

DANCING GRASS

A man wearing a red hooded garment is shown harvesting teff in the Tigrayan Highlands. He is holding a large, flat, woven basket filled with golden teff grain. The background is a clear blue sky with some green trees visible on the left and right sides. The foreground is a large, rounded mound of golden teff grain.

*Harvesting Teff
in the Tigrayan Highlands*

A film by Mitiku G/Hiwot

A film in the MPI series
GUARDIANS OF PRODUCTIVE LANDSCAPES
(*Editor: Ivo Strecker*)

*

Selected Images, Dialogues and Commentary





White teff appeals to the eye.
Our forefathers told us that red teff is superior.
It can be used for soup
and is the healthiest variety of teff.
Stew is prepared using different spices,
as also milk, yogurt and butter.
One can't have enough of it!
Food made from red teff is better than meat.

This is a fertile field belonging to our village.
Here is where we spent our childhood.
During the devastating drought, we left this farm,
but later we returned and resettled here.





Teff is harvested in groups.
During harvest season, we help each other.
Especially sons-in-law are expected to help.
One has to do what one can.

This sickle is razor-sharp,
one has to master the tool!





Maybe now
it is time for beer.

Good beer!

Is the harvesting difficult?

Yes, it is difficult.



Barley and wheat are tall, so you can cut while standing.
Crouching makes your knees hurt.
The hands need to move fast and together as you cut the *teff*.





The most experienced men
work on the left and the right side.

They are called *Amamo*.

Like generals in the battlefield,
they decide on the width
and the pace of the cutting.



*The girl from Worabayu,
her legs are soft
and white her teeth,
May I lie on your lap!*

*The girl from Mokhoni,
her legs are soft
and white her teeth,
May I lie on your lap!*

*Melkam, come on, sing!
What a day! Oh... my
companions
My Companions, let's go
to the sea
What if we encounter
enemies?
If we do, we use a bomb
to blow them up!*



*The men sing
three different kind of songs,
which are heroic, nostalgic and cheerful
The songs help
lift the morale of the workers.*

*Let us sing gumaye!
Line up! Oh, my companions!
Ah, yes!
Oh, my brave companions!
Ah, yes!
Beautiful woman,
may your husband never return,
because he does not deserve you!*



We let the teff dry for a few days,
otherwise it will get mouldy.



We build the stack on a dry surface.
In this way we prevent damage to the seed.
Also, we keep the seeds upward.

We cover the top
with the heads of grain downward.

So you finish the top with teff stalks?

Yes!
This will protect
the grain from rain.



Gombel, behave!

These oxen are like soldiers.

Qelasay, a lead ox,
turns the rotation.

The *Kholalay*,
keeps the oxen together.

They move from
right to left
following the belief
in the power of the right.



Bless the yield!

Let`s give to the ox, they said,
to the good ox with a big dewlap.

Dear ox, because of your labour,
the straw is yours!

Let`s give straw to the ox!

Let`s give a blessing to the farmer
and to the ox with big dewlap.

The strongest farmer,
turns a snake into a stick,
kills a lion for his dogs
and a tiger for his cats!

The farmer has plenty land oxen,
yet begs for sacks of grain

What a day!

Bless them now!

Trample down the seeds!
Trample!

This is for you!
So we bless
the threshing floor.





These two are young oxen.
They need to be tied together
until they are disciplined.

Sweep there!



These stones stand for the trinity.

What's it for?

For the final stage
of winnowing.
The other is
for the first stage,
to brush away the straw.
These two brushes are
different.



One must work barefoot
on the threshing ground.



You better squat down!
The wind blows
towards you.

The upward spiral
calls for abundance.
The cross signifies
an end of the treshing.





The heap is covered to protect
the yield from evil spirits.

Put the forks on top!



The day ends with a meal in the field.

The farmers spread out the different varieties of *teff* for the buyers to see.



What are you selling today?
We sell the grain to buy
salt, coffee and other goods.

This is what i will sell today.
It is called *sergeneway*.
Which you people from the
city prefer.



The red teff is richer
and more tasty.
White teff is dry
and kills the appetite.
Red teff is richer
and most enjoyable to eat.

Farmers don` t choose,
but we like the red best.

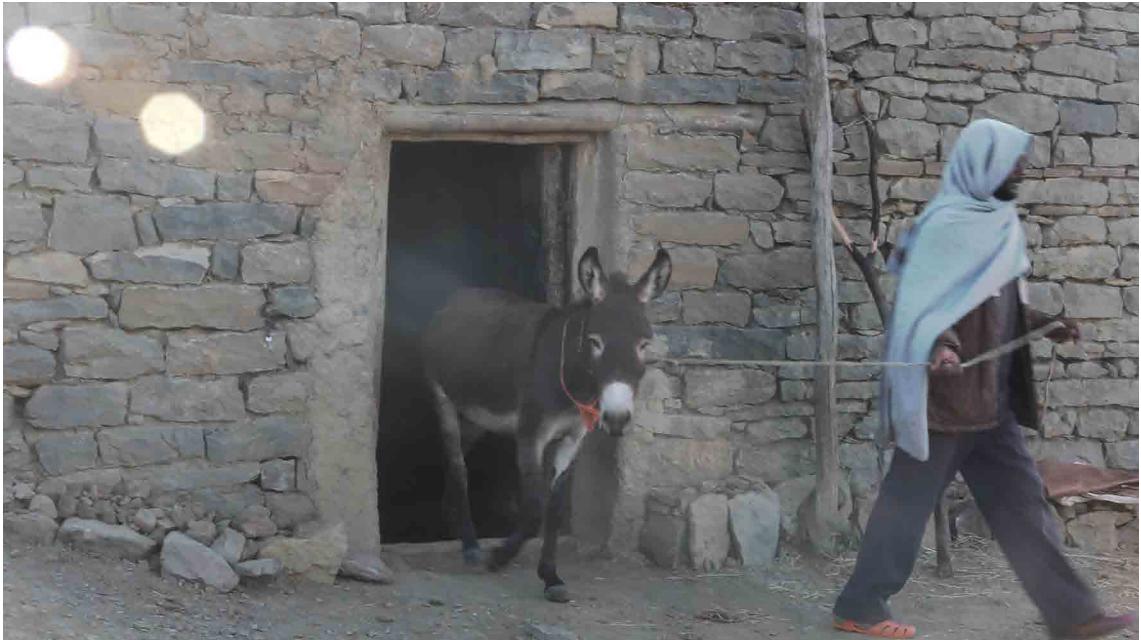
We supply the market
with our best grain.
The civil servants survive
because of us, the farmers!



Wedding parties enter the market.

Accompanied by music,
the groomsmen collect grain
from the farmers.







How long do you
still have to wait?

There are more people
ahead of me.





I use fermented dough.
I mix the flour
with water.
It takes three days
to ferment.

Is this fermented?

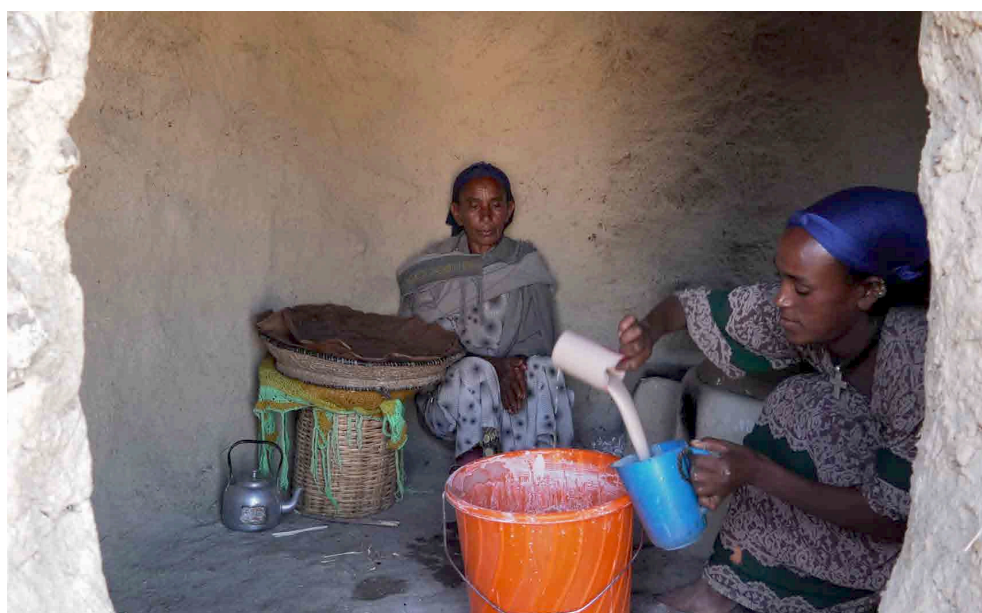
Yes, it is ready for use.



In the past
we ate healthy food,
and there was no disease.

These days
we are conscious
of what we eat.

In the market
I sell eggs
and other goods.



*From where
do you get the pan?*

It is from here.

We use oilseed
to polish the pan.

It is good
to start the day
with fresh *enjera*
and coffee.





May we have a blessed day!



May this house
be blessed!

May your family
be protected from harm,
misfortune and sadness!

May God
give you a graceful life!

May the Holy Saviour
be your guardian!

Amen!



Burn the torch!

Meskel is the biggest religious festival, celebrated among Orthodox Christians of Ethiopia.

Let us sing for *Meskel*!

Queen Elena began the *Meskel* fire. Because of the *Meskel* fire she found the true cross.





Hold it up!



Early morning, priest Mesele
blesses the people and the *Meskel* fire.

Abreha, please hurry!

Meskel, bring us happiness, peace
and good fortune.



The *Meskel* fire
celebrates the end of the rains.
It heralds the beginning
of a new season.

This is how God created
the cycle of seasons for us.



Director

Mitiku Gabrehiwot

Camera

Tesfahun Haddis

Sound

Selamawit Hailu

Editing

Zufan Cherkos

Subtitles

Mitiku Gabrehiwot

Narration

Hailu Meshesha
in dialogue with Mitiku Gabrehiwot

Color Grading

Tom Luehrmann

Sound Design

Arne Ruis

Special thanks to

Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology
Halle/Saale, Germany

Departments of Theatre Arts & Anthropology
Mekelle University, Ethiopia

Ivo Strecker
who helped at every stage of making the film

The welcoming farmers
of Adigudem

Teshome Gabrehiwot
Hailu Meshesha & Mulu Kiros

Booklet Design

Mitiku Gabrehiwot
Tom Luehrmann

© Mitiku Gabrehiwot, 2018, HD, 40 min