

EDITED BY

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BEING AND BECOMING OROMO

Historical and Anthropological Enquiries

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Glossary

This is not comprehensive, and does not list words nor acronyms the meanings of which are clear in their contexts.

<i>abba</i>	father, owner, title of respect
<i>aada</i>	custom
<i>ayyaana</i>	God's creativity in any thing, person or group; personality; essence
<i>balabbata</i>	government chief (Amharic; <i>balabbat</i>)
<i>bokku</i>	club, sceptre
<i>chaffe</i>	grassy place where rituals and meetings are held
<i>d'alachu</i>	to be born, to be reborn, ie adopted
<i>dullache</i> (m), <i>dullatti</i> (f)	impotent, past bearing
<i>eebaa</i>	blessing
ENLF	Ethiopian National Liberation Front
EPLF	Eritrean People's Liberation Front
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
<i>gabbaro, gabaro, gebbar</i>	those who are not of "pure" Oromo descent, allocated tenants who were forced to pay tribute, share cropper
<i>gada, gaada</i>	the generation set system; the major set of rituals of that system; has many resonances
<i>gerarsa, geerarsa</i>	a song about one's own experiences or exploits.
<i>gobana, goobana</i>	from Ras Gobana, an Oromo general of Menelik, a "Quisling"
<i>gosa</i>	clan, tribe, people
<i>-guddifachu</i>	to foster, to bring up
<i>guumi</i>	assembly, meeting
<i>(h)angaafa</i>	first born, senior
<i>hariiya</i>	age-set, age-mate
<i>hayu, hayyu</i>	senior councillor
<i>hora</i>	source of mineral water
IOLF	Islamic Oromo Liberation Front
<i>irre</i>	forearm, foreleg, power
<i>jalaba</i>	junior councillor
<i>jiila</i>	a major ritual
<i>ketema</i>	originally "fortified settlement", now any town
<i>korma</i>	bull
<i>lafa</i>	land, country
<i>medica, meedhicca</i>	a strip of hide from a sacrifice

<i>mogaasa, moggaasa</i>	adoption of an individual or a group, name giving
<i>muuda</i>	anointment
<i>nagaa, nagaayia</i>	peace with God and people; a key political and ritual concept
<i>neft'anya</i>	riflemen, armed retainers, armed settlers
OALF	Oromo Abbo Liberation Front
<i>odaa</i>	large sycamore or fig tree, an emblem of the OLF, a sanctified meeting place
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
OPDO	Oromo People's Democratic Organisation
OPLF	Oromo People's Liberation Front
<i>qadi, kadi</i>	religious judge
<i>Qallu, Qaallu, Qalluu</i>	Hereditary ritual officiant "born from God"; a ritual expert
<i>qomoo</i>	clan, tribe
<i>qulqullu</i>	pure, clean
<i>raaga</i>	prophet
SALF	Somali Abbo Liberation Front
<i>saffu</i>	mutual relationships in the cosmic order
<i>seera</i>	law
<i>soda</i>	affine
<i>tirriiso</i>	patron-client relationship, client
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
<i>tula, tulu</i>	deep well, well complex
<i>umaa</i>	creation
<i>Waaka, Waqqa, Waaqa</i>	God, Divinity, sky
<i>Waata</i>	hunters and gatherers who live among Oromo
<i>wara</i>	homestead, patrilineal descent group
<i>woreda</i>	sub-district or district
WSLF	Western Somalia Liberation Front
<i>yaa'a</i>	council, councillors
<i>yahabata, yaabada</i>	mounted warriors

Introduction

P.T.W. Baxter, Jan Hultin and Alessandro Triulzi

"Let us celebrate our diversity"
Archbishop Desmond Tutu

The Oromo people are one of the most numerous in Africa. Census data are not reliable but there are probably twenty million people whose first language is Oromo and who recognise themselves as Oromo. In the older literature they are often called Galla. Except for a relatively small number of arid land pastoralists who live in Kenya, all their homelands lie in Ethiopia, where they probably make up around 40 per cent of the total population. Geographically their territories, though they are not always contiguous, extend from the highlands of Ethiopia in the north, to the Ogaden and Somalia in the east, to the Sudan border in the west and across the Kenyan border to the Tana River in the south. There are great gaps in our knowledge of Oromo history and Oromo culture and social organisations but it is clear, though different Oromo groups vary considerably in their modes of subsistence and in their local social organisations, that they share similar cultures and modes of thought. The growth of pan-Oromo consciousness and a sense of national identity are comparatively recent but burgeoning.

This volume derives from the conjunction of two stimuli. One was our participation in a research training course on *Inventions and Boundaries: Historical and Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism*, organised by the Nordic Network of Ethnic Studies (Nordnes), in May 1993 (Kaarsholm and Hultin 1994). The other was the insights and flashes of recognition we got from reading *Being Maasai* (Spear and Waller 1993), which had just appeared. We decided that the time was ripe for a workshop which would seek to identify the elements from which an Oromo ethnic consciousness and a sense of national identity have been, and are being, moulded. We particularly wanted some Oromo voices which would express what it is to be an Oromo. The occasion would be the first at which Oromo and Euro-American students of Oromo history and culture met in a common project and would not be a beleaguered minority in a conference of Ethiopianists. We looked forward to relaxed and friendly questionings and probings about the development of, and the constituents of, Oromo identity. With generous help from both the Faculty of Social

Sciences and the Department of Social Anthropology of the University of Gothenburg and from the Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, we were able to hold the workshop in Gothenburg in October 1994.

Any identity needs the presence of other comparable identities in order to define itself. Oromo identity has defined itself, and has been defined by others, as it is seen to stand in opposition to other comparable national identities, most obviously that of the Amhara but also those of the Tigray, Eritreans and Somali. Certainly, common historical experiences, as colonised people in Greater Ethiopia, have shaped Oromo national consciousness. In the south and the east struggles with Somali for grazing and water have sharpened local ethnic identities among the Booran, Arsi and Guji branches of the Oromo. These struggles, in combination with the disputes between Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia have also brought home, at least to their spokesmen, a sense of them all being Oromo. (See the Poem by Jarso Waaqo Qoot'o in the final contribution to this collection.)

As a Ghanaian scholar has put it people need 'certainty of who they are' if they are 'to determine their collective aims and objectives'. 'A people's consciousness of their identity is often forged through collective experience of suffering; but it assumes higher forms when they proceed to a rational definition of this identity through philosophical discernment of collective values and conceptual systems' (Hagan 1990:10). So, as well as investigating the positive consequences that colonisation and competition for resources have had for the formation of Oromo political identity, we have sought to go further and examine the cultural markers of Oromo cultural identity. The 'cultural stuff' enclosed within the 'ethnic boundary' (Barth 1969:15) which the actors utilise to identify themselves, and which give moral significance to their day to day life. We sought to identify some of the features of "Oromoness" which give Oromo 'a real sense of group identity which links the members of "we" because it emphasises their differences from "them"' (Hobsbawm 1992:2-4). We have endeavoured to get beyond simply just creating an Oromo 'retrospective mythology' as a counter image to that purveyed by the old Abyssinian Empire (see Hultin's essay).

We recognise that there can be analytical value in both the 'instrumentalist' view of ethnicity, which sees it as a 'social construct', and in the 'primordialist' which sees it as a 'historical artefact'—but not with the view which sees it as withering away with the development of 'modernity'. Indeed, as Spear and Waller put it:

Ethnicity's power derives precisely from its ability to create a shared historical consciousness and to mobilise this in the service of modern aims, its ability to reflect both traditional and modern concerns, Janus-like,¹ simultaneously. (1993:16)

¹ Janus was the Roman deity of entrances and doors. He was pictured with two faces looking in opposite directions.

We hoped that the contributions to the workshop would contain new ethnographic and historical data presented in forms that made Oromo ethnicity comparable with other emergent ethnicities. On the ground the boundaries between ethnicity and nationality are blurred. We definitely did not want, at this point in the development of Oromo studies, to get bogged down in controversies over different theories either of ethnicity or of nationality. We think that, by and large, our hopes have been realised.

Right from the start of the workshop it was obvious that, though we all shared many assumptions and sympathies, the expectancies of the Oromo and non-Oromo contributors were not identical. In the event the tensions that sometimes quivered were, we think, productive and creative. They certainly enlivened our discussions; but, the differences in expectancies and orientations remained and are apparent in the essays which follow.

The Oromo contributors who originate from Ethiopia are all nationalists for whom 'nationalism is a political programme' (Hobsbawm 1992:4). They have all endured humiliating personal experiences of discrimination, and worse, just for simply being born Oromo; most have suffered imprisonment and exile and seen their families persecuted. They have been, and remain, active participants in an ongoing nationalist struggle. The cultural discrimination which they have all endured meant that when they wrote, like the black American writers of the Harlem Renaissance and the pioneers of *negritude* in the nineteen-thirties, their 'first need ... was that of redeeming their own dignity ... to confirm the lack of foundation for discrimination and to regain self-identity' (Masolo 1994:11). But at the same time, Janus like, they and other Oromo intellectuals remain robustly confident of the vigour and strength and essential *oneness* of Oromo culture. They see local variations in cultural practice, dialect, religion and historical experience as perhaps interesting but essentially diversionary and even irrelevant to their cause. The existence of a distinct, culturally homogeneous and autonomous Oromo nation with its own distinctive common culture is assumed as an unquestioned given. Past and present cultural representations have become important primarily in so far as they serve to legitimise the future. Their approach is generalising and essentialist and seeks to construct, or reconstruct, models derived from the Oromo past that can legitimise and serve as models for a future, independent Oromo nation and, ideally, an Oromo state *Oromia*. They all carry scars from the past, and are all passionately engaged in the struggle in the present. Unlike most contemporary anthropologists and historians they perceive 'culture' and 'ethnicity/nationality' as tangible, definable and enduring.

Those of us who are not Oromo, however strong our sympathies, have not been, and could hardly have been, as directly and unconditionally involved in the struggle. Our rights, dignities and lives have not been at risk. We can empathise with but cannot have shared the experiences. We certainly recognise the actuality of 'being Oromo' but, both our scholarly preoccupations and our training root us in the past and recent present and lead us to the study of local

variations and differences. This bias of interest is strengthened by the fact that most of our enquiries have been among unschooled farmers and herders and not, until recently, among the intellectuals of the Oromo diaspora. We revel in the rich cultural and historical diversity of the Oromo whereas the Oromo contributors, while themselves actually living out those cultural variations, stress the common features of their culture which have sustained them in exile. Their experiences and sufferings have made them more and more conscious of what they share, whereas our local, detailed enquiries and our interests in cultural comparison have led us to concentrate on the particular and the specific.

There was another difference. Whereas the Oromo participants embraced nationalism and the idea of the nation state as hopes for the future, the non-Oromo participants had some unease. In the mid-nineteenth century when: 'Italy was not a country ... but an idea ... of persons who longed for Italian unity and independence', the idea of nation states was an heroic ideal. Now, in Africa as in Europe, it 'has failed to meet the high claims of its promoters and the promise of its propagandists' (Davidson 1992:121, 18). With the end of empires nationalism is no longer the liberal rallying cry it once seemed. Historians of the West can no longer see the 'nation', as so many historians used to, as a 'divinely created unit at work in universal history'. The '*national*' categories of the nineteenth century appear to be of ever-diminishing value to the historian' (Kearney 1989:12). Paradoxically, as nationalisms across much of the world have become more intense so nationalism as an intellectual concept has become an uncomfortable anachronism.

Liberal minded Westerners cannot rid themselves of misgivings about the word "nationalism" and have to make an effort of will to sanitise it. Evil actions have been carried out, and are being carried out, in its name. Its unpleasant reverberations recall some of the more shameful episodes in the histories of their own nations. Simply, the conflicts and horrors perpetrated in its name during the colonial period and the World Wars and currently in former Yugoslavia, Zululand, Rwanda and the former Soviet Union, have discredited the word: the horrors of 'ethnic cleansing' lurk in its shadow. Extreme right wing parties and movements frequently use the word 'national' as a component of their names and invoke 'nationalism' in their strident, often racist, rhetoric. Nationalism and irrationalism have become twinned. So, though all the contributors seek to make clear the distinctive shared values, institutions and historical experiences which distinguish the Oromo, nevertheless there are areas where the aspirations of Oromo activists and those of their sympathisers converge but cannot quite conjoin. Our differences of emphasis will be apparent in some of the essays which follow.

In our instructions to contributors, following the wish of the workshop, we naively asked everyone to spell Oromo words using *Qube Afaan Oromo*, 'the adapted Latin alphabet ... of 34 characters' (Tilahun Gamta 1993). This instruction was in accord with the urgings which we, along with the Oromo Relief Association and the Oromo Liberation Front, had long been making for the

adoption of a standard, uniform Oromo spelling using the Roman alphabet. All the evidence from Africa points to that as the sensible path. However, in the event, *Qube* proved to be too tangled a path for all of the contributors to follow. The contributor who used *Qube* most consistently was Marco Bassi, because he had actually learned to write and to read *afaan oromoo* using the approved *Qube* spelling. Most contributors, either as infants or as adult field researchers, had learned Oromo by ear and had never been schooled in how to write it, if only because such instruction did not exist when they started to learn to read and to write. So, many contributors used their own versions of *qube* spelling, based on the way their ears had heard the words they were writing: but, just inserting double vowels and changing "K's" to "Q's" is not enough. 'Correct' spelling is not simply a matter of amateurish phonetic transcription of the dialect one happens to know, it is a skill in which one has to be schooled and which requires hard application and constant correction. Indeed "correct spelling" in countries that have had universal compulsory full-time education for generations is a skill that many students never fully acquire.

Devising a "correct" spelling and getting it accepted is not a simple non-political technique. In the United Kingdom, for example, those who speak a dialect which is far from what has become known as "standard English", meaning the speech of educated speakers in southern England, tend to find difficulties with "correct" spelling. The question arises as to which Oromo dialect is to be taken as the standard on which "correct" Oromo pronunciation, vocabulary and spelling are to be based?

That there continued to be variations in the way in which contributors spelled should not have surprised us. English was widely written a long time before, following on the widespread production and dissemination of the printed book, 'fixed spellings' became standardised. The Oxford English Dictionary, for example, records 31 different spellings of the word 'merry' (*gammada?*) which were used between the ninth and eighteenth centuries. English spellings 'became fixed in the eighteenth century by a social consensus and not through the recommendations of an Academy or other institution' as in France and Sweden (McArthur 1992:970). "Correct spelling" cannot be imposed either by good intentions or by fiat: but, that is not as important as it may at first seem to be, in practice variant spellings seldom cause misunderstandings. Current British and American spellings, following their divergence in the eighteenth century, often differ but readers are rarely confused. We have not, for example, out of a mistaken passion for uniformity, changed Herbert Lewis's use of 'center' and 'gotten'.

In Kenya, the Booran dialect of Oromo has been written in the Latin alphabet, and used in schools and churches, since the early nineteen-forties and has evolved its own spelling conventions.² This makes *Qube*, though it has a much

² See also the dictionaries prepared by Father Venturino (1973) and Father Tablino (manuscript) and the great, new and comprehensive *Borana Dictionary* (1995) prepared by Ton Leus.

larger potential reading public than the Boorana spelling used in Kenya, a relative newcomer. Canon Eric Webster, who spoke excellent Boorana, published a translation of St Luke's Gospel in 1945, and the Mission School in Marsabit already used Boorana text books. The position was quite unlike that in Ethiopia where, until recently, it was illegal to teach or preach in Oromo, let alone to publish in it using the Latin alphabet. (See Mekuria Bulcha 1993 and 1994.) Many individuals made great efforts to establish standard acceptable forms of written Oromo, notably Haylu Fida in his *Hirmaatadubbii Afanoromo* (1973) and Gene Gragg in his *Oromo Dictionary* (1982), but their works were not allowed to circulate in Ethiopia.

In practice the differences are not so great. No Oromo from Ethiopia who had learned *Qube* would have any difficulties in reading the Bible, *Kitaaba Waaqa* (1994), in Boorana spelling; nor would a schooled Booran have any difficulties in reading anything written using *Qube*. Nor should the variant spellings in this book confuse readers in any way.

Griefenow-Mewis and Tamene Bitima in their scholarly textbook *Lehrbuch des Oromo* (1994) use some spellings which differ from those of Tilahun Gamta, for instance giving *qubee* two final vowels. So, for us to have imposed a fixed spelling would have been an intolerable editorial burden on us and seemed an arbitrary and pointlessly pedantic misuse of our editorial powers. It could have also opened up a hornets nest! Moreover, the use of variant spellings accurately represents the current position.

Better, we think, to let the vigorous outburst of writing and publication in the Oromo language which is happening in Finfine (Addis Ababa) come to establish a consensus about *correct* spelling. What Benedict Anderson (1983:44) has called 'print capitalism', combined with the passionate intentions of intellectual nationalists to create a written language, will almost certainly soon give 'a new fixity' both to the Oromo language and to its spelling. Any reader in difficulty can always consult the glossary.

Similarly we have not tried to impose a uniform spelling on the names of peoples or of places, though we have modified a spelling when we thought that a reader might be confused. To have imposed absolute uniformity would have been to falsify the contemporary ethnographic record, because the 'correct' spellings of many of them are undetermined and still evolving. For example, Booran, is the name both of the pastoral people whose homeland straddles the frontiers of Kenya and Ethiopia and the warriors who conquered the western Oromo lands in the seventeenth century. It is variously spelled as Boran, Borana, Booran and Booraan. Surely, these variations, like Gabra and Gabbra, or Mecha and Macha, are no more confusing than Scottish and Scotch, or Welsh and Welch, or Asante or Ashanti, or Masai and Maasai or, even, Minilik, Menilik or Menelik!

What may puzzle some readers more is why the pastoral Booran of northern Kenya and southern Ethiopia, who are not one of the most numerous Oromo peoples, should feature centrally in nearly half of the papers in this book. There

are a number of reasons; they have attracted researchers and travellers who believed them to have maintained the old Oromo traditions, in particular the generation-set system of *gada*; they have been held to be prototypically Oromo and therefore in some way special; because they are pastoralists and there have been both keen comparative interest in pastoral societies and a considerable input by development agencies; and, finally, in recent years permission to carry out field research has been less hard to obtain in Kenya than in Ethiopia, because the Kenya Oromo are small in numbers and have never had any political clout at all. No politician nor official could possibly be fearful of them.

The essays in this volume are individual explorations but they are interconnected and complement each other. The whole, we think, becomes greater than the sum of its parts. Rather as the Oromo nation is more than the simple aggregate of its 'branches'. As Jarso expresses it in his poem which concludes this volume, *Oromo tuute kinniisa*, 'The Oromo [are] like a swarm of bees'.

The first essay is the sad life history of one girl of great spirit, the last is an impassioned poem, a personal response to events expressed in a traditional form. The essays in between move from the more generalised aspects of Oromo culture and history to more specific case studies. We shall proceed by commenting on the individual papers in the order in which they appear.

The sufferings of Hawani Debella, as reported by Aneesa Kassem, epitomise 'the shared understanding of being Oromo'. When Aneesa read the paper to us in Gothenburg some of the Oromo participants wept quiet tears both for Hawani and for themselves. Their own painfully repressed recollections, of home, of shared sufferings and of lives as exiles were so stirred that a period of intense but vibrant silence followed. The paper is more than just another account of the erratic violence which struck so many people who lived in Mengistu's Ethiopia; it particularises the almost racist virulence which was directed against any of the despised *Galla* who had become prominent. Not even the educated in the capital, who adopted Amharic lifestyles and the Amharic language (see essay by Lewis), were immune because, unlike the Tigrayans or the Eritreans, they not only offered a political challenge but also a cultural and national one. They would not be assimilated and were too numerous to be ignored. The Oromo movement seemed to be doubly subversive because it stood for a different sort of moral order to that of the Amhara elite; which explains why the regime used its cruellest and crudest forms of violence against any signs of distinctive Oromo identity. The result of that policy was to strengthen that which it sought to destroy, and Hawani was forced by bigotry and oppression, like many others, to embrace her own ethnicity. Hawani also voices the patient sufferings which Oromo women have endured as the mothers, sisters, wives and daughters of imprisoned Oromo men; sadly, this is the only expression of an Oromo woman's viewpoint in this collection (but see Ensminger 1987 and Dahl 1990).

The broad comparative conspectus of the growth of national feelings by Herbert Lewis, who has been a sensitive observer of Oromo over four decades,

contrasts with, but complements, Hawani's intense personal experience. He shows, contrary to the beliefs of centralist commentators, that administrative centralisation, more education and the enforced use of the Amharic language did not diminish local feelings of ethnic distinctiveness. Indeed just the opposite happened, and ethnic passions developed 'at home' in response to the mismatch between the new opportunities which seemed to be on offer and the cultural discrimination and oppression people actually experienced. Feelings of cultural distinctiveness were politicised by events which forced all Oromo, but particularly the newly schooled, to see that they were being oppressed: that 'modernity' by itself without equality was a fraud. This is a theme that runs through many of the essays in this collection. Lewis argues convincingly that the development of Oromo identity followed 'a kind of trajectory' that is comparable to that of other ethnic nationalisms in the modern era.

Mekuria Bulcha, a sociologist, and Mohammed Hassen, a historian, are both active Oromo intellectuals of the diaspora and both seek to explain the processes through which Oromo became aware of, and have created, their own national identity; that is 'made' it and not just simply 'rediscovered' it (Calder 1994:2). Their contributions mesh. Mekuria stresses that, though Oromo social institutions were certainly never static, there have been certain distinctive and enduring features of Oromo identity' such as; the myth of common descent, the importance of *Walaabu* as the symbolic source of the nation, a common language, the ability to assimilate strangers, and the concepts of *gada* (which embodies egalitarianism) and of *nagaa* (which embodies peace and co-operation). The themes of assimilation and *gada* are taken up by other contributors. The transformation of a general, diffuse 'sense of overarching Oromo identity' into a sense of one national identity was speeded by Oromo experiences of colonisation and crystallised by the emergence of an educated elite. Mekuria traces four stages in the emergence of elites among the Oromo and the other colonised people of Ethiopia:- the acceptance of the values of the colonisers; a general demand for cultural recognition, equality and fair government; the organisation of liberation movements and, finally, an elite led mass-movement. These stages share features with those which occurred in the freedom movements in French and British colonies in Africa.

The history of the peoples of Ethiopia is extremely controversial. It has almost all been written from a centralist and Imperial point of view which, for Oromo, is that of their colonisers. They have been marginalised historically as well as politically. Mohammed Hassen in his *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History* (1990) has created a scholarly viewpoint which places the Oromo themselves at the centre; which is just what the indigenous historians of the Indians, the Irish and of other colonised peoples have had to do. In his essay, like Mekuria though from a different perspective, he explains and justifies, indeed celebrates and glories in, the growth of Oromo self-awareness and the development of nationalism. Mohammed and Mekuria both stress the historical importance of the Macha-Tulama Association. Mohammed ponders the reasons why, compar-

ed to the other nations of the Horn, 'Oromo nationalism developed so slowly'; slowly that is to an Oromo activist! To most outsiders the development seems to have been quite rapid. He goes on to wonder whether, if the Oromo are permitted to express and to exercise their political options, they will choose to do so in a more open, federal Ethiopia, or, like Eritrea, insist on creating a totally independent Oromia. Mohammed stands back from, but does not conceal, the responses of his own heart.

Jan Hultin's essay examines the implications and overtones of the disliked word 'Galla'. He unravels the Abyssinian 'cultural construction of an Oromo "Other"', i.e., 'the Galla', through analyses of some of the metaphors embedded in Ethiopian historiography and in the Myth of a Greater Ethiopia. He shows how this 'cultural construction' incorporated a 'model of hierarchical relationships', which allocated the Oromo to a perpetually inferior position as barbarian 'Galla', a threatening "other". The 'Galla' were a dark untamed force of Nature which, like a human deluge, could have spilled over Abyssinia, Egypt and the rest of the civilised world if the Amhara had not stopped them. The Emperor and his Amharic speaking followers were represented as having been given the historical mission to conquer, domesticate and christianise the 'Galla'. The northern colonialists used this mythical construction to justify their monopoly of power. Both the history and the myth have become part of a brutal 'contemporary discourse about power and social hierarchy' cloaked in a morality woven from assumed 'facts'. Hultin argues that this hegemonic and essentially racist construction of a unique 'Ethiopian' civilising mission has lived on until very recently in scholarly and popular writings and in Ethiopian nationalist and Western political discourse. Ethiopian history, like so many other histories, has been 'a narrative of the winning side'. Hultin's deconstruction of 'Galla' leads into the two essays which follow by Gemetchu and Thomas Zitelmann.

Many Oromo, like the culturally marginalised everywhere, feel a desperate need to speak up and present a case which sets them in the centre, from where they can state just what it means for an Oromo to be an Oromo. Gemetchu Megerssa endeavours to isolate the elements which constitute the 'Oromo personality' as it is expressed in *Oromumma*, 'Oromoness'. He writes as someone who has personally endured and survived 'the agony of the Oromo social experience' and yet, nevertheless, emerged with both his ideals and his sense of the mystical strengthened. He takes an African stance as distinct from a Ethiopian-Semitic one. His method, in many respects, recalls that of Mudimbe, in that he seeks to explore an indigenous system of thought without becoming dependent on the 'categories and conceptual systems which depend on a Western epistemological order' (1988:x). He feels that only those who have experienced being Oromo can elucidate the essence of 'Oromoness' (see Dahl's essay). He argues that Oromo consciousness and Oromo identity are overlapping, complementary concepts which need to be comprehended (Janus like) together, because both incorporate the underlying values of Oromo oral tradition as maintained

by the elders who are its custodians. The core of that tradition is *ayyaana*, God's creative part in any individual, thing or circumstance. His idealistic position recalls that of the Ghanaian philosopher Abraham in *The Mind of Africa* (1962). It contrasts with the more materialistic positions taken by Helland and Gufu Oba. Gemetchu argues briefly but strongly against Schlee's account of the accommodative capacities of clan and ethnic identities. We are not persuaded.

Thomas Zitelmann has an encyclopaedic knowledge of the Ethiopian and the Oromo literature. He carried out his research among exiled Oromo of the diaspora, which gives him a starting viewpoint which is quite different to that of other contributors. He worked as a 'stranger' among those who had been forced by oppression to become refugees, and hence were themselves 'strangers' in foreign countries. Oromo in the refugee camps had 'stranger hood' imposed upon them. This forced them to reflect upon and to verbalise what being an Oromo meant to them; that is to make explicit to themselves that which at home they had simply lived (see Mohammed Hassen's essay). He starts by decoding the text of a public blessing an elder gave to a meeting of political rivals, and elucidates the subtle distinctions the elder made between 'our people' (Oromo Liberation Front), travellers through the 'borderlands' (Oromo Peoples Democratic Organisation) and 'visiting people' (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front). He proceeds to examine the idea of *Galla* as 'stranger' in the different historical contexts in which it has been used and the varying connotations it has been given. To examine the 'ambiguities' in the use of the categories 'Oromo' and 'Galla', Zitelmann uses a theoretical framework which derives from Simmel and van Gennep, and which has recently been illuminatingly used by Victor Turner and by William Shack. He argues that in the Horn the word *Galla* has been constantly associated with the idea of the 'stranger', as opposed to 'neighbour', and been utilised to close ethnic boundaries that had previously been open. He dismisses most of the 'etymological speculation' about the word *Galla* as 'a product of European linguistic romanticism'.

Father Paolo Tablino has probably spent more of his adult years living among Oromo speakers, the *Gabra*, in their own lands than has any other contributor. His short paper is the only one which actually lists some of the dramatic forces for change which have transformed daily life over the last thirty years, such as; roads, motor transport, schooling, conversion to world religions, effective incorporation in the State, electoral politics and migrant labour. But, a point which he makes strongly, is that in Kenya the '*Gabra* are still *Gabra*'. (See Aguilar's essay on the *Booran* of Waso.) They vote according to clan affiliation, enthusiastically maintain their rituals, their generation-set system and their pastoral mode of life. The 'underlying deep structures of their lives', even of those who live far from their homeland in the cities and towns of Kenya, 'remain very similar to those who continue as pastoral nomads'. *Gabra* have accommodated to change but not succumbed to it culturally.

Pastoralists of the Horn, such as the Booran, must be transhumant or nomadic in order to survive. Gufu Oba starts from the ecological determinants of pastoralism. For Booran, as for their neighbours, well complexes are the most vital resource. It is around them and their associated grazing that 'resource borders' are constantly being renegotiated, and within which local communities and wider ethnic identities are formed (see Helland's essay and cf., Hogg 1993). Fixed line boundaries on the ground which restrict the search for grazing within reach of water are incompatible with pastoralism. Governments have found this hard to grasp (see O'Leary 1990 and Schlee 1992). Over the last thirty years, like so many other pastoralists, the Booran have suffered, almost to the point of extinction, from drought, heavily armed raiders and disastrous interventions by uncaring and ignorant governments. They are increasingly beleaguered on all sides by their mostly better armed neighbours, particularly Somali or groups which are now assuming a 'Somali' identity. Booran 'resource boundaries' have been, and continue to be, encroached upon. Gufu writes as a committed Booran pastoralist who draws strength from the history of his people and the associated construction of *Boorantiti*, 'Boorananness'. *Boorantiti* 'encapsulates Boorana awareness of their identity' and is rooted in their common recognition of common laws, customs, rituals and "The Peace of the Booran". Gufu distinguishes four procedures through which, in the past, Gabra (see Tablino's essay), Sakuye, Garre, Ajuran and even Degodia became associated with, and even incorporated into, the 'Peace of the Booran' which implied the acceptance of a common moral order. These were:- full adoption which may or may not have included ritual integration; following Booran laws and customs in order to share in the 'Peace' for so long as it was expedient to do so; alliances against a third group; formalised patron-client relationships (see essays by Blackhurst and Triulzi). The other peoples involved, as Jarso's heroic poem which concludes this volume suggests, may not have seen these relationships from exactly the same perspective. Gufu also recounts how Booran have defended their 'resource boundaries' against incursions by Laikipia, Samburu, Ariaal and Rendile.

Gufu disagrees with Günther Schlee's writings on two major issues. Firstly, he argues that Schlee puts forward a pro-Rendile interpretation of events in northern Kenya which, in the context of the politicised struggles over resources which are going on, becomes an anti-Booran interpretation (see Gemetchu's essay). Secondly, he takes exception to Schlee's assertion that the Booran form part of a "ritualised killer complex they shared with other Cushites" (the most accessible source is Schlee and Shongolo 1995). That statement, taken out of context, has entered local political discourse. Unfortunately Günther Schlee was not able to be with us in Gothenburg, if he had been the differences might have been resolved on the spot, but as it is we think that the issues raised are important and need some clearing up. It can only hold back co-operative scholarly endeavour if they are left hanging in the air.

Schlee's blend of social anthropology, history, comparative linguistics and ethnology make his book *Identities on the Move; clanship and pastoralism in Northern Kenya* (1989) and his many other publications, innovative, imaginative and major contributions to regional and pastoral studies. We think that his mode of analysis, which traces clan rather than "tribal" associations, could be applied more widely, for example to the Akan, the interlacustrine Bantu and to the Nilotes. He has consistently endeavoured to be comparative which is always a controversial path to follow. We are all immensely indebted to him and his work.³ The differences between him and Gufu are partly due to the use by local politicians of selective quotations from Schlee's work to support their own cases, and partly to the way in which the meaning of some of Schlee's ethnological concepts become distorted because the writer and the reader attribute different nuances of meaning to the same words.

Schlee, of course, presents his data with a bias towards the viewpoint of the Rendile and the Gabra, with whom he has spent several years of close participant field research. Consciously or unconsciously, the sympathies of all participant observers must to some extent be biased towards the people they study. One cannot become deeply involved in the study of a language and culture and remain just a detached "scientific" intellect. Interaction with people must generate involvement in their concerns. If that were not so no non-Oromo would be contributing to this book. As Paul Bohannan pointed out long ago anthropologists are 'not cameras': 'Anthropology provides an artistic impression of the original, not a photographic one' (1957:vii). The experiences and feelings of the observer become part of the picture. But beyond that, once published, all anthropological or historical data are open to skewed interpretation and manipulation: in Ghana, for example, extracts from the books of Rattray, Danquah and Busia are regularly cited in political debates and arguments and in the law courts. Their work is often misappropriated and misinterpreted and used for purposes the authors could not have imagined. Words in books, particularly those published overseas, often overpower local oral testimonies, even if the testimonies are those on which the published texts were based. Gufu's objections, we suggest, are as much to the selective use made of Schlee's data by local politicians, as to the data themselves.

Gufu's exception to Schlee's unfortunate use of the technical phrase "killer complex" (1995:10), will, we suspect, be shared by most readers. The same word or phrase, as we suggested in our aside above on "nationalism", can convey different meanings to different people. They simply are not context free. This, of course, is a constant problem in all cross cultural discourse and translation.

Very few African readers will read "killer complex" as a neutral "scientific term", and in northern Kenya it has already been seized on as a term of political

³ To recall Robert Lowie on Schmidt and Graebner: "In the range and solidity of their knowledge, the German diffusionists are incomparably superior to their British counterparts". Moreover, "they are by no means so intransigent as they appear" (1937:177 and 191).

abuse by politicians who, almost certainly, have never read a couple of pages by Schlee. It has become a manipulable "sound bite". In colloquial English both "killer" and "complex" carry overtones and resonances which, we are sure, are quite contrary to Schlee's comparative intentions and intended meaning. Joined together the words are more than doubly upsetting. Used without clarification "killer" is a brutal, univocal word, more used in America than England, to mean "murderous ruffian". It does not convey the symbolic overtones which blood and trophy taking have for Booran and other Oromo, nor does it consider the contexts in which killing takes place. Elsewhere Schlee (1994) has contextualised the word, and not coupled it with 'complex' so that its use is unexceptionable.⁴ Just used baldly the word "killer" directs most listeners or readers away from the intended meaning and provokes resonances such as murderer, butcher, "killer instinct" and horror movies. It is a term that no people anywhere would like applied to themselves.

Even more damaging to mutual understanding is the word "complex" used with a meaning similar to that of Herskovits in the term "cattle complex" (1926). Herskovits, and the museum scholars from whom he borrowed the concept, meant by "complex" an interconnected cluster of "culture traits". Only students of the history of ethnology can possibly be expected to know that. The word "complex", because of the overwhelming influence of Freud, has been widely and consistently misread as a psychological term denoting an abnormal condition, as in "inferiority complex", and interpreted to mean "an irrational, and often infantile, fixation". Quite contrary to the intention of Herskovits, it has come to be thought of as a term of abuse and discrimination. Comparison remains an important anthropological method but we are not persuaded that it is still useful to seek to delimit culture areas by the presence of clusters, or complexes, of detached culture traits. "Cattle complex" has become so sullied by misassociation that it, and similar usages, would be better dropped from cross-cultural discourse.

Johann Helland's paper is concerned with the material issue of how the very effective pastoral productive system of the Booran can be maintained. His account of Booran experiences under Ethiopian rule complements Gufu's view from Kenya. It also starts from the harsh fact that the control and defence of well complexes are absolutely essential to survival. Helland describes the 'organisational features' which 'distinguish Borana pastoralism from other pastoral systems in the region'. He recounts the pressures which Booran in Ethiopia have survived since they submitted to the representatives of Minilik towards the end of the nineteenth century. Rather than fight what could only have been losing battles with their colonisers Booran continuously adapted to political domination and economic exploitation while, as skilled pastoralists,

⁴ For further contextualisation see Bartels, 1983, especially Ch 23, *Killing and Bearing*. An alternative way of understanding war and killing between pastoralists of the Horn is as; "a common ritual language by which they make themselves significant to each other and to themselves as independent political entities" (Turton, 1993:177).

they managed to maintain their successful system of pastoral production. While they submitted and paid their taxes or tribute they were given some protection from Somali pressures by the colonial governments of both Kenya and Ethiopia. The present governments of those two states may possibly be less exploitative but they are no longer supportive against Somali incursions.

Increasingly violent pressure in both Ethiopia and Kenya from their eastern neighbours, particularly the Somali, have greatly diminished their grazing lands. The Booran military organisation, based on the age-set system *hariiya*, has not been as effective as those of their neighbours in defending their resources (see Bassi's essay). The remnants of the traditional Booran political system are now seriously threatened. The new challenge 'however, is not military' nor only local it 'now involves political representation at the national level'. Booran are not being successful at that level and Helland fears that Liban, one of the two Booran heartlands, may be allocated by the government in Addis Ababa to the Somali region of Ethiopia. The indigenous political system and the control of well complexes are functionally interdependent, so the destruction of the already eroded Booran political system would, therefore, result in the collapse of their extraordinarily efficient method of water management, and hence of their system of pastoral production.

If Helland's fears are realised, and we hear that they are being, then great numbers of the Booran in Ethiopia could become destitutes.

Marco Bassi is equally concerned with the importance of pastoralism for the Booran, but he starts from the political and ritual system rather than from the productive base. He analyses the loci of power in the Booran political system through an examination of the ambiguities in the *gada* system. He describes what actually happens at local meetings and at the general assembly. In the early literature on *gada*, he argues, the power of *gada* office holders has been greatly exaggerated by the words, derived from quite alien European political systems, used to translate their titles. (Another instance of the power of misapplied words!) The first Ethiopian administrators, Menilik's agents, were equally misled and made the *Kaallu* of the Sabho moiety, an entirely ritual status, an Imperial official. We are reminded of the obsession that British colonial officials had with locating "natural rulers" of bounded territories; they believed, in their similar ethnocentric and hierarchical way, that all people must be ruled by rulers, ideally ones distinguished by their birth and upbringing. Once located, a "traditional chief" could be "gazetted" and utilised by the colonisers to administer his specified territory populated by his newly colonised subjects (cf., Allen 1994).

In reality the deliberations of Booran assemblies are normative rather than executive and though *gada* officials may be able to exert some little influence they have no power; indeed, they are sometimes so young and inexperienced that they do not have any influence on events at all. Booran decision making is regulated by 'specific and complex procedural rules', 'reached by general consensus' and persuasion, and is certainly "democratic". Democratic, that is, in

the sense that every married male may participate, but not in the sense that an elected political assembly is empowered, or could empower, office holders who could make or execute decisions on its behalf. There is neither a budget nor an embryonic bureaucracy. Booran traditional "government", and by implication that of other Oromo who had *gada*, was and is "diffuse" and not at all centralised. The jargon of modern politics is no more appropriate to describe *gada* than were the classical nomenclatures of nineteenth-century European travellers. Unfortunately, both continue to obfuscate some descriptions and some administrative decisions. *Gada* is not divorced from politics but is primarily concerned with fulfilling its ritual responsibilities as 'a centre of ritual super-integration'. It legitimises actions rather than initiating or controlling them. Bassi concludes by outlining elements of the *gada* model which might be useful in the construction of an Oromo polity.

Gudrun Dahl argues that Booran 'combine an elaborate system of ideas ... [about] ... sacredness and sanctity with an everyday attitude towards such values which observers find surprisingly relaxed'. One recalls the homely phrasing of the proverb *Dubbi Waaqaaf kolfa sare himbeekan*, "One cannot understand the words of God nor the smile of a dog" (Cotter 1990:468). She addresses some of the more abstract features of the Booran system of thought, namely 'the philosophical concepts that underlie the *gadaa* system' which, she argues, utilise a symbolic code much of which is common to all Oromo. This task requires her to examine some metaphysical aspects of Boorana cosmology and to relate them to the ideals which should govern relationships between generations and genders. She identifies a 'basic tension between equality and hierarchy that is inherent in the Boorana thought world' as the primary pair, among several pairs of binary oppositions *lamii*, which are 'the creative communion between oppositions, the fertile unity of contrasts'. Everything that 'is' or exists in the world is part of 'a flow of life emanating from Divinity'. To make the values of *gada* comprehensible she has to 'explain' the concepts of *ayaana* 'fractions of Divinity' which are present in all creation; *angaafa*, relative seniority of birth; the hierarchies of *gaada* offices and, crucially, the two characteristics of 'sacredness' which (Janus like) reconcile the opposition of equality and hierarchy. The whole forms a very complex, intellectually constructed "World Picture" of "correspondences" (Tillyard 1943) which, nevertheless, can be encapsulated and earthily expressed in the saying: "What applies to the Qalluu (Divinity's fount of blessings in the world) applies to his dog (the lowest of domesticated animals)".

Paul Baxter compares the marriage customs of the Booran and the Arsi and examines the crucial importance that the maintenance of supportive relationships between sets of affines, as a product of marriage, have been in both cultures. He argues that, despite considerable apparent differences, both Arsi and Booran systems of marriage share: (i) common underlying structural features, such as stress on the indissolubility of affinity and the control of the choice of marriage partners by the elders, and (ii) common cultural modalities which

form what John Lonsdale (1992:446) has termed 'moral ethnicities'. His enquiry is a preliminary to what, hopefully, will lead to broader and deeper investigations of Oromo systems of marriage, kinship and affinity. His data on the changes which have taken place among Arsi suggest that cultural forms are very flexible and can incorporate changes while retaining traditional values.

He follows a path taken by Alan Barnard in his study of the Khoisan peoples of southern Africa. The localised cultures of the Khoisan are much more varied and share many less obvious similarities than do the Oromo, and their history of colonial persecution has been even more unhappy; nevertheless, Barnard is able to discern a number of underlying 'elements of structure' which they share 'in common across economic, cultural, linguistic ... boundaries' (1992:3). The notion of underlying elements of structure implies:

- (i) a 'notion of cross cultural similarity';
- (ii) that the absence or presence of elements is determined empirically, so that both their importance and extent depend on context; and
- (iii) the recognition that any element may appear to contrast with, or even seem out of accord with, items of the surface structure.

For example, at Arsi marriages the *sirba* (combined songs and dances) performed are in direct, but tactfully veiled, conflict with the formal, public domination of Islam.

Mario Aguilar also records accommodations between traditional rituals and publicly dominant Islam. He worked among the Booran of the Waso River area of Kenya who, for over sixty years, have been cut off from the rest of their people by wedges of Rendile and Somali. During this period they have converted to Islam and suffered awful hardships from drought, Somali incursions and unthinkingly brutal interventions by government. Aguilar argues that they have maintained their attachment to pastoralism and to the *Nagaa Boorana*, the 'Peace of the Booran' (see essays by Tablino and Gufu). There has been considerable diversification in religious practices so that Islamic practices and many 'traditional Oromo practices and beliefs' have formed 'a continuum in ritual'. The senior generation of male elders has a strong Muslim orientation acquired from the Somali. The elders' interpretations of religious propriety dominate the 'national rituals' which they control, such as namings, weddings and funerals which are associated with public space and the male domain. The 'national rituals' are 'complemented by "sequences of domestic rituals"', which follow traditional pre-Islamic forms, such as; the sacrifice of coffee beans, *buna qalla*; the *ayyaana* cult; daily prayers and blessings and greetings. "Domestic rituals" are associated with women and domesticated space. The generation of males which follows on the senior generation of elders have come to resent the Somali and are prominent in 'domestic rituals'. A common element to both 'national' and 'domestic' rituals is the uttering of prayers and blessings which connect the immediate occasion to the whole Boran people, their heartlands of Dirre and Liban and the traditional Boorana cosmos.

Tesema Ta'a' takes us back to the daily realities of extracting a subsistence, though primarily from the land rather than from livestock, with a summary account of traditional and contemporary co-operative self-help organisations. He argues that development agencies need to know about these organisations and take them into account because, where free people are working their own land, they can increase productivity without coercion. He argues that Oromo 'enjoy working together' and dislike 'loneliness', that sociability and working together with others have value in themselves and that the consequent mutual dependence and reciprocity generate moral norms.

Odd Eirik Arnesen's contribution is the only one set in northern Oromia and is a cautionary tale to those who seek to define ethnicity by simple, fixed criteria such as language and territory. The paper is a detailed analysis of 'the historical construction of' Derra *woreda*, a 'locality in the central Ethiopian highlands' which was settled by Tulama Oromo towards the end of the 16th century. Derra formed a part of the Oromo shifting "frontier" against the Amhara chiefdoms to the east. At that time Oromo did not perceive their territories as 'bounded surface areas', but as 'certain focal places ... linked by paths of ancestral travel from the "cradle" of Oromo culture'. During the 19th and 20th centuries the people of Derra settled to sedentary cultivation and, supposedly, became so 'Amharised' that Haberland could write of them as "Amhara using Galla language". Nevertheless, when the Mengistu regime collapsed, they opted to support the Oromo People's Democratic Organisation. However, that choice is not such a straightforward commitment as it might seem. Over the last four hundred years 'overlapping cultural boundaries, changing polities and a variety of overlapping identities' have been constructed. Ethnicity is not just a simple choice between two clear options. Arnesen argues convincingly that static interpretations of "'nationalist" or "ethnic" space and boundaries' are inadequate to deal with the historical and cultural processes which have formed, and are still forming, Derra. His approach is similar in many respects to that of Schlee (1992) in the south.

Hector Blackhurst also makes it clear that if we are to understand ethnic affiliations we must contextualise them ethnographically and historically, and make sure that we understand accurately the meanings of the words and concepts that the actors actually used (see essay by Bassi). He considers the ways in which different Oromo groups have controlled the boundaries between themselves 'by the manipulation of symbols and by limiting access to various goods and services'. Using insights from his own field research, among Tulama from Shoa who had settled among the Arsi of Bale, he reanalyses the historical reconstructions of the conflicts between the Oromo and the *Gabbaro*, itself a very complex term applied to the peoples who had been conquered and incorporated (see essay by Triulzi). One of the Oromo expansionist strategies, used conspicuously during their period as conquerors in the seventeenth century, was to incorporate strangers through different forms of 'adoption'. In that context adoption was a political and military act, but it was 'couched' in the domestic

language and symbolism of kinship and filiation. The Oromo 'lexicon' of adoption and fostering is extensive and complex; the contents of any sets of relationships which are created by them can only be fully understood in their specific contexts. Blackhurst examines the contrasting modes of incorporation of individuals and groups, in particular those created by *moggaasa*⁵. A term which covers the domestic/kinship relationship created when a foster parent adopts a child and also, by extension, the political act of 'adoption' that takes place when one group of people adopt another into their clan or tribe, placing them thereby in a subordinate position similar to that of a child. Adopted groups, like adopted children, may grow up and seek to manage their own affairs! (See Gufu Oba's essay.)

Alessandro Triulzi examines the history of the relationships between conquerors and conquered among the Macha Oromo in what is now western Ethiopia. Most Ethiopianists, following the Chroniclers and unconscious racist prejudices, have represented the Oromo conquests as relapses into barbarism (see Hultin's essay). Recently a number of historians have reinterpreted the conquest and incorporation of the indigenous populations as a successful 'story of fusion and interaction', through which the 'Oromo genius for assimilation' quickly transformed the conquered into Oromo. Triulzi suggests that the new Oromo interpretation, though obviously truer and more reasonable than that of the Ethiopianists, is a rather 'idealised' view. Incorporation was achieved in good measure through collective adoption *moggaasa* of the conquered peoples as perpetually junior kin. The process was not entirely conflict free. Not all the *gabaro* ("those who serve") accepted the 'ideal type' of 'reborn' (*dhalatta*) relationship in which they had been cast by their conquerors. For the *gabaro* it meant that, at best, they were ritually relatively impure and, at worst, economically exploited subordinates of the new 'noblemen' who had accumulated land and wealth. The rebellion of the subjected *gabaro* in 1618 was hardly surprising. Descendants of the *gabaro* still engage in the 'age-old struggle ... to blur the differences' between them and the descendants of the ritually 'pure' (*qulqulluu*) Booran.

The final contribution is a long poem composed by a young Booran patriot named Jarso, who was killed on the 21st September 1994 in the Oromo liberation struggle. The poem is contextualised by Abdullahi A. Shongolo and extends his earlier work with Gunther Schlee (1992). Jarso was one of the many Booran pastoralists whose families were reduced to destitution by droughts and *shifita* wars. He articulated Oromo demands for 'recognition of the dignity of Oromo culture' by developing the traditional poetic genre known as *geerarsa*, praise songs for heroes, into a form of contemporary political discourse. Tapes

⁵ Incorporation of conquered populations through the use of *moggaasa* 'adoption' was widespread among Oromo and sometimes remarkably effective. Braukamper notes that: 'A considerable part of the Hadiya were absorbed by the expanding Oromo and became actively engaged themselves in expelling their kinsmen who refused to submit to the suzerainty of the Oromo leaders (*aba gada*)' (p. 434). He notes that: 'The Hadiya clans of the Ar(us)si (c. 2,000,000) even outnumber those of the "Oromo" proper' (p. 428).

of his songs became immensely popular and were played, like the tapes in praise of Shaykh Hussain or those of itinerant minstrels such as Ali Mohamed Bira and Abdullahi Jirma, on buses and in bars and coffee houses (Baxter 1986:110). Jarso calls on the Booran, Gabra, Garre, Guji, the local identities he knows of through experience, to combine with the peoples of Harar and Bale as Oromo against the common enemy. This collection of essays ends as it began with the expression of a personal voice.

We have not managed to present a comprehensive description of the lineaments of Oromo ethnic identity, and it would have been overwhelmingly pretentious for us to have imagined that we could. There are conspicuous gaps in both our historical and geographical coverage. Central topics such as gender, the roles of prayer and sacrifice, the roles of spirit mediums, the spread of the cult of Shaykh Hussain from Bale to as far away as Jimma and Garba Tula, oral literature and economic organisation are hardly even mentioned in passing. These lacunae reflect those in both the literature and recent research coverage. Unfortunately Richard Hogg, Günther Schlee, Lambert Bartels, Giorgio Banti and Ulrich Braukamper were unable to attend the workshop, perhaps if they had some of these gaps would have been filled. Nevertheless, we hope we have made a start at delineating some of the crucial features which constitute Oromo national identity.

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Hawani's Story

Hawani Debella and Aneesa Kassam

In analysing the experience and attitudes of an individual, we always reach data and elementary facts which are not exclusively limited to this individual's personality, but can be treated as mere instances of more or less general classes of data or facts, and can thus be used for the determination of laws of social becoming.

(Thomas and Znaniecki 1958:1832-1833)

BACKGROUND

In 1974 a number of social and economic factors combined to unleash a series of revolts at different levels in Ethiopian society which eventually led to the overthrow of the Emperor Haile Selassie in September of the same year. The Emperor was replaced by the council of the Dergue (literally meaning "committee" in the Amharic language) led by middle-ranking military officers. Whilst initially linked to the revolutionary forces which had brought it to power, the Dergue soon became disassociated from the masses it purported to serve and instituted a campaign of terror and violence to suppress democratic reform in the country (Selassie 1980:11ff). One way in which the military ruling elite dealt with its opponents was through the creation of militias in the residential neighbourhoods of the capital, known as *qabale* (*kebele*). As Habte Selassie writes (1980:42): "The military and the *kebele's* militia periodically carried out raids of government offices and private homes, in all the cities, especially Addis Ababa, in search of weapons and 'counter-revolutionaries'. Any resistance led to the shooting of the suspect".

Since it was the Oromo peasantry which had been historically disenfranchised by the Ethiopian empire state and stood to gain from any real land reforms resulting from the 'revolution', it was effectively the Oromo who now became the renewed targets of oppression and repression by the military dictatorship. The Oromo had welcomed the revolution and the Oromo intelligentsia had played a central role in the overthrow of the Haile Selassie regime. In the post-revolutionary period, through the National Campaign for Development Through Co-operation (ZEMECHHA) Oromo students had participated actively in the formation of peasant associations and had helped to edu-

cate and to politicise the rural masses. It was this process of raising political awareness, which had developed contrary to the Dergue's intentions, that the new government now sought to check forcibly. With the revolution, Oromo consciousness had however been fully awakened and the armed struggle for self-determination had become a national cause in different parts of Oromo country. As a result of their persecution, more and more educated Oromo began to go underground, to join forces with the struggle, led by the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). The OLF, the precursor to which was the Macha-Tulamma movement of the 1960s, had been formed in 1973, predating the revolution. (See essays by Mekuria Bulcha and Mohammed Hassen.) In the troubled times following the revolution, vast numbers of Oromo suspected of being members of the OLF were arrested and imprisoned without trial, regardless of their affiliation with the movement (personal communications). Oromo women and wives of leaders and sympathisers were subjected to similar treatment.

It is this period of renewed Oromo suffering that forms the background of the life history document that is the subject of this paper.

Oromo studies, viewed in historical perspective, have focused their attention on the study of the *Gada*, the political and religious institution by which the traditional Oromo were governed prior to the nineteenth century formation of the nation-state of Ethiopia. Ethnographic studies have tended to emphasise the diversity of Oromo culture at the expense of its unity. Detailed variants of the *Gada* system have been presented by researchers, but none have sought to link the different versions to a common root. Moreover, the dominant view presented of the Oromo through these studies has been one of a pastoral nomadic people which had little interaction with the settled agricultural groups that constitute the majority of the people. In the image that has been constructed of the Oromo through these writings, even the people's own name for themselves was absent until it was nationally reclaimed by them in 1974. In some circles, including those of international organisations and agencies, the derogatory name 'Galla' continues to be employed to designate the Oromo. (See Hultin and Zitelmann's essays.) Through their work, anthropologists (including the recorder of Hawani's story in this paper) have thus wittingly or unwittingly been responsible for perpetuating the Galla myth invented by the Abyssinian oppressors of the Oromo. In this representation of the Oromo, dating to the first written historical record about them, they were viewed as wandering nomadic hordes who invaded the land known as Ethiopia today. With the exception of a few non-Oromo writers, notably Baxter (1980; 1983; 1985; 1994a; 1994b; and Blackhurst 1978), there have been few studies documenting the present situation of the Oromo.

This paper was written in an attempt to gain insight into the emerging history of the Oromo by focusing on the experiences of a single individual in

this process. It is thus situated within the renewed framework of interest in the life history method in narrative anthropology.¹

METHOD

This life history document was recorded at Hawani Debella's home in London on the evening of 13 August, 1994. Hawani is now twenty years old and sought asylum in Britain in 1990, where she has been living ever since. I first met Hawani during a visit to England in 1992 and was struck at once at the immense courage with which such a young person was living her life in exile. Hawani subsequently became a close friend of the family. Parts of the experience she recounts were therefore already known to me from previous informal discussions with her. On this occasion, however, I wanted to record her story more formally. Her compatriot, friend and mentor, Gemetchu Megerssa a fellow contributor, was also present on this and other occasions and facilitated the exchange. I had asked Hawani the previous day to reflect over her situation and to tell me what it felt to be a young Oromo woman in exile. Hawani was happy to comply with my request. After discussion as to the best method of recording her story, Hawani felt that she would be able to narrate the experiences she had undergone as a child with greater fluency in Amharic. During her narration, when she referred to incidents familiar to both Gemetchu and herself, she also spoke in Oromo, and for my benefit, sometimes in English. Gemetchu Megerssa transcribed the interview that resulted, and assisted me in the editing. Hawani was visibly moved by the events she was recalling and the emotivity of the telling reinforced and strengthened the bond between all three of us present. Details of the narration were checked and clarified with Hawani on several occasions following the interview. A draft copy of the final document was also given to her to read for comment and approval. Notes clarifying points in the narration have been made with the assistance of Gemetchu Megerssa, as my own experience of Ethiopia is indirect and limited to a single visit in 1984. Over the last few years, I have, however, spoken to several other Oromo in exile about their experiences of being Oromo during the period in which Hawani's story takes place. The incidents narrated in these accounts correspond closely to those which Hawani evokes. They therefore form part of the past and present social reality of the Oromo as a whole.

¹ The use of the personal document has a long history in social science, going back to at least W.I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki's work *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America 1918–20*. This type of material was used extensively in many monographs of the symbolic interactionist 'Chicago School' of sociology in 1920s and 1930s. For various reasons, the method fell into disuse. With the rise of post-modernism in which there is a shift away from the general and abstract to the particular, and as master narratives and meta-theories come to be questioned, there is a move to return to the more atomistic and microscopic approach of the individual experience and to discourse analysis of actual texts, hence the revival of the method. Narrative anthropology employs many of the techniques used in literary analysis in the study and interpretation of life-history documents. For an overview of the method and bibliography, see Denzin (1989).

In recording her story, I did not only wish to capture the turmoil into which the present generation of Oromo has been born, but also to see it from the point of view of a young Oromo woman. Although I had been offered the opportunity of presenting the perhaps richer experience, in terms of historical depth, of an important male subject in the Oromo struggle, I chose to let Hawani relate her own account of events. In making this choice, I was attempting to redress the gender imbalance of my own work and of that of Oromo studies in general, which have tended, on the whole, to have a largely male-bias. Through Hawani's story, I wanted to make the women's voice in the Oromo struggle heard.

Without further preamble, therefore, I will now let Hawani recount her own story.

HAWANI'S STORY

I was born in 1974. The month was June. Neither my father nor my mother were working at the time. My mother married young: she was eighteen years old when she gave birth to me. My place of birth was Addis Ababa. The revolution that overthrew the monarch came a year after I was born. The revolution brought with it great disruption to my family and relatives. Relatives on my mother's side, who lived in the Ambo area, revolted and went into the mountains.² My father's father was murdered by an Amhara. This man is said to have been a representative of the local government authority, known as *qabale*. My mother's uncle, who was elected by the local people to serve as the chairman of a peasant association, was also assassinated by the local government authority. Another relative of my mother's, who avenged the killing of his brother, was locked up for nine years in the prison in Ambo. Soon after that, my father was also arrested in Addis Ababa and imprisoned in the jail known as the 'Bermuda Triangle'.³ He spent two years in this prison. All this I learnt from my mother later on. I was too young to know what was happening.

The first thing that I do clearly remember, was the arrest of my mother's elder brother. He was a graduate from Addis Ababa University. He was arrested at his work place. His wife, who was then pregnant with their first child, came to my mother with the bad news. That same evening, she too was arrested. Both my aunt and uncle remained in jail for over nine years and their son was born and brought up in prison.

This ten year period was a nightmare for the whole family. The whole family was persecuted by the government authorities, in particular by the

² Hawani's family comes from Ambo, situated in Eastern Macha Oromo country 120 kilometres to the west of Addis Ababa. It has historically been one of the heartlands of Oromo learning and knowledge, where tradition has survived despite the persecution of the people by past and present government officials. Hawani's family is a well-known and highly respected one.

³ 'Bermuda Triangle' was the local name given to one of the prisons in Addis Ababa, as few prisoners jailed there could ever hope to come out alive.

qabale. They harassed everybody related to our family. They referred to us as *zernya Galla* ("racist Galla"). Even at school, the Amhara boys and girls who knew about the stand our family had taken continually provoked and taunted us. They called my sister and I bad names. They would form themselves into two groups. One group would shout "coca-cola!" The other group would point at us and cry "*farii Galla!*" ("cowardly Galla"). These are only some of the insults they would hurl at us. I am ashamed even to repeat the others.

But it was my mother and grandmother who suffered the most. The prisoners were not fed in jail. It was the women who bore the burden of taking food each day to the prisoners. My mother visited the prison every other day. The prisoners she had to look after were dispersed in different jails. Sometimes the prisoners would be moved without warning from one jail to another and you could never be sure that the food had reached them. She would spend the whole week running from one jail to another. When she came back in the evening and told us how she had been treated by the prison guards, it was no different from the way my sister and I had been treated at school. It made me cry.

As I grew older, I began to accompany my mother in her visits to the jails, especially at week-ends. It is difficult to tell you in words how I felt during these visits. It was terrible to see my uncle standing there on the other side of the fence, and not to be able to even touch his hand. It was terrible to watch my mother weeping helplessly and not knowing what to do about it. I felt that the whole world had turned against us. And then I slowly realised that we were being treated in this way because we were Oromo. It was a strange feeling, this feeling of not being wanted. You got this feeling in the neighbourhood in which you lived; you felt it at school; you got it when you went to the market-place. You felt it when you went to church and when you went to work. It was everywhere. It made you afraid of everyone, it made you doubt everyone, hate everyone, including yourself.

When we visited my uncle, the prison guards would say: "So! you have come to visit that racist Galla (*yaanin zaranya Galla*)". They did not treat other prisoners in that way. Oromo women who had come to visit their relatives were searched by the male prison guards and subjected to humiliating treatment. The guards would touch their private parts and ask them if they were circumcised. How can I tell you all the insults we suffered during those visits?

So you see, I was born at the wrong time, maybe even on the wrong day, as the Oromo say. I was born right into this terrible situation and I lived through it until I left Ethiopia.

What was even worse, was that even some of our relatives began to avoid the family. They knew that our family was fighting against the government for the liberation of the Oromo and they were afraid of being associated with us. They kept away from us out of fear for their own lives. Of course some would send money to the family through a third party and explain why they could not come and give it to us themselves. But it made you feel as if you had some contagious disease and that everyone was afraid of coming near you.

It is true that the Oromo were not the only group of people who were imprisoned. There were also Eritrean and Tigrean prisoners. But the Oromo were treated differently. When an Eritrean or a Tigrean was jailed or shot, it was reported in the news. You read about the arrest in the newspaper or heard it on the radio. In the case of the Oromo, nobody even knew that you had been arrested. You only heard about it indirectly. Eritrean and Tigrean prisoners were never called *zaranya* or racists.

As my uncle used to say, when you are not well and your relatives come and visit you in hospital, you feel better. You feel loved. He used to say that prisoners were the same. The prisoner wants all his relatives and friends to know what has happened to him. He wants to be visited. These visits are the only contact he has with the outside world and the people who matter to him. You know how terrible it is to be sick and alone. It is even worse to be a prisoner and to be completely cut off from your relatives. There are just no words to describe what you feel. No news was given about the Oromo prisoners; nobody heard about you on the radio or read about you in the paper. You were completely isolated.

It was even worse to be an Oromo woman in this situation. A mother is not like other relatives. She cannot turn her back on her children in prison. Oromo women had to undergo great hardship to feed their children in jail. They suffered the humiliation and disgusting treatment of the prison guards to keep in touch with their sons and daughters. After all, these children were their own flesh and blood; they had carried them in their wombs for nine months and they had looked after them from childhood.

My uncle was arrested just after he had graduated from the university. He was so young. He had hardly begun his working life. His parents and relatives were hoping that he would now be able to share some of the responsibility of looking after the young and the elderly. Instead, he ended up in prison and spent ten years of his life there. Just think, ten years of a person's life gone, just like that. At least the adults knew why they were in jail, what they were doing there. But what about an innocent child? My aunt gave birth to the child she was carrying in prison. He spent the first nine years of his life in jail alongside the adults. What does such a child remember of his childhood? Prison walls and depressed Oromo prisoners. It is not surprising that the child developed epilepsy.

It was terrible to be a child growing up in this atmosphere of fear and tension. The children were not excluded from what was happening to the family. Nothing was hidden from us. We used to listen to the adults discussing the murders, the tortures and the killings. We used to watch them constantly worrying about who was going to be arrested next. Like them, we too were scared stiff to hear that another relative had been murdered in his home or had received the death sentence in prison. We shared in their pain and their anguish. As a child, I used to have dreams in which the Amhara police and the *qabale* had set our house on fire and I would find myself struggling to escape

from the flames. I remember how happy I was when I woke up and found that it was only a dream. I sometimes wished that I had been born an Amhara. Now I understand what the Oromo mean when they say that one's fate is decided at birth. Such has been my fate. It has been my fate to be born an Oromo. To witness the harassment of my family and to worry with the grown-ups about who was going to be arrested and murdered next.

But now I have accepted the worries, the torture and the unhappiness and I know that this suffering is the fate of the Oromo of my generation, of the children who were born into this time of nightmare.

My father did everything to protect us from persecution. The first thing he did was to give his children Amhara names. He kept telling us that having an Amhara name would make life easier for us. But it didn't help. They could identify us even with our Amhara names. Now I have done exactly the opposite. As soon as I escaped from Ethiopia and came to live in Britain, I changed my name. I gave myself an Oromo name of my choice. I like it; it feels good.

I love my mother. I love my father too, but I love my mother even more. I love my mother like I love my country. My mother is a heroine. She went through hell. She not only had to look after the family at home; she had to go to work and to look after several Oromo prisoners in different jails. She didn't even know some of them. All she knew about them was that they had been imprisoned for the Oromo cause and that they were friends of her brother. It was not just my mother who went through such agony. I know several other Oromo women who underwent the same experience. One is a very close friend of my mother. The Amhara killed her husband. Her brother went into the mountains to join the Oromo Liberation Front. She brought up her four sons and daughter all by herself. She was a copy typist in the high court and was paid by the number of pages she typed. She had very little money, but she still managed to look after her children and to send them to school. Of course, she could not send them to the best school. Good schools were only for the rich Amhara, Europeans and a few Oromo traitors. Sometimes the family went without food for days. I remember my mother giving her friend some money. My mother was relatively better off, because my father also had a job. We are not talking about coping like this for a few days or a few months. Such women suffered like this for fifteen years or more and continue to suffer.

Some Oromo who were in jail did not have relatives in Addis Ababa. Their relatives in the provincial towns and countryside would visit them once or twice a year. They had to travel long distances for many days to visit their sons and daughters. When such relatives came to the prison, they were expected to speak in the Amharic language, a language they didn't know. If you couldn't speak the language, the prison guards would chase you away. They didn't care that you had come from so far away. I remember standing there watching elderly women who couldn't speak Amharic with tears in their eyes. Sometimes my mother would offer to translate. Imagine speaking to your own son through a translator. At school, Oromo children were mocked for mispronouncing

Amharic words. Our elders were humiliated by being forced to speak to their own children through a translator when they visited their relatives in jail. They had to do this so that the prison guards could make sure that no secret information was being exchanged.

With all this, you begin to wonder why it is so wrong to be Oromo. What was wrong about speaking the Oromo language? What was wrong about having an Oromo name? Even though I know very little about the traditional Oromo culture and I cannot speak the Oromo language as well as I would like to (this is because I was brought up in Addis Ababa), I now want to be able to speak the Oromo language, I want to know the Oromo culture, I want to know Oromo history. You see, what the Amhara didn't realise, is that the more they tried to force us to give up all that was Oromo, the more we wanted to be Oromo.

The whole idea of imprisoning a person in Ethiopia was not to correct him or her. It was done to punish him, to terrorise him. This punishment was directed not only at the prisoner, but at the whole family. It was meant to serve as a lesson and as a warning to all those who sympathised with the Oromo cause. I remember once my mother fainted and almost went into a coma through shock and had to be hurried to hospital. The incident occurred when we heard that some Oromo prisoners had been executed over the week-end. My uncle's name was on the list of those who had been shot. When my mother heard the news, she collapsed. She had looked after my uncle in prison for eight years; the news was just too much to bear. It was as if she also had given up the struggle. The next day, my father paid the prison guards a bribe to verify the information. We then learnt, thanks be to *Waaqa* (God), that it was not my uncle who had been shot, but another man who had the same name. My mother used to say repeatedly, "I don't know who is worse off, those in prison, or ourselves". I am telling you this because it made no difference whether you were in jail or not. If a member of your family was imprisoned; you were all in jail. The whole family suffered psychologically.

The Oromo prisoners did not only suffer from being restricted to a small space in a narrow cell. They were also physically tortured. Some were permanently crippled. Some of those who were shot were buried in mass graves. Those who witnessed these events and survived physically were traumatised and bore deep emotional and psychological scars from the experiences they had undergone. This scar is permanent, and will remain with them until they die. But those who were not physically jailed, all those who watched and witnessed the events, mothers, brothers, fathers, and sisters, also suffered beyond words. All bear deep and permanent scars.

What I have told you up to now has been about my own feelings and about the experiences of my parents and close relatives. My family may not be a typical family. There were many families who simply disintegrated and disappeared. There were several Oromo women who lost their husbands, Oromo children who lost their fathers and Oromo parents who lost their children over-night. I

heard about one man who is said to have permanently lost his power of speech after witnessing the murder of his four children in his own house. I could tell you several other such stories that I overheard from the adults when I was a child.

It was my uncle who advised my mother to send me away. My parents were afraid for my safety. You see, I had begun to hate the people who were doing all this to my family so much that I didn't care whether I lived or died. I had become extremely violent. I openly criticised the government and would say in public what I felt about what they were doing to the Oromo. My parents had to obtain the papers for my travel to England at great cost. They felt it was the only way out for me. I was only sixteen when I arrived in England. I celebrated my seventeenth birthday here.

I was in England when Mengistu fled the country. It was here that I heard that my uncle had come out of prison. I was overjoyed to hear the news.

After Mengistu fled the country in 1991, we all thought things would change. But nothing has changed for the Oromo. They continue to be persecuted by the so-called democratic government of the EPRDF.⁴ According to local and international human rights organisations, there are up to 50,000 Oromo in concentration camps such as at Hurso in Harraghe, Dhidhessa in Wallaga and other places. The same thing continues.

I hear from home that the Oromo people are determined to resist the present Amhara-Tigre domination. News from home also claims that many Oromo have taken to the mountains. But it is difficult for them to resist when everything is against them. I have no doubt that the Oromo will win in the end, but at what cost, I wonder.

I want to go back to my country, I want to go to Oromia. I want to do all that I can do to change the life of the Oromo women and children for the better. That is why I have chosen to study medicine. You see, medicine is highly competitive in England. You are required to score distinctions in almost all the subjects to secure a place in a good university. That is why I have worked day and night this year. This year, I obtained the best overall grades of all refugees sponsored by the Africa Education Trust. Now that I have scored the required grades and have been offered a place in one of the best medical schools in the country, I will continue to study, so that I can serve my people. I have been worrying and waiting to hear about my grant all summer. Even though I don't know for sure that I am going to get it, I have registered for the courses and have started attending the lectures.⁵ Just look at me, just look at my courage: I am there

⁴ In June 1991, the 'socialist' government of Mengistu Haile Mariam was ousted by the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front. The new 'democratic' government formed following the departure of the ex-president was intended to represent the interests of all the ethnic groups in Ethiopia. When it became evident that the same repressive tactics continued to be practised under a new guise by the dominant Abyssinian partners in the coalition, representatives of the Oromo Liberation Front withdrew from the government and boycotted the recent elections. They continue their struggle for self-determination.

⁵ As we go to press in February 1996 Hawani is still waiting for a student grant without any sign of one materialising! Editors.

without any money. But I will make it; I am determined to make it. I want to dedicate the rest of my life to serving the cause of the Oromo women and children.

I feel better for having told you my story. I always wanted to talk to someone I trusted about the things that have happened to me. It is good to know that someone cares and shares the burden. It is as if a weight has been lifted”.

POST-SCRIPT

From the reactions of many of those Oromo scholars present at the *Being and Becoming Oromo* workshop at Gothenburg, and of those Oromo in diaspora who subsequently read the paper, it is clear that Hawani's story stirs deep chords of resonance that connect to their experiences of being Oromo. The events that Hawani recounts therefore form part of the shared understanding of being Oromo. Her story captures 'pieces' of this collective experience, which together make up the unfolding history of the Oromo. It reflects the ongoing struggle, which is as yet historically unfinished, but will constitute the 'stuff' from which the history of the contemporary will be written. As such, it is history in the making.

As a life-history document, the story is a powerful one; it is simple, but effective. As a narrative, it contains a number of meanings, which can be 'read' at many different levels: sociological, political, cultural, psychological, etc. Due to constraints of space, only some of these meanings can be discussed here.

The story is set against the background of state oppression and persecution in Ethiopia, and describes the ruthless manner in which the minority regime sought to oppress the powerless majority. It gives real-life details of the arrests, imprisonment, tortures and killings suffered by the political opponents and of the anguish, and fear of reprisal suffered by their families. The factual data describing the state prisons and the treatment of the inmates are beyond dispute. The story conveys in an almost palpable form the atmosphere of tension and feelings of exclusion suffered by ordinary Oromo and the extent of the prejudice manifested against them. It recounts, in particular, the humiliation endured by the women-folk and their heroic attempts to maintain family ties and kinship links in the disintegrating situation. The family is the locus of the drama. The whole narration is, in fact, a remarkable example of the ability of kin bonds to withstand the pressures placed upon them. It highlights the role played by women and the onus placed upon them as single parents, forcibly separated from their men-folk, to carry alone the burdens of economic production and social and cultural reproduction. In the break-down of the established social order, the story depicts some of the strategies used by families and the individual members of these families to deal with the situation: withdrawal and armed resistance as guerrilla fighters; compromise with the hated policy of Amharisation for the sake of survival or outright refusal to comply and flight

into exile. In making the choice to leave or to stay, the individuals submerge or affirm their identities and see the sacrifices demanded of them as a fight for the beloved motherland. Far from destroying the Oromo identity, the story shows that the Abyssinian persecution has only served to fire the spirit of *Oromumma*, and by rekindling it, to awaken Oromo consciousness, thus transfiguring it and transforming it from an expression of the local and regional to a truly national sentiment.

And in this lies the social becoming of the Oromo.

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The Development of Oromo Political Consciousness from 1958 to 1994

Herbert S. Lewis

In the truest sense this paper is meant to be exploratory and tentative. I shall try to speak to some wider issues of ethnicity and nationalism—to some ongoing debates regarding “modernity” and ethnicity.

My experience with Oromo people has been varied both in time and space rather than sustained. I should outline what this experience has been.

1. From 1959–60 I lived in the Jimma region, about half the time in town and half of the time in the countryside near Jiren. Except for my acquaintance with two Oromo high school students all my contacts in Jimma were with farmers. Of course all the people I knew were Muslims, and those who were in their thirties or older had lived in the old kingdom of Jimma Abba Jifar during its last days of internal autonomy. At that time I also had conversations with two university educated Oromo intellectuals in Addis Ababa. Dinsa Lepisa was one of these two.
2. My family and I spent 1965–66 in and around Ambo, with a very different Oromo community. Their style of life and attitudes contrasted in many—but not all—respects from the Muslim people of Jimma, with their monarchical background. Once again most of my contacts were with rural farmers, but this time I had regular communication with a number of secondary school students, three of whom lived in a small house in our compound.
3. In 1991, just after the Derg collapsed, and again in 1993, I was able to return once more to Jimma (once) and to Ambo (twice) for short visits. On these trips I also had considerable contact with politically involved and ethnically conscious Oromo in Addis Ababa, at the University and elsewhere.
4. Since 1991 I have been attending the annual meetings of the Oromo Studies Association in Toronto and Minneapolis, and communicating as never before with Oromo in North America.

Until recently the matter of Oromo identity was not central to my research. I was aware of the matter, but I made no special study of it. Today I am now trying to reconstruct what I know in retrospect. In the light of my four decades of unstructured observation of Oromo ethnic attitudes I think that I have seen a sort of “natural” development, a kind of “trajectory” in the growth of Oromo

ethnic and political consciousness that has relevance as well for the wider (comparative) study of ethnicity and ethnic nationalism in the world today. I shall begin, therefore, with a brief outline of what I take to be the central elements of a model of the development of ethnic awareness in the modern world.

A TENTATIVE MODEL OF THE GROWTH OF ETHNIC AWARENESS

It is by now absolutely clear that ethnicity and ethno-nationalism is one of the key phenomena of the end of the 20th century. And yet social scientists have been strangely loathe to come to terms with this, preferring to see ethnicity as "merely" skin-deep and interest-based, false consciousness, situational or circumstantial, easily put on and taken off, "imagined" and basically unauthentic. Although this is a very general attitude, it is frequently employed with respect to the Oromo for obvious reasons: it seems to offer a useful weapon for the opponents of Oromo nationalism.

By claiming that Oromo ethnic identity is unauthentic, that it never existed, that Oromo have too many different local and cultural varieties to ever agree on anything and have no over-arching sense of "nationhood", or that they are inextricably mixed with many other peoples, the opponents believe that they can divide, destroy, or, perhaps, wish away Oromo nationalism. While this attitude has clear origins in politics and "interests", it is facilitated by the general social science discourse that still tends to discount or decry ethno-nationalism. With this in mind I want to experiment with a model that speaks to the issue of the development of modern national identity and nationalism.

1. Without arguing the question of the extent to which "pre-modern" manifestations of ethnicity or nationalism resembled the "modern", I contend that there are some distinctive elements to ethnicity in the modern era. I believe that the increased involvement of individuals from different backgrounds in the "modern sectors"—education, government, the military, commercial and manufacturing enterprises, etc., and the increasing pace of communications around the world, is having a profound effect, bringing people to awareness and, frequently, into competition, conflict, and a sense of grievance, in relation to members of other such categories or groups, in the search for security, equality, even advantage.

To quote from a recent overview of current understandings of ethnic diversity by Crawford Young

... there is no longer any justification for clinging to the belief that the array of processes commonly labelled "modernization" (expanding communication networks and media, urbanization, rising educational and literacy levels, increasing complexity of economic activity and social structuration) lead ineluctably to deepening levels of attachment to the 'nation' defined by the state of residence, or to the erosion of cultural solidarities of ethnos, race, or religion separate from the nation-state unit. Rather, the reverse seems to be the normal pattern: social change tends to produce stronger communal identities. (n.d.:2)

2. Although modern conditions are heightening the process and speeding it up, and although we know that identities are not derived from a fixed and unchanged past, I contend that neither are identities made up arbitrarily, out of the air, out of whole cloth, *ex nihilo*. Nor are they primarily the products of the external imposition of identities, even though colonial rule may play important roles in solidifying and defining particular manifestations and aspects of ethnicity. They are ordinarily based on existing relations and loyalties, a sense of common origin, perhaps a shared history, and symbolic elements and identifying markers such as language. They will always be based on a sense of difference from others—although these can certainly be exaggerated for political purposes.
3. The earliest form of awareness will probably be local (though not always), but it is potentially and inherently expandable, to encompass a much wider group or category who can be called “fellow ethnics”—if such people exist. That is, ethnicity begins at home—but can be extended to others who are seen to share at least some of the same characteristics and symbolic elements.

In the following section I shall present my sense of the state of Oromo identity at those times and places when I had some chance to observe it.

OBSERVATION ON THREE PERIODS

Jimma, 1959–60

This was the period of Haile Sellassie’s consolidation of the Empire of Ethiopia in the post-World War II era. It was before the attempted coup of December 1960; the first wave of young Ethiopians who had been sent abroad to pursue masters degrees and more were just returning from their studies in the United States, England, Yugoslavia, Lebanon, and elsewhere. The University College of Addis Ababa was still a two-year institution run by Canadian Jesuits. The emperor reigned supreme (or so it seemed), development was carefully controlled and “guided” by him, and in Jimma very few Muslim Oromo were attending school.

Jimma had been taken over directly by Haile Sellassie and the Christian and Amhara-dominated regime only in 1932, and the local people do not seem to have been very happy with this change. The heir to the throne of Jimma Abba Jifar, Abba Jobir Abba Dula, was apparently pleased to co-operate with the Italians who restored him to his throne. Although I did not press the subject very far with the people of Jimma, I never got the sense that they disapproved of this alliance with the Italians at the expense of the Amhara regime. I did know that they were not happy about the introduction of Ethiopian orthodox churches to their area, and that they did not approve of the fact that Ras Mesfin

had claimed great tracts of Jimma land on which to grow coffee. But beyond that I did not hear very much criticism of the Ethiopian regime or its minions.

On the other hand, there was never *any* question about identity. That these were Muslims, who spoke *afaan* Oromo, whose culture was different from that of the Amhara (Sidama) was never in doubt. Hardly anyone but schoolboys and traders spoke Amharic. Everyone was Muslim and everyone knew that he or she had a genealogy that extended back through individuals named Mach'a and Raya, thus relating them to the rest of the Mech'a and to the Tulama, the Wollo, Jidda, and Raya Oromo. The ethnonym "Oromo" was not normally used in self-identification because the term stood for those who were not Muslim, and for the time before their ancestors became Muslim, but there was no question that they knew that they were related by language and genealogical history, and perhaps by custom and culture, to other people in the empire who were called "Oromo" and "Galla". If the name "Oromo" had been widely used and acceptable in Jimma at that time I would surely have adopted it in my own writings.

In 1959 the indigenous people of Jimma saw themselves as distinctively different from the Amhara and were not attempting to be like the Amhara. In fact the country people got to see very little of the Amhara since very few outsiders lived in the countryside beyond the city of Jimma. I got the distinct sense of quiet displeasure and disapproval of the regime of the Christian Northerners, but very little was said about the situation. Perhaps this was because of fear of the regime (at one point, late in my stay, a government "tail" was actually sent to spy on me and this did have some inhibiting effect) but I think it was also because there was not much doing and organized political activity was simply not a part of their world at that time.

In Jimma in those years the yoke of the government was fairly light, and while the services provided by the government were almost nil, neither was there the expectation at that time, as far as I could see, that a government *should* provide anything. (I remember there was annoyance at a new regulation by the Coffee Marketing Board which declared that they would no longer buy coffee that had been dried on the bare ground.) Jimma's people were not pressing for schools to which to send their children because they were Muslim and were suspicious of the Christian-dominated educational system. Basically these were country folk, farmers, expecting nothing and for the moment accepting a situation they did not favor but were not suffering much from either. They had no options available for action.

Ambo, 1965-66

Five years made a difference, as did the fact that Ambo was much closer to Addis Ababa than Jimma. This was after the abortive coup of 1960 (see essays by Mekuria Bulcha and Mohammed Hassen); Haile Sellassie's regime had eased up a bit and there had been progress in the educational system during those

few years. To this outsider observer, at least, there seemed to be an improvement in the quality and performance of the central government, with its increased educated workforce. The university had grown to a more sophisticated and larger four-year institution, and students were increasingly influential in the intellectual and political life of the country. The university students had begun to set the tone for the secondary schools and it was there, in Ambo, that I could see a difference in political awareness.

Once more, in the countryside I knew Oromo farmers whose lives were devoted to their agriculture, families, local community affairs, and the relations between themselves and the spirits (*ayana*) and mediums (*k'allu*). For them the major theme seems to have been, like Tevya's prayer, "May Waq'a bless and keep the emperor and his government—*far away from us*". It was good that there was peace, sufficient harvests, and no epidemic diseases. Beyond that, as with Jimma, their identity was never in doubt.

They were Oromo, with their own distinctive history, customs, and beliefs, speaking *afaan* Oromo. The very few Amhara living among them, as neighbors who farmed and engaged in local activities, were accepted if they were good neighbors and lived up to community expectations for co-operative behavior and participation (See Lewis 1970.) Very few children went to school then, but those who did were learning about politics as well as reading, writing, maths, geography, Amharic, and English. This was the very beginning of student activism and political idealism.

The town of Ambo seemed, superficially at least, to be a center of Amhara-based "Ethiopian" culture and society. The language of choice was Amharic; the churches were the place for the elites—even some Oromo elites. The general feeling in Ambo was that of "developing Ethiopia" rather than of a place in the heart of "Oromia". In secondary school, the students, including the Oromo, were involved with the causes that concerned students all over the country, from the university down: (a) the rights of student versus administrators and teachers, and (b) social justice. In particular, the slogan "land to the tiller", enunciated in the university student demonstration of 1965, was spreading to the high schools.

The Oromo students I knew at that time were not particularly involved with Oromo issues, though they made no effort to hide their identity. Only one of them came to me to ask what I knew about *gada*, and then borrowed and read my copy of Huntingford (1955). Several of them were happy to go with me to the *galmas* of the *k'allus* and to occasional Oromo celebrations, but only that one student showed much curiosity about Oromo culture. The others were too busy learning to be Ethiopians, students, and their concerns were the general ones of social justice and progress, seen in terms of Ethiopia as a nation rather than in the light of special Oromo concerns.

The Mach'a-Tulama Association was in its first years at this time, and I had learned about its existence from a visiting American graduate student, but my

Oromo student friends were not yet aware of it. (See essays by Mekuria Bulcha and Mohammed Hassen.)

This period marked the beginning of the increase in education for Oromo youth. For the first time relatively large numbers were entering the educational system and the modern workforce. It was at this stage that their focus, their interests, involved working for success within the system. They assumed that they would have a relatively equal chance to succeed if they did well in school, and they concerned themselves with the general student culture, which included politics. In 1966 my student friends were barely aware of Karl Marx, but student politics were increasingly influenced by Marxism in the search for social justice and equality for all, including for the "nationalities". The focus was on general progress for all of Ethiopia and its peoples.

As I understand it, this trend developed rapidly over the next decade, so that most of these Oromo students joined their fellow students of whatever ethnic background in support of Marxist and revolutionary solutions, setting aside ethnically-specific ones. They either backed the Derg or the parties further to the left. I was not there to witness this, but I have spoken to some of them about this period.

Disillusion

In 1980 I returned to Ethiopia, stopping first in Khartoum, where I met with two leaders of the Oromo Relief Association/OLF. One of these men had been a major figure in the land reform movement under the Derg. He told me of how he had enthusiastically supported the land reform movement until he realized that the same people were ruling over the Oromo, controlling their destinies, and, he believed, getting control over Oromo resources. For him the Derg represented just "the new *neft'enyä*". (It was the first time I heard this usage.) He therefore had taken the opportunity afforded by a trip to China to defect and began to work, in exile, for Oromo causes.

In Addis at that time I heard the same story from a young Oromo lawyer who was working in a responsible position in a government ministry. It did not take long for him and his circle of friends to become convinced that their people, the Oromo, were not being given a fair share of power or proper consideration. He had not chosen flight and exile but was keeping quiet while maintaining his concern with Oromo matters. He was the first one to tell me that there had been a revival of *gada* ceremonies (*butta*) in the Ambo area a couple of years before. This was the first indication I had of the beginnings of a specific Oromo cultural revival.

At that time I learned from a third party that my first field assistant from Jimma, whom I had known when he was in 9th grade in 1959, had been attracted to and worked for the Left in the mid-1970s, but then had become disillusioned—and was subsequently arrested for "narrow nationalism". He spent

7 months in prison before the government agency that he worked for managed to get him released because they needed his expertise.

I have heard a number of such stories and I believe they point to several stages in an almost predictable dynamic process: (1) The first result of growing education and involvement with the modern and urban sector drew young Oromo into the general culture and ideology of most young Ethiopians. (2) The next stage entails disillusion, as they witness the continuing marginalization of and contempt for their people on the part of the Northerners (Amhara, Tigre, perhaps Eritreans). This disillusion normally leads to sympathy for and support of, if not affiliation with, an Oromo national movement and Oromo organizations.

The late 1970s and early 1980s was the period of the development of Oromo organizations in Europe and America, and the crystallization of political rhetoric with its concomitant cultural and historical emphases. But there are other contributors to this volume who know far more about this era than I do so I shall not try to say more about it.

THE GROWTH OF POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND PARTICIPATION

During the period from 1970 to 1990 the Oromo became far more deeply involved in the modern sectors and thus became increasingly politically aware and involved. (This is especially true, I believe, of the groups in Shoa, Wellega, and Jimma, if not elsewhere.) There was a general expansion of education throughout much of the country and more and more Oromo youth went to school, to university, and then into jobs in the modern sector—in education, the military, and government in particular. Although the numbers of Oromo in these fields are still very far from proportional to their numbers in the population in general, in absolute terms the growth has been very notable. I was surprised to discover, in 1991 and 1993, the extent to which there are school finishers and school leavers, including some with university education, living in the countryside, back home with their farm families. Some fled the university in fear after the events surrounding the 1992 election. Others simply can not find work in the city. Thus the gap between city and farm is decreasing as these young people bring urban knowledge and attitudes to their country cousins.

Secondly, the Derg heightened political consciousness through its insistence on organizing everyone into various groups (women's groups, youth groups, peasants associations, urban ward associations, etc.), and holding political meetings all the time, and speaking endlessly of new political arrangements. Thus the message that people can and should organize for political ends became part of life among the Oromo and many other ethnic groups. The Derg did not permit independent organization, of course, but the principle may have gotten a foothold.

1991–present

All of my interactions with Oromo after the Derg fell at the end of May 1991 convinced me that there is no doubt of the ethnic consciousness and preferences of the Oromo generally. When I returned to Jimma and Ambo in June and July of 1991 I found that the attitudes of the farmers were ones of watchful wariness. They had little knowledge, they said, of the platform and the capacity of the OLF, but they were willing to be convinced. They certainly put no trust in the Tigre-dominated EPRDF. That the young, urban, and educated tend to consider themselves Oromo first, if not also last, was clear. But neither in 1991 nor in 1993 did I have any reason to question the centrality of being Oromo among the young—or old—in Jimma, Ambo, Adama, Addis Ababa—or in North America. (The Oromo in North America hold a large annual meeting at the end of July each year, attracting what must be a very large cross-section and sample of the Oromo of the U.S. and Canada, and the atmosphere at these meetings is always one of absolute Oromo-centricity, even of Oromo chauvinism.)

In May 1993 in Addis Ababa there was a public gathering attracting several thousand Oromo, the great majority of them young, at the Menelik II school grounds near Arat Kilo. They were celebrating the progress of *Qube* (the Oromo language written in Latin script) and of Oromo culture more generally. There were many periodicals, pamphlets, and books being sold, Oromo musicians and singers performed, and the atmosphere was one of great celebration and pride.

There seems to be no question about the strength and extent of Oromo identity among the young and educated. I do not believe there is much doubt about the rural farmers either. But I wonder how well the attitudes and rhetoric of the urban and educated match the realities of actual ongoing Oromo life in Ethiopia/Oromia today, away from the university and the auditorium. One of these questions has to do with the extent to which Oromo cultural, religious, and regional differences are barriers to unity, and whether these can be overcome. The other is the question of how well the image that the urban-dwelling, the educated, and the long-exiled have of Oromo life and culture in fact resembles the way of life that the many millions of Oromo living in the countryside actually lead today.

I am not in a position to answer these questions but I can make some observations and suggestions. As to the first question, I should start by reiterating the limitations of my knowledge. My contacts both in Oromia and North American are above all with people from Wellega, Shoa, Jimma, and Ilubabor. Thus I cannot speak, for example, about the Arsi, Borana, Guji, or the Muslims of the east. It is my impression, however, on the basis of my limited sample, that religion and region carries much less importance for the Oromo whom I know than does ethnicity, *being Oromo*. Their *primary* identification and loyalty is attached to their *Oromo-ness*. At least for the elite, living in Addis Ababa (Finfini) or Washington, D.C., for example, the most important thing in their lives, after their work and their families, would appear to be their Oromo identity. For

example, even though many young expatriates from Jimma have some connection to the old ruling family of Abba Jifar, and are Muslim, this seems to present no barrier to their general sense of identity as and solidarity with Oromo and the Oromo cause.

On July 6, 1991 I witnessed a remarkable gathering in Addis Ababa. Several hundred Oromo met in a hall in the main Post Office on Churchill Road in an attempt to reconcile (*ararsa*) the two major Oromo political groups, the OLF and the OPDO. The effort failed, but not because of any lack of shared understanding of values and procedures for conflict resolution. The organizers of the event gathered together ten major elders, *abba jarsa*, or *jarsa biyya*, and these ten old men presided, sitting together at a long table on the dais. They represented: Wellega, Ilubabor, Kafa, Shoa, Arsi, Bale, Borana, Harar, Wollo, and JamJam. There was, of course, the inevitable insistence upon Oromo unity (*tokkumma*) and on common origins, history, common culture, and brotherhood of the *ilman Oromo*. (Dinsa Lepisa spoke of shared Oromo symbols.)

Perhaps such exhortations may be needed precisely *because* unity is in doubt. (It seemed to me, for example, that the Muslim elders did not join in the "traditional" blessings [*ebba*] as enthusiastically as the others did. I could not identify hesitating Christians as easily, if there were any.) But what struck me beyond the hortatory rhetoric was the general and unspoken agreement on procedures and on the spirit of the meeting: the respect for the *jarsa biyya*, the importance of the theme of *arara* (reconciliation) and peace, and the regard for order, procedure, and free discussion in the search for unity.

This is not very much on which to base firm conclusions, but my experiences incline me to the belief that there is quite a bit in the shared language, symbols, culture, and history of the Oromo (not to mention shared economic and political interests) to serve as the basis for a strong ethno-national movement. This can only grow, I believe, as more and more people are educated, are drawn into the "modern sector", and become increasingly politically aware. To reiterate the statement of Crawford Young (quoted above), "social change tends to produce stronger communal identities".

As to the second question above, I believe that there may be a real and potentially serious gap between the ideology and world-view of the urban elite, on the one hand, and the realities of life, culture, and world-view of the vastly more numerous Oromo who live in the countryside. Most of the elite were educated in towns, if not in Addis Ababa, or even abroad, and left their rural families, communities, and roots long ago. They may not actually know very much about the lives of their own kin and communities of origin, let alone be aware of even a small part of the range of variation among the many Oromo groups and regions. Those of us who devote our professional lives to the study of the Oromo have a better chance to comprehend the variations than they do, and yet see how limited we are in the depth and scope of our comparative knowledge. Very few of them are professional students of the subject; they are busy learning and practising accounting or finance, computing and engineer-

ing, law and business. They have to be limited in their knowledge of Oromo life.

Thus the rhetoric of the meetings and the official pronouncements about Oromo culture often tend to be rather empty, generalized, and possibly misleading. The emphasis on *gada*, for example, tends to drive out almost all other discourse about Oromo culture and history, and it is usually based on book-learning—on the limited knowledge available in dated publications. Other important aspects of Oromo culture, ones that could be the source of understanding, or the basis for cultural revivals or development, go unnoticed. I suspect that this insistence on a fairly narrow view of Oromo culture and society is just an inevitable result of the newness of the movement and the exigencies of the current struggles. Assuming that the present movement continues to grow we may expect that there will soon be young Oromo scholars coming along seeking more complex and nuanced views of Oromo life and culture.

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, I shall apply the argument laid out at the start of this paper to what I think has happened to the Oromo over the past 35 years.

1. I do not believe that *identity*, in the sense of knowing who one is ethnically, has generally been problematic for the vast majority of Oromo whom I have known. In Jimma and in Ambo, at least, the line marking the difference between the Oromo and others was quite clearly marked: by language, community, religion, way of life, sense of common historical origins. And although most educated Oromo I have known felt themselves to be Ethiopian as well, and were willing to join in common cause with other Ethiopians to make a better society, most never had any doubt about their origins and identity. Indeed, as they tell it, the Amhara and other Northerners would never let them forget their roots even if they had tried to do so. The situation may be different and more ambiguous in other areas, of course. (Cf. Knutsson 1969; Schlee 1989.) It is apparently also more complicated in the case of certain elite Oromo families that have been long resident in Addis Ababa and intermarried with Amhara and others.
2. Although identity and identification (by self and by others) may not have been problematic, ethnic awareness, consciousness, and the articulation of demands in ethnic terms is activated by, or heightened as a result of, confrontations with realities in the "modern sector". Ethnic nationalism increases as a result of education, competition with others perceived in ethnic terms, and awareness of the wider ethnic and national landscape. This includes both the sense of being discriminated against by others on an ethnic basis, and the recognition that one has ethnic fellows who have the same handicaps as well as

the same language, culture, and understandings. They are potential compatriots and allies against the ethnic competitors.

3. Even without agreeing on all aspects of their shared culture, fellow ethnics can still create a general sense of solidarity among themselves by responding to certain common symbols and by tacitly or explicitly aiding each other in the struggles for resources and honor. This is occurring throughout the world today and it is obviously far more potent than class ever was as a basis for solidarity and organization. I suggest that this is not so much a process of "imagination" as Benedict Anderson (1983) contends, but one of "recognition". Thus Oromo have been increasing the range of their knowledge of other Oromo and extending that recognition of common, shared ethnicity more widely.

The growth of Oromo ethnic consciousness and organization has followed what I would consider a classic trajectory.

1. In the 1950s and 1960s the Oromo—of Jimma and Ambo, at least—had an awareness of their ethnic distinctiveness but lacked an arena or appropriate activities to act on this basis.
2. In the late 1960s and 1970s young Oromo were drawn increasingly into the modern sectors through education, moving to towns and the capital, participation in urban occupations, and the military. They became much more aware of modern politics. At first, for many, this meant identification with the "Ethiopian nation" and the general, nation-wide, problems of social justice, economic development, and "progress".
3. For many, however, this growing awareness also led to a sense of being discriminated against despite their acquisition of modern competence, and to a belief that the Oromo people were being systematically denied their economic, political, and cultural rights, and appropriate respect and "status honor". This led to increasing alienation from the Amhara and their allies and to a growing political movement, which could only exist underground or in exile. The growth of Oromo political organizations, and the rhetoric of ethno-nationalism, and the conscious interest in Oromo language, culture, and history follows a very familiar pattern in the modern world, one very similar to the growth of nationalisms in Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries, and familiar to us today from examples all over the world.

The Survival and Reconstruction of Oromo National Identity

Mekuria Bulcha

INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts to trace briefly the historical trajectories of Oromo national identity, and to describe the important patterns by which it was manifested in the past and to discuss, in some detail, the role of educated elites in the reconstruction of this identity during recent decades.

Although it is clear that the rural non-literate masses remain the reservoir of Oromo cultural heritage, of its values systems and language, it is argued here that the educated elites have played a key role in the revival and reconstruction of Oromo culture and identity. Hence the paper focuses on the passage taken by Oromo intellectuals back to an identity which many of them nearly dropped in the process of assimilating into the Amhara culture and language. The article does not stop with the "recovery" of ethnic identity by these elites as individuals and as a group, but also follows up their roles in the re-awakening of national consciousness among the Oromo people at large.

Oromo intellectuals are not the first to be involved in the activity of asserting and reconstructing a suppressed ethnic identity or promoting "ethnic" nationalism. Intellectuals have always played important roles in fundamental political changes in the histories of nations. Situations where peasants and workers have successfully carried out a revolution which brought about fundamental political transformation without the collaboration of intellectuals seem to be very rare indeed. There is ample historic evidence to demonstrate that it is mainly the intelligentsia who, during a period of change, take the lead in articulating problems and co-ordinating activities over larger geographical spaces and longer time spans. Peasant initiated and led revolt can win battles, free territories from opposing forces, but its capacity to expand to a national level is often limited and usually can be reversed by the centre which has more resources at its disposal.

This was the case with the Oromo struggle for over a century. The conquest of Oromoland by the Abyssinians, which started in the 1860s, and was accelerated as a by-product of the European scramble for Africa in the early 1880s (Holcomb and Ibssa 1990), was completed around 1900. Since then, the Oromo have waged continuous struggle against the Ethiopian state. However, for de-

cares, the struggle was only sporadic and localized and led by traditional elites who lacked an overall perspective of the Oromo nation and were unable to articulate its aspirations. Consequently they failed to mobilize a nation-wide movement. The history of the great Bale movement of the 1960s, which changed its name in the 1980s to the so-called Somali Abbo Liberation Front (SALF), illustrates this very well. (See essays by Mohammed Hassen and Gufu Oba.) As the name of this movement indicates, its traditional leaders were not able to articulate Oromo ethnic identity, let alone Oromo nationality grievances and aspirations. The role of articulating, defining and promoting Oromo identity was assumed by a fledgling intelligentsia beginning in the mid-1960s.

SOME CONCEPTUAL PROBLEMS

Social scientists and historians who, for various reasons, tend to under-estimate the importance of ethnic identity and consciousness in the lives of individuals and communities have often presented it as a phenomenon that is based on "invented traditions". The use of the concept of the "invention of tradition" in this case is similar in origin and purpose with that of the "false consciousness" label with which Marxists had attempted to by-pass ethnicity. Much writing is currently devoted to the thesis that interest in ethnic identity is everywhere the result of particular historical conjecture. It has been argued that the growing sense of Oromo nationalism is a product of "invented history" (Marcus 1992:2). However, identities, which "forbidden" nations such as the Kurds and the Oromo struggle to re-assert, are often those that have been suppressed and denied by powerful others who desire to impose or superimpose a different identity on them.

The rhetoric about an "invented" Oromo history and identity, whether it is presented as an academic or political discourse, is closely connected with the erroneous belief that Ethiopia is an ancient and immutably natural entity. With some scholars this belief results from a superficial knowledge of Oromo history and society. The thesis of the invention or construction of ethnic identities at will and out of nothing, is also plainly untenable. A (re-)construction of an ethnic identity without some recognizable constituents which have at least some roots in the past or are themselves made up of older elements of symbol, language, history, and other earlier forms of identification is simply inconceivable. It would not be logical to maintain that a people can engage in struggle for identity and recognition in a historical vacuum. Any on-going process of nation formation or ethnic consciousness has to be connected to some past events in the history of the group involved.

Those who argue that Oromo history and identity are the invention of intellectuals, have mistaken the absence of a centralized state in Oromoland in the past, for a lack of common identity. On the contrary, as Holcomb and Ibssa (1990) have succinctly shown it was the Ethiopian empire and Ethiopian terri-

torial nationalism which are of recent origins. There is ample historical and ethnographic evidence to suggest that the Oromo had a common past and identity as a people/nation. "In a historical and sociological sense nation is the equivalent of people, that is, a cultural and linguistic community, whose ethnic conscience is clearly felt and espoused by the majority of its members, and which possesses a territory of its own" (Obieta-Chalbaud 1986:65). To make my point clear, I will summarise the manifestations of Oromo ethnic/national identity starting with the distant past when the Oromo existed as an independent people.

THE PRE-CONQUEST PAST

Their mythology and history indicate the Oromo people's descent from a common ancestor or family named Orma. Therefore, each and every Oromo group considers itself and is considered by others as *ilmaan Orma*—the children of Orma. Historical investigations suggest that before their separation into different territorial groups in the sixteenth century, the Oromo had a common government (Mohammed Hassen 1990:18ff). It is generally speculated that it was population growth, territorial expansion and the structure of the *gada* government system, which seemed to have functioned better in small-scale polities, which led to fission. After separation, the different branches of the Oromo nation lived in federations and confederations in several autonomous but contiguous territories. Segmentation into different branches did not diminish the shared belief of common descent from one founding father. As Herbert Lewis has noted:

The Galla [Oromo] view their history in genealogical terms. Groups in space are related to common ancestors, and their present distribution explained as a result of the movement of brothers away from each other (Lewis 1965:25).

This belief, whether it is a myth or a reflection of reality, is supported by a common language and a surprising uniformity of customs, folklores, and world views still existing among these different groups, after a very long period of segmentation and wider geographical dispersion.

It is suggested that the creation of a nation is a process that involves two simultaneous and interdependent aspects: self-identification and the identification of "others" as a possible source of danger (cf. Deutsch 1966:105). Thus, different Oromo territorial groups formed confederations to face others, often non-Oromos, in warfare. (See essays by Gufu Oba and Abdullahi Shongolo.) They identified themselves collectively as *ilmaan Orma*. The fission and fusion of groups at different sociological and territorial levels fulfilled specific problem-solving functions in traditional Oromo society, and was not to form separate and new competing identities. To quote Herbert Lewis again:

The principle of easy amalgamation and contraction along territorial lines evidently operated at all levels of Galla [Oromo] social organization. Whether

for arbitration or warfare, whether involving councils and the *abba boku* [its leader] or warriors and the *abba dula* ['Chief' of War], the Galla would expand to meet momentary exigencies, putting the wider group under the leadership of one person, and then divide once again, if there was no compelling reason or force to hold them together (Lewis 1965:34).

The Oromo rarely formed alliances with non-Oromos to fight against other Oromo groups. *Nagaa Oromoo* ('Oromo peace'), which is a universal principle among the Oromo, sanctioned violence among them. The *nagaa* concept characterized the inner rhythm of Oromo communal life everywhere. Regarding the Boorana branch of the Oromo people Baxter writes:

Between Boran, there should be peace and gentleness. ... Violence, even angry verbal violence, between Boran is a sin which can only be expiated by sacrifice. The 'Peace of the Boran', *Nagya Borana*, is a positive and all-pervasive concept, and the phrase is always on someone's lips. This Peace is much more than a mere absence of strife and implies active co-operation and concord. Its maintenance is the deliberate and constant daily concern of Boran elders (Baxter 1965:65).

The *nagaa* concept prescribes the relations that *ought* to be between Oromos at all structural levels. The myth of common descent, the concepts of *gada* (egalitarianism) and *nagaa* (peace and co-operation) together express some deep sense of solidarity and feeling of peoplehood/nationhood that existed. However, it has not always been possible to obtain full concord between the numerous quasi-territorial branches and sub-branches of the nation; therefore internal conflicts have occurred. But Oromo distinguished conceptually strife among themselves, *lola* (quarrel) from armed conflict with others, *duula* (war). The difference is not just semantic: it involves purpose, duration and intensity of the conflicts, and the method used in their resolution. Whenever and wherever it occurred internal strife was usually settled by the combined efforts of the *gada* councils and elders of the groups involved. A principal purpose of *gada* was, and is, to maintain a united strength against outsiders and peaceful consensus, *nagaa*, within (Baxter 1990:236).

Different *gada* federations made many *duula* together against adversaries of the Oromo people. The history of the numerous Oromo-Abyssinian armed confrontations during the last four centuries is also the history of numerous occasions of large scale Oromo amalgamation to defend or expand their territory. The number of fighters involved in these confrontations was often very large indeed. Whenever a *gada* federation faced threat from strong external force the ruling councils of adjacent federations, and sometimes those from afar, sent fighters to support their kinsmen (Mohammed Hassen 1990:72-82). Whenever several federations were threatened by such a force, they created coalitions and put their forces under a centralized leadership to face it (Abbas Haji 1982; Cerulli 1921:74ff). The solidarity and unity which characterized the coalitions to defend Oromo territory and its inhabitants were reflections of the proto-nationalist feeling which has existed among the Oromo for many centuries and

which has been gathering increasing momentum since the 1960s and is now developing into full-fledged nationalism.

Even if political integration of these federations was loose; there existed a sense of an over-arching Oromo identity that transcended the territorial boundaries of these polities to include them all. In addition to the territorial contiguity, cultural, religious and linguistic homogeneity of these polities, there was a shared sense of *Oromumma* ("Oromoness") and solidarity as denoted by the myth of *Ilmaan Orma* (the children of Orma). So even if they did not live in a single and centralized state, the Oromo seem to have long been conscious of their ethnic community which transcended clan or descent group boundaries. In fact, *gada* confederations were not based on tribal or clan social formations. Groups with similar *gosa* (clan) and *qomoo* (sub-clan) names live scattered all over Oromo territory. Jan Hultin has noted that "the Macha settlement pattern is a bewildering maze of dispersed 'clans' and yet territorial agnatic groups, that the people perceive in the image of a quitch-grass that is overgrowing the country" (Hultin 1987:29).

The mosaic of clan-like descent groups or *gosas* observed by Hultin dispersed over Machaland is replicated in the other branches of the Oromo nation; 'patterns of similarly named putative descent groups are scattered across the whole spectrum of Oromo and at all levels' (Baxter 1994:177). Here it is important to note that the building blocks of different *gada* federations often constituted similar descent groups even if not in the same proportions. Thus, putative descent groups such as Galaan, Jidda, Liban, Warra-Baabbo, Jimma and numerous others, are found among the Macha as well as the Tulama, Arsi and Boorana branches, and in every part of the Oromo country. The same descent group can appear as *gosa* in some places and as *qomoo* in others. Many writers have mistaken these putative divisions and their clan-like sub-divisions for tribes because rigid community structures based on clan or branch membership are extremely rare in Oromoland. Families moved freely and settled among other families from different descent groups, and in any local community it is common to find families who trace their *gosa* or descent group to various branches of the Oromo nation. Scholars have repeatedly pointed out that the Oromo do not place much importance on extended kinship as a basis for social and political activity and that; at every political and territorial level, political offices were filled by individuals who were elected for personal merits and not descent (Lewis 1965; Asmarom 1989; Mohammed Hassen 1990). Therefore, it is quite plausible to interpret the territorial organization of the *gada* polity as a mechanism designed for decentralized governance and not as a mark of "tribal" boundaries and identities. As noted above popular participation was the way politics was conducted in the *gada* system, which necessitated organizing polities on a small scale. The web of clan-like descent groups that cut across the different *gada* confederacies, not only "eased and encouraged individual and group movements" (Baxter 1994:177) but had also welded the different groups together. In addition to the *gada* system, the different Oromo groups shared

social and religious institutions such as the *qaallu* and *abba muudaa*. These supra-local institutions provided the Oromo everywhere with common symbolic bases of identification.

Regarding the *abba Muuda*, at the turn of the century, Martial de Salviac, wrote:

The Abba Muda, "father of anointing", who lives near Wolabo on the western edge of the Arusi country, is supposed to be the eldest son of Orma or Oromo, the ancestor of the Galla, and to possess superhuman qualities. He is the centre of Galla religious life, and the rallying point of the nation, though he has no civil or executive authority. In him are personified and centralized the law and traditions of the Galla, and Waqa [God] is said to speak through him. In former days, every third generation in each family was bound by ... custom to make a pilgrimage to the Abba Muda; after the Abyssinian conquest ... the pilgrimage was forbidden owing to its political and nationalistic influence (cited in Huntingford 1955:63).

The various Oromo federations and confederations maintained contacts with the *Abba Muuda* and through his office with each other. *Jilaa* (pilgrims/ delegates) from various *gosa* and *gada* federations travelled freely through territories inhabited by other *gosa* and *gada* federations thereby keeping contact and flow of information between them (cf. Huntingford 1955:82-85; Mohammed Hassen 1990:7-9).

The office of *Abba Muuda* was at once an encompassing and a categorical institution. It was open to the Oromo people as a whole and was visited by delegates from every *gosa* and from different parts of Oromoland, but non-Oromos were not allowed to participate in the rituals. Thus *Walaabu*, the mythological *madda* (source) of the Oromo, was also the point of convergence for delegates from the various sections of the Oromo nation. Citing Cecchi's travel notes from the mid-1880s as his source, Huntingford wrote that the *Abba Muuda* 'prayed for the prosperity of "Galla land", anointed and blessed the *jilaa*; advised them to live according to the laws (*gada*) of the land, and not to accept an absolute ruler nor allow forced labour; to keep the peace (*nagaa*) among themselves but to drive from their land the Abyssinians' (Huntingford 1955:84). Hence, "These pilgrimages to the *abba muda* ... maintained a consciousness of the unity of the Galla [Oromo] nation as a whole ..." (Haberland 1967, cited in Bartels 1983:66).

THE NON-ESSENTIALIST CHARACTER OF OROMO ETHNIC IDENTITY

Although descent from a common founding father has a central position in the ideology of Oromo ethnic identity, belonging to an Oromo descent group and hence one's ethnicity is not determined by race or biology. Oromo society has, for generations, assimilated individuals and groups from neighbouring peoples. Groups conquered by the Oromo were made to claim the lineages of the *gosa* that conquered them through an adoption ceremony known as *mogaasa* (name-giving, adoption of groups), which included prayers and a binding oath.

(See essays by Triulzi and Blackhurst.) The adopted individuals or groups became the "sons" of the *gosa* (clan) by whom they were adopted. They were now "born" into an Oromo *gosa* and became *ilmaan Orma*—members of the Orma family, accepted by all other *gosa*. Thus, as several scholars have commented, the Oromo might have significantly increased their number by imparting their identity to other peoples they came in contact with or conquered by adopting them into their *gosa* and *qomoo* structures (Mohammed Hassen 1990:64; Hultin 1987:23). (See essays by Gemetchu and Gufu.)

The overall process of assimilation and Oromization of non-Oromos seems to have been smooth and rapid, and the adoption of Oromo identity by newcomers proved to be total. Thus, today it is impossible to differentiate between descendants of the once "proper" and assimilated Oromo groups. It suggested that the "universalistic" nature of the Oromo society and culture (Lewis 1965:38), their egalitarian values, and their capacity to accept the assimilated fully, were the main reasons for the rather quick adaptation of Oromo identity by others. Asmarom Legesse has noted that:

Conquest, in the history of the Oromo has never given rise to sharp stratification between the conquerors and the conquered. The latter were given all the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. It violates Borana egalitarian ethic to describe the two halves as "conquerors" and "conquered" (1989:17).

However, an egalitarian ethic alone is not enough to explain a change of identity that leaves little or no trace of previous identities. Ethnic identity is not something that people assume or discard as it suits them. Nor do people automatically absorb groups who lack social or cultural affinity with them. Therefore, it is plausible to suggest that it was the cultural and linguistic heritage which the Oromo shared with the neighbouring Cushitic speaking peoples, particularly the Sidama, which played an important role in the quick absorption of others into the Oromo society.

Oromo political and social institutions were not static and some changed with the passage of time. As differentiation in the mode of economic production progressed, there also occurred a radical transformation in the social structure and political system in parts of Oromoland. In several places the *gada* form of government was replaced by kingdoms ruled by *mooti* (kings). In the middle of the 19th century three types of political organizations existed in Oromoland; *gada* federations and confederations, chiefly principalities and kingdoms. Irrespective of a radical departure from the *gada* form of political organization, the cultural, and to a great extent, the ideological underpinnings of the kingdoms and principalities remained basically similar to that of the *gada* system. The *qaallu* religious institution continued and *jilaa* from the kingdoms visited the *Abba Muuda* at Walaabu without interruption.

Taken as a whole, what we have described so far makes it clear that the Oromo were, before the conquest, a culturally homogeneous people who were well aware of their differentiation from their neighbours. Even if a centralized and overarching political structure was absent, it was obviously a national idea

and ethnic solidarity which united *gada* federations when threatened from outside. Oromo national identity was characterized by a collective name, a myth of common origin, a shared historical tradition, a shared system of cultural norms and values, a common language, and an association with a specific territory. As noted by Anthony Smith, the origins of modern nations lie in past ethnic formations, and it is here that we may trace the historic deposit of their collective experience (1986:x). It is this, rather than "invention" by some creative intellectuals, which explains the origins of current Oromo nationalism.

CONQUEST AND IDENTITY

Menelik's incorporation of Oromoland into the Abyssinian Empire (Ethiopia later on) undermined Oromo identity by attacking its institutions and symbols. Oromo political and religious institutions were suppressed and their offices ceased to exist. Those leaders who survived the conquest were deprived of power and status, whether they were *abba bokku* of the *gada* system or *mooti* of the kingdoms, as their offices were abolished and replaced by a colonial administration and law. The pilgrimages to the seat of the *Abba Muuda* were banned because the Abyssinians saw it, "... as opportunities for stirring up Galla patriotism and forming plans of rebellion, for men of all the Galla tribes met at Wolabo." (de Salviac cited in Huntingford 1955:83.)

Attempts were also made to assimilate the Oromo into the Abyssinian culture and religion. However, the rate of assimilation remained insignificant for two main reasons: the limited capacity of the imperial system to coopt conquered subjects and resistance from the Oromo people.

The imperial system lacked the institutional capacity to disseminate its cultural and linguistic components widely among its new subjects. It was unable to mobilize the Oromo people beyond a few individuals and families in each *woreda* (district) for voluntary assimilation. Until the beginning of the 1940s, the attempt to assimilate the conquered subjects was limited to forced conversion to Orthodox Christianity, of which the effects on the cultural, psychological make up and even religious life of the colonized majority do not seem to have been significant. Before the 1950s, Amharization, i. e. learning the Amharic language and assimilation into Abyssinian culture and Orthodox Christian religion, was limited to the descendants of a few traditional elites, particularly in Tulama (Shawa), Wallo and Wallaga, whose leaders had submitted to Abyssinian rule without much armed resistance. (See Lewis' essay.)

In order to maintain their identity the Oromo had to stage active and passive resistance. As an instrument of passive resistance, religion was used by the majority to maintain boundaries between themselves and the conquering Abyssinians who were Orthodox Christians. In Wallo in the north, in Arsi, Bale and Hararghe in the south and south-east, and in Jimma in the south-west, Islam was adopted to avoid the often forced mass conversion by the clergy of

the Abyssinian Orthodox Church. In Wallaga, in the west, many Oromos, including most of the traditional elites, became Protestants. In the South in Borana, traditional Oromo religion persisted. Although it was used in the strategy of boundary maintenance against the Abyssinian conquerors, religion was never used as an instrument for mobilization against the state. The different religions that different Oromo groups adopted seem not to have strongly affected the values, language and world view which characterize them as a people. As Paul Baxter has noted, common

... traditions still underpin the ritual expression even of those who have accepted one of the religions of the book, and ... any Oromo would feel at home as a participant in rituals, prayers, blessings and greetings everywhere in Oromoland. (Baxter 1990:235)

Thus, whether they became Muslims or Christians, the underpinnings of Oromo religious belief remained their traditional religion. Most of its rituals continued to be observed by converts of the new religions. (See Aguilar's essay.)

Elements of traditional Oromo political culture also survived. Although it was purged of its political functions by conquest, much of the ritual and social symbols and values of the *gada* system continued to operate, and still today *gada* constitutes a shared political idiom. As political and cultural activities in Oromia have revealed since May 1991, the democratic values of the *gada* system, and knowledge about how the system functioned and how its rituals were conducted, still exist among all religious groups and in all the Oromo regions.

For reasons that I have discussed elsewhere (Bulcha 1994:99–100) the Haile Selassie regime increased its efforts to assimilate the Oromo and other conquered peoples after the end of the Italian occupation. The imperial administrative apparatus and the school system were used to accelerate assimilation. Amharic was declared the official language and the medium of instruction throughout the empire. The assumption was that the spread of Amharic, through official use and the educational system, would reinforce the process of assimilation and facilitate nation-building. Since linguistic assimilation was equated with "de-ethnicization" of the populations of the conquered territories, the use of the Oromo language in school education, church service and public administration was banned.

The responses of the few Oromo children, who were able to surmount the language hurdle and the culturally hostile environment of the elementary schools and advance to higher education, were varied. One can put them into two categories. Firstly, there was those who were completely overwhelmed by the unmitigated assault on their culture and history and dropped (or tried to drop) their identity. The policy of assimilation was successful to some extent, particularly among the first generation of secondary school and university graduates. Many of the educated and some of the coopted traditional elites went as far as severing themselves from their ethnic roots as a consequence of their inability to define themselves in relation to the image of *the* Ethiopian as reflected

in school education. The system was not in favour of psychic mobility or self-identification as Oromo and Ethiopian at the same time. Hence assimilated Oromos and others spoke Amharic among themselves, taught their children only Amharic and behaved as if they were Amharas. Some of these "de-ethnized" (Amharized) subjects were able to rise to prominent positions in the imperial military establishment and civil administration. This did not, however, contribute much towards collective integration of the Oromo into the Ethiopian society and state. As Markakis has correctly remarked:

They were retainers in the pure sense of the word, and in no way did they represent Oromo political participation in the ancient regime, for they represented no one but themselves and served only the interests of their patron (1987:259).

The second category of educated Oromos used superficial assimilation as a strategy for survival and advancement in the imperial bureaucracy. They spoke and taught their children the Oromo language at home and maintained their ethnic identity.

The assimilation of some of the traditional elites and of the educated few during the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s gave many observers an impression of the malleability of Oromo ethnic identity. Levine's conceptualization of the Oromo as self-negating elements in the sociology of what he termed "Greater Ethiopia" was, for example, the product of observations made during that period. His sweeping conclusions about Oromo assimilation were echoed by several other writers who dismissed ethnic identity as a vestige of an anthropological past. What was overlooked was the latency of ethnic consciousness and its potency to come to life as opportunities become available to overcome long-standing denial of political rights. Furthermore, the fact that an antithesis of homogenization was already set in motion by the very educational programme that was meant to socialize and assimilate the non-Abyssinian school children was not detected. Identification with Ethiopia, i. e. its Abyssinian cultural and historical heritage, did not increase with the increase in the number of educated Oromos, because the attempt to suppress ethnic and linguistic differences provoked the desire to be different among many of them. As Donald Donham has correctly observed

... the 'superior' culture that the schools attempted to impart was at least partially contradictory. On the one hand, the stated ideal was one of achievement without regard to cultural background; on the other hand, schools were intimately involved in creating a national identity—one that in many ways simply continued and extended existing categories of 'Habesha' [Abyssinian] and 'Amhara' (1987:35).

The 'inferior' status to which the Oromo people and their culture were relegated in the school curriculum created resentment among educated Oromos which gradually developed into resistance and persistent search for identity.

TOWARDS THE CRYSTALLIZATION OF AN ETHNONATIONAL IDENTITY: THE ROLE OF EDUCATED ELITES

The involvement of educated elites in restoring and reconstructing Oromo ethnic identity can be divided into the following four stages. The first is characterised by awareness whereby only a few individual voices were heard regarding cultural and linguistic rights and was not meant to question the legitimacy of the Ethiopian regime. It echoed a significant psychological break with the past when Oromo elites, ashamed of their ethnic background or as strategy for social mobility, made every effort to assimilate into the dominant culture and "pass" as Amharas.

During the second stage not only were cultural and linguistic rights demanded, but the imperial socio-political order was loudly condemned and the legitimacy of the Imperial regime contested. Oromo students took active part in the multi-ethnic front against the Imperial regime and agitated for its destruction. Regarding their ethnic homeland, their quest was for autonomy although a call for independence was also contemplated, albeit by a minority.

The third stage commenced as elites began to build their own organizations and form an armed front to demand the above mentioned rights. Thereafter, the struggles for linguistic and cultural rights were conducted particularly by those who opted for independence. Thus, what started as cultural nationalism transformed gradually into political nationalism.

As the armed struggle conducted by various national movements brought the demise of the military regime, the Oromo struggle became a mass movement and entered its fourth and current phase.

Organized demand by Oromo intellectuals for rights began with the creation of the Macha Tulama Association in the 1960s. The association was organized by urbanized and educated Oromos but also included members from all strata. Primarily its aim was to promote socio-economic and cultural development in the Oromo areas and not to conduct the politics of ethnic identity. Although the major grievances expressed were about cultural oppression and discrimination, the increasing evictions of peasants and pastoralists due to the introduction and expansion of commercial farming were also important questions of that time. It was precisely the land issue which sparked off the Bale peasant armed uprising with which the Macha Tulama Association was in close contact.

Several factors interacted to turn the Macha Tulama into a political movement but the composition of the membership of the association was the most important; it included office workers, traders, soldiers, military and police officers (among them several generals), urban dwellers, peasants and pastoralists. As branches of the organization rapidly mushroomed in every Oromo region and province, its membership increased dramatically. Meetings organized by the association were attended by large crowds everywhere. It was in these gatherings that the contours of their ethnic landscape became clearer to many

Oromos. In other words, the Oromo nation began to (re)discover itself for the first time since the conquest. The effect of this discovery must have been significant, and the association began to make demands with some political implications. It has been suggested that; "The politicization of ethnicity translates the personal quest for meaning and belonging into a group demand for respect and power" (Rothschild 1981:7). That was, more or less, what the Macha Tulama did. It articulated Oromo grievances and made moderate demands which included educational opportunities, cultural and linguistic rights, and civil liberties within the framework of a multiethnic Ethiopia. Edmond Keller wrote that its members "wanted their group's fair share" (1981:548). The demands were not much more than for the accommodation of differences, recognition of identity, and equality of citizenship.

However, ethnic and cultural pluralism were conditions which the rulers of the empire were not ready to accept. The abortive plot against Haile Selassie and his regime, which has been elaborately described in Olaanaa Zogaa's recent book, *Gizzit enna Gizoot (Ban and Banishment)*, was attempted by Macha Tulama members only after the regime turned deaf ears to their peaceful demands and began to suppress their legal activities (Olaanaa Zogaa 1993). In 1968, the association was accused of subversive, anti-unity and anti-government activities and banned by the Imperial Government, and some of the intellectuals and military men who played leading roles were jailed. Documents and property belonging to the association were confiscated. Banned and harassed by the Imperial security forces, the remaining members were forced to dissolve. Although the war in Bale continued unabated, for a while it seemed as if the incipient pan-Oromo ethnic consciousness had also completely dissipated.

The ban on Macha Tulama was, without doubt, a set-back for the Oromo, but it did not intimidate its nascent intelligentsia into permanent silence. In fact, it did not take long before the issues raised by the Macha Tulama were taken up by Oromo students. Starting in the early 1960s, the few Oromos studying at university level were actively involved in the Ethiopian student movement at home and abroad. Notwithstanding their number (less than 10 per cent of the students), they took leading positions in student activities and were among the first in the history of the Ethiopian student movement to be sent to jail or to be banned from the campus by the Imperial Government.¹ At the same time, an Ethiopian student movement was also taking shape abroad and the few Oromos who got the rare chance to study in foreign lands started to play leadership roles in organizing and running the movements in Europe and North America.²

¹ Gabayehu Firrisaa, who was President of the Union of Students of the Addis Ababa University College in 1961/1962 (see Balsvik 1985:318) was the first student to be dismissed from the university for political reasons.

² Haile Fida and Abdullahi Yousouf, two of the Meison leaders, were examples from the Ethiopian Students Union in Europe.

Although many Oromos were playing active roles in the Ethiopian student movement up to the revolution of 1974, it seems that the incompatibility of Oromo identity with the brand of 'Ethiopian nationalism' being promoted by the Imperial Government and supported by the Amhara-Tigre elites at home and in the diaspora, had been clear to many of them. The approach adopted by the students to ethnicity did not differ much from the imperial policy of linguistic and cultural assimilation. Student publications from the mid 1960s acknowledged the existence and development of what they called "tribal" sentiments and an increasing use of "tribal languages" on the campuses. Some of the student papers and magazines, voiced the need to suppress the so-called tribal sentiments and appeals were made for the cultivation of *Etiopiyawinnet*. By *Etiopiyawinnet* was meant both "Ethiopianism" and being Ethiopian, defined as a feeling that "transcends personal, regional and tribal loyalties" (Balsvik 1985:77, 279). Because de-ethnicization of the empire was emphasized in campus politics, the possibility of ethnic pluralism in a democratic state was not given a thought.

In a multiethnic social and political situation the repression of difference intrinsically undermines the capacity to conduct a rational-critical democratic discourse. Perhaps unity could have been forged and future trust created between elites from the different ethnic backgrounds, had differences been accepted, grievances acknowledged, and reconciliation actively sought. Some of the Oromo students, as indicated by Ibsa Gutama's prize winning short poem³ in Amharic, "*Itiopiaiwuwu mann naw?*" ("Who is the Ethiopian?") were raising questions about identity from 1966, but the student movement was unable to properly address the issue and appraise the identity of the Ethiopian polity. Instead of recognizing ethnic identities and promoting their equality, the discourse, in general, tended to disregard ethnicity altogether. As Randi Balsvik has pointed out, in student debates, "... little resentment was voiced against the ruling class on the basis of ethnicity, reflecting partly the fact that the majority of students were Amharas and Tigres, the ruling ethnic groups" (1985:251). The student movement continued to regard diversity of languages and cultures as divisive and the expression and/or recognition of such diversity as dangerous and anti-Ethiopian.

Ethnicity and the national question, however, proved to be persistent problems both at the level of discourse on the university campuses and in the marches of the empire where liberation fronts of the various nationalities continued to engage the Imperial army in war, in Bale in the south, in Ogaden in the east and Eritrea in the north. First introduced by an article authored by a radical student activist with an Oromo ethnic background (Walleligne 1969), the national question took a central place in student debate at home and abroad. Although there was a shift in emphasis from the importance of the cul-

³ Ibsa Gutama's short, poem which won the second prize in the 1966 Haile Selassie I University Oratorical Contest (Balsvik 1985:338), dealt with both ethnic and class identity in the Ethiopian context.

tivation of Ethiopianism, the question of ethnicity was still disregarded in the debate of nation-building (i.e. the Ethiopian "nation"). The primacy of class over "tribal" sentiments and the cultivation of class consciousness was emphasised. It was argued that class, as collective identity, transcends ethnic identity and therefore Ethiopia's problem ought to be primarily seen as a class problem and not as an issue of ethnic or colonial oppression.

The reduction of the major social and political problem to a class issue was, of course, an over-simplification of the national question in multiethnic Ethiopia. The argument did not tally with the sociological and historical realities of the societies confined within the empire. For many Oromo students, who had witnessed and experienced the over-lapping nature of national (ethnic) and class oppression in Ethiopia, this one-dimensional argument was neither convincing nor sensible. They saw the assertion of ethnic identity not only as rebellion against economic exploitation suffered as members of a given class in the Ethiopian society, but primarily as a revolt against colonial domination of the Oromo nation resulting from conquest by the Abyssinians. Among many Oromos, therefore, the question of identity drew their attention, if not more then at least as much as did the ideology of class struggle.

At that stage Oromo students were not urging for a separate Oromo state. What they were looking for was equal treatment of their culture, language, religion with those of the dominating nationality. They opposed historical distortion and wanted the historical record to be set straight and past injustices against the Oromo to be admitted and redressed by the state. Such a demand, of course, implied public discourse on Ethiopian history, culture and politics. As far as the imperial regime was concerned this was strictly forbidden.

In the late 1960s the number of Oromo students was slightly increasing and conditions for the formation of an underground Oromo student organization were ripening. The experience from the Macha Tulama movement and the Bale peasant uprising alerted the educated youth to new possibilities offered by organized methods of protest and struggle. The atmosphere on the university campuses raised the consciousness of the Oromo students in different ways. Even if their number was still very small, less than ten per cent of about 4500 students enrolled in 1970–71 (Balsvik 1985:55, 279), it was the first time that so many educated Oromos from the different corners of Oromia were able to meet and exchange experiences. It was a discovery for many of them to hear that they shared a common language with little differences in dialect, had similar experiences from the colonial establishment and a common desire for respect for their dignity and identity, whether they were from Borana in the south, Harar in the east or Illubabor in the west. For those students who had not been outside their home districts before (that means the majority), this was a novel learning experience and gave them an idea of the size of the Oromo population and territory in the empire.

However, what these students experienced in Haile Selassie I University (now Addis Ababa University) was not always novel and positive. The general

social and academic environment at the university was, in many ways a replica of that in the provincial elementary and secondary schools, and for at least some of them this had, together with the faint "discovery" of their ethnic community, a very profound effect in awakening Oromo consciousness and gradually shaping a new attitude vis-à-vis the Ethiopian state. Just as in school the majority of students had Amhara/Tigrean backgrounds (Balsvik 1985:279), whose families had settled in Oromia as officials of the Imperial Government, soldiers, landowners, clergymen and in some cases as traders. The same was true for most of the Ethiopian lecturers. The contents of some of the courses taught at the university either ignored or dehumanized the Oromo people as the elementary and secondary school curricula also did (Bulcha 1994).

Paul Baxter has frequently commented that national consciousness has been forced on the Oromo as a people and individuals. Although it would be wrong to 'credit' colonial experience as the sole cause for Oromo consciousness, what Baxter has suggested is true to some extent in the case of students. One of the important factors which awakened consciousness among Oromo students and undoubtedly stirred them to act in the 1960s and 1970s, particularly among those who were enrolled in the social sciences and humanities departments, was the treatment of the Oromo in Ethiopian history, sociology and linguistics.

At the history department dozens of lectures were given by both Ethiopian and expatriate instructors on the genealogical mythology of Abyssinian kings or on the meanings and importance of a few rock inscriptions in Semitic languages excavated in northern Ethiopia; but, nothing was said about the Oromo and their history during a term-long introductory course given on the history of Ethiopia; they were denied any recognition both in the lecture rooms and in the obligatory set text-books.

Imperial histories are often distorted in favour of the empire builders. But in the case of Ethiopia, historical facts were often stood on their heads. Even when occasionally mentioned, the Oromo were consistently depicted as "newcomers" and intruders into Ethiopian territory. The Oromo, who saw themselves as victims of conquest, were depicted as barbarous conquerors of a civilized Abyssinia to whose cultural heritage they "had nothing to contribute" to quote Ullendorff's prejudiced assumption (1965:76). The Abyssinian conquest of Oromoland was portrayed, particularly from the 1960s onwards, as an act of "unification" of Ethiopia. What the history of the so-called unification clearly implied was, however, a reconquest of territory and not an in-gathering of historically, ethnically or culturally related Ethiopian people. In other words, while their land was claimed as part of the Empire, Ethiopian history disowned the Oromo. History text-books bestowed heroism and greatness on past Abyssinian leaders and praised their contribution towards the creation of the Ethiopian Empire. Thus 'state' was closely linked with the Abyssinian people, their culture and identity, while the non-Abyssinian peoples of the Empire were completely alienated. This seems to have had a profound influence on

educated Oromos. It created an identity crisis for many and some of them started a search for roots in the history and culture of their own people.

At the department of Ethiopian languages students spent two terms taking courses in the "dead" and living Semitic languages of Ethiopia while the Oromo and other Cushitic languages, spoken by more than two-thirds of the population of the empire, were totally excluded. The living and dead Semitic languages constituted the Ethiopian heritage. The Cushitic, Omotic and Nilotic languages were too backward, and even "un-Ethiopian", to be treated in the same manner. The social anthropology and sociology department was no exception, the courses that were taught focused mainly on foreign anthropology and sociology rather than on Ethiopian social reality.

Harold Marcus has credited Haile Selassie with "fostering unity through the development of national institutions, and pan-Ethiopian economy, modern communications and an official culture whose main feature was the use of Amharic language in government and education" (Marcus 1992:21). But on the contrary, the Ethiopian school system and the official culture did not create an Ethiopian identity. Instead, it produced "insiders" and "outsiders" and perpetuated existing ethnic prejudices and mistrust. Combined with the "fact of conquest" this has made the integration of the Oromo into the Ethiopian state and "nation" difficult.

REVIVAL OF OROMO IDENTITY AND QUEST FOR INDEPENDENCE

The propaganda about the "inferiority" of the Oromo language and culture (i.e. "inferiority" of Oromo identity in relation to the Abyssinian/Ethiopian identity) had its effects on many young Oromos. Many of the Oromos who learnt Amharic became reluctant to use their mother tongue which was considered as a badge of backwardness in public. This reluctance to speak the Oromo language was a denial of *Oromumma* (being-Oromo). But there were also those who were determined to challenge the denigrating views which were being taught and began to translate their convictions into deeds and concrete actions such as using the Oromo language in public. Around the beginning of the 1970s Oromo students began to speak the Oromo language on campus. It may sound banal, but for the concerned students this was tantamount to making a profound political statement and they spoke loudly to announce that they were proud of their language and their ethnic background.

In order to challenge the system that devalued and stigmatized their culture, some clandestine publications in the Oromo language, and later also in English, started to appear on and off the university campuses (Balsvik 1985:281; Bulcha 1994). These activities were of necessity carried out on very small scales by a few students. The security situation did not allow for a large circulation of clandestine literature and large meetings. Attempts were also made to form an Oromo student union recruited from among university and high school

students in the capital. Following the spirit of the Macha Tulama Association, an attempt was made to build an Oromo university in Wallaga with financial contributions from the Oromos themselves.

Hitherto, the focus of all educated activists was on the restoration of Oromo identity and dignity. Few people entertained the idea of an independent Oromo state. The Ethiopian National Liberation Front (ENLF) which had both traditional and educated Oromo elites in the ranks of its leaders, had similar aims, i.e. removal of felt injustices (ethnic, linguistic, religious) and to build an Ethiopia in which all the nationalities are equal (Asafa Jalata 1994:6). Thus in spite of strong historical socio-cultural and political factors supporting Oromo self-determination, the idea of an independent Oromo state was not yet on the agenda.

When the Ethiopian revolution erupted in 1974 a movement for the revival of Oromo identity was growing and taking some definite shape among the intellectuals. The outbreak of the revolution was received with great jubilation and hope, not least among the Oromo. The revolution, without doubt, made positive contributions towards national consciousness among the various ethnic groups in the empire. Many Oromos took the opportunity to organize themselves. Different views were entertained concerning the future of their nation. With Haile Fida, who was Ethiopia's best Marxist intellectual, as their *de facto* leader, the majority of Oromo elites sought a solution to the national question within the framework of the Ethiopian state and supported the military regime, while a minority opted for an independent Oromo organization which worked for a separate solution based on Oromo nationalism.

The revolution contributed to political awareness. The existence of nations and nationalities in Ethiopia was admitted, and Oromo was substituted as a collective name for "Ye-Shawa Galla", "Kottu", "Ye-Wallaga Galla", Arsi, Bórana etc. The recovery of their collective name (i.e. collective identity) brought about new dynamism in Oromo self-perception, peasants and workers included. This was supplemented by the recognition of Oromo rights to their language; the "legal" use of *afaan Oromoo* for mass media became possible for the first time. The upsurge of activities included cultural shows which brought the Oromo language and arts on to the stage for the first time in the capital city and provincial centres. For the intellectuals, who were behind these activities, and the troupes who performed them, the cultural shows constituted an unequivocal assertion of Oromo national identity, and were understood as such by many in the audiences and by the regime.

The military regime made a quick turn in its policy on nationalities; and the optimism which characterized the early phase of the revolution was over by the end of 1975. As soon as it had consolidated its power the regime continued with the old imperial policy of "national integration" or nation-building through Amharization. Instead of encouraging voluntary integration of the nationalities in the country's socio-political structure, unity and homogeneity were sought by military means while the use of force increased with increasing opposition

to the regime. The recognition of the ethnic identities was not accompanied by rights for their expression. Ethnic suppression continued. The Ethiopian state was not ready to redefine its identity as a composite of the identities of the various groups within its polity. Amhara elites continued to dominate Ethiopia's politics, media, academia and other public institutions. While most of the Oromo elites were, through multiethnic parties such *Meison* and EPRP (the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party), engaged in an attempt to synthesize Oromo history and social grievances with the general class issues in the empire and internationally, a small group, i.e. those who, from the very beginning had opted for an independent Oromo party, started to organize themselves as a front and became the Oromo Liberation Front.

By the end of 1976, the option left to political activists of the oppressed ethnic groups in Ethiopia was armed opposition. Consequently, members of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), left for the mountains to start and lead an armed struggle; some went into exile.

The formation of Oromo student organizations in Europe and America⁴ coincided with the changes at home. Many Oromos who fled Ethiopia had, by the end of 1970s, started to look seriously into their cultural and historical heritage. Their exile in democratic countries of Europe and north America gave them the opportunity to organize and openly carry out cultural, linguistic and political activities. Links were quickly created between them and the OLF, and a common strategy of struggle was adopted. Thus, Oromo organizations in the diaspora became an extension of the growing active struggle of the home front. The main concern of Oromo intellectuals in the diaspora, however, became the study of their language, culture and history. Study circles were organized and several conferences were conducted in European and North American cities. The most recurrent themes of such conferences were Oromo history, the *gada* system and tradition, the Oromo language and culture. Scholars who have observed the activities of Oromo communities in exile have pointed out the importance placed upon culture, language and history. Thomas Zitelman notes that "The fear of loss of culture and history was a constant feature I experienced among Arssi-Oromo in Somali refugee camps in 1988" (cited in Baxter 1994:171). Commenting on the same phenomenon Paul Baxter writes:

As part of the creation of national identity, Oromo intellectuals have been intensely concerned to establish the autonomy, distinctive value and intrinsic worth of traditional Oromo culture. In this respect, as well, they are like other decolonizing people. At the Oromo conferences in which I have been privileged to participate—Berlin, Amsterdam, London, Melbourne, Toronto—the definition and celebration of Oromo culture have been central concerns ... Language and folk culture, of course, commonly become symbols of identity for oppressed nationalities, especially among intellectuals, and Oromo are no exception (1994:171).

⁴ These organizations were the Union of Oromo Students in Europe (UOSE/TBOA) and the Union of Oromo Student in North America (UOSNA). UOSNA became later the Oromo Union in North America (OUNA).

Thus, for many Oromos in the diaspora, their flight became a rendezvous with their ancestral language and identity. Exile gave them opportunities they were denied in Ethiopia to study the Oromo culture and language, and to revalue and practice them. The OLF literacy programme was adopted and many became literate for the first time in their own language.

In May 1991, the military regime was swept away by the ethnic fronts whose identity it tried to suppress. The centre had not only lost control over this *melange* of ethnic communities but, as evidenced by the Eritrean independence, Ethiopia was literally disintegrating, both as a state and a geographical description. The identities that the Haile Selassie and the military regimes wasted so much resource and human life to suppress were blossoming and asserting themselves with a ferocity that was not suppressible any more by military means. The OLF began operating throughout the entire Oromo territory. The Oromo nation became animated by an exhilarating feeling of hope and enthusiasm as a plethora of activities were set in motion in the areas of cultural and linguistic revival and as promises of political self-determination were made.

One of the objective factors that characterizes a national identity, whether that nation has its own state or not, is a specific territory of its own. If the recognition of the Oromo as a people (nation) was the most important achievement in 1974, the geographical demarcation of the Oromo territory and the official and popular recognition of Oromia as the name designating that specific territory, is one of the significant landmarks in the revival of Oromo national identity. Together with the adoption of the Oromo language as a medium of administration, law, education and the mass media in Oromia it brought about the crystallization of Oromo identity. The use of *qubee* as had been adapted to Oromo writing by the OLF was unanimously endorsed and the use of the Sabeian script (used for Amharic and Tigrinya writing) was dropped by all Oromo organizations, making the socio-linguistic boundary constituted by the Oromo language more distinct than before. Although the Sabeian script, which is one of the pillars of Abyssinian cultural legacy, was rejected for technical reasons (Tilahun Gamta 1993), the adoption of the *qubee* script has "also contributed to the psychological liberation of the Oromo people" (Kifle Djote 1993:20). The new alphabet has become a primary symbol of national Oromo identity.

The Development of Oromo Nationalism

Mohammed Hassen

This is an attempt to share some preliminary thinking about the development of Oromo nationalism from an Oromo viewpoint. It may reflect an unintended and unconscious aggrandizement of Oromo nationalism. However, my purpose is simply to attempt to explain why Oromo nationalism developed so slowly. I present this paper to serve as a stimulant for substantive discussion and to tap your experience for constructive criticism and ideas to shape my own thinking. A commonly held assumption by the Amhara ruling elites was that "... the huge Oromo society was nothing more than a conglomerate of petty states having little in common besides the language wherever it was retained. They were zealous to wage wars against one another" (Bairu Tafla 1987:48). In various sources the Oromo were depicted as scattered tribal groups who lacked the essential characteristics of a nation. Accordingly, the Oromo were considered as "... an enormous population of Adams and Eves, from whom the apple of ethnicity had as yet been withheld" (Gellner 1983:84). A similar attitude was shared by the Somali ruling elites who had their own unbridled ambitions to create a Greater Somalia which included millions of the Oromo. They went even further than the Amhara and claimed that the Oromo were pre-ethnic raw materials who could be Somalized. For that purpose the government of General Siad Barre (1969–1991) created the Somali Abo Liberation Front in 1976 as the instrument with which he hoped to Somalize the Oromo of Hararghe, Bale, Arsi and Sidamo through a crash programme! A Somali diplomat actually made this argument to me in December 1977.¹ At the time of the temporarily successful Somali advance against Ethiopians in the 1970s, it was plausible and from the Somali viewpoint attractive, to present the Oromo as a kind of human population without a set form, a pre-ethnic raw material, waiting to be turned into Amharas or into Somalis by the turn of political fortune and religious conversion.

The Amhara ruling elites undermined Oromo national identity and unity on the grounds that the development of Oromo nationalism would lead to the disintegration of the Ethiopian empire. The Somali ruling elites undermined Oromo national identity on the grounds that the growth of Oromo nationalism would abort the realization of the dream of Greater Somalia. Both ruling elites

¹ At a meeting held at Africa Center in December 1977.

were totally opposed to the development of Oromo nationalism but with one essential difference. Whereas the Amhara elites saw the danger to their empire in the growth of Oromo nationalism, the Somali elites perceived the frustration of their ambition in the birth of Oromo nationalism. The Amhara attitude was nourished by the spectre of the disintegration of their empire for, without the resources of Oromia, Ethiopia cannot exist as a viable state. The attitude of the Somali ruling elites was nourished by the untenable ambition to build Greater Somalia. This means that from its birth in the 1960s Oromo nationalism faced intense opposition from both Ethiopia and Somalia. This not only hampered the development of Oromo nationalism but also makes it different from other nationalisms in Africa. There is also a second factor which makes it different:

Oromo nationalism differs from other nationalisms in so far as the experience of Ethiopian rule differed from that of being ruled by a Western colonial power. Ethiopian colonial power was centred in the country itself and not in some distant metropole. The rulers were also 'natives', and did not have immense technological superiority over the ruled nor enjoy vastly superior standards of living. (Baxter 1994:249)

The Amhara and Somali ruling elites did everything possible to undermine Oromo national identity and perpetuate the myth of the non-existence of that identity. For the Oromo elite the claim of national identity was the claim to equality of treatment among the people of Ethiopia (Olana Zoga 1993:75-7) and the Horn of Africa and for this a good number of prominent individuals sacrificed their lives. And today thousands of Oromo are '... quite prepared to sacrifice their lives for the recognition of ... and the restoration of their national rights'.² Oromo nationalism, like other African nationalisms, emerged and developed in response to colonial rule. It is still developing and changing. It took its shape against ... political and cultural dominance. Oromo nationalism emerged partly out of the struggle against Amhara domination, and partly against Somali expansionism.

For Oromo nationalists neither Ethiopian rule which was based on inequality, economic exploitation, cultural subjugation and political domination nor the prospect of Greater Somalia held out any hope for the future of their people. Consequently, Christian Oromo nationalists rejected the appeal of Ethiopian Christian ideology, while Muslim Oromo nationalists rejected the Somali religious propaganda; facts which are often overlooked. During the war of 1977-78 between Ethiopia and Somalia, the Western Somalia Liberation forces and regular Somali soldiers occupied some parts of Oromo territory in Hararge, Bale and Sidamo, where they embarked on a Somalization programme. This meant that the struggle for the creation of Greater Somalia was combined with an attack on Oromo national identity. At that time the goal of the Oromo Nationalist movement was to resist Somali aggression and the Amhara elites attempt to maintain the colonial status quo in Oromia. Consequently, Oromo

² I have drawn on Smith, 1986.

were attacked by both Ethiopian and Somali forces, which may have retarded the development of Oromo nationalism by at least a decade. Be that as it may, unlike other African nationalisms which developed between the 1920s and 1950s, Oromo nationalism developed only during and after the 1960s.

Why did it take so long for Oromo nationalism to develop? It is difficult to answer this complex question. The development of nationalism is a long and slow process mediated by national awakening or national consciousness. The latter emerges primarily as a result of several factors; the spread of modern education, better communications, improved transportation systems, growth of mass media and the press, higher standards of literacy and the growth of literature and intensive interaction among people (all of which most Oromo lacked up to 1991 and still lack to some extent) but all of which combine to provide "a crucial environment for the spread of a national consciousness through a given population" (Alter 1989:77). It is not surprising then if it took a long time to mobilize politically as the Oromo lacked, and still lack, the crucial environment for the spread of a national consciousness. It is important to note that in the rise of nationalisms in different parts of Africa, the educated class played a very decisive role. "It is hard to find a single one of the African Nationalist leaders, whether radical or conservative, who was not a graduate of a western university or else had some other prolonged exposure to western life" (Clapham 1984:29). In the Oromo case there was no western educated class to lead a Nationalist movement up to recently. Most modern educational establishments in Ethiopia are located in urban centers. Nearly ninety percent of the Oromo population live in the rural areas and have no access to modern education. In 1994, it is estimated that out of the total population of more than twenty-five million Oromo ". . . less than .01 per cent have received third level education" (Dhugaasaa Baasaa 1994:30). Oromo are left out of the main stream of modern western education. The absence of an educated class appears to have delayed the rise of Oromo national consciousness. Without national consciousness it is impossible to expect the growth of nationalism. And without nationalism, there is no effective political mobilization. Was there anything that could be described as Oromo nationalism in Ethiopia? The answer is yes and no. Yes if one looks at it from the perspective of Oromo nationalists and no if one looks at it from the perspective of successive Ethiopian regimes.

For the leading members of the Macha-Tulama Association (1964–1967) and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) which grew out of that movement, the existence of Oromo nationalism is a reality beyond dispute. Since the 1960s, and especially after 1974, it invigorated Oromo political thought to challenge and defy the established Ethiopian order (Olana Zoga 1993:50–65, 161, 113, 149). In the 1960s and 1970s, and to some extent even in the 1980s, Oromo nationalism was not a mass movement. It is particularly true of the Oromo case that; "Nationalism is usually a minority movement pursued against the indifference and, frequently, hostility of the majority of the members of the 'nation' in whose name the nationalists act" (Brielly 1982:19). Oromo nationalism was a minority

movement for over two decades but Oromo nationalists knew that nationalism is "... above and beyond all else, about politics, and that politics is about power. Power, in the modern world, is primarily about control of the state" (Brieully 1982:2). Oromo nationalists of the 1960s, at one point, even attempted to take over the control of the Ethiopian state (Olana Zoga 1993:118–133) while the nationalists of the 1970s opted for the formation of an independent or autonomous republic of Oromia. Nationalism represented the spirit of their people's confidence in themselves and their conviction in the justness of their struggle for self-determination. What the nationalists of the 1960s and the 1970s had in common was "the objective of obtaining and using state power."³

The evidence for the existence and growth of Oromo nationalism and the intellectual ferment among the Oromo nationals is everywhere in Oromia, which the new generation of Oromo nationalists and their organizations (mainly the OLF) are struggling to liberate, as well as among the Oromo in the diaspora. The new nationalist spirit cuts across class, religious and regional differences and fuses the Oromo into a single nation. However up to 1980 for the Ethiopian government and Ethiopian nationalists, Oromo nationalism did not exist. In fact the former Ethiopian military regime recognized the existence of Oromo nationalism only in the late 1980s and continued to characterize it as "a dangerous narrow nationalism", "a backward and reactionary movement".

Oromo nationalism was controversial and is still a taboo subject among some scholars. For instance, Harold Marcus recently argued that 'passionately engaged in the Oromo quest for political sovereignty, various authors seek to create a historical nation called Oromia and fabricate a glorious history for the non-existent country' (1992:20). Marcus neither explains why in his view the Oromo are not a nation nor why Oromia is a non-existent country. On the contrary, '... the existence of an Oromo nation is now a recognized fact of political life' (Baxter 1994:251). Today the Oromo 'are emerging ... as the most important nation in the Horn of Africa' (Gellner 1983:84) with a recognized territorial identification with Oromia. Marcus ... 'should have known that [many] countries or states, that are members of the United Nations today are recent historical inventions' (Asafa Jalata 1993:277).

Objective and dispassionate discussion of Oromo nationalism is particularly difficult for three interconnected reasons. First and foremost, is the absence of extensive reliable data, which reflects the depth and the strength of Oromo national consciousness. Although the Oromo are the single largest national group in the Horn of Africa, theirs was not the dominant one in terms of nationalism, up to 1991. Second, the Oromo were never given any opportunity to express themselves in their own language. Since their conquest during and after the 1880s, and especially during the long reign of Emperor Haile Selassie (1930–1974), the Oromo were not given the opportunity to write in their language, to learn their history nor to engage in any free artistic expression. It is important to

³ See for instance, *The Political Programme of the Oromo Liberation Front*, Finfinnee, 1976.

remember that the Oromo language, the core of national identity, was the one language that was most disparaged and least studied in Ethiopia. It lacked '... a developed literature and has less printed materials than any language with a comparable number of speakers' (Mekuria Bulcha 1994:9). From 1942 to 1974, Afaan Oromo was the only language in Africa that was banned from being used for preaching, teaching and production of literature and '... denied any official status and it was not permissible to publish, preach, teach or broadcast in Oromo' (Baxter 1978:288). After 1942, '... Oromo literature was not only banned, but most of what was already available was collected and destroyed' (Mekuria Bulcha 1994:99-100). The period from 1942 to 1990 was the time when the program of de-Oromoization was intensified, through the educational system, cultural institutions and governmental bureaucracy:

... The school was designed to inculcate Ethiopian patriotism in Oromo children by stripping them of their language, their culture and identity. It remains the belief of Amhara rulers and elites that to be an Ethiopian, one has to cease to be an Oromo. The two things were/are seen as incompatible. (Mekuria Bulcha 1993:101)

Systematic attempts were made to degrade the culture, undermine Oromo confidence in their achievements and prevent the rise of Oromo nationalism. Such efforts not only delayed the rise of Oromo nationalism but also weakened it. Consequently, even today, there are two types of Oromo nationalists: Those who have totally rejected Ethiopian identity and those who have not rejected Ethiopian identity. Those who have rejected Ethiopian identity *do not feel* supreme loyalty to the Ethiopian state and its institutions. Those who have not rejected Ethiopian identity *feel* supreme loyalty to the Ethiopian state and its institutions. The former are struggling for the formation of an independent state of Oromia, while the latter seek self-determination for Oromia within Ethiopia.

This means there are competing and rival nationalisms which claim loyalty from the same people. For those who want to create an independent Oromia, there is no Ethiopian nation which generates a common feeling and reflects the past achievements and future aspirations. For them national religion, national dress, national symbols (the church, the flag, national anthem) which are projected to represent Ethiopian nationalism are of the Amhara-Tigray nations.

For Oromo nationalists up to 1991, the Ethiopian state was the *state of* the ruling Amhara elites. Oromo nationalists claim that the Amhara elites expropriated Ethiopian nationalism because their leader, Menilek, the King of Shawa and later the Emperor of Ethiopia (1889-1913), created the modern Ethiopian empire, institutionalizing the monopoly of Shawa Amhara advantages. In other words, the Amhara elites dominated the political, military, economic, cultural, religious, and social life of the Ethiopian state up to 1991. Since 1991, the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) have replaced the Amhara ruling elites. Oromo nationalists believe that the TPLF, in the name of Ethiopian nationalism, has been restructuring the Ethiopian state for the purpose of entrenching the Tigrayan elites control of the Ethiopian economy and domination of the Ethiopian political landscape. The activities of the TPLF demonstrate that

today there is no Ethiopian nationalism based on the collective pride of all the peoples of Ethiopia. On the contrary, there are rival Amhara, Tigray, Eritrean, Ogaden Somali, Oromo and Sidama nationalisms. Even the Old Abyssinian nationalism, which was based on Christianity, the Orthodox church, the monarchy and Amhara-Tigray solidarity is now history; ironically the Amharas and Tigrays fight among themselves in the name of Ethiopian nationalism, but in reality for the control and domination of the Ethiopian state. Where is a single Ethiopian nationalism based on collective pride of all the peoples of Ethiopia? The ruling Amhara elites up to 1991 and the TPLF since then have managed not only to mask their governmental nationalism as "Ethiopian nationalism", but also projected their own interest as national interest and their own survival as the survival of Ethiopia. Consequently, for the Oromo nationalists, since 1992⁴ the Ethiopian state neither embodies a consensus of beliefs, values and aspirations nor instills in them basic trust in its institutions, laws, leadership, and administrative machinery. On the contrary, for Oromo nationalists these are the tools of oppression and subjugation that have to be removed and replaced. However, it is impossible to say whether or not such a view is widely shared by a large section of the Oromo nation.

But what is a nation? What characterizes a nation? As with nationalism, it is difficult to define a nation precisely. One scholar defines a nation as "a people in possession of a state" (Deutsch 1967 cited in Alter 1989:11). This is a very restricted definition for as Alter states 'a nation may certainly exist without its own state, and a state without a unified nation'. The Oromo do not have their own state, and yet the existence of the Oromo nation is a recognized fact of political life. Ethiopia is not a unified nation, but the existence of the Ethiopian state is a reality beyond dispute. 'In many ways it is easier to 'grasp' nationalism, the ideological movement, than nations, the organizational cultures' (Smith 1986:2). One leading scholar states that what constitutes the makeup of a nation are: "language, culture, historical consciousness, mores, social communication and political goals" (Alter 1989:11), another stresses 'that the members of a nation must feel they are bound together by a sense of solidarity, a common culture and a national consciousness' and goes on to add that a nation exists if 'a significant number of people in a community consider themselves to form a nation' (Seton-Watson 1977:5 cited in Alter :13).

The Oromo are a nation because they are '... a community of people who feel that they belong together in the double sense that they share deeply significant elements of a common heritage and that they have a common destiny for the future'.⁵ However, in the absence of reliable data, it is difficult to know the depth of Oromo national consciousness:

National consciousness, the sense of belonging to a political and social community, which constitutes—or wishes to constitute—a nation organized as a state, is the

⁴ After the OLF withdrew from the transitional government of Ethiopia in 1992, the ruling regime has been waging war against Oromo nationalism, thus further alienating Oromo nationalists.

⁵ I have drawn upon Emerson, 1960:95.

fundamental basis of the cultural or political nation. In principle, national consciousness is independent of the existence of a national state; without national consciousness, however, a national movement would be doomed to failure. (Alter 1989:18)

Intellectuals play a very prominent role in the development of national consciousness. They 'serve as an advance guard of the social process, feeling out or peering into the future and striving for something better'. Their tools are ideas by means of which they set up criteria for their own society and its future course (Anderson 1939:16). In the development of Oromo national consciousness, Oromo intellectuals emphasize the various commonalities such as language, culture, the Gada system, historical experience, political ideals and tone down other local, regional or religious differences, which the Ethiopian ruling elites deliberately exaggerate in order to weaken Oromo unity.

The Ethiopian ruling elites left no stone unturned to prevent the Oromo from getting politically mobilized. Political mobilization, i.e., making minds receptive to national slogans, national ideology, is the product of a hard and long struggle by a nationally conscious leadership:

... The existence of a developed and rapidly improving network of communication within a large social group is very important for the emergence of a national movement. Certain conditions must obtain before minds are receptive to national slogans and national ideology. (Alter 1989:79)

Political mobilization tends to proceed in phases. According to one study, political mobilization proceeds in three clearly distinct phases:

In the first phase, learned and culturally-minded individuals such as teachers, students, ... and writers turned their attention to their people's language, history and culture, though without arousing in society at large any great excitement about things national for the time being. (Hroch 1985, 22-23 cited by Alter :79)

In the Oromo case, the first phase was represented by learned individuals such as Onesimos Nasib, who pioneered the production of written literature in the Oromo language, introduced literacy to Western Oromoland (Wallaga) and popularized modern education in the region (Mekuria Bulcha 1994); and by Shaykh Bakri Sapalo, the great scholar-poet, who produced eight works on Oromo history and culture, and invented the Oromo alphabet in 1956. He stirred the imagination and captured the love of the Oromo by means of his poems, which were composed in their language. His poems deal with secular and religious subjects; some of his secular poems deal with the beauty of the Oromo country, its people, rivers, lakes, valleys, mountains and animals, while others deal with Oromo suffering under Amhara colonial administration. One of his poems even compares Shewan Amhara colonialism with Italian colonialism and stresses that the latter was less harsh than the former. In one of his letters in his Oromo orthography, Shaykh Bakri not only indicted Amhara administration but also predicted the eventual victory of the Oromo revolution (Hayward and M. Hassen 1981).

What the two examples of Onesimos Nasib and Shaykh Bakri Sapalo clearly show is that educated Oromo, both Christians and Muslims, emphasized the importance of education for their people and the production of literary material in their language. Onesimos Nasib and Shaykh Bakri Sapalo are clear proofs of the existence of Oromo national consciousness and concern with the Oromo language. They are equally clear proof of the brutality of Ethiopian authorities towards anyone who showed interest in the Oromo language.⁶

The second phase, in political mobilization, comes when the learned interest of the minority, spreads to the other sectors of the population, when it is transformed into channelled political agitation by a minority that thinks in terms of the nation. (Alter 1989:79)

In the Oromo case, the second phase of political mobilization was ushered in by the formation of the Matcha-Tulama Association in 1964.⁷ As a country-wide movement it championed the political, social, cultural, educational and health improvements, and political rights of the Oromo people and symbolized the collective will and determination of the Oromo to assert their unity and human dignity. It marked the beginning of a new political experience that was crucial to the growth of Oromo nationalism in the 1970s, an experience that taught the Oromo elites that they needed a liberation movement that would marshal the resources of their people, harmonize their actions and channel their creative activities against the oppressive Ethiopian system.

There were three stages in the development and politicization of the Association (1964–67). First, the failure to integrate the assimilated Christian Oromo into the Ethiopian political processes, second the realization of the assimilated Oromo that they were badly treated and discriminated against by the Amhara elites and third, the events of 1966 which suddenly politicized the movement. The new ideology became an instrument for mobilizing the Oromo of various regions in their name and interest.

The development of the Association exposed one major weakness of the Ethiopian political process which is often overlooked. This is the intense anti-Oromo prejudice within the Amhara ruling circle. During the 1940s and the 1950s only few Oromo were educated. Those lucky ones had all the necessary criteria to integrate them into the heart and the soul of the Ethiopian system (Darwit Wolde Giorgio 1989). They were mainly Christians, culturally Amharized and spoke Amharic. They were ardent Ethiopian nationalists, and loyal to the Emperor. And yet they were not treated as equals by the Amhara ruling elites:

The life of assimilated Oromos was often peripheral. In spite of their total submission to "pressures for their 'cultural suicide' and to the dominance of the Amhara

⁶ Onesimos was imprisoned and banned from teaching even his own children. Shaykh Bakri, too, was under house arrest for ten years and in 1978 he was forced to flee to Somalia where he died in a refugee camp in 1980.

⁷ I use Olana Zoga, 1993 extensively below. Unless indicated otherwise all the quotations below are from this book.

over non-Amhara peoples in all aspects of life", they were seldom treated as equals by the Amhara. The Amharization of the Oromo and other groups was attempted "without integrating them as equals or allowing them to share power in any meaningful way." As the "Amhara mask" they wore was often too transparent, assimilated Oromos rarely reached decision-making positions within the Ethiopian bureaucracy. (Mekuria Bulcha 1994:104)

The Association had a policy-making board of 13 men, which included four military officers, two lawyers, government officials and businessmen. They were all highly successful men who were well respected among the Oromo. It was this privileged social element which led the first Pan-Oromo national movement. They turned to their roots in reaction to an unbridled policy of Amharization, not to mention their realization of the legal, economic, political, social and cultural policies that affected the Oromo. It was the conflict between the ruling Amhara elites and the educated Oromo within the Ethiopian establishment, that turned the latter towards the Oromo issue. It has been said and rightly that:

... When the educated professionals find themselves unable to gain admission to posts commensurate with their degrees and talents; they tend to turn away also from the metropolitan culture of the dominant ethnic group and return to their 'own' culture, the culture of the once despised subject ethnic group. Exclusion breeds failed assimilation, and reawakens an ethnic consciousness among the professional elites, at exactly the moment when the intellectuals are beginning to explore the historic roots of the community. (Smith 1982:31)

Several military officers from Brigadier General to private soldier, civilian officials, professional elites, business and religious leaders joined the association as a consequence of their disillusionment. They joined it for various reasons, but, by joining it, they elevated the status and transformed the image of the association. Most of all they provided the association with their skills, knowledge, organizational capacities and leadership qualities and in the process they transformed what started as a self-help organization into a pan-Oromo Movement with huge membership and branch offices all over Oromia.

The Movement attracted Oromo students from Addis Ababa University, including Lieutenant Mamo Mazamir, Ibssa Gutama, Barro Tumsa, Yohannes Lata, Mekonnen Gallan and Taha Ali. With the exception of Mamo Mazamir, who was martyred by the government in 1967, the rest were founding members of the Oromo Liberation Front in 1974. (There were many others whose names are not listed here who were members of the Association and later became founding members of the OLF.) Except for the martyred Barro Tumsa, the rest are still prominent members of the same organization. This establishes a direct link between the transition from the Matcha-Tulama Association to the OLF.

Among the university students who joined, the association and radicalized the youth wing of the movement was Lieutenant Mamo Mazamir who made writing Oromo history and production of literature in the Oromo language the ideological battleground for the movement. He wrote a "History of the Oromo", which was confiscated by the government when his house was searched in

1967. In addition to history, the documents Mamo prepared included a plan for a new government, a new constitution and distribution of land among the landless tenants. This was too much for the ruling Amhara elites, and Mamo Mazamir was hung for producing that document. It was also Mamo Mazamir who wrote the following letter to the leaders of the Bale Oromo armed struggle (1963–70):

...The history of mankind shows that a people who rise in the struggle for freedom and independence, in defiance of death, is always victorious... The life and death struggle of the oppressed masses in the Ethiopian Empire against the hegemony of the Amhara and their allies headed by American imperialism is a sacred liberation struggle of millions of oppressed and humiliated people... That struggle will surely intensify in the course of time, as the oppressed people's organizational means and consciousness become deeply rooted. As you learnt in our discussions, the Macha and Tulama democratic movements, which was created to raise the consciousness of the Oromo people, is the present concrete situation working day and night to put in hand co-ordination activities that are within our reach. In fact, the militant members are working now on the means of organizing a nation-wide people's movement which is based on realizing the aspirations of Oromo people as a whole. Please, keep up your heroic armed struggle, defending every inch of the Oromo Nation to the last drop of your blood. The decisive war of resistance you are conducting in Bale will, despite the manoeuvres of imperialism, Zionism and local reaction, be victorious. We shall continue doing everything we can to keep in touch with you.

This letter is very interesting for four reasons: first, it was written on September 10, 1965 and it expresses the spirit of the association at that point in time. Second, it shows clearly the meeting between the leadership of the Bale Oromo armed struggle and the association at which they discussed how to co-ordinate their joint efforts. Third, it shows that while the association struggled peacefully to bring about the equality of Oromos with the rest of the population, it did not exclude the possibility of conducting the armed struggle if peaceful resistance failed to produce the desired result. Finally, the language of the letter demonstrates the author's communist tendency, which is also supported by another source.

What transformed the association from being a self-help organization in the administrative region of Shawa to a Pan-Oromo movement was the public meeting held on May 15, 1966 in Arsi at a place called Itayaa. There tens of thousands of Oromo from different regions, both Muslims and Christians, met and discussed how they were all subjected to harsh economic exploitation and political oppression. It was the beginning of co-ordinated and united Oromo activities and realization about the importance of unity. Those who were at the meeting vowed never to be divided again. Muslims ate meat slaughtered by Christians and the Christians ate meat slaughtered by Muslims. This was an unheard of event in Ethiopia, which outraged the Amhara ruling elites. The meeting was addressed in Oromoo which was proscribed in Ethiopia (Markarkis 1987:260). All subsequent meetings were addressed in the same language. Dramas written in Afaan Oromoo by Mamo Mazamir, that brilliant young officer of boundless energy, were shown at subsequent meetings. At

huge mass meetings fierce oratory, dramas, poems and prayers in Afaan Oromoo all combined to move the Oromo into tears of anger against the Ethiopian system. They became conscious of their deprivation and their treatment as second class subjects, and expressed their determination to be free and equal with the rest of the population of Ethiopia. By 1967, the time when the Ethiopian government could easily divide the Oromo among themselves was gone for good. It was this realization which persuaded the ruling Amhara elites to destroy the Matcha-Tulama movement sooner than later. The leaders of the association appealed to the Emperor for justice but to no avail. It was then that the leadership of the association, under the direction and influence of General Tadesse Biru, decided to assassinate the Emperor and capture state power. Through planted informers the emperor knew all about the poorly planned and badly co-ordinated plot, which was to take effect on November 5, 1967. Shortly after on November 17 an explosion, caused by a bomb planted by Government agents, at cinema hall in Addis Abeba, was used as a pretext to imprison over one hundred leaders and key members and to dissolve the Matcha-Tulama Association itself. The government won only a short-term pyrrhic victory, within seven short years (i.e. 1974) its policy had unwittingly transformed Oromo politics beyond recognition. The Oromo demand for equality within Ethiopia was transformed into a demand for self-determination in Oromia. The demand for literacy in Amharic language and Sabeian script was transformed into a demand for literacy in Afaan Oromoo in the Latin alphabet. In short, the Ethiopian government's brutality produced the Oromo elites's rejection of Ethiopian identity itself. After 1974, Oromo politics were never the same again.

It has been said that the third phase in the political mobilization is the time when the national cause is adopted by the widest sections of society and the people have been successfully 'awakened'. In the Oromo case one can say with confidence that since 1991 the Oromo have been successfully awakened. However, even as early as 1974 the formation of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) added a new dimension to the Oromo national consciousness. The OLF grew out of the Matcha-Tulama Association, it is firmly rooted in the Oromo national consciousness and struggles to achieve the inalienable rights of the Oromo people. Its ideological fire is Oromo nationalism:

Consequently, it can be said that the emergence of a national movement indicates that a population or social group has reached a new stage on the road to nationhood: the transition to political action. The nation, or the sections of a population that consider themselves to be a nation, attempt to create their own state. (Alter 1989:22-3)

The political program of the OLF clearly states that the major objective of the Oromo national struggle is the establishment of democratic republic of Oromia and stresses the importance of the voluntary unity of the people of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. The OLF reflects the political maturity of the Oromo national movement.

From 1974 to 1991, the Ethiopian military regime was able to contain and to isolate the OLF from the people and limit them to small areas of Haraghe, Bale and Wallaga. The military regime's policies of resettlement, villagization and collectivization were undertaken mainly for the purpose of containing Oromo nationalism and isolating the OLF from its mass base. Nevertheless, the OLF made a significant contribution to the combined efforts which defeated the military regime in 1991. In recognition of which the OLF was invited to participate in the London (May) and Addis Ababa (July) 1991 conferences.

The OLF was part of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) up to June 1992. During this short period, OLF cadres and soldiers were operating, openly and clandestinely, in every corner of Oromia. This provided opportunity for the transformation of Oromo nationalism from a movement of small groups to a mass movement. The rapid development of Oromo nationalism since 1991 is; partly a response to the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front's (TPLF) occupation of Oromia, partly to the weakness of the Ethiopian state but, above all, to the activities of Oromo organizations.⁸ Since 1991 the Oromo have experienced a vigorous rebirth of their distinctive national self-assertion and a remarkable flowering of literacy in Afaan Oromoo. The Latin alphabet, which the OLF has been using since 1974, was transformed in 1991 into Qubee Afaan Oromo that speedily gained popularity because it is "the most highly developed and the most convenient system of writing ... readily adaptable to almost any language" (Tilahun Gamta 1993:37). From 1974, when the OLF started using the Latin alphabet, and today when that alphabet is used all over Oromia is only twenty-one years, but the changes are profound. In 1974 even the name Oromo was not known by many. (See essays by Hultin and Zitelmann.) Today, the term Galla is slowly but surely disappearing and Oromia is recognized as Oromo country within Ethiopia. In early 1974, it was still not permissible to write nor to broadcast in Afaan Oromoo, today the ideological struggle over the fate of Oromia is conducted in Afaan Oromoo both in the print and broadcast medias. Who would have imagined in 1974, when there was no reading material in Afaan Oromoo, that by 1994 it would be almost impossible to keep up with reading the literature produced in the same language? In 1993 and 1994 alone more material was produced in Afaan Oromoo than from 1880 to 1992. In 1993 and 1994 alone eight million copies of fifty-eight textbooks were published in Afaan Oromoo (Barber 1994:4). Today Oromo children learn in their mother tongue and the Oromo society is engaged in intellectual reconstruction, using its own resources to create its own knowledge system. The speed with which the Oromo challenged the Abyssinian monopolization of knowledge in Amharic is remarkable! In short since the historic decision of 1991, publications in Afaan Oromoo are mushrooming:

⁸ Following the collapse of military dictatorship in 1991, the Ethiopian state and its institutions were greatly weakened. There are five Oromo political organizations, of which the OLF, IFLO and OPDO are three large ones. OPDO was created by the TPLF and is tightly controlled by the same organization.

... Even more works of translation, as well as essays and novels have been completed, and piles of manuscripts are lying everywhere awaiting publication. Oromos everywhere are flocking in unbelievable great numbers to attend evening language classes on the use of Qubee and on Oromo history and culture. The impact this is having within society is such that even non-Oromos are gradually being convinced to join and attend classes themselves of their free will. This is the simple phenomenon and comes as a vivid illustration of how Oromo language, despite everything is making its influence felt within society. It is interesting to note that the Ethiopian Orthodox Church itself has of late organized a church choir of Oromo singers.... This is a dramatic departure from the past when the Oromo language was considered too profane to be used by the church. Recent developments have also prompted Protestant churches to conduct services and sermons in Oromo language. (Kifle Djote 1993:21)

The rapidly growing Oromo literature reflects the joy and sorrow, the strength and weakness, conflict and harmony, unity in diversity, and greatness of soul and spirit of Oromo unity. It cultivates a feeling of pride, and a sense of belonging to a great nation. The new literature expresses a profound Oromo yearning for return to Gada democracy. It articulates Oromo aspirations for self-determination and nourishes their determination to achieve that goal. The new literature reflects the Oromo mind, the Oromo soul, the Oromo spirit, the Oromo view of the universe and their place in that universe. In pre-1974 Ethiopia, "The Oromo language and culture were reduced to marks of illiteracy, shame and backwardness ..." (Mekuria Bulcha 1994:103). Those days are now gone forever. Oromo nationalism has not yet achieved its ultimate goal of creating self-governing Oromia; but it has fundamentally altered the Oromo perception of themselves and how they are perceived by others.

Today political mobilization has brought back to life the crushed self-respect and self-confidence of Oromo. No force will kill the spirit of freedom, self-respect and human dignity that now resides in the Oromo nation. I believe the Oromo nation will play a crucial role in shaping the future political landscape of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. Today those who torment the Oromo must realize that they will never again be able to govern the Oromo cheaply. The current ruling Tigrayan elites believe that it will take a decade before Oromo nationalism will be transformed into a formidable movement.⁹ Meanwhile, they are doing their best to destroy the movement and divide it before it gets out of their control. Consequently, the ruling TPLF/EPRDF have been busy destroying the military and political capability of the Oromo Liberation Front.¹⁰

The leaders of the EPRDF regime apparently assume that because the monopoly of power has shifted from the Amhara elites to the Tigrayan ones, national domination has ended in Oromia. Far from it. Oromia is still a dominated territory, where the Oromo do not have the basic right to organize freely

⁹ In September 1991, I had five hours extensive discussion with one of the top officials of the TPLF in the city of New York. This official, whose name I cannot disclose now, made it clear to me at the time that Oromo nationalism needs ten more years before it seriously threatens the territorial integrity of Ethiopia.

¹⁰ Personal interview with Leenco Lataa, Deputy General Secretary of the OLF, August 4, 1992, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

which is the bedrock of democracy. On the contrary, it is dangerous in Oromia to think of supporting an Oromo organization that does not receive its orders from the current ruling elites.

The EPRDF leadership must realize that asserting Oromo national identity, demanding equality and genuine participation in administering themselves, is not reckless narrow nationalism; it is a legitimate and necessary measure of self-determination. Like the people of Tigray and Eritrea, the Oromo have a legitimate right to decide their own destiny.

The challenge for the Oromo leadership is to act as responsibly as possible and contribute their share to the democratization process in Ethiopia. Together they can build a better future for their people. Separately they can destroy each other. Those who won the war against the military dictatorship will not, I hope, lose the peace—and a chance for a new beginning.

I have tried to show that the development of Oromo nationalism was a very slow process and was not transformed into a mass movement before 1991. Much remains to be understood about the political maturity and the capacities of Oromo nationalism but it is already clear that an effective and successful political mobilization of the Oromo is the key to the establishment of a democratic federal system in Ethiopia. The freedom of the Oromo is fundamental to the cause of the freedom of the other oppressed people of Ethiopia.

Finally, let me end on an optimistic note, I support the unity of free peoples of Ethiopia. I sincerely believe that in a truly democratic federated Ethiopia, the Oromo will lose nothing but they will have a great deal to gain. What is needed is to decolonize Oromia and democratize Ethiopia. I consider that the decolonization of Oromia is fundamental to the self-determination of the Oromo and one cannot be achieved without the other. In short, the decolonization of Oromia will ensure self determination for the Oromo , while democratization will create a necessary political climate in the country in which conflict will be resolved through rational dialogue, genuine search for mutual benefit characterized by the spirit of tolerance, consensus and compromise. The creation of a self-governing Oromo state is a necessary condition for the establishment of a federated democratic Ethiopia. Because of their numbers, geographical position and rich natural resources of Oromia, the Oromo are destined to play an important role in the future of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. Consequently, Ethiopians should make an earnest effort to understand the reasons for, and come to terms with, the Oromo quest for self-determination.

Perceiving Oromo

'Galla' in the Great Narrative of Ethiopia

Jan Hultin

THE CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION OF HISTORY

The past is good to think, it is the object of reflection and imagination. There is an important trend in recent studies of nationalism, ethnicity and identity to analyse concepts such as 'tradition', 'community' and 'nation' as cultural constructs, as 'imagined' and 'invented' (Anderson 1983; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Ranger 1994; Holcomb and Ibssa 1990; Kaarsholm and Hultin 1994). The notion of invention stresses the point that 'communities' and 'nations' are not things or units out there with clear-cut boundaries, pedigrees and histories, but that they are culturally constructed and imagined. Similarly, 'tradition' is not just a set of ideas, narratives and practices that are passively handed down from one generation to another, it is something that is created and fashioned in the present. This, of course is common knowledge for every historian engaged in the critical assessment of sources, be they written or oral; the reminder has been made in the context of recent studies of nationalism and nation building. 'Tradition', in these studies, is seen as a model of the past that is used in the present, rather than as an unreflectively inherited legacy. The notion of cultural construction implies that tradition is regarded as a "selective representation of the past, fashioned in the present ... and politically instrumental" (Linnekin 1992).

To anthropologists the notion of cultural construction points to a mode of discourse that includes, rather than excludes, non-scholarly voices (Linnekin 1992), but it also makes it possible to apply the same anthropological interpretative procedures to scholarly *written* traditions as to popular *oral* traditions. In this paper I will deal with a case of scholarly construction of history in a region, Northeast Africa, where both history and identity are contested fields and subject to continuous invention and reinterpretation. I suggest that the great narrative of Ethiopia, and of becoming 'Ethiopian' and 'Galla', is a scholarly construction of 'tradition' in a frontier situation (Triulzi 1994) and that this construction can be read as a cultural model of hierarchical relationships among social categories in a polyethnic empire.

In dealing with the cultural construction of an Oromo "other" in a particular genre of *Éthiopian* tradition I will read examples of scholarly narratives as

"both embedded in and contributing to the maintenance of the dominant group's hegemony" (Linnekin 1992.). I will treat these cases as exemplars of an academic 'tradition' that is a voice in the *grand récit* (Lyotard 1979),¹ the Great Narrative, or Myth of Greater Ethiopia (For a critique of the Myth, see Baxter and Blackhurst 1978; Mohammed Hassen 1990; Sorensen 1992, 1993). This narrative is a core element in the state-nationalist discourse of the contemporary Ethiopian élite, and can be seen as an example of an 'invented tradition' (Holcomb and Issa 1990; Sorensen 1993). 'Invention' carries connotations of creativity and conscious reflection and has been used particularly to describe nationalist and colonial representations of relatively recent origin. I use the notions of 'cultural construction' and *grand récit* here to moderate the implications of falsity and mystification in the notion of 'invention': symbolic construction is typical of all social life and not only of the creation of myths, be they cosmological, nationalist, colonial or whatever. My purpose is not primarily to challenge the quoted authors for presenting a false or mystified account of 'what happened in history'; most of them are not historians anyway and their accounts are intended as popular science surveys. As such, they contribute to and are part of a diffuse and general discourse about Ethiopia that is not exclusively, nor even primarily, nationalist. It is only during the last decades that these narratives have been challenged by, for example, Eritrean and Oromo nationalists and incorporated into alternative constructions and inventions of Ethiopia and other nations. Thus, my aim is not so much to criticise a genre of historiography but rather to propose that these narratives are not primarily part of a discourse about history at all (history in the sense of a temporal sequence of 'facts and events'),² but elements in a contemporary discourse about power and social hierarchy.

The exemplars I discuss here can be interpreted as versions of, or elements in, a myth of origin. Such myths often address the problem of how different social categories came into being and how they got their rightful positions in an ordered universe. In this scholarly genre the cultural representation of the Ethiopian self and the Galla other can be read as an expression of a frontier cast ideology (Kopytoff 1987; Triulzi 1994) about the hierarchical arrangement of social roles and categories in the Ethiopian empire. The representation of the 'Galla' in the Great Narrative of Ethiopia is part of a generalized and diffuse discourse about the right of northern settlers to rule over Oromo tenants and other 'invisible' peoples under Shoan domination, a colonial situation that has been brilliantly analysed in a number of studies by Baxter (1978, 1980, 1983, 1985). He has analysed:

¹ The term is coined by J.F. Lyotard (1979) and refers to the myths, cosmologies, religions and the works of the great philosophers of past civilizations and to the corresponding, but no less absolutist, narratives of modernity that have replaced them, e.g. the myth of progress (von Wright 1991).

² For a survey of conventional and scholarly images of Ethiopia, see Levine 1974: 1-25 and Sorensen 1993.

... the nature of relationships between rulers and ruled, as it appeared to the ruled in the districts rather than as it appeared either to officials at the centre, or to foreign observers of those officials at the centre (1980).

The narrative can also be read as a parallel version of a European *grand récit* about origins and historical mission: in this perspective the narrative of the Ethiopian 'other' can be seen as the tale about an African *alter ego*, with whom the Europeans share common descent and a common destiny. I shall not trace the history of this mode of thought but only mention some examples. Thus in the 1930s, when first Ethiopia (or Abyssinia as she was then commonly known) and then Spain became early victims of aggression by European fascism, liberals and anti-fascists called upon the parliamentary governments to take action against the aggressors. In the ensuing anti-fascist discourse Emperor Haile Sellassie and his ancient, Christian kingdom was constructed as a natural ally in the world wide struggle for democracy. Sylvia Pankhurst, the famous suffragette and radical socialist, was an early champion of the Abyssinian cause and her book on the cultural history of Ethiopia, that was published after the war (Pankhurst 1955), is an important voice in the *grand récit* of Ethiopia.

On the eve of African independence, in an era of new nationalisms, colonial wars and unrest, Pankhurst challenged popular European images of Africa as a continent of people without history. Edward Ullendorff's (1960) work, that I will deal with at length presently, was written in the same vein. The *intention* with these works was, *inter alia*, to present a perspective on African history and culture that was an alternative to the hegemonic European racist and colonial imagination. Their works are thus early voices in the attempt to present an African "other" with whom a politically liberal, democratic opinion in Europe could identify, a genre that was later to be developed and pursued by other scholars and writers sympathetic to Africa and her peoples, for example in the work of Basil Davidson. While the political attitude of these writers could be characterised as liberal or left wing, other scholars who perhaps could be characterized as more conservative saw, during the Cold War, the Great Narrative as a tale about a natural political Western ally that could exert a "moderating influence on the ferment and revolutionary violence" in the region (Lipsky 1962). Irrespective of the possible overall intention with Ullendorff's work, I will in this paper deal critically with the general perspective and the form and tropes of his narrative as well as with its—intended or unintended—political implications in Northeast Africa.

BEING GALLA IN THE GREAT NARRATIVE OF ETHIOPIA: FROM SAVAGE TO INVISIBLE MAN

In much Ethiopian historiography the historical migration and expansion of Oromo-speaking groups has been imagined as the culmination of a series of barbaric—that is Cushitic and Muslim or "pagan"—invasions of an ancient

Semitic-speaking, Christian or Judeo-Christian, monarchical, literate civilization in the heart of darkness. The genre draws on Abyssinian royal chronicles and, in the construction of the Oromo, on the admirably detailed but naturally partisan perspective of the Abyssinian ecclesiastic Bahrey's "History of the Galla", written in 1593, and early European accounts such as Alemeida's 'History' (Beckingham and Huntingford 1954) and Ludolphus' 'A New History' of Ethiopia' (1684). The military conquests by Menelik around the turn of the last century is, in this paradigm, seen as a 'restoration' of an ancient and higher order, that temporarily (i.e. for some 400 years) had been upset. Edward Ullendorff's work "The Ethiopians" is often cited as an exemplar of this scholarly imagination. The book was published by Oxford University Press in 1960, and reprinted in 1961 and 1962; the second edition was published in 1965 and reprinted in 1966 and 1967 (I use the second edition here). In the Preface the author states that:

... the general object of the book is to present a balanced picture of Ethiopia to the general reader ... [and] I have been careful to deal almost exclusively with assured results and with positions generally, or at least widely, accepted rather than with some recent and hitherto unproved hypotheses (1967: vii).

It is an influential work and its perspective often slips into other outlines of the history of the region: some of the passages dealt with below are for example echoed, almost word for word, in a work published by the Human Relations Area File (Lipsky 1962:12–13; but not, I must emphasize, in its chapter on the Oromo, pp. 40–43, which reflects the state of the art at the time). Still in the 1980s the central features of Ullendorff's model is applied in a popular presentation of Ethiopia (Hancock, Pankhurst and Willets 1983) that is sold in the souvenir shops of the major hotels in Addis Ababa.

In this narrative the kingdom of Aksum emerged out of an ancient South Semitic culture on both sides of the Red Sea.

Hellenized Egyptians brought commerce as well as the Greek language to the southern Red Sea, and Aksum itself was greatly influenced by these emissaries of Greek civilization. Adulis, the port, opened the road to the Semitic culture of South Arabia and to the Hellenized way of life in the Mediterranean countries (Ullendorff 1965: 54).

The rise of Islam cut off Aksum's old established links with South Arabia, Egypt and the Christian world and led to the decline of that kingdom. Ullendorff opens a chapter titled 'The Eclipse of Ethiopia' (p. 57) by quoting Gibbon's classical work *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (published 1776–88): "Encompassed on all sides by the enemies of their religion, the Æthiopians slept near a thousand years, forgetful of the world by whom they were forgotten".³

Here then is the model of the narrative, and the fabric of its main themes and tropes: ancient Semites, Egypt, Greek civilization and Hellenized Mediterranean countries, encompassment and eclipse, barbaric invasions and dark ages, the

³Trimingham (1952:43) quotes the same sentence. Trimingham's work is an important source for Ullendorff. Gibbon's classic work is an influential voice in the *grand récit* of Europe.

Sleeping Beauty and, as will be seen presently, the prince to rouse her from sleep. The remaining threads in the warp are: the birth of an Ethiopian nation, the enduring and unchanging character of her essential features, disintegrating versus unifying forces and the yearn for the South.

The blocking of the links with the Semitic and Judeo-Christian world caused what from the seventh century became "the traditional direction of Ethiopian policy: the *Drang nach dem Süden*. Semitic speech and Christian religion were carried to the central and southern parts of the highlands". Little is known about these "dark centuries", but "the Cushitic elements reasserted themselves...as the rapid southward drive was bound to dilute and attenuate the ethnic composition and civilizing *élan* of the erstwhile Aksumites" (Ullendorff 1965:58). Out of this darkness, however, a nation was born:

... the virtual imprisonment of the people within its great mountain massif ... moulded all those diverse elements into a nation which in times of external danger could abandon its centrifugal proclivities and become conscious of its essential unity (Ullendorff 1965:59).

In the melting pot idiom of this evolutionist model an entity called 'Ethiopia' developed out of an embryo of 'diverse elements' that were somehow 'moulded' by their common experience of 'imprisonment' into a 'nation' that was born in the interior of the African continent more than a thousand years before such entities were imagined in Europe (Anderson 1983).⁴

The allusion to the north-east European stereotyped phrase *Drang nach Osten* evokes the *grand récit* about an European frontier: the christianizing conquests of the Teutonic Knights, the expansion of Germanic speaking settlers into Baltic and Slavonic speaking areas, and the emergence of Prussia, that bulwark against the barbaric forces of the East, later to become the leading agent in the creation of a unified greater Germany.

The great wars during the first half of the 16th century were "the climax of the Muslim struggle with the Christian Empire culminating in the virtual occupation of the Abyssinian highlands, and Ethiopia's entry into relations with Europe in general and Portugal in particular". The Muslim leaders were not Kings or Emperors but Sultans, Emirs and Imams; they ruled not an 'empire', but 'sultanates' or "Muslim possessions in Ethiopia" (Ullendorff 1965:71-73). The famous Muslim leader, the Imam Ahmad ibn Ibrahim (in Ethiopian history known as 'Granj'), did not rule a fully developed 'nation' (the melting pot and mould), but a looser kind of polity consisting of separate units, "the Dankali and Somali peoples". Hence, when he "welded the Danakil and Somalis into a formidable striking force, inspired by the old ideal of the *jihad* and lust of conquest and plunder", he just led an army, not a unified 'people', a 'nation' or a 'state'.

⁴Trimingham (1952:48ff.) has a chapter on "The Birth of the Abyssinian Nation" in which he analyses the complex social and historical processes out of which "the Abyssinians proper emerge" in the 7th and following centuries. His scholarly analysis of the complexity of historical processes differs from Ullendorff's unilinear, essentialist narrative with its theme of "continuity" and "essential unity".

The holocaust enveloped most parts of Ethiopia and brought in its train misery and murder, ruin and devastation. Much of the literary and intellectual heritage of Abyssinia was irretrievably lost, and the barbarism and brutality had an effect far transcending that age. To Ethiopians a good deal of their hard-won civilization was destroyed, while to the historian and *éthiopianist* precious documentation and irreplaceable evidence perished for ever (1965:73).

At last, however, the Muslim leader, the Imam Ahmad ibn Ibrahim, was killed and the

... Muslim menace to Ethiopia had been removed for ever. Assisted by the soldiers of a Christian country from Europe, the Ethiopians had finally saved their ancient Christian Kingdom and heritage. But the salvation had come at a very late hour: Ethiopia lay prostrate and exhausted; many of its churches and monasteries existed no longer; its clergy was weakened, and its people were Islamized—however superficially—or terrorized and in urgent need of moral and material succour (1965:75).

It was in these troubled times that “a new threat” arose “which was equally damaging to Christians and Muslims alike: the great Galla migrations, which were to become the dominant feature of the next three centuries” (1965:75). The “ancient Christian Kingdom and heritage” was now threatened, not by the designs of a hostile religious and political force, but by the demographic force of uncontrolled Nature.

Some isolated Abyssinian victories scarcely stemmed or even affected the gathering momentum of this tidal wave which, by sheer force of numbers, was utterly irresistible. Abyssinians fled once again from their homes or were swallowed up in this vast immigration. Ethiopian territory became increasingly constricted, and the ethnic composition of the population underwent notable changes. The Gallas swamped most parts of the Shoa province, reached Amhara and extended to the southern and eastern region of Lasta. They settled all along the outer fringes of the plateau in an immense semicircle, leaving untouched only the northern highlands, the area of the old Aksumite Kingdom. The Muslims fared no better. The Gallas invaded the Harar region and settled everywhere (1965:74–75).

Again, the theme of encirclement and siege of a threatened Christian outpost. The metaphors used to describe the disasters show some important differences, however. While the Muslims in this rhetoric are associated with extinction through fire, the metaphors employed to describe the Oromo are associated with destruction by water. The imagery of a tidal wave may seem exotic in the context of the Ethiopian highlands, but it is nevertheless a trope that has caught on (cf. e.g. Bahru 1991:9).⁵ The metaphor of a river may appear more related to local experience. In a textbook for university students Mesfin W. Mariam (1972) cites the early 20th century chronicler Aleqa Atsme who spoke of how “the Gallas like a flooding river would have spilled over Egypt” were it not for the Amhara who “stopped this great human flood and prevented it from going outside Ethiopia” (1972:16). In Atsme’s biblical and diluvian idiom “the Amhara”,

⁵ The ‘tidal wave’ seems to be a standard metaphor in European thought; see for example Kopytoff 1987:8–10.

by containing this deluge, were saving not only themselves, they also became the saviours of Egypt and her ancient civilization—and possibly, in some metonymical sense, the saviours of the whole of the civilised world.

A river does not flow of its own volition and its direction has no purpose. Hence, it is logical that Mesfin perceived “the Galla movement as a nomadic, destructive and purposeless force” (Mesfin W. Mariam 1972:17). Here, Atsme’s Biblical tropes are fused with 19th century Darwinist evolutionism (according to which “nomadism” and pastoralism preceded farming and settled life). The “movement”, however, had lost its momentum by the end of the 19th century when “most Gallas had largely ceased to be nomadic tribes” and also had “learnt farming and settled living”.⁶ By then they were ripe to disappear as an independent force from the stage of history. They were no longer ‘nomadic tribes’, savages living outside the boundaries of civilization, in nature, but had ‘learnt farming’ like other civilised people (i.e. like the Amhara). They had reached a stage of development that made it possible to integrate them into ‘Greater Ethiopia’: “It was Minilik who systematically assimilated them by making them share power in Government, and through intermarriage”.⁷ Minilik’s policy of war and expansion is seen as a return to history: having sustained the afflictions of conflagration and deluge the Amharic speakers now resume their historic mission.

It was at this time that the southward movement of the Amharic speakers that was arrested by the Ghiragn invasion in the Sixteenth Century started after a pause of

⁶ The same evolutionist paradigm has recently been echoed with some emphasis by a prominent historian and by the chairman of the national villagization committee under Mengistu Haile Mariam’s military junta. In a controversy following the publication of Mohammed Hassen’s book on Oromo history (1990) Harold Marcus seems provoked to insist on a simplistic unilinear evolutionist model of historical processes (Marcus 1992a,b). Says Marcus:

“He [Mohammed Hassen] characterizes the Ur-Oromo as mixed farmers, some of whom became pastoralists when they moved to the lowlands. Never does he explain such a surprising development, rare in world history, but for support he cites Eike Haberland (*Galla Süd-Äthiopiens* [1963], p.772), who recounted unsubstantiated Boran and Guji Oromo traditions.” (Marcus 1992a).

Needless to say, Marcus’ statement about a development “rare in world history” is nonsense. Furthermore, his dismissal of Haberland’s hypothesis misrepresents what the latter actually has written (Haberland 1963:4f., 7). The point I wish to make, however, is not one about scholarly detail, but about a scholarly mode of thought. Importantly, this stereotyped mode of thought reflects, as Triulzi has noted, “the limits of historical objectivity whenever confronted with high-tempered professional or ethnic ideologies. ... the ‘unilinear’ approach in Ethiopian historiography has implied a consistent suppressing or diminishing in the country’s official history of its culturally and politically marginalised peripheries” (Triulzi 1994:241).

In the vulgar evolutionism of the military junta “survivals” of an earlier, nomadic stage was seen as an obstacle to development. Says a modernising military-socialist:

“The life of the Ethiopian peasant is in part based on nomadic economy. Although, on the other hand, the peasant may lead a settled farming life, the settlement pattern is scattered, individualistic and lonesome and, consequently, the peasant lacks a sense of belonging and social feeling. The life pattern, farming practices and agricultural tools are still largely archaic. ... One of the measures—indeed the major one—taken to tackle these problems is villagization.” (Ethiopian Government 1987:9f.)

⁷ As an assessment of the history of Menelik’s bloody campaigns, conquests and confiscation of land the latter statement is as appropriate as if it were applied to characterize Cromwell’s policy in Ireland or the actions by the Spanish conquistadors.

more than 300 years. At the time of Minilik Amharic speakers continued their historical movement south and even east (Mesfin W. Mariam 1972: 17).

In this discourse the invading and destructive forces are ascribed distinctively different characteristics. The Muslim 'other' has a religious and ideological zeal and is part of a civilization that is almost on par with the 'Ethiopian'; some Christians even become converted to Islam—"however superficially". Throughout history Islam represents a constant threat, a timeless empire of evil that cannot be transformed. The Oromo, on the other hand, are not ascribed such a moral or religious devotion, they are without a purpose, they are moral neuters—neither evil nor good. Being simply propelled by demographic forces they are situated in the domain of Nature and can consequently be domesticated and transformed by culture: i.e. by the emperor and the Amharic speakers who have been given the historical mission to conquer and christianise the 'Gallas'.

In this narrative historical events are placed, not in their political and economic context, e.g. in the context of the competition over trade routes and production areas, the global expansion of European powers and the regional conflict between Turkey and Portugal, or the Scramble for Africa, but in the context of morality: it is history as "the working out of a moral purpose in time" (Wolf 1982:5). In this historical morality play the destructive powers are ordered in an evolutionistic and moral hierarchy with the Muslims ranked above the "pagan" Oromo. Muslim military success, the invasion, is perceived as an intentional act by leaders with a well organized army, "a formidable striking force" that was even inspired by an "ideal", however loathsome. The evocation of the holocaust with its contemporary European references places the "murder, ruin and devastation" in a moral universe and projects the past into the context of the present: "barbarism and brutality had an effect far transcending that age". At this point, however, the apocalyptic imagination makes a somewhat idealistic and academic turn. When the Muslims destroyed 'the literary and intellectual heritage of Abyssinia', the plight of the historical 'self' is shared by 'us' modern *éthiopiens* for whom precious documents are irretrievably lost: even 'we', the present day scholars, are affected by this evil force.

In contrast, the Oromo 'other' does not represent a correspondingly evil force in history, but dangers outside human society: they represent the hazards of untamed Nature. "The great Galla migrations" are not an 'invasion' of a Christian country, like the Muslim one (only the Muslim Harar region was 'invaded' by the Oromo), but imagined as a kind of natural disaster: a "sheer force of numbers", a "human flood", a "rising flood", a "tidal wave" that "swamped" the country. In the logic of the metaphors of this discourse such a "purposeless force" of Nature

... had nothing to contribute to the civilization of Ethiopia; they possessed no material or intellectual culture, and their social organization was at a far lower stage of development than that of the population among whom they settled. They were not only cause of the depressed state into which the country now sank, but

they helped to perpetuate a situation from which even a physically and spiritually exhausted Ethiopia might otherwise have been able to recover far more quickly (Ullendorff 1965:76).

Again, some dark centuries followed characterized by internal strife and disintegration of the age-less empire, while "the Gallas continued their penetration, and material progress or intellectual development was virtually unknown" until the time of King Theodore in the mid 19th century. The Abyssinian empire got its present borders as the result of an aggressive expansionist policy, massive arms import and large scale wars of conquest during the last decades of the 19th century when more than half of the present area of the country was occupied and annexed. In disregard of the conquered peoples this period is perceived as a renaissance: "Only then, in her rediscovered unity under the Emperors John, Menelik, and Haile Sellasie, does the country find its soul and genius again, its spirit and its sense of mission" (Ullendorff 1965:79). Here, again, are the metaphors of eclipse and dark ages followed by a renaissance (the trope of the Sleeping Beauty and the prince) and of disintegration versus unity.

At this point, however, a new theme is introduced, the tale of modernity and progress, with the 'Gallas' and the Emperor as the main contrasting characters. In this tale there is a clear indication that the 'Gallas' were not only the cause of 'Ethiopia's' depressed state, their presence also perpetuated her backwardness. The barbarians were thus a hindrance to 'Ethiopia's' renaissance and subsequent entry into the modern era. Not until the savage Gallas together with their land had been conquered, domesticated and 'assimilated' into the reunited empire by modernizing and enlightened emperors, did 'Ethiopia' find its "soul and genius again, its spirit and its sense of mission".

At this point in history, however, when the forces of wilderness were domesticated, exit the Galla from the stage of the morality play. The threat of encirclement and invasion was now represented by the very concrete colonial ambitions of Italy. Later, in the post-World War II era, the imagination of Muslim encirclement has, again, come to the fore. Ethiopian leaders have made frequent allusions to hostile regional powers and 'interests' and their alleged allies within Ethiopia, who now represent the perpetual threat of disunity and dismemberment. During thirty years of civil war with regional and ethno-nationalist guerrilla movements in Eritrea and elsewhere and a devastating war with Somalia over the Ogaden the issue of separate histories and identities has been of central importance in political discourse.

In scholarly discourse the Galla, who after 1970 became Oromo, have been dealt with in two major ways. One alternative has been to integrate them into the history of the empire state by a somewhat arbitrary argument about a culture area called 'Greater Ethiopia'; peculiarly, this cultural area, with allegedly unique features that distinguishes it culturally from the rest of Africa, happens to coincide with the boundaries of the contemporary Ethiopian state (Levine 1973; for a critique see Baxter and Blackhurst 1978).

The other alternative in essentialist narratives about Ethiopia is simply to let the Oromo disappear from history because they don't fit into the paradigm. If one, for example, accepts the premise of the Great Narrative outlined above, there can be no part for the Oromo to play in a narrative of Ethiopia's independence; they must simply be left out of the tale. Rubenson's scholarly study (Rubenson 1976) may be cited as an exemplar of this perspective.

If one wanted to use Ullendorff's paradigm for an updated introduction to Ethiopia and her history and culture, it was in the recent past (and still is) opportune to emphasize the theme of historical and cultural continuity and unity and to evoke images of "fanatical Muslim invaders" and "Dervishes" (Hancock et al. 1983: 57, 88) to represent the eternal threat of encirclement and holocaust. In G. Hancock's and R. Pankhurst's Ethiopia, the Oromo are virtually left out of the narrative: there is no role for them to play. In sections describing the beauty of the magnificent highland scenery Oromo may be mentioned in passing (together with Nuer, Dorze and Afar) as picturesque features of the landscape: in Hancock's and Pankhurst's setting they become part of Nature. In the ongoing construction and reconstruction of the 'tradition' of Greater Ethiopia, the savage Galla of the past has become the 'Invisible Man' of the present.

The political role of this historical morality tale is not only in that it has underpinned contemporary ruling élites in Ethiopia. In being modelled on the *grand récit* about Europe, this tale about an African *alter ego*, with whom Europe shares common descent and a common historical mission, has also been well adapted to subsumption under West-European and American Cold War imaginations and rhetoric. In the Cold War era and at the dawn of Africa's independence both the Ethiopian élite and the global great powers had ambitions concerning Ethiopia's mission. Lipsky (1962) echoes the theme of the unique and almost eternal character of a cultural and political entity called 'Ethiopia' and suggests that this makes her particularly qualified as a Western ally in the global conflicts at the time of Africa's decolonization.

"The Empire of Ethiopia occupies a unique position on the African continent in that it has maintained itself almost continuously as an independent political entity for at least fifteen hundred years. Its traditional political institutions have manifested an impressive capacity to meet the special challenges of the twentieth century, and the culture of the Amhara-Tigray people, dominating an empire of varied ethnic composition, has likewise demonstrated a marked survival value. These qualities, together with Ethiopia's location in north-east Africa have enabled it thus far to exert a strongly moderating influence on the ferment and revolutionary violence which has engulfed so much of the continent and to give substance to the expectation that Ethiopia will play a strong role in the emergence of a new Africa (Lipsky 1962; Preface).

Two years before Lipsky's work was published, modernising officers, who were dissatisfied with the inability of the 'traditional political institutions' to adapt to a changing world, had attempted a coup against the Emperor. About the time of its publication the long war broke out in Eritrea and in the following decades

increasing numbers of Tigrinya speakers fought for independence from Ethiopia. In 1964, the Tulama-Macha Association, the precursor of OLF, was founded. At the same time Ethiopian students began to question the oppressive and obsolete traditional polity. In 1974 the imperial régime crumbled; in 1977 'revolutionary violence' in the form of officially proclaimed Red Terror afflicted the peoples of Ethiopia; the war in Eritrea reached an unprecedented scale; a devastating war with Somalia broke out; and Ethiopia's self-styled 'Marxist' military dictator joined the Soviet Bloc. The Myth of Greater Ethiopia seemed increasingly hollow.

The Myth of Ethiopia is peculiarly similar to the European myth of origin; it brings to mind Eric Wolf's characterisation of the *grand récit* about the history of the West and Euro-American notions of self and history.

We have been taught, inside the classroom and outside it, that there exists an entity called the West, and that one can think of this West as a society and civilization independent of and in opposition to other societies and civilizations. Many of us even grew up believing that this West has a genealogy, according to which ancient Greece begat Rome, Rome begat Christian Europe, Christian Europe begat the Renaissance, the Renaissance the Enlightenment, the Enlightenment political democracy and the industrial revolution ... yielded the United States, embodying the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Such a developmental scheme ... turns history into a moral success story ... into a tale about the furtherance of virtue, about how the virtuous win over the bad guys. Frequently it turns into a story of how the winners prove that they are virtuous and good by winning. If history is the working out of a moral purpose in time, then those who lay claim to that purpose are by that fact the predilect agents of history (Wolf 1982:5).

The *grand récit* of Ethiopia is thus the narrative of the winning side. This one sided argument, "which was uncritically reiterated by Ethiopian historiography until recently", is strictly 'political', 'unilineal' and Manichean (Triulzi 1994: 240f.). It is a scholarly construction of 'tradition', a selective representation of the past that has been an integral part of the ideology of the northern, ruling élite. This 'tradition' and its representation of the 'Galla' are elements in a contemporary discourse about power and social hierarchy in the Ethiopian empire; it can be read as an expression of a frontier cast ideology about the historical right of northern settlers to rule over Oromo tenants and other peoples of the South. There are, however, always two sides of a frontier and consequently there are always two—and often several—contested versions of history: the version constructed by the winning side is now being challenged by Oromo scholars and others who are critical of the Great Narrative of Ethiopia.⁸

⁸ There is, however, a need to be aware of the risk of essentialism in attempts to set the record straight so that one does not create mirror images of the models and metaphors of the old narrative (Triulzi 1994).

Oromumma: Tradition, Consciousness and Identity

Gemetchu Megeerssa

OROMONESS

Oromumma, derived from the name Oromo, refers to all those elements that constitute the Oromo personality. This personality is shaped by all those features of the internal and external environment that bind the Oromo to their land, with its mountains and rivers, its plants and animals, its climate, its seasonal patterns and the other cultures with which it interacts. It is constructed by the conditions of life and work that Oromo oral tradition characteristically designates through the paired expression *jiruf-jirenya* ("work and living"). It is anchored in the Oromo language (*afaan Oromo*, "Oromo mouth") through which the Oromo express their connection to life and land. In short, "Oromoness" is composed of the totality of the Oromo culture.

This paper is an attempt to formulate a framework for the understanding of *Oromumma*. In order to do this I have made some underlying assumptions, which are as follows

1. I assume that *Oromumma* is a unique culture despite all the general features it shares with the cultures of the region;
2. I contend that certain concepts should be carefully analysed and understood before we can grasp the content of Oromo identity;
3. In dealing with Oromo culture and identity, I suggest that the subjective reality should be taken seriously;
4. I assume that Oromo tradition provides the basis for Oromo identity;
5. I also assume that the juxtaposition of Oromo consciousness with Oromo tradition and social experience is necessary for the understanding of the nature and content of Oromo identity.

THE OROMO CULTURE

One of the most interesting aspects of the Oromo culture can be said to be the way in which the Oromo personality, cultural identity, belief system and world-view interact and the extent to which these features are inter-woven to form a unity of meaning. This unity of meaning has remained intact and does not

appear to have been affected by the diversity and the wide range of socio-cultural settings in which the Oromo culture has unfolded. What is fascinating about the Oromo culture is, that despite their exposure to other cultures, all the Oromo communities found in East and Northeast Africa retain the essential features of their ancient religious and philosophical system of thought. Whilst some observers would maintain that there exist socio-cultural differences between the different groups, such as the Raayya and Assebu, the Macha and the Tulamma, the Sabbo and Goona, the Sikko and Mando and Itu and Humbana, which compose the Oromo nation, others have equally testified to the homogeneity of the Oromo culture. For instance, in their study of the people, a number of ethnographers have attested to the fact that Oromo share 'core common cultural values and modes of thought' (Baxter 1985:1; 1994:248; Hultin 1987:2). Yet the people are not a racial group on the basis of shared physical characteristics. Oromo could be termed a cultural category. Whilst this asserts the unicity of the Oromo culture, it does not in itself provide an explanation for this unicity nor indicate the nature of the uniqueness of the phenomenon.

These underlying values are founded on the religious and philosophical system that the custodians of the Oromo oral tradition term *ayyaana*. *Ayyaana* is what systematizes the Oromo religious and philosophical thought and oral tradition. It is the unique juxtaposition of the religious philosophical tradition, ethnicity and identity which make up the essential dimensions of Oromo culture. It is true that all cultures share similar features. What distinguishes the Oromo culture, however, is the high degree of overlap that mark both its mythological constitution and its history as a group in these areas. We can think of the English, the French, the Swedish or other peoples independently of Christianity in a way that we cannot think of Oromo independently of *Oromumma*. In other words, in Oromo, as opposed to other cultural and religious groups, the cultural boundaries of personhood, nationhood and religion are so coextensive that they are rendered practically interchangeable. When thinking of the Oromo, we are dealing with a culture in which the people, the language, the land and their belief systems cannot be divorced without doing injustice to the facts that bind them together in the ethnic, communal and socio-traditional dimensions of their existence.

It is the historical relationship of the Oromo culture, through its belief systems and values, in short its systems of thought, to its ancient past, that accounts for its separateness. Never in its history as a people has one of its constituent communities ever broken off its relationship with the common ancestry linking it with the founding father of the nation, Horo. Even those Oromo who have lost their language, such as the Raayaa and Assebu and the Jaarso clan of the Itu and Humbana Oromo groups in Somalia, have still retained their Oromo identity. Of course, language is the other substantive element in this socio-historical continuity that has maintained its solidarity through time and across space in the various Oromo communities living in the region. All these com-

munities possess a common value system, the commonality of which should be stressed. These features of the culture were developed over a long period of time and are intrinsic to the Oromo world-view.

The most elementary trait of Oromo culture is that the belief systems, ethnicity and identity of the Oromo are given historically in the oral tradition. The oral tradition thus constitutes the primordial root of Oromo culture. Unlike other peoples who have adopted religions which were not indigenous to their societies, in the case of the Oromo, the people and the belief system have evolved together. The religion not only proclaims beliefs and dictates behaviour, but also imposes itself on the minds of the people as a vocation, life-giving purpose and guarantee of existence. History further cements and strengthens the meaning derived from the belief systems. This meaning is transmitted from generation to generation in the changing Oromo social experience through the oral tradition in the form of Oromo consciousness. The relationship between *Waaqa* and the Oromo is not only reflected through the belief system, but also through the social organization of the Oromo. The *galma* ("ceremonial house") of the *Qaalluu* has always been as much a political as a religious institution. The more *Oromumma* is threatened, the more indissoluble the tie between *Waaqa* and His people becomes.

In short, for the Oromo, the belief system, ethnicity and identity are given with birth. An Oromo person does not become a member of a believing community through a formal rite of incorporation such as baptism. An Oromo is born with *Oromumma*. Thus, the simplest definition of an Oromo would be that he/she is born of an Oromo father.

This historical and ideological connection between belief systems, ethnicity and identity has important implications for the understanding of what constitutes *Oromumma* or Oromoness in the contemporary context of the Oromo communities, wherever they may be.

CONCEPTS AND THE STUDY OF OROMO CULTURE

Judging by the size and diversity of the Oromo people and the scarcity of the written materials about them, it could be argued that our knowledge of the Oromo culture is still in its infancy. The studies that have been carried out so far only begin to address the vastness of the topic. There also remains the theoretical problem of conceptualizing how the Oromo culture has managed to interact with and be influenced by a wide variety of cultures and social structures, whilst retaining its own intrinsic identity. To gain such an understanding, it is necessary to study Oromo from the perspective of the Oromo themselves. External models cannot serve this purpose and if used will only result in distorting our knowledge of the Oromo reality. Moreover, without sufficient data of an historical nature, it is also extremely difficult to postulate the levels of tradition, consciousness, identity, religious beliefs and practices of the tradi-

tional Oromo at specific periods in the past. Consequently, without such a starting point, it also becomes difficult to measure the impact of the changes that have been brought upon the society as a result of its interactions with other cultures.

Although the concepts of acculturation, deculturation, and assimilation have been popularly used to account for socio-cultural change in traditional societies, they do not necessarily render accurate accounts of the nature of these changes. These sociological concepts have been applied with some degree of success to the study of ethnic minorities in industrialized western societies. Acculturation studies in particular have been used to understand the process of socio-economic and cultural accommodation of minority immigrants into the industrialized world. Other concepts such as ethnocentrism have served to explain the problem of acculturation in the situation of minority groups such as those faced by the Jewish communities. The nature of the realities in traditional societies are however radically different. Their validity become even more problematic when examining changing socio-cultural conditions both within and outside the group in question.

One such or similar approach that has been employed recently in the study of the pastoral societies of East and Northeast Africa is that applied by Schlee (1989). This study claims that pastoral groups, do not control natural resources such as water and grazing land. It assumes that anyone from anywhere can use the natural resources as long as they are plentiful. But when there is a shortage of such resources, people are said to enter into conflict to gain control over them. (See essays by Gufu and Helland.) Under such conditions the weaker party is believed to make a compromise and change its ethnic label and become clients of its former enemies. It is this fusion which, according to Schlee, keeps identities 'on the move'. This of course is a simplistic and a functionalist approach to a complex problem. First of all, ethnicity is not a label that people assume and discard as it suits them. Secondly, people do not automatically absorb and accept persons from other groups are not ethnically related to them. The truth is that the subject is much more complex than Schlee presents it to be and shifting identity is not just a pragmatic solution to an everyday economic problem.

In the case of the Oromo, therefore, Schlee's approach cannot help to explain the types of adaptations and transformations that have taken place in the different social and historical conditions within which the society has evolved. It could be said that the most prevalent feature of the Oromo culture is, on the one hand, its uniquely non-assimilative character and its wide diversity and capacity to adopt to a wide range of cultures and societies on the other.

Some of the difficulties of conceptualizing the Oromo culture are simply the failure on the part of researchers to see it from its own view-point, and the fact that our knowledge of the Oromo is still in its infancy. This allows all sorts of speculations and models to be called in to support the speculations. In the

following few pages I would like to propose some ways in which these difficulties can be overcome.

UNDERSTANDING OROMO CULTURE

In dealing with the Oromo culture, two types of reality need to be taken into account: both the objective and the subjective realities. Since *Oromumma* as a symbol system no longer operates as cohesively in the contemporary context as it did before colonization, it becomes even more imperative to understand the subjective dimension of this reality. Neither traditional Oromo rituals nor traditional Oromo beliefs function any longer as a cohesive and integral symbol system. There is rather a different degree of emphasis on specific rituals and specific beliefs, which may vary not only from one Oromo community to another, but also within the same community. Given that in Oromo equal, if not greater, importance is attached to belief as to practice, such differences could be considered insignificant, as long as the beliefs attached to particular ritual practices remain the same. The problem is how to identify and describe adequately the constituent elements of this system of belief upon which the Oromo identity is founded. In my view, it is the Oromo tradition, Oromo consciousness and Oromo social experience that constitute and perpetuate the Oromo identity. It is the inter-relatedness and the inter-connections between these three aspects of the Oromo identity that I would now like to discuss.

CONCEPTS OF OROMO TRADITION

The concept of Oromo tradition can be viewed in both a broad and a narrow sense. In the broad sense, it refers to the tradition as experienced by the common Oromo. This is known as the knowledge of the *aadaa* or "custom". In the narrow sense, it refers to the knowledge of the experts. The boundary between the two is a formal one, as the expertise of the oral traditions consists of the knowledge of the common man (cf. Gemetchu 1993:52-83). Expert knowledge, such as that of the *hayyuu* ("legal experts") and that of the *wayyuu* ("experts of the belief systems and moral values"), that is codified and orally transmitted clearly demarcate boundaries between ordinary and specialist knowledge.

The Oromo tradition, with its emphasis on the spoken word and 'literacy' continues into the present. The word is the primary medium of Oromo self-expression. It exists not merely as a form of artistic expression, but as a guide to life. Founded on the concept of *finna* or heritage, it is that which links them to the regenerative sources of their culture (Kassam 1986). Symbolism in Oromo tradition is thus underpinned by a sub-stratum of common values. This oral tradition offered each generation words that became the vehicle of their hopes and aspirations. Each generation found its own meaning in the words in relation to its particular historical situation. This relationship between the terms of

the tradition and the particular meaning of these terms in specific circumstances gives the Oromo tradition its historical character. As a result of this historical character of the tradition, early in Oromo tradition, there developed a tension between *uumaa* (literally "creation"), referring to practice, ritual or otherwise, and *ayyaana* as the will of *Waaqa*. It is perhaps this contradiction that gave rise to the concept of *saffu* (mutual relationship between elements of the social and cosmic orders) which maintains practice obligatorily through ethical conduct. This ethical dimension, which was already articulated in the five *yaayaa*, or five founding principles, was later developed and consolidated into the Oromo tradition by different Oromo prophets (*raaga*) and men of wisdom. In Oromo, it must have been the development of the ritual dimension that has given rise to the institution of the *wayyuu*. Thus, in terms of the dichotomy between *ayyaana* and *uumaa*, neither aspect has ever rejected the other and the tension between the two has formed an integral part of the Oromo oral tradition through the ages up to the present. (see Dahl's essay.)

In terms of their interaction with other peoples and cultures, the recent historical experience of the Oromo, especially in relation to the Christian Abyssinian culture, has come to challenge the very basis of Oromo culture and faith. Borrowing their faith from the Judaeo-Christian tradition, Abyssinians came to revere a White God and reduced the Oromo belief in *Waaqa Guraacha* to a form of devil worship. With their monopolization of political power acquired through access to European fire-arms, the Abyssinian minority became a powerful force that established the supremacy of the White God over the God of the Oromo. From the late nineteenth century onwards, empowered by its supply of European gun-powder, this minority Abyssinian elite reiterated the picture of itself as a 'civilized Christian community' in opposition to the 'barbaric pagan Galla' (Oromo). It is this false image that laid the basis for the prejudice against the Oromo and Oromo belief. The Abyssinian church and state which instigated this campaign continues to defame Oromo tradition. Despite these obstacles, however, Oromo tradition remains intact.

Abyssinian history, whether written or oral, is little more than an account of how the Christian emperors persecuted the Oromo. The ideological and social basis for this persecution of the Oromo was laid in the sixteenth century. Abyssinian historiographers attempted to trace the beginnings of the animosity between themselves and the Oromo to a conflict in earlier times, when they claim to have been persecuted and subjugated by the pagan 'Galla'. This 'history of the Galla', as portrayed by Bahrey and used by historiographers as written source material for the study of the Oromo past, became not only part of their international image but was incorporated into, and became part of, the Oromo self-image.

The present history began with the wars of colonial occupation during which multitudes of Oromo were slaughtered or sold into slavery. This was the beginning of the Oromo collective tragedy. As if to quench thirst with poison, the purported Ethiopian revolution that began in 1974 removed uncountable

Oromo lives. The present regime that took power in 1991 continues to persecute the Oromo. The memory of the former and the fresh experience of the latter are together giving shape to and reviving Oromo history. The history of this campaign of persecution that has rendered them stateless in their own country, and the discrimination which they have endured is deeply engrained in the hearts and on the minds of the Oromo. Their collective experience of the events and their common reaction to them also constitute part of the Oromo tradition. The intrusive and destructive image of themselves as fabricated by the Galla myth forms part of their consciousness and social experience and serves as a constant provocative negative pole according to which all Oromo must now continue to define themselves.

Oromo tradition should therefore not only be viewed as part of a static traditional past, but rather as an area that is being continually and dynamically being constructed by the wider experience that is part of their present.

CONSCIOUSNESS AND TRADITION

Despite its importance for Oromo national liberation, the concept of Oromo consciousness has not yet been explored in any depth by Oromo writers and researchers. To speak of Oromo consciousness, one must necessarily evoke Oromo tradition. Indeed, it is the connection that this consciousness has with the tradition and its implications for this tradition that make it a methodologically important concept. It would however be incorrect to deduce that the two areas are interchangeable. The content of Oromo consciousness cannot be totally reduced to Oromo tradition as described in the section above. For the Oromo, consciousness has varied from epoch to epoch and from one Oromo community to another in a way that Oromo tradition has not. Like the tradition, however, Oromo consciousness also varies from region to region and differences may also exist within the same community. This variation will depend not only on the social and economic position of Oromo individuals, but also on the interpretation of the tradition and commitment and dedication to its practices by the members of the community according to generation, education and/or life experience. Variation may also be found arising out of the degree of consciousness that stems from the individual's or group's association with particular shades of *Oromumma*. Intense and deep concern for the ideal of *Oromumma* exists in all these levels.

The content of Oromo consciousness can therefore be described as being underpinned by Oromo tradition whilst, at the same time, bearing the focii of particular social groups and social factors in particular contextual situations. This dialectical relationship between Oromo tradition and Oromo consciousness is important in assessing empirically the transformation of the tradition and in ascertaining the strength and significance of the particular focii given to the Oromo consciousness by the different groups. In other words, the juxta-

position of Oromo tradition and Oromo consciousness is important not only for the study of patterns, but also for understanding the significance and meaning of these patterns in the context of wider areas of social change. For there is no doubt that Oromo consciousness is as much shaped by the wider social factors and wider contexts of socio-cultural change as it is moulded by the weight of Oromo tradition.

CONSCIOUSNESS AND IDENTITY

The concept of Oromo consciousness is more flexible and more dynamic and yet more precise than the concept of Oromo identity, especially when it is used for heuristic purposes with reference to specific Oromo milieu.

Although the concept of identity has been primarily explored by psychologists and psycho-analysts in connection with individual personality, the concept is no less useful in a sociological and anthropological context. Erikson (1968:44) is right in arguing that identity is located both within the core of the individual and within the core of his/her communal culture. What can be said of the Oromo identity also holds true for Oromo consciousness. This interlinkage is especially important for the Oromo, where personhood is closely bound up with the communal aspect of *Oromumma*. Here, therefore, I distinguish between the psychological and the social dimension of Oromo consciousness and Oromo identity. Clearly, what is of concern is the collective social dimension of this identity. Although Oromo identity and Oromo consciousness may be seen as synonymous, in actual socio-cultural situations they embrace somewhat different aspects of Oromo reality and social life. The concept of Oromo identity is more abstract and less able than the concept of Oromo consciousness to account for the subjective dimension of Oromo culture.

General references have been made to the strengths and weaknesses of Oromo ethnicity in the Horn of Africa (Chege 1987:87–99; Habte Selassie 1980:77–86). None have however attempted to define the content of this ethnicity. If we were to ask an Oromo to describe his/her identity, he/she may be no more successful than say an Englishman or Frenchman confronted with a similar task. This difficulty is compounded when attempting to describe what *Oromumma* represents for the Oromo in diaspora. Nevertheless, if we probe deep enough into the consciousness of an Oromo, an adequate framework of meaning composed of his/her beliefs, values and practices would emerge. Insight could also probably be gained for the reasons and social determinants for these beliefs, values and practices. Through such an investigation, we might also be able to discover what significance traditional Oromo beliefs and practices hold for the contemporary Oromo and whether these traditions are upheld either as personal convictions or as associations, or exist for both these reasons. It is only by taking account of the tradition and consciousness that we would be able to address the problem of how best to conceptualize the Oromo identity.

This consciousness obviously exists in the structure of the knowledge system which manifests itself in the form of religious, secular and ethical knowledge.

The separation of these forms of knowledge in the context of Oromo culture poses a number of conceptual problems. The first problem arises from the inclusive nature of religious belief. The second problem relates to the diffusiveness of the content of Oromo religion and of the ideal of *Oromumma*. The third problem concerns the close interconnection between religion, ethnicity and other social factors. The fourth problem is that of how to deal with the different regional contexts of Oromo identification. The fifth problem, finally, is associated with the conceptual difficulties relating to the process of identification itself. Each of these issues pose formidable theoretical difficulties and could only be explored in depth by those privileged researchers who have access to research funding. These are, of course areas of research which are not only limited to the Oromo culture, but are applicable to the study of belief systems. Nevertheless, it is essential that for the purpose of our analysis some minimum content be given to the idea of Oromo religious consciousness and knowledge.

Central to the Oromo religious consciousness or knowledge is found the idea of a monotheistic God (*Waaqa*). *Waaqa* is the source of all knowledge, as He is the source of everything in the universe (cf. Bartels 1983). Acceptance of the law that regulates Oromo society implies acceptance of the Oromo Creator. The Oromo believe that their societal law is derived from the laws of *Waaqa* as given in nature (cf. Gemetchu 1993). Religious knowledge is thus constituted by the knowledge of the processes of creation which in turn serves as the means for classifying all things (Gemetchu 1989). The classificatory system can therefore be viewed as the secular aspect of Oromo knowledge, whilst the ethical aspect can be seen as that which holds the two aspects of the knowledge system together.

CONSCIOUSNESS AND SOCIAL EXPERIENCE

The conceptual scheme outlined thus far portrays the Oromo culture as being to a large extent autonomous. By juxtaposing the concept of Oromo consciousness to that of Oromo social experience, I intend at the same time to argue that Oromo culture, which I have been treating as an irreducible variable, can hardly be understood independently of the social structure and the economic, political and social organizational factors that affect it. The Oromo, like any other people, are part of a larger world and partake in a wider experience. As such, they have been subjected to the general inequalities of class, status and power. It would be incorrect to assume that the social and economic dimensions of the wider world are absent from the Oromo social experience. In fact, the solidarity within Oromo groups that give rise to their consciousness is affected precisely because of class and status divisions. However, it is important to note that these socio-economic divisions are experienced by the Oromo in the context of the

wider world and in the context of their national relations with Abyssinians. It is these national and international divisions and the general social and economic conditions under which the Oromo live, which they share in all the regions from which they come, that over-ride internal differences of class and status that I refer to as the Oromo social experience.

Theories that portray culture as an abstraction dependent on life and social structure lose sight of its dynamics and intrinsic character and nature. Those writers who view Oromo culture and Oromo consciousness as being entirely a product of social conditions have thus either not taken their time to understand the nature of the culture or have other motives in misrepresenting this culture. Neither the so-called 'Ethiopian nationalist' nor the universal democrat can understand the nature of Oromo consciousness because both are unable to grasp the agony of the Oromo social experience. In terms of their perception of the Oromo, there is little difference between the outright anti-Oromo and the so-called democrat. The one wishes to destroy the Oromo as a person, as he sees nothing in this person but an Oromo. The other wishes to destroy the Oromo as a member of his/her culture and completely eradicate in the person his/her link with *Oromumma*, believing that to be so would render him/her *tirru Ethiopiyaawi* ("a good Ethiopian"). The Oromo will never become good Ethiopians before they become good Oromo. The Oromo, conscious and proud of being Oromo and asserting his/her claim to be a member of the Oromo community, without losing sight on that account of the links which unites him/her to others, is never allowed to demonstrate this integrative ability. This is because through colonial imposition the Oromo are not accepted for who and what they are, but only for what they are not.

The theoretical and methodological problem posed here is how to understand the autonomy of the Oromo culture without reifying it or eliminating it as non real. My way of tackling this problem would be to suggest that scholars need not necessarily have to choose between these two options. Instead, the researcher could attempt to look at and understand Oromo consciousness and Oromo social experience in their inter-connectedness, without making the one area impervious to the other. There is no doubt that much of the content of Oromo consciousness and the forms of Oromo culture are shaped in response to the social conditions in which the people live. It is obvious that some of the characteristics of the present Oromo behaviour were acquired as a direct result of the colonial experience, and have grown out of the conditions under which they suffered as well as being shaped by the attitude of the wider world. The intensity of Oromo consciousness will also respond to the intensity of the social experience. Those who wish to understand the Oromo, should therefore enquire into the situation in which the Oromo find themselves, for they are beings in a situation.

This emphasis on the social experience of the Oromo must however never reduce Oromo culture and consciousness to a mere product of that experience. Such an approach would destroy *Oromumma* and would not be able to account

for the historical continuity and essential identity and unity of the Oromo. It is for this reason that I emphasize the interaction between the two realms of their being by juxtaposing these two aspects of their personality and reality.

Thus the variations in Oromo culture and many of its symbolic manifestations cannot be understood outside of the context of the variable and changing social experience of the Oromo as individuals and as a group. To focus on the differences at the expense of the similarities and to portray Oromo consciousness and Oromo culture as heterogeneous and inconsistent would falsify the reality of their experience. The diversity of the Oromo culture cannot be grasped without understanding the unity underlying the diversity. (See Baxter's essay.)

CONCLUSION

Whatever method one employs, it is evident that *Oromumma* cannot be understood without a good grasp of the nature and uniqueness of the Oromo culture. The recognition of this uniqueness can only be achieved through an understanding of the Oromo tradition. It is this tradition which also furnishes the basis for the understanding of Oromo consciousness. Just as there is an overlap between the elements that constitute Oromo tradition and Oromo consciousness, similarly, Oromo consciousness and Oromo identity also overlap. In short, tradition, consciousness and identity are so completely and inseparably inter-linked that none of these aspects can be understood independently of the others.

To a greater or lesser extent, all three aspects can be seen as constituting a form of knowledge. This form of knowledge is one that is lived and experienced by the Oromo people. It serves as a guide to their actions as they traverse the life course. It is that unity of meaning that creates and perpetuates the collective identity. For this reason, it has been my contention throughout this paper that Oromo cannot be understood through models alien to the culture. The images generated of the Oromo through the use of such alien models can never give a true picture of the people as perceived by themselves. The model generated by the Oromo themselves represents a form of knowledge. This form of knowledge then creates a form of identity, which is uniquely their own.

The use of alien models in the study of Oromo culture can be seen as representing the imposition of what Mudimbe (1988) terms a 'colonizing structure'. Although the Oromo were not directly colonized by the European powers, they were indirectly colonized by them. For it was these European powers who supplied Christian Abyssinia with all the necessary tools and political conditions including a legitimizing myth for the colonization of the Oromo and other ethnic groups in the region.

Re-Examining the Galla/Oromo Relationship

The Stranger as a Structural Topic

Thomas Zitelmann

SUMMARY

The contemporary political discourse among the Oromo stresses the discriminating aspect of being called "Galla", notably the image of being "strangers" to the land they inhabit. But at the same time some political activists reproduce facets associated with the image of "strangeness". By making use of interpretations of the "stranger" as proposed by van Gennep and Simmel, a continuous dynamic can be outlined. The Galla/Oromo relationship includes a symbolic repertoire to define distance and closeness, in regard to others as well as among the Oromo themselves; it also includes a structure/anti-structure dynamic. Structure means rigidity of norms and institutions, and the liminality of those who do not fit. Such processes are contingent to the politics of Oromo nationalism.¹

A BLESSING AT THE THRESHOLD OF LIMINALITY

Observing the Oromo through the perspective of refugee communities and from the exiles hinterland of a national liberation organization (Zitelmann 1994) does not mean observing a mythical cradle of Oromo culture. The communities in exile were gatherings of people from different backgrounds. For the activists of nationalism, such communities became cauldrons in which to melt varieties of local traditions into the central symbol of cultural nationalism—the "Oromo culture" *aadaa oromoo*. Literacy in the Oromo language written in the Roman script served as a major medium to communicate this symbol. But language and script also served to draw a social boundary between the followers and the others.

Following the downfall of the Mengistu government in the spring of 1991, the political activists of the periphery switched to the core—of the Ethiopian state and of Oromo society. Drawing social boundaries now became more difficult. Different Oromo organizations had agreed on the language issue, using

¹ The paper derives from a research project on Oromo nationalism, conducted with Georg Elwert and Tamene Bitima, funded between 1987 and 1992 by the German Research Foundation (DFG).

the Oromo language in the Roman script as a public language, but they had not agreed on how to mark other more general social or political boundaries. Additionally, country-wide mutually hostile Oromo organizations were confronted with customary procedures to define or to overcome such boundaries. What classical ethnography termed "rites de passage" of integration or exclusion (van Gennepe 1986:34ff), reappeared in the Oromo case in the context of political activism. Ritual blessing *eebba* by important elders became a required part of meetings between the local populations and the activists of the core. One such blessings was recorded in the Waliso area in 1992, during a meeting between representatives of the Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization (OPDO) and the peasantry.

*Biyyi keenya, biyya nagaan haa ta'u!
 Namni keenya, nama nagaan haa ta'u!
 Nagaan buusufis, biyyi nagaan ka'ee
 wal haa gargaaru! Gargaarsa fi tok-
 kummaa biyya keenyaaf Waqni nu haa
 gargaaru! Harki keenya wal haa qabatu,
 wal haa gargaaru! Kan nu keessaa bayee,
 moggaa deddeemus mee Waqni nuttaa
 deebisu! Akka nutti deebi'us, Waqni nu
 haa gargaaru! Keessummaan biyya dhufe,
 biyya saatti nagaan haa galu! Akka
 nagaan galus Waqni haa gargaaru!
 Yoo galuu dides nuti wal gargaarree
 akka biyya saatti galchinu Waqni nu
 haa gargaaru!*

Peace be with our land!
 Peace be with our people!
 To be peace, let the
 people rise to help each
 other. Let God support us
 to help each other for
 the unity of our country.
 Let our hands join to
 help each other. The one
 who has left us and moves
 through the borderlands,
 let God make him return.
 Let the guests who came
 to our land return to
 their country in peace.
 In order that they return
 in peace, let God be
 helpful. If they refuse
 to return, let God help
 us that we help each
 other to return them to
 their country.

(Tamene Bitima 1993)

This text needs further elaboration. The OPDO, which is linked to the dominating Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), stood in contrast to the older OLF (Oromo Liberation Front) which favoured secession from Ethiopia. The acting elder obviously did not have much sympathy with the OPDO but gave a polite blessing, wishing that those who move through the "borderland", *moggaa*, i.e. the members of the OPDO, will contribute, with the help of God, to the unity of the Oromo people. The "guest", *keessummaa*, i.e. the EPRDF, is wished to return in peace to his country, either with the help of God or by an additional collective effort of the people.

Expressing political dissent in the language of geographical border zones and of peripheral social relations poses an interesting field for an inquiry into the social organization of being Oromo. The wilderness of the *moggaa* and the

exalted marginality of the *keessummaa* express conditions of liminality in the sense outlined by V. Turner (1974:80ff). The collective of "our people", joining hands for self-help, defines a structure, just as well as its anti-structure is defined. Blessing elders protect the threshold. But the issue of context-produced liminality may also lead to a second field of exploration. On the diachronical level, the earlier notion "Galla" included comparable aspects of liminality.

GALLA CHANGING OROMO

Up to the 1960s studying the Oromo largely meant confinement to cultural history (German-, Italian-, American-style)—and it meant studying the "Galla" rather than the "Oromo" (Huntingford 1955; Haberland 1963). Anthropologists were interested in comprehensive and ordered institutional structures, even though such structures existed only in historical reconstruction. Contextual interpretation of data was largely absent. Linking cultural history to participating observation and contextual analysis made Asmarom Legesse's (1974) study of the Borana Gada-system an anthropological landmark. However, the big institutional issues, such as age- and generation-grading and the related politico-ritual-religious order, kept on dominating the research agenda. More mundane aspects of everyday life slipped aside. When cultural history was additionally turned into historical sociology, Oromo society became—within the confines of an Ethiopian nation-state—a sociological model for equality and non-hierarchical structures (Levine 1974:128ff).

With the tremendous disorder following the Ethiopian revolution of 1974, working on the Oromo suddenly meant working in a context marked by violent upheavals. Being Oromo subsequently became an issue of political activism and national liberation, an issue of refugees and of global information. The ordered institutional structures of the anthropologists were taken up by political activists who began to comb their view of the past for true Oromo culture. The sociological model of the non-hierarchical Oromo, once designed to provide a theoretical anti-thesis to the model of the hierarchical Amhara within the Ethiopian nation-state, unwittingly became a blue-print for the Utopia of an Oromo nation-state—without Ethiopia. A change in which researchers followed the political activists, was the shift from "Galla" to "Oromo". In their political discourse Oromo stressed the discriminating aspect of being called "Galla", notably the associated image of being "strangers".

There is still an enduring need by Oromo academics to refute the myth of the "Galla" as being "strangers", "outsiders", "émigrés" or "subjects". Such ideas are denounced as "pseudo-historical traditions about Oromo origin", fabricated by an Abyssinian "clergy for politico-ideological reasons" (Abbas Haji 1994:1). Indeed, nineteenth-century neo-Solomonic ideology which contributed to the glory of an expanding imperial system of "Greater Ethiopia", simultaneously contributed to the discriminating reformulation of a "Galla"

ethnicity as strangers and invaders (Crummey 1988:21; Bairu Tafla 1987:61).² Nevertheless, the observation of an Austrian ethnographer still holds truth: "the etymology of the name Galla ... is an often discussed but completely unsolved question" (Paulitschke 1888:421).

HUMANS, STRANGERS, UNBELIEVERS

Inquiring into collective identity means partly examining the myths surrounding it (Spear 1993:1). In the geographical context of the Horn of Africa, the Galla/Oromo relationship is a case in point where myths meet. The myth of the "Oromo" stresses the qualities of being human, free-born, a people, men (Beke 1848:1; Krapf 1968:73; Arn. d'Abbadie 1868:245; Reinisch 1887:17; Paulitschke 1893:71). On the other hand, the myth of the "Galla" is certainly associated with an archetypical "stranger" or a nomadizing "migrant" (v. Katte 1838:107; Harris 1844:45; Krapf 1968:73).

During my field research among Oromo refugees in the Sudan and in Somalia the Galla/Oromo issue was primarily raised in formal statements about the pejorative contents of "Galla" versus the ancient-old self-definition "Oromo": "they" use "Galla" and "we" use "Oromo". In fact, the seventeenth-century German scholar Job Ludolf already gave his Ethiopian informant Abba Gregorius as evidence for such a statement: "... We give them the name of Gallans" (Ludolf 1682:81). But there is also a different perspective, as Jaenen has pointed out:

The Galla who call themselves Oromo, are as uncertain about the origin of their name as are the anthropologists. *Orma* means a foreigner who is not a relative; *galā* means a stranger who is a guest, *galla* is a stranger who joins a tribe; *gala*, an imperative, means 'go home'; *gala*, a noun, means one who goes home, also provisions for travelling. The Galla language gives us no further hint. The history of the people is indeed a tale of nomadic strangers & guests who are seeking a home. Now they have found that home but they are still designated as guests (Jaenen 1956:172).

The perspective developed by Jaenen was one of internal classification and boundary-marking. His main source was probably Tutschek's "Lexicon of the Galla Language" (1844). Related perspectives have also been upheld by more recent researchers (Hinnant 1972 I:128; Negaso Gidada 1984:141), including the opinion that "Galla" *galaa* is an Oromo word which the Amhara got wrong (Mulugeta Eteffa 1988:3-4). Some external definitions of the "Galla" stressed purely geographical characteristics, like being named after the river Gala in Gurageland (Isenberg/Krapf 1968:233f), the river Galana (Bairu Tafla 1987:155) or a place called "Gellad" (Cecchi 1888:24ff). Others included occupational spe-

² Mekuria Bulcha and Gemetchu Megerssa hinted at additional aspects, in this context defining the enslavable subject. In the Amharic language a boundary was drawn between the "domestic Galla", *ye-meder galla*, and the "wild Galla" or *shangalla* (*shankalla*), associating *galla* with *shanko*, a male, black coloured dog.

culations about "shepherds" (Bruce 1792:402), specialized holders of long-distance camels (Ibrahim Abdalla Muhammad 'Mah' 1982:92ff) or "soldier, servant" (Bairu Tafla 1987:52f).

Etymological speculation about the "Galla" was, by and large, a product of European linguistic romanticism. There were few speculations before the 1830s. Tutschek's Oromo-English dictionary was written at a time when an emerging academic interest in the Oromo (Pankhurst 1976) met with "Orientalism", in the sense outlined by Said (1985: chapter 2, *passim*) and Bernal (1987: chapter VIII, *passim*). Hence some authors even speculated about the Phoenician roots of "galah", meaning "to wander" (v. Katte 1838:107) or about "Galla", meaning "blackness" in some Indo-European languages, as a proof for the "African origin of the Aryan family of man" (Johnston 1844:438).

The boundary-marking religious aspect of being "Galla" or "Oromo" permeates many of the nineteenth-century sources (Harris 1844:45; Soleillet 1884:240–266 *passim*; Borelli 1890; d'Abbadie 1890:136, 287, 345). According to Tutschek, being "Oromo" was a religious self-reference of the Galla in regard to other nations (Tutschek 1844:24). Small wonder that the "Oromo" became also defined as an archetypical "unbeliever", in particular with regard to a Muslim environment (Borelli 1890:133ff; d'Abbadie 1890:266). If "Orientalism", i.e. a network of corresponding scholars, created the ideal type of a "Muslim", etymological speculations about the "Galla" and the "Oromo" began to create the opposite type of an unspoiled "heathen", in permanent confrontation with Islam.

Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, the negative connotation which "Oromo" had in the Islamized territories of the Gibe-states, was widely reported.³ On the other hand, it was observed that Ras Gobana used being "Oromo", including his family ties to the Abba Muda (father of anointment), the main collective religious representative, to enforce sentiments in favour of his military exploits under Menelik (Borelli 1890:150).

Some additional aspects about the use of "Galla" are worth reconsidering. Although most authors agreed that "Galla" was a name given to the people by others, practically all identifiable early Oromo informants of European scholars used the self-reference "Galla". While Tutschek brought the first serious lexical definition of the term "Oromo", his informants, according to their published letters, used "Galla" as a term of self-reference (Tutschek 1845:89ff). The Ottoman slave-soldiers whom Charles Doughty met during the 1880s in the Arabian town of Khaibar, referred to themselves as "Galla" (Doughty 1936:97ff). Observing changes in the identification, Taurin de Cahagne wrote that the "disorganized tribes" in the vicinity of Harar identified as "Galla", while the others did so as "Oromo" or "Barantu" (d'Abbadie 1890:302). Two observers of the use of "Galla", during the 1880s in the Harar area, and during

³ During the discussion of the paper H. S. Lewis remarked that the connotation Oromo/unbeliever was precisely the reason why during the 1960s he wrote about the kingdom of Jimma Abba Jifar as a "Galla monarchy" (Lewis 1965), and not as an "Oromo monarchy".

the 1930s in Western Wallagga, related it to self-irony and teasing self-reference (Paulitschke 1888:421; Wassmann 1935:1–2).

In a poem, published by Paulitschke, which belonged to the material produced by Onesimus Nesib and Aster Ganon at the Swedish missionary station of Monkullo (Eritrea), a woman deploras the fate of being thrown out from the "Galla" (as a slave) to Massawa.⁴ The reference which Onesimos Nesib and Aster Ganon made to the "warra biya oromo" (family of the land of the Oromo), to whom they devoted their folkloristic collection "Jalqaba Barsisa" (Cerulli 1922:102), marks a further stage.

CONTEXTUAL PERSPECTIVES

During the late nineteenth-century the Swedish Protestant missionary activities at Monkullo provided a contextual frame for a modern reformulation of being Oromo, by mixing Protestant zeal, romantic European nationalism and elements of an Oromo past. Although the initial impact on Oromo society was small, the developing structures are comparable with the push to "being Yoruba", received somewhat earlier from the intellectual activities of a Protestant diaspora in Sierra Leone (Peel 1989). From 1978 to 1991 a further reformulation of being Oromo, in the form of cultural and political nationalism, flourished world-wide among Oromo exile communities and among the refugees in the Horn of Africa. This defines the context for further explorations.

From my field experience among refugees, I remember two situations in regard to the Galla/Oromo relationship which I found particular enough to be preserved in my note books. The contexts are different, but what made them comparable is, how the idea of being a "stranger" was encapsulated in the way of reasoning about roots, belonging and identity.

The first setting was Southern Somalia in Spring 1988. In some refugee camps there lived Arsi-Oromo from Bale, some of them used to have linkages with the Somali-Abbo movement, others with the OLF. In 1988 all identified themselves as being Oromo. This fuelled other elements of distinctiveness. At the level of social organization, the social boundary between Somali and Oromo was marked by lineage fiction versus an ideal model of neighbourhood *ollaa*.⁵ In the Oromo case, the ideal of good neighbourliness expressed both a lost way of life just as it expressed a hope for the future. People had left Ethiopia because of bad neighbourly relations with the Amhara, and still longed for the re-establishment of a good neighbourliness similar to that which the elder from Waliso quoted above defined as being between those who "join hands". The Arsi found themselves in the dilemma that they saw no chance of departing from a bad neighbourhood. This was the context in which reference was made to

⁴ "... ofi gala tesani, Mutuwa na buftani ...". The text is attributed to Aster Ganon (Paulitschke 1896:204).

⁵ The general importance of neighbourhood relationships for populations of Southern Ethiopia was outlined by H. S. Lewis (1974).

"Galla" in relation to *gaal* the 'stranger': "The Amhara call us 'Galla' and the Somali call us *gaal* 'stranger'. Where shall we go? We live between two people". (See Mohammed's essay.)

The second context was set in a less collective and more individual argument in regard to the "stranger", which was made in the summer of 1989 in Khartoum by a young man from Eastern Wallagga, of mixed Oromo and Amhara background. Former acquaintances were now holding posts in the OLF office in Khartoum. He was approached by them and asked to work for the OLF. He politely declined the offer. As he said, he was too uneasy about OLF's attitude towards mixed Oromo and Amhara families. He was also uneasy about what being and becoming "Oromo" meant in the context of a political struggle in relation to his being an "Ethiopian". Varying the topic of the "stranger", he stated: "One historian told me, Oromo comes from 'orma' (stranger). It is used by OLF to argue that they are not Ethiopian".⁶

The Galla/Oromo relationship thus found its articulation on two levels. One was public identification vis-à-vis other populations (Somali, Amhara, Ethiopian), the other was social organisation on lower levels of integration, such as the family or the neighbourhood.

GALLA, OROMO AND COMMENSALITY

An additional set of data exists where the Galla/Oromo relationship permeates contextual and historical data. A Protestant missionary who, in the early 1930s, worked in the territory of Dejazmatch Hapte Mariam in Western Wallagga, presented the sketchy remark that "becoming an Oromo for the Oromo", meant to share meals (Wassmann 1938:52). During the 1950s, an Ethiopian ethnographer wrote that in Harar area people disliked being called "Galla", because "Galla" were regarded as people who eat every meat, regardless of whether slaughtered by a Muslim or by a Christian (Andargatchew Tesfaye 1957:35).

In the context of Oromo nationalism the idea of "sharing meat", to pull down symbolic boundaries between the religious communities, became a tacit message (Loltu 1987:2). In September 1991, the infighting between the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromiya (IFLO) was strong in the Diredawa/Harar area (Zitelmann 1993:48). A delegation of distinguished Oromo *manguddoo* (elders) paid a visit to the IFLO's chairman Jaaraa Abbaa Gadaa to mediate between the warring factions. The event was covered on video cassette and subsequently distributed to the Oromo diaspora communities. The video included a lengthy scene in which people are shown simply sitting, eating and drinking together. Here, the

⁶ At that time *Sagalee Bilisummaa Oromoo* (Voice of Oromo Liberation), OLF's broadcasting station, often included historical arguments against any kind of being a "stranger" or late-comer to the area, thus trying to refute the old Abyssinian myth of the "Galla" coming from "outside" Ethiopia. Oral evidence from local elders was quoted to prove the independent rooting that the Oromo had in the region.

message of being Oromo and sharing meat became linked to global information.

Broader regional aspects of sharing food have recently been discussed under the heading of "commensality" (Hamer 1994). Sharing food can be seen as a metaphor for a cultural code which idealises particular realms of social cohesion and resource-sharing. Commensality marks social boundaries. It may be deplored that the transformation of commensality from a local-level symbolism to a symbolism at the level of the total social and political order of Ethiopia, supports parochial chauvinism (i.e. ethnicity) rather than national integration (Hamer 1994:141). However, commensality as a "national code" was already included in the symbolic repertoire of imperial expansion. Emperor Theodorus's (1855–1868) chronicler reported his master's aim "to make Amharas and Gallas sit down to eat at the same table" (Appleyard and Irvine 1985:141). A related idea was visualized in a painting which showed the animals dining together at one table. A dove, the symbol for the Holy Spirit, appears above the dominant position of the Lion; below the table the devil raises his ugly head (Jensen 1936:tabloid 6). Such a vision obviously included a demand for Christian supremacy.

The French ethnologist Arnold van Gennep interpreted the symbol of sharing food or commensality in the wider context of "rites de passage" and the symbolic integration of strangers into an existing group (van Gennep 1986:34ff). The continuous reappearance and reformulation of such a symbol in the Ethiopian and the Oromo contexts provokes a further starting point from which to re-examine the relationship between the "Galla", the Oromo, and the "stranger".

THE HISTORICAL GALLA IN CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM SOURCES

Different kinds of estrangement permeate Ge'ez and Arabic sources which deal with the time of the "Galla migrations". There are remarkable differences between Bahrey's account (Schleicher 1893) and the Arabic "History of the King" which describes the "Galla" besieging the town of Harar (Cerulli 1931:52–62). Bahrey presents the "Galla" as primitive invaders, who during a period of forty years undergo a kind of civilizing process, from the more to the less primitive. There is no such process in the "History of the King". The Muslims of Harar fight with the Galla. They make a peace treaty (a "sulh"); they agree that the "Galla" have to pay fixed prices for cotton (cloth); they quarrel about the possibility of exchanging women. Opposed to every dealing with the "kuffar" (unbeliever) was the Islamic 'ulama (Cerulli 1931:53ff). But, who were the real strangers? The opposing 'ulama, and the Sunnite rigidity promoted by them, during the first half of the sixteenth century was a new factor in the Horn of Africa (Pouwels 1987:40ff). In this regard, the "Conquest of Abessinia" (Futuh al-Habasha) described a perhaps significant conflict,

which occurred during the early years of the reign of Imam Ahmed Granj. It concerned the redistribution of the alms tax (zakat). Against the Imam, representing the political centre and the legacy of the *shari'a*, local notables claimed their customary rights, the "cada" (Chihab ed-Din Ahmed 1897:79, 149), to keep their share of the spoil. It is exactly here, that a recent Somali author locates the "Galla". They were those who during the reign of Ahmed Granj continued to stay with the "cada". While the earlier raisers of long-distance camels, the "gaal", remained for practical reasons at a geographical distance from Islamic civilization; the new "gala", sticking to tradition (cada/ aadaa), were marked by an ideological distance (Ibrahim Abdallah Muhammad "Mah" 1982:92ff).

The "Galla" of the Arabic sources can be related to a set of conflicts which are linked to the emergence of Sunni orthodoxy during the sixteenth century; the "Galla" in Bahrey's history display other features. The author described the segmentary structure of the Borana and Baretuma by using the term "nägädä" which he also sometimes employs to describe the deplored diversity of the status and occupational groups within the Empire (Schleicher 1893:passim). In a sense, the archetypal Ethiopian stranger, the "nagada", appears here (Levine 1979:34), including its cognates in Ge'ez and Amharic such as "tribe", "merchant" and "Muslim" (Dillmann 1867:693; Leslau 1976:116). Segmentary lineage structures apparently posed a problem for the imperial structure (as they did later for the British and French Empires. Eds.). When the imperial law, the "Fetha Nagest", was rendered from Arabic into Ge'ez, the translation of the Arabic "qabila" (tribe) did not find an adequate equivalent. Neither "nägädä" nor the corresponding "bala" (Guidi 1899:413; Dillmann 1867:1343). included the same positive connotation as "qabila" had in Arabic. So strangeness is linked to social institutions, not necessarily to being new in the land. From the different perspectives "Galla" thus appears to be an ambiguous omnibus term. Ethiopian and Arabic written sources, as well as oral legacies among the Oromo and Somali, contributed in different ways to the legacies.

The complex linkage which interest in the Oromo had with an emergent "Orientalism", and its dealing with literate traditions of the Middle East, must have had tremendous affect on etymological speculation about the "Galla". It certainly sponsored the idea to regard them as "migrants", "exiles" or "subjects under government" (Dillmann 1867:1140; Lane 1985:448). It is remarkable that such speculations were largely devoted to "Galla", and not so much to "Oromo" which can also easily be related to the etymological mytho-poetics of the Middle East. The OLF proved this in a pamphlet published in Arabic. By quoting, wittingly or unwittingly, the Koranic Sura al-Fajr to relate the Oromo to the (Yemenite) people of "Iram" (OLF 1984:13) thereby reproducing nothing less than, from an Islamic perspective, the image of the Oromo as stubborn heathens. The people of "Iram" were a "civilized but godless people", as an Islamic commentary says.⁷

⁷ For an orthodox Sunni commentary on the quoted Sura see *The Holy Qur'an*, 1410 a.h.: 1950.

THE GALLA AND THE SOCIOLOGICAL STRANGER

The "Galla" as a "migrant" or "outsider" can be linked structurally to the sociological category of the "stranger" (Levine, 1971; Simmel 1987). Van Genep was interested in the practical processes which symbolized the integration of strangers; processes like sharing food, development of exchange relations, alliances, adoption, sexual affiliation, forms of greetings (van Genep 1986:36ff). Simmel hinted at more theoretical and structural relationships between the stranger and the social environment.

For Simmel the stranger was both an element within a group while being outside it. The "stranger" does not come and go, but comes and stays. Staying, the stranger becomes the "potential wanderer", a symbol for potential mobility, for nearness and distance within a settled group (Simmel 1987:63f). Indeed, Simmel's argument suggests that without the stranger, the organic structure of the group itself would be incomplete (Simmel 1987:70).

William Shack, interpreting Simmel for an African context, pointed towards an ambiguity in Simmel's presentation of the stranger as "betwixt and between" (Shack 1979a:passim). Shack attempted to work out for modern African states the transitory stages which make the stranger change status from being an "alien" to a "citizen". He distinguished between "open" and "closed" societies (Shack 1979b:passim). "Open" societies allow for "deliminalization" of an alien status, whereas "closed" societies tend to develop "structural rigidification" (Shack 1979:45f) which again leads to liminalization. For Shack, sixteenth century Ethiopia was structurally comparable with a modern "closed" society (Shack 1979b:43). This argument has an additional anthropological focus to Victor Turner's "liminal men" and the ritual processes leading to integration into a new context (Shack 1979a:8; Turner 1974:passim). The sociological stranger becomes an expression of a structure/anti-structure nexus which Shack identifies with "closed" and "open" societies. This supposes a dichotomy.

The "Galla" example allows for an interpretation which is close to Simmel's argument about the stranger as an organic part of the group itself. A fluid structure/anti-structure nexus can not only be detected in the Ethiopian/Galla relationship, but also in the Galla/Oromo relationship itself. The integrative neighbourhood of Oromo society is a type of open society which a stranger can join if he or she joins hands with those already settled. (See essays by Dahl, Baxter, Blackhurst and Gufu Oba.) That does not mean that the knowledge of who came first and who came late is necessarily forgotten. The thresholds of liminality are not fixed but movable. The processes of estrangement may well develop within Oromo society itself.

INSTITUTIONAL RIGIDITY VERSUS A SENSE OF IRONY

The importance of the notion of "Oromo culture" *aadaa oromoo*, both in its local and its broader definition, to the creation and constitution of Oromo nationality, has been frequently noted (Baxter 1994a:171ff; Zitelmann 1994:169ff).

Baxter holds the view that, in the long run, the combination of locally shared identities, including its cultural repertoires, will not be sufficient to provide the means to constitute an Oromo centralism (Baxter 1994b:260). The problem can be put into a theoretical frame relevant to the topic of estrangement. The local structure people experience as being Oromo, and the new structure the activists propose, are different things, although symbols are sometimes shared. Structure in the frame of political nationalism also means rigidity of institutions and norms, closure of society and liminalization of opponents. Structure makes the stranger. The activists of the core may contribute to this process, as local society does.

But Oromo society has alternative registers for political integration, as the open model of the neighbourhood shows. A further model can be detected from the sources. As shown above self-irony and teasing self-reference was also mentioned as a reason for identifying as "Galla". This allows return to the liminal position of the stranger betwixt and between. Self-irony can be regarded as a kind of joking ritual, "a mode of liminality" which reverses structure into the tacit message that even the opposite can be possible (Pelton 1980:219f). In the final analysis one may detect a notion of disorder/order or anti-structure/structure in the Galla/Oromo relationship which relates to processes of estrangement within and without.

Being Gabra Today

Paolo Tablino

Early in 1963, when I started my missionary presence among the Gabra of northern Kenya, I had an interesting talk with Mr David Dale, who at that time was the District Commissioner of Marsabit. When he heard that we intended to preach the Gospel to the nomadic Gabra he exclaimed to me, 'Honestly, I must tell you what I think, you are going to waste your time. The Gabra will never change. They are extremely well organised in their rituals and will not accept Christianity. Anyway, if you succeed, I, who am a Protestant, will become a Catholic ...'

Thirty years later, not far from the office where that talk took place, Paul Roba Abudo was ordained by the Bishop of Marsabit as the first Gabra to become a Catholic priest. The ordination was attended by a large congregation of Gabra Christians who had come from every corner of Gabraland, where the Christian communities had grown in activities and in numbers over the last thirty years.

What has happened? Have the Gabra changed? Was the District Commissioner quite wrong?

I will try to provide some answers to these questions. My paper is divided into three parts. First I will show, in spite of the many changes which have taken place around them and in their society, that, in many ways, the Gabra have remained much the same. Secondly, I will consider some of the new elements which have entered Gabra culture. Thirdly, I will try to relate the changes which have occurred among the Gabra to changes in the other nomadic societies of northern Kenya.

GABRA ARE STILL GABRA

The great majority of Gabra still pursue a nomadic, pastoral life, but even those who have become sedentary still feel their distinctive cultural identity fiercely as the following examples indicate.

Two candidates contested the Gabra parliamentary constituency in the general election held at the end of 1992. Each had to stand as the candidate of one of the national political parties, but the Gabra voters ignored the party labels and voted strictly according to clan affiliation. The Gara, the Galbo and

the Odola voted solidly for one candidate and the Algana and the Sharbana for the other one. In 1986 I attended the solemn traditional *Jiila* ceremony which is held to celebrate the transition of the generation classes from one grade to another. An intense degree of participation, interest and conviction was demonstrated. I had not been able to attend the event in 1972 but a confrere who attended both *Jiila* assures me that there had been no diminishment in Gabra commitment since 1972. He and I, and some other anthropologists who were present in 1986, were all convinced that the next celebration, due in either 2000 or 2007, will continue to be just as important to the Gabra and attract the same degree of participation (cf. Schlee 1992).

Muslims, Christians and traditional believers celebrate together and join in prayers together, accompanied by the traditional sacrifice of coffee beans *buuna*, in the towns as well as in the stock camps. Everyone is now familiar with the modern calendar but traditional methods of computation and time reckoning still keep hold on the popular imagination (see Tablino 1980: 78–103). Even those who live in Nairobi or the other towns of Kenya hold their wedding feasts in the months of *Yaka* or *somdera* which are traditionally propitious. There are innumerable other examples.

NEW ELEMENTS

Anyone who returned to Marsabit after an absence of, say, thirty years would notice innumerable changes at many levels—petrol stations, a bank, seven Christian churches of seven different denominations, five mosques, a generating station, hotels, three secondary schools and at least ten primary schools. Even in remote areas like Forolle, Bada Hurri, Gus and Dukana there are schools and nurseries. The people who can read and write can now be numbered in thousands. Students who carry on to higher studies have ceased to be a rarity. Lorries, some even carrying containers, pass through regularly not only on their way to and from towns like Isiolo and Moyale but even to what were only grazing lands such as Diida Galgallo, Torbi and Sololo. Even in Maikona there are not only car owners but even a small factory which produces concrete blocks and employs a dozen workers. There have been corresponding changes in technology. Even ten years ago the water that the camels brought from the wells was transported in hand woven fibre pots *buute*, now everyone uses plastic containers. From Marsabit one can communicate by telephone around the world. Radios are common and several hotels and bars have social rooms in which customers, mostly young people, can watch videos.

The Gabra have also become known to the wider world. A few weeks ago I mentioned in a letter to an American friend that I had been able to offer some hospitality to an American anthropologist who had come to do research among the Gabra. He replied from New York, 'It seems to me that enough has been

published on the Gabra in the last years. What else remains? Among specialists the Gabra are one of the best known people'.

CHANGES AND GABRA IDENTITY

Despite all the apparent changes my personal experience is that Gabra cultural identity continues to be strong and embracing. The underlying deep structures of the lives of those who live in the towns remain very similar to those who continue as pastoral nomads. Indeed, my first general observation about all the pastoralists and former pastoralists of what used to be known as the Northern Frontier District, NFD, and which includes the Gabra, is that despite the influence of all the new technologies and new ideas they have all maintained strong cultural identities. There is a symbiosis.

The political, social, legal and religious changes have not substantially altered traditional structures and traditional rituals. The Gabra have their own elders, their own generation-sets, their own judges, their own *Yaa* 'sacred sites' (see Tablino 1980: 216) and, most importantly of all, their rituals. My impressions are that the Gabra, like the other peoples of the old NFD, Northern Frontier District, have maintained their traditional institutions and rituals and maintained feelings of cultural identity more strongly than have the peoples of central Kenya. This is not to say that educated Gabra, and Christian and Muslim Gabra have not acquired new ideas and new values. Certainly those who have fully accepted Christianity have relinquished customs, such as the abandonment of twins, which are incompatible with their new faith but they have not ceased to be distinctively Gabra. They are convinced that it is possible for the same person to be a true Gabra, a true Christian and a true Kenyan.

In conclusion, it seems to me that accommodations like those that many Gabra have made can cause us to reflect. Africa, indeed the world, is torn by those who want to impose a uniform identity on others. We all have several overlapping and sometimes conflicting identities, just as we have overlapping and conflicting roles, statuses and occupations. If the Gabra, despite the hardships and the radical changes they have endured, have so far found ways of reconciling these; then may not others? The acquisition of new goods and new ideas does not have to mean renunciation of the old. We could say, following Jesus, 'the householder brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old' in the *Kitaaba Waaqa* (1994) aka *abba worraa ka subba ufi keesa waan haree-safi dullacha baasu fekaata* (Matthew 13: 52).

Shifting Identities along Resource Borders

Becoming and Continuing to be Boorana Oromo

Gufu Oba

*Dirre be peace
Liiban be peace
Badha be peace
Golbo be peace
Raba gada be peace*

Over the centuries the pastoral Boorana¹ Oromo, through local competition over water and grazing, have negotiated "resource borders" with neighbouring pastoralists, both Oromo and non-Oromo. Within these constantly renegotiated boundaries Boorana have created and preserved a series of moral ethnic identities.

Boorana territory used to be vast. They shared fluctuating ethnic and resource borders with: to the east Somali clans along the Ganale River; to the north-east the Arsi; to the north-west the Guji; and, to the south first the Laikipia Maasai (Kibia) and later the Rendile and the Samburu (Kore) (Sobania 1992). For the last century Boorana have been under increasing pressure from their neighbours. Boorana land has been reduced to the Dirre plateau, Liiban and the Badha Escarpment in Ethiopia and, in Kenya, to the arid plains of Golbo which run from the base of the Ethiopian escarpment to the Isiolo District (see Aguilar's essay). Now even these are in jeopardy.

As Wood (1993:83–84) has pointed out, conflicts are common where resources are limited and demand is high, so that "a major stage in resolving natural resource conflicts has to be the identification and analysis of the root causes of the conflicts" which frequently stem from past disputes. But, the national governments whose task it is to control current conflicts do not have disinterested histories available to them. Each ethnic group uses its own versions of

¹ Boorana is usually spelt "Boran", but I write it here as it is pronounced by the people themselves. I have followed the advice of Dr. Luka Hukka Wario on spelling, whom I also thank for comments on sections of this paper. I acknowledge the help of the following Boorana oral historians: the late Bidhu Bankare (89 years), Godana Ajaa (68 years), Boru Bulle Borbor (70 years) and Oba Sarite (103 years) and, perhaps the most knowledgeable of all, Borbor Bulle (45 years) who, despite his youth, is a walking encyclopaedia of Boorana history. I also thank Abdullahi A. Shongollo for sharing data from his interview with Roba Bukhura.

history to legitimize its present claims to key resources. Schlee (1984) has interpreted past conflicts from the view point of the southern neighbours of the Boorana. Here I incline towards a Boorana view.

To survive the pastoralists of the Horn must be nomadic or transhumant. Boorana land can usefully be perceived as a series of extensive and often overlapping grazing areas, *dedha*, each of which is associated with a complex of deep wells, *tula*. Well complexes consist variously of open shaft systems, *adadi*, crater wells and spring fed wells (Helland 1980; Hogg 1990, 1993; Cossins 1983; Donaldson 1983). The wells are vital in the dry seasons and serve as the foci of the social organizations and rituals of their users, and hence of their cultural and ethnic identities.²

THE PEACE OF THE BOORANA

Boorana oral traditions suggest that Boorana Guutu were able to enter Liiban, in the latter part of the seventeenth century and took on the identity of *waar' Liiban*, i.e. became *proper* Boorana. They assimilated the residents comprised of the clans of Heero Abba Biiyya including Dawe, T'aaya, T'aasa, Abroji, Duubara and Waata in becoming proper Boorana. The Orma, or War'da as Boorana called them, were displaced.³ The entry of Boorana Guutu into Dirre and Liiban was after a renowned prophet (*raaga*) named Mooro Uchuma⁴ had "minted" or "hammered out" (*hintuuman*) the customs and laws, *aada seera*, required to regulate the use of water sources, pasture lands, cattle, horses, mules, donkeys, small stock, wild animals, people and all the goods used in homes.⁵ These laws and customs provided the requisite social and political order which enabled them to move in and to live with each other in Peace.

That body of verbally transmitted customs and laws was, and in Ethiopia still is, revised and added to as required by changing circumstances at the eight yearly assemblies of the *Guumi Gayo* (Abdullahi Shongolo 1994). They can then be cleansed by a "straightening of law and custom", *aada seera qajeelchani*. Such a revision was undertaken by Dawe Gobo (1706–1714). Three councillors, *garba*

² All Boorana very clearly recognise that they share a common identity but also recognise regional identities. Individuals may identify themselves as *waar* Obbu (people of Obbu in Sololo Division of Kenya), Hote Saku (Boorana of Saku), Wayantu (people of the Eastern region of Dirre), *waar* Liiban (people of Liiban) or *waar* Waaso (Boorana of Isiolo District).

³ I hope to publish Boorana oral history texts I have collected elsewhere.

⁴ Mooro Uchuma was a notable prophet and seer and reformer. His family was endowed with mystical powers. Tradition claims that the "trinity" of grandfather, father and the son were all seers, and this period is referred to as that of "the three Elders", *jaarsa sadheni*. The grandfather was physically more able than the father who was, in turn, more energetic and youthful than the son. This reversal of ageing and disability is said to represent future events; children become less thrifty and tired of the *aada seera*, while their parents and grand parents, who maintain *aada seera*, remain full of vigour. Interview with Bidhu Bankare, June 1978, in Sololo town.

⁵ The only household item which has no *aada* that regulates its use is the hand-axe (*qooch'i*) mostly used by women. It is the main implement used for construction and firewood gathering and is liable to be misused so that settling disputes over it would just be a waste of time. It is a "communal resource" that serves the needs of all.

aduula, were selected from the three corners of Booranalana;- Maale Gaala, a Sabho-Karaiyu-Biito; Abba Kaar Allayo, a Gona-War'jiida-Goyitu from El Wak; and Higu Baaru from Tertalle who represented the Sabho clans, Matari and Digalu. They travelled throughout the land "straightening" custom and punishing violators. Force was used on those who defiled custom. For example, they burnt the crops of those who cultivated the soil on the Badha Escarpment, meanwhile crying out in mockery:

Waari Jida Seele obbru obree daaleni buuqe baase!
The people of Jida Seele planted crops
but their farm hedges only grew (inedible) gourds.

The *Hayyu* Jida Seele himself, of the War'jiida clan, was strangled⁶ because he had acted against custom.

It was the maintenance of a common moral order, if necessary by the use of force, which created *nagaa Boorana* "the Peace of the Boorana". That "Peace" required, and requires, active participation by all members and makes every individual responsible for its maintenance at all times (Baxter 1954:13). Serious and persistent disturbers of the "Peace" could be put to death by beating on "the open palm of the hand and in the groin", *haama mudanmuudi*, with a club, *bokku*.⁷

The maintenance of the proper and correct ritual vocabulary, particularly in prayers and blessings, was a prominent feature of the "Peace" (Baxter 1990). For example, when Boorana shared milk with visitors they used ritual speech *hoo miyyu*, "take to the brim-full" whereas others simply said *hoo dubaji, waama duuba injiraani*, which means, "take this one of the future for there is nothing to follow". Boorana used the ritual phrase *saaye shaarami* to speak of milking, whereas others said crudely, "tie-up the legs of these cows and search in them what they can give". A man who wanted to make love to his pregnant wife might use such foul words as;- "I cannot distinguish your front and the rear, just show me where I shall perish".⁸ Such expressions violated Boorana customs and law and therefore the "Peace"

... no matter what the stake of the conflict existing between the Borana and other non-Borana, there should always be harmony among the Borana themselves. Intra-Borana feud is utterly foreign to this idea which fosters a sense, a consciousness of cultural identity so strong that maintenance of cultural uniformity becomes an ever present, domineering fact of life. In this manner the idea-ideal intra-Borana peace has guaranteed the cohesion, and thus the survival, of the Borana in the midst of frequent feuds with non-Borana neighbors. (Fedders & Salvatori 1980:35).

Boorana distinguished two types of existence. One in which *aada seera Boorana* ruled and another in which no proper rules existed and human relations were

⁶ Blood of *hayyu, qallu* or *abba gada* is never spilt by other Boorana.

⁷ Clubs used to execute violators of *aada seera Boorana* were only disposed of at a place called Bokku Luuboma, the club of the *luuba*, situated between Hiddi Lola and Moyale. Interview with Godana Ajaa, June 1978, in Sololo town.

⁸ Interview with Borbor Bulle, January 1993, in Moyale.

characterized by internal strife. The latter was referred to as *laaf' aada seera Daawe*, "the land where the customs and laws of the fools applied".

The religious life of the Boorana was, and still is, concentrated in the "ritual regions", *arda jiila* of Dirre, Badha, Liiban and Obbu. The lowlands of Golbo, roughly the area now in Kenya, where no ritual sites existed, were peripheral and mainly grazed by dry stock, *fora*. Because there were no sacred sites some warrior age-sets argued that it was a land where the laws and customs of fools applied, so they felt free to raid the grazers. Such occurred at Korondille during the *gada* of Sokore Anna (1829/1837) and is known as *gaafa looni Wiila Ch'aama* (the occasion of the cattle of Wiila Ch'aama) and *gaafa looni Kudubi Duke Maammo* (the occasion of the cattle of Kudubi Duke Maammo). The attack was so ruthless that it alienated other Boorana and that warrior set was dissolved.⁹ The *luuba* of Jaldessa Guyo Dabassa (1852–1860) made similar raids against the Gabra Gaara and Boorana grazing around Haar Dooti, Elle, Kuale and Forole. Those who ran to Obbu or other ceremonial grounds were spared. Jaldessa Guyo Dabassa himself became a bandit. His *luuba* was reconstructed by adding people to it from other sets in a process called "adding to the survivors", *baatu iiti basaani*.¹⁰

Inclusion within the "Peace" was open both to individuals and to groups, non-Oromo as well as Oromo, who accepted *aada seera* and recognised the *qallu*. Boorana distinguished themselves from incorporated groups as the Boorana Guutu or *Guutu abba Liiban*, "Guutu the father of Liiban", terms which imply ritual superiority. The Liiban Boorana often refer to themselves as *Sarkamtu*.¹¹ They believe that they are defenders of Boorana identity symbolised by the *guutu*, a braided tuft of hair on the top of the head worn by men from warriorhood until the final culmination of *buufata* (literally "shedding") at *Gadamoji*, entry into retired elderhood (see Legesse 1973). Baxter (1954) has described *guutu* as a symbol of masculinity but it is more and epitomises a man's whole social and economic status as a cattle owner, which is what distinguishes Boorana from Waata (hunter/gatherers). A man without cattle is called *qolle guutu hiikhana*, "a destitute whose *guutu* is unbraided". Such a person cannot perform his social obligations, marry or participate in rituals. In effect he loses his identity as a Boorana. A person cannot be Boorana by birth alone, since becoming stockless can deny that identity (compare Gemetchu's essay). *Boorantiti* has a moral dimension of peaceful well-being, unselfishness and respect for a common law. Violators of those moral standards are like foreigners, *nyaap'a* or perpetual enemies, *sidi*. Individuals who disturb the peace are said to lack *Boorantiti*. *Boorantiti* creates a feeling of belonging, almost bordering on senti-

⁹ Interview with Borbor Bulle, January 1993, in Moyale.

¹⁰ Interview with Oba Sarite Kura, March 1990, in Marsabit.

¹¹ The word *Sarkamtu* derives from *Sarkama* (*Grewia bicolor*), a shrub which produces sweet yellow berries and is common in Liiban. When ripe its berries excite collectors as each tree seems to offer better fruits than the next. The meaning of Liiban itself has been elegantly defined by Bartels (1994:7–8). "... it means the soft of the morning, a light that does not burn ... Libaan is the first born of all countries: before Libaan was there, no rituals were performed".

mentality, about being Boorana. It encapsulates Boorana awareness of their ethnicity.

Incorporation requires adopting *aada seera* and undergoing rituals of transformation. (See essays by Blackhurst and Triulzi.) There are four ways of doing this. The first, for individuals, requires the ceremonial shaving of the applicant's facial hair and the gift to him of a heifer, he is told to "become a clan member with this", *kaanani goosi*. The heifer is given "for him to braid his guutu". The *aada seera* of becoming is called *hiin Ormomsaani*, "to be made Oromo".

The second, by clan or lineage, *gosa*, is when a family or a group of related families affiliate themselves to a particular Boorana clan or sub-clan, in order to acquire access to its resources. The applicants must accept *aada seera Boorana* while they are utilising those resources but may go back to their own way of life when they recross the resource border. Some such groups however may settle among their hosts and become entirely integrated; as did the Rendile of Bach'eelo blacksmiths, *waar' ilmaani Bach'eelo*, during the *gada* of Guyo Gedo (1753-1761).

It is not uncommon for Boorana to establish similar relationships across ethnic and resource borders. The warrior set of Waalle Koke (himself a Dambitu-Jaaro) crossed the waterless Diida Galgalla and joined up with an Ariaal clan called Ilkukuton. Sometimes such a move was forced, as in the commonly cited example of Wako Badhicha and his family who went to the Guji and developed into the Badhi clan.¹² The third is an alliance called *gooli* formed to oppose common enemies. This does not carry access to natural resources. Such alliances may be reinforced through the exchange of ritual materials such as incense, *qumbi*, but participation in *gada* ceremonies is limited to provision of material support, *fiinna*. The Waata (hunters and gatherers) long ago established close clientship ties rooted in ritual obligations with the Boorana (Baxter 1954; Bashuna 1993), but still maintain their own *aada* and appoint their own *hayyu*. The fourth is a type of patron-client relationship common throughout the pre-colonial Horn of Africa, *tiirriso* in Boorana and *shegat* in Somali (Wilding 1985).

The Gabra have maintained the peaceful bond of *Boorantiti* for more than 300 years through inter-marriage, common language (*afaan Boorana*) and exchange of ritual materials. (See Tablino 1980, and in this volume for their social organisation; Schlee 1989, for their early history; and Robinson 1985, for their nineteenth century history). Here I restrict myself to a resource aspect of Boorana/Gabra relations.

Gabra are divided into Gabra Malbe, who presently graze in northern Kenya between the Goro Escarpment and Lake Turkana, and the Gabra Miigo of Dirre. The Boorana/Gabra alliance pre-dates the entry of Boorana Guutu into

¹² Interview with Godana Ajaa, June 1978, in Sololo town.

Liiban. At least once a Gabra headed the alliance when Abdi Maammo Sarale led both into battle. He is remembered in songs of war exploits, *geemu*:

Abdi Maammo Sarale dabalatu duubo diibe
Abdi Maammo Sarale moves despite
the weight of his heavy ceremonial turban.¹³

Gabra depend on camels. Gabra Malbe had their own territory and resources. Gabra Miigo and Boorana have evolved symbiotic resource use and evolved the required socio-political arrangements. But both maintained their own distinctive *aada* and rituals for which Gabra Miigo were periodically harassed by youthful warriors. This did not accord with *Boorantiti*. So to stop such harassment the Boorana assimilated the Gabra Miigo into a patron-client, *tirriiso*, relationship during the *gada* of Jilo Nyencho (1821–1829).

The Gabra Malbe clans formed a peaceful *gosa/gooli* alliance with individual Boorana sub-clans but did not become *tirriiso*.¹⁴ Some Malbe clans, for example those in the Algana phratry, are of Boorana origin (Schlee 1989:137–144) and have Boorana identity (see Tablino in this volume).

The Saakuyye formerly lived independently on Marsabit Mountain, *Saaku*, but in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries were regularly attacked by the Rendille and either dispersed or absorbed. Most sought protection among Boorana (Baxter 1954; and Goto 1972). Many affiliated to the Karayu clan as clients of the *qallu* Afalata Dido (c.1820–1887); they provided him with baggage camels and indispensable giraffe hide milking and water buckets (Baxter 1986c) in return for protection and access to Boorana resources.

Early Contacts with Somali clans

The oral traditions of Boorana demonstrate that their ancestors (at least the majority) were resident in Dirre and Liiban before arrival of Boorana Guutu in the sixteenth century. Boorana Guutu, a small but politically and ritually more powerful group, incorporated the clans of Heero Abba Biiyya and only then did the identity of Boorana proper, as known today, emerge. The assimilation process did not change the rights to key resources of the resident groups. Those who owned wells joined new clans with their own resources. Only the wells owned by the departed Warda were divided among the Boorana clans by the *abba gada*, Goba Alla (1698–1705).

Turton (1975) and Schlee (1984), however, postulate that antecedent to the Oromo the regions of Dirre and Liiban and continuing into Northern Kenya were inhabited by pre-Hawiya Somali cultural groups composed of people who shared a common culture of camel pastoralism. Schlee (1984, 1989:37–38) argues that even though it was Warda '... who drove the first wedge ... and disrupted

¹³ Interview with Godana Ajaa, June 1978, in Sololo town.

¹⁴ Interview with Oba Sarite Kura, March 1990, in Marsabit.

the continuous settlement of PRS [proto-Rendile-Somali] ... it was the Boorana, using their warrior grade, who terminated the dominance of the PRS culture. Turton (1975:531), suggests that the southern expansion of the Boorana met ...with strong resistance, not from Orma who had preceded them but from the Garre ...'. Pease (1928) records the Garre tradition that earlier in the century they had lived in Serar in eastern Arusi country, and that they moved southward to Filtu, where they came in contact with well established Boorana. The evidence available demonstrates that the conflict with Somalis did not begin until the early eighteenth century.

Schlee (1984, 1989) interprets the effects of the Oromo expansion as one in which the Boorana's role was "hegemonic" in nature and which dispossessed the inhabitants and imposed its rules on the population of the Somaloid cultural groups. He further claims (Schlee 1989 and 1994b) that the military attacks on the Somaloid groups had the objective to mutilate to gain trophies of male "genitals" cut from the victims as part of "... a ritualized killer complex" they shared with other Cushites (Schlee 1994a:979 and 1994b:135). This notwithstanding, he concludes that the relationship between Boorana and Somaloid groups was "... characterized by mutual advantages ..." and the period "... is remembered as a period of relative peace ..." (Schlee 1994a:990).

The oral and literary evidence suggest that Boorana were victims of Somali aggression. There was, however, no doubt that the merger of Boorana Guutu with Heero Abba Biiyya created a powerful cultural and political group. The Boorana remember that they were neighbours of Somali clans in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries on their eastern border at Dhadacha Waar' Abi. Contact with Garre Libin (i.e., Garre of the interior) and Somali clans probably increased as trade between the interior and the coast grew.

The group of Somali clans with whom Boorana had the longest, lasting relationships was the Ajuran. According to Cassanelli (1982), the Ajuran Sultanate probably emerged between 1500–1600. At that time Oromo occupied a vast arc of territory bordering the western margins of the Ajuran Sultanate at Kelafo. Cassanelli believes that their presence may have discouraged Oromo expansion into the present day southern Somalia prior to 1500. The decline of Ajuran power in the Middle Shebelle between 1590–1625, following the in migration of the Hawiya, brought changes. The alliance was defeated and scattered by the joint forces of the Giledi, Jido and Bimaal and "... some of the survivors went to Upper Shebelle ... Other Ajuran crossed the Juba" (Cassanelli 1982:94). Some were driven into present day north-eastern Kenya and formed *gosa/gooli* alliances with Warda and Boorana (Dalleo 1975). They were particularly associated with the Jiilitu clan of the Gona moiety (*jille gamooji*) and, to distinguish them from the former, they were known as *Jille Qullulu*, i.e., without *guutu*. They were integrated into the *aada seera Boorana* but continued as Moslems.

During the mid-seventeenth century the Garre Marro, so called to distinguish them from the Garre Libin with whom the Boorana had earlier contacts, moved down the Juba and came in contact with Boorana in Liiban (Dalleo

1975:30–31). They occupied the land to the west of Galaana Dawa in the country called Hoggobi Marro which bordered Dhadacha Waar' Abi. Contacts increased as trade increased

... the interior towns such as Lugh and Bardera served as staging points for the camel caravans travelling between Borana and the coast. To reach Borana caravans from Lugh travelled along the Daua before striking for Dirre and Liban (Dalleo 1975:45–46).

Garre and Ajuran traders brought cloth and household items in exchange for ivory, rhino horns, coffee and salt (Donaldson-Smith 1897). The traders were called *saffaar goolo*, after the hide bags in which they carried their cloth. Each trader established clientship with an influential Boorana family and hence came to be identified as *saffaarticha*, the Somali of family X or family Y. Patrons were responsible for negotiating prices for the trade goods after they had received their own share:

When the goolo arrives, an ox was slaughtered and the blood of the bull sprinkled on it (skin bag) to "cleanse goolo". The raba gada also received part of the goolo as tax, *fiinna* (more accurately 'gifts').¹⁵

Boorana became active in the coastal trade and 'demanded and received permission to send caravans to Lugh in exchange for permission for Somali caravans to trade in their country' (Abir 1970:130). Boorana was the language of trade.

Through trade and intermarriage the Garre gradually got a foothold in Boorana territory and established small settlements. To gain access to key resources they influenced Boorana leaders with gifts, *fiinna*. Some attached themselves to particular clans. Such clan attachments were largely ceremonial and incomers retained their political and religious independence. Among the notable Garre families that settled in Boorana was that of Uruble, who was adopted into the Nonitu clan. He took over the supply of the ceremonial flags (*qoolo faaji*, white flags and *qoollo baqaal*, red flags) used during the *gada* handing over ceremonies after the Heji (Ogaden) had clashed with Boorana. Peaceful trade association with Boorana families and rich gifts to important elders gained Garre access to the *Tula* and other wells in eastern Dirre.

Tula Wells as Territorial Resources

Tula wells, each have a name and an overseer, *konfi*, also called *aana eela*, appointed from amongst themselves by the clan or clans with hereditary rights (Helland 1980; and Cossins 1983:8). (See Box 1.) All wells, including even the

¹⁵ Interview with Roba Bukhura by A. Shongolo in Moyale.

salt crater of *Boqe Soohda*, have *konfi*,¹⁶ who also usually act as *abba herega*, father of the watering rotas. The upkeep of *Tula* wells is arduous and requires extensive co-operation. Some wells, such as Baka Dubati near Yavello, have been closed for more than 300 years due to rock falls (Donaldson 1983; and Wilding 1985) but well rights can never be expunged. If a *konfi* migrates a caretaker is appointed. Many *konfi* of wells in Ethiopia are now resident in Kenya and though their rights are not recognised by governments, they are by Boorana.

Box 1. Names of clans of the *konfi* of *Lae* and *Gof Tula* complexes

<i>Lae Tula</i>	Clan of <i>konfi</i>
Gadulla Qaalla	Digaalu/Mataari
Gadulla Guda	Digaalu/Mataari
Daambe Saaqo	Digaalu/Mataari
Dalayo	Jidda/Maaliyu
Anicha	Jidda/Maaliyu
Iddi Doyo	Dambe/Nonno
Dambicha Jillo Biili	Dambe/Noono
Dambica D'ae (Deera (called <i>guumis Bicho Rae</i>))	Dambe/Noono
<i>Gof Tula</i>	Clan of <i>konfi</i>
Digalticha	Digaalu/Matari
Yaya	Dambe/Nonno
El qulquelle	Dambe/Nonno
Dambicha	Dambe/Nonno
Saffaarticha	Karayu
Baaro	Arusi

The clans which contribute to the upkeep of the wells and share water are said to be *hoola* to each other. Among the Jilitu clan, for example, the Waar' Jidda and Maliyu form an alliance called Jidda-Maliyu, while the Dambitu and Nonnitu form the Dambe-Nonno alliance, and so on. They share in each others water sources and their maintenance, known as *bisaani maala*, water of the dewlap, i.e., from the dewlaps of the bulls which each have contributed to feed the work force that dug and has maintained the wells. Ajuuran have a *gosa* alliance with, and are *hoola* of, the Jidda-Maliyu and hence are unambiguously entitled to *biisani maala*, water of the dew-lap, as the following watering song indicates:

Gulmai abba Roba
Boor Qootoni saffaare
saffaar limanlimse
guya malaati galche.

The metallic (dark-grey) of *abba Roba*
 The grey of Qootto who became *saffaar* (Moslem)
 You made the *saffaar* wait for the second day,
 to coincide with water of the dew-lap.

¹⁶ The *konfi* of the Soodha crater was Qotisu Ukuuba, of the Arusi clan. The Abyssinians confiscated the well when they conquered Boorana. Interview with Boru Bulle Borbor in 1989 by Qalla Wako, in Marsabit town.

Ajuran gained access to other wells, such as the *Tula* wells of Lae and Gof and the *adadi* of Buna, Batalu and Wajir, by using ties of friendship, *jaala* or affinity, *sodha*. On the watering days allocated to them the Ajuran, in turn, provided water to their *hoola* in other Somali clans.

New-comers, including the Degodia in the late nineteenth century, either negotiated with individual *abba herega* or formed client relationships with the Garre, Heji and Ajuran who had already secured access to Boorana water resources. The Somali clans were not expected to own wells in Boorana and thus depended on the good will of the Boorana clans (Goto 1972).

CHALLENGES TO BOORANA POWER IN THE EIGHTEENTH AND THE NINETEENTH CENTURIES

Conflicts with the Laikipia Maasai Alliance

Boorana power was challenged in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries by the Laikipia Maasai/Samburu/Rendille alliance as well as by the Somali clans. Oral traditions recall that during the *gada* of Walle Wachu (1722–1730) an alliance of Korre (Samburu) and Kibia (Laikipia Masai), under the command of their leader Lsiliyo, attacked and occupied the plains of Golbo as far as the Magado crater and Badha Escarpment. They wiped out the people of Dawiti and killed all their horses at a place named *Dambaala Koricha*. A counter attack was led by Gudda Bari Godde and Gudda Miitto Daallo:

Gudda Miitto Daallo, unbraided his Guutu and let his hair grow wild. At the gathering (*koobra*) of the *raba*, he rolled himself over spear shafts which were laid down during the ceremony, crying that “the *Dabaalle*, the nine *Tula* complexes, the horses, the *hayyu*, the *qallu* and the *gada* were being attacked. The Boorana have lost land, livestock and the *aada seera* was being violated”. He asked the *raba* who were in the middle of an important ceremony to abandon it and go into mobilization (*baalbaaleti baa*). The mobilization involved three consecutive *luuba*: the two which had retired and the one in power. The counter attack was massive, comprised of several thousand footmen and hundreds of horse mounted cavalry. The attack was swift, violent and bloody. The battle was so ferocious that a Rendille by the name Halowa opted to become Boorana “rather than being a victim of such ruthless people”.¹⁷

Lsiliyo, the Laikipia Maasai leader, and some of his men were captured.¹⁸ The Boorana were attacked again by the Kibia alliance during the *gada* of Mada Boru Dadoye (1761–1768). This time is remembered as *gaafa kuuta Arballe* or *gaafa rebu Lequme*, the counter attack of Arballe or Lequme. As before they attacked in the plains of Golbo, the Badha Escarpment and threatened Dirre. Sora Dida Qarsa was the *abba gada* elect. Mad’ a Boru Dadoye, the incumbent

¹⁷ Interview with Oba Sarite Kura, April 1991, in Sololo town.

¹⁸ Before his execution Lsiliyo requested that one of his compatriots carry back home “part of his ear” which he had cut off to be given to his father. The request was granted. The expression, *guura jeede Korichi due*, implies that it was an honour to his family for him to die courageously.

abba gada, requested him to counter attack the enemy at Lequme. This resulted in the loss of both the warrior *luba* and all the six *aduulas*. Boorana remember this event by the following:

<i>Boru Mad'ani biitani</i>	Boru is a match with Mad'a
<i>Boorana Boruni biitani</i>	Boorana are a match with Boru
<i>Bobooran raba, Lequme</i>	The grey-brownish <i>raba</i> , are a
<i>laafa badheeni biitani</i> ¹⁹	match with the lost land of Lequme

Conflict with the Korre/Rendille alliance occurred again in the 1880s during the *gada* of Dida Bitata (1876–1883) (also see, Schlee 1984:11; and Sobania 1993:113). Korre attacked in the plains of Golbo at Toi during a period remembered as *gaafa ree Huqa Guyo Korren haate*, the occasion when the *fora* goats of Huqa Guyo were attacked by Korre, and as *gaafa lola Guyo Buute*, the occasion when Guyo Buute (my direct ancestor in the patriline) was raided. The only counter attack of any military significance was the cavalry attack organized by Jaldessa Guyo Dabassa (1852–1860), which ranged as far south as Laisamis, Mt. Njiro, the El Barta plains and the shores of Lake Turkana (Patterson 1909:287; and Goto 1972:65). Conflicts with the Laikipia alliance were short-lived, but those with the Somali clans over resources were persistent and frequent.

Conflicts with Somali Clans

As Barth (1969a) suggests ethnic conflicts are strong at resource borders where competition is intense. Conflicts with Somali clans have mostly been over rights to wells. Intra-clan fights were alien to Boorana who employed peaceful negotiations to gain access to wells. For Somali clans, on the other hand, rights to key resources can only be established and “defended ... by force of arms” (Lewis 1961:3). The evidence suggests that Somali expansion was stimulated largely by their need for scarce grazing and the intense competition between the Somali clans and sub-clans themselves. The right to graze in an area was subject to effective occupation and the final justification was the capacity to defend it against the invaders:

Thus in all cases of contested ownership, claimants lay stress upon the energy, labour and expense involved in their construction. And when not in use wells which are the sole property of individuals are usually covered over ... Yet despite their existence and wide recognition, specific rights to water can only be upheld by force of arms ... While pasture is thus not owned, and clans do not occupy determinate territories at all seasons of the year, usage backed by effective fighting potential ... creates some degree of customary association with particular areas (Lewis 1982:49).

¹⁹ The word *biitaani* literally means “buy”. In the present context it implies that, as Boru could only be matched with Mad'a (as father and son), only the *raaba* (as the army of the Boorana) could be sacrificed for Lequme, the lost land. Such parallelism are common in Boorana sayings. Interview with Borbor Bulle, January 1993, in Moyale town.

Somali clans initially established a vanguard population which accepted clientship status with Oromo hosts. The next phase was to build up their numbers until they could overthrow their hosts. Somali were effective because, rather than organising a concerted operation, the clans each moved in independently from different directions, at different times (Lewis 1965:32). They slowly wore the Boorana down.

Boorana cattle pastoralists were more restricted in use of the range than the camel herding Somali. Cattle pastoralists only moved into the waterless rangelands during the wet season, when surface pools were available, and returned to the well clusters during the dry season. This mode of transhumance left the dry season pastures in favourable condition for Somali camels (Kelly 1984). The Somali clans occupied the "empty land" and then used force to keep out the cattle pastoralists when they tried to return. (A similar process is going on in Isiolo District now. Eds.)

The Darod had reached the Shebelle River by the nineteenth century. Opposition from other Somali clans diverted the Darod line of migration towards the Juba where they came in contact with Boorana (Lewis 1960). The first violent attacks on the Boorana around Lugh were during the *gada* of Guyo Gedo (1753–1761) which were intensified during the *gada* of Sakko Dadacha Gamada (1814–1821) (Wilding 1985:31). The frequency of attacks increased. On the other front, the Ogaden and their allies crossed the Juba where they were raided by the Orma (Warda):

Thus the new Darod invaders encountered a formidable neighbour whom ... [from 1840 onwards] was more expedient to appease than to provoke. Hence having gained their protection, [they became] ... clients and allies of Galla ... As time passed, the Darod movement continued and further Darod clansmen entered the area, sought alliance with the Galla, and crossed the river to join their kinsmen. Thus the strength of the Darod immigrants under Galla protection gradually increased (Lewis 1965:29–30).

When the Oromo were struck by a severe epidemic of smallpox the Ogaden took the opportunity to inflict heavy casualties. They drove the Warda from Biskaya (the place of battles) and Afmadu, which had been the latter's central power base for many centuries (Turnbull 1957), and drove them across the Tana River. The balance of power began to shift in favour of the Somalis and their vanguard began attacking Pokomo and Orma in the 1850s, reaching a peak in the 1870s (Bunger 1973:22).

On the eastern and western front the Darod raided the Warda/Orma in 1839 at Urai, to the south-west of Mandera, and defeated them at El Wak, Gaba Gol and Seraro the following year. By 1848 Somali raiding parties had reached Wajir Bor. The fate of the Warda was sealed by the joint Boorana, Ajuran and the Garre attack which forced them to retreat beyond Lugh-Ferrandi on the east and the Tana River in the south (Goto 1972:50). In 1870, the Warda Orma were almost destroyed by Darod led by Hassan Liwan and Hassan Barjo at the battles of Kokan Gobu and Tulu Gangesa, near Garsen

(Bunger 1973:62). "With the passage of time, several more sections of the Somali came into the scene of the conflict and in 1872, the Marehan, after crossing the Juba river, moved against the Borana" (Goto 1972:53). By the middle of the nineteenth century, under persistent Darod attacks, Boorana power in the Dawa region was waning.

Boorana had established and maintained peaceful trade with Garre since the middle of the eighteenth century (Goto 1972:46). But, with the growing attacks on the Boorana by the Darod, the position taken by the Garre, especially those on the borders with Boorana, became ambivalent.

Donaldson-Smith (1897) in the mid-nineteenth century saw the evidence of Somali attacks. On one occasion "... just as [his party] reached the water ... they saw 150 Ogaden Somalis on ponies coming down ... about to cross the water [of Shebelle] to raid the Gallas (Oromos)". Along the rivers Web, Ganana and Dawa he met cultivating groups of Somalis. About 150 miles from the Ganana his caravan came across the Garre (whom he called Garre Gallas) divided into Garre Marro (near the river), Garre Badi and Garre Libin. At Aimola [between Liiban and the Ganana river] he met the Saakuyye/Boorana. He entered Boorana country proper at the valley of Sankura where he met villages of Gabra [Miigo] in El Dere and near Mount Jima "... settlements of Hawiya Somalis ... who had migrated from Bardera within the last sixteen years" (1871) under the protection of Abbafilato [Afalata Dido, the *qallu* of Karayu].

There is a twist in this conflict. While the forward immigrant Garre groups continued to increase, the rear groups were attacking the Boorana on the eastern borders. The issue was raised by Liban Wata Nafuri, a retired and ageing *abba gada*, during the Assembly held during the *gada* of Guyo Boru Ingule (1885–1891). He pointed out the consequences that a peaceful invasion by the Somali would bring. His warning was ignored on the grounds that the presence of Garre was beneficial to *raba gada* and the *qallu*!

Then a series of events with dire consequences for Boorana power occurred. These were the internal conflict of *T'iilo Waraaba*, the rinderpest and smallpox epidemics, the Abyssinian and British annexation and division of Booranalana.

The internal conflict of *T'iilo Waraaba* was between the Karayu and the Oditu, the two *qallu* clans, over the election of officers during the *gadas* of Dida Bitata (1876–1883) and of Guyo Boru Ingule (1885–1891). The conflict put *The Peace* in disarray and assisted the Ogaden, whose migration southward was gathering momentum, to force Boorana from the area between Lugh and Wachille/Web (Wilding 1985:31). No sooner were the Karayu and Oditu reconciled during the *gada* of Liban Jaldessa (1891–1899) than the virulent rinderpest epidemic, *ch'iina tiite guraacha* (Baxter 1975:221), destroyed the Boorana pastoral economy and resulted in mass starvation. Some survivors even ate donkey and horse meat. Boorana villages disappeared from the area between Lugh-Ferrandi and Web. The *Tula* wells fell into disuse and large areas of the range became unoccupied. The Boorana social fabric disintegrated and the *aada seera* was terribly weakened. The horrors of this period are still discussed after 100 years!

The Somali, whose economy was based on camels and small stock, were not so badly affected and they occupied the grazing lands from which the Boorana population had disappeared (Wilding 1985:31). The Gabra, Saakuyye and Ajuran alliance endured, with their camels and sheep and goats largely unaffected. But, as the Boorana became stockless and militarily weakened, the Darod (Heji) took to looting camels from Gabra and Saakuyye. The Somali also aimed to Islamize the Boorana *qallu* by force (Goto 1972).

Three major wars were fought. The first conflict was in the *Tula* area at Dongorso, near Lae, where the Ogaden quarantined the camel booty they had looted from the Gabra and the Saakuyye, the period remembered as *gaaf Saffaar Dongorso*. A second was fought around Moyale (*gaaf saffaar Moyale*) where the Somalis were defeated by the Boorana cavalry under the joint leadership of Guyo T'uuye and Kulula.²⁰ The third, remembered as *gaafa Haar Rumicha*, 'the period of the dam of vultures', was fought about 15 km from Wajir on the way to El Wak (Goto 1972). But these victories did not diminish the Somali pressure.

Colonization set off shock waves of immigrants throughout the Horn. Mooro Uchuma, the prophet who had opened the way for the Boorana Guutu to enter Dirre and Liiban, had three centuries earlier prophesied that the unrestricted occupation of Dirre and Liiban by the Boorana would last for only nine generations; which was confirmed when Minilik brutally incorporated most of Booranalnd into Abyssinia during the *gada* of Liban Jaldesa (1891–99). The Abyssinians used the Sabho and Gona *qallu* (Gedo Jillo and Guyo Anna), whose traditional roles were strictly ritual, as agents and tax collectors with the titles of *Fitawrari*. This bypassed the electoral *gada* system (See Holcomb and Ibsa 1990, for the Ethiopian colonial debate).

The later demarcation of the Ethiopian/Kenyan frontier physically divided the Boorana between the two countries and, in some instances, made Boorana clients at their own wells and closed grazing to them. Fixing the frontiers between the colonial powers (i.e. the British, the Abyssinians and later the Italians) created problems for the inhabitants. In 1902–3 the first Anglo-Abyssinian border commission established what came to be known as the "red-line", which defined the borders of Ethiopian jurisdiction. A second commission (1908–9) established the 'Gwynne line or the blue-line', which delimited the areas under the jurisdiction of the British (Farson 1950:261). Herders were forced to water their stock 'north of the red-line but live south of the Blue-line' (Imperato 1983:367). Loss of jurisdiction over key water resources ended the political power base of the Boorana. (See Helland's essay.)

Boorana came under increasing pressure from Somali despite the efforts by the government of Kenya to establish a "Galla- Somali line". The Garre and Ajuran found it advantageous to move out of the "Peace of the Boorana" and to attach themselves to the Ogaden and Darod (Fowler 1924:32, PC/NFD4/3/10).

²⁰ Interview with Roba Bukhura, Moyale by A. Shongolo.

While the colonial powers were drawing up frontiers the Darod were over-running the Boorana grazing in Buna and Batalu. Many Degodia became clients of Ajuran. By 1909 pressure on Boorana at Wajir had become intense (Reece 1931, PC/NFD4/3/1). The British agent Phillip Zaphiro ordered the Boorana to evacuate Wajir and move to Buna. Garre and Ajuran defected to the Ogaden and Darod (Fowler 1924:32, PC/NFD4/3/1). Boorana now had to 'wait for admission to their own wells' (Schlee 1984:12). Deteriorating security forced many Boorana out of their traditional grazing areas.

The colonial policy of the separation of ethnic groups and the exclusive assignment of resources was applied inconsistently, but mostly it was at variance with traditional practices and disadvantaged the Boorana. The restrictions made the articulation of individual ethnic identities more assertive. (See Abdullahi Shongolo's essay.)

CONCLUSION

The Peace of Boorana attempted to create a common social order for diverse groups. Maintenance of common customs and laws became crucial in the allocation of resources. Boorana, as the "hosts", used them to assert their political power. *Aada seera Boorana* was accommodative of different cultural practices only as long as they did not violate the tenets of *Boorantiti*. The provision, or sharing, of ritual materials, as with Gabra and Waata, established moral obligations on all parties based on reciprocity. But, in the case of Garre the provision of the ceremonial flags had no religious significance since they were Moslems nor did it have reciprocity. To Garre it was only a transaction and a means to gain a foot-hold in Boorana territory and expand their own resource borders. The alliance with the Ajuran was military but integration was far better than that with Garre.

The irony of the Peace of the Boorana was that it worked only as long as the "population of the guests" was lower than that of the hosts, so that they were able to maintain the status quo by controlling access to resources. The newcomers accused their Boorana hosts of creating and applying laws and customs, which they alone fully understood, to regulate access to resources to their own advantage. They argued that resource use was now defined either by the laws of the new states or by force of arms. To Boorana such views were "immoral", since they saw their laws as designed to protect resources for a common good. This was not to be as the Somali exploited to the full the conflict along resource borders for survival and for political domination.

The Political Viability of Borana Pastoralism

A Discussion of Some Features of the Political System
of the Borana Pastoralists of Southern Ethiopia

Johan Helland

INTRODUCTION

In this paper I want to examine some political and military aspects of Borana pastoralism, with a particular view to the maintenance of viability in the pastoral adaptation. Discussions of the viability of pastoral systems frequently focus on economic and ecological relationships, often taking the political aspects for granted. On the one side, this neglect concerns the political system of the pastoral society itself, in the sense of the internal distribution of power and authority, arrangements for public decision-making, resolution of conflicts, the maintenance of law and order and so on. Political viability also concerns the relationships of a pastoral society to its neighbours in a wider region, involving issues such as the security of the members of a pastoral society, the relationship between competing groups and to the state. An understanding of political and military factors which define these relationships are as important to an understanding of what is currently happening to pastoralists and pastoral societies as are the more commonly debated issues of the economic viability of pastoral households and the various ecological concerns which may be subsumed under the term "the overgrazing syndrome".

VIABILITY IN PASTORALISM

Since Derrick Stenning's famous paper on household viability in Fulani pastoralism (Stenning 1958), the concept of viability has been an important tool for the analysis of pastoral societies. Barth's classic analysis of Basseri pastoralism (Barth 1964) for instance, demonstrates fully the utility of the concept for grasping the highly dynamic character of pastoralism and to elucidating the relationships between individual management units and the gross features of the Basseri tribe. The concept is used to describe the basic economic units of a pastoral system, in which consumption of herd products must be balanced against saving and reinvestment so that the resources which are needed for continued production can be made available. An important factor needed for continued

production is human labour. Thus, in the analysis of a pastoral society, the viability concept commonly refers to the economic situation of the management units and concerns the balance which must be struck between the product extracted from the animal herds (milk, meat, blood, wool, hair) and the demands of the consumers who depend on the herd (the stock owners and their dependants). In addition to the basic subsistence requirements of the management unit, the herd product must also ensure the social reproduction of the labour force of the management unit which is essential to the continued welfare and continued production of the herd, by protecting it from predators, watering it from deep wells, providing health care and seeking out better pastures.

The viability of the individual pastoral management units thus depends on how management decisions succeed in maintaining the balance between production and consumption at a level which provides the members of the unit with an acceptable standard of living. One should note that "acceptable" in this context involves far more than an adequate diet; an acceptable standard of living must be based on cultural valuations set in a matrix of social relationships. The viability threshold of the household may thus be pushed far above the "energy balance" involved in maintaining minimal food security. Furthermore, the social arrangements which structure relations with neighbouring societies (e.g. the maintenance of the peace) may encompass favourable exchange relations (cf. Gufu Oba's essay). Thus, if pastoral products are in high demand and highly priced relative to other agricultural products like grain in a regional marketing system, the subsequent net subsidy to the pastoral economy (in terms of food calories) will depress the viability threshold.

The viability concept has also been used in other ways, e.g. to express the ecological relationships on which pastoralism depends. These relationships are primarily articulated at a systemic level as the aggregate outcome of management decision in many management units. In the study of pastoralism the most obvious and most commonly used measure of ecological viability involves the balance between the numbers of animals and the available pasture. Viability in this sense primarily concerns energy flows between the trophic levels in an ecological system and may be expressed as a certain ratio between the primary production of the pastures and the nutritional demands of the herds. But discussions of this aspect of the viability concept must also account for a number of intervening variables which modify a picture which initially seems clear-cut and precise. Ecological viability depends, in addition to the net primary productivity of an area of rangelands, on herd composition, herding strategies, migration strategies and other buffer mechanisms, e.g. livestock loan and exchange networks, credit and trade networks and so on.

It has become increasingly clear that a discussion of economic and ecological viability in pastoralism must be based on precise, detailed and site-specific information which so far, to a large extent, has been lacking. How important this is has recently been brought out in the renewed examination of the "overgrazing syndrome" (cf. Behnke et al. 1993), i.e. the notion that pastoralists

regularly exceed the viability ratio and thus destroy the environment on which they depend. The new perspectives brought to bear on African pastoralism, particularly in the driest parts of the African rangelands, emphasise the great degree of heterogeneity of the resource base and the great variability in the exploitation patterns. Much of the conventional wisdom with respect to rangelands dynamics, rangelands management and the options for rangelands development is being questioned. In the driest areas, for instance, the accepted relationship between animal numbers, exploitation pressure and destruction of the range resources seems to be invalidated by new research on the dynamics of the vegetation communities and pasture production. In the driest areas, the vegetation communities composed of highly resilient annual species are actually very well adapted to periodic and intense exploitation. Regrowth depends directly on the rains but has been shown to be comparatively insensitive to high grazing pressures.

BORANA PASTORALISM

In the moister parts of the African rangelands, however, in which Borana pastoralism is set, the maintenance of ecological viability in pastoral systems seems to depend to a larger degree on keeping animal numbers below the limits for sustainable use. In these areas, over-exploitation of the pasture resources has a negative feedback on future pasture production. The pastoral system must therefore contain some mechanism to control numbers and population densities of both humans and livestock. It has been hypothesized that pastoral systems which depend on livestock rearing only actually display systemic properties which adjust population densities against ecological carrying capacities by shedding those parts of the population which have the greatest difficulty in maintaining viable households and forcing them into other adaptations or extinction. It has also been suggested that raiding, warfare and territorial expansion have played an important role in this respect, particularly in Eastern Africa (cf. Haaland 1977 a & b).

Compared to other pastoral areas in East Africa with similar natural conditions, the Borana rangelands have usually (i.e. up to quite recently) been assessed to be exceptionally good. Given that the Borana have occupied these areas for at least four hundred years, the implication is that the Borana pastoral production system contains a mechanism to solve the problems of growth in pastoralism, brought about by the natural propensity of animal populations to grow, particularly in response to favourable conditions. I have earlier argued (Helland 1982) that the limited number of wells, with the capacity to water only a limited number of animals in the normal three-day cycle, have kept animal numbers in the Borana pastoral system at sustainable levels. Since the wells were the only reliable source of water, animals in excess of the watering capacity of the wells would die!

Population Growth

Natural growth rates of the Borana human population were previously thought to be low, with estimates indicating a population increasing by between 1–1,5 per cent per year. The factual basis of these estimates is unclear, and there is no precise knowledge about how and why this low rate has changed, if this indeed is the case. Recent field studies, however, indicate that the rate of natural increase now may be estimated at over 3 per cent p.a. (Lindtjørn 1991). The most immediate cause of this increase seems to be a high fertility rate combined with modest death rates. It is possible to speculate that the population growth rate has increased since the Borana publicly decided (*inter alia* after pressure from the Ethiopian government) to give up the practice of infanticide¹ of children born out of synchronization with the *gada* cycle, but there is no independent evidence in this regard. The abolition of infanticide may, of course, also be seen as a lowering of the mortality rate and reduced mortality rates are usually the direct explanation for increasing population growth. But the cause of apparent reduction of the mortality rates must probably be sought elsewhere. There is no doubt that the Borana areas have become much more closely integrated in the Ethiopian nation-state since the Ethiopian revolution of 1974. Major consequences of this integration have been an improved infrastructure, better communications, improved health services and the more or less continuous distribution of famine relief since the great famine of 1973/74. These factors have probably all contributed to increase the natural growth rate by reducing mortality rates. Given the lack of data on which to evaluate the situation prior to incorporation, it is difficult to assess if or how much the situation has actually changed. One definite effect of famine relief, however, is the retention in the pastoral system of a number of households which otherwise would have been removed. In this context it must also be remembered that famine relief in a pastoral society always implies a positive contribution to herd growth, since reduced consumption of herd products always implies reinvestment of this product in the herd. Hence, economic subsidies from the outside have most probably lowered the economic viability threshold in Borana pastoralism over the past 20 years or so.

Events in the Borana areas over the last century (since they were first visited by the American traveller Donaldson Smith in 1895) are poorly recorded. Most of the attention in the literature has been on the demarcation of the border between Ethiopia and Kenya and the associated macro-political security issues; the condition of the Borana and of Borana pastoralism is only mentioned in passing. Borana oral tradition of course mentions major events like the rinderpest and smallpox epidemics of the 1880s, Emperor Menelik's occupation of the Borana lands, the Italian occupation and so on, in addition to several bad drought periods and famines. But Borana history is also silent on how these various events have affected the Borana system of pastoralism.

¹ In practice most of these children were probably given up for adoption by other groups, e.g. the Waata.

Regulatory Mechanisms

One must therefore speculate that the ceiling on the number of animals set by the traditionally restricted availability of stock water was maintained by the inability of the Borana to increase significantly the supply of water. This could have been caused by difficulties in mobilizing the necessary resources (in terms of manpower and supplies) to dig new wells or at least to re-excavate collapsed wells. A ceiling on the number of animals would clearly imply a limit on the number of people which could be maintained. It is not clear, however, how such a ceiling would articulate with the individual units. I have earlier argued that the resources needed to participate in the politics of the well council and in the operation and maintenance of the wells contributed to raise the viability threshold of the Borana management units (*warra*), causing those who fell below the threshold to enter a downward spiral of poverty, clientship and destitution, eventually being forced out of pastoralism. There is not yet enough information available, however, to corroborate this argument which outlines a *density-dependent* regulatory mechanism in Borana pastoralism. There is some evidence of density-dependent effects, such as reduced milk production in the livestock sector, occurring as the herds are reconstituted after a severe drought (Coppock 1993:53) but how these effects articulate with other parts of the system to regulate the underlying problem of increasing human population densities is not clear!

Irrespective of the importance of a density-dependent mechanism, it is known, that *density-independent* factors have also been important in Borana pastoralism. Animal and human disease epidemics have restrained growth rates and occasionally reduced the populations significantly. Insecurity and raiding from neighbouring groups have also taken their toll, but it is not known if the Borana overall have lost or gained livestock through the mutual raiding which is a feature of the region. Raiding may also have contributed to increase mortality rates, but since the effect of raiding in this respect was biased towards the male population, the net effect in terms of population growth was probably modest. And it must be remembered that the Borana rangelands are susceptible to drought even if traditionally the pasture resources have been comparatively abundant. There is no doubt that drought has been (and still is) a prominent factor in Borana pastoralism and that drought has contributed to depress animal population growth, primarily by driving the calf mortality rate as high as 90 per cent and reducing calving rates in the year following a drought (Cossins & Upton 1988:123). The death due to drought of 45 per cent of all mature cows over an 18-month period has been recorded (Coppock, *op.cit.*, 52; Donaldson 1986:38). The impact of drought on the human population would therefore have been profound, particularly before markets, imported grain and large-scale famine relief became easily accessible, following the infrastructure developments after 1974.

POLITICAL VIABILITY OF BORANA PASTORALISM

Thus, the political viability of Borana pastoralism involves at least two issues. On the one hand there are issues pertaining to conditions within Borana, which may be epitomized by the *nagaayia boorana*—"The Peace of the Borana", which involves the orderly running of public affairs and the non-violent settlement of disputes and conflict. It is organisational features such as these which distinguish Borana pastoralism from other pastoral systems in the region. On the other hand, political viability also involves issues of security, competition and the protection of crucial resources like the wells.

It is proposed here that economic and ecological viability in Borana pastoralism rest on the maintenance and operation of the well complexes in the central Borana rangelands. (See Gufu's essay.) Hence, the ability of the Borana social system to mobilize resources, to organize large groups of people over prolonged periods of time, to make orderly and legitimate decisions on access to and utilization of the wells is of central importance. These features of Borana society are also central political issues in Borana local politics. Thus, political viability in this sense concerns the contributions made by the political processes in Borana society to the upkeep of the fundamental economic activity on which Borana society depends. The resources which are at stake and the decisions which are made are inextricably connected to the basic preconditions for pastoralism in Borana. One may thus propose that without the Borana political system the Borana well complexes cannot be maintained; without the wells the Borana model of pastoralism cannot be sustained and significant changes in the pastoral production system will follow. This will, in turn, have significant repercussions in Borana society.

The *Gada* System

The Borana are rightly famous for being one of the few, if not the only, Oromo society in which a *gada* system remains virtually intact. The structural complexities of the Borana *gada* system have been explored by several authors (cf. Asmarom Legesse 1973; Baxter 1978; Haberland 1963 and Bassi in this volume) and has been quite well described. I shall make no attempt here to make yet another presentation of the *gada* system or to render full justice to the debate concerning the various aspects of the *gada*, but only point to a few of the most salient features. The main area of disagreement is over interpretations of the meaning aspects of the *gada*. Asmarom Legesse interpreted the *gada* system to be a politico-military system (although by no means exclusively so) with strong democratic elements, manifested through the designation of clan and lineage representatives to take part in the various *gada* observances as the cycle of *gada* events unfolds, and through the peaceful and orderly succession of *abba gadas* at fixed intervals. The clan and lineage representatives fundamentally represent their *generation* (all living members of a particular generation will here be called

a "generation set", while the term *luba* includes everybody of the same generation, including those dead or not yet born) and are vested with the responsibility of discharging the obligations of the *gada*, which fundamentally consist of a series of public rites which must be performed in an 8-year cycle. The *gada* also involves a cycle of rites to be performed by the individual, preferably together with his own *luba*. The unfolding of the 8-year cycle of rituals determines rituals undertaken by other generation sets as well, most significantly in the "father" generation which undertakes the spectacular *gadamoji* retirement rites as well as in the "son" generation. The chronology of the *gada* cycle also determines events in generation sets placed in any of the four other series (the *gogessa*) into which the Borana generations are ordered.

A major problem in the analysis of the *gada* system concerns the rules governing the recruitment to the *luba*. The creation of new *luba* is structurally determined by the chronology of the *gada*, so that the "son" generation set is opened for recruitment 40 years after the "father" generation was opened. But the period of procreation for a Borana male may span a longer period of time, partly in purely biological terms, but also partly due to cultural features such as polygyny, the levirate and the distinction made between biological and social fatherhood. A man may thus bear sons even after he is dead, which means that the age span within the "son" generation may be great. Furthermore, the discrepancy between the "structural age" of the *luba* and the biological age of *luba* members will be amplified over the generations.

All Borana belong to a *luba*, but a large part of the population are born into their respective *luba* too late to take part in the public *gada* observances when their *luba* is charged with this responsibility. People born into the *luba* after it has completed its obligations in the *gada* cycle are known as *ilman jarsa*—"the sons of old men", in distinction to the *ilman korma*—"the sons of bulls" who are born prior to this point in time. The problem which Asmarom Legesse discussed quite thoroughly in terms of the stability of the *gada* system, is that because of the recruitment rules the proportion of *ilman jarsa* in the Borana population is increasing. If the *luba* is seen as a politico-military formation which holds *political* power during the eight years in which it is responsible for the *gada*, the implication is that a large part of the Borana population is excluded from political and military participation. This is of course not very democratic, and in military terms it would be rather foolish.

There is no evidence, however, that the *ilman jarsa* in any way are second-class citizens in Borana society. The *ilman jarsa* perform the individual rites of the *gada* with chronological reference to some other *luba* and may even take part in the 8-year *gada* cycle where certain positions (known as *hayu garba*) are either open to or reserved for members of generations other than the one responsible for the cycle. With respect to the ritual requirements, the *ilman jarsa* are not really disadvantaged, since their *luba* at an earlier stage have discharged their obligations properly and the individual rites may be performed at any convenient time. The *gada* does not really concern the pragmatic requirements in-

volved in military defence or participation in the public affairs of Borana society. Although all students of Borana society will be indebted to Asmarom Legesse for the rich ethnography of his work on the *gada*, it is very difficult to share his interpretation of the *gada* as a political system, both in a historical as well as in a contemporary context. It is interesting to note, however, that the publication of Asmarom Legesse's book coincided with the public turmoil which culminated in the Ethiopian revolution, and the "democracy" of the *gada* system seemed to present a ready-made, alternative political paradigm to the decaying imperial order. In a contemporary context, these ideological aspects continue to play a significant role.

Baxter provides an alternative interpretation of the *gada* as being concerned with "an exhausting ritual burden" rather than with political power. The absence of independent evidence that the *gada* actually had any instrumental political functions (and there are no ethnographic reports to this effect) led Baxter to conclude that the *gada* is primarily a cognitive system. "The *gada*", he argues, "represents in an idealised form what social relationships should be through a four-generational paradigm. In ascending order these are: a generation of non-responsible infants, one of irresponsible warriors, one of politically and economically responsible elders and one of economically non-responsible but ritually very responsible retired elders. *Gada* epitomises what social relationships should be, not what they are" (1978:155-156). None the less, the *gada* does involve real people involved in activities which obviously are of great concern to them. Many people take part in the celebration of the rites, a lot of resources are mobilized to support the *luba* as it discharges its responsibilities and the various events of the *gada* generate a lot of interest. But Baxter argues convincingly that the *gada* is only very indirectly related to the political aspects of Borana society. The most pragmatic evidence offered by Baxter is the simple fact that neither of the two colonial powers of the region "have utilised the *gada* as a basis for indirect rule or for local government. Indeed it is doubtful if administrators have even been aware of its existence. I suggest that a major reason for the survival of *gada* has been its very lack of political visibility. It has not had either to buckle under or to oppose, but merely to continue" (178).

Baxter's thorough discussion of the of the Borana *gada* system allows him to sum up the alternative interpretation quite neatly: "For Boran it has served as (a) an organised way of ensuring that there is always a responsible segment of the nation responsible for maintaining proper relations with God, (b) as an organised way of ensuring that every man has the opportunity of a fulfilled ritual life while also fulfilling his obligations to the nation. It offers its own rewards" (178).

The Political System

Although it is very difficult to see how the rules of the *gada* system can be articulated in a political system which is sustainable over any period of time, its most important political function is probably that it invests those men who seek *gada* positions and their associated lineages with considerable prestige. Those individuals who in this process have been formally designated to represent their *luba* are known as *hayu* and when they have completed the *gada* obligations they are collectively known as the *lichu* or "horsewhips" of Borana. The *lichu* will gradually build individual reputations as wise men, who are intimately familiar with the *ada-sera Borana* (the customs and laws of the Borana), whose words carry weight in all public assemblies, which may be convened on the basis of the clan or on the basis of proximity. The *lichu* are expected to participate actively in all public affairs, to counsel, arbitrate and settle disputes. The authority of an old, well-established *lichu* extends throughout his own clan, but is also effective within the general area in which he happens to reside. It is important to note, however, that this influence does not derive directly from having taken part in the *gada*, but depends rather on the time-consuming and gradual process of gaining a personal reputation. Several other factors, in addition to an involvement and familiarity with the *gada*, are necessary in this process.

At the time when the *hayu* are selected to take up the *gada* obligations, they each appoint a small number of *jallaba* in consultation with the elders of their clan. The *hayu* (the future *lichu*) represent a first tier in the political system, but the *jallaba* are probably the more important political operatives. They are appointed with an eye to personal qualities (in which the fortunes and reputation of their lineage carry considerable weight) as well as the territorial distribution of clan members. Borana clans are not localized, so the *jallaba* of any particular clan, including those appointed by the *hayu* of other *luba*, should be reasonably well distributed throughout the Borana lands. The *lichu* and the *jallaba* are generically known as *abba Kae* (fathers of the meeting place) and are collectively supposed to oversee the welfare of the members of their clans. They convene meetings to discuss any matter of public concern and any Borana with a grievance or a problem will first approach a *jallaba* of his clan (preferably his lineage) for help.

Conflicts between Borana should be solved peacefully and the maintenance of internal peace is a strongly expressed ideal in Borana public life. The public meeting is the usual mechanism for upholding the peace and such meetings are called by the *abba Kae* to discuss virtually any topic of interest or concern. Depending on the matter at hand, however, the meeting may be called on the basis of territory (*kora Deedaa*) or clan (*kora gosaa*). Anybody with an opinion has the right to be heard and as the meeting evolves the senior men present will gradually formulate a consensus of the meeting. The rhetorical and argumentative skills and reputation of the *lichu* who embark on this exercise are crucial. If the meeting concerns individual conflicts and one of the litigants is not satisfied,

he may ask for the opinion of some *hayu* not present, thus postponing the decision to another meeting.

Such public meetings are well suited to solve conflict. In Borana they are also able to reach collective management decisions, most significantly with respect to water. Water is a scarce resource and thus a major controlling factor as far as the fortunes of the Borana herds are concerned. Meetings to discuss water distribution rotas in the wells as well as operational issues such as labour requirements and contributions to well maintenance are called regularly throughout the dry season which is the main season for well use. These well council meetings depend on the same procedures and the same sense of legitimacy as a meeting called to resolve a specific issue. The well council meetings, in effect, distribute resources which are crucially important to pastoralism. Furthermore, the operation and maintenance of the wells depend entirely on the orderly decision-making process in the well councils and the general acceptance by all responsible Borana of these decisions as legitimate expressions of Borana jurisprudence.

The most important meeting, involving the largest number of people from the clans, is known as the *kora debanu* (meeting of/about wealth). A limited number of *abba Kaee* within a clan are appointed by the *kora debanu* to call this meeting which could involve hundreds of people. Only the most serious and intricate cases affecting the clan members reach this meeting, which also is the ultimate arbiter within the clan in matters of compensations and public collections of animals to assist or restock unfortunate members of the clan. An individual may ask his clan for assistance to solve a large variety of problems, from assistance in obtaining a wife or in adopting a son to gifts of stock to replenish decimated herds. The *jallaba* will screen the problems, however, and try to find solutions at a lower level in the system before they reach the *kora debanu*. A problem may thus take a long time to reach the *kora debanu* because these large meetings are not held very frequently. But a decision of the *kora debanu* carries the full coercive authority of the clan and the ultimate sanction of a recalcitrant person being declared to "be without clan". Only cases of extraordinary complexity and importance will be passed on to the ultimate high court of Borana society—the *gumi Gayo* (see Asmarom Legesse 1973:93–98 and Abdullahi Shongolo 1994).

THE MAINTENANCE OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

This, the "real" political system of the Borana, has been maintained in the Ethiopian parts of the Borana lands up to the present time. It has succeeded in maintaining the social order of the Borana and the contributions which this social order makes to Borana pastoralism, most significantly in terms of a secure and stable supply of water in the dry season. Over the last century or so, however, this political system has come under direct challenge from two external

sources. In the colonial scramble for this particular corner of Africa, the two colonial powers of the region divided the Borana lands between themselves, in a process which met with virtually no opposition from the Borana. The Borana political system seems to have met this challenge by submitting and adapting to a superior force. The incorporation of the Borana into the colonial state implied an increased extraction of resources in the form of tribute and tax, but the Borana production system seems to have been robust enough and productive enough to sustain this additional drain up to quite recently. The persistence of Borana society under colonial rule, with what seems to have been a minimum of internal disruption and disturbance, probably owes a lot to the fact that the Borana submitted so quickly and so peacefully. Under the circumstances it was probably the wisest possible strategy in terms of the political viability of Borana society.

The Colonial Challenge

Menelik laid claim to the Borana areas, it seems, as a matter of strategy to counter the British influence in eastern Africa rather than with a view to the Borana areas themselves. Although there are parts of Borana which are suitable for arable agriculture there can be no doubt that the Ethiopian colonizers at the time saw Borana as unsuitable for settlement and normal colonization. The first colonial incursions into the Borana lands probably took place in 1896, when Asfaw Dargé, the son of *ras* Dargé, the ruler of Arsi, led an expedition/raiding party into Liban. Asfaw Dargé may have set up the first garrison *ketema* at Arero, but was ordered by his father to return to Bale. The incorporation of the Borana lands into the Ethiopian empire had begun, however, and up to the Italian occupation of Ethiopia in 1936 the Borana areas were a fief in the Ethiopian feudal system. The Borana areas were granted to one of Menelik's most famous generals and later Minister of War, *fitawrari* Hapte Georgis, in recognition of his services and valour at the famous battle of Adua in 1896. After the rains in 1897 *dejazmach* Wolde Gabriel, one of his retainers, quick-marched a military column from Addis Ababa to Sodda where they met with a large gathering of Borana elders. The Borana offered no resistance and agreed to pay tribute, although *dejazmach* Wolde Gabriel returned north again after only a few days, perhaps to avoid a confrontation with Lord Delamere's expedition from Berbera to Nairobi which passed a small distance to the east within the same week (Turton 1970:269 ff.). The Borana still tell stories about the local version of the *gabbar* system for extracting tax and tribute. Further north, in the agricultural areas, this system was based on share-cropping contracts between the feudal retainer, who was given land grants by his lord, and his tenants. In the pastoral areas of Borana, however, each *neftegna* (rifleman) soldier-settler was allocated a number of Borana families who were obliged to supply him with

corvee labour and material contributions like livestock, water, firewood, honey and game products.

The lack of any form of resistance on the part of the Borana to the Ethiopian occupation is remarkable. Hodson, who was the British consul along the Ethio-Kenyan border from 1914 onwards, gives the following explanation:

The Boran are very quiet and inoffensive and never give any trouble. Consequently, both Europeans and Abyssinians generally despise them as cowards, but personally I consider this judgement most unfair. In the days of spears, the Boran were very warlike and more than held their own in battle with neighbouring tribes. Then the Abyssinians came armed with rifles and shot down the hapless Boran like rabbits. Being by nature a philosophical people, the Boran soon saw the uselessness of resisting the Abyssinian hordes. Nowadays a single Abyssinian can go to any big Boran village and get what he wants for the asking—not because the Boran are cowards but simply because they lack the means of resistance. After many years of subjection, this passive role has become second nature to them (Hodson 1927:43).

Zaphiro, a Greek trader appointed Border Agent by the British, gives a slightly different story in a report written a few years earlier:

When F. Hapta Giorgis, seven years ago, came to Borana, the Borana people gave up their country to the Abyssinians without any fight. The cause of their doing so was that when Bottego, eleven years ago, came to Borana, the Borana at Karayu tried to kill him and take his goods. Until then they did not know the effect of guns. They came, hundred of them, to Karayu, and Bottego was obliged to kill about 150 of them; the others went away. Since then they have a horror when they see guns, and especially a white man. Seeing that the Abyssinians had guns, and fearing to be killed, they gave up their country (Zaphiro 1906:15).

Actually, the real culprit was neither Bottego nor the Abyssinians but the American explorer Donaldson Smith whose camp was attacked by the Borana on April 8, 1895. According to oral tradition in Borana this event took place at Dukke Higo, not far from the Higo wells, at a small hill even today called the Goro Daara ("the hill of ashes"). As Donaldson Smith's caravan entered the Borana territories from the east the rumour arose that the Somali in the caravan had come to capture the Kallu and the Kalliti (the ritual wife of the incumbent Kallu, and mother of the next Kallu) of the Karayu and to force them to adopt Islam. A famous Borana *raaga*, Asebo, heard of the preparations to attack the caravan and warned against it. Another *raaga*, however, a woman called Jibbo Bokko, egged the men on, pointing out how they would become rich and making particular mention of all the cloth the caravan was carrying. When the attack finally came, it was organised in two waves, led by Akako Tukale and Guyo Galgallo respectively, both *hayu* in the *gada* period of Jaldessa Guyo Dabassa. Both waves were cut down by rifle fire, although by Donaldson Smith's account the last wave almost broke through the thornbush enclosure. It came close enough actually to remove parts of the enclosure and for Donaldson Smith's valet to be killed by a spear-thrust. The Borana finally fled in terror and a few days later Guyo Galgallo approached the caravan with peace offerings of a sheep and honey. He surrendered his *lichu* to Donaldson Smith who did not

return it. Special mention is made of this fact, when the Borana now tell the story about the man who took away Guyo Galgallo's whip!

After the Borana had surrendered, *fitawrari* Hapte Georgis appointed the two major Kallu's of the Borana as *balabbat* to represent the Ethiopian state to the Borana population and as spokesmen for the Borana. Initially, in the case of the Karayu, the position was occupied by the Kallu himself. Gedo Jilo was made *balabbat* for the Sabbo moiety of the Borana. The brother of the Oditu Kallu, Guyo Anna, was appointed to represent the Gona moiety. Subsequently, close agnatic relatives of the Kallu have filled the office of *balabbat* for the Borana. The functions of the *balabbat* were fundamentally to mediate relations between the state and the local communities, and in Borana they also maintained this role after World War II. The pre-war feudal administration based on feudal retainers extracting tribute, partly for themselves and partly for their overlords, was replaced after the war by a modernized bureaucracy, responsible to the state and paid salaries by the state on the basis of taxes collected on behalf of the state. The main preoccupation both before and after the war was the border with Kenya. The administration of the Borana areas remained quite rudimentary, however, and as long as the Borana paid their taxes and kept the peace, they were to a large extent allowed to order their own affairs.

The Borana political system, in the sense discussed above, was thus not seriously challenged until 1974 when the Ethiopian revolution swept away the old order, including the Ethiopian local administration and the *balabbat*. In the wake of the land reform proclamation of 1975, the so-called "Development through Cooperation" campaign sent thousands of students to the countryside to organise the implementation of the land reform and set up a new administrative system to replace the oppressive structures of the past. Although the land reform as such was only implemented in the limited agricultural areas of Borana, the administrative reform introduced in conjunction with the land reform, based on a system of peasant associations, was extended to cover the whole area. Borana students played an active role in adapting this system to the local conditions. The *balabbat*, as direct representatives of the imperial era, were of course the first to go. But also the local political system of the Borana, dominated by the old and probably conservative *lichu* and *abba Kae*, was found inadequate. The students thus attempted to replace the "primitive" clan-based arrangement of the traditional political system with a neatly hierarchical and territorially based structure for local administration, with the *madda* as the basic building block.

The *madda*, (which literally means "source" or "spring") is a vaguely defined unit with a permanent water source, such as a well complex, at its centre. In Borana terms it includes all the people and all the animals who use the wells, in addition to all range resources serviced by the well complex. There is no evidence, however, that the people who happen to reside within this unit are organized in any way with reference to the territorial unit. The idea of an association based on the *madda* (cf. Hogg 1990) cutting across the normal organizing

principles of lineage, generation or age never gained legitimacy in Borana. Hence, the administrative structure of the peasant associations was throughout the revolutionary period a construct replacing the *balabbat* rather than the Borana political system proper, in the sense that the peasant associations mediated relations to the state in this period. But the peasant associations, as agents of the state (and later, as agents of the Party), played a much more active role and interfered much more in local affairs than had been the case with *balabbat*. Initiatives were probably generated by a need to maintain control over possible opposition and subversive activities directed against the state, but occasionally they had more direct effects in the local context. For example, attempts were made to take over the management and control of water, to require local pastoralists to apply for permission to move from one association to the next, or to use the judicial committee of the peasant association to resolve conflicts. Increasingly, the peasant association also became the main instrument to extract resources from the Borana, first in the form of taxes and various membership fees, later "voluntary" contributions and delivery quotas of livestock at state-determined prices, as well as recruits for military service. But the Borana political system persisted also during the revolutionary period. After an initial period in which a lot of importance was attached to establishing the absolute hegemony of the new structures of the Ethiopian revolution, the political system was allowed to re-emerge and was to a large extent left alone, much more by default than by any clear design. In the last few years of the revolutionary era, the peasant associations had given up any attempt actively to manage the pastoral areas in Borana, totally reverting to what may be termed their *balabbat* role.

The Regional Challenge

Parallel to the macro-political process of colonial expansion and later nation-building efforts, the Borana have faced a different but perhaps not unrelated challenge from the expansion of pastoral competitors in the region. This challenge has probably had a far greater impact than the colonial expansion, since the competition in this case is over resources of direct importance to the pastoral production system and the economic base of Borana society. Over the past century the Borana have lost access to considerable tracts of land along their eastern and northern borders. The pressure against the Borana areas has been relentless, and although the Borana have reclaimed territories temporarily lost during the Ethio-Somali war of 1977-78, it is still an on-going process. Although the challenge in both cases involved a military threat, the nature of the threat, and the Borana responses to it was not the same. In the case of the colonial occupation the threat clearly arose out of the devastating technological superiority of modern firearms over spears, a technology the Borana apparently had not acquired. In the latter case of pastoral competition, the challenge came from groups which were familiar to the Borana and which the Borana, as the hege-

monic power in the region in earlier times, had dominated (cf. Schlee 1989:35 ff. and Gufu Oba in this book).

The Borana Military Organisation

The basic military formation in Borana is known as a *chibra*. It has been commonly assumed that these *chibra* were recruited on the basis of the *luba*, particularly during the two 8-year periods before the *luba* took on the ritual responsibilities of the *gada*, i.e. when the *luba* was in its *raaba* stage. But it follows from the internal logic of the *gada* system, that unless there at some earlier stage has been a rule which closed the *luba* to further recruitment, the demographic instability in the system would in effect limit military recruitment to a constantly diminishing segment of the population. In a military situation with simple technology numbers clearly matter, and a rule limiting recruitment in this manner would hardly make sense! It has been proposed that a *chibra* alternatively could be recruited on the basis of age and the Borana *hariya* has been seen as an age-regiment, of the kind known in military organisations in other African societies.

The *gada* system classifies people according to generation, and a fundamental distinction obtains between the *ilman korma* and the *ilman jarsa*. Although the *ilman jarsa* can in no way be seen as second-class citizens, and are allowed to celebrate the various individual rites of the *gada* at any convenient time, they do not take part in the public celebrations which the *ilman korma* undertake. But not even all the *ilman korma* take part in these. After a new *luba* is opened and progresses through the various grades of the *gada*, a new age-cohort is added to the *luba* every eight years, so by the time the *luba* reaches the *gada* stage it contains five cohorts, each covering an 8-year span. Obviously the youngest cohorts cannot take part in the ritual cycle in any meaningful way. The responsibility for the *gada* is primarily discharged by the three oldest cohorts. At the stage when the *luba* is preparing to select people for the various positions of the *gada*, only these three cohorts exist; the oldest age cohort, which typically contains the future *abba gada*, becomes known as the *barabara* of the *luba*. The two succeeding cohorts become the *wakhora* and the *wagura* of the *luba*.

As the *ilman korma* celebrate the *wal'argi* and *nyachisa* feasts through which they coalesce into the *barabara* group (although the younger age cohorts also take part in these celebrations), their coevals, who are *ilman jarsa* of other *luba*, will start to form small groups of young boys, known as *ijolle kuchu*. These will take part in a cycle of activities (singing, dancing, excursions to various places, visiting villages to demand or steal milk and meat and other kinds of licentious behaviour) which is generically known as *kuusoma* and is quite similar to the *wal'argi* undertaken by the *ilman korma*. The *kuusoma* will end with celebrations known as *chinna* which take place at a number of prescribed sites in Borana, during which a *hayu* for each site will be selected. After *chinna* the *ijolle kuchu* will be known as a *hariya*. The *hariya*, which is based on age, but which excludes

the *ilman korma*, will eventually be named after the *hayu* selected at the *chinna* near the wells of Borbor, with a prefix which is either *Wakhor* or *Dambal* (cf. also Baxter 1979:84 ff.).

The *hariya*, which in effect are age-sets (all members are recruited on the basis of age) are not localised, but members of the *hariya* in a locality will meet every year to perform a rite known as *korma-korbeesa* which involves the ritual slaughtering of a male goat. An interesting aspect of this rite is that it must be performed in the bush, outside the settlement. Only grown men may attend and the meat is roughly roasted on a fire and quickly consumed. All remains are burnt on the fire and traces of the fire are concealed. The *korma-korbeesa* is performed regularly by the *hariya* to avert war and insecurity. This particular task of the *hariya* is frequently mentioned in reply to questions of what a *hariya* actually does.

The localized *hariya* perform the *korma-korbeesa* during three *gada* periods and, as their *ilman korma* coevals hand over the *gada* responsibilities to the next *luba* the *hariya* performs a different rite called the *korbeesa yuuboma*. After this the *hariya* become *yuba*, just as their coevals become *yuba* as they come out of the period of *gada* obligations. The men do not come together as a *hariya* after this, but will take part in the *korma-korbeesa* performed by other *hariya* up to the time when they celebrate their retirement in a *gadamoji* rite.

The *hariya* is often discussed in the literature as a full-blown age-set organisation, with a strong military function. Baxter's discussion takes exception to this. The fact that the *hariya* in its active phase actually excludes the *ilman korma* is frequently overlooked (conversely, the *luba* contains no *ilman jarsa* in its active stage), as are the similar parallel features of the formative stages of both the *luba* and *hariya*. It may also be significant that the *hariya* is mostly referred to in Borana in its ritual capacity, rather than in any instrumental or pragmatic sense. Baxter is most probably right in his assessment that they would be an ineffective way of organising military units. Perhaps the *hariya* may be seen as a simplified alternative to supplement the *gada*, which may have grown in importance as the demographic instability of the *gada* excluded progressively larger parts of the population from ritual fulfilment.

Baxter points out that the decline in the military fortunes of the Borana seems to coincide with the reorganisation/introduction of the *hariya* in the latter half of the last century, but rejects the idea that this reorganisation was detrimental to Borana military organisation. We have no precise information, however, on how the *chibra* were recruited and activated, but it seems likely that the normal political instruments of the Borana of convening assemblies to deliberate over problems and letting consensus gradually emerge has also governed the military mobilization of men and resources. As the Somali re-appeared on the scene in the middle of the last century, this slow and cumbersome system seems to have been no match to the military and organisational superiority of the segmentary lineage system of the Somali.

CONCLUSIONS

The Borana political system has managed to maintain the political viability of Borana pastoralism up to the present. It seems to have been far more successful in providing the necessary infrastructure for successful pastoral enterprise within the Borana areas than in defending the Borana areas and its resources from incursions and occupation from the outside. As far as the viability of the pastoral system is concerned, however, the colonial occupation of Borana and the subsequent acceptance of and adaptation of the Borana to the new political order seems to have been a successful strategy. Borana pastoralism has persisted and has managed to respond to the additional burdens which have been put on it. It has had to produce a quite significant economic surplus to the state in the form of taxes, but has also received significant subsidies in the form of famine relief. By adapting to the superior force of the colonial occupants, the Borana have retained control over the most significant resources required for continued pastoralism.

The Borana political system has been less successful in meeting the challenge from the pastoral competitors in the region. Since the colonial conquest the Borana seem to have depended on the colonial powers, both in Kenya and in Ethiopia, to provide a buffer against the constantly expanding Somali. In Kenya the Borana were being constantly pushed back until the colonial authorities established the so-called "Somali line" in the Northern Frontier District, beyond which Somali expansion was curtailed. In Ethiopia the demarcation has not been as clear-cut, particularly not in Liban (i.e. north of the Dawa river). In Dirre, south of the river, the road/track between Wachille and Moyale has served the same purpose since the Ethiopian reoccupation of the area after World War II. In Kenya, where the "Somali line" was abolished after independence, the Somali westward expansion has continued and the Borana have neither managed successfully to mobilize the state to provide a buffer against the Somali, nor to mobilize their own military resources to stop the expansion. During the war between Ethiopia and Somalia in 1977-78 the buffer in both Liban and Dirre was immediately challenged by the Somali, and it was only after the Ethiopian state managed to reverse the fortunes of war on a national scale that the Borana regained the areas from which they had been forced out by the Somali. Although this particular series of events, in which the Borana almost lost the central areas of Dirre, the heartland of Borana pastoralism containing the great well complexes known as the *tulaani sallani*, also contained a significant involvement from the Somali state as well as the challenge from local Somali pastoralists, the pressure continues after the obliteration of the Somali state. (See essay by Mohammed Hassen.)

The challenge this time, however, is not military. The conflict between the Borana and the Somali is given a new expression and is fought by new means, in addition to localized skirmishing of a more traditional nature. The contest now involves political representation and political recognition at the national

level, in the new macro-political context brought about by the downfall of the revolutionary regime. The contest now is over the inclusion of Liban within the boundaries of the newly defined Somali region of Ethiopia, or over the recognition of the Garre as proper representatives of the pastoralists of Dirre. The Borana political system since the end of the last century has depended on the state to protect the territorial integrity of the Borana lands. If the state withdraws this protection, or is no longer capable of providing it, the Borana pastoral system will most likely lose political viability. The alternative of the Borana political system itself defending the pastoral resources of the Borana against the constant encroachment from the east does not seem likely.

Power's Ambiguity or the Political Significance of *Gada*

Marco Bassi

Gada is certainly a very strong symbol of Oromo ethnic identity, but, as with most symbols, it may have multiple meanings. It manifests itself in a wide range of social phenomena, including prescriptive rules, ceremonies, rites, public offices and actual physical villages. Each manifestation holds symbolic meanings which influence both the conceptions of the people still practising *gada* and their social relations. When an Oromo nationalist talks about *gada*, he may not be interested in the constellation of symbols of *gada* practice, but rather in the institution as a whole. *Gada* becomes a conceptual abstraction, something in which all Oromo are supposed to identify themselves because they recognize it as a root feature of Oromo culture or as a symbol of a pan-Oromo national political identity (as distinct from the Ethiopian national identity) (Baxter 1994a). The recent debate on the application of the principles or values of *gada* to a modern state¹ is part of this process.

The conceptualization of *gada* with this second meaning is basically the outcome of a long tradition of Oromo studies which has, by and large, legitimated Oromo nationalists to stress the central political role of the system. However, when shifting from *gada* as a symbol of identity to *gada* as a political practice we are moving from one domain to another. Baxter's criticism of the classical political interpretation of the *gada* system² and, more recently, on its applicability to a modern polity³ constitutes a serious warning of the possibility that some misinterpretations may have occurred.

THE PREVAILING MODEL WITHIN OROMO STUDIES

The earlier accounts of the Oromo political system have probably been affected by a lack of analytical instruments. The European travellers or missionaries of the 19th and early 20th centuries could only interpret the ethnographic data

¹ Asmaron Legesse (1987) and Lemmu Baissa (1994) are, among others, relevant contributors to this topic.

² See especially Baxter (1978).

³ See Baxter (1990:236; 1994b:260) and, especially, Baxter (1994a:177-184). See also Helland's essay.

against the background of the known political concepts and models.⁴ Oromo polity appeared to be structured and ordered, showing some elements of political centralization. The society was guided by institutional leaders differentiated by a variety of formal titles and the political discourse was dominated by a constant reference to widely accepted oral norms and laws. The various authors have, consequently, translated Oromo titles and institutions with terms and equivalent concepts which referred to current Western political systems,⁵ particularly to Western democracies. However, there was very little critical analysis of the functions, powers and operational rules inherent in the various Oromo political offices and institutions.

Later, when the characteristics of Oromo polity have been formulated in more specialised terms, the ethnographic descriptions had become the ethnographic reality, a process certainly favoured by a scarcity of research in the specific field of political anthropology.

The analogies with Western state systems have, for instance, been expressed indirectly by stressing a bureaucratic character in the *gada* polity, an interpretation which may have originated from the following statement by Herbert Lewis:

... certain characteristic of Jimma government, particularly those that seem most bureaucratic ... were typical ... of the "republican" Galla (1965:126).

Lewis's book is certainly one of the few relevant contributions to the political anthropology of the Oromo. However, it refers to an Oromo monarchy whose protagonists had completely abandoned the *gada* system; he was forced to rely on older or less specialistic sources to reconstruct the *gada* type of polity. Despite the references to the functional specificity of the different *gada* offices, in several passages Lewis introduces many restrictive remarks⁶ on such a feature, which is basically accepted as an 'ideal pattern' (Lewis 1965:28). The ideal pattern only developed concretely with the formation of a monarchy. Two years later we can read, in an authoritative European anthropologist, that 'the leading positions of the class in power can be said to constitute a bureaucracy in Weber's sense' (Knutsson 1967:167), thus giving a concrete dimension to the ideal pattern.

These kinds of scholarly traditions have probably influenced later scholars more than is generally assumed. Asmaron Legesse, whose systematic study has so strongly marked the current ideas on *gada*, for example, writes '... that the core band has already developed some characteristics of a functionally differ-

⁴ The instruments for analyzing the great variety of African political systems will only develop with the growth of comparative political anthropology.

⁵ For example, Salviac directly translates various Oromo titles and institutions into 'premier magistrat', 'assesseur', 'juges', 'parlement', 'gouvernement' and 'ministre' (Salviac 1901:183-184).

⁶ See, for example, the explicitly expressed doubts on Salviac's translations (Lewis 1965:28).

entiated bureaucracy' (1973:69).⁷ As a result most descriptions of the *gada* system seem to respond to a general model consisting in a generation class acquiring the leadership of the *gada* council (called *yaa'a* in Borana) for a period of 8 years and, with it, acquiring the political (as well as the ritual) power and the capacity to 'govern' for a period of 8 years. During such a period of 'government' the members of the class are called *gada* (or *luba* among some Oromo groups). The cyclical replacement of the 'class in power', a typical feature of the '*gada* government', is considered a rotation in the control of the political power and, consequently, it is sometimes regarded as a basis for the Oromo, or *gada*, democracy, as opposed to the Amhara 'imperialism' and 'despotism'.

Figure 1. *The prevailing model*

The progress of a generation class through the grades

		Grades	
8 years		dabballee	
16 years		gamme	
8 years		kuusa	
13 years		raba	(bureaucracy)
8 years		gada = government	{ juridical power executive power legislative power
27 years		yuba	
8 years		gadamooji	

Such terms as 'power', 'government', 'centre', and other correlated expressions refer either to ambiguous or too wide political categories. Even in the narrow field of political anthropology they have been used with different meanings. If an attempt to apply the *gada* political philosophy to a socially and economically differentiated modern Oromo polity has to be made rationally, then the terms of the discussion have to be clarified and the political significance of the *gada* system has to be analyzed in relation to its proper context. I will try to illustrate my

⁷ Elsewhere in the book Asmaron seems critical of that same view. He explicitly states that the Borana 'have little inclination to parcel out specific tasks to individual officers ... in the manner of bureaucratic organizations' and that 'the assembly has little internal differentiation in terms of functional tasks' (Asmaron Legesse 1973:69).

views with reference to the results of the research⁸ I have carried out among the Oromo-Borana of Southern Ethiopia.⁹

ASSEMBLY ORGANIZATION AND DECISION MAKING

Perhaps the dominant element of Borana polity is not the *gada* system, but rather, as Baxter and Uri Almagor were already suggesting during the 70s (1978:19), their complex, articulated and structured assembly organization. There are assemblies of different types, involving different kinds of social groups, as well as of different levels, involving larger groups in a pyramidal assembly structure.¹⁰ All binding decisions, concerning virtually all spheres of social activity,¹¹ have to be reached during an assembly. They include money or cattle collections for collective investments or for assisting the needy, arrangements on management and use of natural resources and all juridical proceedings. Each issue is discussed in the appropriate assembly context.¹²

The modalities through which binding decisions are reached are strictly regulated by specific and complex procedural rules. Broadly speaking, decisions are reached by general consensus under the guide of the institutional leadership. (See Helland's essay.) The prerogatives of the institutional leaders, as well as the limits to their decisional power, are implicitly fixed by the procedural rules, by the assembly's behavioral practices and, more explicitly, by the dominant political ethos.¹³

Participation in Decision Making

The decisions taken during an assembly can only involve the members of the community concerned with that specific assembly. The married men of the

⁸ This paper is mostly based on data collected in Southern Ethiopia in 1989 and 1990 as part of the fulfilments for a doctoral program at the Istituto Universitario Orientale, Naples. Fuller ethnographic evidence is presented in the author's doctoral thesis (Bassi 1992a) and it is presently under further analytical elaboration. The author expresses his thanks to Dr. Berhanu Abebe and Dr. Taddese Beyene for the assistance provided by the Ethiopian academic institutions and to Dr. Bernardi and Dr. Triulzi for their academic guidance. He also thanks Dr. Baxter for his comments on this paper.

⁹ The majority of the Borana of Ethiopia follow their traditional religion and among Oromo groups show the strongest attachment to and observance of *gada*.

¹⁰ A partial outline of Borana assembly structure is published in Bassi (1994).

¹¹ Decisions regarding the allocation of manpower within the family are excluded, since they fall under the competence of single *abbaa waraa* ('father of the family'). Domestic disputes are, however, discussed at the assemblies. Military actions are excluded from the assembly topics. Strictly speaking, the decision to take part in a raid against neighboring ethnic groups is not binding. Defensive wars are spontaneously organized, while individuals can decide upon participation in offensive raids.

¹² Assemblies may be held frequently and in any place; the organization of and the participation in assemblies can be considered among the most demanding engagements in Borana and are certainly the elders' main job and responsibility.

¹³ The egalitarian ethos of the Borana has been stressed by Baxter several times. See, for example, Baxter (1994a:183).

same community can either be represented or participate personally.¹⁴ Therefore, through the overwhelming assembly organization, all binding decisions are reached by consensus with the direct or indirect participation of the persons involved. Once the individual or his representative has accepted a resolution, there is no need to enforce it by the use or by the threat of an executive force. The general consensus is the force. The formation of consensus, however, is not a spontaneous process. A number of procedural forms and expedients are used to avoid or to get out of impasse situations. There are also specific procedural means, which I have elsewhere called 'procedural sanctions', used in order to persuade individuals to accept the assembly's will. Sometimes the pressure exercised by the assembly and its leaders on individuals is so heavy as to be considered full coercion.

We can thus conclude that, in Borana polity, coercion is directly exercised within the assembly context, taking the form of persuasion, even if that is sometimes an exasperated one. The leaders, by virtue of their prerogatives, play an important role in exercising this type of coercion/persuasion and they may obtain some public advantages, such as the maintenance of the *yaa'a* or an investment for digging a well. In this sense they have some executive capacity, but, since they do not control any executive force, they are not invested with what is usually implied by 'executive power'.¹⁵

The Rhetorical Use of the Juridical Sanction

The Borana legal system fits the general pattern described above. Borana customary law is characterized by a relatively large number of juridical sanctions.¹⁶ Sometimes the text of an oral rule contains the proper sanction to be applied in the case of law breaking. However, if the ethnographer moves his attention on from the theoretical statements of law to its practical application, then it becomes evident that the most heavy sanctions are only used rhetorically in order to persuade individuals to accept court resolutions rather than being actually applied and enforced (Bassi 1992b).¹⁷ Hence, as in the case of the village tribunals of the Bunyoro (Beattie 1960:69), the juridical practice of the Borana seems to aim at the restoration of good relations rather than at the punishment of an offender.

¹⁴ Borana assemblies, therefore, fall within Kuper's 'community-in council' category (1971:14).

¹⁵ The lack of executive powers by the *abbaa bokuu* (1886:79) and by the assembly of the Oromo were already noted during the 19th century by Massaja (1886:172). Perhaps, the characteristics here described are not exclusive to the present day Borana, but they may also apply to the highland Oromo during the mid 19th century. Very interestingly, Massaja is one of the few 19th century authors providing some observations on specific aspects of the political process.

¹⁶ They include heavy fines, corporal punishments and others. The curse (*abaarsa*), implying both a metaphysical dimension and the community's ostracism, may end up in banishment. For a comment see Baxter (1990:238). For a systematic account of Oromo legal institutions see Dinsa Lepisa (1975).

¹⁷ Dinsa Lepisa, while stressing the authoritative character of Borana law, after evaluating a great number of cases comes to the conclusion that the Oromo legal system is oriented towards arbitration and compensation rather than punishment (1975:86).

The General Assembly and the Legislative Process

Among some Oromo groups a general assembly may be gathered, whose legislative role for the entire community has rightly been stressed. I refer especially to the Borana *Gumi Gaayoo* (the 'crowd' at the place 'Gaayo'), which is the supreme juridical and formal legislative body. However, it would be misleading to think of it in terms of a central and permanent legislative body on the model of a modern parliament. The *Gumi Gaayoo* only meets periodically, once every *gada* period (8 years), and the laws actually proclaimed during each general assembly are really very few.¹⁸

The proclamation of laws at the *Gumi Gaayoo* is only the final phase of a wider legislative process taking place through the long debates at all types of assemblies. Among the Borana, as elsewhere, norms are expressed in a variety of ways, ranging from old and new social practices to ambiguous concepts symbolically expressed by rituals. Such a wide normative domain falls under the Borana category *aada*. When a dispute arises it is taken to the assembly where people are confronted with the established norms. In this context norms of any kind need to be verbally expressed and hence verbally re-elaborated. Conflict resolution may need non-ambiguous normative statements which have binding value. Such statements in the oral laws, *seera* which can be defined as that specific category of verbally expressed norms, which are elaborated and applied in the assembly context. Only a few out of the commonly applied laws are actually formally announced at the *Gumi Gaayoo* which, though important, is not the exclusive legislative and juridical gathering; but, it is an integral component of the assembly organization.¹⁹

THE POWER OF THE GADA AND BORANA GOVERNMENT

The stress usually put on the political power of the *gada* class is probably a consequence of the failure to recognize the different qualities of the ritual and the political powers. Bernardi (1984), with reference to age and generational class systems, has clearly shown that, though interrelated, the two types of power are not identical.²⁰ When taking a leading role at the *yaa'a gadaa*, the six *hayyu aduulaa*, including the three *abbaa gadaa*,²¹ are the representatives of the *gada*

¹⁸ Asmaron Legesse lists twelve laws (Asmaron Legesse 1973:93-9) announced during the 1966 assembly. Since the same rules are reported by Abdullahi Shongolo as 'cardinal laws' with reference to the 1988 assembly (1992 and 1994), they are actually re-statements. Shongolo also describes a few supplementary laws.

¹⁹ The political relevance of the general and other assemblies in Oromo polity is receiving growing attention. But the supporters of the political centrality of *gada* tend not to differentiate between the *gada* and the assembly context, as Baxter shows referring to Asmaron Legesse's interview for *Qunnamtii* (Baxter 1994a:180-2).

²⁰ In order to respond to the peculiar distribution of powers in the different grades Bernardi defines power in terms of 'the capacity to perform social activity' (Bernardi 1984:59). Such a capacity can be ritual, political, and so on in the different grades of the system.

²¹ The three *abbaa gadaa* are the first three among the *hayyu aduulaa* to be mentioned during the public announcement.

generation class. However, this does not imply that the class members and the class representatives are also the political leaders of the Borana.

The term *yaa'a* ('*yaa'* is the root of the plural form of the verb 'to go', 'to move') applies to any mobile village whose members co-reside in order to perform ceremonies which are considered critical for the well-being of all the Borana. There is a *yaa'a gadaa*,²² led by the *abbaa gadaa arbooraa*, and five *yaa'a qaalluu* ('village of the *qaallu'*'), each led by a different *qaallu*.²³

Despite being a political centre, for reasons which I will explain later, the *yaa'a gadaa* should not be considered a centre of government. I never saw or heard from the elders about the necessity to implement or 'execute' a decision formally taken at the *yaa'a gadaa*, other than providing the human and material resources needed to maintain the *yaa'a* itself and to perform the inherent ceremonies. I was not told of, nor did I witness, any behaviour that suggested that the *yaa'a gadaa* was the competent forum for discussing problems not solved within lower assembly contexts, since, according to my informants words, 'the *yaa'a* members are kept too busy with rituals'.

The different titles, such as *hayyu aduulaa*, *hayyu garbaa*, *hayyu meedicha* and various *abbaa gadaa* point up different attributes, such as the individuals generation class, and which *yaa'a* he serves on with respect to his own class and clan membership and to the order of his nomination. Title differences may imply different ritual statuses and different assignments during the performance at a *yaa'a*, but not a differentiated political responsibility, let alone differentiated administrative or executive duties.²⁴

Political power should be identified with the capacity, within the various assemblies, to take over certain leading roles. During all types of assembly the members of the *gada* class do not enjoy any particular decisional prerogative compared to the non-*gada*. The decisional influence grows with age and experience. Since the *gada* are either relatively young, even very young, they have very limited political power.

The situation is more complex with reference to the six class representatives. The permanence of the *yaa'a* is a pre-requisite for institutional political leadership. The taking over of the most important formal roles during the assemblies is reserved to those who have been invested with titles such as *abbaa gadaa*, *qaallu*, *hayyu*, *jallaaba*, which correspond to certain roles at the various *yaa'a*.²⁵ The *hayyu aduulaa*, hence the members of the *gada* class, are only a minority among the various officers in service at any given time at the *yaa'a gadaa*. All the

²² The *yaa'a gadaa* is divided into three close and coordinated sub-villages, each led by one *abbaa gadaa*.

²³ There is also a *yaa'a rabaa*, related to the *gada* institution, which is not relevant here.

²⁴ This last point is also made explicitly by Asmaron Legesse (1973:69).

²⁵ Only the *jallaaba*, the institutional leaders of lower level, can eventually be nominated without having resided at a *yaa'a*; for example, some Muslim elders living in Garba Tula received *meedich* bracelets from the *qaallu* of the Sabbo moiety as a sign of appointment (Baxter, personal communication). Since those *jallaaba* must be chosen by a *hayyu* or by the *qaallu*, the source of their legitimacy is related to the *yaa'a*.

officers are equally entitled to institutional political leadership.²⁶ Moreover, the *wara qaalluu* descent segments²⁷ are represented by their own leaders at the respective *yaa'a qaalluu*.

Most important is the fact that entitlement to formal leadership is only a *potential* social capacity: the *actual* assignment of authoritative roles is, in practice, largely conditioned by the consensus of the community involved in any given assembly. Only those who are considered capable of responding adequately to the responsibilities assigned to them have political prestige and authority. This requires some definite qualities, such as knowledge of both substantive laws and procedural rules and rhetorical skills. All these skills may grow with the experience and practice of assembly activity, and it is only over time that a political leader gains the trust of the people. This is why, in all assemblies I have happened to witness, the *yaa'a* officers currently in service, including the representatives of the *gada* class, have shown smaller political authority than older and 'retired' *hayyu*. The *gada* officers in service, despite having a central ritual responsibility, are not regarded as those with the capacity to chair an important assembly, to act as a judge or to solve practical problems, other than those regarding their ritual activities at the *yaa'a*.

In this context, if the *gada* have to be considered the 'class in power', then it is their ritual power which has to be stressed, since they do not exercise any particular political authority in the assembly context, nor do they represent a centre of government. If the term government has to be applied to Borana polity, then it may be better described as 'diffused' following Lucy Mair's well known definition of a government which can be said to consist of the whole adult male population (1962:78).

POLITICAL CENTRE AND INTEGRATION

Elsewhere I have suggested that clans are the basic units of Borana political organization.²⁸ The *gada* system plays a key role in integrating those units (Bassi 1994). The officers in service at any given time at the *yaa'a* are basically representatives of the major clan divisions. The *hayyu*'s common action and their common residence at the *yaa'a gadaa* symbolize inter-clan unity and inter-clan cooperation. By executing the *gada* rituals they mediate between the human and the divine worlds, but they also promote the *Borana nagaa* ('the Peace of the Borana') (Baxter 1965 and 1978 and essays by Mekuria, Helland and Gufu). They are the ritual guarantees of inter-clan peace, to which aim they devote a minimum of eight years of their lives. Only after such an experience, hence when they have become conscious of the critical importance of promoting good

²⁶ Several informants claimed that the *hayyu aduulaa* have often shown less capacity than other types of *hayyu* because they are chosen when they are too young to be properly evaluated.

²⁷ Borana descent sections are known as either *wara qaalluu* or *wara bokkuu*.

²⁸ Borana clans fulfil all requisites of corporate groups as defined by Allott, Epstein and Gluckman (1969:41).

inter-clan relations, are they allowed to lead their own clans. At that point they will be able to value the interests of the Borana as a whole above and higher than their own immediate corporate interests.

Institutional political leadership, therefore, is legitimated by the formative ritual experience at the *yaa'a* and, consequently, it possesses a divine dimension. The divine source of the leader's power is symbolized, for instance, by the *rufa* turban, which they wear during the *yaa'a* rituals and, later, during the assemblies. The *rufa* combines the colours black and blue both of which in Borana are called *gurracha*, the colours of *Waaqa* (literally 'sky' and 'God'), passing from blue to black with the coming of night. Furthermore it is kept on the head and hence is up like the sky. It is said that it should never touch the ground, just as the sky, the domain of *Waaqa* ('God'), does not touch the earth, the domain of man. The *rufa* clearly symbolizes the sky and the divinity. The person wearing it is consequently a bridge between the sky and the earth, hence a mediator between the social (human) and the divine worlds.

We can thus conclude that the *yaa'a gadaa* is not a centre of government, but it is a political centre, a centre of ritual super-integration which bears a direct political effect on the process of formation, and on the legitimation of, the institutional leadership.

The maintenance of the centres, implying the different *yaa'a* and the performance of the inherent ceremonies, needs some human²⁹ and material resources,³⁰ which are independently provided by each *hayyu* in service. In turn, each *hayyu* is supported by his own descent section.³¹ The same descent section also corporatively selects its candidate for appointment as *hayyu* or *abbaa gadaa*. The rules on the nomination of all *gada* officers prevent political competition arising among the major clan divisions, though such competition may emerge between the descent sections into which they are segmented.

GADA AND KINGDOMS: TWO ALTERNATIVE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHIES

The ritual and political integration obtained by the *gada* system carries some important economic consequences. Despite strong competition for scarce water resources, clans or other social entities do not physically clash with one another. All residential groups are formed on an inter-clan basis and pastoral cooperation occurs between members of different clans. (See Gufu's and Helland's essays.) The exploitation of all natural resources occurs on an inter-clan basis and appears to be extremely efficient and highly coordinated. This situation

²⁹ The 'helpers' of each *hayyu* are classified into *makala* ('messengers', 'pastoral assistants') and *jal-laaba* ('assistant', who help the *hayyu* in the coordination of his ritual-political activities).

³⁰ The material resources can be either *kaato* (legitimate contribution to the *yaa'a* members), mainly cattle to be slaughtered during the ceremonies, and *galata* (literally 'thanks'), consisting in cows or cash, *harakee* (alcoholic spirits) or other goods given to the *yaa'a* members in order to push a certain candidature for an office. The latter, though widely practised, is considered illegitimate.

³¹ The *hayyu aduulaa* can also collect cattle or the equivalent money (*kaato*) and assistants from among their own generation class mates, the *gada*.

clearly differentiates the Borana from other segmented pastoral societies, rather recalling the achievements of African kingdoms as described by Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940).³² However, whereas kingdoms and, more generally, states may impose law and political decisions by the use, or potential use, of an organized force—whose control is delegated to certain social entities—the Borana maintain their internal order by consensus and persuasion, which, in turn, are obtained by diffused and intense participation in the process of decision-making within the assemblies. Clearly the two political systems differ radically in their operational modalities. Though the assembly procedures may be as coercive as the use of physical force, the political philosophy inherent in Borana polity seems to be opposite to that of African kingdoms. On the other hand the similar practical achievements would rather suggest that Borana polity is an alternative to kingdom polities.

The Borana have successfully developed an egalitarian but efficient political system in a pastoral context, with the *gada* system promoting social integration. It would seem that the Oromo were able to adapt the latter institution to the agricultural environment of the Ethiopian highlands. However, whereas among the Borana *gada* integrated clans, among the highland Oromo of the XIX century 'the *gada* assemblies and officers were territorially organized institutions, uniting contiguous local districts' (Lewis 1965:29). In such a context clans were no longer corporate groups and the organizational capacity had shifted to the local communities, a process facilitated by the clan fragmentation related to the migration and by the closer bond to land inherent in agricultural activity. Moreover, under certain historical and environmental circumstances, the *gada* type of polity was replaced by a state systems, as in the case of the Oromo monarchies. (See essay by Lewis.)

THE OROMO DEMOCRACY

Borana polity, of which *gada* is only one component, may certainly be considered a democracy, if 'democracy' is strictly taken in its classic meaning of 'government of the people, by the people, for the people' (Lincoln). The diffused participation into decision-making and the political process—in the juridical, legislative and other fields—effectively moving from the base to the centre make it, perhaps, even more democratic than modern states based on division of powers and universal suffrage. However, Borana polity does not imply a large number of features normally associated with modern democratic states. For the sake of clearness I will recall, though they are obvious enough, some of them. The *gada* system works in an unstratified and non-specialized society: political integration is obtained among clans, hence among groups which are analogous to one another. Nowadays, even in Borana country, *gada* is effective

³² Also the Borana demographic consistency resembles that of African kingdoms as described by Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940:7).

only in the rural context. Traders, social workers, public employees and others are not effected, since they refer to the Ethiopian legal system and administrative structure.³³ Borana polity does not imply a bureaucratic administrative structure, a centrally, or even peripherally, controlled organized force, with a delegation of executive power. Consequently, it does not produce a national budget. No division of powers is conceived as in modern democracies, since the institutional leaders, during the assemblies, are at the same time active in the juridical and in the legislative fields, as well as in persuasive relations with their people.

I wonder if the use of such ambiguous words as 'government', 'class in power', 'alternation of power', as well as of more specific but less applicable expressions such as 'reigning set', 'parliament' and 'bureaucracy' are actually a response to the unproved, but dominant, ideological assumption that a centralized state based on the use of an organized force is a more efficient polity. From this perspective those terms implicitly allow a direct comparison between the Oromo and the Ethiopian polities, implied as equally efficient but with the differences marked by the term 'democracy', stressing the moral superiority of the Oromo system (Baxter 1994a:177). But by doing this the real peculiarity and value of the Borana and *gada* political philosophy are implicitly undermined.

A MODERN OROMO POLITY

Perhaps the true problem is not the application of the *gada* principles to the emerging unitary, stratified and specialized Oromo nation, but the construction of a polity compatible with the old and still operative political practices. This is certainly a very serious challenge to the Oromo politicians. Without entering into this extremely complex and muddling subject, I think it worthwhile to outline some of the elements which I think have emerged from the above analysis, hoping to contribute to a debate which, in my opinion, can only be constructive.

A very critical element concerns 'despotism' which is not avoided, as generally thought, by a rotation of the group 'in power', since there are no structures of government into which corporate groups periodically enter and exit.³⁴ Rather, the political power of the institutional leadership is limited, at any given moment, by the rules and practices of the decisional procedures, by the political ethos and by an absence of delegation of executive power.

The peculiarity of the Borana polity lays in the diffused and capillary participation to all kinds of decision-making at the various assemblies, with a general flow from peripheral assemblies to higher pyramidal councils and assemb-

³³ It is possible that this is simply the result of political submission. These activities are the ones in which non-Borana are engaged as well. Had the Borana remained autonomous, their own polity might have evolved differently.

³⁴ For the same reason the giving up of 'power', also mentioned by Baxter (1994a:183), may be a false problem. After having expended heavily for the specialistic training of one of its members, the clan and the community do not have any interest in loosing a capable leader.

lies, or, applying the development jargon, from down to top. The assembly practice and procedures, which are not subordinated to the *gada* system, have also been stressed as central 'republican' elements of Oromo political culture and values, as well as a democratic practice in Oromo life (Lewis 1993:5-6 and 9).³⁵ There is no reason to believe that such political elements are incompatible with a modern polity, though some kind of decisions may require faster procedures.

The *gada* model implies that peripheral groups choose and sustain persons to stay in a centre for training before being entitled to leading roles in the periphery. Again, there is no reason to believe that the same model could not be extended to a more articulated society.

The *gada* model could also be taken as an inspiration to keep both the resources controlled by the centre and the powers delegated to the political centre as limited as possible, in order to reduce a competition which has been one of the major causes of devastating inter-ethnic conflicts in the post-colonial African states.

³⁵ Lewis' observations are very interesting because they were drawn from two different highland Oromo communities, one of which was previously a monarchy.

Sources of Life and Identity

Gudrun Dahl

INTRODUCTION

Getting rid of the idea of cultural boxes has become a top priority of anthropology at a time when ethnicity has become dominant as a discourse of political conflicts. Recent anthropology puts more emphasis on the social and cultural creation of identity than on the actual sharing of characteristics in a group. It focuses on the construction and spread of the idea of an ethnic community and on how political allegiance is mobilized by being grounded in subjective and emotionally charged identification. This requires that the researcher makes a clear distinction between, on one hand the actual distribution of ideas, practices or personality types and, on the other, the claims raised by social actors that in their group there is a certain cultural pattern or sharing of substances or values setting them apart from others. Rather than creating or enforcing ethnic distinctions, post-modern anthropology may have ambitions which clash directly with the ideologies of ethnic movements.

'Essentialism', the ascription of shared and often assumedly natural characteristics or substances to a group, is one of the major ideological tools and traps of ethnic thinking. However, in this presentation I would like to show that essentialism in itself may take different cultural forms. In European thought, the dominant way of thinking about categories is to see them as bounded, homogenous units. 'Ethnic categories' are only a special case of this. Cognitive theorists have contrasted how people think about the category 'category' itself with how people—in the West and elsewhere—think with categories. Classical theories of how human thought categories work see them as based on uniformly shared defining properties among the members. No member should be more central than other members, and the category has clear boundaries, defined by the common properties (Lakoff 1987:16–17). Following Wittgenstein (1953:1:66–71) authors like Austin (1961:71), Rosch (1977) and Lakoff have criticized this view and developed the 'theory of prototypes and basic-level categories'.

Lakoff (84) suggests that when it comes to how human cognition operates in practice, it is more fruitful to conceive of the categories with which humans think in terms of radial structures. The cognitive category has a central prototypical case and conventionalized variations on it which cannot be predicted by

general rules. Hallpike (1979), who appears to think that prototypical thinking is more characteristic of preliterate societies than of the modern West, says that it is based upon "the functional, perceptual and contextual associations which things have with one another in everyday life, not on taxonomic properties which are the basis of logical class". In contrast, Lakoff's point is that all people, irrespective of their own ideas of how they think, tend to think in terms of prototypes rather than logical classes. The classic theory of classification reflects our predominant folk model of classification rather than our actual mode of thinking (118). Hence we tend to think also that ethnicity operates on the basis of logical class thinking.

Lakoff makes a distinction between concepts that are understood directly through our experience from those which are understood indirectly through the use of metaphor. He notes that many of the sources for metaphors are based in kinæsthetic experiences, i.e. recurring experiences of a bodily nature, such as metaphors relating to *containers, paths, links, forces, balance* and in various orientations and relations: *up-down, front-back, part-whole, centre-periphery* (267). Johnsson, in *The Body in the Mind* has elaborated on a number of these basic "image schemas", among others the *container* schema (suggesting a boundary distinguishing interior from exterior), the *path* schema and the *centre-periphery* schema. Our folk model of ethnicity, as well as of how categories in general are built up, seems to elaborate on the container metaphor, while, it will be argued here, the centre-periphery schema is another possible option not only for the Western analyst working in the spirit of Rosch, Lakoff and Johnsson, but perhaps also for the Boraan insider cognitive philosopher. I will elaborate an argument from Galaty's analysis of the Maasai (1977, 1979) that pastoral ethnicity in East Africa is not most fruitfully analyzed as related to concepts of bounded categories. A pastoral 'tribe' like the Boraana or the Maasai is a conceptual construct, arranged around an idealized image of what it is like to be a true Boraana or a true Maasai. The focus of this paper is on the metaphors which structure the discourse on identity in the Boraan context: not only in terms of how identities relate to each other, but also in terms of what identity in itself is.

I will address the philosophical concepts that underlie the *Gadaa* system. (See Bassi's essay.) In particular, I will look at the tension between equality and hierarchy that is inherent in the Boraana thought world: the "primus inter pares" paradox. The paper is concerned with metaphors of centre-periphery relations and of purity of essence, which are an important part of Boraan political ideology. The analysis is based partly on literary sources and partly on my old fieldwork with the Boraana of Waso which was concerned mainly with issues of subsistence organization (Dahl 1979). But, above all, it is based on interviews—or 'apprentice lessons' undertaken by Gemetchu Megerssa with a couple of Boraan elders in Nairobi, in the Oromo language and then transcribed

and discussed with me.¹ The data I have used do not allow for any independent study of how ideas are perpetuated in practical life situations, other than by recollections of earlier fieldwork, and the text should be read with this in mind. Our informants are refugees from the ritual centre of the Boraan where they were brought up close to the political core of the Boraan polity. Such people by necessity represent views which may be more articulate than those of the average Boraan, and the models they offer are also idealizing. Their image of what is typically Boraan, as well as my rendering of the same, are admittedly unrealistically timeless. I will have to ask the reader to take into consideration that the image is mediated by men who have experienced Boraan subordination to imperial, revolutionary and post-*derg*ue regimes in Ethiopia rather than having lived under unimpeded rule through the *Gadaa* system. It should also be said that there are always alternative ways of looking at society, even within the society itself. Many aspects or varieties of Boraan ideology have to be left out here even though they may be seen as more central by other persons. An important thing to note is, of course, that the view presented by these elders is a decidedly male one. The aspect of Boraan political ideology developed here is mainly concerned with the egalitarian relation between freeborn men, whereas relations between men and women, between Boraan and their enemies and between, for example, pastoralists and hunters, is qualitatively different. In terms of the dominant discourse such relations are talked about in terms of superordinate-subordinate, penetrator-penetrated, self-control—capricious etc.

THE BORAANA

In contrast to many other Oromo who are cultivators, particularly those further to the North, the Boraana are by tradition herdspeople. Only a few decades ago impoverishment caused many of them to take up irrigated agriculture and cultivate maize, vegetables and fruits (Hogg 1981, 1983). The pastoral subsistence of the Boraana proper is mainly based on cattle, sheep and goats while the closely related Gabbra and Sakuye rear camels in the desert. Boraana consider the latter two groups as affiliated to them, but separate. They have many customs in common although the latter are more frequently Muslims. Boraana themselves follow their traditional monotheistic religion, or are Christians (at Marsabit and in parts of Southern Ethiopia) or Muslims (at Waso in Kenya). Muslims and Christians retain many traditional beliefs. Much of the symbolic code used is common to all Oromo. (See Aguilar's essay.)

The pastoral group as an ethnic entity is formed around a paradigmatic ideal picture, from which the classification as Boraana or Maasai can be extended to comprise a number of more or less peripheral entities, who may deviate in various ways from the ideal concept (Galaty 1977). Within the Boraan entity,

¹ Gemetchu is not to be blamed for any mistakes in this text, but merits my gratitude for generously sharing his material with me as well as for being a brilliant discussion partner. See his essay.

there was also a ritual/political centre defined by the *Gadaa* system, whose spatial boundaries of course were not entirely irrelevant. The aggressive raiding against neighbours that was once an important task for the *gadaa* centre to organize was concerned with maintaining a border of spatial integrity within which Pax Boraana (*nagaya boraana*) could operate. But this boundary was not fixed in time or spatially rigid, but a matter of the Boraan centre continuously having to assert its influence. When it comes to concepts of ethnic identity, however, boundaries seem to have been less important than prototypical core values. (See essays by Helland and Gufu.) The ideal concept does not represent exclusive characteristics the absence of which would define a person or group as non-Maasai or non-Boraan. But, in contrast with Western folk-models which seem to regard concepts in the light of a "container metaphor", the idea of a defining central core with extended applications of attenuated meaning is basic to much Boraan meta-thought in the fields of ethno-cognition, ethno-ontology, and ethno-law. However, this central core is closely tied up with ideas of normality, morality and righteousness. Baxter (1994:248) emphasizes how, from when they are small, Boraana are taught the values of "proper, mature, human behaviour" by explicit reference to Boraana (n.b. not "Oromo") norms. "Boraana do not behave like that". This raises the question of identity as personal, subjective and emotionally charged identification as against centrally perpetuated ideology from a political elite.

In the Boraan case, the general assembly (*Gumi Gayo*) would traditionally be the political forum for restating what, essentially, it would mean to be a Boraan. In the assembly deliberations that Asmarom (1973:95) recounts, one day was apparently spent in discussing laws relating to the definition of neighbouring groups as Boraana or non-Boraana. The Gumi is said to have made the following two statements "laws":

The Rendille are brothers of the Boraana. They should henceforth be called "Boraana" and be accorded all the privileges a Boraana enjoys.

All Boraana and all brothers of Boraana must henceforth refrain from wearing the loincloth. Any man who is found wearing such clothing shall be treated like a Somali.

At the time Asmarom assumed reasonably enough that these two new laws would prove to be outstanding innovations in customary law which, in a context of rising animosities between Somalis and Boraana, would force those with an ambiguous identity to take a clear stand by dismantling symbols of disaffiliation. Subsequent events have generally shown these laws to have had hardly any lasting effect on intraethnic realities in the periphery, and perhaps one should not have expected them to. The relation between political decisions, open allegiance and personal identification is more complicated than that. As Bloom (1990:61) states:

Identification with and loyalty to the nation is evoked from actual experiences in which it is psychologically beneficial to make the identification.

The Boraana that Baxter worked with in the fifties (Baxter 1954:20), and those of Waso during the seventies had little idea of a general larger Oromo community, although they knew of the Arssi and the existence of further Oromo speaking groups to the north and south-east. The Waso Boraana often referred to the concept of Warri Libin, a larger cluster of related peoples, including the Gabbra, Ajuran, Garri and Sakuye. (See Gufu's essay.) Today, of course, the idea of a larger ethnic community is much more relevant politically, and Aguilar's research at Waso hint at a renaissance for the Oromo connection. It is difficult to say to what extent centrally placed Boraana social thinkers and historians in the Dirre-Liban area had any Oromo consciousness at that time, or whether it is a recent development. (See Helland's essay and Jarso's poem, both in this volume.)

At both the personal level, and that of political ideology, identity is founded on a marked opposition between ourselves and other/s. (See Comaroff and Comaroff 1992:51). This is the source of the 'image of the Other' which has been so much focused by recent anthropological and literary debate. (See Hultin's essay.) But not only Male White Mainstream Euroamericans create images of 'the Other': any people are likely to do so. In the idea of the moral prototype there is always contained the idea of that which is immoral: not necessarily, however, in terms of the stereotyped evil, but perhaps in terms of that which is peripheral to the ideal. Borders, as they are actualized in the conflicts of daily life, when inclusion or exclusion in an ethnic category are at stake, draw inspiration from such images of 'the Other', but they are also likely to be more situationally adaptive than the stereotyped counter-image of the society's ideal member. They relate to the extended, peripheral applications of the prototypical category.

FLOWS OF FERTILITY

I will turn for a while to a discussion of Boraan ontology and theory of essences. The recreation of vital resources is a central value in many cultures, but the question is not simply if the relation between growth and continuity in the reproduction is particularly characteristic of an economy such as the Boraan one. Life flows from Divinity through the rain that impregnates the soil and fills up the wells. It flows through the sprouting grass and through the mineral waters that nourish the cattle so that their bellies are filled with calves and their udders with milk. This is a flow which is very visible to the Boraana and elaborated upon culturally. If the chain is broken, even if temporarily, the consequences are far reaching. In a shorter time perspective human subsistence, mainly based on milk, is very vulnerable to disturbances in reproduction. In a longer perspective, the total survival of the Boraan society and culture depends on the survival and rebirth of herds. Access to many animals and many children are a concrete insurance of continuity and ongoing well-being.

The Boraan view of cosmology, ecology and human ontology is one of a flow of life emanating from Divinity. The benignness of Divinity is expressed in rain and other conditions necessary to pastoralism. When people, satisfied from what they get from their herds, live happily and peacefully together according to 'Law', formulated by consensus but at the same time divine, a balance is created between people and Divinity, and favourable conditions are reproduced. In the chain of life, from rain to human consensus, one can pick up almost any item and see it as symbolically representing the whole chain of fertility: fat cattle, dung, grass, milk and so on. Any of these items can be seen as a "key" symbol in the sense that they all provide a clue to the essential values and concerns of the Boraana.

The Boraan God *Waqaa* has been described in the literature as distant and largely passive (Bartels 1983). Perhaps this way of describing Oromo concepts stems from a Western view of God as a personalized Creator and Creation as a definite action. However, it would be wrong to regard creation as something which for Oromo was a matter of once and for all. With their conception of time, the act of creation (*umaa*) is still there: it continues as characteristic of the agent of creation.

THE ESSENCE OF THINGS

The traditional cosmology of the Oromo is built around a "quasi-platonic" division between the real world and the world of ideas or principles. Everything that exists in the material world as well as in the form of abstract values, has its correspondence in the form of an immaterial principle (*ayaana*) which is decisive for the character and fate of that entity. Some examples: A person is born with a predisposed personality and a particular life destiny. A social group, such as a lineage, is thought to have its own *ayaana* which defines its demographic and material success. A day in the calendar has its particular character due to the influence of a particular *ayaana*. All these "essences" or "principles" can be seen as fractional parts of Divinity. Divinity is the universal sum of all principles, but at the same time conceived of as a personalized, if distant, Sky-Divinity. Under certain conditions the fractions, too, can be personalized in the form of spirits, rendering the concept of *ayaana* relevant to different varieties of possession cults (Knutsson 1963; Dahl 1983, 1989).

A particular *ayaana*, being an immaterial principle, can be materialized in different real entities. An ancestor's *ayaana* can be reincarnated in a descendant's personality and fate. In particular, the general fate of the Oromo people is seen to be embodied in their leaders, and returns from generation to generation according to an intricate cyclical way of time reckoning which links up with the *Gadaa* system as the pre-eminent ritual and political institution of the Oromo.

It should be clear from the above, that an individual does not only have his or her own *ayaana*, he or she may also, to varying degrees, represent a collective *ayaana*. In fact, any social category has its unique *ayaana*, including each lineage, each one of the *gadaa* streams (*gogessa*) and each *gadaa* unit within them. *Abba* means father but also 'owner' and 'leader'. We may think of the *Abba* as a person who embodies the hierarchy of fractions, whether this is a hierarchy of kinship units, of individuals in a collective, of land or livestock property. The same *ayaana* that is linked to the *abba* also characterizes the social unit or set of property or knowledge for which he is responsible. Therefore, like a son resembles his father, the *ayaana* of a particular *gadaa* group resembles the personal *ayaana* of their leader, the *Abba Gadaa*. The fate of the *Abba Gadaa* as a person is irrevocably linked to the fate of his group. This is tied to a concept of cyclic time, so that the oral record of earlier *gadaa* regimes provides a set of fates to be relived and reembodyed in later rulers and their descendants.

The structuring of time and fate by *Ayaana* can be seen as the way through which God creates. It is the source of the continuous flow of life, rather than as the ultimate deliverer of sanctions, that God acts. Bartels notes that God is punitive mainly through his withdrawal. He has to be close to humans, in "creative communion" with them for human life to be bountiful. The implication would be that the process of continuous creation slows down when he is angered.

In Boraan views, this flow of life and blessing cannot be seen as different from the process whereby Divinity creates order through structuring the world, first of all into dual categories by creating distinctions between them, and then making his print on the world by imposing other typical patterns. One, which can be summarized by the number 5, represents basic human conditions: the structure of human bodies as well as the spatial configuration of the world in which they live. Other patterns are temporal, and express themselves in sets of seven 8-year periods of fate (*maqabasa*) and in the astrological calendar of 27 recurrent days in a month (*ayaana*). The creative act is one of continuously imposing a structure of temporally regulated fates. The Boraan calendar, like the Javanese calendars that Geertz (1973) writes about, is concerned with marking out "different qualities of time".

Above all, however, pairs and binary oppositions (*lamii*) are regarded as reflecting fundamental cosmological truths. The Boraana conceptual world, as well as the world of social categories, are extremely dualized. The basic core of sets of opposition contains themes which are well-known from many cultures. Simplifying it to the extreme, there is a linking of 'up' with dominance, with the right (in both senses), with the north, with structure, reason, peace, coolness and maleness: 'down' is linked with the south, with subordination, with the left, with chaos, with women, with male as well as female passion, with dangerous heat. From a geographical point of view this set-up agrees well with the conditions in the Boraan area, as described above. Divinity can be seen as the active force which joins the basic contrasts that divide the whole Boraan uni-

verse: God is black, *gura'acha*, an expression that essentially summarizes notions of uninterferedness, originality and lack of distinction. 'Everything flows out of this undifferentiated state in the form of *ayaana*' (Gemetchu 1990:19). *Waaqa* is at the same time creating these contrasts, containing them and superseding them, and thereby creating something new out of them. One may see this as an extension of the metaphor of human sexuality and procreation, but to Boraana the latter is just an instance of a principle that is much more encompassing—the creative communion between oppositions, the fertile unity of contrasts, containing not-yet-realized potentiality. Sacredness implies temporal and communicative closeness to this regenerative force, and is also usually expressed in terms of a certain ambiguity, for example in terms of metaphorical gender. Morality, on the other hand, is phrased in terms of maintaining these basic dual divisions by showing "respect and distance" between social categories defined by them.

At one level in its totality the *Gadaa* system expresses this idea of sacredness, as the office-holders and members of active and appropriately timed cohorts are as a collective all approaching "ideal life spans". Within the complex of officers particular sanctity is attached to the senior councillors but even more so to the ritual officiants, *Wayyu*, and to the lineages within which these offices are inherited. As it appears, sanctity, too, is a relative value and a form of power which has to be diffused rather than limited. There is also, outside the *Gadaa* system itself, a small number of heritable positions as *Qaalluu*. These are more direct intermediaries to God with strong powers to bless and to curse, and whose sanction is needed to legitimize all appointments. The term is often translated "priest king", but like all other holders of offices and title, the incumbents are not very drastically marked off from other herdowners in their lifestyle. Boraana combine an elaborate system of ideas of sacredness and sanctity with an everyday attitude towards such values which observers often find surprisingly relaxed.

Let us return to the concept of *ayaana*, of cosmological principles. As stated above, these are themselves immaterial but have material manifestations in this world. In the words of an educated Boraan: 'When we say *ayaana* it is (something) abstract if you take the English sense. It is something that you cannot touch, you cannot see as an object. However it is something that has been there and will be there, that is always there. It is like the concept of *waaqa*, beauty. It is there and real. You can describe it, but you cannot see it or touch it' (Gemetchu 1990). However, the this-worldly manifestations are basic to the order of things and everyday life. Whether they are characteristics tied to particular calendric days, human personalities and tasks in life, or the collective fates of specific groups of people, they can be experienced by human senses, even if the *ayaana* are immaterial themselves.

Some of the "essence" of the *ayaana* concept itself can be grasped if we compare it with the English expression "spirit" as used with reference to personal moods, supernatural beings and ideological-emotional principles e.g. "the spirit

of capitalism". The Boraan *ayaana*, however, can be thought of as fractions of Divinity: fractions which arise from the continuous Creation by which God expresses himself and imposes structure on the world. One of the most important aspects of the cosmic principles is that they are temporally structured, and this is seen in the use of the concept to refer to the calendrical days. Furthermore, the *Ayaana* of a phenomenon represents its basic essence, as intended by God. It is the cause of a phenomenon which expresses itself through the characteristics of that phenomenon and also through its ensuing consequences. The Boraan concept of truth, *duuga*, refers to this closeness to God's ultimate intention.

In accordance with what has been said above, a person's personality, his fate and the lasting results of his work are all expressions of the same principle. The concept of *ayaana* is very close to that of *gar*, which relates to the *ayaana* of a particular person or being as he is born. In this way of thinking, personalities are embodiments of abstract ideas, which can also express themselves as the essence of material things. Although a person, man or woman, is the material embodiment of an abstract principle, a person is also his or her physical being. The Boraana are quite explicit that the physical being only lives once. The conscious, physical life is referred to as *lubbu*. This concept is closely associated with the neck. When you slaughter an animal and cut its eight veins, it is the *lubbu* that is cut. Food, air and water are necessary for *lubbu* but *ayaana* is a much more abstract concept, independent of mundane necessities. It is a mystery which only the Creator himself is thought to be able to understand. The *ayaana*, as understood by Boraan philosophers, is not tied to a particular person for the limit of his or her physical existence. It precedes him and is his ultimate cause, but is also expressed in him and in the results of his actions. It is there in his children, and also in the results of his deeds, in the wealth and knowledge that he leaves after himself. It is abstract but it does have a real existence independent of the person, and it can have an impact on physical realities.

This way of thinking is reflected in the way Boraan elders express themselves about ancient mythical figures, such as the mythical ancestor of the Boraan, Horroo. *Horroo* as an expression refers to sources of mineral water, and there is thus an ambiguity as to whether Boraana claim to emanate from "a source" or perhaps even "Mr. Source". As personalities are embodiments of abstract ideas, which can also express themselves as the essence of material things, *Horroo* can at the same time be seen as a person, as a well, or as the general principle of wells, the well "as idea". The essence of a cultural invention is sometimes similarly expressed in personalized form. We will return to the metaphor of the well below.

TIME AND THE GAADA SYSTEM

Many East African pastoralists have political systems based on age-sets and age-grades. The Boraana *Gadaa* system differs from these. Apart from having a regular "age-set system" working for the recruitment of warriors, the Boraana have a "generation-class system", i.e. a structure based upon fictive rather than biological age. As cohorts of men move through the system they pass through collective life stages, ideally regulating the timing of marriage (cf. Baxter's essay), fatherhood and retirement and with ritual and jural power allocated to the group at fixed eight-year periods. All Boraan belong to one of five categories of lineage sections, and within the line to one particular generation class. The membership in these five streams of generation classes is inherited from father to son, so that a son belongs to the set initiated 40 years after his father. Larger patrilineal categories such as clans, however, crosscut the division into *Gadaa* streams.

Power circulates between these categories, returning to the first line after five periods of 8 years duration. Thereby ritual and jural power come back to the sons of the members of the first group 40 years after their reign. For each such cohort, a large number of offices are appointed by election or inheritance: a senior council consisting of the major *Abba Gadaa*, two *Abba Gadaa Kontoma* and three other senior councillors (*Hayyu*) plus four ritual officiants: the councillors are supported by voluntary deputy councillors (*Jallaba*) and a large number of junior conscripts. For each of the two *Abba gada kontoma* there is an additional junior council consisting of a number of *Hayyu Medicca* councillors, who represent all Boraana clans and *Hayyu Garba* representing the clan as the *Abba Gadaa Kontoma* himself. The senior councillors tend to be selected while their cohort is still "young". Future councillors are then selected among youngsters who have promising personalities and good ancestral records, stemming from ideally peaceful, generous and eloquent earlier leaders. The selected youths will often be firstborn sons or grandsons of the councillors of earlier generations, although there is also alternation between families. Asmarom, who offers the most detailed description of this system, notes that despite the multiplication of office, the men in question are generally expected to serve as "universal leaders" and there is little role differentiation between them when it comes to their activities (Asmarom 1973:85; see also Bassi's essay).

Besides being, in the past, the major time regulator for scheduling rituals, assemblies and intertribal warfare, the record of past *gadaa* reigns provides a skeleton chronology for oral history. Oral history is kept relevant by the fact that fate is considered cyclical. The past and the present are continuously re-evaluated in relation to each other.

The ideal working of the *Gadaa* system presupposes that all sons are born 40 years after their fathers. This is, of course, not true, and there is a demographic peripheralization process that continuously separates those who approximate the conditions imposed by the system, and those who are born too late to fit it.

This process has been well described by Asmarom (1973). Particularly the younger sons of younger sons of younger sons tend to be extremely delayed in relation to the time when they would fit the *gadaa* process. People who are born around the appropriate time have good reason to stay on close to the ritual centres. On the other hand, men born more than a lifespan after the time when "their" *gadaa* class was in power are overrepresented at the periphery, for example at Waso in Kenya. "Retired" classes do have a certain representation in the *gadaa* system through the junior councils of the two *Abba Gadaa Kontoma*, but do not have access to senior positions and are increasingly underrepresented. While the ritual centres lie in the grassy highland, the dry lowlands are seen as fit for Boraan categories which for demographic reasons are peripheral to the *gadaa* system. That is, for "younger sons" generally, and also for allied groups classified as junior to the Boraana proper such as Gabra, Sakuye and Waata. These peoples are considered by the dominant Boraana ideology, if not necessarily by themselves, as Boraan clients. (See essay by Gufu Oba.)

TO BE THE FIRST

Boraan dominant ideology puts a heavy emphasis on being the first-born son, the *angaafa*. The *angaafa*, more than any of his brothers, represents in undiluted form the same essence as his father and by extension the lineage: he inherits a somewhat larger part of the father's herd and is his father's representative.² Ritually, he is carrier of "Boraanness" to a higher degree. On the female side, the idea of the senior wife (the first to be married to the husband) reflects the same basic thinking.³

In fact, the whole *gadaa* system could be seen as an age-system which, rather than making all brothers equal by fictive age, only took account of the firstborn sons. Even firstborn sons, of course, are not necessarily born at the most appropriate time, but an important rule associated with the *gadaa* ensures that they are not born too early to fit the ideal interval of 40 years.

On the scale of the community as a whole, these distinctions are expressed as distinctions between the senior-born Boraana Ilmaan Korma (The Sons of Heroes) and the junior and more peripheral Ilman Jaarsaa⁴ (The Sons of Old Men). Taboos and ritual restrictions apply more strictly to the former. The latter are born too late to take part in the regular ritual cycle but, it is often stressed,

² Among the Konso, however, this synecdochal relation of the first son to the father is even more marked since younger sons take the names of their immediate father as patronym, while the elder son and his elder sons etc. retain the patronym of the lineage founder. This is not so among the Borana (Hallpike 1979).

³ Among women, the first married wife has a more secure and privileged position than later wives—she represents the prototypical, ideal marriage.

⁴ The conventional translation has been "Sons of Bulls" but I here yield to the suggestion from Gemetchu Megeressa that it would be offensive to the Boraana to make cattle the measure of men: "hero" should be the basic meaning of the term, which can then be applied to men and bulls as one wishes. See Dahl, 1993:107.

that, except for their degree of ritual purity, they are part of the same community in all important respects: they abide by the same law, the same custom and the same culture they are part of the same society, but they have a different role to play. Baxter (1994:248) quotes Knutsson to emphasize that the essence of Oromo identity is active involvement in Oromo cultural values through local ritual performances: "the overt expression of one's ethnic identity is found in small-scale rituals and feasts with exclusive participation of members of a single ethnic group" (Knutsson 1969:97). However, ritual participation is not necessarily a value open to all equally, it reflects the symbolic distance to the identity-giving source, to origin and essence, in terms of time. This is also reflected in a decreasing scale of communal interest in life-cycle rituals on the scale of the "tribe" as a whole, which can be exemplified by the social gradation of name-giving ceremonies in which primacy of time is very important:

- a. The *gubbisa* of the first-born *Daballe* and their *Daballe* brothers within the *gadaa* ritual cycle
- b. The *gubbisa* of other first-born sons, not born at the time appropriate to the *gadaa* cycle
- c. The lesser *moggasa* ceremony of junior sons and daughters (see Blackhurst's essay).
- d. The *waqalal* ceremony of peripheral, Muslim boys (see Aguilar's essay).

At the centre, closest to the divine sources of blessing and fertility, we find the namegiving ceremony of the *Daballe*, the ones whose biological ages fit the ritual *gadaa* ages most comfortably. The ceremonies of the *Gamme*, the *Daballe* and the *Gadamojji*, all come at the same time in the cycle and are performed on the same day. The *Daballe* are boys born to members of the ruling *gadaa* class. They are the first children that class was allowed to keep. Children born earlier used to be "thrown out", i.e. left in the forest at least nominally to die or to be picked up by the hunting-gathering Waata caste. The *Daballe* were brought up by Waata as well, but are brought back into the Boraan community. They make up a holy category, able to convey fertility and blessing and are dressed drably in order not to attract attention. Other name-giving ceremonies are important to the individual, but they are not seen as equally central to the continuity of Boraan society nor to the same degree as a communal issue.

The idea of primogeniture—and of the pre-eminence of the first wife—links temporal seniority with the prototypical ideal and origin. Yet, I stress again that, although there is this dimension of time to originality, creation continues at the same time to be an ongoing process.

CORE AND PERIPHERY

As "elder brothers" have more reason to stay on in the central areas, this becomes an "organizational" fact, relating to how people over time actually be-

come distributed in terms of space (Dahl 1979:163). People "out of time" tend to disperse towards the periphery. But this process also has its correspondence on the ideological level, for the reproduction of good living conditions for all Boraana is seen as hinging on the proper following of ritual by those timely—born and centrally—placed descendants of first-born sons. They were responsible for the two most important aspects of Boraan government—on one hand to provide metaphorically a thorny fence against potential enemies by carrying out ritually regulated warfare and raiding and, on the other, to minimize conflict within the community. "Peace" is the key concept for understanding Boraan values: in Boraan views to settle disputes by consensus, negotiation and compromise is absolutely essential to human well-being. (See essays by Helland and Bassi.)

Boraanness is therefore a value which extends from a core to a periphery, gradually waning away. However, the essence of being a true Boraana is also an essence of being close to God, close to the sources of fertility and blessing. Adherence to the norms implied by living at the tribal centres on the Kenyan-Ethiopian border and following the proper rules of the *Gadaa* system makes those Boraana a source or channel of blessing and fertility which radiates to the social, spatial and demographic periphery. In everyday personal interaction Boraan men are expected to treat each other in an egalitarian way, respecting each others physical and psychical integrity by not using violence, threats of violence, orders nor insults to each other. Yet social control is put in to practice very much through the use of blessings and the implicit threat of cursing, so hierarchical differences in ritual efficacy are still important.

Boraan dual structures can best be understood by reference to Dumont's notion of hierarchical opposition. In a hierarchy of contrasts, A may be superior to both a and b by containing them both: a is more similar to A than b is and thereby a is superior to b from some points of view but equal from other points of view (the *primus inter pares* paradox!). Or, in terms of Boraan concepts, of two subordinate units, the one which has temporal primacy is better fit to be used as a synecdoche for the more comprehensive unit. A man is superordinate to all his sons who all embody his *ayaana* but, as mentioned above, he will be represented better among them by his eldest son, to whom his powers and characteristics are considered as transferred in the most undiluted way. In terms of property, the first-born son takes over that part of his father's herd which the latter has not yet formally allotted to any specific other child at the time of his death. Yet, from other points of view, the brothers may be treated as equals. Equality and hierarchy may rest as alternative possibilities in the same concept, ready to be emphasized according to the exigencies of the situation.

In the descent group structure, the idea of first-bornness is expressed in terms of senior lineages—those who descend from the first born sons of first born sons. Among the Macha Oromo of Ethiopia, where the term *Boraana* is used to refer to a particular subgroup within the Macha, *Boraanness* stands for the type of seniority just described and clans classified as *Boraana* represent

more purely the power of blessing and curse ultimately deriving from Divinity (Hultin 1984:13, 1990:158 ff.; Bartels 1983).

SOURCES OF EXISTENCE

There are two themes in the above description that are relevant to Boraan conceptions of power and legitimacy, as based on "holiness". It is possible to identify two important characteristics of sacredness in Boraana terms. One implies transcending the fundamental binary oppositions that are so prominent in their culture (e.g. by standing above gender): the other relates to closeness to Divinity in terms of "essence and dilution" or a graduated "purity". "Purity" in this context has nothing to do with chastity, but refers to something which in an unmediated way represents its original essence.

Now it is time to return to the well metaphor, and I will ask the reader to dwell for a while on the idea of "the source". Think of a source of clean water, where the water swells up in the middle and ripples the surface in concentric rings until flowing over the brims at each side and muddied by the soil slowly dissipates into it. This metaphor—combining the basic schemas of paths and flow with that of centre/periphery—expresses some essential elements of Boraan ritual hierarchy : the principle of temporal primacy, origin and seniority, the spatial hierarchy of centre over periphery, the idea of essence and dilution or a graduated purity.

To express the fundamental principle of extending a central idea to peripheral applications, the Boraana say "what applies to the *Qalluu* applies to his dog" or, in the context of Law *Seera*:

<i>Waanqarri Qabuu</i>	What the sharp end has
<i>Qarqari Qabaa</i>	the sharp edge also has
<i>Waan Hayyun Qabuu</i>	what the senior councillor has
<i>Makalli Qabaa</i>	the assistants also have

or, forthrightly, "What goes for the centre, goes for the periphery".

This is the basis of Boraan jurisdiction, combining customary understandings administered at local elder's courts and transformed by praxis, with holy Laws, proclaimed at the central assembly and organized around central symbols, emblems or paradigms, which are worthy of protection because they represent the flow of blessing and/or the authority. The use of the Laws is mainly through interpretative extension by "prototypical classification" from central, explicit statements to more peripheral applications suited to the situation.

According to the conceptual thinking of the Boraan law specialist, a superior value or concept, representing the original idea or essence (*ayaana*) of something, dominates and influences its context. Moving centrifugally from this central concept, we find that related issues are dominated by the same considerations or characteristics, but in diluted form. That which comes closer to the

original essence of the phenomenon, imposing structure on the context, is also closer to God taken as the generative force and hence holier: it reflects his intentions. One could express it thus; that this is an emic model of "prototype categorization". It is also, seen in its ritual and spatial context, a political claim for supremacy.

I will not try to look for the ultimate cause or source (!) of this metaphor, except to note that the metaphor of "source" is by no means alien to the Boraana who, in their own conceptions originated from Horroo Wallabu "the source of Lake Freedom", and who relate the original formation of their particular *Gadaa* system to the take-over of the nine central well-complexes. I have referred to the ambiguity of *horroo* earlier and have elaborated on Boraan ideas of wells and water elsewhere (Dahl and Megerssa 1990). The well is the beginning of everything. As we recall, centre-and-periphery thinking is one of the basic ways of conceptualizing that Lakoff and Johnsson regard as based in primary bodily experiences, but there are also good reasons why such a metaphor makes particular sense to the Boraana. As a curiosity it can be mentioned that researchers such as Upton (1986:21), who have dealt with range and water-management problems in Boraan areas, illustrate well use by images of circles showing decreasing intensity of settlement (and grazing pressure) from centre to periphery. Increasing time has to be spent on burdensome travelling with the cattle the further away you get into the periphery, until you reach the point where the pasture is left to waste because of lack of water. The concentric circle is, of course, a conventional way of depicting such phenomena. It is neither limited to the Boraan setting, nor does its occurrence in technical reports necessarily reflect "emic" views in the concerned populations. Certainly Upton makes no claim to offer an "insiders view". On the other hand, his image presumably reflects a reality which can also be experienced by Boraana and which can also offer them an image of how values can be spatially conceptualized. Another way to look at this spatial paradigm is to see in it a widely shared Abyssinian mental image: after having written the first version of this text I became aware of a passage in Donald Levine's *Wax and Gold* (1965:74-75) in which he states that "the pattern of a charged centre surrounded by circles of decreasing significance recurs in the main areas of Amhara life". None of these contextualizations is necessarily more relevant than another. I have also noted above how the principle of primogeniture tends to work centripetally on the elder sons and lineages and centrifugally on the younger ones, and thus create a spatial reality which approximates to the way space is conceptualized as more or less sacred, thereby more or less conforming to the ideals of a true Boraana society depending upon closeness to the centre.

The well-known psychoanalyst, Erik Homburger Erikssen, has attempted to define "identity" as "a subjective feeling of life-giving unity and continuity" (1971). This is how I would conceptualize the Boraan image of *Waaqa*: a source of identity, of life-giving unity and continuity. The closer you are to His plans in time and space, the holier you are and the more Boraan you are as well.

Being a Boraan is thus a matter of graduality. What is the relevance of this for Oromo identity? Well, I hold that is more a matter for the social and political philosophers of the Oromo and Boraana to argue about, than for the social anthropologist, who should be wary about claiming to define the true cultural essence of any ethnic group.

Towards a Comparative Ethnography of the Oromo

The Importance of Affines

P. T. W. Baxter

An increasing number of Oromo are documenting aspects of their vibrant and distinctive culture. In this they are part of the much wider African struggle to break free from the dominating and divisive cultural legacies of the colonial past. This entails:

- (i) the rediscovery of pre-colonial cultural and social inheritances;
- (ii) the re-evaluation of the content of those discoveries; and
- (iii) connecting (i) and (ii) to the present.

This rebuilding of cultural confidence as a source for contemporary pride has become, in the words of Basil Davidson's striking title, a major part of *The Black Man's Burden*. The Oromo only differ from other Africans in that the alien rule which they have survived did not appear to be so obviously colonial as that endured by, say, the Kikuyu or the Ashanti or the Xhosa.

Davidson argues, quoting Meyer Fortes, that the volunteers who fought in the African national liberation struggles looked to their cultural pasts, 'as media for giving tangible substance to moral obligations' because they felt 'a conviction that there is a moral order in the universe, and that a man's well-being depends upon obedience to that order as men see it' (Fortes 1962:298). That 'order' consisted, and continues to consist, of sets of shared understandings and reciprocal responses which are based in custom sanctioned social relationships; i.e., those modes of daily behaviour which seem so obviously proper to the people themselves that they do not require explanation nor analysis; they are just lived. As parts of peoples lived experience such cultural practices are constantly open to accretion and diminution but, and above all, creative invention and adaptation.

As Benedict Anderson has put it; nationalism can be best understood not by aligning it 'with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which—as well as against which—it came into being' (1983:12). A common part of this process, and certainly one which is true for Oromo nationalism, is to extend the felt cultural boundaries beyond those of localised and distinctively named *tribes*, such as Booran or Arsi,

so as to incorporate all those who share a common culture within one ethnicity or *nation*. The importance and centrality of such traditional moralities (or cultural modalities) for the active participants in liberation struggles, and the need they felt to extend the boundaries of their moral community, has been well documented, most notably by John Lonsdale (1992). Efforts to connect with the moralities of the past cannot simply be dismissed as sentimental nostalgia or backward looking antiquarianism. But sadly, despite its obvious importance, even now 'moral ethnicity is not given its due in analyses of modern Africa' (Lonsdale 1992:446). The creation of such 'moral ethnicities', the reconciliation of reconstructed pasts with apparently depressing and slippery presents, has largely been left to African creative writers.

I hope that this short paper will be a tentative first step towards a contextualised comparative ethnography of the underlying 'elements of structures' (Barnard 1992: Ch. 1) of Oromo social relationships. I examine certain aspects of marriage among the Booran and the highland Arsi of Chilalo and the consequent relationships of affinity which are generated by marriage. I think that certain important underlying structural similarities will be discernible beneath the differences.

Marriage and the maintenance of proper relationships between the two groups of close kin of both the spouses are central to the traditional and the contemporary social orders. Both Booran and Arsi cite the collapse of marriage and of proper respect between the sets of affines which marriage creates as horrifying indicators of social and moral anarchy, such as that which occurred during the horrors of the Great Famine which devastated most of eastern Africa towards the end of the last century. Alula Pankhurst (1992) has described how Resettlement villagers who had entered into casual unions of convenience during the horrors of the enforced migrations converted them into proper unions, by the performance of traditional marriage rituals (however abbreviated those had to be), as soon as they could. Not simply to become respectable but in order to set each marriage within a moral order and, by its social recognition, create two bodies of supportive affines. Such contextualisation of individual relationships within a traditional moral order was not unique. It was paralleled by the memorial services which were held to transform the corpses which had been abandoned like dogs by the roadside into properly buried people: into departed but remembered kinsfolk and neighbours, and members of the ongoing community of the living and the dead.

Ordinary people leading humdrum lives certainly 'become aware of their culture and experience their distinctiveness not through the performance of elaborate and specialised ceremonial but through the evaluation of everyday practices' (Cohen 1982:6). Many, probably most, Oromo have no personal experience of *gaada*, but every Oromo child will have attended many marriages and is constantly made aware, by the respect that affines must be accorded during their constant comings and goings, that it has a large group of classificatory affines. Moreover everyone must marry and assume the unavoidable reciprocal

obligations of affinity.

Oromo men frequently assert, as a mark of their cultural difference from Amhara, that Oromo married women have more respect, rights and independence than do married Amhara women. Certainly Booran and Arsi wives, so long as they observe the social proprieties, maintain a high degree of control over their own personal lives. The comparative freedom in manner, speech and deportment that wives assume stems, I suggest, from the traditional indissolubility of marriage and the protective power and influence which the immediate agnates of wives can wield as the affines of their husbands. (But cf. Ensminger 1993:144 and 178–9.)

My own field observations from the traditional Booran of Kenya date from the fifties and those from the Muslim highland Arsi of Chilalo from the sixties; so my ethnographic present may now be only a mirror to the past. Nevertheless I do not think, despite the awful experiences of drought, famine and political discrimination which both peoples have since endured, that my present argument, which is about underlying values, is invalidated.

Booran and Arsi share very similar sets of notions about the complementary roles of men and women in domestic life and the division of labour in subsistence activities; as they do also about pollution, fertility, virility, sexuality and fecundity. They also share similar notions about relationships between the generations, and both are gerontocratically inclined. For both peoples a child which is conceived by an unmarried girl is abhorrent and polluting. Marriage cattle cannot be received for a girl who is known to be pregnant because they would pollute the herd. I only knew one unmarried, pregnant Booran girl; though I heard horrified stories about two others, one of whom fled with her boyfriend to Ethiopia and the other became a prostitute in Nairobi. I did not hear of a single instance of an unmarried girl getting pregnant when I was in Arsi. Early and binding betrothal of girls (and sometimes boys) was approved and frequent among both Arsi and Booran.

The story of the pregnant Booran girl is sad but instructive. She was ungainly, rather dull, several years past the normal age of marriage and from a large but almost stockless family. Her father had been dead for several years and not surprisingly her mother was careworn and morose. Her eldest brother, a bachelor of about thirty, acted as male head of the family. He was an amiable, conscientious and industrious man, but was often away from home working as a casual labourer. I had employed him several times as a donkey syce and had come to know him quite well. Once the pregnancy was discovered there was a whirlwind of activity among the local elders; meetings were held, prayers and sacrifices offered and the girl quickly handed over to a MuKamba policeman who was leaving the very next day on a posting down country. The elders did not even allow her brother to accept the fifty shilling token of good intentions that the new 'husband' was anxious to give to him. They argued that it resembled a marriage payment and that shillings, like the stock they stood for, might be a source of pollution! A baby without a socially recognized 'pater', and

therefore without a patriline, is an absolute social anomaly and therefore extremely dangerous.

The seducer, a man of similar social and personal attributes to the girl, was expected to flee and become a client herdsman to a Rendile or Samburu; that is to cease to be a Booran. He refused to do this. When his age-mates threatened to drive him away he countered by threatening to take them before the District Commissioner and charge them with assault. So his age-mates grabbed hold of him and put him through a token burial ceremony, even to breaking his staff and splitting his sandals, in a hole which a hyena had dug for a den. It was a short but tense drama. From then on every one (except his mother who still milked for him) treated the young man as if he was dead. Unfortunately I left shortly afterwards. When I revisited some twenty years later I enquired if the seducer had held out or if his age-mates had driven him away. But I could not find anyone, not even among those of his age-mates who had participated in the mock burial, who would admit to any memory of the girl, the man, the family or the event! The incident had been expunged from public recollection. It was as if none of the actors had ever been. I can only assume that the man had fled.

There are clear points in both Booran and Arsi marriage rituals at which a girl becomes a wife. From then on for the rest of her child bearing life any children she has, regardless of their genitor, are recognised socially as her husband's. Ideally, and often in practice, a woman of child bearing age whose husband dies should go to live with a husband's brother and continue to bear children to the name of her physically deceased spouse. This is a continuation of the original marriage rather than true levirate. Sons inherit from the herd of their 'father', that is the man who first 'took' their mother as a wife. Women who rejected either their husbands or their deceased husband's brothers and went to live with lovers could only ever do so as lovers *jaaltuu*, they could never become wives. Any children such a woman bore were reckoned as those of the man she had married as a virgin bride. For all daily purposes such couples behave as a man and wife. I only became aware of the existence of several such relationships when I was making village censuses and taking genealogies. There can never be any confusion about legal parenthood and hence of the lines along which property is transmitted.

Neither Booran nor Arsi have a word which directly translates the English word 'widow', because a woman always remains the wife of the man she married: women whose husbands have died and have been left on their own are described by their social position, such as *haadha hiyeesa* 'a mother who is poor' or as *ta dhirsa inqaane* 'who has not got a husband' (Leus, Van de Loo and Cotter 1992:231). *Guursumetti*, in varied spellings, which Tutschek, Foot, da Thienne and others give as 'widow', is more properly a woman who has run away from, or been driven out by, her husband and gone to live with another man. (See Tilahun Gamta 1989:283; Leus 1988:278).

Most women past childbearing age choose to live with a married child.

An Arsi wife who dies childless in the early years of her marriage should be substituted for by another girl from her family, ideally a younger sister, who is known as a *bimbetoo* (cf. Tegegn Nureesa Wako 1994:107). A *bimbetoo* is welcomed, feasted, blessed and exhorted as if she were a bride but in a much less extravagant style than a wife would be. No further cattle are transferred and a *bimbetoo* is spoken of as 'given' rather than 'taken'. She is treated with the respect and honour appropriate to a bride, but socially she is simply a replacement who is there to nourish the affinal relationships which were being established. Such a replacement wife is not required when a union is well established, especially if it has been fruitful. As far as I know Booran do not practice this custom. I think it would be redundant.

Both Booran and Arsi marriages so overfulfill the famous catalogue of 'classes of rights' which Edmund Leach (1961:76) listed as being established by marriage, that neither divorced woman nor widow are possible statuses. Some Muslim men insisted to me that the ability to divorce 'a bad wife' was one of the progressive advantages that Islam had brought; but, I knew of none who had actually divorced a wife, however aggravating her behaviour. Simply, they valued their affines too much. [I was told by some devout Arsi Muslims that they neither gave bridewealth nor sent accompanying cattle *geegowu* with a bride, because to do so was both against the teachings of Islam and contrary to the laws of modernising Ethiopia. But I never located a single person, not even the Kadi nor one of the many zealously pious Haajis, who married without substantial transfers of cattle.]

If marriage is unbreakable even by death it follows that affinal relationships must be unbreakable; so that the relationship with a wife's brother is as unbreakable as that with a brother. So, not surprisingly, Booran and Arsi take great care both in the selection of spouses and in the fostering and maintenance of good relations with their affines *sodda* (cf., Peters 1976). In folk etymology, though not I have been told in linguists truth, the word *sodda* derives from *-soddu* 'to fear', a common saying is *sodda sodda soddat* 'affines respect (even fear) affines'.

The first marriages of men and girls are arranged for them and the selection of useful and congenial affines is the main concern of the marriage arrangers; the compatibility of the couple is seldom an issue. An elder who has command over his own herd may arrange his own marriage(s), which must of course be with a girl, but he would be unwise to ignore the counsel of his close agnates on the new affines that, through him, they are making. The fruits of a wife's womb are totally incorporated into the family and descent group of her husband. For example, the verb *-worrmsu* can mean, i. to take the virginity of a bride; ii. to become a parent; iii. to incorporate into your family or homestead *worra*. The consummation of a marriage is known as *gaafa woworrmsu*, which has many resonances, but could be translated as 'the time of becoming a family together'. An Arsi phrase which appears quite frequently in my texts is *Namni nitii'fi inworrmsa*, one translation of which could be 'A person brings his wife into the

family by taking her virginity'.

For both Arsi and Booran affinal alliances were central to strategies of herd management and to the construction of networks of political influence. But, there were several differences in the marriage rules and customs of the two peoples.

Among highland Arsi the planning and performance of marriages, and the organisation of the complex series of ceremonies and rituals which accompanied them, seemed to dominate social and ritual life. They were constant topics of gossip and negotiation. My original research intention had been to study *gaada*, but I soon discovered that very few Arsi were interested and then mostly only in an antiquarian way. Whereas marriage arrangements were on everyone's lips. During the marriage season, when the milk pots were brimming and the granaries full, I was invited to more weddings than I could fit in. Marriage forced itself to the top of my research agenda. Go betweens or matchmakers *keeticha* (cf. *keeto* 'watchman, sentry, scout') were always spying out likely matches. One very wealthy and influential 'big man' told me that he was constantly having to divert *keeticha* who sought to entangle he and his family into marriage entanglements that they did not want.

Arsi wedding days are times of intense emotion and frenetic activity. There may be hundreds of guests to be fed, some of whom may stay on for a night or two. Entertainment is lavish. Emotions run high, particularly among the young men of the girl's neighbourhood who, while recognising the inevitable, nevertheless often passionately resent a beloved companion being taken off by strangers. The families of both the bride and the groom, particularly those who may not have favoured that particular match, are often looking for slights from their new affines at which they can take umbrage. Quarrels are easily sparked off and elders must be constantly alert to smother them. A very conspicuous feature of weddings was the solemn, dramatic and highly stylised, but nevertheless very specific and fierce, series of harangues which the bride gives delivered to the bride receivers.

The head of cattle exchanged at a marriage varied from a couple up to a hundred or more, depending on the status and wealth of the contracting parties. The composition of the herds along with the particular attributes of specific beasts, were a topic which combined economic, political and domestic gossip and the imaginative pleasure of talking about the social genealogies, pedigrees, colours, patterns and particular beauties of individual cattle.

Marriage and its consequences were as crucial for Booran as for Arsi but public recognition of the event was strikingly less marked. Booran have a rich complex of rituals centred on those of the life cycle associated with *gaada*, but the ceremonies and rituals of marriage concern only a few close kin and neighbours. The collection of a bride only takes from just after sunset until just before dawn. I was never invited to a 'wedding' but did happen to be present on two separate occasions when brides were collected to be escorted formally to the homestead of the father of the groom, and once when a bride was formally re-

ceived. Indeed marriage ceremonies were so inconspicuous and discussion of marriages so slight that I collected much less data than I ought to have done. (For fuller descriptions see Asmarom Legesse 1973, *The Marriage Process*, 28–32.)

Booran brides do not come 'accompanied' by cattle. By tradition (though this was changing among the Muslims of Isiolo District. See Hogg 1982: Ch. V), bridewealth, regardless of the wealth of the two families, was fixed at four head of cattle *karaata*, plus some cloth for the mother of the bride and some tobacco and coffee beans which were transmitters of blessings. All but the very poorest grooms could readily raise that. The cattle were seldom, if ever, physically moved from the herds of the groom's family but remained there as a living debt. The cattle should only be called in as a sanction on affines who had acted extremely badly or if the bride's family were in very dire need indeed. The *karaata* became the nucleus of a breeding herd which 'belonged' to the brides agnates but was herded with the stock of the groom and his agnates. The new affinal relationship was immediately enmeshed in the complex practicalities of stock ownership, management and inheritance. As the progeny of the bride-wealth cattle increased so did the debt and with it the influence of the brides agnates over the man to whom they had given a bride. Only a great pestilence or a disaster which wipes out the national herd can destroy relationships so embedded in cattle. When that happens, as during the great famine of the 1890s or during the *shifita* wars of the 1960s (see Hogg 1980), then proper social life ceases and anomie prevails until the herds, and with them human dignity, can be restored.

Booran, have a set of rules which regulate the choice of marriage partners and which, like those which regulate the movements of individuals within generation-sets *luuba* and age-sets *hariiya*, are formal, uncompromising, logical and definite. They seem to bear the impress of philosophical thought and mesh intellectually with the organizations and rules of the lower level putative descent groups and the generation-set system. Marriage is forbidden between girls and men whose fathers are members of the same generation-set or sequential age-sets, but these and other restrictions need not concern us here. It is sufficient for present purposes just to note that the range of possible marriage partners for Booran is much more restricted than it is for Arsi. The crucial rule is that of moiety exogamy. Booran say, 'We have *Gonha* and *Sabho*', that is two exogamous moieties of those names (see Haberland 1963: Ch. V for a full description). Everyone, except for the divine exceptions of the *Kaallu*, may only take a spouse from the moiety opposite to their own. Moieties and their component parts are not localised and control no productive resources. (See essays by Helland and Bassi.)

A consequence of moiety exogamy is that, through the use of classificatory kinship terms of address, otherwise unrelated members of opposite moieties can, and do, address each other either generally as *sodda* 'affine', or by a more specific term appropriate to their ages, generations, genders and statuses. Similarly, members of the same moiety may address each other by the appro-

priate agnatic term of address. As classificatory affines all the members of the opposite moiety are people who should be treated with a mixture of deference, respect and fear. In daily life the terms of address are often used to joke and banter with, but the rule is most important conceptually. The sort of complementary opposition it embodies is a positive daily expression of the 'Peace of the Boraan' (Baxter 1965:64-78); all Booran are bound to each other conceptually as classificatory agnates or classificatory affines. The marriage of a man and a woman is among other things, therefore, a particular celebratory commemoration, or repetition, of an ongoing state of being. In so much as a marriage is a reaffirmation of social relationships which are reiterated daily in greetings and prayers it does not call for dramatic recognition; it is a reaffirmation of what already is.

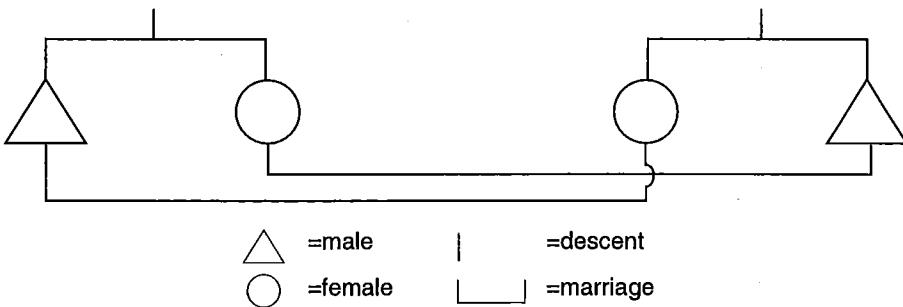
Arsi, who make a great drama out of marriage, do not have exogamous moieties but practice simple patrilan exogamy. Their rules of incest are similar to those of the Booran. In answer to my questions Arsi usually stated that they had two types of marriage. The one known as either *halanga* or *halanyi* 'horse whip' or *gabarro* 'bridewealth', which here I translate as bridewealth marriage. The other was *woll'gaara* 'exchange of wombs', which I render here as 'exchange marriage'.¹ Arsi also have marriage by elopement and by capture, but bridewealth and exchange are by far the most common. Arsi told me that until the catastrophes of the 1890s all marriages were accompanied by bridewealth. The amount of stock transferred was determined by negotiation and was commensurate with the status and wealth of the two exchanging parties. In the wake of famine and defeat there was economic and social collapse; existing relationships between elders and youngsters, parents and children, men and women and between affines could not be maintained properly. In particular there were no cattle which could be spared for bridewealth, and without bridewealth there could not be proper marriage. A future without proper marriage meant a future of continuing anomie, for there could be neither legitimate children nor affines.

At this time the Arsi of Chilalo and Langano had not been converted to Islam and *gaada* still functioned. The general story had it that an elder of proven wisdom and valour named Daatu Takaako called a general assembly. (Kallo, a great, great grand daughter of Daatu and a wife of a local magnate corroborated the common story). Daatu persuaded the assembly to institute a form of marriage by which two families each exchanged a daughter to provide wives for one of their sons. He argued that the purpose of bridewealth had been to provide cattle with which a brother of the bride could, in his turn, obtain a bride. In effect bridewealth enabled a womb to be acquired to replace one lost. By making use of the expedient of exchanging girls directly men and women could continue to be married properly even though there were no exchanges of cattle.

¹ The term 'exchange marriage' is only a handy descriptive term and has no utility as a comparative analytical concept. 'Exchange marriages', as they have been described among some peoples of Nigeria, the Sudan and New Guinea, are not comparable sociologically.

The ideal form it follows logically is the direct exchange of a brother and a sister for a brother and a sister, as is illustrated in Diagram 1 below. Ideally all the four spouses should be 'ready', that is responsible in their behaviour and of an age to consummate the unions. The chances of such qualified pairs of siblings being available at the same time is slight and commonly quite distant classificatory brothers or sisters are substituted, or children who are not 'ready' may be betrothed but not taken. The exchanges of the two grooms and the two brides should take place on the same day.

Diagram 1. *Ideal exchange*



The word *woll'gaara* is charged with associations. It has two components:

- (i) *woll'* means 'together', 'with', 'at one time': as in *-woll'fuudu*, 'take one another in marriage'; *-woll'deemu*, 'go together'; *-wollin'dugu*, 'drink together'; *-wollin'jijirru*, 'to be as one together, exchange or share clothes'.
- (ii) *gaara* means 'stomach' or 'womb' and so, by extension, a 'kinsperson'; *nuu gaara tok'* 'we are of one womb' ie. 'we are one family' or 'we are one stock'. A common repetitive lament at funerals is *gaara kiiya baddee* 'my kinsperson is lost'. So here the word means not only the exchange of wombs but implies 'knowing each other well', 'sharing freely and openly'—as in the phrase *gaara wollin'argu*, 'see into each others stomachs' (which are the home of the emotions), ie. 'to get to know each other well, to see into each others hearts, to share everything'.

At all weddings there are series of events which require sitting together, eating together from the same dish, using the same knife to cut up each others meat, drinking together from the same pot with arms linked and kissing and embracing each other. Open exchange is the ideology of affinity.

Now obviously bridewealth could have been scaled down as, for example, the Nuer did in hard times (Evans-Pritchard 1957:82–3), token bridewealth payments could have been made or debts incurred. But that is not the point. The story was respected as both history and a truth encapsulating myth. My

questions, very properly, were deemed to be pointless.

It may be that Daatu had the vision to foresee some of the radical changes that the Shoan conquest would bring to Arsi life, but the longer term consequences could hardly have been apparent to most people. The most serious middle and long term consequences were the alienation into Crown or private estates of the pastures and waters which had formerly been common resources. The land was divided into *gashas* which were mostly given to Shoan landlords. Almost all the people became tied and grossly exploited tenant/serfs. The traditional transhumant, semi-nomadic mode of pastoral life was so tightly restricted that for most herdsmen it became impossible. Clan segments were arbitrarily localised to delimited lands which could not provide anything like the range of resources which pastoral subsistence requires; a variety of different types of territorially dispersed grazing so that the *fora* 'dry herds' and the *hawiicha* 'milking herds' can be grazed separately; year round access to pasture and water for all the stock; fallback barley land; bamboos for houses and stock compounds; thatching grass and firewood. Arsi devised ways of getting around the new restrictions. They were assisted in this because most of the Shoan *neftanya* found the pastoral and agro-pastoral ways of life so onerous and uncongenial that they left for home. Some Arsi bought titles to the land from the departing landlords.

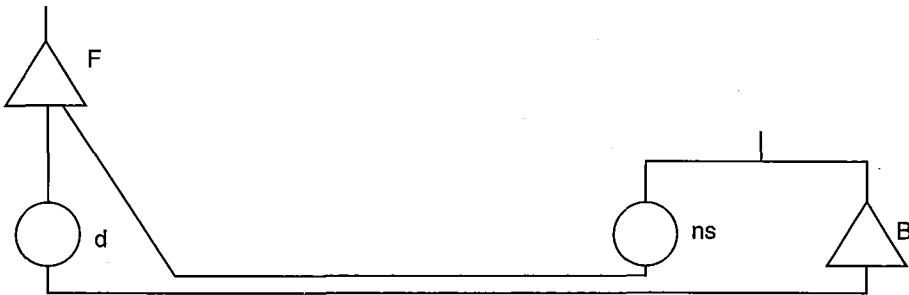
The first requirement for families which sought to rebuild their herds was access to the range of resources listed in the last paragraph. This required the establishment of extensive networks of stock associates, kinsmen and affines. Most close agnates had been settled in the same neighbourhood and, therefore, could not be providers of the required variety of other resources but only be competitors for the local resources that they already shared. With very reduced herds it was not possible to make many stock associates or blood brothers let alone bridewealth marriages. The ideal solution for a family, as Daatu so presciently saw, was to make a series of exchange marriages with a spread of families which could each offer access to a needed resource. Such unions required a reciprocal return. The many stranded affinal connections which exchange marriage provides fit admirably with the many types of dispersed natural resources to which the manager of a family herd needs to have access. That meant long term planning of marriage links and balancing the opportunities offered by new affines with the needs and demands of co-resident agnates. Useful and reliable affinal connections became the most important economic resource a family head could command.

Affinal relationships which are based in double stranded exchange marriages, of the type summarised in Diagram 1, are also less at risk from random blows of fate, such as death or infertility, than are those based on single strands. Indeed many families endeavour, as far as the rules of incest permit, to maintain useful and productive affinal connections over successive generations. The continuation of the system depends on affinity being as indissoluble as agnation. Indissoluble marriage makes that possible in theory but in practise, just as

with agnatic kinship, to exploit its full potential the relationship requires sustained interaction. The utility of exchange marriage is demonstrated by its enduring success; by the nineteen sixties it had become the most common and prestigious form of marriage between two Arsi families.

That it was so much in accord with the spirit of traditional norms and served traditional morality so clearly must surely be two of the reasons for the success of Daatu's innovation. But its success, I suggest, was also related to the self interest of the elders in that it maintained gerontocratic domination. In traditional theory the power of the elders lay in the *gaada* system. In the mundane practicalities of daily life however their power lay in their control of the herds, and hence of bridewealth cattle and the marriages of young men. After the conquest and the associated disasters *gaada* was in disarray and its active participants persecuted. Most of the elders were destitute or nearly so; they became as powerless as infants. Any heifers which survived were such a crucial source of regeneration that they could not be spared for bridewealth. Exchange marriage enabled the elders to retain control over the marriages of their daughters and consequently over their sons: and all, truthfully enough, in the name of maintaining tradition!

Diagram 2. *A wife for a daughter*



F, the father of a child daughter *d*, gives *d* as a betrothed wife to *B* in exchange for *ns* his nubile sister who is nearly of marriageable age. By this arrangement F gets a second wife who will soon be ready to join him as a wife and *B* is ensured of a wife when *d* matures. If *d* does not survive F is committed to provide a substitute. There are other variations which can be played. I hope too publish some texts and descriptions of the rituals which accompany marriage. Now I just sketch in a simplified and stylised account of the collection of a bride.

Exchange marriage continued after the herds had recovered and the immediate need for it had passed, but it ceased to be a simple exchange of girls and became again the occasion for torrents of lavish ritual and great exchanges of cattle. I have no record of a marriage, however poor the families, which took place without the exchange of cattle. The 'underlying structure' moulded Daatu's in-

novation so that it became a buttress of tradition and not simply an opportune expedient to shore it up. In the sixties exchange marriage had many variant forms. A common form allowed many elders to utilise the system for their own advantage at the expense of their younger brothers or sons. As Diagram 2 makes clear. (Bridewealth marriage, of course, allows similar sharp practices).

Early on the agreed morning the groom, accompanied by an escort of mounted agnates, neighbours and age-mates, rides to collect the bride from her natal homestead. They are met outside the bride's village by a party of her kin and neighbours. Greetings are exchanged and both parties sit and face each other. Prayers, blessings and libations are offered. The groom's party are harangued by spokesmen for the bride's family about the inescapable obligations that, as affines, they are taking on. Any difficulties which have been caused by the groom's family and any faults they have made are rhetorically rehearsed. The groom's party can raise no objections. A recurrent feature of harangues in 1968-9 was the obligation of affines to assist each other with court fines or bribes. The parties then drink together and bless each other with their arms linked.

Later in the day the bride is escorted to her new home where she is welcomed, harangued in her turn by the women, sat on the lap of her groom's mother, asperged with fine sprays of milk from the mouths of the fertile women of the family she is joining and sprinkled with grains of barley. She is 'reborn' into her new, permanent home to which her own womb now belongs. In the 'sixties the number of cattle exchanged were a clear indication of the wealth and status of the families. The poor might only exchange a couple of head. One magnate I knew despatched well over a hundred accompanying cattle *geegowu*, a dozen large cloth wraps, a rifle and a richly caparisoned mule. He received an equally lavish return. Most marriages, obviously enough, were made between families of similar status and wealth. Exchange used the language and symbolism of democratic tradition to contribute to the maintenance of the structure of wealth and power without appearing to disadvantage the poor.

The underlying structural elements of traditional notions of marriage and affinity, common to both Booran and Arsi, had been influential enough in Arsi to transform a unique and daring innovation into a version of tradition which legitimised current structures of power. Arsi were culturally proud and confident about their systems of marriage, I never heard any criticism.

An interesting next step, I suggest, would be a comparative analysis of other Oromo structures of marriage.

Keeping the 'Peace of the Waso Boorana'

Becoming Oromo through Religious Diversification

Mario I. Aguilar

Boran society sometimes appears to float on a river of prayers and blessings ...

P.T.W. Baxter (1978:155)

Prayers and blessings are an important part of the daily life of every Boorana. In those prayers the most important word is peace (*nagaa*). In every moment of prayer (morning and evening) peace is asked for by the community, and that action of praying together is understood as a public statement of peace. A Boorana community gathers in unity to pray to God (*Waaqqa*) and also to express their own unity, namely the peace of the Boorana (*Nagaa Boorana*). That Peace of the Boorana becomes the ideal for society and it is kept through the efforts of every individual and of every household.

The *Nagaa Boorana* has been in the past associated with the traditional rituals of the Boorana, those communal moments related to the *gada* system. At the celebrations of *gada*,¹ a new group of responsible Boorana took over the leadership for a period of eight years, assuring the continuity of the community and at the same time the peaceful relation among the Boorana themselves, and between the Boorana people and God. That Peace assured the fertility of the land, animals and human beings (Bartels 1983:373), through the re-enactment of 'a dramatised philosophy or a way of acting out a folk faith rather than an instrumental organization' (Baxter 1978:179).

Due to historical and political changes (conquest by Ethiopian rulers, conversion to a world religion, geographical isolation, etc.), some groups of Boorana ceased to celebrate the *gada* festivals. In those cases, other religious practices began to take place at community level and replaced the ritual and social order generated by *gada*.² In the case of the Waso Boorana of Kenya, the

¹ For a full description of the *gada* system, see Legesse (1973). While Legesse suggests that *gada* is a political system, Baxter (1978:153, 1990: 236, 1994: 180-182) has stressed its organizational and ritual importance among the Boorana.

² Conversion to Islam assumes the replacement of the *gada* ritual structures among the Oromo by other systems of ritual with their own practices (Lewis 1965:31).

gada festivals were never celebrated in the Waso area,³ but other religious practices and ritual moments have been assumed as important for the keeping of their communal ideal, the Peace of the Boorana. In other words, those other religious practices have served the same communal purpose as the *gada* festivals in the past. A process of religious diversification in the history of the Waso Boorana, has allowed them to celebrate a new set of ritual moments that contribute to the keeping of the *Nagaa Boorana* in the Waso area, and has also allowed them to feel united with other Boorana groups in Kenya and Ethiopia. This paper is a brief summary of those changes assumed by the Waso Boorana over a period of sixty years (1932–92).⁴

THE WASO BOORANA

The Waso Boorana of Kenya live around the area of the Waso Nyiro river in the Eastern province in Kenya. They are Oromo speaking peoples,⁵ and therefore related to the Boorana in Northern Kenya/Southern Ethiopia and the Oromo of Ethiopia.⁶ Their social and communal interaction takes place at settlements (*manyatta*),⁷ built beside trading and administrative centres such as Garba Tulla, Merti, Malka Daka and Mado Gashi. Waso Boorana households reside in those *manyatta*, while shepherds move with the herds (sheep, goats and some cows) in search of grazing and water. The whole societal life and subsistence of the Waso Boorana is related to the caring and growth of their herds. Nevertheless, while animals constitute their means of subsistence, animals are also used in every rite of passage and important communal occasion. Therefore at those communal occasions, the animals are given symbolic connotations that relate to Boorana traditions and beliefs.⁸

Shared language is not the only reason for suggesting that the Waso Boorana are Oromo, the contexts and contents of their ritual occasions are Oromo. While language constitutes the main element for a so called 'cultural confederation'

³ Baxter (1979:87) suggests that the *gada* ceremonies have not been held in the Isiolo District since the nineteen thirties. According to the testimony of the older people in Garba Tulla, those ceremonies were never performed in the Waso area (e.g. GTHT/KOR/f.n./1992/48). [GTHT=Garba Tulla Historical Texts, being the creation of written texts from interviews I conducted during my fieldwork, following Sobania (1993:117, footnote 2).]

⁴ This paper is a summary of the argument that I have discussed at length in my unpublished Ph.D. thesis (Aguilar 1993a).

⁵ Any Oromo-speaker can be understood by other Oromo (Baxter 1994:167).

⁶ Baxter (1978:151) suggests that the Boorana have been assumed to be the ancestors of all Oromo.

⁷ The word *ola* is the proper word for a settlement in the Boorana language. Nevertheless, the word used in daily life by the Waso Boorana in Garba Tulla is *manyatta*. The use and meaning of this particular word has to be distinguished from that of the Maasai. Only *morani* warriors can live in a Maasai *manyata* (plural *manyat*) (Mol 1978:102). While the word *manyatta* in Kenya is assumed to be a Swahili word, it does not appear in the Swahili dictionaries. Rechenbach (1967:285) points out that *manyatta* is a foreign loan-word from the Maasai language.

⁸ For example at the naming ceremony, the sheep being slaughtered symbolizes the child being named (Aguilar 1993a:85–96), and also reminds the Boorana of the prohibition of eating the right foreleg (Dahl 1989:158; Bartels 1983:155–56) as part of the traditional classification of the Boorana into two exogamous moieties (Baxter 1965:67).

(Lamphear in Fukui and Markakis 1994:9) of Oromo peoples in the modern states of the Horn of Africa, 'it is ... important to understand the power of the symbols embedded in myth, language, and social behaviour that sustain social identities, for it is this very power that makes ethnicity so effective once such loyalties are evoked' (Spear 1993:16).

In the case of the Boorana of the Waso area, several historical processes of change in religious practices have taken place since the beginning of this century. The symbols and religious practices that associate a Waso Boorana with other Boorana today are part of a process of development in religious affiliation and appropriation of symbols that has indeed been dynamic and complex.

HISTORICAL PROCESSES IN THE WASO AREA

While groups of Boorana were already present in the Isiolo District at the beginning of this century (Aguilar 1993b; Dalleo 1975; Hogg 1981:20), a single group of 1,500 Boorana was escorted into the Waso area from Wajir by the British colonial police in 1932 (Aguilar 1993b). The arrival of that group of Boorana in the Waso area, and the settlement of colonial boundaries in 1934, meant that the Waso Boorana became geographically isolated from other groups of Boorana in Northern Kenya and Southern Ethiopia. After their settlement in the Waso area and throughout the colonial period, the Waso Boorana came into close contact with the Somali, and as a result, they underwent a process of 'somalization' (Baxter 1966) and became Muslims.⁹ The colonial administration encouraged their conversion to Islam, and the Boorana saw the Somali as successful people when dealing with the administration (Aguilar, forthcoming).

At the time of Kenya's independence, the Waso Boorana sided with the Somali in a war of secession (1963–68) known as the *shifita* war.¹⁰ In 1962, Somalia had already made claims to parts of the NFD in Kenya as of being part of a so called 'Greater Somalia'. The Waso Boorana supported the Somali claim on the lines that they were supporting their Muslim brothers. The conflict meant a guerrilla conflict, during which mines were planted on the roads and vehicles were attacked. The response by the Kenya Army was firm, and a state of emergency was declared. As a result, the Waso Boorana were confined to camps and they lost most of their animals, as they were not able to bring them for water and grazing outside the internment camps.

⁹ The idea of a 'somalization' of the Waso Boorana is a process that can be verified by comparing the Waso Boorana and those Boorana who live in Northern Kenya. The Waso Boorana way of dressing (e.g. pictures in Reyes-Cortez 1994a, 1994b, 1994c) resembles that of the Somali (e.g. pictures in Buchholzer 1959:80, 144) and not of the Boorana of Marsabit (e.g. pictures in Haberland, Tafel, 45–47, 50–51, 56–58, 65, 71, 73, 75, 77; Baxter 1979:83, 90) or Ethiopia (e.g. pictures in Bartels 1983:381, 383; Van de Loo 1991).

¹⁰ The word *shifita* means bandit and is derived from the Amharic language (Hogg 1990:30; Schlee 1989:51).

As a result of the *shifita* emergency, the Waso Boorana felt that they had been used by the Somali for their own political purposes. The loss of animals meant that the Waso Boorana became impoverished pastoralists. During the 1970s and 1980s the Waso Boorana tried to rebuild their herds helped by development agencies and churches. All those efforts meant that an area which in colonial times was closed to other peoples became the focus of national policies to change famine relief efforts into development projects (e.g. NCKK Report 1971, SOAS/CA2/A/8/2).

During the last twenty years, due to their disenchantment with the Somali and therefore with Islam, the Waso Boorana have diversified their religious practices. While the older men continue practising Islam, younger generations have on the other hand revived what they see as Boorana traditional practices. Some of the Waso Boorana, especially children, are also following Christian religious practices at the Catholic and Methodist churches in the area. Therefore I have suggested elsewhere (Aguilar 1993f:106) that any study of Waso Boorana religious practices cannot be carried out with the general presupposition that they are Muslims, and that their religious practices go through constant and dynamic processes of change, re-evaluation and adaptation. The Waso Boorana claim allegiance to Islam, and are considered Muslims by the rest of Kenya, but their religious practices show different traditions interacting in local communities of the Waso area, for example Garba Tulla.

RELIGIOUS DIVERSIFICATION IN GARBA TULLA

Garba Tulla¹¹ is located 120 kilometres east of Isiolo. It stands as a trading centre in the middle of the semi-desert of Eastern Kenya. It has a population of a few thousand people and it has intermittently been an administrative post in which a district officer resides.

Garba Tulla town has a centre, on the main road which links Malka Daka and Kinna, where shops and plots are located. In the same main street there is a local police station and a few *hoteli*, places for lodging in the East African sense. One can get food and some communal accommodation in which to pass the night. The centre of town has a mosque, a white building in which Muslims gather five times a day for prayers. The centre of town provides the centre for Islamic influence and, through the Qur'anic school, the orthodox core of Islam tries to influence Waso Boorana religious practices and beliefs.

Manyatta are located outside this established centre of town. They are settlements of Waso Boorana, who need a place to reside, to keep their few possessions, their women, children and young animals. In those liminal settlements life has a different character than in the town itself. During the rainy season

¹¹ Fieldwork in Garba Tulla (Waso area) was conducted between 1987–1988, 1990 and 1992, with the generous help of the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) and an additional fieldwork grant from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London.

there is a constant flow of visitors and people staying for a few months, in the dry season people are fewer. *Manyatta* which are located near the mosque on the west side of town, tend to follow Islamic religious practices more closely than those further away. In town it is the mosque which constitutes the centre of attraction for religious gatherings, public meetings and trade in general. Important links between people are established through conversations before and after the daily prayers. Those Waso Boorana men who gather at the mosque before and after daily prayers are older men, interested, I would suggest, on being recognized as religious and wise men while, at the same time, trying to keep up with news about possible transportation and the stock trade.

Traditional practices which are more emphasized in the settlements outside the centre of town, also provide opportunities for Waso Boorana men and women to establish their own networks and personal authority, but on a more limited scale, within their own *manyatta* or with other *manyatta* in Garba Tulla.

The historical process of gradual conversion to Islam of the Waso Boorana took place over a period of approximately twenty years, the period between their arrival in the area in the 1930s and 1952, when the colonial archives report that most of the Waso Boorana are Muslims (Aguilar, forthcoming). Thereafter, from 1952 to 1992 to be a Waso Boorana in Garba Tulla has been to be a Muslim. In practice though only men of the older generation have been consistent with their self-identification as followers of Islam and their daily attendance of prayers at the mosque in Garba Tulla. Those older men were instructed in Islam when they were young and, even when they cannot read or write, they have learned Islamic prayers and rituals.

Younger men were not instructed in Islam because of the disruption of Waso Boorana life during the emergency of the 1960s. Thirty years ago they saw all the suffering and violence that their fathers and families had to endure because of their support for the Somali cause. Their questioning of that historical period took place in the 1970s; they not only realized that the Waso Boorana were still confused by other Kenyans with people who, living in Kenya, were not really Kenyans (the ethnic Somali), but further that being Muslims and close to the Somali, the Kenyan government associated them with the *shifita*. Therefore the Waso Boorana tragedy of the emergency was not only the loss of animals and resources, but also the fact that since that time, they have been looked at with suspicion by the other communities in Kenya. As well as questioning the validity of Muslim religious practices and their close association with the Somali, those younger men asked questions about the traditions of the Boorana (*Ada Boorana*) and the practices of the Boorana in the past. That rethinking of their ritual life led to a new appreciation and re-actualization of their traditional practices, e.g. the sacrifice of coffee-beans, the traditional Boorana prayers and naming children with Boorana names rather than Muslim ones.

A younger generation of children born during and after the *shifita* war were also influenced by those processes of rethinking a Waso Boorana identity. As traditional Boorana prayers became more frequent at the different households

in Garba Tulla after the Emergency, children learned about their Boorana traditions from their mothers. Waso Boorana women during and after the Emergency had 'their own ways of expressing their religious discourse, their identity, their aspirations and their religious reality' (Aguilar 1994c:54). They in turn taught their children traditional Boorana prayers on a daily basis, in what I would call a school of Waso Boorana tradition. Children born in the 1980s in Garba Tulla have also been influenced by the Christian tradition through the Catholic school and the interaction with development work carried out by the Methodist and Catholic churches.

Another historical factor that influenced the re-appearance of traditional religious practices after the emergency was the resurgence of Oromo nationalism and the improvement of roads and communications with Ethiopia in the 1970s and 1980s. Due to renewed communication with Ethiopian Boorana practices, such as the cult of Sheikh Hussayn of Bale together with processes of divination related to Boorana spirits (*ayyaana*), became common in the *manyatta* of Garba Tulla and the Waso area (Aguilar 1994a). It is in this context of historical religious diversification that the religious practices of the Waso Boorana correspond to those of a Muslim community but, nevertheless, include important ritual moments that reflect traditional Oromo practices and beliefs.

Muslim rituals and Muslim symbols are therefore followed in three communal occasions: (a) during the naming of a child (*waqlal*), (b) at a wedding and (c) during a funeral. Their common characteristics are: (i) each one of those public occasions requires the participation of a religious leader from the mosque, (ii) part of the ritual is performed outside the Boorana settlements, (iii) some non-Boorana with public offices in town take part as guests, (iv) the community of the *manyatta* (periphery) relates to the town (centre), in which the influence of the mosque plays an important part. I would also suggest that in each one of those Muslim rituals, the Waso Boorana assume a community identity as Muslim practitioners, mainly because those rituals have taken the place of the *gada* festivals of the past, in a post-colonial Kenya that does not encourage traditional religious manifestations to be considered part of a Westernised African republic. While the *waqlal*, weddings and funerals include some traditional Boorana elements (e.g. Boorana prayers for peace), nevertheless they are rituals that currently require the involvement of a wider community. Religious functionaries from the mosque and administrative personnel who are non-Boorana issue birth, marriage and death certificates, while medical personnel play an important administrative role in the process of birth, the formation of families and the process of dying.

Importance tends to be given at community level to moments at which most of the community is expected to be present (rites of passage). Those are the ritual moments in which a community can be seen as community, and therefore those moments become what Baxter (1990:238), calls 'sequences of national rituals'. The idea of a 'national ritual' in the case of the Boorana derives from the fact that in the past the *gada* system provided the community with a large

gathering of people who represented the whole Boorana nation for a ritual purpose. For the Boorana of Garba Tulla, national rituals such as namings, weddings and funerals are complemented by 'sequences of domestic rituals'.

'National' and 'domestic' rituals have a crucial importance in the process of encouraging God 'to maintain his flow of blessings', and therefore they are a foundational way of keeping the Peace of the Boorana. Following Baxter's terminology, national rituals are those Muslim ones performed in the public sphere of Garba Tulla, while domestic rituals are those performed by several households at *manyatta* level, but not carried out at the same time by the whole Waso Boorana community of Garba Tulla. Those 'domestic' rituals are in general closely related to a household and to the Boorana who constitute a household, as members of a localized community.¹² Therefore, I would suggest that Waso Boorana ritual ('national' and 'domestic') follow the distinctions which the Waso Boorana make themselves between the space outside the house and the space inside the house. The outside is associated with men, while the inside is associated with women.¹³ In the past and in most cases today, the daily lives of men and women are divided by those spheres of the outside as opposed to the inside. Men go outside the villages with the animals,¹⁴ while women remain inside the villages with the animals that are to be kept closer to the *manyatta* (young, weak and pregnant animals). (See Dahl's essay.)

It is in relation to the inside sphere of the *manyatta* that domestic rituals and their related practices tend to involve places, spheres and social roles which in Waso Boorana society are closer to women. Women in that sense are conceptually linked not to the herd but to the house (Dahl 1990:130). The inside of the *manyatta* and therefore spaces near the Boorana houses constitute the location for domestic ritual. Spheres of interaction and social roles mostly involve people who, physically and spatially speaking, are related to the domestic and the inside of the *manyatta*. Men are not excluded from those domestic rituals, on the contrary they take part in them, but they are not the main actors.¹⁵ Therefore, women, men without children, and children themselves play the most important part in all domestic rituals.¹⁶

¹² While traditionally every household had a male head, and different relatives belonged to that household, that is not the case in Garba Tulla any more. Due to the killings during the *shifita* emergency, and the famine that followed, several households now have a female head. In other cases mothers with their children (and no husband) constitute a household, an anomaly in the traditional social concept of a Boorana family (Aguilar 1994d).

¹³ Hogg (1981:110, diagram 2) shows the clear division between the public and the private, the male and female spheres of a Waso Boorana house. While I agree with his analysis, my own emphasis stresses the importance of the outside, meaning the space outside a Waso Boorana house, as complementary and distinct from the inside of the house itself.

¹⁴ Those camps outside the *manyatta* are the usual target for attacks by bandits (Aguilar 1993e).

¹⁵ As a man I could participate in domestic rituals, but women were always pointed out as those who understood them and to whom questions concerning those rituals should be directed. I am extremely grateful to my female assistant Fatuma Kanu for her expertise on female spheres during fieldwork. Dahl faced problems being considered a 'young girl' during fieldwork (Dahl 1979:267-68). I had problems being considered an older man, due to my then religious status in Garba Tulla.

¹⁶ Dahl (1989) has documented the fact that it is mostly women who took part in the *ayyaana* cult in Isiolo during the 1970s. While the same happened in Garba Tulla during my fieldwork, some men

A problem of classification arises when it comes to the sphere of domestic rituals. In the case of the communal dramatized celebrations of ritual, it is clear that those moments to be considered as 'national' are those which involve the whole community and through which members of the Waso Boorana society pass from one status to another, therefore eventually changing social roles. In the case of domestic rituals, apart from traditionally extraordinary occasions for the Garba Tulla community, such as the offering of coffee-beans and the *ayyaana* cult, at first glance there seems to be no other domestic communal rituals worth mentioning. Nevertheless, in reality, the Waso Boorana assume that the keeping of the *Nagaa Boorana* needs other daily ritual moments, those that have sometimes been overlooked by scholars. Those include two important actions in a Boorana community: (1) the ordinary litany of prayers or blessings (*eba*) (Tablino 1980:149–59) and (2) the everyday greetings (Baxter 1990:237). Everybody, including children, take part in those ordinary daily ritual practices. In the case of children for example, one of the first social lessons for a child is to greet other people properly, and therefore in the case of a Waso Boorana child, to wish others and the community peace through every use of proper daily greetings (Aguilar 1994b).

In summary then, the current religious practices of the Waso Boorana can be divided into national and domestic rituals. National rituals: (a) the naming ceremony (*waqjal*), (b) the wedding, and (c) the funeral. Domestic rituals: (a) the sacrifice of coffee-beans (*buna qalla*), (b) the *ayyaana* cult (Dahl 1989), (c) daily prayers and blessings, and (d) every day greetings. The common element of all these rituals is the uttering of Peace, by each one of the participants, unto others and by the whole group of Waso Boorana unto the Boorana communities in Kenya and Ethiopia.

SYMBOLIC CONSTRUCTION OF PEACE

Hogg (1981:30) writes: '... though they may look like Somali to outsiders, Boran are jealous of their homeland and distinctive culture and history, and maintain the Peace of the Boran'. It is interesting that a group of Boorana that is considered by other Boorana as half-Boorana or half-Somali, still understands itself as in relation to their homelands and traditions in Ethiopia (Aguilar 1994a). Their traditional leaders in the past, the *Kallu*, are still revered by the Waso Boorana as the ones who make possible the correct flow of prayers and blessings that the Boorana need in order to continue being alive and well. One of the explanations concerning their impoverishment and destitution given by the younger men of Garba Tulla is that it happened because of those foolish men who converted to Islam and left their traditions.

were present during the sessions. Most of them had never married, were not Borana Gutu (the Boorana proper), and in the case of Diba Roba (the man who collected medicinal plants in the wild) were not supposed to marry because of their social role in the Boorana community.

There is on the part of the Waso Boorana, I would suggest, a symbolic construction of community with all the other Boorana in Kenya and Ethiopia through the fact that in every ritual (national and domestic) in Garba Tulla, the Peace of the Boorana is invoked, remembered and actualized. Baxter (1990:238) has suggested that:

... the bounty which God evinces in the gift of rain, and hence well being, and the gift of fertility to women and to stock, and hence prosperity, must be maintained by a flow of prayer and sacrifice and that condition of consensus and active co-operation which Boran call the Peace of the Boran.

That flow of prayers, common ritual and co-operation is a characteristic of the Waso Boorana today.

Traditional prayers are uttered at every communal occasion. That flow of prayers is centred in the request for peace unto the community, not only the Waso Boorana one, but unto every Boorana community. During fieldwork I witnessed the fact that even at meetings related to development called by the international donor agencies working in the area, the Boorana insisted on praying for peace during any meeting being held at *manyatta* level. The following prayer, for example, was said at the end of a meeting concerning famine relief, at which government and church officials met with the Boorana of *manyatta* Dhemo in Garba Tulla (GTHT/DHE/wp):

Let it be peace! *Nagee!*

(After every invocation, the form *Nagee* is used by all the people present, in order to wish peace to the community and to agree with the formula used by the prayer leader)

Let it be peace to the herd,
 Let it be peace to the herd,
 Let our evening be peaceful,
 Let our milking moment be peaceful,
 Let the future be peaceful,
 Let the past be at rest,
 Let the Warta be at peace,
 Let the cows be at peace,
 Let Bor¹⁷ be at peace,
 Let the Boorana be at peace,
 Let Saq,¹⁸ have peace,
 Let the Sakuye have peace,
 Let Dirre be peaceful,
 Let Dirre and Liban¹⁹ be at peace,
 May God send rain and fill our swampy areas,
 May God fill our *boma* with animals,
 May you stay and multiply and be satisfied with milk,
 get good things!!!

¹⁷ According to my informants, Bor is a place in Ethiopia dear to the Boorana.

¹⁸ Saq' is a variant of Saaku the Borana name for Marsabit Mountain—the homeland of the Sakuye.

¹⁹ Dirre and Liban are located in Southern Ethiopia, and in the Boorana tradition they are associated with their places of origin, where their traditional leaders (*Kallu*) live. Baxter (1994:182) reports that the last Boorana national assembly was held in Dirre in 1987.

Even for Muslims, rituals constitute part of that flow of blessings and prayers needed in order to keep the communal consensus and assure the prosperity and fertility of the Boorana as a 'nation' in the Waso area of Kenya.

THE PEACE OF THE WASO BOORANA: UNITY IN DIVERSITY

For other Boorana, Muslim practices cannot contribute to a flow of blessings and prayers in order to keep the *Nagaa Boorana*. With that premise in mind, I would suggest that the understanding of the Peace of the Boorana in Garba Tulla (and indeed in the rest of the Waso area) has assumed a very localized development. In that current development the need for public rituals to be performed in order to keep Peace has been the constant, while the symbols used and actions performed have been the variants. It is in that sense that Muslim symbols, have been appropriated by the Waso Boorana in order to replace their own traditional symbolism at the public level. As suggested before, 'the power of the symbols' used in communal actions helps 'sustain social identities' (Spear 1993:16). Muslim symbols sustain a Boorana identity in the Waso area of Kenya. That identity is also asserted in the domestic sphere by stressing what are perceived to be connections with the symbolic systems of the Boorana of Ethiopia (Aguilar 1994a). The unity with the wider 'Oromo nation' is realised in this symbolic way by the appropriation by the same local community of both Muslim and traditional symbols.

Ritual moments secure Peace, and thereby the sustenance, life and continuity of the herds and of the families and their children. In that sense survival has been a constant throughout their history. To enhance their prospects of survival Waso Boorana have adhered to a variety of ritual systems in a way that resembles their varied methods of caring for their herds and flocks in a variety of very different geographical locations.

DIVERSIFICATION FOR SURVIVAL

Stock are divided into *hawicha* and *fora* herds. The *hawicha* animals are the herd of milk animals kept near the *manyatta*. They provide milk for children and a few animals for slaughtering if the need arises. The *hawicha* herd leaves the *manyatta* for watering and grazing in the morning, and returns to the *manyatta* in the evening, where it is kept inside an enclosure. The water needed for this herd is usually near the *manyatta*.

The *fora* herd consists of dry cows, and immature stock and is constantly on the move. It has also some milking cows in order to provide food for the herdsmen.²⁰ This division of the flock and herds is what Dahl (1979:216) calls 'diversification as a "strategy"'. It is clear that the strategy of diversification

²⁰ The *fora* herds of Garba Tulla are kept in the territory between Kinna and Garba Tulla.

provides a household (and a *manyatta*) with the security that if something happens to either of the herds, the remaining herd can eventually (through reproduction) replace the lost stock. That diversification is also related to the fact that, as pointed out by Baxter (1978:164), 'adult siblings are likely to be distributed widely across the land'. Therefore, according to this strategy, animals can also be entrusted to siblings and therefore kept secure in many parts of a district. This strategy of diversifying the herds and their location in a district has intensified due to bandit (*shifita*) attacks. While I was in field *shifita* stole animals from different locations. Those who had animals with relatives in different parts of the Garba Tulla Division did not lose all their animals through a local *shifita* raid.

When it comes to religious practices, I would suggest that the Waso Boorana have gone through a similar process of diversification throughout their history. Those religious practices are not isolated moments in which the Waso Boorana become religious people, but those religious moments express the tight line between life and death, prosperity or famine, being Waso Boorana or being somebody else.²¹ Those responses have been given in order to preserve the *Nagaa Boorana*, to have life, prosperity, and to be a society as such. Therefore, through their own history, the Waso Boorana have tried to keep a religious continuity (Peace), which at the end has generated change as well as incorporated 'new components, to meet changed circumstances' (Hogg 1981:371). Those different religious practices have been gradually assumed by the Waso Boorana as part of a continuum in ritual. All those ritual moments have contributed to keep the flow of blessings from God and therefore the fertility and life of the community.

While the priority in the outside (public) sphere is to follow Muslim religious practices, the Waso Boorana have diversified their religious practices so much as even to allow their children to take part in Christian practices. For example, Waso Boorana children help as altar servers during the Sunday Roman Catholic Mass. I asked several mothers about that fact of life in Garba Tulla. Halima from *manyatta* Dhemmo replied:

My children are Muslims because we are all Muslims. But they are Boorana. They go to school, and to the Catholic school. They like reading and learning at the school. Therefore they go to Mass on Sunday because their peers go there. There is nothing wrong with it. In the evening they will have coffee-beans (*buna*) with us at home (GTHT/DHE/1992/m.a.).

In their inside sphere of influence, namely their settlements (*manyatta*), the Waso Boorana have also incorporated several symbols and actions from their traditional Oromo religion. The Peace of the Boorana provides then the foundation and continuity of communal purpose for both spheres of religious practice,

²¹ See Knutsson (1967:180) on the possible world disorder when the Peace of the Boorana is not kept through failure to perform the proper ritual festivals. Cf. Baxter (1978:181, 1979:73).

as Muslim and traditional Boorana religious practices are the ritual means for the continuity of that Peace.

CONCLUSION: BEING WASO BOORANA, BECOMING OROMO

I have suggested so far that following a Boorana (Oromo) process of diversification, syncretic practices occur in Garba Tulla, as the Waso Boorana have integrated in the last twenty years or so new elements into their Muslim religious practices. Their principle of diversification has become in practice a process of syncretism. Islam is prioritized, but other practices are also followed. If one associates various religious practices with particular locations, for example the mosque, a church, a *mola* (the site for the *ayyaana* cult in the *manyatta*) or a hut, Waso Boorana diversification in religion suggests that they have a diversity of places where they can ask God for his blessings. In economic terms diversification puts an emphasis on a variety of stock and businesses; in religious terms, there is an emphasis on Muslim and traditional religious practices. In both cases, economic diversification and religious syncretism, I would suggest that other economic and religious practices are going to be incorporated in the future, in a dynamic process of communal response and social change, in order to survive as a community that needs to be in relation to the outside world.

The *Nagaa Boorana* as a foundational principle of Boorana ritual and daily life has been assumed by the Waso Boorana of Garba Tulla as the main characteristic of being Boorana. That process began in the late 1960s and it will continue in the future. Being Boorana in the Waso area today requires from every member of the community a commitment to keep the Peace of the Boorana, even through ritual practices that are not traditionally Boorana (Oromo). I would further suggest that the traditional *Nagaa Boorana*—associated with the *gada* festivals—has de facto become the *Nagaa Waso Boorana*, currently associated with a variety of religious practices and ritual occasions. The keeping of that Peace unites Waso Boorana with the rest of the Boorana. To have respect for the homelands in Ethiopia and the *Kallu*, symbolically makes the Waso Boorana closer to the rest of the Oromo in Ethiopia. It is in that sense that I would also suggest that as the Waso Boorana have revitalized traditional Oromo rituals as the *Buna Qalla*, they have once again become part of a wider Oromo nation, not only through language and history, but through habitual participation in common ritual moments.

Traditional and Modern Cooperatives among the Oromo

Tesema Ta'a

Scholars in the humanities and the natural sciences have been pondering the problems of development in general, and those of rural development in particular, for many years. Various strategies for rural development have been advocated but, nevertheless, the social and economic difficulties of the peoples of the Third World, particularly in Africa, seem to be waxing rather than waning. Perhaps a major reason for this is the lack of proper and clear understandings of indigenous cultures, organizations and institutions. However in recent years scholars have started to give due emphasis to the study of the role of indigenous cultures, local organizations and informal institutions in order to promote successful rural development. As Popkin has so rightly put it '... to understand the historical transformations of rural society and to develop effective programs for improving peasant welfare, we need to begin with a more accurate view of peasants and their institutions' (1979:ix). Popkin regards peasants as rational problem solvers and argues that they have keen interests of their own and the need to bargain with others to achieve mutually acceptable outcomes. This paper attempts to highlight some of the prominent 'traditional' and 'modern' cooperative institutions of the Oromo which, in my view, should be taken into consideration by those who seek to develop the Oromo regions and to adopt development strategies in order to improve living standards.

Oral and written sources indicate that reciprocal social and economic relationships and voluntary self help organisations have been, and are, common among the Oromo. It is difficult to know when and where such cooperative ventures emerged, but one can safely assume that they have long been part of pastoral and agricultural activities. Indeed Gufu Oba, for example, has recently demonstrated how, among the sedentarised pastoral Boran of Kenya, they can continue to render mutual support even in the most awful situations of deprivation (1994:17-22).

Such institutions of reciprocal mutual support stem, I suggest, at least in part, from the Oromo dislike of loneliness which they think of as the beginning of death itself. Therefore, because loneliness is dangerous, a lonely person is pitied. 'Hence, being together, working together constitutes ... a value of its own, irrespective of its output in terms of achievement' (Bartels 1977:499). Sociologically, because they are social and sociable transactions, all traditional

forms of Oromo cooperation are characterised by an underlying mutuality and hence the absence of cash payments. The obligations of immediate patrilineal kinship are, of course, of great importance but they do not dominate all other relationships. Oromo should, and generally do, hold maternal kin and affines (see Baxter's essay) in equal regard with their agnates.

PASTORAL COOPERATION

Pastoralism demands a complex organisation of labour:

Whether controlling reproduction, standing watch over, watering or breaking in the animals, giving them veterinary care and protection from predators, milking or transforming milk products, this pastoralist labour requires an elaborate division of labour, since the mobile herd is frequently separated from the human group exploiting it (Bonte 1977).

Oromo pastoralists have learned from experience that cooperation and collective labour are vital for pastoral success and productivity. For example, well digging, regulating access to grazing, burning of vegetation, the selective grazing of herds, the provision of veterinary care and many other tasks are most effectively performed by working groups which are larger than the immediate family. When the Oromo were predominantly pastoralists there was a division of labour according, in part, to *gadaa* grades and responsibilities. Some selected appropriate grazing sites, some made sure that the stock got *hoora* (minerals) and some protected the stock against predators and raiders. (Interviews with Abdissa Mossa and Tamru Guta, Naqamte, 1979. See also Gufu Oba's essay.) Indigenous knowledge about veterinary practices and herbal medicines were important. There was a range of herbs and leaves used as preventative and curative medicines, knowledge of which was transmitted from generation to generation. The range of knowledge available to any one family was perforce limited and all depended on access to the community's pool of knowledge. (Interview with Buli Anke and Nigussa Kanae, Shambo, 1980.)

FARMER'S ASSOCIATIONS

It is true that many Oromo families which settled to sedentary mixed farming relied basically on the labour of their own household, but cooperative economic and social activities were strengthened by the collective efforts which ploughing, sowing, weeding, harvesting and house construction required.

As Bonte has argued in his essay on pre-capitalist farming:

... the realisation of labour in agricultural societies rests upon the organisation of land, that is, a high degree of incorporation and accumulation of human labour in order to transform and reproduce the natural environment. Changing the chemical and physical properties of the soil, specialised surface vegetation, supplying water

through irrigation, etc., are features distinguishing these societies from nomadic pastoralist. In this case the organisation and reproduction of a land surface appears to determine domestic production (the immediate realization of agricultural labour in the process of production) (Bonte 1978:25).

The collective appropriation of plant and water resources and the forms of extended cooperation were realised among the Oromo by communal forms of land holding and the existence of a variety of neighbourhood voluntary self help associations. These helped Oromo to generate surplus production, food security and self sufficiency.

Before Menilek's conquest, even among the *Maccaa* amongst whom the institution of kingship *mootti* had evolved, the ritual and religious practices of *gadaa* had not been entirely abandoned. Indirectly they regulated land use and occupation rights and promoted reciprocal associations. Land then was not short. Every male member was entitled to his *dhoqee* (arable land) which he could cultivate and the right to graze cattle, sheep and goats (Tesema Ta'a 1984). An important point is that before Menelik's conquest it was recognised that there was some sort of mystical bond between man and the land that could not be changed through force of arms. In a way land was personified by Oromo, so 'that land had eyes and ears and could act upon men who usurped the rights of the rightful owners even after the latter had died or moved elsewhere' (Hultin 1977:7). Such respect towards the earth seems to have helped in the proper and equitable distribution of arable and grazing lands among Oromo peasants.

The following popular poem about mother earth clearly illustrates this feeling:

<i>Dachee nagaan Oltee</i>	The earth have you spent the day in peace?
<i>Dachee nagaan bultee?</i>	The earth have you spent the night in peace?
<i>Ya gudditii dhugaa</i>	The big full of truth (or with truth).
<i>Jaartii garaa Margaa</i>	An 'old woman' whose belly is full of grass (vegetation).
<i>Irriikee midhaanii</i>	Upon you there is food.
<i>Jaliikee Bishaanii</i>	Under you there is water.
<i>Sirra horree yaa fnaa</i>	We graze our herds on you.
<i>Sirra qotnee nyaanaa</i>	We farm on you and eat.
<i>Jirraa keenyaa himbaataa</i>	You carry our living.
<i>Du'aa keenyaa hinnyaataa</i>	You swallow /eat our dead.
<i>Dachee yaa dinqiituu</i>	The earth full of wonders
<i>Yoo soreessa nyaatee is a</i>	If you swallow /eat the rich, who has
<i>shitto qabuu</i>	perfume.
<i>Hiyeessa hinjibbituu isa citto</i>	You do not hate/neglect the poor who
<i>qabuu.</i>	has measles.

(Interview with Dingulaa/Abba Qashume, Naqamte, 1980)

The Oromo have developed terminologies which explain the type of reciprocal labour services rendered to each member of the cooperative association. All forms of cooperation are governed by moral norms. Some of these terms are still in use in many parts of Oromia such as: *Daadoo*, *Daboo*, *Jigee* and *Adamoo*.

Daadoo is a type of cooperative labour service provided on equal terms, usually organized among able-bodied males and females. Working days of the week are scheduled in such a way that all members of the *daadoo* work on the fields of each member in turn. The work could be harvesting, weeding, ploughing or clearing forests for a new farm plot. It is the duty and the responsibility of the *abbaaa daadoo* to feed the group on the day of his/her turn. Oromo traditions witness that *daadoo* has been one of the most important cooperative associations particularly in enhancing agricultural productivity.

Daboo is another economic and social means of mutual help in which the head of a household requests the labour of several able bodied men and women in the community to work on his farm. The work could be ploughing harvesting or building a house. Before an individual goes out to ask for help he makes plans with his wife as to how the work should be carried out. After an agreement is reached a certain date is fixed for the *daboo*. Then the wife with the help of some neighbouring women starts to prepare food and drinks while the husband goes out and asks his fellow men and women for help at the appointed date. It is important to note that the *daboo* help is given according to a person's agreeable manners, love of friends, generosity and sociability. A poor man who possesses these qualities could obtain more help than a rich man who is in a position to throw a fabulous feast on the day of his *daboo*. A wealthy man may slaughter a bull but, for most, an evening entertainment is enough.

As Bartels puts it:

The amount of participation in a *dabo* ... depends on the sympathy enjoyed by the family who gives the *dabo*. So a rich man may well get less helpers than a less wealthy neighbour, for all the excellent beer he gives. Some people are known to be good 'fathers and mothers of the *dabo*, to be concerned with their helpers' needs, their hopes for a good meal and plenty of beer, and to be not too exacting in case of bad weather (1975:891).

A *daboo* work usually takes place for a day. It starts in the morning with a lunch break at noon and continues in the afternoon up to about 6:00 pm. In the evening a programme of dinner and beer is arranged by the *abbaa daboo* followed by a prayer of thanksgiving, blessings and songs unless some body in the neighbourhood has died in which case singing is prohibited (Bartels 1975:897).

Cooperative works among the Oromo are accompanied by various kinds of songs including, love songs, war songs and others. For example the following verses in praise of grain (food) are usually sung during harvesting.

Nooruu, nooruu yaa buddeenaa
warqeekee sumaa fi yoonaa
gesee lubbunkoo

Sit down, sit down oh! Bread
my gold its because of you that my soul
survived so far.

nooruu, nooruu, yaa buddeenaa
takan miidhaan faarsa
boqoollo isa molgoo
bisingaa isa hokkoo

Sit down, sit down, oh! Bread let me
praise grain a little
the maize with its *molgoo* (drooping ear)
the sorghum with its *hokko* (drooping
plumes like a reaping hook)

*xaafii daabii diimaa
daaguja quaqumee
tuuta mataa tuuta
isa tuuta galshaa*

*nooruu, nooruu
Awaashi gadi
citaatu baala
Kuula nafi hinbitu?
Yaa Maanee*

*Kan Waaqi gadii
miidhaantu caalaa
bishaantu itti ana
Yaa waaqi situ caalaa
quufa nufi hinfiddu
Yaa waaqi mee.*

the light coloured tef
the compact *daayujja* (eleusine)
many grains of corn together,
which could feed and satisfy many people.

Sit down, sit down
below the Awash (river)
there is tall grass (everywhere)
Maanee won't you
buy Kuula (colour) for me?

After Waaqaa
grain is the best
water comes next
Oh! Waaqaa you are the highest One
Oh! Waaqaa please bring us satisfaction.

Jigee is slightly a different type of association from *daadoo* or *daboo*, in that it is based on close family ties. It is the help given to parents-in-law by sons-in-law. The sons-in-law may be members of a *daadoo* in their own locality and they could involve members of their *daadoo*, about 100–180 people or more, to work for their parents-in-law for certain days, gathering crops, repairing old houses or building new ones; preparing an extensive farm land for planting etc.

Adamoo is undertaken by organized males in groups of 150–200 or more, mostly armed with spears and knives, to hunt down wild animals such as pigs, monkeys, apes and others which destroy grains. It is usually carried out from February to May every year, just before the rainy season and the sowing of seeds. (Interview with Gudataa Ayaara and Taddasaa Olic, Naqamte, 1990.) The *adamoo* cooperation, however, has one serious negative effect. It leads to the reduction of wild life resources because a number of precious wild animals like antelopes and others are also killed for meat. It is the only traditional means employed by the Oromo peasant farmers to save their grain from destruction by wild animals.

POST CONQUEST

Traditions of close family ties, mutual support, communal life and strong sense of belonging to one another among the Oromo, as well, as their economic viability began to face serious stresses and strains following Menilek's conquest and the increasing centralization. One of the main features of Menilek's reign was a new land tenure system named the *qalad* or *gasha* system through proclamation. Atsme Giorgis defined *Gasha*, an Amharic term, as meaning "the land in which we settle after, we expel the Galla {Oromo} from it by our might, strength and wisdom" (n.d:5). According to Menilek's proclamation all the land was measured and redistributed on the basis of military, political and religious services to the central government. The *qabiyee* rights of the indigenous people were wiped

out, rendering them legally landless. Land was central to the life of the Oromo cultivators and pastoralists. Land which was transmitted through generations and was recognized by the Oromo as the collective property of the society at large was lost (Hultin 1977:10–20).

Land alienation and confiscation forced most of the Oromo into tenancy and dramatically reduced their standard of living. It also had a serious negative impact on the cooperative traditions of the Oromo owing to the deteriorating socio-economic and political conditions following the land appropriation. The Oromo tenants were forced to pay about 3/4 of their produce to the *neftegna* settlers, the new land lords who also dominated the administration in Oromo areas. They were also obliged to give labour services to their overlords and pay taxes to the state which were often burdensome and unbearable. Although the cooperative traditions continued, gradually a majority of the Oromo peasants lost incentives to work as hard as they used to do before the conquest and were subjected to poverty and destitution. (Interviews with Emru Gebre and Kifla Challa, Naqamte, 1980.)

MODERN FORMS OF COOPERATION

Some of the “modern” cooperative systems practised by the Oromo include *iddir*, *iqub*, *mahiber* and *senbete*. *Iddir* and *iqub* seem to have developed in the first half of the twentieth century while *mahiber* and *senbete* were introduced more or less following Menilek’s conquest of Oromia. In the words of H.S.Lewis, ‘... *Mhabber* and *ik’ub* are relatively recent introductions, and although burial associations are old, the formal *iddir* organization is new’ (1970:179). *Senbete* and *mahiber* have both been closely associated with the Orthodox church and are often consumption oriented.

Mahiber is usually held every month. It is often dedicated to the saints: St. George, St. Michael, St. Mary and others. Every member prepares food and drinks on his *mahiber* day. He is supposed to give a fabulous feast usually slaughtering animals if it is not a fasting day or season. Studies have shown that holding a *mahiber* has often been too costly for ordinary peasants who tend to withdraw their membership because of the unbearable expenditure. The priests and deacons of a parish take turns to be present at a given *mahiber* to lead prayers and enjoy the food and drinks. They are not supposed to prepare a feast themselves but they go to the individual peasant households. Local orthodox church leaders have popularized the practice of having *mahiber* associations all over the rural areas among the Oromo Orthodox Christians (Interview with Gamada Urgessa, Finfinee, 1993). *Senbete* is a form of association in which the members are obliged to prepare some food and drinks and take it to the local church every Sunday in turn. Usually, the membership of a *senbete* is slightly smaller than that of a *mahiber*.

Both *mahiber* and *senbete* associations were recent practices among the Oromo and are mostly consumption oriented. They are religiously motivated since prayers are made by the members at every meeting. Only under certain circumstances or in rare cases do they engage in development activities such as road and bridge constructions. But from the point of view of the Ethiopian government both Mahiber and Senbete were very important. They rendered invaluable social and political services to the government. It was through these associations that the priests and deacons penetrated the rural Oromo communities to undertake works of security and socialization for the government in addition to their religious indoctrination.

Iddir and *iqub* are cooperative activities which involve reciprocal financial contributions. Although the origin and the emergence of *iddir* and *iqub* are unknown, some scholars rightly argue that both evolved in the first half of the 19th century and grew particularly during the Italian occupation of Ethiopia which was accompanied by an accelerated rate of urbanization. According to Mekuria Bulcha, "The five years of Italian rule over Ethiopia between 1936-1941 and urbanization, which has been accelerated since then, gave rise to *eder* in the Ethiopian towns as an extension of the mutual-aid practices prevalent in the rural areas" (1973:37).

Iddir evolved in an urban environment and is mainly directed towards social security and funeral services. It is a formal organization with written rules and regulations. Although record keeping is a recent phenomenon it has become increasingly important in making sure that every member attends funerals and meetings as well as pays assessments and does other cooperative works according to the demands of the *iddir* (Lewis 1970:170).

Iqub, on the other hand, has been regarded as a sort of capital accumulator with which to start up small business enterprises or to buy something necessary. The major driving force behind an *iqub* is, therefore, to save money for a specific purpose. A certain amount of money agreed upon by the members of the *iqub* will be contributed by each member and an individual member is entitled in his turn, the order of which is decided by secret ballot, to receive the whole amount. However, the usual practice so far has been to give the money contributed for the first time to the collector/initiator of the *iqub* who is often assigned as treasurer for the association. *Iqub* involves cash and it operates on profound mutual trust between the members. Usually the members keep a constitution which governs the operation of their *iqub* (Kebebew Daka 1978:31-33). Both *iddir* and *iqub* are popular among the Oromo who live in urban centres but the practice is not widespread among the Oromo majority in the rural areas. Where the traditional cooperative systems which are production oriented are predominant.

As we have attempted to highlight in our discussion, the Oromo have very rich traditions and experiences in cooperative activities. They enjoy working together for increased productivity, mutual benefit and really feel comfortable with each other. The Oromo are open and respectful to other people irrespective

of race, colour or creed which creates a fertile ground for any governmental or non-governmental organizations to establish cooperative systems. If modern cooperative systems geared towards genuine development with popular participation are initiated at local levels, with some sort of external support or assistance, we are sure that they will improve the lives of millions of Oromo peasants in a short period of time.

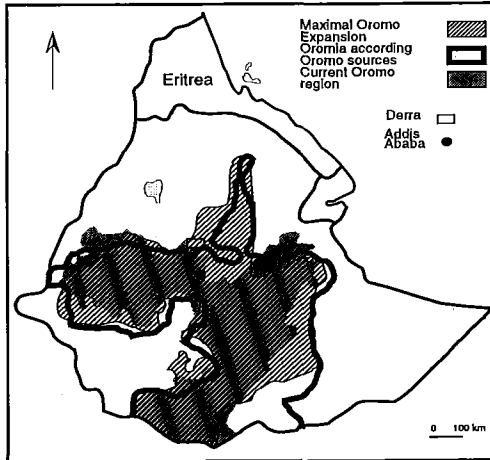
The Becoming of Place

A Tulama-Oromo Region in Northern Shoa

Odd Eirik Arnesen

Place is normally presented as a condition of human everyday experience since we are: “always ‘in place’, much as we are always ‘in culture’”. For this reason our relations to place and culture become elements in the construction of our individual and collective identities” (Entrikin 1991). This is the simplest and yet the most complex starting point from which to analyse the historical formation and transformation of a segment of the Oromiffa speaking groups (from the *Tulama* branch of the Oromo) that settled and took up farming in the highlands

Map 1.1 *Oromo expansion and current administrative delimitation*



of north western Shoa in an area named Derra¹ (conforming to one *woreda*—sub-district in the present day Ethiopian administrative structure), probably by the end of the 16th century. Their “colonisation” of the region took place during the “great” Oromo expansion from the southern highlands of Ethiopia, that began in the beginning of the 16th century, and came to an end in the beginning of the 18th century. This led to contact between groups of Semitic and Cushitic speakers, groups with different ways of life i.e.

pastoralists vs. agriculturalists, and Christians vs. non-Christians. The earlier interpretation of the Galla “invasion” as devastating and “locust-like” (Trimingham 1965), has partly been substituted by more differentiated interpretation of the intricate processes of interaction, domination, subordination, adaptation, and assimilation, that population movements normally involve (see essays by Hultin and Zitelmann). Little is known about these processes in the *Tulama*-

¹ Today the population is dependent on a mixed farming system that is similar to the system found throughout the northern highlands. To the west Derra borders Gojjam (the Blue Nile) and towards the north Derra borders Wollo (Borana being the neighbouring region).

Oromo populated areas in northern Shoa and even less is known of the neighbouring areas in Wollo, where the process of cultural syncretism has gone furthest and where the environmental contrast from the Oromo cultural heartland is the greatest.

Derra *woreda* is today incorporated into the new Oromo region of Ethiopia (region 4, Northern Shoa zonal region, Map 1.1), although not included in the rather diffuse delimitation of "Oromia" by Oromo researchers and in Oromo journals (Asafa 1993, *Oromo Commentary* 1992). Derra has formed a part of the Oromo "frontier" towards the Amhara chiefdoms to the east and the west, as well as being a cultural "transitional" region between the new Oromo communities in the north, mainly in Abbay's eastern watersheds, and the southern Oromo. Derra has been defined differently as both a part of the "Wollo Galla" territory (Trimingham 1965) that ends in the south with the rivers Wenchit and Jemma and, in modern times, as a part of Selale and thus Shoa proper, defined southwards from Betu river (from Borana *awraja*) as Tulama-Oromo (Map 1.2). The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Forces (EPRDF) took over the area in 1990 and Derra is hailed as the birth place of the Oromo People's Democratic Organisation's (OPDO) armed struggle, being one of several ethnic liberation movements (and political parties) under the umbrella of the EPRDF.²

I first started my work in Derra in 1988, a *woreda* that few identified as an "Oromo" area. Derra was then a sub-district under the "Amhara" *awraja* (district) Merhabete and in the eastern parts of the *awraja* (populated mainly by an Amharic speaking population in the historical region of Merhabete proper—Tach Bet and Lay Bet *woreda*), ordinary peasants referred to the people of Derra either by its place name or as *Galla*³ speakers. When I first visited the peasant association (PA) that I use as case study, an old man approached me and joyfully announced; "Thank God, the Italians are back again! We Ethiopians can't handle this situation by ourselves without quarrelling". He was an orthodox Christian speaking Oromiffa, living in a "mixed" village that contained a church and a Koran school within the PA, his homestead was located close to the old *adbar* tree⁴ where his ancestors had first settled and it was still the place of worship for both Christians and Muslim (performing the ceremony together). My first impression was one of a complex cultural melting pot of different ethnic and religious groups, an allegory that I shared with several writers (Levine

² As the main force within the EPRDF, Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) moved into territories occupied by other ethnic groups (nationalities), it became necessary to transform their movement into a multi-ethnic organisation to capture popular support.

³ "Galla" is a value loaded and often negatively denoted term to describe the Oromo. It is primarily used by non-Oromo people although it was previously, to some extent, used by the Oromo themselves. Since most of the official Amharic terms presented in this text are used by the Oromiffa speaking population, I have not made any attempt to distinguish between words in Oromiffa or Amharic.

⁴ The "sacrificing" and praying to the *adbar* spirits is not directly related to the traditional Oromo religion but integrated with the importance of trees in Oromo mythology, this is found all over the north-Shewan highlands (cf. Aspen 1994).

1974, Mesfin 1991; cf. Baxter and Blackhurst 1978 and Hultin, this volume for a discussion).

Through the migration and expansion to the west and to the north, the Oromo underwent a gradual transition from a predominantly pastoral and semi-nomadic society to a sedentary mixed farming way of life. This transition had a great impact on the organisation of the Oromo society as well as on the societies with which they interacted. During the 18th century territorial Oromo chiefdoms emerged out of the *gada* polity, with hierarchical political structures that resembled the neighbouring Amhara speaking communities, and Derra is one area that underwent such a transformation. Some of the older people can follow their genealogies some seven generations back, to what they see as the first settler in the different localities, but at best they are only able to give some indications of the last place of settlement before their lineage settled in Derra and that they originally came from the south. People with knowledge of their genealogies identify themselves as originating from the *Galla* cultural group. On further enquiry some people can relate elements of their own culture to an Oromo or *Galla* culture that they themselves have gradually "lost". Their genealogical map points southwards as they see a stronger Oromo cultural tradition alive in the southern regions.

At the end of the *Zamana Masafent* (Era of the Princes, 1769–1855) the Shoan military campaigns under Menelik II soon led to frequent military confrontations as well as alliances, both with local Amhara chiefs and with *Tulama-Oromo* and *Wollo-Oromo* groups. These developed different loyalties and confederations. The well organised local Oromo chiefdom of Derra was defeated in this process by what was most probably a joint Shoan (Amhara-Oromo) force and incorporated into the expanding Shoan kingdom in the 1880s. The settlement in this geo-political location and agro-ecological complex led to substantial changes in the local political and cultural organisation with its roots in the traditional *gada* system⁵ of the *Tulama-Oromo*. In this historical process the people of Derra gradually found them selves, on the one hand, as peripheral to the Oromo cultural heartland, being referred to as "Amhara using *Galla* language" (Haberland 1963) which, on the other hand, point to their subdued position under the hegemony of the Amhara culture, adapting to the role of "the poor Amhara" (Knutsson 1969). This process of "Amharisation" in the 19th and 20th century is highly complex and can in no way be reduced to a fixed border situation between two homogenous cultural groups, nor a total change of identities, but rather a multiplicity of fluctuating situations of subordination, domination and inclusion within and between different groups that are culturally as well as economically constituted. The allegories of a "melting pot" and "Amharisation" have clearly to give way to a more structured interpretation of *identity formations*

⁵ There is no need to rehearse the *gada* system here but briefly point to two central characteristics; the reliance on participation by the "tribe" as a political community and a pastoral mode of production without any unproductive class. The leaders personal power was derived from the *gada* assembly and the ruling group changed every eight year, curbing hegemonic tendencies (see essay by Bassi).

as cultural domination and social stratification acted out in daily life, as well as in relations, experiences, and understandings that are constructed on a far larger historical and geographical scale than the locality or even nation scale, the local articulation being both *unique* and *general* at the same time.

Derra serves as an example of the formation and transformation of (different) local identities as well as social and economic structures, integral processes that are high on the agenda in the current ethnic regionalism, forming an important component of the regime's policies. Derra has officially been identified as an Oromo *woreda* and the creation of (a new?) "Oromo" identity is now actively promoted in the locality, partly through the training of OPDO cadres and the strict usage of Oromiffa by the local administration.

ETHNICITY, TERRITORIALITY AND SOCIAL CHANGE

The adoption of a "place based" approach is not new to African studies. Berry finds that in the past researchers commonly assumed that rural economies in Africa were made up of local variations of generic institutional categories such as household, village and agro-ecological zones, a uniqueness of place in very much the same manner as ethnicity has been interpreted (1993). Although later approaches have accounted for the complexity and fluidity of rural institutions (institutions often subjected to multiple interpretations), researchers do still, according to Berry, assume that what is needed: "is to identify those clearly bounded, homogeneous social entities which carry out the function of resource allocation in the local setting". Since social interrelations are unlikely to be confined to one geographical area, it is reasonable to ask if, in our search for ethnic or cultural regions or any other social abstraction, we are in danger of constructing conceptual, classificational or geographical "boundaries" that do not exist around entities that *do not matter*. This holds true for whatever geographical scale we choose to study and Barth issues a warning that by (1992): "... calling any particular area of the world a 'society' we are justified in imposing a holistic format on our description of the social organisation of its population, .. and that the relevant context for human social life is everywhere a territorial unit, politically organized on the model of a nation-state". Instead societies should be studied as disordered systems, characterised by an absence of the closure (ibid.) that has been so pervasive in community studies. Cultural differences do however persist, despite inter-ethnic contact and interdependence, as identity formation in the current representation and contestation of past experiences where territory is an essential source of identification. The increasingly dominant role of identity politics has reinforced the role of territoriality or community as a source of identity, whether it is the *ethnic/cultural* nation and *territorial/civic* nation model that is subscribed to. At the centre of this struggle is the identification and control of territories as "homelands", with strong roots in the African "doctrine" of *primacy of the first settler* (Kopytoff 1987, for a debate),

through a symbolic reconstruction of seemingly vanishing (often mythological) aspects of society, culture and identity. The outcome is often based on an interpretation of *when* history begins and *whose* history we choose. Our point of departure is the historical construction of one *locality* in the central Ethiopian highlands. Watts presents us with the central question (1992); How exactly are individuals interrelated by multiple and often contradictory cultural and symbolic practices rooted in historically constituted communities and places?

This paper is an attempt to reconstruct the *historical construction of place* in the "frontier region" of Derra *woreda* at the intersection between three processes; firstly the Oromo expansion into the Abyssinian heartland and the establishment of a new form of Oromo territoriality; secondly the Abyssinian/Shoa-Amhara expansion and occupation of the different Oromo chiefdoms; thirdly the emerging territorial structure of "socialist" Ethiopia; finally the new political reality under the current transitional government. It follows from our interpretation of the relationship between ethnicity and place that we need to transcend the static and reductionist conceptualisation of "nationalist" or "ethnic" space and boundaries (*as being*) and provide processual interpretation of place (*as becoming*). Our point of departure is the place, analysed in the intersection of its unique qualities and the articulation of general regional and national processes in the local community, pointing at the *betweenness* of place (Enrikin 1991).

THE SETTING

Our historical journey begins with the first encounter of Derra (in the current location) as a political/regional unit, corresponding in time with what has been considered the foundation of the Abyssinian state under Amda Syon (1314–44). Amda Syon ruled a conglomerate of Amhara principalities with hereditary vassal princes. According to contemporary sources there were seven isolated Muslim sultanates in Abyssinia, to the east and the south of the traditional highlands, of which one was Darra⁶. (Trimingham 1965; Trimingham 1968). Amda Syon attacked the different sultanates and incorporated some into the Amhara kingdom,⁷ expanding the boundaries to the Awash river, annexing the Shoa regions of Menz and Zega and making the rulers of Yifat (also known as Argobba, see Map 1.2 for location of remnants of Argobba culture in the highlands of northern Shoa) and Hadya and others tributary to Abyssinia. Darra is presented in *Gadla Anorewos* as a Muslim province (tanbalet) probably situated south of the Abbay and, according to Tadesse Tamrat's (1972) extensive review of the location of the Muslim sultanates, Darra is located further south than the present day Derra. These Muslim sultanates were considered by Trimingham as

⁶ Darra is mentioned in the *Gadla Anorewos* (1374; C.S.C.O., Scr. Aeth., ser. ii, vol. xx pp.1,54,76–7).

⁷ The king was mainly interested in a control of the southern caravan routs and the trade that was dominated by Muslim merchants from the southern regions. The king's rule does not amount to a conventional occupation of the area but the establishment of churches and missionary stations through which Abyssinian influence could be maintained (Tadesse 1972).

(1965): "... impoverished, weak and poor, because the cohesion between the inhabitants is weak, the produce of the country is not abundant ..." and they were partly made tributary to the Amhara king. The present day Derra was probably considered a part of the Shewan kingdom although it is difficult to confirm whether it was a part of the core provinces of Shewa Moret. The ruins of a church can be found in the Woreda town Gundo Meskal (the name relates to the myths of the finding of the true cross and has no relationship to the present population that use the old name of Aderre), but whether this indicates the existence of a "pre-Oromo" Christian—"Amhara" community or a Muslim community made tributary to the Amhara kingdom, being culturally "annexed" through the church/missionaries, can not be confirmed. The old church and the mythology that evolved around the existence of an "ancient Amhara" community was however important in the historiography and the ideology of the expansionist Shewa-Amhara rulers (cf. the primacy of the first settler).

By the time when Imam Ahmed ibn Ibrahim al-Ghazi (nicknamed Grañ, 1506–43) led a jihad⁸ against the Abyssinian chiefdoms, the Muslim districts such as Ifat had been conquered and made tributary to the Abyssinians, as was probably also the case of present day Derra. The effect of the war was, however, equally disastrous for both the orthodox Christian and the Muslim states. It is difficult to see that any strong state structure could have been upheld in these depopulated areas and the Abyssinian king's inclusion of the sultanates of Dawaro, Fatajar and Bali into the southern parts of Abyssinia in 1545, must have been mainly in the name of the king and through Orthodox Christian missionaries still residing in these regions (Tadesse 1972, Trimmingham 1965).

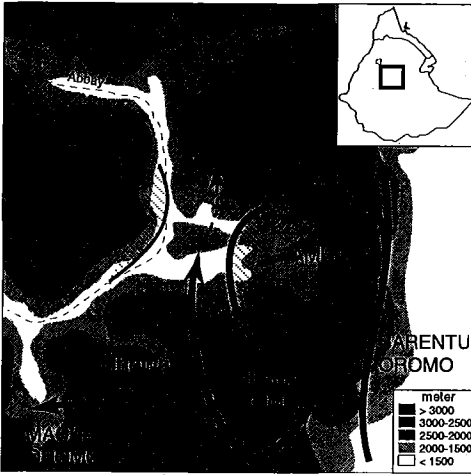
The form the Oromo migration took in the gradual movement northwards of several "clan" segments from the southern regions of present day Ethiopia is controversial. Were they military campaigns⁹ organised under the *gada* political system or more peaceful incremental movements by smaller subgroups, integrating the population in the "new social order" (Hultin 1987, Hassen 1990 and Trimmingham 1965 for a discussion)? On the more general level we are left with several important and still unanswered questions; firstly, whether Imam Ahmed's conquest had permanent effect upon the religious practices of the decimated highland population of northern Ethiopia. The general position is that some pockets of Islam seem, however, to have remained in some isolated parts, some of these being remnants of the Muslim sultanates. The forceful conversion of the Christian peasantry to Islam seems to have had little long term effect on their religious commitment (Stitz 1974). Secondly, we do not know how far the Oromo expansion into the Abyssinian highlands had taken place before Imam Ahmed's campaign and if this had any affect on the religious prac-

⁸ Imam Ahmed's campaign was devastating, reaching all the way into Tigray. He occupied two thirds of the Abyssinian territory and his expansion was only halted when the Abyssinian king received assistance from Portuguese musketeers.

⁹ The presentation of the Oromo expansion into the Abyssinian heartland as a brutal "invasion" played an important role in Ethiopian historical narrative of "Greater Ethiopia" (cf. Hultin this volume).

tices of the northern Oromo groups. In the case of Northern Shoa, Haberland notes that the country was almost without inhabitants in the period after Imam Ahmed's defeat, although he also refers to the local historical tradition that the Oromo had settled in the area before the Imam Ahmed's campaign (1963, cf. also Hassen 1990 and Marcus 1992). It does however seem reasonable to state that the Oromo had not settled permanently in Derra, at the time of Imam Ahmed's campaign in northern Shewa.

THE OROMO EXPANSION INTO THE NORTHERN HIGHLANDS



Little is known about the original homeland of the Oromo, why they began their migration from the areas they occupied in the beginning of the 16th century, and how this expansion¹⁰ was possible (Knutsson 1969, Hultin 1987, Lewis 1966). We will have to set these questions aside and, in the context of the northern Oromo groups in general and the situation in Derra in particular, give a brief outline of the geopolitical situation in Shoa between the mid-16th century and

until the mid-19th century, including the Era of the Princes (1769–1855). In the process of their northwards migration, the two main branches of the *Borana-Oromo* group had set up a ritual and political *chaffe*¹¹ in *Oda Nabi*. Their mode of subsistence was still predominantly pastoral and the *gada* centre implied a relationship between the country and people, not as a bounded surface area, but between certain focal places represented in their common histories and social organisation. These ritual/religious places are linked by the paths of ancestral travel from the "cradle" of Oromo culture (*Wolamo*) in the southern parts of Ethiopia (Haberland 1963). In other words these spatial representations are zero-dimensional (places without a specific extension, ritual space) or one-dimensional (vectors, lines, paths) rather than two-dimensional¹² bounded surface areas (Schlee 1992 for a discussion). Zero and one-dimensional appropriation of space by pastoralists (and hunter/gatherers) implies an absence of two dimensional territorial boundaries and the differences are clearly related to the

¹⁰ The term expansion and not migration is used since the Oromiffa speaking groups established relative autonomous territorial control in large parts of the highlands until the end of the 19th century.

¹¹ A meadow where the main rituals were performed as shown in the Macha case by Hultin.

¹² Ingold perceives two-dimensional tenure as a consequence of agricultural production although the transition between different spatialities is not a historical necessity (Ingold 1986).

construction of place/local identity through *appropriation* (the production process) and *domination* of space, that is through processes constituted in the social construction and transformation of nature.¹³

Besides the political and economic peculiarities of the *gada* system that suited a one-dimensional territoriality, the flexibility of this type of territoriality made it difficult for an aggressor to control the area for a longer period of time. This is an argument followed by several writers like Hultin (1984) and the contemporary observer Almeida (1954). At the same time the *Abba Bokku*,¹⁴ through the *gada* system, could organise military campaigns relatively efficiently (Haberland 1963). Another aspect of this type of territoriality was the limited administrative control any occupying ruler could exert in these territories. Therefore an early strategy for the Shoa-Amhara rulers (since Sahle Selassie, 1812–1846) was to divide and rule, gaining influence in certain tribes through intermarriages and military support during internal friction within the Tulama-Oromo (Markakis 1974).

The Tulama and the Macha are made up of a large number of "territorial" groups that share an ideology of common descent. Each has its own distinct name. In some areas they traditionally define themselves by reference to genealogical relationship to a common ancestor (Knutsson 1967). The relationships between the different groups within the Tulama branch have varied through history and, after having settled in the fertile plains of northern Shoa, the internal solidity of the different branches was gradually dissolved as a political unit or ritual organisation as a new type of territoriality emerged. These changes relate both to internalised changes in the Oromo polity and external influences. The first sign was among groups settling further away from the ritual center of the *gada* system. According to Knutsson (1967) the increase in geographical distance from the communal Macha/Tulama center at *Oda Nabi* and settlement in inaccessible valleys reduced contact with the central ceremonial place. Secondly, as we will return to later, the transition to a mixed farming system also led to a changing territoriality and, not least, the existence of surplus product that could be appropriated by the ruling elite. These seem to be the prime forces changing the Oromo polity. By 1589 the Macha-Oromo, in a process of continuing movement westwards, broke away from the common central *chaffe* of *Oda Nabi* setting up their own ceremonial center in *Oda Bisil* (Hassen 1990).¹⁵

By 1570 the Oromo of both the *Borana* and the *Barentu* section had occupied the land up to the Abbay and Jemma-Addabay rivers and penetrated the Shoa highlands. In Wollo they migrated along the eastern escarpment and by 1600 they controlled the undulating plains south of Mofer river (Stitz 1974). Segments of the *Karayu* group migrated along the eastern escarpment and came into con-

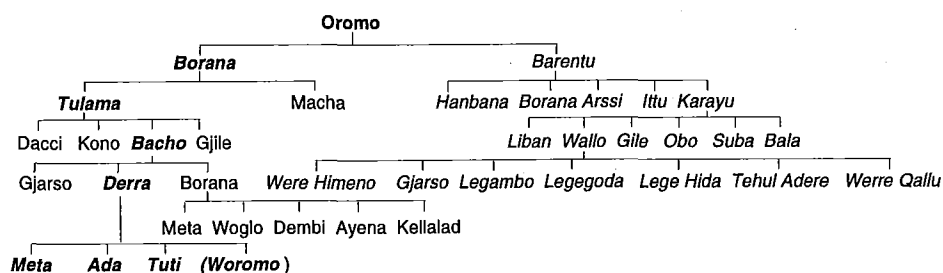
¹³ While the absence of boundaries in a geopolitical or juridical sense, as land tenure, does not imply that their production or utilisation of the environment is unregulated in time and space.

¹⁴ "Father of the sceptre"—ritual leader under the *gada* system.

¹⁵ There are several reasons put forward explaining why this split took place and the potential conflicts that arose (for an overview see Hassen, 1990).

tact with the Muslim Argobba/Yifat chiefdom before they turned westward within the Abbay basin. Parts of the Amhara speaking population withdrew to isolated valleys and mountain strongholds that were easily defensible against the Oromo cavalry, while other population groups were gradually integrated into the emerging local society. In the west, along the Abbay, the migration met with little resistance before entering into Wollo proper. The Wollo-Oromo (the Barentu and the Yaggu) are first mentioned in 1581/82 during the reign of Sarsa Dengle and re-occur through different conflicts with different Abyssinian kings¹⁶ (Trimingham 1965).

Figure 1. Selected genealogy of North-Shoan and Wollo-Oromo groups



The form that this migration took is unclear. We find some indications that Oromo war-parties repeatedly raided the northern and western kingdoms and chiefdoms without settling permanently in these regions. Bahrey (1954) states that the recurrent raids were extended into new territory at least every eighth year, mobilised through the *gada*, and reaching as far as five hundred kilometres into enemy territory. At a later stage individuals and groups would then begin to migrate and settle not as whole clan groups but in a gradual process with a distinct genealogical pattern. This implied either a complete expulsion, or a pacification and inclusion of the original population into the new polity. We find evidence of both processes creating, in the first case, a sharp divide/frontier between the two groups (Trimingham 1965) and, in the second case, a ritual incorporation of the remaining local groups into the new social order (for example the *gabbaro* among the Macha, Knutsson 1969; Hultin 1987). Furthermore, the migratory pattern was ordered according to certain symbolic and genealogical systems that led to certain spatially arranged settlement patterns, a "ritual topography". Firstly the "horizontal" aspect of settlement was

¹⁶ During the same period as the Oromo influence in Gondar increased through the inclusion of Oromo warriors in the kings army and through the marriage between the Wollo Oromo female chief Amito and Negus Iyasu (1730–55). Their son Iyoas (1755–69) continued to enrich his Oromo relatives with governorship over provinces, further alienating the Amhara regional chiefs from the Gondar dynasty (Trimingham 1965) Shewa was gradually cut off from the rest of the empire by the Wollo Oromo after the death of Iyasu.

formed according to the *miticha* type of settlement.¹⁷ According to oral tradition this implied that when households or lineage segments migrated in search of new places they stopped when the favourite bull/reproductive bull, the *korma*, bellowed under a tree. If the area had available water and pasture they would perform the *miticha* ceremony the same night, slaughter an animal, prepare a meal under the tree, and tie the skin (or a leather strip, cf. Teferi 1993) on to the branches of the tree, declaring the territory to be theirs.¹⁸ The *vertical* settlement pattern is related to the possibility of settlement on the highest *ambas*, i.e. closest to *Waqqa*¹⁹. This is in my opinion an idealised picture of what becomes a ritual "three dimensional" territoriality and local modifications are apparent in the tradition of the incoming Derra population.²⁰ The first tree remained the focal point of worship and sacrifices, and was left undisturbed as a remaining element of the one dimensional territoriality of the *gada* polity.

When the newcomers settled they became the founders of new, local descent groups, which again were split up by the emigration of some of their (younger) members, while the *angaffa* was supposed to stay with his father (Hultin 1987). A new lineage group did not usually take the name of the local founder as its "family name" but retained the name of the "clan" to which it had belonged when it first left. Several descent groups thus share a common name with groups found in many different places in Shoa and in Wollo (i.e. Ada and Meta cf. Hultin 1987).²¹ The establishment of a strong lineage which claimed one region as being under its control might indicate that the migration into new areas was formalised within the tribe, since it enabled a tribal segment to claim a rather large territory under the authority of the *balabat*. *Balabat* is an introduced Amharic term used by the present population in describing the position of the first settlers. Derra contained three such *balabat* regions, Metta, Ada and Tuti, all three *balabats* being related to each other by blood. The Ada *balabat* was the *angaffa* of the three, and the Meta *balabat* the youngest. It is important to notice that the usage of *angaffa* as a superior/elder does not necessarily refer to a

¹⁷ Another aspect was that the younger sons of the family were supposed to move and the *angaffa*, the elder son, remained with the father, creating a genealogical settlement pattern (see Bassi's essay).

¹⁸ The *miticha* resembles the *meddicca* ceremony of the western tribal segments; when a person is adopted into the "tribal segment" they slaughter an animal and tie a strip from the skin to the hand of the adopted person. The two ceremonies seem an analogue, symbolic appropriation or adoption of an area/person although the *meddicca* ceremony has, according to my informants, not been performed in Derra. I had the honour of being adopted (symbolised by a strip of goat skin with a hole in the end around my hand) by one Boran clan at the *gada* assembly that took place in southern Ethiopia in 1988. I'm indebted to Jan Hultin who brought this possible analogue to my attention during the writing of this paper.

¹⁹ Cf. Hultin 1987, who also describes other "rituals" and symbolic acts in relationship with the settling or migration into a new area.

²⁰ Although the first comers might initially have preferred high *ambas* it seems that in many instances (according to the location of the tree) they settled in what is called the *sacka* which is the first narrow plateau just beneath (50m) the uppermost plateau. This site provided better protection against the cold wind and would be closer to water and springs at the lower part of the escarpment.

²¹ Haberland finds the development of the first settler into a clan as mainly a question of reproduction (1963): "Dank der unglaublichen Fruchtbarkeit der Galla wurden in wenigen Generation aus einzelnen Familien kleine Stämme, von denen sich Gruppen".

person's age but can be related to tribal status (see Dahl's essay). It seems that during an early phase the *balabat* of Ada functioned as the *abba boku* or *hayu* of Derra and in this position, according to local tradition, being the *angaffa* of the Bacho tribe/confederation that extends southwards (including Garso) to the Muger river (Map 1.2). People in Tuti can still identify the tree where the first comers performed the *miticha* ceremony and the borderline between the three *balabat* is still a part of the "mental map" used by people in the area (delimited in Map 1.3, after being surveyed in the terrain).

Within such a "tribal" territory there are a great number of local agnatic descent groups forming a poly- "tribal" agglomeration of "clans" (see Map 1.2 and Figure 1 for classification of tribal segment, tribe and clans, concepts not used by the Oromo).²² Each one having its own name and its own territory that conforms to the "jurisdiction" of a second group of *balabat*. This group established their claim to the land on the basis of a similar *miticha* process in different localities within Derra, claiming the area as theirs. A third group of settlers that came later often make up patri-focal groups within a *hamlet* (sometimes family groups living beside each other within the village). Within the territory of the original *balabat* the different villagers may or may not have common descent since new population groups gradually moved into the jurisdiction of one *balabat*. As a result clan/segments are widely dispersed within the "tribes" or even spread across "tribal" boundaries. Although the mythological characteristics and significance of the *miticha* can be questioned, a corresponding settlement pattern can still be seen today. The pattern seems very much in contrast to the settlement pattern of the neighbouring Amhara territories with nucleated villages containing more than 300 households.²³

The primacy of the *angaffa* lineage seems to have been maintained since the *abba boku* held, in principle, land in a similar way to the lower *balabats* and only claimed the other *balabat's* loyalty as a part of clan relationship. As new people settled in the area without this formal clan-commitment, new forms of enforcing the authority of the *abba boku* and the lower *balabats* must have been activated since land was given to the newcomers under the auspices of the *balabat*. Unfortunately there are only a few historical sources covering Derra²⁴ and much of my reconstruction has to be based on sources dealing with the different Tulama tribes and oral tradition and genealogies; the more extensive material

²² Besides the genealogies and territories of each group and the common notion of Oromo (or Orma and Oroma) there are few territorial concepts of social groups or systems and an early observer found that (Krapf 1842): "... the Gallas have no general name to indicate their nationality or its seat, I propose to include both under the designation of Ormania".

²³ These settlements were central defence positions located on the different *ambas* (table mountains) of the independent "Amhara" chiefdom of Merhabete.

²⁴ Haberland includes Derra in his Galla Südethiopiens although using a different name, Borana that is the neighbouring province in Wollo (1965). Several of the travellers passed through Merhabete and Derra but their perspectives were mostly derived from the viewpoint of the Amhara nobility. This did not keep them from noting the environmental contrast to the more barren Shewan highlands (Krapf 1842): "... What a noble land would Ormania be if it were under the influence of Christianity and European culture! What a pity that the course of our emigration is not directed to those regions!"

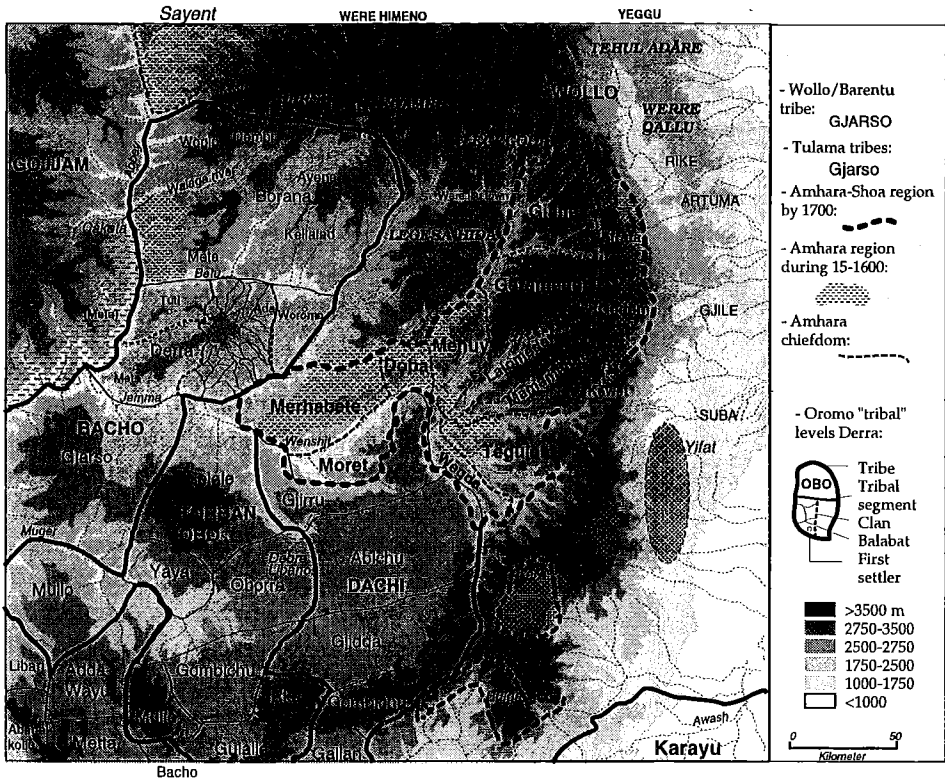
on the Macha society has been used as comparative reference. The first important question then is how and why the transformation from a political system with a one dimensional territoriality, and a distinct political/social system, with inherent democratic qualities, changed into two-dimensional territoriality and hereditary chiefdoms? The answer can be found in the complex intersection of constraints imposed by the process of migration (both distance from the "original" polity and the settling in and establishment of a new polity in the new locations), the settling in a new agro-ecological regime based on a mixed farming system and external influences through interaction mainly with Amhara chiefdoms but also other Oromo segments.

The different clans that made up a tribe could in some instances probably (from Jemma and southwards) retain a separate *gada* system with a separate *gada* assembly (in the same way as Hultin has suggested in the case of the Macha, 1987 and Ege 1978, for other parts of northern Shoa). It is difficult to see that this has been the case in Derra and, according to Haberland, it was quite normal that the new clan structures emerging in Wollo, and northern Shoa had only the *Abba Boku* or the *Hayu* as the paramount "chief" (1967). While we find no trace of any armed conflict during the settlement of Derra, it is clear that the Amhara population of the Merhabete chiefdom retreated into mountain fortresses on the high and easily defensible *amba* (Stitz 1974). The existence of several defence positions in the lowland towards Merhabete and the natural defence lines of Jemma and Wenchit river gorges tell us that there has been armed conflicts between the two groups. Whether the settlement of Derra took place in the aftermath of previous armed raids into Wollo, or whether the settlement took place in the aftermath of the Imam Ahmed's campaign can so far only be a matter of speculation. Oral tradition does not recall any fighting with local groups while this is clearly the case in neighbouring Borana (see also map of churches in that period in Tadesse 1972:204).²⁵ It is reasonable to believe that Derra was de-populated at the time of the arrival of the first settler and that no major military force was used. The five segments of the Borana, under the leadership of the chiefs Geferso, Ayena, Dembi and Meta and Wogelo made the local Amhara speaking population retreat from the current area of Borana. Through *miticha* they divided the territory between them (into five major localities, *get ager*) and named it Borana (Teferi 1993). According to Stitz (1974) Amhara speaking groups were found across the Betu river in Borana at the time of Oromo migration into Wollo (the *Caketa* chiefdom, Map 1.2; cf. Tadesse 1972:204). From Borana we have oral accounts of clashes between the Oromo

²⁵ In Selale the local Amhara peasantry were integrated in the Oromo society which again led to transformation both in production system as well as social and political organisation (cf. Ege 1978). The continued existence of Debre Libanos monastery after the settlement of Oromo groups in the region is an interesting feature that raises questions about the form of co-existence between the Christian population and those adhering to traditional Oromo religious practices.

and the local population (probably the Caketa) as well as of Imam Ahmed's destruction of churches and monasteries in this region (Teferi 1993).²⁶

Map 1.2 A generalised overview of the distribution of Oromo clans and Amhara chiefdoms in northern Shoa and Wollo in the period 1600–1850²⁷



The *balabat* of Ada emerged as a central ruler (or *angaffa/aba bokku*) within the Bacho tribe and we have some accounts of his position from the neighbouring Borana.²⁸ While the different clan groups settled in Borana "tribal segment", some disagreement developed as to the responsibility of the different clan leaders within Borana territory. To settle their dispute they called the *abba boku* of Derra (probably the Ada *balabat* but the term *abba boku* was used) to mediate and he gave each segment responsibility for defence, representation etc. (using an elaborate analogue of the parts of an oxen's body, Teferi 1993).

Elements of the Oromo traditional political and social systems must have been carried on into the 18th century but it is difficult to date the transition from

²⁶ Asnake, in Teferi (1993), mention the existence of few clusters of remaining Amhara speaking communities among the Oromo.

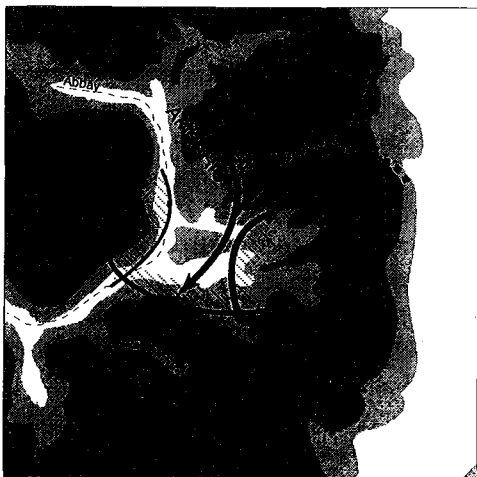
²⁷ Based on Stitz 1974, Haberland 1963, Ege 1987, Teferi 1993 and own material.

²⁸ Gelen was the *angaffa* tribal segment of the Dachi and Gombechu the *angaffa* within the Torban Obo (Stitz 1974).

a modified *gada* system to the adoption of *balabat* titles, since in Derra this did not imply any radical shift in the control over the land. There are few written sources about this area and local oral tradition does not allow any precise conclusion about to what extent (if any) the men who held *gada* office were also political leaders. Here, as Herbert Lewis (1965) has suggested in the case of 19th century Macha, the differences between being "a man of influence", a "leader", and a "ruler" (*mooti*) were probably rather diffuse.

By the beginning of the 19th century it seems certain that territorial leaders had emerged in Derra and that these leaders assumed the Amharic title of *balabat*. Furthermore, the terrain that Derra provided was not suitable for extensive pastoralism and therefore a mixed farming system must have become a central feature of the local production system relatively early, paving the way for a land "owning" class. According to Stitz, Derra and Borana were considered as one of the less favourable environments in the northward extension of the Oromo groups. These regions extend beyond the well watered undulating plains of the Shoan plateau, and he indicates that the people settled in these areas almost as a "last option" (Stitz 1974).

TRANSFORMATION OF THE TULAMA-OROMO AND THE RELIGIOUS DIVIDE



The Tulama retained Oda Nabi as their *chaffe*, although the increasing distance between the different sub groups, new forms of political leadership and the break up of the political center must have put a strain on the political organisation, similar to the Macha case (Blackhurst 1978 and Hassen 1990). By the beginning of the 18th century this must have weakened the political and not least the military capacity of the *abba boku* and the *gada* of Oda Nabi (Ege 1978).

Furthermore this was a period of major changes in the geopolitical situation. It is possible to identify three confederations of Tulama that existed as late as 1840s, the Tubo Obo, the Dachi, and probably Bacho, although these also correspond to what we, in want of adequate concepts, have named a clan. The yearly Dachi assembly gathered in the first half of the 19th century more than 30,000 persons, indicating at least the symbolic significance of the assemblies (Harris 1844). Several *chaffes* and *gada* systems existed on different tribal levels but it is unclear to what extent these were ritual meetings devoid of any political content (cf. Hultin 1987). The *gada*

as a religious and ritual system seems to have remained an important part of the Oromo societies on different "tribal" levels, especially related to significant points in the cycle of *gada* grades (Blackhurst 1978).²⁹

The disintegration/transformation of the *gada* as tribal political system can be related to three, often interrelated processes that, to a different degree, applies to the formation of Tulama groups in northern Shoa cf. Knutsson (Knutsson 1969, Lewis 1965, Ege 1978 and Blackhurst 1978):

- the disintegration of the Tulama group into more or less independent clans, led by regional or local chiefs;
- the evolution of the traditional war leader into a permanent chief, coexisting with *gada* rituals;
- the evolution of a clan chief into the chief of the tribe.

By the beginning of the 18th century the overarching Tulama political system had in praxis been dissolved as a political unit. The frequent internal wars between clans and clan groups indicated the new forms of territoriality that evolved. It would however not be correct to attribute this disintegration of old political structures and the consolidation of a new territoriality units solely to Shoan³⁰ interference. The "modified" *gada* system of the new "chiefdoms" north of Jemma river, with one *Abba Boku* or *Hayu* functioning in effect as a chief, was the result of several gradual changes in the intersection between the local polity and the geo-political location. On the other hand, the adoption of permanent agricultural systems and the possibility of appropriating the product of the peasantry by a land "owning" class is clearly incompatible with the *gada* form of governance.³¹ It must, however, have been in the interest of the *abba boku* or *angaffa* to adopt the Amhara form of *balabat* rule in these areas. As the hegemonic power of the inter-tribal *gada* assembly was gradually weakened, the local enforcement of a transition of power within the *gada* cycle would be difficult to maintain and the *gada* became transformed into its religious component, mainly on a local level down to the hamlet (cf. Blackhurst 1978). The ritual center at Oda Nabi continued to function well into the 19th century and an excerpt of the ritual prayer illustrates the double sided threat to the *gada* (Krapf 1942): "O Wak [God], give us children, tobacco, corn, cows, oxen, and sheep. Preserve us from sickness, and help us to slay our enemies who make war upon us, the Sidama (Christians), and the Islama (Mohammedans)".

On the other hand since the time of Assefa Wessen the Shoan nobility's policy was explicitly based on a principle of divide and rule, combining military

²⁹ Several of the travellers in Shoa in the mid-19th century describes importance of the religious content in these *gada* assemblies (Harris 1844, Isenberg, C. W. and J. L. Krapf 1843). See Bassi's essay.

³⁰ Shoan here implies the mainly Amhara speaking population in the highlands of northern Shewa and southern Wollo under domination of the Shewan King.

³¹ A foreign observer found that at the close of the nineteenth century besides the *gada* system "there exists another social order based on property and wealth which establishes a veritable landed nobility" (Salviac 1901:195, in Markakis 1974 and Lewis 1965).

strategy with intermarriages with Oromo chiefs and supporting the rise of chiefs within the clan, thereby avoiding military occupation that could not have been sustained. The change in Tulama polity was, however, until the beginning of the 19th century mainly due to internal dynamics in the Oromo polity and migration into new, and often environmentally different, areas that increased the distance to the political center. Through the Shoan's policy of intermarriage and alliances Christianity gained influence in the Tulama tribal segments as the new "chiefs" (*balabats*) were Christened. In contrast to the Barentu-Oromo in Wollo, however, they retained their language thereby creating a distinct identity from the northern Wollo-Oromo.³² The northern Bachu tribes retained their traditional Oromo religion when they settled in the region, but from the north the Wollo-Oromo, through their close contact with the centre of power, had adopted central elements of the Amhara society including the language. By 1840 they were, according to Krapf, all Muslim (Krapf 1842). While the change in language gave the (Yaggu-) Oromo easier access to the courts of the Empire, the adoption of Islam has been interpreted by Trimingham (1965) as a reaction to keep their separate identity against the Abyssinian. While this might be the case in the northern provinces, the process of conversion to Islam among the Tulama-Oromo towards the Jemma river further to the south has not been satisfactory explained. Several general hypotheses have been presented and, besides the one presented above by Trimingham, two more are plausible. Firstly the possible existence of Muslim communities in Wollo as remnants of Ahmed Mohammed's conversion of the Christian population to Islam. Secondly the strong influence the Muslim communities and sultanates, located along the eastern escarpment of the Shoan highlands, must have had on the Oromo groups partly moving northwards into Tigray, partly turning westwards into Wollo and the Abbay basin. We have little or no material covering the spread of Islam into Wollo although, according to Trimingham, Islam was actively professed by the chiefs of the Wollo-Oromo during the first half of the 18th century.

It is not possible to isolate one factor since most probably there has been a conjunctural effect in which the creation of an "ethnic" boundary, by conversion to Islam, must have played a major role in this process (cf. Knutsson 1989).³³ This peculiar mixture of geopolitics, Islam/traditional religion and Orthodox Christianity was until recently endemic to Wollo and played a central role in the further historical development in the region. In the Oromo regions south of Derra the geopolitical situation led to a different development through the local adoption of Orthodox Christianity, making Derra the central conjunction between northern and the southern Oromo groups.

³² The propagation of Amhara culture in the conquered Oromo provinces was mainly the responsibility of the Church (Darkwah 1975). Major reasons for not forcefully baptising the Muslim parts of the population was the fact that trade was dominated by Muslims and not to disturb relationships with the rich regions in the south. It was only during Menelik's later period that discriminatory laws were passed against the Muslim communities.

³³ The adoption of a new religion did not mark a swift change in the religious practices of the people but rather in political commitments by the political leaders.

Zergaw indicates that Borana (of the Bacho) settled in present day Wollo as one out of three Oromo groups,³⁴ Wollo, Tulama and Wichale, of which Wollo was probably the group constituting the "*Sebat Bét Wollo*" (Seven houses of Wollo, Zergaw 1973 in; Teferi 1993). By 1842 Isenberg and Krapf (1941) found only a few Wollo-Oromo speaking their own language and the present day northward distribution of Oromiffa takes us only a few kilometres into Borana *awraja*. Borana chiefs of South-western Wollo were under the strong influence of the northern Islamicized Oromo groups. Influence from the north included the adoption of Amharic. The emergence of a strong Muslim kingdom located in Were-Himeno, the Mamedoch dynasty, must have added to this process (Bahru 1991), including Borana and Derra in its sphere of influence until 1825 when the dynasty was gradually dissolved. According to Plowden (who includes Derra in the Borana) in 1850 the Borana were governed by a powerful king who was able to muster 30,000 horses "though they can scarcely be said to be governed by him" (1868:312). They preserved their independence against the King of Shoa; "mostly speaking Amharic, and [are] constantly at enmity with the Wollo Gallas". The spread of Islam into Derra, but not further south along this axis, must be related to the geopolitical situation where the relatively independent Wollo-Oromo groups functioned as a buffer between Amhara-Shoa, the emperor in Gondar and his kings in Gojjam. Furthermore, this change in identity removed the new chiefs from the political hegemony of the *gada* polity. But even among the Wollo elements of the *gada* polity existed as late as 1830 curbing hegemonic tendencies (Krapf 1942): "The *Heyu*, or chief, whose term of office is for seven years, another being then chosen in his place by one or more of the Galla tribes. The *Heyu* commands in time of war, and is judge in time of peace", which indicates a relative high concentration of power.

The southwards expansion of Sahle-Selassie was the result of a different strategy; co-option of local Oromo chiefs rather than on the establishment of direct and permanent Shoan rule over these vast areas. Harris estimates that during the rule of Sahle-Selassie the province was inhabited by one million Christians and one and a half million Muslims and pagans (Harris 1844). Through a process of intermarriages, christening, and military campaigns the Tulama-Oromo areas were however only temporarily made tributary to the expanding Shoan kingdom. This placed them in an ambiguous position as both allies and subjects of the Amhara king, but with territorial aspirations of their own, mainly demonstrated as "in-fights" between different Oromo groups as new chiefs emerged as great warriors.³⁵ Even when they were allies with the

³⁴ In the literature it is common to name all Muslim inhabitants of Wollo as Galla, although several other groups are present. Trimingham delimited the Wollo-Oromo by the Abbay from Gojjam, by Wenchit and Jemma from Shewa, in the North east by the Mille and in the east by the Wollo region (Trimingham 1969). This definition includes Derra in the Wollo-Oromo groups while Harberland includes the Derra, as he mistakenly names Borana in the Shewa Oromo group (Haberland 1963). There is great confusion over the definition of this area.

³⁵ Plowden notes that the conflicts between Wollo-Oromo tribes did not lead to the same devastating results as when they attacked the Amhara regions (1868).

Shoans, their *gada* system continued its rituals as late as in the mid-19th century. This was a period of great political tension in Shoa, when Menelik advanced northward and established Wara Illu as the Shoa Amhara's northernmost garrison town, and later advanced westwards into Gojjam.³⁶ Derra, being the southernmost "frontier" of the Muslim Wollo Oromo sphere of influence, was apparently caught in the middle. It was now the northernmost Tulama-Oromo group that had mainly kept Oromiffa as their language.

The position of *abba boku* in Derra must gradually have been transformed into one of chief, albeit the chiefdom was characterised by a decentralised power structure with inherent tensions through the hereditary *balabat* system. The term "*balabat*", as it has been used in Derra, resembles the original usage, both among the Amhara and the Tigray, i.e. the claim to land made by the descendants of the first settler or conqueror of the area (the *Abbat*-father). This right to land in the old Amhara provinces is termed *rist* (and the holder of *rist ristegna*)³⁷ and denotes (Markakis 1974:75): "... the status of a person whose rights over land derived from membership in a kinship group".³⁸ Such rights do not refer to a certain plot of the land but rather to a part of the land that was claimed by the original settler (Hoben 1973). The size of the *rist* areas seems to have corresponded to that of the lower *balabats* in Derra but, in contrast to *balabat* land, the *rist* land was held corporately by all the descendants, through any combination of male or female ancestors. Land was inherited in a direct line of descent from father to son where the eldest son retained the title of *balabat*. The Shoa-Amhara authority was by this time mainly imposed on the Dachi tribal segments of Gjirru and Abichu (Map 1.2, Ege 1978). The Gojjam ruler's attention was mainly directed towards the region of the Macha-Oromo to the south, being the main source of trade items and traversed by taxable caravan routes. The Garso (Djarso in Darkwa's spelling) market was a major center of foreign trade in north-western Shoa and was probably under the influence of the Gojjam rulers (Darkwah 1975).

At the end of the 18th century the *balabat* of Ada, Wodeg Duri, controlled Derra as the *angaffa*. By the first half of the 19th century his son Weseñu Wodeg expanded his power after having defeated the *balabat* of Meta, Ali Mare.³⁹ Situated in the outskirts of Merhabete, one of the oldest Shoa-Amhara chiefdoms, Derra had periodically been paying tribute to the ruler of Merhabete. It is difficult to date when Derra was considered a province under Merhabete. Derra can not be found under Cecchi's presentation of the administrative division

³⁶ Several rationale have been presented as to why the Shewans expanded their territory i.e. religious motives, economic motives and the ideology of re-conquering old Amhara land, liberating the remaining Amhara population in these areas, beside more psychological accounts of developments within the Shewan aristocracy (Darkwah 1985, Bahru 1991, Abir 1968).

³⁷ The *rist* land usually granted by the emperor or king to persons for service and is known as *gult*. The *gultegna* has the right to collect taxes from the *rist* holders on the king's behalf but the *gult* right is not normally hereditary.

³⁸ In its purest form this resembles the *enda* kinship organisation in Eritrea (Tekeste 1986)

³⁹ Ali Mare fled to Menz where he joined Ras Kassa Derge who later became the main military opponent to the Derra chief.

under Asfa-Wessen (1774–1807), while most Dachi tribes were at that time listed as paying tribute. Soleillet lists seven un-named provinces under Merhabete during the reign of Sahle-Selassie (1813–1847), the same number of provinces listed under the reign of Menelik, when Derra is presented as one of them (Cecchi 1886, Soleillet 1886 and Ege 1978). It is plausible that Derra was considered a tribute paying province during the reign of Sahle-Selassie and that the authority of the Shoan king must at times have been felt in Derra. Another threat to Weseñu Wodeg's authority came from the Oromo chief Abba Moallé who, with Shoan support, rose from being the hereditary chief of the Saggo under the Selale tribal segment, to paramount chief of the Muger-Selale (being *de facto* a Shoan governor). Besides being a prominent warrior in his own right, his alliance with Sahle-Selassie led to a marriage between Sahle-Selassie and Abba Molale's sister (Ege 1978).⁴⁰ Several Oromo chiefs paid tribute to this new chief and his main route of expansion was north-west towards Jemma and the Garso.

In this manner the southern "frontier" of Derra was created by "Christian" Tulama Oromo who in many instances operated independently of the Shoan ruler. In this period (1855–70) the Oromo kingdoms beyond the Gibe had converted to Islam but with the same "flexible" religious commitment as in Wollo. In an attempt to strengthen the religious commitment within the Muslim communities the Egyptian and Sudanese merchants in these regions aided the attempts to form local Muslim religious centres (the first being Gimma Abba Gifar, Cerulli 1916, 1922). According to Cerulli (1922:22) these centres generated the "first fanatics and the first attempts at rebellion. The first rebel was a warrior of Derra, a tribe in Shoa near Selale". While he is known by his Oromo name Weseñu Wodeg in Derra, his Muslim name was Hasan. In turn he defeated *Deggatch Masassa Sayfu*, sent against him by Menelik, and *Ras Mikael* sent by Emperor Johannes IV, who escaped Weseñu's cavalry by taking refuge on the mountain Tulu Aylu, in the vicinity of Derra. Later, when a large army had been prepared in Shoa to march against Derra the Oromo sang this riddle (Ibid.:23):

<i>Takké tarakké</i>	Come on, divine!
<i>lafen okkotet rakkaté?</i>	Is the bone distressed in the pot?

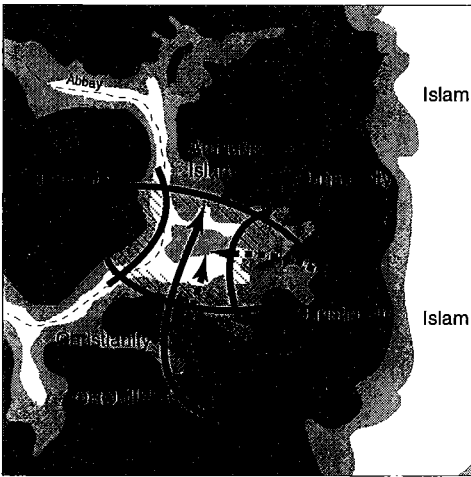
The riddle is explained by Cerulli as; the bone is Weseñu, desired by the dogs, i.e. the Amhara; the pot was Derra, his tribe. As a pot protects the bone against the dogs who will not risk rushing into the pot, and cannot get the bone except by breaking the pot, so Weseñu was protected by the Derra against the Amhara who would not risk their lives by coming into Derra's country and could not

⁴⁰ The Abichu had an even closer contact with the Shewan dynasty but still retained their *gada* system (Ege 1978). The Oromo chief Gobana became one of Menelik's most successful generals in the southwards expansion and subordination of Oromo tribes, being given the title Ras as provincial governor over Macha territory. Besides pointing to the intricate position this places the different Oromo groups in, Darkwah finds that "in Shewa, race, birth, or religion was in itself neither a passport nor a barrier to a position of importance and confidence" (1975:134). What Darkwah does not question is what type of new loyalties and identities this creates, sometimes involving whole tribes.

capture Weseñu except by defeating the Derra. Cerulli's account gives an interesting perspective on the external influence involved in the development of local power structures and, according to local tradition, these external Arabic contacts even provided Weseñu with a cannon. Local oral tradition confirms this presentation and adds to the picture of a wider political alliance and "in-fight" between the "Muslim" chiefdoms, where religious commitment probably played a partial role in the shifting alliances that were relatively far reaching.

According to local tradition, Weseñu assisted several other local Muslim "chiefs" of the Wollo-Oromo group. In one battle at Wara Illu, Weseñu Wodeg was called to assist the Muslim forces in their fight against the Shoa Amhara under the leadership of Ras Derge. During the battle he was seriously wounded and later died on his way back to Derra.⁴¹ The inclusion of Derra into the growing Empire of Menelik can be approximated to 1880. By that time the population was still mainly Muslim Oromiffa speakers (cf. Cerulli 1922).

THE RISE OF AMHARA HEGEMONY AND INTRODUCTION OF ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY IN DERRA



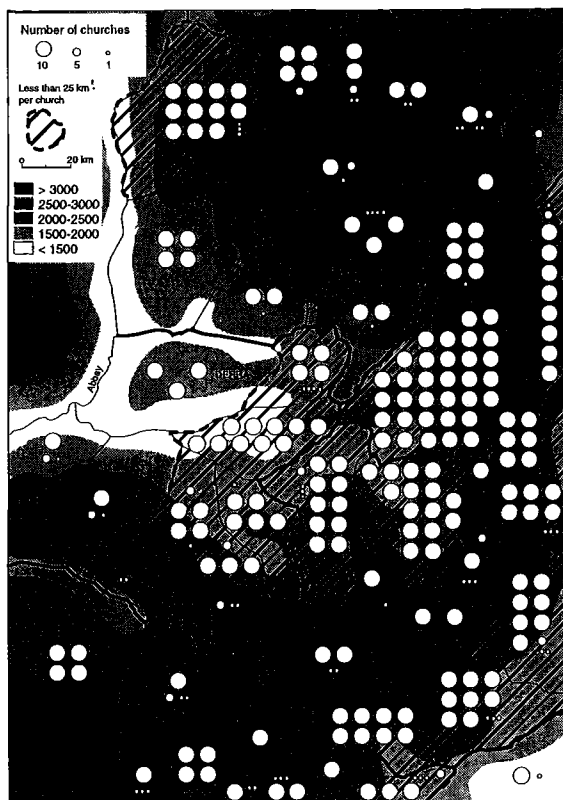
Ras Derge was appointed ruler of Derra and, according to practices described in several other conquered regions (cf. Markakis 1974), the *balabats* retained their positions, although with some significant changes. Beginning in 1897, the new rulers organised a confiscation and redistribution of land in the Oromo provinces (Markakis 1974). The Oromo *balabats* retained the jurisdiction over their former territories but were only allotted 1/3 of the total land while the rest was divided as church and state land.

The new governors were all appointed among the Amhara-Shoan nobility⁴² (which also included "Oromo" who had adopted most of the customs of Amhara culture) and then mainly from Merhabete. The praxis of appointments contributed to the antagonism between the defeated Oromo and the new Shoan

⁴¹ His death was kept a secret and his wife Wolele took up the role as leader. From the fortress they had constructed on an *amba*, Wolele resisted several attacks by *ras* Derge's forces but after three years she surrendered and Wolele was imprisoned in Debre Libanos.

⁴² One example of Menelik's policies is given in Cerulli (1922) describing how Menelik, after having defeated the Oborra and Abbicchu (who had rebelled against Menelik for over a year), replaced the chief of the Oborra, Wube, with an old man from Derra (Lidj Getane) who had served as an officer of the Shewan court. Menelik did however not take vengeance on the Oborra, and Woube was later appointed governor of Nonno.

Map 1.3 *Distribution of churches 1960 adapted from Stiz 1974*



elite.⁴³ An important step taken by Menelik was to initiate church building in Derra and to appoint priests from the wider Amhara region. Conversion to Christianity became a political necessity for many local *balabats* if they wanted to be present at the Amhara courts; we have examples of *balabats* that converted and retained their Muslim name, perhaps an indication of lack of commitment to their new religion. That the policy of converting the Muslim population to Christianity was less than a success can be read out of Map 1.3 which shows a corridor of districts from south of Muger river to Wollo with less than 25 km² of land per church. The present sheikhs in Derra do not see the chiefs of pre-Menelik Derra as dedi-

cated Muslims since Oromo traditional religious practices (probably intermixed with traditional praxis from the surrounding regions) were still followed. Islam is still the dominant religion in Derra. The different local Muslim communities in Ethiopia existed in relative isolation without any institutional expression on the national level and this enabled the Ethiopian government essentially to ignore its existence (Markakis 1974).

During the Italian occupation the army built a garrison in Derra,⁴⁴ perhaps necessitated by the strength of the guerrilla in Merhabete and, like they did in many other places, the Italian army tried to co-operate with the Muslim communities. This "alliance" culminated with the active and armed participation of the Derra people in averting an attack from Ethiopian forces under the leadership of Ras Mesfin (launched from Merhabete and Fiche). This military co-

⁴³ The elders of the district had earlier requested Menelik to make Derra a *rist* area since this seems to have been the case in some other conquered regions (cf. Darkwah 1975), but without any luck. One reason for Menelik's rejection of this request was, according to local tradition, that Weseñu Wodeg had killed the governor of Merhabete, Kebet Abesserra in Desso (a *balabat* area in Derra) during one of the Shewan campaign.

⁴⁴ The Italians moved the *woreda* town and main market place to the old center Yaya, probably out of symbolic considerations.

operation was decided on after an open expression of support for the Italians in a meeting of the elders, arranged by the *balabat* of Ada. In Merhabete this co-opting by the Italians of the Derra people is still remembered, and allegations about how the Derra people acted as scouts for the Italians are still held against them.

Apart from the introduction of a new land-tax system after the war, the situation remained much the same during the reign of Haile Selassie as in the pre-war period. Governors in Derra continued to be appointed from the Shoan nobility (which in itself did not preclude governors of Oromo descent) while the *balabat* remained in local control. The increasing subdivision of the land (through inheritance), however, led to a gradual decline in the *balabat* living standards, leaving some of them barely above the general peasant standard. Importantly, most of the trade was controlled by people who had connections to the administration or the church. None of the *balabat* took part in the "modern" trading networks, became owners of shops or established themselves in the lucrative business of grain milling; their shortcomings can be related to the limited capitalisation of production and traditional investment in livestock.

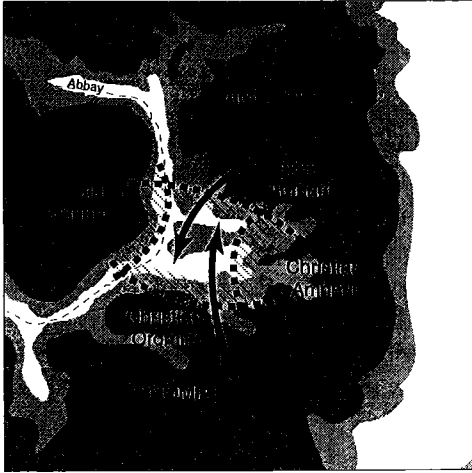
In what follows we question in what manner and to what extent Shoan hegemony (political, economic, and cultural) had established itself in Derra by the end of Haile Selassie's reign. This is done with reference to the general statement of "Amharisation" of the Tulama made by Haberland (1963:522).⁴⁵ The local *balabat* remained in power within their jurisdiction, functioning as the extended arm (as tax collectors) of the *gult* holder and the Emperor. To the east and the south, in Merhabete and Garso/Fitche, we find an orthodox Christian population that is described as highly intermixed, (both within the peasantry as well as the nobility) although in the south the population has to a large extent retained their Oromo language. To the west, along the Abbay, we find an orthodox-Christian, Amhara speaking population that historically has been a part of the Tulama-Oromo but has to a large degree been integrated into the Gojjam polity.⁴⁶ To the north we find the people of Borana who are mainly Amhara speaking Muslims. As shown earlier, in Derra we find a mixture of both religions and languages. Without attempting to present any logical explanation why people do not "identify" themselves as Oromo, it becomes clear from the regional mix that there is no consistent "Oromoness". People relate to their *Galla* ancestors mainly as a historical reconstruction (we "used to be Galla"). At the same time it would be difficult to speak of a unilateral process of "Amharisation". Instead Orthodox-Christians have adopted the traditional term *Sidama* for themselves (originally a term used for non-Oromo). This is mainly a result of overlapping cultural boundaries, changing polities and a variety of "overlapping" identities constructed over the last 400 years. Inherent in this

⁴⁵ "Die Schoa-Galla, deren eigentlicher Name Tulama kaum noch gebraucht wird, sind im Begriff, allmählich im Amharatum aufzugehen."

⁴⁶ Poluha 1989, within Ashene, Gojjam the population recognise their ancestors as being of Oromo origin but elements of the previous Agaw population are also present, so no distinct "ethnic boundary" is upheld.

process is the local construction of identities in which we find the contradictions created by some *balabat* adoption of Christianity after the Shoan occupation, attempting to enhance their own social position. The adoption of identities was thus also related to new processes of social stratification emerging as a result of centralisation of the new Ethiopian state.

THE CURRENT SITUATION IN DERRA—SORTING OUT THE FRONTIERS



The effects of the 1974 Revolution was not really felt in Derra until two years later, when students from the *Zemetza* campaign and the new *woreda* administrators organised the local land reform.⁴⁷ In the mean time the former *balabats* had continued to collect land tax (after convincing the tenants that what they had heard over the radio was false information). The new Peasant Associations (PA) that were established to a large extent followed the delineated areas of the former *balabats*. The land reform did not

involve a major redistribution of land and in most cases people retained their old plots, although smaller than previously, since more people were given the right to cultivate. The Revolution was apparently not seen as something that would last. The continuing authority of the *balabat* and their lineages in local affairs is reflected in the fact that the son of the former *balabat* was elected as the new leader of the PA I studied most closely.⁴⁸ Although he was later removed by the *woreda* administration, the authority of the former *balabat*, the social structure created by the *miticha* settlement pattern and the local territoriality did not change with the land reform itself. The different hamlets continued to be the nuclei of economic and social activities, since the better off peasants retained most of their oxen they could still maintain a strong economic position in their hamlet. We have already noted that the *balabat* in Derra did not take part in the growing modern sector of trade that developed during the later part of Haile Selassie's reign. The socialist policies of the Mengistu regime opened up new trading patterns but trade was still dominated by Christian traders, many of

⁴⁷ The Revolution in 1974 is seen as having the greatest effect in the regions that were conquered and included into the Ethiopian empire after 1880, generally described as *gult* areas (Dessalegn 1985).

⁴⁸ Some few *balabats* turned into *shiftas* (local outlaws), and remained so for several years without seriously threatening the local administration. They later gave themselves up and were given land in their former PAs.

them residents in the *awraja* town Alem Katema. Since Derra was the major surplus producing area in Merhabete *awraja*, it became important for the traders in the *awraja* town to control the Derra market as agents for the Agricultural Marketing Co-operation (AMC) or later as commissioned traders. The need to control the Derra market became so acute that the only dry weather road that linked Derra with Fiche (across Jemma river) was blocked by the *awraja* officer in 1978, thus forcing the grain trade to pass via Alem Katema.⁴⁹

The land reform in 1975 did not, in essence, change the peasant communities territoriality and the "traditional" territoriality was a major concern to the military regime, as it has been to many other African governments (Arnesen 1991). The villagisation programme was a deliberate attempt to rearrange the territorial structure of the region and, thereby, also remnants of the *miticha* system. Although not explicitly recommended in the villagisation guidelines, the local villagisation committees were deliberately ordered by higher authority to spread the former members of the hamlets into different corners of the village. The idea was make the households more susceptible to new forms of co-operation, i.e. producers' co-operatives. The villagisation process did not succeed in its goal of transforming all of Derra's hamlets before the area was overtaken by forces from the EPRDF. The new "rulers" of Derra immediately introduced their own "land reform" and redistributed the land in most of the PAs. There was a total reshuffling of the peasants' plots, with a new plot perhaps located some hundred meters from his/her previous one. The peasantry interpreted this as the new ruler's way of showing their strength and, through a "territorial strategy", the existence of a new social agenda.

The PA leadership that was established in 1974 had the potential to become a self governing political institution but was gradually turned into the military regime's extended arm. Being devoid of any power to initiate local development initiatives, new forms of local co-operation and management of social and economic relations have developed. These were both new and old "institutions" that have parallel functions to the official ones (i.e. judicial and conflict-resolving functions such as the *ad hoc* council of elders) and partly arranged as specific self-help organisation (eg. funeral societies).⁵⁰ The situation seems to repeat itself today since the peasantry again see the new PA leaders as co-opted by the new regime. Their resistance towards new state policies is in general not an open one, the general policies are reworked and contested through the local power structures. This can be interpreted as a re-vitalisation of traditional social organisations but not primarily linked to remnants of the "ethnic" or "tribal"

⁴⁹ One example indicates the continuing cleavage between Derra and Merhabete. Since development initiatives were decided in Alem Katema, the well-to-do people in the *woreda* town of Derra, Gundo Meskal, bribed the *awraja* officials in Alem Katema in an attempt to provide the town with an electric generator. When the generator finally arrived it was blocked by people from Alem Katema and taken by force to the *awraja* town. As a response the people in Gundo Meskal blocked the grain market in the town for a short period, denying Merhabete traders access.

⁵⁰ The old *balabats* seem to have outlived their role. Some of them pin their hope on the new royalist party of Ethiopia, in the hope that this will help them regain their land and tenants.

polity i.e. the *gada*. Peasant's institutions are continuously reworked to form what some writers see as a counter ideology or hidden opposition to the changing external forces and the increased investment in tradition as a coping strategy (Dessalegn 1992).

To an outsider, the different population groups, whether Christian or Muslim, Amharic or Oromiffa speakers, could not be easily discerned in 1988 by their way of dressing. They live side by side in the village (some villages in the lowland are predominantly inhabited by Muslims) and the PA leaders are elected from either religion. The main exception was the dresses of religious leaders and the small symbolic items worn by many females, such as jewellery and crosses (both metal and tattoos), used as symbols of identity. The limited use of symbols can also be found in the architecture of the churches and mosques, being similar in outside appearance (circular) but with different "ritual architecture" inside. The existence of several cultural groups and cultural traits coupled with social stratification within the community, could be considered unstable or prone to strong cultural manifestations, i.e. the construction of "cultural boundaries" or the formation of a system of religious syncretism. The latter comes close to Mesfin's "melting pot" allegory (1991), while the claim of an "Amharanised" Tulama-Oromo (Haberland 1963) does not seem to fit the situation in Derra very well either. What we seek here is a more "structural" explanation to what I see as the containment of potential "centrifugal" forces in Derra.

With the introduction of Islam and Christianity in Derra new ritual centres were established in the region, in general one church in the area of one *balabat*, while the Muslims gathered in the relative few dispersed mosques or in designated forests. While this created a diverse ritual territoriality that segmented the peasant association, I find that the inherited territoriality of the *miticha* settlement pattern counterpoised such tendencies through the existence of flexible religious constellations or a tripartite syncretism with traditional religious beliefs as the uniting entity. By following this line of reasoning it is tempting to denote the "traditional religious beliefs" as remnants of Oromo *gada* religion. What is seen as "traditional" is however also a mix of different religious impulses that is continuing to spread between the different population groups in northern Ethiopia. It is difficult to find any distinct Oromo religious practice in this mix but certain elements related to the remnants of Oromo territoriality will be presented (see Aguilar's essay). What is interesting is that these practices bring together adherents of monotheistic religions to worship "communal" spirits. Taking the *adbar*⁵¹ ceremony as the most important example, a ritual which is common over the whole of northern Shoa as well as other parts of the country, this ceremony plays an important part in the social life of the hamlet. The "*angaffa*" (as the "keeper" of the *adbar*) of the different hamlets organises the ceremony and the religious groups prepare their food according to the ritual of

⁵¹ Gamst (1969) find the *adbar* spirit related to pre-Christian, Hebrew beliefs and practices associated with the Qemant people, "the pagan Hebrews of Ethiopia" in (Aspen 1994).

their religion but under the same tree. The *communality* of the ceremony is important and individual ceremonies in the house, often to one of the poles, was by one Sheikh considered as praying to the *Giñi* ("the devil"). There are however different manners and circumstances in which the rituals are performed, ranging from the throwing of corn to the floor during the indoor coffee ceremony to the preparation of food in the compound of the household. The communal ceremony is held under the *adbar* tree,⁵² and often under the old tree where the first settler performed the *miticha* ceremony. This is a protected tree,⁵³ not related to any particular species, but often the largest tree in the neighbourhood. Without going into details regarding the protective *adbar* spirit(s) (for further information on *adbar* see Aspen 1994 and Morton 1973) it seems natural to speculate if this is syncretised to the tradition of the *miticha* in Derra.⁵⁴

The market reforms which had already been introduced in 1989, apparently opened the way for new impulses. With the change in government in 1991 travel restrictions were lifted. I stayed in Derra for some months in 1994 and immediately noticed several striking changes, beside the dismantling of the socialist institutions and the establishment of a new hegemonic polity under the Oromo People's Democratic Organisation (OPDO). The most apparent change was that parts of the Muslim community had strengthened their use of sartorial symbols, adopting Arabic styled garment instead of the traditional dress worn by members of both religious communities.⁵⁵ This was inspired by the increased contact with the Muslim community in Addis Ababa and through the increase in pilgrimages from Derra to Mecca. Furthermore, an impressive modern mosque with a minaret had been erected in a Muslim dominated lowland PA, a bit outside the *woreda* town. The mosque had, according to my informants, been financed by loans from sources in Saudi Arabia. The local Muslim population in Derra could not have afforded such a building. The increased pilgrimages, and increased remittances from relatives working abroad have in turn led to the opening of several new shops in the *woreda* town, financed by "Saudi money", thus breaking the dominant position of the Christian-Shoan ("Amhara") merchants. Besides the opening up of additional economic linkages and trading patterns, partly based on religious affiliation, the establishment of *national* Muslim organisations will probably have implications for Derra's traditional religious center Wollo, as the main center of Islamic influence. So far this is a

⁵² The *adbar* spirit has different connotations in different regions, being partly embodied as a tree or even a stone, and partly conceived as a spirit of the household and compound. Morton refer to a special category of spirits among the Oromo, living in large trees, rocks and rivers, as *genii loci* or *boranticha* that has similar characteristic to the *adbar* (Morton 1973).

⁵³ Single trees on the roadside are also given a symbolic representation as Isenberg and Krapf describe in the territory of the Yajju Galla (Isenberg and Krapf 1843:439–40, (Trimingham 1952:260–261): "They grease this tree, and perform religious ceremonies under it. Nobody dare touch or damage the tree without risking a severe punishment".

⁵⁴ In addition to the *adbar* there are other spirits and mediums. The *Kallu* play an important role, being regularly possessed by spirits (*ayana*) (Lewis 1970). The *Kallu* are not directly related to specific decent groups nor geographical areas but play an important part in the local society, i.e. as healers and as a conflict resolving institution.

⁵⁵ Cf. Hussein Ahmed (1994) for a presentation of Ethiopian Muslim societies and institutions.

trend mainly restricted to the *woreda* town Gundo Meskal where, in addition, the US Baptist mission recently erected a church in the vicinity of the town (they have been engaged in relief operations in the region since the famine of 1984/85). This new, but relatively small, congregation has added to the general picture of changing cultural impulses which has always been a part of the "becoming" of Derra.

During my last visit to Derra three churches were allegedly burned down during one night and this naturally created a lot of tension and anxiety in the *woreda*. Indignation was felt in both the religious communities. The event did not lead to general accusations toward the Muslim community although orthodox priests, during personal conversations, indicated their suspicion. These events might, however, represent a radical new phase when identity constellations are created and contested in the locality. New spheres of influence have penetrated the local economy and created new forms of capital formation, a process in which (Pred & Watts 1992:xiii-xiv, my emphasis): "... the symbolic discontent that emerges as new forms of capital make their local appearance; as the agents and actions of capital intersect with already existing—more or less sedimented—everyday practices, power relations, and forms of consciousness; as local residents simultaneously experience *modernity* and *hegemony* in new guises". A central question is then how these "hegemonies", or rather social institutions, that in the local context have "internalised" and constructed identities, can mediate between the existing and the new spheres of influence. This does not only relate to the development of a new national Islamic identity or a new "Oromoness" (symbolised by inclusion in the Oromo region) but the complex intersection with the new polity and new "agents of capital". The recently introduced structural adjustment programme will evidently generate a wider frame of influences and new "loyalties" that will challenge the existing "hegemonies" as people seek to enhance their situation. While some will seek a secure livelihood by invoking *traditional institutions* or "moral economy" (especially the poorer section of the population, Dessalegn 1992) this is clearly not a homogenous reaction as some sort of *communal* "exit option". The peasantry's relationship with the wider social sphere is progressive in the sense that the social and cultural organisations are actively mediating between the "new" and the "old".

CONCLUSION

It seems that the current Ethiopian regime is left with few options beside the laborious task of building new economic and social institutions and modes of government that involve some sort of remaking of history in the context of the present. Basil Davidson has posed some central questions in this respect (1992:19): "Very well. But why then adopt models from those very countries or systems that have oppressed and despised you? Why not modernize from the

models of your own history, or invent new models?" In doing so, in the Ethiopian context, the search for answers takes us back several hundred years and eventually ends with another question, *when does history begin*, and *whose history do we choose?* While we acknowledge the inherent democratic qualities in a peoples right to its own history, the traditional image of Africa has often been one of closed territorial ethnic entities. In much of the current development literature this is mirrored in a revival of neo-populist positions that attempt to construct local and "traditional" platforms for development. This implies a construction of decentralised autonomous spaces (Scott 1990), often articulated as some form of altruistic communalism that is seen as parallel to the essentialism of politically constructed ethnicity. Our understanding of the complexity of the continuing construction of ethnic boundaries and identities is however now increasing, although the intersection with national and international capital has created new complex constellations and not a uniform culture in the palm of the multinationals. Our presentation of the historical construction of place, in the case of Derra, shows partly how the territorial structure evolves as an articulation of multiple layers of identities and loyalties and the close linkage between territory and identity. There is a multitude of terms and symbols of identity that are evoked in certain situations, pointing at the multi-dimensionality of identity formation and entangled histories. The fluidity of and multi-dimensionally of social boundaries have been reflected both in Barth's approach in the 60s and in the recent discussion on tribes as an invention by the European colonisers (Barth 1969, Lonsdale 1994). In this paper we have taken on the elaborate task of reconstructing the becoming of Derra, using the locality as our point of departure.

While the Oromo migration and settlement in northern Shewa (and then not as the first population group to occupy the area) marked the beginning of a gradual transformation of the Oromo polity and religious system, symbolised by the *gada*, the disintegration of intertribal solidarity can be related to several influences. The outcome of these processes was to a great extent related to the geopolitical location, and simply to speak of an unilinear process of "Amharisation" of these Oromo groups is highly misleading. The same can be said of the "melting pot allegory". In the case of the Tulama-Oromo region we have shown how the Bacho tribe has been split into three segments, one Christian-Oromo (Bacho), one Muslim-Oromo (Derra), and one Muslim-Amhara (Borana), if language and religion are used as the criteria. The social structure that emerged in Derra, with the *balabat* and the chief as the leader, was both a result of the weakening of cross tribal political structures under the *gada* as well as local contingent effects brought about by the adoption of agriculture and the mode of migration. By adoption of the role of the *balabat* and also to some extent a Muslim identity, the new political leadership could create new social boundaries that disentangled them (the chiefs) from both the political and the religious aspect of the *gada*. The new chiefs' political legitimation still had its root in the local polity, based on the ritual topography and territoriality of the

reworked Oromo polity, albeit articulated within the new regional power-alliances that frequently shifted. In this position the emergence of new hegemonic powers and their loyalties were highly conjunctural, exemplified by the conversion to Christianity of several *balabat* after their inclusion in the expanding Ethiopian empire. The core hypothesis is that the subsequent overlapping spheres of influences or social boundaries, that we have placed as "overlays" over Derra, were both contained and contested within the locality, creating multiple identities with roots in the *miticha* pattern and the ritual topography of the first settlers. New identities can be said to have been enforced by the subsequent rulers, including the previous military regime that through extreme measures, such as villagisation, tried to break up the pattern.⁵⁶

In principle there is nothing new to the current situation in which ethnicity has become the new mode of political mobilisation, since the core element has so far only been the usage of Oromiffa in public administration. It is difficult to predict the role economic liberalisation will play in the future, and the way new agents of capital will take hold in the local political economy. We have presented some essential linkages between religious identity, economic resources, and social stratification but since the surplus product is restricted in this region, the current state ownership of land will probably circumscribe the development of strong new hegemonies besides the state. On the other hand, Derra is still at the junction of several cultural influences and the effect of the "ritual topography" will continue to play an important part in the re-working and contestation of (political) identities, even if it is a reconstructed "Oromo" identity, of a population that "used to be Galla". In this sense Knutsson is right in concluding that (1969: 98): "... he has lost part of his ethnic identity without gaining a new [ethnic] one" but then we are constructing identities that are irrelevant for the majority of the Derra peasants. This process began as the first settlers made their way into Derra and continues as a part of the becoming of Derra. These changes do not amount to a tabula rasa of previous structures but rather represent contested layers of new forms of territoriality fuelled by new forms of capital formations and hegemonies.

⁵⁶ Some few "Oromo" balabats are now actively promoting the return to monarchy through the royalist party Moa Anbessa but mainly to regain their old power base and wealth and not as a return to "Amhara hegemony".

Adopting an Ambiguous Position

Oromo Relationships with Strangers

Hector Blackhurst

The ways in which Oromo have established relationships with outsiders have had a profound influence on their history and, according to at least one observer (Levine 1974), on the history of Ethiopia. In this paper I propose to discuss one aspect of this process, the way in which Oromo groups have defined and controlled the boundary between themselves and others.

I use two types of data to pursue this enquiry. The first comes from my own anthropological fieldwork in what was, in the period 1969–1971, Bale Province. The second is historical. I should perhaps emphasise here that I am not an historian. I take the liberty of applying some anthropological techniques to historical data, but those data have been taken from historians, principally Mohammed Hassen (1990), and not quarried from original sources by me. I therefore run the risk of misrepresenting or distorting another's interpretation for my own ends. I have, of course, tried to avoid this.

Oromo have at their disposal a number of cultural mechanisms for establishing relationships with strangers or outsiders. I have elsewhere (Blackhurst 1994) described some of these as they operated amongst the group of Shoan Oromo (or Tulama) with whom I am most familiar. These were a community of migrant settlers who had come to Bale Province, either directly from Shoa or after a period of settlement in Arssi Province. The first groups of migrants had arrived in Bale some thirty years before I entered the field but, while I was there, a few new families came down from the North. The normal unit of migration was the household or a small group of agnatically-linked households. There was no large-scale population movement and the territory the migrants entered was already settled by Arssi. To survive, the immigrants had early to establish relations with the Arssi. However, while these relations had an economic imperative to them, because Arssi were the major landowners in the area, Tulama immigrants also quickly established their intra-community relations and organisations to counter the power of the Arssi and establish an area of communal independence.

By the time I arrived in Bale the Tulama community was flourishing and was itself acting as the host community to later immigrants, many of whom were now not arriving in households but as single men and women and boys

and girls. Many of these were displaced persons who had felt obliged to move because of the after-effects of the then recently-quelled Bale Rebellion (Gebru Tareke 1991) or because of the activities of a rural development project to the North in Arssi. Many of these immigrants found a place in the community by being accepted into households as labourers or domestic helpers. If they and the household members worked and lived well together the relationship between them could develop into a more supportive, parental one and, for some purposes, the immigrant would be treated as a child of the household.

Such developing relations, though important as a mechanism for offering social support to the friendless and kinless, were informal and depended ultimately on goodwill. Goodwill was also certainly an element in three other methods of incorporation used by the Tulama, but in addition, these also showed an increasing degree of formality. Two of these mechanisms were used mainly in the context of child care: fostering and adoption. Haberland (1965) maintains that Tulama are frequent adopters. I have no statistics of adoption, which would in any case be difficult to collect, but I was made aware of a number of instances of adoption among the people I knew. The same is true of fostering, though as I mention below, and have described more fully elsewhere (Blackhurst 1994), the distinction between the two is not always clear cut and the exact status of a child may be difficult to determine.

Adults, in my experience, are not usually adopted. A relationship which to a degree mimics a parent-child relationship can however be established between two adults through the ceremony of *harma hodu*. This phrase which means to suck the breast refers to a part of the ritual of establishment of the relationship where the 'son' licks or sucks honey from the breast of his 'father'. The ceremony highlights the nurturing aspect of the relationship, the practical aspect is in fact one of clientship where the son expects some material assistance in return for the political and economic support he will give to his father.

My information about *harma hodu* is slight. I attended one ceremony only and I lack any general data about its prevalence in the community I knew. I mention it here, however, because, along with adoption and fostering, it forms a set of mechanisms which could be and were used to establish relations of incorporation in the Tulama community. They were not used to establish relations between the Tulama and the Arssi. A point I shall return to below.

None of these mechanisms is of course unique to Tulama. Haberland (1965) gives details of adoption (and fostering) among the Borana (pp. 235-6) and adoption among the Arssi (pp. 483-4). He argues that the main reason for adoption is to enable childless couples to have children and hence heirs, though he admits that its prevalence among some Oromo is too great to be explained by one such motive. In his discussion of Borana adoption, Haberland maintains that Borana distinguish verbally and in practice between *ergifata* on the one hand and *ilmo tuti*, *ingubisa* or *gubifaca* on the other. *Ergifata* he describes as not a real adoption but the loan of a child which is returned when it has grown up. In *Ilmo tuti* the child is fully united with its adopted parents, is treated as no longer

being related to its natural parents and may, in theory at least, marry its natural sister (1965:236). This distinction mirrors to a large degree the western distinction between fostering, a caring and nurturing relationship, and adoption in which an additional element of jural incorporation is present. Ideologically, however, the two sets of distinctions are not necessarily identical: the Western rationale for fostering is usually child welfare whereas in the Oromo, and other African instances, (Goody 1973:204 ff.) it is just as much parent welfare or inter-generational linkages which are at issue.

I have argued (Blackhurst 1994) that although this distinction between adoption and fostering existed in the Tulama society I was familiar with, in the day to day conduct of relationships it was not rigorously attended to and only became an issue at key moments of social drama where relationships of inclusion and exclusion were laid bare. Or, to put it another way, when the official element of a hitherto informally treated relationship came to the fore. The presence of this official and public element in adoption is well illustrated in Haberland's account of the Tulama. He reports that if the mother of an adopted child subsequently has her own child and the parents wish this child to be treated as their first-born, which according to the customs of adoption it is not, they are required to have a special law passed at the *Chaffe* to allow this reversal in the precedence of the two children in favour of the natural child. An official relationship thus requires a public act in order for it to be redefined. A linguistic parallel to this is provided by the Borana use of the word *Moggaasa* as another term for adoption. As Haberland points out, this word is also used by some Oromo for a gada ceremony marking the official acceptance of a child into the system. That is, it marks officially and publicly a change in status.

The lexicon for the field of adoption and fostering in Oromo is large and, to a non-linguist, confusing. Elsewhere (Blackhurst 1994), I followed Gragg in linking *Moggaasa* with the Tulama word *Mogshe*—namesake—and argued that *Moggaasa* denotes the naming and incorporative aspects of adoption. Words with the roots *guddi* or *gubbi*, on the other hand, refer to the caring and nurturing aspects of both fostering and adoption. I had not at this time read Mohammed Hassen's *The Oromo of Ethiopia: a history 1570–1860*, and in particular his discussion of Oromo adoption. My initial reaction to his account was that either we had different data or, if we had the same data, my interpretation was in error. Here, in an abbreviated form, is what Hassen writes about adoption:

An important Oromo institution which seems to have facilitated the process of the migration was the process called *moggaasa* (adoption). One form of *moggaasa* is known as *guddifacha* (a foster parent adopting a child) ... The second form of adoption ... is known as *moggaasa*, adoption into a clan or a tribe. The adopted individual or group could be either Oromo or non-Oromo. The adoption was undertaken by the Abba Gada on behalf of his *gossa* (1990:21).

Here Hassen seems to be equating *guddifacha* with fostering and *moggaasa* with adoption. I suspect, however, that this represents a difference in the use of

terminology between the two of us rather than a fundamental difference for, although he describes *guddifacha* as a foster parent adopting a child, he goes on to say that: 'traditionally, the adopted son was looked upon as a real son, and he enjoyed all the rights of a true son'. Less easily reconciled to my original interpretation is his delineation of *moggaasa* as a second form of adoption which can be distinguished from *guddifacha* not by the rights transferred or expunged but by the nature of the parties involved. That is to say, *moggaasa* involves adoption by a group of another group or an individual rather than the more usual (in our terms) adoption of an individual by a family.

Clearly, the distinction between group and individual adoption is an important one and, as Hassen shows, the practice of group adoption has played an important part in the history of the Oromo's relations with outsiders. I would argue, however, that the occurrence of the term *moggaasa* signals here not so much the presence of a group of adopters but rather the nature of the relationship created between them and the adoptees. The use of the term here also denotes the public or official and incorporative aspect of the relationship. The individual or group adopted may or may not receive nurture—*guddifachu*—from the adoptees, what they certainly are receiving is a new political status.

Any adoption has both private/domestic and public/political components. From a definitional point of view there may come a point where one or other of these components becomes so dominant that the use of the term in its normal English sense may not be appropriate. My aim here, however, is not to build a continuum ranging from an apolitical adoption to a formal, politically motivated adoption, but merely to suggest, on the basis of the analysis, that the two components are frequently present in any act that may loosely be termed one of incorporation. The balance between the two depends partly on the intention of the act, but equally importantly, it depends on the overall social context in which the act takes place. This is true both of contemporary Oromo societies and of the historical development of Oromo relations with outsiders.

The main outlines of Oromo history are recounted in many places, most books on Ethiopia have something to say on the topic. Indeed there is almost a formula which could be parodied as: sometime in the 16th century, from somewhere to the south or south-east, hordes of sanguinary savages began a series of incursions into Abyssinia. The Abyssinians, weakened by earlier heroic struggles against another brutal invader, could not resist. Eventually the invaders had conquered much of the southern half of the country and had penetrated so far north that they began to exert an unhealthy influence on the dynastic politics of the Christian Kingdom. Fortunately, their lack of civilisation began to tell in the end. They could not sustain their previous triumphs and eventually fell victim to the superior organisational and military skills of the Abyssinians. They, in their turn, were then savagely raided (or pacified), and were ultimately persuaded of the superiority of the northern, Christian way. (See essays by Hultin and Zitelmann.)

This 'sanguinary hordes' approach to Oromo history is now being radically questioned, for a variety of reasons. It is already clear that it fails adequately to take account of many of the processes of negotiation and accommodation employed by the Oromo in their dealings with the groups they encountered. Had the Oromo not developed such techniques for securing their initial gains, they would certainly not have been able to advance as far north as they did. Recent research has helped to highlight the mechanisms involved here and Hassen (1990:22–24) has neatly encapsulated them as a three-stage process. Stage one was characterized by surprise attacks, carried out mainly during the night. These attacks yielded booty but they also had the effect of softening up the enemy. In the second stage, the raiding became directed at specific weak spots whose existence had been revealed by intelligence gathered during the initial stage. By increasing the pressure selectively, the Oromo were able to force their opponents either to quit or submit. In either event, the Oromo were then able to move into the new territory. If the conquered inhabitants had opted to remain, they were incorporated into Oromo society and thus added to the fighting force. In the third stage, the newly-conquered territory becomes the base for a further thrust. This third phase required administrative innovation because now people had to be governed, and not just plundered, if the home base were to be secured.

One of the strategies of administration used by the Oromo was adoption. Hassen (1990:21) gives some ethnographic details of this process. The adoption was undertaken by the Abba Gada on behalf of his *gossa*. Before adoption animals were slaughtered and a knife was dipped in the blood of the victim and planted in the assembly which was composed of the elders of the *gossa* and the representatives of other *gossas*. Then the Abba Gada said a prayer blessing the new members and the adopted individual or groups touched the knife repeating in chorus what the Abba Gada said: 'I hate what you hate; I like what you like; I fight whom you fight; I go where you go; I chase whom you chase'. This oath was unbreakable. The adopted groups now became collectively the 'sons' of the *gossa*. As Hassen remarks, this arrangement was inspired by political, military and economic considerations, though clearly it is couched in the symbolism of kinship and filiation.

The historical and ethnographic record for this process is inevitably sketchy but we can assume that some such process of assimilation was one feature over the long period of the expansion of the Oromo and their own divisions in tribal groupings. By the early Seventeenth Century the political and ethnic map of the southern half of Ethiopia had been transformed by the Oromo. They, too, had been transformed by their own success. These changes are apparent in three areas: their own overall political structure, the relations between the components of this political structure and their relations with outsiders. Hassen's discussion of the Matcha can again be used to illustrate these points.

Oromo political structure as it existed before the expansion began was flexibly centralised in that major office holders were located at fixed points but

power was sufficiently diffused throughout the system to enable local-level decision making to continue without constant reference back to the centre. However, the whole system was renewed spiritually and structurally by the meetings at the *Chaffe* where legal matters were discussed and the law laid down or reiterated.

Massive expansion in numbers and a northward trend in migration, as distinct from the hitherto seasonal transhumance of the pastoral economy, placed strains on this structure though at the same time enhanced its perceived value. In practical terms the problem was that those Oromo groups who had moved the farthest north were unable effectively to participate in the political life of the whole and were, at the same time, losing any organised representation of their own unity and political personality. (See Arnesen's essay.) To counter this the Tulama/Matcha confederation established their own separate *Chaffe* at Oda Nabi which then became the symbolic centre of their political organisation and the place where political change and legal adjustment were negotiated.

The establishment of a second *Chaffe* symbolically weakened the unity of all Oromo but this should be seen not as an attempt to establish independence by the Tulama/Matcha but merely as a recognition that, administratively, the old arrangements had to be modified. At the time it may have appeared that this was a one-off adjustment. In practice, however, it was the first instance of what was to become a repetitive process. As the Tulama/Matcha continued to move forward and the Matcha moved increasingly to the West, the same organisational problems arose. Again the *Chaffe* was split with the Tulama staying at Oda Nabi while the Matcha established a new centre at Oda Bisil. As the Matcha themselves continued to migrate, a further splitting occurred to accommodate the two Matcha confederacies of the Afre and the Sadacha. This process of fission eventually ceased as the migration itself was brought to a halt.

Two aspects of this process need to be distinguished. On the one hand there is the repetition of fission, which, I will argue, has its own internal alternating pattern. On the other, there is a non-repetitive process of political change which was gradually transforming the nature of Oromo politics despite the institutional continuity of the *Chaffe* and the associated *Gada* officials and ceremonies.

The eight-year *Gada* period has both symbolic and practical significance. It provides an emblematic focus for unity but the offices which make up the institutional framework of the system also provide a focus of competition which draws the component segments of the society together and obliges them to think in community-wide rather than parochial terms. Although intimately linked with moiety and lineage, *Gada* does provide the forum for a type of political activity which is greater than any lineage or descent-based organisation. If the links between these central offices and activities and the wider society begin to attenuate, then the nature of political activity will tend, in turn, to become more parochial and based on the remaining structures of society, be these domestic groupings or lineages. This would mean that Oromo political life over the period of the expansion would have exhibited fluctuations between periods

with community-wide politics focused on the *Chaffe* followed by a period of more introspective, local-level activity which the creation of a new *Chaffe* would once again broaden out.

This periodic alternation was accompanied by another process of linear change caused in large part by the changing economic base of both Tulama and Matcha societies. This was the shift from a predominantly pastoral economy to one based on agriculture. One result of this change, as Knutsson has pointed out (1967:204-5), was to increase the parochial tendencies already present. When communities became territorially anchored, interests became regionalised and politics particularised. The result of this process could have been the creation of a series of increasingly local *Chaffes* as each community sought expression for its own political identity. This did not in fact occur because, as localism strengthened, so the basis for political association changed. Increasingly, differences in wealth rather than *Gada* rank became the determinant of political status. Hassen (1990:89 ff.) describes this process and the emergence of the *Sorresa* aristocracy in some detail.

The changing basis of political association over this period influenced, in turn, the ways in which the Oromo responded to outsiders. Their, as it were, international relations cannot be divorced from their internal organisation. To explore this idea I shall use both the historical data just outlined and my own fieldwork experience. I examine three contrasting modes of interaction and at the same time seek to clarify further the earlier discussion of adoption and fostering.

During the first phase of the expansion and emigration process the Oromo's relations with outsiders were essentially negative. Strangers were raided and then left to their own devices while the Oromo retreated to their base territory. The second overall phase of migration brought about a change in this practice in that now the Oromo started to settle among their erstwhile prey and had, therefore, to come to some arrangement with them. One of these was incorporation by adoption, *Moggaasa*. As the previous discussion has shown, *Moggaasa*, although ideologically equivalent to a domestic adoption, was in fact a political act. This was shown by the involvement of *Gada* officials in the main ceremonies by which the act of adoption was achieved. In order for this essentially domestic act to be broadened out into a process of political incorporation it is necessary that there be an organised polity which can sanction and give its imprimatur to the change in status. In other words, for *Moggaasa* to be performed, some overarching organisation is necessary which, in the case of the Oromo was *Gada*. The nature of this overarching organisation influences the mode of incorporation. The notions of filiation and lineal descent are intimately involved in the overall structure of the *Gada* system. It is not surprising, therefore, that this idiom should be used to effect the incorporation of outsiders into Oromo society. A political system elaborated on, amongst other foundations, kinship and descent, used these as a symbolic representation of the newly-created relationships.

If the internal constitution of Oromo society during the *Gada* period accounts for the mode of incorporation of outsiders at this time, it is legitimate to ask how this mode changes when *Gada* as a political force begins to attenuate. The available historical data, unfortunately, do not allow firm conclusions to be drawn about this. A speculative history is that, as the centralising power of *Gada* waned, local groups were increasingly unable to make formal arrangements with stranger groups and that the political adoption, *Moggaasa*, was superseded by smaller private arrangements akin to fostering or domestic adoption. It is likely that these small-scale acts of incorporation would recruit some people while others became the subject of adoptions and were absorbed into the surrounding community and lost to the Oromo. The importance of the revitalisation of the *Chaffe* in such fluid circumstances is that it could provide a means for re-establishing boundaries and for controlling entry to and exit from the community.

This hypothetical history can, fortunately, be supplemented by two more substantial pieces of data which both demonstrate how changes in political constitution can affect the Oromo response to outsiders. The first of these has been provided by Hassen in his discussion of the rebellion of the Matcha *Gabbaro*.

The term *Gabbaro* is a complex one. As both Hassen (1990:63) and Beckingham and Huntingford (1954: 116 n. 1) make clear, the word in Oromo means servant, cultivator or taxpayer, though it is cognate with the Amharic *Gabaré*, slave. Hassen writes:

... the Oromo term for the conquered people was *Gabbaro* (those who serve). The Oromo adopted the *Gabbaro* en masse, giving them clan genealogy, marrying their women, and taking their young into service for herding. Simultaneously, adult men were recruited for military service in times of war and worked on the land in time of peace.

This picture of the *Gabbaro* in the conquered territories has two, potentially conflicting, themes. There is the notion of adoption and genealogical linkage but, in addition, there is an element of servitude and subordination which does not fit easily with the creation of clan genealogy and intermarriage. The acuteness of the conflict depends on circumstances and, in the normal round of daily interaction, the ambiguity could be left unresolved. There is in the kinship idiom an element of inequality between adopter and adoptee and the servile aspects of *Gabbaro* status could easily be subsumed in this. Equally, the clear definition of relationships of sub- and superordination would, for the most part, not be an issue, though, at critical times, relative status could become contentious.

Hassen (1990:64 ff.) gives details of such an occasion in his discussion of the rebellion of the Matcha *Gabbaro* early in the 17th century. He describes how, as a result of provocations, including non-recognition of rights and the sale into slavery of women and children, the *Gabbaro* rebelled against the true Matcha. According to Hassen the *Gabbaro* first demanded their own *Chaffe*, separate from that of the true Matcha. This was granted but the rebellion continued,

fomented by Sela Christos, the Governor of Gojjam, who wished to subdue the Matcha. By allying themselves with the Gojjamis, the *Gabbaro* were able to free themselves from their Matcha conquerors, but at the cost of a stultifying dependence on their allies who subsequently settled them as a buffer zone against any future attacks from the Matcha.

This rebellion shows clearly how the ambiguity in the status of adoptee or *ilma gossa* can be resolved in a way which practically negates all the ideological commitment put into the creation of the relationship. This contrast is nicely underlined by the reported speech of the *Gabbaro* when they were treating with Sela Christos: 'Behold, we have quarrelled with our masters the Galla. We have fought them until we have both shed blood. Come quickly and receive us for, from old, our origins and descent is from you and not from the Galla' (Hassen 1990:65). Here origin and descent are traced to the Gojjamis while the Matcha are masters: a complete repudiation of the kinship inherent in the idea of adoption.

Whatever the ultimate causes of the *Gabbaro* rebellion may have been, it is clear from Hassen's account that one precipitating factor was a change in the nature of the relationship between Matcha and *Gabbaro*. This change in turn can be traced directly to cumulative changes in the internal constitution of Matcha society which were gradually undermining the structure which hitherto had supported the relations between the two groups.

The shift from a predominantly pastoral way of life to a settled, agricultural one had a profound affect on Matcha social organisation. Knutsson has traced the influence of this process on the *Gada* system and both he and Hassen have remarked on the growth of a wealth-based hierarchy which paralleled and, on occasion, competed with the *Gada* hierarchy. This emergent chrysochrycy derived its power from the control of land and people and was not subject to the periodic redistribution of power inherent in the *Gada* system. The new leaders sought to accumulate and maintain power for as long as possible and, although they could use limited redistribution of wealth as a strategy to foster loyalty among their followers, they were obliged to compete with each other for the available resources and ultimately to exploit the producers of those resources to achieve the necessary accumulation. In a society which is turning towards exploitative accumulation, any existing inequalities are the fault lines along which the new status divisions will develop. Once Matcha social organisation began to develop, even in a preliminary way, attributes of class organisation, the *Gabbaro* were the natural targets of the ensuing processes of domination and extraction.

Matcha, of course, did not overnight turn into a society riven by class struggle, nor did the new economic relations eradicate the old political system in a revolutionary convulsion. The *Gabbaro* phrased some of their dispute in the terms of the old politics by asking for their own *Chaffe* and, as Hassen describes, for a while the newly emerging wealthy class sought to exert influence through the *Gada* assembly and its offices. Nonetheless, the subtle interlinking of political office, filiation and descent which had been the basis of social organisation

was falling apart and, in these circumstances, a relationship which had been created in the spirit of this organisation and ratified by it—that of adopter and adoptee—was certain to be the subject of redefinition.

These developments in Matcha social organisation took place in a period when the Matcha, the Tulama and many other Oromo groups were independent entities who were able to conduct their own 'foreign policy' with their various neighbours. As Imperial Ethiopia expanded southwards, this independence was lost. All Oromo groups still had to establish relations with outsiders, but they now had to operate within a more restricted political environment where they themselves were not polities and where they lacked any central office-holder or organisation to represent and foster their unity. The administrative and political functions of *Gada* or the chrysoocracy were, to a large extent, abrogated by the imperial administration, though this was, of course, a gradual process.

By the time of my own research this process was all but complete and the Tulama I worked with were a typical peasant part-society in Redfield's sense. (Redfield 1960). The local community consisted of households or household groups frequently linked by agnation. The individual households formed the units of production and consumption and, for the most part, household relations with the organs of the state were not mediated by any local, community-based organisation, for example groups of elders, lineage councils, etc. Indeed, as far as possible, most people tried to keep the state and its local agents at a long arm's length (see essay by Lewis). Between the household and the state there was, of course, an arena of social interaction between groups and individuals. Within this domain Tulama exhibited a wide range of relationships: households were linked by marriage, there was a variety of voluntary associations, some linked to the church, others entirely secular, and the usual array of friendships, cliques and informal associations. The imperial incorporation did not in other words destroy the normal activities of what is referred to as civil society.

It is difficult to characterise simply the nature of the relations in civil society, but outside the realms of kinship, marriage and friendship, which are all in any case closely linked, a dominant theme in this society of migrants was the need to secure access to land and livelihood. Few Tulama were self-sufficient in land, though a good number owned their house sites and some agricultural land. Most, however, needed to supplement their holdings by renting or sharecropping. Many of these economic transactions set up relations with people outside the Tulama community, principally Arssi Oromo, but also Amhara. The way in which the Tulama community handled these relationships provides an interesting contrast with the two previous instances.

The major difference between the Tulama in Bale and the Oromo of the expansionary period is one of power. The Tulama arrived in Bale in small groups needing land and had to negotiate for it; the Oromo of the earlier period arrived in large groups and took land. The Tulama had to establish relations with the

dominant Arssi in order to survive, but in doing so they risked losing their identity by being drawn into Arssi society in a subordinate position. To avoid this, they adopted two strategies. The first was to opt for, as far as possible, economic contracts for access to land with defined rights rather than more fluid share-cropping agreements which could easily become mired with traditional obligations and expectations. The second was to define as rigidly as possible a boundary between themselves and the Arssi using a range of cultural diacritica. The most potent of these was the religious difference between the Orthodox Tulama and the Muslim Arssi (See Arnesen's essay), but many other, less dramatic ways were found to emphasise difference rather than community which, given their shared ethnic heritage, was also potentially there. In other words, the Tulama in this context, chose exclusion and boundary maintenance as the strategy for dealing with outsiders, rather than a more flexible, incorporative approach.

This response can also be interpreted as a reflex of the internal organisation of the Tulama which severely limited the range of options open to them in their dealings with the Arssi. The Tulama community existed as an ideological construct and manifested itself in a range of intersecting relationships and organisations. No set of relationships and no organisation, however, existed which encompassed and structured the community as a unit distinct from other similar units. In contrast to the earlier Oromo migrants, this community did not have the mechanisms to establish and ratify extra-communal relations on a political scale. Although the cultural tools, such as adoption and fostering, were still there, these could not be deployed in the absence of the political and administrative arrangements which could enable the notion of adoption to be expanded into the incorporation of stranger groups. Equally, in the absence of big men or a political aristocracy of wealth, Tulama were not able to negotiate with Arssi, whose political structure was, to a degree, like this, from a position of organised strength. In the conditions prevailing in Bale, therefore, the Tulama could deploy neither the incorporative strategy of the expansionist Oromo nor seek to dominate as the Matcha had done with the *Gabbaro*. The ethnic boundary response was therefore the strategy of a relatively weak and disorganised community.

Ethnicity has two principal advantages in the position of weakness and need in which the Tulama found themselves. Firstly, ethnic boundaries can be made permeable. Tulama, therefore, could establish economic relations with outsiders and use ethnicity to filter out, as it were, the non-economic elements in these relationships, for example by using differences in religious affiliation to limit the socialising which might have otherwise developed out of shared labour and concerns for crops or cattle. Secondly, ethnicity, which can be adequately expressed and maintained in daily face to face interaction, requires no elaborate organisational backup. An ethnic boundary is maintained through the manipulation of symbols and by limiting access to various cultural goods and activities. To achieve this some shared cultural consciousness is necessary, but

the policing of the boundary does not require a police force as such. Each member of the group maintains the boundary as part of their daily routine. If they do not, the informal sanctions of gossip and ostracism can be used to stiffen their resolve. The ethnic response is thus ideally suited to controlling the relations between a loosely organised and relatively powerless community which faces an economically and politically superior group.

Each of the three instances of inter-group contact examined here has had a different outcome so far as the relations established were concerned. Incorporation has been replaced by domination and, more recently, by ethnic exclusivity. I have sought to show that, in each instance, some sense can be made of the response to outsiders if the internal constitution of the Oromo group in question is analysed. The central aspect of group organisation in this context is the extent to which the private/domestic sphere is opened out into a wider public/political sphere and the balance between the two. Adoption and fostering, with which I started this paper, have probably always been a feature of Oromo domestic life but only in specific circumstances are these cultural mechanisms elaborated into a means of establishing political relationships. Equally, Oromo ethnicity as an ideology has undoubtedly existed for centuries but this also only becomes a tool of political interaction when the overall social and political conditions make it an appropriate strategy.

This paper has been somewhat eclectic in its choice of data and has lifted, with a rather cavalier regard for chronology, chunks of the historical record, mainly from the work of Mohammed Hassen. I do not think it could, strictly speaking, be called an historical analysis. The point I have sought to make is, I believe, an historical one and one which relates directly to the question of Oromo ethnicity and identity. Oromo are not blessed, any more than any other group of people, with a unique and, immutable set of qualities. Thus, while it is true that Oromo make great use of adoption and fostering and can, more generally, exhibit what Levine (1974:90) has called an 'apparently pronounced capacity... for expansive social affiliation', it is also true that they can exhibit intensive social exclusion and can be positively bloody-minded towards outsiders. To understand this behaviour we need to contextualise it. From this understanding we may then be able to further our knowledge of both Oromo identity and ethnicity. I doubt whether this knowledge will yield any grand all-encompassing theory of the Oromo and their place in history, but then, who wants that?

United and Divided

Boorana and Gabaro among the Macha Oromo in Western Ethiopia

Alessandro Triulzi

We know little of the settlement process of the various Macha groups in western Ethiopia.¹ Even dates are not certain: western Wallaga is stated by Nagaso Gidada (1984:71) to have been broadly occupied by the Macha and under their 'effective political control' since the beginning of the seventeenth century; Mohammed Hassen (1990:47) claims that the Macha were overlords of all the Ethiopian west, with the exception of the kingdom of Ennarya, by the end of the sixteenth century; on the basis of genealogical calculations, Tesema Ta'a (1980:28) estimates that the settlement process of the western Oromo was basically over by the 1680s.

We know little, also, of the original peopling of the western region on the eve of the Macha settlement. The absence of reliable primary sources, coupled with the inherent difficulty of using traditions to reconstruct chronologies, or to reveal memories of subject groups, make the unfolding of this chapter of western Ethiopian history highly speculative. Of the (mostly Oromo) researchers who have ventured into this intricate muddle, Nagaso Gidada (1984:92–129) lists among the main groups remembered in Macha traditions the Mucucoo, Gabato, Agadi, Kaza, Daamota, Warago, Ganqaa, Konchii, Mao-Busaasee, Kwegu or Koogoo, Kwaama or Komoo, and Majang or Masangoo (the author's spelling has been retained). Nagaso's emphasis on the traditions 'remembered' by the Macha ('I should clarify that most of the peoples discussed in this chapter are the ones which are mentioned in the Mecha traditions', p. 92) is particularly significant in view of the strong assimilation processes pursued by the Macha, and of the consequent obliteration of the original memory of ethnic separation within the assimilated groups.

The consequences of the Oromo encounter with non-Oromo peoples—mainly Omotic ('Sidama') and Nilo-Saharan groups living in the western highlands—have been variously described in the literature. While the Ethiopian

¹ This is an abridged form of a longer paper in Italian to appear in Y. Bèyene, R. Fattovich, P. Marrassini, A. Triulzi (eds.), *Etiopia e oltre. Scritti in onore di Lanfranco Ricci*, Napoli, Dipartimento di studi e ricerche su Africa e Paesi Arabi, Serie Etiopica n. 1 (in print). The spelling of Oromo words follows on the whole the *qube afaan Oromoo*, but words such as Macha (Macca), Oromo (Oromoo) or *gada* (*gadaa*) have been maintained in a more simplified version.

chronicles (and more generally speaking the Ethiopicist literature) have strongly emphasized the negative impact of the expansion of the 'heathen' Oromo within the Ethiopian kingdom,² recent Oromo literature attempts to represent the settlement of the Oromo within non-Oromo groups in rather opposite terms. Adaptability to different social and ecological environments, and an inherent capacity for assimilation of outside groups are said to be the basic ingredients for what is described as a successful 'story of fusion and interaction' (Mohammed Hassen 1990:4) by the expanding Ethiopian Oromo. The process has best been outlined by Mohammed Hassen (1990:20–21):

At this early stage in their migration, the pastoral Oromo seem to have manifested unique characteristics of adaptability. They easily adapted to another environment and coalesced with indigenous people, and at the same time they imparted their language and the complex gada system, which eventually replaced the Islam of the conquered people. The desire to participate in the spoils of the Christian and Muslim states may have attracted various non-Oromo groups to join the Oromo groups that entered in the course of the battles. An unusual aspect of Oromization was that many of the absorbed groups were nomads. The Oromo genius for assimilation quickly claimed any non-Oromo, defeated or otherwise.

Other authors have outlined some of the complexities of the settlement process: Nagaso Gidada, for instance, emphasizes that Oromo incorporation of non-Oromo groups 'could only reduce, but not exclude' internal conflicts within the western Oromo (Nagaso Gidada 1984:93). Tesema Ta'a rightly confines the Oromo assimilation process to the Omotic peoples (i.e., the agriculturalist Daamota, Ganqaa or Sinicho) thus excluding the Nilo-Saharan pastoralists and other *shanjella* groups of the western lowlands (peoples such as the Agadi, Gabato, Kaza, Masangoo or Mao) who, on the contrary, were 'furiously fought' and pushed back to the 'dry, hot, lowland basins' and 'into the hearts of inaccessible forests' (Tesema Ta'a 1990:30; the author's spelling has been retained).

Little of this complexity is shown in recent historical literature where the more egalitarian culture of the Oromo is contrasted to the 'political culture of domination' shown by the Ethiopian 'colonists'. In the words of Asafa Jalata (1993:22):

... the Ethiopian conquest and colonization of the Oromo was qualitatively different from the process of Oromo expansion. Ethiopian colonialism took place within the context of the capitalist world economy. It organized the colonized peoples in ethnic-class hierarchy by assimilating the intermediate class. The Ethiopian political culture and economic system were discriminatory, and prevented the assimilation of colonized peoples. In contrast, the Oromo used the preclass democratic values engrained in the *gada* system to successfully integrate conquered minorities through adoption, marriage, and cultural assimilation. The *gada* system allowed the Oromo to strengthen themselves politically and numerically in the Horn of Africa.

The author acknowledges that '*gada* government was a preclass institution based on democratic principles' even though it did exclude 'caste groups (such

² On this point, see essays by Jan Hultin, Mohammed Hassen and Thomas Zitelman.

as smiths and tanners) and women' (Asafa Jalata 1993:19). Closely following Mohammed Hassen's reconstruction of the settlement process, Asafa identifies *moggaasa*,³ or clan adoption, as the essential key to a basically smooth process of assimilation: 'The Oromo increased their numbers through Oromoization of other peoples they conquered, "adopting" them to the *qomo* (clan) in a process known as *mogasa* and *gudifacha*.' (16). Through collective adoption, the affiliated groups were given new genealogies and started counting their putative ancestors in the same way as their adoptive kinsmen. A special blood-mixing ceremony, symbolized by tying strips of hide (*meedhicca*) taken from the sacrificial bull around the wrists of the adopted individuals, made them part of the adoptive clans, thus transforming the assimilated groups into *ilma gossa*, lit. 'sons of the clan' (Mohammed Hassen 1990:22). *Meedhicca* and 'Oromization' went hand in hand (Yilma Deressa 1959 E.C.:239; Mohammed Hassen 1990:22): the new birth was symbolized by the term *dhalatta*, lit. 'he who is born'. Clan adoption thus cancelled all previous ties the new adoptees had with their own original group; these included genealogical memory and even that of defeat.

In actual fact, not even the strong assimilative model of the Oromo could eliminate totally the internal conflicts between the new settlers and the local inhabitants, or the tensions which derived from the new struggle for power and wealth which marked the post-settlement society. Macha traditions remember such conflicts through a series of formulae, sayings, prescriptive rules, and differentiated participation in ritual, which represent symbolically the historical memory of the separation between the two groups: on one side the 'pioneers' of the Macha heroic age extolled by tradition, the *Boorana* or the 'pure' ones, the first occupiers in the region (*daggal saaqi*, lit. 'the opener of forest', Tesema Ta'a 1980:28), hence the *hangafa* or 'elders' in the poly-ethnic settled society; on the other, the non-Oromo subject groups, those who had been conquered and assimilated, i.e., the *gabaro* (or *gabra*, *ilma garba*) who were both sons and servants to their new masters, and whose lower social status came to be expressed ritually and genealogically through laws of purity and descent: the less 'pure', the lesser or 'junior' members (*quxisuu*) in Macha society.

The incipient classificatory system of the settled Macha Oromo would soon enrich itself with a flurry of new groups and social strata based on descent which reveal the terminological and segmentary 'muddle' resulting from the settlement pattern of the Macha (Hultin 1987:11). Mohammed Hassen gives a revealing resumé of such a pattern when he states, in the Glossary to his book (1990:viii), that the term *gabaro*—first used by Bahrey as *gabare* in connection with the Bifole gada (1546–1554)—indicates 'men of low social status because they were not of "pure" Oromo descent', but basically meant 'conquered men who were required to serve':

The term *gabare* describes the obligatory relation between the conquerors and the conquered. The vanquished, still owners of their plot of land, became serfs or clients of the pastoral Oromo, who now demanded service and tribute from them.

³ For a discussion of *moggaasa*, see Hector Blackhurst's essay.

The Oromo term for the conquered people was *gabbaro* ("those who serve"). The Oromo adopted the *gabbaro* en masse, giving them clan genealogy, marrying their women, and taking their young into service for herding. Simultaneously, adult men were recruited for military service in times of war, and worked on the land in time of peace. While *gabbaro* was the common term for describing conquered people, other terms were also used in a different place. For example, both the Barentu and the Tulama used the term *dhalatta* ("he who is born") to describe the status of the conquered people. The phrase "he who is born" does not have anything to do with real birth. It only describes the ideal type of relationship that should exist between the conquered and the conquerors after the latter adopted the former. (Mohammed Hassen 1990:63–64)

Thus, it is the *ideal* type of relationship which subsumes the 'new birth' granted to the subject peoples after clan adoption. The assimilation within Oromo society of those who had been defeated, and their collective affiliation through adoption, reflected a policy of pacification which assimilated the conquered to the 'new born' mainly at an ideological level. In actual fact it would seem that the conquered 'Sidama'—let alone the forlorn *shangella* or Nilo-Saharan groups of the lowlands—were gradually deprived of their land and of the 'primacy of occupation' (Kopytoff 1987:56) by the advancing Macha settlers. Present-day renderings of such a complex and traumatic event through the beneficial 'sheltering' of the *gada*—however democratic or 'preclass' one may conceive it—do not help in my view to clarify a past which needs revisiting but not mythologising.

The first to be aware of the implications of such a complex and by no means bloodless process is Mohammed Hassen himself when he describes the consequences of the *gabbaro* rebellion of 1618: for the first time disaffected Oromo and Oromized troops were said to fight side by side with the Christian highlanders and, as a consequence of their revolt, they were used strategically by their Christian enemy as an ethnic bulwark against their own people (Mohammed Hassen 1990:64–71).

It is true, as Jan Hultin has suggested, that the Macha advancing in the western region at the beginning of the seventeenth century found a local population 'decimated by war, famine and incessant slave-raids' as it had suffered for half a century 'constant ravages by the predatory armies of the Abyssinian kings and war-lords.' I am less certain the Macha did indeed offer the battered populations 'some form of peaceful coexistence' and 'an alliance against their common enemy', as Jan Hultin has claimed, and indeed wonder whether 'the *gabbaro* institution' as such may have been the basis for such an 'alliance' (Hultin 1984:9–10). Basing his findings on field data collected among the Sibbu of Wallega, Hultin himself acknowledges that, on the one hand, the *gabbaro* were originally recognized as 'partners in marriage' with 'recognized legal rights and obligations', but on the other they were assimilated to the *ilma garba* (which he translates as 'sons of boys'), i.e., 'were adopted and regarded as the sons and equals of the "true Oromo" in the social and jural, but not in the ritual respect.' As such the *gabbaro* were seen from the beginning as 'ritual juniors', they were assigned 'the same status as that ascribed to drop-outs from the *gada* system',

placed in the category of 'eternal youth', the 'sons of boys', a category which was made up, in his words, of 'ritually de-graded Oromo and ritually "up-graded" outsiders (1984:15).⁴

It was perhaps due to this initial mark of separation, which was patterned along a traditional division within Macha society, but was meant to maintain social distance and ritual superiority vis-à-vis the non-Oromo in the new 'frontier' society (Triulzi 1994), that the subjected *gabaro* in time came to be socially and politically discriminated against, particularly in those areas where the accumulation of land and wealth by the *Boorana*, the new 'noblemen' among the western Oromo, (Mohammed Hassen 1990:6) gave them an undue power over their subjects thus weakening the traditional *gada* structure. It was such internal abuses within Macha society that led the *gabaro* to open 'rebellion' in 1618, and caused the *gada* culture of the pioneers, particularly in the Gibe region, to suffer heavy blows as the renewed processes of accumulation of power and wealth in the region increasingly involved, and alienated, the dispossessed junior elements within Macha society.

Thus the ethnic re-affiliation of the original inhabitants, and their ritual separation from the pure *Boorana*, later developed into 'a great variety of chiefless groups, chiefdoms and state formations' which ignited new 'relations of cooperation and conflict among many different groups and a constant rearrangement of political relations and tribal genealogies' (Hultin 1987:6-7).⁵ As the settled Macha society along the western frontier adapted to the new surroundings with a renewed classificatory system, it is perhaps useful to reconstruct the various stages of such an itinerary by following its new nomenclature.

According to Merid Wolde Aregay (1971:417), at the beginning the advancing Oromo treated the conquered people according to the 'political culture' which is said to have prevailed in the region, i.e., they 'made them slaves and called them *gabar'* (Bahrey, in Beckingham and Huntingford 1954:116; Guidi 1907:198):

Since as conquerors the Galla needed to maintain the distinction between themselves and the subjugated peoples, they took the social system which they found and adopted it to suit their requirements and the conditions then prevailing. (Merid 1971:417)

Because of their mobility, however, and because the Oromo, according to Merid, 'lacked the fully developed machinery for policing large numbers of such people', they soon found out that 'to have resentful subjects was unnecessary and potentially dangerous'; they thus resorted to a system which allowed them to assimilate their new subjects and yet did not endanger their supremacy.

⁴ Hultin's interpretation appears to provide an answer to what Asmarom Legesse calls the 'senectation' of the *gada* system and its alleged excess of male population. Generational rules appear to have been changed sometime in the sixteenth century because of this reason. See Asmarom Legesse 1973:135-162.

⁵ Different forms of 'incorporation' of outside groups, and of sharing, and negotiating, fluid ethnic and 'resource borders' are described in Gufu Oba, above.

In this way the *gabar* 'were attached to each clan, by the bands of which they were taken prisoners, and given age-sets so that they could regulate their own affairs' (1971:419).⁶ Clan adoption proved more functional than territorial apportionment; yet it carried an element of subversion of the Oromo social order in so far as the subject peoples were far more numerous than the Oromo themselves. Separate age-sets for the *gabaro* were the answer, together with mixed forms of kinship and clientage, serfdom and freedom, to the extent that one wonders whether the setting up of separate age-sets for the subject people was indeed, as claimed by Mohammed Hassen (1990:65), 'a major victory for the *gabbaro* and a great concession on the part of the Matcha.' Let us look at the available evidence.

The first hint at the existence of separate age-sets for the conquered peoples is to be found in Bahrey (Beckingham & Huntingford 1954:128; Guidi 1907:207). Later Ethiopian sources mention several groups of assimilated Oromos who appear to belong to the same category. For instance, the *yahabata* and *ilmaguozit* mentioned in Susenyos' Chronicle as the allies of the Oromo who rebelled in 1618 were such groups. Both terms are employed in the Ethiopian sources to describe Oromo troops and their allied subjects. According to Merid (1971:420) the *ilmaguozit* troops were made of 'good fighters, most of them being mounted.' Mohammed assimilates the *ilmaguozit* to the *ilma gossa*, i.e., the adopted *gabaro* groups (contra Pereira 1898–1900:II, 468), while the *yahabata* according to him formed the nucleus of the Oromo cavalry as the Macha distinguished 'the *gabbaro* cavalry from other ordinary *gabbaro*. The term /*yahabata*/ describes the brave *gabbaro* who swelled the ranks of the Matcha cavalry' (Mohammed Hassen 1990:64).

In fact all these terms are 'confusing', not just because of their spelling, and the above interpretations appear to be based on rather flimsy evidence. As for the real reasons for the *yahabata* 'rebellion' against their 'Galla' masters, we know next to nothing or, rather, we only know what the Christian chroniclers tell us, which is very little:

During the rainy season (1618) a great conflict broke between the Galla and the *yahabata* of the Borana. They fought bitterly because God sent them Satan who caused them to err and destroyed the wall of love between them.

and:

The Galla and *Yahabata* have quarrelled and fought ... there is no peace between them and they no longer live together. (Pereira I:191–192 as quoted in Mohammed Hassen 1990:64–66)

As the religious explanation does not really tell us much as to the background of the rebellion, one must search for other clues. A possible one is contained in the urgent call for help that the rebellious *yahabata* troops, threatened by the

⁶ Of course, Merid's own interpretation of these events may be said to reflect in turn the 'political culture' of the sources he uses, mainly Ethiopian Christian chroniclers and later European reports.

joint forces of the Macha confederacies, sent to the Christian King Se'ela Christos:

Behold, we have quarrelled with our masters the Galla. We have fought with them until we have both shed blood. Come quickly and receive us. *For from old our origin and descent is from you and not from the Galla.* (My italics. Pereira I:191 as quoted in Merid 1971:420)

In commenting on this passage Merid ventures that, "since these communities regarded the Galla as their masters, they must have been excluded from the Galla age-sets and from leadership" or, possibly, "they must have been restricted in the number of cattle which they could own" (1971:420). I do not know, frankly, if the Christian chronicler's rendering of a typical plea for help can be used as evidence for this analysis, but it is striking that the descent issue should be raised here as the bone of contention between the two groups. Merid, in fact, may be quite right when he explains that the *yahabata* 'must have been excluded from the Galla age-sets' because of their origin. Among the Sayyoo of western Wallega, for instance, the term *yaabbata* denotes a slave origin: *Abbaansaan birmadu, haati garba, yooki haati birmadu abbaan garba, warri akkasii booranas gabaros hin-jedaman, yaabbata jedamu.* ('Those whose father is free, and the mother is a slave, or whose mother is free, and the father is a slave, these people are not called *boorana* or *gabaro*, but are called *yaabbata*.) (Bartels, *Fieldnotes*:799.) Ensermu Waquma, one of Bartels' informants claims further that 'Gabaro is more than yabata. A gabaro will not marry a yabata', although "The yabata call themselves borana" (*Fieldnotes*:797).

That the issue of descent was strictly connected with the adoption practices the Oromo used to integrate the subject peoples is made more evident from another term used in the sources, that of *talata*. Again, the evidence is flimsy but not insignificant. As Susenyos' chronicler reports:

After this matter of victory (against the Wallo Oromo) the King of Kings Seltan Sagad ordered that they cut off the genitals and chopped the noses and ears of the Galla who were taken prisoners. Those who were *talata* and *gabar* he had them adorned with beautiful ornaments. And he sent the Galla who were emasculated and the *talata* who were adorned to their homes. (Pereira I:235 as quoted in Merid W. Aregay 1971:421)

Could these *talata* be the same as the *dhalatta* of the adopted groups (as in Mohammed Hassen 1990:64), and what was the difference between them and 'the Galla who were taken prisoners'? At first glance, the chronicler's statement would appear to confirm the distinction between the Oromo and their tributary subjects; yet, what we have here is not another tributary or client group who 'may not have been made to adopt age-sets' (as in Merid 1971:425), but quite the contrary. The 'new born' (*talata*, *dhalatta*), as we have seen before, were non Oromo subjects who had been collectively adopted and transformed into half kinsmen by the Macha. Susenyos' 'benevolence' was merely a stratagem to captivate recently Oromized people who may have been disaffected by Oromo rule and use them as an ethnic bulwark against his own enemy.

Furthermore, as all these groups had been collectively affiliated by the Oromo through various forms of individual or group adoption, the issue of their being part and parcel of Oromo society, or merely its junior section, was indeed a real one and must be tested against whatever little evidence we have. On one side, it appears from Susenyos' chronicle that the *yahabata* groups from Bizamo, whom Se'ela Christos had moved across the Abbay to be settled, had in fact been admitted to *gada* as they are reported pleading with the Christian Emperor to be allowed to perform the *butta* ceremony so that 'our laws would not be transgressed untimely' (Pereira I:197 as quoted in Mohammed Hassen 1990:68). Yet we read in Iyasu's chronicle that, among the Tulama of Fatagar, the 'Galla *talata*' clashed with the 'Galla *waladanha*' over yet apparently disputed assembly rights, as Merid refers to the adopted but apparently rightless *talata* being opposed to the *waladanha* (from *waldaa*, in the sense of assembly), i.e. those who were allowed to participate in the *gada* rituals. Yet the reference remains obscure as well as its historical implications.⁷ Clearly, a perusal of the terminology is simply not enough and one must attempt to go farther and move closer to oral evidence.

The first mention in modern times of the existence of internal conflicts among the Oromo and their western subjects comes from the French traveller and scholar, Antoine d'Abbadie. D'Abbadie was able to spend near to ten years among the Gudru Oromo south of the Abbay in the 1840s, where he gathered a wealth of oral information on the western Macha which he daily transcribed in his still unpublished *Journal de voyage*. Here is the information he gathered among the Gudru:

(23 August 1841)

The Borana are noble Galla. Ibsa translates this term with *sharif*, as he cannot translate it in Amharic ...; a true borana must come from both father and mother borana ... (BN, Abb 265:ff. 69r)

Foreigners. The gabbaro is a foreigner established among the Galla. He is well received, and if he sucks the little finger of a borana he can even marry the daughter of a borana. But the day *gada* is performed he is due to hide away as he would be killed otherwise. (Ibid.:ff. 88r)

(19 march 1845)

Growing importance of plebeians. In the Roman constitution there was no consul for the plebeians. Similarly among the Ilmorma only the Borana could be *gada*. But societies like mountains tend to level ... Kuti Boshe was a brave gabbaro or plebeian who had killed five elephants ... He went to war and killed. In return for his valiance he was allowed to sit with the salgan (nine judges), and since then the gabbaro acceded to *gada*. (Abb 267:ff.7r)⁸

⁷ See Guidi (1903), text: 190, 256; trans.: 200, 275. For a discussion, see Merid W. Aregay 1971: 423–425.

⁸ In his study of the southern Gonga states (1982:59–61), Werner Lange has one Kote as the traditional ruler of the 16th century Bosha state extending 'from the Omo to the east to what Garo informants generally defined as "Wallaga" in the west'. In the nineteenth century the Bosha state was finally overrun by the Jimma Oromo after fierce fighting giving rise to the new Oromo state of Garo. The name of the original Gonga ruler, Kote Bosha, may have been remembered by tradition and assigned to a nineteenth century local hero. Among the Gonga, Lange writes, 'every period of signifi-

Plebeians' gada. 'Oromofi gabbaro walitti gaday' is the saying which consecrates the plebeians' entry into the gada. They are gada only because they slaughter the butta, but have no special functions ... However the death of a gada gabbaro is punished as severely as that of a gada Borana.

Vilified gada. Both freed slaves and craftsmen could not sacrifice the butta. Today everybody can do it, even craftsmen, but they don't talk about it. (Ibid.:ff.9v)

The information gathered by Antoine d'Abbadie—himself significantly a Basque nationalist at first, though later he was naturalized French—is quite interesting as it allows us to understand how the integration process in the early settlement areas was still far from complete after about two centuries of cohabitation in the region south of the Abbay. From d'Abbadie's evidence, it would appear in fact that the relations between the *boorana* and the *gabbaro* were still precarious and conflictual by the mid-nineteenth century, although the *gabbaro* had managed to achieve some right of access to *gada*.

We do not know exactly what this 'right of access' entailed, nor when it was granted, nor on what conditions. It would appear however from d'Abbadie's evidence that in 1841 the *gabbaro* were not allowed to perform *gada* rituals as they had to 'hide away' on that day, while only a few years later they are said, though 'plebeian', to have 'acceded' to *gada* but in a somewhat diminished role. Whether this concession involved the setting up of separate age-groups and *gada* rituals within Macha society we do not know, but the mention again of the *butta* ceremony in this context is quite revealing: *butta* is the most important of the *gada* rituals among the Macha; it is a turnover ceremony, where descent and primogeniture, 'ritual purity' and political precedence, are inextricably linked to the elder (*boorana*) group in society, and to their paramount power of blessing. It is they who traditionally lead the complex *gada* ceremony among the Macha. Thus, it is they who administer and control, through ritual, the balanced growth of the multiethnic society under them.

In a letter dated 20 April 1865, the Italian missionary Guglielmo Massaja adds further information to that provided by the French traveller on the foreigners' access to *gada*:

He who has been gada only once, cannot be gada again except with the consent of the yay (the Oromo Assembly). If he has been gada for two or three generations, this is not (necessary). Foreigners must be made to be accepted, and must eat the meat killed by a Borana, which amounts to something like apostasy.

And again, on 21 April:

One had to be a Borana, once, to be (part of) gada: today the nationalised are also admitted ... A nationalised, even if he is (part of) gada, could never become a Borana ... (BN, NAF 10223:ff. 21–23)

Again, a social and ritual rift appears to divide the *boorana* from the 'nationalized' foreigners of the sources. Enrico Cerulli, who travelled through

cant social change ... is envisioned as a struggle of individuals, often two in number, each representative of a particular social force.' (p. 58)

Macha country in 1927–28, recorded the same ‘separateness’ among the Jidda Oromo, among whom the subject people were collectively called *gabra*, and were considered just ‘like foreigners’, numerous and ‘enemy-like’ (‘For ninety are the Gabra, /but/ nine are the Borana’, Cerulli 1933, I:35). Among the Leqa, *boorana* rule is described by Cerulli as ‘particularly harsh’ and craftsmen such as smiths and potters are said to have been excluded from *gada* rituals.

The Leqa example is in fact illuminating. Cerulli claims that among the Leqa the *gabaro* (i.e., what he calls ‘the subject Sidama peoples’) had been admitted to separate *gada* rituals in order to maintain in local traditions the memory of the original ‘concession’ to the non-Oromo population. Being a witness to the *butta* celebration, Cerulli noticed that the *qondala*, the age group which was to assume power for eight years, was divided into two sections, each performing separate sacrifices: the *boorana* group, led by an ‘Abba Corma’, slaughtered the traditional sacrificial bull (*korma*), while the group formed by the *gabaro*, under their head ‘Abba Dullaccia’, sacrificed an old cow (*dullacca*). The saying recorded by Bartels in the 1970s among the Sayyoo: *Booranni korma gurraacca qala, Gabaro dullacca qala* (‘A boorana slaughters a black bull, a gabaro slaughters an old cow.’ *Fieldnotes*:778) appears to confirm the persistence of this tradition among the Macha.

According to Cerulli, the ritual parallelism had a precise symbolic function for the Leqa: it was to remind them of ‘the admission of Sidama foreigners to the *gada* rituals of the Galla’, and to show at the same time ‘that Borana and Gabaro, though of different birth, have become “like husband and wife”’ (1933, I:126–127). It is clear however that, of the two separate *gada* rituals, it was the one led by the *abba korma* which carried more weight for the Leqa as the normative parts of the ceremony—the handing of the ritual sceptre (*bokku*) and the formal proclamation of the new law (*seera tuma*)—were ‘reserved only to the Abba Corma and not to the Abba Dullaccia’ (1933, II:129).

It is interesting to note also that separate *gada* assemblies have been reported among the Jidda, Gudru and Leqa, that is among those Oromo groups where chiefdoms and monarchical state-formations have been most pronounced; and that it was strong conflicts, not just peaceful integration, that pushed these groups to ‘separate’ their rituals. Nya’a Bassa, a Leqa informant I interviewed in the early 1970s, told me of the existence of two separate *odaa* or assembly places for the Leqa, one for the Borana (*odaa boorana*) and one for the Gabaro (*odaa gabaro*). There was no question as to where real power lay between the two:

The *boorana* and the *gabaro* were separate. The tradition of both was the same. Both were Galla. They were elder and younger respectively. The *boorana* were the witty and the blessed ones. The others were the commanded ... The *gabaro* were also Oromo. They were not *boorana* ... Soon the *gabaro* bowed low to the *boorana*. Thus the *boorana* remained elder and the *gabaro* remained younger. *Motumma* (power) was thus given to the *boorana*. (Informant: Nya’a Bassa, *Fieldnotes*, LN-15, 1973:6, 28)

In actual fact, the more the *boorana* managed to have the upper hand in the ritual field, the more the *gabaro* seem to have tried to escape the internal rules of

the game, and to have started building their own source of authority, and their political power, outside of *gada*. It was during their protracted struggle against the power of the *boorana* that several 'monarchies' between the Abbay and the Gibe were created by forceful *gabaro*: the dynasties of Gama Moras among the Gudru (Massaja 1885-95, III:50-51), of the *warra* Bakare among the Leqa (Tesema Ta'a 1980:4-10), or of the Galaan of Sayyoo (Nagaso Gidada 1984:287-89) all came to power with the help of disaffected groups within Macha society. Thus Bararti Ammo, the paternal uncle of Bakare Godana, who started the Naqamte dynasty in Wallaga in the mid-nineteenth century, is said to have come to power after agreement had been reached with the *gabaro* and a joint sacrifice of a *korma* and a *dullacca* was performed to cancel the social distance, and the symbolic memory, of the original separation between the two groups (Nya'a Bassa LN-15, 1973:8).

After twenty years of missionary labour and anthropological observation among the Sayyoo of Wallegga, Lambert Bartels is quite right, I believe, when he reminds us of the 'seeming equality' between the two groups and of the 'age-old struggle on the *gabaro*'s part to blur out the differences (with the *boorana*) as far as possible' (1983:162). These 'differences' are reflected today in several sayings and proverbs of the western Macha among whom the *boorana* are still perceived collectively as *hangafa* or the 'elder group':

Booranniifii gabaro hangafaaf quxisuudha malee, ijoollee Rayyaati / Rayyaa jechuun abbaa oobooti; ooboommoo abbaa coraati

Borana and Gabaro are sons of Raya; of these however one is the *hangafa* or the eldest; the other is *quxisu* or the junior one'

And again:

Hangafa nama boorana / hangafa ifa booruu diima

'The *hangafa* of man is Borana / the *hangafa* of light is dawn'

(Bartels *Fieldnotes*:783, 290)

Thus the *boorana* are invariably perceived as the 'eldest' or senior members of Macha society. They are said to be the ones who 'opened the way' (*daggal saaqi*, Tesema Ta'a, 1980:28) on behalf of the incoming Macha groups, those who fertilized the sub-soil of the new settlement areas (*abba cirracha*, Hultin 1987:16): the land (*lafa*) is therefore theirs by right, it is only they who can give it away:⁹

Qabannoon lafaa kan booranati / Booranatuu kennefi eebbisa

'The owning of land belongs to the *boorana* / It is to the *boorana* to give and bless'

⁹ According to Jan Hultin, the Macha make a distinction between the *abba cirracha* ('father of the sub-soil') and the *abba dhoqqee* ('father of the top-soil'); the first one, in his words, 'should be a *borana* to the highest degree, i.e. a first-born son of a man of a senior *borana* lineage, an *angaffa*. The 'father of the sub-soil' was a cultural hero who took possession of the land, killed wild animals and enemies. He blessed the land and made sacrifices and held the land in trust. In many respects his position was comparable to that of a 'father of a well' among the Boran ... As a ritual trustee the 'father of the sub-soil' granted land to 'fathers of the top-soil', who then devolved land upon others. As lord of the land he was first and foremost a ritual warden. He was the lord of the *ayana* of the area' (1987:16).

or:

Gabaro qabannaa hinqabane, booranatuu ofii qabate debarsee kenneef

'The *gabaro* do not own land, it is the *boorana* who have taken the land and have given it to the *gabaro*'

(Fieldnotes:779, 783)

As for ritual and social precedence in daily life, the following is an eloquent testimony of *boorana*'s seniority in Macha society:

Boorana dura hinadeemin

Isatuu dura adeema

Qalmiif eebbi kansaati

Namni utuu hinoofkalin

Boorana dura darbee hindeemin

Yoo inni hoofkali jedheen dura darba

Booranni ana dura hindeemin hinjedhu

Isa adeemtuu sodaata.

Do not step in front of a *boorana*

It is he who goes first

Slaughtering and blessing are his.

Unless one is allowed

No one should pass in front of a *boorana*

(But) if he allows the other can pass by.

A *boorana* will never say 'don't pass in front of me'

It is the other who is afraid to pass by.

(Fieldnotes:778)

The reason why the *boorana* carry such weight among the Macha is because they are considered to be 'pure' (*qulqulluu*), they are 'people of blessing' (*mana ebba*), somewhat 'closer to God (*Waqa*)', in other terms, 'people of power' (Bartels 1983: partic. 133–160). At the same time, according to tradition, both the *boorana* and the *gabaro* are *birmada*, 'freemen' and, as we have seen, destined to live together 'like husband and wife'. It is for this reason that they are both *ijoollee Rayyaati*, 'sons of Raya', the common ancestor to all the Macha groups, of whom they are respectively perceived as *obo* (senior) and *coora* (junior). In the balanced world of Oromo values, both *obo* and *coora* play mutually codified roles and the general order of society relies both on the consensual agreement over social and ritual roles as well as on the complementarities of such binary oppositions. Thus the ideal 'tension between equality and hierarchy'¹⁰ is reconciled in Oromo society by a constant balance of fertile contrasts between generations, groups and social categories. Because it is the union of contrasts that generates life, the moral economy of the Oromo world (*borantitti*) surfaces to the open through its constant pairing of social and human oppositions. Both are necessary to a smooth running of society. Both make it an ordered universe. This is why, as the Sibū say, 'borana must not marry *boorana*', as their union would lead to sterility¹¹ or, as Gemmetchu Megerssa explains in reference to the Borana

¹⁰ See Gudrun Dahl's essay.

¹¹ Jan Hultin, personal communication.

not eating the forelegs (*irre*) of animals, (see Bartels 1983:156) '*irre* does not eat *irre*, power does not eat power', as it would be 'like eating oneself. Man does not eat man'.

Makkoo Bili, the 'law-giver' of the Macha (Triulzi 1990), expressed similar values in the following ruling, remembered in Macha tradition:

Masqalli waggaadha
Buttaan bar saddeet
Abbaan ooboo haata'uu
Ilmi cooraa haata'uu
Oboon cooraa haadhalchu
Cooraan ooboo haadhalchu
Safuu walii haafudhatu
Walitti hindarbin
Yoo kun jiraachuu baate
Abbaan ilma hinbeeku
Ilmi abbaa hinbeeku
Coora oboon abbaakoo haajedhu
Ooboo cooraan abbaakoo haajedhu
Coora lammattammoo in akaakuu arge
Obboleessakoo haajedhu
Seerri Makkoo Bili kana.

Masqala is every year
Butta is every eight years
 Let the father be an *obo*
 Let the son be a *coora*
 Let the *obo* beget a *coora*
 Let the *coora* beget an *obo*
 Let them display *safu* towards one another
 They must not change place with one another
 If this does not happen
 A father will not recognize his son
 A son will not recognize his father
 Let a *coora* call *obo* his father
 Let an *obo* call *coora* his son.
 When a *coora* has a grandson
 Let him call him 'my brother'.
 This is the law of Makkoo Bili.

(Bartels, *Fieldnotes*:364; also 1983:309)

It is perhaps for this reason that, according to Macha tradition, peace among the Oromo (*nagaa Oromoo*) coincided with the celebration of *butta*, the most important ritual of *gada*, the ceremony which, perhaps more than any other, outlined the limits of separation, but also of unity, among the different social categories of the western Macha frontier. Once *gada* was trampled upon, and *butta* prohibited, or devalued, the term *boorana* increasingly 'became a mark of distinction to express feelings of cultural and social superiority' and, in time, simply 'acquired the meaning of noblemen, rich in cattle and slaves', a synonym for *sooressa*, 'the wealthy ruling class' aimed ostensibly at distinguishing themselves from the 'plebeians' in all fields (Mohammed Hassen 1990:62).

Mengesha Rikitu has recently reminded us that, after the *butta* celebrations were prohibited by the Derg in the early 1970s, the ordered universe of the

Oromo was not able to mediate any longer the strong contrasts between the different forces within Oromo society thus allowing the present political and moral crisis to unfold:

The crops that were cultivated no longer grow. The cows give birth to deformed calves. The oxen refuse to fatten. The bull refuses to mount the cow. Pregnant women give birth to their children at the wrong time. Nobody respects truth. There is no justice among the people. Children refuse to obey their parents. The younger generation refuses to obey the king and the law. War, famine and drought plague our country. There is no peace between high and low people. Real elders and wise people no longer exist. There is no peace in our land. (Informant: Dabala Jafoo, in Mengesha Rikitu 1992:9)

Thus tradition celebrates, by inversion, the times of *butta*, a ritual of unity and division, which served as a reminder, among the Macha, of the complex events leading to the hierarchical yet composite society of the western Oromo, i.e., both the 'bloody reactions' (Cerulli 1933 II:173) which accompanied the settling of the Macha pioneers among the Omotic and Sidamo peoples of the western highlands, and 'the husband and wife' rule of conduct (1933 I:127) which was to preside over their daily interactions. Now that *gada* rituals are enacted again, may the memory of such events not be cancelled by new prescriptive rules or selective memories, so that the story of division and unity within Oromo society of the past may help us understand, and possibly sustain, the healthy growth of the present one.

The Poetics of Nationalism

A Poem by Jaarso Waaqo Qoot'o

Abdullahi A. Shongolo

Jaarso Waaqo was a Boran of the Nonitu clan living at Tuqa in southern Ethiopia, near the border town Moiyale.¹ He grew up as a herdsboy and later moved to the Ethiopian half of the town which is located on the main highway between Ethiopia and Kenya. The vast majority of its population is Boran, but there are also Gabra, Garre, Burji and Somali from the surrounding region. In both halves of the town there are also people from beyond Boranaland in the respective countries, e.g. traders, civil servants, policemen and soldiers. Jaarso had never gone to school and, like many other young men in the small towns along the highway, he eked out an existence as a casual labourer.

He was in his early twenties when, in 1991 or -92, he joined the OLF (Oromo Liberation Front). Before that Jaarso had for some time composed songs about local politics and about development topics such as, for example, the dangers of alcohol. Now he began to record his political poetry on cassettes. He used oral poetry to create political support for OLF's pan-Oromo cause. The audiotape cassette found an avid demand not only in Moiyale but spread widely among the Oromo communities both in Ethiopia and Kenya. The poems expressed themes in the OLF struggle against the former Amhara government as well as against the predominantly Tigre government that succeeded it, and particularly against the government supporters in the ethnic parties of the EPRDF (Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front) coalition. His intention with the poems was to politicize the Ethiopian Boran. He urged them to support the struggle for independence and to prepare for armed struggle. Jaarso also called for the support of the neighbouring, non-Boran communities, that were inclined towards other political objectives (Schlee and Shongolo 1995). He articulated the OLF's demand for freedom from Amhara and Tigre supremacy, for recognition of the dignity of Oromo culture and for their right to establish an independent nation. The poems expressed the feelings of rage against the political and economic oppression under both Haile Sellassie and Mengistu, and against the harassment by the present Tigre dominated government.

¹ In order to distinguish between the Ethiopian and Kenyan side of the town I shall use the Kenyan convention and spell its name 'Moyale' to refer to the Kenyan half and 'Moiyale' to refer to the Ethiopian half.

The social and political context of his poetry is the transitory and contested situation that followed upon the demise of Mengistu Haile Mariam's military regime. The guerrilla forces of the Tigray based movement TPLF (Tigray² People's Liberation Front) marched into Addis Ababa in the last days of May 1991. The dictator and some of his associates fled the country, while others were arrested and imprisoned. In southern Ethiopia many party cadres, civil servants, soldiers and policemen who had been closely associated with the junta regime fled across the Ethio-Kenyan border. For about half a year Boranaland, like many other parts of the South, was without representatives of state power. The imperial and military regimes had never done much good for these areas and people found that they could live perfectly well without any Addis Ababa government; all authority they needed was provided by their own councils of elders.³

In November 1991, however, this stateless and relatively peaceful condition came to an end when the new Tigre rulers tried to establish their authority in this remote part of Ethiopia. Outside Eritrea TPLF was the militarily strongest of the guerrilla movements that fought against the military junta. Although it professed to be Marxist and was organized like a Leninist party,⁴ it remained basically a regional movement with little popular support outside its Tigrinya speaking base area in northern Ethiopia. In 1988–89 the Eritreans and the TPLF, on their respective fronts, defeated the demoralised government armies in a number of decisive battles. As the TPLF rapidly advanced southwards, it seems to have co-ordinated its military operations with those of other liberation fronts and also made formal, political "front"-alliances with some other organisations. The resulting EPRDF (Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front) coalition was modelled on the communist type of "democratic fronts" that were launched in Eastern Europe after the Second World War; that is with one "leading party" and a number of client parties. The OLF, that was active in many Oromo speaking regions, was not part of this front. In the months immediately before the collapse of the junta TPLF therefore set up a "sister party", OPDO (Oromo Peoples Democratic Organisation) that from its start was a part of the EPRDF. Initially, the members consisted mainly of Oromo government soldiers who were prisoners of war.⁵ When OPDO later on managed to recruit more members, the latter were branded by OLF as "Goobana", as Quislings.

Before the TPLF/EPRDF marched into Addis Ababa they had operated only in northern Ethiopia. They had no popular base in the south of the country, where other organizations, like the OLF, represented the opposition to the junta. In the following months, therefore, the Tigre were faced with the task of taking control over the rest of the country and establishing themselves or their political

²In the Boran language they are called "Tigre".

³For a case study of the working of a "traditional" assembly see Shongolo 1994.

⁴Towards the end of 1989, when the East European regimes were crumbling one after another, a TPLF leader stated in a BBC interview that the Front regarded Albania as its ideal model of society.

⁵In a similar fashion the EPRDF also organised other ethnic "PDOs".

clients, like the OPDO, as representatives of the state. A transitional government and a parliament with representatives from many political organisations was established in Addis Ababa and a new constitution was to be prepared. New, administrative divisions based on criteria of ethnicity were to be established: Amhara, Tigray, Oromia, Somalia etc. Regional elections were scheduled for June 1992, but harassment and arrests of OLF candidates and other irregularities in the preparation of the elections led to the withdrawal of the OLF, leaving the field to the OPDO.

When, in late 1991, the Tigre began to assert their presence in Boranaland, they were confined to the major towns and mainly fending for their own security. Various ethnically based political movements which anticipated that statehood might be established, started to fight about a share in it. The main opponents in this local war were the OLF, which was identified with the Boran, and the OALF (Oromo Abo Liberation Front) which was made up of Gabbra and Garre. The Oromo Abo, or its Garre nucleus, was until recently called the Somali Abo Liberation Front (SALF). *Abbo* is a form of address in the Oromo language, roughly meaning "Hey man!". Somali Abo are thus those Somali who say *abbo!*, i.e. Oromo speaking Somali.⁶ In 1978, during the Ogaden war between Somalia and Ethiopia, the SALF struggled for the incorporation of the Somali areas of Ethiopia into Somalia. Later, when the Somali state had ceased to exist, the Somali Abo re-affiliated themselves to become Oromo Abo and were struggling for a special status within the emerging province of Oromia in the EPRDF dominated Ethiopia. Today, after these attempts have been frustrated, it appears that the OALF has split. One part remains the OALF while another has reverted to call itself SALF and is now attempting to transfer a slice of the Oromia province to the new Ethiopian province of Somalia (Schlee and Shongolo 1995 and Helland's essay). The situation was further complicated by warlords with gangs or armies of various sizes, who sided with the Garre or pursued their own interests. One of them was the former Somali president Mohamed Siad Barre who had a sizeable army in the area. For the combatants themselves the war was about wells and grazing areas, while for the leaders, who were aware of the wider political framework, it was a struggle for representation in the emerging new order in Ethiopia, in which the new regional divisions were to be shaped along ethnic lines.

The OLF organized the opposition against the junta and even waged guerilla war in many parts of Ethiopia. They had not, however, established themselves in any significant way among the Boran and their pan-Oromo ideology had not made much of an impact in Boranaland. The term "Oromo" was simply unknown to many ordinary people: people regarded themselves as being Boran or Garre or Gabra (Schlee and Shongolo 1995). When the OLF began to establish itself as a political agency among the Boran it attracted young men like Jaarso. His poetry thus reflected how a young Boran recruit came to embrace OLF's

⁶ "Oromo Abo" is thus a pleonasm. See essay by Mohammed Hassen.

nationalist ideology and general political message of unity against a common enemy.

The poem that is presented here was composed in the early days of the OLF resistance to what they saw as Tigre attempts of Abyssinian neo-colonialism. OLF's political discourse contains many references to the historical experience of the northern Oromo that are not always relevant for the Boran experience, e.g. allusions to the 19th century Oromo Shoan warlord Goobana who conquered Wollega, Jimma and large parts of Shoa for his master Emperor Menelik; Goobana was completely unknown to the peoples of southern Ethiopia, but Jaarso managed to integrate this symbolic figure and other features of nationalist discourse into a basically Boran idiom.

In many of the verses the general tendency is critical of the Gabra-Garre alliance against the Boran: Jaarso's message is very plain to all involved, especially to those who are fighting against the Boran. They are reminded that they are killing their own brothers and thus committing an act of treason to their nation. Despite such acts of treason, the Oromo will continue their struggle until victory is won. The poem also asserts that, come what may, the Boran and the Gabra and the Garre "are one": they have always lived together and in spite of cattle raids and temporary feuds they have always reconciled. (See Gufu Oba's essay.)

Jaarso is addressing a situation in which the social construction of identity and belonging involves a very complex use of criteria of language, descent and cultural practice (Schlee 1989; Schlee and Shongolo 1992:17ff.). He is directing his appeal to people who by one set of criteria are regarded as Oromo but by other criteria are not. The "Gabra" he is talking about in this context are the Gabra Miigo who are related to the Gabra Malbe (Tablino 1980 and essay in this volume) but form a different regional cluster (Schlee 1989: *passim*). The Gabra Miigo claim that in earlier times they split off from the Garre. The latter trace agnatic descent from two ancestors, Tuf and Kuranyo and ultimately from Samaale, the eponymous ancestor of the Somali (Schlee 1979:28; Schlee and Shongolo 1992:17). Regardless of how tenuous the historical evidence to support them may be, such genealogical claims are socially important in that they are used to establish social identities. Affiliation to the "total genealogy" of the Somali and/or to Arab ancestry is often motivated by the striving for religious prestige and political strength (and not by the search for some kind of historical truth in the academic sense). The Gabra Malbe, Rendille and Garre share a cluster of lineages collectively referred to as Odoola or Adoola and they also share a number of common cultural beliefs and practices (Schlee 1989: 147-162).

The oral traditions of the Garre suggest historical links with the Rendille and Gabra (including the Gabra Malbe). They share traditions with other groups, like the Sakuye, about an exodus to free themselves from Boran hegemony. These traditions about a long migration probably reflect the Oromo expansion in the 16th century. Some of the traditions about the flight from the Oromo contain references to groups that were left behind (like the Gabra Miigo), or state that some emigrants later returned to their old homelands and pastures. These

traditions thus account for the fact that there are groups of Gabra who live close to the Boran and, by and large,⁷ have adopted their language (Schlee 1989:92–144; Schlee and Shongolo 1992:18). Other Garre traditions emphasize religious differences and suggest that the Boran are not true Muslims. Garre may, for example, often explain their conflicts with the Boran by suggesting that you cannot have peaceful relations with “people who have no religion”. During the armed conflict between Garre and Boran in 1992 our conversations with Garre elders often revolved around events that took place in the past, in the 16th century and in the following centuries and the inter-ethnic relationships that allegedly derived from them. The *tirriso* relationship established between the Boran and their neighbours (see Oba in this volume and Schlee 1989: 91, 99, 119, *passim*) which, among other things, comprise elements of ritual dependence, was invariably regarded as humiliating: the ongoing war with the Boran thus acquired emotional elements of a long history of struggle against Boran domination.

In the poem presented here Jaarso is playing down these differences and instead emphasizing traditions of common origin, shared customs and language which are now being refurbished as the basis for a revised national identity. The poem also has a message which underscores the crucial issues of the recent conflicts between the Boran and the Gabra and the Garri and suggests that the root of the enmity was ignorance and misunderstanding resulting from the Ethiopian policy of divide and rule. The poet appeals generally to all the peoples of southern Ethiopia who were at war with each other.

Jaarso composed his poems while he was serving in the OLF guerrilla army. The style of the poems can be said to be an imaginative and creative development of a traditional genre of boasting songs, *geerarsa*,⁸ in which men give poetic accounts of their heroic deeds—and sometimes also, like in the American blues, of their problems and grievances in life. Jaarso creatively combined plain, everyday language with traditional rhetoric style. He consciously used metaphors as a weapon in a “war of words”, as opposed to a war with arms. This contributed to the popularity of the poems, because in the past the Boran and their neighbours used to counter any threat to their territory by “war with arms” and never by “war of words”.

Jaarso used his poetic skill to appeal to his fellow Boran as well as to the Gabra and Garri, urging them to unite in support of the pan-Oromo struggle for national independence. His particular style of poetry was a new mode of expressing modern, generalized and collective—in contrast to the *geerarsa*'s tradi-

⁷ Among the Garre there are also groups who speak Somali dialects: one is Rhanweyn, the other Garre Kofar. These dialects are very similar to each other but are neatly kept apart by their often bi- or trilingual speakers. All three linguistic groups among the Garre—i.e. speakers of Rhanweyn, Garre Kofar and Boran—cut across the entire clan spectrum of the Garre, i.e. all Garre clan segments are represented in all three of the linguistic groups.

⁸ They were, however, not a radically new genre of heroic, political poetry of the kind that developed in, for example, the Gikuyu or Somali resistance struggle (See Kinyathi, ed. 1980 and Samatar 1982). Boran take pride in expressing their thoughts and achievements in the form of *geerarsa* heroic songs; “in the days of the spear Boran were the greatest of all the peoples of the Horn of Africa”.

tional and individual—political values and goals among the Boran. Importantly, he developed a traditional genre of orality for communicating central aspects of OLF's, pan-Oromo political programme to the people of the area. He found a way of expressing a universalist, modernising political message in a traditional and yet innovative mode of orality that spoke to the heart of his fellow Boran. One may say that he invented a new kind of political discourse and a highly efficacious mode for its dissemination in a largely pre-literate society. The themes of his poems had a profound effect on all who listened to them. Jaarso's poetry probably contributed to hasten the mobilization for the OLF cause in southern Ethiopia. Both the Ethiopian authorities and the ethnic parties in the EPRDF coalition publicly condemned the circulation of the cassettes.

During his time as an OLF soldier Jaarso learnt how to read and write the Oromo language in the Latin alphabet. He applied his new skill when he composed poems by writing them down and revising and perfecting them before he recited them. It is important to note, however, that he used literacy only as a mnemonic device to perfect his oral performance; his concern was orature, not literature.⁹ The traditional art of Boran poetry is addressing listeners, not readers. Thus, when Jaarso wanted to reach a wider audience, he recorded his recitations on a cassette recorder and handed out copies to people without charging any money. Transistor radios and cassette players are to be found everywhere. People who happened to listen to his cassettes and who liked them, made new copies and others, in their turn, made copies of the copies. There are no record companies, no copy rights, no private ownership of this popular orality. Jaarso's tapes are now spread over a wide area outside his hometown: they are played in buses and lorries, in bars and cafés from Nairobi's Eastleigh in the south to Addis Ababa's Mercato in the north. He was, and still is, regarded as the greatest poet of his time.

Jaarso died on the 21st September 1994. In the last days before his death he was composing a poem in a slightly new form, using Boran wise words and adages to express the Boran worldview and moral imagination; it became his legacy to the Oromo people. Jaarso was seriously wounded when the TPLF forces attacked an OLF base in the bush and he shot himself rather than be taken prisoner. The OLF forces lost nine men in the fight, but the Ethiopian losses were said to be ten times as many.¹⁰ The memory of the events of the 21st September has already grown into the Boran national myth as a historical date.

Isi warri Oromoo, uumati
Borana, Arsi Jaanjamtuun
jed'ani kun, duri maanifi walhad'a?

Why did these people of Oromo masses,
the Boran, Arsi and Jaanjamtu
fight each other in the past?

⁹ As far as I know his hand-written manuscripts have not been preserved.

¹⁰ Nine and ninety are symbolically significant numbers in Oromo thought and often used in standard expressions of quantitative relationships among social categories. Compare, for example, the Arsi and Macha saying: "Nine are the *boran* and ninety are the *gabaro*".

Warra hama duri kaaniti
akkan walti naqa.

Ama re d'aamsa
akkami erguufi
malteeti kana?

Arsi, Jaamjamtu, Borana,
isani obboleessa
eegadd'a Goobana.¹³

Kan tuqe, kan tuqe
ufi kaarra gora
isanii wal lola
eegadd'a Goobana.

Ilme te ijjeese
ufi kaarra gora
isanii wal lola
eegadd'a Goobana.

Arsi, Jaanjamtu, Borana
isan obboleessa
eegadd'a Goobana.

Arsi, Jaanjamtu, Borana
Ilmaan haad'a tokko
eegadd'a Goobana.

Takka qubaat dua,
gulan kumaat dua,
Goobanaan tan fed'a,
kaarra teesan bua,
eegadd'a Goobana.

Duri finni badeef,
gargari qoodamtan,

It was those bad people¹¹ of the past
who brought conflict between them.

Now then,
what message would
you send them?

Arsi, Jaanjamtu¹² and Boran
you all are brothers
beware of Goobana.

He will hit you both here and there,
but then he will side-step,
whilst you will clash with one another,
beware of Goobana.

He will kill your sons,
but he himself will step aside,
whilst you will clash with each other,
beware of Goobana.

Arsi, Jaanjamtu and Borana,
You all are brothers,
beware of Goobana.

Arsi, Jaanjamtu and Borana,
children of the same mother,
beware of Goobana.

First only one would die,
thereafter a thousand would die,
that's the wishes of Goobana,
he will disunite you,
beware of Goobana.

Long ago social order was disrupted,
hence you all separated,

¹¹ The Amhara colonialists.

¹² Jaanjamtu is another name for the Guji.

¹³ Gobana (ca. 1821–1889) was an Oromo who became a famous warlord, or "general" under the Abyssinian Emperor Menelik II. Gobana led several campaigns and conquered large parts of the Oromo territories to the south and southwest of the Amhara heartland. For his service to Menelik he was awarded the honorific title "Ras". Oromo soldiers from Wollo and Shewa were an important element in the Abyssinian armies. Says Levine (1974:85):

As early as 1871 Menelik integrated Wello Galla soldiers with his Amhara troops, and one of his key officers, Ras Gabena, was Galla in origin. Ras Gabena supported by numerous Galla nobles and soldiers, in fact carried out much of the work of conquering other Galla tribes for Menelik.

All this happened long before the rise of modern Oromo nationalism. The moral evaluation accorded to Gobana in his time may of course differ from the one ascribed to him in a later perspective. In contemporary OLF discourse he is regarded as the proverbial traitor; the name and the concept "Gobana" corresponds to the Norwegian name and concept of "Quisling" (Vidkun Quisling was a Norwegian politician who in 1940–45 cooperated with the Nazi occupation force. After the war he was sentenced to death and executed.)

Gobana's campaigns, however, never included Boranaland and he is never mentioned in Boran oral traditions; as a historical personality he was completely unknown to the Boran. The reference to him in this context is thus a reflection of how the poet has incorporated current OLF discourse into a basically traditional genre of Boran poetry. It also shows how a pan-Oromo nationalist discourse is being disseminated among the Boran.

isa obboleesssa
eegadd'a Goobana.

Me, nurra lakisa
wal didda yoowana
yoi kun yo hama
eegadd'a Goobana.

Yaa ilmaan Oromoo
atin akkan taatu beeta?
Oromia te bulfachu
atin hagan itti geeta.

Mana bareessaa-baranoota
utaalchumaan oli seent.

Akka gaaf duri kaan
deebite ch'icha wa teeta?

Duri ch'icha sunu hin d'uftu
nam gaadi¹⁵ eju d'eeta.
Kofia¹⁶ mata irra fud'atte,
jilbaan itti gad deemta.

Atu reefu fula d'ugaa geeta
afaan isaatu wa d'ageeta?

Wom inni si gaafatu
takka quba wa d'ageeta?

Ilti wa si hin garre
d'iitichi reefu gaange tae.
Qara yaayu deema d'ufte
amma dandeete wa d'eeta?

"Eey! nan ijjeesin Geetta,
Goofa¹⁷ kiyya beesse¹⁸ feeta?
Birri meeqa?¹⁹
Ch'ufa fud'add'i ukha kan keesa".
"Yo ani sin d'aanin
atin gumbo kennu hin deeta?"
"Deebie hin ded'u."
"Yo ani amm' si gaddiise,
bakka²⁰ man keesani hin ch'eeta?"

but you are all brothers,
beware of Goobana.

Do stop us
from the on-going squabbles,
for the present time lacks decorum,
beware of Goobana.

Oh! sons of Oromo, you are such
don't you know?
You are capable to administer your
Oromia, on your own.

Nowadays you can enter
the houses of writing and learning.¹⁴

Would you remain sitting in the yard,
as you did in the past?

In the past, you never dared to go there,
for fear of the guard.
You lifted your hat from your head,
and approached him on your knees.

Now when you have become conscious,
will you ever know his language?

Will you understand even a word
of what he asks you?

Your eyes have not yet noticed, that
the kick has become like that of a mule.
You have come a long way,
would you dare to retreat now?

"Hey! do not kill me *Geetta!*
Dear Sir, do you want money?
How many Birr?
Take all from my pocket"
"If I don't beat you,
will you not forget to give bribe?"
"I will never forget."
"If I let you go now,
will you then run straight home?"

¹⁴ Institutions of learning, i.e. schools

¹⁵ *Gaadi*, from the English word "guard". It is a neologism in this context.

¹⁶ *Kofia* is a Swahili word meaning "hat". As a gesture of reverence it is a common tradition in Ethiopia to lift up the hat and bend down when exchanging greetings, especially with persons of authority and with the dominant Amhara class in general.

¹⁷ *Goofa* is not known in the Boran dialect; it is a northern Oromo word meaning "lord". *Geeta* is an Amharic word meaning "great lord".

¹⁸ From the Swahili word *pesa*, money.

¹⁹ *Birr*, Ethiopian currency, one Ethiopian dollar. *Meeqa* is a Northern and Central Oromo word meaning "how much"; it is not used among the Boran.

²⁰ *Bakka*, a corruption of the Kiswahili word "*mpaka*", that means "to", the word is not commonly used among the Boran who would rather say *haga*.

"E-eee".

"Chei yoos, daalle!"

Achumaan maqaan "daalle" bae
dirmammuun dirri gaarre tae
quuqae garaan baarre tae
tirate gale warraan bae,
deebie ch'iisayyu wa kae?

Qallate qitt'e laawwee tae
quuqan kaani garaat tarsae
hin fayyu ato buul taee.

Qooqala waan qalatu d'abe
galgal gara goga rafe
dammanne, achumaan hafe.

Fula itti awwaalu hin qabu
abbaan bool kad'a d'aaqe.

"Nami due", jennaan.
"Ijjeefte d'ufta", jed'e qabe.

Namum kanke si irra ijjeese
innumaani dubbi siti d'ale.

Dubbiit jira hin awwaalani
reefi manum keesati shame.

Kaani, beese waan baasu baase
man hid'aa keesa gale.

Yo inni gale ya ch'ich'ite
lafeele guure walti qabe.

OLFiin yayyabame,
guyya sun danqaraat gale.

Eegi guyya suni
arra mootummaan²² nuu gale.

Aada teesaniit deebia
ta kale Waaqi itti isan d'ale.

Sangaan warri lafaan qotatu
mooe warra gubba mare.

"Oh yes!"

"Run then, you fool!"

Thereafter "fool" became his name.
His trunk was fretted with sores,
his stomach distended like a *baarre*,²¹
stumbling along, he reached home.
Has he ever risen again?

He grew as thin as an arrow,
the ulcer burst inside his belly,
he will never recover.

He should have been given meat to
recover, but there was nothing to him
slaughter so he slept with an empty
stomach and never rose from his sleep.

There was no place to bury him,
so his father went to beg for a grave.

"Someone has died", he said.
"So you killed him, and came here", they
said and arrested him.

He just killed your own kin and then
fabricated false allegations against you.

Because of the court case the dead man
could not be buried, and the corpse lay
rotting in the house.

This man paid much money
to be released from jail.

When he returned home, the corpse was
rotten so that he could only collect the
bones.

OLF was thus founded.
That day they went into the bush.

And since that day,
they have given us our own rule.

Revert to your old customs,
which were given us by God.

They used people like "oxen" to pull the
plough, now the people have triumphed
and rule over them.

²¹ *Barre* is a small pumpkin.

²² From *moo'a*, autobenefactive: *moo'ad'/t*, is a cattle image. For example *Kormi sun him moo'a*, "that bull is in heat" and *sa'a sun iti moo'a*, "he is mounting that cow". With reference to human beings the implication is not necessarily sexual but can denote superiority or dominance in general. An *moo'a*, an *mooti* is a formula of self praise used by a new Abba Gada during his inauguration.

Sai duri warri elmatu
gale abba ufiiti d'ale.

Woma hin sodaatina
aadan siin qabani hin jirtu

Duraan hin baasiftu balee
Oromo hundi tokocha
gargari d'angalaate dameen.

Jiddu nama seeniti
Goobanaan itti gabare.²³

Kai gingilfadd'u garbumma!
Goobana eegaddu male.

Yaa ilmaan Oromoo!
Ganna d'ibba armaan duraati
akkum looni wal qalatan.

Had'e loon wal irra fuud'e
gale moona ufiit naqata.

Had'i tan maan jala argattani?
tanaan laafan jajabaata?

Jabaan keetu waliin raa'ata
eesan bilisummaati baatani?

Yo isan sare wal haatu taatani
akkamiin waraabess haatani?

D'iigi keesan tokko laala
me yo akkan waliin yaatani.

Gadaan teesan tokko laala
guyya jila walti baatani.

Waliin d'alatani, ammo
deebi'ani foon wali hin nyaatani.

Bilisumma teesan yaada
Me! waraan kan nurra d'aaba.

Jabeen keesan suni dansa,
yo bilisummaan baatani.

Gar balchuma il baasa
Oromo, obboleeyan tiyya
Me! Lakkisa wallaal kana.
Oromo male abbo
biyyiti ya bilisa baate

Yaadi Oromtich wallaale
tikhaati wal ijjeese gaade.

The cows that they used to milk
came home to give birth for their owner.

Do not be afraid of anything, for there
are no illegal laws to arrest you.

There is no way ahead for the
Abyssinians. The trunk of Oromo is one,
the branches are spreading wide.

Gobana created discord among the
people, but he too became a serf.

Rise and shake off servitude!
But beware of Goobana.

Oh, the sons of Oromo!
A hundred years ago
you slaughtered one another like cattle.

You raid each other to steal cattle to
take home and keep in your own corral.

What did you gain from such raids?
By this, will the weak ever gain vigour?

Your strong men will be eliminated,
how then will you ever attain freedom?

If you are like dogs fighting each other,
how then would you fight the hyenas?

Look, you are all of the same blood
as you march along together.

Look, you share a common gada
culture on your ceremonial occasions.

If you were born together, then
you should'nt eat one another's flesh.

Think about your liberation struggle
Hey, stop this war from us!

That strength of yours, would only be
worthwhile if utilised to achieve
freedom.

My dear Oromo brothers, direct your
eyes towards the liberation struggle.
Hey, do away with this ignorance!
With the exception of the Oromo all
others have achieved independence.

The ambition of those ignorant Oromo
was to murder each other while they
were herding.

²³ *Gabare*, peasant farmer, sharecropper.

Galte mata filatta
diin ijjeese jed'e d'aade.

Maan diin ijjeese
foon obbolees ufi nyaate.

Hamaan isan kobla
reefu gaaden diidatti baate
hama koblu ma hin d'owarre
wal had'iis kan yaala baate?

Yo d'iigi Oromoo nam quubse
namu qara ga'ateeni.

Yo horiin keen nam horsiise
namu ya saame galateeni.

Kara sila yaau him beenne
ch'ufa ya yaa'e barateeni.

Orma wante hin ta'ina
nami balchuma araade.

Ka wal had'e hin lakimne
sabi Oromoo ya maraate?

Wald'ab keen araarsiti
OLFiin ya dandae.
Alaaba ilmaan Oromoo
bakalchi Oda irraan angae
Kan jalaati ha qoru,
Gadaan sadeen wal waldae.

Yaa ilmaan Oromoo
Gada teetin bulte kaata
alamiin ch'uf sii khakhatte
wal gaafi adda adda irraati
sihumaati mootummaan galate.

Bakalchi Oromiaa,
ya akka ilm hawwii sii d'alate,
amma ufumaan ufi bulchita,
bari duri kaan ya hafe,
akka gaaf duri dukallo
seeri gadaan kaan ya gale.

Oromiaan hin dandamanne
duri akka guubee dabbe

You only come home to comb your
hair²⁴ and chant songs about having
killed an enemy.

What enemy has he killed?
He only ate his brother's flesh.

The bad people will laugh at you and
now their fangs become visible.
Won't you stop fighting each other
and stop being their laughing stock?

Can the blood of Oromo satisfy any
of them, when they all have sucked
more than enough already.

Can our livestock enrich any of them,
when they all have looted more than
enough already.

Before they couldn't find their way here,
but now they know all roads (because
some of our people help them).

He who is longing for freedom,
must never be a shield for the strangers.

Why don't they stop fighting each other,
have the Oromo masses gone mad?

The OLF can now reconcile
our differences.
On the Oromo flag, the Morning Star
is glittering over the Oda²⁵ tree.
Let the three Gada leaders
have their council under it.

Oh! children of Oromo,
with your Gada you can prosper.
All the nationalities have confirmed that
at their different conventions. You
have achieved sovereignty on your own.

The Morning Star of Oromia is born,
like the long waited birth of a son,
now you will govern yourselves,
the past era has ended and
like it was long long ago,
the rule of gada law has returned.

Oromia was not spared,
in the past it became bent like a bow,

²⁴ Those who have killed an enemy let their hair grow bushy as a symbol of heroism.

²⁵ *Oda* is a tree honoured as the symbolically most important of all trees. Its shade is a source of peace. In a modern context it is a symbol of the Oromo people, of its unity, solidarity and peace. It is an emblem on their flag.

maqa kale d'alateeni
irra jijirani d'abde.

Ilmaan isii wam barattu
hariyya ufi jala ch'abde,
ta barattu, huji hin qorani,
ka University fit'e
huji didiqooti gad qabde,
irreen kiristinna kaati
ch'ufti aada ufi d'abde.

Kutaan sadi lafaat qabde
kud'ani tokko gubba marte.

Kutaan kud'ani tokko tun
dubra male gurba d'alte?
Ee'e!

Yoosi ch'aqasa!
Ta qara ch'ufti d'ara
Oromia'aan reefu dabde.
Oromia ufi bulfachu
Oromoon ufi ya dad'abde?
Hiyo!

Oromo naga buumna jette,
takk hin garreen nutti qubatte
akka Oromoon bulte kaatu
ch'ufa kees yaate hubatte.

Qabeen Oromia teenna
walumaati qabde t'uut'atte.

Kuta kud'ani tokkeessoo
tokko ya Soomaliin fud'atte.

Ka Oromiaan gurguramte
Oromoon teen ya raawatte?

Dammaqi erga tan ch'aqasi!
Sanga adii, diimaa, gurraacha
wal qabate raasa lit'ee.

Leench'i hin nyaata d'umnaan
waliin reebe itti simee.

Leench'i kaan gaar kore
sanga gurraachatti wa himee:

it's proper name
was changed and lost.

It's youth never got education
and hence lagged behind their agemates,
those who studied were never employed,
those who completed the University
were relegated to inferior jobs,
forced to convert to christianity
they lost trace of their culture.

"The three regions", dominated over
"the eleven suppressed regions".²⁶

Did these eleven regions
only give birth to girls and not to boys?
Oh yes!

Then listen!
What happened was of no good to us.
Even now Oromia is misgoverned.
Were the Oromo incapable
of governing their Oromia themselves?
No!

They said they would bring peace to the
Oromo, but they never did. Instead they
settled among us, travelled everywhere
and surveyed the resources of the
Oromo.

They took possession
of the wealth of our Oromia.

One of the eleven regions
has been seized by the Somali.

Have the Oromo all perished so that
Oromia can be leased out to others?

Wake up and listen to this message!
The white, the red and the black oxen
went together into the forest.

When a lion came to attack them
they all rushed and gored it.

The lion climbed over a hill
and said to the black ox:

²⁶ The singer probably refers to the 14 administrative divisions in earlier times, i.e. during Haile Sellassie and the junta. He says that the Tigre and Amhara speakers constitute a majority only in three regions. Oromo live in all the former administrative regions except Eritrea and Gondar. In some "Amhara" provinces, e.g. Gojam and Wollo, they are a sizeable minority and in most other regions they constitute the bulk of the population. It is not clear exactly to which provinces "the three" refers here. The present government has divided the country into regions based on ethnic criteria, e.g. Amhara, Oromia, Tigray, Afar and Somalia; Eritrea has become an independent state.

"Siifi diimani him mullattani yo sangaan adiin d'id'imee.	"You and the red one would be less visible if you got rid of the white ox.
Sanga adi uf irra gussa kuno wa isanii himée".	Chase away the white ox, now that I have cautioned you".
Sanga diimafi gurraachi sanga adi geegessitee.	Thus the white ox was sent off by the red and the black oxen.
Foon sanga adii nyaate quufe leench'i ka yeroon beelessitee.	The hungry lion devoured the meat of the white ox.
"Sanga gurraacha ati him mullattu yo sanga diima geegessitee".	"You black ox would be less conspicuous if the red ox were sent away".
Sadeenu addaan baafta nyaate ijoolen leench'a balleessitee.	The three were thus separated from each other and eaten up by the lion cubs.
Yeroon chaarterii, ²⁷ kuta Borana sanga adi fakkeessitee.	According to the present charter, the region of the Boran is like the white ox.
Kutaan kud'ani ka gadi hafe kuta Borana geegessitee.	The other ten regions sent the Boran region away.
Naga kuta Borana Soomali Abbon balleessitee.	The peace of the Boran region was then threatened by Somali Abbo. ²⁸
Oromo Abbo jette maqa kanaan d'aattefattee.	They now call themselves "Oromo Abbo"but the use of such a name is revealing.
Jaanjamtuufi Boranaalle d'ufte walti nyaanyessitee.	They came to create hostility between the Jaanjamtu and the Boran.
Kutaan kud'ani ka haftani kuta suni reeba isanti himée.	You from the remaining ten regions, I urge you to rush to rescue that (Boran) region.
Yo hin reemne lakiftani sangaan diimafi gurraachilleen nyaatamee.	If you fail to rescue them then you should know that also the red and the black oxen will be devoured.
Nami waan dansa argate deebie waan d'abu ufi hin seu.	He who has achieved a good thing and a fortune will never expect to loose again.
Ya garbummaan lafe seente, sabi keen nam ufi hin seu.	Because serfdom penetrated into their bones our masses never regarded themselves as human beings.
Nami garbummaan awwaalte deebie waan kau hin seu.	A person who was buried deep in servitude will never expect resurrection.
Nami yaabbate barate waan fardi buusu uf hin seu.	A person who has acquired the skill to ride, can never expect to fall off a horse.

²⁷ *Chaarterii* is of course a loan-word from English.

²⁸ The Oromo Abbo Liberation Front (OALF) is made up of Gabbra and Garre, i.e. people who were traditionally under Boran hegemony (see the *tirriso* relationship mentioned above); the OLF was mainly identified with the Boran. As mentioned earlier, the Oromo Abbo Liberation front was until recently called the Somali Abbo Liberation Front (SALF).

Fardi duri guddo qolchaa
yo isaati d'ibii irra hin ch'eu.

A horse that used to come first can never
imagine that another would outride it.

Eeli qallaan bisaan mijuu
waan arbi t'ut'u ufi hin seu.

A shallow well filled up with water, does
not expect that an elephant would suck it
dry.

Karaan duri guddo ballaa
waan debie duudu ufi hin seu.

A road that was once wide, does not
expect to be overrun by bush
encroachment.

Bilisoomte lafa kai!
Sab keen.
Beela'aan waan quufu
ufi hin seu.

Rise up, for you have achieved freedom!
Our masses.
A hungry person can never expect
to be satisfied.

Guddayyo biyy isa
gubbaat maqaan d'okate,
Oromo tuuta kinniisa.

Great is his land
in which his name was never heard,
Oromo like a swarm of bees.²⁹

Oromo guddo bade,
duri finni isa
oobru biyya qota
ch'ufti kaihim isa
qaampara-ginda baata
yo d'aqa galiisa.

In the past, the Oromo were oppressed,
their resources were mismanaged,
they cultivated other people's farms,
all their young people
carried the yoke and the plough
to and from the farm.

Qoraanin yo hin galin
ya d'ufte uleen isa.

If he failed to bring home firewood,
he was beaten up with his own staff.

Haga bariite hin d'unne
shaai bakkeeri isa.

Since daybreak he didn't drink
even a glass of tea.

Garaachan baduuti jira
yo kana mani isa.

Also his household
is perishing from hunger.

Ya d'od'ooqe bade
haalate d'amni isa.

His cheeks are hollow
and he is emaciated.

Arriin ya waraante
jaaruma maddi isa.

The hair has become white on his temple
because he is getting old before his time.

D'ukubuulle hi oolchani
keesa huji qotiisa.

Even when he was sick, he would'nt be
allowed to rest from farming.

Jaarsi jilbaan jal deema
oobru golgoliisa.

The old man walks on his knees
when he is weeding.

Faan gaala fakkaata
jilbi molmoliisa.

His worn out knees resemble
camel's feet.

Ol kau hin gaggaba
ilti bool godiisa.

He faints when he draws himself up;
his eyes are sunken.

²⁹ The metaphor "Oromo like a swarm of Bees" has many connotations: the Oromo are many and by working together in unity, they are also powerful. In North East Africa bees are often a symbol of wealth and power connected with kingship (Haberland 1965).

Ol kau hin dandau
duddi gad gogiisa.

Maddi isa keesa
damfi ch'och'obiisa,
ilme isa hin qarqaaru,
Oromo damfi isa.

Maqa irra jijjirani
Guddayyo biyy isa
gubbaat maqaan d'okate
Oromo tuuta kinniisa.

Yaadae biyya bae
Oromo ilmi isa.

Ka ilme saree hanqate
yo ch'ufa finni isa.

Tiitee t'ut'i hanqate
Oromo ch'inni isa.

Ch'ich'ite irra jige
ch'ibri haad' ilm isa.

Haad'a dootu much hod'a
diqqaan daaim isa.

Maqa irra jijjirani
Guddayyo biyy isa
gubbaat maqaan d'okate
Oromo tuuta kinniisa.

Sagale biyyaa d'aabdi
haati ilm isa,
galgala galattiin
buddeen³⁰ qarqar isa.

Diiram bisaan d'it'iif
durees ilm isa.
D'uud'uti manaat fit'ate
daaim saab isa
saati hin argattu
ta keesa guurisa.

Mana baranoota yaati,
durees ilmaan isa.
Oobru isa yaati,
Oromo ilmaan isa.

Maqa irra jijjirani
Guddayyo biyy isa

He cannot stretch himself to his full
length, because he has bowed too long
under the yoke.

From his temple
the sweat is trickling down;
it does not benefit his child,
the sweat of an Oromo.

It's name was changed
Great is his land
in which his name was never heard,
Oromo like a swarm of bees.

Frustrated by the oppression, the youths
of Oromo fled their home.

They were treated worse than underdogs
all their lives.

The mass killing of Oromo
was like the killing of flies and ticks.

Their mothers' plaits
were so worn that they fell off.

The little babies were sucking
their dead mothers' teats.

It's name was changed,
Great is his land
in which his name was never heard,
Oromo like a swarm of bees.

Cooking food for "others" is the
hard fate of the mothers of (Oromo) sons,
taking home in the evening
the leftover of *buddeena*.

She bathes them every morning,
the children of the rich.
At home the babies of her own womb
are infested with fleas,
because she does not have time
to remove them.

They go to school,
the children of their rich.
They go to work on the farm,
the children of Oromo.

It's name was changed,
Great is his land,

³⁰ *Buddeen* (an Amharic word), a kind of bread similar to chapati, or *anjeera* made from teff and is the staple food in large parts of Ethiopia.

gubbaat maqaan d'okate
Oromo tuuta kinniisa.

Yaa! ilmaan Oromoo
Odaan guddaan ka laf isa
lafti guddayyoon tam isa.

Lafaat gadi qabani
saba isa.

Rigani doomsan
qara isa.

D'aanani boochani
nafa isa.
Kees oolu d'owwani
mana isa.

Luugame duraan fiige
farda daanya isa.
Bututtu irraat jiise
damfi maddi isa.

Nama fardaan wal doggome
isanu him beettani akk isa
fardaati ch'e'e qolche
geessa, gar man hid'iisa.

Maqa irra jijjirani,
Guddayyo biyy isa,
gubbaat maqaan d'okate,
Oromo tuuta kinniisa.

Yaa, ilmaan Oromoo!
Yagae marroon isa
Yo lolaalle taate
mirgiillen kam isa.

Hinaafalle oolan
biyyeellen tam isa.

Hark namuutu hin jiru
finniillen kam isa.

Waaqayyoon d'agaefi
kad'a ilmaan isa.

Wal agarra koota
dabballe daadisa.

Waan gartan gumaacha
guyya gubbis isa.

in which his name was never heard,
Oromo like a swarm of bees.

Oh, the children of Oromo!
The large Oda is in his land,
that vast land is all yours.

Your broad masses
were bent to the ground.

His sharpness
was rendered blunt.³¹

His body was beaten up
until he cried.
He was prevented from,
living in his own house.

The horse of his master was harnessed
and trotted ahead.
The sweat from his temple
soaked his tattered clothes.

The man who competed with a horse,
even you could tell the result,
that the horse would win;
and then they took him to jail.

It's name was changed,
Great is his land
in which his name was never heard
Oromo like a swarm of bees.

Hey, children of Oromo!
Now his turn has come
Even if it means fighting
the 'right'³² will be his.

Even if it is contested
the land is still his.

He is no longer in the hands of "others"
and he will get self-rule.

The Almighty God has heard
the prayers of his children.

Come and let's rejoice together
marching along with *dabballe*.³³

Contribute whatever you can on the
occasion of his naming ceremony.³⁴

³¹ The meaning here is that the gifted and talented Oromo, or the Oromo elite, were never given equal opportunities with the Amhara in Ethiopia: they only got jobs below their qualifications.

³² Meaning "victory will be his", "he will triumph".

³³ *Daballe*, the first gada grade.

³⁴ Meaning the celebration of the birth and naming of the new Oromo nation.

Tana jal boqodd'a
Oda gaadis isa.
Borana Bareetum
obbolleeyan isa
waliin dabsa turan
warr kan ch'uf isa.

Maqa irra jijirani
Guddayyo biyy isa
gubbaat maqaan d'okate,
Oromo tuuta kinniisa.

D'iir ilmaan Oromoo
akkan akki isa.

Ya qotiin gad gossite
jilba hid'aan isa.

Mid'aan inni qotu
ch'ufti ka daanya isa.
Harka d'ibba keesa
tokko qofaat ka isa.
Yo t'aasan tokko badu
hisaabi³⁷ gama isa.

Guyya dua biti
boolti awwaal isa.
Yo d'ossaan awwaalani
hin qotani reefa isa.

Maqa irra jijirani.
Guddayyo biyy isa
gubbaat maqaan d'okate.
Oromo tuuta kinniisa.

Gaaltam durb Oromoo
akkan akki isa:
d'akaach biyya daakha
ch'ufti gaaltam isa.

Alaati gadi him baatu
hin argani fuul isa.

Namu irra him bau
waan gar fuud' isa
gaaltam garaati bade
jabaa qaroon isa

Here it is, rest under the
shade of his Oda tree.
Borana and Bareentum
are his brothers,
they too were oppressed for a long time,
(like) all of these people.

It's name was changed,
Great is his land,
in which his name was never heard,
Oromo like a swarm of bees.

The male child of Oromo
this was his living condition.

His knees and hips are bent
from his ceaseless digging.

The maize harvest from his labour,
belongs to his landlord.
Out of a hundred hands,³⁵
only one was his.
Even if only one *t'aasa*³⁶ was missing,
he had to pay it from his own share of
the crop.

For the day of his funeral,
the grave must be bought.
If it was secretly buried,
the corpse was exhumed.

It's name was changed.
Great is his land
on which his name was never heard,
Oromo like a swarm of bees.

The damsels of Oromo,
this was their condition of life:
all the damsels
ground maize for "others".

They dared not come out,
their face could not be seen.

Therefore no man could take notice of
them and take them in marriage. The
wombs of the young women could not
bear even if they were strong and clever.

³⁵ "One hand" is common expression for denoting "one quintal", that is 100 kilograms.

³⁶ *T'aasa*, a weight measure corresponding to gram or hectogram; a fraction of a *kimbotin*, a kilogram.

³⁷ *Hisaaba*, a Kiswahili word meaning "accountable for".

garbitiin yaamani
ya bade maqaan isa.

Maqa irra jijjiirani
Guddayyo biyy isa
gubbaat maqaan d'okate
Oromo tuuta kinniisa.

Oromoon ya gaargale:
abbaan olla isa ,
lubbuuf ch'ubbu qora,
d'ia bari isa,
sa'a tokkoch sirra baasa.
Ch'ubbuullen tam isa
him baasu hin lakkisa
lubbuullen tam isa.

Lubbu du'ut jira
ch'ubbuuti irra goomisa
ya gabayaati oofani
raada much hoosisa.

Warra sa'a kanaan jiru
d'ageetu boo isa?

Maqa irra jijjiirani
Guddayyo biyy isa
gubbaat maqaan d'okate
Oromo tuuta kinniisa.

Guddin laf Oromoo
an taae gimmida.

Waahel heddu qamna
simpirree, simpirra.

Ka nu tocha turan
guddo na qilt'ipa.

Maqaan biyy teenna
Harari Jijigaa.

They were called slavegirls (by Amhara)
and so their own names were lost.³⁸

It's name was changed
Great is his land
on which his name was never heard
Oromo like a swarm of bees.

The Oromo have suffered. Even the
"father" of their village (the "chief")³⁹
who solves disputes of murder and evil
deeds both evening and morning, will
charge you to surrender your only cow.
If he fails to impose a fine (and give you
damages), you may curse him
and let him face the consequences.

Thus he would rather accept
the curse than to die
thus driven to the market
was a suckling calf.

As for those depending on this cow,
can't you hear how they are crying?

It's name was changed
Great is his land
in which his name was never heard
Oromo like a swarm of bees.

I sat down to reckon
the greatness of Oromoland.

We have many companions
of different bird species.⁴⁰

Therefore I am very worried
by what they have done to us.

The names of our territories
are such like Harar and Jijiga.

³⁸ Slaves cannot have socially recognized children: their names are thus "lost" both to their mother's and their father's descent line.

³⁹ The *abbaa olla*, was an elder who the government had appointed as a "village headman" or administrative chief. To a large extent he functioned as "middleman" or mediator between the administration and the local people. He could act as a judge and impose fines. Here the poet talks about the corruption of the chiefs. If an Amhara had done wrong to you and you went to the chief to sue the Amhara in the hope of getting damages, the chief would demand a hefty fee; you must pay him your only cow. After you had paid, he may nevertheless not bother to consider your case. Then your only way to persuade the chief to take action, was to threaten him with a curse. If the chief took action against an Amhara, he would risk to be killed by the Amhara. Therefore he would rather "accept the curse", i.e. accept your challenge. Instead of summoning an Amhara to his court, he would accuse a completely innocent person and force him to pay money to the chief (who eventually would pay you). In this case the chief has chosen to accuse a man who has a cow with a calf. The poor man has to take the calf to the market and sell it and give the money to the chief. The poet asks his audience to consider the fate of the poor family: "can't you hear how they are crying?"

⁴⁰ That is, there are different ethnic groups who share a common cause and interest; "birds of the same feather".

Maqa irra jijjirani
Guddayyo biyy isa
yo qajeelchu baatan
waraana qillisa.

Fula heddu jira
fiit'aa firi isa.

Nagayaan ha jiraatu
d'iibuu dinqi isa.

An wa isan gaafadd'a
Oromoon d'iaate
haadachu ginda isa?

Maqa irra jijjirani
Guddayyo biyy isa
gubbaat maqaan d'okate
Oromo tuuta kinniisa.

Nu Oromoon gargari hin jirru
abbaaf obbolleesa firra.

Baale Harari duri fagoo
amm Moiyaleen wal bira.

Naga Nageelle Borana
Harari Baalet nuu hima.

Irre takka ha tolfannu
Waaqayyo guddaat nuu jira.

Ya isanti eebimne
d'aabattani hin jigina.

Warra nuun gama tokko
Oromo seetani
fuitani walti hin firina
dubbiin warra ch'utfi d'ara
fuitani walti hin himina.

Gurmu Oromoo nuu ch'aqasa
yaada nu qabnu isanti hima.

Armaan duraati walt hin daandinu
warra hamaati jiddu teen jira

Guddo nufa'acha ture,
urate duddi nu jira.

It's name was changed,
Great is his land,
if it will not be restored,
the spears will jingle.⁴¹

They are widely spread all over,
his kith and kin.

Let only peace prevail
within the inner and the outer rooms.⁴²

I am asking all of you:
is the Oromo going to
shave off his *ginda*?⁴³

It's name was changed,
Great is his land
in which his name was never heard
Oromo like a swarm of bees.

We, the Oromo are never apart
we are fathers and brothers and kinsmen.

Bale and Harari were once far away,
but now they are nearer to Moiyale.

Convey greetings of peace from Nageelle
of Boran to the people of Harari and Bale.

Let us unite our strength,
our Great God is there for us.

We have given you our blessings, now
that you have united, never waver.

That community⁴⁴ on our periphery
who assume that they too are Oromo,
never accept them as kinsmen,
their talk is false gossip,
never accept them or discuss with them.

Listen to us the united Oromos
we shall share our thoughts with you.

We never visited each other until now
because bad people came between us.

We've carried the Amharas' loads for too
long, but no more bruised backs.

⁴¹ Meaning there will be war and armed struggle to achieve independence.

⁴² That is within the neighbourhood and in the countryside around it.

⁴³ The *ginda* is a thick shock of hair worn as a sign of commitment and hope to achieve something that is much longed for, especially by one who has not achieved the status of having killed an enemy.

⁴⁴ Categories and groups of Somali origin, e.g. the Garri.

Warra male nu garboota
ch'ich'ite gurri nu jira.

D'iirs d'aante niiti fuuti.
Yo keeti uwwi nu jira?

Aanan seent'in hin murre feeti
fuud'an male lubbuuti jira.

Aanan billaan hin waraanne
gari fuud'aniifu jira?

Yo kanaayu lafti beela
daami garaacha nu jira.

Maqaan huddu abba keetiti
jaarsi abaarsa nu jira.

Ya gargari nu d'isani
mali wa waliin nu jira.

Galat Waaqa ya wal garre
maan tauu malle amm sila?

Naga tauu malle.
Nage!

Me ch'aqasi isant hima;
Fula dira d'ibaati jira
afaan dira si naa jira
waan laf jirani si natti hima.
Fula ati hin jirre na sii jira.
Waan sii hin galin na sii dida
narraan hin jiddu an sii kiba.
Yo akkana rakkoot jira?

Hiyo!

Yoosi hark wal nu qabachiisaa,
fuul wal nu barachiisaa,
murti teen baayyanachiisaa,
gurmu teen wal qabachiisaa,
sab keen gammachiisaa,
warra diin keenna mamsiisaa.

To them we were all slaves,
but no more tattered ears.⁴⁵

They beat the husband and rape his wife.
do you think, there are any of our wives
left?⁴⁶

They demand youghurt which is so thick
that knives cannot cut through it.
If you don't give them, they will not
spare our lives

Milk that a knife cannot penetrate, from
where can such a thing be produced?

Before, hunger was prevalent in our
country and our babies were starving.

We are called names such as 'your
father's shit', no more are our elders
being reduced to nothing because of such
insults.

Since we have lost our sense of direction,
we cannot attend to our own affairs.

Thanks to God we are restored to each
other, what undertaking shall we now
embark on?

We'd better embark on peace.
Let it be peace!

Now, listen to what I tell you.
Within the towns there are problems;
through your presence in the town you'll
inform me what they are talking about.
Where you are absent, I'll be there in
your place.
I'll take care of your doubts and worries,
I'll support you and never let you down.
Hence, can there be any problem?

No!

Then let us join hands
to acquaint ourselves with each other,
to rejuvenate our laws,
to rejoin our shoulders together,
to please our broad masses,
to astonish our enemies.

⁴⁵ Tattered ears; the meaning is that they have beaten you and maltreated you so that you have no human dignity left, you are worthless, reduced to nothing.

⁴⁶ This outrage and this suffering has deprived many Oromo women (perhaps all of them) of their human dignity: the oppressors' intention was to reduce the population to nothing. Hence the question: "do you think that there are any women left?"

Bisaan jalaati bubuusaa
hidda Oda rooba lachiisa.

Yo gar qeench' heddeenna d'a'ani
nam ch'uf nutti irra jira.

Nu sab Oromoo kana
waan biyyaa hin jirreeti nuu jira.

Afaan keen awwaalani,
nami dubbatu wa jira?

Raadio keesatti saati lama,
yo suni namu man wa jira?

Aada teen balleesani,
Waaqa male nami jira?

Nami walii gumaachani
laf teen male garu jira?

"Kooti" jed'ani nu yaamani.
D'ufu baanu lubbuut jira,
nu gad d'umnu nu d'aanani.
Jireeninu wa nuu jira?

Ado isiin nu ijjeefte
nami lakki jed'u wa jira?

Yo an hin himadd'a d'ufu
biirrolle warraat kees jira.

Afaan Amaara him beeku
nami na d'agau jira?

Yaa! ilmaan Oromoo
aadan teen tokko Gadaafu
nu wal hin d'abnu tanaafu
teesumti hin jirtu baraafu
hid'anne ha kaanu lafaafu
dandammi hin qabnu dabaafu
wal ha barbaannu tanaafu
d'ugaan d'abamte d'araafu
mataa ya mullate anaafu
ya bosonte baate,
gammeen dabballee lataafu.

Sprinkle water under it to enhance
the growth of the roots of the Oda tree
of all seasons.

If we were enumerated in a census we
would constitute the majority in the
country.

But we, the Oromo masses,
were treated differently from others.

Our language was effaced: was
there anyone left who could speak it?

Your radio was at eight o'clock.
Was there anyone at home at that time?⁴⁷

Our culture was obliterated: had it not
been for God, would anyone have
remembered?

People who were kept in bondage,
were there any except in our land?

"Come", they called us.
If we refused, we would be killed,
if we came, we would be flogged.
Was there really any hope of life for us?

Even if they killed us,
was there anyone who could stop them?

If I were to accuse them,
there they were in the office too.

I do not speak Amharic, was
there anyone who could understand me?

Oh! children of Oromo,
because of Gada, our culture is one,
because of this we shall not contend
ourselves,
because of the era, there'll be no rest,
because of the land, let's take up arms,
because of injustice, we've not been
spared,
because of this, let us unite,
because of falseness, the truth was lost,
according to me, the head is visible,
it is growing in rank,
the tonsure of *dabballe* is budding.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Transmissions in the Oromo language were at times when people did not have time to listen.

⁴⁸ *Daballe*, is the first grade in the gada system. Members of the *daballe* gada grade have a tonsure shaved on their heads. Here the poet compares the progress of OLF's struggle to the progression of men through the gada system; the struggle is in its beginning, in grade one where the shaved skull

Yaa! gos teen Gabra Garri
si dubbisa na d'ageeta?

Siif Borani tokkuma
atin akkan taatu beeta?

Abaabo akaaku heddu
marra bisaan waliin d'eedani.

Ado walumaan yaatanu
guyya tokko qub il wal keetani.

Guyya lama sadden tokko
giriftani gargari d'etani,
yo guyyaan afreeso gau
dachaatanani waliin teetani,
akkum kalee kaani
marra bisaan waliin d'eedani.

Warri horii hin godaana
qupantani gad hin teetani.

Namu walti isan hin qorre
gara kees wal him beetani.

Babaddum tan keesa
diiram arra waliin geetani.

Hori wal irra fuutani
barum heddu waliin d'eedani.

Intal wal irra fuutani
soddaa, wal irra ch'eertani.

Much'a soddaan kanke d'ale
boriyyaatee ijjeftani.

Ado inni abuyya jed'u
gorraatani bira deemtani;

Isan abbaa obboleessa
me lakkisa hameen kan.

Warra keen uf qaabadd'aa
me lakkisa deene tan.

Waan gurraan d'ageete dubbadd'i,
odu d'iisa seene tan.

Me onne teesan irra d'iqa
ch'ile eelee tan.

Oh our clansmen of Gabra and Garre!
I call your attention, do you hear me?

You and Boran are one,
did you know that?

Your many ancestors and grandfathers
have been sharing pasture and water.

Whilst you have been living together in
this way and yet one day you poke each
other in the eyes.

For about two or three days
you stampede and flee from each other,
but on the fourth day
you return to live together,
and just like it was yesterday,
you share pasture and water again.

People of livestock often migrate,
thus you never sit and settle down.

No one has arbitrated between you
inwardly you do not rhyme.⁴⁹

In such dire circumstances you
have survived together until this day.

You raid livestock from each other,
yet you were herding together for many
seasons.

You marry girls from each other,
as in-laws you revere each other.

The son of your brother-in-law,
yet the next day you just kill him.

As he is pleading for mercy, saying
"uncle", you slaughter him and go away.

You are affines and siblings,
so put an end to this evil.

Our people, remember who you are,
and put an end to this neglect.

Talk of that which you've heard
yourselves, stop talking out of hearsay.

Hey, clean your hearts
of such soot from a cooking pot.

is visible (the tonsure is budding), but it will progress and grow in prestige and maturity like men grow in rank and prestige as they proceed through the gada grades.

⁴⁹ Figuratively speaking it means "you are not in harmony with each other".

Oromoon ch'uf ya wal d'att'e
isanumaat eeget hafe.

Dalla keesani walti d'aaba
kaarra duucha seele tan.

Koota waliin yaana jed'aa
me lakkisa deeme tana.

Hamaan yaayyu isan koble
nurra d'iisa eebe tana.

Yaa! Gabra, Garrii, Boran,
ilmaan teesan wal fakkaati
maanin gargari beetani?

Isan abbaa obboleessa
maanif gargari d'eetani?

Duri hinum araaramtani
maanif arra gargari teetani?

Bineessi beekatani
nam hin nyaatu.

Walti deema wal hirbadd'a,
maanif wal bira deedani?

Irreen woma hin mid'aasitu,
tun waan ufuma beetani.

Ebelu raad tokko gosaa baase
lamaat fula tanteet hafa.

Yo sai tokko sii d'ale
walii shaai addeessa.

Ilmaan man isant aanu
teetin wal fakkeessa.

Yo arralle wa him beekin
isan yoom wa beettani?

Isan jaala sodda isan
isan ardaa olla isan
Oromiaa mogga isan
wal haatani gowwa isan
wallaala keesan d'owwa isan
ka waraan jed'u morma isan
ka wal isan haasisu fed'u
walii qabaa horda isan
Ibid hark isan guutani
waliit isan bobbaasani

All Oromo have reconciled
only you have been left behind.

Join in the construction of fences
to fill up this narrow gap between us.

Say, "Come let's march together".
and put an end to this lonesome walk.

The evil people have laughed at you,
relieve us of such a disgrace.

You Gabra, Garri and Boran,
your children all resemble each other:
how can you distinguish them?

You are fathers and siblings,
why did you withdraw from each other?

In the past you used to reconcile, why do
you stand aloof from each other today?

The beast that one of you has noticed,
cannot attack anyone amongst you.⁵⁰

Join hands and contribute to the help of
each other: why are you impoverished
among your own people?

As you know very well,
strength alone cannot redress the wrong.

If someone contributes one calf to his
lineage, he would still have two animals
left.

If one of your cows has calved,
offer milk for tea to each other.

Children of your neighbours next door,
let them look as healthy as your own.

If you haven't understood by now,
when would you then learn?

You are friends and affines,
you are close neighbours,
you live on the frontiers of Oromia,
you fight each other like fools,
restrain your ignorant people,
refute those who vote for war,
those who intends to bring war between
you, unite to hit him hard,
you have been fully armed and
you are marching together, mind you,

⁵⁰ A proverbial saying. It means that an enemy that you watch out for cannot catch you unawares. In this context the poet is warning the Gabra, Garri and Boran not to entertain the idea of compromising with the enemy, but instead asking them to reunite.

uf qaabattan male beeka
waliin isan hobbaasani.

Hagum d'alate uf arge
hamaan keesan arra rafe.

Ch'ariin Waach'ille Moiyale
hagum geetun ch'ufti lafe.

Fakkaatan Tullu him banne
yaayu kaar teesaniit hafe.

Daara teesan hin d'abini
ka gari tanaaf ch'iis d'abe.

Yo akk warri herregeeti
hundi keesan fiig d'abe.

Ka nam ch'ufaatu bisaani
ilmi keesan d'iig d'abe.

Maanguddo teenna me wal arga,
nageenni arra siif tase.

Waan qabdaniin wal qarqaara,
warr keen wal hin d'owwatina.

Yaada qabdan walt baasa,
gara wal hin d'offatina.

Gochi teesan oromuma
d'eeta jettani hin mormatina.

Isan abba obboleessa
warr keen walti hin onnatina.

Sori bilisummaa hin d'ufa,
jabaad'aa jal hin hollatina.

Mata gargari guuradd'a,
walti gadi hin qotatina.

Warra keesan wallaaltani,
nyaap warra hin tolfatina.

if you don't consider who you are you
will be forced to eliminate each other.

From the day they were born
your enemies have rested only now.

The plains of Waach'ille and Moiyale
are all over covered with bones.

People like Tullu⁵¹ are still
residing among you.

The fact that all of you haven't perished
yet, makes others unrelenting

If it were as they had hoped, none of the
people in your base would have
survived.⁵²

For them it was just like water,
when your sons lost all their blood.⁵³

Our elders held council together for the
present peace was disturbed because
of your negligence.

What you have, share with others,
our people never disoblige each other.

The thoughts that you have brought for-
ward, never reserve them in your belly.

Ethnically you are all Oromo,
for fear, never deny it .

You are all fathers and brothers, our
people, never be ill-disposed towards
each other.

A trickle of independence is coming.
Be strong and never tremble.

Draw back your heads from each other,
never be bent towards confrontations.

Failing to know your own people
never seek alliance with the aliens.

⁵¹ Tullu is the name of a man who had become known as a collaborator with the Tigre and a spy. He was exposed shortly before Jaarso composed this song. Tullu is thus (like) a "Gobana", the proverbial quisling.

⁵² Here and in the preceding verses Jaarso alludes to the intensification of the conflict between OLF and the TPLF/EPRDF in mid 1992. OLF cadres and sympathisers were harassed and intimidated and some thirty thousand OLF activists were held prisoners in large prison camps all over the country. There were also armed clashes between OLF soldiers and groups in the Tigre led coalition. In Borana there were clashes between OLF and bands of Garri.

⁵³ The song refers to the fact that the families who had lost their sons and husbands in the war in Eritrea or Tigre never got any compensation. In the jargon of the junta they died in the defense of "the motherland".

Daandi bilisummaa irra,
achiif achi hin qonyatina.

Akka waan nami loon taate,
buufattani wal hin gorra'atina.

Foon ya wal irra fitt'ani,
lafe wal hin qorratina.

Isan qofaat eegeti hafe,
daalleleen wa beekutti jirti,
gochi wal birra gussani,
ch'uftummaan wal eegutti jirti.

Bilisumma ufiiti jette
lubbu ufi wareegutti jirti.

Irre ufi walti naqatte
diin ufi aleelutti⁵⁴ jirti.

Eritereaan ya bilisoomte
jaaramte bareedutti jirti.

Waan akka isiin argatte suni,
Oromoon kajeelutti jirti.

Daandin waan suniin nu d'att'u
mid'aadde qajeelutti jirti.

Waan badan gul him badina
isiinu wareerutti jirti;

Ule ormi isanuun d'au
tokkole hin d'ukubsattani?

Dubbi nyaapi isaniin jed'u
tokkole hin qunqumfattani?

Jaalata keesan hunduma
dubbi isa hin fud'attani?

Haga wal gurgurattani
loon keesan hin gurgurattani?

Jiru biyya ol tutt'ani
teesan ol hin tutuqattani?

Kuno isanii guyyaase
na jala hin fud'attani?

Yo arraalle awwaallamtan
deebitani hin d'ud'ukattani
qub qabaadd'a.

From the path to independence,
never sway to and fro.

As if men were livestock, never
haul down each other for slaughter.

You've already eaten each other's flesh,
now don't scratch each other's bones.

It's only you who have been left behind.
Even the fools have begun to realize
things, even those clansmen who were
detached, are all waiting to rejoin again.

For the cause of their liberation
they are prepared to forfeit their lives.

They have united their forces
and are rooting out their enemies.

Eritrea has attained independence
it is developing impressively.

Something of that nature which it
attained, Oromo is longing for.

The path that would lead us there,
is hopefully becoming straight.

Never fall into line with the lost ones
for they are now panic-stricken.⁵⁵

The stick with which strangers lash you
does not one of you ever feel pain?

The way the enemies insult you
does not one of you ever resent it?

From all your sympathizers
do you never accept their advice?

When you sell amongst yourselves
do you ever sell your own livestock?⁵⁶

You have promoted the livelihood of
others, do you ever improve your own?

Now that I have made it clear to you
will you not follow my advice?

Even if you'll be buried today,
rest assured that you will never
ever resurrect again.

⁵⁴ *Aleeli* literary means "to root out".

⁵⁵ Refers to the intruders who took power by unjust means.

⁵⁶ Of course, something which Borana could never do. Cattle exchanges between Borana are channels of social relationships, never commercial sales. (Eds.)

Duaaf jireennilleen
waan Waaqayyoon
namaa laatu.

Haga jiru hin dammaqu
uumati keen daalle raatu.

Wanti nu mooatan kun
armaati hin d'alanne daatu.

Seeri isiin nuun bulchitu
diqoolle hin jiid'u kaafu.

Bari kaan kaanum fakkaata
aduunyan ch'ufti nuu taabu.⁵⁸

Wanni tataa'ani hin jirtu
garbumma jala bau yaadu.

Giseen⁵⁹ takkumma feesifti
sun waan ufiit fiiganiiniti.

Wanni jabdu fakkaatan kun
yo nu itti kaane nuu raafu.

Amma ya obsu dad'abe
garbumma uf irra waadu
ya ilkaan qarate beeka
hantuuti qat'urre nyaatufi.

Warri ganna d'ibba nu mooate
Amaarti warra arda tokko.

Warri sun buunan nukorte
Tigrean warra arda tokko
warri kooran dirr irra him buune
nu arda kud'ani tokko.

Uumati keen odu qaba
Ertreaan mootumma tokko
Guddinni isii milioon⁶³ tokko?

Nu warri kooran ch'illaafate
milioon soddomi tokko.

Death and life
are all what God Himself
has destined for everyone.

They never awake for ever more
our masses are but foolhardy.

This "thing" that rules us
was not born here.

The laws that they administer to us
are not even slightly damp but dry.⁵⁷

Every year is successively the same
our life on earth is but ever problematic.

There is no more idling away but to
direct thoughts to liberate yourselves.

The era demands unity but that is not
something which one can go about alone.

This thing which seemed invincible, it's
no more than *raafu*⁶⁰ if only we faced it.

Now patience is no longer tolerable,
it's time to find a solution to servitude,
know that the rat has gritted it's teeth,
so as to eat up the cats.

The people who ruled us for a hundred
years, the Amhara, are only from one
region.⁶¹

When they fell, those who mounted⁶² us
were the Tigre from one region,
while we whose back is always saddled,
are from eleven regions.

Are our masses aware
that Eritrea is a state,
with only one million inhabitants?

We whose backs have been depressed
by saddles, are thirty one million.

⁵⁷ Their laws are "dry" and thus dead; they do not even have the slightest "moisture" (life). Hence they have no legitimacy whatsoever; the law is a dead letter.

⁵⁸ *Taabu*, a neologism of a Kiswahili word meaning "problem".

⁵⁹ *Gise*, a neologism of an Amharic word meaning "present time" or "present period", "the present".

⁶⁰ *Raafu* is a plant. Its leaves can be cooked and eaten. The leaves become very soft when they are cooked. Here, the meaning of the trope is "something that can easily be overcome".

⁶¹ The poet suggests that the Amhara, who were the dominant people during the previous regimes, came mainly from one region.

⁶² Those who overthrew the government and took power of the country, i.e. the Tigre.

⁶³ *Milioon*, is a neologism. The highest number in Boran is *laggii*; one hundred thousand.

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