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7. THE NYANGATOM: AN OUTLINE
OF THEIR ECOLOGY AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

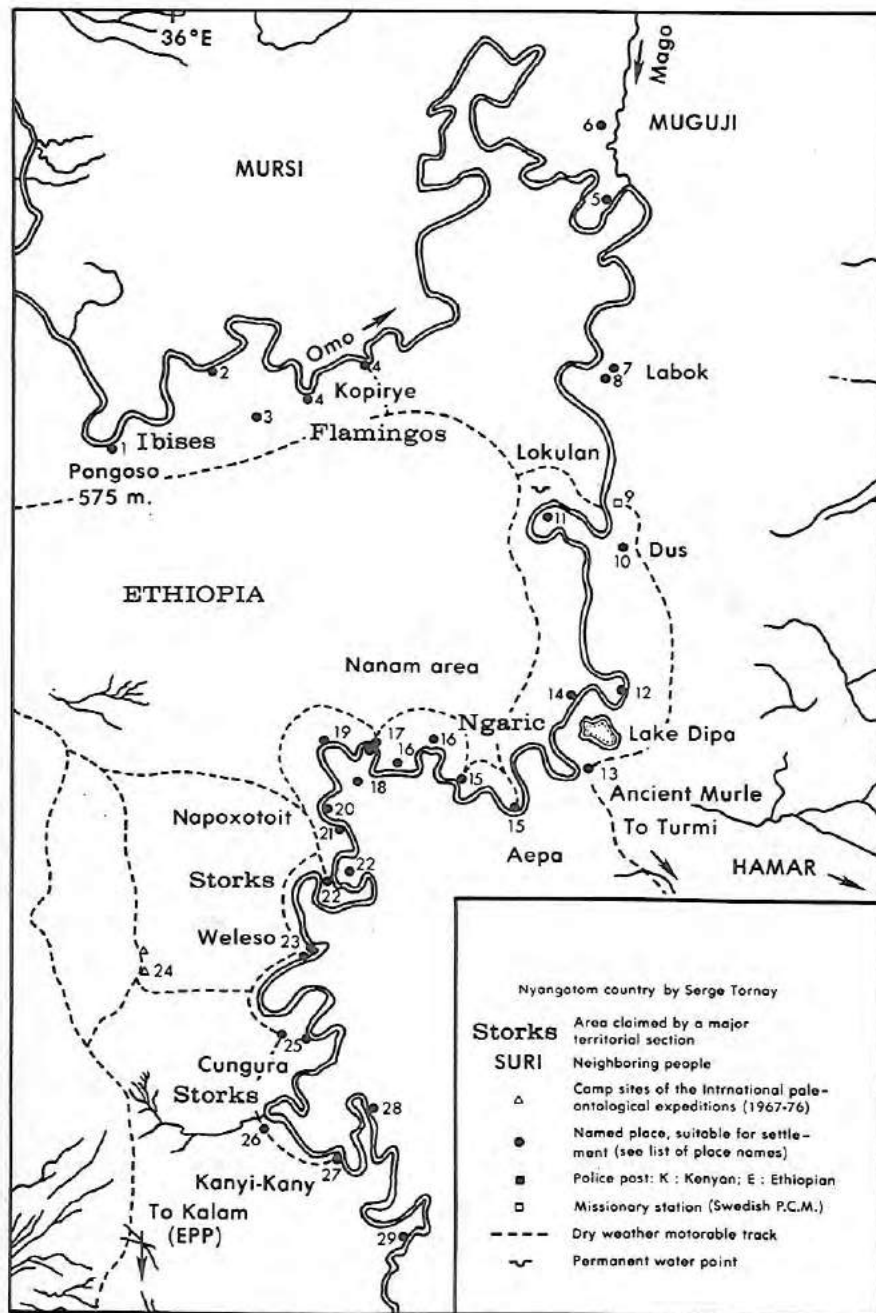
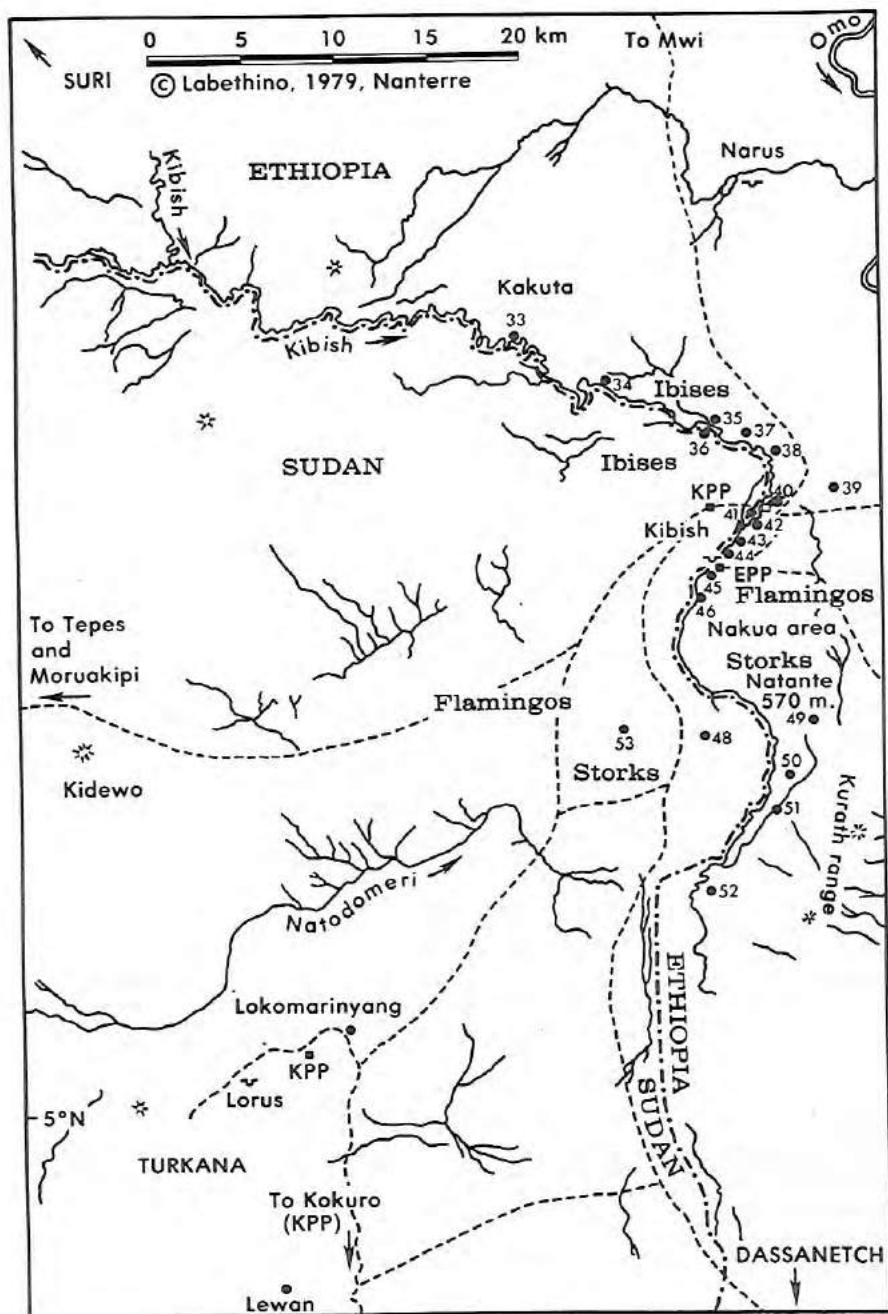
SERGE TORNAY*

7.1. Introduction

The Nyangatom, or "Yellow Guns" number 5,000 individuals and inhabit a part of the Lower Omo Valley (Gemu Gofa Province, Ethiopia) and adjacent western lowlands and mountain piedmonts in Sudan. They are one of the minor and least known tribes of the "Karimojong cluster" (P. and P.H. Gulliver 1953). Their economy, although ideally pastoral, should be described as mixed, since sorghum cultivation, fishing, and gathering all play an important role in subsistence. Linguistically, according both to traditional and recent work (Bender 1976), the Nyangatom are, together with the former "Central Nilo-Hamites", a branch of the Nilotic sub-family, within the East Sudanic family of the wider Nilo-Saharan phylum. With this Nilotic connection they are linguistically and culturally rather isolated in their present setting: among their neighbors, only the Turkana in the Southwest (Kenya) and the Toposa in the West (Sudan) speak dialects immediately intelligible to them. Their immediate neighbors in the Lower Omo Valley all belong to distinct linguistic families. These are

- the Dasanec (15,000) in the southernmost part of the Valley and the Omo Delta, speaking a Cushitic language;
- the Kara (800) and the Hamer (10,000) on the eastern side of the Omo, speaking Omotic languages;
- the Mursi (5,000) in the north and the Suri, farther to the northwest, belonging to the Surma family (Bender 1976).

Surrounded by a diversity of ethnic groups, alien to them for linguistic, cultural, and historical reasons, and in strong competition with them for relatively scarce resources, the Nyangatom have a strong feeling of their cultural identity and of the specificity of their social organization. Up to the present day they have been very weakly influenced by the small Ethiopian, British, then Kenyan, and even (for a short period) Italian garrisons, established in their territory in the course of the present century. They had no missionaries until 1973 and the Swedish who came then, members of the Philadelphia Church Mission, engaged more in medicine and in marginal economic assistance (e.g. seed distribution) than in specifically missionary activity. This form of assistance, coupled with some governmental relief, proved to be useful in the course of the last five years, during which the Nyangatom have been in a state of war with most of their neighbors, particularly with the Dasanec. Raiding, both offensive and defensive, brought about a collapse of agricultural production, thus adding famine and some times epidemics to an already



MAP

NYANGATOM COUNTRY

Serge Tornay

Additional key to Fig. 1.

1. Nyangatom place names for the Omo or Nanam area

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Pongoso | 17. Kangaten and Nakoriceke |
| 2. Care | 18. Nakiryenkipi |
| 3. Narumatom | 19. Narogwey |
| 4. Kopirye | 20. Napoxotoit |
| 5. and 6. Ngumocu or Muguji* | 21. Kangiporoxwe |
| 7. and 8. Labok* (Kara) | 22. Nacuro |
| 9. Crocodile hunter's camp,
then missionary station
(Swedish P.C.M.) | 23. Weleso and Kacae |
| 10. Dus* (Kara) | 24. Nakuloy (International
paleontological research
camp sites 1967-76) |
| 11. Kurdam* (Kara) | 25. Cungura and Kalimadik |
| 12. Kadokocin | 26. Kare |
| 13. Ancient Murle or Nauamur | 27. Kanyi-kany |
| 14. Toro | 28. Naoyakori |
| 15. Aepa or Ngaric | 29. Kolony* (Dasanec) |
| 16. Ngimerirët, Longothima and Lojir | |

2. Nyangatom place names for the Kibish and Nakua area

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| 33. Kakuta | 44. Nacukut |
| 34. Korukuma | 45. Naoyatir |
| 35. Lopokori | 46. Natir (EPP), Natikar |
| 36. Lokorilam | 47. Natante |
| 37. Logongoy | 48. Lotikipi |
| 38. Aoreatagabongin | 49. Ruk-ruk |
| 39. Naoyapua | 50. Kajamakin |
| 40. Naoyapye (Swedish P.C.M.
since 1972) | 51. Celengmur |
| 41. Lodot | 52. Malipath |
| 42. Lokwamunyen | 53. Naoyacebey |
| 43. Lokuam | |

* : Places occupied by neighboring peoples in 1970.

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precarious economic existence. But the Yellow Guns are culturally and historically prepared for such situations. They are a proud, autonomous agro-pastoral people fighting for their lives in a harsh environment.

7.2. Nyangatom ecology

7.2.1 Territory

Nyangatom territory covers about 2,400 km² in the Lower Omo Valley (Ethiopia and Sudanese border region) and a narrow transhumance belt connecting Kibish with Moruankipi. This extends for over 120 km from east to west and over 10 to 20 km from south to north, that is an area of about 1,800 km². This represents an approximate total of 4,200 km² for 5,000 individuals, i.e. an average of nearly 1 inhabitant/km². In fact, a very large part of this territory is either

- unexploited (thick bush, barren areas, the Kurath Mountains),
- periodically exploited (pasturelands far from permanent watering places), or
- unsuitable for certain activities (e.g. access to the Omo forest is forbidden to cattle owing to the presence of the tsetse-fly).

Thus a large part of the territory is either not directly productive or is used only for movement to other resources.

From east to west one can distinguish three main areas of settlement and economic exploitation:

- the riverain forest and the banks of the Omo, a region of agriculture, gathering, and fishing extending for about 300 km² and with about 1,000 people in permanent residence (mainly Nyangatom who have lost their livestock);
- the pastoral region of Kibish, with permanent water resources extending for about 300 km² and with 3,000 inhabitants during the wet season, - say ten inhabitants/km² at the time of the highest concentration¹. A tendency towards sedentarization can be seen in this region;
- the transhumance area in Sudan, with the possibility of settlement on the extreme west, at Loole, at the foot of the Moruankipi mountains. I estimate that about 1,000 Nyangatom have settled down in this area. This trend to settle in the west is looked upon at Kibish as a kind of secession movement, partly due to the fear of the Dasanec. The Toposa, though allied to the Nyangatom, seem to try to drive them away to the east (1976).

The integrity of this ethnic territory is neither threatened by the Mursi, who are apparently expanding northwards (Turton), nor by the Kara, who are too few in number to attack any but the most isolated Nyangatom settlements on the Omo and who are a purely agricultural people. The principal threat comes from the south, from the Dasanec, who

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attacked the Nyangatom on the Omo and at Kibish several times during these last six years. The Suri (Ngikoroma) and occasionally the Jiye and the Turkana still represent a real threat for the groups moving to or coming from Sudan.

7.2.2 Climate and vegetation

The various ethnic groups in the Lower Omo Valley have to deal with the same difficulties: the necessity of subsisting in an environment providing resources which are scarce and irregularly distributed in time and space. This region, which lies with Lake Turkana in the depression of the Rift Valley, represents with its various human, animal, and vegetal populations, a complex of ecosystems with the following common features:

- 1) low altitude (in general under 500 m);
- 2) high average temperatures with small annual variations (an "equatorial" feature);
- 3) relatively low rainfalls (350 to 400mm/y., according to what few estimates are available) but with an approximately bi-seasonal rhythm: a "wet" season from March to June and a "dry" season from July to January (a "tropical" feature);
- 4) a hydrographic system, in which the Omo and its tributary the Mako, in Mursi territory, are the only permanent rivers, and with a few temporary rivers whose phreatic sheets are used by the herdsman to water their herds (e.g. Kibish);
- 5) contrasted vegetation areas: the riverain forest of the Omo, dry forest with tall trees and creepers, savannas with or without acacias, and alternating with thick thorn-bushes, and almost barren areas (volcanic tuffs, overgrazed areas, etc.).

The tribes living in this area are subjectively pastoral (cattle, goats, sheep, donkeys), but they are forced to resort to a greater or lesser extent to dry farming and flood cultivation (sorghum, maize, beans, calabashes, tobacco), gathering, fishing, and hunting in order to ensure their subsistence. The diversity of the biotopes associated with the various productive activities should ensure a relatively steady economic equilibrium, since each tribe has roughly at its disposal a section of the Omo river, the adjoining areas with their own resources (rangelands), and agricultural areas (flood land along the banks of the Omo and the temporary rivers, as well as land for rain cultivation). However, two crucial factors make this equilibrium precarious:

- a) The forest of the Omo is infested with the tsetse-fly, and thus inaccessible to cattle, so that the only permanent river of this region is unsuitable for watering stock. For the Nyangatom, the Omo is a place of refuge for pastoralists

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who have lost their livestock and who are forced to survive on the resources of the river and its forest, i.e. from fishing, gathering, and farming. The pastoral Nyangatom are concentrated on the banks of the Kibish river, 40 km away from the Omo where, however, they grow sorghum and other crops after the flood (October-January) and during the wet season (March-June).

b) The second factor is the climatic instability and especially the irregular rainfall, which affects both stock-raising and agriculture. In the dry years the cattle are threatened by famine and epidemics. Dry farming and flood cultivation in the spreading area of the Kibish river, whose catchment area is limited, are also directly dependent on climatic conditions. These uncertainties have a significant effect on intertribal relationships, for the endemic local warfare has more than merely "cultural" causes.

An original map of Nyangatom country shows the distribution of the main Nyangatom settlement areas. Concerning the place names and their connection with actual residence, it should be noted that although the Nyangatom can be said to have permanent settlement areas - such as Nakua, the Kibish area, or Nanam, the Omo area -, they have no permanent settlements proper. Physical settlements are not permanent, according neither to their location nor to their members. Thus a named place, acknowledged by the Nyangatom as a residence site, may be found settled or empty according to the season (many pastoral settlements are "abandoned" during the dry season), or to the state of intertribal relations (many villages on the Omo side were deserted after the Dasanec raids in 1971-1972).

7.2.3 Annual subsistence cycle

The main economic activities of the Nyangatom are presented in Figure 2. The annual cycle is different for the Kibish people, who have cattle and for the Omo people, who have none.

7.2.3.1 Kibish Cycle

This is the more complete cycle, since pastoral life is associated both with agricultural exploitation of the Kibish and Omo areas and with gathering in the more difficult periods.

During the wet season the main settlements are concentrated around the Kibish and there are practically no secondary cattle camps in the bush. Ideally, the groups who have moved to the west return to Nakua (Kibish). It is the time of social festivities which require plenty of milk and food. In February, before the first rain, the women cut and clear cultivation sites on both sides of the river for the

Figure 2. Chart of Nyangatom Subsistence Activities

Season	March	April	May	June	July	August	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.
Rainfall	A K I P O R O or "ABUNDANCE" A K A M U or S T A R V A T I O N											
	Rains ... possible short rains short rains dry weather											
Kibish river	in flowing, flood ,dry possible floods dry											
Agriculture	tilling, sowing gardens harvesting clearing, sowing harvesting (dry cultivation) (flood cultivation) fields											
Pastoral life	cattle back to Kibish Oscillating grazing, possible transhumance to Tepes and Moruankipi cattle camps near Kibish or cattle camps near Kibish											
Animal food	plenty of grass sorghum stems fresh grass scarcity sorghum stems											
Animal yield	plenty of milk milk scarce some milk no milk											
Gathering	wild greens wild berries, roots											
Omo river	low ... rising main flood falling ... very low											
Agriculture	harvesting sowing harvesting clearing, sowing harvesting, sowing "swamps" bush gardens river banks river banks, "swamps" (dry cultivation) (flood cultivation)											
Fishing	harpoon harpoon											
Gathering	wild fresh greens honey wild berries, roots honey											

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purpose of dry farming (sorghum, beans). During the wet period (March, April) they sow these gardens, sometimes several times, since heavy rainfall may flood the gardens and rot the seed. This harvest, in good years, is ready by July. From July to September the cattle have to graze farther and farther from Kibish. The milch animals stay in the main settlements and the young men pitch cattle camps in the bush (10 to 15 or more km away from Kibish). They water the cattle either at Kibish, where they return every second day, or in the pools formed by occasional falls of rain. They live essentially on the blood of their cattle, gathering and occasionally hunting (dik-dik, topi, warthog, hare, guinea-fowl, etc.). In August-September some members of the polygynous families at Kibish (e.g. one or two wives and girls, accompanied by a young man) settle on the banks of the Omo, which is in flood, so as to clear them for flood cultivation. This work is all the harder because the tools are rudimentary (the "pankas" or bush knives are usually not sharp) and food is scarce: the main food items are gathered products, fish obtained from the permanent inhabitants of the Omo and birds or mammals killed in the riverain forest, including baboons. The river bank cultivation sites are sowed in October, as soon as the water has retreated. In September-October other members of the families prepare the fields of Natante in the Kibish area; here the harvest depends on the size and timing of the flood, which is much less reliable than at the Omo. It happens frequently that an unexpected rise in water level inundates the fields and destroys the seeds. In October a short period of rainfall usually occurs, which partially restores the pasturelands and usually allows pastoral camps to be established in the vicinity of the Tepes mountains (about 50 km west of Kibish, in Sudan). There the herdsman can graze and water their livestock for one or two months. As the dry season progresses and reaches its climax (December-January) they must either come back to the vicinity of Kibish (dry season settlements and watering place in the Kibish river bed) or move farther to the West where they can find permanent watering places at Moruothe, Loole, and Moruankipi. There they meet and live on friendly terms with the Toposa, though some quarrels may occur between them about watering. During these movements risks of raids arise from the Ngikoroma (Suri people in Ethiopia and Sudan), Jiye (Sudan), and Turkana (northern Kenya).

During December people begin to gather the main harvest of sorghum at Natante (Kibish) and on the Omo banks. This is a period of relative plenty for the people of the main settlements while the young stock and their mothers eat sweet sorghum or maize leaves and stems. As the first rain falls, in March, the people wait for those who had been away herding cattle to come back to Kibish.

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7.2.3.2 Omo cycle

The agricultural cycle at the Omo is the same as at Kibish: dry farming during the wet season, and flood cultivation on the lands flooded by the river during the dry season. The Omo people sometimes succeed in preparing a third harvest from "swamps" that they use as fields: these are lowlands lying within the large loops of the river, which are inundated during the river's flood by subterranean infiltration and which remain free of any shrubby vegetation precisely because of these prolonged inundations. According to the importance of the flood the "swamps" remain sodden until December-January. As soon as people can walk on them or clean them they sow them with sorghum, maize, beans. The harvest will be ripe just before the rainy season, thus providing the additional food indispensable to the Omo people who suffer more from famine than those of Kibish. Of course, numerous exchanges occur between the Kibish and the Omo people, based on kinship ties, alliances, and contractual friendship; dried fish, honey, grain, pots from the Kara and the Mursi, and tobacco are the Omo products that are exchanged for meat, butter, hides, and small stock (the latter for domestic and medical rituals). However, in periods of chronic insecurity - as has been the case since 1971 - these exchanges become spasmodic or non-existent, so that the Omo people live in a great deal of isolation and are more subject to ecological uncertainties. Gathering leaves, berries, and wild roots; collecting wild honey, fishing, crocodile hunting, killing birds, and trapping small mammals and herbivores, the Nyangatom isolated on the Omo banks become simple hunter-gatherers in the bad years. Because of their poverty they cannot, like the Kibish people, acquire fire-arms, and for this reason they are more vulnerable to the raids of warlike neighbors wishing to acquire the status of "killers" within their own society.

To conclude, perhaps the most relevant feature of the Nyangatom economy is that it is highly diversified. Nyangatom technology is rudimentary, but it allows the exploitation of a great variety of resources. At Kibish the people are well adapted to a pastoral life, but there is a risk of overgrazing in the central zone and of neglecting agricultural activities. Ruined herdsmen can adapt themselves to life on the Omo banks, though they see this as a regression. Agricultural resources at the Omo area are important, but they are underexploited owing to the poorness of the means used for clearing the ground and to the lack of irrigation. Agronomists visiting the area often conclude that some modest technical assistance could considerably improve food production in the Lower Omo Valley.

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7.3 General features of social organization

According to traditional ethnographic usage, the framework of Nyangatom social life will be examined first at a local and familial level, then at a wider, tribal level. Due to the limits of the present contribution, the relationships between the Nyangatom and their neighbors will be alluded to only briefly in the conclusion. Life at the local level is symbolized by belonging to a settlement and to a family, these two realities being possibly coextensive. Among the Nyangatom the idiom of kinship does not provide a frame for the wider political organization. They have no segmentary lineage system like their remote but famous anthropological cousins, the Nuer. Beyond the local and familial level, the social organization of the Nyangatom is based on two distinct but connected systems: a territorial and an age system. The present account is limited to an outline of the structure of those systems, leaving the analysis of their numerous functions for other publications.

Though the following description is valid for the Nyangatom in general, some parts of it - for example the account of settlements - apply more precisely to the pastoral Nyangatom in Kibish.

7.3.1 Local life

7.3.1.1 The settlement

The Nyangatom pastoral settlement, nawi, pl. ngawiey, has a typical Nilotic look. The inhabited area is enclosed by a fence of thorns or, in time of danger, by heavier stockades. At night the various gateways, ngiguderin (sing. eguder), are carefully closed from inside by means of a heavy pile of thorny branches. Inside, the main structure are the cattle kraals and smaller kraals for the remaining livestock: donkeys on one side, goats and sheep on the other. Young stock are usually kraaled inside higher enclosures within their mother's kraals. In the vicinity of the cattle kraal, which is the economic, social, and ritual center of the polygynous family, one finds the beehive-shaped huts of the married women. Each wife, including the widows of a deceased father or brother of the family head, generally has a day hut, or "kitchen", ekal, and a night or sleeping hut, akai. The family head has no private hut. The yard between the huts of each wife is swept and often partially enclosed by a fence, in the form of a palisade or wind-screen, akitubo, securing both shade and some privacy for daytime activities or for the accommodation of guests, grown up children, and youths of both sexes.

The size of the ngawiey varies. At one extreme, a family head, that is the married owner of a herd of cattle,

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may live in a settlement of his own with his wives, children, and other dependent persons such as his mother or other widows of his father, and sometimes with one or more married sons. Such a settlement is coextensive with a homestead and with the family, polygynous or extended, living in it. The largest ngawiey may consist of as many as 20 families, the mean size being 8 families.

The Nyangatom distinguish two types of settlements:

1) the ngeerea (sing. ere), or main settlements, which shelter either full families depending on a head or, as during the dry season, less mobile elements of the families such as old persons, pregnant women, nursing mothers, and usually the family head;

2) the ngaborea (sing. abor, "backside") or secondary settlements. These are temporary goat or cattle camps set up by married but not yet autonomous sons of the family head or by youths from one or two families whose heads live in the same main settlement. These camps are set up at a maximum distance of half a day's cattle walk (15-20 km) from the main settlements and watering places. In the case of transhumance proper, a settlement may be called ere or abor, according to the presence or the absence of the family head and of the main body of his human and animal dependents.

In spite of the mobility of families as autonomous units, one can observe a good deal of long-term stability in residential associations. Family heads tend to settle down together on the basis not so much of agnatic but rather of cognatic - particularly matrilineal - and affinal ties, as well as of age and bond partnerships. At a macroscopic level, the solidarity of the members of a nawi is immediately suggested by the terms used for identifying the settlements in everyday speech. One can use:

the name of an important family head: nawi of Kotol, of Lokuti, of Tikapil, etc.;

the name of a social generation: nawi of the Elephants, of the Ostriches, etc.;

the name of an age-set: nawi of the Ngimeriputh, age-set of the Ostriches (see below 7.3.2.2).

To these sociological references is added a system of place names. Thus the question "Where are you going?" may be answered as follows:

if one is at the Omo: "to Nakua" (Kibish area) or "nawi" (that is, "home");

if one is at Kibish: "to Lokwamunyan" (a site), or "nawi" (that is, "home");

if one is at Lokwamunyan: "to the nawi of the Elephants";

if one is inside the nawi: "to the nawi of Kotol". In the latter case, nawi means homestead. Thus, although the meaning of nawi is wide, the context makes it possible, in any particular instance, to determine what particular refer-

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ence the speaker has in mind.

Except in the case of "bad death", the dead are buried inside the settlement: the man in the middle of the kraal, the married woman in the kraal, but near the fence, the children and widows outside the kraal, often near the main settlement hedge, but always inside it. A pile of some additional thorn branches may be necessary to keep away the hyenas.

A settlement is often deserted because of the accumulation of human excrement (nobody goes out at night). This excrement is particularly embarrassing during wet periods. If the new settlement is built nearby, the frameworks of the old huts, which can be carried in one piece by several women, and also the precious thatch of Graminae are used again. For the thorn-fences people prefer to cut fresh bushes each time they build enclosures, which constitutes a real threat to such vegetation in densely populated areas.

7.3.1.2. The family

The word nawi can refer both to the physical settlement and to the social group inhabiting it. Thus it may refer to a single polygynous family². The polygynous family is defined by reference to a living married male, the family head, who is considered the owner or master of all the livestock on which he and his dependents are living. Polygynous families headed by current senior elders are the typical social units. But one can observe also extended families, that is local corporate groups made up by the joint residence of an elder, his wives and children, one or two married sons with their own nuclear or polygynous families, and other relatives of the family head, possibly including one of his married sisters. This type of family is reminiscent of the Jie rather than of the Turkana mode of family organization - although the Jie seem to be more "patrilineal" (see Gulliver 1966). But extended families are not the norm among the Nyangatom, and the Turkana emphasis on the residential and later jural autonomy of adult males is more pervasive. Nevertheless it should be noted that separate residence of, say, two male siblings, does not imply that they have achieved a state of jural independence, particularly in connection with their respective rights in the herd inherited from their father. Inheritance rules lead to stressing another social unit, the "kitchen".

Like the word nawi, which means both the settlement and its inhabitants under a male head, so the word ekal, "kitchen", refers both to the day hut of a wife and to the very important social unit that she constitutes together with her progeny. The polygynous family is so far from being a "nuclear family" (see note 2) that each "kitchen", through its head, the mother, develops into a corporate body

which exhibits, at least temporarily, the strongest internal solidarity. Though the father is considered the final owner, elope, of all the livestock of a family, each wife, first at marriage and gradually with the birth of her children, is given "rights of use" over specific animals of the family herd. These rights are long-lasting and include the progeny of the female animals. At the death of the husband-father, these rights of use become rights of inheritance, thus contributing to the identity and rivalry of the various ngikolya ("kitchens", or "houses" as P.H. Gulliver 1966 names them), the social units which emerge as transitional forms of the family at the death of the patriarch. A typical house consists of a widow and her male and female children, under the authority of her eldest son. The latter is then usually married and becomes the owner of the cattle inherited as the joint property of the house. Although the various brothers of the fraternity may each achieve, with time, a relatively high degree of autonomy, the authority of the eldest living brother is long-lasting in both the economic and ritual spheres, even if they do not live together. In fact, the permanent residence of a set of full brothers - whether married or not - is seldom achieved owing to the constraints either of pastoral management (the setting up of cattle camps for example), or of the various agricultural tasks (e.g. cultivating on the Omo banks), or simply to strained relations resulting from the ever-present authority of the senior brother. The age at which a man marries is, in the last resort, less dependent on his actual age than on his position within the family, for marriage implies important transfers of stock. Ideally, it occurs in strict order of seniority, but it sometimes happens that the eldest takes a second wife before conceding to the youngest brother the right to "conduct home" his first legal wife. First spouses of younger brothers are usually widows "seized" from deceased fathers or elder brothers. Such wives keep the legal status they acquired by their first marriage and transmit "kitchen seniority" to all their children. In particular, all their children belong to the social generation (see below 7.3.2.2 The age system) immediately following that of the first legal husband, irrespective of the generation of the inheriting husband. Thus secondary marriages fit into the category of levirate rather than of "widow inheritance" proper. Although such wives are usually treated as "real" wives, levirs are usually keen to get "wives of their own".

Sexual rivalries and elopements³ are a common source of conflict between close agnates, first between fathers and sons and second between male siblings. Adult sons and younger brothers often try to take up residence with maternal kin, actual or prospective affines, or with age mates in order to ensure their future autonomy and to escape, at least partially, from a state of submission and social inferiority within their family or house.

7.3.1.3. Incorporation and affinity

The Nyangatom, as has already been pointed out, have no lineage system for establishing a frame of stable inter-group relationships. Segmentations does play a role in the kinship structure, but only at a shallow genealogical level. Segmentation occurs between co-wives rather than between full or half brothers. Houses are the basic "segments" of the society, but they are kinship groups and do not provide any political structure beyond the family. Houses are arranged into polygynous and sometimes extended families, the latter exhibiting a tendency towards a patrilineal pattern of incorporation. But such families cannot be conceived as lineages, or as part of lineages, since they do not define themselves by relationships of solidarity and/or opposition towards similar groups within an overall unilineal frame of reference. One could say that jural segmentation between agnates and their descendants is a private matter, a problem of seniority and of cattle inheritance, not a public matter influencing the political relationships between communities. Elder agnatic relatives, like first cousins or even half brothers, are usually rivals rather than solidary companions: once they have achieved their autonomy as cattle owners and masters of a homestead they may settle down at distant places and see each other rather infrequently: for example, at funeral festivals or when claiming rights over the bride-wealth of a common female relative. In the absence of offspring they may inherit the estate and become pro-husband of a deceased relative. But meanwhile they often prefer to go their own ways, to engage in residence, transhumance and economic cooperation with age-mates, affines, maternal kin, and bond-friends.

Thus Nyangatom clans should be viewed as emblematic entities rather than as descent units. The term ateker, pl. ngitekerea, applies to any agnatic kin as well as to a clan as a whole. Cattle brands, ngimacer, are among the significant connotations of ateker. Any Nyangatom, male or female, is a member of his father's clan just as people inherit family names in western countries. But clans are exogamous: I noted only 21 cases of clan endogamy out of a total of 809 marriages. Moreover, one usually does not take a wife from one's own mother's clan. In the same way, marriage prohibitions are sometimes imposed on the progeny/of grand-mothers, whether paternal or maternal. But this is true only if kinship ties are well-known to the families of the prospective partners. Finally, except in the case of proper clan exogamy, it is close consanguinity which is considered a bar to marriage, rather than membership of specific descent units. One could say that the rules of exogamy resemble those prevailing in Crow- and Omaha-type systems, but that a stress is laid upon reckonable consanguinity rather than on

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the members of whole descent units having once "given" a wife. This is in accord with the weakness of the lineage principle among the Nyangatom. Cognatic tendencies are also evident in the kinship terminology (see below 7.3.1.4.).

Generally speaking marriage bonds quickly develop into kinship ties. A mother's brother is a kinsman, not an affine; marriage with affines is disapproved, for it can bring about contradictions in meeting bridewealth obligations. For example, if a man were to marry a sister of his first wife he would receive, through his first wife, at least one head of the marriage cattle he had handed over for his new wife. Bridewealth is important, both sociologically and numerically - it consists, ideally, of twenty head of cattle and fifty of small stock - and its payment, lasting as it does over many years, establishes strong ties of solidarity: it is to the advantage of each partner to develop as diversified a net of affines as possible.

To return to the clan, to what extent can agnatic descent and father-right be said to be "strong" principles of incorporation among the Nyangatom? Although women, through marriage, seem to be strongly incorporated into their husband's families, and although divorce seems to be rare, daughters and sisters never lose all their rights within their original families. Widows with no levir may come back and live with one of their brothers: they can always claim rights over some cattle within the estate of their original house. The bond between full brothers and sisters is a strong one, a feature which should not be seen as restricted to matrilineal societies. The sisters of a wealthy man may stay in her brother's settlement at marriage, her husband adding to its labor-force. Thus, mother's brothers can be more authoritative persons than fathers for some members of a settlement. Moreover, the apparently low rate of divorce may be an illusion, due to considering only well-established unions, for which a great deal or all of the bridewealth has been transferred. But if one looks at the many unions in which young men, especially younger brothers, tentatively engage and which are very often shortlived, then we get a very different picture. Fathers and brothers control for a long time the lives of their daughters and sisters. Girls and women are firmly tied to their families of orientation. But although the father is said to exercise an overall control, people's main loyalty is to their original houses rather than to their agnates. It is thus not surprising that maternal kin, especially maternal uncles, are so important for both sexes. Young men frequently try to join their uncle's settlements temporarily or permanently. They like to get married there, to cooperate with their maternal kin, and eventually to become levir of a wife of the deceased uncle, thus possibly succeeding to him as leader of a settlement. To label the Nyangatom a "patrilineal" society would

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thus obscure some important aspects of their kinship organization.

Both the diversity of alliances and the flexibility of residence rules lead to a high degree of dispersion of the clan members within Nyangatom territory. Territorial sections (see below 7.3.2.1.) have no boundaries which can stop a man changing his economic routines and territorial affiliation. Although rights to cultivable land are sometimes claimed on the basis of clan membership, it is residence which finally turns such claims into rights of use. There are no clan claims on pasturelands. Clans provide a sense of personal identity and are operative only in regard to exogamy, domestic rituals, and a few public ritual prerogatives such as rain making. Domestic rituals vary a great deal, both formally and substantively, from one clan to the next. These "customs", *etal*, *pl ngitalyo*, provide the best basis for establishing clan identities, a subject which cannot be developed here. I conclude this section with a list of the clan names, most of which are "proper names", untranslatable in the present state of our knowledge. Since a number of clan names are recorded among other tribes of the Karimojong cluster, they may provide clues for ethnohistorical connections.

Thy Nyangatom are divided into twenty clans. The first ten are the stronger numerically. Smaller clans tend to be associated with particular territorial sections. A few subsidiary clan names are derivatives from tribal names. The very few members of such "clans" are wives acquired from the Dodoth, Lotuko, and Turkana peoples.

Clan Names	Approximate number of members (in the Kibish area)
1. Ngidoca	520
2. Ngimuyoxo	500
3. Ngilobol	410
4. Ngitoroy	380
5. Nginyanga	320
6. Ngiribo	200
7. Ngukuko	130
8. Ngithiger	100
9. Ngiraputa	90

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Clan Names	Approximate number of members (in the Kibish area)
10. Ngukunom	70
11. Ngipuco	40
12. Ngimeturana	30
13. Ngibeleka	30
14. Ngimedauno	25
15. Ngikakureca	less than 20
16. Ngimacermukata	"
17. Ngikatap	"
18. Ngikolya	"
19. Ngoleroto	"
20. Ngikadongoro	"

This last name means "Those of the Dongoro" - an original tribal name of the Nyangatom.

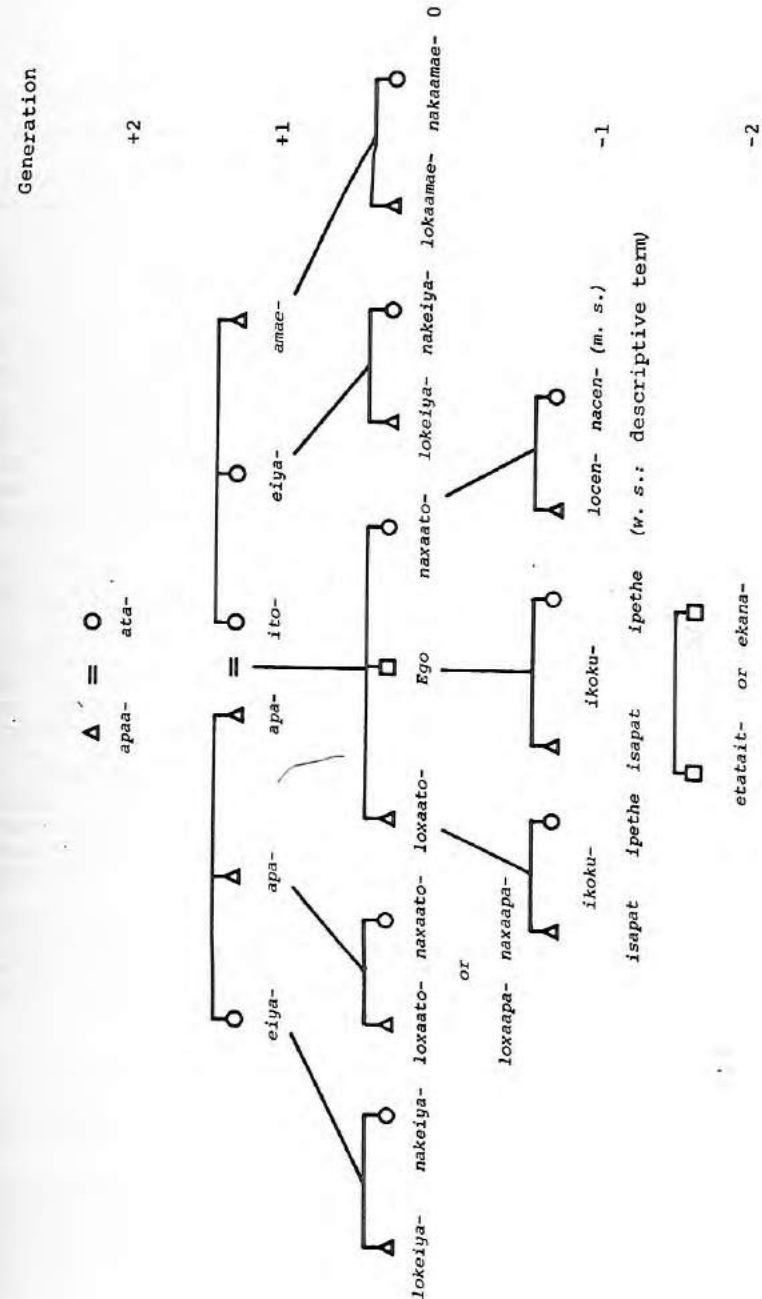
7.3.1.4. Kinship terminology

Fig. 3 presents the main terms for consanguineal relatives. The simple terms apply to the first ascending generation; the terms for Ego's relatives in his own generation are derivatives from the former. In their short form (which appears in Fig. 3) the terms are used for address. The terms of reference are obtained by the addition of a possessive: ito! "mother!", itoxang "my mother". The prefixes lo- and na- designate respectively a male or a female relative.

A striking feature of the terminology is bifurcate merging for the male relatives only, whereas on the female side there is a lineal principle, contrasting M with FZ and MZ, who are termed "aunts" as in an Eskimo-type terminology. This particular features is to be studied in the light of the sociological principles underlying the kinship system.

Let us start with brothers and sisters. Logically they are the children of both (or either) mother and father. Although in the present usage siblings - full as well as half - are regularly termed lo- or naxaato-, that is "the one, male or female, of (or from) the mother", we find for

Figure 3. Kinship Terminology: Consanguinity



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the FBch an optional choice between this term and lo- or naxaapa-, that is "the one, male or female, of (or from) the father". Loxaato- is said to be a more affectionate term and loxaapa- a more neutral one, something like "clan brother". Interestingly, the Nyangatom living at the Omo call loxaapa the sheltered place which serves as a club for the males of a neighborhood. These contrasted terms, I suggest, indicate jural elements which express the basic status difference between full and half siblings. For any Nyangatom, even to-day, the children of his mother are not equivalent to the children of his father, born by another mother: the former are members of his house, the latter are not. We have already noted the importance of this distinction in connection with rights of use and inheritance of livestock. The fact that loxaato- is extended in daily use to half-siblings and to the FBch does not imply a weakening of the jural elements in kinship, but rather an ideological emphasis on solidarity and amity between "brothers" in general. The terminology can thus be said to be of the Sudanese type for cousins, but only for those born from men. The collateral relatives born from "aunts" are all "children of aunts", again as in an Eskimo-type terminology. Why should an MZ not be termed "mother" and her children "siblings"? Here again the sociology of kinship and alliance helps in understanding the linguistic usage. Any mother personally founds a house and is not replaceable by her sister in this function: there is no synchronic or diachronic sororal polygyny. Hence "the real mother is my mother and her sister is my aunt". Moreover, the FZ is also an "aunt", eiva. No informant could understand why I worried about "paternal" or "maternal" aunts or aunts' children. They all conceptualized this relationship as bilateral or cognatic. Instead, when speaking about male collaterals, they insisted on the fact that FBch are members of their own clan, whereas MBch are not: hence the merging and the bifurcation.

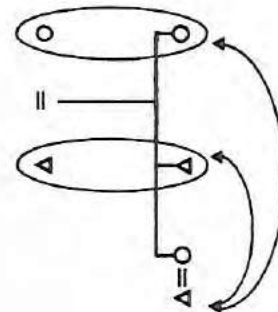
Affines of consanguineal relatives are usually referred to by descriptive terms: "husband of my aunt", "wife of the daughter of my uncle", etc. When addressed, such relatives are frequently called by simple terms, particularly "father", "mother" or "brother/sister-in-law" according to their generation.

The affinal terminology exhibits, beyond the terms husband, ekile, and wife, aberu, two basic classificatory categories (see Fig. 4). The ngakamurak and the ngamwiyok are categories used as reciprocal terms between affines of the same or of different sex and/or generation.

The logical setting of this contrast was not obvious to me for some time. Finally I realized that the distinction is based upon the point of view selected for conceptualizing a given alliance. Hence we have the following sets of

Figure 4. Kinship Terminology: Alliance

ngakamurak



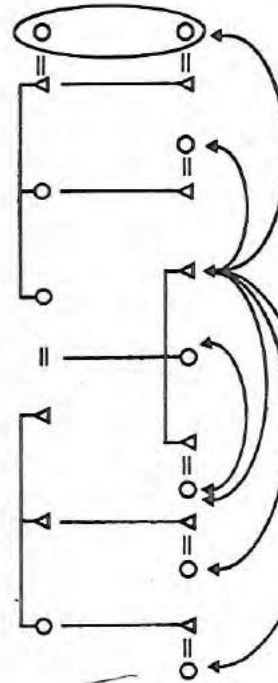
Class definition of the ngakamurak :
 m.s.: wife's male or female kin
 m. and w.s.: female kin's husband

Type-relationship



Legend: Reciprocal use of the term:

ngamwiyok



Class definition of the ngamwiyok :
 w.s.: husband's male or female kin
 m. and w.s.: male kin's wife

Type-relationship



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features for defining both the terms as labels for contrasted categories and the attitudes as opposed components of alliance depending on whether the man or the woman is considered the link:

<u>akamuran</u>	<u>amwi</u>
• relationship centered on <u>the woman</u>	• relationship centered on <u>the man</u>
• compulsory reciprocal gifts; transfers of cattle	• occasional "taking and giving"
• formal respect	• joking relationships
• sexual taboos	• potential sexual intercourse: levirate
• political alliance	• organic solidarity
• ngakamurak of the same sex are <u>men</u>	• ngamwiyok of the same sex are <u>women</u>

Thus, basically the akamuran relationship expresses an interest in wives and the amwi relationship an interest in husbands. Here again we find represented in the terminology some of the more important concepts and jural components of the Nyangatom sociology of kinship.

As a final remark, it is worth stressing that kinship usage is an important part of daily communication, going far beyond the circle of local families. According to one's sex, age, position in the age-system and in the network of alliances, one is automatically termed father, son, brother, in-law, etc., thus going about one's daily life in an atmosphere of familiarity.

7.3.2. Beyond the local community

Individuals and homesteads participate in wider public life through the territorial and age systems.

7.3.2.1. Territorial system

Any Nyangatom, male or female, is born through his or her father into one of seven territorial sections. These sections are called ngiteala (sing. ekitala). This term designates "open country" as opposed to bush. It also refers to savanna or pastureland. The contrast savanna/bush is of considerable importance for pastoralists: ekitala is the open country, the pastureland where cattle and people are not in danger, while amoni has various "anti-cultural"

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connotations: these are hunting and gathering areas, but they are also lairs for hyenas and human enemies. The Nyangatom often deforest wide areas in order to settle in the open and "see the country" all around. Like previously noted concepts, ekitala denotes both a physical and a social reality: a part or section of the tribal territory and the group formed by its inhabitants.

Membership of a territorial section is a fundamental social parameter for any individual. A newcomer is first identified by inquiring about his section, then about his generation, and eventually his age-set (see below 7.3.2.2.). His clan does not interest anybody, unless family or marriage matters are involved in the discussion. Whether boy or girl, a Nyangatom belongs to his father's section. When they get married, women are in some way "transferred" to the section of their husband. Four sections have bird names, mostly migratory birds. Listed below are the names of the sections followed by a translation which corresponds to the most practicable eponymous bird or tree, and finally a shorter name for each section:

Ngilingakol	<u>Sphenorynchus abdimii</u> White-bellied Stork	Storks
Ngkapung	<u>Phoenicopterus ruber</u> Greater Flamingo	Flamingos
Ngsakol	<u>Ibis Ibis</u> Wood Ibis	Ibises
Ngutokoraaman	<u>Pternistis leucoscepus</u> Yellow-necked spurfowl	Spurfowls or Sorghum eaters
Ngibuney	Castor-oil tree	Castor Trees
Ngukumama	Proper name	Ngukumama
Ngingaric	Section with Murle origin	Ngaric

The territorial sections are the real constituent units of the tribe. Numerically, the first three are clearly predominant: each of them includes members of most clans. In the smaller sections one finds peculiar clan names, suggesting their distinct origin. The mingling of clans within the sections is facilitated by the fact that any Nyangatom can, with time, change his territorial affiliation: a Stork becomes a Flamingo by changing his residence and transhumance routines. De facto, this change occurs immediately; de jure, the process takes at least one generation. In this way, the rule that "a Nyangatom belongs to his

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father's section" is respected.

These sections are really territorial and reference to the land is a significant component of their definition: the Nyangatom generally agree upon an ideal division of their present territory into sections. It is possible to map these data for the Kibish area, the Omo banks, and the transhumance zones (see Map). Members of the sections have rights to settlement, grazing and watering, cultivation, and transhumance within their territory. In practice, some latitude is allowed in the choice of residence and in the exploitation of primary resources. The people of smaller sections are allowed to live on the territories of larger ones. The resources of the small sections are too limited for their members to live on permanently. Frequent raids and the resulting changes of settlement help to bear out the frequent statement: "We are all Nyangatom". Such changes occur frequently, and were especially notable from June 1972, when the Storks, a southern section, fell back upon the Flamingos' territory immediately after the memorable attack by the Dasanec. In 1976 the Storks had still not by any means, reoccupied their whole territory.

It is within the framework of the larger sections that the main military and ritual activities are arranged. More-over Storks and Flamingos feel themselves to be a ritual community referred to as Ngimeris: "the Flea-bitten", like the Guinea-fowl. In their economy and settlement these two sections are also very close to each other. The Ibises, a northern section, claim that they are economically, geographically, and ritually independent from the Ngimeris. The Spurfwowls and Castor Trees (the latter section having male members only on the Omo side) are politically dependent on the Ibises. The Ngukumama and the Ngaric claim special links with the Storks. The Ngaric, "Omo Murle"⁴, are today well assimilated into the Nyangatom. By offering a Nyangatom partner one or two head of the bridewealth of a daughter or sister they were able to acquire Nyangatom clan names, but they maintained the notion of a separate origin by becoming a separate Nyangatom section.

Each section has one or several ritual experts (emuron, pl. emurok). The Ethiopian Administration has often given these experts the status of balabbat or c'ik'ashum, thus conferring on them a type of authority unknown to the Nyangatom. Being in charge of collecting taxes, or doing rather unpopular administrative duties, few officials of this kind have maintained real influence over the Nyangatom, except for the balabbat Tikapil, a rich and wise man of the Ibis section. The leading figure among the Storks is Lokuti, a real political leader, but without official status and therefore *primus inter pares*. Another influential man of this section is Locam, a sort of master of the land, who is entitled to distribute the arable lands of Natante, in the

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flood area of the Kibish river. The assumed basis of Locam's authority is that his grandfather was the first to make these lands cultivable by getting laborers to divert the river from its natural course. Important figures, whether ritual experts or political leaders, can give their names to their sections, the members of which are then conceived of as a corporate body.

7.3.2.2. The age system

The chief concepts to do with age categories are as follows:

ekas, pl. ngikasa: generation; in some cases, a part of such a generation (ekas is then the equivalent of ajere) or even an age fellow: "he is going to his ekas";

ajere, pl. ngijerea: group of men involved in common (especially pastoral and military) activities, on the basis of their belonging to a sub-class of a generation. Hence: generation-sub-class, age-set, raiding party, or even army in the broad sense, whatever its composition may be, and including the armies of enemy groups.

The generation and age-set system is one of the bases of Nyangatom social organization. The women, though less involved in the system, take part in it by being assimilated to their husband's generation and age-set.

Generations: the fundamental principle is the dissociation of adjacent generations, a dissociation which can be observed in everyday life and in the identification of alternate generations, both on secular and ritual occasions. Thus, for example, members of alternate generations "sit under their tree" together at meat eatings.

Generations are named according to an open-ended list of non-recurrent names. The asserted identity of alternate generations does not involve identical names. However, in everyday speech and when specific distinctions are not needed, terminological assimilation is made spontaneously.

Each individual belongs to the generation immediately below that of his father (*pater*), regardless of the genitor's generation. There are, at any one time, two major or dominant generations, in a numerical, political, and ritual sense. These two generations represent an extension of the Father - Son relationship to the society as a whole. At present (1976) the Elephants are the Fathers of the country, the Ostriches are their Sons and the rest of the population is defined by its relationship, whether adjacent or alternate, to these two central generations. When the Ostriches become the Fathers of the country, this will be marked by a complex handing-over ceremony, called asapan, "ritual head-shaving". Asapan also refers to a man who, after having been touched during the handing-over ceremony, is said to lose his senses and die in the bush.

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The Elephants and Ostriches have members of all ages, but the Elephants as a whole are an older generation: they have more extinct sub-classes, and their recruitment is almost over. In fact, there are only few surviving Stones and their wives, as well as the widows of their deceased age-mates, nearly all past childbearing age. The Ostriches have full young sub-classes; they are now the acknowledged warriors and new sub-classes are still being formed, since the Elephants are still producing children. Ostriches in turn beget Antelopes, who are the structural equivalents of their grandfathers, the Elephants. Some Antelopes are already married. They beget Buffaloes, grandsons of the Ostriches, none of whom were married in 1973. Figure 5 summarizes statistical data on the distribution of the adult male population of the Kibish area in 1973 according to the generations and their main subdivisions. This table makes clear the relative seniority of one generation over the next, and it also emphasizes that access to legal wives, measured by the rate of polygyny, is a function of age and not of the membership of a particular generation.

Generation subdivisions: ngijerea

Generations, as is now clear, are not classes of co-vals, since recruitment to them ends only with the death of all the members of the preceding generation - or rather when their last surviving legal wives are no longer able to bear children. A generation is thus not a horizontal but an oblique section in the demographic pyramid, and it is quite natural that its members be ranked internally by seniority. Since adjacent generations represent the relationship between father and son, a single generation can then be conceptualized as a collection of brothers, the senior brothers being old men or even already dead, while junior brothers are still being born. As suggested by the name itself (*ajere*, "raiding party"), a new subdivision within a generation comes into existence when young groups of herdsmen first distinguish themselves in an offensive or defensive action. This first exploit heightens the general feeling of their existence as a local corporate group, and they henceforth constitute a new age-set.

Among the Nyangatom initiation into a new age-set is not an individual matter: the founding group acts as a representative of all the actual and potential members of the new age-set. The main custom is the offering of small stock to the members of the senior sets within the same generation; the elders in return allow the initiands to wear the adult mauve plastered head-dress and to adopt the new age-set name, which is either proposed by the initiands or imposed by the senior generation mates. The coming into existence of a new age-set should be viewed as a gradual process rather than as

Table 4. NYANGATOM GENERATION AND AGE SYSTEM IN 1973

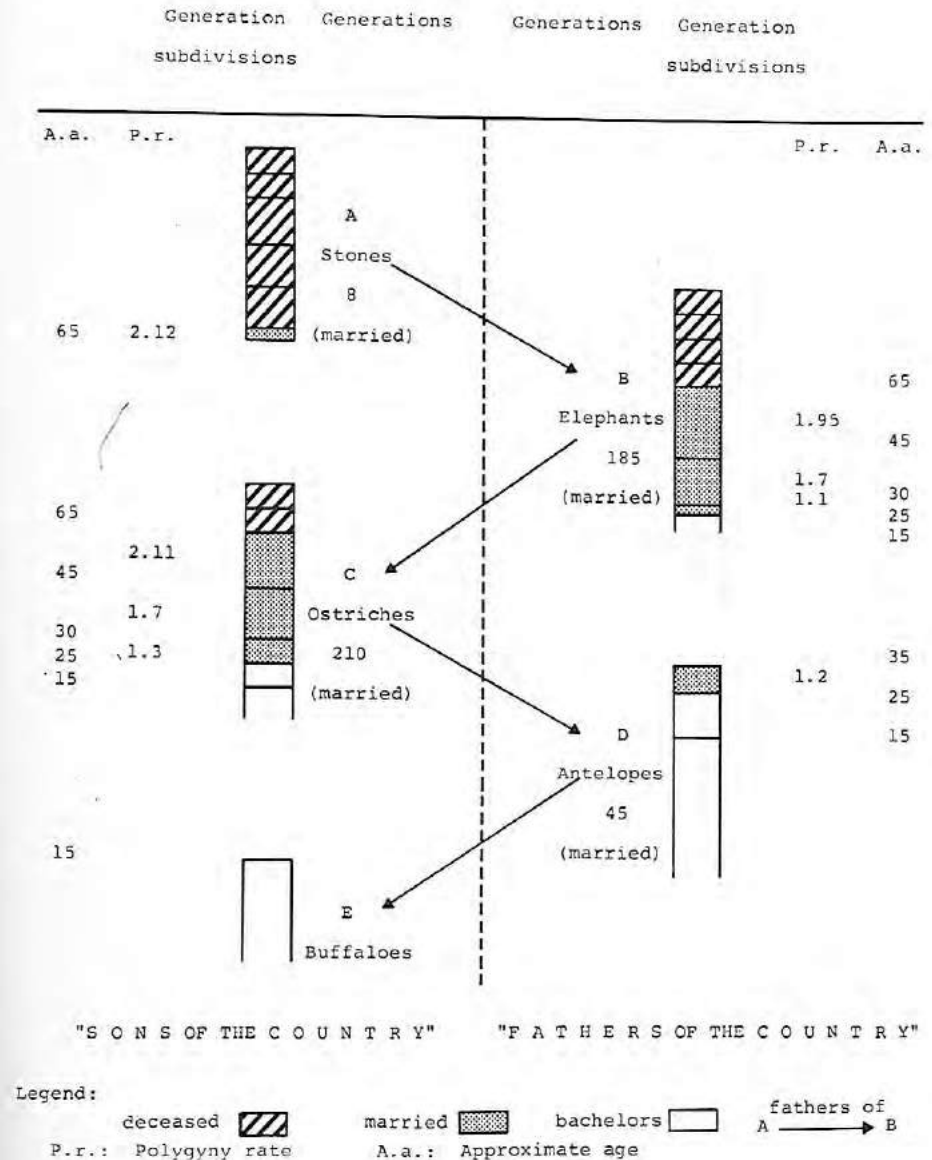


Figure 5.
Nyangatom Generation and Age System in 1973

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a sudden event. Youths are joining the existing junior set all the time. Eventually they become numerous and strong enough to escape the direct authority of their senior age mates by declaring that they henceforth constitute a new, autonomous, age-set. Senior sets usually accept this as a "fait accompli". Ajere: age-group, age-set or age-category? Very clear distinctions between these concepts are now available in the literature⁵. Among the Nyangatom (and this seems to be a very general feature of age systems) corporate groups based on common age are local groups of herdsmen-warriors who engage in common herding, scouting, raiding, and who may even live together when they get married. But these local groups are not isolated, and in any military or ritual context they spontaneously join their age mates of other settlements, other neighborhoods and, not infrequently, of the whole territorial section. I even attended a formal tribal meeting where the corporateness of the age-sets within each territorial section and generation was displayed during a whole day in formal movements, mock-fights, dancing, singing, sitting, hearing speeches, praying to God and cursing the enemies. From that moment it was clear to me that, although at a general level subdivisions of generations could best be understood as age-categories, their existence as proper age-sets could not be denied:

a) they are named classes, and although the names do vary slightly from one territorial section to the next, everybody is quite aware of the structural equivalence of these names within a given generation;

b) these names are not recurrent, thus emphasizing their "historical" character;

c) these classes provide the framework of social life for their members, not only during warriorhood, but right up to death;

d) the corporateness of the classes is seen in everyday action at a local level, not infrequently at the level of the neighborhood or territorial section and even sometimes, on solemn occasions, at the tribal level;

e) finally, these classes are structurally organized according to a ranked order, not only within each generation but in accordance with the ranking of similar classes within adjacent or alternate generations. Thus a general tool is provided for conceptualizing all social relationships in term of the bonds between fathers and sons and between age mates, elder and younger brothers.

Generation and age-set names

These names are important for cross-cultural comparison, since the literature on the age-systems of the related peoples is rich⁶. The interested reader may look for connections.

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Generation names

In 1973 I recorded seven named generations. The two most senior were totally extinct, while the Stones had only eight survivors in the Kibish area. Generations are ranked from the senior (1) to the junior (7) each one being fathers of the next. Elephants and Ostriches were the main generations. In 1976, the year of my last stay among the Nyangatom, no formal handing-over ceremony yet had been held.

	Name	Translation	Personnel in 1973
1.	Ngutukoy	Zebras	Extinct
2.	Ngibokoy	Pink oxen	Extinct
3.	Ngumur	Stones	Eight survivors
4.	Ngitome	Elephants	<u>Fathers of the country</u> 185 married members
5.	Ngimerikopir	Ostriches, lit. Flea-bitten feathers (Guinea-fowl)	<u>Sons of the country</u> 210 married members
6.	Nginyangalim	Antelopes lit. Yellow-no horns (young of Duiker Antelope)	increasing: 45 married members
7.	Ngikothowa	Buffaloes	increasing: still bachelors

Age-set names

In 1973 only the generations of the Stones, Elephants, and Ostriches had named age-sets. Names had been forgotten for the Zebras and Pink oxen. The Antelopes already had three names, but they were still optional as generation names, although they probably would apply to distinct age-sets in the near future. The Buffaloes had only a single generation name.

Stones' age-sets

The sequence of sets, from senior to junior, was given to me both by a member of the Stones, Erimanyang, and of the Elephants, Kamaringiro. The latter gave the same names but

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in different order. All sets were extinct (+) except Erimanyang's. Here is Erimanyang's picture of his generation:

Ngimerikora +	The flea-bitten he-goats
Ngingerewoy +	The Topis
Ngikathala +	The fasting ones
Ngimuthingo +	The Rhinoceroses
Ngingoley +	The Falcons
Ngikoryo	The Giraffes

Elephants' age-sets

Adjacent age-sets, as listed by Kamaringiro, are conceptualized as forming broader subdivisions (a, b, c, d), the ones which have been retained for Figure 5.

a.	Ngeleacetom +	The converging tusks
	Ngimagalibong +	The diverging tusks
	Ngilimongwar +	The bald greys (young of elephants with no tusks)
	Ngoyangura +	The white muzzles (of donkeys, another emblem of the generation)
b.	Ngukwaakook	The white bellies (of donkeys)
	Ngimerirot	The spotted tracks (of elephants)
	Ngimerikajo	The spotted legs (elephants' footprints)
c.	Ngisaaaja	The pack-saddles
	Nguralim	The bald-white muzzles (donkeys have no horns)
d.	Ngulukumong	The inverted-U-shaped-horn oxen
	Ngicumaputh	The killers of the blue-green ox

Ostriches' age-sets

Listed below are the names in use among the Flamingos.

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Among other territorial sections names do vary to some extent, but people know the formal equivalences, at least in terms of broader subdivisions (e, f, g).

e.	Ngikapelo	The white flanks (of the male ostriches)
	Ngimeriputh	The flea-bitten blue-greens (Guinea-fowls, another emblem of the generation)
	Ngukwaemong	The white ox
f.	Ngutulyaputh	The flecked blue-green (ox)
g.	Ngutulyangorok	The flecked except the muzzle (ox)
	Ngikoriareng	The speckled red (ox)

To conclude this description of the age-system I would like to emphasize two points. First it should be clear that categories and classes referred to by the names given so far are basic social concepts among the Nyangatom, not folkloric, marginal ones. They are omnipresent in daily speech and govern massive parts of the individual's behavior. My second remark bears on the significance of the age-system. Many writers had tended to relegate East African age-systems to the politico-ritual sphere, hardly recognizing its importance at the more materialistic level of daily life where kinship can be expected to be the only outstanding social register. I think that, at least among the Nyangatom where I have observed its working, the age-system is operative at both the supra- and the infra-structural levels of social life. In the politico-ritual sphere a basic ideological function must be assigned to the generation system. At the local level of productive activities the age-set system, by organizing solidarity and hierarchy within the generations, appears as a social device allowing the people to overcome the tensions and contradictions of family life without undermining its overall conservative principles⁷.

7.4 Conclusion: Language and inter-tribal relations in the Lower Omo Valley

Since 1970, when I started studying the Nyangatom, I saw a progressive deterioration in inter-tribal relations in the Lower Omo Valley. In 1972 and 1973 one could describe the situation almost as a "generalized state of war"⁸. The causes of these conflicts are complex: ecological, political, cultural and also partly evolutionary or adaptational. I must restrict myself to a few remarks on the linguistic

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factor. First of all, the Lower Omo Valley is characterized by a strong linguistic heterogeneity: all the tribes belong to different linguistic families or at least to different sub-families or language groups, as noted in the Introduction. Linguistic identity is of course a strong reference for the definition of one's own group versus "alien", and, in the local perspective, hostile groups. But sharing a common language is not by itself a guarantee of peace and unconditional alliance. The Turkana, for example, although they speak nearly the same dialect as the Nyangatom, are, and often have been in the past, perceived by the latter as public enemies. On the other side, linguistic difference is not by itself a bar to positive contacts and exchanges in normal periods: many Nyangatom, as a result of their pastoral and agricultural routines, have learned as a second language that of a neighboring tribe. They exchange goods with and have bond-friends among the Hamar, the Mursi, the Turkana, and even the Kara and Dasanec, although hostilities with the latter two peoples may continue for many years, following the terrible conflicts of 1972 and 1973. Thus, bilingualism is frequent among the Nyangatom and among their neighbors⁹.

Moreover, cultural borrowings often have a linguistic basis: Nyangatom cattle songs are heard all around their country; Kara and Dasanec¹⁰ give Nyangatom names to a great number of their age-sets. It is interesting to note that the Nyangatom, in return, do not seem to borrow important linguistic items from their neighbors, although some of these, such as the Dasanec, are numerically and politically much stronger.

Finally a striking fact should be remembered: the possibility for some groups or factions to change their language together with their identity in a particular social, historical and economic context. The case of the Omo Murle should not be treated as exceptional. At the margins of larger cultural domains - in the present case in the transition area between the Cushitic, Omotic, and Nilotic worlds - we can find small ethnic groups having, as such, only a very short history and without an assured and long future. David Turton and K. Fukui, both contributors to the present volume, have been among the first to develop this theme. In doing so they have opened new perspectives for comparative research¹¹.

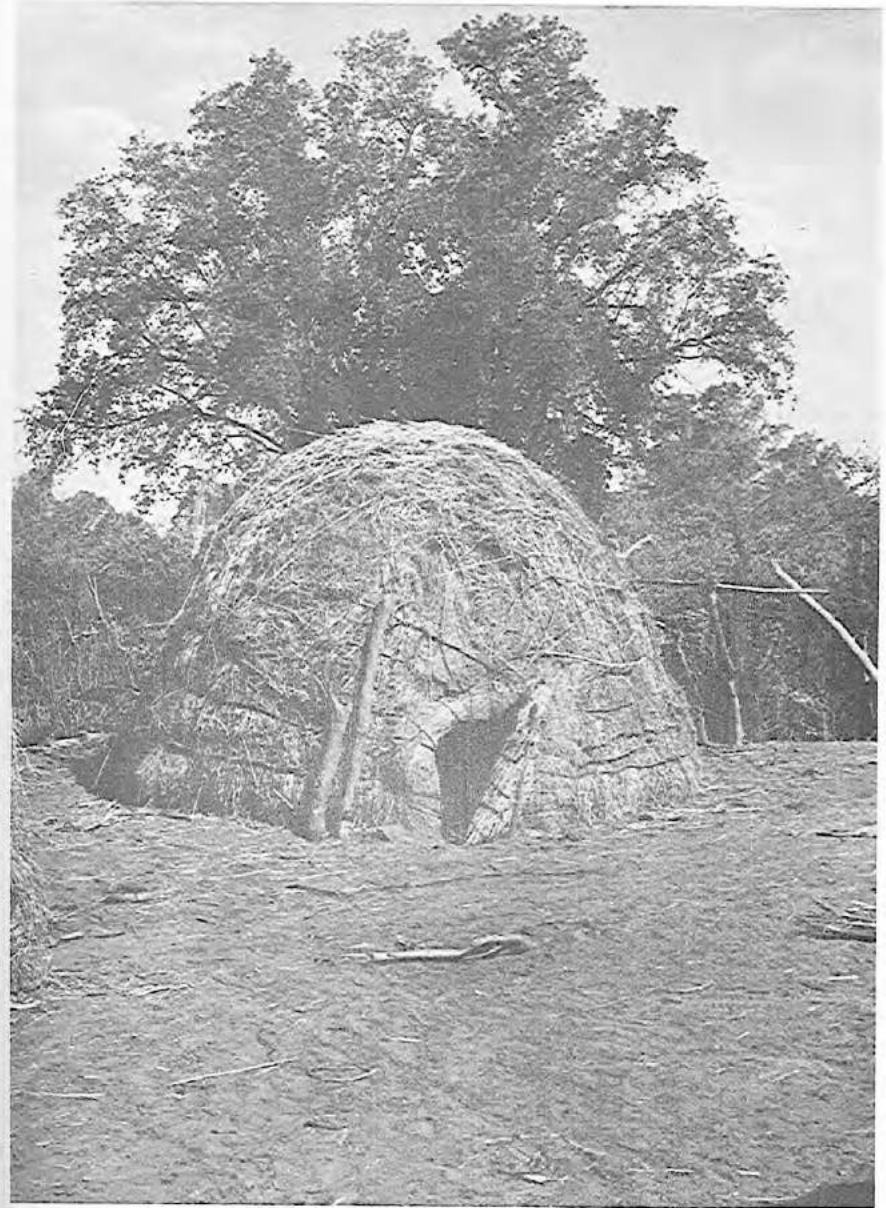


Figure 6. Nyangatom Sleeping Hut

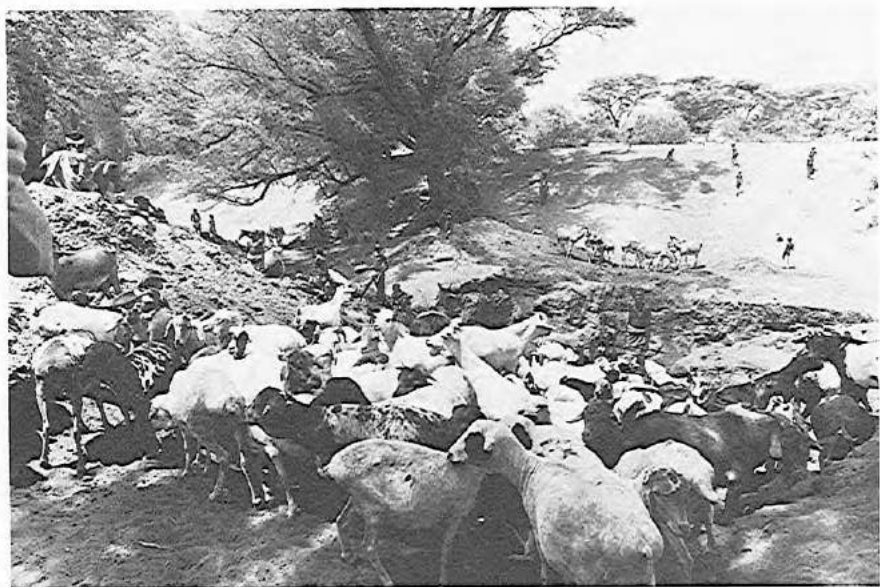


Figure 7. Watering Small Stock
in the Bed of the Kibish River

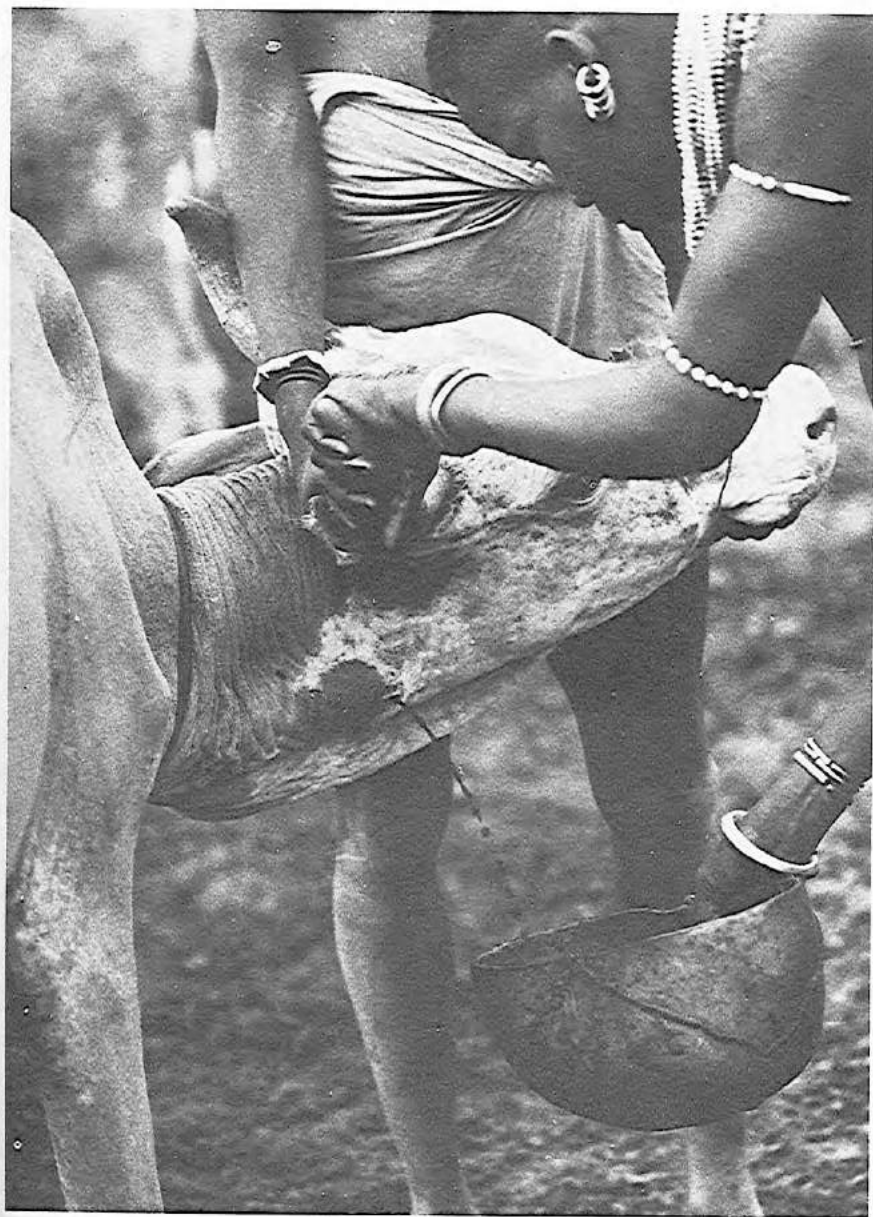


Figure 8. Bleeding a Cow:
Basic Food of Cattle Herders



Figure 9. Water Hole in the Bed of the Kibish



Figure 10. Nyangatom Meeting After
the Defeat by the Dasanech



Figure 11. Seated Group of Warriors
During a War Dance

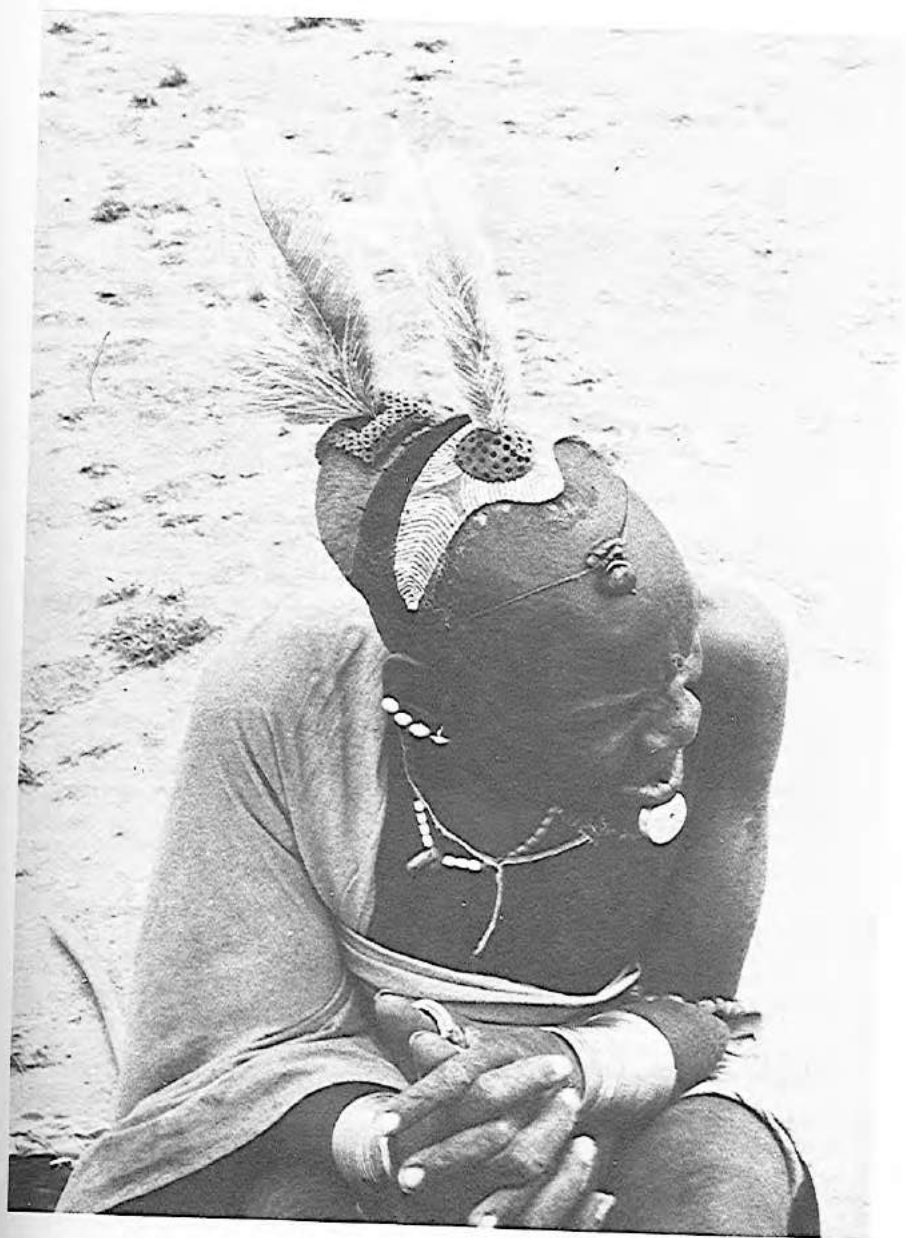


Figure 12. Tikipil, a Nyangatom Leader

NOTES

- * The author is lecturer of social anthropology at the University of Paris X, Nanterre. Between 1970 and 1976 he went five times to the field and spent altogether 24 months with the Nyangatom. Research funds came from the French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS) through the French Omo Research Expedition led by Y. Coppens; from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research which partly sponsored the same Expedition, and from the University of Paris X through the Laboratoire d'ethnologie et de sociologie comparative, led by E. de Dampierre.
1. A statistical study of the married population in the Kibish area, according to settlements, clans, territorial sections, social generations, and other parameters has been published in a working paper series of the Laboratoire d'ethnologie, University of Nanterre (see Tornay 1975).
 2. In *The family herds* (1955 and 1966) P.H. Gulliver describes the Turkana polygynous family as a "nuclear family". Although he is right in contrasting the polygynous with the extended family, there are no grounds for such a departure from current anthropological usage.
 3. Young men usually try to force agreement to a marriage by capturing the girl and installing her at the home-stead of their father or elder brother. They are often unsuccessful however: the girl is either recaptured manu militari by her people or sent back by the senior relatives of the young suitor.
 4. See 3. *The Omo Murle Enigma* in the present book.
 5. For the distinctions made here I owe a particular debt to David Turton for his excellent analysis in "Territorial organization and age among the Mursi" (see references).
 6. See in particular P.H. Gulliver (1953 and 1958), N. Dyson-Hudson (1966a), J. Lamphear (1976).
 7. This subject is developed in my communication presented at the International Symposium on Pastoralism, Paris, December 1976 (see references).
 8. A detailed study of contemporary tribal conflicts was presented in September 1977 at the First International Symposium on Inter-tribal Relations at Osaka (see references).

9. It should be noted that very few people in the Lower Omo Valley speak Amharic, and that the national language is far from being a lingua franca in this remote area. At meetings with Government officials all debates are translated by the few local interpreters who have learned Amharic when serving in the Police Force.
10. U. Almagor, personal communication.
11. Special thanks are due to M. Coadou, CNRS, Paris and to D. Turton, University of Manchester, who helped me at various stages in anglicizing the present contribution; thanks are also due to J.M. Chavy, LA 140 Nanterre, for drawing the map, and to C. Hallot, Paris, for typing the manuscript.

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8. MYTHS AND RITUALS OF THE ETHIOPIAN BERTHA*

ALESSANDRO TRIULZI

8.1 The myth of origin

Bertha origins are shrouded in a legendary past, the reconstruction of which is made all the more difficult by the absence of written records. One has to rely on the only evidence which is available to the historian in similar cases, which is the myth of origin transmitted orally by the people themselves. Like similar accounts, Bertha traditions of origin lack an appropriate chronological framework and are vitiated by ideological prejudices, individual additions, and justificatory claims which are made all the more evident by the complex ethnic structure of the area. Furthermore, the existence of several layers of external influences in the region make the enucleation of single cultural elements a very difficult task.

Yet, the reconstruction of these traditions seem to me worth trying because they may offer clues to the interpretation of the region's past, and provide some tentative explanations about its unfolding. Of course, as Vansina and others have indicated,¹ traditions of origin are important indicators not so much of what actually took place - something we may never find out - but of what the people themselves think happened or, at times, wish had happened. Yet, in the case of the Ethiopian Bertha, these traditions seem to be less functional to present-day interests than is usually the case. The Bertha, in fact, have been dominated throughout the ages by alien groups (the Funj, the Sudanese Arabs, the Mahdists, the Ethiopians) who have attempted to impose on them their political institutions, their cultures, their religions, and not last, their history. The Bertha have resisted foreign intrusion by adhering to their own culture, using their own language, and performing traditional ceremonies which symbolized their adherence to Bertha cosmology and self-identity. The myths of origin and the traditions that have survived through different ages and subsequent invasions, is part of this cosmology.

As it happens often in traditional societies, these traditions are loosely structured, with a central nucleus practically uniform and unchanged, and peripheral parts which vary from one region to the other. The following reconstruction, therefore, will try to present the core account of the traditions, leaving aside minor details or regional variants unless they appear to be historically relevant.

Most Bertha informants agree that their ancestors did not originate in the region they at present inhabit, but