



**The Perils of Face: Essays on cultural contact,
respect and self-esteem in southern Ethiopia
(Mainzer Beitrage zur Afrika-Forschung)**

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At the end of the 19th Century, southern Ethiopia was one of the last areas to experience the "Scramble for Africa", as Emperor Menelik II sent his armies south to conquer and incorporate this territory into his empire. For almost hundred years, the peoples of southern Ethiopia had to live under the highly centralised rule of the Emperor and later that of the Marxist Dergue regime, but this changed in 1991, when a new constitution was proclaimed and all barriers of class, gender, ethnic affiliation, religion and place of birth were officially abolished. But how can such a transformation to a new social order be achieved? What are its obstacles and what are its prospects? To answer this question it is indispensable to know how the culturally different peoples of Ethiopia remember their past, and what conceptions they entertain of each other. The present essays address this issue. In particular, they explore the dangers inherent in situations of cultural contact and examine how the powerful notions of pride, honor, name, and self-esteem come into play, as people struggle to maintain their identity, individually or as a group. The master trope for this kind of sensitivity and vulnerability in social and cultural interaction is "face". This is why the volume is entitled "The Perils of Face".

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