

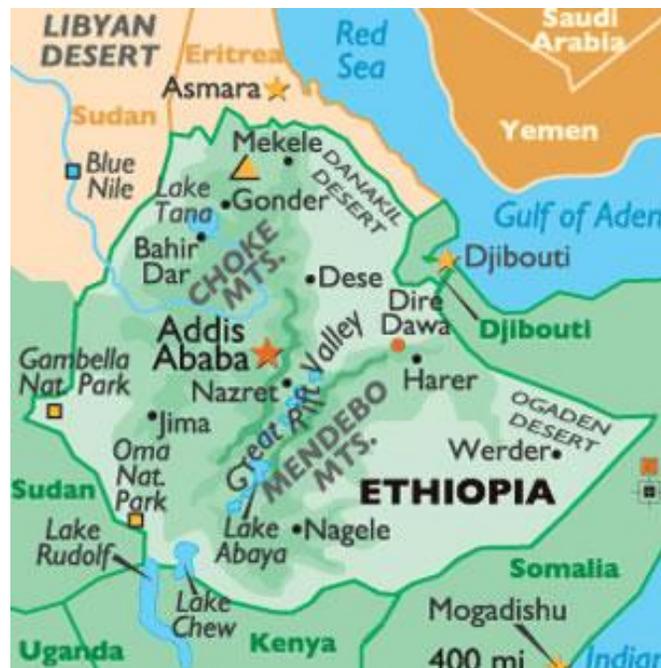
10: System Stress

The Amhara of Ethiopia

Ethiopia is one of the oldest nations on earth. It has been independent for over 2,000 years. Unlike most African nations, it was never a colony of a European nation.

Ethiopia is a “living laboratory” for the study of cultural interaction. For centuries, different groups have lived in the same area. Although they interact constantly, they have never integrated. Their occupations, religions and customs differ.

The people you will study in this section are the Amhara. They live on the high plateau (over 2000 m. above sea level) in northwest Ethiopia. Gonder, near Lake Tana, is the main city in Amhara territory. Although close to the Equator, the high altitude gives the region a mild climate. Rainfall, which can be unreliable, falls mainly in June through September; little rain falls in the dry season from December through March.



<http://www.evgethiopia.com/tourist/geography/ethiopia-map.html>

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Most Amhara are farmers. Although they make up only 27% of Ethiopia's population of about 100 million, the Amhara consider themselves to be the true Ethiopians. They're the second largest ethnic group in Ethiopia.

The data in this section was supplied by Professor Allan Young of McGill University.¹

Amhara young people:



<https://africanwandering.wordpress.com/tag/amhara/>

¹ Marion Brady and Howard Brady, *Idea and Action in World Cultures*, 1977, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall. p. 477 (Copyright transferred to Marion Brady and Howard Brady.)

Investigation: Status and Stress

As you've already learned, every society assigns higher or lower status to different groups. A certain amount of stress—**worry, fear, or frustration**—usually occurs when people of differing status interact. Stress may affect the higher status person, the one with lower status, or both.

In the following account, (1) Identify and list the status groups and their relative status, (2) identify and describe stress in interactions between the groups, and (3) identify and describe action patterns used to respond to stress.

Tesfahun, an Amhara, is 27 years old. He lives in the *Weyna Dega*, the most desirable part of Ethiopia. Like most of his neighbors, Tesfahun owns the land on which he lives, and farming and owning his own land are important to him. His ideas about other people who live in the area is about the same as those of his Amhara neighbors.

Below are some of Tesfahun's comments, recorded by anthropologist Allen Young after Tesfahun returned from a trip to the local market town near his home:

“Soon Easter will be here and I must wear clothes that will make me proud before my family and neighbors. After all, I want a new toga [traditional outer garment]. So I went to a weaver to ask if he would weave one for me. He agreed and then we set a price. At first I thought that I would offer him money, but I do not have much of that. Then I decided to offer him some of the wheat that I grow in my fields. In a short time it will be the rainy season and food will be hard to buy. Because he is a weaver, he is not one of us. A real Amhara man could never be a weaver. Weavers learn how to weave from their fathers, and can own no land of their own. They must get most of their food by selling what they make out of cotton (like togas). The weaver I talked to agreed to accept the wheat, and I shall have my new toga.

(Continued)

Amhara man ►

<http://kwekudee-tripdownmemorylane.blogspot.com/2014/08/amhara-people-ethiopias-most-culturally.html>



“Others, those we call *tayb*, also cannot own land, but have skills they must have originally learned from devils or evil spirits. We buy the things they make of clay (like pots), or of iron (like knives and plow points). We Amhara would not know how to make these things. Some weavers are also *tayb*. Around here, the *tayb* usually live in their own hamlets among their own sort. It’s just as well, too, since they have the *buda* that makes decent people sick.

We don’t like to talk about *buda*, especially at night. If those with *buda* are prowling around and hear us, they get angry and bring illness. They are especially dangerous to our children, and a beautiful child is in the greatest danger. They do it with their eyes. They look very hard at you if you are doing something they would like to be doing. If they are hungry and you are eating, watch out! If they are thirsty and they saw you drinking, watch out! Envy makes them do their evil. Each of them has a bad spirit and it leaves their body and enters into their victim’s body through his mouth. Then that spirit begins to eat at its victim. It is better that these *tayb* should live by themselves.

“At the market, I saw an argument between two men. Both were Amhara, but one of them is always commenting on the other’s very dark skin, as if to say he is not a real Amhara. After they had argued, the dark man said to me, ‘Black I may be and red [that is, brown-skinned] he may be, but surely that gives him no right to always compare me to devils and slaves because of my color.

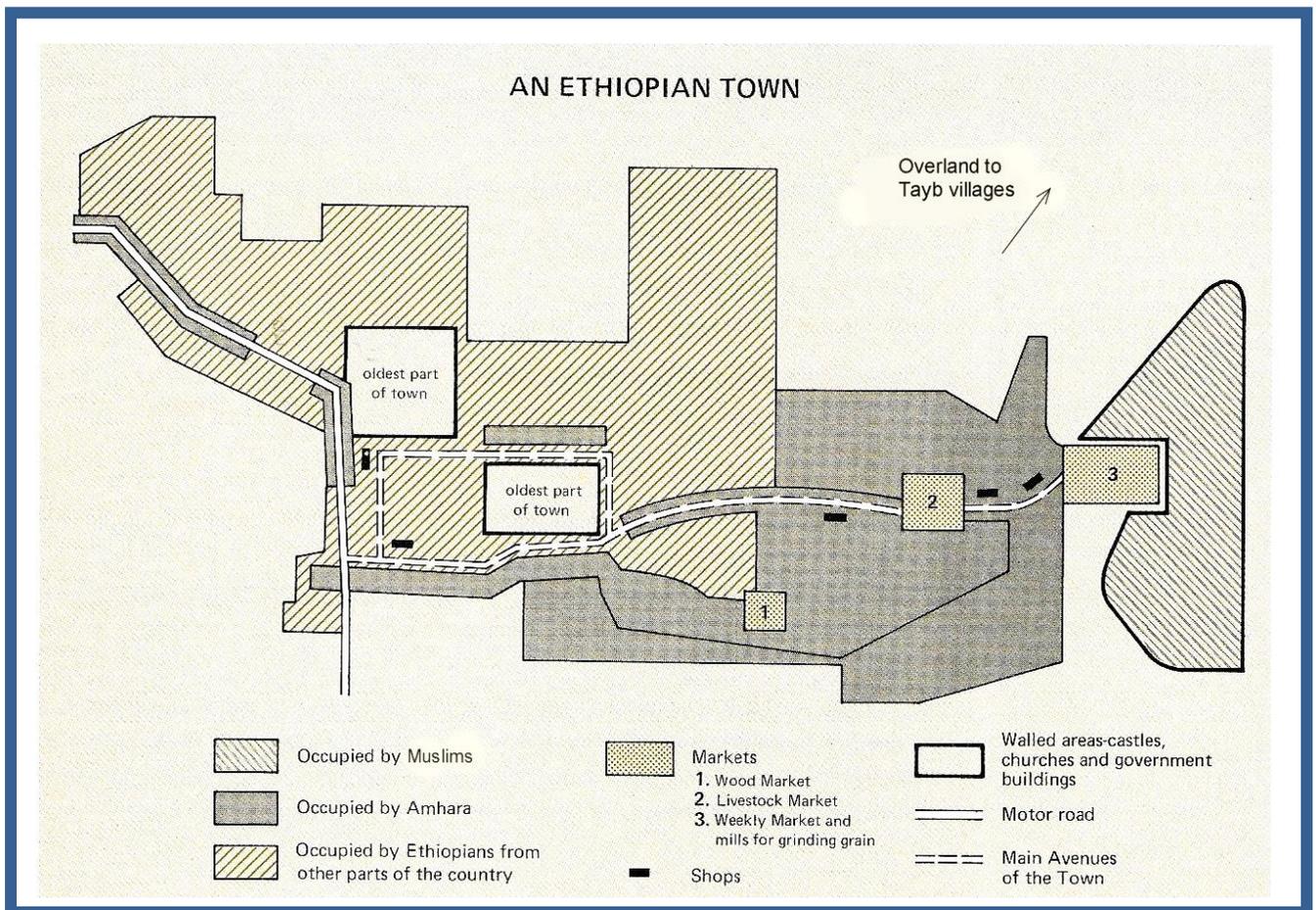
“I do not have much contact with Muslims except to buy from them at the market. They are not dangerous in the way that those with *buda* are, but I do not care for them much anyway. You know, they are the enemies of the true Church. If we had not defeated them in many wars, there would be no Christian rule in Ethiopia today, nor would this land be owned by its rightful owners, the Amhara. Then the Muslims would be the cultivators of this soil. Then we Amhara might be the landless weavers that many Muslims now are. Or we might have to farm the hot and feverish lowlands the way that some of them must. Perhaps they would try to impose some of their foolish ideas on us. They find it sinful that we drink mead and beer and *arakiy* [local distilled drink made from grain], even though this is a harmless activity unless you become drunk and do or say foolish things. At the same time they smoke tobacco, which is really sinful, and they act as if it is an innocent pastime.

“Of course, I am speaking about Ethiopian Muslims, *Jabarti* [rude term for a Muslim, implying half-caste]. These are people who look like us Amhara. There are also many Arabs at the market place. The Ethiopian Muslims at the market sell only things that are grown around here, but the Arabs import and sell things that are made in other countries. I really know very little about these people, but I think that they must be quite rich. It is strange; I have seen Arab men at markets for as long as I can remember, but I have yet to see an Arab woman! The men never let them leave

(Continued)

home, I think. I have never visited the Arab settlement, just beyond the marketplace. I would be a foolish man to wander about that place. Tesfahun would go in on his own two feet, but I do not think that is the way I would come out. All the Arabs live in that place. Most of the Ethiopian Muslims live there too, especially those who are merchants. Sometimes Ethiopian Muslims live on the edge of Amhara hamlets where they rent fields, farm a bit and weave a bit.

“At the market, I sold an ox hide to a tanner. The tanners are strange people. They claim to be Christians, and I suppose they are. Yet, they are different from us all the same, and they always marry among themselves. A true Amhara can be a farmer or he can serve in the Church, the army, or the government. The tanners do none of these things, and I think they are not so different from the Muslims and tayb after all.”



Discuss: If you were an Amhara child growing up in this town, how would your attitudes toward non-Amhara people be affected by this setting? Record your conclusions.

Many Amhara children have their hair cut like this boy. Sometimes a triangle of hair is left standing, or a clump of hair is left on each side of the head. These haircuts are given to protect the children from sickness believe to be caused by *budas*. Amhara believe that if a person with buda sees such a child while the child is eating or drinking, their eyes will be attracted to the hair and away from the child's mouth.

The blue cord around the boy's neck is a sign he is an Amhara and a Christian. The small leather pouch or *kitab* contains a parchment with religious incantations or a religious drawing, along with selected herbs, which protects the wearer from the buda and evil spirits ("satans") who live in the forests, lakes and rivers, and may be present in the home in hearth ashes and beer dregs.

<http://weblog.larkvi.com/2009/07/boy-galawdios-amhara-ethiopia-july-2009/>



Amhara (and many other people in the Middle East) never compliment parents of healthy, good-looking or smart children. Instead, they say "poor thing" or make some other similar negative remark. ***Why would they do this? Record your opinion.***

If a traditional Amhara farmer needed a new iron plow point, how would he obtain it? In your journal, describe in detail possible action patterns the man would follow.

Buda beliefs are fading away among the better-educated Amhara. Most Americans and Europeans would consider the traditional Amhara beliefs about *buda* people and the "evil eye" to be *superstition*. However, superstitions sometimes persist because they fill some kind of need, or have some kind of purpose.

Discuss and hypothesize: What possible advantages might the "evil eye" beliefs give those that hold the beliefs? For example, how might these beliefs help avoid problems? Record your ideas about possible explanations.

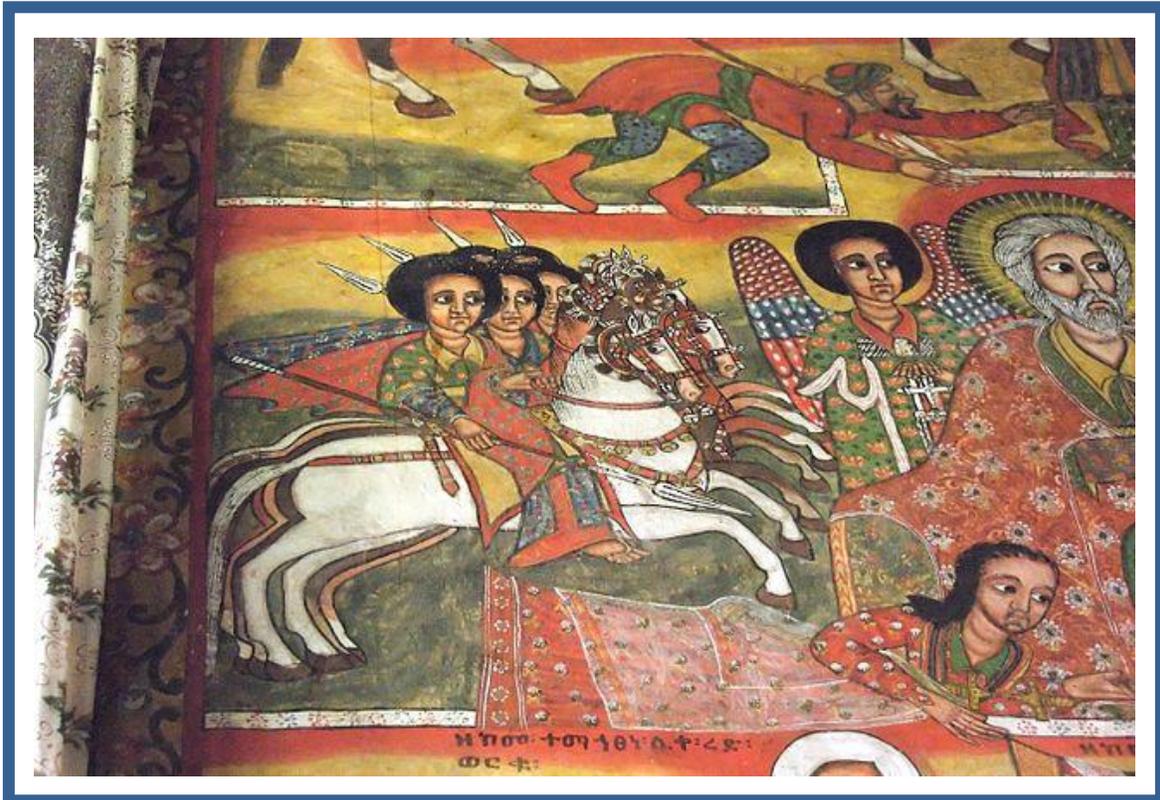
Dagnew, an Amhara man, made the following remarks about the eating habits of the Americans and Europeans he has watched:

“You foreigners are strange in your eating customs. It seems to me that you do not really care what you eat, how it was prepared, or who is there when you eat. You eat the meat of a pig, but no Amhara would. Indeed, not even a Muslim or a Falasha [Ethiopian Jew] would do that.

“Even when you eat decent food, like sheep or goat or chicken, you have no concern for how it was killed or who killed it. If another Christian killed it, the meat would be acceptable to me, but how could I possibly eat it if a Muslim had done the job? Of course, with *buda* around, I would be afraid to be seen eating altogether. You do not seem to care one way or the other.

“There is another thing that I find strange. When you foreigners sit down to eat, your whole family is invited to dine with you. Your wife and your children sit with you, and you share the food equally with them. With us Amhara, it is the men who eat with the men, and it is the women who serve. When we are finished, then they eat.”

The insides of Amhara churches are decorated with brightly colored paintings, most showing events from the Bible. Others are scenes from Ethiopian history or tradition. In the church painting below, the person at the top being killed by a spear is a Muslim.



[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ethiopian_Church_Painting_\(2376981245\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ethiopian_Church_Painting_(2376981245).jpg)

Autonomy, stress, and system change

Have you ever said, or heard someone else say, “You’re not my boss!”? Having control of one’s own life and fate—“autonomy”—is a deep-seated human need (an important Shared Idea). When this control is missing, feelings of **helplessness** and **frustration** cause stress.

Action Patterns: People often react to the feelings caused by lack of autonomy in ways summarized below. Some reactions may help increase autonomy, others may help cover up feelings of helplessness:

1. **Group formation.** Joining with others; forming groups to gain collective power.
2. **Opinion appeal:** Publicizing the situation in an attempt to gain support, perhaps by marching or staging a demonstration.
3. **Economic or other pressures:** Striking (refusing to work), boycotting (refusing to buy a company’s products), or devising some other strategy.
4. **Violence.** Directing anger or violence at those seen as causing the problem, or at something of value to those people.
5. **Scapegoating:** Blaming individuals or groups other than those actually responsible for the situation.
6. **Over-conformity:** Strangely, conforming as closely as possible to what it’s assumed the dominators want. This reaction is most likely when the dominating group has overwhelming power.
7. **Escape:** Stress may be alleviated or masked through use of alcohol, drugs, entertainment, etc., or by physically moving away from the situation.
8. **Other-worldliness:** Those feeling helpless may turn to religion, superstition, magic, or some other supernatural intervention.
9. **Stasis:** Doing nothing because the situation is seen as hopeless.

The two most important sources of inadequate autonomy are *repression by more-powerful people or groups*, and *adverse economic conditions*. Of course, natural disasters such as drought, earthquakes, or typhoons can also cause devastating loss of autonomy.

History books are filled with examples of system change brought on by these reactions to inadequate autonomy.

Investigation: Zars

Work with others to analyze the following data. Identify the people who lack autonomy, and their reactions. Which of the categories (page 8) fit their reactions to stress?

Many Amhara women are made sick by a spirit that is known as the zar. Once zars have chosen to make a woman sick, they will let her recover if she obeys them. They never leave her permanently, however, and they continue to revisit her throughout her life. When the zars wish to communicate with a woman, they possess her body and speak through her lips. Since the possessed woman has no knowledge of what the zars have said to her, she must have friends who will be there while she is possessed and will tell her later what the zars have said. Usually, the zars demand gifts of clothes, jewelry, or food. If their demands are not met, the zars continue to sicken the woman or promise to make her sick in the future. In order to deal better with the zars, women join together in congregations. The zar congregations usually meet once a week and on holidays sacred to the zars. At their meetings, the women dance for their zars, listen to what the zars are saying through the lips of other women of the congregation, and share in feasts prepared in honor of the zars.

The following remarks were made by Berey, an Amhara woman who belongs to a zar congregation in a large town in northern Ethiopia:

“I am an Amhara and a Christian, of course. The Church does not like Christians to join a zar congregation, however. The priests and monks say that there are no such things as zars, that they are only devils who are trying to lead us away from the Church. It is easy for them to say this, since Amhara men are only rarely chosen by zars. For them, it is enough to know what the Church says is right or wrong.”

“My mother also had zars. I had none until she died. When she died, I was very sad and I felt alone. There was no longer anyone else on whom I could rely for help and friendship. Soon after that, the zars that used to visit my mother chose me. Since that time, I have been a member of the zar congregation.

“Amhara men despair when they are chosen by zars. They act as if it were the end of their lives. For an Amhara woman, it is very different. I enjoy going to the congregation meetings, to dance and feast, to see other kinds of people. Men can travel around and get their pleasures easily, but for a woman life is often very dull. For women like me, who live in the town, it is especially difficult. Most of us have no husbands, and our relatives live far away in the countryside. In the congregation we

(Continued)

meet people who can be our friends, on whom we can rely for favors. Also, the zars are not fussy like other people; they choose all kinds of people. They choose Amharas, Muslims and black people, and not just one kind. At the congregation we all gather together and dance for our zars.

“It is easy to tell when someone belongs to a zar congregation. One of the first things a zar demands of a person is that a stripe of his favorite color be woven into her toga. If you do not obey the zar’s command, he will never let you recover from your illness which he has sent you. Ordinary people wear togas that are all white, without any decorations.”

This woman is a member of a zar congregation:



Investigation: Amhara Problems

The Ethiopian people, including the Amhara, have suffered a great deal in recent years. Poverty is a huge problem. Ethiopia is the second poorest country on earth (U.N. statistics). The government has been unstable, corrupt and repressive, imprisoning or killing many citizens who tried to protest various government actions. Border wars with Somalia and Eritrea, internal fighting and various economic problems have plagued the lives of many. The government used starvation as a political tool, causing a famine in 1983 which (coupled with drought) killed at least one million people. Another drought from 2009-2011 also led to malnutrition, starvation and death.

Based on the following data, identify and describe (in your journal) the ways in which the Amhara lack autonomy, and their responses to this lack.

News report, July 15, 2016:¹

At least 20 people, including police officers, have been reportedly killed in northern Ethiopia following days of ethnic Amhara protests, according to various reports and eye witnesses.

Demonstrations on Thursday and similar protests in recent days in the northern city of Gondar were against what protesters see as the erosion of their “ethnic identities” in the area.

The violence is believed to have started after Tigray regional police, disguised as federal police, apprehended four members of the Welkait – Tegede Amhara committee and were heading to arrest the fifth committee member and leader, Col. Demeke Zewdu, in the early hours of Tuesday morning.

Shots were fired after the Colonel refused to surrender to the forces. The Colonel returned fire, killing two of the Tigray police officers.

When they heard the Colonel was besieged by Tigray forces, hundreds of armed local Amhara peasants from around Gondar flocked to defend Col. Demeke, resulting a dangerous standoff. In the ensuing firefight, dozens of civilians and armed locals were killed. The incident led enraged protesters to set fire to state vehicles and a bus that belongs to the Selam Bus Company, which is affiliated with the ruling Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF).

“This seems to be another ethnically-based conflict,” said Al Jazeera’s Charles Stratford, reporting from Addis Ababa.

Images posted online show burned-out vehicles and armed men firing their guns in the air as hundreds of other people cheer them on. Unlike the stone throwing protests that took place in the Oromia region few months ago and resulted in the death of over 400 protesters, the Amhara Protests in Gondar involves well-armed protesters.

<https://www.tesfanews.net/tag/gondar-protests/>



The politically-dominant Tigray ethnic group is 6% of the Ethiopian population. Before 1974, the Amhara held the most important positions in government and business in Ethiopia. The largest ethnic group in Ethiopia, the Oromo (34.4%), are also protesting government actions and oppression.

¹ <https://www.tesfanews.net/ethnic-protests-northern-ethiopia-claim-20-lives/>

Another news report:¹

Many of the young protesters are angry at a government that has been in charge for almost their whole lives and that is seen to favor the minority Tigrean community who occupy key positions in government, the security services and public companies. “There is a tangible development. You can’t deny the roads, the buildings, the power supply but the VIPs are all from Tigray. Tigreans dominate economically and socially. All the industries are in Tigray,” said Ashenafi, a young Amhara protester.

BBC News, 8 August 2016:²

Nearly 100 people were killed in the weekend's protests in Ethiopia as demonstrators clashed with security forces in different parts of the country, Amnesty International says.

The rights group says the most deadly incident happened in Bahir Dar, where at least 30 people died on Sunday. [*Bahir Dar is an Amhara city.*]



Demonstrators in Gondor, 2016.

<http://ecadforum.com/2017/01/13/tensions-resurface-in-ethiopias-amhara-region-following-hotel-attacks/>

¹ <http://news.kuwaittimes.net/website/protests-anger-still-boils-northern-ethiopia-arrests-multiplied-since-demonstrations/>

² <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-37015055>

Idil Osman, “Why are African men and women still fleeing to Yemen?” *Al Jazeera* News, April 2, 2017:¹

Conflict has been raging in Yemen since 2015, yet people from Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea remain determined to go there on unsafe routes, only to encounter dangerous conditions when they get there.

Since 2013, nearly 290,000 refugees and migrants have landed on the Yemeni coast. Nearly 80 percent of these were Ethiopians, and most of the rest were Somalis.

The Ethiopian state of emergency that was declared October 2016 continues to fuel outward displacement, and Ethiopian asylum seekers interviewed in Yemen, are increasingly referring to the unrest as a key reason for their migration out of the country.



The state of emergency banned protest demonstrations, set up curfews, blocked Internet social media, restricted opposition party activity and banned diplomats from traveling more than 40 km outside the capital (Addis Ababa) without approval. These conditions were enforced by national police.

¹ <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/04/african-men-women-fleeing-yemen-170401081941703.html>

Investigation: Autonomy Here and Now

Each of the following article excerpts deals with an aspect of Autonomy. **Based on the data, summarize the significance of Autonomy. Explain relationships between each article and the Autonomy summary on page 8.**

Kerry Close, *Time Magazine* (On-line Newsletter), Oct. 16, 2016¹

Good news: Your high-pressure job may actually be improving your health.

A new study from Indiana University has found that employees in stressful positions are a third less likely to die than those with less strenuous jobs, the *Daily Telegraph* reports. However, there's one important caveat: Workers need to have control of their own workflow.

Indiana University researchers studied thousands of workers in their 60s between 2004 and 2011. They found that those who had more flexibility in a stressful job were more 34% less likely to have died. Unfortunately, the study also found that those who had high-pressure jobs with little freedom were the most likely to be unhealthy and ultimately, die sooner.

Lack of control in a difficult job can result in people turning to unhealthy coping mechanisms like over-eating and smoking. "When you don't have the necessary resources to deal with a demanding job, you do this other stuff," lead researcher Erik Gonzalez-Mulé told the *Telegraph*.

Stressful jobs that give employees the freedom to set their schedules and goals, meanwhile, force employees to problem-solve and brainstorm ways to complete their work. "Instead of being something debilitating, [they] can be something that's energizing," Gonzalez-Mulé said. "That stress then becomes something you enjoy."

How do the researcher seem to be defining a "stressful job?"

¹ <http://time.com/money/4536431/stressful-job-health/?xid=newsletter-brief>

UFO sightings. Hoaxed moon landings. Reptiles who rule the world.

What, in the name of our alleged lizard overlords, convinces a person to believe in conspiracy theories?

According to a pair of new studies published in the journal ***Applied Cognitive Psychology***, conspiracy theorists—and there are a lot more of them than you may think—tend to have one thing in common: they feel a lack of control over their lives.

Jan-Willem van Prooijen, associate professor in social and organizational psychology at VU University Amsterdam, has been studying conspiracy theories and those who believe them for six years. “When I started this research, one of the things that I really found astonishing was how many people believe in certain conspiracy theories,” he says.

Conspiracy theories often crop up during times of uncertainty and fear: after terrorist strikes, financial crises, high-profile deaths and natural disasters. Past research suggests that if people feel they don’t have control over a situation, they’ll try to make sense of it and find out what happened. “The sense-making leads them to connect dots that aren’t necessarily connected in reality,” van Prooijen says.

He and his team showed that the opposite is also true: feeling a sense of control is protective against believing conspiracy theories.

From a review of a book about crime and imprisonment:²

“...recent sociological research: it’s not that the prohibition of drugs attracts crime, which then produces violence; it’s that violence thrives among young men deprived of a faith in their own upward mobility, making drug dealing an attractive business. In plain English, young men without a way out of poverty turn to gangs, and gangs always turn to violence.”

¹ <http://time.com/3997033/conspiracy-theories/?xid=newsletter-brief>

² Adam Gopnik, “Rattling the Cage” (Review of *Locked In* (Basic) by John F. Pfaff); *The New Yorker*, April 10, 2017, p. 72

“What Makes People Feel Upbeat at Work,” By Maria Konnikova, in *The New Yorker*, July 30, 2016:¹

...sales were higher in environments with moderate rules, while environments with too few or too many rules suffered. The highest performers of all were those in a moderately regulated environment who also felt a high degree of autonomy, as determined by their responses to a single statement: “My job permits me to decide on my own how to go about doing the work.” In other words, people want to feel in control. They want to be afforded respect and to determine on their own how to act; it is this autonomy that helps foster emotional positivity.

Author Edward Tenner:²

...physician-historian Leonard A. Sagan...argues that something about nineteenth- and twentieth-century society has made people more resilient and self-confident. Many disease microorganisms are present in individuals who never develop symptoms; differences in immune response must be the cause. Those who feel in control of their future apparently have stronger immune systems. Literacy and education are better indicators of state of health than is income.

From an article in *The Atlantic*, June 2014:³

“When children spend more time in structured activities, they get worse at working toward goals, making decisions, and regulating their behavior, according to a new study.

“Instead, kids might learn more when they have the responsibility to decide for themselves what they’re going to do with their time. Psychologists at the University of Colorado and the University of Denver studied the schedules of 70 six-year olds, and they found that the kids who spent more time in less-structured activities had more highly-developed self-directed executive function.”

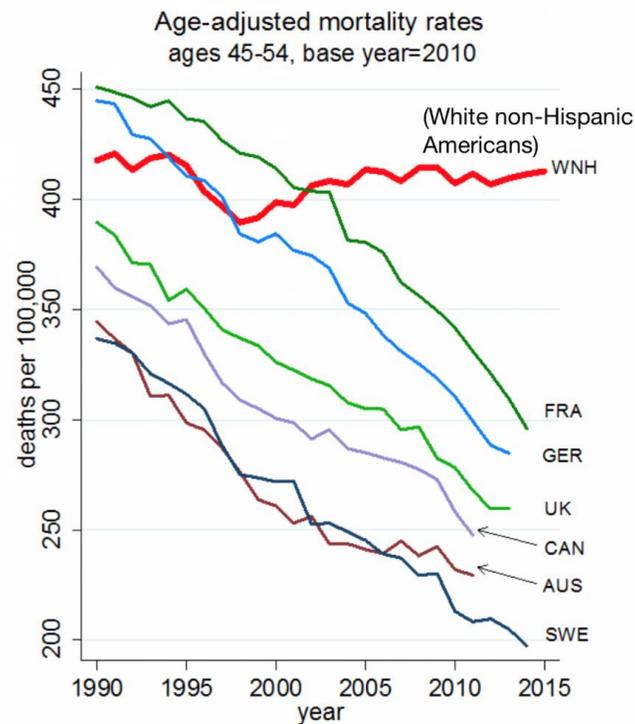
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[http://www.newyorker.com/?p=3234730&mbid=nl_073016%20Daily%20Newsletter%20\(1\)&CNDID=24459693&spMailingID=9280546&spUserID=MTA5MjQwMjQzMDQ0S0&spJobID=962432916&spReportId=OTYyNDMyOTE2S0](http://www.newyorker.com/?p=3234730&mbid=nl_073016%20Daily%20Newsletter%20(1)&CNDID=24459693&spMailingID=9280546&spUserID=MTA5MjQwMjQzMDQ0S0&spJobID=962432916&spReportId=OTYyNDMyOTE2S0)

² Edward Tenner, *Why Things Bite Back; Technology and the Revenge of Unintended Consequences*. 1996, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, pp. 29-30.

³ <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/06/for-better-school-results-clear-the-schedule-and-let-kids-play/373144/>

Jeff Guo, “The disease killing white Americans goes way deeper than opioids”
Washington Post, March 24, 2017:¹



Fifteen years ago, white middle-aged Americans were dying at the same rate as Germans. Now, every year in the United States, about 410 out of every 100,000 middle-aged whites die—but in Germany, only about 285 out of 100,000 die. That’s a difference of 125 deaths per 100,000. Of those 125 additional American deaths, about 40 can be explained by the increases in deaths from drugs, drinking and suicide. The rest of the difference is harder to explain, but heart disease also seems to be a major factor.

So the theory comes back to despair. Case and Deaton believe that white Americans may be suffering from a lack of hope. The pain in their bodies might reflect a “spiritual” pain caused by “cumulative distress, and the failure of life to turn out as expected.” If they’re right, then the problem will be much harder to solve. Politicians can pass laws to keep opioids out of people’s hands or require insurers to cover mental health costs, but they can’t turn back the clock to 1955.

¹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2017/03/24/the-disease-killing-white-americans-goes-way-deeper-than-opioids/?utm_term=.d74655ba668d&wpisrc=nl_&wpm=1

Investigation: More “Here and Now” Autonomy Evidence

In the words of the United States *Declaration of Independence* (1776), basic human rights include “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”—autonomy. Almost every law being passed, every speech by people running for office, every war being fought relate in some way to maintaining, increasing, or preventing future loss of autonomy.

From the pages of newspapers, news magazines, TV news, or Internet news sources, collect information about a conflict, a demonstration, words of a political speech, summary of a court decision, or summary of a new law. Analyze this data to identify ways in which the information you’ve collected is related to autonomy—the people affected, the effects on those people, and ways in which people are reacting to inadequate autonomy.

For Teacher/Mentor:

Social system change has many causes. The most obvious is new technology that alters Action Patterns. From the adoption of metal tools at the beginning of the Bronze Age, through the replacement of slaves with machinery during the European medieval period, on through the Industrial Revolution, to the robots that recently replaced auto workers, technical innovation triggers change.

Other forces—environmental, demographic, and belief and value system change—also alter ways of life. This unit deals with another major cause of system change—social stress caused by lack of or loss of autonomy. Often neglected by textbooks, stress underlies much history and many world events—violence, political upheaval, formation of new groups and alliances, even such things as the epidemic use and abuse of drugs.

Growth in learners' understanding of the (probably universal) human need to feel in control of their own fate, and the consequences when this need is thwarted, ought to be a primary goal of education.

Reactions to reduced autonomy are so prevalent that they were evident in earlier data in the course:

Unit 2: Bolivian Tin Miners, pages 8-11

Unit 5: Thonga, pages 4 & 5

Unit 7: Irish, pages 12 & 13; Vanuatu, pages 20-22

At some point, learners might look back at this information for additional analysis.

In the original version of this section on the Amhara, in our Prentice-Hall textbook, *Idea and Action in World Cultures*, the primary unit focus was on attitudes toward and interactions with “outsiders,” with concern for such things as stereotyping and prejudice. Those elements are still present, but we’ve chosen instead to focus on societal stress caused by lack or loss of autonomy of people within a particular society.

Significant changes have occurred in Ethiopia since the original materials were developed. In the original material supplied by anthropologist Allan Young about the Amhara, the main out-group were the “*Beta Israel*” Ethiopian Jews, the people the Amhara called “Falasha,” (a somewhat derogatory term meaning “landless wanderers”). These people were skilled and essential artisans, doing weaving, making pots and iron implements. These were also the main people assumed to have *buda*, possessors of the dangerous evil eye. They occupied about 500 villages, mainly in northeastern Ethiopia, but weren’t permitted to own land.

In the years since the original publication of this material, Israel formally recognized the “Beta Israel” Ethiopians as truly Jewish, eligible for immigration to Israel under the Israeli “Law of Return.” Since 1977, virtually all Ethiopian Jews have relocated to the nation of Israel.

The “Falasha” are gone, but the “buda” beliefs persist, assigned to other skilled artisans who supply the pots, knives and plow points needed by Amhara farmers, and who are given caste-like status. The “buda” beliefs include a great deal that is not in the data for learners. For more information about this, see Ronald A. Reminick, “Evil Eye Belief among the Amhara of Ethiopia.” *Ethnology*, Vol. 13, No. 3, pp. 279-291, available at:

http://www.refugeelaidinformation.org/sites/srlan/files/fileuploads/Reminick-TheEvilEyeBeliefAmongAmharaEthiopia_again.pdf

For an overview of Amhara society, see <http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Costa-Rica-to-Georgia/Amhara.html>

Investigation: Status and Stress

Economic interactions between people with unequal status are often stressful because the person lower on the status ladder may feel that the higher-status person is taking advantage. If there’s no alternative source for whatever good or service the higher status person wants, the exchange may be more agreeable. Stress increases if either party feels threatened in any way.

The segregated nature of the Amhara town helps prevent contact between Amhara children and those of other ethnic groups, an important element in maintaining the social boundaries between groups.

The Amhara farmer that needs to buy a new plow point would probably go to the ironworker in a *tayb* village, being very careful to avoid arousing any kind of feeling, and also guarding his mouth—never smiling, showing no emotion, keeping his mouth closed as much as possible, possibly shielding it by pulling his toga across the lower part of his face. The belief (shared well beyond the borders of Ethiopia) is that the evil eye is triggered by envy, so the farmer would probably wear old, shabby clothes for the encounter with the *tayb*.

The main ideas learners will find interesting have to do with Amhara beliefs that Westerners would call “superstitions.” **Superstitions often grow out of inadequate autonomy.** In an uncertain world, superstitions provide (1) explanations for events and (2) some feeling of protection against the forces that threaten life and health. Parents that obtain a *kitab* and hang it around a child’s neck feel they have done something positive to shield the child from danger.

Reminick (in the article cited above) explains the evil-eye beliefs as a psychological projection of internal stresses, primarily those within the family, onto external agents. Prejudice in most societies has elements similar to this—the stereotypes we project onto outgroups are those negative characteristics we struggle with in our own personalities.

An additional reason, perhaps more important, for the buda beliefs is not mentioned by Reminick. In societies with a great deal of stratification of status, and where some people are born into castes, the dominant society seems to need a rationale for keeping those in castes in their place, preventing change. In traditional India, the religious ideas associated with karma and rebirth provided

that rationale. In Ethiopia, the caste-like status of the artisans is justified by the assumption that their skills come from spirits that give them power to do evil.

The role of artisans in producing necessary wares in societies like that of the Amhara gave them significant power; if they were also allowed to accumulate wealth by owning land, their power would be greater than members of the dominant society. This also helps explain the status structure of the society.

It may be interesting for learners to speculate how some of these beliefs began. The “evil-eye” ideas that are prevalent in so many societies around the world may have had some origin in eye infections that cause conjunctivitis, which are extremely contagious. The author remembers grade school beliefs in “pink eye” being communicable just by looking at another person with the condition—only a short distance from “evil eye” superstitions.

Linking iron and ceramic workers with evil by the Amhara may have originated with the worker’s use of much hotter fires than people normally use, and the association of such fires with long-persistent Middle-Eastern religious ideas related to devils and hell. The Amhara believe that the strength of products from artisans is attributable to the powers of the evil spirits that possess the *tayb* people.

Autonomy, Stress, and System Change

It is essential, at this point, for learners to comprehend the concept of autonomy. Young people, of course are concerned with personal freedom, being “able to do whatever a person wants to do.” We’re looking for a bit more depth here—autonomy as a reasonable belief that a person isn’t likely to be overcome by events beyond his or her control in the future. That form of autonomy, and the frustration and stress when it is lacking, are motivations for major human actions, as suggested on page 8.

Investigation: Zars

Amharic society is paternalistic and authoritarian. Women are given second-class status, traditionally have limited roles, and their participation in religious activities associated with the Ethiopian church are also limited.

The Zar cult seems to be a reaction to the limited autonomy of women in the society. The cult crosses ethnic boundaries—affecting Muslim and Ethiopian Jews (even those now in Israel), and has spread to other countries in the region. It illustrates several of the reactions to limited autonomy listed on page 8—other-worldliness, group formation, and even, in a subtle way, opinion appeal—in the color-striped clothing that indicates membership in the zar-possessed sub-society. Dancing and feasting in zar congregations can be satisfying forms of escape.

Some learners may assume that the women are just pretending to be possessed by zar spirits to gain their advantages. This is not the case at all—the women definitely go into altered mental states, and cannot remember what they say or do while in these “fugue” states, which are probably similar psychologically to hypnotic trances.

Investigation: Amhara Problems

As this is being written, the political situation in Ethiopia is volatile—and tragic. Large numbers of Ethiopian citizens are fleeing the country, many thousands going across the Red Sea/Gulf of Aden to Yemen—a poor choice of destinations, because Yemen is being torn apart by war. The Ethiopian government is using an extended “State of Emergency” to prevent demonstrations and to control dissident factions. No end of trouble is in sight for the Oromo and Amhara people, who together make up about 60% of the population.

This material was included to round out the evidence for the reactions to loss of autonomy. Reactions described here include violence, group formation, opinion appeal, and escape. If we had adequate data, the remaining kinds of response on the list (page 8) would likely be found among the Amhara people.

Because the Ethiopian situation is volatile, we suggest checking the Internet for recent developments to assist learners in making sense of the situation, perhaps adding to the data that is supplied in this unit.

In 2018, a new prime minister has enabled a much higher level of democracy (and autonomy), emptying the prisons of political prisoners, giving positions of power to women, and ending the war with Eretria.

See <https://www.cnn.com/2018/12/31/africa/abiy-ahmed-ethiopia-2018-analysis-intl/index.html>. We hope, of course, that the improved conditions persist.

October 11, 2019: “Ethiopian Prime minister Abiy Ahmed won the Nobel Peace Prize on Friday for his dogged pursuit of democratic reforms and regional peacemaking efforts,” per our colleague Max Bearak who is on the ground in Addis Ababa.” (*Washington Post*)

(2022) “The human rights and humanitarian situation in Ethiopia deteriorated further in 2021, with civilians impacted by a devastating conflict in Tigray, security force abuses, attacks by armed groups, and deadly ethnic violence in other regions. The government’s actions in Tigray contributed to growing international pressure to address accountability for rights abuses.” [World Report 2022: Ethiopia | Human Rights Watch \(hrw.org\)](#)

Investigation: Autonomy Here and Now

Investigation: More “Here and Now” Autonomy Evidence

The article excerpts that provide data for these investigations should help convince learners of the importance of the autonomy-related concepts introduced in this unit. The principles being studied apply in employment, health, and education—indeed in almost every other aspect of life.

(HLB) Unit completed April 2017, addition to recent history (above) 1/2/2019. Nobel Peace Prize notation added 10/11/2019. 2022 annotation added 3/30/2023.