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Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology Working Papers

Working Paper No. 121

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Territorialising Ethnicity: the political ecology of pastoralism in northern Kenya and southern Ethiopia

Halle/Saale 2010
ISSN 1615-4568

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Territorialising Ethnicity: the political ecology of pastoralism in northern Kenya and southern Ethiopia[1]

Günther Schlee[2]

Abstract

The idea of the nation state has penetrated the colonial and postcolonial organisation of statehood in Kenya and Ethiopia deeply at a level much below the “nation” state (a debatable entity in Africa and elsewhere). The colonial perception of “tribes” led to an administrative order in which districts and grazing reserves were delineated according to “tribal” boundaries which often were thought to be pre-existing but in reality were created in the process. Ethnicity in that process was not invented (as has been claimed for other parts of Africa) but it has changed: it has acquired a territorial character which it did not have in this form before.

Ideas of group rights to parcels of the land (the miniature version of the modern territorial nation state) in the mind of policy makers combined with ideas of preservation of the range which, as modern range ecology has found not so recently, were misconceived. These ideas led to policies that restricted the range of movement of pastoral nomads.

The paper draws a line from colonial policies to modern politics, in which territorial subdivision of administrative units and the restriction of nomadic movements continue. A number of reasons for this are explored. These reasons are found to be guided by the interests of self-styled elites and not by the interests of the pastoralists who are adversely affected by them.

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[1] A version of this paper has been presented at the 16th IUAES (International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences) World Congress in the workshop of the Commission on Nomadic Peoples, entitled “Resilience to Resistance: Pastoral Strategies in Response to Contemporary Political and Ecological Disruption and Change in Africa”. The conference was held in Kunming China, 27th–31st July, 2009. The present version has profited from comments by Fekadu Adugna and Kirill Istomin as well as the comments of the participants of the African Studies Workshop at Chicago University and John Galaty’s doctoral students at McGill University, Montreal.

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Introduction

This paper deals with the distribution of herbivores and the humans in symbiosis with them on the ground. The herbivores in question are camels, smallstock, and cattle, and the humans the pastoralists to whom they belong. Among the many factors that influence this distribution, politics and policy are singled out for special attention. The regional focus is on the arid lowlands of northern Kenya. The history of the pastoralists there, however, is so closely interwoven with their co-ethnics and neighbours in southern Ethiopia, and the relationships between pastoralists and the state show so many similarities in both countries, that the analysis of the situation can only profit from throwing a glance across the border every now and then.

A key element in the relationship between pastoralists and the state is how the pastoralists are organised in groups and alliances and how this is reflected in the categories applied by the state for classifying them and handling them administratively. We therefore turn our attention first to "tribes" and "ethnic groups".[3] In northern Kenya at the beginning of the twentieth century, the British encountered ethnic groups called Rendille, Gabra, Boran, Sakuye, Garri, etc. To speak of tribes or ethnic groups as a colonial invention, as some fellow deconstructionists who are more radical in their deconstructions than I am have done it, in the case of northern Kenya does not appear to be justified. Without postulating the absence of change, many of the groups we know now were already in existence at that time in very similar shapes in terms of defining characteristics (group specific cultural features, including language) and composition, i.e. the clans and lineages they comprised.[4]

To speak of relative stability over time in today's anthropological environment exposes one to accusations of "primordialism" and "essentialism". These sins be very far from me. All I mean is relative stability over time, and that means that collective identities change at different rates and any one of them may have a different speed of change in different periods. One point I have made long ago in a book (Schlee 1989a) is that many of the clans in northern Kenya are older than the ethnic groups there, and that many of the present ethnic groups there have evolved in a way that the new ethnic boundaries cut across clans, giving rise to the many interethnic clan relationships we find today. In the same book, I pointed to Newbury's finding that among Kinyarwanda speakers in what now is Rwanda and the Congo, who split around 200 years ago, there is no overlap of the clan lists. The clans he found all seem to have come into being since the split and do not pre-date it. This appears opposite to my case in which ethnicity has been found to change at a faster rate than clanship. A reasonable anthropological debate would therefore revolve around the speed of change of different social units and the conditions for the acceleration and slowing of that speed, rather than around fruitless dichotomies like "essentialism" and "instrumentalism", which make collective identities either appear time-honoured and stable or, on the other extreme, *ad hoc* and transient, and do not take into account the many intermediate speeds of change and the changes of speed (Schlee 1989a: 236).

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[3] These terms reflect the different terminological fashions and different periods of writing rather than different realities on the ground. Often "tribes" have been renamed "ethnic groups" or more recently "communities" in order to avoid real or perceived pejorative undertones.

[4] This, of course, requires some qualifications. The Ajuran were originally classified by the British as Oromo ("Galla" in the language of the day) and later as Somali (Schlee 1989a: 39–51; Schlee 2007). A group called Gelible for a long time had an unclear affiliation, at times to the Degodia, at times to the Ajuran (Schlee 1989a: 43). In postcolonial times, the Sakuye have largely disappeared and reappeared in the national census, reflecting their relationship to the Boran, of whom they at times claimed to be a part or from whom they claimed to differ at other times. Still, these twentieth century changes are negligible in comparison to the changes caused by the Oromo expansion in the sixteenth century.

While the sixteenth century in northern Kenya and southern Ethiopia appears to have been one of rapid change of ethnic identities,[5] the same cannot be said about the twentieth century. In spite of dramatic historical changes, like colonisation and de-colonisation, the list of ethnic groups from the beginning of the twentieth century reads much the same as today's.[6] But the character of ethnicity and its political and economic implications have changed a lot. The most important form of change, and the root of other changes, has been the territorialisation of ethnicity. Groups that did not have bounded territories now have them.

"Territorialised ethnicity" refers to the same phenomenon as "ethnic territoriality". The two concepts do not differ in their denotation but in their derivation. An ethnic group is territorialised and as a result of that process territorial, in contrast to those groups whose identity is not tied to a particular piece of land, but only to a professional specialisation, a genealogy, a religious affiliation, or the many other things which can exist without a fixed locality or a bounded surface[7] and can serve as social identification. The contrast here is between territorial and not territorial. "Ethnic territoriality", however, starts with the presence of a territory or territories and contrasts different forms of identification, which justify a claim to such a territory. Ethnic territoriality stands in conceptual contrast to (but, of course, may be combined with) individual ownership, the nation state, and the emotional and ideological attachments to the Fatherland that come along with it, combinations of personal rule with religious affiliation (cf. *cuius regio, eius religio* – the famous principle of the Westphalian Peace) and many other relationships between people and land, which are of a possessive and potentially exclusive nature and therefore justify the term territorial.

Ethnicity as such has no territorial implications, and, in this regard, the concept of an 'ethnic group' differs from that of a 'nation'. To say that the Kurds are the world's largest nation without a state implies a problem. The implication is either that they should have a state or, as some fear, that they might succeed in getting one. Nationhood implies the claim to (territorial) statehood or at least to regional autonomy within a state as the next best thing.

With ethnic groups it is different. Where we find professional specialisation along ethnic lines, as in West Africa, ethnicity can only have limited territorial implications or none at all. Professional specialisation implies having to meet on the market place. It cannot be combined with a high level of territorial separation. And there are other examples of ethnic groups, defined with reference to other shared features, that do not possess territories or claim them. So, instead of a correlation or close dialectic between ethnicity and territoriality, we find variation in the ways in which and the extent to which they go together.

In this sense, the relationship between ethnicity and territoriality resembles that between ethnicity and language, which I have summarised elsewhere (Schlee 2008a: 99–103). At one extreme, there are cases in which the members of an ethnic group, well defined by many other features, do not share a language, and, at the other extreme, there are ethnic groups that are defined almost exclusively by their language. In between, there are many other possible relationships between language and ethnicity. The same kind of conceptual logic applies to the relationship between ethnicity and territoriality.

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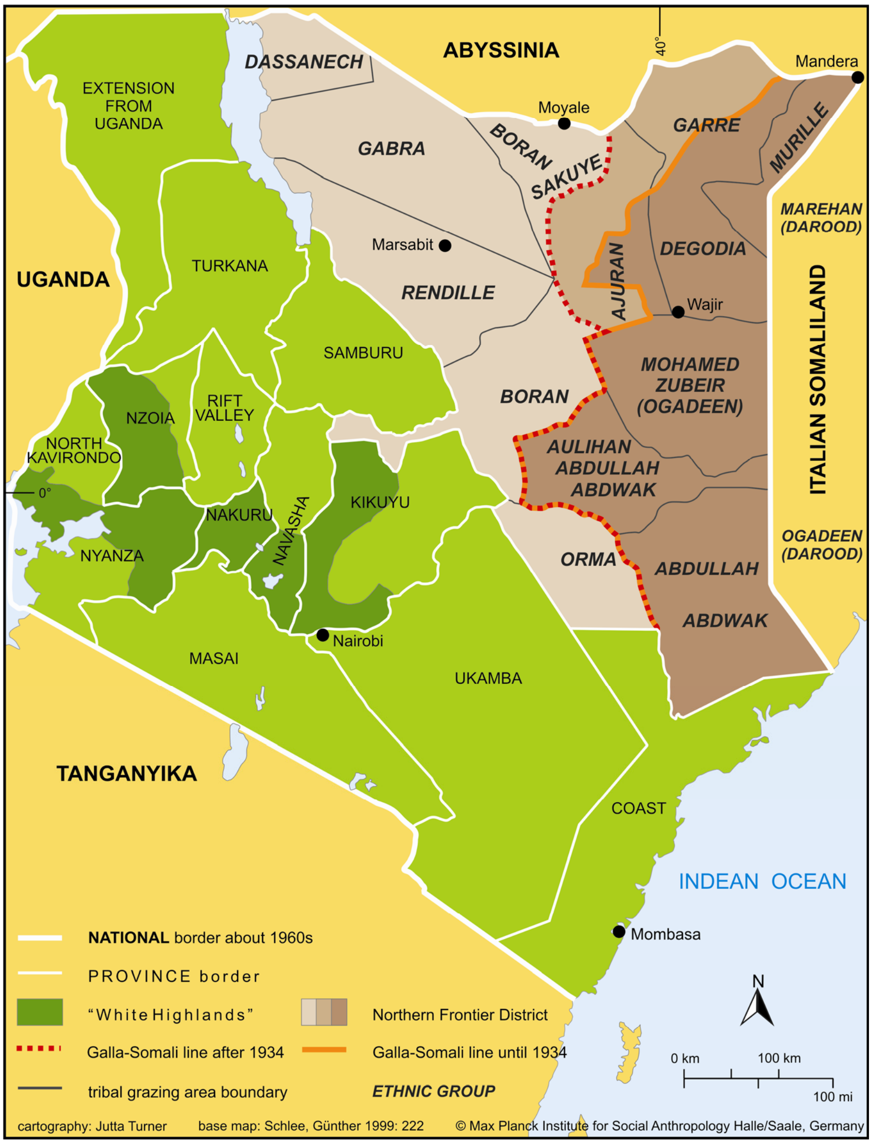
[5] For fuller accounts see Schlee (1989a: 35–42), Mohammed Hassen (1994), Merid Walda Aregay (1971).

[6] This is in contrast to other areas of Kenya. The "Kalenjin" are known to have emerged only in colonial times as a combination of linguistically vaguely related groups and have been very much tied together by national electoral politics since then (Van Nahl 1999), and the "Bantu of North Kavirondo" (Wagner 1949) have evolved into the Luhya. No need to mention Ethiopia as another contrast. There, in response to a national policy favouring ethnic groups, new ethnic groups and subgroups form and campaign for recognition continuously.

[7] See Schlee (2008a) for a systematic treatment of forms of identification and the conditions under which they take place.

The Emergence of Territorialised Ethnicity in Northern Kenya

In northern Kenya, territorialised ethnicity and thereby ethnic territoriality have emerged in their present form in the colonial period and have been greatly politicised since. The British order was a territorial order. After set-backs during World War I, when British forces were needed more urgently in Tanganyika (now Tanzania) to fight the Germans, the British managed to establish a degree of territorial control in northern Kenya. They delineated territories for each of the pastoral groups, as they perceived them as such. Soon the tracks, which led from different sides to Wajir, and a number of cut lines in the vegetation served as boundaries between "tribal grazing areas". If a herd was found on the wrong side of a line, ten percent of it were taken as a fine. To the pastoralists this did not make much sense, except that some of them thought that these ten percent constituted the livelihood of the British, who, like all of us, need to live off something.


ABYSSINIA
40°
Mandera
DASSANECH
Moyale
GARRE
MURILLE
EXTENSION FROM UGANDA
GABRA
BORAN
SAKUYE
MAREHAN (DAROOD)
Marsabit
DEGODIA
AJURAN
UGANDA
TURKANA
RENDILLE
Wajir
ITALIAN SOMALILAND
SAMBURU
MOHAMED ZUBEIR (OGADEEN)
RIFT VALLEY
BORAN
NZOIA
NORTH KAVIRONDO
AULIHAN ABDULLAH ABDWAK
0°
KIKUYU
NAKURU
NAVASHA
OGADEEN (DAROOD)
NYANZA
ORMA
ABDULLAH
ABDWAK
Nairobi
MASAI
UKAMBA
TANGANYIKA
COAST
INDEAN OCEAN
Mombasa
NATIONAL border about 1960s
PROVINCE border
"White Highlands"
Northern Frontier District
Galla-Somali line after 1934
Galla-Somali line until 1934
tribal grazing area boundary
ETHNIC GROUP
N
0 km
100 km
100 mi
cartography: Jutta Turner
base map: Schlee, Günther 1999: 222
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Map 1:
Boundaries in colonial Kenya, based on Schlee (1999) and Farah (1993).

This form of control based on bounded surface areas and lines on the map differed greatly from earlier systems. Before the British, the Boran had established hegemony[8] over much of northern Kenya. Many groups of lowland camel pastoralists, who spoke Somali-like dialects or had spoken such dialects before they adopted the Boran variety of Oromo as their form of speech, brought them regular presents to their ritual centres in what now is Ethiopia, from an economic perspective a very light burden, and received a blessing from the *qallu*, the ritual head of one or the other of the two moieties to which the Boran and all of their allies were associated. Also the age-grading systems (*gada* systems) of some groups took chronological clues from each other and involved ritual exchange (Schlee 1998a). Before the Boran influence, these groups of Lowland East Cushitic[9] speakers had their own, independent *gada* type generation set systems that were – along with many camel-oriented rituals and a specific calendar – part of an earlier Proto-Rendille-Somali (PRS) complex of cultural features (Schlee 1989a). This picture of social relations is made up of both difference (Somali/Somaloid/Oromo speakers; cattle/camel husbandry, distinction along interethnic hierarchy) and interaction (co-residence in the same or adjacent areas, sharing of water points, economic exchange and ritual interdependence). It was a system organised along differences without separation. This interethnic system, the Boran-centred alliance known as *Worr Libin* (People of Libin), also had a military aspect. The Boran, jointly with their camel-keeping allies, repelled the Laikipiak Maasai who had ventured far into northern Kenya.

The Laikipiak Maasai are well known from the accounts of the Maasai civil war by early European travellers. These Laikipiak scattered after their defeat by the other Maasai (Thomson 1968 [1885]), and a large body of their warriors moved north from what is now the Laikipia District (with the district capital Nanyuki, 200 km north of Nairobi), took the whole of Rendille, people and livestock, as their spoil and divided them up among themselves, leading a brief and happy life as their superior force enabled them to do. However, when they wanted to move the whole Rendille society and make them follow to elsewhere, the Rendille warriors who had been hiding in the bush chased them away in a bloody battle.[10] The Laikipiak then moved north, raiding cattle and driving large herds along, until they were beaten by the *Worr Libin* cavalry near Buna.[11] A British compiler[12] of the accounts of "some old men" gives 1876 as the probable date of the battle and Korondile as its place.[13] Whatever the exact location might have been, it is clear that these Maasai had ventured far into the Boran heartland. The father of our informant Waako D'iriba[14] took part in this battle, and Ido Robleh, the Ajuran leader, is also reported to have borne "the mark of an arrow got near Buna in one fight with them".[15] Apart from the Boran and the

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[8] Some authors (e.g. Kassam 2006) have taken the term hegemony to imply an accusation against the Boran and have regarded it as offensive. I have quite deliberately chosen this term rather than domination or colonialism, because it implies a superior status among others who, to some extent, are equals and situationally regarded as such and it is not based on direct administration or the constant use of violence. I still find it quite appropriate to describe the relationship between the Boran and the other member groups of the *Worr Libin* alliance, implying neither too much nor too little inequality (Schlee 2008b).

[9] Lowland East Cushitic languages comprise Rendille and other Somali languages (Maxatiri, Maymay), Arbore, Afar, Saho as well as Oromo.

[10] Common Rendille tradition. Cf. Grum (1976), Schlee and Sahado (2002: 113).

[11] Conversation with Waako D'iriba, Boran, Marsabit, April 1980.

[12] Kenyan National Archives, *Moyale Station Report*, microfilm Reel No. 43, 1917.

[13] Paul Robinson (1985) has collected the names of years used by the Gabra. Here we find the Wednesday year "Arba Gabbri Urbur dat", explained as the withdrawal of the Gabra from the Laikipiak northwards to a place called Urbur, for 1879 and "Kamis Kibiyi basan" the Thursday year when the Laikipiak were chased, for 1880.

[14] Conversation with Waako D'iriba, Boran, Marsabit, April 1980.

[15] "Notes on the traditional history of Wajir tribes," *Wajir Political Record Book* Vol. II, Kenyan National Archives, compiled 1939 from accounts by Ido Robleh, Dima Abdi, other elders and from other sources. The "Korei" (Korre = Maasai and related peoples) here are not specified as Laikipiak.

Ajuran, the other member peoples of the *Worr Libin*, the Garre and Gabra[16] were also involved in these fights and the subsequent pursuit of the intruders and temporary solidarity was extended even to the Rendille, who stood outside this alliance.[17] The only people who did not join the Boran in these fights were Warra Daya, who had had a bloody conflict with the other *Worr Libin* in the preceding decades and had withdrawn to the south[18] where the Daarood Somali were to continue their decimation. Their remnants can be found among the Tana Orma.

As far as the Somaloid associate peoples of the *Worr Libin* are concerned, we can say that they were strongly engaged on the side of the Boran in the Laikipiak war, as they had been earlier in the Boran/Warra Daya conflict. The wars of the nineteenth century thus show that the alliance was then strong and functioning.[19] We have had a closer look at these wars to ascertain that there was an accumulation of power, that there was an organisation, that there was ritual and military cooperation in this pre-colonial pluriethnic society. All this was achieved without districts and provinces.

How then were the *Worr Libin* organised? All we know is that they did not have boundaries delineating surface areas. Even the words for ‘boundary’ in the local languages are loanwords from other languages (Schlee 1990, 1994). So what do we know about the spatial organisation of this cluster of peoples in the absence of boundaries? In the wet season, people and herds must have dispersed and mixed widely, but in the dry season the Boran certainly exercised some control over the access to pastures by controlling wells. No thirsty herd could be refused water once, but the people in control of the water management (*herega*), the ‘father of the well’ (*abba eela*) and those who acted on his behalf, could certainly arrange the watering schedule in a way that made it unattractive for strangers to come back. Another factor that influenced the distribution of people and livestock on the ground was war. War did not have territorial expansion as its aim. Stated aims were the acquisition of the honoured killer’s status and taking livestock as loot. Not all pastoralist groups were members of the Boran-centred alliance. Those who were not better stayed at a distance. Warfare may well have had territorial effects, even though its primary objectives were different.

The only form of direct control of grazing (rather than through regulating access to wells) seems to have been applied to a category of land called *kaloo* in Boran. With reference to Boran villages on the foothills of the Ethiopian highlands, where some agriculture is possible, Bassi (2005: 145) describes *kaloo* plots as small, “fenced or marked with branches”, “close to villages and often adjacent to cultivated fields, and meant for ‘calves’ in case the dry season goes on longer than expected.” The calves in question are those which belong to those few cows one keeps in the settlement for milk supply as long as conditions permit. For the far ranging *fora* or satellite herds in the care of young men there is no reserved grazing. With the advancing dry season they would move wherever conditions are still most bearable.

Leus (2006: 383) traces the term *kaloo* to the Guji usage of the Oromo language. The Guji are another subgroup of the Oromo, bordering the Boran in the north. The relationship between the two groups has been hostile for long periods (Tadesse Berisso 2009) and the Guji have recently expanded at the expense of the Boran. Leus explains that the Boran adopted the *kaloo* reserves only in the *gada* period of Jaldesa Liban (1960–68), because before there used to be plenty of grass and no need for *kaloo yabbiyee* (grazing reserved for calves) or *kaloo haawwicha* (grazing reserved for breeding cows).

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[16] No information on Sakuye participation.

[17] Conversation with Boru Galgallo, Odoola, Gabra.

[18] Kenyan National Archives, *Wajir Political Record Book* Vol. II, 1939, Schlee 1992a.

[19] As this is the only point I wanted to illustrate here, I refrain from unfolding the rich and vivid traditions about the Laikipiak war, which have been collected from all over northern Kenya.

The term *kaloo* is roughly equivalent to the Rendille term *liig*. *Liig* is the area immediately around a camp, where the kids, lambs, and (camel) calves graze during the day, while they are separated from their mother animals that moved further away with the adult and adolescent stock. Rendille would refrain from pasturing their animals too close to settlements or other settlements. The *liig* zone, however, is neither clearly defined nor marked.

Such rudiments of directly controlled reserved pasture rights are on a much smaller scale than the pasture areas of ethnic groups which are the topic of the present paper. These latter have never been marked or delineated.

The British system of formally laid down and mapped tribal grazing areas, though pastoralists did their best to circumvent it, was in stark contrast to this earlier system, in which pasture was, if at all, controlled only indirectly through water. Use rights were negotiated and contested, peacefully or violently, among equals, with the Boran being somewhat “more equal” than the others, and not controlled by non-pastoral people with government functions.

“Scientific” Considerations for Imposing Boundaries and the Economic Reality

The British had scientific reasons for what they were doing. They were convinced that the land was “overgrazed” and therefore exposed to “erosion”. Apart from restricting all groups to “their own” areas, so that the consequences of over-utilisation would be suffered by those who caused it, “de-stocking” was thought to be the remedy. Chenevix Trench (1993) describes the disastrous “sheet erosion” caused by “overgrazing” and the beneficial effects of colonial policies in Samburu. But already Spencer’s (1973: 180ff.) account shows a much more complex picture and can by no means be read as a success story.

Rapid environmental decline seems, however, to have been a dogma among expatriate scholars as well as African bureaucrats and has justified numerous studies and all sorts of interventions. For someone like me, who has visited the same areas in northern Kenya for over thirty years, the empirical base for these assumptions seems to be lacking. Most areas look roughly the same as ever, and localised destruction of the vegetation through overuse or trampling seems to be due to lack of mobility and the concentration of stock around major settlements rather than the open character of the range and “the tragedy of the commons”.

Apart from such localised forms of vegetation destruction that impairs re-growth, the regeneration of pasture in northern Kenya seems to depend exclusively on the highly erratic rainfall. While the British thought that there was an equilibrium between herbivores and pasture, which needs to be maintained by limiting grazing pressure to the “carrying capacity” to guarantee the re-growth of the same plant biomass next year, range ecologists have since then found that in settings like semi-arid northern Kenya the growth of plants in one year has little to do with how many animals fed on them in the preceding year. Environments in which this is the case have been called “disequilibrium environments”, maybe somewhat unfortunately, because it really is about the absence of an equilibrium, not the presence of a disequilibrium (Behnke, Scoones and Kerven 1993).

Another “scientific” reason for restricting nomadic movements was livestock epidemics. All across Kenya there was a quarantine belt separating the nomadic north from the “developed” part, and even today it frequently occurs that livestock transports from one district to the other are forbidden. In many cases, however, the same diseases were endemic on both sides of the barrier, making the scientific reason of quarantines questionable. Looking for an explanation, one should not forget the broader picture. Pastoralists are not the only producers of livestock in Kenya. There was, and to some extent is, a White Settler economy based on large ranches (Raikes 1981; Schlee 1990, 1998b).

Ranching is another form of extensive livestock production, essentially not so different from pastoralism. I cannot think of any improvements of livestock production brought by ranching, which could not also have been brought about by improving pastoralism. Those who think that there is a fundamental difference in the form of production because ranchers are sedentary while nomads are nomadic are mistaken. The ranchers soon found that their holdings, immense as they may be as individual properties, were too small to balance the risk of rain falling in one area and not in another and were soon exchanging pasture rights across the country, effectively reverting to nomadism. The main difference is that ranches and the open range belong to different categories of people. Ranches are used for a white family with two or three children who go to expensive boarding schools in England. The Maasai, from whom the land was taken, used to raise hundreds of low cost children on the same land and also produced a surplus for the market. Why appropriation by a few should be better for the national economy than appropriation by many is difficult to see.

It is obvious that the quarantine regulations shielded the ranch sector against competition from pastoralists to the benefit of white settlers and later, after independence, of the new elites who took over many of their ranches. The quarantines were part of a dual livestock economy with a low price and a high price sector. Livestock was accorded different grades, and African livestock was accorded the poor grades and to be bought up by ALMO, the African Livestock Marketing Organisation, the colonial precursor of the KMC, the Kenyan Meat Commission. The “auctions” carried out by these organisations did not deserve that name, because prices per kilogramme of live weight were fixed at a low level.

The colonial literature is full of laments about the irrationality of the pastoralists, who did not want to sell and kept unproductive animals for sentimental reasons or for prestige. The facts are that no group of pastoralists in Kenya has ever been self-sufficient. They always engaged in barter for agricultural produce, they had glass beads from as far as Venice or Bohemia and cowry shells from the Indian Ocean. Whether or not they sold animals always depended on the price, and not to sell for an artificially fixed low price should have been recognised as quite rational also by these colonial writers and as the same as their own market behaviour would have been in a similar situation.[20]

Still, although obviously defying an economic logic, the territorial regulations imposed by the colonial government were phrased in economic terms and in terms of “development”. Galaty (2009) cites a number of reports and plans from the 1950s, which linked land ownership to agrarian development and justified the implementation of land registration in the Kikuyu reserves in the same way as the demarcation of sectional boundaries and later group ranches among the Maasai.

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[20] For examples of stereotypes about pastoralists see Schlee (1989b: 398 ff.).

The Progress of Territorialised Ethnicity in Kenya since Independence

Kenyan Independence in 1963 came with lot of rhetoric of African solidarity against the former colonial masters, nation building,[21] and unity. Yet it was clear that the ruling party was based on earlier regional and tribal organisations and that the civil service was dominated by the Kikuyu, the tribe of the president (Kioli 2009). Both the colonial order and the African opposition within it had shaped Kenyan politics along ethnic lines, and ethnicity was well on its way to acquire its present territorial and exclusionist form. In the pastoral north, people had been misled by a referendum held by the British to believe that joining the newly independent Somalia was an option. The results of the referendum made the newly founded independent Republic of Kenya aware of the lack of "Kenyan" feelings among some of its (so far marginalised and unnoticed) citizens, and it moved in with its armed forces. The *shifta*[22] war lasted for most of the sixties. Free movements of people were prevented by insecurity emanating from the insurgency and the counterinsurgency. The Sakuye were concentrated in camps, guarded by the army, where they lost all of their livestock. Other groups ranged as far as they dared. Far from overcoming the colonial heritage, local chiefs have since continued to invoke old colonial boundaries in order to keep "intruders" off.

Still, as late as the 1980s, ethnic politics were not part of the public discourse. Ethnicity figured as the interpretation of others and the hidden agenda. To accuse others of pursuing pursuit of ethnic or tribal interests was part of the critical discourse. That changed in the 1990s.

In the late years of President Moi's term, Abdullahi Shongolo and I analysed a number of conflicts between pastoralists in northern Kenya and also collected press cuttings to identify reactions by both the wider public and the government and forces going out from these external agents, which may have had an influence on these conflicts between pastoralists. It was quite clear to us, and remains so retrospectively, that the late nineties and the years around 2000 in Kenya were a period in which ethnic territoriality dispensed with all sorts of excuses and came out in the open (Schlee and Shongolo, in preparation).

Again, local patterns of conflict among pastoralists in the north were influenced by national politics or regional politics in other parts of Kenya. In order to mobilise the government for their own causes, local leaders had to find out which degree of ethnicisation had become usual and subsequently legitimate elsewhere. There the ethnicisation of politics and the tolerance towards or even promotion of ethnic violence proceeded in giant steps, and the idea that every group had a homeland and the right to expel minorities by force gained ground.

Here, global forces come into the picture. As long as superpower rivalry was a major factor in a bipolar world, i.e., prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, human rights, civic rights, and democracy were not a major issue in Africa. Dictatorships and one-party systems were tolerated as long as they were viewed as dependable allies. The early 1990s, however, brought a completely new political climate, one that favoured, nay demanded, democratisation and multi-party systems throughout Africa. In Kenya, the Moi government introduced multi-party democracy under pressure from the International Community and the internal opposition. Moi had predicted that multi-party democracy under Kenyan conditions would lead to ethnic violence. This was not implausible, and Moi –, who, after all, had the power to make his predictions come true – turned out to be right with very little effort on his part. Before the 1992 elections and the ones in 1997, there were the “Rift Valley clashes” in which Kikuyu settlers were targeted by people claiming the region as their ancestral land (often neglecting yet older claims by the Maasai). (Kioli 2009; Mutie 2009; Shongolo 2009.)

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[21] The term "nation building" to denote a political programme makes clear that there was no nation when Kenya was founded as an independent state. While national emancipation in Europe (as in the formation of new states after World War I in accordance with Wilson's Fourteen Points) assumed the existence of nations prior to the point of time when they achieved statehood of their own, Kenya at independence had the shell of a "nation state" yet to be filled with a "nation", a process some people are still waiting to occur. It is clearly a case in which the state precedes the nation.

[22] Amharic for "bandit".

Reading the Kenyan press in the 1990s, I was often astonished how openly people claimed territorial control of given areas in complete defiance of the existing law and with complete impunity. Members of Parliament (MPs) threatened to prevent political rivals from visiting their constituencies. The press reported such statements without any explicit negative comments.

Electoral politics in northern Kenya made use of group rights which were granted or denied. In the materials collected by Abdullahi Shongolo (Schlee and Shongolo, in preparation) there are cases in which MPs favoured the admission of pastoralists moving in from elsewhere into their district, hoping to get the votes of these groups, or practiced a violent rhetoric of exclusion in order to gain the vote of those opposing the newcomers. All this is based on the assumption that there are group rights to specific territories.

There can be no doubt that “[d]eterritorialization is one of the central forces of the modern world” as Appadurai (1991: 193) pointed and exemplified by the movement of people and imaginations a long time ago. That force has continued to be at work since, and Appadurai’s findings have become even truer. However, one can also find developments in the opposite direction. What happens in northern Kenya and Ethiopia to important aspects of peoples lives (the administrative order, land rights, even safety) is not deterritorialisation but territorialisation. A global, far-travelled model, the nation-state, here applied *en miniature*, leads to territorialised forms of ethnicity.

Soon after apartheid was overcome in South Africa, its principles have gained ground in Kenya, not between different ‘races’, but between Africans. They have privileges in their own homelands and reduced rights in the homelands of other Africans, if danger for life and limb does not prevent them from venturing there at all. Is this where Kenya actually wants to go, after denouncing apartheid in South Africa till it came to an end there? If there was a government willing and able to guarantee peace and justice and to organise sustainable resource use on another basis than ethnic subdivisions and ethnic exclusivity, the development towards apartheid could be reversed.

Ecological Constraints, Perpetuated Inequalities, and the Legitimacy of the State

The basic problem of the northern lowlands is the same as that of the rest of Kenya and of many other African countries. State institutions, including the law, no longer command loyalty. The political class themselves have come to regard the state as a source of private appropriation. There is a spiral of corruption: everyone makes sure that he does not steal less than his competitor. Politicians are expected to receive kick-backs, to misuse public resources, and to distribute a part of their loot among their co-ethnics. They are blamed if they do not do “enough for their own people”. I do not know how to reverse this spiral. But let us suppose it could be done, let us suppose there could be a new start somehow. Suppose policies could be formulated, which would actually be implemented and not converted into money by officials who receive payments for tolerating their circumvention – which policies would we then wish to formulate for the pastoral areas of northern Kenya and the Horn of Africa?

Loyalty needs to be paid for. Even kings "by the grace of God" had to give something in return for the loyalty of their subjects: they had to protect them, speak justice, and strike coins of stable value to facilitate their transactions with each other. The same applies to institutions on all levels, including that of the state. If you wish people to feel and act as Kenyans or Ethiopians, participation in Kenyan or Ethiopian institutions needs to pay out for them. The key institution of integration into a modern nation state is the school. In 1984, in El Das, Wajir District, no geometry was taught because too few parents had been able to buy the mathematical set for their children at KSh 40. If pupils from that primary school wished to go on to secondary school, they would lack the points from a whole sub-discipline of mathematics. This is just one example I happened to find in my field notes. I am sure examples from the quarter of a century which has elapsed since are myriad. The situation does not seem to improve. The quality of teaching in northern Kenya leads to joblessness and criminality in Nairobi and elsewhere. But even those who by miraculous circumstances acquire good school leavers' certificates can no longer regard them as entry tickets to employed work. Education no longer holds the promise of integration.

School leavers often cannot even be re-integrated into the local livestock economy, the economic basis of the area. They lack the nomadic education. To be a nomadic herdsman requires to know vast areas of land like the palm of one's hand, to know many plants which are fodder for the animals or poisonous, or which are useful for making tools. It requires familiarity with the behaviour of predators and parasites. To be a leader among herdsmen also requires knowledge of history and the local equivalent of sociology. One needs to be aware of interethnic clan relationships, wherever they exist, or of other far reaching relationships (distant origins, religious ties), to be able to appeal to them in times of war or drought. One needs to keep track of the stock partnerships of one's father and grandfather, of the animals they gave out as gifts and loans, in order to be able to claim animals in return. To acquire this knowledge, the children of nomads need to stay in touch with their families. And that should not be achieved by restricting the movement of households to a narrow radius around permanent settlements where a school can be found, as is frequently the case, leading to fast deterioration of the pastures within that reach. The solution would be to provide formal education, reading, writing, mathematics and the rest, on a mobile basis. Rather than building classrooms, a lorry should be given to a school and it should move with the nomads, the way Qur'an schools have always done, even without lorries. Thus one would be able to train the future producers of milk and meat and contribute to their integration into the national economy and society, rather than producing school leavers for an urban job market, which cannot absorb them.

In by far the largest part of the lowlands there is no basis for sedentarisation[23]. Agriculture is not possible, and in many of the mushrooming rural towns and trade centres of northern Kenya people either live on hand-outs or trade that is split into smaller and smaller portions as more people move into this sector without an increase in the overall buying power[24]. Other people are miserable servants of small-scale traders or underpaid teachers. There is a constant demand for stimulants like beer and *miraa* (*khat, qat*, *qaad, catha edulis*), but even that is limited because there is little wealth generated locally to acquire these or other goods. True, some people receive a salary. But how much money does a teacher have to drown his frustrations?

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[23] This is not meant to imply environmental determinism. No environment imposes just one specific way of life. In an arid environment such as northern Kenya, one can also work in tourism, mining, software development or many other branches, although many of these options might be taken up more easily by people other than those who populate northern Kenya currently. But, if one limits the discussion to food production, mobile forms of animal production seems to be the only option, apart from hunting and gathering (on ecological variations cf. Roba and Witsenburg 2005, 2008).

To enable people to have productive lives and to help them out of the sedentarisation trap, education needs to be provided in a mobile form. What is true for education also applies to other services like health and security. Basic health care should be put on wheels.[25]

Insecurity leads to overgrazing around the urban centres and in all those areas to where people withdraw. There, due to trampling and overuse of the most palatable species, pasture regeneration is actually impaired in such a way that, come the rain, pasture production is less than proportional to precipitation. On the other hand insecurity leads to vast tracts of land becoming no-man's land between the grazing areas of the opposed groups, areas where no one dares to go. There, undergrazing also leads to the destruction of pastures, to bush encroachment and the invasion by parasites of all sizes, from lions to tsetse flies, which find cover in the bush. For a sustainable form of nomadic land use in these spots threatened by degradation, more animals need to move away for longer periods, mobility needs to be brought back to former levels, and for that purpose security needs to be brought to where the vegetation is. Away from the concentrations of population, where pasture regeneration solely depends on precipitation due to the erratic spatial distribution of rainfall, the only rational system of utilisation is characterised by opportunistic (rather than periodic and following regular circuits), fast, and wide-ranging mobility. The policies towards pastoralists have to take these natural givens into account.

Even if the government can be persuaded to provide services on a mobile basis, that would not be sufficient. The nomadic population must group itself into units, which are sufficiently large to absorb these inputs. Not every hamlet of a dozen households can be accompanied by a teacher and a health worker, but it should be possible to provide units of about two-hundred houses (mat-covered tents) with these services and also with some administration police and enough registered guns and counted (and to be accounted for!) ammunition to deter raiders or deal with them appropriately. The self-administration of such units should work hand in hand with the public administration and other such units to coordinate grazing management and maintain mobility and security. With this degree of co-ordination, it should also be possible to limit grazing pressure around wells and bore-holes. Without it, water development often has adverse effects. The vegetation around new bore-holes tends to deteriorate fast. Therefore, regulation is required, but the system needs to be kept flexible, so as not to interfere with basic liberties. It must be possible for individuals, households, or lineages to leave pastoral units and join others.

Critics of development intervention have often stressed that the "traditional" systems of pastoral production are those that work the best. This may be true when one compares them with systems which suffer the effects of misconceived development intervention,[26] but it does not mean that the "traditional" systems are the best of all possible systems. Mobile animal husbandry has become associated with backwardness. Often, this backwardness has been romanticised. The Maasai and the Hima are among the preferred objects of photography because of their "archaic" cultures, but now we should come to regard this image of nomadism as outdated. Modern technology has overcome the stage when it required a sedentary form of life. Portable computers and satellite dishes enable us to communicate with the rest of the world wherever we are. If a mobile education unit wants to have a library, it no longer needs an extra lorry for the books. A substantial library can be stored in the memory of a computer or be carried along on a couple of CDs, with internet access even that is not necessary. Modern communication technology could enormously facilitate the provision of mobile services, including education, health, and security. That nomads are still lured into town by the sedentary provision of these services, is an anachronism. To become "civilised" used to involve to become settled. The place of modernity was the city. All this no longer needs to be the case. Not nomadism, sedentism has become outdated.

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[24] There is a NGO and development discourse going on about "income generating strategies", "coping mechanisms", and the "ingenuity" and "agency" of impoverished, sedentarised nomads. Insofar as such traits do not necessarily increase overall production and buying power, accounts of these developments may be too optimistic. A limited market comes into being with the influx of money from outside for handicrafts produced for tourists. This is accompanied by the usual process of self-folklorisation. Miniature weapons and "traditional" bead ornaments are produced for tourists' tastes and needs.

[25] None of these recommendations are new. Similar things have been said before by numerous authors, including myself. I am just reiterating earlier recommendations, which have found their way even into a publication by the Kenyan Government (Ministry of Livestock Development), the *Kenya Range Management Handbook* (Shaabani et al. 1991, 1992a–d)

Among Kirill Istomin's helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper were some critical remarks about mobile services. He points to the history of failures of mobile education and mobile health care in the Russian north among reindeer nomads of the tundra since the 1920s. The basic reason for these failures was the dispersal of the nomads. In response to my above suggestion that the nomads should combine into units of ca. 200 households, he notes that the combined reindeer herd of such a large nomadic hamlet would not be manageable. Reindeer nomads would form groups of up to twenty households and then there would be too few children to justify the employment of a teacher who moves with them, even if one combines them all in one class. These points are perfectly valid, and I am far from propagating universal solutions.

But among the Gabra of the northern Chalbi region of Kenya, 200 households were combined into one nomadic unit in colonial times for security reasons. A camel patrol was attached to each such unit. Larger units, of course, have to move more often than smaller ones, because the pasture in their vicinity is exhausted faster, but that is what nomadism is all about. An even distribution of smaller camps over a large area would not increase the pasture but just use it up more slowly and then finish it in the entire area. It would be affordable to attach a teacher to such a unit and a health worker, who would not replace a doctor but who would considerably reduce the frequency of people having to see a doctor. Even if nomadic education under such conditions would not lead to the same school certificates in the same time as boarding schools would do, it would still provide formal education to children who would otherwise receive no formal education at all. They could also help postpone the transfer of those who want to pursue a fuller educational career to a more mature age, after acquiring some pastoral skills and some pastoral knowledge, so that the educated elites are not alienated from pastoral life and can later become useful for their own communities. Istomin also points to alternative solutions like taking teachers from ordinary schools to nomadic children during weekends or holidays or taking nomadic children to ordinary schools for such periods. Maybe one should not discuss these things as alternatives. Why not combine one with the other? The aim should be to generate as much useful knowledge as possible in combining formal education with the experience of growing up as a pastoralist.

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[26] In many cases I know, development intervention has not had any lasting effects, neither positive nor negative, and can therefore not be regarded as dangerous. A couple of years after the money was spent and the reports were written, local people were not able to identify any way in which the project had altered their way of life. For a history of development intervention in Marsabit District see Machan (1999).

In the colonial literature and among development agents, pastoral nomads have a reputation of being stubborn and conservative. The reason for this is that the innovations brought to them were not in their interest. Other innovations are. Without any outside intervention, mobile phones have spread even faster among pastoral nomads than the necessary networks. People had phones already, before the areas they lived in were adequately covered by networks and they climbed trees or hilltops to make calls. So far, they use phones only to contact relatives in town. But with adequate coverage, mobile phones and other small, portable technologies like GPS can also revolutionise herding techniques.[27] They might help to locate a lost herd rather than dying of thirst looking for it. Nomads have a good sense for things which are portable and useful. I have no worries that nomadic children will take to portable information technologies in no time and that this will open new chances for combining a pastoral way of life with knowledge about the modern world.

Education and health care thus may no longer need to be disincentives to pastoral mobility. The same applies to security considerations. The political responses to raiding and ethnic clashes (Schlee 1999; Schlee and Shongolo, in preparation) often involve the carving-up of the pastoral lands and granting rights to a given territory to a given tribe or "community", if one prefers the politically correct label. If the administration and the provision of security were actually brought to the people, on a mobile basis to a mobile population, it might no longer be necessary to enforce district boundaries which date from the colonial period. There would be more efficient means of guaranteeing peace than patrolling a boundary, which cannot be effectively patrolled anyhow. Movements could be organised to take into account the needs of pasture, water, and minerals of the livestock of one's own and the neighbouring pastoral units rather than obeying lines on the map, which were drawn generations ago and do not take into account any of these things.

The current political trend in Kenya, however, goes precisely the opposite way. Neither organisation skills nor technical innovations are used to enhance mobility and the optimal utilisation of marginal lands. On the contrary, everything is done to subdivide territories, which are already too small, into even smaller units. Prior to the last national elections in December 2007, numerous new districts were created and constituencies were about to be subdivided, a process stopped by a parliamentary committee. Subdivision at all levels was just what the political "elites" had asked for, and the government, believing to buy loyalty and support, was only too willing to comply. Kenyans at present expect this process to continue, some critically, others full of hope for their particularistic interests.

Kenyan Members of Parliament receive some of the highest salaries in the world. In addition, the newly created "Constituency Development Funds" are at their disposition. The constituency (and the MP who had won it) became the new channel of funds, replacing the district and the earlier policy, introduced by Moi in 1983, of the District Focus for Rural Development (DFRD). In this older model, a District Development Committee, chaired by the District Commissioner (DC)[28], would submit plans to the central government, which would ultimately decide (Mutie 2009). The new policy, moving away from the administrative units of the executive to those of the legislation (although the two often coincided in their geographical extension), has given the MPs the opportunity to ingratiate themselves not only with their constituencies in the wider sense (the electoral district and its population) but to specifically favour their constituencies in the narrow sense of whoever voted for them, and to discriminate against clans, lineages, or individuals who supported their rivals. Social disruption thus follows the creation of smaller and smaller "Bantustans", to take up the apartheid metaphor once more, in which specific groups and networks claim privileges at the expense of others.

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[27] For an interesting discussion of technology in connection with the potential of pastoral production cf. Dwyer and Istomin (2009).

[28] DCs are appointed by the central government and come from all over the country. The ethnic group of the incumbent president has always been overrepresented among them.

In many cases the pastoralists quite clearly perceive that it would be in their own interest to enhance the productivity or their herds by an open boundary policy and by reaching agreements with their neighbours, granting each other access to pasture and water. But few people among the more vocal and better connected "urban"[29] population seem to care about the wellbeing of the productive elements among their district population and the economic viability of their districts. The whole logic of Kenyan politics seems to be geared toward taking and distributing (keeping what one can to oneself), not producing and selling. Mobile livestock production may be the best way to use the arid half of Kenya's surface, and with all sorts of technologies becoming smaller and easier to carry, it no longer has to imply "backwardness" and lack of modern education. It is also what pastoralists are best at. But their representatives do not seem to care.

At the time of up-dating and expanding this text (July 2009) for the present publication, it appeared to me that the problems discussed in the preceding paragraphs (productivity of pastoral production for the national economy, education and political integration) are almost luxury problems. The people around me (at Korr, Laisamis District, Rendilleland) have much more basic problems. They face the almost total loss of their livestock, and even their camels are affected by the draught at a time when the dry season can be expected to drag on for another five months. There is also no guarantee that the next rainy season will actually occur and that rains, if they come, will actually fall here. Animals are dying, while people suffer malnutrition if not starvation. There have been a number of really bad years in my experience among the Rendille, 1984 being one of them, and this one is one more such year with the potential of becoming one of the worst.

This place, to where Rendille have been lured by mission handouts and stationary schools, and where they have become sedentary, neglecting even to train loading camels for the eventuality that they will have to move at one point, may turn into their destiny of an all too final sort. Even in normal years, when the camels, ewes, and goats have plenty of milk, the milk is not where the children are. With the exception of brief periods (if and when a rainy season produces enough pasture in the vicinity and for the sacrificial *sooriyo* ceremonies four times per year) the herds are kept in far away satellite camps with some young adults. These camps move hundreds of kilometres away, because, after all, ecological givens are givens. This pattern has existed for a long time (cf. Shaabani et al. 1991). The old, the married, and the children stay here, living on money from the occasional sale of livestock and from remittances from relatives who work as watchmen, mainly in Nairobi. Proceeds from livestock sales decline. The livestock is no longer fit for sale or dies in far away places. The diet of "urban" Rendille used to consist mostly of carbohydrates, maize meal for *posho*[30], and sugar (for tea) for most of the year (Roth et al. 2005: 175), and now there is not enough even of that for many, because the money to buy these items is missing. The gap is only partly filled by famine relief.

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[29] "Urban" is here used in a relative sense. The "towns" of northern Kenya are often of the size of what are villages elsewhere.

[30] *Posho* is stiff maize porridge. A variant served in Italian restaurants is known as *polenta,* the common Kenyan term is *ugali.*

In the new system, in which herds are kept in satellite camps for much longer periods than they were before, one can again observe that one form of mobility compensates for another.[31] The mobility of the animals remains roughly the same as it was before, because, after all, the animals need to go where there is pasture and water. But the movement of the settlements with the mat-covered houses is greatly reduced. At the same time, movements between satellite camps and settlements become more frequent (because the separation lasts for longer periods) and more demanding (because the satellite camps keep moving farther away). The most lamentable aspect of this separation, however, is that the milk tends to be in one place and the children in another.

Donkeys have always been used to accompany the herds of smallstock and to carry provisions and water for the herders. For transporting houses and fetching water for the hamlets, camels were used. These loading camels have now been given up. Donkeys and people have taken over the transport tasks. When a hamlet has to move for a couple of hundred metres (and that is what the range of movement has been reduced to) people put their belongings onto donkeys or use their own muscles to drag them along. The donkeys now are collapsing and many have died. To transport water to the hamlets, women take over. But the system of satellite camps with the smallstock moving in a wider radius around the waterholes than the hamlets with the houses (mat-covered tents) and families can no longer be maintained as the pasture recedes, the distance to the wells increases, and the donkeys die. The smallstock herds, which may survive to a larger extent, are those that have moved far west into Samburu District or to the vicinity of Isiolo. There they can still find pasture in a manageable distance from water points. And fortunately, the new system of territorialised ethnicity has not yet started to prevent Rendille herds from moving into neighbouring districts. The situation for Boran and Gabra, who at present would not dare to venture into each other's vicinity, is different.

The Rendille around me agree that in the old system, with the camel powered mobility of hamlets and families, they could all be with their herds, hundreds of kilometres away from here, where the situation is that of an ordinary drought, something they manage very well, instead of the present prospect of total loss of livestock and the choice between famine relief and starvation for the people.

The hyenas have left. Last year, when the livestock was healthy and tasty, hyenas made daring attacks to snatch sheep or goats from under the eyes of the herdsmen and were even a danger to people. Now the ubiquitous carcasses are hardly touched. Only the eyes are plucked out by crows. Not even vultures circle in the sky. Predators and scavengers are no longer interested in what is left of Rendille livestock production. One elder explains to me that hyenas are diviners. There are human diviners, the people of the lineage Chaule in Maasula, Ariaal, who are said to be able to converse with them. But there is no need to predict a disaster which has struck already. Diviners or not, hyenas certainly have enough common sense to go to where the situation is bearable. I never heard them advocate sedentism and territorial subdivision.

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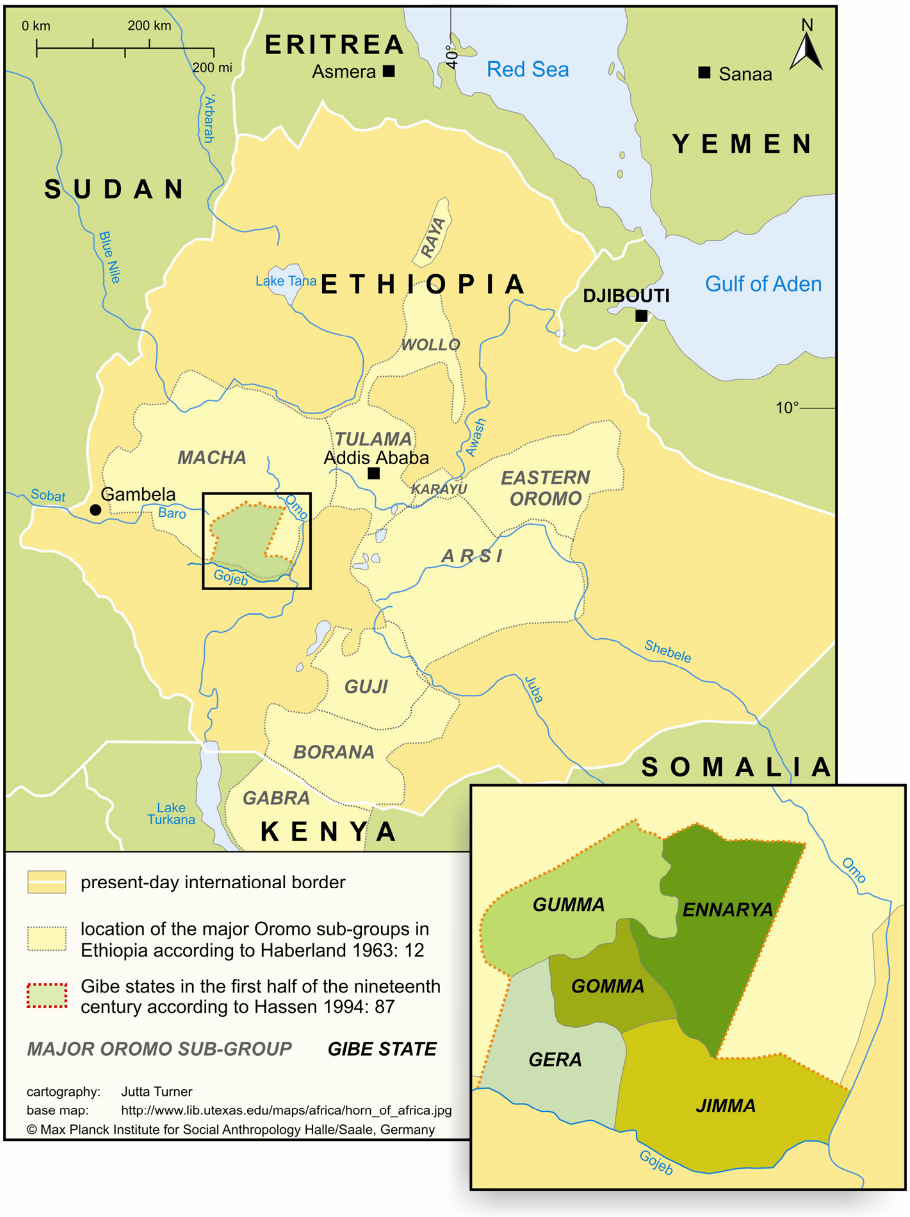
[31] On forms of pastoral movement: With the possible exception of special market niches for "organic" foods, livestock production generally requires a certain total amount of mobility, which may, however, consist in several forms of mobilisation that have the potential to replace one another. If the atoms that make up the piece of beef we are eating or the milk we are drinking had their origins written on them, we would see that they stem from several locales within a larger region or even from all around the globe. This is true for all kinds of livestock production, including nomadic forms, agropastoralism, ranching, dairy farming, and even intensive stable-feeding and zero-grazing forms of cattle keeping in peri-urban or urban settings. All forms of livestock production require a wide geographical range and a lot of mobility. There is no such thing as sedentary livestock production. In the "oily" kind of agriculture of the developed world, huge amounts of fossil hydro-carbons are used for cattle production. Primarily, it is burned in the combustion engines of ships and motor vehicles. Fodder crops are shipped across oceans. Beef may come from an animal that was born in one place, raised in another, fattened in a third and slaughtered in a fourth that is hundred of kilometres away by lorry. Its meat then ends up fresh in a wide range of supermarkets, or it may be frozen. If the latter is the case, and there is overproduction, it may be dumped again in Africa, from where some of its atoms (in the form of exported fodder plants) originally stem.

Looking Across the Border into Ethiopia: some comparative perspectives

The ethnic groups mentioned in the beginning in many cases straddle the Kenyan/Ethiopian border. There are Gabra, Boran, and Garri on both sides. It is therefore of interest to know how ethnic issues involving the same groups are dealt with in the neighbouring country, in a different political system. This situation also invites the study of mutual influences between ethnic politics on both sides of the border.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ARSI
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Juba
GUJI
BORANA
SOMALIA
GABRA
Lake Turkana
KENYA
present-day international border
location of the major Oromo sub-groups in Ethiopia according to Haberland 1963: 12
Gibe states in the first half of the nineteenth century according to Hassen 1994: 87
MAJOR OROMO SUB-GROUP
GIBE STATE
GUMMA
ENNARYA
GOMMA
GERA
JIMMA
Omo
Gojeb

cartography: Jutta Turner
base map: http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/africa/horn_of_africa.jpg
© Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology Halle/Saale, Germany

Map 2:
Location of the major Oromo sub-groups in Ethiopia according to Haberland (1963: 12) and Gibe states in the first half of the nineteenth century according to Mohammed Hassen (1994: 87).

For the southern Oromo, Haberland (1963) is still the classic reference. For the "proper" Oromo subethnic groups, the Boran, Guji, and Arsi, his work has the richness of an ethnographic and historical encyclopaedia. As Haberland (1963: 143) points out, he had no opportunity to work among the Gabra, Sakuye or Garri, the peoples we have referred to above as oromoised Somali-like, former members of the *Worr Libin* alliance or heirs of the PRS. These neighbours of the Boran, many of whom are also Oromo in the wider, linguistic sense because they speak Oromo today, are of special interest to us here, as we are dealing with the interethnic organisation of rights in pasture. Unfortunately, Haberland's information on these groups is sketchy and partly misleading. The choice of the term "vassals" for them, which stems from European feudalism, is particularly unfortunate.

In the course of their rapid expansion in the sixteenth century, the Oromo not only came to dominate southern Ethiopia and parts of what is now Somalia and Kenya. They also penetrated into western (Wollega), northern (Wollo), and eastern (Hararge) Ethiopia, just to mention the extremes of their expansion, so that today the Oromo-speaking area, since 1991 the regional state Oromia, extends through almost the whole width of Ethiopia. Much of this expansion took place in fertile highlands with developed agriculture, a mining industry, and full-fledged states in the shape of little kingdoms, which were either independent political entities or entered into changing alliances with each other to subdue and pillage each other or to enforce payment of tributes. The fullest description of this process is Mohammed Hassen's work (Hassen 1994), which focuses on the Gibe states, like kingdoms along the Gibe river (the northern end of the Omo catchment) by the names of (clockwise from the south) Jimma, Gera, Gomma, Gumma, and Ennarya (later Limmu-Ennarya). This region lies around 200 km south-west of the modern capital Addis Ababa.

One after the other, these states were taken over by Oromo. The strong men among the no longer pastoral Oromo thus ended up as kings of a sedentary population of mixed farmers, artisans, and slaves. The *gada* councils, formerly legislative assemblies that had age-set officials, who rotated in an eight-year rhythm (the seniormost among them bearing the title *abba gada*), as their executive branch, became advisory, legitimating, or purely acclamatory bodies in the service of autocratic kings.

These states, and especially the kings who did not only keep tributes for themselves but also privileges on certain types of trade and monopolies on branches of production, like musk from civet cats, for themselves, enjoyed high levels of production with surpluses for long-distance trade and high levels of consumption for the emerging upper strata at the expense of free peasants and slaves. Traces of the more egalitarian *gada* system continued to fade. Mohammed Hassen depicts court life in a Gibe state marked by a coffee and mead drinking culture with leisure and wealth consisting of gold, ivory, musk, and slaves. *Chat* (*catha edulis*) was dipped in honey before chewing. Bees also provided the wax for lighting the royal residence (Hassen 1994: 123). All this is a far cry from the pastoral life and the egalitarian generation-set based bands of warriors, which had been characteristic of the Oromo in an earlier period.

Boundaries between these petty states were only marked but not fortified. At the interior of these states and generally in the Oromo dominated parts of the Ethiopian highlands (from the sixteenth century to the Amharic conquest under Menelik in the late nineteenth century) interethnic relations were of different kinds:

1. There was adoption of peoples who submitted to the Oromo and joined their ranks. Intermarriage also led to assimilation without any trace on a very large scale (Merid Walda Aregay 1971: 316, 418–420). By far the largest part of the ancestry of the present-day Oromo must have been non-Oromo before the sixteenth century. Being Oromo proliferated as a successful model and as a political affiliation. The genes of Oromo conquerors may have spread rapidly, but not as fast as their language and their social organisation.
2. In other cases adoption did not take the form of full individual assimilation but as incorporation at the group level and the continued ascription of an inferior status (Triulzi 1996). Separate *gada* systems were set up for *gabar* (an Amharic term the Oromo had taken over) for people of dependent status (Merid Walda Aregay 1971: 416–420). In Wollega (which is the example I have heard of; there may be more) such status differences appear to endure. When I asked poor Oromo labour migrants from Wollega in the Sudan about their tribal origin, they explained to me that they were "not good Oromo" and in some cases implied that this had played a role when they had lost claims on land and were forced to migrate.
3. Apart from the rulers and the ruled, there were guests. Jabarti, Muslim traders from the Christian Amhara kingdom(s) to the north and north-east were courted by the kings who competed for market outlets for local products and luxury goods from abroad.

The Oromo states often were at war with one another. Modern nationalism, which perceives Ethiopian history as a struggle between Christianity and Islam, later "pagan" Oromo against the Christian kingdom, and yet later as a Christian "colonial" conquest of Islamic and pagan territories, leads to an anachronistic interpretation inspired by modern classifications. Since the times of the Prophet, even before the conquest of Mekka, there have been Muslims and Christians in Ethiopia and also the languages peoples speak, and their ancestral forms have a long history. But rulers, administrators, and soldiers mostly did not act on behalf of such wider religious or ethno-linguistic groups. History abounds with examples of Christian-Muslim alliances against other Christian rulers, Amhara-Oromo alliances (with the conversion of many Oromo to Islam the categories "Muslim" and Oromo had come to overlap) against other Oromo or Tigray, and of course individual soldiers or entire units of mercenaries of the same origin fighting for some political unit dominated by people of another ethnic or political affiliation.[32] One should not forget that the general who in the end conquered most Oromo lands for Menelik, Ras Gobana, was himself an Oromo, and – at the time – he was not regarded as a traitor of the Oromo cause. He was just an ordinary warlord and slaver, or maybe an extraordinary one among many lesser warlords and slavers. He has only become the proverbial traitor retrospectively, from the perspective of modern Oromo nationalism.

With regret, we have to leave the Ethiopian highlands and their fascinating history again, before they lead us too far astray from our present topic. The conclusions we can draw from them for the comparative analysis of the spatial organisation of interethnic relations in the lowlands further south are quickly drawn and can be briefly stated:

1. In the highlands, the Oromo came to rule clearly marked territorial entities. Political stratification and a sedentary mode of production developed hand-in-hand.

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[32] Examples can be multiplied. They comprise the ones cited by Merid Walda Aregay (1971: 512, 513, 571).

2. The prevalent causal factors we can discern for this development are ecological economic ones. Ecologically, the highlands permitted sedentary use of forests (coffee plantations) and mixed farming, and so the Oromo came to superimpose themselves and then to become part of a sedentary population with very clear ideas about territorial boundaries.
3. “Culture” and religion were of secondary importance in these processes. Elements of *gada* organisation persisted, but were often transformed and were no longer the basis of politics and military. Islamisation may have helped in the centralisation of power and in the weakening of *gada* institutions. It may also have provided a state ideology. But in other Ethiopian princely states the same role was played by Christianity. So, neither having a monotheistic religion nor having a particular one of them seems to have been a decisive and indispensable factor. Both in the agricultural highlands and in the pastoral lowlands we find Muslims and non-Muslims. The wide differences in the forms of political organisation and the management of space clearly result from ecological and economic factors and are only marginally affected by cultural origins[33] or religious affiliation.

The Oromo kingdoms in the Ethiopian highlands form a vivid contrast to the relationships the Boran maintained with their Somaloid neighbours further south. The latter were basically egalitarian, with a senior status for the Boran, which only ended with colonial conquest, by the Amhara north of the boundary and by the British on the southern, Kenyan side. Water points were shared, with the Boran owning key water resources and controlling them, and pasture areas overlapped, but only seasonally and partly. There were also pastures too remote from the water points or too ligneous to be of use for cattle, and it is there that the “people of the mats” (*Worr Dasse*), the Somaloid camel nomads, could stay without interfering with the cattle economy of the Boran. It is this ecological differentiation, the principle of the niche, the specialisation on different species of ruminants with different needs, which reduced competition between the different groups of pastoralists and thereby was conducive to the reduction of violence and a measure of peace. The fact that this specialisation is now frequently reversed by Boran acquiring camels, Gabra taking up cattle husbandry, etc. does not augur well for peace (cf. Schlee 1989a: 51; 2009: 207 on “niche”). We may summarise the difference between Oromo kingdoms and Oromo/non-Oromo pastoral systems by characterising the latter as much less hierarchical and as not based on the direct control of territories in the sense of bounded areas of the surface of the earth. Territoriality or possessiveness in a wider sense have been attached to routes, holy sites (Schlee 1990; 1992b), and water points.

The histories of Ethiopia and Kenya differ significantly. Here we can only enumerate a few salient points. Ethiopia is the only African power ever to have beaten a regular European invasion army. (The Italians at Adwa in 1896; and conversely Italy is the only European nation ever to lose a conventional war against an African country.) For a long time, Ethiopia was not colonised. (Its critics say it even became a colonial power of its own.) This is how, not only for the Rastafarians but for the Pan-African and African liberation movement in general, it became the symbol for African independence. The Ethiopian colonial experience with Italy, in the end under Mussolini, was late, short, and brutal (1936–1943). In contrast, Kenya was first a ‘protectorate’ for many decades, then a colony, and in its more attractive parts a settler colony. One would therefore expect the exposure to European models of statehood to be much stronger in the Kenyan case.

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[33] According to Haberland, the Oromo, before their descent into the lowlands, may have been mixed farmers. The Oromo lowland pastoralists who penetrated the highlands in the sixteenth century may thus only have reverted to an earlier way of life (Haberland 1963: 5, 774; Mohammed Hassen 1994: 4).

Ethiopia has undergone a socialist revolution in 1974, with the subsequent elimination fights between the revolutionaries, purges and all. In 1991, the socialist dictator was ousted.[34] The new regime, the core of which was composed of former separatists from the TPLF (Tigrayan People's Liberation Front) under the new name EPRDF (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front) adopted a policy of ethnic federalism. In Kenya, by contrast, transitions were mostly non-violent. The Mau Mau Uprising and its suppression by the British were brutal, but did not lead directly to independence in 1963. It was the result of negotiations with more moderate elements. Since independence, as we have seen above, political discourses stressed nation-building and national unity. While Ethiopia adopted a constitution in 1994, which stressed ethnic federalism and ethnic self-determination including the right of secession,[35] the dominant discourse in Kenya was still one of universal citizenship as Kenyans and against "tribalism".

In view of all these differences, it is surprising to see how similar a role ethnicity plays now in both countries. The only difference appears to be that, in Ethiopia, ethnicity has been the official organising principle since 1991, while in Kenya it has grown into that role unofficially but with the collusion of many people. Why is this so? One factor seems to be that ethnicity, with its variants "indigenous rights", "minority rights", "culture", "cultural defence", etc. is riding on a wave of legitimacy world-wide. Not surprisingly, after the Second World War, nationalism, *Volkstum* (peoplehood), territorial claims based on ethnicity, and the like had been discredited and raised suspicion if not aversion. Modernist discourses against traditionalism, parochialism, and tribalism added to this effect. This obviously has changed since the 1970s. Ethnicity had once again become a good and perfectly legitimate thing. Religion has gone through similar ups and downs. Not too long ago it was regarded as a pre-modern relic that, at the most, had a place in one's private life, but since then it has re-gained its public role and its legitimacy as a point of political identification. Crusaders and Jihadists from the radical fringes of their respective communities are presently engaged in a process of verbal escalation unheard of since the conquest of Constantinople. These ups and downs follow a global tidal rhythm, and they seem to affect remote areas like southern Ethiopia and northern Kenya in the same way, accounting for some of the similarities we find in the two places.

Of course there have also been direct influences by people and ideas moving across the border. In the 1920s, the British had the idea of grossly subdividing the peoples of the northern Kenyan lowlands into two broad categories, Oromo (or "Galla", as they were called then) and Somali. There were and are people who do not really fit into this classification, and those who do still have many historical links to the other category. Still, the British drew a territorial boundary, the "Galla-Somali line", which can be seen on the map (above). This idea seems to have caught on in Ethiopia.

The recent work of Fekadu Adugna (2009) offers great detail about this Oromo Somali line in Ethiopia. While the Kenyan part of the line is now a provincial boundary (between Eastern and North-eastern Province), its continuation in Ethiopia is the contested boundary between the Oromia and Somali Regional States.

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[34] He now enjoys the hospitality of Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe.

[35] Few observers would advise any group to actually attempt it.

Having written so much about how historical and ethnographic data does not fit and the constructedness of the distinction, what I find most remarkable in Fekadu's findings is the extent to which the dichotomy Oromo/Somali has been accepted by local actors in recent decades. It is an imposed dichotomy. It is a bit like (correctly) stating that the major branches of the Indo-European language family along the western shore of the European continent are the Romance branch and the Germanic branch, and that the French and the Germans are the major representatives of these two branches. So far so good. But the Ethiopian logic described by Fekadu would then lead to the conclusion that the smaller peoples or nations, the Belgians, Dutch, Danes etc. should please make up their mind whether they want to be French or German. The Dutch certainly would object, I suspect.

Around 1990, I met Garri in the Mandera District, Kenya, who insisted that they were neither Somali nor Oromo but Garri. Gerald Hanley, in his popular account of his adventures during the Second World War, *Warriors and Strangers* (1971), describes the pride the Somali take in being Somali, and then, in contrastive terms, discusses his servant and guide, a Garri, as a person from a world in which more than anything else it mattered to be Garri, with the implication that this was an alternative identification and that the person in question would not understand why the people in Somalia, or anyone else for that matter, would care about being Somali, as it was clearly more desirable to be Garri. What has become of all the people of northern Kenya and southern Ethiopia who claimed to be neither Oromo nor Somali? Today, they identify as one of the two, and even if they switch back and forth they only claim to be one of the two at a time. *Tertium non datur*.

When I spent many hours in the Office of the President in Nairobi to get a research permit in 1978 for my research on interethnic clan relationships in northern Kenya, which later resulted in the book *Identities on the Move*, the main difficulty was that I also wanted to visit the Somali districts. Memories of the secessionist war (the *shifta* emergency) were still fresh and I was told that since then no one had ever received clearance for research on Somali in Kenya. In order to dispel the fear that my research might be too close to politics, I stressed its historical aspects and even said that I was more interested in the sixteenth century than in the twentieth, as the sixteenth century, which witnessed the Oromo expansion, was thought to be a formative period for the present ethnic groups. Little did I know that what I said in order to appear harmless, namely my interest in ethnogenesis and "origins", was soon to turn into one of the most hotly contested political issues. Even the sixteenth century has turned into a minefield. People are abused, threatened, misquoted, accused, and slandered on the internet if they discover something which others do not want to hear.

As ethnicity in the region then was much less politicised than it is now, it may have been easier to use the critical historical methods to get behind the individual discourses and to get a clearer idea of what really might have happened. Apart from analysing discourses as interest-guided, as Fekadu does, I attempted to reconstruct history from my perspective, as a result of a comparison and critical analysis of a great variety of sources. My reconstruction did not result in a binary opposition between Oromo, on the one hand, and Somali, on the other. I found important cultural elements of the modern pastoral groups to go back to a Proto-Rendille-Somali complex. Apart from the Rendille, Sakuye, and others, I included the Gabra and Garri discussed by Fekadu in this perspective. My conclusions were that those among the ancestral populations, who were bearers of this PRS culture, not Somali, but speakers of Somali-like (Somaloid) languages like Rendille. For being Somali, they lacked the core feature of being Muslims. I thought and continue to think that at an early time and before their split into the modern ethnic groups, they may have borrowed elements of Arabo-Islamic culture, but that the bulk of their camel-oriented beliefs and rituals had (and in many cases still have) nothing to do with Islam. They were not Oromo either. Many of them adopted the Oromo language (or more precisely the Boran dialect of it) only in recent centuries.

Still, although among many other influences, I identify *three* major interpenetrating cultural strata in the region: Oromo, PRS, and "modern Somality". By the time my book was out, however, it was read from the perspective of a binary division. Oromo accused me of Somali sympathies (by misreading PRS as "Somali" and concluding that I attributed Somali origins to so many people), and Somali, including my own wife, criticised me for not sharing their belief that the Rendille are just a lost group of Somali and at one point of time were all Muslims. The world had suddenly changed in a way so that everyone had to be either Oromo or Somali with the effect that more complex findings were not even understood.

I have written about the colonial "Galla[36]-Somali line" that divided northern Kenya since the 1920s as a colonial imposition, which did not really fit the local givens and was therefore circumvented in many ways. People identified as Oromo or Somali to fit the categories of the British. For themselves, they knew better. I have observed the emergence of "Oromo" and "Somali" as politicised identifications over several decades. If there is anyone who should not be surprised by Fekadu's findings, it is me. Still, I was fascinated and even to some extent shocked by his findings. I would not have anticipated the two categories becoming so dominant as not to leave room for anything else in such a relatively short time. The most differentiated perspective Fekadu records is Gabra and Garri elders claiming to be Somali by origin and Oromo by culture. Of course there is a grain of truth in this. They themselves might share more features with the "Oromo" (in this context always meaning the Boran) than their ancestors who might have more widely spoken Somaloid languages and were "Somali" in some wider sort of sense. This perspective is already quite sophisticated and might be difficult to maintain in a political environment, which favours simplistic slogans. Still, differentiation and scepticism do not go far enough to question the categories "Oromo" and "Somali" as such. What justifies referring to ancestral populations, who lived 500 years ago, by the names of modern ethnic groups? How far can these identities be traced back, and were they the only ones in earlier periods of time? The – quite plausible or at least arguable – position that the ancestral Garri or Gabra were neither Oromo nor Somali, but something intermediate or different from both, apparently is no longer upheld by anyone. In 1990 in Mandera, I might have met some of the last believers in a Garri identity, which is separate from both Oromo and Somali.

Fekadu analyses the factors that favoured this process as an increasingly rigorous framing of social identities with great detail. Selective historical memory of things which have been (rather than free invention) responses to political incentives. These incentives are of a different kind for pastoralists and for the educated "elites", i.e. those who speculate on finding employment in administration and politics. While for the former, once the principle of granting each other access to water points and pastures is given up, are interested in reserving strategic water points and thereby access to pastures for themselves, for the "elites" it is not so much the whereabouts but the existence of a boundary that is essential. They need separate political units to the name of their own group to acquire a new set of administrative functions earmarked for them. Like in Kenya, the process of territorial subdivision also in Ethiopia is “elite”-driven. Pastoralists simply adjust to the new rules of the game. If it is about dividing the cake, one has to be sure to get one’s share.

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[36] Galla is an old name for the Oromo, which since has become politically incorrect.

In the end, pastoral production will suffer, because pasture becomes too restricted to balance climatic risks and seasonal fluctuations. Less meat and less milk will mean less food and less money and increased competition with loss of human life and less potential for the survivors to develop their full humanity. It is as simple as that. No grass. No food. No life. But lots and lots of politics.

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