

THE SOUTHERN MARCHES OF IMPERIAL ETHIOPIA

Essays in History and Social Anthropology

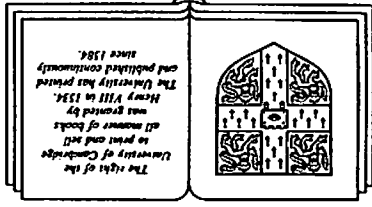
DONALD DONHAM

Department of Anthropology, Stanford University

and

WENDY JAMES

Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Oxford



CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
CAMBRIDGE
LONDON NEW YORK NEW ROCHELLE
MELBOURNE SYDNEY

OTHER BOOKS IN THE SERIES

- 4 The Nigerian Military: A Sociological Analysis of Authority and Revolt
1960-1967 Robin Luckham
- 6 Labour in the South African Gold Mines, 1911-1969 Francis Wilson
- 9 Dependence and Opportunity: Political Change in Ahafo John Dunn and A. F. Robertson
- 11 Islam and Tribal Art in West Africa René A. Braumann
- 14 Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel Emmanuel Obichina Donald
- 15 Saints and Politicians: Essays in the Organisation of a Senegalese Peasant Society Donald
- 17 Politics of Decolonisation: Kenya Europeans and the Land Issue 1960-1965 Gary Wasserman
- 18 Muslim Brotherhoods in Nineteenth-century Africa B. G. Martin
- 19 Warfare in the Sokoto Caliphate: Historical and Sociological Perspectives Joseph P. Smailone
- 20 Liberia and Sierra Leone: An Essay in Comparative Politics Christopher Clapham
- 23 West African States: Failure and Promise: A Study in Comparative Politics John Dunn
- 24 Africaners of the Kalahari: White Minority in a Black State Margo and Martin Russell
- 25 A Modern History of Tanganyika John Iliffe
- 26 A History of African Christianity 1950-1975 Adrian Hastings
- 27 Slaves, Peasants and Capitalists in Southern Angola 1840-1926 W. G. Clarence-Smith
- 28 The Hidden Hippopotamus: Reappraisal in African History: The Early Colonial Experience in Western Zambia Gwyn Prins
- 29 Families Divided: The Impact of Migrant Labour in Lesotho Colin Murray
- 30 Slavery, Colonialism and Economic Growth in Dahomey, 1640-1960 Patrick Manning
- 31 Kings, Commoners and Concessionaires: The Evolution and Dissolution of the Nineteenth-century Swazi State Philip Bonner
- 32 Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism: The Case of Sayyid Mahammad 'Abdille Hasan Said S. Samatar
- 33 The Political Economy of Pondoland 1860-1930: Production, Labour, Migration and Chiefs in Rural South Africa William Beinart
- 34 Volkstaat: Class, Capital and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism 1934-1948 Dan O'Meara
- 35 The Sciller Economies: Studies in the Economic History of Kenya and Rhodesia 1900-1963 Paul Mosley
- 36 Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa Paul E. Lovejoy
- 37 Anticlericalism: Revolutionary Leadership and People's War Patrick Chabal
- 38 Essays on the Political Economy of Rural Africa Robert H. Bates
- 39 Feshas and Nigerians: The Incorporation of a Yoruba Kingdom, 1890s-1970s J. D. Y. Peel
- 40 Black People and the South African War 1899-1902 Peter Warwick
- 41 A History of Niger 1850-1960 Finn Fuglestad
- 42 Industrialization and Trade Union Organisation in South Africa 1924-55 Jon Lewis
- 43 The Rising of the Red Shawi: A Revolt in Madagascar 1895-1899 Stephen Ellis
- 44 Slavery in Dutch South Africa Nigel Worden
- 45 Law, Custom and Social Order: The Colonial Experience in Malawi and Zambia Martin Chanock
- 46 Salt of the Desert Sun: A History of Salt Production and Trade in the Central Sudan Paul E. Lovejoy
- 47 Marrying Well: Status and Social Change among the Educated Elite in Colonial Lagos Kristin Mann
- 48 Language and Colonial Power: The Appropriation of Swahili in the Former Belgian Congo 1880-1938 Johannes Fabian
- 49 The Shell Money of the Slave Trade Jan Hogendorn and Marion Johnson
- 50 Political Domination in Africa: Reflections on the Limits of Power Patrick Chabal

OTHER BOOKS IN THE SERIES

- 4 *The Nigerian Military: A Sociological Analysis of Authority and Revolt 1960-1967* Robin Luckham
- 6 *Labour in the South African Gold Mines, 1911-1969* Francis Wilson
- 9 *Dependence and Opportunity: Political Change in Ahafo* John Dunn and A. F. Robertson
- 11 *Islam and Tribal Art in West Africa* René A. Bravmann
- 14 *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel* Emmanuel Obiechina
- 15 *Saints and Politicians: Essays in the Organisation of a Senegalese Peasant Society* Donal B. Cruise O'Brien
- 17 *Politics of Decolonisation: Kenya Europeans and the Land Issue 1960-1965* Gary Wasserman
- 18 *Muslim Brotherhoods in Nineteenth-century Africa* B. G. Martin
- 19 *Warfare in the Sokoto Caliphate: Historical and Sociological Perspectives* Joseph P. Smaldone
- 20 *Liberia and Sierra Leone: An Essay in Comparative Politics* Christopher Clapham
- 23 *West African States: Failure and Promise: A Study in Comparative Politics* John Dunn
- 24 *Africans of the Kalahari: White Minority in a Black State* Margo and Martin Russell
- 25 *A Modern History of Tanganyika* John Iliffe
- 26 *A History of African Christianity 1950-1975* Adrian Hastings
- 27 *Slaves, Peasants and Capitalists in Southern Angola 1840-1926* W. G. Clarence-Smith
- 28 *The Hidden Hippopotamus: Reappraisal in African History: The Early Colonial Experience in Western Zambia* Gwyn Prins
- 29 *Families Divided: The Impact of Migrant Labour in Lesotho* Colin Murray
- 30 *Slavery, Colonialism and Economic Growth in Dahomey, 1640-1960* Patrick Manning
- 31 *Kings, Commoners and Concessionaires: The Evolution and Dissolution of the Nineteenth-century Swazi State* Philip Bonner
- 32 *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism: The Case of Sayyid Mahammad 'Abdille Hasan* Saïd S. Samatar
- 33 *The Political Economy of Pondoland 1860-1930: Production, Labour, Migrancy and Chiefs in Rural South Africa* William Beinart
- 34 *Volkskaptalism: Class, Capital and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism 1934-1948* Dan O'Meara
- 35 *The Settler Economies: Studies in the Economic History of Kenya and Rhodesia 1900-1963* Paul Mosley
- 36 *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* Paul E. Lovejoy
- 37 *Amilcar Cabral: Revolutionary Leadership and People's War* Patrick Chabal
- 38 *Essays on the Political Economy of Rural Africa* Robert H. Bates
- 39 *Ishas and Nigerians: The Incorporation of a Yoruba Kingdom, 1890s-1970s* J. D. Y. Peel
- 40 *Black People and the South African War 1899-1902* Peter Warwick
- 41 *A History of Niger 1850-1960* Finn Fuglestad
- 42 *Industrialisation and Trade Union Organisation in South Africa 1924-55* Jon Lewis
- 43 *The Rising of the Red Shaws: A Revolt in Madagascar 1895-1899* Stephen Ellis
- 44 *Slavery in Dutch South Africa* Nigel Worden
- 45 *Law, Custom and Social Order: The Colonial Experience in Malawi and Zambia* Martin Chanock
- 46 *Salt of the Desert Sun: A History of Salt Production and Trade in the Central Sudan* Paul E. Lovejoy
- 47 *Marrying Well: Status and Social Change among the Educated Elite in Colonial Lagos* Kristun Mann
- 48 *Language and Colonial Power: The Appropriation of Swahili in the Former Belgian Congo 1880-1938* Johannes Fabian
- 49 *The Shell Money of the Slave Trade* Jan Hogendorn and Marion Johnson
- 50 *Political Domination in Africa: Reflections on the Limits of Power* Patrick Chabal

THE SOUTHERN MARCHES OF IMPERIAL ETHIOPIA

Essays in History and Social Anthropology

edited by

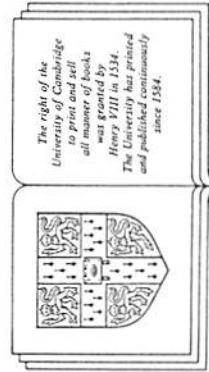
DONALD DONHAM

Department of Anthropology, Stanford University

and

WENDY JAMES

Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Oxford



CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE

LONDON NEW YORK NEW ROCHELLE

MELBOURNE SYDNEY

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP
32 East 57th Street, New York, NY 10022, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1986

First published 1986

Printed in Great Britain at the University Press, Cambridge

British Library cataloguing in publication data

The Southern marches of Imperial Ethiopia:
essays in history and social anthropology.

— (African studies series, ISSN
0065-406X; 51)

I. Government, Primitive — Ethiopia,
I. Donham, Donald L. II. James,
Wendy, 1940 — III. Series.
306'.2'0963 GN650

Library of Congress Cataloguing in publication data

The Southern marches of Imperial Ethiopia.
(African studies series; 51)

Revised versions of selected papers originally
presented at a workshop of the Cambridge African
Studies Centre in July 1979 and at a conference
at Monterey, Calif. in March 1982.

Bibliography: p.
Includes index.

1. Ethiopia — History — 1889-1974 — Congresses.
2. Ethiopia — Politics and government — 1889-1974 —
Congresses. 3. Ethiopia — Economic conditions —
Congresses. 4. Ethiopia — Social conditions —
Congresses. I. Donham, Donald L. (Donald Lewis)
II. James, Wendy. III. Series.

DT387.S68 1986 963 86-2224

ISBN 0-521-32237-5

AFR. EAST So 88
RECEIVED
OCT 10 1986
RETURNED

VN

No sooner has the peasant unloaded the tribute due to the lord than the latter 'congratulates' the peasant for having come just at the right time to be sent to the lord's measured lands somewhere beyond the Awash, from which the peasant is supposed to bring a load of *tef*. The toil-worn peasant supplicates, pleads and laments:

'Oh, Sire, it is harvest time in our area and if I do not harvest now, before the approaching rains, Sire, I will be finished, evicted, uprooted. Oh, Sire!'

No heed to his pleadings and lamentations. He must go to the measured estate and collect the load of *tef* as the lord ordered. The peasant has no choice and he submits. Cursing the day he was born, like the Biblical Job, he takes to his heels in the direction of the Awash. At the estate, the inevitable happens. The lord's representative engages the peasant in the renovation of the lord's house there. That takes a whole week's work. Only then does the peasant reach Addis Abeba with the load of *tef*. At Addis another task, another order! Endless! The peasant now collects the whole lot of grain — that from the Awash estate which he would have to have ground into flour and that he himself had brought earlier — and stores them properly.

While he does this, he runs out of his own provisions and in the hope of keeping his belly full hangs about feast places — and comes back exhausted, sick, and diseased. Like a sick old dog with his head resting on a heap of animal dung, the peasant passes his last torturous and agonizing days below the fence of the lord's compound. When at last he dies, the lord's household servants carry out the body on a stick and after a few scratchy digs, they 'bury' him in a ditch.

Oh, the peasant's donkey! No problem, somebody has helped himself to it as the peasant lay dying below the fence.

A lady living nearby asks a lady of the lord's household: 'Sister, I saw a dead body leaving your household for burial today. Who could he possibly be?'

'Don't mind him, sister,' retorts the lady from the lord's household, 'he was not human born; he was only a *gebbar*.'

Asbe Hailu, *Birhanina Selam*, 1927

process of imperial expansion that more directly affected their neighbours, both in the Omo Valley itself and in the highlands to the west and east. On the contrary, one purpose of this paper is to suggest that Mursi domination of the Kwegu was shaped and conditioned by the growing demand for ivory, which during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, played such an important part in the domination by Shewans of their southern periphery.

THE KWEGU AND THE MURSI

The Kwegu are a river people. Their settlements are found on both banks of the Omo, never far from the river itself. They regard themselves, and are regarded by their neighbours, as the indigenous inhabitants of the Omo forest. During the dry season (November to February) they cultivate small pockets of floodland along the river bank, and, following the first heavy rain in March or April, plant a second crop in forest clearings, farther back from the river. Their principal crop is sorghum, but they also grow maize, cow peas, beans and tobacco. Fishing, by harpoon and hook and line, is confined to the dry season, when the river is low and the water clear. They hunt game animals, using firearms and pit traps. They keep beehives in the tall trees of the Omo forest and gather wild honey by following the honey bird. Living all the year round in close proximity to the Omo, which is flanked on both sides by eight to ten kilometres of dense tsetse-infested bush, the Kwegu keep no domestic animals except dogs. It is their lack of cattle which makes them, in the eyes of the Mursi, an inferior and peripheral group. Indeed, the Mursi name for the Kwegu, *Nyidi* (sing. *Nyidiri*), may be translated 'poor [i.e. cattleless] people'.⁵ For their part, the Kwegu give great cultural emphasis to their hunting activities – although they appear to have no tradition of having lived by hunting and gathering alone.

Just as the Kwegu depend mainly on cultivation and see themselves as hunters, so the Mursi depend on cultivation but see themselves as herders. Having little more than one head of cattle per head of human population, they cannot fully support themselves on the products of their herds. In fact, they depend for at least 75 per cent of their subsistence on grain (mainly sorghum). Cattle, however, make a vital contribution to the long-term viability of their economy as an insurance against crop failure, when they may be exchanged for grain in the highlands. Because the Omo itself is such an inhospitable environment for cattle, the Mursi keep their herds in the wooded grasslands 10–20 kilometres east of the river and make clearings along the eastern fringes of the Omo bush-belt for rain cultivation. But since rainfall in the Omo lowlands is too erratic for regular reliable cropping, they also depend on flood cultivation along the banks of the Omo.⁶ Floodland is a vital and scarce resource for the Mursi.⁷ Between October and February, therefore, the Mursi cultivators – mainly women, children and older men – far outnumber Kwegu at the Omo. The cattle, meanwhile, are kept well to the east of the river ('outside', as the Mursi put it), under the care of young men and boys,

A problem of domination at the periphery: the Kwegu and the Mursi

DAVID TURTON

The Kwegu live on the banks of the River Omo in south-western Ethiopia. They depend for their subsistence mainly on cultivation, but are also expert hunters and fishermen. This chapter is about their relationship with a neighbouring group of cattle herders, the Mursi.¹ There are between 4,000 and 5,000 Mursi and the Kwegu I am concerned with in this chapter do not exceed 200.² The relationship between the two groups is, I argue, one of domination. The Kwegu provide the Mursi with various goods and services but do not receive equivalent goods and services in return. Neither side, however, sees this economic imbalance as the defining feature of the relationship. Indeed, in a sense, the Kwegu see themselves as gaining most from a relationship that places them in a socially inferior position, which, to the outside observer, results in their economic exploitation and which is kept in being, in the last resort, by Mursi command of superior physical force.

If the interpretation which I present below is correct, this is a case of the successful domination and incorporation of a peripheral group by a 'centre' which, in relation to the rest of imperial Ethiopia, was itself highly peripheral. Both the Mursi and Kwegu were less affected than other groups by the extension of military and administrative control to the south at the turn of the last century. Lying between two rivers, the Omo and its tributary the Mago, which are difficult to cross for at least half the year, Mursiland was literally bypassed by explorers and military campaigners alike during the twenty years which saw the 'pacification' of the Lower Omo valley by Menilek's forces.³ No garrison was set up in Mursiland during this period, and the only military 'invasion' subsequently experienced by the Mursi was by a small Italian force which briefly occupied a fort on the east bank of the Omo in 1940. It was not until 1970 that the existence of the Mursi was officially recognized by the creation of a new *woreda* called Mursi-Bodi in Hamar-Bako *awraja*, Gamo Gofa Province. The administrative centre of the new *woreda* was at Hana which is sixty-five kilometres north of the Mursi, in the territory of their neighbours the Bodi. There remains to this day no police post or other administrative centre in Mursiland itself (see Map 11).⁴

I do not wish to claim that the Mursi and Kwegu were unaffected by the

although they may be brought to the Omo for a few weeks at the height of the dry season, when the harvest is ready and the tsetse flies less troublesome. During February and March, as the rains approach and the Omo begins to rise, the entire Mursi population moves back to the eastern plain, leaving the river, once more, to the sole occupation of the Kwegu.

Although physically indistinguishable, the two groups are clearly distinct in a cultural sense. First, they speak different, though closely related, languages.⁸ Very few Mursi are able to speak or understand Kwegu – many, indeed, are unaware of the name Kwegu itself – but the Kwegu are bilingual, speaking their own language only amongst themselves. Secondly, although both Kwegu and Mursi depend overwhelmingly on cultivation, they are, in ideology and sentiment, hunters and herders respectively. Thus Kwegu, unlike Mursi, are fully at home both in the Omo forest and on the river itself. Knowing, for example, how to make a pit trap, a snare or a honey barrel, how to hollow out a tree trunk to make a dugout canoe, or how to take such a canoe across the Omo when it is running high and fast – these are the expected accomplishments of all Kwegu men. The Mursi, on the other hand, have adapted themselves to the Omo environment only to the extent necessary to exploit it for flood cultivation. While they acknowledge (and indeed take full advantage of) the *technical* superiority of the Kwegu as hunters and boatmen, they nevertheless regard these skills as inferior in a *cultural* sense – that is, in so far as they symbolize a way of life. And while the Kwegu take an obvious pride in their hunting and river skills and do not aspire to become herders, they do not publicly contradict the Mursi dogma that herding is the epitome of a 'civilized' way of life.

A third factor which helps to maintain the cultural distinctiveness of the two groups, despite their frequent and regular interaction, is that marriage and sexual relations between them are denounced as dangerous by the Mursi. It is said, for example, that if a Mursi man were to have sexual intercourse with a Kwegu woman, his cattle would die, and, if found out, he would be beaten. A Kwegu man who is discovered to have had sexual intercourse with a Mursi woman will, in theory, be bound and thrown into the Omo, but, in practice, is more likely to be severely beaten. The children of such illegitimate unions will be Kwegu if the father is Kwegu, but the male child of a Kwegu mother and Mursi father will be legitimized as a Mursi through the payment of up to six cattle to the mother's relatives by the father. (Since these cattle cannot be kept by the Omo, they will end up being herded by a Mursi who has a special relationship, to be described later as patronage, with the mother's family.)

Intermarriage, including that of Mursi men with Kwegu women, though strongly disapproved of by the Mursi, does occur, with the result that some men (I know of one case) carry the stigma of being 'sisters' sons' of Kwegu. Another case I was told of concerned a Mursi, now dead, who took a Kwegu woman as his third wife, handing over goats in bridewealth. The woman continued to live at the Omo and when she visited her husband's cattle homestead she slept 'in the bush' – that is, outside the compound fence. She died childless, but had she borne children they would have been regarded as

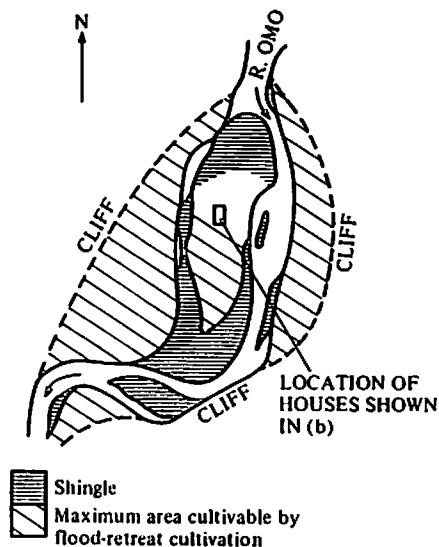
Mursi. One other case of Kwegu–Mursi intermarriage is worth describing because it is the only one of which I have first hand knowledge.

On February 23rd 1974 I met a Kwegu, Tongogoloin, who had several nasty cuts across his back. Three days before, he had been beaten up, with duelling poles, by five Mursi, the sister of one of whom was the mother of his child – now a toddler. T. had already handed over, as bridewealth, five cattle (two cows and three calves) obtained with the help of his Mursi patron, but the attack was apparently designed to persuade him to pay more. A month later he was in trouble again. On March 21st I heard that, on the previous day, he and the same girl had been found together in an empty house by a passing Mursi who was seeking shelter from a sudden downpour. T. was again beaten up and left tied to a tree. (This story was told to the accompaniment of much amusement on the part of the newsbringer and his audience.) I met T. again in January 1982. By this time he had increased the bridewealth by an additional twenty-three 'cattle' – obtained in exchange for bullets, which had themselves been obtained in exchange for ivory – and he was living with his Mursi wife and their two surviving children (regarded as Kwegu) at the Omo.

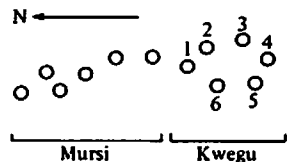
It should be noted that, while the second of these beatings may have been administered because Tongogoloin and the girl were found *in flagrante delicto*, the first, at least, was motivated by the fact that he had got the girl pregnant without paying bridewealth – an offence which would have provoked a similar response from the girl's brother, even if the offender had been a Mursi. Obviously then, this proscription does not prevent, though it may discourage, marriage and sexual relations between Mursi and Kwegu. One thing it does do, as the above examples show, is prevent a Kwegu from acquiring Mursi status through marriage, and, in the case of Kwegu men, this applies also to the offspring of such a marriage.

The denunciation by Mursi of sexual relations and marriage with Kwegu is, from the Mursi point of view, a way of maintaining the 'otherness' of the Kwegu. Seen in this light, it is part of a wider denunciation of close contact with Kwegu as dangerous for Mursi – or rather for their cattle. As with intermarriage and sex, these wider avoidances are said to have been more strictly observed in the past. Thus it is said that, in the past, a Mursi would not drink from the same calabash as a Kwegu, nor sleep on the same sleeping skin, for fear that his cattle would die. In those days, Mursi and Kwegu built their settlements on opposite banks of the Omo, and when a Mursi visited a Kwegu settlement, he would drink from a special calabash and sleep on a special sleeping skin. Some Mursi have told me that they would not allow a Kwegu to enter their cattle compounds unless he wore shoes, since an animal whose dung he trod on with his bare feet would die. The same justification is given (by Mursi) for the fact that Kwegu make only infrequent and brief visits to Mursi cattle camps. And while Mursi and Kwegu cultivate at the same places along the Omo, their houses and strips of cultivation are not randomly intermingled. Kwegu cultivation strips are usually contiguous and their houses, even when part of a settlement which includes Mursi houses, are grouped together. This is illustrated by Figure 2.

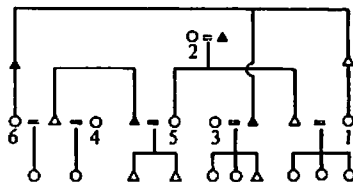
Reorienting kinship and identity



(a) Sketch map of Alaka showing the Omo at its dry-season (January) level



(b) A settlement of Mursi and Kwegu houses at Alaka (January 1982)



(c) Kinship connections of the occupants of the Kwegu houses shown in (b)

Fig. 2 A Mursi-Kwegu settlement

AN EXCHANGE OF GOODS AND SERVICES?

Because of their hunting, bush and river skills, and, as I shall explain, simply because they live at the Omo all the year round, the Kwegu are able to provide important, even vital, goods and services for the Mursi. The Mursi, on the other hand, have little in the way of economic benefits to offer the Kwegu. This suggests, as I shall argue in the following two sections, that the contribution made by the Kwegu to the Mursi economy is more in the nature of tribute than trade. In this section I compare the Mursi and Kwegu from the point of view of the usefulness to each of the specialist skills and services of the other.

The tracking and hunting skills of the Kwegu are valued by the Mursi more as a means of acquiring ivory and leopard skins than as a means of acquiring game meat. Elephants abound in this part of the Omo Valley and appear to migrate in large numbers, during the wet season, between the Mago and Omo rivers. Tracking and shooting elephants in the dense Omo bush is a dangerous activity and a Kwegu accomplishment to which few Mursi aspire. Indeed, many adult Mursi have never seen an elephant despite their abundance in the area. Elephants are stalked by one or two individuals, not attacked 'from all sides' by a large hunting party as Howell describes the Nuer method of elephant hunting.⁹ Today, firearms are used, but formerly a spear, with a blade about 35 centimetres long, was planted in the animal's groin while it slept. The hunter then beat a hasty retreat, returning later to follow the tracks

A problem of domination at the periphery

of the dying elephant. Leopard are killed by means of a technique designed to minimize damage to the skin. After the tracks of a leopard have been spotted, a piece of game meat is left in a tree close by, as bait. If the leopard returns, the next step is to set a trap. A rifle is lashed horizontally to two forked stakes about two feet from the ground, and a piece of meat tied to the end of the barrel. A string is drawn from the meat to the trigger, so that when the leopard pulls on the meat, it is shot in the mouth.

If it were not for the external demand for ivory and leopard skins, the Mursi would have little use for them (some men wear ivory bracelets, and leopard skins are among the accoutrements worn by contestants in ceremonial duelling).¹⁰ As it is, these products are a highly prized form of wealth, being readily, if secretly, exchanged with highland traders for firearms, ammunition and cattle.¹¹

Honey is another specialist product of the Kwegu which is highly valued by the Mursi as a trade good. There is a ready market for honey in the highland towns and villages on both sides of the Omo Valley, mainly, no doubt, because of the enormous popularity of *tej* (mead) which is virtually the national drink of highland Ethiopia. Honey is therefore a convenient means of acquiring the cash to buy such relatively small items as axes, hoes, cloth, and goats. If not traded, it may be used to provide mead for an agricultural work-party.

The river skills of the Kwegu include the making and using of fish harpoons and dugout canoes. Fish is regarded by the Mursi as an inferior food to be eaten only out of necessity. During the dry season, however, it can make an important contribution to the diet of those Mursi who are living at the Omo. Harpoon heads are made only by Kwegu (they beat them out of pieces of scrap metal), and few Mursi can match their skills as harpoonists. Making dugout canoes is a traditional Kwegu skill which some Mursi have mastered. Poling and paddling these canoes across the Omo is another traditional Kwegu skill which is shared, to a greater or lesser extent, by some Mursi, who have spent an especially long time at the Omo. But, while it is easy enough to take a canoe across the Omo during the dry season, it is quite a different matter to do so after about March, when its volume and speed increase. Most Mursi then become uneasy crossing the Omo, and very few would attempt a single-handed crossing. The Kwegu, in contrast, pride themselves on being able to take a canoe across the Omo, single-handed, even when it is at its highest, usually in August.

Since the Mursi keep their cattle east of the Omo, they must cross the river in order to take maximum advantage of the available floodland distributed along both banks, especially on the inner bends of meanders. During December and January the Omo can be forded in several places, but preparations for flood-retreat cultivation have to begin in September and October, when the river is still too high to ford. It is therefore vital to the Mursi that, at this critical time, they should have access to dugout canoes, and this means that the canoes must be moored and looked after during the wet season. Thus, it is not so much the skills of the Kwegu as boatmen that are vital to the Mursi, but the fact that the Kwegu live at the Omo throughout the year and

are able to watch over the canoes. Since it is the needs of their cattle which prevent the Mursi spending the whole year at the Omo, and since flood cultivation nevertheless makes a vital contribution to their economy, it follows that the Mursi could not sustain a cultural commitment to pastoralism in their present environment without the aid of a people, the Kwegu, who specifically lack such a commitment.¹²

There can be no doubt about the importance of the Kwegu, in an objective economic sense, to the Mursi. It is equally clear that the Mursi have little by way of economic benefits to offer the Kwegu. The only possible economic advantage the Kwegu could derive from the specialist skills of the Mursi would be access to pastoral products. But since, by custom and practice, the Kwegu make only brief and infrequent visits to the Mursi cattle camps and homesteads, it is difficult to see how pastoral products could make a significant contribution to their diet, especially since their hunting and fishing skills ought, anyway, to guarantee them an adequate supply of protein. It is true that cattle could be herded by the Mursi on behalf of the Kwegu, but what would be the economic benefit of such an arrangement to the Kwegu? For the reason just given, they would have little opportunity to make use of such cattle for subsistence purposes, and they would not appear to need them as a form of famine insurance. Hunting provides an alternative food supply, and even if the supply of game meat fails, the Kwegu could use ivory and leopard skins as trade goods to obtain the cash to buy grain in highland markets.¹³ We must conclude that there does not exist here the potential for a balanced exchange of economic goods and services.

This being so, the problem for the Mursi is how to incorporate the Kwegu while preserving the *otherness* upon which their usefulness as a source of goods and services depends; or in other words, how to engineer an ideological dependence of Kwegu on Mursi which reverses, and, in the eyes of the Kwegu, overshadows the objective economic dependence of Mursi on Kwegu. This is the problem of Mursi domination and Kwegu consent to which I now turn.

THE MEANS OF MURSI DOMINATION

Although I have spoken of the Mursi and Kwegu so far as two separate peoples, and of the relationship between them as an inter-group relationship, this has only been in order to clarify the exposition. In fact, as I hope to show in this and the next section, the Kwegu have been incorporated, as a peripheral and exploited minority, into Mursi society itself: they have been subjected to the political domination of the Mursi 'centre'. The principal means of Mursi domination is an institution which binds individual Kwegu to individual Mursi and which I call clientage (there is no indigenous term for it).¹⁴ Since the Kwegu are few in relation to the Mursi, only a minority of Mursi have Kwegu clients. But each Kwegu man has a relationship of mutual indebtedness with a particular Mursi, whom I call his patron.

The client is expected to perform various services for his patron, based upon

the specialist Kwegu skills outlined in the previous section. The patron may, for example, ask his client to kill a game animal to enable him to provide soup for a sick relative (thus avoiding the need to slaughter one of his livestock); he may ask him to kill an elephant or leopard so that he can use the ivory or skin to buy cattle, bullets, or a rifle; he may ask him to collect honey and make mead which he will then use to mobilize a work party to clear a new cultivation site; and he will expect him to be on hand to ferry him and his family across the Omo when it is time to start preparations for planting on the west bank. These are not only valuable economic services, but they also help to further the general social standing and prestige of the patron among his fellow Mursi. He can, for example, use his client's services as boatman to organize the highly important crossing of the Omo at the end of the wet season for other members of his local community. Clients are a political as well as an economic resource.

The jural basis and principal symbolic expression of this relationship (which does not occur between Mursi) is the patron's gift of a large male stock animal to his client at the time of the latter's marriage. If a Kwegu is asked what he receives from his patron, the standard reply is 'He gives me cattle with which to marry.' But the Kwegu do not – indeed, the Mursi specifically say that they should not – use cattle as bridewealth. The animal in question *does* make a contribution to the client's bridewealth, but only indirectly after it has been converted into goats, the conversion being made with the aid of either another Mursi or of a member of a neighbouring group. These goats, which cannot survive long at the Omo because of tsetse flies, will be handed over to various Mursi either as gifts or for safe keeping. The bride's father's patron, for example, will expect to receive part of the bridewealth, which may include ivory, bullets and a firearm, in addition to goats. He bases this expectation on the fact that he, or his father, contributed to the bridewealth of the bride's mother. It is not, however, as a partial contribution to the client's bridewealth that the patron's gift of a stock animal has its greatest importance. Its most significant function by far is symbolic: it symbolizes the interest the patron has in his client's marriage and in the offspring that will result from it. On the strength of his gift, the patron acts on his client's behalf in the bridewealth negotiations, playing the part that would be played by the groom's father in a marriage between two Mursi.

The patron opens the negotiations by asking the bride's father to give him his daughter 'so that she may carry water and collect wood for me', as though he were going to marry her himself. The patron is, indeed, spoken of as 'marrying a wife' for his client, a terminology which implies that he has a kind of proprietary right over his client and over his reproductive potential. By linking this to the reproductive potential of livestock, the patron's gift of a large stock animal, albeit converted into goats, symbolizes the links of indebtedness that will arise out of the marriage for future generations. Thus, the relationship between the patron and his client's children is expressed in the idiom of kinship. He is their 'father' because he 'married' their mother. Not only does the patron receive a share in the bridewealth of his client's daughter,

but her marriage cannot proceed without his approval, which is symbolized by his attendance (or by that of a brother or a son), together with the bride's actual father, at the discussions over her bridewealth.

It follows that patron-client links are inherited (the patron's son becoming the patron of the client's son) and that they bind not only individuals but also shallow patrilineal descent groups. So although rights to Kwegu services are individualized in particular patron-client relationships, they are also incorporated in patrilineal descent groups, as are rights to other scarce resources such as women, cattle, and floodland. It may be said that Kwegu marriage is not so much an exchange between two groups of Kwegu in respect of a woman, as an exchange between two groups of Mursi in respect of a Kwegu – or rather, a Kwegu couple. By disposing of the marriages of their Kwegu, the Mursi treat the Kwegu as objects which can be used to set in motion mutually beneficial cycles of reciprocity amongst themselves and which, like cattle, have the added advantage of being able to reproduce themselves.

If, as seems appropriate, we use the term 'ownership' to describe the rights held by a Mursi in his Kwegu client, it is apparent that what is fundamentally owned is not the Kwegu himself but his reproductive potential: he is human capital, in which the patron has a reproductive investment. This is brought out if we consider the way in which a Mursi without a Kwegu client goes about acquiring one. Since by definition there is no such thing as a patronless Kwegu, what such a man has to do is persuade another Mursi who has a client to transfer a share in the reproductive potential of this client to him in exchange for a large stock animal. The clientless Mursi then 'marries' a Kwegu girl, paying all the bridewealth himself and using the Kwegu, in whose reproductive services he now owns a share, to beget children by the girl. The male offspring of this union then become the clients of their Mursi 'father'.

The Mursi, therefore, exercise control over the Kwegu by the same means that, according to Claude Meillassoux, elders exercise control over juniors in subsistence-based societies – by controlling access to marriageable women, the 'producers of the producers'.¹⁵ But there is, of course, a difference. It is precisely by gaining access to marriageable women that juniors free themselves from dependence on the elders and become in due course elders themselves.¹⁶ The Kwegu, on the other hand, are not freed from their dependent status by marriage – even, as was pointed out earlier, by marriage with a Mursi. It is more revealing to compare the status of Kwegu within Mursi society to that of women. For, like women, and unlike juniors, Kwegu remain jural minors in relation to the wider Mursi society even after marriage: they have no legal rights 'against the world' except as clients of Mursi.¹⁷

The Kwegu express this by saying that they need the protection of their patrons against other Mursi. The following are two standard explanations, given to me by Kwegu, of why they need strong patrons.

(1) If I didn't have a Mursi [patron] and I killed an elephant in the bush, a Mursi would come and say, 'What have you got there?' 'It's ivory.'

He would say, 'I'm going to take it and, later on, I'll give you an animal to marry

with' [i.e. 'become your patron']. He would just pick up the tusk and take it. If I argued, he would get others, and they would beat me up, tie my feet together tightly and throw me into the Omo. Or else they would hang me from a tree. Back home, my people would say, 'Where is he? He went off into the bush yesterday and must be sleeping out.' Then, when I still didn't return, they would say, 'He must have been gored by a buffalo or a rhino. He must be dead.' If I did not have my Mursi [patron] no-one would worry.

(2) Imagine I had no Mursi and I was clearing here at the Omo while the Mursi were still with their cattle. One of them might come and say, 'This land you have cleared is mine. Why did you clear it?' 'It's mine.'

'It's not yours. Get off into the bush, Nyidini.' I would say to myself, 'If I argue with him, he'll beat me up. What can I do?' So I would go back home and sit down, and people would ask me, 'Why aren't you clearing?' 'My land has been taken by a Mursi.'

If I had a strong Mursi, he would come and find out what was wrong. He would come and find the man who took my land and say, 'Doesn't this man also need to eat? Why just take his land? You should have said to him, "Give me some land so that my wives can plant beans." Then the Kwegu could have marked off a strip for you. Don't Kwegu take you across the Omo? When your children are ill, don't you give them bullets to shoot an animal to make soup? And yet you take their land and chase them off into the bush. I am now going back to the cattle, but if I hear that you have done the same again, I shall come immediately.'

So I would continue clearing. As long as my Mursi is strong, no other Mursi will take my land.

Despite the vividness of these descriptions, my informants were not describing what actually *does* happen. Rather, they were describing what would happen if, *per impossibile*, a Kwegu had no patron. It is not that Mursi never practise violence against Kwegu, as the case of Tongogoloin, described above, illustrates. A certain amount of violence must presumably be experienced by the Kwegu in order to keep alive their alarming vision of what life would be like without their patrons. But such violence is not a normal part of daily life, and Kwegu are not, in fact, bound and thrown into the Omo under any circumstances. These standard, hypothetical descriptions of life without a patron amount to a Kwegu 'state of nature', a myth which legitimizes Mursi domination by showing that a Kwegu without a patron does not count as a legal individual.

The picture I have presented is of a Kwegu dependence on Mursi which has been 'engineered' by the Mursi; an ideological dependence in comparison to which the objective economic dependence of Mursi on Kwegu pales into insignificance. For, according to this picture, the Kwegu depend on Mursi both for their own reproduction and for the means of their subsistence. The goods and services provided by a Kwegu for his Mursi are, from this point of view, tribute extracted in return for the gift of life. But is this the 'point of view' of the Kwegu? Have I succeeded only in presenting a smokescreen of Mursi dogma, behind which the 'real Kwegu' remain as elusive to the Mursi as to the enquiring anthropologist? I have reached a point at which the question of Kwegu 'consent' can be deferred no longer.

KWEGU CONSENT

I have shown that whereas the Mursi depend economically on the Kwegu, the Kwegu gain no significant economic advantage from their association with the Mursi. It is also evident that the willingness of the Kwegu to provide the Mursi with goods and services is not based upon the overt use of physical force by the Mursi. A Kwegu does not say that he accedes to the demands of his patron for fear of physical reprisals, but that he needs his patron to ensure that his rights to property, and therefore to a livelihood, are not over-riden by other Mursi. I argued in the previous section that this amounts to the acceptance by the Kwegu of the status of jural minors in Mursi society. As women in many societies may depend on their fathers and husbands for legal status in the eyes of the world, so Kwegu depend on their patrons. But what does it mean to say that the Kwegu 'accept' the status of jural minors? By using the term 'domination' in this context I imply that the Kwegu accept the legitimacy of their subordinate status; that they have come to share, in some important respects, a Mursi interpretation of the world. In this section my intention is to defend this argument against the predictable charge of 'Mursi-centred bias'.

The charge is plausible because all my investigations amongst the Kwegu were conducted in Mursi and because, having spent over 90 per cent of my field work living exclusively amongst Mursi, I am certainly closely associated with them in the eyes of the Kwegu. Is it not likely, therefore, that the Kwegu would have given me a Mursi 'version' of their situation on the assumption that this is what I wanted to hear? The answer would be yes *if* a significantly different Kwegu 'version' did indeed exist. What grounds are there for believing that it did, given that my best efforts to discover it did not succeed?¹⁸

The Kwegu, potentially at least, have considerable bargaining power in their dealings with the Mursi. The services they provide as clients are highly valued, and there is presumably no shortage of would-be patrons vying for the allegiance of Kwegu clients. The dispersed nature of Kwegu settlements along the Omo provides an individual Kwegu with opportunities to change his place of residence by making use of his network of kin and affines. The situation enables him, to some extent, to 'keep his patron guessing' about his present and future whereabouts, and, if he wishes to break off his relationship to his (Mursi) patron altogether, he can go north to live with relatives who are the clients of Bodi and take a Bodi patron himself. Mursi certainly complain about the frequent changes of residence made by the Kwegu, even within the Mursi area of the Omo, from one season to another. Their complaint is the familiar one of those who would control a mobile population (although the Kwegu are in fact less mobile than the Mursi): 'We cannot find them when we want them.' An example of the sort of situation that gives rise to this complaint is provided by the following incident.

On the 23rd September 1969, the group of Mursi I was living with moved to Makaro, on the Omo, to begin preparations for dry-season planting. At least

half the cultivable land at Makaro is on an island and, on the date we arrived there, it was impossible to reach the island on foot. The river level was not expected to fall sufficiently to make a foot crossing possible for another three weeks. There was a canoe at Makaro, but it was 'on loan' from its Kwegu owner who lived at Alaka, a few kilometres upstream. Much of the cultivable land at Alaka is also on an island and was also, at that date, inaccessible from the east bank. The Alaka canoe would therefore soon be required, not so much by its Kwegu owner as by his Mursi patron who had a cultivation area on the island at Alaka. It was this man who came to collect the canoe, on September 29th, and before he took it back to Alaka that evening, the first party of cultivators was taken across to the Makaro island, where they were now isolated.

The nearest canoe to the south was a day's walk away, at Kennokora on the west bank. It was owned by an elderly and respected Kwegu, Doki, whose Mursi patron, Aritilohola, cultivated at Makaro. On the same day that the Alaka canoe was returned, I was invited to accompany a party of Mursi who were going south the next day to 'catch hold of' Doki's canoe (as it was called). This was obviously not going to be a straightforward matter. First, the party was divided in half, three of its members (including me) following the east bank and two (including the eldest son of Doki's patron) following the west bank. Secondly, no indication was to be given to people we met on the way of the true purpose of our trip. This was to prevent word of our intentions getting to the Kwegu before us, in which event they might simply take the canoe farther south. Thirdly, my companions intended to use me to add weight to their request for the canoe, since I also needed it (though far from urgently) to get to my supplies, which were on the west bank of the Omo itself.

In fact, it was only my need for the canoe which was mentioned when we reached Doki's settlement on the evening of the 30th. He raised no objection, but said he would accompany us back to Makaro since I would only need the canoe for a few days. Highly vociferous opposition came, however, from the Mursi at Kennokora (who were in roughly the same position as those at Makaro and Alaka) when they realized the next morning what we were about. We eventually got away with Doki and the canoe at about midday after several parties of women and children had been ferried across to the island at Kennokora from the east bank. Doki stayed at Makaro until the 9th of October, taking the canoe back to Kennokora on that day, and the first foot crossing to the Makaro island was made on the 12th.

There are several things to be said about this incident. First, Doki could not, it seems, be ordered to hand over his canoe, even by his patron. Tact and cajolment were necessary. In fact, although Aritilohola's son accompanied us on our journey, he did not spend the night with us at Doki's homestead, perhaps in order to add realism to the deception that it was I who wanted the canoe. A good patron is one who looks after the interests of his client and does not make unreasonable demands upon him, and it is clear from this case that the client has some scope for 'non-co-operation' in order to put pressure on his patron to conform to this model. Secondly, by accompanying us back to Makaro, Doki literally did not let the canoe out of his sight and forced the Makaro people to 'pay' for it by making himself their guest for eight days. It must have been evident to him (a) that it was not my needs (or at least not my needs alone) which had inspired our trip to Kennokora, (b) that the Makaro

people intended to keep the canoe for as long as possible, and, therefore, (c) that they did not welcome his decision to accompany us back to Makaro. Third, while Doki made no public show of displeasure at our request (indeed, for all I know, he may have welcomed the opportunity to spend time at Makaro), we were bitterly berated by the Mursi at Kennokora. This was probably where my presence was most important – not, that is, in persuading Doki to agree, but in making it more difficult for the Mursi at Kennokora to disagree. Doki, sitting quietly by while the Makaro and Kennokora Mursi almost came to blows over his canoe, graphically symbolized the potential there is for a Kwegu to play one Mursi, or group of Mursi, off against another.

It is to be expected that the Kwegu would enjoy some room for manoeuvre in their dealing with the Mursi, since a relationship of domination which allowed the dominated no area of choice whatever would amount to bond slavery. But the range of choice available to a Kwegu is not so great as to make his relationship with his patron an entirely voluntary one. A Kwegu *may* be able to choose whom to accept as a patron, but he cannot choose to have no patron at all. The fact that the patron–client link is symbolically expressed by the obligation for the patron to contribute to his client's bridewealth means that the relationship is invested with the quality of kinship: it has a time depth of several generations. But whereas a patron can in theory repudiate an inherited link to a client simply by refusing to contribute to his bridewealth, a client has no such easy option available to him as a means of extricating himself from an unwanted relationship with a patron. He can certainly let it wither, like kinship, with social and geographical distance, by moving outside the orbit of Mursi political control (that is by taking the Bodi option) or he may, at least in theory and by prior agreement with another Mursi whose client he wished to become, refuse to accept the proffered assistance of his patron in arranging a marriage. But in this (entirely hypothetical) case, the issue would resolve itself into a conflict between two Mursi and would be decided by the relative strengths of their respective bargaining positions. Any power a Kwegu might have to affect his own future by transferring his allegiance from one Mursi patron to another, can only derive, therefore, from his skill in playing the two Mursi off against each other, and not from the legally autonomous exercise of his own will.

If the argument against Mursi domination were pursued with comparative evidence, an obvious case would be the relationship between the Mbuti pygmies and the Bantu villagers of the Ituri rain forest of Zaire, described by Colin Turnbull.¹⁹ The Mbuti hunters provide the villagers with various goods and services which are far more important than the goods they receive in return. The Mbuti are at home in their 'forest world', which to the villagers is full of dangers, both real and supernatural. Villagers attempt to control 'their' Mbuti, among other ways by arranging their marriages for them. The 'owner' of the groom pays bridewealth to the 'owner' of the bride.²⁰ The villagers see themselves as having freed the Mbuti from the necessity of living in the forest

'like animals', and use this to justify their rights to Mbuti goods and services. But the Mbuti enter into this relationship of apparent cultural dependence only out of calculated self-interest and only 'in the village context'. The failure of the villagers to exercise effective control over the Mbuti is explained by the 'constant state of flux' of the nomadic, non-lineal, territorial bands which characterize Mbuti social organization. This enabled them 'to represent to the villagers a structure so fluid that any formal relationship of the kind envisaged by the villagers was impossible'.²¹ Fully legitimate marriages for the Mbuti were only those in which they exchanged women among themselves (compare Wendy James' study of this mode of marriage in the previous chapter).

The force of this example is that Turnbull's study was undertaken partly to put to the test of field observation the previously accepted view 'that the Mbuti are subject to village authority, that they are a subordinate people'.²² What grounds are there then, for believing that a study of Kwegu–Mursi relations which was based on a field investigation of the Kwegu as intensive as Turnbull's of the Mbuti (he spent a full calendar year living with one hunting band of Mbuti) would not similarly undermine the picture of Mursi domination which I have presented in this paper?

The most obvious answer is that while the Mbuti are 'pure' hunters, the Kwegu depend primarily on cultivation and are therefore 'forced' to live in relatively stable local groups. The elusiveness of the Kwegu, although complained of by the Mursi, is very limited indeed when compared with that of a typical Mbuti band, whose whereabouts may be totally unknown until such time as it chooses to 'descend' on its village 'owners'.²³ And yet it may not be physical elusiveness which is the crucial factor. It may be that Mbuti 'social flux' has its most important effect on Mbuti–villager relations not so much by placing physical obstacles in the way of village control as by promoting certain values among the Mbuti themselves. I have in mind here an argument which James Woodburn has presented about the connection between 'immediate-return' economic systems and 'assertive egalitarianism'.²⁴ Woodburn's point is that the most egalitarian of human societies are hunting and gathering ones, because only this mode of subsistence is compatible with a system in which 'people obtain a direct and immediate return for their labour'. The central feature of the extreme form of egalitarianism which is associated with immediate-return systems is that it 'disengages' people 'from the potentiality in property rights for creating dependency'.²⁵

Turnbull sees the fluidity and flux of Mbuti bands as presenting a problem to the villagers in their attempt to exercise political control. But if Woodburn's argument is correct, one would expect the extreme egalitarian values of the Mbuti, rather than their physical elusiveness, to constitute the real obstacle to village control. For such control would depend upon the Mbuti accepting a subordinate position in the social order of the village, not on the basis of calculated self-interest, but on the basis of shared values which legitimize that order. The real problem for the villagers, it therefore appears, is to get the Mbuti to accept, not a particular hierarchy, which may be difficult enough

(since the Mbuti would form its lowest level), but the idea of hierarchy itself, which may be impossible.

Turning now to the Kwegu and Mursi, they both have delayed-return systems, so the fundamental prerequisite of successful domination – the acceptance by the dominated of a hierarchical interpretation of the world – can be assumed to be present in this case. The Kwegu accept the legitimacy of subordination itself as a principle of social relatedness, whereas the Mbuti do not. Kwegu ‘consent’ is, therefore, most fundamentally consent to the idea of hierarchy as a legitimate principle of social organization. But it is, secondly, consent, backed by the threat of violence, to a particular hierarchical system, which places them in an inferior and subordinate position to the Mursi. I suggested earlier that this system is accepted as legitimate by the Kwegu because it makes them ‘dependent’ on the Mursi, not for goods and services, but for the conditions that make possible the continuation of life itself. In so far as these conditions benefit, in a practical sense, the Mursi at the expense of the Kwegu, the Mursi can be said to have ‘engineered’ them, and their acceptance by the Kwegu may be described as ideological. It is not that the Kwegu are unaware of the fact that the goods and services which they provide for the Mursi outweigh anything tangible which they receive in return, but that this *economic* imbalance is not for them the defining feature of the relationship. They treat the goods and services which they provide for the Mursi as relatively trivial simply because they *are* goods and services (that is, visible, material, economic realities) rather than the conditions for the continuation of an orderly social life, which is what they receive from the Mursi.²⁶ I do not claim that Kwegu consent is total and homogeneous; but in fact I have recorded only one negative statement made by a Kwegu about Mursi in general, and this was almost forced out of him by my questioning. He said ‘Yes, they are hyenas’ (that is, ‘they eat us’). Solitary though this statement was, it provides another interesting contrast with the Mbuti/villagers case. For it is the villagers who see the Mbuti as ‘parasites’ and the Mbuti who see themselves as ‘eating’ the villagers.

KWEGU IDENTITY: A LONG-TERM VIEW

My account would remain incomplete if it ignored the fact that Mursi–Kwegu relations have developed over time and that Mursi society itself has been affected by, and is partly a product of, external influences. In the final part of this chapter I make some necessarily tentative suggestions about the historical context of Mursi domination.

Let me begin by relating some Kwegu and Mursi oral traditions about the origin of their present relationship. This is how a Kwegu, a man of about sixty, described the first meeting of the two groups, several generations ago.

The Mursi came from the west and went down to Dole [on the Omo]. They crossed the river there and went on to Moizoi [in the plain, west of the Omo]. They met a Kwegu there, called Gaima, and he brought them, as his guests, to

his home at the Omo. They came with their cattle and the Kwegu had to cut a path for the cattle, through the sorghum, which was nearly ripe, so that they could drink at the river. They made *tishu* [‘green’ sorghum, lightly toasted] for the Mursi, who sat and ate it in the shade. After the cattle had drunk they were taken back to the plain and returned the next day to drink again.

There were other people in the plain, and the Mursi asked Gaima who they were.

‘They are Bodi.’

‘Do they keep cattle?’

‘Yes.’

So the Mursi said, ‘You stay where you are at the Omo. Stay away from the Bodi and we will attack them.’ The Mursi fought the Bodi, driving them northwards, all the way to Merkule [the southernmost Bodi cultivation site on the east bank of the Omo, opposite the Mursi cultivation site called Kuduma].

Soon after the Mursi had settled down, the Kuchumba [Amhara] came from many directions. Some came along the river Mui [west], others came from the plain [east], others from Shara [north-west] and others from Buru [north-east]. The latter stole Mursi cattle . . . Later on the Haranchi [Italians] came and fought the Kuchumba. We were already grown up by then.

There is no reason to doubt the broad historical authenticity of this account. The points to note about it are (1) that the Kwegu introduced the Mursi to the Omo environment; (2) that the Mursi came into immediate conflict with the cattle-herding Bodi with whom the Kwegu were presumably already in contact; (3) that the Kwegu were insulated from this conflict because they were not in competition for pastoral resources with the Mursi, with whom they immediately established friendly relations; and (4) that all this happened not long before the turn of the last century, when Menilek’s forces first appeared in the Lower Omo region. (The date of the first arrival of the Mursi at the Omo must remain vague, but, from calculations based upon Mursi accounts of the formation of past age sets, I would place it somewhere during the first half of the nineteenth century.)

Mursi accounts of their first contact with the Kwegu tend to be less ‘matter of fact’ than that just recorded, having the unmistakable purpose of ‘mythical charters’ justifying present relationships. Both Mursi and Kwegu acknowledge, for example, that some of today’s Kwegu are descended from Mursi ancestors. The most commonly told story accounting for this state of affairs concerns an important priestly family, a senior member of which gave me the following version.

Ages ago, when our fathers were on their way to the Omo from the west, there were two brothers. The elder brother’s wife was pregnant, and when they got to Dirka [a hill, 30 kilometres west of the Omo] she was ready to give birth. So the younger brother took the cattle on to drink at the hot spring at Dirka, while the elder brother stayed with his wife. After she had given birth, the placenta would not come away. Her husband saw vultures in the sky some way off and said ‘I will go and get some meat so that my wife can drink soup.’ When he reached the spot where the vultures were, he found some Kwegu eating the meat. He took some of the meat and made soup for his wife, eating the rest himself. It was giraffe meat – something we priests never eat.

When the younger brother came back with the cattle, the elder brother said 'Don't come near. We have eaten giraffe.' His brother was shocked and said 'Why did you eat it?' 'Because my wife was ill. You take the cattle on yourself. I will stay with the Kwegu.'

So the younger brother went on with the cattle. When he had crossed the Omo and reached the plain on the other side, he built compounds for his cattle and asked whether anyone had seen his brother.

'My brother who ate giraffe and joined the Kwegu - where is he?'

'He is at a place called Alaka, on the Omo.'

So the younger brother went to see his elder brother, here at Alaka.

'Are you my brother?'

'I am he.'

'Is this your place now?'

'Yes, it has become my place.'

'Then let us both eat from it.'

The elder brother asked how the cattle were and his brother said, 'They are fine.'

Now I herd the cattle; I am descended from the younger brother. The elder brother's descendants are my Kwegu, so we are brothers.

This story explains the accepted Mursi origins of some Kwegu as a consequence of the incompatibility of Mursi and Kwegu values - in this case the 'laxity' of Kwegu in the matter of food taboos. According to a similar 'mythical charter', Kwegu lack of cattle is explained, not by their occupation of an environment in which cattle cannot survive but by their proven inability to stand up to the rigours of the herding life. The same Mursi informant expressed this as follows.

Once upon a time the Kwegu had cattle. But they grew tired of them. They just killed them - they speared them and ate them. 'Cattle are bad,' they said. 'One has to herd them all day in the sun. They are a big job. Raiders come and attack us and drive away the cattle. If we had no cattle, we would not be attacked; there would be no hard work; the sun would not beat down on our heads; we could stay in the shade.'

That is what the Kwegu said long ago. 'We'll be killed if we keep our cattle.'

This 'blaming the victim' is, of course, a familiar device used by dominant groups to justify their positions; one is reminded especially of similar myths about the 'original' control by women of the symbols of male power. Equally familiar is the fact that the myth contains a partial truth which makes assent not entirely unreasonable. For it is their lack of cattle which makes the Kwegu immune from attack by their militarily more powerful herding neighbours.

These oral traditions find many echoes in the literature about hunters living in association with herders in East Africa, the most commonly discussed being the Dorobo, or Okiek.²⁷ Early attempts to account for these 'despised castes' as the 'remnants' of aboriginal hunters, forced into inaccessible forest environments by incoming herders,²⁸ have now been discarded, a commonly accepted explanation today being that they are made up of more or less temporary refugees from the pastoral economy caught in the 'safety net' of the hunting and gathering mode of subsistence.²⁹ There are, however, at least two problems with this residue theory. First, it emphasizes the cultural identity of

the herders at the expense of that of the hunters, since the latter are defined as would-be or failed herders. A related problem is that the theory cannot take account of the repeated assertions of the historical priority of the hunters, an assertion which, as in the Kwegu-Mursi case, must be treated as reflecting particular historical events, rather than the general chronological priority of hunting as a human adaptation. Two authors who have made intensive field studies of East African hunters living in close association with pastoral neighbours, Blackburn and Harvey, have attempted to account for the distinctive ethnic identity of these groups as a product of their adaptation both to a forest environment and to neighbouring groups of non-hunters, and I believe a similar approach may be usefully applied to the question of Kwegu identity.³⁰

Although the Kwegu cannot realistically be regarded as a politically independent unit, this should not be allowed to disguise the fact that they have a strong sense of their separate identity, not as a people who lack cattle but as hunters. Their cultural distinctiveness is most evident in their possession of their own language which, although closely related to Mursi, is not mutually intelligible with it and must have begun to differentiate itself from other languages of the Surma group at least several hundred years ago. Their hunting traditions have clearly been long established, and, although their culture has been heavily influenced by their contact with the Mursi, they maintain a vivid and detailed tradition of earlier customs such as the giving of spears, sorghum, and the fatty chest meat of game animals in bridewealth payments to the bride's mother.

Try as I might, I have not been able to find evidence of the assumption of Kwegu identity by Mursi, and *vice versa*, as a simple consequence of change in mode of subsistence. Mursi who, for one reason or another, have few or no cattle, certainly spend long periods at the Omo, and some may never return to full participation in pastoral activities. But mere residence at the Omo, together with Kwegu, does not *ipso facto* lead to the assumption of Kwegu identity. Both Kwegu and Mursi insist that however long a Mursi stays at the Omo, he does not thereby become a Kwegu. Such a change of identity would require the positive assertion of Kwegu values - including, incidentally, the taking of a Mursi patron. As for movement in the other direction, from Kwegu to Mursi, this is even more difficult to envisage because of the operation of the patron-client relationship, which, as described earlier, blocks all exits 'up' for the client, leaving only the 'side' exit to another patron. I have heard of no case of a Kwegu living together with a Mursi in the cattle settlements, let alone of one who has assumed Mursi identity. This is not to deny that this transition is made, in both directions, by the junior generation as a result of intermarriage and sexual relations between Mursi and Kwegu (always remembering that this does not apply to the children of a Kwegu man). But this is not what is meant when the proponents of the 'residue' theory speak of the 'permeable membrane' which divides such groups as the Dorobo from their herding neighbours.³¹

Taking all this into consideration, it seems evident that the Kwegu have

ecological niche which provided a perfectly adequate subsistence but which was unsuitable for cattle. It is this fact which has enabled them, as it were, to opt out of the continuing drift, punctuated by periodic wars, into which their herding neighbours have been inexorably locked by their combination of herding and cultivation in a marginal environment. And this, it seems to me, is where we can find the truth in the tradition of Kwegu priority: it is not so much that they were historically prior, as geographically stationary. They remained stationary in their ecological 'trap' as successive groups of herders moved by, not like billiard balls, but like waves, each one overtaking the one in front, as they approached the 'shore' of the Ethiopian highlands. If this is correct, then the Kwegu, far from being a 'residue', do in a sense possess a more permanent cultural identity than their several herding neighbours.

THE CONTEXT OF RECENT IMPERIAL HISTORY

There can be no denying that Kwegu identity has also been shaped by their recent relations with their neighbours. In taking up this second aspect of Kwegu adaptation, I specifically do not assume that they have always been linked to their herding neighbours in the way they are now linked to the Mursi. In fact, I should like to suggest that Mursi domination of the Kwegu, in its present form, is the consequence of a particular series of relatively recent historical events, the most important of which was the penetration by the Ethiopian centre of its south-western periphery, beginning in the late nineteenth century. This suggestion rests upon two assumptions. First, the patron-client link between Mursi and Kwegu, seen as a mechanism of Mursi domination, exists first and foremost to enable the Mursi to exploit the Kwegu as a source of ivory, and, indirectly (that is, through exchange with highland traders), of cattle and guns. Secondly, the trade in ivory, cattle and guns did not begin to have a significant impact upon the Mursi until the late nineteenth century, with Shewan demands for tribute from their recently-conquered southern provinces.

There are several points to make in support of the plausibility of the first of these assumptions. To begin with, there is no doubt that the main value of a Kwegu client, in the eyes of the Mursi, lies in the ivory and leopard skins which he provides for his patron, not that the main value of ivory lies in its ready convertibility, through external trade, into cattle.³⁴ Having a Kwegu client is seen as synonymous with having a full cattle compound, and the standard reason given by those Mursi who do not have Kwegu clients for wanting to acquire one is that 'they shoot elephants'. Given the particular rôle of cattle (as a form of famine insurance rather than as a major source of daily subsistence) in the Mursi economy, and considering the social and ecological crises that have drastically affected the Lower Omo region during the past century, it may not be an exaggeration to suggest that the exchange of ivory for cattle has made a vital contribution to the survival of the Mursi as a pastoral people. If the main value of a Kwegu to a Mursi patron is as a source

Reorienting kinship and identity

been occupying their ecological niche along the Omo long enough for this to have given them a distinct cultural identity, and that this identity should be given no less weight than that of their herding neighbours in attempting to understand their present position. Put differently, we should treat as equally problematic the historical permanence and discreteness of both Kwegu and Mursi identity. Who then are the Mursi? Since I have proposed an answer to this question elsewhere, I shall give only the briefest summary of it here.³²

When viewed over a longer time span than the last two or three generations, Mursi society must be regarded not as an historically permanent and distinct unit, but as a temporary outcome of a vast movement of cattle-herding peoples in the general direction of the Ethiopian highlands. This movement has been generated by the need to reduce the uncertainties of pastoral and agricultural production in an environment in which there is a wide range of fluctuations. The nature of this movement is exemplified by the recent history of the Mursi which has seen them pushing northwards into the territory of the Bodi, and, during the past five years, setting up a permanent agricultural settlement in the Mago Valley. Their advance against the Bodi has been achieved by peaceful infiltration accompanied by periodic wars. These periodic conflicts are publicly resolved by means of peace-making ceremonies which have the effect of giving *de jure* status to what had been the *de facto* occupation by Mursi of formerly Bodi territory. Today's Mursi, in other words, are yesterday's Bodi, while today's Bodi are tomorrow's highland cultivators. For, as herders move into higher, better watered land unsuitable for cattle (because of the tsetse challenge), there takes place a process of cultural and linguistic differentiation which eventually gives rise to new political and ethnic identities. The Mursi think of themselves as having migrated *en masse*, in an anti-clockwise direction, from their homeland somewhere to the south-east. The historical truth of the matter may, I believe, be more accurately summed up by saying that it was not the Mursi who made a journey, but a journey that 'made' them - a journey of cattle-herding peoples going far beyond the present Mursi in both space and time. According to this view, the determining factor in creating and maintaining Mursi identity has been the occupation of and adaptation to a particular environment, whereas Mursi accounts of their own history are based upon the assumption that ethnic groups move about the landscape, pushing each other around like billiard balls across a table and maintaining their distinctiveness as they go.³³ The Kwegu make the same assumption, of course, except that they see themselves as stationary, if not entirely disinterested, spectators as successive groups of herders have shunted their way past.

If this view of Mursi ethnic identity is correct, it illuminates the position of the Kwegu as follows. It shows that Mursi identity is as much the outcome of a process of cultural and linguistic differentiation, generated by ecological and environmental factors, as is their own. Both Kwegu and Mursi identities have been shaped by the same movement of Surma-speaking peoples around the south-western edges of the Ethiopian highlands, the Kwegu having found an

of ivory, it is not surprising that the patron-client relationship begins to appear tailor-made for exploiting Kwegu skills as elephant hunters. The client is obliged to provide his patron with at least one of the tusks of any elephant he kills, in recognition of the contribution made by the patron to his bridewealth. In other words, the Kwegu is 'incorporated', by the link to his patron, into the Mursi system of rights and obligations arising out of the payment of bridewealth, while being permanently confined, by reason of the same links, to the status of jural minor. The productive potential of the Kwegu as providers of ivory so overshadows, in the eyes of the Mursi, their other services, and the link, through bridewealth, between patron and client is so well suited to exploiting this potential, that it is reasonable to assume that the particular shape of the relationship that now exists between Mursi and Kwegu is a consequence of the Mursi demand for ivory.

I come now to the second of the two propositions set out above, that this demand was itself a consequence of imperial Ethiopian domination of the south. While ivory has been exported from the East African coast for at least the last two thousand years, it seems to be agreed by historians that it was only in the nineteenth century, with greatly increased European and American demand, that the interior of the region began to be significantly exploited as a source of these exports.³⁵ According to Beachey,

... it was in the nineteenth century that the great development of the East African ivory trade took place. An increased demand for ivory in America and Europe coincided with the opening up of East Africa by Arab traders and European explorers, and this led to the intensive exploitation of the ivory resources of the interior. Throughout the nineteenth century, East Africa ranked as the foremost source of ivory in the world; ivory over-topped all rivals, even slaves in export value and it retained its position right up until the end of the century.³⁶

Within the East African trading network, Abir distinguishes three caravan trading systems which converged, from different directions, on the interior of East Africa 'about the beginning of the nineteenth century'.

One system was that of the Khartoum merchants (*Jelaba*), who began to push southwards into the Sudd and along the Bahr al Ghazal following the 'geographical' expeditions sent by Muhammad Ali between 1839 and 1841. The second was the even older system of the Somali merchants from the Banadir coast . . . The third and most important of all to the history of East Africa was the caravan trade of the Arab and Swahili merchants of the East African coast, the so called 'Zanzibari' merchants.³⁷

None of these major caravan routes, nor the small trading system of the Kamba in northern Kenya, seems, however, to have made a significant impact on the area north of Lake Turkana.

As for the areas of the extreme south beyond Lake Margherita (Abbaya) and as far as, and beyond, the Omo river to the west, they escaped to a large extent even the limited social and cultural impact of the Christian north and the Muslim coast in its heyday in the Sidama area. Those areas, where a multitude of

peoples, cultures and languages existed side by side, was [sic] left in its virginity until the 20th century. We have already seen that the trading systems operating in what is today Kenya only touched on the southern borders of this area at the end of the 19th century. From the little available evidence it also seems that this area was not penetrated by the Somali trading system nor by the north Ethiopian Jabarti trading system and definitely not by the Sudanese Jelaba system.³⁸

Assuming these conclusions of Abir are correct, it follows that the peoples of the Lower Omo did not feel the full effect of the nineteenth-century expansion in the ivory trade until the end of the century, as a result of the demands coming from the Ethiopian centre. The Mursi were perhaps the most 'isolated' of these peoples, being hemmed in on three sides by two rivers, the Mago and the Omo. Because of their geographical position, they avoided direct military confrontation with Menilek's forces, and there are no reports of Ethiopian posts being set up, even temporarily, in their territory. There is evidence, however, that the Mursi were taking part in the ivory trade by the end of the century. The earliest evidence comes from the first (and only) European expedition to travel through Mursiland during the twenty or so years (1890-1910) which saw the 'opening up' of the Lower Omo, an Italian Geographical Society expedition led by Vittorio Böttego.³⁹

Coming from the north-east, Böttego's party reached the lowland plains of the Omo in July 1896. Sticking doggedly to the east bank, they then followed the river to Lake Turkana, passing through Mursiland during the first week of August. After making a long detour up the Mago river (which was too full to cross at its junction with the Omo) they reached a Kara settlement just south of the Omo-Mago junction on August 29th. Here they received a friendly welcome which they contrasted with the hostile and unco-operative attitude of the Mursi. They attributed this, no doubt correctly, to the fact that the Kara were 'used to trade'.⁴⁰ This trading rôle of the Kara, which is attested to by other visitors to the Lower Omo at this time, is explained by their strategic position on the route from the Ethiopian highlands via the Mago Valley to Lake Turkana - and on the only feasible route (at least in the wet season) from Bako, east of the Omo, to Maji and the southern Sudan to the west. Their main item of trade at the time of Böttego's visit was ivory, most of which they had obtained from the 'Murzu' (Mursi). Four years later the American explorer, Donaldson Smith, making a second visit to the area north of Lake Turkana, found the people reeling from the combined effects of disease and 'Abyssinian raids'. The Mursi, on the other hand, whom he contacted from the west bank of the Omo in the south of their present territory, appeared to be unaffected by the military turmoil to the south. They were also, it seems, keen to sell ivory:

The Mursu, whom we found on the banks of the Omo, had escaped the raids of the Abyssinians, and were in a most flourishing condition. After we had shot a couple of hippos for them they became most friendly and brought us much food, consisting of durrha or sorghum, lentils, beans, maize and dried tamarinds. I

bought a small tusk or two from them at first to start trade; but when I discovered a long line of ebony-like forms bearing about a ton of ivory upon their shoulders to my camp, I had to cry a halt, and it was impossible for me to transport more ivory than I had with me.⁴¹

It is, of course, impossible to prove that the ivory trade was unknown to the Mursi before the last decade of the nineteenth century. But I think it is likely that ivory only then became of major economic importance. This was because a voracious *external* demand, newly created by the energetic collection of tribute by Menilek's governors in the recently-conquered highlands to the west and east of Mursi territory, coincided with an equally voracious and newly created *internal* demand for the products for which ivory could be exchanged – cattle and guns.

Garretson's and Donham's studies in this volume make it clear that the establishment of imperial Ethiopian rule in Maji and Bako respectively imposed heavy demands for tribute on the surrounding population of the highlands, ivory and slaves being the most valued forms of tribute. As for the area farther west, Johnson (also in this volume) writes that, during the first ten years of the twentieth century, 'the Ethiopian demand for ivory outstripped the supply in the immediate frontier area, and it was not long before Ethiopian merchants were being supplied with ivory from deep within the Sudan'.⁴² Mursi ivory, therefore, must have found its way eastwards to Bako via the Mago Valley (and the Kara settlement visited by Böttego's party in 1896) and westwards to Maji which, by 1909 'was being called the "chief market" in south-west Ethiopia for ivory'.⁴³ This increased demand from the highlands for ivory was experienced by the virtually unadministered Mursi more as an opportunity for trade than as a demand for tribute. One must ask, therefore, what internal needs they sought to satisfy by means of participation in this trade.

The answer is not difficult to find if we assume that during the last twenty years of the nineteenth century the Mursi suffered comparable disasters to those suffered by surrounding groups of pastoralists. For this was a period not only of 'Abyssinian raids', the worst excesses of which the Mursi may have been spared,⁴⁴ but of drought, famine, human and animal diseases and intertribal warfare. Since neither Böttego nor Donaldson Smith makes any mention of the Mursi having cattle, it may be that they met them after their herds had been depleted by rinderpest and/or pleuro-pneumonia and/or raiding, all of which had a devastating, if selective, effect on the pastoralists of northern Kenya during the 1880s.⁴⁵ If, as seems likely, the last twenty years of the nineteenth century were a period of ecological crisis for the Mursi followed by relatively rapid human and animal population growth, then the sudden increase in the external demand for ivory that was created by Menilek's southern expansion would have come at a most opportune moment. Apart from trading ivory for cattle (as they have continued to do throughout this century) the Mursi probably also began to trade it for guns and ammunition, the demand for which was both created and supplied by the same process of

imperial expansion. This situation would have given the Kwegu a greatly increased, if not an entirely new, importance in the eyes of the Mursi. Through their elephant-hunting skills, the Kwegu were a potential source of the most valued of all Mursi possessions. The institution of clientage enabled the Mursi to exploit the elephant-hunting activities of the Kwegu as a kind of 'commodity production' from which they could cream off a profit in the form of cattle and guns. My suggestion is, therefore, that the incorporation of the Kwegu by the Mursi 'centre' (and therefore the present cultural identity of the Kwegu) was at least partly determined by the incorporation of the Mursi and others into imperial Ethiopia through the expansion of trade at the turn of the century.

- Dabus and the Diddessa, which were sometimes ruled by an Oromo aristocracy but at other times were independent and at war with the yellow-skinned people (which appears to be a reference to the Shinasha). The Gumuz in Dasifi told Schuver that beyond the Oromo, there were yet other Gumuz (Schuver, *Reisen*, p. 87).
- 42 A. Triulzi, 'Trade, Islam and the Mahdia'; Terrefe Woldetsadik, 'The Unification of Ethiopia (1880–1935): Wälläga', *JES* 6 (1968), pp. 73–86.
- 43 L. Vannutelli, 'L'Uallega e l'industria mineraria', *BSGI* 4 (1903), pp. 561–75. A. Weld Blundell suggests a figure of 80,000 for the annual export of Nejjo in his article, 'Exploration in the Abai Basin, Abyssinia', *GJ* 27 (1906), pp. 529–53.
- 44 Hugues le Roux, 'Voyage au Ouallega: Itinéraire d'Addis-Ababä au Nil Bleu', *La géographie* 4 (1901), p. 228.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 230.
- 46 E. Haberland, 'Über einen unbekanntem Gunza-Stamm in Wälläga', *Rassegna di studi etiopici* 12 (1953), pp. 139–48.
- 47 Rahel Mammo was my assistant and interpreter on this occasion in 1974.
- 48 Terrefe Woldetsadik, 'Unification', mentions that Moroda extended his power with the help of 'some devoted vassals', p. 74.
- 49 I spent ten weeks in Aba Bulcho, June–September, 1975, and also made some inquiries in the settlements near Diddessa Bridge in the course of my work in western Wellegga in 1974 and 1975.
- 50 This and subsequent texts used in this account were tape-recorded in Aba Bulcho, 1975, and transcribed and translated in collaboration with Gali Sambato. In my work with the Gumuz language I have been greatly helped by the loan of ms. notes from M. L. Bender, and his article, 'Gumuz, a Sketch of Grammar and Lexicon', *Afrika und Übersee* 62 (1979), pp. 38–69.
- 51 Lee Irwin, 'Some Notes on Saysay Culture', *JES* 6 (1968), pp. 131–9; Patrick Wallmark, 'The Bega (Gumuz) of Wälläga: Agriculture and Subsistence', in *Peoples and Cultures of the Ethio-Sudan Borderlands*, ed. M. L. Bender (East Lansing, Michigan: African Studies Center, Michigan State University, 1981), p. 79. I used 'lineage' terminology in my own earlier references to the Gumuz, for example in 'Kwanim Pa', pp. 242–3, but on reflection consider that the 'descent principle' in Gumuz society does not take precedence in the way that the terminology of 'segmentary lineages' would imply. The writings of Pierre Bourdieu have been a valuable guide in rethinking Gumuz marriage; see especially his *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. R. Nice, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).
- 52 There are many analogous features between the present Gumuz system and the traditional marriage system of the Tiv of Nigeria. I have found the Bohannans' work on the Tiv illuminating in my study of Gumuz marriage, as well as the autobiographical account of Tiv society by Akiga: R. East, ed., *Akiga's Story: The Tiv Tribe, as seen by One of its Members* (London: Oxford University Press for the International African Institute, 1939); Paul and Laura Bohannan, *The Tiv of Central Nigeria*, Ethnographic Survey of Africa, Western Africa, Part 8 (London: International African Institute, 1953), *Tiv Economy* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968) and *A Source Notebook on the Tiv Life-Cycle* (New Haven: Human Relations Area Files, 1966).
- 53 Among the prohibitions are for example those on eating chickens and eggs, or even taking food or drink from pans which might have been used for eggs. This appeared at first to be a blanket prohibition on all women at all times, but on further enquiry, appeared to apply only to women living in their husbands' villages, and not to the chickens and eggs of their own village; cf. Wallmark, 'The Bega (Gumuz)', pp. 110–11.
- 54 There are elaborate ceremonies, songs and rites which are the exclusive province of women among the Wellegga Gumuz. The younger women of a village are educated into this women's culture by the older generation. During my short stay in the village, I was only able to glimpse something of this field, which remains undescribed.

- 55 In Wellegga, apart from using the blanket term 'Shanqalla', the Gumuz speakers refer to themselves by section names, such as Dukunzilla (or the Oromo equivalent Sese), Agalo (Oromo, Ebanja) and so forth. Wallmark has adopted *bega* 'people' as an ethnic self-name (Wallmark, 'The Bega (Gumuz)', p. 79); the stress is on the second syllable. However, 'Gumuz' occurs at least as far back as 1822 in the written sources (Frederic Caillaud, *Voyage à Méroë, au Fleuve Blanc, au delà de Fâzoql dans le midi du royaume de Sennâr*, 4 vols. (Paris: L'Imprimerie royale, 1823–7) where he refers to 'Dar el Goumousse'), and is accepted today by the majority of speakers of various closely-related dialects of the Gumuz language both in Sudan and in Ethiopia.
- 56 C. W. Gwynn, 'Surveys on the Proposed Sudan–Abyssinian Frontier', *GJ* 18 (1901), pp. 562–73.
- 57 The Bugua and Dizhangwe sections were said by my informants to be now in the Sudan.
- 58 Cheesman, *Lake Tana*, p. 360. Erring, as a settlement, and Iaringhe, as a hill, both appear on immediate post-war maps, scale 1 = 100,000, Asosa sheet.
- 59 Taddesse Tamrat's research has revealed that 'Gulbak' occurs as a topographical name in western Gojjam as far back as the seventeenth century – 'Early Trends', p. 12, and p. 19 note 43.
- 60 I am aware that the distinction *Oromo/dina* can be used in various ways. Here, *dina* carries the implication of 'stranger from the wilderness', rather than 'enemy'.
- 61 Wallmark, 'The Bega (Gumuz)', pp. 109–10 and *passim*.
- 62 P. J. and L. Bohannan, *Tiv Economy*; M. Douglas, 'Primitive Rationing', in *Themes in Economic Anthropology*, ed. Raymond Firth (London: Tavistock, 1967).
- 63 Wallmark, 'The Bega (Gumuz)', pp. 99–100.
- 64 Successive reports chronicle the efforts of the Norwegian Missionary Society in their magazine *Norsk Misjonstidende* (Stavanger), from 1979 onwards.
- 65 Lévi-Strauss, *Elementary Structures*, Chapter 27.
- 66 *Ibid.*, pp. 448–9.
- 67 Wendy James, 'Sister-Exchange Marriage', *Scientific American* 233 (1975), pp. 84–94.

6. A problem of domination at the periphery

- I should like to record my gratitude to Dr James Woodburn, Professor Eike Haberland and the Rev. W. F. Muldrow for their help and encouragement when I was planning my first field trip to the Omo valley, with the intention of studying the Kwegu, in 1968. Bill Muldrow gave me invaluable practical assistance when I was setting out from Maji to make my first contact with a group of Kwegu whom he had visited a few months earlier. I am also grateful to James Woodburn, Dr Paul Baxter, Dr John Comaroff, and to participants in the Monterey Conference (particularly Dr Wendy James), for their helpful comments. The weaknesses that remain in the chapter are, of course, my own responsibility.
- The Kwegu described here are only part of the Kwegu population of the Lower Omo valley. Others live farther upstream, in association with the Bodi (see W. F. Muldrow, 'Languages of the Maji Area', in *The Non-Semitic Languages of Ethiopia*, ed. M. L. Bender (East Lansing, Michigan: African Studies Center, Michigan State University, 1976), p. 606), and yet another group of Kwegu lives south of Mursi territory, just south of the junction of the Omo and the Mago. The latter, whom I have never visited, and who are known as Muguji to their southern neighbours, the Kara and the Hamar (Jean Lydall, 'Hamer', *The Non-Semitic Languages of Ethiopia*, ed. M. L. Bender (East Lansing, Michigan: African Studies Center, Michigan State University), p. 394), do not, as far as I know, have a special relationship with the Mursi. They certainly have no regular contact with the Kwegu described here, who barely know of their existence. (This need cause no surprise. Blackburn says of the Okiek (Dorobo) hunters of the highland forest region of south-western Kenya that 'many Okiek local groups are so distant from each other that they have no knowledge of each other' – R.

- H. Blackburn, 'In the Land of Milk and Honey: Okiek Adaptations to their Forest and Neighbors', in *Politics and History in Band Societies*, ed. E. Leacock and R. Lee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 285). The northern Kwegu, on the other hand, do have close and regular relations, notably ones based on intermarriage. Muldrow puts the total population of the northern Kwegu at 600, which is probably an over- rather than an underestimate.
- 3 The only exception was the Böttego expedition, which, following the left bank of the Omo, travelled through Mursiland in August 1896 – L. Vannutelli and C. Citerni, *Seconda spedizione Böttego: l'Omo viaggio d'esplorazione nell'Africa orientale* (Milan: Hoepli, 1899). On Menilek's campaigns in the Lower Omo area see Chapters 4 and 8 of this volume.
 - 4 The most direct involvement of the Mursi with the Ethiopian centre has come during the past ten years, as a result of the famine relief operations of the Ethiopian Government's Relief and Rehabilitation Commission. During the early 1970s the Mursi suffered their worst period of drought and hunger in living memory and conditions were again very bad at the end of the decade. One result of this has been a spontaneous migration, beginning in 1979 and now accounting for about 20 per cent of the entire population, from Mursiland proper to higher, better watered land in the Mago Valley. Having set up a permanent agricultural settlement within three hours' walk of a highland market in an area unsuitable, because of tsetse flies, for cattle, the migrants are in the process of becoming sedentary agriculturalists, like their highland neighbours, with whom they are developing close economic ties (D. A. and P. Turton, 'Spontaneous Resettlement after Drought: An Ethiopian Example', *Disasters* 8 (1984), pp. 178–89).
 - 5 On one occasion, when I was pressing a Mursi on the relationship between the two groups, he asked, in some exasperation, 'Don't you English have Nyidi?'
 - 6 Butzer estimates that the 'upland plains of the Lower Omo Basin' receive a mean annual rainfall of about 480 millimetres, but adds that 'year-to-year variability is very great as is the concentration of the rains in the several rainy spells within the year' (K. W. Butzer, *Recent History of an Ethiopian Delta: The Omo River and the Level of Lake Rudolf*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Department of Geography Research Paper No. 136, 1971), p. 26).
 - 7 At this latitude, the topography of the Omo banks does not allow the creation of extensive flooded flats such as release the Dassanetch, farther south, from reliance on rain-fed cultivation (cf. Almagor in Chapter 4 of this volume).
 - 8 Both languages are members of the Didinga-Murle or Surma groups. See A. Tucker and M. Bryan, *Linguistic Analysis: The Non-Bantu Languages of North-East Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 370–91, and M. L. Bender, 'The Languages of Ethiopia: A New Lexicostatistical Classification and Some Problems of Diffusion', *Anthropological Linguistics* 13 (1971), pp. 165–288; M. L. Bender, 'Nilo-Saharan Overview' in *The Non-Semitic Languages of Ethiopia*, ed. M. L. Bender (East Lansing, Michigan: African Studies Center, Michigan State University, 1976), pp. 467–72. See also Eike Haberland, 'Zur Sprache der Bodi, Mursi, und Yidemic in Südwest Äthiopien' in *Neue Afrikanistische Studien*, ed. J. Lukas (Hamburg: Deutsches Institut für Afrika Forschung, 1966).
 - 9 P. P. Howell, 'A Note on Elephants and Elephant Hunting among the Nuer', *SNR* 26 (1945), p. 95.
 - 10 D. A. Turton, 'Territorial Organisation and Age among the Mursi', in *Age, Generation and Time: Some Features of East African Age Organisations*, ed. P. T. W. Baxter and U. Almagor (London: Hurst, 1978), p. 110.
 - 11 Two types of firearms are used by the Mursi: the 6.5 millimetre Italian Manlicher Carcano carbine and the 8 millimetre Austro-Hungarian Manlicher rifle.
 - 12 This point is brought home by the recent migration of Mursi to the Mago valley (see above, note 4). These are now the only Mursi who do not make use of floodland at the Omo, but, in cutting their dependence on this resource, they have moved into an area of high tsetse challenge where successful cattle herding is impossible.

- 13 My impression is that the Kwegu have fared better than the Mursi during the recent years of drought.
- 14 There is no equivalent in Mursi (nor, as far as I know, in Kwegu) for the English terms 'patron' and 'client'. A Mursi refers to his client as *Nyidini a-nano* ('my Kwegu') and a Kwegu refers to his patron as *Muni a-nano* ('my Mursi', *Muni* being the self name of the Mursi).
- 15 Claude Meillassoux, 'The Economy in Agricultural Self-Sustaining Societies: A Preliminary Analysis', in *Relations of Production: Marxist Approaches to Economic Anthropology*, ed. D. Seddon (London: Frank Cass, 1978), pp. 127–57, and *Maidens, Meals and Money* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). See also Emmanuel Terray, *Marxism and 'Primitive' Societies* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972).
- 16 According to Meillassoux, 'It is through women that the elders maintain authority over the juniors, it is also through women that the latter emancipate themselves from the elders' (*Maidens*, p. 78).
- 17 Like women, therefore, Kwegu approach more closely than juniors in Meillassoux's model the position of an exploited social class. Indeed, according to Meillassoux's usage, they approach it more closely than women:

Class relations are created, not out of *categories* like 'elders' and 'juniors' but through the dominance of entire, organically constituted communities which endow *all their members*, irrespective of age or sex, with prerogatives and privileges, over *all the members* of the dominated communities. In fact, classes cannot be reduced to categories of age and sex. They are organic social groups operating in functional relations dependent one upon the other, and each possessing their own mode of reproduction (*Maidens*, p. 81; italics in the original).
- 18 When I first visited the Lower Omo valley, in 1968, I intended to study hunter/non-hunter relationships and was well aware of the importance of conducting such a study from the vantage point of the hunters. The Kwegu were therefore the first people I contacted in the area. Rightly or wrongly (probably, I now think, wrongly) I gave up my plan to focus my research on them because they were so few and because they were not the 'pure' hunters which, as a callow graduate student, I was hoping to find. In turning my attention to the Mursi I maintained a strong interest in the Kwegu and went out of my way to cultivate particular friendships among them. My principal Kwegu informant worked for me for several short periods during my first field trip – he was then a boy of about fifteen and is now married with two wives and (in 1982) two children – and I believe I have as close a relationship with him as I have with any Mursi. In my (private) conversations with him and other Kwegu I have tried to elicit an assessment of their relationship with the Mursi more in accordance with my assessment of it as an 'objective observer', but have found no evidence of a Kwegu 'version' of the relationship which contradicts that of the Mursi.
- 19 Colin Turnbull, *Wayward Servants: The Two Worlds of the African Pygmies* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1966).
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 50.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 13.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 37.
- 24 J. C. Woodburn, 'Egalitarian Societies', *Man* 17 (1982), pp. 431–51.
- 25 *Ibid.*, pp. 432, 445, 447.
- 26 This interpretation of 'Kwegu consent' conforms to a general hypothesis advanced by M. Godelier ('Infrastructures, Societies and History', *Current Anthropology* 19 (1978), pp. 763–72) to explain the origin of classes in classless societies:

I should now like to formulate the following hypothesis: for relations of domination and exploitation to have arisen and reproduced themselves durably in formerly classless societies such relations must have presented themselves as *an exchange* and as an exchange

- of services. . . We may even suggest that the formation of classes may have taken the form of an *unequal* exchange, one that looked more advantageous to the dominated than to the dominant, and it is perhaps this that we call an extreme case of alienation (pp. 767–8; italics in the original).
- 27 Paul Spencer, *Nomads in Alliance: Symbiosis and Growth Among the Rendille and Samburu of Kenya* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973); M. G. Kenny, 'Mirror in the Forest: The Dorobo Hunter-Gatherers as an Image of the Other', *Africa* 51 (1981), pp. 475–95; R. H. Blackburn, 'The Okiek and their History', *Azania* 9 (1974), pp. 139–57; 'Milk and Honey', pp. 283–305.
 - 28 G. W. B. Huntingford, 'The Social Institutions of the Dorobo', *Anthropos* 46 (1951), pp. 1–48; 'The Political Organisation of the Dorobo', *Anthropos* 49 (1954), pp. 123–48.
 - 29 Spencer, *Nomads*; J. L. Berntsen, 'The Maasai and their Neighbors: Variables of Interaction', *AEH* 2 (1976), pp. 1–11; R. van Zwanenburg, 'Dorobo Hunting and Gathering: A Way of Life or a Mode of Production', *AEH* 2 (1976), pp. 12–21; Cynthia Chang, 'Nomads without Cattle: East African Foragers in Historical Perspective' in *Politics and History in Band Societies*, ed. E. Leacock and R. Lee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
 - 30 Blackburn studied one of thirty-odd Okiek (i.e. Dorobo) groups living in the highland forest region of south-western Kenya. In his view, ethnographic and linguistic evidence supports the Okiek contention that, although now dispersed 'for at least several hundred years', they were once a single group, and that 'they were living in central Kenya prior to the arrival of any presently existing people' ('Milk and Honey', pp. 286–7). The fundamental reason for their survival is their adaptation to the forest, for which pastoralists have no direct use. But their relationship with the present Maasai, who invaded the area nearly one hundred years ago, has also been a formative influence on their culture. Steven Harvey, in 'Hunting and Gathering as a Strategic Adaptation: the Case of the Boni of Lamu District, Kenya' (Ph.D. thesis, Department of Anthropology, Boston University, 1978) describes a group of Boni hunters-cum-horticulturalists living in the Lamu district of Kenya, with Somali and 'Galla' neighbours. He sees the Boni as derived from a predominantly pastoral population which migrated into the area some two thousand years ago, and explains their present identity as, fundamentally, a product of adaptation to a forest environment. But he also suggests that an important factor may have been the external demand for ivory, which rapidly increased in the nineteenth century and in which Somali and 'Galla' acted as 'middlemen' between the Boni and Arab and European traders.
 - 31 Kenny, 'Mirror in the Forest', p. 480.
 - 32 D. A. Turton, 'Territorial Organisation'; 'A Journey Made Them: Territorial Segmentation and Ethnic Identity among the Mursi', in *Segmentary Lineage Systems Reconsidered*, ed. Ladislav Holy, Queen's University Papers in Social Anthropology, Vol. 4 (Belfast: Queen's University Press, 1979), pp. 119–43; 'War, Peace and Mursi Identity', in *Warfare Among East African Herders*, ed. Katsuyoshi Fukui and David Turton, *Senri Ethnological Studies* No. 3 (Osaka, Japan: National Museum of Ethnology, 1979), pp. 179–210.
 - 33 This image is borrowed from J. Burton, 'Atuot Ethnicity: An Aspect of Nilotic Ethnography', *Africa* 51 (1981), pp. 496–507.
 - 34 Leopard skins are an important trade good today, being exchanged usually for a rifle and/or ammunition. The external demand for leopard skin is, I presume, recent compared with that for ivory, and for this reason I think it can be safely ignored in the present argument.
 - 35 R. W. Beachey, 'The East African Ivory Trade in the Nineteenth Century', *JAH* 8 (1967), pp. 269–90; Mordechai Abir, 'Caravan Trade and History in the Northern Parts of East Africa', *Paideuma* 14 (1968), p. 104.
 - 36 Beachey, 'The East African Ivory Trade', pp. 269–70.
 - 37 Abir, 'Caravan Trade', p. 104.

- 38 *Ibid.*, p. 111.
- 39 Vannutelli and Citerri, *Seconda Spedizione*.
- 40 *Ibid.*, p. 328 – 'alquanto abituata agli scambi'.
- 41 A. Donaldson Smith, 'An Expedition Between Lake Rudolf and the Nile', *GJ* 16 (1900), pp. 600–25.
- 42 Douglas H. Johnson, Chapter 9 of this volume.
- 43 Peter P. Garretson, Chapter 8 of this volume.
- 44 That they did not entirely escape these 'raids' is shown by the comments of the Kwegu quoted on p. 164.
- 45 Neil Sobania, 'A View of a Frontier from the Frontier: the Ethiopia–Kenya Frontier, c. 1875–1925' (Paper presented at the Society and History of Imperial Ethiopia Conference, Monterey, California, 1982).

7. Coffee in centre–periphery relations

- 1 The literature on this topic is extensive. General continent-wide analyses can be found in J. Forbes Munro, *Africa and the International Economy, 1800–1960* (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1976), and Immanuel Wallerstein, 'The Three Stages of African Involvement in the World-Economy', in *The Political Economy of Contemporary Africa*, ed. Peter C. W. Gutkind and Immanuel Wallerstein (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1976), pp. 30–57.
- 2 John Tosh, 'The Cash Crop Revolution in Tropical Africa: An Agricultural Reappraisal', *AA* 79 (1980), p. 79.
- 3 Unfortunately no thorough investigation of Gedeo social and political institutions has yet been accomplished. The material here is largely drawn from my own field work, which focused on other issues and was verified as much as possible by earlier Italian sources. See Charles W. McClellan, 'Reaction to Ethiopian Expansionism: The Case of Darasa, 1895–1935' (Ph.D. thesis, Department of History, Michigan State University, 1978), Chapter I; Adolf E. Jensen, *Im Lande des Gada* (Stuttgart: Strecker und Schröder, 1936); Roberto Asinari di San Marzano, *Dal Giuba al Margherita* (Rome: L'Azione Coloniale, 1935). The Gedeo *gadaa* system was borrowed from the Guji and largely mirrors it, although in some aspects it is like that of the Sidama. For comparative material consult Bruno Lonfernini, *I Sidamo, un antico popolo cuscita* (Bologna: Nigrizia, 1971); John H. Hamer, 'Sidamo Generational Class Cycles: A Political Gerontocracy', *Africa* 40 (1970), pp. 50–72; John Hinnant, 'The Guji: Gada as a Ritual System', in *Age, Generation and Time*, ed. P. T. W. Baxter and Uri Almagor (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978), pp. 207–43.
- 4 Richard A. Caulk, 'Adwa: How Much of a Challenge to Colonialism?' (Paper delivered to an Interdisciplinary Seminar of the Faculty of Arts and Education, Haile Selassie I University, Addis Abeba, 1970–1, mimeographed).
- 5 For a more developed discussion of this trend, see my 'Land, Labor and Coffee: The South's Role in Ethiopian Self-Reliance, 1889–1935', *AEH* 9 (1980), pp. 426–40.
- 6 Teferi's father, *ras* Mekonnen, had ruled Harergê from the time of its incorporation into Ethiopia in 1887 until his death in 1906. Balcha was given the post two years later on the death of Teferi's half-brother, Yilma. At the same time, Teferi was provided with a portion of Sidamo to rule over, undoubtedly because he was considered at that time too young and inexperienced to handle a province as important as Harergê.
- 7 Comparable data is hard to come by. Just prior to the railway's completion to Addis Abeba in 1916, A. Spaletta, in 'Il Caffè nell'Abissinia', *L'Agricoltura coloniale*, 11 (1917), p. 204, noted that a mule load of coffee from the capital to Dire Dawa cost MTS 9 per 100 kilograms. A little later, the rail rate on 'Abyssinian' coffee (that from the interior provinces) was U.S. 9¢ per ton-mile or a flat rate of U.S. \$ 11.40 per ton (equivalent to MTS 17.48 per ton if MTS 1 = U.S. 65¢). At the flat rate, 100 kilos of coffee to Dire Dawa would cost around MTS 1.75. See United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic