, when the federal government granted it this status after years
of mounting pressure by Wolaitta people, including community elders and
teachers, and after serious riots in the Wolaitta capital of Soddo in
November 1999, during which at least five young people were killed in
the city streets by police, eleven seriously wounded, and a lot of property
destroyed. The disturbances were sparked by the federal government's
policy to impose a new synthetic language, composed of elements of sever-
al local languages/dialects for teaching purposes in the primary schools.
This was to unify, apparently both for reasons of cost effectiveness and
easier local governance, four closely-related but different languages and
ethnic groups in the area—Wolaitta, Gamo, Gofa, and Dauro—into a
combined one, abbreviated "Wogagoda," and perhaps to neutralize the
political challenge from Wolaitta.[10]

An important underlying reason for the 1999 revolt was the longstand-
ing desire of Wolaitta people, of elders, the educated elite, and young peo-
ple, to have an administrative region of their own. Since the days of the
empire, under Emperor Haile Sellassie (1930-74), Wolaitta had not been a
named and recognized as a political unit on the Ethiopian map.[11] Howev-

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[10]For more information see Data De'a, "Managing Diversity? A Note on the
"WoGaGoDa" Politics in Omotic-speaking Southwest Ethiopia" in Siegbert Uhlig, ed.,
Proceedings of the XVth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, July 21-25,
2003 (Wiesbaden, 2005). Local zone administrators in the South may also have thought
that by magnifying the scope of their units through language (seen as the prime defining
mark of ethnicity by the government) they could enhance their own political clout.

[11]Although in imperial times it was known under the old name "Wolamo," today seen
as denigrating. This name was already mentioned in the soldiers' praise song on Ethiopi-
an Emperor Ishaq, dating from the early fifteenth century. See Ignazio Guidi, "Le can-
zoni Geez-Amarica in onore di Re Abissini," *Rendiconti della Reale Accademia dei Lin-
cei* 5(1889), 53-66. Emperor Haile Sellassie had allowed Wolaitta to be governed by
fitawrari Desta Fisseha, the grandson of their last king, T'ona (who died in Addis Ababa
in 1908). Desta Fisseha was a major informant of Haberland.

er, among the population of the area there was pride in their former prominence and state tradition, and never any question about their strong political and cultural identity as Wolaitta *vis-à-vis* their neighbors or about their right to express this. This was a feeling shared by the elite as well as the ordinary people, and in the ethnic tide after 1991 they wanted explicit recognition. In 2000 the zone status was finally accorded, and the zonal administrators appointed were respected local men.

III

When preparing research on Wolaitta, I had come across Haberland's work and had always been curious about his data and why he hadn't done more with them. I also knew he was the first ethnologist who had done serious fieldwork in the area. He was not followed by others until the 1980s, when some research was done on oral history, language, and material culture, notably by a few ex-missionary teachers (e.g., Remo Chiatti, Bruce Adams) and by newly trained Ethiopian sociologists and anthropologists in the 1990s. In addition, several Ethiopian and foreign researchers worked on Wolaitta in the context of various development projects, funded by international NGOs and aid agencies. My plan was to 'retrieve' Haberland's data, kept in his voluminous papers (Nachlass) deposited at the Frobenius Institute, and update or at least add to them in a comprehensive manner on the basis of my new field research.[12]

For various reasons, this was a precarious undertaking. I do not only mean the difficulty of deciphering his dense and cryptic handwriting in German, but also the choosing of a formula for reporting on this project. Should I reconstruct the manuscript that Haberland had started to write and give a retrospective reconstruction that would be essentially his and accompany it with a critical introduction on Haberland as ethnologist? I soon discovered that he had done some analysis but had put only a little of it on paper, and that I of course should not write for him, from his notes. Should I very selectively use some of his data, e.g. on settlement structure, kinglists, oral traditions, kinship, traditional religion, clan histories, etc. for my own analysis of Wolaitta society 30 years later? Or should it be a 'joint' project, where both Haberland's data and mine were to be integrated in an historical view on Wolaitta from the days of the kingdom until today?

The corpus of Haberland's field notes dates largely from the 1950s and 1960s. He spent a total of nine months in the field (in 1955, 1967 and

several months between 1970 and 1974). The corpus, which, as noted, is in German, is quite extensive and at times inaccessible, but offers a rare view of his intensive style of working and of his raw data, as well as of his provisional thoughts and plans for writing up. In the papers one could see the positive as well as the still unclear and puzzling aspects of his material. After having studied (part of) it, I decided to write my own ethnohistorical study of Wolaitta and in the process make a study of Haberland as a source and as a pioneer interpreter of the region, and to combine the last two perspectives, retaining authorship myself. Despite heavily relying on Haberland, I felt that only in such a way I could do justice to his pioneering work and write a study of Wolaitta that speaks more to contemporary concerns.

   Another reason to see this project as precarious was simply that one cannot hold a dialogue with the dead—I would make interpretations to which the author could no longer respond. I am aware of the fact that one should not judge Haberland anachronistically, but as a product of his time, recognizing his background as an ethnologist raised in a certain theoretical and methodological tradition: the Frobenius 'school' of cultural forms or Kulturmorphologie, as elaborated by, notably, A.E. Jensen, Haberland's teacher, and H. Baumann. This tradition, dating back essentially to German ethnologists F. Ratzel and W. Schmidt, put an emphasis on the "essence" ("Wesen")[13] and "configuration" ("Gestalt") of a culture, and, especially in the version of Leo Frobenius it had a kind of Hegelian metaphysics, which by romanticizing African societies ultimately revealed its Eurocentric bias.[14] Although Haberland did not accept all the tenets of this school, e.g., rhetorically rejecting the diffusionist notion of cultural layers ("Kulturschichten") that supposedly made up a culture, and which were seen as dating from various historical epochs, he moved within the parameters of this theoretical framework and did not really formulate his own, except by insisting on a more thorough and less speculative ethnohistorical approach and an empirically-based presentation of the society studied.

IV

The Haberland Nachlass consists of eight large boxes ("Kisten") and six additional piles ("Stapel") of papers, field notes, offprints, photocopies,

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[13]I will quote the relevant German words in brackets.
[14]It is often underestimated that this allowed Frobenius—in the heyday of colonialism—to call for an authentic recognition of African cultures in their own terms and not imposing our own views. Ultimately, however, this amounted to a romanticizing, relativist view. Senegalese scholar-statesman Léopold-Sédar Senghor had a very positive view of Frobenius's work, but contemporary African intellectuals much less so.

sketches, drawings, maps, lists, photos, correspondence, and diaries, altogether thousands of pages. A 12-page inventory of this material was made in the late 1990s by staff at the Frobenius Institute. This is very helpful, but it lists the titles of papers or the nature of the materials in a summary descriptive manner. Not much can be gleaned from the list about the contents of the material, and a close scanning or reading of all of it is necessary to find out what it is about.

The Wolaitta box ("Kiste Wolayta") contains all the Haberland material on the Wolaitta research. It has 39 large files, containing mostly handwritten diaries and notebooks, series of notes, stories, observations, excerpts, maps, and sketches.[15] Hardly anything, except a table of contents and a Preface to what was apparently going to be his monograph, is written out.

One of the most valuable contributions of Haberland to Wolaitta research is his large collection of black-and-white photographs. These are all of high quality and are deposited in the photographic archive of the Frobenius Institute. The pictures give an invaluable overview of the country, showing leading Wolaitta personalities, ordinary people, old churches and cultic places, material culture, artifacts, agricultural activities, and the landscape. When I showed a number of these pictures to Wolaitta informants during fieldwork in 2003 and 2004, they evoked responses of nostalgia among elders, and surprise or puzzlement among young people.

The chief headings under which Haberland organized or archived his field data reveal his interests and his approach to culture: kingship, kinglists, history, estates ("Stände"), the "meritorious complex" ("Verdienstkomplex"), self-government and public order ('Selbstverwaltung und öffentliche Ordnung'), religion, material culture, ceramics, economic life and crops, life histories, family structure, and stories.[16] The folders on the last three subjects contain very little information. Although I will be critical of Haberland in the remainder of this paper, I emphasize that his data are still of great value and can be used profitably in further work on Wolaitta society and history because:

* he has given us a very detailed, be it fragmented, ethnohistorical and ethnographic record and a collection of all crucial material culture items from a quite interesting and understudied Ethiopian region. Many of his recorded data and collected artifacts can now no longer be found in the field.

* he made an exemplary photographic documentation of Wolaitta society just before the devastation of the *Dergue* period since 1974.

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[15]Two relevant tables on 1960s population statistics of Wolaitta were found in Box 1.
[16]See Ulrich Braukämper, "Der 'Verdienstkomplex': Rückblick auf einen Forschungsschwerpunkt der deutschen Ethnologie," *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 126(2001), 209-36.

*   he emphasized the need to ground a case study of Wolaitta ethno-history solidly within general Ethiopian history, and on this he displayed great erudition and command of all the relevant literature.
*   he called attention to a much-neglected case of premodern indigenous African state formation on the margins of a larger empire, which should bear comparison with other states in precolonial Africa. Wolaitta, however, has not figured in the general discussions on early states and state formation in Africa.

V

As evidenced in his published work, Haberland's approach to culture was strongly historical, but aimed foremost at reconstruction in the Rankean sense: how had a culture or society "in fact been" in the past, before transformative, usually externally-generated, culture contacts had had their effect. He did not necessarily see cultures as static entities, but saw them as having an ethos, a relative coherence. He was convinced that, especially in the Ethiopian realm with its often violent and competitive political relations and its emerging nineteenth-century imperial state, many ethnocultural groups were strongly, often negatively, impacted by external forces and by their incorporation into the empire.[17] This point of view is not necessarily wrong, but by systematically following it Haberland defined the ethnographic enterprise predominantly as a kind of salvage ethnology. He thus often worked with elder informants who could tell about the past. In his works there are frequent remarks about how the elder generation knew much more about how it once was than the younger people did.[18] In his books on the Oromo and the Dizi and in many papers on other groups, he indeed recovered a quite valuable record of oral traditions, rituals, indigenous knowledge, values, and customs from the past of particular societies (Dizi, Oromo, Gofa, Konta, Male, etc.) that has greatly enhanced our knowledge of Ethiopian societies.

But in the case of the Wolaitta data, it did not go according to plan. Haberland did not reach a synthesis. Many years elapsed after his 1950s-1960s fieldwork before he set to writing. No doubt his other duties of teaching, researching, and writing on other projects and administration took much of his time, but he did not even write a first draft of his "in preparation" monograph. Only one book chapter and four papers on

[17]Characteristic is his remark of preconquest Wolaitta as having had a ". . . long and happy history," Haberland, *Untersuchungen*, 256.
[18]E.g., in Eike Haberland, "An Amharic Manuscript on the Mythical History of the Adi Kyaz (Dizi, South-west Ethiopia)," *BSOAS* 46(1983), 243.

Wolaitta were published after 1965.[19] My guess is that Haberland thought that the data that he had gathered along the lines of his ethnohistorical epistemology simply did not allow him to write the monograph that he had envisaged. The material was substantial, but also patchy, incomplete, and fragmentary, and gathered without an organizing theme behind it; in other words, it revealed a kind of inductive, empiricist historiography that showed its limits. The data did not suggest a clear narrative. In the end he might have felt that he had even less solid material on Wolaitta than on Dizi (see note 4), and he mulled over the Wolaitta data while he finished his 1993 Dizi book, even though he admitted that this last work also remained "a torso."[20]

Accordingly, the Haberland data contain a rich mine of material but no structure. His four published papers were all on historical aspects of Wolaitta: its historical self-consciousness, slavery, marriage procedures of the past, and information on an old, presumably northern Ethiopian influenced item of material culture (a door in the Tigray style). But he talked little about the society as he observed it. There are only a few files about social organization, community, economic activities, and crops and useful plants in Wolaitta. Even with regard to his ethnohistorical material, he noted that "[a] lot is hearsay, not cross-checked; not from own observation. There are a lot of mistakes and hiatuses, also somewhat static. I wrote the oral sources myself, so to speak."[21] Indeed, when reading his notes, it appears that the information is often somewhat disjointed. It was not observed or placed within living communities.

The core of his monograph, if it had been written, would undoubtedly be an ethnohistorical survey of the development of the kingship and political hierarchy, and an overview of the social stratification (clans) and the public rituals, laws and, ceremonies upholding the political order. He also had anecdotes and stories about the deeds of kings, the exercise of power, and clan relations (often fraught with rivalry) to illustrate the socio-political order of this complex, premodern kingdom. While Haberland admit-

[19]Apart from his chapter on Wolaitta ("Das Königtum von Wolamo") in his *Untersuchungen*, 255-80, these are idem., "Eheschliessung im alten Wolayta," *Ethnologica* ns1 (1983), 556-67; idem., "Zum Geschichtsbewusstsein der Wolayta (Süd-Äthiopien)" in Peter Snoy, ed., *Ethnologie und Geschichte* (Wiesbaden, 1983), 212-20; idem., "Eine 'tigre'-Tür aus Wolayta (Süd-Äthiopien)," *Paideuma* 34(1988), 23-30; and idem., "Sklaverei im alten Wolayta (Süd-Äthiopien)," *Jahrbuch des Museums für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig* 39(1992), 157-73.

[20]Cf. Haberland, *Hierarchie und Kaste*, 23. However, this book, on a remote southwest Ethiopian, Omotic-speaking people, has a remarkable amount of invaluable historical and ethnographic details of which even few present-day Dizi people have any knowledge.

[21]Sketch of the Introduction, *Haberland Nachlaß* (Frobenius Institute, Frankfurt/M), Kiste "Wolayta."

ted that ". . . there was a different historical and state consciousness among the different social strata," he gathered virtually no information on how Wolaitta people actually expressed these differences in their appreciation of their history, how rival views were developed, or what meanings contemporary people attached to the political memory of the Wolaitta kingdom and its traditions.[22] It is important, however, to make sense of the differences in outlook between members of the leading clan (the *tigre* or *kawóna*, i.e., "those of the king"), the descendants of the two other leading, prestigious clans, and the common people or the lower social groups (caste group and slave descendants).

In my own fieldwork over the past few years, I also found notable differences of opinion and varying appreciations of the historical Wolaitta, and even of its military resistance and defeat in 1894, among descendants of various clan and social groups. This lingering rivalry under the surface, however, has now been extended into the current political domain: members of elite clans and of commoners regularly played on the changed ethnopolitical conditions in post-1991 Ethiopia to put their former rivals down and get the upper hand.

No doubt Haberland still stood firmly in the tradition of German cultural history of Graebner, Schmidt and especially Jensen, and was remarkably removed from the (Berlin) tradition, the ethnosociological school of Richard Thurnwald (1869-1954), another giant of German ethnology/ sociology in the first half of the twentieth century. Thurnwald was a researcher more akin to the British tradition of social anthropology, more functionalist-oriented.[23] He was interested in the dynamics of contemporary societies, including ethnopsychology, though he combined this with a deep historical concern that was less ethnographically concerned. In line with his earlier approach in his book on Ethiopian kingship (1965) and the political and cultural influences from northern imperial Ethiopia (Aksum, the Solomonic empire after 1270), and formed by Adolf Jensen, Haberland was more of a diffusionist who wanted to solve historical riddles.

This approach and the question of the emergence and cultural history of Wolaitta was pertinent because Wolaitta was one of the very few Omotic-speaking areas in southern Ethiopia that developed into a centralized, authoritarian kingdom, and Haberland thought that the case allowed

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[22]"Vorwort," ms., *Haberland Nachlaß*, Kiste "Wolayta," file 3.
[23]See, for example, Richard Thurnwald, *Grundfragen Menschlicher Gesellung: Ausgewählte Schriften* (Berlin, 1957). Compare also his remarkable early work, *Die Gemeinde der Bánaro* (Stuttgart 1921, a translation of his *Banaro Society* [Menasha, WI, 1916]).

a retrospective, objectivist reconstruction of its past.[24] But in doing this, his attention to contemporary society, its power struggles, the diverging class perspectives within Wolaitta, and a presentation of acting and speaking subjects making their history and reflecting on that past, fell by the wayside.[25]

VI

Haberland's methodological and implicit theoretical approaches led to limitations and omissions in his material, despite the irreplaceable and rich nature of the data gathered. What are the limits and problems of the material in Haberland's corpus?

The central fixation on a particular reconstruction of the historic Wolaitta kingdom is one. Haberland tried to reconstruct Wolaitta "like it really was," before the conquest. That is why he always put great value on older key informants (of elite groups) with a presumably purer and more complete knowledge of history. Perhaps the idea of such a reconstruction is now illusory. Haberland may in fact also have realized that it was very difficult to speak in retrospect of an integral or integrated, unitary Wolaitta state or kingdom, and that one cannot really 'reconstruct' it as such from contemporary (*post facto*) sources.[26] This was one of the points revealing his somewhat historicist-positivist bias.

There may also be the possibility that Haberland saw his notes and sketches being overtaken by new work done on Wolaitta. In 1978 the Austrian ethnologist Friedrich Klausberger published his version of the royal history of Wolaitta.[27] In the 1980s the French researcher Jacques Bureau started to work on Wolaitta history.[28] In 1984 Remo Chiatti, a

[24]Apart from Kafa, Wolaitta was the only full-blown authoritarian state that formed in the Ometo-speaking area, probably departing from a small chiefdom or a democratic, egalitarian assembly society, as still retained today in neighboring Gamo. Dauro was a somewhat similar kingdom, but less powerful.

[25]Even some of the Wolaitta oral genres, such as the *gerésa* praise songs, were not fully valued by him.

[26]His preliminary sketch of the table of contents for his projected book had chapter headings very similar to those in many of his articles and chapters on South Ethiopian groups, his Oromo monograph (1963), and his last book on the Dizi. His outline of Wolaitta book chapter titles was: 1. Land and People, 2. History, 3. Material Culture, 4. Economy and Food, 5. The Kingship, 6. The Imperial Structure, 7. The Social Strata ("Stände"), 8. Kinship and Family, 9. The Life-Cycle, 10. The Achievement Complex, 11. Religious Life, and finally 12. Story Material (Haberland Nachlass, Kiste "Wolayta," file 11).

[27]Friedrich Klausberger, "Die Königsdynastien der Wolamo (1270-1900), Süd-Äthiopien," *Wiener Ethnohistorische Blätter* 15(1978), 29-50.

[28]Jacques Bureau, "Comment s'écrit l'Histoire d'une Province d'Éthiopie: le Wollaita," *Abbay* 11(1980/82), 225-41, and idem., "The 'Tigre' Chronicle of Wollaita; a Pattern of Kingship" in Richard Pankhurst et al., eds, *Proceedings of the First National Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, April 1990 (Addis Ababa, 1990), 49-64.

long-time missionary in Wolaitta, presented his dissertation on the politi-
cal history of the historic Wolaitta, based on many years of painstaking
field research.[29] This work, and others that followed it in the 1980s, in
many ways filled the gaps that Haberland had in his data on the kingship
and the political structure and the social organization of the kingdom, and
looked at Wolaitta from a more contemporary perspective as well.

There is also Haberland's tendency, despite his formal disclaimers
against the *Kulturschichten* theory, to see the culture and history of a
region or a people as layered according to historical origin and composite
groups, and showing less interest in the newly-emerging social and politi-
cal formations that resulted.

Haberland's notebooks are filled with a large mass of random ethno-
graphic details, gathered without much focus. At the same time, there is
the lack of attention to and data on actual, *functional* economic life and
decision-making, social organization, and kinship relations in their social
context. There is virtually nothing on property disputes, legal arguments,
family relations, life histories, etc. Neither is there any information on
"religion in action" or on the complex, interlocked whole of religious life.
On this point, his data read like a catalog, with headings like: time reck-
oning, festivals, churches, the priest clans (*K'esiga*), images of God(s), the
soul and the ancestors, sacrifices, possession phenomena, sorcery, rituals,
divination, and rain-making, but the material is fragmentary. Neither is
there information on the great impact on Wolaitta society, from the late
1920s, of the Protestant SIM mission churches and schools.

There is as well a certain theoretical poverty: a lack of theorizing and
placing the case study in a wider field of anthropological discussions on
power, authority, social stratification, state formation, castes, slavery,
constructed identities, or feudalism (e.g., he speaks of Wolaitta as a "feu-
dal society," but this is doubtful). Haberland also did not critically discuss
important indigenous cultural and religious concepts, like *gomé* ("sin" or
transgression, wrongdoing and its moral aspects).

Also lacking is attention for the 'subjective' side of historical represen-
tation—who tells what and when? A criticism of this time-bound conven-
tion would be unfair, because made from our current vantage point, but in
Haberland's notes, the voice of the informants themselves is lost in the dis-
course when written down. The notes always carry the authoritative voice
of the author—Haberland. The information of living and speaking per-
sons is abstracted from the social speech settings and used only to recon-
struct a mythico-historical past, as an object in our discourse. Must this
necessarily be seen as an 'alienating' procedure, yielding abstract historical

[29]Remo Chiatti, "The Politics of Divine Kingship in Wolaitta (Ethiopia), 19th and 20th
Centuries (Ph.D, University of Pennsylvania, 1984).

accounts? Or is it legitimate? The question could be avoided when the personal sources of the 'data' and the different versions are presented as such. Persons as speakers cannot be reduced to their 'factual' historical statements about the past.

VII

Next to the above general points to consider when drawing upon Haberland's material, there is reason to elaborate or to take issue with some of his findings—insofar as we can ascertain these from the notes. I intend to discuss such issues in depth in a later study.

The first of these concerns the relevance of the kingship. Was Wolaitta identity as a people and as a state 'forged' by the kingship, as Haberland claimed? This sounds plausible, seeing the very mixed ethnic and cultural background of the Wolaitta population, which is a composite of more than four or five ethnic groups, but it has to be substantiated from the data. Traces of this mixture, however, can still be abundantly found in present-day accounts of Wolaitta informants. The term "Wolaitta" itself is usually translated as "to come together."

Haberland's detailed enumeration and analysis of the Wolaitta clans and clan relations is very intriguing, as is his remark that "[c]lans, though, remained [in the face of the unifying force of the kingship], autonomous units of identification."[30] He also stressed the trans-ethnic nature of clans, some of which occurred as well in neighboring societies like Kämbata, Arssi, Hadiyya, Dauro and Borodda.[31] This is a modern idea, the full implications of which he could not address. It might seem paradoxical that Haberland found this out because of his lingering adherence to the *Kulturschichten* approach of Jensen, from which he never released himself: he concluded that the trans-ethnic or trans-political presence of clans was due to migration, conquest, and political dominance of one emerging stratum over others. However, this cultural-layer approach was of little value in his treatment of "slaves" and "occupational castes" as remnants or old strata of ancient, external origin; or when talking about religion and magic, or when emphasizing the "blending" in Wolaitta of two political traditions of "power construction:" first, the meritorious complex (*Verdienstwesen*)[32] and then the "feudal chivalry world and the estate order" taken over from the northern Amhara-Tigray state.[33] But in reality the

[30]Haberland Nachlass, Kiste "Wolayta," file 35.
[31]Wolaitta has more than 90 patrilineal clans.
[32]The "meritorious complex" was expressed in the successful quest for wealth and prestige commodities, public display of generosity, and a record of killing enemies and/or large animals.
[33]Haberland Nachlass, Kiste "Wolayta," file 20, and idem., *Untersuchungen*, 257.

system contained both elements from the start, and these did not come in neat succession.

Haberland modeled his description and interpretation on a latent Eurocentric approach, as revealed in his use of concepts now no longer palatable: frequently returning keywords are for instance: imperial order ("Reichsordnung"), kingship ("Königtum"), Ethiopian high culture ("äthiopische Hochkultur"), remnant peoples ("Restvölker"), cultural fossils ("Leitfossile"), estates ("Stände"), ancient tribes ("altertümliche Stämme des Südwestens"), or lacking sense of history ("mangelnde historische Sinn") among some southern Ethiopian peoples. He also used a superficial, pseudo-racial typology of peoples, ethnic groups, and even caste groups/slaves within a society (e.g., Wolaitta), despite his disclaimers of the scientific value of physical types and races. This entire terminology has to be revised.

VIII

The relevance of historical research on Wolaitta is still there. But we recognize now, more than Haberland did in his time, that history and historical memory—and the situated subjectivity of the informants reflecting on both—are interconnected. The narratives are part of identity formation processes and inform social and political action. The 'data,' the statements and stories that we rely on as external/foreign researchers—outsiders—are thus better seen as emerging narratives that are to be explained within certain long-term conditions and politico-economic concerns of the speakers, and yield no direct road to historical reconstruction, at least not as easily as Haberland perhaps thought. In addition, his preoccupation with the relations between the northern Ethiopian "high culture" ("Hochkultur") and the ancient, less elaborate, southern Ethiopian political traditions, is best abandoned, or at least reformulated.[34]

Finally, to return to a question posed above: why didn't Haberland finish his Wolaitta book? Was he too busy or were the data insufficient or contradictory? Did other authors surpass him? My thesis is that, while mulling on the voluminous material, he became aware of the limits of his own paradigm of reconstructing cultural history, and of the relatively static nature of his organizing concepts. Haberland saw, first, that a picture of disjuncture or disconnection between past and present appeared, and second, that the place of Wolaitta in Ethiopian and in southern Ethiopian history was more complex than just an "intermediate type" between

[34]This point emerges in many places in his work and his notes; one example is ibid., 269.

Ethiopian (Christian/Muslim state building) high culture and the small-scale, decentralized indigenous societies of the south.[35]

This quandary led him to even more gathering of relatively unfocused ethnographic data in his three subsequent visits after 1955. Finally, he may have noted that Remo Chiatti's reconstruction and cultural analysis of the historical Wolaitta (1984) needed to be addressed, as it partly refuted his own paradigm of dynastic history as ultimately reconstitutable into one unified account, and also that his information on Wolaitta social organization and popular culture needed to be supplemented. While also strongly historical and kingship-oriented, Chiatti's account was much more grounded in actually observed social life of the contemporary Wolaitta people. The publication of other studies, e.g., those by J. Bureau, F. Klausberger, and several Ethiopian scholars, only reinforced this need for rethinking.

When researching about Wolaitta history and society today, the focus therefore has to change. The memories of political history, the proud past and cultural identity are very important still, but equally predominant in the minds of the Wolaitta people today are the current problems of region-state relations, livelihood challenges, population pressure and fierce competition for resources, religious reorientation (with evangelical Christianity expanding rapidly), and redefining the nature and scope of 'Wolaitta identity' within federal Ethiopia, where the Southern Region is a marginal unit.[36] Writing an historical ethnography of Wolaitta, focused on constructed history and memory not only of elites but of all social strata, might allow us to pay attention to current concerns of the region and its people, as well as do justice to the evolution and transformation of Wolaitta society in the past century. In this effort, the work of Haberland is an essential starting point.

[35]Cf. ibid., 256-57.
[36]The "Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional National State" is currently a weak and underfunded state in the Ethiopian federation, although there is no scarcity of dedicated and capable leaders on the regional and local levels. The central (federal) government still exerts major control over politics and the economy. Ethnically-defined tensions within the South are generated by the new political system and have impeded economic growth and development, and people have been sidetracked in identity struggles behind the scenes.