

**To Live with Others**  
Essays on Cultural Neighborhood  
in Southern Ethiopia

Edited by  
Echi Christina Gabbert and Sophia Thubauville

With a Preface by  
Günther Schlee



RÜDIGER KÖPPE VERLAG · KÖLN

# MURDER AS A MARKER OF ETHNICITY

## IDEAS AND PRACTICES CONCERNING HOMICIDE AMONG THE DAASANECH

*Yvan Houtteman*

**Abstract.** The focus of this paper is on homicide among the Daasanech. Through the dramatic life story of Losseiya, ideas and practices about murder and killing are described and related to boundary making. Murder and killing are explained as a way to demarcate and to objectify differences between the Daasanech and their neighbors.

### Introduction

The central theme of this essay is the way in which murder and killing among the Daasanech of South-West Ethiopia may be viewed as a construct in the ideology behind "us against them." Here I adopt Barth's (1969: 9) analysis of ethnic boundary making in which:

[...] categorical ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of mobility, contact and information, but do entail social processes of exclusion and incorporation whereby discrete categories are maintained despite changing participation and membership in the course of individual life histories.

As we shall see below, the conceptualisation of the difference between *gaalkunyo* (us, our people) and *kiz* (potential enemies) is an open one. I will describe and explain different processes of exclusion and inclusion into Daasanech society through the life history of Losseiya, a Daasanech man in his 30's who was killed by his fellow tribesman. The social drama happened in the 1990s and had a significant impact on me since the protagonist became a good friend of mine during my first months of fieldwork in the spring of 1995. He assisted me in the field and he was present when I was initiated as an adult (*maa kaabana*) of his age-set.<sup>1</sup> His dramatic life-story serves as the lens through which I will de-

- 1 I conducted fieldwork among the Daasanech between 1995 and 1997, funded by the FWO in Belgium and coordinated by Gustaaf Verswijver of KMMA Tervuren (Houtteman 1998, 2004). The initiation into manhood happened one evening in May 1995. Young men from the village Aoga, where I lived, and the surrounding villages gathered around my tent, all painted in yellow, singing war songs (*guodib*). I was asked to kill an ox for them. After the killing, I was smeared with chyme (*uro*) and was given a headrest (*kara*). Later on, I realized that this act was a way to give me an identity and incorporate me into the group.

scribe and explain different concepts, symbols and ritual acts associated with raids, killing and murder. Although the question I try to answer is why Losseiya was killed by his tribesman, the main purpose of this essay is to elaborate on ideas and practices, which all have to do with boundary making. Let's begin with the story:

### Losseiya's story

Losseiya was around 35 when he was murdered. For Daasanech standards, he was doing well. He had a lot of cattle, which his younger brothers and half brothers kept during the dry season on "the islands" of the Omo-Delta.<sup>2</sup> He also was the owner of a large riverine agricultural plot in Aoga.<sup>3</sup>

He was member of the Ongaat age-set of the Nyitaabus generation<sup>4</sup> and the eldest son of his father's second wife. His father and the brothers of his father all died quite young. They were cursed by Ikoriye, a well known member of the Turnyerim clan, who was chased away from his agricultural plot down in Aoga village many years before by the father of Losseiya and his three brothers. That plot was claimed both by the house of Geeche of the Fargaro, which was the house of Losseiya's father and by the house of Waashia of the Turnyerim to which Ikoriye belonged. Ikoriye, a man renowned for his spiritual powers, was angry about that and cursed the four brothers, who ultimately died one after the other.<sup>5</sup>

This meant that Losseiya became head of the family when he was still quite young. He lived with his wife, his mother, and his unmarried sister and shared his compound with three bondfriends, all of whom belonged to a different section. Los-

- 2 "The islands" is an area in the Omo Delta. After the flood waters retreat, it offers dry season grazing lands.
- 3 Daasanech distinguish between two types of farming land: the *diele* and the *har*. A *diele* is an inundated river bank. These banks are inundated every year. They belong to a certain family. *Haram* are those lands which are inundated during the flooding of the Omo River. They have no specific owner, but are used by the one who clears them first. The conflict mentioned in the story is a conflict about ownership. Ownership is claimed through ancestry, but some ownership is disputed.
- 4 The Nyinyaabor are the second *modo* ("calf" age-set) of the Nyitaabus generation-set. These boys were initiated as *kaabana* around 1980 and were circumcised around 1985. At that time, the Nyitaabus were the youngest generation-set and at that time, they were still recruiting new members.
- 5 This was what the others said. Losseiya himself said that they were cursed by different people. Losseiya's father was called Nachabel. Nachabel's brothers were called Lomakol, Diangole and Losseiya.

seiya's mother was a Turkana, who had been taken during a raid and became the second wife of his father.<sup>6</sup>

As a young warrior, Losseiya took part in many raids and wars. He killed two enemies (*kiz*): one Borana and one Kenyan policeman. This gave him a lot of prestige and the markings of a killer.<sup>7</sup> He was circumcised during the second circumcision of the Nyitaabus generation-set. Shortly after, he married Haane, a girl from the Elele section. She gave birth to three children. In 1994, he took Aarsui by force as his second wife. That woman, also a woman from the Elele section, lived close to his place and was already married to Lonyakodos, a man from the Orro section who lived along the river and had lost all of his animals during a Nyangatom raid a few years before. Since then, he lived from fishing.<sup>8</sup>

The fact that Losseiya took a married wife by force created a lot of commotion in the village. Losseiya was punished heavily by his Ongaate age-mates, because this behavior gave them a bad name. Also, the Bulls, the ritual elders, became involved. They decided however to leave the case and agreed with this *fait accompli*, because Lonyakodos had no more cattle to fulfill his bridewealth requirements.

In 1995, Losseiya was convicted to prison for two years for stealing a gun from an Amhara man in Omorate. However, he managed to escape from the police post in Omorate after he intoxicated his guards with *arake* (strong liquor). He fled to the islands in Diiba, where his brothers were taking care of his cattle. Once in a while, he went back to Aoga to look after his sorghum. During one of these visits, he was seen by a *dalaala* ("vagabond"), a Daasanech working for the *ushumba*<sup>9</sup> who told the police that he saw Losseiya in Aoga. Early one morning, the police surrounded his compound, arrested him and put him in the Jinka prison, where he was sentenced for more than a year.

Back in Aoga, his first wife Haane stayed with his mother and sister near their fields, while Aarsui returned to her father's homestead, as she was in conflict with Haane and also Losseiya had not yet paid any bridewealth for Aarsui, even though she had already given birth. Losseiya's mother returned to Turkana on a regular basis to get food or money because Losseiya's half brothers refused to look after her.

6 Losseiya's mother admitted that she was taken in Turkana land during a raid, while others believed she was taken by force when she was near Kelem in Daasanech territory while exchanging goods.

7 These are made out of 10 to 12 rows of horizontal cuts from the shoulders to the stomach area, called *tomo*.

8 See Tornay 1979.

9 *Ushumba* means Highlanders and is the name for the Amharic-speaking migrants who came to Daasanechland in recent history on behalf of the local government, either as soldiers or as traders.



When he finally finished his sentence and returned to Aoga, he started to prepare for his daughter's *dimi*.<sup>10</sup> Losseiya thought that the *dimi* would bring him back the prestige, which he lost by being away for so long in prison. Since many animals are needed in order to perform a *dimi*, Losseiya decided to steal cattle from a trader in Omorate. When the perpetrator of the theft became known, he escaped back to the islands for fear that he would have to return to prison. A few weeks later, Losseiya killed a Daasanech schoolboy whom he held for a spy. By committing this murder, Losseiya got polluted with *nyogich* and ostracized himself and his close relatives from Daasanech community. The only way out for him would have been to perform the necessary cleansing rituals, but for some unknown reason, he refused to perform them and escaped with his mother, first wife and children to Turkana land. Here, the story would have most likely come to an end, if Losseiya would not have been spotted during a Turkana raid in Toltale, the most southern area of Daasanechland, close to Lake Turkana.

A few days later, he was spotted again in Daasanechland. When he was questioned, he said that he had come with his wife to visit his brother, but his mates did not believe him: "Where is your wife? Show me if she's present." They suspected that he had come to get his cattle so the age-mates of Diiba took him, tied him and beat him to death with their sticks.<sup>11</sup> To finish the whole affair, they put his body under an acacia tree facing the direction of Turkana and put the buttocks of a sheep in his mouth and a white ostrich feather on top of his head, as a curse. Afterwards, most people were satisfied with the outcome; they believed that Losseiya deserved to die – after all, his mother was a Turkana!<sup>12</sup>

### Daasanech and foreigners (*kiz*)

The conceptualisation of the difference between *gaalkunyo* (us, our people) and *kiz* (foreigners and potential enemies) is an open one.

As a young warrior, Losseiya took part in many raids and wars. He killed two enemies (*kiz*): one Borana and one Kenyan policeman. (...)

Losseiya killed a Daasanech schoolboy whom he held for a spy. By committing this murder, Losseiya got polluted with *nyogich* (...)

- 10 The *dimi* is a major ceremony among the Daasanech. During several months, fathers feed the elders in order to obtain their blessing for their daughters.
- 11 In another version people said that he was thrown in the Omo River and drowned.
- 12 I use the names of all people involved, because I think most Daasanech who were living at that time know about the story and know these people. Hopefully, some of them might provide additional comments to my interpretation.

The Daasanech distinguish between killing an enemy and killing a fellow mate. Losseiya killed two enemies and one Daasanech. For the former, he was decorated with the typical markings of a killer; for the latter, he became polluted with *nyogich*<sup>13</sup> and was finally killed.

Before delving deeper into the topic of homicide, I would like to first say a few words about the Daasanech concept of *kiz*. I start with Tosco's (2001) translation of *kizich* (pl. *kiz*) as "enemy" and "foreigner," though the word seems to lack the negative connotation of "enemy". As one of my core informants Lokwasep explained, for instance, Randal and Kuoro,<sup>14</sup> two of the eight sections which form the Daasanech, are also *kiz*: "They are our *kiz* (*kizkunyo*)."<sup>15</sup> Surprised by his remark, Lokwasep argued: "Do Randal and Kuoro have alternations (*dolo*), do they have *dimi*, do they have Bulls (*ara*)?"<sup>15</sup> For Lokwasep, Randal and Kuoro are *kiz* because they have customs (*nyatalaam*) that are different from the other six territorial sections of the Daasanech. He argued that Randal and Kuoro lack some important customs of the other Daasanech. Therefore, he did not consider them real Daasanech and called them *kiz*. It is important to note that Lokwasep, like other Daasanech, differentiates between Daasanech and *kiz* in terms of cultural differences. More precisely, he stresses the two main customs through which Daasanech discriminate themselves from others: the *dimi* and male circumcision (*bilte*).<sup>16</sup> Circumcision is the mark (*hez*)<sup>17</sup> that turns somebody into a Daasanech: it allows a girl to be married<sup>18</sup> and it opens in a man his pow-

13 This concept indicates a state of impurity because of murder and other severe crimes. A man with *nyogich* is said to have "blood under the nails".

14 Randal and Kuoro are two of the eight Daasanech sections. They joined the existing sections by the end of the 19th century from Samburu and Rendille. They do not have the alternating generation-system that the other sections have and therefore also lack all rituals related to that system. There are also some other slight differences, but the language is the same.

15 *Dolo*, *dimi* and *ara* are elements of culture which Randal and Kuoro do not share with the other Daasanech. The *dolo* is an alternating generation-system which divides the group into two moieties, those from the inside and those from the outside. The *dimi* is the main ritual of this system in which the marriageable girls are blessed by the elders of their proper moiety and the Bulls (*ara*) are those elders who are blessing these girls and who are also important in other rituals. I write "Bulls" with a capital to discriminate them from the bulls in the herd.

16 The *dimi* is called *jila hadda* (the celebration of the girls). Shortly afterwards, the girls are circumcised and are allowed to marry. The *bilte*, which literally means bleeding arrow, is called *jila galliaab* (the celebration of the men) and stands for the male circumcision. Girls are circumcised before puberty, men after puberty.

17 Daasanech differentiate between *hez* and *gui* as marks of animals: *gui* is a mark in the skin; *hez* are the incisions in the ears of the cattle.

18 Daasanech say that circumcision "opens" a girl for marriage.

ers to bless or curse. Consequently, the Daasanach will also describe others in terms of their customs and rituals (and not in terms of language or territory).

This means Randal and Kuoro are considered as "our people" (*gaalkunyo*) and as *kiz* by the other sections in Daasanach. On the other hand, we see that the term *gaalkunyo* is not equivalent with all of Daasanach, but that this concept also includes some other groups, which at first sight do not share important customs or language with the Daasanach. The two best examples are the Kerre (Kara) to the north and the Marle (Arbore) to the east.<sup>19</sup> They are *kiz* but Daasanach claim that they are "one" (*tikidi*) with them. Besides Kara and Arbore, also Elmolo (Hereny),<sup>20</sup> Toposa (Topos), Rendille (Randal), Samburu (Kuoro) and Pokot (Nyube)<sup>21</sup> share a similar status, although these days intense contact with most of these groups has become rare or non-existent. Several reasons are given as to why people are considered one with Daasanach. These are ranging from "we share similar customs and the same history (*hib*)" to "we cannot kill each other," or the usual "*wak'* made it that way."<sup>22</sup>

On the other hand, there is strong unanimity about the groups which are true enemies, peoples with whom Daasanach regularly fight and between whom casualties occur. Traditionally, the four main enemies are: the Turkana (Bume or Turkana) to the south, the Nyangatom (Bume or Odongoro) to the east, the Hamar to the north and northwest, and the Gabra (Boron) to the southwest. Similar to what Gabbert (this volume) writes about the Arbore association between enemies and mountains, the Daasanach associate their four main enemies with the four mountains which surround them. These four

19 Few oral traditions refer to ancient conflicts between Marle and Daasanach, which caused the Marle to split off and move to their present territories, where they formed a new identity. Other traditions speak about common origins between Marle and Daasanach. It is interesting to note that the Daasanach are called Marille by their Kenyan neighbors.

20 The Elmolo were considered the smallest tribe in Africa until the 60s. They lived on the eastern side of Lake Turkana as fishermen and spoke an East Cushitic language very similar to Daasanach. In the 70s they took over the Samburu language. Among the Daasanach, there is evidence to suggest that the small Riele section are Hereny who were integrated as a separate section and that the so-called Dies are families of Hereny origin, who were adopted by non-Riele sections. Typical for the Dies is that they are not allowed to have their own bulls (although some families do nowadays) and that they fish and hunt the crocodile, just as the Elmolo did or still do.

21 I call the Nyube legendary because Daasanach claim that they are the same tribe. In reality, however, the groups have neither a language nor customs in common. A possible explanation for this genealogical commonality is that from the original Nyube, some groups found refuge with the Pokot, while others moved northwards to form the Daasanach.

22 *Wak'* is the Sky-God, the Supreme being and source of life and rain.

mountains,<sup>23</sup> which serve as borders or corners of the Daasanech flatlands,<sup>24</sup> are Mount Kuraz in the northwest where Nyangatom territory begins, the Hamar Mountains in the northeast where the Hamar live, Mount Kokai near Marsabit to the south where the Gabra graze their cattle, and Mount Labur in the south, west of Lake Turkana, which is the land of the Turkana.<sup>25</sup>

The Daasanech say that the lands of the enemies are behind these mountains. In front of them are the communal grazing lands which are shared by these (potential) enemies during times of peace.<sup>26</sup> With Nyangatom, Turkana and Hamar, periods of peace (*shimiti*) oscillate with periods of war (*oso*). With the Gabra however there has never been peace.<sup>27</sup> Other known enemies, which are further away, are the Muruzu (Mursi) and the Tsemai (Ts'amakko). Kenyan police and soldiers and the *ushumba* or Highlanders are also considered as *kiz*, and killing them is considered similar to killing a traditional enemy.

In April 1997, I witnessed such a conflict when Kenyan policemen drove into Daasanechland around Kokuro. When they returned, they claimed to have killed seven Daasanech who were suspected of raiding Turkana cattle. It is said that the Kenyan government is somehow obliged to use their army for peace-keeping purposes to protect the disarmed Turkana from the armed Daasanech. However, according to the Daasanech, the main problem remains that these soldiers only allow the Turkana access to the Ilemi Triangle, an area which was formerly also used by Daasanech and Nyangatom as wet season grasslands, and formed the corridor to Toposaland in Sudan.<sup>28</sup>

23 These four mountains are projected on the intestines of an animal that is killed to divine matters of war.

24 Daasanech land itself is extremely flat. They call it "the land of our fathers" (*les izaamkunyo*).

25 Turkana and Nyangatom are both called Bume or Buma, but they also have more specific names: Turkana and Odongoro.

26 See Sagawa this volume.

27 The peace ceremonies organized by the government are not considered serious because Daasanech feel injustice and discrimination from the Borana dominated council in Marsabit district. Some say that the government just wants the Daasanech out of Kenya, just as they tried to do at the Ilemi Triangle (see below). During a peace ceremony after a defeat of the Daasanech by the Gabra, a man called Lotira shot one of the Gabra elders, called Geeto. This made the Gabra swear that they would only make peace with the Daasanech "when the birds sit on a ripe stalk of sorghum without eating a single grain and when the hyena has entered without touching a lamb."

28 At the same time, there was a big war with the Borana, which caused several hundreds of casualties and became big news in Nairobi and Addis Ababa (see below).

## Daasanech of the skin (Daasanech *tuudle*) and servants (*gedech*)

Losseiya's mother was a Turkana, who had been taken during a raid and had become the second wife of his father.

Daasanech descent is patrilineal, similar to all pastoralist groups in the neighborhood. This means that even if Losseiya's mother is a foreigner, all of her children are considered Daasanech.<sup>29</sup> In a broader sense, descent also plays a role in the realm of getting access to certain political functions and property of land,<sup>30</sup> which is only given to "Daasanech of the skin" (Daasanech *tuudle*), who can be traced to Ger, the mythical lands of origin far beyond Labur. Families that became Daasanech after the migration to the Omo River are called servants or *gedi* (sing. *gedech*). They are descendants of individuals or groups who sought refuge among the Daasanech and stayed. The term *gedech* refers to someone who served the one who adopted him, for whom he was a son (or a brother). When such a person comes without his own cattle and thus without cattle brands, he is taken into his father's lineage and will be considered a son, belonging to the opposite alternation and opposite generation. Later on, his father might look for a girl for him and allow him some goats and cattle to begin to pay his dowry.

If a newcomer brings his own cattle and brands with him, the situation is different. Then he may be incorporated as a separate lineage within the lineage or within a clan. This explains why several names of lineages refer to neighboring groups, such as Boron, Dodos or Kuor or sometimes to clans within these different groups. This supports Schlee's (1985) hypothesis that groups fuse and merge at the clan level. In the case of Randal and Kuoro, who became part of Daasanech at the turn of the 19th century, however, both groups of *gedi* (servants) were so large in number that they were adopted as independent tribal sections.

The incorporation of single girls – mostly taken during raids, just like Losseiya's mother – differs from the integration of men and usually leaves no trace within the lineage. When caught in a raid, a girl might be given to a father's brother of the raider. The father's brother will consider her as his own child and she will become Daasanech when circumcised together with the other girls of the family. Later on, her new father will give her away as a bride and will get bridewealth for her. Older girls who received their menses before being

29 When a Daasanech girl marries a foreigner, her children are considered foreigners. When a Daasanech man marries a highland girl, which happens quite often nowadays, her children are considered Daasanech and they should perform all necessary rituals.

30 In the story, both the Waashia and Geeche lineages are coming from Ger and may be owners of riverbanks.

adopted are not circumcised. When one becomes a bride, it is up to the husband if he will pay for her or not. If he does, he opens up a whole set of potential alliances among foreigners, which may be useful for him. If he doesn't, the danger of revenge from the brothers of the girl is always lurking.

It is likely that the argument that Losseiya's mother was a Turkana is just an insult. But precisely this fact unmasks it as a subtle marker of a boundary between Daasanech and Turkana. In the same light, the main argument against Losseiya was that he actually behaved like an enemy. When rumors started spreading that Losseiya was spotted when attacking his own people, the boundaries had shifted already and Losseiya wasn't considered anymore "one of us." Especially the belief that he planned to break away from Daasanech and take his herds with him made him into a Turkana.<sup>31</sup>

### **About schoolchildren and vagabonds (*dalaala*)**

A few weeks later, Losseiya killed a Daasanech schoolboy whom he held for a spy.

A growing number of Daasanech attend school. Since the Ethiopian government signed the 2015 Millennium Development Goals,<sup>32</sup> a lot of effort has been put into education throughout Ethiopia. In recent years, mobile schoolteachers have been hired to teach the basics of reading and writing in even the most remote villages. More and more parents send their children (especially boys) to school, with the hope to get an income in the future. Daasanech parents are fully aware that schooling brings a new mentality and new ideas and that schooling may alter their traditions. They also know that some of the teachers look down on them as backward. This is a predicament for many families, who on the one hand want their children to keep on with the traditions of their forefathers, but on the other hand, want to give them opportunities in a changing world. They mostly fear that their children will discard the ways of the ancestors and, by doing so, upset the ancestors (see Lydall this volume). As a consequence, there is a strong fear that they might bring misfortune to the family. Therefore, parents encourage their children who attend school to perform at least a shortened version of the circumcision.

- 31 Because all of his "fathers" died, he actually became head of the family and got his share from the herds of his father. The fact that his half-brothers refused to support his mother while he was in prison, indicates that there were already tensions between Losseiya and his paternal cousins, most probably about the inherited animals.
- 32 The Millenium Development Goals are eight goals that almost 200 states and over 20 international organizations agreed to achieve by 2015. In return for aid, governments of developing countries have to prove that they have been effective in reaching these goals.

Children may go on to school until grade eight in Omorate and, afterwards, those with good grades can continue their schooling in Jinka, the capital of the province. Others have to look for work. Jobs are scarce however and there is competition with Highlanders who migrated and speak better Amharic. In the best case, such people can find a relatively good job in government administration or related areas, while others may find a job as guard or policeman. Many however remain jobless and hang out in Omorate as self-proclaimed tourist-guides, working for the highland traders or hotel owners as so called *dalaala*. The difference between such go-betweens and small criminals (*duriye*) is often very small.<sup>33</sup> These young men live in town with an irregular income and with few ties to the pastoral economy. Traditional Daasanech look down at these youngsters who adopt the Highlander's ways, chew *qat*<sup>34</sup> and neglect Daasanech customs and obligations. In the 90s, when only a few Daasanech became *ushumba* (Highlander), social pressure was still strong enough to force them into performing their rituals, but the group became larger in recent years and social pressure has lost its force.

It is unclear in which way Losseiya perceived the schoolboy that he killed. What I know is that he despised the young man who betrayed him after he had stolen the gun from an *ushumba*. The fact that he could betray his own kin epitomized him as a *duriye*.<sup>35</sup> One particularly ambiguous category of Daasanech who become like *ushumba* is that of Daasanech policemen, who act in ways that are against Daasanech interests. This clash of interests in moral and criminal domains emphasizes the duality which is already observed in dealings with *dalaala*.

We will never know whether Losseiya perceived the schoolboy as a vagabond or *dalaala* or as a Daasanech, however, I strongly believe that it was fear and self-defense that drove him to pull the trigger, as he was afraid of being betrayed once again.

Whatever the case, it becomes evident that the traditional Daasanech view on the difference between "us and them" – which was in the first place related to rituals and customs – is threatened when confronted with youths who are born as Daasanech but later attend school and adopt the customs and ways of the Highlanders.

33 *Duriye* are Amharic words used for "crook" and "thief" (sic). These people, who are seen as good-for-nothing, alcoholic or *qat* addicts, unsuccessful non-pastoralists, who earn their living by loading trucks, assisting in selling animals, fetching water and the like (for a discussion of the emergence of *duriye* also see Girke this volume).

34 *Chat* (*qad*) is a plant which brings the chewer in a state of relaxation and tranquility.

35 He was jobless and quarrelsome and like the other Highlanders, he lived in "a grave". Daasanech disapprove the houses of the Highlanders and call them "graves", because they have sand on the roof.



## The markings/scarification on the chest of a killer

These killings gave him a lot of prestige and the incisions of a killer.

Losseiya had twelve rows of scarification on his chest. These symbolized that he was a *maa raarakiny*,<sup>36</sup> a term used for a killer shortly after his heroic deed.<sup>37</sup> Although further investigation is needed, I was told that only the killer of an adequate enemy is allowed to carry these enemy incisions. In fact, I found no evidence to state that the killing of an Amharic schoolboy, schoolteacher or even an "innocent anthropologist"<sup>38</sup> would allow these incisions for the simple reason that these people usually are not involved in cattle and marriageable girls and that they form no actual threat to the Daasanech. In order to obtain the honorable incisions of a killer, the killing should happen in the context of defense of land, people and cattle or in an act of offence and revenge against former aggression. The person who is killed should be a member of a group at war with the Daasanech. I will return later to this point, when dealing with the breaking of the peace, as discussed below.

I didn't hear nor find evidence for the claim that the Daasanech ever held the tradition that a young man had to kill an enemy or a wild animal in order to be accepted in a certain social category, as was the case among the Borana (Baxter: 1979). What is sure is that a man who kills an enemy gains a lot of prestige and that the honor continues throughout his life (see Poissonnier this volume), when his exploits are honored in several songs of praise, such as specific cattle songs and the *Gaaro*, the song which is made when he and his wife perform the *dimi* (fertility ceremony for their daughters).

This honor is expressed in the new name that he gets (an enemy name or *yirmit kiziet*), and is embodied on his chest through ten to twelve rows of small horizontal incisions from the upper shoulders down to the stomach (*chedam kiziet*). Although these incisions are common throughout the area, the Daasanech however claim that this custom originated from them and that neighboring groups just imitated them.

36 *Nyikiriam* is the Nyangatom word for a heroic killer. In matters of cattle raiding, Daasanech prefer to use Bume words. *Raarakiny* refers to the act of making the incisions of a killer.

37 This honorable name is used for the killer fully decorated with the strips of the white goat, the tuft clay balls at the front of his head and the red ochre on his head and shoulders.

38 This jokingly refers to the popular book of Nigel Barley, *The Innocent Anthropologist* (1992). But in fact, Daasanech will not kill white people. I got the following explanation: "A long time ago, our grandfathers told us: whenever there is war, don't kill white people. Just capture them and send them away."



These incisions are made with the thorns of acacia and razorblades. The skin is raised with the thorn cut horizontally with a sharp knife or razorblade. Butter is then smeared on the wounds to make them swell. I was told that these incisions are not just a sign of beauty and praise, but that they also have a therapeutic value: "If you kill an enemy, his blood goes in the ground. The blood of the dead body spills. Your blood should also leave, so you will not be left with wounds (*daafo*)."<sup>39</sup> This explanation shows that the blood of the victim will contaminate the blood of the killer and may bring misfortune to the killer. The incisions are a way to remove the bad blood caused by the killing. Another reason I heard was that this operation (as well as the blessings) are meant to counter the curse of the mother (or the wife) of the victim. Indeed, Daasanech say that the moment the mother yells out of grief when she is informed that her child or husband died is a strong curse against the killer. This also might explain why the killer has to sing the following song, called *Armaa chello* after he killed her child:

Strong bull of mine  
 his mother shouts,  
 she cries like a dog.  
 Heeya, heeya[imitates the sound of the dog crying].  
 She cries early morning.  
 Her house is in the mountains.<sup>40</sup>  
 His mother wanted a cow from us.  
 My father's milking cow.  
 I like that cow  
 that cow of the ritual stick<sup>41</sup>  
 the cow my father raided.

Besides this song, several other cleansing acts are performed in order to remove the pollution (*adaab*) of the killer. When there are no casualties among fellow Daasanech and the men return from war, this return is celebrated with a lot of ecstatic yelling and singing. When coming back from the killing, the mother of the warrior will wash him with *erer*, a mixture of milk and water. In earlier times, the killer had to stay in the bush and was not allowed to eat or drink with others until he was blessed.<sup>42</sup> When blessing her son, she wears her ceremonial

39 The term *daafo* (wounds) is not only used to denote physical injuries, but also to point at the polluting consequences of having harmed somebody else. Another expression the Daasanech use is to have dirt or blood under the nails.

40 Cf. the idea that the enemies live in the mountains (see above).

41 The cow of the *naas* is a cow which is slaughtered in preparation of the *dimi*, when the long ritual stick (*naas*) is cut and smeared with butter.

42 In fact, even people who were in a foreign country had to be blessed upon return in order to protect them from possible pollution.

skirt (*ogo*) and has oil (*salap*) on her shoulders. Her son sings *Armaa chello* for four days in a row. In the meantime, he has put bells around his legs. His mother may sing with him while using the horn of an ox filled with small stones as a rhythm instrument.

The killer remains decorated like that four days until his father invites the elders and his age-mates for the communal meal of the so-called *aany chelaam* (goats of the strips). This is a white goat whose skin is used for decoration and the blood for washing away the evil (*adaab*). The blood is taken into a calabash and mixed with water. This mixture is called *kam* and is taken in front of the mother's house. There, the witness or friend (*shelech* or *misso*) smears the killer with the *kam* while he is standing there naked.<sup>43</sup> To the east, the mother places a big calabash filled with water. The killer runs to the water, throws some water to the east and washes all blood from his body. Then, lines (*daaro*) are painted on the body, just like after circumcision, white and red lines. The main difference is that the red lines are not made by red clay this time, but by the blood of the goat. After that, the killer runs around the cattle kraal four times, while singing *Armaa chello*. Then he runs to the water and throws it out, calling out "take away the bad" (*hekwa diewa eew*). Then, the mother shaves the front part of his hair. In the meantime, the white skin of the goat is cut into small strips (*chelaam*) which the killer wears around his head, shoulders, arms and legs. Also his age-mates as well as the witness of the killing all get a small part which they wear around their arm. Later on, his hairstyle is modified into the typical hairstyle of a *raarakiny* (decorated killer): the hair at the front (*shurte*) is entirely shaved while the back (*shushulich*) is made into a normal clay cap. Upon the *shurte*, small clay-balls are made and the whole is smeared with butter and red ochre.<sup>44</sup> The girls of the village, especially those who triggered the anger (*izane*) of the killer and made his heart tremble before he went off to raid offer him pieces of their necklaces. He is also given a *nyakaasia* or *seech raarakiny*, a very long white ostrich feather. The neck and head of the killer are smeared with red ochre and butter. Then, the killer is ready to go into the kraal to kill an ox (or a goat in case he killed a female). The rumen is cut and the chyme (*uro*) is used to smear the warrior and his age-mates and the meat is roasted. The elders eat the roasted meat of the white goat and bless the killer afterwards. Typical for this meal is that the bones may not be given to the children or thrown to the dogs. Instead, all bones should be burned in the fire. The meat of the ox is eaten by the age-mates. This animal is usually a gift of the relatives of the killer. The

43 This ritual act is very similar to the washing of the circumcised man at the end of his seclusion, when he returns home and is allowed to return to herding tasks.

44 This differs with the other Cushitic peoples such as Konso and Borana who give the killer a *kalash* (gun) after killing. This enigmatic symbol, which many researchers call phallic, also exists among the Daasanech, but it is used by the girls during their *dimi*, and not by the men.

specific color of that animal may be used for the new honorable name, called *yirmit kiziet* that the killer will receive.

From then on, the *maa raarakiny* is allowed the incisions of a killer (*chedam kiziet*). In case he already has them and he kills for a second time, another set of incisions may be marked on his shoulder. It is also possible that the wife of the killer will also get these shoulder incisions.

Losseiya made the incisions of a killer on his breast after he killed his first enemy. He did not mark his second killing on his chest and neither did his first wife Haane. Unfortunately, I did not ask him if he killed his enemies during a raid or during a war. The difference between the two only became clear afterwards, and I think it is important to say something about this difference.

### Raids and wars – *sula* and *ruu*

Wars make the difference between Daasanech and *kiz* very clear for the simple reason that wars with "our people" never happen, while wars with enemies are common.<sup>45</sup> Between the Daasanech and their four main enemies, there is either war or peace. Warfare may take two forms: a raid (*sula*) or a full out war (*ruu*). Hereby I only partly agree with Almagor (1979: 126) when he states that:

[...] it is helpful to distinguish between two degrees of warfare. One is a state in which reciprocal raids are normal, and the other, an escalation of the former, is one in which their tempo so increases that grazing areas are affected.

Almagor (1979: 126) further explains that there is a form of hostility which is not considered a big problem, as long as they are:

[...] governed by certain conventions, namely that the quantities of cattle looted should be reasonable, that casualties should be kept to a minimum and that the frequency of raids should not be excessive and, finally and most important, that each tribe may retaliate similarly.

In my understanding, reciprocal raiding is also a problem. Although it is true that there is a clear difference between this state and full blown war,<sup>46</sup> I focus on the fact that both forms of warfare are in the first place consequences of a state of war. My point is that, as long as there is no ritually installed peace between two groups, reciprocal raiding and casualties may happen and reciprocal raid-

45 This is only partially true since oral traditions reveal conflicts between Daasanech and Kara and between Daasanech and Arbore. According to my informants, these conflicts were the reasons why these groups migrated.

46 Almagor (1979: 156) makes a difference between reciprocal raiding called *nyasagsag*, escalation called *hol dim* and full out war called *nyakiryam*.

ing causes worries and fear for the herdsman and for the people staying behind in the villages. Normally, raids only occur during war and only then, these raids are accepted by the elders, be it under the conditions stated above. However, when there is peace, no raids are allowed and if they occur, they might be sanctioned. For that reason, I prefer to focus on war and differentiate between the two forms of warfare: raiding and war.

In fact, a *sula* is a spontaneous expedition, mostly held at night, when age-mates go out to steal cattle from a neighboring tribe. Such raids might be held secretly without the knowledge and approval of the elders or war magicians, while other raids may be approved by them.

In the well documented literature about warfare and the relation with age-systems (Almagor 1978; Fukui and Turton 1979; Kurimoto and Simonse 1998), it is shown that raids are a means to demarcate the birth of new age-groups. This is also the case among the Daasanach: young groups try to accumulate prestige for themselves and their age-group by raiding. Doing so, they discriminate themselves from their senior age-sets. I was told that the frequency of these kind of raids has raised in the last decades to reach its peak in the 90s. Since then, it decreased again due to intensified efforts of the government to control their prohibition.<sup>47</sup>

In the past, raids were only tolerated when they were blessed by the elders. Even nowadays, elders still highly disapprove of raids in times of peace. "How come you go and kill, if children and cattle are well? They say, or, If you go and kill, all our animals should be returned to the islands. Then the children will lack their milk and cry."

But I was told that in recent times, youths just go without consulting their fathers and without their blessing. Formerly, individuals who broke the peace – especially when they made casualties – were actually punished by the elders, their animals confiscated and even killed. But the elders claim that this is a thing of the past: "Now, we lost control over the youths and they just go out to kill for their own sake to obtain the marks of the killer." Uri Almagor (1979: 142) also touches upon this change, when he writes: "Unnecessary violence has probably been employed only since the introduction of fire arms." Lydall and Strecker (1979: 150) mention a similar phenomenon within Hamar:

Killing was only allowed in defense of cattle and land and, of course, during raids that were ritually licensed by elders and war magicians. Those who had raided and killed without permission would hide from public social control by living with the

47 Nowadays, the government targets youngsters and tries to convince them to leave the traditions of killing. UN-sponsored projects on peace-keeping are organized and sanctions against killers have become more severe. They are sought in the field and taken to court, even from across the border with Kenya, which might explain why killers are more reluctant nowadays to kill.

stolen herds in the bush for a long time. Today, Baldambe says people praise any killer without distinction. Cynically, he imitates the wail with which the women welcome the killer home: *elelelelelele*.

This being said about a raid, let's move to large scale warfare. In a full out war (*ruu*), killing in defense of the land is always licensed by elders and diviners. Different from *sula*, a *ruu* is a huge military expedition. It is directed towards an enemy group with the explicit purpose to kill enemies, to finish or annihilate them and to force them to flee. In a *ruu*, Daasanech aim to capture as many animals and young boys and girls as possible. Then, several tens and even hundreds of warriors participate. Such an army, which is also called a *ruu*, is recruited by the elders and the participants – which are called *gaal ruurich* – belonging to several sections and age-sets. Before going to war, diviners are consulted and strategies are discussed. All participants are ritually blessed: an ox of color (*aany bisiet*) is killed and the warriors walk over the skin. Then, they trample the chyme with their feet, smear their bodies with it and before leaving, they walk through the smoke of a fire or under the legs of a war magician. Then the army (*ruu*) takes off, heavily armed and licensed to kill by the elders. During fieldwork, long lasting tensions between Daasanech and Gabra culminated when two Daasanech boys were found killed and their genitals cut off by Gabra warriors. The reaction was harsh and resulted in a bloody confrontation of the Inkoria and Ngarich sections and the Gabra in the Kokai area, where over a hundred

Gabra died. Shortly after the attack, fourteen Kenyan soldiers who intervened were driven into an ambush and killed. The next citation comes from the Kenyan newspaper *The East African* (April 8, 1997) which gives a biased description of what happened during that *ruu*:

Too many unanswered questions have arisen to shrug off the recent violence at the Kenya-Ethiopia border as the traditional predilection of local tribesmen to steal each other's cattle. The violence was extreme, the raids were large and well-planned [...]. The raids by heavily-armed *Shangilla* and *Armakolle*<sup>48</sup> bandits [sic] in the Kokai area between March 23 and 25 resulted in a reported 80 Kenyan dead, including 19 security officers, though figures are not definitive, while some 4000 head of cattle were stolen and six Kenyan women were said to have been abducted. A senior military officer said the security men were apparently driven into a marshy area of Lake Turkana and shot down in cold blood; they were stripped of their guns, ammunition and uniforms and left naked. [...] This type of extreme violence does not characterize hostilities involving these border peoples and makes it unlikely that the raid was, as has been suggested, retaliation for earlier rustling by Kenyan Gabra. [...] As one security

48 *Shangilla* is the name that many Kenyans use for the Daasanech. I do not know what *Armakolle* stands for.

officer said, "Cattle raiding is their way of life, a traditional custom of these pastoralists. Borders<sup>49</sup> mean nothing to them."

Daasanekh elders told me that such types of full out wars became more frequent the last decades. Also Almagor (1979) mentions this and found the reason for this in the growing influx of automatic weapons in the 1970s. At that time, the Nyangatom gained access to superior machine guns and drove the Daasanekh out of Kibish (Tornay: 1979). This war lasted until the 90s, when the Daasanekh finally returned to their grazing areas across the west-bank. During the 1990s, peace was made with the Nyangatom, but hostilities arose with Turkana and Gabra and to a lesser degree with the Hamar. Again, these conflicts were fed by an influx in heavy arms after the socialist regime was overthrown, and during the civil war in Sudan, and the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea. At that time, these conflicts – such as the one described above – received international attention, especially since the Kenyan army was facing numerous casualties.

On a smaller scale, the Highlanders are also seen as enemies. In this view, the theft of a gun and of *ushumba* cattle may be understood as raids on the Highlanders. They are an easy target and stealing from them is not considered as a crime by fellow tribesman.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, there is no difference between stealing cattle or guns from Hamar or Turkana, as there is from stealing from a Highlander.

### *Dor kiziet* – Cursing the enemies

His father and the brothers of his father all died quite young. They were cursed by Ikoriye, a well known member of the Turnyerim clan, who was chased away from his agricultural plot down in Aoga village many years before by the father of Losseiya and his three brothers. That plot was claimed both by the house of Geeche of the Fargaro, which was the house of Losseiya's father and by the house of Waashia of the Turnyerim to which Ikoriye belonged. Ikoriye, a man renowned for his spiritual powers, was angry about that and cursed the four brothers, who ultimately died one after the other.

49 Approximately 5.000 Daasanekh live inside Kenyan territory in the north of Marsabit district. This group, which belongs to the Inkoria section, felt at that time discriminated against by the local government and were very critical about the increase of raids against their herds.

50 *Ushumba* are aware of that. This explains maybe why they usually take heavy measures and bloody revenge when such crimes happen.

In Losseiya's story, we learned that the father and the three brothers of Losseiya were cursed by Ikorye. The story mentions a conflict about a riverbank, which was claimed by two respective lineages or houses. The house of Ikorye is the house of Waashia (also called Merigil). The name literally means "given by the Sky-God" and the clan is said to have come from out of the water.<sup>51</sup> The elders of this clan have a powerful stick (*gure*)<sup>52</sup>, which is used to bless the warriors when they go to fight. The eldest born son of this clan is the one responsible for the blessing of all Daasanech each time the new moon rises.<sup>53</sup>

Both the house of Waashia and the house of Geeche are *nyerim* (divine clans), denoting their special relation with the Sky-God and their special blessing and cursing powers. In a spiritual sense, the house of Waashia is considered one of the most powerful among all Daasanech, while in the story the four brothers seemed to have more physical strength.

In times of war, specialists from these divine clans, such as Ikorye, are consulted to prepare special *muor kiziet* (magic of the enemies). The Turnyerim clan curses the enemies by putting a stick with a sharp point (*fudeyn*) through the mouth of a dog. This cursed dog will be put in the borderlands with its head in the direction of the enemies. Members of the Fargaroclan, the clan to which Losseiya belonged, used to smear red ochre on top of a horn of an antelope and put the horn in the ground with the point in the direction of the enemies. The symbolism is clear in both: enemies who pass that way will die like dogs and they will be speared.

An interesting point to mention here is that the Daasanech highly disapprove of other Daasanech who curse deliberately by using words,<sup>54</sup> while the vocal cursing of the enemies happens on many occasions. This is especially so during meat feasts of the age-sets and during military parades, called *yoi*,<sup>55</sup> which are organized by the different sections at the beginning of the rainy season, before the big migration (*guura*) to the wet season pastures. During these

51 In Daasanech stories, something or someone found in the water often indicates that it or he is special and has special powers, as the water is the passage between this world here and the world out there

52 The *gure* is made of the horn of a rhinoceros and is considered a very powerful cursing stick.

53 During this so-called *wolewole* (ritual), the *farich* (decorated instrument made of the horn of an antelope) is blown, and the owner of the *farich* sings songs of praise together with his age-mates. Everything is smeared with white clay.

54 See Houtteman forthcoming.

55 At the beginning of the rainy season in February 1997 and after a period of hunger and big drought, a lot of military rituals called *yoi* were performed, both among Sheer Inkabelo and Randal, who planned to go to the wet-season grazing lands behind Kokuro at Ilemi, fully aware that clashes with Turkana were possible as among the Inkoria and Ngarich, who faced big troubles with the Gabra.



feasts, name oxen are killed and the younger age-sets show their power, shooting bullets in the air, making sham fights and singing *guodib*, beautiful songs in the Nyangatom language in praise of the cattle, like the one below:

Hear the river birds in the yellow dust of the cows.

Mmmmmm!

The cattle went to take water at Kokuro and the dust springs up like a cloud.

The fight should come from the homestead of the warriors.

Mmmmmm!

The cows of Marille (Daasanech), in the hands of the warriors.

During the feasts discussions about the grazing areas and the moves of the enemies are held and the elders motivate their juniors not to behave like cowards<sup>56</sup> but to go and fight and give their lives when needed. At the end of each speech, the enemies are cursed and long litanies are answered by the listeners with *kuf* (die!) and *yiese* (kill!).

Another group who keeps the enemies down through their curses is the group of circumcised men (*her*). During the rainy season of 1995, I walked with Losseiya up to Lomotia, a village about 20 km south of Omorate, where the circumcision of his younger brother took place. At nighttime, a few hours before sunset, the leader of the group of circumcised men – traditionally somebody of the Turnyerim clan – starts to sing a song of the enemies (*meerte kiziet*). All men leave their seclusion hut through a special cursing exit (facing west) and walk around the shed four times. Then they stand in a circle and start to curse the enemies. The sons of the *nyerim* clans (Turnyerim and Fargaro) thereby use their cursing stick (*gure*), while the other clans put their little finger in the air (*ell niinya dok*), which is smeared with red ochre. Important here to note is that Daasanech told me that at any time, there should be at least one group of circumcised men (*her*) in seclusion, so the cursing of the enemies is continued yearlong.

One last point about curses has to do with the last sequence of Losseiya's story, when Losseiya's body is used as a curse against the Turkana:

To finish the whole affair, they put his body under an acacia tree facing the direction of Turkana and put the buttocks of a sheep in his mouth and a white ostrich feather on top of his head, as a curse.

In order to use Losseiya's body as a curse, several symbols are used: he is given a big ostrich feather such as the one given to a killer. Furthermore, the buttocks of a sheep, a part which contains a lot of fat and is usually highly appreciated, is

56 At that time, elders insulted the younger groups with statements like: "Don't be cowards! Don't return into the vagina of your mother!"



put in his mouth as to offer him the best peace.<sup>57</sup> Normally the fatty parts of a sheep are used to strengthen people, but here it seems to strengthen the curse. Thirdly, the acacia where he was placed is a tree full of thorns, also associated with the ancestors. Putting him under that tree allows the ancestors to witness and give their support. Finally, the direction in which the head of somebody is put is the same direction of the curse, which, in this case, was west, where the Turkana are.

### The concept of *nyogich*

By committing this murder, Losseiya got polluted with *nyogich* and ostracized himself and his close relatives from the Daasanech community.

Afterwards, most people were satisfied with the outcome; they believed that Losseiya deserved to die (...) The concept of *nyogich* is an important concept to understand Daasanech morality. The concept seems to me an important marker of the difference between “us” (*gaalkunyo*) and “them” (i.e. enemies). In the bible translation of the SIM mission in Ileret, the term *nyogich* is translated as “sin” and also Tosco (2001) followed that translation. Although this translation makes sense, I prefer to use rather “pollution” or “impurity”.

In the first meaning, *nyogich* is equated with murder: “to kill another Daasanech is *nyogich*.” *Nyogich* is not only the deed (of murdering another Daasanech) but it also refers to the consequence of that deed: somebody who killed another Daasanech not only committed *nyogich*, he also carries *nyogich*. The metaphor of pollution seems adequate because it also is compatible with the fact that *nyogich* is contagious. Somebody carrying *nyogich* affects his whole family and, as long as it is not removed, it is also transferred on to future generations. Furthermore, people who come in contact – especially when they eat together with people who carry *nyogich* – will get *nyogich* too. The main consequence of this strong notion of contagiousness is that someone who committed a murder socially ostracises himself and his family from the community. Nobody is allowed to eat together with such a person.<sup>58</sup> Losseiya’s move to Turkana can be understood perhaps as an acceptance of this consequence.

I was wondering whether the concept of *nyogich* was restricted to homicide alone or if this concept is also used in other contexts? It looks as if the latter is the case and that there are several other contexts in which the concept is used.

57 The act of putting the buttocks of a sheep in somebody’s mouth also happens on other occasions. I noted one story in which a magician placed the buttocks of a sheep in the mouth of a fish to stop the flooding of the river.

58 Daasanech say that the belly of a person with *nyogich* will swell and cause death.

A major context which was different from murder was that one commits *nyogich* when he breaks the peace. A well-known example of this is the story of Lokasiamoi (Iwoye), who was an important ritual leader at the time of research. In his youth, keen to be a hero and to carry the incisions of a killer, Lokasiamoi went to raid Nyangatom and killed several people during a time of peace. Because of this incident, the big war called Nyebeleyianga broke out, which lasted several years and caused many casualties. Therefore, the Bulls (*ara jeleba*) decided that Lokasiamoi should be killed, but his father, who also was a respected Bull at that time, could prevent the death of his first-born. It was agreed that they would not kill him but that they would confiscate his cattle instead. Afterwards, Lokasiamoi had to be cleansed from *nyogich*, as described below. The point is that Lokasiamoi got *nyogich* because he started a war.

Another context in which the concept *nyogich* is used is when somebody makes mistakes against specific Daasanech customary laws, especially those which may lead to the death of fellow tribesman. A good example is the neglect to shave the hair of your deceased father or mother and to shave the front part of one's own hair. If not shaved, Daasanech say, then death is not cut off and this will lead to more deaths. Only the shaving of the hair of a diseased person marks that it is finished.<sup>59</sup> In the same realm, somebody also gets *nyogich* when he makes a girl pregnant which belongs to the opposite moiety or the same clan. This incestuous act is considered *nyogich* because it will bring misfortune to both of the clans to which the secret partners belong.

A fourth example of *nyogich* is a girl who menstruates before she is circumcised. This event is believed to be a strong curse against the Bulls and their power in matters of fertility and thus a curse against all Daasanech.

A last context in which *nyogich* was used, was in the case of malevolent curses against one's own group. Once in a while, it happens that anyone becomes mad and turns his rage against his fellow tribesman by cursing the sorghum, the cattle, the rain or the lands with the aim to destroy. Also such a person commits *nyogich*.

When we bring all these contexts together, we see that they all have to do with actions against the proper group, leading to the death of fellow tribesman. I leave it to the reader if such a concept may be translated as "sin" or if it is better left as such.

59 Interesting in this matter is the fact that in former times, the hair of ancestors was woven into the hair of the survivors. In fact the term *gabbarich*, a term of praise which the Daasanech use for themselves, refers to this. There are old gravures of Daasanech with extremely long hair at their back, which was hair of the ancestors. Gustaaf Verswijver who was the initiator of my research was the first to introduce me to such a hairstyle.

Whatever the translation, it would be interesting to look into neighboring groups for similar concepts.<sup>60</sup> The Daasanech also have a quite related concept, called *adaab*, which I will discuss in a forthcoming article. Also *adaab* has something to do with wrongdoing and gets when committing a crime or misbehaving. Comparing both *nyogich* and *adaab*, it looks as if *nyogich* is stronger than *adaab*. Misbehaving towards your wife or being greedy will not be called *nyogich*, just as killing a Daasanech or breaking the peace will not be called *adaab*.

The strong negative connotation *nyogich* has, gives firm ideological support to the taboo on murder and offers an instrument for the strong disapproval of violence against one's own people, be it the Daasanech themselves or people like the Kara or Arbore.<sup>61</sup> A consequence of the impact of *nyogich* which I didn't mention yet is that some clans are very reluctant to take part in fights with groups with whom they have a common ancestry.<sup>62</sup> Exemplary of this is the case of the Ngarich section, who might abstain from wars against the Nyangatom, as they know they could get *nyogich* if they kill Nyingarichclan members from Nyangatom. As Serge Tornay (1981) shows in his article on *The Omo-Murle Enigma*, the Nyngarich of Nyangatom and Ngarich among the Daasanech share a common Murle origin. As a consequence both groups will have *nyogich* when they kill each other. The Ngarich were told by their fathers: "Don't kill Odongoro (Nyangatom). If you want to kill, kill Turkana, kill Hamar, but don't kill Odongoro. If you do, you'll have *nyogich*. They are our brothers." The same holds for people of Boron lineages: they will not go to fight the Gabra. Although further research is needed, this might bring us to the hypothesis that the ideology behind befriended groups like Kara and Arbore lies in the fact that these groups consist of a large proportion of Daasanech and/or vice versa.

### Cleaning away *nyogich*

The way out for him would have been to perform the necessary cleansing rituals. For an unknown reason, he [Losseiya] refused to perform them and escaped with his mother, first wife and children to Turkanaland.

60 LaTosky informed me about the similar concept *nyowa* among the Mursi (pers. comm., 2009).

61 Both among Daasanech and between Daasanech and Kara and Daasanech and Arbore, it is not allowed either to use sharp tools when fighting each other.

62 If this aspect is present in more than only a few obvious cases, an in-depth study of who can fight whom could reveal a lot about the genealogy of the different sub-groups at clan and lineage levels, similar to Schlee's (1985) comparison on cattle brands.

The story indicates that Losseiya could have performed some rituals to wash away his *nyogich*, but that he refused to do so. Such a refusal placed himself and his family outside the Daasanech community. Unfortunately, I do not know why Losseiya refused these cleansing rituals, as I didn't meet him again after he committed the murder. When I asked other people, they told me that he was just stupid. Even if he acted in self-defense, he should have accepted his *nyogich*. To me, it seems as though he was fed up after all of the trouble he already had and preferred to live among the Turkana.

Whatever his motivation might have been, it brings me to the description of the several steps that he should have followed in order to be cleansed from *nyogich*. First, Losseiya should have had to steal and break a black clay pot (*ibille*)<sup>63</sup> as well as a perfect drinking calabash (*daate*), one without a single crack in it. The reason for breaking the clay-pot was that such pot is as black as *nyogich*. Somebody told me: "When you kill a man, you have to run in the dark to hide. To break the pot is to break the dark." Then, he should have killed a dog and washed his body with the blood of that dog. Some people told me this act makes the killer into a dog, while others said the dog represents the victim, because a dog cries like a man when killed. Finally, he should have washed away the blood of the dog with the blood of a donkey. This donkey should belong to somebody of the Edhe clan, by preference of the subclan of those who have witchcraft (*muor*), like the Edhe Kamgaye. The Edhe is the clan which is responsible for the preparation of a substance (*shuom*) which is used to initiate the Bulls. There is evidence to suggest that the donkey symbolizes the person he killed, because a donkey has the same number of teeth as a man. The dead body of the donkey should be put with the head to the west and the right front leg should be cut as well as the belly. The intestines should be put on top of the dead donkey. The blood of the donkey now should be washed with water.<sup>64</sup> After that, his hair should be completely shaved.<sup>65</sup> Because of the taboo of touching somebody with *nyogich*, the barber should be a stranger, preferably a neutral stranger, like a Konso. After that, the man may return to his homestead, where he should kill a goat of a dark color and walk under the blood of that goat, a ritual which is called bleeding goat (*aany fasiyet*) and is very common when dealing with curses and ancestor possession. Finally, he and the rest of his family should walk again under the blood of a goat with a red color. Then his family should find a special plant called *nyerich*. All the joints of the body of

63 These pots are not made by the Daasanech. They are traditionally traded through the Kara from the Bashada who make these pots.

64 I am not sure here, but I think this water should be from the calabash without a single crack.

65 The symbolism of shaving might refer to a new birth, but further research is needed into the symbolism of hair, which seems quite important among Daasanech.

the killer should be covered with the inner bark of that plant. I was told that this act is to arrange that the joints of the dead person fall apart.

Had all of these steps been taken, Losseiya would have cleansed himself and his family from *nyogich* and relations with other Daasanech could have been normalized, although, still one further step is needed. The final step is taken a year later and is called "sorghum beer" (*bersho*). This ritual act is a common blessing, in which the fermented sorghum is drunk and then purged.

In fact, also the family of the victim should take that step. Both families have to build up a village for all members of their lineage (thus not only the brothers, father's brothers and father's brother's sons, but all those sharing the same cattle brands). Then, the leading Bulls (*ara jeleba*) of the Riele<sup>66</sup> section are invited. Just like during *dimi*, sorghum beer which was prepared a few days before, is offered to the Bulls and different animals are slaughtered. The Bulls eat the meat and bless all the people and their houses. The next morning,<sup>67</sup> the Bulls go out to collect branches of the ritual *miede* tree (*cordia sinensis*). They return to the village while singing a Bulls' song called *Hogaare*. An example of such a song is given here below:

This is the song of the father of Ngarich  
 Your father's tree is in Loyma Mountains  
 The wood is there.  
*Hogaare!*  
 The decision is taken  
 The Bulls have the wisdom  
 They hide their secrets.  
*Hogaare!*

When they arrive in the village, they beat their sticks on these huts while singing *Hogaare* songs. After that, families of murderer and murdered are said to be ritually cleansed again, although the families will no longer eat with each other.

### Death penalty and *nyogich*

Little is written yet about the special category of leading Bulls (*ara jeleba*) and their role and function within the community.<sup>68</sup> It is known that they are the spiritual leaders in Daasanech and that the name Bull reveals something about

66 The Riele are the smallest of all eight Daasanech sections. They are most probably the source of the system of Bulls, moieties and *dimi*.

67 Somebody told me that this happened the same evening and not the next morning.

68 I use a capital for Bulls (man), to distinguish them from the bulls (cattle), but also because they are a special category among the Daasanech.

their function: just as a herd needs a Bull to procreate, each clan and alternating moiety within that clan (each herd) has its proper Bulls, who deal spiritually with procreation. Almagor (1978, 1979) supposed that they are elders who hold political and ritual power and were elected from the eldest generation-set.

In fact, Daasanech have many Bulls. They are those who performed a special ceremony, which is held only once every 40 years or more for each section. Anybody can attend that ceremony, but, usually, a father allows only some of his sons (usually the brightest) to attend the initiation ceremony.<sup>69</sup> The initiation itself is very simple: the initiate has to walk over the hide of a cow which is spread out in a special house, starting from the back, over the hump, and then the head. After that, he is blessed with *shuom*, a mixture of milk and water (*erer*) and white clay, by somebody from the house of the Shuom of the Edhe clan. By taking part in this ritual, a future Bull has to make some moral promises: not to use force, not to steal and not to sleep with another man's wife. The specific power of their Bull-hood is activated after their *dimi* (fertility ceremony). From then on, they are allowed to cut out the sacrum (*tuo*) of oxen slaughtered during *dimi*<sup>70</sup> and to bless nubile girls in order to induce their fertility. From all of the Bulls, only those who belong to the reigning generation may be chosen to become *jeleba* (ritual leaders). These *jeleba* function as the leaders of the fertility ritual and as judges. They may be called to judge in disputes about bridewealth, dowry and adultery, like during the conflict between Losseiya and Lonyakodos. Also in cases of major crimes or continuous threats, which Daasanech call *shalamanti*, the *jeleba* may ultimately decide that such a person should die.

This has been the case with Losseiya too. Ultimately, it is the *maa jeleba* belonging to the clan of the accused who has the last word. If he agrees with the penalty, the young groups (*haris*) are sent out to get the wrongdoer. This however places them in a paradoxical situation because the killing of a fellow tribesman is *nyogich*.

Questioning this paradox, people told me that this kind of communal killing, called *alaano ki yiese*, is exceptional and should happen without the spilling of blood. Those who club the victim should paint themselves with white clay and then wash themselves with the clay to clean away possible contamination. Baxter mentions a similar custom among the Borana (1979: 70).

Boran do not spill Boran blood and believe that to do so would provoke God to withhold the rain. Traditionally a man who was found guilty of offences of such magnitude that his continued presence was unbearable or dangerously polluting, such as murder, impregnating an unmarried girl, buggery or sodomy, was driven away into the bush to die from exposure, to live like a wild animal or to become a dependent

69 I was told that women can also attend. If a pregnant woman attends and is blessed, her unborn child will also be a Bull.

70 During *dimi*, the Bulls have to cut out the sacrum (*tuo*). Only they are allowed to eat that meat.

herdsman among a less scrupulous tribe. A Boran who was sentenced to be executed was clubbed across the neck and in the groin, but without spilling blood.

Such people also may be forced to die by themselves, for instance by tying them with a rope and throwing him in the river so the river would eat him.<sup>71</sup>

Another intriguing aspect regarding communal killing also has to do with the *jeleba*. I was told that each time a generation steps aside to retire and the next generation comes into power,<sup>72</sup> the surviving *jeleba* of the former generation order their young groups (*haris*) warriors to go around the country and kill all families with *nyogich* and confiscate their cattle, as if they want to render the country clean for their successors. Further investigation is needed on this matter.

Although further investigation is still needed to understand this paradox, two reasons for killing a tribesman may be considered. First, the *nyogich* taboo is weakened through the act of communal killing or that – just like in Baxter's description – it is important that no blood is spilled. When somebody is collectively clubbed to death, it is not known who gave the fatal blow. Besides, all men who were involved with the clubbing must perform a cleansing ritual by smearing themselves with white clay (*kuul*) and washing it off in the river.

Another possible answer is already mentioned above: because Losseiya had *nyogich* and especially because he planned to take his cattle (which were in a way Daasanech cattle) to Turkana, he wasn't considered a Daasanech anymore. The reference to his matrilineal descent might serve as a marker for this identity shift.

## Conclusion

Even if I could not answer all questions raised in this article, Losseiya's social drama gave me the opportunity to explore some ideas and symbols behind killing and murder among the Daasanech. Through this drama, I explained the difference between Daasanech and *kiz* and between people considered as "our people" and "real enemies." I showed that these categories are open ones and that all kinds of different arguments are formulated to demarcate these boundaries. Exemplary in this context is the way the Randal and Kuoro are seen within the group and Arbore and Kara outside the group. One of the clearest demarcations of boundaries is objectified in the ideology behind concepts dealing with peace and war, with killing during times of war and in times of peace and with

71 This way of punishment is called the prison of Lusinyang (*kaal Lusinyang*).

72 The shift in the *naab*, the central place in the village, is a metaphor for the shift of power between generations. Such a shift occurs approximately every 30 to 40 years, although the last one lasted much longer.



the difference in attitude towards cursing between tribesmen and foreigners and especially the murder of a fellow tribesman. Here, Losseiya's life history became relevant as he was both honored through the incisions on the chest and polluted through murder. I described both the rituals performed by the killer as the ritual of reconciliation to clean away *nyogich* and prevent further misfortune. Looking into what motivated Losseiya, I can only guess why he killed the schoolboy. There is evidence to suggest that the frustration and hate he felt after the betrayal by a Daasanech misfit made him so suspicious that he killed the schoolboy, whom he took for a spy. There is a growing ambivalence the identity of Daasanech who behave like Highlanders and lose their traditions. It is clear that modernity forces the Daasanech to redirect their traditional categories of boundaries between "us" and "them", something which will become more important as more and more youth attend school and take over Highlander's customs.

But the same sort of ambivalence that Losseiya might have felt towards the schoolboy might have been similar to what his age-mates must have felt towards him: Losseiya, their age-mate, refused to clean himself from *nyogich* and fled to the enemies. I can only guess why he refused to do so.

A first argument might be that he had troubles with his brothers even before he committed *nyogich*. For example, since his half-brothers did not care for his mother when he was in jail, she and his wife and children had to seek refuge among the Turkana. Secondly and more importantly, the fear of being caught and put in prison again must have put a heavy burden on him.

At the same time, by not performing the rituals of purification, he also *de facto* ostracised himself from the community and gave himself no other choice but to flee and to become a *gedech* (servant) among the Turkana. Without cattle, Losseiya would have been a nobody among the Turkana, so it is not surprising that Losseiya decided to steal his herds or even to raid Daasanech cattle, as he had nothing to lose. But by intending to do so, he not only behaved like an enemy, he became one.

Furthermore, the fact that he knew the land well induced the fear that he might serve as a guide during Turkana raids, a fear which was expressed in the rumors about him. All in all, we see a clear shift in the boundaries between "us" and "them" in Losseiya's case. Ultimately, the only way out was to kill him. However, since under normal circumstances the death penalty is prohibited, people had to take matters into their own hands.

By killing him, the process of exclusion was put to an end, while the *nyogich*, the polluting aspect of the killing was not, which applied to both Losseiya's family and to those who clubbed him to death. It is obvious that those who killed him were aware of this danger, especially when looking at the way he was killed: by clubbing him, no blood would be spilled and nobody would be held responsible for the fatal blow. That it ultimately ended the way that it did is a pity. Therefore, I would like to dedicate this essay to Losseiya and his family and to all Daasanech who suffered from this drama.



## Epilogue

In April 2009, I returned to Aoga and met Haane, Losseiya's mother and his younger brother. All had gone through a cleansing ceremony to remove their *nyogich*. Haane remarried a man from the Ngarich section and moved there. Losseiya's mother lived next to Losseiya's brother in Aoga, in the vicinity of the agricultural plot that Losseiya owned. She cared for Losseiya's eldest son. Losseiya's brother performed the *dimi* for Losseiya's daughter and Losseiya's son stayed with him. Lonyakodos and Aarsui died several years ago.

## References

- Almagor, Uri, 1978: *Pastoral Partners. Affinity and Bond Partnership among the Dassanetch of South-West Ethiopia*. Oxford: Manchester University Press.
- Almagor, Uri, 1979: "Raiders and Elders. A Confrontation of Generations among the Dassanetch". In: Katsuyoshi Fukui and David Turton (eds.): *Warfare among East African Herders*. Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 119-146. (Senri Ethnological Studies, 3).
- Barley, Nigel, 1992 [1983]: *The Innocent Anthropologist. Notes From a Mud Hut*. New York: Holt.
- Barth, Frederik (ed.), 1969: *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organization of Culture Difference*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Baxter, P.T.W., 1979: "Boran Age-Sets and Warfare". In: Katsuyoshi Fukui and David Turton (eds.): *Warfare among East African Herders*. Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 69-95. (Senri Ethnological Studies, 3).
- Fukui, Katsuyoshi and David Turton (eds.), 1979: *Warfare among East African Herders*. Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology. (Senri Ethnological Studies, 3).
- Houtteman, Yvan, 1998: "Leven in de Navel van Waag. Daasenach Sociale Organisatie en Conflictmanagement". In: Rik Pinxten and Ghislain Verstraete (eds.): *Cultuur en Macht*. Antwerpen, Baarn: Houtekiet, 227-272.
- Houtteman, Yvan, 2004: "Rituals and Identity among the Daasanech". In: Steven Van Wolputte and Gustaaf Verswijver (eds.): *African Pastoralists Studies II. At the Fringes of Modernity*. Tervuren: Royal Museum of Central Africa, 81-117.
- Houtteman, Yvan, (Forthcoming): "Curses, Ancestor Spirits and Divination among the Daasanech. About the Socio-Spiritual Impact of Misfortune". In: Susanne Eppele and Felix Girke (eds.): *Images of Self and Other. Essays on Identity and Cultural Diversity in Ethiopia*. Cologne: Köppe.
- Kurimoto, Eisei and Simon Simonse (eds.), 1998: *Conflict, Age and Power in North East Africa. Age Systems in Transition*. Oxford: Currey.
- Lydall, Jean and Ivo Strecker, 1979: *The Hamar of Southern Ethiopia. Vol. I. Baldambe Explains*. Hohenschäftlarn: Renner.

- Schlee, Günther, 1985: "Interethnic Clan Identities among Cushitic-Speaking Pastoralists". *Africa* 55 (1): 17-37.
- Tosco, Mauro, 2001: *The Dhaasanac Language*. Cologne: Köppe.
- Tornay, Serge, 1979: "Armed Conflicts in the Lower Omo Valley 1970-1976. An Analysis from within Nyangatom Society". In: Katsuyoshi Fukui and David Turton (eds.): *Warfare among East African Herders*. Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 97-118. (Senri Ethnological Studies, 3).
- Tornay, Serge, 1981: "The Omo-Murle Enigma". In: Lionel M. Bender (ed.): *Peoples and Cultures of the Ethio-Sudan Borderlands*. Michigan: African Studies Centre, 33-60.