

CHAPTER SIX

CUSHITES

**Oromo(Boran, Gabbra, Sakuye, Orma, Burji)
Sam Speakers(Somali, Rendile, Arrial)**

Boran

The area the Boran (Oromo-Galla) occupy in Kenya includes parts of the Districts of Marsabit, Moyale, Mandera, Wajir and Isiolo; in Ethiopia, the Boran occupy the southernmost parts of the Sidamo province. They are also found in some parts of the Jubaland province of the Somali republic in the vicinity of the Dawa and Ganale rivers. They originated from Dirre and Liban areas of southern Ethiopia.

Linguistically the Boran language belongs to the Eastern Cushitic sub-division of the Cushitic group of languages, which derives from the main Afro-Asiatic family of languages. In Kenya in addition to the Boran, the Somali of North Eastern Province and the Wardy Galla of the Tana region both belong to the Cushitic group of languages. Boran is a corporate term embracing principally three major groups of Borana speakers. They include the Gabbra, Sakuye and Borana Guttu, that is the 'Borana proper'. Also closely related to the Boran are the Watta (Waata) people who are descendants of an original hunter-gatherer population. Other peoples who have also played some role in shaping Boran history are the neighbouring groups. These include the Somali and in particular the Gurreh (Garre) and Ajuran sub-groups of the Somali, the Wardy Galla, the Samburu and the Rendille peoples. Writing on the origin, migration and settlement of the Boran, Paul S.G. Goto has stated:

Taking their cue mainly from Cerulli and L.M. Lewis, most scholars of African history accepted as an article of faith the theory that the Galla people occupied the horn of Africa before the Somali, who beginning around the 10th Century A.D, swept south and to the south-west from the shores of the Gulf of Aden and drove the Galla before them. The Galla reached Ethiopia and in the 16th Century overran the greater part of that country.¹

According to Haberland and H. Lewis, the origin of the Galla (Oromo) is to be found in the highland region around Bali in South-Central Ethiopia and traditions are unanimous in confirming this. The center of Galla dispersal is traced around the region, which is currently the homeland of the Boran. Paul S.G Goto writing about Boran, Gabbra and Sakuye human and stock movements wrote thus:

Hence over the years the vital areas of Boran migrations and settlements were the homelands of Dirre and Liban, and the lowland region of Golbo and Wanyama stretching from the east of Lake Rudolf [Turkana] to Qaddaduma and beyond in the east. It also included Dadasha Waraba as the furthest out post of Boran settlement in the north-east directions, in the lower reaches of the Dawa and Ganale Gudda rivers.

KENYA ETHNIC COMMUNITIES: FOUNDATION OF THE NATION

Traditional migration tendencies were increased by disturbances taking place in the horn of Africa as a result of the Jihads by Mohammed Abdille Hassan and the pressure exerted by the Amhara annexation of Boran country under Menelik II in 1897. Many groups migrated to the Golbo lowlands and on to the further reaches of the present Marsabit district of Kenya. Paul S.G.Goto on the occupation of these lowlands wrote thus:

We would refer to these as the 'low altitude' areas, called Golbo by the Boran and the slightly 'higher-altitude' regions, the area traditionally known to the Boran as Dirre and Liban. The latter is the traditional homeland of the Boran and is still regarded as such. The whole of it lies in the Southern province of Ethiopia. The Golbo is that region which coincides with the area below the southern boundary of Ethiopia with Kenya, stretching from the east of Lake Turkana [Rudof] to the region of confluence of the Dawa and the Ganale rivers, in the east. physically, it is set off from Dirre and Liban by an escarpment which roughly coincides with the Ethiopia Kenya border and is called Gorro by Boran.³

Writing on the Boran in the book *People and Cultures of Kenya*, Andrew Fedders and Cynthia Salvadori had this to say:

Kenya Borana are the progeny of Ethiopian Borana. The latter descended from the highlands, abandoned agriculture and adopted a pastoral life-style many generations ago. The Borana move to the lowlands may have occurred around the years 1660-1720. They have been migrating to a greater or lesser degree ever since, and periodically fresh infusion of their fellows have entered northern Kenya. Unlike their relations, the Orma, who remain cattle herding pastoral people, the Kenya Borana have been forced to change to a predominantly camel-herding economy. This recent and relatively drastic change has resulted in part from the progressive desiccation of the Borana environment and in part from the loss of most of their cattle during the shifta (Somali bandit) troubles in the north of Kenya in the sixties.

Social and Political Organisation

Borana homesteads are grouped into settlements. A settlement may consist of eight or nine homesteads, with the largest grouping up to forty such homesteads. Every settlement has a titular leader who is the head of all the grouped households and that is the extent of the settlement organisation. Communal life and co-operation in a Borana settlement are not institutionalised and social organisation among the Borana is loosely structured. Paul S.G Goto has described social structure of Borana life thus:

Among the Borana society the institutions of clan and moiety, age-set and generation set are the vital elements of this feature. Clans and moieties: Boran society is divided into two exogamous moieties; Sabho and Gona. Each moiety is in turn divided into named clans and sub-clans and one of the moieties-Gona moiety is divided into the sub-moieties of Haroresa and Fullale. Like the moiety, Boran clans and sub-clans are without exemption exogamous.⁵

KENYA ETHNIC COMMUNITIES: FOUNDATION OF THE NATION

Below is a break-down of Boran clans and moieties.

The Sobho moiety three clans:

1. Karayu;
2. Matarri;
3. Digallu.

Karayu is the priestly clan of the Sabho moiety.

The Gona moiety is divided into two sub-moieties:

The Fullele and Hororesa under each of which are the clans listed below:

Fullele Haroresa

- | | |
|------------|---------------|
| 1. Oditu | 8. Arussi |
| 2. Sirayu | 9. Qarcabdu |
| 3. Galantu | 10. Dambitu |
| 4. Daccitu | 11. Hawatu |
| 5. Kinitu | 12. Nonnitu |
| 6. Baccitu | 13. War Jidda |
| 7. Maccitu | 14. Maliyu |

Gabbara

Most Gabbara live in Marsabit District but some are found as far north as the Kenya-Ethiopian border area and as far west as the Lake Turkana area. They are camel nomads who herd sheep and goats as well. They are a sub-group of the Boran to whom they are related linguistically and culturally. Their economy is distinguished by the camel rather than cattle, which were the traditional Boran livestock, although this distinction has lost most of its significance today.

It is very difficult to determine the origin of the Gabbara people as their traditions are characterised by their vagueness and contradictions. Certain stories pertaining to Gabbara origin are shrouded in myths such that it is difficult to detect any element of historical reality in them. It is possible that these accounts are made up with the deliberate intention of forging an identity between the Gabbara and the Boran by claiming common origin. Establishing the historical facts is a basic problem which confronts every historian who makes use of oral sources, and this problem with regard to the Gabbara is not peculiar to them alone. Even then, it is only one section of the

KENYA ETHNIC COMMUNITIES: FOUNDATION OF THE NATION

Gabbra, the Algana, who are constantly referred to as being the closest sub-group to the Boran and as directly descended from the Qallu, the Karayu clan of the Sabho moiety. The Algana or Algan are the section of the Gabbra who live in close geographical proximity to the Boran, especially the Karayu clan which is often identified with the region around the escarpment separating the Galbo lowlands from the higher grounds of Dirre. The case of the Algana is similar to that of another Galbo resident group, the Sakuye, who are also linked with the Karayu. In addition, many Boran people today have inter-married with the Algan Gabbra on a scale surpassing that with the other Gabbra groups, namely the Galbo or Golbo, the Gara or Garra and Odolla. Boran and Gabbra traditions narrate a story of the origin of the Algana Gabbra which is widely told and which runs as follows:

A long time ago, the Qallu (of Kalayu clan) had two sons. The elder son liked tending to camels very much. The younger one preferred looking after cattle. The Qallu had herds of both these animals. The people began to wonder as to why the elder son of the Qallu showed such a liking for camels especially since Qallu are not allowed to eat camel meat or drink its milk. The council of elders decided to call the elder son "Algala" (meaning some sort of outlaw), but the Qallu instead called him Algana. He gave him his blessings and allowed him to feed on the meat of the camel and on its milk. Then Algana went to live with his camels and his descendants are today called the Algana Gabbra.

Andrew Fedders and Cynthia Salvadori have on the origin of the Gabbra written thus:

Gabbra origins remain uncertain. Earlier in this section on Cushitic peoples, in discussing the fate of the Somali-speaking Garre who were defeated and disbanded by the Orma in the sixteenth century in the region between the Juba and the Tana Rivers, it was suggested that one of the three groups emerging from the routed Garre may have eventually given rise to the Gabbra (as well as to the Rendille and the Sakuye). In other words, it is possible that the Gabbra were Somali speakers who evolved into Galla-speakers. Another possibility that has been proposed is that the Gabbra are a mixer of the Somali, the Samburu, the Rendille and the Borana. Still another possibility is that the Gabbra were simply a sub-group of the Borana but emerged as a distinct people.

Paul S.G.Goto in supporting the Garre origin postulation has written:

In the absence of concrete traditions of origin, we should place more importance on the infrequent references to the origin of the Gabbra from the Gurreh Somali and the Watta peoples. One account has it that the Gabbra are a branch of the Gurreh who came to live alongside the Boran and adopted the latter's language and most of their customs . . .

It is also true that among the Gabbra are several names which closely resemble traditional Muslim names. Such names as Ali, Adano, Abudo, Isako, etc were probably original Muslim names, which have been modified slightly. Finally, the Gabbra names for the names of the week also resemble the Arabic ones or probably the Somali version of the Arabic calendar. These names are Sabdi, Ahad, Alsinim, Talasa, Arba, Kamusa and Gumata corresponding to the days of the week from Saturday (Sabdi) to Friday (Gumata).

KENYA ETHNIC COMMUNITIES: FOUNDATION OF THE NATION

While the evidence here may be insufficient to confirm the descent of the Gabbra from the Somali it is likely that the Gabbra and the Gabbra Miigo, who constitute one of the sections of the Sakuye people, originated from the Gurreh at some point in the past before the Sakuye became part of Boran society. It is possible that the ancestors of the Gabbra people might include the Somali, Rendille and Miigo. Also the widely told story of the Galbo Gabbra originating from the Watta cannot be entirely ignored. However, there is enough evidence to indicate that various elements are represented in this group — Boran, Sakuye, Watta, Gurreh and Miigo and possibly Rendille. E. R. Turton has written:

The first threat to Garre hegemony over the Juba/Tana region seems to have come from the Orma after the latter had reached the coast near the mouth of the River Tana. The Orma then turned north, defeating the Garre and pushing them back to Afmadu, where they were subsequently dispersed. One group moved to Giumbo, near the mouth of the river Juba, but after being repeatedly attacked were forced to cross the river and eventually moved north to Merca. A second group of Garre moved to the coast and then crossed to the Dundas islands, where they sought the protection of the Bajun and were eventually absorbed by them. A third group moved inland from Afmadu, reached the Lorian Swamp and then moved further north. Very little is known about this last migration, though it has been conjectured that it was from this group that the Rendille, Gabbra, Sakuye and Gabbra Migo all have their origin.⁴

Boran oral traditions have it that the Gabbra were a sub-group of the Boran but emerged as a distinct people, but these traditions do not explain exactly what the status of the Gabbra as a sub-group was. A Boran proverb refers to the Gabbra in conjunction with potters, hunters and smiths. It is best to say that perhaps at one time in the past the Gabbra may have been a sub-group of undetermined status among the Boran, but that today they are a group apart. Andrew Fedders and Cynthia Salvadori writing on the similarities between the Gabbra and Boran have stated the following:

Today the Gabbra are a people apart in spite of being Galla-speakers, pastoral nomads and similar to the Boran in other cultural characteristics. In outward appearance, dress and hairstyles and ornamentation, the Gabbra resemble the Borana in most basic respects. The women display a common taste in aluminium ornaments, such as bracelets and necklaces. Aluminium beads, in fact, form the bulk of both Gabbra and Boran women's jewelry. A peculiarly Gabbra ornament though is the double band of aluminium worn by their women around the head.⁵

Like the Boran, the Gabbra have a gada-system, but it has been reported that they have only three gada groups, whereas the Boran have five. The Gabbra share fundamental religious beliefs with the Boran and it is to the Boran priest to whom they go to receive blessings. The Gabbra Malbe adhere to their traditional beliefs. The Gabbra Miigo refer to themselves as Muslims, at least in their contacts with outsiders. On their social and political organisation, Fedders and Salvadori have written thus:

The most relevant sub-division in the daily life of the Gabbra is naturally the residential or settlement unit. The Gabbra settlements are highly mobile residential units, averaging some seventy people and seventeen houses each. Residents may be related through complex kinship ties and marriage bonds. The settlement is not only the basic residential unit, but also the basic political and ritual unit of the Gabbra.

KENYA ETHNIC COMMUNITIES: FOUNDATION OF THE NATION

KENYA ETHNIC COMMUNITIES: FOUNDATION OF THE NATION

Sakuye

Traditions regarding the origins of the Sakuye, unlike those on the origins of the Gabbra are more explicit. The indication here is that the Sakuye people were acculturated into the Boran society at a much later date than the Gabbra. As their name implies, Sakuye came to the Boran from the direction of 'Saku' which is the local name for the site of the present Marsabit township and the surrounding area. These people are said to have broken away, together with the Rendille, from the Garre Somali at some unknown time in the past. The two communities had lived together around Mount Marsabit, where the Sakuye left the Rendille. It is not known why Sakuye moved away, although Samburu pressure on them is suspected to have contributed to their emigration.

In the meantime, a group of people called the Miigo, who had long been acculturated into Boran society, were camped at Demo Derra, a mountain to the east of the present town of Marsabit where they were performing Boran religious ceremonies. Tradition has it that the Miigo are a break-away Gurreh Somali group who had accepted Boran protection as they were a small group and therefore became fully acculturated into Boran society, although they retained their identity as Miigo in certain respects. The story goes that the group from Saku met the Miigo at Demo and on being asked where they came from, they replied 'Saku'. Hence the Miigo called them "Sakuye," meaning people of Saku. The Miigo decided to introduce them to the Qallu of the Karayu clan as he was the authority under whom they also lived. The Qallu gave protection to the Sakuye and asked them and the Miigo to live together as kinsmen thereafter. Necessary Boran ceremonies were performed for the Saku foreigners to be accepted as a friendly group and as members of the group. They were first required to pay certain dues to the Qallu in the form of camels and they were then required to anoint the Qallu every time they visited him as a sign of recognition of his authority as the spiritual leader of the clan and group. Paul S.G.Goto in confirming the Sakuye adoption by the Boran Qallu has written thus:

Henceforth, Sakuye came to be known as "Sakuye of the Qallu" and to all intents and purposes were counted as members of the Karayu clan to which the Qallu of the Sabho moiety had initiated them.¹

The Sakuye inhabit the general region of Moyale and their principal centre is Dabel on the road to Buna Wajir. The small population is scattered in an area stretching from Moyale region in the north to Wajir and Marsabit in the south. The Sakuye area has no strict territorial demarcations. They maintain a cultural resemblance to the Gabbra. Their economy is based on camel and goat husbandry. Their houses' walls and roofs are covered with hides and mats like those of the Gabbra. The women wear their hair in the Gabbra style. Sakuye culture is fundamentally changing with time. Nomadism is on the wane and they have increasingly converted to Islam during the last sixty years or so. Although the Sakuye look to the Qallu of the Boran for ritual leadership, it is no longer clear whether or not they have a gada-system at all. Andrew Fedders and Cynthia Salvadori explaining the current situation facing the small Sakuye community have written thus:

Being numerically so inferior to their neighbors and having suffered greatly during the shifta troubles between 1965-1968, the Sakuye have become preoccupied with peace. They are too few to survive in a fully nomadic and frequently belligerent way of life. Possibly in the near future they will be absorbed by the Somali. Sakuye culture is gradually being sacrificed so that Sakuye themselves survive.

KENYA ETHNIC COMMUNITIES: FOUNDATION OF THE NATION

Orma (Wardy - Wardai)

Andrew Fedders and Cynthia Salvadori in their book *The People and Cultures of Kenya* have described the people known at the coast of Kenya as Orma and by the Boran in the north as Wardy in the following manner:

The wedge of Galla speaking peoples parting the Rendille from their fellow Somali speakers has its greatest width along Kenya's border with Ethiopia and tapers down through Marsabit to a blunt point around the region between Isiolo and Garba Tulla. But to the southeast of this wedge is another group of Galla-speakers, a fragment removed from the mass of fellow Galla. These are the people who call themselves Orma, or Oromo. They are also known as the Southern Galla and as the Tana Galla, after the river along which they live, and as the Wardeh and the Barraretta.¹

The story of Boran expansion to the east began with the ejection of the Wardy out of the plains of Dirre. Boran traditions have it that the defeat of the Wardy in Dirre took place during the gada of Abbayi Babo, which corresponds, approximately to the years 1657-1665. However, according to Turton's evidence, even by 1800 the Wardy were in possession of Wajir and El Wak and the area to the north-east as far as the Dawa river. Gunther Schlee has written:

The wave of Galla or Oromo that moved furthest into Kenya were the Wardeh, Warday or Warr (a) D(a) ay(a) whose descendants are the Tana Orma. 'Orma' is a common southern dialect form of 'Oromo'.

On the aftermath of the ejection of the Wardy from Dirre, Paul S.G Goto has written thus:

What is likely to have occurred is that between the ejection of the Wardy from Dirre in the middle of the 17th century and the beginning of the 19th, the Wardy grazed over the lowland regions of Golbo, Wayama and the eastern reaches of the Dawa river until 1800 when concerted pressure was exerted on them by a condominium of forces comprising principally Boran and the Garre Somali, but also including the Ajouran Somali.

The last known major defeat of the Wardy in the north was inflicted by the Darod Somali. Paul S.G. Goto has written thus:

Further south, in the region of El Wak, Buna and Wajir, Boran traditions claim that it was they alone who were responsible for the ejection of the Wardy and that they occupied the vacated wells for themselves. This claim is partly borne out by fact that Boran occupation of Wajir did not really come after the defeat of the Wardy by the Darod in 1867-69. It is perhaps during the 1840s that the Boran occupied the wells at Wajir and the area to the west.⁴

Orma traditions, like those of the Garre, are extremely limited both in time and in range. For both these peoples have been defeated and scattered, the Orma being virtually annihilated in the process. Orma have fairly definite traditions concerning their migration from Dirre to the coast. They claim to have migrated on account of famine. E.R. Turton has written:

KENYA ETHNIC COMMUNITIES: FOUNDATION OF THE NATION

All accounts agree on the route taken, though there is some uncertainty as to whether the migration took place under Ana Akr or Bierami Higu. The Orma maintain that they moved south to Moyale and then continued to the Lorian Swamp, whence they proceeded to the river Tana and so to the coast. According to one report, the Orma divided into two at the Lorian Swamp and one part went to Aji, which cannot be identified, on their way to Kismayu. What is particularly interesting is that Orma at no time claim to have come from central Somalia.

Burji

The actual place of origin of the Burji in Ethiopia is not clearly known but it is thought that they were at one time part of the Amharic peoples of Ethiopia. This view is borne out by various factors, one of which is similarity between the names; one is known as Amhara and the other as Amara. There is also considerable linguistic affinity between the Burji and the Sidamo who are related to the Amhara. Apart from Sidamo language, there is no other language in the whole of Ethiopia, and even among the Galla, which resembles that of the Burji. However, the Burji and the Boran have many common words which are incidental when viewed against the whole structure of the language and may have arisen from the social and cultural contacts between people bordering on each other for a long time and traded. Burji supplied food and cotton cloth manufactured with their home-made hand-loom for which the Boran paid with cattle within the framework of commercial exchanges. Thus certain words became common to both tribes.

Ancient Burji were agricultural people who lived around the Burji mountain. Their territory was to the east of the River Galana Amara, and south-east of Lake Abaya. To the west, across the Galana Amara was the Konso country, to the north the Darasa, and to the south and south-east the Boran.

The Amara-Burji are divided into two main groups — the Burji and the Gubba. The Amhara live in the extreme north-western corner of Ethiopia and next to them is the Gubba tribe. It is difficult to establish any cultural or linguistic affinity between the Gubba in the north and the Burji Gubba. If this could be done, it would help to confirm the theory that the Amara-Burji are in fact an off-shoot of the Amharic people. It would also explain the separate identity and yet sharing of the group name between the two Gubba people. But although the ultimate origins of the Burji are unclear, Burji history from around the middle of the seventeenth century is very well known by the traditional historians who also have rough idea about the movements of the tribe as far back as early sixteenth century. On this, K.A. Mude, a Kenyan Burji himself has written:

Round about the early sixteenth century, the Burji seem to have arrived from a northerly direction at a place called Liban in south eastern Ethiopia. They were not alone for there were the more numerous Boran who were part of this general southerly movement. Boran traditional history also tends to support this belief. It is not known how long these tribes stayed in Liban nor why they moved. Some claim that a Boran King and high priest advised the people that if they crossed the Liban river, and want to live on the plains beyond, they would multiply and prosper. It may well have been due to pressure from the north or east. Most legends, however, claim that the migration of the Burji was triggered off by a misunderstanding between the Burji and the Boran.

With the Burji in Kenya came to the close of an important chapter of their history. The first Burji to cross the border into Kenya was perhaps one Hille Ume in about 1906. His arrival in Moyale

KENYA ETHNIC COMMUNITIES: FOUNDATION OF THE NATION

was slightly in advance of that of Philip Zaphiro, the first British Frontier Agent in Moyale. Hille Ume went back home for a period of time but returned to Kenya during the early years of the Great War accompanied by Nawe Gubbe. These two, then, were the first Burji in Kenya.

From about 1918 onwards, the Burji are recorded in government records as coming over in small numbers from time to time. Occasionally when times were hard, as when Moyale was hit by famine in 1928, or simply when they felt nostalgic, the Burji would return home only to reappear once more with a few friends or relatives. Those who stayed in Kenya took employment there. In 1920 there were about one hundred and fifty of them in Moyale. By about 1930 there were about three hundred.

According to Moyale District Annual Report, the Burji were a great asset in the district as they were the main agricultural workers. They also built the houses and the road between Moyale and Wajir and were producing enough flour to supply Moyale and other stations. By 1926, they were the sole supply of labour in the District. That is how the Burji came to Kenya with the greater number remaining in Gara Burji or scattered elsewhere in southern Ethiopia — in Yaballo, Agar Maram, Mega and Hiddi Lola. According to 1989 census, Burji numbered 5975.

SAM SPEAKERS

Somali

The Somali people in the Republic of Somalia inhabit an area of approximately 320,000 square miles (828,800 sq.km) in the horn of Africa, running from 2 latitude south to 10 latitude north, bordered to the east by the Indian Ocean, and to the west and south-west by Ethiopia and Kenya. Neighbouring tribes are: to the south, the Wardy Oromo (Galla), to the north and north-west the Afar and to the west the Oromo — Itu, Ala, Aniya, Arussi and Boran. The territory was divided among the colonial powers into: British Somaliland, 68,000 sq. miles (about 75,000 sq. km); the United Nations Trusteeship Territory of Somalia administered by Italy, 200,000 sq. miles (518,000 sq. km); French Somaliland, 5,700 sq miles (about 14,800 sq. km) and those living in the Ethiopian territory of Ogaden and North Eastern of Kenya Province. I. M. Lewis in his book *The Modern History of Somaliland: from Nation to State* has written:

Ethnically and culturally the Somali belong to the Hamitic ethnic group. Their closest kinsmen are the surrounding Hamitic (or as they are often called "cushitic") peoples of the Ethiopian lowlands and Eritrea — the traditionally bellicose 'Afar' (or Danakil), the Galla, Saho, and Beja. Their immediate neighbours to the north are the pastoral Afa with whom they share French Somaliland and who extend into Eritrea and Ethiopia. To the west, in Ethiopia, the Somali are bounded by the cultivating and pastoral Galla; and in the south by the Boran Galla of Kenya.¹

This vast territory is occupied by an unevenly distributed population. Terrain and climate present a gradual progression from the extreme aridity and heat of the north-west corner, which lies in the former French territory, through the relatively less barren lands and milder conditions of the former British Somaliland. Comparatively, the former Italian trusteeship has arable soils and more temperate climate. The barren northern regions provide grazing for camels, sheep and goats, and some of the richer pastures of the plains have cattle husbandry. Arable land occurs in patches where temporary cultivation is practised by the nomadic people of the region.

KENYA ETHNIC COMMUNITIES: FOUNDATION OF THE NATION

KENYA ETHNIC COMMUNITIES: FOUNDATION OF THE NATION

The Name Somali

In classical times the Somali were known as "Berbers" a designation which survives in the name of the town of Berbera and found in the writing of the Arab geographers of the middle ages, who describe the inhabitants of the southern part of the Horn as 'Zengi' (black). I.M. Lewis has written:

The Zengi are to be identified with the pre-Cushitic Negroid precursors of the Hamitic Galla and Somali. The word 'Somali' first appears in the Ethiopian hymn celebrating the victories of the Abyssinian Negus Yeshaq (1414-29) against the state of Ifat (which later became the state of Adal), and occurs frequently in the futuh al-Habasha (1540-50). Various attempts have been made to establish the origin of the word "Somali"; it has been suggested that it is a combination of so (go) and Mal (milk) referring to their pastoral economy. Burton quoting from Kamus, says that "Samal" was the nickname given to a tribal chieftain who had thrust out (samala) his brothers' eyes. Wright suggest that "Somali" derives from the epithet samahe (heathens) bestowed upon the Somali after the campaigns of Ahmed Grafi in the 16th century. The 1945 military report derives "Somali" from Soma bin Tersoma Nagashi, "who was governor of the country from Zeilah to Hafun". Such a derivation is substantiated by the genealogies of Drake-Brockman and Hunt, in which Somale Rag (-ashi?) figures as the son of ram Nag (-shi?) who is currently represented as having been an immigrant Hindu. While Cushitic philologists have not yet succeeded in establishing the etymology of the word "Somali" it seems extremely likely that its use to designate the noble inhabitants of Somaliland derives from its being the name of a tribal chieftain or partriarch.

People

The Somali who are closely related to the Afar and Saho and, according to Cerulli, with the Oromo(Galla) and Beja belong to the southern Cushitic peoples. The Somali, afar and Saho have traditions of common origin in the north-west corner of the Horn of Africa. All the three share a common culture with differences among the Saho attributable to Ethiopian influence and variations in ecology. Nomadism is the basic economy with camels as the beasts of burden, though among the Saho and in some parts of southern Somalia camels are few and oxen replace them as beasts of burden. All three peoples are extremely individualistic and this is consistent with their segmentary political structure. Power and authority with which particular chiefs are invested is a function of the segments involved in any given situation. I.M. Lewis has written:

Although there is much variation amongst them, the physical features which immediately strike the eye and seem most generally characteristic of the Somali people as a whole, are their tall stature, thin bone structure and decidedly long and narrow heads. Skin colour shows a wide range from a coppery brown to a dusky black. In their facial features particularly, the Somali also exhibit evidence of their long standing relations with Arabia; and in the south, amongst the Digil and rahanweyn tribes, physical traces of their past contact with Galla and Bantu peoples in this region. Traditionally, however, Somali set most store by their Arabian connections and delight in vaunting those traditions which proclaim their descent from noble Arabian lineages and from the family of the prophet. These claims, dismissed by Somali nationalists today as fanciful, are profound Somali attachments to Islam. They commemorate the many centuries of contact between the Somali and Arabian Coasts which have brought Islam and many other elements of Muslim Arab culture to Somaliland.³

KENYA ETHNIC COMMUNITIES: FOUNDATION OF THE NATION

The Kenya Somalis

As has already been seen, Somali are an internationally strongly differentiated people forming one big segmentary system. Their genealogical system ultimately traces patrilineal descent of every single Somali back to the Quraish, the tribe of the prophet Muhammad. African ancestry, which is obvious from the physical features of the Somali, is attributed exclusively to female ancestors. This genealogy does not perhaps describe history so much as make it.

The diagram provided shows the position of Isaaq, Degodia, Garre, Dulbahante and Ajuran in the genealogy of the Somali nation. Gunther Schlee on this has written:

Apart from the agnatic links which all Somali claim to the Quraish, i.e. the tribe of the prophet and more specifically to his father Abu Talib, the importance attributed to female links to Irrir, the son of Somaale, should be noted. The Ajuran who are often referred to as Hawiyya claim to descend from Fadumo s/o Jambelle s/o Hawiyya. The whole Darood clan family is also Somali (in the narrow sense of descendants of Somaale) through Darood's wife Domberre d/o Dir s/o Irrir. Also Isaaq and Saransur are ascribed Irrir wives, Isaaq one of Dir, Saransur, the father of Degodia, one of hawiyya descent.¹⁷

The diagram also shows how the major Somali groups of northern Kenya fit into the total genealogy of the Somali nation. It shows the place of the Garre and the Degodia in the genealogy and their relationship to the other major Somali clan families without going into details on the sub-groups of the latter.

Before the Boran were removed from the position of dominance in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by the northern Somali, mainly Darood and the British, Gabbra (Malbe and Miigo), Sakuye, Ajuran, Warra Daaya and Garre lived in the area of Moyale, Wajir and Mandera under the Boran tutelage. On the earliest inhabitants of this area, I.M. Lewis has written:

After their defeat, the Ajuran and their allies, the Madanleh, to whom so many striking well-stone works are attributed, were hurried south eventually into what is today the North Eastern Region of Kenya where they appear to have been among the earliest recorded inhabitants. Here, they were joined later by the Boran and Warday Galla who established a local ascendancy which was only finally overcome by the massive wave of Somali migration in the nineteenth century.¹⁸

The Ajuran and Madanleh under the Boran were made to pay tribute. In this regard, Gunther Schlee has written:

With regard to those Ajuran who paid tribute to the Boran in Northern Kenya, the Degodia (who on the threshold of the twentieth century came into hostile contact with them) report that they were pagans, indistinguishable from the Boran and unable to speak Somali. With which justification do both groups now claim the name Ajuran? The oral traditions are contradictory; on the one hand the present Kenyan Ajuran stress their Somali genealogy and their descent from Aqil Bin Abu Talib, the uncle of the prophet; on the other hand, they claim to descend from the legendary well-digging giants, Madanleh, the autochthons of the country. Both claims may have an element of truth and certainly contain one of ideology; the first proves Islamic legitimacy, the second justifies the territorial claim. It seems most likely that an older non-Islamic or only marginally Islamic group, which was originally called Madanleh and temporarily also Bal'ad,

KENYA ETHNIC COMMUNITIES: FOUNDATION OF THE NATION

assimilated more and more Hawiyya Somali elements. Under Boran dominance the soil was not suitable for the flowering of Islam, so its practice became lax or forgotten. When, however, the Boran were replaced by muslim Somali as the dominant ethnic group, people remembered their share of Hawiyya and then in the main sailed under the flag 'Ajuran' although this might have corresponded to genealogical truth only for a minority.¹⁹

The years between 1850 and 1910 saw the first wave of invasion by the Darod, who expanded partly at the expense of other Somali, the Hawiyya, who had preserved a higher share of pagan proto-Rendille-Somali culture and were allied to Boran. The Boran, profiting from the defeat of the Warra Daaya (Wardy Galla), acquired land and watering rights. Whatever the set-backs suffered by certain Somali groups, the final results are clear; that all Oromo groups suffered large territorial losses to Somali, and autochthonous (indigenous). Somali groups were culturally assimilated by the northern Somali, with the consequent unification of Somali culture in addition to territorial gains. Those of the Warra Daaya left after defeat. Some were sold by the Ogaden into slavery in the markets of Lamu and Zanzibar while others withdrew to the south-west, to the Tana River. The women captured from the Warra Daaya enriched the Ogaden with a mixed population. On this Gunther Schlee has written:

These events changed the ethnic composition of northern Kenya roughly as follows: the Darood Somali, mainly Ogaden (Telemuggeh, Mohammed Zubeir, Maghabul, Habr Suleman), entered what is now Garissa District and later expanded into Wajir District.²⁰

As the British were starting to administer Jubaland (after 1895) and the North Frontier District of Kenya which was inhabited by the Somali among others, another group under the umbrella of the Ajuran as second degree sheegad — adoptees or alliants (sheegad is a derivative of the form ku-sheegada — 'I name you', i.e. 'I name your ancestor when asked for my ancestor) of the Boran. They counted themselves as belonging to the Hawiyya, but claim like the Ajuran to descend only by a female link from Hawiyya. These were the Gelible, a sub-group of the Degodia. Gunther Schlee on this has written:

The one group of the Degodia which went further in integrating itself into the Ajuran tribal community and which for decades was not generally regarded as Degodia at all but as Ajuran, was the Gelible. Because of a slightly discriminatory attitude on the part of the other Degodia against them — when in anger, they call them kufaar or 'unbelievers' — and because of some cultural attributes the Gelible share with the Rendille and the Gabbra (elements of the proto-Rendille-Somali culture), I suggest that the Gelible are a relatively recent addition to the Degodia and that their ultimate affiliation to one of the major tribes at that time was still open.²¹

Also the other Degodia did not come from a different world, however, but from the region around the rivers Dawa, Parma and ganale Daria in south east Ethiopia and from El Ali in Somali, where fellow tribesmen of theirs are still present today.

Rendille

The Rendille people are said to have broken, together with the Sakuye, from Garre Somali long time ago; both the Rendille and the Sakuye are said to have lived around Mt. Marsabit before the Sakuye left the Rendille. They now live west of the Somali clans, separated from them by a wedge of Oromo-speaking peoples. They roam the region of northern Kenya between lake

KENYA ETHNIC COMMUNITIES: FOUNDATION OF THE NATION

KENYA ETHNIC COMMUNITIES: FOUNDATION OF THE NATION

Turkana to the west and Mount Marsabit to the east, between the Merille River and the Ndoto Mountains to the south and the Chalbi Desert to the north, an area of roughly twenty-two thousand square kilometres.

The Rendille are a Cushitic people whose culture and language bears some similarity to the Somali further east. According to traditions collected in the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Garre or some section of them began migrating several centuries ago from the area around down the right hand side of the river Juba towards Afmadu where they settled. The Oromo defeated and dispersed them, with one group moving from Afmadu to Lorian Swamp and then further north. It has been conjectured that it was from this group that the Rendille, Gabbra, Sakuye and Gabbra Miigo all have their origin. E.R. Turton has written:

There is ample evidence that confirms this scattering of the Garre. In the first place, they seem to have left behind small remnants along the routes they took in their migrations. At Afmadu there are the Bon Garre and there are others at Gelib near the mouth of the river Tana of whom one group (for they are of mixed origin) spoke Somali in the nineteenth Century, not the Somali of their Darod neighbours but rather the southern Somali dialect of the Garre. H.C. Flemming who has noted this linguistic clue, could find no obvious explanation for it, though in the light of the traditions of the Garre an explanation suggests itself. Finally, there are some Rendille that claim a Garre origin, as well as some sections of the Gabbra.¹

In economic terms, the Rendille depend primarily on camel herding. In this regard Fedders & Cynthia Salvadori have written:

Rendille preoccupation with the camels undoubtedly is due in part to the fact that camels husbandry is such a demanding and arduous occupation, more so than herding cattle. A camel may stray as far as eighty kilometres from the herd, and may require a week or more to trace and retrieve.

Any loss is a minor disaster, because a female camel yields far greater quantities of milk than does a milk cow. A herd of Rendille camels have the capacity to produce a quantity of milk equivalent to that of a herd of the neighbouring Samburu cattle four times larger in number, and two good female camels in milk may suffice for a Rendille couple and their children.

Settlement

In considering the economy of northern Kenya, the pattern of rainfall is of vital importance. There are two patterns of rainfall. The western part extending to the Leroghi plateau and the western side of Mount Ngiri experiences heavy and generally reliable rains during the warm and hot months. The eastern remainder of the area — the low country — experiences heavy but unreliable rains during the cooler months. The societies inhabiting these areas have either settled or live as mobile camps depending on the reliable availability of natural resources especially water. The Rendille may be said to inhabit three different ecological zones, A, B, and C. The first, type A, is an area where there is a semi-permanent water point and a salt lick, usually in the same area. Type B, is an area where there is a semi-permanent water point but no salt. Type C, is an area where there is neither semi permanent water, nor salt but with grass or browse. On Rendille settlement, camps and patterns of nomadism, Paul Spencer has written:

KENYA ETHNIC COMMUNITIES: FOUNDATION OF THE NATION

KENYA ETHNIC COMMUNITIES: FOUNDATION OF THE NATION

The Rendille herds and population are divided between settlement and camp for the greater part of the year, especially during the dry season. In the settlement live the women, small children and most married men and they keep only enough milch camels for their immediate needs. In the camps, the older boys and the young active men look after the remainder of the herds.

These camps are situated in areas where living is rough but browse is adequate (i.e. type A grazing areas where there is salt but browse is sparse during the dry season). The rigours of camp life with a general shortage of water are offset by the abundance of milk: it is not simply that browse is plentiful (it may not always be), but also that all milch camels' surplus to the requirements of the settlement are at the camps, and only a portion of the human population are there to live off them. The ability of camels to cover up to 30 miles or more a day in a two-day trek to and from the water point opens up a large part of the district to camps during the dry season.

In these houseless camps the warrior age-set herdsmen, roughly aged between fourteen and thirty years, safeguard the family herds, with the assistance of uncircumscised boys. Water is often far away from the choice camel grazing areas and the treks to bring water can be difficult. Even at the watering points, the process of watering the stock is laborious as camels consume staggering volumes of water as container after container are passed up from hand to hand, from sometimes very deep wells, to keep the wooden drinking troughs topped up until the thirst of every camel has been slaked.

Rendille clan settlements tend to be influenced by migratory tracts which do not imply ownership of the land. The Orare, Urwen and Nahagan clans tend to inhabit the more northerly areas of the district parallel to the shores of Lake Turkana. The other clans of the Rendille proper tend to concentrate in the dry season on Lamagaati. During the wet season, Gavana and Galdeelan remain in these areas while Nebei, Tubsha and Dibshai move in a north-westerly direction towards Mount Kulal and Lake Turkana. Uiyam, Matarpa, Gobonai and Rongumo clans migrate westwards into the Hedad.

Social and Political Organisation

The segmentary social system of the Rendille proper has four levels distinguishable primarily by associated modes of behaviour. A man normally inherits his position in this system through his father, although the belief in common ancestry for the more inclusive levels is diffuse. Rendille agnatic lineages extend typically to grandfathers and no further which is about one generation further than the generation of currently living young men. It is not always certainly clear how collateral (parallel) lineages of a sub-clan are descended from one putative supposed ancestor. As the groups grow larger, common ancestors tend to become forgotten as members disperse and the clan tends to fragment into smaller scattered units.

Rendille exogamous clans are corporate groups mostly living in the same settlement. typically each clan includes 100 or more adult males who tend to rely on one another economically rather than on other Rendille, mobilising local resources, and taking important decisions through debate and mutual consensus. Seniority in clans determines the order in which different families participate in certain ceremonies. Andrew Fedders & Cynthia Salvadori have described Rendille clan-based settlement thus:

KENYA ETHNIC COMMUNITIES: FOUNDATION OF THE NATION

The clan is the basic Rendille social unit. Traditionally, although not today, an entire clan of which there are ten, lived together as one settlement, gob. Yet even today each settlement is a clan unit, an extended family unit of which each male acknowledges a common forefather. A settlement typically consists of about two dozen houses sheltering approximately ten dozen occupants. Each married woman and widow has her own house. Indeed, the term for marriage means house-building, because when a woman marries a house is constructed for her. Most of the building materials for the new house are taken from the house of the brides' mother.

The Rendille moities, Belisi Bahai (upper Belisi) and Belisi beri (lower Belisi) consist respectively of five and four clans. Upper Belisi can claim ritual precedence because it is the first to perform age-set ceremonies; the Disbhai clan of the Belisi Bahai moiety chooses the incumbents for certain ceremonial offices in each age-set. Lower Belisi in certain respects may claim superiority because the most senior incumbents in ceremonial offices and the ritual leader must always be chosen from its Saali clan. The moities have no significance outside these rituals. Brotherhood by descent assumes that the linked segments of different clans are descended ultimately from one ancestor although they may have since been separated by interclan and inter-tribal migrations. Bond brotherhood is a rather special form of brotherhood by descent, where behaviour and mutual obligations are prescribed by custom and it is believed that any breach of these would lead to severe misfortune. A man has powers of moral coercion over his bond brothers who should not refuse him any request.

Ariaal

The political alliance between the Rendille and Samburu is maintained through the mediating role of another group of the Rendille to the south known among the Rendille as the Ariaal and among the Samburu as the Masagera. Socially, economically and geographically, the Ariaal Rendille occupy a position somewhere between the two tribes. Many members of the Ariaal are either emigrants from the Rendille proper or second and third generation descendants of such emigrants. It is also generally assumed that at one time some Samburu gained camels in warfare and decided to take to camel management and of poorer Rendille who left their natal clans and gained camels by raiding or by trading small stock with the Somali. Paul Spencer has written:

The Ariaal Ilturia clan are regarded by many Rendille as an epitome of the Ariaal. According to their myth of descent, a group of Rendille enticed their sisters' younger sons who were still living among the Rendille proper, to come and help them manage their herds. Gradually a tradition developed that inside the Ilturia, it was possible to build up herds of camels primarily by trading small stock with the Somali at Arbah Jahan or elsewhere. Rendille proper from many clans were tempted to join this clan: ilturia, in fact means literally a collection of people from all over the place (a — turit — "to mix and grow" — Samburu). Along with the other Ariaal, they live in the country which is better for small stock (even worse for camels) than the areas to the north inhabited by the Rendille proper.

Although the Ariaal retain the culture and exogamous restrictions of their former Rendille clans, each Ariaal settlement is affiliated to one of the Samburu phratries. The youth grow their hair in the style of the Samburu moran and form localised clubs maintaining considerable independence from Samburu clubs. Apart from those who claim descent from the Rendille proper, a large proportion of Ariaal claim Samburu descent and have cattle-owning kinsmen among the Samburu and they do not observe the age-set customs of the Rendille proper. However, they

KENYA ETHNIC COMMUNITIES: FOUNDATION OF THE NATION

observe other customs associated with the well being of camel herds, including the sorio and almhato festivals and stock avoidances associated with the Rendille ritual (see Nomads in Alliance page 65 - 71) calendar. An Ariaal settlement normally consist of both ex-Rendille proper or ex-Samburu immigrant families and the language and material culture are essentially Rendille.

A Rendille may go either to a linked Ariaal clan and continue living inside the camel economy or he may be tempted to consider a complete change and take up cattle raising among the Samburu. For this reason, about one-third of the Samburu claim ultimate Rendille descent and they assume that their immigrating ancestors were those that could not be contained within the camel economy. On this Paul Spencer has written:

While the Ariaal do not own cattle in the strictest sense, they do have very close links with the cattle economy and live, as we have seen, in an area where they are interspersed with the Samburu. In many cases, one elder may own both camels and cattle. His first wife is often a Rendille girl who lives in one of the Ariaal settlements of his clan with his camels; and his second wife, who may be either Rendille or Samburu, lives in a Samburu settlement in the vicinity and looks after his cattle. In his Ariaal home, this man is an Ariaal speaking Rendille and observing Ariaal Rendille customs: and in his Samburu home, when he visits it, he is a Samburu, speaking Samburu and observing Samburu customs. The distinction between the two tribes is as slender as that.

The Samburu and Ariaal are inextricably linked by economic and cultural ties that virtually preclude any possibility of radical separation between them. For many generations, the Samburu have claimed certain rights in Rendille-Ariaal camels and vice-versa. With every marriage and individual migration, these rights are fully exercised and the claims are made good. In spite of considerable cultural differences and towards critical attitude sometimes the adoption of one another, they are bound by ties which transcend cultural and political barriers. Ariaal are a particular social formation, distinguished from the Samburu by their bilingualism, camel keeping, and following certain Rendille customs in settlement organisation and rituals affecting livestock, and from the Rendille by their bilingualism, cattle-keeping and their inclusion in Samburu descent groups and age-set rituals. Elliot Fratkin in Maa Speakers of the Northern Desert has written:

Ariaal share many cultural features with the Rendille including large lowland settlements (often thirty houses of five people each) as well as practising rituals associated with camel production including Sorio and Almhodo (schlee, 1989). However, Ariaal clans which constitute the core residential settlements are affiliated with the Samburu rather than the Rendille descent system, particularly with Lorokushu, Longieli, Lukumai, Masala, and the composite Turia descent sections. Ariaal age-set ceremonies follow the Samburu rather than Rendille ritual cycle, including the performance of five ritual ox-slaughters (mugit) over the fourteen-year period between age-set initiations (Spencer, 1973: 89-93). While Rendille also follow a fourteen year age-set cycle and indeed Samburu and Maasai may have borrowed this system from them (Beaman, 1981), their ritual structure is quite distinct from Samburu. Ariaal are not permitted to attend the large gaalgulamme ceremony following Rendille initiation which defines Rendille age-set inclusion and identity (Schlee, 1989:9).

KENYA ETHNIC COMMUNITIES: FOUNDATION OF THE NATION