

# The politics of space in Borana Oromo, Ethiopia: demographics, elections, identity and customary institutions

Marco Bassi

## POST-PRINT VERSION FOR OPEN ACCESS

(For quotation please refer to the published version due to minor editing and different pagination)

### Published version:

*Journal of Eastern African Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2, July 2010, 221-246

ISSN 1753-1055 print/ISSN 1753-1063 online

©2010 Taylor & Francis

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2010.487333>

DOI: 10.1080/17531055.2010.487333

### Citation of the published version:

Bassi, Marco (2010) 'The politics of space in Borana Oromo, Ethiopia: demographics, elections, identity and customary institutions', *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 4: 2, 221 — 246.

**Keywords:** conflict; Ethiopia; customary institutions; human rights; ethnic identity; elections

**Abstract.** This article addresses the protracted state of political violence developed in and around the Borana and Guji zones of Oromia region after the introduction of the ethnic federalism in Ethiopia. In order to account for the persistence of the role of certain groups during different phases of the conflict, an attempt is made to elaborate on the connections between ethnic identity, natural resource and customary institutions by introducing the notion of primary identity. Since the turn of the millennium there is in Ethiopia a theoretically grounded attempt to co-opt customary institutions and elders into modern governance, particularly in the pastoral sector and with reference to both the political field and development. The field-research focused on the interplay of customary and modern politics on occasion of two electoral events, the 2004 referendum organised to solve the border issue between the Somali Regional State and Oromia, and the 2005 political elections. The analysis of the political dynamics and of local political history suggests that the constitutional provisions were transformed by the federal strategic need to control the insurgency of the Oromo Liberation Front, and by the peripheral motivations bound to the primary groups. The combined effect of these two factors produced a systematic abuse of human rights and the manipulation of development and refugees policies, involving the various actors in an informal 'demographic politics of space'. As a result the Borana Oromo were displaced from a large portion of their customary territory and were relegated into a state of permanent food dependency. Under these conditions, the opportunistic cooption of elders and customary leaders can only lead to the most destructive outcomes. It is here suggested that human and indigenous rights as defined by the relevant international instruments may better contribute to constructively valorise the potentials of customary governance.

Since the introduction of federalism Ethiopia is trying to re-qualify its administrative space. The process started at the time of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) by broadly defining Regional States along ethnic lines. It continued at lower administrative levels, under the impulse of international policies of devolution. The administrative demarcation led to ethnic tension, especially occurring along administrative boundaries: over the years an impressive series of ethnic clashes and massacres took place, increasingly attracting the attention of scholars.<sup>1</sup> In this paper I consider the episodes of violence recorded in and around Borana and Guji Zones of Oromia region by exploring the complex interplay of customary and modern politics. This research is built upon the 2004 referendum organised to solve the border issue between the Somali Regional State of Ethiopia (Region 5) and Oromia (Region 4), and the 2005 political elections<sup>2</sup>. The discussion is informed by the current debate on customary institutions, with a theoretical attempt to qualify the link between customary institutions and identity in the study area.

### **The co-option of customary institutions**

In modern Ethiopia there has always been a *de-facto* coexistence of governmental and customary institutions, although the latter were not recognized by the Ethiopian State and were not acknowledged in mainstream contributions of social and political sciences. This is better documented with the Oromo, due to the anthropological attention received by their *qaalluu* and *gadaa* institutions. The Oromo are the largest nation in eastern Africa. The main political element of the *gadaa* system is a mobile centre (*yaa'a gadaa* or *caffee*) whose responsibility is entrusted to a new generational class every 8 years (a *gadaa* period). The generational class is represented by elected and titled leaders, representing the main segments of a political unit organized under a single *gadaa* center. During this 8 years period the generational class is known as *gadaa* or *huba*, referring to central stage of the *gadaa* life-cycle, with overall responsibility for the political community at large. The *qaalluu* constitutes the second pole of Oromo governance, complementary to *gadaa*. *Qaalluu*-ship is a hereditary office whose sacredness is expressed by the myth of origin.

These two institutions contribute to train and legitimize a differentiated institutional leadership, capable to assure the governance of the entire group by exercising their political and juridical influence in different types of meetings, assemblies and councils.<sup>3</sup> From the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Menelik II managed to establish control over most of the previously independent Oromo. During the imperial time the Oromo customary institutions were tolerated. There was an attempt to formally co-opt the two major *qaalluu* of the Borana (the southern section of the Oromo) in the position of intermediary chiefs (*balabat*). They refused the appointment due to a symbolic incompatibility of roles and conflict of interests, but they kept the position of *balabat* within their own families. From the 1974 revolution the socialist government was ambivalent. In western Oromia and more generally in the Oromo highlands *gadaa* was repressed, but in the pastoral Oromo areas of southern Ethiopia it was tolerated. In 1989 and 90, during my doctoral field-work, I found an informal but reciprocally acknowledged division of competences between the administrative and the customary structures. Customary institutions were governing the natural resources asset and livestock production. In addition, customary institutions were regulating family and interpersonal relations in the rural areas. Governmental institutions and statutory law were regulating trade, including cattle trade, tax, military conscription and inter-ethnic social relations, mainly in towns.<sup>4</sup>

Since the turn of the millennium informal coexistence was replaced by a multifaceted attempt to co-opt customary institutions and community elders. The post-socialist governments of Ethiopia have shown a full awareness of the potential of indigenous mechanisms in conflict resolution. Attempts to institutionalize the role of elders had been made in Oromia before the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) withdrew from the TGE in 1992.<sup>5</sup> More structured initiatives were later taken, especially in Afar and in the Somali regions.<sup>6</sup> From 1999 the Somali Regional State has built a formal structure of councils of elders and clan leaders at level of district (*woreda*), zone and region, parallel to the governmental structure. According to the specific provision contained in the 2002 Somali Regional State Constitution these elders have the mandate to assist the government in matters of peace and security on regular salary. Tobias Hagmann analyses their role in buiding neo-

patrimonial relationship in the Somali region. Indeed they also act as ‘government informers and help disseminate government policies’, thus serving as a ‘bridge between the State and community’, and have been instrumental in campaigning and mobilizing voters for the Somali People Democratic Party (SPDP), a party highly coordinated with the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), the ruling federal party.<sup>7</sup>

The instrumental traditionalism enhanced by the Ethiopian government is mirrored by the rhetoric of recent international narratives on poverty and pastoral development. An IFAD-commissioned report claims:

“the PCDP [Pastoral Community Development Project, based in the Ministry of Federal Affairs and financed by the World Bank], is based on the assumption that pastoral livelihoods can be improved by strengthening the self-management capabilities of indigenous institutions”.<sup>8</sup>

Similar considerations have been informing the Pastoralists Communication Initiative (PCI), established with DFID funds and expertise from the Institute of Development Studies (University of Sussex) with the initial objective to obtain a chapter dedicated to pastoralism in the National Poverty Reduction Paper (PRSP) for Ethiopia. PCI has later supported the efforts to improve dialogue between the pastoralists and the Government of Ethiopia, trying to involve the customary institutions and leaders. From February 2004, PCI paid attention to the Oromo speaking pastoralists, as a result of a policy formulated and adopted by the Oromiya Pastoral Development Commission (OPDC), explicitly referring to the need to integrate the customary institutions of the pastoralists. From 2004 PCI, besides various initiatives in the formal political sector, facilitated a number of local scale meetings between the Borana, the Gabra Miigoo and the Guji Oromo pastoralists with one another and with representatives of the government of Ethiopia.<sup>9</sup>

Self-expression of pastoralists’ needs and priorities was also facilitated in Ethiopia by introducing the Pastoralist Day, from 1999 onwards. This initiative started with local meetings organized by civil society with the participation of governmental officers, up to national scale meetings coordinated by the Ministry of Federal Affairs, with the participation of several customary leaders, including *gadaa* leaders.

Parallel to this revival of customary institutions, several NGOs working in pastoral areas have also changed approach. Elizabeth Watson has studied this change and a subsequent raising skepticism in Borana, where several NGOs worked with or through the indigenous institutions, considered a ‘bridge’ between them and the community, a ‘ready-made set of participatory structure’.<sup>10</sup> Indeed serious and successful work of interaction with customary leaders was implemented by SOS Sahel-Ethiopia in the field of collaborative forestry.<sup>11</sup>

The capacity of the customary institutions and community elders to serve as a ‘bridge’ with the community was reviewed by Sara Lister with a research implemented in Borana Zone. Her paper is built upon the emerging notions of ‘direct’ or ‘participatory’ democracy and its capacity to supplement the shortcomings of the standard mechanisms of electoral representation in a context such as the Ethiopian one. The assumption is that “the interaction between formal and traditional systems mediates between citizen interests and policy outcome, and thus fulfills a ‘representation’ function”. Her analysis of the trends in the Oromo and Somali regions and of the dynamics of policy making in Ethiopia discloses a serious skepticism about the possibility to effectively build alternative channel of representation in a non-conducive political environment.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, whatever efforts have been made, the practical outcomes of the national and international efforts to integrate customary institutions in modern governance deeply differ from the theoretical assumptions and propositions. For instance, *The Indigenous World 2006* is very critical about the role taken by Ministry of Federal Affairs during the Pastoralists Day of 2005.<sup>13</sup> More importantly, a careful review of the official policy documentation reveals contradictory statements by different governmental institutions or, at best, very weak or generic predicaments, not to mention the gap between policy statements and their enhancement into practice.<sup>14</sup>

## **The customary institutions in Borana and Guji zones**

### ***Primary identities***

The study area is characterized by a dynamic interaction between different groups. The identification of the groups relevant to the current political processes is not simple, because of the

of the overlapping of identities at different levels of segmentation (family, lineage, clan, ethnic group or tribe, nation), based on a variety of emic classificatory criteria (genealogical, linguistic, religious, insiders/outside) and of the ongoing process of social stratification (subsistence pastoralists/peasants, traders and investor, various elites, educated youths, administrators...). Since we are here mainly concerned with customary institutions, it is quite safe to refer to a number of primary identities – such as Borana, Gabra, Garri, Digodia – qualifying different local pastoral and agro-pastoral groups, but keeping in mind that in the urban and peri-urban context there are also relevant actors not bound to the customary institutions, such as immigrants of various ethnic background, immigrated subsistence farmers, national and international investors.

Recent literature stresses the instrumental processes of ethnicity. These processes are clearly in action in Ethiopia and are key factors of State-related politics, as one may expect out of the introduction of the ‘ethnic’ or multicultural Constitution. ‘Ethnic entrepreneurs’ can potentially operate along all the above lines and levels of human classification, but in the study area the observed processes of identity shift have as far mainly taken shape with reference to the higher levels of identity. For instance religious identity was a key factor during the Somali irredentism, when Muslim Oromo and Somali both sided with the Somali front. National identities (such as Oromo and Somali) have instead been prevailing during the struggle against the Derg and in the current ethnic federalism. The national and local fabrication of ethnic discourse built upon the collocation of primary identities, taken as a block, within the national identities (Oromo, Somali...) - focusing on origin, language, religious or cultural affinity. Although some attempts have been made to downplay primary identities or bypass them at individual level for political opportunism, the existence and continuity of these primary identities from the pre-colonial time through the modern period cannot be questioned, just as the belonging of each individual to one or the other cannot easily be denied, rejected, manipulated or by-passed.

There is a direct correlation between the persistence of primary identities and customary institutions. Sociological theory and analysis of political symbolism confirms that any society must

convey to its member a sense of continuity over time. The long-term survival of a pastoral or agro-pastoral group must be combined with the immediate need of the productive units (families, lineages...) to have access to natural resources for their livelihoods. The interaction with the environment determines the definition of groupings co-operating in the productive activities and it defines norms of access to and exclusion from access to natural resources. Full-fledged systems of governance thus develop. In the study area each primary identity is shared by a number of productive units with its own sets of rules, norms, myths, decisional procedures and enforcing mechanisms. Primary identities provide the aggregative principle to form a unit of resource management, with its own governance mechanisms and customary institutions. The group must have access to a number of complementary resources for the viable survival of its members. It may enter either into competitive relations with similar groups, engaging in territorial disputes and conflict, or in complementary relations, such as in the case of the separate identities of the pastoralists and hunter-gatherers sharing diverse resources on a same geographical territory. From the individual's point of view, having a primary identity and customary institutions is a matter of survival. At the collective level, customary leaders have the responsibility to assure access to the natural resource required for livelihoods and survival, in the case of pastoralists enough grazing land and water sources.

### ***The pastoral groups of the study area***

The primary groups in the study area can broadly be classified along linguistic lines. The prevailing local languages are Oromo and Somali, both Cushitic. The Borana, Guji, Gabra and Arsi speak Oromo. The Ogadeni, Mareexaan, Digodia speak Somali. The Garri are linguistically heterogeneous, with most members being able to speak both Oromo and Somali.

The Borana live in Ethiopia and Kenya. In Ethiopia they are today confined to the southern portions of the current Guji Zone and Borana Zone. In Kenya they are concentrated along the border, in correspondence with Mooyyale and Sololo towns, in and around Marsabit Mountain and in Isiolo area. They have a single encompassing *gadaa* system and five *qaalluu*. They have

managed to maintain their governance system, although the political influence of *gadaa* is limited to Ethiopia, especially to *Liiban* and *Dirre*<sup>15</sup>. Each generational class of the Borana is ritually represented by 6 *hayyu adulaa*. When their class reaches the *gadaa* stage, they take corporate responsibility over the three villages that together constitute the *yaa'a gadaa*. At this stage the senior *adulaa* is recognized *abbaa gadaa*. He leads the *arbooraa* village. Next in seniority are the *adulaa* from the Hawaxxuu and Konnituu clans, each taking the leadership of the two *kontomaa* villages. They are also acknowledged as *abbaa gadaa*, although of a lower authority. The *yaa'a gadaa* is also formed by other officers, including several *hayyu garbaa* and *hayyuu meedichaa* (the latter being only in the *yaa'a kontamaa*), plus several other assistants and ritual officers. Two out of the five *qaalluu* have higher relevance, being associated with each of the moieties.<sup>16</sup>

The Guji are agro-pastoralists and live to the north of the Borana. Writing in 1978 about the three sections of the southern Guji – the Uruga, the Mati and Hoku –, John Hinnant found that *gadaa* had lost its governance dimension, but it still was a basic ritual reference for the Guji. Today *gadaa* is reviving among the Guji as well as all over Oromia. The Guji have several *gadaa* centers (*yaa'a gadaa*), each with its own set of classes and with structural features and terminology very similar to the system of the Borana. Each *gadaa* center corresponds with an autonomous territorial section. The unifying factor of Guji polity is represented by a single *qaalluu*. The *Qaalluu* mediates among the various *abbaa gadaa* when inter-section disputes arise.<sup>17</sup>

The Gabra have two main territorial divisions and sub-identities, the Gabra Malbee, whose territory is mostly in Kenya, and the Gabra Miigoo, customarily living among the Borana in Ethiopia and sharing pastoral resource with them. The Gabra Malbee live in the arid lowlands to the west and southwest of the Borana, east of Lake Turkana, mostly in Kenya. In 1978 William Torry described a fully operative system of governance of pastoral resources based on the *gadaa* system. They are subdivided into 5 phratries, the 'five drums' (*dibbee shanan*): the Gara, Galbo, Alganna, Odola and Sharbana. Each of these phratries tends to be associated with a separate rangeland, has its own self-governing council or *yaa'a*, its own independently operating – but mutually



coordinated - system of generation sets and grades, and its own holy grounds where pilgrimage and transition rites take place. This territorial sub-division, with separate *gadaa* centers, recalls Guji's territorial setting, but the Gabra differ because they do not have only one *qaalluu*. Each phratry has its own senior *qaalluu*, himself a leading member of the *yaa 'a* with the power to legitimize two *hayyu* from each generation set (*luba*) entering the *gadaa* stage. The senior *hayyu* is called *adulaa*. Additional officers of the *yaa 'a* are the custodians of the sacred drum, the custodian of other emblems and various assistants. Inter-phratry coordination takes place by periodical meetings of the 5 'drums', but there is no a permanent uniting body or office, nor an officer corresponding to the *abbaa gadaa* of the Guji or of the Borana.<sup>18</sup>

The institutions of the Gabra Malbee and of the Borana appear to have been highly coordinated in pre-colonial time, two diversified adaptations to different ecological niches. The Borana were prevalently cattle-pastoralists and transhumant, the Gabra camel-pastoralists and highly mobile. Probably in the pre-colonial time the joint use of a same territory on seasonal basis was much more extensive. Aneesa Kassam notes that the present day delimitation of the grazing grounds correspond with the 'tribal reserves' imposed by the British Colonial Administration, while the Gabra were previously accessing a wider territory. Most of the sacred sites to which Gabra make pilgrimages today are located in what is normally considered Borana territory. She clearly outlines the strong inter-dependence of the two systems.<sup>19</sup>

The ethnography of the Gabra Miigoo is little known. They are supposed to own a 'sixth drum', but there is no evidence of much coordination and inter-action with the Gabra Malbee until these last few years. During my recent field-research both Borana and Gabra confirmed that the Gabra Miigoo used to have their own recognized *yaa 'a*, close to the ritual centers of the Borana. The practice was abandoned after their conversion to Islam. During the phase of the Somali irredentism the Gabra Miigoo sided with the Somali and most of them were forced to seek refuge in Somalia when the Somali were defeated in 1978. Some families remained in Ethiopia and continued their pastoral life among the Borana. After the Somali crisis in 1989 many Gabra started

to come back with the status of returnees, and very recently they have re-established their own *yaa'a* in Weebi area, with the consent of the *yaa'a* of the Borana. Recently some foreigners working in Borana Zone have started to refer to the leader of the new *yaa'a* with the term *abbaa gadaa*, in speech as well in unpublished reports. However, following on complaints made by several Borana, I found out that the Gabra Miigoo did not historically have their own *abbaa gadaa*, nor were they authorized by the Borana *yaa'a* to create this new office on occasion of the recent re-establishment of the *yaa'a*.

### **The territorial dispute and the referendum**

In the study area modern politics and, more specifically, the post 1991 electoral processes are intertwined with territorial competition among the primary groups, and among national groups. The Oromo and the Somali have for many centuries interacted along a 1000 kilometres line. From the political point of view they are both internally segmented, but explicit national identities slowly grew in relation to the construction and developments of modern states, hence by the colonial and post colonial experiences. The referendum held in 2004 was designed to institutionally address the competition developed over the demarcation between the Somali Regional State of Ethiopia and Oromia.

The Somali perception of their interrelation with the Oromo emerged from a recorded field interview conducted with Digodia (Somali) in Filtu in August 2005. The narrative is pervaded by two dominant features. The first is a long term and historically rooted pattern of progressive expansion of the Somali westwards, slowly pushing the Oromo further west. The second one operates as the legitimising principle of this expansion, the representation of the Oromo as pagan and cruel persecutors of the Muslim Somali.

### ***The colonial construct and its impact on ethnic relations***

At the verge of the colonial time the Oromo-Borana were firmly established on a vast area having the ritual and political centres in today's Ethiopia, but extending their political influence and rangeland over large sectors of northern Kenya. In today's Ethiopia they were permanently

occupying an area corresponding to the southern portion of Sidamo Region as demarcated during the imperial and Derg time, from the confluence of the Ganale and Dawa rivers in the east – where the presence of the Garrimarro is recorded since the 19<sup>th</sup> century explorations – to Lake Chew Bahir to the west.

The area between the Ganale and Dawa rivers is locally known as *Liiban*, while the lands to the southwest of the Dawa river is *Dirree*. *Liiban* and the *Tula sallan* (the nine clusters of sacred wells of the Borana) core portion of *Dirree* are considered the historical political and ceremonial centres of the Borana. In northern Kenya they were permanently established in several localities served by permanent water points south of today's international border. They were also seasonally using other wet-season pastures jointly with other Oromo and Cushitic speaking pastoral groups allied to the Borana in the *tiriso* network of alliance, symbolized by pilgrimage (*muuda*) to one of the *qaalluu* of the Borana. Historical evidence shows that several of these groups, including the Garri, the Gabra Miigoo and the Gabra Malbee, were also enjoying access to certain permanent water points in the homelands of the Borana (*Liiban* and *Dirree*) and were accordingly jointly using the associated rangelands.<sup>20</sup> The arrangements for joint use of pastoral resources were common in East African pastoralism, with flexible negotiation of resource use through recognised traditional institutions. Galaty suggests that there were zones mainly associated with certain groups rather than physical boundaries, but this cannot be generalised.<sup>21</sup> Well defined ethnic territories with dividing lines were both conceived and mutually recognized even before colonialism. This was the case along the Borana/Somali divide, where according to Vannutelli and Citerni – the survivors Bottego's second expedition crossing Boranaland in 1896 - Somali caravans were imposed tolls and regulations when crossing into Borana territory.<sup>22</sup> According to the vivid description of the trespassing procedures provided by Duuba Dima, entering into Borana territory was subject to the customary leaders' permission even for the sake of grazing.<sup>23</sup> Vannutelli and Citerni clearly identify an old border spot between the Borana and the Muslims in Daka Barruu, a locality on a caravan route along the Dawa river, approximately 40 km west of Dooloo. They found numerous

Oromo tombs along this caravan route on the way to Bua-Herere, a locality mentioned as a battlefield between the Somali and the Borana 50 years before Bottego's expedition. They report that the Somali gathered from Lugh and from Bardera to fight the Borana. The Somali alliance won, forcing them to retrieve beyond Sancurà wells (10-20 km southeast of Chillanko), the border between Borana and Somali at the time of the expedition.<sup>24</sup>

The pre-colonial time is indeed already characterized by a south and westward movement of several Somali clans.<sup>25</sup> The expansion in the north-eastern part of current Kenya has affected several of the local groups allied of the Oromo-Borana. This early Somali westwards movement was confirmed by a group of Borana elders interviewed in Nagelle on August 6<sup>th</sup> 2005

The Somali push became more effective by the time of the scramble for Africa, when the British and the Abyssinians introduced firearms in the region, built their empires and severed the relation between the Borana centres in Ethiopia and the Borana and their allied in Kenya. Already at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, before formal incorporation into the Ethiopian Empire, *Liiban* and *Dirree* were affected by the activities of a group of armed northerners, the *Tigre*, bringing insecurity and displacement. This is the time when a group of Digodia, a Somali clan, managed to establish itself in the south-eastern part of *Liiban*, in the area between Dooloo and Boqqol Mayo.<sup>26</sup>

Later movements were highly determined by the relation that single groups and leaders managed to establish with the colonial authorities and by conflict among colonial powers. After the deterioration of the relation of their leader Gababa Mohammed Guracha with the British, in 1923 the Garri penetrated into *Dirre* and built a good relationship with the Ethiopian authorities.<sup>27</sup> In 1932 the Mareexaan too penetrated into Oddo area, in south-eastern *Liiban*, and then moved to the area around today's Filtu, in eastern *Liiban*. Recurrent feuds of these three Muslim groups with the Borana and among themselves for grazing and water resources are reported since these early colonial times.<sup>28</sup>

The Italian time marks a drastic change in the modality of encroachment of Somali groups. The Italians brought Somali soldiers into the territory of Borana and gave new opportunities to the

Muslim clans already in the area, in line with the trend outlined by Sbacchi: “the Ethiopian Muslims gave the Italians unconditional help in return for the Italian government’s support of their religion and institutions”.<sup>29</sup> The detailed historical reconstruction of the Italian period made by Belete Bizuneh corresponds to the events narrated by several Borana elders I have interviewed in August 2005. The Borana and the Gabra could not communicate with the Italians and were exposed to opportunistic miss-translation by the Somali interpreters. The local Somali (Muslim) groups managed to join the *askari* (the African troops attached to the Italian army); they were armed by the Italians, and managed to depict the Borana as supporters of the Ethiopian resistance. The empowered Muslim groups massacred both the Borana and the Gabra. The Borana were pushed out of *Liiban*, where the Mareexaan are known for having been particularly active, and equally suffered in eastern *Dirree*, where the pro-Italian warfare was mainly implemented by the Garri. The Italians have favoured the settlement of both the local Muslim clans and the detribalized Muslim soldiers in those areas, to check a possible return by the Amhara.<sup>30</sup>

The Borana have later joined the Ethiopian resistance in Kenya and fought back the Italians and the *askari*. The post Italian period was still characterized by intensive ethnic warfare until 1943, especially instigated by *ex-askari* who had come from Somalia and Kenya, locally known as *Jigheer*. They took up banditry, that soon escalated by involving members of the local Muslim communities. The Borana and Gabra were the main targets in *Liiban*. According to a recent appeal based on the method of family oral traditions and presented by Borana elders to the governmental authority, during the *Jigheer* 90% of Borana living in *Liiban* and 25% of those living around Mooyyale were massacred and their stock entirely looted by the Somali. The Borana living in the area of today’s Mega and Areero districts were displaced and lost 50% of their stock. This is described as the time when the Borana were permanently forced out of Dooloo district.<sup>31</sup> After they have been armed by the government, the Borana indiscriminately reacted against all Muslim communities in the area.<sup>32</sup>

In order to pacify the tense relations that have been persisting among the different ethnic groups and clan of the region, the Ethiopian administration established ‘tribal grazing areas’ on the model of Kenya. Fecadu Adugna identifies tax extraction as a main criteria used by the imperial administration to allocate grazing rights. By that time the Borana were both destitute and dislocated as a result of protracted and intensive warfare. Hence large grazing blocs were allocated to the wealthier groups.<sup>33</sup> The demarcation of the grazing area was apparently accepted by Diima Kulaa, *balabat* of the Borana in *Liiban* and father of Duuba Diimaa whom I interviewed in 2005<sup>34</sup>. During the interview Duuba Dimaa clarified that the agreement was unquestionably about temporary grazing rights only, not about ownership of land. The temporary nature of the grazing rights is fully confirmed by the Agrotec report written in 1974:

- “the whole of Borana Awraja is to be collective property (*rist*) of the Borana tribe, from Dolo to Nagelli, Mega and Moyale, asserting that the Borana inherited it from their forefathers”;
- “Other tribes, some of them Somali (the Marrehan, the Digodia, the Garri, the Gura and minor ones) some other Galla (Arusi, Guji) [Galla is the old name applied to the Oromo] have been ‘temporarily assigned grazing and water rights over the eastern and northern portions of the Awarja, which they had already conquered by warfare’”;
- “even if the non-Borana tribes pay livestock tax, they cannot claim ownership rights over this land, which belong to the Borana”.<sup>35</sup>

### ***The Shifta movement and the Derg***

The Somali irredentism is the next regional macro-level event. It brought warfare into Sidamo, Hararge and Bale administrative regions since 1963. Most Somali speaking clans, several Muslim Oromo and part of the Sidamo joined the armed movement known as *Shifta*. After the Ethiopian revolution the *shifta* were re-organized into the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF), with the objective to annex the Somali-speaking area of Ethiopia to Greater Somalia. In 1976 the Oromo and Sidamo speaking fighters splat off, forming the Somali Abbo Liberation Front (SALF). The WSLF mainly operated in Ogaden, while SALF was military active in Sidamo Province and in other Oromo speaking areas.<sup>36</sup> The Borana were initially ambivalent, but after cruel acts committed by the *shifta* against Borana villages – such as the massacre at Bulbul village in *Liiban* – the Borana perceived the occupation of their land by the guerrilla fighters as a new attempt by Muslim groups

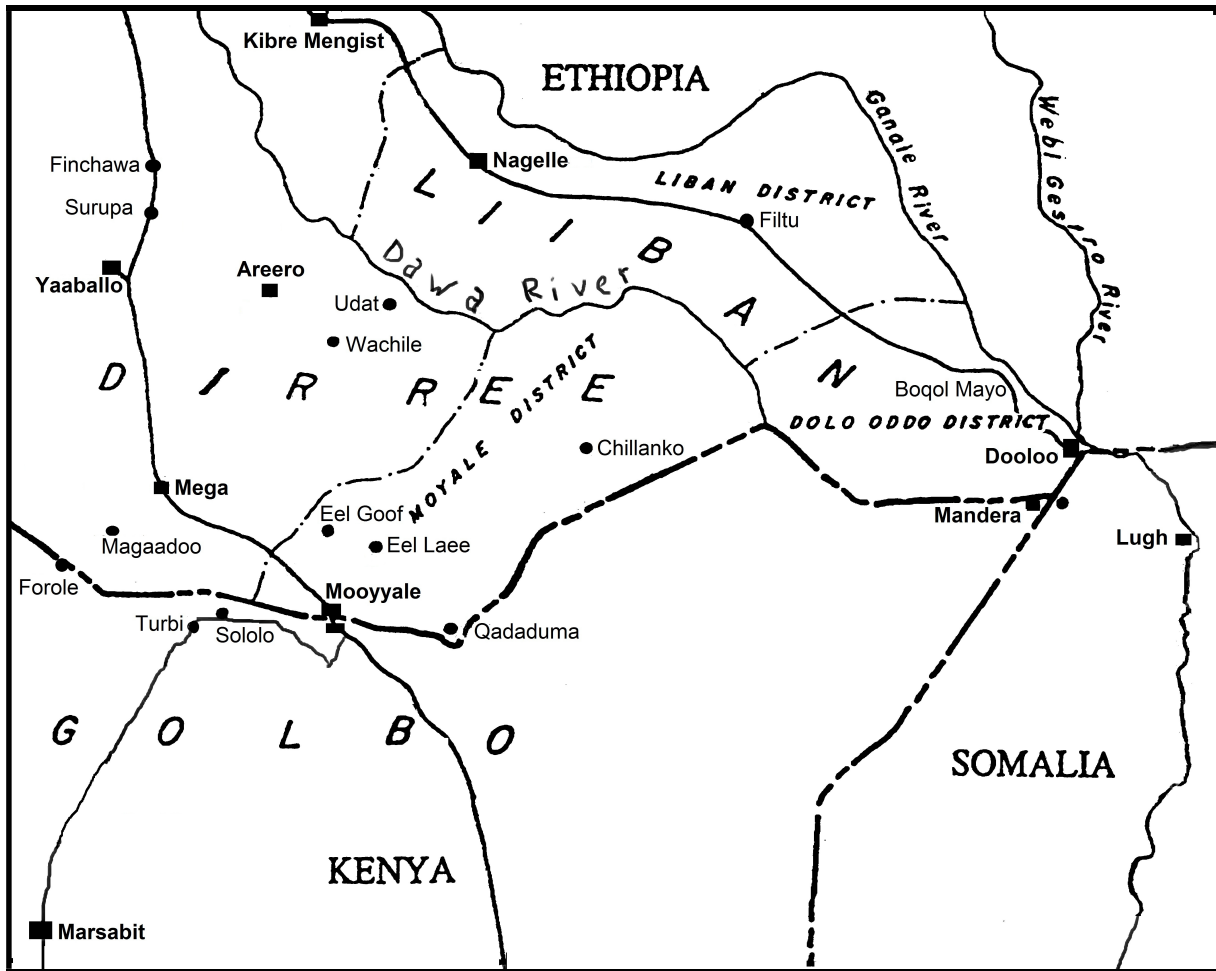
to take over their territory. The Borana of Ethiopia fully sided with the Ethiopian government. Like the Italian time, the Mareexaan were particularly active in *Liiban* and the Garri in *Dirree*. The Digodia, who have no clan links in Somalia, appear to have kept a non-alignment position, while the Gabra, who had converted to Islam, sided with SALF.<sup>37</sup>

The irredentist movement was defeated during the 1977/78 full scale war between Somalia and Ethiopia. Most Mareexaan and several Garri, Arsi, Gabra, Guji, found refuge in Somalia. The remaining Gabra were reintegrated among the Borana. The Garri governmental representatives I interviewed in Mooyyale administration in August 2005 complained about harsh repression suffered by the Garri at that time, including the massacre of villagers, followed by a provision of confinement to a small territory east of Mooyyale, a view that was already reported by Getachew Kassa.<sup>38</sup> My field data collected towards the end of the socialist period and interviews of well informed Borana elders made in 2005 confirm the confinement of the Garri and Gabra, but only during the *Shifta* for security reasons. After the war, there was no governmental restriction on grazing on ethnic base. The grazing blocks earlier allocated ceased to operate. The responsibility for the land was formally transferred to the newly established peasant associations, the smaller administrative units, normally called *kebele*<sup>39</sup>. Land was State owned, but pastoral production was left to customary practices. The Garri were soon able to obtain permit of access to Eel Goof, Eel Laee, Udat and Wachile, which they used jointly with the Borana. In all these areas the Borana had been the uncontested owners and managers of the traditional wells for centuries. The wells have been run according to the customary rules and regulations, differentiating between ownership and access. As in all Borana wells, a quota of access is granted to different clans, and to any applicant, belonging to any ethnic group. Users are requested to contribute either in labour or cash to the ordinary maintenance, but this contribution does not imply ownership, which is strictly maintained within the clan or clans that have first dug the wells.<sup>40</sup> At the time of my doctoral research in 1989-90 Eel Goof and Eel Laee and their surrounding excellent rangelands where the only two cluster of *tulaa* wells where dry stock for the market were allowed. They were therefore used by the mobile

herds of the Borana all, in addition to the Borana community living there. All the mentioned areas in *Dirree* were part of a compact territory permanently used by the Borana, extending into eastern *Liiban*, where, during the socialist time, the Mareexaan were also able to expand west of Filtu. But the Borana were also seasonally accessing rangelands under more permanent occupation by Somali, close to Filtu, and of the Garri, near Qadaduma.

From 1987 the entire customary region of *Liiban*, up to the confluence of the Dawa and the Ganale rivers, corresponding to the eastern Ethiopian section of the pre-colonial territory of the Borana, was the Borana Province (*awraja*), subdivided into Liiban and Dooloo districts (*wereda*). Liiban district was mainly inhabited by Borana, Dooloo district by the Mareexaan and Digodia Somali, with some grazing rights reciprocally granted between the Somali and Oromo speaking communities. The western part of the Borana customary territory (*Dirree*) was under Areero Province. Areero province was subdivided into Teltelle, Dirree, Yaaballoo, Areero, Mooyyale, Burji and Hagaramaram districts (*wereda*). The first five districts were mainly inhabited by the Borana, with access rights granted to the Gabra (mainly in Yaaballoo district) and Garri (mainly in part of Dirree, Areero and Mooyyale districts). Burji and Hagaramaram districts were inhabited by the Burji and the Guji-Oromo respectively.





Map of the main mentioned localities and eastern districts of the Borana and Areero provinces, Sidamo Region (1991).

### *The post Derg and the OLF factor*

In a paper based on a research implemented in 1993 I have discussed how the collapse of the Somali State produced a wave of massive return of the 1978 refugees from Ethiopia, mixed with new refugees from Somalia. In 1991 and 1992 this led to an influx of persons generally recognized as 'returnees'. They were assisted by UNHCR and several NGOs. In some districts and *kebele* the returnees overwhelmed the local population up to nearly 300%, a figure showing that returnees were actually mixed up with new refugees from Somalia and immigrants from Kenya.<sup>41</sup> By registering as returnees, families were able to access individual support by UNHCR, provided on relevant scale until 1994. The sites with large presence of returnees have also received strong development and infrastructural support by several international organisations until 2004.

During their experience in Somalia and in the course of their repatriation, the ‘returnees’ had developed a higher opportunistic capacity to act in modern politics and to successfully interrelate to international refugees policies and to UN organizations. On their return they linked up to the local pastoralists of their own clan, but they retained a rather separate identity and life-style compared to the pastoral component. Getachew Kassa reports that the Garri returnees were identified as *qohati* (returnee), implying a rather differential world view, a higher inclination to adopt agricultural practices and a stronger interest in Islamic learning.<sup>42</sup> While the Arsi and Guji ex-members of SALF re-defined their agenda and identity in terms agreed with the local Oromo and quitted the organisation, the Garri, the Gabra and the Mareexaan returnees changed the name of the organization into Oromo Abbo Liberation Front (OALF).<sup>43</sup> Claiming an Oromo identity was a way to legitimise their demand to be resettled into Oromo speaking country. The Borana identified this influx as a new organized attempt by the SALF to take over control of their territory. Conflict soon broke out both in *Dirree* and *Liiban*, before the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF — the core component of EPRDF) army entered the area.

In *Liiban* clashes occurred since June 1991 between Oromo groups and the Mareexaan who had managed to penetrate in large number, and from September 1991 between the Borana Oromo and Mareexaan.<sup>44</sup> In *Dirree* conflict first broke out in November 1991 between the Gabra Miigoo and Borana, after an attempt to open an OALF office in Yaaballoo. It resumed in early 1992 in Mooyyale district, between the Borana and the joined Gabra Miigoo/Garri forces.<sup>45</sup> According to Fecadu Adugna, at this stage the Digodia were not siding with the Somali, being not part of the SALF-returnees network and because of their clan affiliation in opposition to the Mareexaan in Somali politics. They have rather supported the Borana in checking the movements of the heavy armed and motorized ex-soldiers of Siad Barre that have been supporting both the Mareexaan and the Garri/Gabra Miigoo against the Borana.<sup>46</sup>

In the meanwhile the TPLF army arrived and arbitrated among conflicting parties, while simultaneously re-organizing the administrative set-up and building its local net of alliances. These

political dynamics can only be analysed in view of the OLF factor. At this crucial early stage, the Borana came to be identified as strong OLF supporter, despite the fact that this organisation was only active in this area during the short period of campaigning from 1991 to 1992, when it was part of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia. This impression was later exacerbated by the position of the Borana along the border with Kenya, in an area where one of the OLF military branches became active after 1992. Although I have implemented no research on the OLF, I can recall the opinion expressed in conversation by several Borana elders who were quite critical about the OLF decision to withdraw from the 1992 elections, a decision that exposed the youths, supporters and sympathizers to harsh State repression.

The 1992 OLF withdrawal from the district and regional elections, and its re-entrance into underground activities, had a negative impact on the relation between the Borana and the TPLF-led government of Ethiopia. Clapham notes how the practice of self-determination of the new Federal Ethiopia “amounted only to the exercise of local government in alliance with the EPRDF”.<sup>47</sup> In Borana Zone the TPLF co-opted minority ethnic groups and clans that were previously in opposition to the Derg and have for long been competing with the Borana for pastoral resources, such as the Garri, the Gabra Miigoo, the Digodia and, until 1994, the Mareexaan. On the other hand, due to the alleged sympathy of the Borana for the OLF, the federal government lacked the trust to devolve political authority to Borana representatives. The 1992 candidates in Mooyyale were only Garri and Gabra representatives of the OALF. They obviously ‘won’ the elections.<sup>48</sup> I have no detailed information concerning the remaining districts, but Borana Zone is enumerated among the ‘unstable’ areas where the federal security forces have taken direct control, bypassing normal representative mechanisms.<sup>49</sup> Based on her research implemented in 2003, Lister suggests that even in those districts that had remained under the administration of Region 4 (Oromia) after 1994, where the Borana had been squeezed, the Gabra Miigoo have generally been well-treated by the EPRDF in order to create a counter-force to the Borana, and have benefited with increased numbers of political positions.<sup>50</sup> In 2004 the Gabra Miigoo were still representing the Borana in the

House of People's Representatives (the Federal Parliament) from Yaaballoo constituency, and members of other urban minorities of mixed ethnic background had mainly been empowered at zonal level. The 1995 and 2000 regional and federal elections, and the 2001 *wereda* and *kebele* elections were formally held, but implemented without any opposition, to the point that all political representatives and administrators were considered to be simply "appointed" by the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO) through an internal party's process.<sup>51</sup> Very a few Borana, with low educational background who had in the meanwhile affiliated with OPDO, had managed to get some political positions, mainly at the lower level of district (*wereda*). Some elders in the countryside were co-opted in the leadership positions of the *kebele* administrative structure, increasingly used to mobilize small militia groups to guard the territory against the low-scale cross-boarder military incursions of the OLF, and for routine food distribution.

Lack of political representation was a crucial element influencing decision making on cross-border movements of population, a factor that has later strongly affected the process of demarcation of new administrative boundaries. In 1992 the regions were re-organized according to the ethnic federalism introduced by the Transitional Charter. Region 4 and Region 5 were created, subdivided into zones and administrative districts (*wereda*). Borana Province, with the exclusion of Dooloo district inhabited by the Digodia and other Somali speaking minorities, was changed into Borana Zone of Oromia (Region 4), with the addition of Jamjam Province, a highland in the north inhabited by the agro-pastoral Guji-Oromo. The administrative centre was set in Nagelle Borana, that had previously served as centre of Borana Province. The Borana and Guji inhabited districts of Areero Province were also incorporated under Borana Zone.<sup>52</sup>

The Somali National Regional State (Region 5) was divided into nine administrative zones, but the formalisation of the internal demarcation was slow, especially along the border with Oromia. The south-western corner was called Liiban Zone, bordering Kenya to the South, Afder Zone to the east and Oromia Region to the north and west. In 1994 the TGE tried to solve the territorial dispute that had arose between Region 4 and Region 5. It emanated a declaration by

which eight *kebele* from Liiban District of Region 4 were transferred to Liiban Zone of Region 5. They formed Filtu district, in addition to Dooloo district.<sup>53</sup> Despite being just a small rural village, Filtu obtained the *de-facto* status of Zonal Administrative Center and grew with the support of the international cooperation. The zonal authorities formed their own militia. According to local sources and to several appeals presented by the Borana elders since 1996, this militia was used to further push the Somali territorial claim to Liiban district of Region 4. Armed clashes between the Borana and the Digodia occurred from 1997 to 2001, particularly in Qorati and Hadhessa *kebele*.

In the meanwhile the Garri had managed to resettle in large sectors of the Oromo speaking Mooyyale and Areeroo districts of Borana Zone in *Dirree*. From 1992 to 1994 the OALF leadership shifted from the Oromo to the Somali identity. By formal decision of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia, 11 *kebele* of Mooyyale district were annexed to Region 5. These included the *tulaa* wells and surrounding rangelands of Eel Lae and Eel Goof, crucial to Borana pastoralism. Seventeen *kebele*, including the entire town of Mooyyale, were instead confirmed under the administration of Region 4.<sup>54</sup> The Garri were allowed to form their own militia and, according to several written complaints made by the Oromo and by Liiban Jaldeessaa – at that time standing *abbaa gadaa arbora* of the Borana – the Garri super-imposed their own administration to seven *kebele* legally assigned to Region 4, including part of Mooyyale town, where they established the administrative headquarter for their new district. Similarly, they obtained the administration of the important pastoral area of Udat from Areero District of Region 4.

By 1994 the administrative configuration of Liiban Zone (Region 5) was thus emerging as divided into the three districts of Filtu, Dooloo and Mooyyale. Mooyyale town was formally under Region 4, but *de facto* divided into two, serving as administrative centre for both Mooyyale District of Borana Zone (Region 4) and Mooyyale District of Liiban Zone (Region 5). Several *kebele* legally under Region 4 were either controlled by the militia of Region 5 or under *the facto* double administration. According to several complaints filed by the Borana elders, the Oromo living in the

*kebele* administered by Region 5 were either displaced by conflict or have suffered serious abuse and were ultimately forced to leave.

By the time of the 1995 regional and federal elections the new configuration of the ethnic alliances and the position of the respective customary leadership were quite settled. In April 1992 the *abbaa gadaa arbooraa* of the Borana, Boruu Guyyoo Boruu, was assassinated just after attending a peace-making meeting arbitrated by the TPLF. This event produced a strong diffidence and distance between the customary leadership of the Borana and the EPRDF officials. In 1995 the Borana were excluded from institutional politics, had lost important seasonal rangelands in *Liiban* and crucial market-oriented permanent water and pasture resources in *Dirree*.

The Digodia and the Garri had fully re-aligned themselves with the Somali People Democratic Party (SPDP), a party highly coordinated with the EPRDF, standing in opposition to the secessionist political organisations of Region 5 since 1994. The Digodia were not part of the returnees SALF network, but have contiguous territory in Kenya and could move people cross-border. They obtained most political positions both at district level, in Dooloo and Filtu, and at zonal level, in Filtu (Region 5).<sup>55</sup> By 2004 their customary leaders appear to be fully incorporated into modern politics, a process facilitated by the official policy and constitutional and constitutional provision of Region 5.

The Garrii and their customary leaders had obtained full control of Mooyyale district of Region 5, and representation in the House of People's Representatives.

By 1995 the Maareexan seem to have fallen out of the EPRDF sympathy. In 1998 the pastoral component of the Maareexan gave up with the Somali territorial claim in Liiban District of Region 4, and recognized the Borana traditional system of resource managements. They slowly re-established themselves in pastoral life.<sup>56</sup>

The returned Gabra Miigoo retained their Oromo identity and aligned with the OPDO, the Oromo branch of the EPRDF. As mentioned, the Gabra pastoralists slowly re-built their relations with the Borana pastoralists by revitalizing their customary leadership and *yaa'a*.

In 2002 the boundaries of Borana Zone were again changed. It was divided into Borana Zone and Guji Zone, with Yaaballoo Borana and Nagelle respectively as administrative centres. Despite the naming, this division does not correspond with the territory of the two groups. The districts of Areero, Dirree, Taltallee, Yaaballoo, Mooyyale, mainly inhabited by the Borana, and Hagaramaram, Galaana, prevalently inhabited by the Guji, were included under Borana Zone, while Adoola, Oddo Shakkisoo, Uragaa, Booree, prevalently Guji, and Liiban, prevalently Borana, formed Guji Zone.

The inclusion of ‘Guji’ as name of one of the administrative zones was regarded as a corrective measure, that, according to several local observers, was facilitated by a progressive engagement of one of their *abbaa gadaa* with the OPDO. While most Borana interviewed in 2005 agreed that the recognition of the Guji at zonal level was a due act, many complained about the failure to consult civil society and the community at large about both its naming and boundary demarcation. It was feared that the proposed ethnically connoted but misleading names could provoke confusion and mistrust between these two communities that had managed to build very peaceful relations since the fall of the socialist government.

### ***The territorial complaints of the Borana***

The entire Liiban Zone of Region 5 was cut out of the customary territory of the Borana Oromo, without any consultation, while the Borana were politically not represented in formal institutions. Out of the three districts of the newly established Zone, only Dooloo was not used any longer by the Borana herders. This administrative reshaping would not be problematic in terms of human and territorial rights, had the Borana been allowed to continue to live in the area, to access and use their customary pastures and water resources. As mentioned by Hagmann and Mulugeta, ‘pastoralists mostly interpreted ethnically defined administration as the exclusive rule by a dominant group within a given home territory’.<sup>57</sup> My field interviews with Borana customary leaders, informed elders and with *abbaa eelaa* (‘father of the well’) of Eel Goof, recorded in 2005, confirm that the Borana were displaced from the area under the administrative or military control of Region 5. Until

2005 the Borana, including the owners of the wells, were actively prevented to enter these areas, either as individuals or herders, by the militia, the police and the Ethiopian army. In term of current international law the displaced communities should be regarded as Internally Displaced Persons, having been both displaced and deprived of their property, not only houses but, especially, the wells on which investment was made over generations, and the rangelands, a key asset for their own livelihoods and for the Borana pastoral system.<sup>58</sup> They have of course been hosted by the neighbouring Borana community, but at a high environmental and economic collective cost.

Not only had the Borana community at large lost their eastern territory and squeezed with their herds in the remaining part, but more and more land in their wetter areas, especially in town outskirts and bottom valleys, was allocated for farming by the local administrators and by the leaders of the *kebele*. Being the Borana politically under-represented, the main beneficiaries of this process of internal allocation and individualisation of commons were non-Borana urban minorities or few Borana individuals affiliated to the OPDO.

Under this double external and internal pressure on the water and grazing resources, the pastoral system of the Borana became more and more unviable, exacerbating the state of permanent dependency on food distribution.<sup>59</sup>

The Borana community and customary leaders have constantly appealed against their territorial loss and the abuse of human rights to various governmental officers at federal, regional and zonal levels, either in written form or orally on occasions of important customary events attended by the highest regional and federal authorities, as well as during international gatherings.<sup>60</sup>

### ***The 2004 referendum***

The border issue between Region 4 and Region 5 was dealt by the Office of the Prime Minister until June 2000, when it was presented to the House of People's Representatives in accordance with art. 48 of the Ethiopian Constitution. A total of 770 *kebele* were still contested, 615 claimed by Region 5 and 155 by Region 4. The House of People's Representatives nominated a Committee of nine members to collect documentation and to discuss with the administrators of the contending regional



States, but not decision was reached. The issue was re-addressed to the two regions for a consensual solution. This new attempt was coordinated by the Ministry of Federal Affairs. In August 2004 a political solution was found for 287 *kebele*. Among the 484 pending *kebele*, 150 were claimed by Region 4 and 334 by Region 5. The contention between the two regions was again presented to the House of People's Representatives that decided for a referendum and formed the electoral board and the Regional Sub-permanent committees. After a more careful screening, the councils of the two regions agreed to reduce the number of disputed *kebele* to 463. The pre-conditions for the referendum were agreed, including disarmament of militia, stopping distribution of identity cards, stopping resettlement and the construction of new buildings for new settlers. A National Committee was established for its implementation, with members from the Ministry of Federal Affairs, regions, zones and districts. The responsibility for the ballot was entrusted to the National Electoral Board.<sup>61</sup>

The pre-referendum period was extremely tense in Borana and Guji zones. This is the first time the customary leadership of the Borana got directly involved in electoral politics. The *abbaa gadaa arboora* Liiban Jaldessaa led delegations, negotiated with governmental officers, and campaigned. In a formal letter he complained about the process of unjust administrative demarcation in *Liiban* and *Dirree*, the migration of Kenyan and Somali residents into Oromo-land in Ethiopia, the partisan behavior of the Ethiopian army, the imposition of Region 5 administration in *kebele* legally allocated to Region 4 in 1994, the abuse of the customary grazing rights, the forced displacement of the Oromo on occasion of the elections held in 2000, the protracted abuse of human rights, including illegal detention, disappeared persons and violence on women. Other complaints and appeals were filed by the Internally Displaced Persons themselves, community members and elders. They clarified the legal concerns of the Borana in relation to the referendum, and provided supporting documentation. A first complaint regards the partitioning of the *kebele* for the referendum during the process of preparation above described. In Mooyyale district, Eel Gof, Bede and Buladi *kebele* were subdivided in way to demarcate sub-areas where the Garri settlers had come

to constitute the majority since the change of government. The same occurred in Hadheessa *kebele* in Liiban District (Region 4). Hadhessa *kebele* used to include the excellent rangelands of Walenso, an area where the Derg government established a ranch during the socialist time by signing agreements with the local Borana community. During the recent Borana - Digodia conflict, the Digodia established a settlement and the Borana were displaced from a portion of Welenso locality. This portion was demarcated as an independent *kebele* during the process of preparation of the referendum.

The registration of voters has been a second major cause of mistrust and conflict. The Borana have complained about the influx of numerous Somali in Walenso just before the referendum, and the practice by the Somali of holding several identity cards in order to be simultaneously registered in different *kebele* for the ballot. On their hand, the Oromo made several attempts to return to the areas they were displaced from, particularly to the partitioned *kebele* after they knew about the new demarcation. However, the referendum regulations were locally applied by allowing registration only to individuals who have been residing in the *kebele* during the last 5 years. The Borana had been displaced in the early 90s from several *kebele*, but could still have claims to some *kebele* close to Mooyyale town, where they were displaced on occasion of the 2000 elections. Their return was anyway prevented, perhaps in observance of the just approved pre-conditions for the referendum, stopping distribution of identity cards. By effect of these regulations, returning home had become 'an illegal act', something that was perceived as highly frustrating by the Oromo. Tension grew very high in Mooyyale district. Several Oromo officers were arrested. In addition, killings and other acts of violence took place in Mooyyale town against the urban population of mixed ethnic background that in the meanwhile had apparently manifested the intention to vote for Oromia.

The ballot was formally postponed in the entire Mooyyale district, including the town itself, for 'disagreement about registration of migrant' and other issues. Despite the pessimistic expectations, the ballot was peacefully held in Liiban and Arero/Udet districts on October 14, 1997.

In October 2004 the House of People's Representatives approved the Report by the National Electoral Board. At national scale, the registration of voters was halted in 39 *kebele*. The ballot was successfully completed in the remaining 424. In two of them the ballot was declared illegal for procedural problems. 323 *kebele* were assigned to Region 4 and 99 to Region 5.<sup>62</sup>

This result may appear an overwhelming victory by the Oromo, but the deeper analysis in Borana and Guji zones reveals a different reality. In the first place the Oromo-Borana could not even claim areas where they were present before 1992 and from which they were definitively displaced from 1994, such as the pastures in eastern *Liiban*, and their crucial permanent pastoral resources of Udat, Eel Laee and Dhokisuu. This decision was probably taken by the concerned officers because the Oromo were not inhabiting those areas any longer. From 1992 to 2004 the Somali and Garri politicians have exploited their privileged relationship with the Federal Government to manipulate refugees policies. They have established new settlements within the Oromo territory and have been put in position to control trans-boundary migration. The partitioning of the *kebele* for the sake of the referendum allowed the demarcation of small spaces where Somali or Garri constituted the majority. Indeed Adugna notes that several of the claimed *kebele* in Liiban (Region 4) were actually pockets in Oromoland, sharing no boundaries with Region 5 or even small section of Nagelle town, where the demobilized soldiers of Siad Barre and other 'returnees' were settled.<sup>63</sup> Even during the 90s, Region 5 was administering returnees' camps as islands within Region 4, as in the case of Udat locality, a pocket within Areero district.

Thus, although the official results of the referendum in Liiban district reports 16 *kebele* won by Oromia and only three by Somali Region, the actual outcome is a loss of the important grazing area of Walenso *kebele*, the establishment of the Somali administration inside Region 4 in the small refugee camp of Haro Mareexaan adjacent Nagelle town, Goofa-ambo, and the consolidation of the territory earlier annexed to Filtu district, not contended at all by referendum. In Mooyyale district the postponement of the referendum in 9 *kebele* implies the continuation of the double administration in the administrative divisions that in 1994 were legally assigned to Region 4, and

the perpetuation of the displacements of the Borana from the areas assigned to Region 5 in 1994. In Areero/Udat district all the 4 contended *kebele* were won by Region 4, but the remaining part that was administered by Region 5, including the traditional Borana wells of Udat, are consolidated in that status.

The referendum itself was considered by most Oromo as a legal device to consolidate the demographic unbalance achieved in the year 2000, after the first wave of displacement of the Oromo communities. Two factors may have contributed to the promulgation of unfair regulations for the referendum and the inherent decision making, having no provision for the return of the Oromo displaced persons. The first is the political under-representation of the Oromo-Borana at all administrative levels. The second is the leading role by the Ministry of Federal Affairs in all negotiations and committees. This institution followed on the Regional Affairs in the Office of Prime Minister in a program of support to good governance to peripheral pastoral Regional States lacking the necessary experience, including the Somali Regional State but excluding Oromia. This support was specifically provided in the political sector to develop the administrative structures.<sup>64</sup> By this link not only the negotiator or arbitrator had a systematic and long-standing working relation and trust with only one of the contending parties, but the program could also locally be used for mobilization in view of the referendum.

In absence of specific data the results of this brief analysis cannot be generalized to the other parts of the contended border between the two regional states. Before the referendum most observers were worried about tension and episodes of violence especially occurred in this southern sector of the administrative border, but cruel and protracted episodes of ethnic cleansing actually took place after the ballot in several localities in the remaining portions of the border, reported both in national and international media.

### **The 2005 elections**

The attitude of the Borana majority in the post 1991 elections is perfectly expressed by the concept of political apathy formulated by the Norwegian school, consisting in a total lack of enthusiasm,

participation and ritual inclusiveness in the election, later defined 'as an expression of a form of popular resistance towards the non competitive election and the derailed democratisation process'.<sup>65</sup> Indeed after the OLF withdrew from the 1992 elections, the repression of the OLF candidates, supporters and sympathizers, and due to protracted abuse of human rights against both pastoralists and students in towns, the Borana did not take any active role in electoral processes. They have carefully avoided taking any public stand, simply watching the political developments.

However by 2005 the severe territorial threat posed by the referendum had raised the level of attention and awareness for national-related electoral politics: had the Borana and their customary leaders not mobilized for the referendum, they would have legally lost the largest part of their territory. The 2004 full mobilisation for the referendum had an immediate follow up in the 2005 elections. The pre-electoral political debates disseminated through radio and television, and the space given to the opposition parties in newspapers, had created the diffused sensation that this time some degree of effective competition may have developed. The registration of candidates of the opposition was very slow in Guji and Borana zones, but when I was in the field at the end of January 2005 there was a clear expectation that party representatives may soon arrive, recruit candidates and eventually win the elections, a clear sign of perception of an improved democratic process. The general atmosphere was turning from total apathy to a distant but interested follow up. The most influential and prestigious individuals were still keeping themselves out of the competition and of any active political involvement, but there was also a progressive engagement by few individuals with both the OPDO and with some of the opposition parties.

The feeling of an existing competition was equally perceived in the rural areas, where intensive campaigning by the OPDO took place. Elders were aware about the adoption of a double standard strategy by the OPDO. In official meetings officers used to explain the procedures and the democratic guarantees, assuring free and fair right to associate, campaign and compete, with good procedural standards for vote registration and at the ballot. This official position was in tune with the message disseminated through the media. But, as it was also reported from other parts of

Oromia, informally the *kebele* structure was intensively utilized to threaten the rural population.<sup>66</sup> The *kebele* officers explicitly warned the villagers about the intention by the OPDO to apply measures of “revenge” (*haaloo*) in those rural divisions where the vote would have resulted in favour of the opposition parties. The type of revenge was not spelt out, but based on previous experiences the rural communities were aware that the ‘revenge’ would have manifested in unfair food distribution. In the past individuals openly supporting the OPDO had been receiving more food, while no-sympathizers were discriminated. In the pre-electoral phase food was already received in the two zones and stored, ready for distribution. It was now feared that the discriminatory practice would have escalated from the individual to the collective level, with retaliations against the areas corresponding to a certain polling station, whose results could easily be monitored by the OPDO officers. This threat was obviously perceived as being very effective, having the Borana been forced into heavy food-dependency since 1992. The second perceived area of potential discrimination was access to rewarded jobs in development. In the past job opportunities were assigned to OPDO sympathizers. This shift from a generic favouritism for political sympathizers to a more specific mechanism of “food for vote”<sup>67</sup> or “job for vote” is probably related to the widespread feeling, even among the OPDO officers, that this time an actual competitive process was ongoing. The opposition parties actually arrived, but did not manage to register candidates in all constituencies. They were anyhow allowed to organize themselves and campaign.

### ***The involvement of the customary leaders in the campaign***

Several local observers have reported an attempt by the OPDO to involve the customary leadership of the various Oromo groups in the campaign. In the pre-electoral period rumours were circulating about the occurrence of informal meetings between some customary leaders and certain OPDO officers. The perspectives of cooption ranged from the establishment of a formal mechanism of involvement of customary leadership similar to that of the Somali Region, to the possibility of including the top customary leaders of the Borana, Guji and Gabra in the district councils.

Evidently this last solution implied the possibility for OPDO to candidate the three major leaders at

the forthcoming district elections with the OPDO, while demanding their open support during the present campaign. This option appeared feasible concerning the top leaders of the Gabra and one *abbaa gadaa* of the Guji, both considered very close to one or the other OPDO officer. The issue was much more controversial concerning the *abbaa gadaa arboora* of the Borana, whose relation with the governmental structure had been mirroring the position of the Borana majority: observing from a distance. Of course the recent experience of the referendum had strengthened some personal links with governmental officers. But the 2005 political elections were a different matter. Whatever negotiation took place, the *abbaa gadaa* of the Borana never gave open support to any of the competing political parties, formally maintaining a “non alignment” position. Differently from the customary leaders of other Oromo groups, they did not attend the OPDO campaigning events. As a result no formal mechanism of cooption took place, although rumours of informal alliances have continued to circulate and have probably negatively influenced the post-electoral intra-Oromo conflict.

### ***The results of the ballot***

The ballot was regularly held on May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2005<sup>68</sup>. It was peaceful, but complaints were raised about the absence of opposition or even independent observers at the polling stations. According to several urban elders the observers were simply nominated by the district officers and by the leaders of the *kebele*, hence by the OPDO.

The results of the ballot disclose a clear pattern. In all the constituencies where the Oromo National Congress (ONC) component of the United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF), locally known as *Obko*, or the OFDM (Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement) managed to register candidates, these either won or seriously challenged the EPRDF (OPDO) candidate. In Borana Zone they won 3 parliamentary seats and only lost in Kercha by a 4% difference. Serious anomalies were reported in this constituency that was initially attributed to the UEDF candidate and later changed to the OPDO candidate. This constituency, previously under Hagaramaram district, was raised to the administrative statute of district. In Guji Zone members of the ONC/UEDF and OFDM only

managed to register in two constituencies. They won in Bore and lost in Kibre Mengist by a 7% difference. Kibre Mengist ballot was also contested and included in the official list of constituencies for NEBE investigation. Conversely, the CUD (Coalition for Unity and Democracy) candidates never went above 17%, and stayed below 10% (often below 4%) where UEDF or OFDM opposition members were also competing.

Both the ONC and the OFDM promote a federal model of Ethiopia and support the principle of self-determination as defined in the Constitution of the FDRE, only criticizing the way federalism has been implemented by the EPRDF. The CUD expresses a more centralistic ideology and is highly critical of the principle of self-determination. Despite the threat of unfair food distribution, voters have therefore expressed a clear choice in favor of the Ethiopian Federal Constitution. Contrary to most media interpretations disseminated after the elections, the results from Guji and Borana zones show that an ideologically grounded federal choice has overrun the logic of ‘opposition at all costs’.

The capacity to express a clear preference based on the parties’ ideology and program may be taken to imply that that the EPRDF legitimately won the competition in large sectors of the Ethiopian countryside. However in Borana and Guji zones this happened mainly in constituencies where other federalist candidates failed to register, in addition to the more fundamental problem of the exclusion of the OLF from the electoral process.

### ***Pre and post-electoral ethnic violence***

In Guji and Borana zone ethnic conflict was high along the Oromo / Somali divide until the 2004 referendum. The 2005 national elections bring in a new dimension: intense intra-Oromo violence among groups that were previously very peaceful to one another. The serious armed clashes between the Borana and Guji from May to June 2006 originated as a Guji – Gabra Miigoo conflict before the elections. In early August 2005 I have interviewed governmental officers, elders, customary leaders involved in the negotiations, professionals who lead a peace workshop, intellectuals and foreigner observers. Already in 2004 the Gabra Miigoo are said to have submitted



a request for demarcating a district in their name, formed by 4 *kebele* in Yaaballoo District and 1 in Areero District, where they had settled after 1991. This is an east-west strip along the area where Borana and Guji have for long been interacting. Mistrust between Gabra and Guji grew on occasion of the referendum, the Guji having accused the Gabra Miigoo of failing to provide the expected support in Madari *kebele*, contested by Region 5. A number of cruel episodes of reciprocal killings, including murdering of elders and women in their own house, and low scale cattle raiding took place afterwards, in a protracted state of low intensity warfare. All actors and observers I managed to interview agreed that the underlying factor was competition over pastoral resources, but they differ about the specific dynamics. Several identify a latent factor of reciprocal mistrust for the chance by each primary group to connect to national politics and to the leading party in particular, thus gaining advantage in the process of demarcation of administrative boundaries within regional states. Attempts to negotiate peace agreements took place with the involvement of the customary leaders of the three groups, but they failed. Most observers attribute failure to the arrogance of the Gabra Miigoo in the pre-electoral phase. According to some accounts, tension further raised after a senior OPDO leader campaigned in the area, due to rumours about a commitment by the OPDO to form the mentioned Gabra district in case of victory. At the beginning of April 2005 a large scale raiding party formed by Guji attacked the Gabra in Surupa and surrounding villages. In this episode alone more than 35 Gabra were killed. Later the conflict extended to Finchawa, Gallaba and some *kebele* in Areero district. Although a large amount of stock was looted, this attack does not fit the normal pattern of pastoral raiding, being implemented against a small town, and having involved a large number of coordinated fighters with the deliberate intention to kill women and children and to burn houses, as it had already happened along the Oromo/Somali divide after the 2004 referendum. These acts are alien to customary stock raiding, whose symbolism is rather connected to manhood and bravery. The focus on the reproductive capacity of the target group (woman and children) and on the symbol of permanent association with land (house) rather recalls the idea of ethnocide and ethnic cleansing, perhaps for the first time

enhanced in intra-Oromo conflict. Indeed UNOCHA reported 43,000 displaced persons from Yaaballoo to Hagaramaram and Areero districts as a result of this warfare.

In the meantime a new line of conflict had emerged in Kenya and cross-boundary between the Borana and the Gabra Malbee, two groups that had never engaged in armed conflict of any relevance in recorded history, and previously deeply connected by ritual inter-dependence. For some time the Gabra Malbee had unusually been engaging in a number of episodes of violence with the Borana and the other neighbours in Kenya. Several incidents were also recorded around Forole, at the border with Ethiopia. In one raid the Gabra killed 7 persons, including three children. The Borana community living there was displaced and hosted around Magaadoo, in Ethiopia. A Borana chief was also assassinated in Sololo, a Kenyan small town close to border. As it often happens in these types of ethnic conflicts, large scale raids occurs after a number of low scale killings, cattle rustling, retaliations and counter retaliations, especially if no measure is taken to keep escalation under control. On July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2005, hundreds of armed Borana raiders attacked Turbi, a small Kenyan town between Marsabit and Sololo, mainly inhabited by Gabra. The style recalls the Surupa attack, but it was even more brutal. Some 70 people were killed, including 22 children. This horrible episode was fully reported by Kenyan and international media.<sup>69</sup> On the same day (accounts differs on the temporal relation between these two events), a school bus with Borana children and young boys going to a Catholic seminar was ambushed and the occupants cruelly executed.

When asked about the Surupa episode, all the Borana I spoke to have expressed their deep concern, especially because the two groups had been so peaceful and ritually interrelated. Many complained about the recent and unusual aggressive attitude of the Gabra Malbee. More and more people in Ethiopia were talking about an emerging collaboration between the political elite of the Gabra Malbee in Kenya and the Gabra Miigoo in Ethiopia. While for the Gabra this strengthened inter-relation is simply a process of building a common identity across the Migoo -Malbee divide, the Borana and the Guji were highly scared, given the recent experience of displacement with the

Somali and Garri as a result of planned cross-boundary migration. This fear was exacerbated by the rumours that some Gabra were holding two identity cards, one from Kenyan and one from Ethiopian. In addition, mistrust about the older history of alignment of the Gabra Miigoo with the Somali was still there.

In early August 2005 the situation was pervaded by contradictory and transitional signs, perhaps connected to a weaker position of the Gabra within the OPDO. The possibility for the Gabra to build in Ethiopia an exclusive administrative space, demographically sustained from Kenya, seems to have scared the Guji more than the Borana. The Borana were still in conflict with the Gabra Malbee in Kenya, but they were rather supportive of the Gabra Miigoo in Ethiopia. In this post-electoral phase the Gabra Miigoo acknowledged that they were in the over-all customary territory of the Borana, but they refer to the fact that they have always enjoyed grazing rights with the Borana to sustain their claim in opposition to the Guji.

The Guji had tackled the problem of intensification of agriculture in their core territory by moving herds into the large zone of interaction with the Borana and the Gabra Miigoo. In 2005 the Guji were feeling uneasy about the idea of having a Gabra buffer zone between them and the Borana and were especially complaining about the Gabra claim of Tula Wayyu *kebele* in Areero district, strongly regarded as their own.

In the post-electoral period Hiddo Galgallo, *abbaa gadaa kontooma* of the Hawattu clan, Borana, chaired the negotiations between the Guji and Gabra, working in close cooperation with the government. The Borana customary leadership asserted their over-all responsibility by declaring to both sides that any attack between Oromo in their territory would be considered as an attack on the Borana themselves.

The third stage is the outbreak of a direct and devastating conflict between the Borana, supported by the Gabra, and the Guji, in the same contested area. Heavy fighting, with modern logistic support, took place for a couple of weeks from May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2006, and continued later at lower intensity. This conflict strikes for its unusual brutality: 100 – 150 casualties were reported by the

humanitarian organizations, with unnecessary violence and mutilations against women and children belonging of both rural and urban population. About 24,000 persons were displaced.<sup>70</sup> Again, State politics is called as a major factor besides mere competition over pastoral resources. An Irin article reports the demand by the Guji to the government of land belonging to the Borana, and an anonymous report by a UN observer states that the conflict started after the entrance of nearly 90 Guji families into the grazing reserves of the Borana, with no regards to customary pastoral rules.<sup>71</sup> Those families were apparently allowed to do so by their governmental officers, with confirmation by their customary leader. When I managed to go back to the area in July 2006, I realised that rumours about the establishment of a new Zone of the Guji cut out from Borana Zone and including some core Borana areas had circulated. Most non-governmental observers were also concerned about the passive role of the army during this protracted heavy conflict.

At the beginning of 2007 tension was still high when Jaldessa Borbor, *abbaa gadaa kontooma* of the Konitu clan, Borana, was reported having been assassinated by a Guji man who had surprisingly been released from detention after a previous case of murdering.

### **A plea for a rights-based approach**

Each episode of ethnic violence in federal Ethiopia needs to be understood within its specific context. It is nevertheless possible to suggest that they are all in a way or another linked to processes of transformation and manipulation of formal policies and constitutional principles. The understanding of this gap between constitutional theory and political practice – already addressed in a recent study of the Ethiopian ethnic federalism edited by David Turton<sup>72</sup> – can be refined by keeping into account two factors simultaneously operating, though in different ways. The first is the strategic objectives of the political centre. In the region considered in this article it is the need to check the OLF. These objectives are often unstated, especially when they obviously clash with the normative model. The second is rooted in local history and it mainly operates at local level. It consists of perceptions of group affiliation and belonging, hence political identity, and competition over resources. In the case here considered it is land competition among the pastoral and agro-

pastoral primary groups. The combined effects of these factors on formal policies are rather unpredictable, but, I argue, the field of human rights has today developed a range of guidelines that, if properly applied, would prevent the destructive outcomes described in this article.

In 2002 Clapham defined the ‘the new politics of space’ in Ethiopia as the macro-process of demarcation of regions and other administrative boundaries, locally perceived as exclusive ethnic spaces.<sup>73</sup> We have seen this principle producing conflict between the Oromo and the Somali on occasion of the referendum. In the border region of the Borana we have identified an additional element, the manipulation of refugees policies, international aid and cross-boundary migration, to the point that we could speak of a ‘demographic politics of space’, defined as the planned attempt to gain control over land by means of forced or voluntary migration or by any demographic strategy. Knowingly or unknowingly, the new regional demarcation of Borana and Guji zones, the displacement of Borana population and the referendum held soon after have produced a permanent demographic change strongly recalling the policy of ethnic cleansing as defined by Petrovic with reference to the Bosnia and Herzegovina case.<sup>74</sup>

Political culture is a combination of values, practice and experience. Political events acquire a symbolic meaning and are interiorised by the actors. The post-1992 Oromo/Somali experience in Guji and Borana zones has introduced new ways to define the association of land and people, people and administrative space, alternative to the historical and customary one: individuals, communities and elites have learned from experience about both to opportunities and threats of the demographic politics of space. The experience with the regional boundary was transferred to the process of zones and districts demarcation within Oromia, this time producing the most destructive intra-Oromo conflict. This process shows some analogies with the proliferation of localized conflict recorded by Vaughan and Tronvoll in the ethnically diverse Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region. In Guji and Borana zones too the relatively educated and urbanized elites have learned that an elevation of administrative status brings enhanced budget provisions and economical opportunities, but here conflict was articulated at level of primary identities and it occurred at a

scale and with a type of intra-ethnic violence never seen before. In this area the differentiation proposed by Vaughan and Tronvoll between settled communities, mainly interested in State budget, and pastoralists, competing over grazing and water resources, is not helpful.<sup>75</sup> Here the most destructive outcomes take place when the two components, urban political elites and pastoralists, converge on common opportunistic objectives, or defensively react against those attempts, often fuelled by mistrust and rumours. In this renovated political environment primary groups are not directly competing for the State resources, as in the famous proposition by John Markakis, but rather enter into conflict because of the failed regulatory mechanisms of the State. One dimension is the demarcation of administrative space and the inherent budget, the other is the capacity to influence the demographic balance and the allocation of basic natural resources, including land, grazing and water. The real question is why the administrative structure has the all-pervasive capacity to create an 'exclusive' ethnic space. The answer sounds quite obvious: systemic abuse of human rights. Perhaps no other case better illustrates the need to consider all human rights as a single interrelated package. Various scholars have already exposed the problems concerning civil and political rights in this area. Freedom of speech and opinion, and the necessity to effectively open the democratic competition to all components are the priorities. Human rights of second generation, are the second key component, since development is politically manipulated and food dependency has emerged as the most serious constraint to a free political choice. But development has no chance in the current situation of conflict and without an accountable and responsive political environment. The construction of exclusive ethnic spaces, so dangerously close to the policy and practice of ethnic cleansing, runs opposite to the customary practices of the pastoralists, and to their regulated mechanisms of resource sharing. Collective tenure, customary and territorial rights, customary law, governance and leadership are part of the so-called human rights of third generation, or collective rights, protected under a number of instruments of international law on indigenous and tribal peoples. In the study area during the last 15 years of conflict the pastoralists

have constantly tried to rebuild links across both primary and national groups, besides and sometimes against the initiatives and choices of the political engineers of their own ethnic groups.

The political environment of this southern part of Ethiopia is dynamic, but it is unfortunately getting more and more unstable and insecure. A new awareness by all actors is highly required to promote the construction of open and transparent political process and more inclusive democratic practices. Internationally speaking, the explicit adoption of a rights-based approach to development, with a strong emphasis on third generation human rights, is the priority. The application of the available international instruments on collective rights may help to protect the customary space from the negative influence of a poorly articulated State's presence, and institutionalise the relation between the State and the customary dimensions of governance beyond opportunistic cooption. In absence of these corrective measures, instruments that may appear the right solution according to mainstream Western practice and political theory – such as referendum and elections –, or attempts to by-pass shortcomings by means of participatory or direct democracy, and a standard approach to development are locally turned into means of abuse that generate a negative chain of unpredictable reactions and counter-reactions.

## References

- Adugna, F. "Inter-Ethnic Relations between the Oromo and Somali: The Case of Borana, Digodia and Maarehan." Master Thesis, Dept. of Social Anthropology, Addis Ababa University, 2004.
- Agrotec. "Southern Rangelands Development Project, Vol 2, Sociology and Pastoral Economy." Agrotec for Livestock and Meat Board, Rome, 1974.
- Bassi, M. *Decisions in the Shade: Political and Juridical Processes among the Oromo-Borana*. Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Press, 2005.
- . "Returnees in Mooyyale District, Southern Ethiopia: New Means for an Old Inter-Ethnic Game." In *Pastoralism, Ethnicity and the State in Ethiopia*, ed. R. Hogg, 23-54. London: Haan, 1997.
- Bassi, M. and G. Megerssa. "Failed Modernization of the Ethiopian State: Oromo Perspectives on Ethiopian Political Culture." *The Journal of Oromo Studies* XV, no. 1 (2008): 79-112.
- Baxter, P. "Boran Age-sets and Generation-Sets: Gada a Puzzle or a Maze?" In *Age, Generation and Time: Some Features of East African Age Organisations*, ed. P.T.W. Baxter and U. Almagor, 151-82. London: C. Hurst, 1978.
- Bizuneh, B. "Inter-ethnic Relations in Borana (Southern Ethiopia): A Historical Survey to 1943." Master Thesis, Dept. of History, Addis Ababa University, 1999.
- Bruchhaus, E.-M. and M.M. Sommer, eds. *Hot Spot Horn of Africa Revisited: Approaches to Make Sense of Conflict*. Münster: Lit, 2008.
- Clapham, C. "Controlling Space in Ethiopia." In *Remapping Ethiopia: Socialism & After*, ed. W. James, D.L. Donham, E. Kurimoto and A. Triulzi, 9-32. Oxford: James Currey, 2002.
- Donham, D.L. "Old Abyssinia and the New Ethiopian Empire: Themes in Social History." In *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia: Essays in History and Social Anthropology*, ed. D.L. Donham and W. James, 3-48. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University press, 1986.
- Farah, A.Y. "The Plight & Prospects of Ethiopia's Lowland Pastoral Groups." In *In Search of Cool Ground*, ed. T. Allen, 124-42. London: James Currey, 1996.
- FDRE. *Statement on Pastoral Development Policy*. Addis Ababa: Ministry of Federal Affairs, 2002.
- Fiseha, A. *Federalism and the Accommodation of Diversity in Ethiopia: A Comparative Study*. Nijmegen: Wolf Legal, 2007.
- . "Theory versus practice in the Implementation of the Federal System in Ethiopia." In *Ethnic federalism: the Ethiopian experience in comparative perspective*, ed. D. Turton, 131-64. Oxford: James Currey, 2006.
- Galaty, J.G. "The Land is Yours: Social and Economic Factors in the Privatization, Sub-division and Sale of Maasai ranches." *Nomadic Peoples*, no. 30 (1992): 26-40.
- Haberland, E. *Galla Südäthiopiens*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1963.
- Hagmann, T. "Beyond Clannishness and Colonialism: Understanding Political Disorder in Ethiopia's Somali Region, 1991-2004." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 43, no. 04 (2005): 509-36.
- . "Bringing the Sultan Back In: Elders as Peacemakers in Ethiopia's Somali Region." In *State Recognition and Democratization in Sub-Saharan Africa: A New Dawn for Traditional Authorities?*, ed. L. Buur and H.M. Kyed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Hagmann, T. and A. Mulugeta. "Pastoral Conflicts and State-Building in the Ethiopian Lowlands." *Afrika Spectrum* 43, no. 1 (2008): 19-37.
- Hinnant, J. "The Guji: Gada as a Ritual System?" In *Age, Generation and Time: Some Features of East African Age Organisations*, ed. P.T.W. Baxter and U. Almagor, 207-44. London: C. Hurst, 1978.



- HRW. "Suppressing Dissent Human Rights Abuses and Political Repression in Ethiopia's Oromia Region." Human Rights Watch, May 2005, Vol. 17, No. 7, New York, 2005.
- Hukka. "The 37th Gumii Gaayo Assembly: Gada, The Oromo Traditional, Economic and Socio-Political System." Norwegian Church Aid, Addis Ababa, 1997.
- Kassa, G. "The Displacement & Return of Pastoralists in Southern Ethiopia. A Case Study of the Garri." In *In Search of Cool Ground*, ed. T. Allen, 111-23. London: James Currey, 1996.
- . "A Short History of the Garri up to 1941." Masters Thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1983.
- Kassam, A. "The People of the Five 'Drums': Gabra Ethnohistorical Origins." *Ethnohistory* 53, no. 1 (2006): 173-94.
- Kefale, A. "Federalism: Some Trends of Ethnic Conflicts and their Management in Ethiopia." In *The Quest for Peace in Africa. Transformations, Democracy and Public Policy* ed. A.G. Nhema, 51-72. Addis Ababa: OSSREA, 2004.
- Kelemework, T. *Indigenous Institutions of Conflict Resolution among the Ab'ala Afar of North-Eastern Ethiopia*, Social Anthropology Dissertation Series. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University, 2006.
- Lata, L. *The Ethiopian state at the crossroads : decolonization and democratization or disintegration?* Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1999.
- Legesse, A. *Gada: Three Approaches to the Study of African Society*. New York: Free Press, 1973.
- Lewis, I.M. "Pan Africanism and Pan Somalism." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 1, no. 2 (1963): 147-61.
- . "The Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) and the Legacy of Sheikh Hussein of Bale." In *Modern Ethiopia*, ed. J. Tubiana, 409-15. Rotterdam: Balkema, 1980.
- Lister, S. "The Processes and Dynamics of Pastoralists Representation in Ethiopia." Institute of Development Studies, IDS Working Paper N. 220, Brighton, 2004.
- Markakis, J. "Anatomy of a Conflict: Afar & Ise Ethiopia." *Review of African Political Economy* 30, no. 97 (2003): 445-53.
- Oba, G. "Assessment of Indigenous Range Management Knowledge of the Booran Pastoralists of Southern Ethiopia. Part 1." Booran Lowlands Pastoral Development Program, GTZ, Nagelle Borana, 1998.
- OPDC. "Three Years Strategic Plan (Draft). (2003/4 – 2006/7)." Oromia Pastoral Development Commission, Finfinne (Addis Ababa), 2003.
- Pausewang, S., K. Tronvoll, and L. Aalen, eds. *Ethiopia since the Derg: A Decade of Democratic Pretension and Performance*. London: Zed Books, 2002.
- Petrovic, D. "Ethnic Cleansing – An Attempt at Methodology." *European Journal of International Law* 5, no. 3 (1994): 342-59.
- RGE. "Oromia Rural Land Use & Land Administration Policy (First Draft)." Oromia Economic Study Project Office, 2002.
- Sbacchi, A. *Ethiopia under Mussolini: Fascism and the Colonial Experience*. London: Zed Books, 1985.
- Schlee, G. "Gada Systems on the Meta-Ethnic Level: Gabra/Boran/Garri Interactions in the Kenyan/Ethiopian Borderland." In *Conflict Age & power in North East Africa*, ed. E. Kurimoto and S. Simonse, 121- 46. Oxford: James Currey, 1998.
- Stidsen, S., ed. *The Indigenous World 2006*. Copenhagen: IWGIA, 2006.
- Tablino, P. *The Gabra: Camel Nomads of Northern Kenya*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1999.
- Tache, B. *Pastoralism under Stress: Resources, Institutions and Poverty among the Borana Oromo in Southern Ethiopia*. As: Noragric PhD Thesis, 2008.
- Tache, B. and B. Irwin. "Traditional Institutions, Multiple Stakeholders and Modern Perspectives in Common Property." *Securing the commons* 4, (2003).

- Torry, W. "Gabra Age Organisation and Ecology." In *Age, Generation and Time: Some Features of East African Age Organisations*, ed. P.T.W. Baxter and U. Almagor, 183-206. London: C. Hurst, 1978.
- Tronvoll, K. and Ø. Aadland. *The Process of Democratisation in Ethiopia: An Expression of Popular Participation or Political Resistance?* Oslo: Norwegian Institute of Human Rights, 1995.
- Tronvoll, K. and T. Hagmann, eds. *Contested Power: Traditional Authorities and Multiparty Elections in Ethiopia*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, forthcoming.
- Turton, D., ed. *Ethnic Federalism: the Ethiopian Experience in Comparative Perspective*. Oxford: James Currey, 2006.
- Vannutelli, L. and C. Citerni. *Seconda spedizione Bòttego. L'Omo, viaggio d'esplorazione nell'Africa orientale*. Milano: Ulrico Hoepli, 1899.
- Vaughen, S. and K. Tronvoll. *The Culture of Power in Contemporary Ethiopian Political Life*, Sida Studies, 2003.
- Waters-Bayer, A. "Local Level Socio-institutional Issues and Capacity Building in Pastoral Community Development." ETC Ecoculture for IFAD, 2003.
- Watson, E. "Inter Institutional Alliances and Conflict in Natural Resources Management. Preliminary Research Findings from Borana, Oromia Region, Ethiopia." Marena Research Project, DFID, Working Paper no. 4, 2001.

<sup>1</sup> Fiseha, *Federalism*, ch. 5; Hagmann and Mulugeta, "Pastoral conflicts"; Markakis, "Afar & Ise"; Bruchhaus and Sommer, *Hot Spot Horn Revisited*, part 2; Kefale, "Federalism".

<sup>2</sup> Most of the data on the referendum and the elections were collected during the research "Contested power: Negotiating 'traditional' authority in 'modern' elections in Ethiopia", coordinated by Kjetil Tronvoll for Norwegian Centre for Human Rights (NCHR), University of Oslo. This is a shortened version of a forthcoming chapter appearing in Tronvoll and Hagmann, *Contested Power*. This article does not address peace negotiations and further large scale ethnic clashes occurred in the region after 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Baxter, "Boran Age-Sets"; Legesse, *Gada*; Bassi, *Decisions in the Shade*.

<sup>4</sup> Bassi, *Decisions in the Shade*; Bassi and Megerssa, "Failed Modernization"; Donham, "Old Abyssinia", 44-5.

<sup>5</sup> Lata, *Ethiopian state*.

<sup>6</sup> Kelemework, *Indigenous Institutions*, 93-4; Lister, "Pastoralists Representation", 26; Vaughen and Tronvoll, *Culture of Power*, 39; Hagmann, "Elders as Peacemakers".

<sup>7</sup> Hagmann, "Beyond clannishness", 21-22.

<sup>8</sup> Waters-Bayer, "Local Level Issues", 2, 7.

<sup>9</sup> PCI progressively scaled up its activity, facilitating a number of regional gatherings of pastoralists.

<sup>10</sup> Watson, "Institutional Alliances", 15.

<sup>11</sup> Tache and Irwin, "Traditional institutions".

<sup>12</sup> Lister, "Pastoralists Representation", 13-4, 27-30.

<sup>13</sup> Stidsen, *Indigenous World*, 433-4.

<sup>14</sup> FDRE, *Pastoral Development Policy*; OPDC, "Three Years Strategic Plan"; RGE, "Oromia Rural Land Policy".

<sup>15</sup> These are two of the traditional regions inhabited or accessed by the Borana, their homelands. The same words are used to indicate administrative divisions, but with different geographical boundaries. In this article I use the italics to refer to the customary territorial units.

<sup>16</sup> Baxter, "Boran Age-Sets"; Legesse, *Gada*.

<sup>17</sup> Hinnant, "Boran Age-Sets".

<sup>18</sup> Torry, "Gabra Age Organisation"; Kassam, "Gabra Ethnohistorical Origins"; Schlee, "Meta-Ethnic"; Tablino, *Gabra*, 34.

<sup>19</sup> Kassam, "Gabra Ethnohistorical Origins". See also Tablino, *Gabra*. Elements of ritual coordination between the *gadaa* of the Gabra and that of the Borana are also reported in Schlee, "Meta-Ethnic".

<sup>20</sup> Bassi, "Returnees".

<sup>21</sup> Galaty, "The Land is Yours".

<sup>22</sup> Vannutelli and Citerni, *L'Omo*, 149.

<sup>23</sup> Duuba Dima, recorded interview, August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2005.

<sup>24</sup> Vannutelli and Citerni, *L'Omo*, 136-139. The text of the book is based on Bottego's hand notes. This information was probably gathered from the Somali translators, guides and guards accompanying the expedition.

- <sup>25</sup> In order to demonstrate that the presence of an old Somali tomb in Nagelle area does not constitute a legitimate territorial claim by the Somali, Borana elders have mentioned the presence of several relatively recent tombs of Borana elders deep inside the current Somali territory, in Lugh area.
- <sup>26</sup> Bizuneh, "Inter-Ethnic Relations", 38-40.
- <sup>27</sup> Haberland, *Galla*, 338; Kassa, "Short History", 39.
- <sup>28</sup> Bizuneh, "Inter-Ethnic Relations", 44-46.
- <sup>29</sup> Sbacchi, *Ethiopia under Mussolini*, 161.
- <sup>30</sup> Bizuneh, "Inter-Ethnic Relations", 49-74.
- <sup>31</sup> "Historical Evidences Against Somali Claims of Large Portions of Oromia with Particular Emphasis on Boorana Zone", Appeal by Boorana Oromo Elders in Finfinnee, 2001.
- <sup>32</sup> Bizuneh, "Inter-Ethnic Relations", 70-99.
- <sup>33</sup> Adugna, "Inter-Ethnic Relations", 75-7.
- <sup>34</sup> I recall here that the *balabat* were not the customary leaders of the Borana, but local elders appointed by the government in an imperial structure, without any mandate from and accountability to the community.
- <sup>35</sup> Agrotec, "Southern Rangelands", 75.
- <sup>36</sup> Lewis, "Pan Somalism"; Lewis, "WSLF".
- <sup>37</sup> Adugna, "Inter-Ethnic Relations", 79-91.
- <sup>38</sup> Kassa, "Return of Pastoralists", 115-6.
- <sup>39</sup> Strictly speaking *kebele* is an urban division, but in current language the term includes the peasant associations, the lowest rural administrative division. In this paper I will use *kebele* with this broader meaning.
- <sup>40</sup> Bassi, *Decisions in the Shade*, 1-12; 145-166.
- <sup>41</sup> Bassi, "Returnees", 34-42..
- <sup>42</sup> Kassa, "Return of Pastoralists", 122.
- <sup>43</sup> Adugna, "Inter-Ethnic Relations", 98-99, 104.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 99-104.
- <sup>45</sup> Bassi, "Returnees".
- <sup>46</sup> Adugna, "Inter-Ethnic Relations", 103-107, 124. About this group of armed refugees from Somalia see also Farah, "Plight & Prospects", 133-4; 138-9.
- <sup>47</sup> Clapham, "Controlling Space", 29.
- <sup>48</sup> Bassi, "Returnees", 42.
- <sup>49</sup> Vaughn and Tronvoll, *Culture of Power*, 134.
- <sup>50</sup> Lister, "Pastoralists Representation", 24.
- <sup>51</sup> The OPDO is one of the regional parties federated to the EPRDF.
- <sup>52</sup> Borana Zone was thus subdivided into 12 administrative districts: Adoola, Oddo Shakkisoo, Uragea, Booree, Hagamaram, Galaana Abayaa, mainly inhabited by the Guji-Oromo, and Areero, Liiban, Dirree, Taltallee, Yaaballoo, Mooyyale, mainly inhabited by the Borana Oromo.
- <sup>53</sup> Adugna, "Inter-Ethnic Relations", v, 111.
- <sup>54</sup> "Demarcation of boundaries of 11 woredas bordering the two regions", Letter by the Transitional Government of Ethiopia to Oromia Regional Administrative Council and Region Five Administrative Council, June 10, 1994.
- <sup>55</sup> Adugna, "Inter-Ethnic Relations", 37-40; 113-114.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 107-9
- <sup>57</sup> Hagmann and Mulugeta, "Pastoral conflicts", 29.
- <sup>58</sup> Different researchers at different times have independently been collecting a list of the Borana wells in Eel Goofa and Eel Laee, with information about their ownership.
- <sup>59</sup> Studies of the negative impact of these changes on the pastoral system and on impact on poverty have been made by Gufu Oba and Boku Tache respectively. Oba, "Indigenous Range Management", 62-63;75-6; Tache, *Pastoralism under Stress*.
- <sup>60</sup> The *Gumii Gaayoo* (General Assembly of the Borana held every 8 years) of 1996 was attended by the President of Ethiopia, Nagaso Gidada and by the President of Oromia Region, Kumaa Dammaqaa (Hukka, "37th Gumii Gaayo", quoted in Oba, "Indigenous Range Management", 35, 63). The 2004 Gumii Gaayoo was attended by the President of Oromia Region, Juneydi Saddo.
- <sup>61</sup> "The Decision of the House of the Federation on the Dispute on Kebele of Oromia and Somali Regional States" [in Amharic], *The Voice of the Federation*, FDRE, 2005, 01 (02).
- <sup>62</sup> FDRE, "House of the Federation"
- <sup>63</sup> Adugna, "Inter-Ethnic Relations", 124-6.
- <sup>64</sup> Fiseha, "Ethnic federalism".
- <sup>65</sup> Tronvoll and Aadland, *Process of Democratisation*, 42-44); Pausewang et al., *Ethiopia since the Derg*, 38.
- <sup>66</sup> HRW, "Suppressing Dissent".
- <sup>67</sup> Pausewang et al., *Ethiopia since the Derg*, 239.

---

<sup>68</sup> In the constituency under the administration of Region 5 it was held in August 2005 with an overwhelming victory of the SPDP.

<sup>69</sup> Irin, 12 and 13 July, 1 August, 2005.

<sup>70</sup> Irin, July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2006.

<sup>71</sup> Irin, July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2006.

<sup>72</sup> Turton, *Ethnic Federalism*.

<sup>73</sup> Clapham, "Controlling Space", 25-30.

<sup>74</sup> Petrovic, "Ethnic Cleansing", 9, 11, 19.

<sup>75</sup> Vaughen and Tronvoll, *Culture of Power*, 107-8.