Filming Pilgrimage to Ya'a[1]: Toward a Participatory Filmmaking

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Ya'a, an Oromo village located in Beni Shangul and Gumuz Regional State in Ethiopia, is one of the most significant Muslim pilgrimage centers in Ethiopia. Ya'a became a pilgrimage center when a Tijānī *shaykh*, *Al-Faki* Ahmad Umar, died there in 1953. This article is about the process of making the film titled *Pilgrimage to Ya'a*. Matsunami, the filmmaker, participated in the pilgrimage ritual and involved the residents of Ya'a in making the film. We describe how Matsunami accompanied a group of pilgrims traveling on foot and how the festival performed at Ya'a was organized by the residents. The film was screened at Ya'a in October 2007, and we also detail how the viewers, the residents of Ya'a, reacted to the film. This study reconsiders the collaborative approach to making ethnographic films and examines the possibility of a participatory filmmaking.

Key words: Oromo, participatory filmmaking, pilgrimage, Tijaniya, Ya'a

1. INTRODUCTION

Ya'a, located on the western fringe near the Sudan border, is one of the most significant Muslim pilgrimage centers in Ethiopia (Jabo 1988). While pilgrimage customs in Ethiopia share certain commonalities (Pankhurst 1994), each pilgrimage center has some distinctive characteristics closely associated with the personality and contributions of the founder and the cultural and historical background of the center (Eade and Sallnow 2000). The film *Pilgrimage to Ya'a* focuses on the pilgrimage ritual to Ya'a, the reasons people conduct the pilgrimage, and how and why the festival is organized as it is at Ya'a.

Eade and Sallnow, in their critical essay on the contested features of sacred centers and the performance of pilgrimage, asserted that researchers should focus on the diverse perceptions and discourses concerning the pilgrimage and the pilgrimage center, and on how the pilgrimage center (re)produces its 'sacredness' through exchanges between human beings and the divine (2000: 26–27). This article examines how *Pilgrimage to Ya'a* focuses on the diverse perceptions of those participating in the pilgrimage, the film's creation in collaboration with those concerned in the ritual practice, and how the film was received by the organizers and residents of Ya'a pilgrimage center.

Matsunami, the filmmaker, not only took part in the pilgrimage ritual but also involved pilgrimage participants in the filmmaking process and sought opinions from these participants by collecting their feedback. In this respect, he took a collaborative approach to the making of the film *Pilgrimage to Ya'a*.

The history of collaborative filmmaking can be traced back to Robert Flaherty's work in the 1920s. Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922) was a challenging work aimed at capturing the lives of the Nanook people using their own viewpoints. This was accomplished, as he later reported, through

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intensive discussions with local Nanook following the screening of footage and by planning together what and how he should shoot next (Flaherty 1950).

In the early 1960s, an improvement in filming technology brought about the reduction in the size of filming equipment. This enabled filmmakers to be more 'objective' in the sense that the process of filming exerted a somewhat lesser effect on the activities of the people in front of the camera. Later, this type of films came to be known as 'observational style films' (MacDougall 1975).

However, Jean Rouch, a contemporary to this trend, took a different approach. His *Chronique d'un été* (Chronicle of a Summer) (1961) was inspired by the idea of Flaherty's collaborative filmmaking. In this film, a scene set in Paris shows the film's producer and its subjects discussing the film itself. Rouch's interest was in sharing the authority over filmmaking with the subjects. Rouch commented as follows:

> "It is this permanent 'Ethno-dialogue' which appears to me to be one of the most interesting angles in the current progress of ethnography. Knowledge is no longer a stolen secret, devoured in the Western temples of knowledge; it is the result of endless quest where ethnographers and those whom they study are on a path which some of us now call 'shared anthropology'" (Rouch 1971: 7).

Although 'shared anthropology' has been held to be problematic as too idealistic for scientific research (MacDougall 2006), many filmmakers have been influenced by Rouch's conception. These include Sarah Elder and Leonard Kamering, whose well-known early-1970s Alaskan Heritage Film Project is a remarkable example (Elder 1995).

Rouch and Flaherty's attempts to capture the world from the 'natives' point of view' motivated Sol Worth and John Adair in the 1970 production of their Navajo Film Project. In this film project, some Navajo participants were taught how to use the camera and then left to self-produce their own films without the intervention of Western ideological precepts (Worth and Adair 1972). This project stimulated a worldwide trend in indigenously-made films (Aufderheid 1995, Turner 1990).

The collaborative approach to filmmaking was adopted as a criticism against the observational approach. The observational approach implies studying people as objects, whereas the collaborative approach implies working with people, attempting to understand and represent their points of view and experience (Pink 2006). Bank also criticized the observational approach, remarking that "swooping god-like into other people's lives and gathering 'data' according to a predetermined theoretical agenda strikes me as not simply morally dubious but intellectually flawed" (Banks 2001: 179).

Pilgrimage to Ya'a takes the collaborative stance in the sense that the filmed interviews were not conducted by the producers of the film, but rather by the participants themselves. The interviewers were not 'translators' who merely transmit the questions of the filmmaker to the interviewees in their own language. Instead, they formulated questions that both they and their interviewees deemed meaningful and appropriate, thus setting a collaborative and positive tone for the film. In this sense, the filmmaking process is 'participatory.' Although Matsunami was behind the camera directing the shots, the interviewers stood next to him, and selected both the interviewees and the questions. In this respect, the stance taken here is close to that in indigenously-made films. However, Matsunami's filmmaking approach is distinguishable in that the presence of the filmmaker (Matsunami), despite his invisibility, is recognizable in the reactions of the people to cameras and to foreigners. Matsunami is not 'invisible' as expected in observational films; he is making the film together with his assistants, both pilgrims and local residents.

2. YA'A AS POLGRIMAGE CENTER

Ya'a is one of the nodal centers of the 'Tijjānī Cult' (Ishihara 2007), a regional branch of the Tijānīya Order[3] introduced in western Ethiopia in the first half of the twentieth century.

Ya'a became a pilgrimage center when a Tijānī *shaykh* from Borno (Nigeria), *Al-Faki* Ahmad Umar, died there in 1953 (Ishihara 1997). A mausoleum was built, and people (mainly Oromo) who revered *Al-Faki* Ahmad Umar settled around the mausoleum, forming a village in the midst of land sparsely inhabited by Nilo-Saharan peoples, including the Mao, Komo, and Berta.

The population of the Ya'a mausoleum village was estimated at around 1,000[4], mainly consisting of Muslim Oromo settlers from Western Ethiopia, i.e., Illubabor, Jimma, and Western Wälläga. The residents of Ya'a are responsible for maintaining the mausoleum and the facilities associated with it. The residents, organized under the Mosque Committee, also receive and attend to pilgrims, who customarily visit the mausoleum on one or more of the annual Muslim festivals, i.e., the Arafa ('Īd al-'Adhā'), the Mawlid (Mawlīd an-Nabī), and the Mi'rāj. The particularity of the pilgrimage to Ya'a resides in the interaction between the residents and the pilgrims, which is closely related to the life and deeds of *Al-Faki* Ahmad Umar.

Reasons for conducting the pilgrimage to Ya'a are diverse. Some pilgrims go to Ya'a to fulfill their votive offerings (*nazri*), and others go to Ya'a because they have troubles of their own, often personal illness or the illness of a close relative. They have in common their reverence or love for *Al-Faki* Ahmad Umar. The veneration of *Al-Faki*, sustained by multiple dimensions of the 'Tijjānī Cult,' still retains its vigor despite the creeping influences of reformist assertions against such religious customs and attitudes (Ishihara 1996).

At the beginning of January 2006, a week before the celebration of Arafa, Matsunami accompanied a group of pilgrims traveling on foot to Ya'a to experience the troubles they encountered and to inquire why they chose to accomplish their pilgrimage on foot[5].

Before the all-weather road connecting Ya'a to the arterial road was constructed in 2002–3, Ya'a was only accessible to pilgrims traveling on foot. However, the construction of the road had a considerable influence not only on the daily lives of residents of Ya'a, but also on the pilgrimage itself. The population of pilgrims increased considerably[6], and a majority of the pilgrims began using chartered buses and trucks, and only a handful of people still conduct their pilgrimage on foot[7].

Matsunami chose to film the pilgrims who travelled on foot (Matsunami 2006). By joining in and sharing the fatigue of accomplishing the pilgrimage on foot himself, he established personal relationships with the pilgrims that enabled him to gain an insider's viewpoint.

The film also shows how residents of Ya'a interact with the pilgrims, exchanging sacred elements '(re)produced' at Ya'a. The distribution of sacred elements represented in the feasting ceremony is a climactic moment in the ritual process of pilgrimage at Ya'a. The sacred elements are (re)produced by the residents, who are mainly hard-working agriculturalists, along with some talented engineers. They regard themselves as servants (*khādim*) of *Al-Faki*, bearing the responsibility of serving the pilgrims in the same way the servants of *Al-Faki* had done in his lifetime. *Al-Faki* Ahmad Umar was known for his generosity, and meals offered free of charge for his guests symbolically represent this quality. The consumption of the meals distributed during Muslim festivals is a highlight event of the pilgrimage, during which the sacred elements produced by the residents are distributed and 'embodied' by the pilgrims, who, in turn, bless the residents for their labor.

3. FILMING THE PILGRIMAGE PROCESS

3.1. Encountering Pilgrims

Matsunami started his trip with his assistant, Seifu *Abba* Madad, at Chanka, the site of the intersection of the northward road to Ya'a and the main arterial road (Fig. 1). At Chanka, they encountered a group of 10 Oromo pilgrims traveling on foot from Dabo (Illubabor). The pilgrims, half of them women, consented to his request to join them and agreed to be filmed as they traveled on foot (Fig. 2). The main reason they were traveling on foot was financial. A one-way trip to Ya'a from Qaqe can cost as much as 50 *birr*[8]. The pilgrims traveling on foot due to financial constraints told Matsunami that they would opt for a ride if they were offered free trips. Some others, in contrast, were traveling

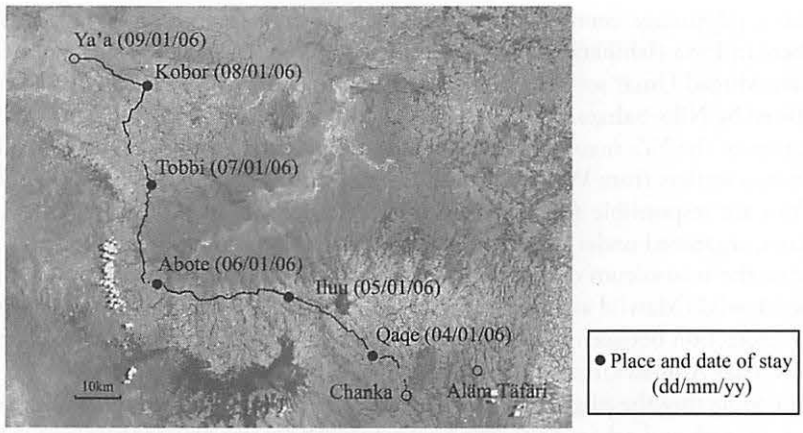

Fig. 1. The pilgrimage route from Qaqe to Ya'a
(From a Landsat satellite photograph)

Fig. 2. Pilgrims traveling on foot

on foot because they had vowed to do so. They either had promised to come to Ya'a on foot after their prayers were answered, or they had difficult problems yet to be solved.

3.2. The Process of Pilgrimage

Matsunami accompanied the party of pilgrims from Qaqe to Ya'a, a trip that took six days (Fig. 1). They spent their nights at the residences of followers of the 'Tijjānī Cult' living along the pilgrimage route to Ya'a. Most pilgrims brought along grain from home to be made into bread known as *injära* on their way. At local mills, they ground the grain and asked their hosts cook the flour into *injära*. Some pilgrims brought loaves of bread from home. Customarily the hosts invited them to home-made stew, to be served with the *injära*. The pilgrims took turns sharing what they brought from home, and they invited Matsunami and his assistant to join in the meal they shared. The pilgrims also carried roasted and ground coffee beans, a kettle, a small kerosene lamp, and other personal belongings, all wrapped in pieces of cloth.

Pilgrims walked as much as 20 to 30 km per day, without hurrying. Because the group included old men, women, and even young mothers carrying babies on their backs, they proceeded at a slow pace. When one of them lagged behind, the other members waited for him/her to catch up. The pilgrims Matsunami accompanied had come from a single neighborhood, and they continued to stick together during their stay at Ya'a and on their journey back home. This was probably considered important because the journey was full of danger and they needed to depend on one another.

The pilgrims usually got up at six o'clock in the morning. They normally had bread for breakfast,

sometimes accompanied by some fruit bought the day before. If a river or a well happened to be nearby, they prepared coffee using their kettles. While they traveled, they regularly conducted their obligatory prayers three times a day: before they set out on their day's trip in the morning, after they finished their lunch at noon (Fig. 3), and before they went to sleep. They usually walked until three or four o'clock in the afternoon. They never walked after dusk, for fear of hyenas and robbers.

The group consisted of men and women, young and old. The oldest was a woman 70 years of age, who was on her thirteenth trip to Ya'a on foot; the youngest were two 14-year-old girls who were going to Ya'a for the first time. The two girls were traveling with their mothers, who had vowed to take them to Ya'a when their daughters had recovered from severe illnesses. Most members of the group were experienced pilgrims who knew which route was best, where the rivers and wells were located, where weekly markets were held, and where they could find followers of the cult to provide them with shelter and food. Such information was directly transmitted to the younger generation accompanying them on the trip.

Although the group was traveling according to plan, on the third day out from Qaqe, they were unable to reach their intended destination. As a matter of fact, this was because Matsunami, overwhelmed by exhaustion, could not continue any farther on the day's journey. This indicates that pilgrims were beginning to regard him not as an outsider, but as a fellow pilgrim. At dusk, they reached a smallholding just outside the town, the planned destination of that day. They asked the owner of one of the houses if they could spend the night outside on the veranda. The host, a Christian Oromo who knew about *Al-Faki* Ahmad Umar by name, consented to their request, and gave them some fruit. Being a professional *mäsinqo* (one-stringed violin) player, the host began practicing his *mäsinqo* in the house in resonance with the rhythmical *manzumas* (religious verses) and *du'ā'* (supplication) that the pilgrims chanted in the twilight darkness outside while chewing *čat* (*Catha edulis*).

On the fifth day, the party arrived at Kobor, a town located 20 km from Ya'a. This was the final night of their journey. Many of the Oromo residents of Kobor were members of the Cult, and this town was where all pilgrims traveling on foot customarily spent their last night before entering Ya'a. The night was spent at a lodge (locally called *khalwa*) owned by an individual belonging to the Cult. The lodge was specifically built to serve as a rest house for the pilgrims to Ya'a. The owner invited the party to dinner and told us about his family and how the pilgrimage used to take place even during 'wartime' in the 1980s[9].

At seven the next morning, the party left Kobor. The group encountered several other pilgrims heading for Ya'a, because this road was the only way there. People were readily recognized as pilgrims because of their possessions, including large packages and tape recorders.

At a small village called Gure, where the pathway leading to Ya'a diverged from the road to Tongo, every pilgrim underwent inspection by the police. The policemen asked all pilgrims to show their

Fig. 3. Prayer on the roadside at noon

Fig. 4. Pilgrims rejoicing over the arrival of other pilgrims

ID cards and the contents of their baggage. One of the pilgrims had a dagger in his bag, which had been entrusted to him by a passerby who asked him to take the dagger to Ya'a as a votive offering. However, the dagger was confiscated by the police for security reasons.

After passing the checkpoint, pilgrims became livelier than before, chanting the customary *manzuma*, expressing their veneration to *Al-Faki* Ahmad Umar and the Prophet Muhammad. After leaving Gure, the party was overtaken by three buses heading for Ya'a, sounding their horns as they passed by.

On entering Ya'a, pilgrims welcomed those just arriving, chanting *manzumas*. The welcoming circle gradually expanded, stirring up clouds of dust. At the end of the *manzuma*, the *Salāt al-Fātih*, the central litany of the Tijānīya, was recited by all those present, and then everyone exchanged greetings, kissing the back of one another's hands and hugging one another (Fig. 4). This was a climactic moment suggestive of Victor Turner's concept of 'communitas' (1969).

4. FILMING THE RITUAL PERFORMANCES AT YA'A

4.1. Preparations for the Festival at Ya'a

When Matsunami reached Ya'a with his group, two days were left before Arafa was celebrated. Matsunami and his assistant went to stay at the residence of Musa Ahmad, to whom he had already been introduced by Ishihara, a colleague who had conducted research at Ya'a since 1994. The rest of the members of the party took shelter in the 'Dākil' (Fig. 5), the mosque customarily used for Thursday *hadras*[10], where they found over 200 pilgrims already taking shelter. Early pilgrims had reached Ya'a a week beforehand and the shelters were already crowded.

The next day was the eve of Arafa, and it was celebrated with much enthusiasm. At night, the feasting was to take place. The preparation of this ritual feast was conducted according to plans laid out long before the festival. The residents of Ya'a cooperated to cultivate the crops necessary to entertain the prospective guests and pilgrims. They collaborated in preparing the meals for the ritual feast, building temporary shelters, and mending and cleaning the mosque and waterways for ablutions.

The preparation began with the production of crops. Harvested sorghum and maize were stored in the warehouse owned by the Mosque Committee. The crop was ground by the 'children of the

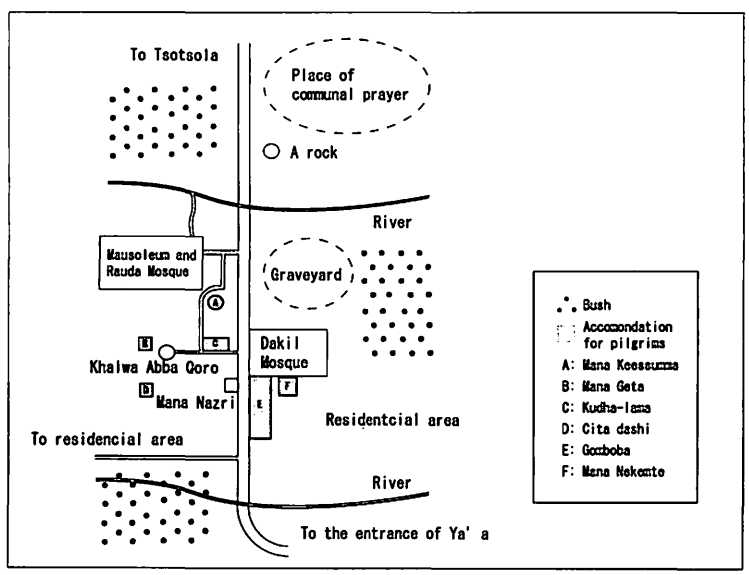

Fig. 5. Layout of the mausoleum village of Ya'a

Fig. 6. Residents preparing temporary shelters

mosque'[11] about two weeks before the festivals and distributed to the residents to be cooked into *injära*.

Floured sorghum and maize was distributed to every household about a week before the festival. Normally, women baked the *injäras* individually at home and men slaughtered the sacrificial beasts, cooking them into stews. The cooked *injära* was collected and stored again in one of the warehouses of the Mosque Committee. The necessary amount of *injära* was estimated from the amount consumed in the festival held the previous year. Based on this calculation, the Mosque Committee determined the amount of flour to be allotted to each household. For the Arafa festival held this year, each household was directed to prepare around 30 to 50 pieces of *injära*. There being about 200 households in Ya'a, this amounted to a total of six to 10 thousand pieces.

Preparations for the pilgrimage also included construction of temporary shelters, a toilet, and a shower room. Most of the temporary accommodations were constructed voluntarily by communal labor (*kidma*[12]) on the last Thursday preceding the festival (Fig. 6).

There were also some permanent accommodations for pilgrims in the village (Fig. 5). These accommodations had names, such as *Mana Keessumma* (or *Adarash*) (literally meaning 'house of guests'), *Mana Nekemte* (house of Nekemte), *Mana Geta* (the lord's house), *Kudha-lama* (literally meaning 'twelve,' which indicates the number of rooms), and *Gomboba*. Each had the sheltering capacity of about one to two hundred people. Normally these permanent accommodations were occupied by wealthy pilgrims during the festivals. Among these permanent accommodations there was a compact but seemingly cozy hut called *Cita Dashi*, which was only allotted to prominent descendants of *Al-Faki* Ahmad Umar[13].

4.2. Rituals Conducted on the Day before the Festival

Most pilgrims arrived at Ya'a on the day before the Arafa. These pilgrims were mainly those who used chartered buses and large vehicles, and had therefore traveled according to schedule. Over 10 vehicles arrived that day, in contrast to the three that had arrived earlier. These buses came from a variety of places, including Addis Ababa, Gondar, Bambesi, Asosa, Gimbi, and Nekemte. Trucks also arrived from short distances away, such as Asosa and Tongo. Those using vehicular transportation were mostly those able to afford the fare, but even these relatively wealthy pilgrims apparently also had their own personal reasons for making the pilgrimage.

The pilgrims spent the day enjoying reunions with friends and shopping at the marketplace. Most of the sellers were local Mao and Komo peasants, but there were also Oromo merchants from nearby towns and merchants from Sudan selling medical herbs and minerals, perfumes, and dried fish. The merchants were seated under the line of mango trees along the main road dividing the village in half (Fig. 5). Children were also selling food such as corn, bananas, oranges, pineapples, mangos, and papayas. Merchants sold merchandise in local *suqs* (kiosks), such as soap, incense, sugar, matches, packets of tea, and razor blades.

Čat, incense, coffee, sugar, and matches were indispensable items for performing the *hadra*. *Čat*, an important cash crop for the residents of Ya'a, was sold by the children of Ya'a. The income gained by selling *čat* reaches about 200 *birr* per household for one festival. This equals a month's income from *čat* during ordinary periods.

Pilgrims dedicate their votive offerings at *Mana Nazri* (the lodge for votive offerings), a small lodge located on the left side of the main pathway (Fig. 5). One of the residents stood in charge, and, after listening to the pilgrims' reasons for the offering, conducted the *du'ā'* on behalf of the supplicant. After the *du'ā'*, he accepted the offerings, in most cases consisting of one or two packets of incense sticks[14].

Some pilgrims brought along cattle and sheep for votive offerings. These offerings were brought not to the *Mana Nazri*, but directly to the area where sacrificial slaughtering took place. Four or five residents, all men, were stationed here to accept the offerings and to perform the *du'ā'* on behalf of the pilgrims. They were in charge of slaughtering the cattle and preparing stews with the meat. The stews were to be served to the pilgrims with *injära* for dinner. The enormous amount of stew was cooked outdoor in halved oil drums.

There were also a number of Christian pilgrims coming from Gojjam and Asosa. These pilgrims were not served this stew; instead, they were given chicken or sheep to slaughter and cook on their own.

During the day and into the evening, pilgrims gathered for *hadras* in groups of people from the same village or district. Each group shared their *čat*, making supplications to God and occasionally summoning the intercession of *Al-Faki* Ahmad Umar.

At eight in the evening, one of the residents made an announcement urging the pilgrims to return to their seats so that the meal could be served. This was the climactic moment of the festival, a spectacular event in which the interaction between the pilgrims and the residents reached a climax. Musa guided Matsunami through the dark, showing him where and how the meal was distributed. Those residents in charge of distributing the meal queued up for *injära* to be piled on their plates and for the stew to be poured on top. Then, these residents, each carrying a large plate of *injära* over their shoulders, dispersed among the crowd of pilgrims in order to distribute the meal (Fig. 7). These residents took great care so that every pilgrim had a share in the meal, making sure that no one was left out or served twice. The pilgrims started their meal with the usual saying, "*bismillāhi ar-raḥmāni ar-raḥīm*," and ended with their thanks to God and by reciting the *Salāt al-Fātiḥ*. After reciting this verse, every pilgrim took a portion of the leftover pieces of the meal with his or her hands, clearing the plate. The pilgrims claim that the remnants, over which they conducted the *du'ā'* and recited the *Salāt al-Fātiḥ*, are charged with the *baraka* (blessing) offered by the pilgrims. Making sure that each group had finished their meal, the residents collected the empty plates. The plates were carried to the warehouse of the Mosque Committee, where the residents, mainly women and girls belonging to the 'children of the mosque,' washed the dishes.

Fig. 7. Plates of *injära* with stew ready to be distributed to pilgrims

After the meal, the pilgrims returned to their *hadra* gatherings. Pilgrims chewed *čat* as they chanted the *manzuma* and conducted the *du'ā'*. The *hadra* continued until daybreak.

4.3. The Arafa Ceremony

On the day of the Arafa, many residents and pilgrims got up early in the morning to wash themselves in the river. Men gathered upstream while women gathered downstream in a bushy space relatively hidden from view. At around seven o'clock, pilgrims had breakfast. Ordinary pilgrims were not served breakfast by the Ya'a residents, but shared what they had in groups. Some made do with some fruits or locally baked bread sold in the morning markets. In contrast, breakfast was served to the descendants of *Al-Faki* Ahmad Umar and special guests, who had spent the night separately either in the *Mana Geta*, *Mana Keessumma*, or *Cita Dashi*.

At half-past eight in the morning, residents including elderly *shaykhs* (religious leaders), gathered at *Khalwa Abba Qoro* (the prayer lodge of *Abba Qoro*[15]). A microphone and amplifier had been prepared for the communal prayer. The residents headed by *Sharif* Sālih[16] led the pilgrims in a queue to the open field at the northern side of the village, reciting "*Allāhu akbar* (Allah is great), *Allāhu akbar*, *Allāhu akbar*, *lā-ilāha-illallāh* (There is no god but Allah)." Upon arriving at the field, they sat down side-by-side forming lengthy parallel lines (Fig. 8), turning their backs to the village and facing northward, the direction of Mecca. The group of women positioned themselves behind the men. The *imam* of Ya'a sat in front of the lines to guide the prayer. The prayer was conducted in the same way as the Friday prayer, i.e., by performing two *rak'as*. After the prayers, the *imam* turned around toward the people, preaching in Arabic.

When the *imam* finished preaching, the people stood up and slowly started to return to the village. On their way back, many pilgrims stopped by a large rock, about three meters in height, just at the northern edge of the village. From the top of this rock there is a good view of the whole village site of Ya'a. When *Al-Faki* Ahmad Umar first came here, he is said to have conducted his prayer on top of this rock and pointed out the location where his *khalwa* should be built. Because of this tradition, many pilgrims customarily kiss the rock and perform their prayers on it. Over the years, this practice has resulted in the creation of three shiny, shallow holes, indicating where the knees and forehead should be placed.

At around ten o'clock, as soon as they finished packing their belongings, pilgrims rushed for the buses and trucks stationed at the entrance of the village. Each vehicle had a distinct destination, and the pilgrims chose the most suitable one while the drivers revved their engines. At half-past ten, the first bus left Ya'a. At the same time, those pilgrims traveling on foot also left Ya'a. Whether those people leaving Ya'a on foot traveled all the way back to their home village without other transportation could not be verified because some pilgrims who left Ya'a on foot could take advantage of public transportation at Gure.

Fig. 8. Communal prayer in the open field

Fig. 9. The Rauda mosque

Fig. 10. Pilgrims supplicating to *Al-Faki* Ahmad Umar inside the mausoleum

Before they left Ya'a, some pilgrims performed the *ziyāra* (visitation) at the mausoleum of *Al-Faki* Ahmad Umar to bid farewell. The mausoleum is located on the northern side of the Rauda mosque (Fig. 9). Inside the mausoleum, the pilgrims bowed and kissed the walls of the tomb, murmuring in supplication to *Al-Faki*, some even shedding tears (Fig. 10). In contrast to the bustle outside, the atmosphere inside the mausoleum was one of tranquility. Many pilgrims lit incense sticks and left them at the entrance or just beyond the tomb.

At the watering facility inside the compound of the Rauda mosque, many pilgrims queued to fill their water jugs with *zamzam* (holy water). Almost every pilgrim carried some *zamzam* back home for medicinal use.

Just as the pilgrims began their journey back home, men and women of the Nilo-Saharan peoples including Mao, Komo, and Berta residing in villages surrounding Ya'a suddenly appeared in groups, creating a commotion of music and songs. It was now their turn to celebrate the festival at Ya'a. They sang their original *manzumas* in their own languages, accompanied by traditional music made with instruments including various lengths of wooden horns, drums, and iron cymbals. The Oromo pilgrims seemed to welcome their performance, and some even tape-recorded their music and *manzumas*. One of the rich pilgrims blessed them, offering 100 *birr* to the leader of the group for their performance. This performance went on for between two and three hours.

At midnight, the last bus, heading directly for Addis Ababa, left Ya'a with about 30 rich pilgrims on board. After this, there remained only a small number of pilgrims at Ya'a, who left for their homes on foot.

5. FILMMAKING AS A RELIGIOUS DEED

Being accompanied by a foreigner with a video camera was quite a new experience for the pilgrims, and it took some time for the pilgrims to become used to the presence of Matsunami and his camera. However, recognizing that his motivations were firm and seeing him refuse a ride offered by a truck driver, although he was suffering from fatigue, they gradually accepted him as a fellow pilgrim. They came to think of his work as having a religious motivation. Regarded as such, the pilgrims began to feel comfortable revealing their personal backgrounds and motives for joining the pilgrimage in front of the camera. The interviews were conducted by Seifu *Abba* Madad, a pilgrim serving as Matsunami's assistant, who knew what kind of questions were meaningful and appropriate to ask. The presence of Seifu helped Matsunami intermingle with the pilgrims and allowed the interviewees to feel more relaxed in answering questions.

At Ya'a, Matsunami had received permission from the Mosque Committee to film the rituals, on

Fig. 11. Residents watching *Pilgrimage to Ya'a* at Ya'a

condition that he refrain from taking certain shots that were considered unacceptable for religious reasons. This 'acceptability' included criteria of their own making aimed at avoiding criticism from the Islamic reformist movement (locally called *Wahabiya*). One of main criticisms of the Cult made by the *Wahabiya* is that *hadra* gatherings are immoral occasions at which both sexes intermingle; therefore, the Mosque Committee told Matsunami not to take shots of the *hadra* at the festival. A resident of Ya'a, Musa Ahmad, was always at his side facilitating the shooting and informing him where he should take pictures and which questions should be addressed to whom.

On October 13, 2007, on the eve of 'Id al-Fitr, *Pilgrimage to Ya'a* was screened at Ya'a (Fig. 11). Ya'a had recently installed a hydroelectric system and a resident owned a 14-inch television and a Sony DVD player. At midnight, Matsunami, with the support of the Mosque Committee, set up the TV and DVD player in *Gomboba*, the biggest building available in Ya'a. About 100 men and boys filled the shelter[17]. The audience seemed to be impressed by the film, and kept silent when it ended. Musa, acting as chairman, opened the discussion as follows:

> Musa: ...Now, the film has ended. And I have questions for you all, *Khadims*. The film that you have just seen is a report about you. He wants to show this film in the land of foreigners. Now he is asking your permission.
> *Hajj* Mahmud: Hey, *Khadims!* He is asking all of you. Asking permission of you all.
> *Khadims*: (nodding and whispering approval among themselves)
> *Hajj*: Fine! Your work is a *Khidma* (voluntary service)! Your work is a *Khidma!* Our faith is satisfied. Watching the film and listening to it, we are satisfied. We permit it. Let this film be shown everywhere in the world. Let's recite the *Salāt al-Fātih*!
> *Hajj* & *Khadims*: (Recite the *Salāt al-Fātih*)

Although Matsunami expected a heated discussion of the film, almost none occurred, and *Hajj* Muhammad, the *imam*, commented on the film's representing the voices of the residents. Evaluating the film and filmmaking of the pilgrimage as a *khidma* (volunteer work), he reframed the film in a religious context, which was more familiar to the residents. By giving his blessing for the film to be screened all over the world and reciting the *Salāt al-Fātih* with the audience, he granted the film religious meaning. In this way, the filmmaking process was interpreted as a religious deed, and the film was approved as religiously acceptable.

6. CONCLUSION

Pilgrimage to Ya'a shows that the pilgrimage ritual is constructed by people with different roles and

diverse perspectives. On the one hand, pilgrims have a firm belief that their prayers will be or have been answered by *Al-Faki* Ahmad Umar, and this feeling induces them to set out on their journey to Ya'a. The residents of Ya'a, on the other hand, regard it as their obligation, bestowed by *Al-Faki*, to devote themselves to producing the food to be distributed at the festival. The interactions of the two parties, the pilgrims and the residents of Ya'a, reach a climax at the ritual feast conducted on the eve of the festival.

Matsunami took a participatory filmmaking stance from the very beginning by participating in the pilgrimage himself, involving pilgrims and residents in conducting interviews and editing the film, and showing his film to the participants. 'Participation' was a mutual act involving both filmmaker and participants in the filmmaking process.

This mutual participation provides an opportunity for participants to engage in the reflexive representation of their own images. Being able to participate subjectively in this image production, the people recognize the possibility of alternative ways of imagining themselves. In a way, the participatory filmmaking process enabled the people to objectify themselves and even offered the potential for communication among people with diverse perspectives. However, Matsunami admits the film has its own limits, in the sense that people with controversial stances towards the pilgrimage and the veneration of *Al-Faki* Ahmad Umar were not included in the film. In a nutshell, the film shows only one side of the story.

In order to present a more comprehensive view of the pilgrimage ritual, people with opposing views of the ritual should be included. How this could be accomplished through participatory filmmaking is a topic worthy of future consideration.

NOTES

(1) This article is a revised version of a paper presented at the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies held from July 2–6, 2007 at Trondheim, Norway.

(2) The co-authorship of Yasuo Matsunami and Minako Ishihara derives from the fact that the former is responsible for the information on Ya'a, on the filming process of the pilgrimage and on the visual anthropological ideas developed in this article, while the latter is responsible for the information on the 'Tijjānī Cult' and Al-Faki Ahmad Umar.

(3) The Tijaniya is one of the sufi orders (tarīqa), founded in Morocco by Ahmad B. Muhammad al-Tijani (b. 1737-8, d. 1815) (Abun-Nasr 1965).

(4) This estimation was provided by Shaykh Muhammad Thani, the chairman of the Mosque Committee at Ya'a in 2005. Ya'a belongs to Ya'a Beldigis qäbäle, located in Tongo wärädа, Beni Shangul and Gumuz Regional State.

(5) The research on which this article is based was conducted from December 2005 to January 2006, under a project subsidized by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research), entitled 'Anthropological Research on the Incorporation of Traditional Market Systems in the Modern State of Ethiopia' (Project Leader: Minako Ishihara, Nanzan University).

(6) In the 1990s, Ishihara joined the pilgrimage ritual four times, and on each occasion, the only vehicle to reach Ya'a was a heavy truck chartered from Neqemte that carried around 80 people. Most of the pilgrims reached Ya'a on foot (including Ishihara). This restriction eventually affected the size of the groups of pilgrims to Ya'a.

(7) An estimate of the number of pilgrims traveling on foot is difficult to make, because many pilgrims arriving at Ya'a on foot used transportation on their way to and from Ya'a. Some pilgrims reaching Ya'a by vehicle had started their journeys on foot.

(8) 50 birr (5.9 US $) is quite expensive for an ordinary peasant. The bus ticket from Addis Ababa to Asosa (about 600 km) cost about 80 birr (9.4 US$) (1 US $=8.5 birr).

(9) This 'war' was conducted between the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), which was supported by the Sudan government, and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), which was supported by the Ethiopian government. The host lost two of his children in this 'war' (Matsunami 2006).

(10) Regularly held religious gathering with the specific purpose for reciting litanies.
(11) The 'children of the mosque' are married and unmarried men and women raised by the members of the Mosque Committee. They were raised to play a key role in the pilgrimage rituals, some of them becoming efficient organizers of the ritual feasts (Matsunami 2007).
(12) The term 'kidma' is derived from the Arabic 'khidma (service)'.
(13) None of the descendants of Al-Faki Ahmad Umar lives in Ya'a.
(14) Incense sticks are available almost anywhere in the countryside, with cheap ones costing no more than 3–5 birr a packet.
(15) 'Abba Qoro,' literally meaning landlord, is the commonly-known name of Hajj Adam Abba Diko (or Abba Wari Abba Diko), who was head administrator of the community of followers of Al-Faki Ahmad Umar. As a skillful engineer, Hajj Adam, until his death in 1978 or 1979, laid the foundations of the village of Ya'a, which developed into a prosperous self-sufficient community.
(16) Sharif Sālih, one of the oldest residents of Ya'a, was born in Yemen and is one of the few living contemporaries of Al-Faki Ahmad Umar.
(17) The film was shown to the women after the 'Id al-Fitr, during the daytime.

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