

# Primary Identities in the Lower Omo Valley: Migration, Cataclysm, Conflict and Amalgamation, 1750-1910

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**Abstract.** This article applies the working definition of primary identity to explore the emergence of the ethnic identities in the southern-most tract of the lower Omo valley. The current identities are the result of two correlated movements, migration to the valley by organised pastoralists and scattered groups, and a move down to river and to the Omo delta where the ecological niche generated by the regular flooding of the Omo River provided a rich variety of livelihoods alternatives. The major migrations were connected to great population movements occurred in East Africa during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The current identities emerged out of a series of cataclysms that differently affected the various groups and their territorial distribution. The Daasanach recall the occurrence of large floods; the Nyangatom stress the destructive impact of the Ethiopian conquest; the Kwegu and the Kara were hit by sleeping sickness epidemics. The cataclysms changed the demographic balance with the natural and the reciprocal relations of power, leading to the disappearance of some of the primary groups whose existence and prosperity were recorded by the early explorers, and to processes of assimilation. The historical reconstruction here presented shows that the notion of primary groups exercising coherent governance over a broad and sometimes scattered range of resources needs to be complemented with the theoretical relevance of clusters, specific localities characterised by high interaction and co-presence of different primary groups. Clusters were important knots of culture and identity elaboration. They were the premise of the process of incorporation into the prevailing primary groups and gave the start to specific local identities. In the case of the Daasanach access to a viable pool of natural resources by a mixed population allowed the development of a lasting primary group.

Keywords: Ethiopia; oral history; ethnicity; Omo; cataclysm.

Research based on oral sources in East Africa has shown that most ethnic groups identified during the colonial phase are made up of a conglomeration of smaller groups of diverse origin that came together under particular historical circumstances. As suggested by David Turton and Serge Tornay, the lower Omo valley provides a rather unique environment to explore these issues.<sup>1</sup> The regular flood of the Omo River is an added environmental value to an otherwise dry region. From the point of view of the ecological services provided to human beings it plaid a function similar to that of Lake Baringo, acting “as safety net for destitute pastoralists during periods of drought and social destitution”.<sup>2</sup> Lower Omo worked at a scale larger than Baringo. The possibility to engage in reliable flood-retreat agriculture, fishing, hunting, honey gathering and to exploit the abundant and permanent forage for small stock and cattle was a strong pulling factor for scattered groups, being them destitute or dislocated pastoralists, hunter-gatherers or caste artisans looking for temporary or permanent alternative livelihoods. This basin attracted both scattered and organised groups across the poly-ethnic and multi-resources regional ‘systems’ described by Richard Waller.<sup>3</sup> Given the extension and fertility of the flooded surface, a number of local identities could emerge, with no overall governance mechanism.

I here consider the emergence of the Kara, Kwegu (or Muguji), Daasanach and Nyangatom – incorporating the Murle – identities in the southern-most tract of the Omo river and in the Omo delta. The field-research was implemented in two phases, in 2008 and 2009. The bulk of the primary oral data were gathered during semi-structure interviews on the history of the main groups and of some selected territorial sub-units. Family and lineage traditions were also recorded.<sup>4</sup> The selection of the relevant historical circumstances was made triangulating the narratives independently collected among the different ethnic components. From 1888 to 1909 lower Omo was crossed by several European and American explorers and travellers. From the aftermath of the battle of Adwa (1896) the area was militarily incorporated into the expanding modern Ethiopian Empire. The availability of several accounts of the explorations and of the military campaigns gave the possibility to extend triangulation to the available written sources for the last part of the period here

considered. The overall methodological prominence given to oral sources brings to light events retaining meaning in the current field of ethnic relations. This choice was made partly because of lack of different data for the early phases, partly because of the attempt to disclose the basic mechanisms and the dynamics of ethnic relations and identity formation in the lower Omo valley. In this account we may accordingly miss reference to groups that may have entirely disappeared from the valley, and to some of the current sections that were not selected for in-depth field research.

### **Defining primary identities**

In his study of the 19<sup>th</sup> century migrations in East Africa, Waller noted that “identity could be used as a means of controlling a scarce resource, by delimiting the group that had rights of access to it”.<sup>5</sup>

As he explained:

Many East African societies were composites, developing from the partial fusion of separate groups detached from different parent societies and linked together through the gradual assumption of common identity based on the mutual exploitation of a particular ecological niche.<sup>6</sup>

With specific reference to the lower Omo valley, David Turton has analysed the shaping of local identities through the process of moving and acquiring access to new resources.<sup>7</sup> He adopted the concept of ‘place’ to account for the cognitive incorporation of physical spaces: “To understand how people experience place, and how it becomes ‘inextricably bound up’ with their social and personal identity, we must treat it not as a stage upon which social activity is carried out, but as a product of social activity”.<sup>8</sup> Turton further addressed the difficulties with the concept of ethnic identity, due to its multiple meanings:

Mursi identity is linked essentially to the occupation of an ‘actual terrain’ and not to the supposed origin of certain Mursi clans [...]. This is why I prefer to think of Mursi identity as political rather than ethnic and of ‘the Mursi’ simply as a territorial based political unit.<sup>9</sup>

Some of these difficulties with the theoretical concepts can be overcome by introducing the notion of ‘primary identity’, a tri-dimensional working definition considering the links among identity, physical environment and politics.<sup>10</sup>

The physical environment provides resources that are necessary for the livelihoods. Individuals and scattered groups need to associate in order to access them in a structured way. At a minimum standard governance of natural resources by a localized group requires a knowledge system – through which the available biological resources make meaning in relation to their livelihoods type – and the definition of norms, procedures and roles of authority to regulate internal relations in accessing the natural resources. This is achieved through group-specific institutions. A system of knowledge is expressed through a language. Similarly, institutions require intensive communication and common understanding. We can therefore expect that scattered groups starting to interact around a common resource-pool would adopt or develop a common language. Since localised groups are also likely to compete with others to gain or maintain control over the relevant natural resources, governance of natural resources will include defence or attack devices to contend or protect the resources from outsiders. In the context of lower Omo, age and generational class systems provided the main institutional framework.

I define a ‘primary identity’ – such as Daasanach, Kara, Nyangatom, Mursi – the main and most immediate symbol qualifying belonging to a major group that, in contraposition to others, establishes a priority of access to a pool of natural resources. By adopting a primary identity or being socialised within it, individuals acquire group-specific cultural traits that make up the governance of a viable set of natural resources. By viable it is implied that they should assure the basic survival of the primary group through the year. The pool often consist of a combination of diverse resources, such as dry and wet-season pastures, cultivated fields of various type, wildlife and fish, complementing each other through the seasons.

The pool of natural resources associated to each primary identity gets defined in a field of interaction with other primary groups. It is not simply a matter of arriving to an empty territory and starting exploiting resources. It is rather about cutting out access in negotiation or conflict with others, up to a common understanding of what resources compete to whom. Hence the association of a primary identity with a set of resources must be shared or acknowledged within the inter-ethnic

field of interaction. Obviously the specific perceptions by the different groups may differ, but, following Barth, primary identities exist insofar they are recognised by the others who are interacting with those primary groups.<sup>11</sup> Otherwise stated, primary identities are externally forged, or they take shape in a continuing process of interaction. When perceptions become incompatible, such as in expansionist attempts or under a situation of resources shortage for demographic dynamics or environmental crisis, conflict may occur. I would suggest that peace-making rituals such as those between the Mursi and Bodi recorded by David Turton – whose chosen sites represent ‘a claim to *de jure* ownership of territory which was formerly owned only in a *de facto* sense’<sup>12</sup> – are important devices to assert new understandings about territorial rights embedded in the primary identities.<sup>13</sup>

### **The early pastoralists west of the Omo delta**

During the field-research the sharpest representation of the early habitation of the southern portion of lower Omo valley was provided by the Elelle and Borana components of the Daasanach. Neil Sobania suggested that Daasanach identity is the result of the merging of newcomers with autochthonous components. The early newcomers were the Shir and Oro, who arrived together after having been displaced by the expanding Turkana early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Today Shir is a secondary identity within Daasanach, encompassing both the Inkoria and Inkabelo territorial sections. The Shir claim to have splat from the Nyupe. The Elelle and the Narich are the two territorial sections associated by Sobania to the autochthonous groups. The other major sections recognised by the Daasanach are the Randal, the Koro and the Riele. Only the Randal have their own territorial portion of territory, while the Oro, Koro and Riele live among the others.<sup>14</sup>

The Shir have become the dominant component among the Daasanach, hence their traditions of migration are often presented as the tradition of Daasanach *tout court*. However, if specifically asked, Shir elders do acknowledge the priority of the Elelle. They also acknowledge the presence of the Borana in the area prior to their arrival. They do it by narrating a codified story of adoption of the family of a sick Borana man left behind after the Borana were defeated and displaced.<sup>15</sup> Today

‘Boran’ is a common lineage name under several Daasanach clan in various territorial sections. The Borana are also considered to constitute one of the two major components of the Riele section of the Daasanach.<sup>16</sup>

In 2009 I have recorded the Elelle tradition of migration from a selected group of elders.<sup>17</sup> They asserted a common origin with the Gabra, reinforcing the statement by claiming that a component of the Elelle is still found among the Gabra.<sup>18</sup> They claimed to have arrived to the eastern side of Kuraz Mountain going round the lake from the south, thus assuming an origin from the East. They also moved to Natade (today called Nyememeri). When they arrived to the Omo valley, they report to have found the Marle in the area of Kuraz Mountain, particularly in Kailbeyo locality. The Marle are not present in the Omo valley any longer. Since the 1888 Teleki’s exploration they were reported to constitute one of the major components of the Arbore in the Weito Valley, just north of Chew Bahir. Presence of the Marle at Mount Kuraz at the time of the arrival of the Nyangatom was confirmed by traditions independently collected by Serge Tornay and myself. They are said to have kept excellent relations with the Nyangatom and to have migrated because of drought.<sup>19</sup>

Concerning the livelihoods of the early Elelle, the elders claimed:

When they [the ancestor of the Elelle] migrated, they were pastoralists. They also brought seeds of beans when they splat from Gabra. An Elelle elder called Nyigabite found *duba* (seeds of millet or sorghum) in elephant dung when they were in Kuraz. This is how *dura* was introduced in the valley. All happened before the arrival of Shir”.<sup>20</sup>

The metaphor of the elephant dung is shared by several groups of the study area. It may be taken to express that sorghum cultivation was not actually introduced by any of the current primary groups with their arrival, but it was rather an occasional encroachment. The palaeo-ecological sample collected by Graciela Gil-Romera from a site in current Mursi-land indicates presence of pollen of sorghum from around 1750.<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, the Elelle version of the story could indicate that they arrived to Mount Kuraz before the diffusion of sorghum in the valley in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century.

In 2009 I interviewed Nyekudor Longole, a Daasanach woman of the Riele section, claiming a Borana descent.<sup>22</sup> She explained that the grandfather of her grandfather used to speak Borana as a domestic language. Her family tradition claims that those Borana were coming from elsewhere but that they had established themselves for long in Lodwar and in a huge area including Lokitang, Gurmit Riele, up to her current area, just west of the current Omo Delta. They were pastoralists. They were driven out by the Shir coming from Nyupe and by others, probably the Turkana.<sup>23</sup>

Reference to a Borana community west of Lake Turkana is reported in Turkana traditions too. Like the Nyupe, they are among those communities displaced and partly incorporated during their expansion. They were part of what Lamphear identified as an early 19 century alliance between the Samburu (Kor), the Rendille and the Borana.<sup>24</sup>

Nyekudor mentioned three nearby groups speaking the same language: the Marle (Arbore), the Elelle and Kara. She considers this language spoken before the arrival of Shir to be the bulk of the current Daasanach language. She explained that the Kara – today speaking an Omotic language strongly related to Hamar – have lost it along the way, during a following migration. This may probably indicate that this is only one component of the current Kara. The Borana – whose language was quite similar – were living just south of them. The relationship among all these early pastoral inhabitants of the lower Omo was described very peaceful.<sup>25</sup>

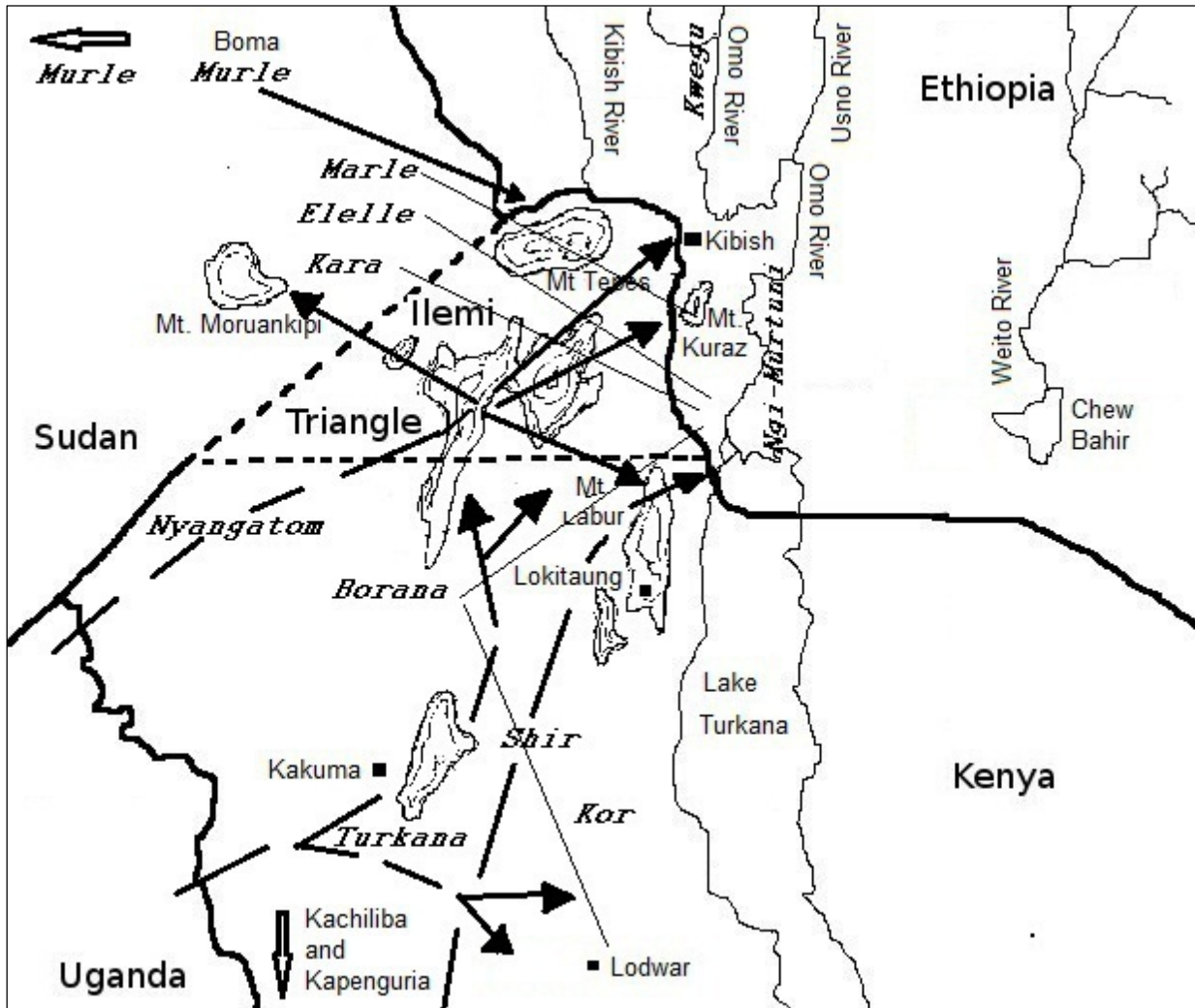
Co-residence of the Kara with the Arbore and Daasanach by the Omo delta is also mentioned in a secondary version of the Kara myth of origin, first accounted by Ivo Strecker.<sup>26</sup>

### **A 19<sup>th</sup> century wave of incomers**

The narratives so far presented describe the presence of four nearby Cushitic speaking pastoral groups west of the Omo delta and Lake Turkana, living peacefully with one another. Most likely they were shifting their herds to the Omo delta and to the shore of Lake Turkana for dry season pastures. This state of affairs was radically changed by the massive movement of population that took place in East Africa during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a change considered by Waller far more relevant

than the European colonisation in shaping the current ethnic patterns of the region.<sup>27</sup> The population dynamics originated in central Karamoja of Uganda and the following expansion by the Ateker (Central Paraniotes) groups down the Karamoja Escarpment are probably the most relevant population movements in relation to the lower Omo valley.<sup>28</sup>

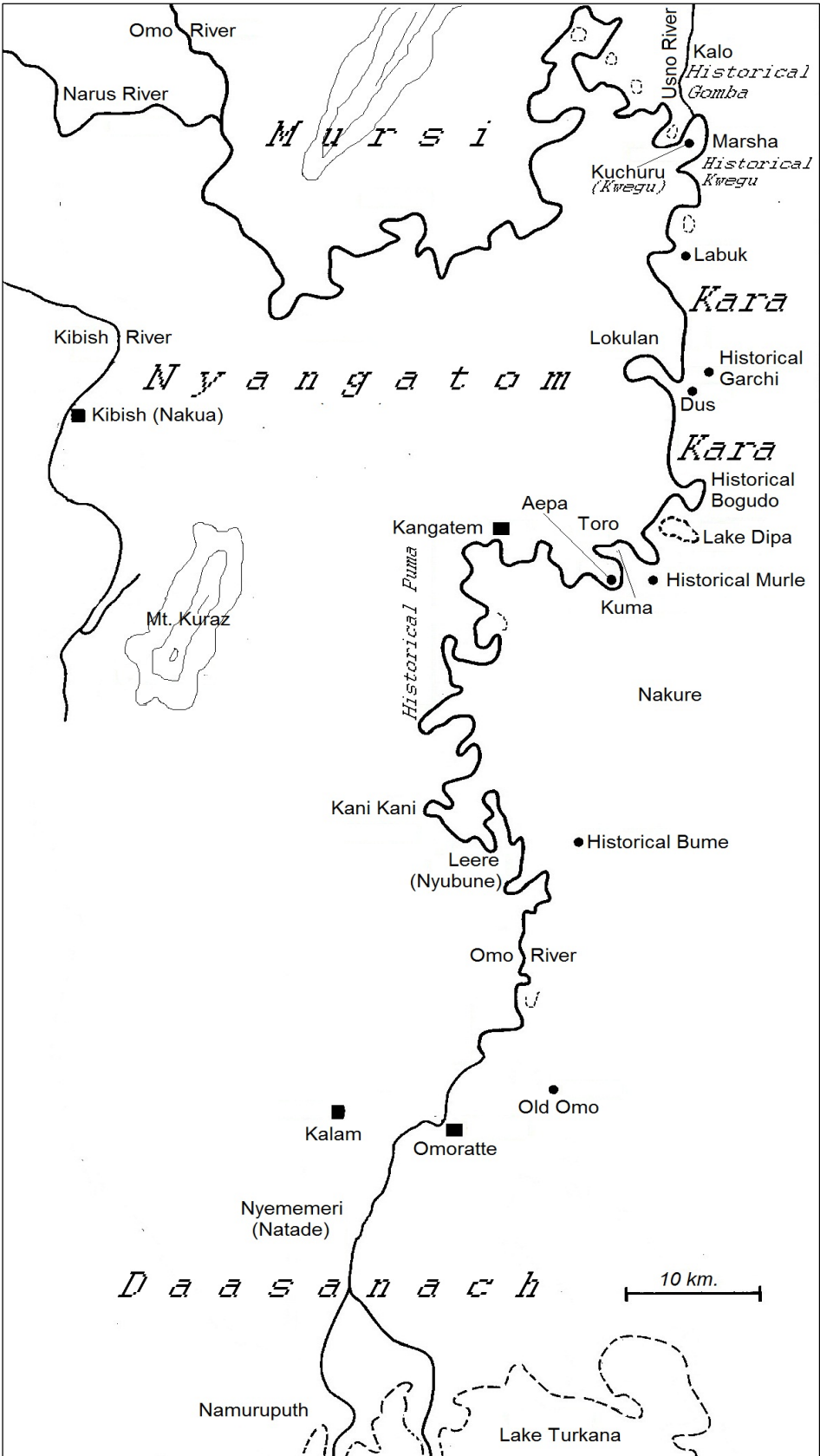
Map 1. Early 19 century migrations.



The Shir, the Nyangatom and the Murle represent themselves as having arrived to Omo River from the west, before the Ethiopian conquest of the lower Omo valley. The southern Kwegu and the Kara seem to have arrived from the east, at least in the last phase of their migration.



Map 2. Main mentioned localities along the Omo River and current ethnic groups



### ***The arrival of the Shir***

The Elelle characterise the arrival of the Shir by a ritual handing over of their *Nyerim*, the capacity to re-generate water sources from a previous place. This tradition seems to indicate that they peacefully accepted these new pastoralists as co-habitants in Natade (Nyememeri).<sup>29</sup> However Sobania collected some different traditions referring to a phase of conflict between the Shir and the Elelle, leading to a late and forced assimilation of the Elelle. He quoted a secondary version of the story of the Shir migration mentioning that “the Oro rescued the Shir from annihilation at the ends of the region’s previous occupants, the Elelle and the Boran”.<sup>30</sup>

During my own field work Lotikori Yerakal, a known and respected Shir elder, reported a history of contiguity with the Turkana all along their migration, characterized by both intermarriage and occasional feuds. He especially mentioned Kaachiliba, Kapenguria and Lodwar to be the localities where interaction with the Turkana mostly took place.<sup>31</sup> Together with other elders, he explicitly mentioned a period of warfare against the Marle and the Borana who were living around Mount Labor when the Shir arrived –, a conflict that forced those two groups to cross the Omo river from west to east and permanently leave the Omo valley after having temporarily settled in Old Omo.<sup>32</sup> The Nyangatom too openly accused the Daasanach of having fought the Marle, contributing to their permanent displacement from the Omo valley.<sup>33</sup>

Bringing together the various narratives, it is possible to suggest that at an early phase during the 19 century the Shir-Turkana movement displaced the Borana from Lodwar, probably pushing them closer to the Marle-Elelle at Mount Labor and Mount Kuraz. As the Shir established themselves west of Lake Turkana and the Omo delta, they might have engaged in clashes with the local Elelle and Marle too, until the Elelle managed to arrange a coexistence symbolised by the *Nyerim* power. This reconstruction would also explain why the Elelle do not recall any conflict with the Marle, but rather claimed to have later moved together from Mount Kuraz to the northern shores of Lake Turkana.<sup>34</sup>

### ***The arrival of the Nyangatom***

The Nyangatom established themselves north of the Shir. Their migration has been reconstructed by Tornay. Basing his chronology on Lamphear's historical work on the Jie and on a generational class simulation made in collaboration with Harald Müller, Tornay identifies the emergence of the Nyangatom identity toward the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century in northeast Uganda, in Dodos country.<sup>35</sup> During their migration they stopped for most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Kasiren Mountain (Lokwanamur), before firmly establishing themselves in the Omo valley during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>36</sup> Groups of scattered and stockless Nyangatom could have started to arrive to the Omo valley already from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>37</sup>

Like the Shir, the Nyangatom were interacting and sharing residence with the Turkana along their migration, engaging in intermarriage as well as in occasional feuds, particularly around Lopeta Mountain.<sup>38</sup> Interpreting a narrative by Lokuti, Tornay outlined that the Nyangatom had their golden age during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when they lived at Riele (Leere) along the Omo with the Marile (Daasanach), extending up to Moruankipi (in current Sudan) and including Nakua (Kibish), over a range of 300 Kms.<sup>39</sup> The Nyangtom oral historian and elders I have interviewed confirmed that they were extending over a vast territory, also maintaining access to Lopeta for a long time after they had established themselves at Nakua (Kibish) and Leere.<sup>40</sup>

### ***The arrival of the Murle, or Ngarich***

The early explorers and travellers to the lower Omo valley used to stop and buy grain at two nearby villages on the eastern side of the Omo river, 'Bume' (also spelt 'Buma') and 'Murle'. The nearby cultivated land could produce reliable supplies of sorghum for the explorers' large caravans, hence the definition of the areas as a 'land of Goshen'.<sup>41</sup> The two villages were inhabited by different people. Bume is today an exonym referring to the Nyangatom. The Murle captured the imagination of the travellers for the custom by their woman to wear 'monstrous' conical plugs in their deformed lower lip.<sup>42</sup> Murle is also the name of a people living in the White Nile basin in Sudan, with a

minority separately settling closer to the Ethiopian border, on the Boma plateau. They speak a language classified in the Southwestern branch of the Surmic group of the Nilo-Saharan family. In his detailed study of the Omo Murle Tornay suggested the occurrence of repeated flows of population between this group along the Omo river and the Murle of Sudan.<sup>43</sup>

The Omo Murle were not found any longer by the last travellers crossing their place in 1909, and had entirely disappeared from any successive account. They thus became an ethnographic ‘enigma’, until in 1972 Serge Tornay found that the ‘Ngi-ngaric’ section of the Nyangatom claimed a ‘Murle’ clan identity.<sup>44</sup> As mentioned, there is also a ‘Narich’ territorial section of the Daasanach. Both the current Daasanach/Narich and Nyangatom/Ngarich are assimilated to their respective host groups, having lost their original language and the custom of the lip plug.<sup>45</sup>

The narratives I collected in 2008 and 2009 unify in a single codified tradition events separately reported by Etir and Lokuta to Tornay in the early 70s. As in Etir’s version, the Ngaritch today found as a section of the Nyangatom claimed origin from Poma. The youths left due to a conflict with a senior generational class. They left with some girls and with mules, but without any other property, particularly without cattle. This wondering group of Murle met the Ngikapung section of Nyangatom at Tepes Mountain. The Ngikapung welcomed them. The Murle decided to live together with the Ngikapung, but later they shifted their alliance to the Ngi-ligakol section of the Nyangatom, the latter having provided a helpful mediation with the Daasanach in a case of mule theft. The Murle stayed for a while in Nakua (Kibish) with the the Ngi-ligakol.<sup>46</sup>

According to the elders these events took place when the Ngibokoy generation of the Nyangatom was the ‘fathers of the country’, having the Murle acquired that generation name at their arrival. According to Tornay’s chronology, this generation first appeared in 1700 and became the ‘fathers’ between 1830 and 1880.

### ***The arrival of the southern Kwegu, or Muguji***

The Kwegu differs from most contemporary groups of lower Omo because they do not attribute any relevance to livestock. Hiroshi Matsuda has differentiated between the northern Kwegu – living in

association with the Bodi –, the central Kwegu – bound in unequal client-patron relations with the Mursi<sup>47</sup> –, and a southern Kwegu, also known by the exonym Muguji.<sup>48</sup> Their language belongs to Southeastern branch of the Surmic group. The linguist Osamu Hieda differentiated between the ‘Koegu’ or Muguji dialect spoken by the southern group from the Kwegu dialect of the northern groups.<sup>49</sup>

The Ngarich (Murle) I interviewed in 2009 consider Toro the border between the Murle and Kwegu before the arrival of the Kara. They mentioned they met the Kwegu in Kalikita, corresponding to Korcho area in today’s Kara territory. Their livelihoods were strongly based on hunting, including hippo hunting, fishing and honey cultivation, but without agriculture, at least in this southern fringe of the Kwegu-land.<sup>50</sup>

Although the Kwegu are regarded as the ‘first inhabitants’ of lower Omo by most neighbours, the historical narratives I have collected speak about successive waves of migration and amalgamation by different groups under the unifying Kwegu identity. Working in Kuchuru – the only village where Kwegu independently live without being encapsulated as lower caste by larger agro-pastoral groups – and in a small Kwegu village in Aepa – a community displaced in 1988 from Kara, now assimilated to the Nyangatom – I could clearly identify at least three components of the southern Kwegu, each with a different migratory history. The collected versions stand in contradiction with one another concerning the sequence of events.

In this southern sector of the river, corresponding to the junction between the Omo and Mago, the Marsha group seems to be the main Kwegu component. Marsha is the locality of confluence of the two rivers.<sup>51</sup> Their own narrative of migration represents themselves as the result of the merging of different communities along the migration, in Chale. This mixed group further moved to Tukkule and then down to Marsha, an empty area by that time. They were fishing and hunting by spear during the non-fishing season. A second version mentions an itinerary from Arkisha, to Worle and then to Marsha. The same Marsha tradition refers to the coming of a hunting group along the Omo River from Mursi area. They are said to have spoken the same Kwegu

language. This band ‘saw the smoke and took the fire’ from the Marsha group, settling in Dhuui for a while. Then the Worpa, another Kwegu component, arrived to Marsha area, but settled separately.<sup>52</sup> The ‘Worpa’ are today the Kwegu that for decades mixed with the Kara, until their recent displacement from Kara following a land conflict.<sup>53</sup> Like the Kara and the Bashada, the Worpa recalls a story of co-migration and separation from the Arbore and Daasanach. However they claim to have arrived before the Kara, having reached the Omo River in the tract corresponding to Dipa oxbow lake after a final stop in Nakure.<sup>54</sup>

It is not convincing that all these small groups, with such heterogeneous provenience, were speaking Kwegu as the elders of all Kwegu components claimed. The most likely scenario is that they simply acquired the Kwegu language after arrival to the valley from a pre-existing Kwegu community, probably those living further upstream along the Omo, represented in these local narratives by the Dhuui component.<sup>55</sup>

### ***The Kara and the other fragmented groups***

The main myth of the Kara arrival to the Omo River from east following ‘the trail of the red bull’ in search of drinking water was analysed by Felix Girke.<sup>56</sup> The story is often told with innovative narrative elements, but it is anyway built around some fixed elements. It refers to Atula, a mountain in Bashada area, as Kara’s place of origin. From Atula the Kara moved to Eeseni Mountain, where they engaged in rain fed agriculture as well as cattle husbandry. Cattle were grazing in Silalee. The story about their arrival to the Omo River refers to a disengagement of the Kwegu from cultivation, legitimising the establishment of agricultural activities by the Kara over the same geographical space of the Kwegu. As this narrative suggests, the Kara were practicing both cattle pastoralism and flood retreat agriculture when they arrived to the Omo River. They claim to have lost cattle at some point in history. Today they are mainly cultivators, also keeping small stock. The cultural value of cattle is still high, but they only keep them in association with Hamar pastoralists, who are granted access to water points and dry season pasture along the Omo River in return.

The Kara normally claim a priority of arrival to the valley on Nyangatom and Murle, but this does not match with the Nyangatom, Murle and Kwegu versions. The ‘Kerre’ (Kara) were found in their present position by Smith in 1895, but already Teleki and von Höhnel gathered information about their presence in 1888. Both these expeditions recorded the presence of additional communities along the Omo. The comparison of the accounts of various explorers with the list provided by Aike Berinas— an esteemed Hamar elder also known as Baldambe in several ethnographic studies – to Jean Lydall of the groups present along the eastern bank of the Omo River prior to the Ethiopian conquest allows us to identify the following settlements from south to north: Bume, Murle, Bogudo, Dus (Kara), Garchi, Labuk (Kara), Marsha (Muguji or Kwegu), Gomba.<sup>57</sup>

### **The cataclysms and the early river dwellers**

Sobania has recorded a myth of formation of Lake Turkana shared by several of the current primary groups at regional scale. The myth refers to an undifferentiated community formed by the forefathers of the Samburu, Turkana, Daasanach, Rendille and Borana, who were divided by the emergence of the lake. Sobania interpreted this myth as a way to account for a different configuration of the relationship between the Easter Cushitic and the Nilotic groups at a time older than present historical awareness, a time when those two broad categories were together west of Lake Turkana.<sup>58</sup> In their study of the Oromo concept of time, Gemetchu Megerssa and Aneesa Kassam have outlined the existence of the concept of ‘historical cycles’ – *jaatama*. The end of each *jaatama* is characterized by chaos and confusion in all aspect of life, representing the end of an order and the birth of a new one.<sup>59</sup> This cyclical and cataclysmic model of thought may explain why a story on the emergence of Lake Turkana may have been taken to symbolise the beginning of an era dominated by the contraposition between Nilotic and Cushitic speaking groups, characterised in the last phase by the mentioned expansion of the Ateker (Central Paraniotes).

A new series of ‘separation and re-formation’ have accompanied the entrance of the people of the lower Omo valley into the sphere of influence of the colonial and imperial States, forging the perceptions of the current group composition and of their territorial distribution. The events that

have marked their entrance into the new ‘modern order’ are consistently described in cataclysmic terms by all the groups considered in this article.<sup>60</sup> The Daasanach recall the occurrence of destructive floods; they also acknowledge the destructive impact of the Ethiopian military conquest. The Nyangatom stress the second disaster and acknowledge sleeping sickness. The Ngaritch assimilated to the Nyangatom (Murle), the southern Kwegu and the Kara only mention sleeping sickness.

*Table 1. Summary of confluence of ancient groups into current primary groups in the lower Omo Valley*

<b>Early groups</b>	<b>Groups arrived with the 19 century migrations</b>	<b>Current primary groups (after the late 19 century cataclysms)</b>
	Rendille	Daasanch/Randal
	Samburu	Daasanch/Koro
Borana		Daasanch/Riele
	Shirr	Daasanch/Inkabelo and Daasanch/Inkori
	Oro	Daasanch/Oro
Component of Kara		Kara (different area in the valley)
Marle		Arbore in the Weitu Valley
Elelle		Daasanch/Elelle
	Murle	Nyangatom/Ngarich; Daasanch/Narich
Ngi-murtuni (in Nyangatom language) or one component of Murlaya (in Kara language)		Mursi
	Nyangatom (pastoral sector)	Nyangatom
	Nyangatom/Puma (mixed with Ngi-murtuni)	
	Nyangatom/Bume	
Kwegu		Kwegu
	Marsha (Kwegu)	Kwegu/Kuchuru
	Worpa (Kwegu)	Kara; recently Kwegu/Kuchuru and Nyangatom
	Kara (Bashada)	Kara
	Bogudo	
	Gomba	
	Garchi	

### *The saga of the great floods and the emergence of Daasanach identity*

The historical narratives of the Daasanach are pervaded by reference to a series of large floods either directly destroying people, or forcing them to retrieve up the hills and staying in starvation due to the failed retrieve of the water for one or several consecutive years. The narrative of the first



flood is connoted by strong metaphysical elements. In short, the story describes the emergence of a warrior from the water of the lake. The Walagol who were playing *bao* by the shore of the lake made joke of him. The warrior walked back into the water of the lake, but only to re-emerge the next day. The water of the lake started to rise after he sang a war song. Water also spilled out of the ground behind them, destroying the Walagol. The Walagol were described either as an ancient people, or as the founding generation of the Daasanach. The following floods are historically located, having occurred within the time range of family traditions. Their dynamics were different too, being produced by the combination of heavy local rainfall with exceptional high inflows of water from the Omo River. According to Lotikori the most destructive flood directly killed about 100 people, forcing all Daasanach to retrieve up the hills. The Shir were forced to move to Mount Labur. The Elelle, Randal, Horo and, Rielle found refuge on Mount Kuraz, together with the Nyangatom and the Kara. Lotikori mentioned that the flood took place twice. He narrated with vivid particulars the attempt to rescue the survivors from the trees, the starvation who forced them to eat birds, shoes and cloths, and the rituals and symbolic events that ultimately led the Daasanach out of the crisis. He directly heard this story from his paternal grandmother's brother, who was a living witness of the event and very old when Lotikori – who is now about 80 – was a teenager.<sup>61</sup> Lotikori's narrative of two episodes of large and destructive floods fits with Butzer's reconstruction of the fluctuations of level of Lake Turkana. Based on the explorer's cartography and on their records of the flooded vegetation, Butzer has identified a long period of exceptionally high level of Lake Turkana, subdivided into two phases of transgression and regression. The first great transgression may have started in the early 1870s. By 1888, the time of Teleki's exploration, the level of the lake had dropped to a lower level. The second transgression took place just before the Smith's first exploration in 1895. The lake then entered a phase of progressive regression, bringing the water down to the pre-1870s level, until the 1918 deluges.<sup>62</sup> The second transgression falls within the possible life range of the witness, Lotikori's paternal grandmother's brother.

Several scholars have stressed that a transgression of Lake Turkana kills the riverside vegetation and covers up the delta flats. This change is likely to seriously affect the livelihoods of the Daasanach, but it favours the communities upstream, since the sites of water outflow would move up. Conversely, a regression phase progressively uncovers large extensions of land subject to regular flooding in the Daasanach area.<sup>63</sup> Butzer has estimated that the regression started in 1898 exposed 280 square kilometres of flat lands in the delta, and an equal amount in Ferguson Gulf.<sup>64</sup> Keeping this environmental factor in mind, I would suggest that full integration of the Shir with the others under a common Daasanach identity is the result of the regression phases, when resources become fully accessible to all. As mentioned, this movement and the inherent social process of ethnic fusion took place twice. The great wealth of the Reshiat (Daasanach) observed in 1888 by Teleki and von Höhnel is likely to be the result of the first regression, while the repeated records of deprivation of the Daasanach by Smith (1895, 1900), Neumann (1896), Cavendish (1897) can probably be mainly attributed to the following flood and transgression of the lake.<sup>65</sup> Reference to the separation between the Shir and all the other current components of the Daasanach on different hills during the ‘refuge’ time may indicate that the overall transgression occurred before the full integration of the Shir. Indeed the Elelle component of Daasanach did not mention a movement up to Mount Kuraz as in Lotikori’s cataclysmic version, having been there since their arrival to the valley. We first find a reference to the ‘Dahaseneh’ ethnonym during Bottego’s expedition, hence just after the second flood.<sup>66</sup> However, already by the time of Teleki’s expedition the country of the ‘Reshiat’ – a people at that time found all around the lake – was described as stretching away from the northern shore of Lake Rudolf to Mount Nakua (Mount Kuraz), an area broadly identified with the territory of the Elelle.<sup>67</sup> Accordingly, it seems that elements of a common Shir – Elelle identity must have already developed during the first phase of transgression, and possibly earlier. With all probability, Lotikori’s saga of the great floods works as a Shir-based myth of foundation of the Daasanach unity and identity, overcoming the narratives of difference of each component.

***The move down to the Omo and the displacement of the early river dwellers***

The opening up of new land and grass resources by the lake’s regression worked as a cross-ethnic pooling factor, but the dynamics pushing communities to converge to the new area, cooperate or compete along certain lines are the result of a more complex combination of demographic, ecological and cultural factors. This more clearly emerges by comparing the oral traditions of the Elelle component of the Daasanach with those of the Nyangatom cluster, both describing a movement from Mount Kuraz and other areas west of the Omo river down to an area corresponding to the site where the Omo river flew into Lake Turkana at its maximum transgression. This locality was characterized by high ethnic interaction. It is called Nyubune in Daasanach and Leere or Riele in Nyangatom. It is today found west of the Omo River, but it is likely to have included Bume village found by the early explorers on the eastern bank of the Omo River.<sup>68</sup>

*Table 2. A cluster of important contiguous localities*

	Land for cultivation	An island used for grazing at time of high transgression of Lake Turkana	Land for cultivation and grazing	The paleo-archeological site
Daasanach language	Oyord	Dibile	Kuornakuanini or Kare	Lokobe or Nakabila
Nyangatom language			Leere or Rielle	Leere

The ecological motivation of this move down to the delta is explicit in the Elelle tradition:

The lake was larger and the area dry. Close to the lake there was good grass and water for animals. As water went down the Elelle followed the banks and started cultivation too. At the time when they moved the Shir had already arrived. [...] The Shir remained in Natade [Nyememeri]<sup>69</sup>

Loruko Longoko, a bright Nyangatom oral historian, again recalls the environmental factors for both the Marle migration off the Omo valley and for the Nyangatom move down to Leere:

There was a drought at that time, except in water reserves, like in Leere. This is the same reason why Nyangatom migrated from Kibish to Leere.<sup>70</sup>

The accounts given by both the Nyangatom and their Ngarich (Murle) section speak of a contemporary exploitation of Kibish (Nakua) and Leere by the Nyangatom. Both areas are

mentioned for their agriculture potential, responding to the needs of the destitute Nyangatom. At the time of Leere the Turkana are reported to have engaged in peaceful trade relations with them, exchanging grain produced in Leere and Nakua (Kibish) for livestock and intermarrying. This is indeed acknowledged in several descriptions of way the stockless Nyangatom re-established themselves into pastoralism.<sup>71</sup>

The Ngarich (Murle) too reported having resided for a while in Leere:

They [the Murle] stayed in Leere with this section [Ngi-ligakol], sharing with Nyangatom. [...] The story of the donkey is based in Leere. Yes, the Nyangatom, especially the Ngiligakol section, were living in Leere. The Murle went to ask them land for cultivation and they were given a section of Leere. They were cultivating, but after some time they crossed the river to explore the area. They met the Borana there and they raided their cattle. They settled in the places called Kiso [a river about 10 Km from Murle locality] and Keske [a river near to Turmi]. These are the places they got the cattle from. Afterwards they went to Kuma. There was plenty of water there and they settled. At that point they moved their elders from Leere to Kuma.<sup>72</sup>

Kuma is the inundated flat cultivated by the inhabitants of the historical Murle village.<sup>73</sup> The Nyangatom version of the history of the corresponds, only stressing the hegemonic Nyagatom role in addressing the Murle to Kuma and to Aepa – the inundated flat on the western side of the Omo River, opposite to Kuma – and a very short permanence of the Murle in Leere.<sup>74</sup>

The collected traditions seem to indicate an ecological crisis that took place among the pastoralists around Kuraz Mountain. This was induced by a drought, or a series of droughts, following an increase of the demographic and livestock pressure after the arrival of Nyangatom, the Shir and possibly the Borana during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Further population pressure might have been produced by the transgression of Lake Turkana. Under this prolonged pressure the Marle engaged in a voluntary relocation in the similar environment of the Weito river, maintaining for a while presence in both valleys.<sup>75</sup> In the Omo valley they might have migrated with the others down to the delta as mentioned by the Elelle and may, like the Borana, have engaged in conflict with the Shir before definitively leaving the valley.

*The Ngi-murtuny*

When the pastoralists and the destitute pastoralists moved down to the fertile land around Sanderson Gulf and along the Omo River they didn't find an empty land. The Elelle mentioned a number of peoples they encountered, including the Horo.<sup>76</sup> Tornay has recorded a Nyangatom tradition indicating that interethnic convergence to Leere was actively encouraged to contend the place to the earlier river-dwellers. According to this tradition, the 'Lele' – likely to be the Elelle – managed to displace the Ngi-murtuny from Rielle (Leere) after two battles. The Ngi-murtuny were described as a Mursi speaking group that used to live along the Omo River from Lokulan hot springs to Lake Turkana. The Nyangatom were later invited to settle in Leere to help displacing the Ngi-murtuny. The Ngi-murtuny retreated north, to the mountains of the Mursi, and along the Omo River, until they were exterminated by the sleeping sickness.<sup>77</sup>

The presence of the Ngi-murtuny all along the river – from Leere up to current Kangatem and including Kuma, Kangaten, Nakiryenkipi and Nakuro, – prior to the shift of the Murle to Kuma was fully confirmed during the interviews I made in Nyangatom. The Ngi-murtuny were said to have been in this area already before the arrival of the Nyangatom.<sup>78</sup> Their presence south of the current Mursi territory was confirmed by the Kara as well. The Kara call them 'Mullaya' or 'Murlaya', a category including the historical Murle too. Despite the common name, Kara elders were explicit about the fact that the Murlaya were composed by a Mursi speaking component and by a group speaking a different language, later assimilated to the Nyangatom. They sometime use the derogative term *KawoMurso* (or *QauMursu*), bush-Mursi. This last expression indicates a life style: "We call them *QauMursu* because they spent most of their life in the bush, in the wild, alone". The term hence indicates the fact that they permanently dwell in the gallery forest.<sup>79</sup> All accounts indeed agree in describing the Ngi-murtuny as primarily river banks cultivators, like the Murle.<sup>80</sup>

The Elelle confirmed that they have invited the Nyangatom down to Nyubume, but deny having engaged in any conflict with the early river dwellers.<sup>81</sup>



Map 3. Side by side habitation of the Reshiat (Daasanach) and Bume (Nyangatom) as represented by Smith in 1895.<sup>82</sup>

I have instead found reference to the occurrence of repeated clashes between the Murle and the Ngi-murtuny. Major feuds were reported by the Nyangatom elders to have occurred at an early stage at Leere and, after the arrival of Murle to Kuma, at Nakiryenkipi. The Ngaritch (Murle) justified their attack on the Ngi-murtuny and having displayed them from Nakiryenkipi as retaliation for an earlier attack to Kuma. They also mentioned a conflict between the Ngi-murtuny and the Ngi-tumuru (Bodi) by about the same time.<sup>83</sup>

As in the recent Mursi-Bodi pattern of interaction recorded by Turton, these traditions indicate a progressive northwards displacement of the Ngi-murtuny by the Murle, who were evidently competing over a same resource pool, despite the cultural affinity of the two groups.<sup>84</sup> This displacement was, however, only partial, since the Ngi-murtuny seem to have maintained good relations with the Nyangatom. Loruko indeed has reported the existence of mixed Nyangatom-Ngi-murtuni settlements on the western bank of the river, in Kani Kani, south of Kuma.<sup>85</sup> The Kara also confirmed presence of the Mullaya at Kani Kang, probably the same locality.<sup>86</sup> This is the area where Bottego found several small villages inhabited by the 'Puma', a population whose women used to wear the lip-plate.<sup>87</sup> Puma is considered an alternative name for Nyangatom, found in the

explorers' accounts. The women with lip plates were probably Ngi-murtuny, hence we have here a confirmation of the existence of the mixed population mentioned by Loruko. Differently from the Murle, cultivation was regarded by the Nyangatom as an adaptive strategy to recover from destitution or as a complementary activity, anyway a transitory condition until they could fully re-establish into pastoralism, exploiting their kinship ties to access the pastoral resources controlled by the Nyangatom away from the river. For their agricultural activity, the Nyangatom needed to associate to expert cultivators holding land-rights in the valley.

### ***Lopetar and the decline of Nyangatom***

The dominant cataclysm for the Nyangatom is *Lopetar*, whose literal translation is 'dispersion'.<sup>88</sup>

Here are some excerpts illustrating the use of the concept among the Nyangatom:

MB: What does the term 'lopetar' mean?

Loruko: The Amhara had come from the Maji side and killed a lot of people. Some Nyangatom migrated to Toposa, Daasanach, Kalobong [Mursi]. So it was the war between the Amhara and Nyangatom, over a very wide area.

[...]

Loruko: We say *lopetar* because the Amhara came and killed lot of people over a large area.

MB: Is the word only used for war?

Loruko: It is not only for war, it is for a destruction happening at a large scale.

[...]

Loruko: Marco! We use *Lopetar* to indicate a time of history!<sup>89</sup>

Loruko's description is specific enough to identify the first military incursion to the lower Omo valley. In 1898 *ras* Wolda Giyorgis led about 30,000 armed soldiers from Kaffa to Maji and then south along the western bank of the Omo river. The large scale destruction produced by this campaign and its extreme violence were described by Bulatovich, a Russian military observer attached to the expedition.<sup>90</sup> The following year another campaign hit the valley, this time arriving from Bako, from east, in Hamar country. This was the controversial attempt of 'colonial enterprise' organised by the Russian adventurer Leontieff, with soldiers from Abyssinia, Senegal and Russia.<sup>91</sup> As stated by Turton, the early military campaigns reduced the area "to a state of crisis which lasted for at least the next ten years", well reflected in the accounts of subsequent travellers.<sup>92</sup> Tornay has reviewed the written references with the specific objective to reconstruct the history of the Murle.

Still in 1897 the Murle were estimated by Cavendish to be as many as ‘10,000’ and were described “a great fighting power [...] enriching themselves at their neighbours’ expense”.<sup>93</sup> In 1899 Leontieff found Murle village on the eastern bank with full granaries, but he also engaged in a large battle likely to have occurred south of Murle against the Murle, the Nyngatom and the Daasanach. Thereafter travellers only found a few huts where they expected to see the flourishing villages of Murle and Bume.<sup>94</sup> They found some communities in very poor conditions hiding themselves in the forest along the western bank of the river, from opposite Murle area down to Lake Turkana. Loruko, the Nyngatom oral historian, mentioned the abandonment of Murle and Bume villages and the crossing of their inhabitants to the western bank after a ‘conflict with the Hamar’.<sup>95</sup> This probably indicates a phase of raiding from the Hamar country to their east, from Bako where the Abyssinians had established an administrative and military post, consolidated during Leontieff campaign.<sup>96</sup> Observation of women wearing lip-plates among the refugees on the western bank of the Omo River south of Murle was interpreted by the explorers as a presence of Murle survivors, but they could actually have been both Murle and Ngi-murtuny. Indeed Tornay has rightly noted that to the analogies between these two groups may have caused the failure by the explorers to identify the Ngi-murtuny. Tornay has nevertheless highlighted that in 1902 du Bourg de Bozas recorded the existence a mixed population of Puma (Nyngatom) and ‘Mursi’, and the capturing of two Murle, two Puma (Nyngatom) and a Mursi just next to a large and wealthy Daasanach settlement that the expedition raided for survival, in an area corresponding to Nyubune-Leere.<sup>97</sup>

In the oral narratives I have collected the act of crossing the river from east to west is associated to the introduction of a social reform capable to bring together the Murle and the Ngi-murtuny. This is an account provided by a Kara elder:

By the time of the migration [from eastern to the western bank of the Omo river] Bhiibhii was the leader of Mullaya. He collected all the Mullaya in one village. He introduced a new marriage regulation. He was supporting the Murlaya to marry each other by providing cattle [bride wealth, a practice not in use among these agricultural communities]. [...] Some Mullaya and Kara continued to die by *Gindo* [sleeping sickness] even after they crossed to the western side. He became their leader.<sup>98</sup>



Reference is here made to the Murle and Mursi components of the Mullaya. Among the Nyangatom Bhiibhii is considered a Ngi-murtuny leader whose grand-grandson is said to be last Ngi-murtuni still living among them. Being the descendant of the ‘fathers of the land’, he has particular ritual prerogatives.<sup>99</sup>

The narratives provided by the Ngarich (Murle) and the Kara seem to imply a protracted period of sleeping sickness epidemic, producing a first crisis forcing the Murle to cross the river and continuing thereafter. Although we cannot exclude the occurrence of two outbreaks of the disease, the triangulation with the written accounts suggests that the crisis forcing people to cross was induced by the military conquest. As noted by Tornay, the earliest signs of the epidemic were observed by Stigand only in 1909.<sup>100</sup> Most likely, Bhiibhii’s reform was introduced after most Murle and Bume were forced to cross to the western bank seeking refuge among the Puma, the mixed Nyangatom - Ngi-murtuni community. The Bume were Nyangatom, but the inflow of the Murle required an overall internal re-definition of the resulting host community.

*Lopetar* has probably affected the entire Nyangatom cluster, but it is only stressed by the Nyangatom because it produced the end of their ‘golden age’, an irreversible crisis similar to the one the Turkana had to face from 1918. As mentioned by Tornay, from 1898-1899 the Nyangatom appear to have become weak. In 1902 they were reported to be ‘dominated’ by the Daasanach.<sup>101</sup> Similarly, the Kara have described the Nyangatom presence in the valley virtually ‘irrelevant’ from that time – when the Kara were directly engaging in conflict with the Turkana in Nakua and beyond until the Italian time.

### ***Gindo – sleeping sickness and the disappearance of the Murle and the Ngi-murtuny***

The elders of the Nyangatom and of their Ngarich (Murle) section consider sleeping sickness epidemic the cause of the final disappearance of the Murle as an autonomous group and the definitive move of the Ngi-murtuny to Mursi country across the Omo river.<sup>102</sup> Sleeping sickness – *gindo* – is central to the southern Kwegu and Kara traditions too. The Kara elders I have interviewed in 2008 presented *gindo* as a crucial event for the Kara, having produced the

demographic crisis still affecting them. According to this narrative the Kara were forced to change their structure by assimilating the Muguji (Kwegu) and the Gomba, but they anyhow lost their cattle, forcing them to interact with the Hamar to fulfil the cattle-connected ritual requirements.<sup>103</sup>

In 2009 I have discussed with the Kara elders some pictures of Labuko – a Kara war leader and mediator with outsiders – taken by Emile Brumpt during du Bourg de Bozas' expedition.<sup>104</sup> Afterwards they provided a much more sophisticated reconstruction. They acknowledged that the Kara were only partly affected by the disease, since Labuko and many warriors were out on the hills herding cattle.<sup>105</sup> Both the Kara and Kwegu are fully aware that only those close to the river were affected by the disease, hence the Mullaya (the Murle plus the Ngi-murtuni), the Kwegu and those Kara who had remained in the main villages. In one version of the story a Kara elder depicted the spread of the disease among them as a deliberate act by the Mullaya who have joined them in the Kara village. In revenge the Kara warriors were advised by the Kara elders to attack and disperse the Mullaya, who were forced to cross the river and seek refuge in neighbouring communities.<sup>106</sup>

We are thus faced with a surprising alternative explanation of the 'Murle enigma': the Murle did not disappear from the historical and ethnographic accounts because of the disease or because of the Ethiopian and Russian military campaigns, but as a result of a deliberate attempt to demolish them by one of their neighbours after they had been weakened by the disease!

Spreading the disease works in the above narrative as moral justification. A second narrative, independently recorded, reveals the existence of a land demarcation issue between the Kara and the Murle:

Lokoryo: The land of the Mullaya was vast. [...]. Agarta [a place on the eastern side of the Omo river, from the lodge towards Omoratte, about 10 km from lodge, in the current hunting area] was established as a border between Mullaya and Kara. In Agartadelo [a specific locality within Agarta], Balacho, a Kara warrior, killed many Mullaya. [...] He killed them because they were extending their border up to the lodge area. Balacho took half of Agarta land and gave it to Nakuta, his close friend from Nyangatom. He allowed him to farm and graze in Agarta. Nakuta was a Nyangatom, his clan is Kumama. The Mullaya asked him; "who authorized you to use this land? Just go away as soon as you can". He replied that it was a Kara to authorize him. They said: "Who are the Kara to authorize you? This is not the land of the Kara. We have made a border with them, so just go behind that border in Kara land".<sup>107</sup>

One is tempted to read here an expansionist move by the Kara, an attempt to take over agricultural land in Kuma, an area previously associated to the Murle. This attempt was probably favoured by the fact that the Murle or most of them had been forced to cross to the western bank of the Omo River. This reconstruction fits with the observations made in 1902 by the members of du Bourg de Bozas' expedition. They crossed Murle area, but could not see any Murle. Rather, more Kara warriors joined the Kara war party that was marching with the expedition.<sup>108</sup> This is also likely to be the time when Bhiibhii introduced his reform, whose aim could also be an attempt to reconstitute the demographic strength of the displaced group. The Kara may have lastly reacted against this joint Murle and Ngi-murtuny attempt to regain control of Kuma by the time of the epidemic, in 1909 or short after it. The written records indeed indicate that by the turn of the century the relations of power had turned in favour of the Kara, who probably managed to establish better relations with the invading military. In 1901 Austin found the Kara to be better off than the others. In 1902 Du Bourg de Bozas managed to contact them through the mediation of some Oromo (Ethiopian) soldiers left behind from Leontieff' campaign, and the Kara proved their capacity to quickly mobilize a large war party. In 1909 Stigand found an Ethiopian military post in Kara.<sup>109</sup>

The ultimate result was the disappearance of the Murle and of the Ngi-murtuni primary identities from the lower Omo valley. While the continuity of the ancient Murle with the Ngaritch section of Nyangatom is clearly claimed, the connection between the historical Murle and the Narich section of the Daasanach is less evident. The elders of the Elelle section stated that the Narich splat from the Murle, and could also include some Mursi.<sup>110</sup> This statement is probably based on the fact that 'Murle' appear as clan and lineage name in several sections of the Daasanach, and 'Mursu' as a lineage of the Ili clan.<sup>111</sup> A Nyangatom/Naritch elder mentioned that some Murle went to seek refuge among the Daasanach at the time of sleeping sickness.<sup>112</sup> The Shir rather recall a codified story of a Narich woman with many daughters married by the Shir youths.<sup>113</sup> Lotikori mentioned that the woman was found by the time the level of the lake was a bit higher, since she was fetching water by the locality Old Omo, a place probably corresponding to Teleki's camp in

Daasanach. Using Butzer's projection as reference for the fluctuations of Lake Turkana, this locality corresponded to the lake's shore either by the time of Teleki in 1888 or, after the following transgression, around 1900. These dates are compatible both with a possible assimilation of the Murle and Ngi-murtuni living in Leere following the northwards push by the lake on the Daasanach living in the delta, and with the mentioned influx of refugees after the Ethiopian conquest.<sup>114</sup>

As mentioned, similar processes of assimilation was activated by the Kara. The Garchi and the Bogudo, identified as separate groups by the explorers, are today considered Kara proper, hence there is no open assertion of assimilation.<sup>115</sup> A conflict occurred between the Kara of Dus and the Garchi – ultimately leading to a stronger integration between these two Kara components – is presented in Kara narratives as an internal war.<sup>116</sup> Some elders indeed consider this tragic event rather than sleeping sickness to be the cause of the Kara's demographic crisis and their permanent lost of cattle.<sup>117</sup> Concerning the claimed assimilation because of sleeping sickness, I have focused my ethnographic attention on the Gomba, the group today constituting the majority of Labuk village. The Gomba elders claimed to have arrived to the Omo Valley after the Kara. As in the case of the Kwegu/Marsha, they claimed a heterogeneous origin. Concerning their language, Ambi Bilale explained: "I do not know what language they were speaking when they came. They arrived after the Kara. Therefore they were speaking the Kara language among themselves". In line with the written sources, the Gomba elders claimed to have settled at Kalo, a place a little bit upstream the Usno (Mago) River, just next to its junction with the Omo river.<sup>118</sup> Some family traditions reveal a much later arrival of some of them, showing that scattered groups have continued to flow to Kalo for long.<sup>119</sup> Concerning the process of assimilation, they did not mention sleeping sickness, but rather their desire to get direct access to the banks of the Omo river, lastly achieved thanks to their role of mediator taken on occasion of the Dus-Garchi civil war. Some started to live with the Kara at Labuk village, until they all were integrated into Kara polity.<sup>120</sup>

If the interpretation here provided is correct, the prominence of natural disasters in the oral historical narratives of the region may respond to a mode of thinking by which new orders emerge out of cataclysm. Natural disasters such as large flood and sleeping sickness did occur and change the context of interaction – reducing or expanding the resource basis available to human groups – but new identities emerged as a matter of longer term processes of movement, competition and assimilation, deeply rooted in the cultural and political fields as much as in the environmental one.

### **Identities formation in the lower Omo valley**

#### ***Primary identities***

The reconstruction of the process of identity formation in the lower Omo confirm the validity of the assumption that major group identities are primarily defined by the association to a specific pool of natural resources. The current primary groups of this southern tract of the lower Omo valley were affected and often re-structured by the cataclysms of the last part the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Nyangatom engage in a complementary governance of both pastoral and agricultural resources. The Daasanach practice a similar combination, but they are mainly confined to the delta flats. The Kwegu are directly bounded to the Omo River, their livelihoods being based on fishing and honey cultivation in the gallery forest. Hunting was a crucial component in the past, but it has now been substituted by river bank and flood-retreat cultivation. The Kara used to practice an agro-pastoral combination analogous to the other two groups, but having lost access to pastoral resources they are now mainly confined to flood-retreat cultivation, associating to the Hamar for the pastoral component.

Failure by the Borana, Marle, Ngi-murtuny, Murle, Boguto and Gomba to maintain or gain access to a viable resources pool led to the disappearance of their primary identity from the valley. Traces of their primary identity are found in the form of lineage and family traditions, and as secondary identities within the broader primary group – Borana and Narich among the Daasanach; Ngarich or Murle among the Nyangatom; Gomba, Bogudo and Garchi among the Kara – or as clan or lineage name – ‘Boran’, Murle and ‘Mursu’ in Daasanach, Murle in Nyangatom. The Marle

managed to reconstitute their sub-identity in a new geographical context in interaction with the other components of the current Arbore.

Language is the most relevant feature qualifying primary identities in the lower Omo. Whatever the specific dynamics of group formation, the adoption of a common language seems to be the crucial factor to develop an encompassing governance of natural resources, reducing potential of conflict within the community. Groups that have lost control of a viable pool of natural resources managed to preserve secondary identities, but have lost their mother language within the next generation.

### *Clusters*

The reconstruction proposed in this article shows that the concept of a discrete geographical unit exclusively associated to each primary group does not fit with the on-ground situation. Being the relationship between each primary group and the physical environment resources oriented, each of such groups geographically overlaps or partly overlaps with one or several other groups. The notion of primary groups exercising coherent governance over a broad and sometimes scattered range of resources must therefore be complemented with the recognition of specific localities characterised by high interaction and co-presence of different primary groups. We can call such territorial-based units ‘clusters’. Clusters have their own dynamics and life. Since each group retains elements of its own governance, new governance solutions specific to the locality had to be developed by adopting multi-linguism and specific ritual solutions. Following Turton’s approach, we may say that a new sense of place was created through social interaction, up to the development of new local identities such as Puma, Marsha and Gomba (Kuma), names that were taken to mean both the locality and the associated communities. Only by gaining access to a diverse and viable pool of natural resources could these emerging identities be sustainable in the longer term, as in the case of the Daasanach.<sup>121</sup> Clusters thus become knots of culture and identity elaboration. They have probably played a key role in distributing the generation class system across the valley.

The range of possible forms of cross-cultural associations is obviously varied. Under most circumstances people are very accommodative towards newcomers as a normal human habit, a regional cultural response to the fact that the natural resources and the local demographic balances were continuously changing, forcing individuals and groups to move. Shifts within the resource pool of a primary group are simply normal, facilitated by a multiplicity of social ties. Otherwise the movement implies a cultural and linguistic change. The cases discussed in this article show that scattered groups losing connection to their parent society are likely to immediately adopt the language dominant in the refuge area. This process is continuously taking place through various mechanisms of adoption or cooption, as it is well illustrated by the case of the Borana in Daasanach, adopted despite the relations of conflict. In the simplest case, the newcomers spread across the host community without retaining any collective rights over the natural resources. A slightly different case is the one when arriving scattered groups converge on under-utilized resources, at the margin of the locally dominant primary group. The small groups that have continued to arrive to the Omo River from east appear to have gathered in localities not specifically claimed by others but anyhow capable to offer livelihoods resources, such as Marsha and the area of Diba oxbow lake, and, after this sites were occupied, Kalo (Gomba). The newcomers have acquired the Kwegu language before the coming of the Kara and Kara language thereafter. This process seems to be based on the principle that access to resources that are not used cannot be denied. Adopting the language expresses adherence to the local governance set.

Groups that maintained a link with their parent society and those managing to gain access to a viable pool of natural resources retained their own language. Since they found themselves in interaction with other pre-existing groups, they gave origin to clusters in a more strict sense. In the lower Omo valley we can differentiate among two main patterns of interaction. Clusters formed by primary groups exploiting different types of resources on a same geographical unit appear to have been rather stable over time. This was the case of the Kwegu with the Kara and with the Mursi and Bodi upstream the Omo River. In this case the Kara and the other dominant pastoral communities

upstream seem to have over-imposed their governance, relegating the Kwegu to a niche economy, and establishing forms of ethnic hierarchies. Again, the principle that access to resources that are not used cannot be denied seems to have provided the legitimacy for the Kara's superimposition on the same territorial space of the Kwegu, expressed by the disengagement of Kwegu from cultivation in the Kara mainstream myth of migration down the Omo River. The association between large pastoral groups and niche cultivators along the Omo river is a variation of this case, best represented in the lower Omo valley by the Nyangatom and the Ngi-murtuny.<sup>122</sup> Differently from the Kwegu, some Nyangatom directly engaged in agriculture, giving the start to a new local identity.

The second scenario is geographical co-habitation by groups practicing similar livelihoods. Even in this case localized community are normally accommodative towards newcomers. Allocating part of the resources when they are available is a both a moral obligation and a way to extend the network of solidarity and reciprocity. This was obviously easier when the demographic balance favour availability of resources. Intermarriage may further strengthen these ties. When co-habitation is established, processes of resources demarcation take place. Portions of the resources are locally allocated or negotiated at a variable degree of recognised rights. Pastoralists may be granted use rights of existing wells, allowed to dig new ones, given access to the river banks or to the inundated flats. This type of relationship seem to have characterised the early Cushitic clusters west of Lake Turkana, as well as the penetration of the Nyangatom in the area of Mount Kuraz, where they report to have peacefully co-resided with the Marle and the Elelle.

In the case of cultivators, productive land is demarcated within specific localities. This was the case of the Daasanach and Nyangatom in Nyubume/Leere, and possibly between the Kara and the Murlaya before conflict broke out over an issue of land demarcation within Kuma.<sup>123</sup>

The co-habitation of members of primary groups practicing similar livelihoods has a greater potential for competition and conflict. As mentioned by Turton, once a group of 'pioneers' has successfully established itself in a new area, infiltration by individuals seeking access to the new



economic resources may bring a demographic unbalance between human beings and the natural resources.<sup>124</sup> An environmental crisis may exacerbate the problem, leading either to the voluntary resettling or to conflict, or to both. The voluntary move of the Marle off Mount Kuraz and probably off the Omo valley is one of such voluntary choices. The move down to Nyubume/Leere is a second case. The solidarity built by the Nyangatom with the Elelle at Mount Kuraz and with the Murle at Moruankipi allowed them to engage in a temporary alliance to address the conflict outwards, seizing new resources to the Ngi-murtuny. This alliance was short living. The Daasanach could move southwards following the receding shore of Lake Turkana, while the Murle found their own space at Kuma. The oral records of clashes of the Shir against the Borana, the Marle and the Elelle may instead represent a case whereby conflict broke out within pastoral clusters. These dynamics seems to correspond to Waller's definition of 'attrition', a typical modality of pastoral expansion, seizing control of key resources such as wells or dry season grazing area. The victims have no choice but to withdraw or to join the aggressor as the cumulative effect of attrition increases.<sup>125</sup> The Shir probably seized the excellent forage of the inundated flats in the Omo delta, but even in this case the notion of 'cluster' helps to better explain the process of cultural fusion of the Shir with the Elelle into a new Daasanach identity.

Among the cultivators, the Murle and the Ngi-murtuni have been engaging in a similar ambivalent relationship, intermarrying at an early phase, engaging in conflict when the Murle cut out their own space in Kuma, and merging into the Puma (Kany Kany) cluster following the devastation and insecurity brought by the Ethiopian conquest.<sup>126</sup>

Under conditions of intense resources competition between groups practising similar livelihoods conflict may escalate to a systemic level: it takes shape along the social boundaries of groups whose belonging is defined by the primary identity. It corresponds to a specific type of movement of the groups of the lower Omo described by Turton "a gradual but concerted *de facto* occupation of territory claimed by another ethnic group, as a result of which the geographical location of the ethnic boundary between them is changed over time".<sup>127</sup> In the southern part of the

Omo valley it was the conflict of the Shir against the Borana, the Murle against the Ngi-murtuny, the Kara against the Murlaya. It was a clash deciding which governance set was competent over a contested resource, whose result defined what the primary identities of the valley are.

The need to protect the rights over the natural resources forces communities to seek for the optimal demographic balance, both to avoid a vacuum ‘at the periphery’ that can be potentially be filled by threatening groups and to be able to protect the natural resources from contending outsiders. This means that under particular political and environmental circumstances the formation of new clusters may actively be encouraged by promoting the inflow of outsiders. We have heard this to have happened when the Daasanach invited the Nyangatom to Nyubume/Leere, and the Nyangatom in turn called the Murle to contend key land resources to the Ngi-murtuny. Bhibhii’s reform may also have responded to a strategy of this type, a last attempt to keep their primary identity alive. It is the same principle asserted by the Kara claiming to have assimilated the Gomba and the Muguji to reconstitute their demography after sleeping sickness.<sup>128</sup>

### ***Territorial sections***

Territorial sections are a third relevant grouping category to be considered. They retain some elements of the primary group, insofar they are always qualified by a name marking a distinctive sub-identity. They are also associated to a sub-pool of natural resources, subject to some degree of autonomy and differential governance modalities. Participation in the broader governance exercised by the primary group is facilitated by the adoption of a same language. Individuals may indeed very easily move across the territorial sections of their primary group. Shared governance is above all manifest in the absence of conflict and feuds within a primary group.

A new territorial section may develop in several ways. Turton has analysed the process by which new territorial sections expanded from a main group among the Daasanach and the Mursi.<sup>129</sup> The opposite process was considered by Waller. He has selected the Daasanach to illustrate how ‘agglomerative’ societies “can expand fairly rapidly by drawing in members from the surrounding populations [...], exploiting complementary niches with a particularly rich and varied

environment”.<sup>130</sup> I would suggest that agglomeration is likely to be the last phase of a cluster contiguous to the territory of the agglomerative group. The codified story about ‘marrying the daughters of a Narich woman by the Shir’ may indeed refer to a phase of mixed Murle - Shir habitation characterized by bilingualism and intermarriage, before fully accomplishing agglomeration. This is even clearer with the assimilation of the Ngaritch to the Nyangatom. They have engaged in a cluster with them at Nakirionkipi at an early stage, and again in Kany Kany. When the Murle sought refuge in Kany Kany they were already *de facto* assimilated, since the change was irreversible. The relevant question is why they were granted the status of territorial section, hence why they had dedicated land rights recognized within Nyangatom, despite their displacement into a Nyangatom territory. The solution can be found with reference to the broader field of ethnic interaction: by recognising the Murle as one of their major sections, the Nyangatom acquired the territorial rights embedded in the Murle primary identity. Indeed the current Ngarich are again cultivating in Kuma. So strong is the reciprocal acknowledgement of the primary groups’ rights over the natural resources that the Nyangatom still recognize the rights of the Marle over an abandoned well in Kuraz, more than one hundred years after the latter left the valley!.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tornay, "Murle Enigma"; Turton, "Warfare and Ethnicity".

<sup>2</sup> Adams and Anderson, "Irrigation", 528; Anderson, *Eroding the Commons*.

<sup>3</sup> Waller, "Ecology, Migration", 348-9.

<sup>4</sup> This was part of the ethno-historical component of the AHRC funded "Landscape, People and Parks: Environmental change in the Lower Omo valley, Southwestern Ethiopia" research project, based at the African Studies Centre, University of Oxford. I am indebted to David Anderson and David Turton for their valuable advice. Interviews are here quoted with reference to the internal research coding system.

<sup>5</sup> Waller, "Ecology, Migration", 349.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 350.

<sup>7</sup> Turton, "Meaning of Place", 267; Turton, "Warfare and Ethnicity", 151, 159, 165.

<sup>8</sup> Turton, "Meaning of Place", 275. For an overall picture of the process of formation of specific identities through movement in the lower Omo see Turton, "Warfare and Ethnicity".

<sup>9</sup> Turton, "Mursi Political Identity", 19.

<sup>10</sup> Bassi, "Community Conserved Areas"; Bassi and Tache, "Borana Conserved Landscape"; Bassi, "Politics of Space".

<sup>11</sup> Barth, "Introduction".

<sup>12</sup> Turton, "Warfare and Ethnicity", 164.

<sup>13</sup> In 1993 SNV-Ethiopia facilitated a large inter-ethnic peace-making ceremony in Arbore, documented by Ivo Strecker and Alula Pankhurst in the film *Bury the Spear!*. Afterwards several international actors, GOs and NGOs have been promoting inter-ethnic peace initiatives based on inter-ethnic committees of elders. These initiatives continue to play the important role of building shared understanding about rights to natural resources and rules in a changed context.

<sup>14</sup> The Randal and Koro section are likely to be the result of the late assimilation of destitute Rendille and Samburu after the natural disasters of the 1880s and 1890s (Sobania, "Peoples of Lake Turkana", 66-70, 72, 113-4, 202-3, 206; Almagor, *Pastoral Partners*, 14-18).

<sup>15</sup> MB27; MB40; MB 43. Sobania has also reported this story too (Sobania, "Peoples of Lake Turkana", 58, 73-4).

<sup>16</sup> Almagor, *Pastoral Partners*, 19-21; MB27; MB43.

<sup>17</sup> Lotikori Yerakal, a known and respected elder in Daasanach, helped me to gather this group of Elelle elders including Elelle oral historians.

<sup>18</sup> Aneesa Kassam critics to the work of Gunther Schlee show that the Gabra are a composite group of heterogeneous origin (Kassam, "Gabra Ethnohistorical Origins").

<sup>19</sup> Tornay, *Les Fusils jaunes*, 100, 108; MB34. See also MB39. The Nyangatom clearly differentiate between the 'Marille' (Marle) and the Ngi-Marile (Daasanach) (MB 29).



<sup>20</sup> MB46.

<sup>21</sup> Gil-Romera et al., "Long-term resilience". This is part of the ecological component of the AHRC funded "Landscape, People and Parks: Environmental change in the Lower Omo valley, Southwestern Ethiopia" research project.

<sup>22</sup> She had never met a Borana and was not aware about the current Borana living in Southern Ethiopia, although she heard about the Gabra living to the east of the Daasanach.

<sup>23</sup> MB43.

<sup>24</sup> Lamphear, "Origin and Expansion of the Turkana", 31. 36; Lamphear, *Traditional History*, 194; Lamphear, "Ateker 'New Model'", 67-8, 71. Sobania is very cautious about the identification of these Oromo speaking communities. He nevertheless refer to a process of partial assimilation of Borana by the Samburu (Sobania, "Peoples of Lake Turkana", 73-4, 76-7, 84-5, 89-90). It is worth recalling that some early 17th centuries sources written in Ge'ez indicate that by the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century 'Borana' had already emerged as a specific primary identity among the Oromo speaking communities of southern Ethiopia (Beckingham and Huntingford, *Records of Ethiopia*; Lusini, "Storia dell'Etiopia"; Tubiana, "Un ethnographe Éthiopien").

<sup>25</sup> MB43 and MB46.

<sup>26</sup> Strecker, "Traditional Life", 17. This tradition is also reported in Petros, *The Karo*, iv, 5-7. The same tradition is shared by the Bashada, a group closely related to the Kara (Epple, "Culture Contact").

<sup>27</sup> Waller, "Ecology, Migration", 347.

<sup>28</sup> Lamphear, "Ateker 'New Model'"; Tornay, *Les Fusils jaunes*, 80-82.

<sup>29</sup> MB46.

<sup>30</sup> Sobania, "Peoples of Lake Turkana", 72-3.

<sup>31</sup> MB40.

<sup>32</sup> MB27; MB40. This reconstruction was provided as a preamble to the story of adoption of the sick Borana man.

<sup>33</sup> Tornay, *Les Fusils jaunes*, 109; MB39.

<sup>34</sup> MB39.

<sup>35</sup> Tornay, *Les Fusils jaunes*, 82-3.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 108-9.

<sup>38</sup> MB32.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>40</sup> MB32.

<sup>41</sup> Tornay, "Murle Enigma", 129.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.. This plug, made of a section of horn, is different from the terracotta discs still used by the Mursi.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.; Tornay, "Murle".

<sup>44</sup> Tornay, "Murle Enigma"; Tornay, "Murle".

<sup>45</sup> Hieda only found a few elders capable to use a few words of the old language (Hieda, "Omo-Murle").

<sup>46</sup> MB30.

<sup>47</sup> Turton, "The Kwegu and the Mursi"

<sup>48</sup> Matsuda, "Koegu and their Neighbours".

<sup>49</sup> Hieda, "Koegu".

<sup>50</sup> MB30. Today the southern Kwegu provide contradictory statements concerning their ability to cultivate at the early times.

<sup>51</sup> The review of Dardano's cartography of Bottego's exploration seems to indicate that the course of the Omo and the spot of confluence may have slightly changed since 1986.

<sup>52</sup> MB36.

<sup>53</sup> Matsuda, "Koegu and their Neighbours". See also Girke, "The Ädamo", Ch 4.

<sup>54</sup> MB36; MB29.

<sup>55</sup> David Turton suggests that the Mui river, a western affluent of the Omo, is an important place for Kwegu identity (Personal communication, 2009). This fits with a recently collected statement of the central Kwegu about priority of their arrival downriver from the north, after a stop at Mirga Hills (Lewis and Woodburn, "Final Narrative", 7). In 1896 Bottego identified an autonomous community of Bachaa ('Kwegu' in Mursi and Bodi language) between the Bodi and the Mursi, in a tract of the Omo corresponding to the confluence of the Mui into the Omo.

<sup>56</sup> Girke, "The Ädamo", 109-10 and segg. See also Petros, *The Karo*, 5.

<sup>57</sup> Smith, "Somaliland (Conclusion)", 228; Cavendish, "Through Somaliland", 385; von Höhnel, *Discovery*, 168. 'The 'Marle' misspell in this last source is corrected into 'Murle' in von Höhnel, "Subsequent Exploration Part 1", 26; de Léontieff, "Explorations", 114.. Jean Lydall, Personal communication, Oct 2009.

<sup>58</sup> Sobania, "Peoples of Lake Turkana", 52-4.

<sup>59</sup> Megerssa, "Oromo World View"; Megerssa and Kassam, "Oromo World View".

<sup>60</sup> The timing of these cataclysmic events corresponds to the pick of elaboration of poetic apocalyptic text by the Borana (Bassi and Tache, "Oromo Eschatology").

<sup>61</sup> MB41; MB6; MB7.

<sup>62</sup> Butzer, *Level of Lake Rudolf*, Ch. 3.

<sup>63</sup> Carr, *Pastoralism in Crisis*, 271 and segg.; Butzer, *Level of Lake Rudolf*, 140-3.

<sup>64</sup> Butzer, *Level of Lake Rudolf*, 143.

<sup>65</sup> von Höhnel, *Discovery*, 166-200. By 1902, time of du Bourg de Bozas' exploration, the Daasanach appeared to have fully recovered, despite the negative impact of the Ethiopian military campaigns (Tornay, "Murle Enigma", 129-32).

<sup>66</sup> Vannutelli and Citerni, *L'Omo*, 355, 362. Cavendish, crossing the area a few months later, reports 'Darsonich' (Cavendish, "Through Somaliland").

<sup>67</sup> von Höhnel, *Discovery*, 163. The 'Reshiat' did not allow them to travel west of the Omo river.

<sup>68</sup> The course of the river might have slightly shifted in this tract, or the locality might have included land on both the left and the right side of the river.

<sup>69</sup> MB46.

<sup>70</sup> MB34.

<sup>71</sup> MB30; MB32; MB39.

<sup>72</sup> MB30. Baldambe reported that the Murle were having some cattle before the Ethiopian conquest. They were keeping it at Kizo, Omalle, Wolait, Dunka, Irbangode, Karawa and Aiba (Jean Lydall, Personal communication, Oct 2009).

<sup>73</sup> I have found the place to be under cultivation by the Ngarich still in 2009, on the eastern bank of the Omo river. The site of cultivation has of course slightly shifted over time because of the change hydrology of the valley.

<sup>74</sup> MB32; MB39.

<sup>75</sup> MB39.

<sup>76</sup> MB39.

<sup>77</sup> Tornay, *Les Fusils jaunes*, 112-23; Tornay, "Murle Enigma", 136.

<sup>78</sup> MB32; MB34; MB39.

<sup>79</sup> MB21; MB22; MB23.

<sup>80</sup> The occasional engagement by the ancient Murle in pastoralism is disregarded by the other people of lower Omo. The Murle elders have mentioned engagement of the Ngi-murtuny in hunting by trap as a complementary activity (MB30).

<sup>81</sup> MB46.

<sup>82</sup> Smith, "Somaliland", Map.

<sup>83</sup> MB30; MB32; MB39.

<sup>84</sup> Turton, "Warfare and Ethnicity".

<sup>85</sup> MB32.

<sup>86</sup> MB23.

<sup>87</sup> Vannutelli and Citerni, *L'Omo*, 362 and maps.

<sup>88</sup> The Turkana use the same term to indicate the 1918 'Turkana Patrol', the British-led military campaign that reduced the Turkana to destitution with a permanent impact on their society (Tornay, "Le Triangle Ilémi"; Lamphear, "Turkana Leadership", 240-1).

<sup>89</sup> MB32.

<sup>90</sup> Bulatovich, *Ethiopia*.

<sup>91</sup> de Léontieff, "Explorations".

<sup>92</sup> Turton, "Exploration", 5 and ss.

<sup>93</sup> Smith, "Somaliland", 228. Cavendish, "Through Somaliland", 384. Tornay rightly suggests that 10,000 is probably an exaggeration.

<sup>94</sup> Tornay, "Murle Enigma", 129-31. Already by December 1899 Smith found a few huts only on the western side of Omo river (Smith, "Lake Rudolf", 607).

<sup>95</sup> MB34.

<sup>96</sup> Kassa, "Hamar-Bako Awraja", ch 1. de Léontieff, *Provinces Équatoriales*, 35-6, 72.

<sup>97</sup> Tornay, "Murle Enigma", 130-2, 139. The area where De Bozas found the mixed 'Puma' community correspond to that earlier identified by Bottego.

<sup>98</sup> MB22. Bhiibhii's reform and his leadership by the time they crossed to the western bank were independently mentioned by a second Kara elders (MB21). The practice of intermarriage between the Murle and the Ngi-murtuny during the time of sleeping sickness was independently confirmed by a Nyangatom elder in Kibish (MB39).

<sup>99</sup> MB34. His name is sometimes pronounced 'Bheebhee'.

<sup>100</sup> . Tornay, "Murle Enigma", 133. An elder of the Kara/Gomba claimed that the Kara died by the epidemic after the Mullaya crossed to the western bank.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>102</sup> MB30; MB34; MB39. Mention of this last move by the Ngi-murtuni is compatible with a Mursi tradition mentioning that the Mursi clan called Changuli has come from the south (David Turton, Personal communication, March 2010).

<sup>103</sup> MB3.



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- <sup>104</sup> Billoreau, "Mission de Bozas"; Tornay, "Itinéraire de Bozas ". I am thankful for the kind collaboration offered by Serge Tornay and Stéphane Kraxner – archivist of the Institut Pasteur – for their assistance in accessing the documentation of Du Bourg de Bozas' expedition.
- <sup>105</sup> MB24; MB21.
- <sup>106</sup> MB22. Elders of Kara/Gomba independently confirmed that the Mursi were displaced by the Kara (MB24).
- <sup>107</sup> MB23.
- <sup>108</sup> Maurette, *Mission De Bozas*, 300.
- <sup>109</sup> Ibid., 292, 296-300; Tornay, "Murle Enigma", 130-3.
- <sup>110</sup> MB46.
- <sup>111</sup> Almagor, *Pastoral Partners*, 19-21.
- <sup>112</sup> MB30.
- <sup>113</sup> This story was also recorded by Sobania.
- <sup>114</sup> MB40. Butzer, *Level of Lake Rudolf*, 123, 136.
- <sup>115</sup> Strecker, "Traditional Life", 19; Petros, *The Karo*, Ch. 1; Girke, "The Ādamo", 88 ff.
- <sup>116</sup> Girke, "The Ādamo", 63-4. Girke suggested that this internal war can be the one mentioned by Neumann, who was in Dus by the beginning of 1996 (Girke, Personal communication, Feb 2010; Neumann, *East Equatorial*, 328-8).
- <sup>117</sup> MB21; MB22; MB23; MB24.
- <sup>118</sup> MB24.
- <sup>119</sup> MB12.
- <sup>120</sup> MB24.
- <sup>121</sup> Although the Kara myth of migration depicts them having arrived down to the Omo River as a fully fledged and compact group, their identity too may have locally developed after arrival to the river banks by the process of merging of groups speaking different languages.
- <sup>122</sup> Waller describes this type of relationship between pastoralists and niche cultivator as 'symbiotic' (Waller, "Ecology, Migration", 363-4).
- <sup>123</sup> Still today the Nyangatom/Ngarich allocate land to the Nyangatom by specifically demarcating it within the inundated flat that is as a whole considered of their competence.
- <sup>124</sup> Turton, "Warfare and Ethnicity", 162.
- <sup>125</sup> Waller, "Ecology, Migration", 366.
- <sup>126</sup> Reference to the introduction of bride wealth in Bhiibhii's reform seems to indicate that the Nyangatom were the element of union between communities that were previously competing.
- <sup>127</sup> Turton, "Warfare and Ethnicity", 161.
- <sup>128</sup> The rapid formation of clusters, the need to quickly find shared governance solution with a necessary military component is likely to be the reason of the spread of the generation system in the lower Omo valley.
- <sup>129</sup> Turton, "Warfare and Ethnicity".
- <sup>130</sup> Waller, "Ecology, Migration", 367.
- <sup>131</sup> MB20. Some Nyangatom have recently sought permit to re-open it.