

'The Arada Have Been Eaten': Looking into the Crisis of the 'Street Hustlers' in Addis Ababa.

Marco Di Nunzio¹

¹University of Oxford, Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Oxford , United Kingdom

marco.di-nunzio@anthro.ox.ac.uk

In Addis Ababa, the term 'Arada' means different things. It is a place, the old city centre of Addis Ababa where firstly the market was located and, later, modern shops, night clubs and cinemas opened. Arada is also a category of the city life or even an identity that has been claimed and performed by different urban actors, i.e. the elite in 60s with its discourses and practices of modernity, the street 'hustlers' and sex workers, and, now, the businessmen of the poor areas with their attempts to join the growing economy of the city. More than that, it might be said, that 'Arada' is a notion of 'personhood' that has to do with ideas of 'smartness', modernity and even sociality. 'Arada' is an interchangeable notion that people use to make sense of historical changes and define social locations. The narrative on the 'Aradas' is indeed a discourse on the city and its social transformations.

In this paper, I will focus on the analysis of what my informants describe as the 'crisis of the Arada'. 'The Arada have been eaten', they say. There is a substantial difference between the concept of 'Arada' and the everyday life of the street 'hustlers' who call themselves 'Arada'. More precisely, this is not the 'crisis' of the concept, but rather of the 'street Aradas'. The economies of 'hustling', 'sharing', 'enjoying' and even 'respect' of 'street Aradas' just as their ability to 'make business' have been increasingly questioned and challenged by the repression that followed 2005's elections, the implementation of employment projects, the narratives on self achievement and entrepreneurship, the deepening of cleavages and differentiations within the 'urban communities' and, broadly, by the interconnection of mobilization and control of which the political strategy of the ruling party at the grassroots consists of.

In this context, the crisis of the 'street Arada' does not consist of the disappearance of their way of living and surviving. It is rather the product of the emergence of new form of marginalities and social exclusion in the urban society. 'Street Aradas' still exist and hustle, but their lifestyle has lost its symbolic and economic currency and efficacy. This has not only wrecked their 'terrains' of respect but it has also transformed the economy of the street and the quest for change and dignity in the poor areas.