

Oromo settlers from the northern highlands (cf. Ricci 1974: 280).

The characteristics of the *qamtut* discourse, as reconstructed from Me'en statements, are as follows. *Qamtut* are antisocial, uncontrollable persons with the evil inclination of preying upon human flesh, at times dissociating themselves from normal social life. They roam at night, away from their home area. Apart from their spear, they often carry a knife on every hip. They possess secret knowledge of how to attract or influence human victims, or how to get a body out of the grave (e.g., tapping with a certain stick or reed). Some *qamtut* have also the power to cast a curse. If, for instance, a cow killed at the burial ceremony carries a hard ball of hair in its stomach, this is seen as the work of the *qamtut*, having cast a mark, and having preyed upon the deceased. There are no protective measures against *qamtuts*, except for the guarding of the grave (where the corpse – wrapped in a cowskin – is placed, minimally two, sometimes four metres deep in the earth, and covered with layers of wood, sand, and large stones). Suspected *qamtuts* can be slain on the spot. In one case already mentioned, a man was killed at night while he moved about unannounced near the grave of a recently buried old woman. Her son killed this man. After the deed, he fled from the area, fearing revenge from the *qamtut*'s relatives.

The *qamtuts* can never be publicly accused or pinned down to any demonstrable misdemeanor. They are the object of persistent rumours only, and they continue to live among the non-*qamtut* population. Me'en say it is impossible to say who is or will be a *qamtut*: any Me'en could be one. They just live a normal life amidst the other members of the village.

The earlier-mentioned second type of "cannibal," active in broad daylight, is called *gorogoro*.¹¹ According to descriptions, they have a silent, intimidating power over individuals when they meet them on the path; they hypnotize them, so to speak. The victim becomes nervous, starts shaking after their touch and may become ill afterwards. When the victim does not recover but dies, it is said that the body will certainly be taken by the *qamtut*. Here one might liken their role to that of the classical witch, except for the fact that they can never be identified, be publicly accused, or called upon to surrender their victim. This difference

leads me to conclude that the *qamtut* representation cannot be explained successfully with reference to the phenomenon of witchcraft. Furthermore (and similar to other societies with a pastoralist ethos), the Me'en have no specific or elaborate theory about misfortune caused by human agents acting with secret magical means. What they know about this (cf. the *gorogoro*), is most probably derived from general Ethiopian notions about the "evil eye." I will, therefore, not pursue the witchcraft analogy, because it does not appear to help in explaining the *qamtut* representation. In fact, this latter idea seems hardly connected to other ideological representations in Me'en society: neither to witchcraft nor to traditional healing, and only marginally to Me'en religious notions.

In sum, the following elements can already be discerned in the *qamtut* representation:

- Supernatural power: resorting to unknown magical means to extract the corpse from the grave or to cast a spell on people who may become inexplicably nervous, ill, or may die.
- Antisocial character: they are beings moving only at night or in deserted places, alone, beyond normal social control. Thus:
- Outsider status: exposed *qamtut* are not found to be members of the *du'ut* where they made their attack.
- Inversion of central Me'en values: the unthinkable consumption of human flesh instead of animal meat; the mocking of human death.
- Threatening the continuity of the *du'ut* by trying to prevent the burial of a deceased member in its territory. Thus, the passage of the "soul" of the deceased to the realm of Tuma is prevented. Especially if the patrilineal *qalua* spirit is not "appeased," it will keep on disturbing the living members of the lineage. We will come back on these points in the following sections.

The Cannibalist Discourse in the Light of Theory

If we follow a classical social-structural approach – stressing a link with witchcraft – to account for the cannibal idea among the Me'en, we find that the evidence is ambiguous. The *qamtuts* do not appear to be witches. Is the accusation of being a *qamtut* related to Me'en envy of personal success? Among the Bodi-Me'en indeed, the richest clan (the Degit) is claimed to be the clan of the *qamtuts* (cf. Klausberger 1981: 244). This would in some way support the early etymological evidence (see above). But my observations, as well as case stud-

¹¹ *Goro* means "path," "road" in Me'en. *Gorogoro* means something like "those on the road." The expression is: *Ani koi fatiyinani, gorogoro amanihu* ("When I go out alone, gorogoro will attack me") and it refers to possible *qamtut*.