

3 Annexation & Assimilation: Koeugu & their Neighbours

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The lower Omo valley is home to about a dozen known groups that claim distinct ethnic identities (see Map 2, p. 14). Given the constant flux in the inter-group relations that shape temporal ethnic identities, it is never possible to know exactly how many there are (Table 1). The fluidity of interethnic relations is illustrated in the case of the Koeugu, whose existence was anything but obvious when I first visited their area in 1986. My interest at the time was focused on the Kara, and I spent some months in the village of Dus, which I thought was exclusively populated by the Kara. At one point, I visited the village of Kuchur, 30 kilometres to the north, where I was told Kara also lived, and I detected no difference between the people there and those at Dus, only that the people at Kuchur referred to themselves as Karo.

After my return to Japan, a linguist (Hieda, 1991) who had visited the same region alerted me to the existence of the Koeugu, who lived among the Kara, and I returned to the region in 1988 intending to study the relationship between these two groups.¹ My plan was to see this relationship from the vantage-point of the Kara; therefore, I went to stay at Kuchur. As I was to discover, this was a Koeugu village with only two Kara families in it. Dus, on the other hand, had a mixed population of Koeugu and Kara. The two groups were closely integrated in a relationship I call annexation, and the name Karo was used as a common designation. While I was there, this relationship broke down amidst conflict. As the distance between the Kara and the Koeugu widened through violence, the latter moved closer to the powerful Nyangatom, a former enemy of both Kara and Koeugu. This new

Table 1 Ethnic groups in the lower Omo valley

Self-name	Name given by others	Language group	Population	Subsistence E.	Reference
Koegu	Muguji	Surma (N-S)	500	A·P·H·G·F	Matsuda 1991: 17-32
Kwegu	Nyidi	Surma	200	A·P·H·G·F	Turton 1986: 148-171
Kwegu	Yidi	Surma	400	A·P·H·G·F	Turton 1986: 148-171
Me'en (Meken)	Bodi	Surma	3,000	A·P	Fukui 1979: 147-177
Mun/Muni (pl./s.)	Mursi	Surma	5,000	A·P	Turton 1976: 533-561
Omo Murle	Ngarich (Murle)	Surma	200	A·P·F	Tornay 1981b: 33-60
Nyangatom	Bume	Nilotic (N-S)	5,000	A·P·G	Tornay 1981a: 91-117
Kara	Karo	Omotic (A-A)	1,000	A·P·H	Matsuda 1991: 17-32
Gomba	Gomba	Omotic	50?	A·P·H	Matsuda 1991: 17-32
Hamar	Hamar	Omotic	15,000	A·P	Lydall 1976: 393-437
Beshada	Beshada	Omotic	?	A·P	Lydall 1976: 393-437
Bana	Bana	Omotic	11,000	A·P	Bender 1976: 1-23
Dassanetch	Geleb	Cushitic (A-A)	15,000	A·P·F	Almagor 1978

Note: 1 The Gomba speak Kara, and the Beshada speak Hamar now.

2 Populations are approximately estimated.

3 Abbreviations are as follows:

N-S; Nilo-Saharan Super family; A-A; Afro-Asiatic Super family, A; Agriculture, P; pastoralism, H; hunting, G; gathering, F; fishing.

relationship seemed to be a step in the direction of assimilation of the Koegu by the Nyangatom.

The Koegu-Kara clash differs in four respects from the usual conflict among pastoralists in the lower Omo. Firstly, there is no memory of earlier conflict between the two groups. Secondly, it does not involve cattle-raiding, since the Koegu have no cattle and depend on cultivation, fishing, hunting and gathering. Thirdly, territory is not involved, since the Koegu are not seeking to expand. Fourthly, this is not a conflict between two separate political entities, but rather a division of the Karo into two rival ethnic groups. In this essay, I will seek to clarify the reasons for the division and the role of conflict in balancing interethnic relations.

During my stay in the lower Omo region, from August 1988 to March 1990, I stayed for 12 months in Kuchur, where 350 out of 500 inhabitants were Koegu. I also spent a few weeks each in other Koegu hamlets, as well as in Kara and Nyangatom settlements. I followed closely the process of the conflict, which continued after I left. I sought the views not only of the Koegu people, but of the Kara and Nyangatom as well. I attended meetings held in and outside the area. Local government officials were concerned about the conflict, and I discussed it with them, and also consulted some of their records. Kara was the language most often used on such occasions, while Koegu was used less frequently because even Koegu coming from outside the region did not understand this language, nor did the Nyangatom.

Koegu: people of the forest and river

The Koegu belong to the Surma group of languages. Because they are called Muguji by the Kara, they appear by that name in several ethnographic studies (Bryan, 1945: 196; Bender, 1975: 37, 1976: 10, 467; Turton & Bender, 1976: 535; Lydall, 1976: 393; Turton, 1986: 273). They are one of the smallest groups in the lower Omo, and remain among the least known. Their number in the area of my research did not exceed 500. There are other smaller Koegu groups living among the Bodi and the Mursi, which have little or no contact with the group I describe here. One reason for the Koegu's low profile is their habit of introducing themselves to outsiders as Karo, the name they share with the Kara. They were ordinarily in the shade of the Kara.

Their settlements are scattered in the riverine forest along the Omo River. Four to seven families cluster in small hamlets, and

acquire their food and commodities within the space of a few kilometres. However, when I was among them in 1988, about 350 people congregated around the village of Kuchur, near the junction of the Omo and its tributary the Mago, because they feared an attack by the Mursi, their northern neighbours. Another group of about 150 Koegu lived in the village of Dus with the Kara, and a few more families lived in Labuk, another Kara village four kilometres south-east of Kuchur.

More than 70 per cent of the food consumed by the Koegu in Kuchur consisted of agricultural products obtained from river-bank cultivation (Matsuda, 1988). The main crop is sorghum. Some maize is also planted in the flood plain after the land dries. The seed and leaves of cow-peas and green grams are mixed with hard porridge of sorghum. Though they have two or three grain harvests in a year, they do not produce enough for their subsistence. Fishing is a crucial activity for the Koegu, and fish becomes their main food in the off-crop season. Techniques for preserving fish, such as drying and smoking, are not used. This is partly because it is easy to catch fish with harpoons in shallow pools during the rainy season. Men and children often go there to spear fish when the pools begin to dry. They sometimes spend a night there and eat many fish, but they seldom bring a catch back home. They also fish with hook and line in the main course of the Omo, but many people do not have hook and line. The hand-to-mouth nature of the Koegu economy is revealed in their fishing activity — that is, immediate obtaining and immediate consumption.

Honey-gathering is important in two aspects: economic and spiritual. Grown men set beehives on trees, the number of which sometimes is more than fifty for each person. They can get honey two or three times a year after the flowering season. The total is 40 to 80 kilograms for each person, quite enough for a year's consumption of a family. Honey is eaten with porridge of sorghum. Some honey is sold for money in markets, though the Koegu rarely go to town. Honey is given to trade partners in neighbouring groups, and some people brew honey wine for guests. To treat elders and close friends to a party like this is considered to be a good custom. The elders invited to the party bless the host by blowing wine through their mouth on his face. It is said that the more urine a guest discharges in the house, the more honey there will be in the host's beehives the following season.

In his discussion of the symbiotic relationship between a group of Koegu and the Mursi, Turton (1986) regards the hunting skills

of the former as an important factor in that relationship, in the sense that the Koegu are valued by the Mursi as a source of ivory and leopard skins. Indeed, the Koegu at Kuchur are regarded by their neighbours as having an uncanny knowledge of the forest and the animals living there, as well as for their skill in hunting and trapping them. However, the value of their knowledge and skills has diminished because the sale of ivory has been banned by the Ethiopian government, and the Koegu hunt animals for food with old rifles. I recorded only 12 incidents of animal shooting in a period of 79 days. Given the size of Kuchur's population (350), this is not enough to qualify the Koegu as hunters.

Wild plants are used more in the production of material culture than for food. Except for some iron parts used in utensils and tools, the Koegu make all their utensils from the products of the forest. The largest and most unique product of the Koegu is a dug-out canoe made from the trunk of the wild fig-tree. The Koegu also make clay pots for cooking. Canoes and pots are important items in Koegu trade with their neighbours along the Omo, the Kara and the Nyangatom.

A conspicuous feature of the Koegu economy that sets this group apart from its neighbours is that they have no cattle. The people in Kuchur own a few goats and sheep, but they entrust them to the care of their kinsmen in Dus, who are more inclined to herding. The Koegu economy and way of life and their sense of economic values contrast sharply with those of their pastoralist neighbours. This contrast is the underlying reason for the unique social position of the Koegu in the lower Omo, which is described in the next section. In this connection, I would like to stress the role which fishing and hunting-gathering groups have played in the regional economy. According to Sobania: 'For all the pastoralists of the Lake Turkana basin, the hunting, gathering and fishing communities in their midst represented a possible refuge upon which the impoverished and destitute members of their societies could fall back' (Sobania, 1988: 45).

The case of the Koegu is somewhat different. The Koegu are not simply a refuge for the neighbouring pastoralists in times of crisis. Rather, the Koegu move in and out of close relationships with their neighbours, depending on the change of natural and social conditions. This is a process of group interaction in the Lower Omo, where very small groups and the larger pastoralists have coexisted; a process that also affects ethnic identity formation. At the time of my study, the relationship of the Koegu with the pastoralists was shifting from what I call 'annexation'

by one group, the Kara, towards 'assimilation' by another, the Nyangatom. The shift, I believe, represents the Koegu main strategy for survival, as well as the pastoralists' approach towards the small fishing, hunting and gathering groups such as the Koegu (Matsuda, 1991).

Koegu and their neighbours

The Kara, a group that numbers about 1000, were formerly more like brothers of the Koegu rather than neighbours. In fact, a bond partnership between families of both groups was often compared to brotherhood by themselves. Both groups believe that the Koegu are the original inhabitants of the Omo area, and that the Kara immigrated to this place later. The Kara have the following oral tradition of how they came to stay at the riverain area.

In former days, the people of the Kara lived in the mountainous area where the Bana live now. One day an ox was missing and a man followed its footprints. He discovered the big water [Omo River]. This is the place which they call Keske now [near Dus]. Because he found it a good place to plant sorghum, he went back at once to his village and had a talk with the villagers. Then, all the villagers decided to move to this place. Though the Muguji [Koegu] had already settled there at that time, they did not plant sorghum. So the Kara taught cultivation to the Muguji.²

These two groups are not distinguished from each other by appearance, body ornaments, clothing, hair-style, economic activity or anything else. While the Kara persist in regarding themselves as pastoralists, they have no cattle, only a few goats and sheep, and subsist mainly by cultivation. The two groups lived in the same hamlets, spoke to each other in Kara and fought together against outsiders. The partnership called *belmo* in Koegu and *bel* in Kara characterized their merger into one political unit under the name Karo. Exchange of gifts made the partnership strong and enduring. For example, if a Koegu gave sorghum or honey to his Kara *belmo*, the Kara gave a goat, sheep, cotton cloth, coffee or bullets to his Koegu partner. There was no fixed time or rate of exchange, but they remembered well when and what was given and received. Firearms were also given to the Koegu in this way. A Koegu elder told me:

Some years before, the Kara loaned rifles to the Koegu and we shot elephants and leopards with it. The Koegu gave ivory and leopards' skins to the Kara *belmo*. After that, the rifle was given to us in return for those gifts. The rifles which the Koegu have now are obtained like this.³

I would like to note that *belmo* is not a relationship of equity. From the Koegu side, not only goods but also labour power were offered to their Kara partners. For example, the Koegu slashed fields and watched over birds for their partners in the farming season. The Kara did not reciprocate. Moreover, since the Kara claimed possession of all the arable land along the Omo, the Koegu presumably had only the right to cultivate their partners' land. Obviously, the Kara were dominant in this sense.

Taboos and disdain demarcated the respective positions of the two groups more distinctively than the economic aspects mentioned above. Not only intermarriage, but sexual contact between them was taboo. They believed their flesh might rot if they had sexual intercourse. For the same reason, it was prohibited to drink water, sorghum beer or honey wine from the same bowl. This meant they never enjoyed drinking together in a circle, though they lived in the same hamlet. In addition, the Kara called the Koegu 'stinking people' who usually ate fish, and 'poor people' who had no cattle. The Kara expressed even stronger feelings of contempt, saying, 'The Muguji are baboons'. I would describe the relationship between the Koegu and the Kara as one of annexation of the former by the latter. The two groups were regarded as one by outsiders. Their spatial territories overlapped. They acted as one group against enemies. The ethnic boundary between them, however, was rigidly maintained through taboos and disdain, and they never amalgamated into one ethnic group.

The Nyangatom are an agro-pastoral group numbering about 5000 people, living on the western side of the Omo. The influx of automatic rifles in the 1980s triggered a series of clashes in the region, which resulted in a chain reaction of group displacement in the Omo basin. The heavily armed Turkana drove the Nyangatom eastward, and the latter in turn, having obtained arms from the Toposa, forced the Dassanetch (pop. 15,000) and the Mursi (pop. 5000) to cross from the western side of the Omo to the east. Nyangatom society is described in detail by Tornay (1979, 1981a). I shall briefly mention their changing relationship with the Koegu.

The Koegu and Kara fought together against the Nyangatom until 1988. According to Tornay, the Nyangatom clashed three times with the other two in the 1970s (1979: 97). Though they were enemies, however, the Koegu were strongly influenced by the Nyangatom. I shall mention here just a few instances of this. During my stay in Kuchur, three Koegu girls got married to the Nyangatom. In all three cases, these girls were carried off from

Table 2 Koegu songs

Language	Number
Koegu	5
Kara	14
Nyangatom	58
Bana	9
Hamar	2
Mursi	13
Dassanetch	12
mixed	5
Total	118

Note: See (Matsuda 1992: 59).

the village and taken to their husbands' relatives. It was after some weeks that the negotiation for a bride price started with the girls' relatives. It seemed to me that the Koegu parents were pleased with their daughters' marriages to the Nyangatom. I did not observe the reverse, that is, Koegu men marrying Nyangatom women. Possibly, this is because the bride price of the Koegu is much lower than that of the Nyangatom. A Koegu man pays one rifle and some goats and sheep to the bride's relatives, while the Nyangatom man continues to pay cattle, goats and sheep for the rest of his life.

Such intermarriage is not a recent development. In fact, Koegu and Nyangatom used to live together earlier in Kopriya. One of the territorial sections of the Nyangatom, named Ngikumama, was closely associated with the Koegu, and some Nyangatom of this section are said to speak Koegu even now. All of the Koegu in Dus and the male adults in the Kuchur group were fluent speakers of Nyangatom. They said they learned it from the Nyangatom as boys, when they were working as herdsmen.

Another aspect of Nyangatom cultural influence is seen in the dances and songs of the Koegu. I recorded 118 songs which they sing in dancing. Fifty-eight of these were sung in the Nyangatom language, while only five were sung in Koegu (Table 2). Most of the Nyangatom songs were sung in dances where the youths jump high in Nyangatom fashion. The subject of most of these songs was cattle. On the other hand, most of the Koegu songs were about animals and birds (Matsuda, 1992). I collected 12 age-set names at Kuchur in 1989. Six of these were the same as Nyangatom age-set names which Tornay noted in his paper (1981a: 166-7). The order of these six names was nearly identical to that of the Nyangatom. However, Tornay states that among

other Nyangatom territorial sections (he collected them in the Kibish area) names do vary to some extent. We may therefore assume that the Nyangatom and the Koegu have a similar age system. It is possible that the culture traits of the Nyangatom were introduced to the Koegu by way of the Kara. Nevertheless, I have no doubt that these cultural similarities promoted Koegu assimilation by the Nyangatom.

In addition to intermarriage, language and other cultural affinities, the Koegu began to develop bond partnerships with the Nyangatom during the conflict with the Kara discussed below. The Koegu also call their Nyangatom bond *belmo*, but it is a different relationship from their bond with the Kara. The Nyangatom are not owners of cultivating fields, nor do they exact labour from the Koegu. Moreover, apparently there is no taboo or disdain towards the Koegu on the part of the Nyangatom. Thus, while the Koegu and the Kara have a vertical superordinate relationship, the Koegu and the Nyangatom have a horizontal co-ordinate relationship. Moreover, while the Koegu have maintained the ethnic boundary that separates them from the Kara, they seem to want to remove the boundary that distinguishes them from the Nyangatom. That is why I see this relationship as potential assimilation, and distinguish it from the relationship the Koegu had with the Kara, which I see as annexation.

The Kwegu and their neighbours

The name Kwegu — spelled with a *w* rather than an *o* — appears in some ethnographic and linguistic works (Bender, 1976: 37; Muldrow, 1976: 606), but little is known about them. Turton's (1986) study offers a glimpse of their social organization and relationship with the Mursi. According to him, about 200 Kwegu live in Mursi territory and another 400 live among the Bodi, north of Kuchur. The Mursi (pop. 5000) are cattle herders with a strong pastoralist ethos. They move from pasture-land to the riverain area, which is infested by tsetse-flies but suitable for cultivation. Seasonal movement is indispensable to their way of life and to their identity as herders. Consequently, the Mursi depend on the technology and knowledge of the Kwegu to live in the riverain area. For example, the Kwegu hunt elephants and leopards, make and use fish harpoons and dug-out canoes, control canoes during the dangerous rainy season, etc. As in the case of the Koegu-Kara relationship, the Kwegu and Mursi

ethnic boundaries are maintained through taboos on marriage and other social distinctions. The Kwegu do not depend economically on the Mursi, but they need strong patrons to protect them from other Mursi.

Turton defines the Kwegu-Mursi connection as a patron-client relationship which is a means of domination, and speculates that it was formed initially to provide the Mursi with ivory and animal skins. His conclusion is that the ethnic identity of the Kwegu has been formed through their relationship with the Mursi. Domination connotes essentially a political, that is, a power relationship; while the Koegu-Kara connection is more than that. I prefer to call it annexation, meaning that one group joins another in a closely united but subordinate capacity.

What differences, if any, are there between the Koegu-Kara and Kwegu-Mursi cases, and what do such differences reveal? To begin with, while the Kara also regard themselves as herders, they do not own cattle, only some goats and sheep, and they live in the riverain area throughout the year. They have fully adapted to the environment of river and forest. All the men keep beehives in the forest, and are able to control a canoe on the swollen river. In short, Kara economic dependence on the Koegu became negligible, and their relationship lost its material substance and became a mere shell. It is not surprising, therefore, that it could easily disintegrate, as it did recently. Very little is known of the Kwegu who live among the Bodi. Fukui's essay in this volume provides some information (p. 33).

Koegu-Kara conflict

In October 1988, at Jinka, the capital of South Omo Administrative Region, a Kara student told me the Kara were quarrelling with the Koegu in Dus, and that the Kara had ordered the Koegu living in Dus to move to Kuchur. I heard later that leaders of the two groups had quarrelled over the distribution of goods brought to them by aid organizations and the government of Ethiopia. This was the immediate cause for the conflict whose course is described below.

On 10 December 1988, a Nyangatom man was shot dead by a Dassanetch at Kundama, in Kara territory along the Omo. The killing took place in the sorghum field of a Kara leader, who was the killer's bond partner. The Kara let the Dassanetch escape in order not to be caught by the Nyangatom. That night, hundreds of Nyangatom warriors assembled in Kadakuchin, a

small settlement on the bank opposite Kundama, to plan an attack against the Kara. The Koegu in Kuchur who heard this news took refuge immediately in the forest on the east side of the Omo, fearing the Nyangatom would attack them as well. This shows how the Koegu identified with the Kara. However, the Nyangatom attacked neither the Kara nor the Koegu.

In May 1988, the Nyangatom had been raided by the Turkana and were forced to evacuate the area along the Kibish River, which was important to them for cultivation and grazing. The Nyangatom moved their camps eastward to the Omo, and many of them were staying in Kadakuchin with their herds when that incident occurred. While I was in Kadakuchin, the Nyangatom told me they intended to drive the Kara out of the Omo area. For the Nyangatom, the Kara were not a potential partner for coexistence. The latter also regarded themselves as pastoralists, and the two groups had a serious fight in the 1970s. (Tornay, 1979: 97). It appears the Nyangatom intended to ally with the Koegu and occupy the riverain area by displacing the Kara. On their part, the Koegu needed the support of a strong ally in an armed conflict against the Kara. Thus, the Koegu and the Nyangatom both had good reasons to form the close relationship described below.

On 9 February 1989, the Koegu and the Nyangatom held a big feast in Kuchur to celebrate their alliance. In the evening, about 70 Nyangatom came to Kuchur and began to dance with the Koegu girls. Honey wine was prepared for the Nyangatom guests in some houses. On 10 February, trouble occurred in Dus, and the news reached Kuchur within the day. A Koegu had attacked a Kara with a knife, and was himself shot by the Kara. The feast in Kuchur converted to a meeting to plan reprisals. All the villagers and visitors got ready to fight under the leadership of a Nyangatom elder. The Koegu and the Nyangatom seemed to further strengthen their solidarity after this day. Many Nyangatom came to visit the bond partners they had made in Kuchur during the feast. They brought sacks of sorghum and maize loaded on donkeys. In contrast, the break between the Koegu and the Kara became definite after the incident of 10 February. The last Kara family left Kuchur before the feast.

In June 1989, the administrator of Hamar *awraja* (district) came to Murle (45 kilometres south of Kuchur), and talked with the leaders of the Koegu, the Kara and the Nyangatom about the trouble. According to the administrator, whom I interviewed later, the following agreement was concluded. The Koegu who had been living in Dus were to move to Kuchur. The area higher

than Labuk was to be Koegu territory, while the Dus area, lower than Labuk, belonged to the Kara. However, the Koegu from Dus did not move to Kuchur, but established a new settlement in Galgida two months later. Galgida is 10 kilometres downstream of Dus, and near the Nyangatom border. The reason why the Dus group did not move to Kuchur was that there was no arable land there to be distributed to them. Moreover, the Dus group had increased the relative importance of pastoralism in their economic life while living with the Kara, and this made them hesitate to move to Kuchur. Kuchur was more suitable to the original way of life of the Koegu, which depended on fishing, honey-collecting and river-bank cultivation.

We have to take into consideration also the viewpoint of the local administration. Kara territory consisted of two *kebele*, the smallest administrative unit in Ethiopia. One was the Dus *kebele*, which included the habitat of all the Kara and the Dus Koegu group. The other was the Labuk *kebele*, which included the Kuchur group of the Koegu. Both *kebele* were in the Hamar *awraja*. The administrator of the *awraja* suggested to the people that the arrangement be changed to comprise the Dus *kebele* with all the Kara in it, and the Kuchur *kebele* with all the Koegu, so that the two groups would be separated administratively. The Koegu did not agree, believing that if they were grouped into one *kebele* they would get less from the government in terms of aid, and particularly firearms and ammunition. Moreover, the Koegu hoped to be included in Kurraz *awraja* where the Nyangatom belonged. The Koegu always complained that the administrator of Hamar *awraja* was a native Hamar, and favoured the Kara because of their close links with the Hamar.

The Koegu from the Dus group moved to Galgida after all. This shows they preferred unification with the Nyangatom, rather than a distinct political unit of all the Koegu. The Dus group would move again in December 1989 from Galgida to Ukuule, which is in the midst of the Nyangatom territory. In the first half of 1989, the conflict between the Koegu and the Kara was not very serious. There was plenty of rain in 1988, and there was a wide arable flood plain at the beginning of 1989. In contrast, the rainy season of 1989 — March to May — was poor. Consequently, there was a tense atmosphere between the groups on the reduced flood plain when the cultivation season started in October.

On 12 November, a Gomba man living in Labuk came to Kuchur to see the field which he had cultivated the previous season. He wanted to cultivate his field again. Because the

Gomba are regarded as part of the Kara by the people in Kuchur, the man was thrashed with a stick by a Koegu in front of the village. Some elders intervened and settled the quarrel; however, tension between the two groups reached a new peak. A Koegu man from Labuk came to Kuchur to report that the Kara in Labuk threatened to burn Kuchur. In Kuchur, people decided to send women and children to the forest the same day, and they sent a messenger to the Nyangatom villages to ask for help. After sunset, they held a meeting and war-dances outside the village. The Kara did not attack Kuchur, because they knew the power of the Nyangatom, who were armed with automatic rifles. Some Nyangatom warriors came to stay permanently at Kuchur after this incident.

On 23 December, a Koegu elder was thrashed by some Kara in his field between Labuk and Kuchur. After the elder fled to Kuchur, the two groups had an exchange of shooting that lasted the whole day. A young Koegu was wounded in the leg in this fight. Two days later, some Koegu from Kuchur, including women and children, on their way to Galgida to seek refuge, were attacked by Kara at Laapa, inside Nyangatom territory. One Kara was shot dead. The Dus group now left Galgida and moved to Ukuule, further inside Nyangatom territory. Two months later, the people of Kuchur decided to leave their village until the next cultivation season. They departed, leaving most of the harvest of that season in the fields and granaries. Some went to Kopriya, 20 kilometres west of Kuchur, and the rest to Lorutuk, 40 kilometres south. Both places are in Nyangatom territory.

Conclusion: the drifting ethnicity of the Koegu

Group coalitions of the type described here play an important material and political role in the survival strategies of the inhabitants of the lower Omo and, as Sobania (1988) notes, elsewhere as well. As suggested in the case of the Koegu and the Kwegu, another function served by the ties formed between such minor groups and their larger and more powerful neighbours might be to reinforce the ethnic identities of both partners. These relationships are based on the 'consent', as Turton (1986: 158) put it, of the minor group to be stigmatized and subordinated. In return, the subordinate groups receive protection. Such a relationship can last only as long as the underlying reasons for it exist. The Koegu-Kara union disintegrated because it no longer had a *raison d'être*. By contrast, the developing Koegu-Nyangatom union

resulted from the need of the Nyangatom pastoralists to find a partner in an area where they had recently moved in large numbers, and the permanent need of the Koegu for protection.

I would like to reconsider from this point of view some factors which caused the disruption of the Koegu-Kara relationship.

1 There was a reciprocal dependence based on the bond partnership between the two groups. It was functioning well and stabilized their connection while ivory was an important item in local trade in the Lower Omo. The Koegu received protection from the Kara against other groups, such as the Nyangatom and the Mursi. After the ban on hunting elephants, the *belmo* partnership lost its substance.

2 The Koegu and the Kara had a common enemy in the Nyangatom, at least till the 1970s. The situation changed after the Nyangatom obtained automatic rifles and the military balance shifted accordingly. The Kara could no longer defend the Koegu against the Nyangatom.

3 The Dus group of the Koegu, who were no longer regarded as foragers, began to graze their goats and sheep on the west side of the Omo, while the Kara did the same in the east. An element of competition now entered their relationship, which also involved arable land.

The long-standing relationship between the Koegu and the Kara was broken, but this does not necessarily mean the Koegu were asserting their identity independently of ties with any group. Their alliance with the Nyangatom was consolidated through the conflict, but this was not the first close contact between the two groups. They had been associated with each other for a long time, and their new relationship was formed in this historical context. Assimilation, as I have called the Koegu-Nyangatom relationship, was thus strengthened and promoted through the conflict. This relationship appeared to be a step in a process leading to the Koegu becoming part of the Nyangatom.

Notes

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2 Recorded in an interview with Lale Aila, an elderly Kara at Dus, on 11 February 1987.

3 Recorded in an interview with Aiko, a middle-aged Koegu at Kuchur, on 4 July 1989.

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4 The Evolution of Ateker 'New Model' Armies: Jie & Turkana

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One stereotypical image of Eastern Africa is that of a stalwart herdsman leaning on his spear (never his musket or rifle!), as he gazes stoically into the distance. Indeed, a number of valuable studies have convincingly demonstrated that firearms played little if any role in the military organization or tactics of many East African pastoral and semipastoral communities (Fukui & Turton, 1979). And yet, over the past couple of decades, significant numbers of those same communities have become increasingly reliant on large stores of rifles, and those weapons have made a profound impact on social, economic and military structures. This has contributed, in turn, to a tragically endemic climate of violence which has beset many parts of the region.

This chapter suggests that in some cases the process of militarization among pastoral peoples has roots going back a century. This vital era of transition, corresponding to the period when outside intruders first appeared in this region, has received relatively little scholarly attention. Specifically, this chapter will investigate the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century experience of two closely related Ateker communities of the eastern Nilotes, the Jie and the Turkana, in order to determine why each was to develop a military structure and an attitude towards outside military technology and organizational forms sharply different from the other.¹ In the process of this analysis, it is hoped that some light may be shed on broader processes of military transition that have been going on in this region for some time, and continue today.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, many ancestral Jie were part of a rather loose 'cultural confederation' of disparate peoples living in central Karamoja of Uganda. Some, mainly