

ST.LAWRENCE UNIVERSITY 2009 ETHIOPIA COURSE

UTOPIA IN ETHIOPIA:

GENDER, CULTURE, AND COMMUNITY:

The case in Awra Amba, Ethiopia

SOCIOLOGY/AFRICAN STUDIES/GLOBAL STUDIES/GENDER STUDIES 247

Profs. Abye Assefa/ Florence Molk

This course explores a remarkable, quasi-utopian community established in Awra Amba, in the north of Ethiopia. Here patriarchal Christian and Islamic values and norms have been displaced by intentionally reassigning gender roles; furthermore, Awra Amba is open to people of all faiths, and this inclusive, ecumenical approach contributes to the utopian character of this enclave.

The research area is located in the Northern highlands of Ethiopia, which is also the cultural epicenter of historical Abyssinia. Keeping the well entrenched patriarchal culture in the background students will conduct empirical investigations in the community. To that end, students will actively participate in different tasks of community life. They are required to keep field journals. They are also encouraged to initiate individual research projects that can be useful for future projects in senior Independent/Honor Papers.

Students are organized into four groups. Practical experiences are also arranged into four categories.

- (1) Elementary school and library
- (2) Textile cottage industry
- (3) Farm
- (4) Retirement facility

Every few days, groups are assigned to a different responsibility. By the end of the course, every student will have a chance to experience with all of the four aspects of community life. In addition to experiencing and analyzing the cultural innovations in Awra Amba, students are also exposed to traditional Ethiopian culture. Visiting the local villages, the medieval city of Gondar, and the ancient monasteries in the Island of Lake Tana give them the contextual ground in situating the Awra Amba Community.

Most importantly students visit the Fistula medical clinic in Addis, which treats young girl victims of institutional sexism. The experience reinforces an understanding of the damage that traditional gender norms perpetuate. In addition to the formal lecture by the staff at the clinic, students are encouraged to engage in informal conversation with staff and patients.

TEXTS:

Abbink, J. 'An Historical-Anthropological Approach to Islam in Ethiopia'
Journal of African Cultural Studies, V. 11, N. 2 1998

Hiwet, A. 'Analysing the Ethiopian Revolution'
Review of African Political Economy, N.30 1984

Hoberman, B. 'The Ethiopian Legend of the Ark'
The Biblical Archaeologist, V. 46, N. 2 1983

Moore, D. 'Christianity in Ethiopia'
Church History, V. 5, N. 3 1936

Otoo, N & Pobi, S. 'Early Marriage and Poverty'
Gender and Development, V. 11, N. 2 2003

Quirin, J. 'Caste and class in Historical North-West Ethiopia'
The Journal of African History, V. 39, N. 2 1998

Massow, F. 'We are the forgotten Earth'
Gender and Development, V. 8, N. 1 2000

SEMINARS:

Seminars are held intermittently; prior, during and after fieldwork. Discussions are organized around assigned readings and field experiences

FIELD JOURNAL:

Students are required to keep a field journal. They have to record their work assignments and conversations daily. Journals are collected and evaluated several times during the course

EVALUATION:

Course evaluation are based on participation in formal seminar, informal Q&A, field Journal, and research paper

RESEARCH PAPER: **To be handed back in the US**

A 10-15 page research paper is required. Papers can either be empirically or theoretically oriented. However, empirical paper has to be theoretically contextualized and theoretical paper has to be informed by empirical data. Students should discuss their topic and method with professors.

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK I: The Exploration of Ethiopia

- June 3** **Registration at the US Embassy
Visit of the Biggest Market in Sub-Sahara Africa**
- June 4** **Travel to Awra Amba**
- June 5** **Introduce students to founder and members. Tour of the
Community. Assignment of students to different tasks**
- June 6** **Saturday: Lecture on the history and philosophy of the Settlement
Afternoon: Explore the general vicinity and cultural composition of
Villages**
- June 7** **Sunday: Students Engage in Informal interactions with Members
Afternoon: Class meets for discussion**

WEEK II:

- June 8** **Groups in Their respective Assignments
Afternoon: Meeting to evaluate and make adjustment**
- June 9** **Work Continues
Afternoon: Question and answer session with women**
- June 10** **Work continues
Afternoon: Question and answer session with men**
- June 11** **Change of group assignment
Afternoon: Question and answer session with the founder**
- June 12** **Work Continues
Afternoon: Class meets for discussion**
- June 13** **Saturday: Visit the Medieval City of Gondar**
- June 14** **Sunday: Visit the ancient monasteries in the Islands of Lake Tana**

WEEK III:

- June 15** **Change of group assignment
Afternoon: Question and answer session with the elderly**

- June 16** **Work Continues**
Afternoon: Question and answer session with children
- June 17** **Change of group assignment**
Afternoon: Question and answer session with the entire community
- June 18** **Work Continues**
Afternoon: Class meets for discussion
- June 19** **Travel Back to Addis Ababa**
- June 20** **Saturday: Visit the Fistula Clinic: Meet Health providers**
Afternoon: Visit the national Museum and Archives
- June 21** **Sunday: Shopping**
- June 22** **Fistula Clinic: Question and answer with patients**
Afternoon: Class meets for discussion
- June 23** **Day of Departure**