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• John Markakis •

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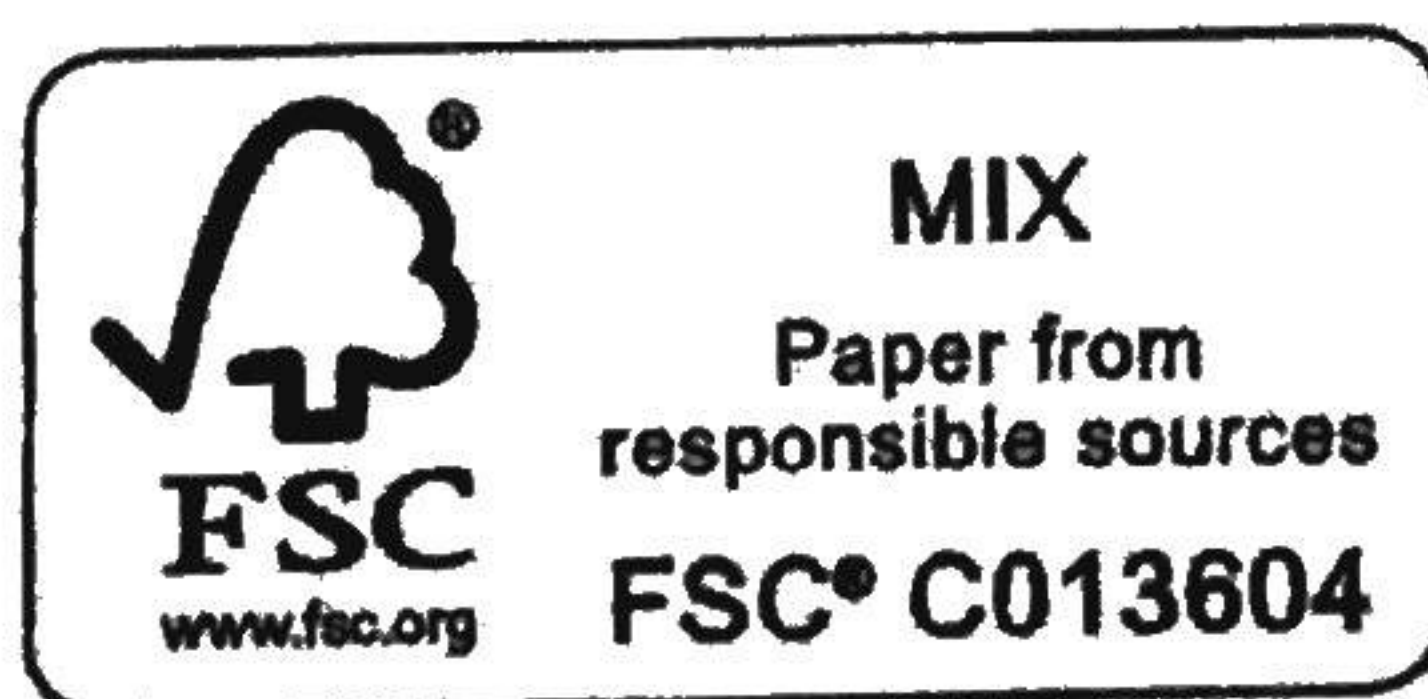
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against it to assert superiority. The Gabbra accepted their inferior status in the past, but are no longer willing to do so. Encouraged by the status accorded to ethnicity under federalism in Ethiopia, 'they want to be equal with us', sneer the Borana and Guji. The Somali also claim the Gabbra as their own and have found Gabbra leaders who agree.

In the 1990s, the Gabbra were required to assume a political identity. Since the territory over which they roam was partitioned between the Oromo and Somali *kilil*, they had to decide which one to join. This being a political choice, the Gabbra responded opportunistically. Some opted for Oromo and others for Somali identity, based on a calculation of immediate benefit. They attached no more importance to this choice than to another that they have so far evaded: the choice between Ethiopian or Kenyan citizenship. Things went wrong for the Gabbra who settled on the Borana-Guji boundary with their camels, when they made bold to demand their own administrative district and territory. This sparked a violent response by the Guji and Borana, discussed further in Chapter 14.

South Omo

The Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples *kilil*, conveniently referred to as Debub ('South'), with a population at the last count (2007) exceeding 15 million, is a grand mosaic of some fifty ethnic groups. A dozen of them live in the South Omo Zone in a highly variegated and continuously changing physical setting that provides life-sustaining niches for communities of modest size. The north-central portion of the zone – Bako Gazar and Gelila districts – forms the tail end of the northern plateau with an elevation of 1000m-1500m, and a tropical climate with precipitation rates that reach 1200mm. Elevation drops sharply south-westwards to less than 500m in the Omo River Valley, where precipitation likewise falls below 600mm. The climate in the south and west, where evaporation exceeds precipitation, is arid, yet tempered to some extent by the abundance of surface water drained from the plateau by many rivers, among which the Omo and Mago are the mightiest.

This is a transition zone between ecologically and culturally contrasting terrains, the sodden savannah of Southern Sudan to the west, the arid steppe of northern Kenya to the south, and the humid Ethiopian highlands to the north. A varied topography and climate offer 'strikingly different environments, and the transition of one zone to the other over a distance of only a few kilometres is as noticeable in temperature, vegetation and crops as in culture' (Abbink 2000: 533). On the upland to the north they have adapted to rainfed cultivation, with two planting rounds annually to coincide with the big and small rains. Lower down they rely on a mixed agro-pastoralist system. Land is ample, but rainfall is low and erratic. Given good rain, they plant sorghum that ripens in ten weeks and is harvested in twelve. They clear land in the bush with

machetes, use hoes to loosen the earth and digging sticks to plant. The land is used for some years, and is left fallow for some more before they return to it.

The Omo River sustains several communities living along its banks, or commuting between the river and the interior.² In its 760km long course, the Omo is fed by the Gibe, Mago and Gojeb tributaries, and drops 2,000m from its highland source to its final destination in Lake Turkana. Wetlands in the lower Omo delta support flood retreat cultivation that shifts with the river's whims. The Omo River is filled with fish, and the wooded bushland that flanks it up to ten kilometres on both sides provides honey and game, but is infested with *tse tse* that excludes livestock, which is the mainstay of the Omotic communities away from the river in the lower valley. The frequent change of channel direction in the Omo Delta, as well as the periodic rise and fall in the river's flow, are facts of life to which the communities depending on the area's resources are obliged to adapt.

The oral history of the Bashada, a tiny group of hunter-gatherers and potters, offers a poignant, if bleak, illustration of this process. Forced by drought to leave their land, their forebears set off in search of water. On the way, a cow was lost, but was found some days later in good health. Reasoning that the animal had found water, half of the group followed it to the Omo River, where they settled and became known as Karo ('fish eaters'). Too fatigued to follow, the rest settled where they were and became known as Bashada ('the exhausted ones').

South Omo's collection of mini-groups and micro-cultures has exercised the anthropologist imagination with two queries: first, the reason for such spectacular diversity, and second, how to account for the tenacity with which groups cling to and defend their distinct identities. What can possibly explain the Arbore taboo on honey collection, a product they themselves consume but have to buy from their Hamar neighbours? Obviously, such markers of exclusiveness are designed to maintain group distance and segregation. Among the dynamics of group formation and fragmentation is the drying out of the Omo Delta in recent times. The evidence includes a 25-metre drop in the level of Lake Turkana from the 1890s to the 1970s (Butzer 1971), and satellite imagery since the 1970s, confirming that the process is continuing. It is assumed that the resulting pressure on resources discourages group aggregation. Another presumed factor is the convergence of three major African language families – Cushitic (Dassanetch), Omotic (Hamar, Aari, Dizzi) and Nilo-Saharan (Mursi, Surma, Nyangatom) – in a relatively small area. One result of this extraordinary linguistic diversity is to produce and sustain cultural boundaries between communities living in proximity and interacting over a very long time. Finally, because South Omo did not come within the scope of the state building project and integrationist pressure until the beginning of this century, the social and cultural fluidity that characterises this region was allowed to continue unimpeded until recent times.

² 'Omo-riate', ('Omo is my meal') is the name of the main Dassanetch settlement.

It has been suggested that conflict itself may perform the same function, that is, to maintain boundaries between groups.³ According to one scholar, the Mursi do not fight with their neighbours because they are separate groups, but rather the reverse: they fight in order to remain separate (Turton, 1994: 23). A colleague agrees that what outsiders often see as mindless exercise to which the lowlanders are addicted, 'is a "creative" or at least "constituent" force in social relations' (Abbink 2000: xii). If that is the case, then there is something seriously askew with conventional conflict resolution theories, in which the basic approach is to reduce distance between groups and promote mutual understanding. Sketchy profiles of the communities that live in South Omo are offered below, ordered by population size as registered in the 2007 census (shown in brackets).

*

The Aari (283,000) is the northernmost Omotic community, living in Bako Gazar district on the elevated northern part of South Omo, where they practise rain fed cultivation, producing ensete, sorghum, maize, vegetables, coffee and cardamom. They also keep sheep on high ground and cattle below. Their community is organised in territorially defined clans that were in the past ruled by a king. The fact that their language, Araf, has five dialects, illustrates the extent of fragmentation in the region. In the past, the clans were frequently at war with each other over territory, and as a result the Aari developed 'a culture of bellicosity and a cult of masculinity' (Naty 1994: 60).

The Maale (98,000) occupy territory between Jinka town and the Woito River. It includes highland in the centre and north and lowland in the southeast. Slash-and-burn cultivation is the main line of production on higher ground, with two planting seasons coinciding with the big and small rains cycle. Sorghum, corn, finger millet and teff are produced. In the lower and drier land, cattle-raising is more important, but fields are also planted once a year for the big rains. The Maale from the lowland exchange livestock for grain with their kinsmen on higher ground.

Maale social organisation combines kinship with territoriality. Their territory is divided into four regions, each of them sub-divided into chiefdoms, of which there are a total of thirteen. Each of the latter is headed by a chief (*goda*) and his deputies (*gatta*). Traditionally, a king (*kati*) was the supreme Maale authority, a figure of divine powers who maintained the fertility and prosperity of his subjects, 'the ripening of crops, the fecundity of women, the reproduction of cattle and goats' (Donham 1999: 38). The king remained in his ancestral home while the chiefs collected tribute in the form of labour and kind from the people. Their fields were cultivated by their subjects under the supervision of the *gatta*, who also collected tribute in livestock and honey for the king and

³ The insights contained in the last two paragraphs were contributed by David Turton in a private communication.

chiefs. The warrior ethos is highly developed among the Maale, and as usual is linked to raiding. 'No more masculinizing acts existed in Maale...than raiding cattle from enemy peoples, killing a large animal like a lion or buffalo, or killing an enemy' (ibid.: 1999: 119).

The Dassanetch (48,000), also known as the Geleb, inhabit the northern shore of Lake Turkana. The Omo River crosses the zone in the west, inundating it regularly and permitting bank cultivation. When the waters recede, the people congregate on the banks. Away from the river and the tse tse plague, they keep cattle and smallstock. The Dassanetch are grouped into eight clans, each inhabiting separate territory and living independently of the others. Inkabelo, the largest clan, accounts for about half the total Dassanetch population, and occupies the largest stretch of land along both banks of the Omo. The other clans occupy land on one side of the river only. Each clan is divided into exogamous sections whose members live dispersed and do not display significant solidarity. Each clan has its own age-grade system with six named grades. Authority is vested in the senior grade, and is exercised by an elected group of some thirty of its members known as *ara* ('bulls') (Almagor, 1978).

The Hamar (46,000) are the southernmost group of the Omotic peoples. Their system of social organisation has a combination of kinship and territorial features. Kinship is represented by two moities comprising twenty four clans, each divided territorially into two main sections and twenty four sub-sections. The Hamar live in settlements of ten to thirty households, each sited near a source of water and of fields for cultivation and pasture. Their system of authority is described by an anthropologist: 'The Hamar have hereditary ritual leaders (*bita*). They also select political spokesmen (*ayo*), leaders for war (*djilo*), guardians of grazing and cultivated land (*kogo*, *gudili*), but the basic agents of politics are the married men (*donza*)' (Strecker 2006: 39). Public meetings (*osh*) of married men, held at various levels of inclusiveness – from the homestead to the entire Hamar community – are where matters of common interest are debated.

The Hamar are agro-pastoralists who practise slash-and-burn cultivation to produce maize, sorghum and beans. They raise cattle and small stock, and are particularly dependent on goats. 'People with goats are like ropes or leather straps. Their life is well secured, it will not snap', they say. Goat herding does not require the cooperation of large groups, and the Hamar are known for their individualism and resistance to authority. Hamar men are also keen hunters and livestock raiders. Strecker also notes: 'In Hamar a man should prove himself before he marries by hunting dangerous game and/or killing an enemy' (ibid.: 135). Those who distinguish themselves are ritually anointed. The man who kills a hyena shaves off his hair and smears white paint on his forehead. He who kills an elephant, lion or leopard smears red ochre on his forehead and sticks a feather in his hair. Raiding is an integral feature of Hamar society, and their Borana neighbours across the Segen River are a favourite target. Although only the width of the river separates them, the two speak different languages and are mortal

enemies. A Hamar song boasts:

*When we have lost our cattle, our mothers' brothers and fathers call out:
Hey children! Yo! Have you lost your cattle?*

We have lost them.

*Do you see the mountains over there? Do you see the Borana mountains?
Those are not clouds, they are cattle. If you go there you will collect cattle.*
(ibid.: page 135)

The Bana (25,600) live between the Woito and Omo rivers. They are agro-pastoralists, inhabiting diverse environments stretching from mountainous cool terrain around Kako town to hot savannah near Dimeka. Their main settlement, Kay Afar, stands at 1,500m. Unusual in this area, the Bana use the ox-drawn plough. They also keep livestock, produce honey and hunt in the Mago Park. Territorially they are organised in two chiefdoms (*bitta*), sub-divided into sections (*kogo bitta*). In terms of kinship, they are divided into two exogamous moities, Binna and Galabu, each comprising a number of clans. They also have an elementary age-grade system, with males progressing from boyhood (*naasi*), to uninitiated (*ukuli*), to unmarried (*maz*), and to married adult (*donza*). Bull jumping is the main initiation ritual.

The Nyangatom (22,000), also called Bume in South Omo and Dogiro in Kenya, have an elaborate age-grade system that divides males into generation-classes graded according to seniority, with each generation in turn divided into age-grades comprising males of roughly the same age that are likewise graded. Junior generations, or 'Sons of the Country', advance in time to become 'Fathers of the Country' and exercise decision-making power. When an anthropologist visited the Nyangatom in the 1970s they had five generation-classes named Mountains, Elephants, Ostriches, Antelopes and Buffaloes. The Ostriches were the 'Sons of the Country', the Elephants were the 'Fathers of the Country', and the senior age-grade within the Elephant generation were the supreme rulers (Tornay 1981, 1989).

The Tsemay (20,000) territory includes lowland on the western side of the Woito River and upland further westwards. They are agro-pastoralists who depend mainly on cultivation, working both the rain fed land higher up and flood retreat land on the Woito River. The river floods twice annually and flood land is redistributed each time, a task carried out by their elders (*mura*). The Tsemay were the main suppliers of honey to the area markets until deforestation and pesticide spraying from the air in a plantation nearby killed off the source. They are grouped in seven clans that live in sixteen villages, and have an age-grade system with four grades. The Tsemay are affiliated with the Arbore, Hamar and Bana through marital exchange. However, the exchange is one way. Arbore men marry Tsemay women, but not the reverse. Consequently, there is considerable ethnic convergence and cohabitation in the area, as shown in the composition of the village of the main Tsemay chief, where one-third of its households were Arbore

(Yukio 1994). Tsemay relations with their neighbours are convoluted. They are allies of the Arbore and the Bana, but also of the Hamar who are enemies of the Arbore. In turn, the Arbore are allies of the Borana who are enemies of the Tsemay.

The Mursi (7,500) live in the lower Omo Valley north of Lake Turkana in an area bound by three rivers, Mago, Omo and Mara. They are a good example of the frequent location shifting that is noted in this region. They are said to have come from the west in two movements. The first brought them to the Omo River some 150 years ago, and the second to the Mara River in the 1920s. One other section moved northwards to higher land quite recently. They are divided into three territorial sections – Ariholi, Gongulobibi and Dola – each of them with its own age-grade system through which males move from boyhood (*lusi*) to adulthood (*hiri*). The Mursi cultivate flood retreat and rain fed land, planting sorghum, and keep cattle ten to twenty kilometres east of the tse tse infested banks of the Omo. Although on average they own very few animals and depend on cultivation for most of their food, their culture ‘elevates cattle to a position of supreme symbolic importance’ (Turton 1985: 334). However, neither livestock nor cultivation ‘is sufficient in itself, nor even in combination, to provide a regular and reliable subsistence’ for them (*ibid.*: 333).

The Mursi share the warrior ethos of all pastoralists. ‘The age organisation of the Mursi turns men, ritually, not only into adults, but also into killers, ready – and indeed eager – to show towards non-Mursi the very antithesis of that peaceful sociability which they are required to show towards Mursi’ (Turton, 2002: 179). Having killed an enemy, a Mursi man cuts a horseshoe shaped mark into the skin of his arm representing the spirit of his victim. Raiding offers the best opportunity to display valour, and is often exercised at the expense of their preferred enemies, the Nyangatom and the Bodi. Due to various setbacks, no age-grade was initiated from 1961 to 1991, when a new one was formed with an age range of fifteen to forty-five years. Two months later, the new age-grade attacked the Nyangatom, inflicting heavy casualties.

The Bodi (8,000) are an Omotic group whose blurred identity has tested anthropologists’ mettle. Linguistically, they belong to the Surmi language group, and comprise two distinct clans that call themselves Mela and Chirim respectively. However, they are known as Bodi by their neighbours, although they themselves do not use this name. The Mela are divided into two territorial sections, Hana and Gura, each with its own chief (*komorut*) and separate territory. Hana and Gura in turn are subdivided into clans (Fukui, 1994). The Bodi have no corporate structures or political solidarity, and the various sections often clash with each other. The Mela also fight with their neighbours, the Mursi and the Hamar. They have peacemaking agreements with the Mursi and do not harm women and children, but they do not extend the same courtesy to the Hamar.

The Arbore (6,000), also called Hor, inhabit the delta of the Woito River before it ends in the salt flats of Lake Stephanie. Some Arbore live

in Teltele, across the Segen River in Borana, where they are known as Wata Wendo and are considered by the Borana as part of their own community. Agro-pastoralism, in flood retreat land in the fertile delta of the Woito River, is their main productive activity. Land is communally owned and annually redistributed, and sorghum is the main crop. The language and culture of the Arbore are related to the Borana, whose language they also speak. They are similarly related to the Konso, whose language and Borana are mutually intelligible (Wolde Gossa Tadesse 2002: 130). Arbore social structure combines kinship and territorial principles with the age-grade system. Most of them live in four main villages, bonded in two pairs called Marle and Arbore. Their clan organisation has four territorial sections – Gandarab, Kulam, Murale, Egude – each with its own ritual leader (*gawot*), secular leader (*kernet*), distributors of flood land (*mura*), and councillors (*jaldab*) who comprise the senior age-grade (*berr*).

Like all their neighbours, the Arbore place high value on fighting. Their favourite enemies – because they have ‘sweet blood’ – are the Maale and Samburu. By killing someone of ‘sweet blood’, the warrior gains the power and fertility of the victim, and the latter’s severed genitals are displayed as the symbol of power that will multiply cattle and children. ‘Once a man kills a Maale and anoints his body with the blood of his victim, he will become rich in cattle, he will have many children. Arbore land will live in peace and there will be no famine’, they believe (Wolde Gossa Tadesse 1997: 674).

The Kwegu (1,500) live in widely dispersed settlements along the Omo River. Inhabiting tse tse infested territory, they keep no livestock. They live by cultivating flood land, fishing, hunting and collecting honey, a valuable trade product used for making the mead liquor *tej*. Anthropologists have been hard put to pin down this small group with its opaque identity and many names. According to one, the Kwegu are in fact three distinct groups. One is associated with the Mursi, who call them Nyidi, another with the Bodi who call them Idinitt, and a third with the Kara who call them Muguji (Hiroshi, 2002: 180). Kwegu have their own language, but also speak the languages of the groups they are associated with.

Gambella

Jutting out into the southern Sudanese flood plain, Gambella is among the most remote of Ethiopia’s far flung nether regions: 800kms from Addis Ababa. Its size – 25,000km² – makes it the second smallest (after Harar) of the federation’s nine regional states. Located in the southwestern corner of the country, where the northern plateau drops abruptly from heights over 2,000m to a flat plain at 500m, Gambella has a very hot climate with an annual average temperature reaching 37°C. Unlike most lowlands, however, it has an average annual rainfall of 800mm, sufficient for many crops. Dense tropical forest covers the elevated western edge, and savannah forest, grasslands and marshlands cover the lowland plain as far as the border with Sudan.

NFD's population was settled in fifteen strategic hamlets encircled with barbed wire and thorn bush fences. A 32km wide zone around villages was marked for grazing; beyond it was a free shooting area. The result was the annihilation of livestock due to the disappearance of pasturage around the camps, the spread of epidemic disease, and confiscation by the police and soldiers. Worse hit were the Muslim Borana in Isiolo who had sided with the rebels. They lost all their livestock when they were interred in camps, a disaster they recall as '*Gaaf Daaba*' ('Time to Stop'), and from which they never quite recovered. The end came in 1967 when the Egal government in Mogadisho changed policy and ceased to supply them.²²

South Omo

Little is known of events in this part of the lowland periphery during the first three decades of imperial rule. Neither travellers nor anthropologists ventured there to leave a record. Evidence from indigenous oral history suggests it was a period of instability and population shifts, as the people resisted the plunder of their properties by the new rulers on one hand and, on the other, plundered each other. Impressed by the firepower of the *neftegna*, the Hamar named them *kushumba* ('horn'). Much later, an anthropologist recorded one Hamar recalling how his father lamented the loss of livestock: 'The foreigners, they are smallpox, they are diarrhoea, they are fire', the father had said, adding how the Hamar finally sued for peace by sending a lion cub to Haile Selassie (Strecker 2006: 154). Ethiopian garrisons were established in Bako and Gidole on the heights overlooking South Omo, and a small number of highlanders came to settle among sedentary communities, where they acquired land and *gabbar* to work it. Understandably, the latter resented the burden imposed on them. The Aari described their situation as '*set homenal*' ('becoming women') and '*beg homenal*' ('becoming sheep') (Naty 1994: 62). The Italians occupied South Omo briefly during 1938-1940, leaving stores of weapons when they departed.

In the post-1941 administrative reorganisation, South Omo became an *awraja* in Gemu Gofa province, with Jinka as its capital. The life of administrators stationed in the lowlands was an unenviable one. Posting there was considered punishment. 'Amelu kekefa lakew Gemu Gofa' ('If someone misbehaves, send him to Gemu Gofa') people said. Living conditions were primitive. 'I am now found under the shade of trees as usual,' wrote one *woreda* governor, complaining of not having even a hut for his office and asking for transfer. His request was backed by his superior, the *awraja* governor, who also made a sensible suggestion that 'people who are of the same culture and know the reality be appointed' to such posts.²³ Police and military stations were set up after 1941 in some places, remote, isolated,

²² For the full story of this conflict see Nene Mburu (2005).

²³ Letter to Maji Awraja Governor from the Governor of Geleb Woreda. No. 341/6149 (10 September 1949).

and scarcely sufficient to uphold the authority of the state. The logistics of maintaining these outposts were a serious problem. One that was planted among the Dassanetch in the southeast border had to be supplied by truck from Jinka, and was cut off by floods for several months each year. Soldiers' morale was low; drunkenness and suicide were common among them (Almagor 2002). These solitary outposts were the closest most people in South Omo came to a sign of the state's existence.

The function of this thin police presence was to back up the administrators in their main task, tax collection. It was easier to enforce in the higher reaches of the region, among the Maale and the Aari, where cultivation was practised, *neftegna* had settled, and the *balabbat* were able to facilitate this task. Lower down, in the pastoralist habitat where the population outgunned the state's representatives, it was a frustrating chore and seldom worth the effort. As late as 1957, an *awraja* governor complained that he had no clue about the livestock holdings of the Surma on which to base their tax liabilities, and he had to take their word for it.²⁴ Understandably so, since he had a force of 150 to police a community armed with an estimated 2,300 firearms.

It was inevitable that the incessant demand for taxes, for which the state offered no obvious return, would colour the perception and attitude of the people towards its representatives. The Arbore called the Ethiopians 'Sidam' and held very negative opinions of them:

The Sidam do not raise cattle but like meat very much. They consume cattle other people have raised. They do not like to carry their own belongings while travelling and do not cook their own food, but make others carry and cook for them. They love taking bribes, other people's possessions and rifles. They like wearing clothes. They are to be avoided'. (Wolde Gossa Tadesse 2002; 154)

The Aari who had collaborated with the Italians were harshly punished by returning *neftegna*, a time they remember as '*aushtira dagnia*' ('justice by the gun').²⁵ The *neftegna* regarded themselves as socially superior and disdained the natives. They would not eat or drink with them, and would not join the Aari working parties. The Maale, among whom a sizable *neftegna* presence was established, were most affected during this period. The appropriation of land by the *neftegna* and the Maale *balabbat* led to scarcity for the rest of the people and was strongly resented. By the late 1960s, a social division was emerging, with the *neftegna* and *balabbat* land-owners in one class and the erstwhile *gabbar*, now tenants or holders of dwarf plots, in another. These underlying class tensions came to the surface during the 1974 Revolution.

What an anthropologist terms 'a form of mutual exclusion' characterised the interaction between highlanders and pastoralists in South Omo (Almagor 2002: 96). Social relations between them were confounded by superstition and misapprehension, as shown in the report by one official written in 1957:

²⁴ Report to the Governor-General of Kaffa Province from the Governor of Maji Awraja. No. 3647/13/123. (8 May 1957).

²⁵ *Aushtra* refers to the Austrian Mannlicher rifle.

The men don't put on clothes and they go about naked. When they go naked, it is difficult to identify them as human beings...The land is good enough to cultivate cotton. If they took the initiative to cultivate the land and grow cotton, they could sell the surplus in Jimma and not use all of it for themselves. They could put on clothes made of cotton instead of going naked. But they don't do this, because they prefer to spend their time beating each other with a stick rather than work in the fields. They have a lot of cattle...If they sold butter they could pay the outstanding tax ...They don't do this, instead they drink full cream with blood.²⁶

The Abyssinians' scorn for the *zelan* did not endear them to the natives. 'They do not love animals and do not like people who raise and live with animals', said the Arbore (Tadesse Gossa Wolde 2002: 54). The Dassanetch called the Ethiopians 'Ochumba' ('stranger with cloth'), and their own *balabbat* '*kansitch ochumba*' ('leader for the foreigners'), and were horrified by the Abyssinian habit of eating raw meat and drinking *tej* (honey wine). On their part, the soldiers called the Dassanetch '*baria*' ('slaves'); 'women' because they wore necklaces and arm bands; 'cannibals' because they bled and drank cattle blood in the dry season, and despised them because they were not Christians (Almagor 2002: 107). By 1970, the Dassanetch did not speak Amharigna or practice any of the so-called 'Amharic' customs. They had been 'institutionalized at a relatively low – and finally hostile – level of interaction' wrote one anthropologist (ibid.: 97), a conclusion that applied to most aboriginal pastoralist groups on the fringe.

South Omo was little touched by the state's integration efforts, and that was only in the higher elevations where highlanders had come to settle, and new agricultural products – teff, coffee, cardamom – were introduced and marketed. This helped the growth of Jinka, the only town in South Omo that was founded as a garrison town and survived as an administrative centre. At an elevation of around 1000m, Jinka has a milder climate, albeit still exposed to malaria, yellow fever and yaws that threatened the immigrants who came as civil servants, traders and policemen. State elementary schools for the children of the highlanders opened in Jinka and a few other large settlements, and Orthodox churches were founded to care for their spiritual needs.

During this period, foreign missions established a presence in South Omo. A Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) station was set up in Aari land in 1927, but had little success and was finally closed by the Italians. SIM trained indigenous missionaries from Wolayta remained in the area and continued to proselytise, founding another station in Bako in 1945 (Naty 2000). SIM returned that same year, began offering medical treatment and set up another station in Konso in 1952, where it made rapid progress. By contrast, a Swedish Mission that went to Nyangatom in 1972 with plans for education and health made no converts at all. The missionary approach was described by a Bashada man in South Omo:

²⁶ Report to the Governor-General of Kaffa Province from the Governor of Maji Awraja. No. 3647/13/123 (8 May 1957).

‘Father’ has brought us oil, and he showed us how to cook with it. He also showed us how to boil water and milk. He taught in his house. If you stayed here for a few days he would afterwards give you a cloth. He would also give coffee, or salt, everything. And he took you home in his car. The Ethiopian government simply says ‘pay taxes’.²⁷

Conflict in the pastoralist zone continued as before, only now it became increasingly lethal given the quantity and quality of firearms that became available. The collapse of the Ethiopian army in 1936 and the Italian army in 1941 released a large supply of rifles onto the local market and lowered the price to make the weapon affordable to pastoralist warriors. The collapse of higher authority – twice in that period – incited communities to settle scores with attacks on each other and waves of livestock raiding. Hostilities, as often as not, took place across borders. These were neither marked nor guarded; a cause of great frustration for the Ethiopian administrators who vainly complained to their superiors. As one reported:

As we have noted earlier on many occasions the border is not identified properly. It is impossible to pursue offender who cross the line between one country and another having killed people and plundered cattle. There is no post or sign that indicates a borderline, so it is difficult to say whether a locality is in Ethiopia, Kenya or Sudan.²⁸

Gambella

The first decades of Ethiopian rule in this remote region were marked by ceaseless conflict between the Anywaa and the Nuer. Thanks to rifles they acquired from Oromo highlanders in exchange for ivory, the Anywaa succeeded for a time in halting the Nuer intrusion. By the 1910s they were reported to have accumulated 25,000 weapons (Bahru 1987: 119). Access to firearms shifted the balance of power in their favour, and they launched continuous raids on the Jikany Nuer, taking slaves, stealing animals, and driving many of the people across the border into Sudan. The colonial administration there was understandably perturbed and determined to disarm the Anywaa. In 1912 it sent an expedition against the *nyieya* Akwei in the Adongo region inside Sudan, but despite their inferior weaponry, the Anywaa carried the day, inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy (Direje Feyisa 2003 :321). British pressure on Addis Ababa to cooperate fell on deaf ears. Mainly interested in the profits of the ivory trade, the Ethiopian government was inclined to tolerate the assertion of Anywaa power, even their unwillingness to pay tribute regularly, until they went too far.

Addis Ababa kept a representative in Gambella town to keep an eye on the British who administered the inland port. In 1913, the Anywaa killed this official, starting a confrontation with Addis Ababa that was to last for

²⁷ Cited by Epple (2005).

²⁸ Report to the Governor-General of Kaffa Province from the Governor of Maji Awraja. No. 3647/13/123 (8 May 1957).

South Omo

The experience of this region under the military regime is little known. Few anthropologists were able to work there, and those who did preferred to tread lightly on the impact of the Revolution. In the words of one: 'Much of the anthropology of the last twenty years has...paid surprisingly little attention to the impact and 'appropriation' of the Ethiopian revolution as a socio-cultural phenomenon on local societies.' (Abbink 1997: 236-7) What is presented below is the weaving together of fragments of information gathered from a variety of sources.

Only ripples of the wave that swept away the imperial regime from the highlands reached the benighted milieu of South Omo, where it appeared first in the form of a handful of intrepid *zamatcha* students who arrived there in 1975. None of them had the slightest acquaintance with the region, and all were bemused by the exotic world they encountered. Even so, they hoped to 'telescope' the process of social evolution by setting off a class struggle among the bewildered natives. They harangued them in the freshly minted Amharigna revolutionary vocabulary that reached their audience through the garbled translation of local interpreters. Emulating the Red Guards in China, they launched a frontal attack on traditional institutions and practices they condemned as 'feudal', 'oppressive', 'harmful' and 'reactionary'. The immediate targets were the local *balabbat* and they were unceremoniously booted out. The assault gathered momentum to include all figures of secular and religious authority, as well as traditional rituals, symbols and customs through which such authority was manifested. On several occasions, the campaigners laid violent hands on these, destroying shrines and demolishing ritual objects, forcing people to violate cultural taboos, and generally sowed confusion. On their departure, they left many communities divided between those who welcomed change and those who opposed it, leaving the majority agitated and perturbed.

The call of the Revolution found its loudest echo among communities on the higher elevations, where agriculture was practiced, *neftegna* landlords had settled and the *gabbar* system had been imposed. Coincidentally, these also were communities where foreign missionary work had borne fruit, and it was young Christian converts, already at odds with tradition, who welcomed the promise of radical change and became the local standard bearers of the Revolution. 'When the revolution began to promise a new beginning, local Christians, particularly the educated, entered into the work of attacking tradition as enthusiastically as Russian or Chinese revolutionaries' (Donham 1999: 178).

Such favourable conditions were ripe in the case of Maale, where a Sudan Interior Mission station had begun work in Bako in 1954.¹² In the

¹² This is the only community in South Omo whose experience during this period has been detailed by an anthropologist. See Donham (1997, 1999).

minds of the converts to Protestantism 'the Christian narrative of conversion and enlightenment was transformed into a modernist narrative of social revolution and progress' (Donham 1997: 328). Conflict over land between *gabbar* and landowners had reached the courts before the Revolution, with Christians who had learned Amharigna taking the initiative. In mid-1975, four *zamatcha* students came to Bala, deposed the Maale Kati (King) and chiefs, desecrated the venerated bones of former kings and smashed the traditional symbols of ritual authority. Excited by the land reform, the *gabbar* followed the *zamatcha* instructions to form *kebele* and exclude former landowners and 'feudal elements' from election to office. The process of grooming the local elite included military training for young men, cadre training at the Yekatit Political School in Addis Ababa, recruitment into COPWE and latter in the WPE. Eventually these people were appointed to office in the local administration. The numbers involved were minute; the WPE in Maale had no more than ten members. 'What was the main thing they taught us?' one Maale who responded to the call of the Revolution said later. 'The landowners, the big ones, the ones who made their wealth from the farmers – that way of life had to be destroyed. Everyone had to be equal. That was what we learned first. We really didn't learn much about socialism' (Donham 1997: 331).

Zamatcha agitation in Aaari, another South Omo agricultural community with a history of tension between *gabbar* and *neftegna*, exploded in violence against the *neftegna*, whose property was looted and women raped, and there was fighting with many casualties in Bio Barka. Before leaving, the campaigners managed to offend the people by forcing them to violate the taboo against Aari castes sharing a meal or having sex together; they killed an ox and forced members of different castes to eat it together. After they left, the *neftegna* and police raided the area arresting looters and confiscating animals.

By contrast, the *zamatcha* had no impact in Arbore, where no *neftegna* had settled and no missionary had put in an appearance. The people there listened to *zamatcha* speeches politely, but the only interest they evinced was in getting weapons and military training from the new regime. Afterwards, the Arbore returned to their reclusive ways and kept outsiders at bay. Only a couple of Arbore men were sent to the Yekatit School, and one was made deputy administrator of Kayfer *awraja*. One event the people here did not forgive or forget was the mindless arrest of their senior chief and the breaking of his staff (Wolde Gossa Tadesse 2002: 54); likewise with the Surma, where a handful of *zamatcha* students appeared in 1976 in Kibish. Revolutionary slogans had no meaning for them. Surma traditional authority was not affected, nor did the people respond to *zamatcha* advice to cover their nakedness, stop wearing lip-plates and settle down to cultivate. 'Suri realities did not answer to the model of an unequal, oppressive, feudal society' and the impact of the campaign was nil (Abbink 2002: 162).

The Revolution's echo died before it could be heard in the fringe periphery, the people inhabiting the shifting, fluid ecosystem of the Omo River delta. The *zamatcha* itself collapsed before it could reach this

unapproachable region and it was only years later, when the state's spreading administrative and military tentacles reached them that the people realised something was afoot. Usually this occurred when their traditional authority structure came under attack by the regime's local cadre preparing to assume the role of peripheral elite. Even the Nyangatom had their three *balabbat* supplanted by *kebele* chairmen.

Several regime initiatives boosted the process of integration of this hitherto ignored region. The reorganisation of the state in the late 1980s raised South Omo's status to administrative region. Its people were introduced to state provided education for the first time, with primary schools in many villages and a secondary school in Jinka, the regional capital. Nearly all teachers came from the highlands, but local graduates were also trained to teach, while others were employed in the local administration. A network of roads linked Jinka with district capitals, and these became arteries for the flow of local trade. Jinka got electricity and telephone connections, as well as hotels and restaurants for an expanding population of highlander civil servants, soldiers and traders. Though a measure of commercialisation was stimulated by these developments, the economy of South Omo did not rise from the basic subsistence level it has occupied since time immemorial. The regime had no policy of pastoralist development, limiting itself to occasional exhortations on behalf of agro-pastoralism. It did, however, open schools for pastoralist children in Dimeka and Kayfer.

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The campaign of suppression waged by the radical zealots produced the first signs of disenchantment and opposition to the regime. This occurred in communities like Maale, where Protestantism had taken root. The campaign alienated Christians who initially had welcomed the Revolution. The closing of churches and schools was strongly resented and, on a few occasions, forcefully resisted. In the 1980s, the grievances of people in South Omo accumulated, and 'as the revolution wore on after the late 1970s, the state became ever more unpopular in Maale' (Donham 1997: 327). Increased and more efficiently collected taxation was a key reason. Whereas the imperial regime had levied taxes on heads of extended families, the Dergue taxed all married households. Contributions demanded by the 'call of the motherland' were an additional burden. Local officials interfered with trade, and the new road network became a venue for extortion. Transportation of certain goods – wood, hides, skins, animals, incense, sorghum – was made illegal. Vehicles were searched, identity documents checked, goods were confiscated and fines were imposed.

The reinforced presence of the state, especially the military and police, and the exertions of the new breed of political cadres, served to dampen inter-community conflict in South Omo. They followed a policy of bringing foes together in large meetings to harangue them and resolve their differences. Of course, conflict was not entirely eliminated. In a famous incident that occurred in 1984, the Hamar crossed the Segen

River to loot 18,000 Borana cattle. The regime could not control cross-border conflict, which took on new dimensions in the 1980s due to the worsening situation in Southern Sudan. Just as the war there was forcing the Nuer to cross the border into Gambella, other groups in the Ethiopia-Sudan borderland moved eastwards towards the escarpment and clashed with the local population. The Surma came under continuous pressure by the Toposa and Nyangatom who had obtained automatic weapons from the SPLA. When the Surma themselves were similarly armed, they turned the weapons against their Dizi neighbours in a relentless campaign of displacement that continues to this day. The situation deteriorated in the late 1980s as the embattled regime reduced its presence in the region, and three army posts in Surma sub-district were abandoned. When the regime collapsed, the region lapsed into anarchy.

Gambella

The impact of the socialist state on Anywaa society, an anthropologist notes, 'was profound and far reaching' (Kurimoto 1997: 799). The first shock came with the arrival of some 500 *zamacha* students who set about to convert a pre-literate society to 'scientific Marxism' with missionary zeal. Security conditions forced them to congregate in the towns of Gambella and Itang, but this did not dim their enthusiasm. The Anywaa word *agem* that signifies the deposal of a king or village headman was adopted for 'revolution;' suitably enough, because the *zamacha* targeted Anywaa traditional leader and *balabbat* who had served under the imperial regime. Labelled 'reactionary', 'anti-revolutionary' and 'feudal', the perplexed *nyieya* and *kwaaro* were rudely removed and replaced with the chairmen of the newly formed *kebele*. 'Backward cultural practices' like bridewealth payment in beads (*dimui*), initiation scarification and witchcraft were proscribed; bridewealth payment was monetised and its price was fixed in birr. The people themselves proved less than enthusiastic to join the 'class struggle', and later tried to restore the *nyieya* and *kwaaro* to their traditional status, leading a highlander to conclude that 'although there was exploitation by indigenous *balabbat*, the broad masses were not aware of its existence.'¹⁴

Some sectors of Anywaa society were receptive to the reforms. While the traditional leaders and elders felt themselves under attack, youth perceived the change as progress. It appealed particularly to the first generation of missionary and government educated Anywaa who saw in it the promise of modernisation. A start was made to form mass organisations, a number of educated Anywaa joined POMOA, and a few were appointed to office in the local administration. Several were sent to Addis Ababa and Eastern Europe for political training; others joined the Ethiopian army and were sent to fight in Eritrea. A teacher training institute and twelve primary schools opened in the region, teaching in Amharigna and spread-

¹⁴ Cited in Direje Feyisa (2003: 334).

a firm that uses it as holding ground for livestock, the herders have found it increasingly difficult to maintain their herds, and relations with their neighbours deteriorated.

Both Guji and Borana were indignant when the Gabbra in Surupta asked for their own separate *kebele*, hoping to have exclusive access to its land. The spark that set off the conflict in the spring of 2005 was the killing of a Guji woman by Gabbra. Both communities mobilised and drew apart as Guji and Gabbra left the sites they occupied jointly. Finchaa town was evacuated when the Guji fled to Hagere Mariam, and issued the traditional call for mobilisation that all males must obey by rushing armed to the scene. There they chose an Abaa Dula and attacked the Gabbra in March 2005. Fighting lasted a few days and some sixty people were killed, allegedly quite a few of them by the military who arrived to stop the fighting. Hundreds of Gabbra homes were burned, thousands of their livestock were looted, and many people fled to Moyale. There was no mechanism of conflict resolution between Guji and Gabbra because, as they said, they had 'never fought before'.

When the Guji retreated north of Finchaa during this conflict, abandoning land south of the town, the Borana promptly moved into it. In the summer of 2006, after the Guji-Gabbra conflict subsided and the Guji began drifting back to reclaim their land, they met Borana resistance, and the two clashed heavily over several weeks with the loss of many lives. The road to Moyale was blocked and federal military intervention was required to open it. A meeting held in Yabelo in June 2006 attended by the Guji and Borana Aba Gaada and state officials arranged a ceasefire but did not resolve the conflict.

The three Oromo groups clashed with extraordinary violence in northern Kenya a few months later. On 12 July 2005, in the Didigalalo-Turbi area, 130 km from Marsabit town, some 1000 heavily armed raiders attacked the Gabbra town of Turbi, killing 76 people, including 22 primary schoolchildren, destroying schools and shops, and looting thousands of livestock. Although the slaughter continued for a whole day, the Kenyan security forces did not appear until it was over. The raiders were said to be Borana and Guji from Ethiopia supported by the Oromo Liberation Front.

South Omo

During crises in the centre, state power in the periphery reaches low ebb, and violence claims the lowlands as communities seize the opportunity to settle accounts with their neighbours over accumulated grievances. The collapse of state authority in 1991 was the signal for a free-for-all among groups in South Omo, just as the region was flooded with automatic weapons left by the dismantled Dergue army. Dergue officials fled to Kenya, leaving arms depots to be emptied by youths who sold weapons to the rural people. Police stations were looted, prison guards fled and prisoners escaped, and Jinka was left without telephone and radio links with the rest of the country for some time. The Borana were immediately attacked by a coalition of Konso, Hamar, Arbore, Tsemay and Bana. An

ill-timed Borana retaliatory attack against the Arbore left 400 of the attackers dead. The mayhem continued until early 1993, when elders of twelve communities reached an agreement that secured the peace until 1997. Land use rights were the focal point of the agreement. It was stipulated that rights over land concern use not ownership, and all groups and their animals have the right to survival. Accordingly, the Borana agreed to allow access to their territory for a limited number of their neighbours' livestock after harvest time.

The EPRDF army arrived in the autumn of 1991 to set up bases in Jinka and Kara (70km from Jinka). With the exception of a handful of former Aari soldiers who had joined it, there were no natives of South Omo in its ranks, and the initiative to represent that region was taken by a handful of educated natives who found themselves in Addis Ababa at the time. A group of them put together an Omotic Peoples Democratic Front, and two – Makonnen Dori and Assefa Chabo – were seated in the July 1991 Conference. In 1992 a rival Omo Peoples Democratic Union appeared to represent the descendants of the Amhara settlers in the Omo region. Neither of these was acceptable to the EPRDF, and a third party whose title listed the names of nearly all communities in the Omo region appeared with its blessing. This party took most of the seats in the 1992 local elections and then proceeded to lose most of them to challenges and reruns. A fourth entry named the South Omo Peoples Democratic Movement came first in the 1995 elections.

In the federal arrangement South Omo became a zone in Debub *kilil* and was subdivided into *woreda*, whose number increased steadily as most ethnic groups in the zone demanded to have their own. Larger groups were given a *woreda*, and an effort was made to accommodate smaller groups in their own *kebele*. The political status of the descendants of the *neftegna* who had long dominated the region was a controversial issue at the time. The EPRDF insisted on inclusiveness and fair representation, and the first administration of South Omo Zone was headed by an Aari teacher, Getahun Goitang, whose deputy was a Gurage, Yaqob Dembel. The principle of inclusiveness applied also in the *woreda* and *kebele* councils by giving every group fair representation.

Federalism shifted the task of administration to local people. This was a great advance on the past, if only because it brought government closer to the population and opened the possibility of gaining their trust. Unfortunately, local government did not have the means to carry out the tasks assigned to it. Due to severe shortages of human and material resources, the *woreda* empowerment programme ran into serious difficulty. There are not enough educated natives to staff the administration, and few non-natives are willing to work in the primitive hamlets that serve as *woreda* centres, despite a bonus offered for this purpose. The *kilil* budget assigned 61% of the total to *woreda*, yet this proved inadequate to meet even staff salaries. In 2006, South Omo Zone was 2.2 million birr in the red, and most *woreda* had not paid staff salaries for months. Needless to say, the zone's revenue capacity is nil, and it depends entirely on federal subsidies.

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A painfully slow start was made in the first years of this century to raise the capacity of the indigenous communities in South Omo for self-administration. A network of elementary schools brought modern education to this borderland for the first time, and a beginning was made to accommodate pastoralist youth in boarding schools. Jinka began to acquire a modicum of urban facilities and was linked by air with Addis Ababa. A road connection through Konso to Borana was started, but the zone still lacks a direct connection to the national network. The economy of South Omo remains purely subsistence. There is no market in it even for livestock, its major resource. It has not attracted investment save for a private cotton plantation at Birale that had been established before 1991 on land taken from the Tsamako community without permission or compensation.⁵

The exceptional physical setting of the Omo River Valley attracted interest as a potential tourist area. A major portion of it had already been reserved under previous regimes for national parks, wildlife reserves and controlled hunting. The reserved area amounted to more than 18,000 km² in South Omo Zone whose total area is 22,360 km², that is, over three-quarters. Its potential for tourism could be exploited only if herders and livestock were excluded from the designated areas, or their activities restricted. Mago National Park was established in 1978 in an area covered 2,200 km². An area twice as large was later designated as the Omo National Park, but neither was demarcated or gazetted. Both are in Salamago *woreda*. The Park is regularly grazed by Hamar and Bana herds from the south and Mursi herds from the north, and all depend on the waters of the Mago and Omo rivers in the dry season. The Mursi also cultivate the banks of the Mago River in the south, while the Aari cultivate higher land in the north. The history of Mago National Park is one of continuous confrontation with the local people. In 2002 the Park Warden and two policemen were killed in a Bana village. Park employees are intimidated by the herders: 'They are armed and they see us as the enemy', one said. Prudently, they did not attempt to expel the herders from the Park.⁶

In 2005, the Wildlife Department of Debub *kibil* carried out a demarcation of the Omo and Mago parks. This was prompted by a proposal from a Dutch enterprise, the Stichting African Parks Foundation, to take over their management. It had already secured a contract for the management of Nech Sar National Park in neighbouring Gemu Gofa Zone. Drafted by the Foundation, the agreement put heavy emphasis on banning hunting by the local people, calling it 'poaching'. 'It is most essential that poaching is stopped', it stated, and made plans for 'a highly mechanised scout unit, with airplane, radio, binoculars and 80 motorcycles. It is predicted that

⁵ A confrontation between the Tsamako and the plantation owners in 1995 led to military intervention and the killing of nine Tsamako men.

⁶ Interview with Getu Wolde, Warden of Mago National Park, Mago Park, (27 January 2006).

nearly all poaching will have ceased in year three', it confidently predicted. The people who used the land had other ideas and were given a chance to voice them in a meeting organised locally by the UNDP.⁷ 'This demarcation is like itching. It is really itching us, really very tough', complained a Nyangatom elder:

We know the wildlife, they are our resources. It is our wealth, like our domestic animals. We need to balance wildlife and animals. If we give a large portion of grazing land to the wildlife, what about the domestic animals? If this demarcation happens in this place, it is really, really better for us to die.

Another elder added: 'We will never agree that we will never hunt anymore. In our culture it is really very difficult because when a new bride comes she cannot be married until an animal is killed and a skin is prepared for her to wear.' A third accused the authorities: 'The land is being privatised without telling the people.'⁸ Local resistance led the Foundation to reconsider, and following the death of its owner, it pulled out of South Omo and Nech Sar.

The rivers that cross the zone are another resource with potential for development to which Addis Ababa has turned its attention in recent years. The focus is the Omo-Gibe basin, whose hydroelectric energy potential is second only to that of the Blue Nile. The country's biggest supplier of electricity, fed from a dam known as Gilgil Gibe I, it began operations in 2004. Known as Gibe II, a second power plant fed from this dam was nearing completion in 2010. Neither of these is thought to have a significant impact on the hydrology of the lower Omo. By contrast, a third project known as Gibe III, sited on the Omo River 300km southwest of Addis Ababa, has raised great concern in that respect. Gibe III, whose construction began in 2006, is advertised as the second largest dam in Africa and expected to double Ethiopia's generating capacity. Up to 50% of its output will be exported to neighbouring countries. The Italian government provided part of the funding for the project, the contract for which was awarded to an Italian company without bidding, as was the contract for the initial ecological impact assessment that made no mention of the dam's potential impact on the ecology of the Omo River flood plain.

Concern voiced abroad prompted Ethiopia's Environmental Protection Authority to carry out its own assessment two years after construction began. Referring to the lower Omo, it recommended the annual release of 'controlled flood' over a ten day period 'to fully compensate all adverse effects'. This assessment was roundly condemned abroad as 'grossly inadequate'.⁹ The African Development Bank, which had provided part of the initial funding and was considering additional support, was then obliged to produce its own assessment. Critics abroad found this one 'fatally flawed in terms of its logic, in terms of its thoroughness, in terms of

⁷ Global Pastoralist Gathering organised by the UNDP at Turmi, South Omo, 9 January 2005 – 2 February 2005.

⁸ The organisers published a newsletter (*Turmi Morning Herald* 29 January–2 February 2005) from where the statements cited here are taken.

⁹ International Rivers Press Release, (23 July 2009).

its conclusions'.¹⁰ Nevertheless, a Chinese firm was awarded the contract for a fourth dam on the Omo River, 100 km to the south on the northern end of South Omo zone.

Those who know the area warn of a potentially devastating impact on people whose livelihood depends entirely on the river's floodwaters. Seasonal flooding sustains pastures for their livestock and prepares the land for crops that make up a good portion of their diet. Already significantly reduced, Lake Turkana, which is fed by the Omo River, is threatened with extinction, as are the people who live on its shore. The intrusion of agri-business based on irrigation is another development prospect seen as beneficial for the area because it would provide employment for the local population as well as improved infrastructure. It began with the acquisition of 30,000ha by an Italian 'alternative energy company' for oil palm and jatropha cultivation. Undoubtedly, there would be gains for the state from this development. If the experience of the Afar in the Awash Valley is any guide, however, there will be little gain and possibly great loss for the people of South Omo.

Conflict in South Omo

Federalism had no dampening effect on conflict in South Omo, where it remains endemic and irrepressible. According to the records of the Justice and Security Bureau of South Omo Zone, 204 people were killed in 2000-2005. Since not all incidents are reported to the police, this was an understatement. With a zone population of some 450,000 at the time, the incidence of violence might not seem alarmingly high. The picture changes when the spatial distribution of this phenomenon is considered. All the incidents cited in the report took place in four *woreda* – Nyangatom, Dassanetch, Hamar, Salamago – inhabited by herders and agro-pastoralists. Nyangatom and Dassanetch *woreda* together held the zonal record with 171 deaths during that period. Hamar came second with 29 deaths, and Salamago a distant third with 5 deaths. There were no reports of violent deaths in the other *woreda* of the zone. A follow up report for January-April 2006 that listed 17 deaths – including five women and four children – described this period as 'relatively peaceful' (CEWARN July 2006).

The extent of the problem is magnified by the fact that the area and population involved include adjacent areas and kindred populations in Northern Kenya and Southern Sudan. Dassanetch and Nyangatom are found also in Kenya's Turkana District, while Nyangatom and Murle live also in Eastern Equatoria and Jonglei provinces respectively in Southern Sudan. The border is neither garrisoned nor patrolled. A thriving trade in automatic weapons and ammunition is conducted across it and livestock raiding, another cross-border activity, flourishes. Nearly all males are

¹⁰ Richard Leakey interview, BBC Amharic Service, (14 April 2009).

armed and carry their weapons everywhere, except inside Jinka town. Asked why they need weapons, they invariably reply 'for self-defence'.

Indeed, the imperative of self-defence that prevailed in the pastoralist habitat in the past remains valid in the beginning of the 21st century. Although the lowland periphery was brought under the Ethiopian flag over a century ago, succeeding regimes have done little to provide security for its inhabitants. The police force for the entire South Omo zone numbered less than 500 in 2007 and was supported by a militia of one dozen men in each *kebele*. The police are stationed mainly in *woreda* capitals and a handful of other posts. Without vehicles, the police is effectively immobilised and is no match for raiders who move swiftly even when driving looted livestock. The police have a mixture of automatic weapons, M1 rifles and carbines of WWII vintage. *Kebele* militias have only a few weapons they use on a shift basis.¹¹ By contrast, there must many thousands of automatic weapons in the hands of the population.

An advantage of local self-government is the fact that local officials are cognizant of peoples' need for self defence and their own limitations in providing security. Wisely, they refrain from aggravating the situation with coercive measures. Instead, the preferred approach is negotiation and conciliation with the aim of containing conflict. Officials become involved only when an act of violence is reported to the police, which is not always the case, or when they are warned of impending serious conflict between groups. Their first concern is to prevent conflict from spreading. This requires convincing the victim's kinsmen not to retaliate until the elders complete negotiations for blood compensation and the return of stolen property, and persuading the guilty party to surrender and be taken to prison for his own protection. 'We go to the site of a crime to make peace, not to make arrests', one official explained.¹² Punishment is a secondary consideration, subject to lengthy negotiations between the authorities, the elders and the culprits themselves, and seldom reaches the state courts.

Gambella

The chaotic interval that followed the overthrow of the military regime in 1991 was particularly violent in Gambella, where it is remembered as *girgir* ('turmoil'). When the Dergue soldiers abandoned the area, pent up Anywaa resentment of highlander settlement in their midst found immediate release through attacks on settler villages. The initial incident was an assault on the village of Ukuna that had a mixed population of some 3,000 settlers and 770 Anywaa. The village was burned down and as many as 100 highlanders lost their lives. This signalled the start of an exodus of settlers that eventually left only a small number behind in Gambella.

¹¹ Interview with Getachew Toronche, Head of Justice & Security Bureau, South Omo Zone, Jinka, (25 January 2006).

¹² Interview with Moluka Wubneh, Bako Gazar Woreda Administrator, Jinka, (24 January 2006).