

# Conflict and Conflict Management in the Horn of Africa

## CASE STUDY

### Cattle, Khat, and Guns:

Trade, Conflict, and Security on northern Kenya's Highland-Lowland Interface<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Management of socioeconomic change under conditions of cultural diversity is the theme of this case study of northern Kenya. The study begins by describing the regional attributes and theoretical dimensions of the problem. A historical review is to familiarize the reader with longitudinal context of social exchange and group conflict. We then proceed to focus on three commodities whose circulation has significantly increased during the 1990s: firearms, livestock, and miraa--the socially consumed twigs of *Catha edulis*. These commodities form a triangle where livestock is identified with production markets, weapons with inputs, and miraa with social consumption.<sup>2</sup> The conclusion evaluates the role of trade within a problem-solving framework for identifying sectoral policy priorities.

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<sup>1</sup>This paper incorporates views and information acquired through numerous informal discussions and unstructured interviews with inhabitants of the region under discussion, police and security personnel, civil servants, elected representatives, NGO staff, business people and traders, et.al. I do not reference these conversations as most of these informants wish to remain anonymous. The information also reflects ideas, perspectives, and personal experience accumulating over a long period of formal research and applied work in the region. I also make use of published materials, newspaper reports, and other written sources which are footnoted in the case of specific references. I otherwise try to acknowledge my sources in the course of the text. The views that appear here are otherwise my own.

<sup>2</sup>This is congruent with Bates (1981) observation that analysis of African market dynamics must distinguish among the three markets driving local economic behaviours.

## Part I: Introduction

This working paper examines the influence of markets on contemporary conflict and its management in the region spanning Kenya's northern highland-lowland interface. Current economic policies prioritize free markets as the engine of African development, and designate the private sector as the antidote to poor governance. Commerce promotes conflict as well as stability. Markets are important, as this test case demonstrates, but so are other institutions that regulate production, exchange, and group relations.

Inter-group violence has accelerated dramatically in northern Kenya apace with economic liberalization. The rise in violence is only partially due to intensified competition over scarce resources. As production for markets increases, so has acquisition by force. The changing nature of conflict blurs the line between ethnic competition and criminality, raising questions about civil society, the role of political factors and state actors in exacerbating violence, and methods for controlling the growing chaos disrupting trade across the region. These are some of the questions we hope to clarify, at least on a tentative basis.

The study surveys the highland-lowland interface linking Meru to the pastoral rangelands to the north, a geographic basin spanning virtually all the interior ecological zones in Kenya. Environmental variation conditioned a similar cultural diversity encompassing group strategies from hunting-foraging to agriculture to pure pastoralism. Econiche specialization engendered various forms of exchange and symbioses among culturally distinct societies which eventually coalesced into an extensive precolonial trade network whose hub was the Nyambene Range in northern Meru.

Like cross-cultural trade everywhere, trade in the greater Mt Kenya region has always involved institutional mechanisms facilitating communication and trust (Curtain 1984). Trade operated within a larger cultural framework for managing conflict among diverse societies which included fictive kinship, religious beliefs and cultural ideologies, and clan councils. Other cultural factors like age-set rituals and progression, and technological aspects of subsistence often promoted aggression.

The counter-intuitive historical reality is that opposition promoted exchange where similarity encouraged conflict. Competition was most marked among culturally similar societies like Maa speakers and the Turkana; exchange was most prominent among groups like the Meru and Maasai who defined themselves as enemies. Conflict and exchange both sustained coevolutionary adaptation in this environment, while dominance and autonomy led to entropy and eventual cultural extinction.<sup>3</sup> This pattern of alternating cooperation and conflict, multiple and mutable identities, and cultural-political syntheses illuminate the interactive qualities of ethnic social relations.

Environmental forces and regional social histories continue to exert a gravitational pull on

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<sup>3</sup>Territorial dominance was followed by the rapid decline of the Maasai, and the outright extinction of the Laikipiak (Waller ref.).

group behaviour observable in ethnic economic networks and violent competition for resources. Practical resolution of conflicts entails addressing the traditional roots as well as immediate causes of conflicts. Cultural institutions that remain viable in some situations are unable to cope in others. But even when indigenous structures are rendered obsolete by the state, historical relationships among diverse ethnic groups often remain influential. Kenya's inter-group violence *is* tribal in so far as it is localized and tends to crystallize along clan and ethnic fault lines. But tracing its catalysts usually reveals the influence of national politics, regional events like the collapse of Sad Barre's government in Somalia, and factors originating on the international level.

This cultural complexity and political subtleties makes clarifying how trade fits into the real scheme of things all the more difficult. The juxtaposition of traditional and modern elements, the diversity of group conflict scenarios, and questions related to data and its accuracy presents certain methodological problems. Cataloguing regional circulation of trade commodities and the conflicts arising in their wake alone would be a most unparsimonious exercise.

To control for these factors we proceed by identifying the salient characteristics of the predominantly pastoral region spanning the Mt. Kenya and northern rangelands in order to better understand the system dynamics underpinning longitudinal regional change.<sup>4</sup> Expediency requires we account for the complexity influencing commercial phenomena within a generic model subsuming the multiple determinants of both ethnic conflict and cooperation. We therefore start by describing regional *initial conditions*--or the matrix of environmental and social parameters--conditioning cultural and economic interactions.

### East Africa's Historical Pathways

Regional initial conditions emphasize the environmental factors that still influence local developments: periodic calamities occurring within an unpredictable climatic regime; concentrations of critical resources (e.g. permanent water) within a generally fragile environmental base for production; physical barriers to communication and the region's spatial isolation from adjoining areas; and risk spreading strategies that tend to favour different forms of exchange over long-term self-sufficiency.

These infrastructural variables in turn influence long-term social patterns: the persistence of small-scale economic organization; the role of clan and sub-clans governing access to resources; group reliance on physical and cultural mobility (e.g. manipulation of ethnic identity) over time; and strong social institutions but weak centralizing political structures. The plurality of languages and cultural diversity arising out of the original Bantu, Nilotic, and Cushitic cradlelands exemplify this long-term phenomena. Our initial conditions also explain how most ethnic systems represent syntheses of different cultural traits acquired

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<sup>4</sup>This is not the kind of research amenable to traditional participant-observation, most informants are inevitably biased to some degree, and this problem also extends to written sources such as press reports. There is, however, an extensive historical and anthropological literature which allows us to make inferences about the region's long-term social dynamics.

through cross-cultural interactions. Even when a cultural system collapsed individuals and whole clans integrated into other ethnic polities, carrying selected elements of their cultural and technological repertoire over into the new order.

The influence of this environmental-social matrix is visible in the centrifugal or decentralizing tendencies manifesting across the region up to the present. The centrifugal forces observable in the region's political conflict and ethnic strife, however, also give rise to social mechanisms for countering them, such as cultural reciprocities and symbioses, clan cross-linkages across diverse ethnic groups, exchange linkages and alliance based on fictive kinship, adapted forms of social organization, technological innovations, and centralizing political ideologies and leadership.

These mechanisms generally anticipated conflict and usually minimized the incidence of violence. As risk spreading strategies they operated reasonably well except during periods of extreme environmental stress or external invasion--interludes that often catalyzed population migration, economic change, and political shifts. The escalation of violent conflicts suggests this juncture may be one of these unusual periods.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, this analysis qualifies the intensifying competition over resources thesis by placing it in the context of Kenya's ongoing transition to capitalism.

The trauma of capitalist transition which is, according to Gershenkon, more wrenching for late developing economies may be even more intense in the presence of Africa's ethnic pluralism. Trade contributes to this transition just as exchange influenced the cultural transformation of diverse clans into the Meru polity as described presently. But commodity exchange is not capitalism, and shifting forms of trade and competition parallel accelerating economic liberalization, weakening state influence, and gradual withdrawal of external powers--trends that favour the reemergence of indigenous regional dynamics long held in check, but following the far-sweeping changes instigated during the colonial interlude.

Understanding the relationship between trade and conflict under these circumstances requires that we place contemporary problems against the historical backdrop where exchange stabilized group relations. This also allows us to familiarize the reader with important environmental, cultural, and demographic aspects of recent conflicts; identify specific roots of individual conflicts; and place the empirical data in chronological order.

#### Highland-Lowland Historical Processes

The pre-colonial trajectory of the East African region describes a gradual shift from econiche subsistence to more specialized forms of agriculture and pastoralism over the last thousand years. The rise of the Meru polity, however, is the outcome of convoluntary interactions

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<sup>5</sup>The acute level of inter-group hostilities during this decade coincides with the spreading entropy overtaking the region's state structures, the prolonged drought of 1996-97, and the emergence of widespread famine.

leading to the integration of different cultural systems within one ethnicity.<sup>6</sup> Lowland processes generated significantly different variations on convoluntary interaction.

Camel-based pastoralism supported conservative strategies and fissionary ethnicity distributing single clan lineages across several tribes linked by common institutions and ritual complexes. Cattle-based strategies generated expansionary systems that absorbed other cattle herders or incorporated politically other camel rearing clans. The nineteenth century expansion of Darod Somali clans highlights a third variation, based on intensive methods of camel management and diversification into mixed herding as they encroached upon cattle herding populations. These technological variables resurface in contemporary pastoral politics and conflicts.

Elucidating the process of Menu ethnogenesis is relevant to our objectives in that institutions for resolving conflicts were central to the emergence of the Menu polity. These cultural institutions retain their vitality in northern Menu, which remains the Kenyan highland society most linked economically and culturally to pastoral societies of the north. The larger purpose of this historical review is establishing a basis for some counter-intuitive observations and their analysis concluding the study.<sup>7</sup>

#### The Highlands: Menu Ethnogenesis

Agriculturally oriented Bantu clans began to filter into the region around five hundred years ago. They arrived in the Mt. Kenya highlands via two main migrations coinciding with periods of extended drought in the late fifteenth AD and seventeenth centuries. During the intervening period the pastoral Maasai expanded out of the Rift Valley corridor and occupied rangelands adjacent to Mt. Kenya. The *Thagana* clans which convolved into the Menu polity arrived during the latter migration, completing the Mt. Kenya area's pre-colonial cultural configuration.

The Bantu clans possessed cultivars including bananas and root crops that allowed them to gradually colonize higher and more humid altitudes formerly the domain of hunter-foraging groups such as the Agumba of Gikuyu oral tradition. These technologies no doubt increased their influence beyond their numbers, facilitating the gradual absorption of other highland Nilote, Cushitic, and other Bantu populations already present in the region. As the Menu moved down the ecological gradient they came to subsume different production strategies, clans, and cultural influences of other populations.

The two sections of the Nyambene Menu, the Tigania and Igembe, display the contrasting influence of pre-*Thagana* cultures. The Tigania, who entered the Nyambenes from the south reflect a strong pastoral production bias acquired through their symbiotic relationship with

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<sup>6</sup>This process is described in detail in my forthcoming article: "A Brief History of Sustained Resource Management in Meru," *African Affairs*, 1997.

<sup>7</sup>Some readers may wish to skip these interesting but complex historical details and proceed directly to the roots of the modern situation outlined in Part II.

the Maasai. The decidedly more agriculturally oriented Igembe entered the higher elevations of the Nyambenes from a northerly direction and assimilated autochthonous forest dwellers and Mwoko agro-pastoralists--probably a synthesis of southern Cushite and highland Nilotes populations associated with the Sirikwa.

The Igembe also came into contact with Maa speakers (especially the Samburu) as they expanded across the interior valleys of the Nyambenes. Maasai-Samburu influence manifests in their age-set rituals, similarities between role of Maasai laibons and the religious office of the Mu'we (Mugwe among the Mt. Kenya Menu), and widespread kin-clan connections which the Menu still acknowledge. Such was the Maa influence that one British District Commissioner commented that, while linguistically Bantu, the northern Menu were in many other aspects culturally Nilotic.<sup>8</sup>

Despite a number of similarities distinguishing them from the Mt. Kenya Menu, Tigania-Igembe variations on the convoluntary process reflect centrifugal tendencies latent in the regional environment. Differentiation proceeded in tandem with environmental variation and the assimilation of non-Bantu groups as marked by the number of clans of female origin and contrasting production strategies in the Nyambenes. A semblance of unity under these conditions was maintained through the institution of the *Njuri Ncheke*.

#### The Njuri Ncheke

The *Njuri Ncheke* marked a significant development distinguishing it from the decentralized *njuri*, or local councils of elders (as distinct from *kiama* councils on each rung of the age-set system) that are a common feature among the Mt. Kenya peoples.<sup>9</sup> It rose to prominence as a centralized institution preserving the unity of the original *Thagana* clans which had separated in the lowlands, and were evolving into distinct sub-ethnicities as they moved up the ecological gradient of Mt. Kenya and the Nyambenes. The council functioned as a court complementing other embedded governance structures on the local level, and acted as an ad hoc government on the regional level.

The *Njuri Ncheke* thus institutionalized Menu identity, and formalized legal procedures among a society that otherwise resorted to numerous different sorcerers, curers, and other ritual specialists called in to settle disputes. Its membership comprised the most distinguished elders from different clans and locations. These local leaders or spokesmen (*agambi*) underwent three levels of initiation as they distinguished themselves within the council. Both local *njuri* and the *Njuri Ncheke* remain active in the Nyambenes, particularly in setting environmental policies, and is called in to settle group land disputes when local administration mediation fails. *Njuri* typically meet in local groves of indigenous trees preserved for the purpose, or in plots of the oldest miraa trees--miraa having always served as an important adjunct to their deliberations for as long as anyone can remember.

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<sup>8</sup>Kenya National Archives, DC Mru 1, 1927.

<sup>9</sup>In addition to the Menu these include the Gikuyu, Embu, Chuka, Tharaka, Mbere, Ndia, and Chugu.

## The Pastoral Lowlands: Cattle vs. Camels

Agro-pastoralist groups of highland Nilotes-southern Cushite extraction like the Sirikwa present on the southern flanks of the Rift valley were followed and absorbed by Maa speaking cattle herders. A cluster of culturally-linked camel pastoralists Schlee (1994) terms the Proto-Rendille-Somali were oldest antecedents of other pastoral groups inhabiting Kenya's northern rangelands. A number of proto-Somali groups deriving from this PRS core migrated beyond the northern Kenyan region along the Ethiopian highland fringe at some point in the distant past.

Some five hundred years ago those who remained behind were joined by the Oromo Warra Daya, forerunners of the Orma of the Tana River, who are believed to have spread across large areas of eastern Kenya. Expansion to the west was sealed off by the Maasai-Samburu cattle herders who established themselves in the higher elevations south of Turkana. After 1820 the modern Somali crossed the Juba River and surged into eastern Kenya, while a new wave of Oromo cattle mono-culturalists, the Boran, made inroads into the region from the Oromo cradleland area to the north. The easterly penetration of the Turkana during the latter decades of the 1800s completed the picture.

The population of the area under consideration was, until fairly recently, low in terms of potential environmental carrying capacity. Demographic expansion anchored in the highlands supported the diversification of Menu production and the emergence of political structures fostering multi-cultural assimilation. While pastoralists cultivated exchange and social linkages with their agricultural neighbours, headers discouraged the incorporation of (livestock poor) outsiders where agriculture strategies encouraged incorporation of outside clans and individuals. Territorial circumscription and demographic growth in the rangelands, in contrast, intensified ethnic conflict, but this varied according to groups specific pastoral bias.

The different ) societies of northern Kenya can be classified according to their respective camel or cattle based production systems. Historically, camels supported what we will term conservative strategies and cattle what we term as expansionary strategies. Pastoral expansion weakens central institutions and shifts the foci of internal organization down segmentary lineage vectors. Expansion that multiplies organizational units without centralizing mechanisms thus increases the potential for internecine conflict over time.<sup>10</sup>

The emergence of pure pastoralism practised by the Maasai dramatically illustrate these dynamics. Several factors facilitating Mace expansion down the Rift Valley. Production centred on disease resistant Zebu cattle gave them an advantage over their Sirikwa predecessors possessing less hardy and more ecologically restricted Sanga cattle. The cattle monoculture enhanced returns to labor and supported expansion under favorable ecological

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<sup>10</sup>The Beduin 'myself against my brother, me and my brother against my uncle...' principle explains how normally fractious edouin societies like post-independence Somalia can sustain impressive levels of social solidarity.

conditions. Their mono-cultural cattle economy was enabled by agricultural expansion in proximate econiches, i.e. the pastoral ideal depended upon exchange relations with either other food producers or Dorobo middlemen.

The Mace were the dominant party in these external relations by virtue of their highly developed military complex based on age-set organization and rituals. Mace territorial gains proceeded mainly at the expense of previous ace occupants who they scattered and absorbed. In Menu, however, the Mace lived in symbiotic coexistence with the north Imenti and Tigania through the mid-nineteenth century. Symbiotic relations with agricultural groups ultimately put them on a collision course with their high zone neighbours as the latter accumulated cattle and incorporated elements of Mace military organization into their own social structures. By the 1840s the Menu were becoming the aggressors, and ten years later the Kubai generation defeated the Mace occupants of Mt. Kenya's *buuri* highland range and drove them into present day Laikipia.

Mace society was becoming less cohesive, and thus less dominant, at this juncture for several reasons. The cattle-centric herdsmen were generally more susceptible to environmental factors like erratic rainfall as they collided with expanding agriculturalists under the advancing territorial circumscription--intensified by other pastoralists entering the region from both the northwest (Turkana) and the northeast (Somali). The periodic rangelands ecological crises saw increasing numbers of pastoral drop-outs who formerly would have temporarily 'gone Dorobo' join sedentary agro-pastoral groups. This reinforced their neighbor's military capacity, reversing the population balance over the long run.

Intensifying competition for now limited pastures led to internal changes within the egalitarian social structures of pure pastoralists like the Mace and Turkana. Lamphear (1994) discusses how age-set organization limits cooperation as a population expands. His account of changes in Ateker military strategies and other studies describe the rise of prophets and other kinds of charismatic religious and military leaders to prominence within the pastoral sector as a centralizing force.

Before the mid-nineteenth century raiding was more a individualized sport, a means for making a name and filling the kraal. On the group level, it functioned to maintain buffers between otherwise inter-connected clans sharing an austere and highly variable environment: the rule was either raid occasionally or be raided within an elaborate system of kin, clan, and reciprocal relationships specifying who could raid who. This changed as demographic growth and migration into the region intensified competition for resources.

These circumstances naturally selected for politically savvy individuals like Loriang among the Jie and the Turkana's Kokoi who enhanced military success by introducing innovations and modifying traditional organization in order to bring more warriors together than formerly possible. The emphases on prophecy and mystic power is probably deceptive. The shift from local champion to political operator and networker probably could not have been accomplished without supernaturally endorsed legitimacy. Once established, however, the warrior prophet phenomenon spread in a manner illustrating leadership was a commodity in high demand among the region's decentralized societies.

The transition from the warrior hero like the Galla Fumo Liongo of Swahili legends to the Shaka Zulu-type of leader commanding influence over multiple clans represented a new



threshold for individual leadership in terms of political autonomy and scope of influence. We might even argue it was the most important pre-colonial development that neutralized the prevailing environmentally-embedded centrifugal forces.

The new breed of political *laiboni* and seers promoted themselves through what was in essence the provision and manipulation of information. These prophets provided the valuable information for making group decisions. Once in power, as Waller notes, "they needed to absorb or incorporate pre-existing sources of power and to adapt themselves further to the perceived needs of their clientele among the Mace."<sup>11</sup> The same can be said for many modern African leaders.

Even so, for the Mace weakened by encroaching agro-oriented neighbours and internecine conflict, *laiboni* like Mbaitany and Lenana worked to preserve through political negotiation territory originally occupied through military conquest.

### Oromo and Somali Expansion

The conservative dynamics of the proto Rendille-Somali (PRS) camel based production systems present a fundamental contrast to the expansionary cattle monocultures. These dynamics are rooted in the small but important ecological differences between the drylands suited for camels and slighter higher elevations capable of supporting cattle. Though these eco-tones allowed for overlapping utilization, neither animal prospered in the others environment over long periods of time.

The camel utilizes limited resources of forage and water more efficiently, is less vulnerable in the face of climatic vagaries, and has a longer reproductive cycle. These conservative factors which dampen the expansionary impulse are mirrored in the longer span of age grades, controls lowering the rate of human reproduction, and other aspects of the PRS cultural complex. The nature of PRS production, transhumance, and ritual complexes supported tribe-wide ceremonies countered the embedded conflictual propensities, while growth within bounded econiches supported clear fissionary tendencies manifesting in the out-migration of clans. The Rendille thus spun off sub-clans who joined other PRS cultural polities like the Gabbra and Sakuye, and the Garre, Ajuran, and Degodia sections of the Somali. Other clans among these groups, however, reflect non-PRS origins, and over time clan movements went both ways creating a braided configuration distinct from the usual genealogical tree.

Different forms of animal exchange among nomadic pastoralists are a primary mechanism for spreading risks, building defense alliances, and developing networks for political and jural assistance. The institution of the *maal* camel is emblematic of how highly complicated system of reciprocities developed over the generations.

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<sup>11</sup>Richard D. Waller 1994. "Kidongoi's Kin: Power & Prophecy in Maasailand," pg. 36: in *Revealing Prophets*, eds. David M. Anderson and Douglass H. Johnson, London: James Currey Ltd.

The *maal* camel is a female gift camel invested with special cultural significance. Though the receiver owns any bulls subsequently born, female offspring in theory belong to the original owner and retain his brand. The owner will only claim them when forced to do so by circumstances such as herd losses or to meet pressing social obligations such as those accompanying marriage. Moreover, the second party can give a *maal* camel to a third party, in which case the original owner rights in the *maal* herd are also transferred.

*Maal* camel genealogies spanning generations and multiple clans are actively remembered, creating another set of cross-cutting linkages. The upshot of this and other forms of animal exchange designates that the only lost camel is one that dies or is stolen from its legal owner, and networks based on different clan, kinship, and variations on exchange linkages regulate the balance of conflict and cooperation among these different ethnicities. The raiding governed by this pattern was also adaptive mechanism for maintaining interactive clans ability to resist external threats.

The Oromo expansion of the sixteenth century added new clans to PRS societies listed above while driving a wedge between the Rendille, Gabbra, and Sakuye cluster and the clans now associated with the Ajuran and Garre Somali. The first wave of Oromo, the Wardeh or Warra Daaya cattle headers, spread across a wide area of Kenya's eastern lowlands. A second wave of Borana established the loose political order responsible for the Oromo-ization of certain PRS groups. Longstanding antagonisms between the Borana and the Wardeh absorbed most of their military energies, while the principle of economic specialization otherwise limited hostilities among the configuration of PRS groups. This equilibrium was to be undermined by the appearance of 'modern' Darod Somali who crossed the Juba River in 1820.

The modern quality of the Darod separating them from other camel herding societies was Islam. The rise of Bardera as a center of Muslim activity infused the invaders with a religious zeal propelling their advance at the expense of the Wardeh. Under pressure from the Boran-Ajuran-Garre alliance, the Wardeh suffered crushing defeats inflicted by the Darod in two major engagements at El Wak in 1844 and Wajir in 1860. This opened the way for the occupation of territory whose center was present-day Garissa District by mainly Ogaden clans, whose proximity prompted the cultural re-Somalization of the Ajuran, Garre, and Degodia.

Other equally important factors included their willingness to incorporate outsiders and an intensive approach to camel management which upset the camel-cattle cultural balance mentioned above. Darod camels are pampered and even allowed to graze at night. The superior size and productivity of these Benadir camels, to paraphrase Schlee, owed to maximizing inputs and outputs where the conservative PRS management minimized the same. If this fuelled their rapid expansion, the incorporation of cattle into their production strategies added a convolutionary advantage over the surrounding livestock monoculture paralleling the example of Menu expansion and diversification. The incorporation of camels by the cattle herding Turkana is a similar development that helps explain their displacement of Maa speakers on the Western flank of the Lake Turkana. These technological factors contributed the changing nature of inter-ethnic conflict, and the reconfiguration of the northern region's cultural units.

## Part II: Trade, Conflict, and Contemporary System Dynamics

We continue our outline of how pre-colonial trade and conflict condition contemporary system dynamics by describing the rise of the northern Nyambenes as the hub of the far-reaching exchange network linking the highlands and the lowlands, and extend the account to the present.

The Nyambene Range consists of a narrow peninsula of hills projecting into the northern rangelands along a northeasterly tangent. High altitude forest crown the southern base of the range, fertile valleys extend down the middle, and the respective western and eastern flanks present dry and humid slopes that gradually merge into a semi-arid lowland apron. The Nyambene environment thus encapsulates an usually close succession of distinct ecozones as one follows the downward gradient, and a variety of shifting ecotones across any given latitude. This variegated microcosm of the larger region supported the confluence of econiche specializations underpinning the unique Igembe Menu production system.<sup>12</sup>

From a spatial perspective, the Nyambenes' strategic location supported its emergence as a hub for highland-lowland trade. But the foundation of trade is production, and Igembe apparently produced a range of agricultural products in high quantities. Highly sophisticated agro-forestry practices reflect the influence of forest dwelling autochthones incorporated into Igembe society. Agricultural production modeled on the ecological efficiencies of natural biodiversity generated a range of products and conferred stability in the face of climatic extremes. The agro-forestry cycle also reduced labor requirements, which allowed household members to diversify their economic activities.

Though distance had long limited the scope of regional trade, over the course of last century Igembe markets attracted traders which besides the Mt. Kenya peoples included the Kitui Akamba, the Nyeri Gikuyu, and pastoralists groups including Samburu, the Borana, and even the distant Rendille.

The one single-most important mechanism supporting the expansion of trade was *gichiaro* "blood brotherhood. Bernard discussion of *gichiaro* as political bonds linking the various Menu sub-ethnicities into a network of military alliances represents one-dimensional interpretation of the custom. Igembe informants and late nineteenth century accounts indicate *gichiaro* institutionalized ties of fictive kinship binding individuals, clans, and localities into dyadic reciprocal relationships. As in other kinship and generational structures, violation of mutual responsibilities invoked a curse.

The practice is best viewed on the group level as a means of spreading risk; among individuals it ensured trust and fairness between friendly parties when other controls did not exist. *Gichiaro*, however, was not prerequisite for trade. Trade, though not an everyday

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<sup>12</sup>The historical process and convoluntary qualities of the Igembe Menu cultural-agricultural system are described in detail in the forthcoming article, "A Brief History of Culturally Sustained Resource Management in Kenya's Menu District," (Paul Goldsmith) *African Affairs*, 1997.

activity, was apparently accorded extremely high status considering that in Menu and other areas of central Kenya women continued to conduct trade even while their men fought. Menu traditions' emphasis on the hostile nature of their relations with the Maa speakers is contradicted by the high incidence of inter-marriage and cultural influence.

According to the convolutionary model, regular exchange following out their natural economic symbiosis explain these phenomena. Even after the Samburu wars of the 1870s that saw the latter pushed beyond the Waso Nyiro trade continued. Menu trade with the Samburu conducted at a special market located in the millet zone below Kangeta reveals an interesting form of communication. Dolichos, the major legume cultivated in the Nyambenes, has a thin carapice that detaches as the beans dry. The Samburu monitored Igembe harvests by detecting the papery flakes the wind carried across the plains, and travelled accordingly.

*Gichiaro* did facilitate exchange and cooperation where it did not exist before among the different sections of the Menu and culturally distinct parties. Thus the Igembe are linked to the Borana and Rendille by *gichiaro*, who no doubt needed some form of institutionalized guarantees before making the long trip to the Nyambenes. The ritual became a universal procedure in the region with the advent of the ivory trade, if not before. Such ties between individuals often extends the relationship to larger groups.

Kamba elephant hunters were the first outsiders to appear in the region, followed by growing numbers of Swahili ivory traders and caravans during the second half of the century. Highland agricultural societies, like the Igembe, willing to barter with these new long distance traders preferred to do so at a distance. And as strangers in a strange land, the traders required guides and middlemen. The job naturally suited Dorobo hunter-gathers of the savanna, who were probably acting as middlemen among different cultural polities for some time.<sup>13</sup> The long distance trade likely prolonged their independent existence for several decades, and most became absorbed into other groups with its end.

By the end of the century even the more isolated groups like the Gabbra had accepted new forms of commerce as trade shifted from the caravan trade's large, highly capitalized operations to micro entrepreneurship. Most of the entrepreneurs were of northern Somali extraction, and operated within clan networks expanding through metropolitan contacts. Small numbers of mainly Isaaq and Dulbahante entrepreneurs were a final, but not insignificant, addition to the region's ethnic map as the precolonial period ended.

### The Colonial Regime

The colonial administration restricted lowland populations moving within intersecting orbits to tribal blocks, separately administered as the Northern Frontier District. The barrier erected between the highlands and pastoral rangelands reinforced other spatial and

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<sup>13</sup>Chanler's 1893 map of the Nyambene-NFD region identifies the areas occupied by different tribes, and shows the Dorobo dispersed among different nodes at the juncture between different cultural groups.

infrastructural constraints that rapidly vitiated the expanding precolonial regional economy and marginalized northern pastoral societies over the course of this century.

The colonial economy based in the highlands, in contrast, provided a platform for upcountry Kenya's European-style modernization. The differentials that resulted account for the pastoral north's traditionalism, and the perceptions of modern Kenyans colloquially expressed in references to it as Kenya B. Though northern Menu is ostensibly part of Kenya A, other factors locate it among the warrior societies of the NFD where tradition is perceived to conspire against development and cultural proclivities lean towards violence.

The Nyambene Range in northern Menu was unique insofar as it remained spatially isolated and resistant to the sweeping societal changes initiated by the British. Indirect commercial influences still reached the areas of the Nyambenes where the Igembe section of the Menu had long cultivated miraa. Miraa was a local commodity of considerable cultural significance in the Nyambenes, and also served as an important adjunct to precolonial trade between the Igembe and their pastoral neighbours. The link between tradition and violence that links the Nyambene Menu with their pastoral cohorts in the eyes of other Kenyans suggests we briefly discuss general perceptions of miraa at this juncture.

Miraa underwent a transformation from a highly respected cultural commodity into the most successful indigenous cash crop in East Africa. Social consumption in the form of chewing twigs and branches in social settings is a totally alien concept for Westerners, who usually view it from a jaded perspective that in some instances degenerates into the ludicrous. Sharing miraa became a standard component of the Igembe *gichiaro* rituals which promoted both precolonial trade and its expansion as market commodity.

During this century miraa production expanded unencumbered by the formal production and marketing institutions governing other smallholder crops. In contrast to 'modern' cash crops like coffee that carried African farmers into the formal sector, miraa reinforced indigenous institutions and structures governing economic behaviour linked to progression through the Menu lifecycle. Because miraa consumption is a decidedly non-Western social activity, the marketing network expanded ties between Nyambene society and other non-Westernized groups.

Miraa began to find its way beyond Menu town to Nairobi during the interwar period. Colonial policy restricting indigenous urban settlement to Arab/Swahili, metropolitan Somali, and detribalized Africans made urbanization a predominantly Muslim affair. The growing concentration of alcohol-eschewing Islamic urbanites in Nairobi provided the magnet. Relaxation of this policy, the rise of an African educated class, and its popularity among mainly informal sector consumers reinforced miraa's association first with Swahili ghettos, and later with the urban underclass.

This and the predominantly negative image projected through the media perpetuates a similarly jaded impression of miraa in the eyes of many Africans and a significant segment of the Muslim community. Most critique ignores the physiological action of *Catha edulis*. The fresh leaves and twigs of miraa contain two active alkaloids, cathine and cathinone. Cathine, or nor-pseudoephedrine, is an ingredient of many over the counter cold and asthma medicines. Cathinone is a phyto-chemical precursor of cathine that is slightly more potent,

but quickly reverts to cathine after harvesting. This explains the difference between organic miraa and commercial norspseudoephedrine products, and the premium placed on fresh miraa.

The mild stimulatory effects of miraa include a mild sense of euphoria and enhanced sociability, heightened concentration, anorexia. Consumer behavioral responses usually include a preference for intellectual discourse or stimulation but avoidance of 'fujo', or commotion, and a distinctive rooting tendency that makes most users avoid excessive physical movement. In other words, miraa chewers like to sit and socialize in peaceful surroundings and are disinclined to overexert themselves physically--which explains the charge that it makes people lazy.

The public controversy over miraa in Kenya and elsewhere closely parallels those accompanying the spread of similar botanical commodities such as coffee, tea, and sugar. Statements by Kenyan professionals of different persuasions, including the recent debate in parliament, usually ignore the extensive scientific and anthropological literature.

The former fails to make a case for harmful physical and psychological effects over time; the latter underscores the socially integrative influence of social consumption and how it complements the search for meaning under circumstances of social change. My personal investigations on the negative aspects of miraa consumption emphasise the serial usage of other substances (mainly cigarettes and the chewing gum some users consume in large quantities), individual economic abuse, and time lost to the prolonged wakefulness following chewing. I would add that indigenous folk models of miraa's pros and cons tend to be more objective than Western analysts' interpretations of miraa phenomena.

Kenyan miraa consumption has been spreading across different social niches, elite consumers have come out of the closet, and the negative attitudes mentioned above have been changing rapidly during the past several years. The international export of miraa has increased significantly during the same period. Miraa is a high value commodity subject to high formal (e.g. airfreight charges) and informal (i.e. police roadblocks etc.) taxation. As a consequence, the Kenya Government has quietly been revising its negative-to-neutral stance vis a vis the commodity in recognition of the foreign exchange and tax revenues it generates, and its spreading social legitimacy.

The expanding circulation of *Catha edulis* is intimately linked to the Somali factor. Although the great majority of ethnic Somalis have never tasted miraa, at least until fairly recently, where Somalis go Miraa usually follows. The only place where miraa was traditionally consumed by Somalis is the Isaaq dominated north. Except for the Arab/Swahili role initiating the marketing of miraa on the Nairobi-Mombasa axis, the Isaaq have been in the vanguard of new miraa markets. Just as they pioneered regional markets in many parts of eastern Africa, they are the primary actors responsible for miraa's latest jump to Europe and North America.

The growth of Nairobi during the first decade of colonialism created new markets for agricultural commodities and meat. The Gikuyu response to commercialization also increased the demand for cattle in Central Province. The NFD was the main source, and Isiolo town became the terminus for livestock supplied by Somali traders for these upcountry

markets. The formal miraa trade dates back to this time as Igembe began making the long day's walk from Kangeta to Isiolo in order to supply the growing numbers of Isiolo-based Somalis.

The British recruited soldiers and policemen for Kenya in Somaliland. The Crown provided settlement areas in Nanyuki and the Ndare Mara area of Isiolo for those *askari* who wanted to retire in Kenya. Some settled in these places, and others fanned out across Kenya and northern Tanzania to start small businesses. These Somalis of mainly Isaaq, Dulbahante, and Majertain extraction and other urban Muslims forming trade networks connecting urban nodes in East Africa and eastern Zaire consequently came to dominate the regional transport sector. Miraa, a natural adjunct to long distance driving, naturally diffused across these networks. After Mau Mau the Menu began taking over the large markets in Nairobi and the coast, and the NFD, though mainly as wholesalers in the north.

After World war II commercial miraa production began spreading out of its traditional niche in the Njia area of Igembe. Over the next three decades it became the main cash crop in the Nyambene Range's fertile and densely populated interior valleys. After independence the Igembe steadily assumed the dominant role in the regional marketing network. Igembe control of the lucrative and ever-expanding miraa industry from production to retailing culminated in the long-running though highly localized northern Nyambene economic boom.<sup>14</sup>

Where statutory regulations dictate that formal sector cash crop production is mono-cultural, commercial miraa cultivation has remained anchored in the indigenous agro-forestry system. Because miraa is produced within a wholly organic configuration generating food, fodder, fuelwood, and other use products it is gender-friendly and supports high levels of household self-sufficiency.

Miraa's traditional role in *njuri* elders deliberations, social ritual, *gichiaro*, and promoting urban ethnic integration, and small-scale trade prior to the phase of full-scale commercialization unambiguously locates it on the positive side of the conflict-resolution equation. Miraa's contribution to the contemporary situation is considerably more complex. The two case studies presented here illustrate this indirect influence against the background of Nyambene society and the regional political economy.

#### Tigania-Igembe Clashes at Kia Mwituu

The commercialization of agriculture in Igembe contrasts with combination of modern and traditional agriculture in Tigania. Intensification of Igembe production and revenues generated by employment on different rungs of the miraa marketing system created large differentials in cash income. In a reversal of the traditional relationship, many Tigania find themselves seeking employment created by Igembe's flourishing roadside capitalism. And

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<sup>14</sup>The onset of this boom dates back to the 1970-72 period when market returns to miraa overtook that of other products. Its higher value during previous decades reflects the ease and low costs of miraa production.

But the Karama subsequently rejected the evidence and held to their claim. The Njuri Ncheke then decided to administer the *Nthenge* oath. The curse invoked by violation of this most potent of Menu oaths is greatly feared: on the appointed day the Karama failed to appear. The Njuri Ncheke then ratified their earlier border agreement and petitioned the administration to formally mark the divisional boundary. The District Commissioner gave the solution his official imprimatur when he visited the site of the conflict later that year.

The *Kya Mwituu* incident identifies an intriguing mix of modern-traditional institutional dynamics. The original cause was the elevation of Karama from sub-location in Muthara Location to the status of Karama Location, which prompted Muthara clans to exclude the Karama from acquiring lower zone farms in what was formerly administered as Menu's Northern Grazing Area (NGA). The invasion itself, however, was encouraged by administratively appointed chief for Karama location and an elected member of local county council.<sup>16</sup>

Though the *Njuri Ncheke* resolved the conflict where the local administration failed, hostilities remained under the surface. A Karama university student I spoke to conceded the legitimacy of the border, but insisted upon the Karama people's right to what they considered to be unused land on the basis of the high incidence of intermarriage between the two groups. The tradition of access to land through women relatives verifies the deeper roots of the incident.

The invasion, however, was an attempt to secure land for future expansion in the not yet settled margins of the Igembe NGA. This situation in turn reflects the greater land hunger associated with coffee cultivation in the Tigania highlands in contrast to the significantly higher returns to land and labor associated with Igembe miraa agro-forestry in Igembe--where the population density in the more limited highland zones is higher. In this case, indigenous commercialization segued with Menu institutions to reinforce the cultural system's capacity for internal adaptation.

#### The 1995 Miriti Miraa Strike

Another incident involving internal cultural dynamics indicates some of limits of indigenous mechanisms in the face of capitalist transition. To understand the 1995 *Miriti* miraa strike it is necessary that we return to the fast changing local miraa economy.

Miraa plots may be harvested over eight times over the course of year. The steady but incremental cash flow is difficult to manage. This pattern of income flow combined with high domestic self-sufficiency and steady employment in the labor intensive marketing network to support unusually low differentials of income distribution. Igembe's egalitarian traditional social ideals support social consumption at the expense of capital accumulation, and 'cash money' generated by wholesale and retail sale of miraa has seen alcohol displace the social consumption of miraa at home.

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<sup>16</sup>While conducting a feasibility study in Tigania I personally witnessed an example of the chief's incitement during a baraza in Mbeniku sub-location.



Though Hopkins remarked that the Igembe are the one Menu section who did not consume beer on the order of other Menu sections, through the early 1990s the Igembe quaffed beer in ever-increasing quantities.<sup>17</sup> At the same time small farm agricultural intensification and expansion of markets has fuelled the impression of unlimited informal sector opportunity while dampening general demand for education, especially in the late commercializing areas of Ntonyiri Division.

Miraa marketing generates fluctuating networks of micro economic organization that has mitigated against the emergence of internal economic diversification including the rise of a patron class. Individual traders have accumulated considerable resources, but until recently a host of factors encouraged Igembe investment in property and businesses outside the Nyambenes, and the diversification of agriculture for the most part into tea and lower zone farms in their home areas. Depicting how the limits of this agrarian success story only became apparent three decades into the miraa boom requires that we return to the Somali factor.

Somalia's President Sad Barre ostensibly banned miraa in 1981 for legitimate reasons of national development. In retrospect, however, the ban can be seen as a calculated move to take the lucrative commerce in miraa away from perceived political opponents and allow illegal importation to continue under the aegis of individuals identified with pro-government clans.<sup>18</sup> Later pro-Barre clans were allowed to operate militias equipped with small arms whose importation was financed by conservative Arab states. Access to miraa must have been one of the privileges conscripts enjoyed.

Events prior and subsequent to the collapse of Barre's government in January of 1991 produced two outcomes that boosted Somalia miraa consumption to unprecedented levels: the growing flow of refugees to Kenya, Ethiopia, Yemen, and Europe; and the rise of clan militias into the vacuum left by state collapse. Refugees inside the camps and outside took to chewing miraa in order to pass the ennui and discuss ad infinitum the situation that had overtaken their society. Warlords fighting for control over the limited resources available in the environs of Mogadisho found importing miraa a source for funds and incentives for the technicals battling to advance their political objectives.

This catalyzed far-reaching consequences back in the Nyambenes. Isaaq exporters who had already begun to send miraa in small quantities to London responded as demand expanded apace with the growth of England's Somali refugee community. The Isaaq were only one part of the new class of Somali miraa agents supplying the growing markets in Somalia and Kenya's Northeastern Province that settled down to business in Maua and Eastleigh. The considerably higher returns per unit of export miraa allowed them to penetrate Igembe-controlled supply networks. Initially this propelled the miraa boom to new heights, but over

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<sup>17</sup>Hopkins, Gerald (1944), *The Menu*. Nairobi: Ndia Kuu Press.

<sup>18</sup>During the 1980s miraa destined for Somalia was delivered to a special depot in Kaelo (several kilometers below Laare, flown to Mandera, shipped across the border on camels, and picked up by army landrovers who sped it to Mogadisho and Kismayu.

time it served to cut out traditional Igembe middlemen and replace them with their own agents, and to siphon off profits that formerly circulated within Igembe.

The practice of renting miraa plots furthered Somali ascendance in the Igembe reserve. The practice of renting miraa farms for an agreed upon number of mainga, or harvests, had been growing over the 1980s. Some of the reasons mentioned above fuelled the situation where many farmers found themselves temporarily unable to meet new demands for cash. The household head caught out in these circumstances enter into contracts exchanging X number of *mainga* harvests for cash advances (usually equivalent to half the market value of the miraa). The overheating local economy made it easy for Somali agents awash with capital to secure these agreements.

The Igembe responded by pressuring the administration to ban Somali agents from the rural interior. The administration complied by dictating that Somali agents could only pick up their orders in places along the tarmac road between Kangeta and Maua, but the ban proved unenforceable, especially in the presence of Somali cash inducements to officials and the police. In any event their Igembe compradors went about their business unencumbered. To make things worse, once in control Somali traders and the ethnic cohorts that flocked to Maua in their wake became extremely arrogant in their dealings with the local Menu. Individuals who reported abuses like physical beatings for late delivery to the police could find themselves incarcerated instead.

The miraa complex of this century developed along the lines of Menu age-set organization. Warriorhood transmuted into entrepreneurship, and capital earned by these warrior entrepreneurs financed their progress through subsequent stages in the life cycle. At any given time a specific age-set is prominent in retail marketing. The *Miriti* are the economically active traders during this specific 12-15 year juncture.

The worsening position during this decade prompted several concerned traders to organize a traders association. They set about calling a strike against miraa exports which commenced in late January, 1995. Age-set councils still actively meet in Igembe, and age-set dynamics remain generally remain strong in the Nyambenes. The strike, although effective at first, foundered due to several reasons. The timing which coincided with the beginning of Ramadhan to the day, the one time when many habitual consumers forego consumption, was extremely poor. More important, the strike was the brainchild of Nairobi based traders who had neglected to promulgate their strategy among their rural counterparts.

Although miraa supplies were initially reduced to a trickle began increasingly surreptitiously and strike-breakers began to operate openly after several days. Even so, the meeting called between the Igembe actors and their Somali competitors went forward. The meeting, chaired by the local administration, allowed each side to air their grievances. The main weakness of the *Miriti* activists was revealed by the position of Igembe producers who stated that the Somali pay slightly higher prices than their Menu affines. The meeting, which went on for several days, did sensitize the Somali to the building resentment, and they quickly took measures to rectify the problem.

Public opinion scored the first round to the Somalis, business as usual resumed, and relations have remained on an even keel during the aftermath. The more significant import of the

event may lie in the fact that it brought frictions into the open, and was the first step towards institutionalizing dialogue among parties having shared economic interests. It may mark the rise of a new kind of synthetic local institution harmonizing differences among ethnic groups operating within what has been an informal economic sector guided by internal cultural structures.

The Nyambene exemplar highlights problems of the emergent African capitalism. Recent developments in Igembe reveal this indigenous capitalism to be as ruthless and relentless in the face of cultural structures and institutions as any of its global predecessors. The initially adaptive confluence of indigenous culture and agrarian commerce in the Nyambenes is wholly consistent with what Illife describes as easily achieved procapitalist-capitalist syntheses. Fast moving changes since the early 1990s push it to a new threshold, revealing the less visible limits of this Igembe synthesis. Extrapolating from their convoluted history leads to the hypothesis that the problem is not conflict, but the lack of conflict over past decades. In this sense the predicament highlighted by their Somali dilemma may be just the wake up call Menu's exuberant agro-foresters needed.

### The NFD Revisited

The competition for scarce resources thesis provides a sufficient but unsatisfactory explanation for the contemporary situation in the NFD where pastoralists battle state security forces, down military helicopters, and the normal security mechanisms have proven wholly inadequate for preserving peace. The environmental crunch variable should therefore be viewed as a constant to be factored together with other internal and external determinants of violent group conflicts. These include the matrix of national and regional politics, international events, donor decisions, and other macro variables influencing the increasingly chaotic state of the African countryside to the State.

Examining the nature and pattern of regional trade, in contrast, helps fill in the picture of the social space from which the state has been receding over the past decade. In this section first we fill in the picture, and then sketch in the details of trade and conflict as they vary across the northern region.

Livestock in general, and cattle in particular, are by far the north's main producer commodity. Before discussing cattle markets several comments concerning livestock production are in order. Small holder agriculturalists owning cattle have benefitted from considerable research and development like the small holder dairy initiative promoted by Kenya's veterinary department. Large-scale ranchers have also realized considerable benefit from private and institutional breeding and research. Relatively little technical work has been directed towards pastoral livestock production in comparison. Formal interventions have concentrated on infrastructural supports and organizational schemes intended to facilitate sedentarization--including attempts to engineer pastoralists out of livestock production altogether.

The failures recorded along the way has finally led to recognition that traditional pastoralism is still the most adaptive and resilient form of land use and production in ASAL (arid and semi-arid lands) areas. Northern Kenya provides over half of Kenya's animal protein requirements, and the demographic-economic equation favors growing future demand for

pastoral products. Commercial livestock production, however, should not be viewed as an end in itself, but as a means for promoting economic diversification.

Pastoralists nevertheless face formidable obstacles to development. They entered the modern era marginalized and have been exploited as much as they have been ignored since independence. Large areas of pasture have been alienated as parks and wildlife reserves, and lodges built on strategic water sources. The situation is made more difficult by the lack of infrastructure, education, medical facilities, water, and most other prerequisites for meaningful economic progress. After numerous false starts donor, NGO, and missionary efforts have made a start towards rectifying some of these problems; and while the current policy regime designates market production as the primary engine for development, prospects for outside investment are at best remote.

Politically, pastoralists are the least empowered segment of Kenya's population. Endemic violence and limited opportunities for social intercourse has done little to allay the natural mistrust existing between pastoral warrior societies and the country's agricultural majority at independence. International factors are equally important for understanding the pattern of regional insecurity. British willingness to administer the Northern Frontier District was pure self-interest based on its value as a buffer zone. The value of this spatial function, more than livestock or other economic resources, designates NFD social stability as the key objective of state policies.<sup>19</sup>

The northern tourist circuit has become an important contributor to national coffers, reinforcing other factors underscoring the need to maintain security in the country's pastoral rangelands. Since creating extensive wildlife reserves was done at the expense of pastoral subsistence economy, improving productivity in the livestock sector is critical to the north's economic and political viability. Different angles on the pastoral dilemma all come back to the central importance of livestock economy, which highlights the position of cattle at the intersection of group conflict and criminality.

### The Cattle Trade

Cattle marketing, except for the quarantine and disease control measures brought to bear on animals leaving the northern region, has long been a *laissez faire* affair. The location of inspection and certification facilities in Isiolo make Kenya's 'Gateway to the North' the primary gateway to the south for livestock. Cattle marketing continues to follow traditional routes that channel most of the north's cattle destined for Nairobi through the district. The other major network leads from outlying areas to Garissa, and to Mombasa via Lamu or Garsen.

One riddle of the security situation is that conflict and insecurity rarely disrupt the cattle trade itself. Animals are still driven as far as Nairobi on the hoof. Though trekkers consider security and theft are a concern, the fact that small teams of lightly armed cowboys escort

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<sup>19</sup>Greater investment in basic services indicates the Moi regime has appreciated the north's political importance more than Kenyatta's did.

large herds of cattle indicate it is not a major problem en route. Herdsmen have long recognized the potential for conflict at permanent water sources.

Schlee describes an incident illustrating how relationships among groups interacting over time is used to manage the kind of conflicts arising over access to natural resources like water and pasture. The incident was occasioned by the need for Rendille to seek pasture outside their home territory.<sup>20</sup>

On one of the many misunderstandings between Rendille and Ajuran over the wells of Koiya some shots were fired and a group of Rendille youngsters who had come to fetch water fled in one direction while their donkeys stampeded in another. Hassan Turkana, not only out of personal interest but also in his role as a local political leader, tried to resolve matters. The Somali were willing to return the donkeys, but these had got lost again and first had to be found. The donkey affair was to be lengthy and inconclusive. At one stage my father-in-law took a Rendille warrior, one of those who had taken the donkeys to the well, with him to the centre of the cluster of Somali hamlets to introduce him to Mu'allim Ibrahim and Kosar Mohammed and other Ajuran elders. He had told the boy to identify himself as Saale when asked for his clan, and thus the boy did. Kosar reacted in a speech, the gist of which was, 'I am Bedan Ajuran and you are Sanle Ajuran. We are brothers, son of the same father. There should never be fighting between us. We did not want your donkeys; they just came running toward us. Although I have more important things to do, I shall do my best to find them so that you can see our good intentions.

Schlee then discusses the complex relationships, and perceptions of relationships like the in reality slender association between Saale and Sanle clans among Rendille and Ajuran, manipulated in this case to provide a mechanism bridging the conflict.<sup>21</sup> He explains the how principle of clan lineages is integral to conflict resolution in an earlier passage:

Apart from linking a few dozen or hundred people in one ethnic group to another small group in another, such inter-ethnic identities of clan or lineage serve another purpose in the arguments of those who appeal for inter-ethnic peace: by the multiplicity of such binary relationships and the many indirect relationships they imply...they convey a general sense of relatedness...and in northern Kenya, where human solidarity traditionally is not extended to non-relatives, people who are deaf to the laments about the shedding of human blood in general might yet be shocked at the idea of inadvertently killing a clan brother.

I have witnessed (and employed myself) use of kinship, fictive kinship, and even fictional kinship to mediate disputes. It is not, however, essential. In many instances cattle in transit are allowed to water before local herds in order to reduce the possibility of friction flaring into violence. As during the pre-colonial era, some forms of commerce is apparently accorded special respect. Then again, cattle are clumsy form of booty; bandits typically ambush traders on their way home in the case of animals transported by lorries. Much of the region's internal instability is nevertheless a function of violence resulting out of strategies for capturing livestock.

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<sup>20</sup>Schlee op. cit., pp. 178-79.

<sup>21</sup>Schlee, op.cit. pgs. 211-212.

### Cattle Rustling and Banditry

Guns are the most important new trade commodity in terms of regional impact. We identified firearms as an input market in the introduction because weapons have always been a primary technological accessory to eastern Africa pastoralism. Guns were one of the new commodities introduced by expeditions organized on the coast. Lamphlear has observed that older type of guns did not change the balance of power among Ateker groups, and their appearance was not as influential as new forms of military organization.

The spread of the AK-47 during this decade, in contrast, has intensified conflict within the larger region. Guns have also made it more difficult to separate conflict from criminality, yet the region provides numerous examples of counter-intuitive developments accompanying the spread of firearms. One would logically expect, for example, that the districts bordering chaotic Somalia would be the most effected by its internal instability. But Mandera has probably been the most peaceful district in northern Kenya while spatially central but culturally diverse Isiolo may be the most violent in recent years.

Differentiating group cattle rustling and banditry turns on the cultural precedent of the 'raid or be raided principle' of territorial competition. While raids between groups always target the victims' animals, they pave the way for territorial expansion and assume a political dimension in numerous instances. Modern firearms are an essential adjunct to production under these circumstances. Guns abet group expansion in a manner suggesting, at least in terms of our historical model, that cattle are their technological predecessor.

The introduction of modern weaponry into northern Kenya is a direct outcome the post-independence Shifta conflict. Access to guns grew out of the linkage between the abortive war of Somali self-determination and the banditry which replaced it. Darod Somalis in particular were able to obtain guns by volunteering to join the fight for the Ogaden, and then slipped back into Kenya. In some cases AWOL Somali soldiers did the same. Over the 1970s and 1980s the level of banditry in northern Kenya, Tana River, and Lamu directly mirrored episodes of instability in Somalia.

For a time shifta bandits were able to operate safely in Northeastern Province by manipulating ethnic loyalties. Kenyan Somalis suffered the consequences in the form of state repression and the general terror occasioned by anti-shifta campaigns. Attitudes shifted as the bandits began to prey on local Somalis as well, catalyzing a domino effect where Kenyan Somalis started invading Isiolo to recoup their losses. Banditry was predominantly associated with the Somali until the collapse of the Somali state began to flood the formerly politically controlled markets for guns. This and the numbers of firearms percolating into Kenya from southern Ethiopia and Sudan made acquiring a modern rifle much easier than before. Their impact, however, has varied across districts.

### Garissa: Commercialization of Banditry

The greater part of Garissa District is inhabited by Ogaden clans, part of the larger Darod confederation, whose historic presence is relatively recent. The Darod connection made Garissa the epicenter of shifta in Northeastern Province, and the base for predatory attacks from Isiolo, Meru, and Kitui to Tana River and Lamu districts. The social banditry of the

1970s has evolved into a considerably more professional enterprise driven by commercial forces.

That clan-based raiders still range across the landscape clouds the fact that larger problem is well-equipped Somali highwaymen that prey on livestock, lorries and buses, and small market centers. There are several factors that qualify Garissa District as the main enclave for these modern brigands. The largest is the political connection: the role of General Mahmoud Mohammed in squashing the coup attempt of 1980 was rewarded with high positions in the government for family members and new opportunities for their close associates. Many of his Ogaden clansmen were recruited into government service, the army in particular.

Garissa town has subsequently flourished, the district prospered relative to other pastoral areas, and the influence within the state administration insures a degree of protection for some businessmen dealing involved in smuggling and other illicit activities. Trade from Somalia passing through Garissa made Liboi the most notorious border town in Kenya, closely linked to the flow of weapons and other contraband since the government collapsed in 1991. These changes contributed to the changing nature of shifta.

Once the province of desperadoes and outlaws driven to indiscriminately revenge wrongs on civil servants, informants report that shifta banditry is now financed by well-connected trade barons who recruit from the pool of retired army personnel and school leavers--a new class of professional and sophisticated highwaymen. Shifta raids north of the Tana, for example, were previously assumed to be primarily the work of Somali nationals who employed Boni hunter-gatherer middlemen as guides. Banditry in Lamu District now attests to how it has evolved into a more commercialized criminal strategy internal to Kenya.

Mukunumbi is a small mainland settlement that is home to a number of Swahili traders who formerly owned large herds of cattle. These animals are transported by sea from nearby Mokowe or by road. It has repeatedly come under attack during the last ten years. There was a period several years ago when Somalis sold large numbers of cattle at unusually low prices to Swahili eager to reconstitute herds diminished by raiders from the interior. Over the following year, however, virtually all of the stock and many other animals were stolen in a series of well-organized attacks. The implication is traders with excess livestock simply transferred cattle to lush areas of the coast as a temporary holding ground.

This and subsequent predation that reduced formerly wealthy Swahili cattle traders to small shopkeepers and farmers also effectively reduced competition in the Mombasa market, now dominated by traders based in Garissa. A similar pattern is discernable in Tana River District, where local Swahili claim recent raids are calculated to drive out the Swahili-Arab traders who originally pioneered commerce in this remote area. This reveals a new aspect of shifta calculated to abet the expansion of larger ethnic trade networks originally financed by cattle sales.

The anonymous quality of the raiders and dispersed distribution of traders disguises the reality that this criminality is still embedded in ethnic competition. Conflict resolution in these circumstances is a unambiguous matter of state security--which has proved ineffective despite large numbers of army and security personnel posted to the area.

The Orma inhabitants of the adjacent hinterland, in contrast to commercially-oriented Swahili ranchers, are completely dependent on cattle. Orma resistance has galvanized after years of more "traditional" shifita attacks. They adopted the tactic of hot pursuit when raided, and have been able to recover their stock through effective use of their larger numbers, even when they do not possess equivalent firepower.

This and the shifita fatalities incurred by attacks on the Orma has significantly discouraged raiding over the past several years. Professional bandits, like hired soldiers of fortune, simply shift their energies elsewhere when the risk factor becomes too great. Despite long-standing negative associations of banditry with ethnic Somalis, it is Garissa's Kenyan Somalis who are now the main victims of highway robbery.

#### Isiolo: From Ethnic Clashes to Tribal Terrorism

Ever since the British demobilized their cavalry by banning horses as weapons, the Borana have been on the receiving end of their neighbours' aggression. Northeastern Province's increasingly commercial banditry has made it necessary for their neighbors to the east to acquire modern weapons. That the Borana did not do this earlier requires explanation.

One reason is linguistic and economic: purchasing guns through the greater Oromo network extending into Ethiopia was obviously more difficult and expensive during the Mengistu period. Another explanation lies in the more subsistence-orientated economy of Borana and Samburu cattle headers, and their comparatively low level of economic diversification. Also, most of the ethnic groups occupying the area bisected by the Isiolo-Moyale highway (Isiolo, Samburu, and Marsabit districts) are historically linked in some way, and have relied upon the state for protection against external threats. The spread of automatic rifles in Isiolo and environs has therefore occurred in the context of ongoing group competition for resources.

The odd shape of Isiolo District reflects its haphazard creation by the British, and it has been contested turf ever since. Most of the District was Samburu land during the distant past, and Chanler's 1893 map indicates the Somali were already established in the eastern portions. It was given to the Borana in exchange for Wajir, which was turned over to the Somali on the British premise that their expansionary behaviour could be better managed by consolidating and confining them within one contiguous block. The colonial administration had a difficult time doing so, and since Kenya independence the district has experienced continuous ethnic jostling.

The state response to the outbreak of shifita aided long-term Somali expansion by reducing the Isiolo Sakuye to destitution by shooting their camels (on the pretext they were Somali accomplices) and by placing the Borana in camps, which had similar results. In matters of grazing pastoral logic abhors a vacuum. As a consequence, the mixed camel/cattle/small livestock Ogaden economy and Degodia Benadir camel-abetted expansion has exerted constant pressure to expand into unoccupied fringe areas whenever ecological and other conditions diminished their neighbours' herds.

Further north, the historically lower level of competition between conservative camel and cattle-based systems apparently still reduces communal friction among these cultural groups. Degodia Somali acquisition of vigorous Benadir camels at some point in history as



explanation for their steady encroachment at the expense of the 'conservative' Ajuran camel system also tallies with the pre-colonial model. The diffusion of guns throughout Northeastern Province accounts for Degodia pressure on Borana pastures as well.

Conflicts among historical neighbours still remain amenable to mediation. Borana relations with the Samburu have been generally stable, while clan elders and administrative arbitration has been adequate to keep hostilities with neighbours on the Somali boundary within reasonable limits. Turkana raids on the Samburu's western flank have followed the same pattern. Conflict in this area thus falls within the raid-or-be-raided tradition of maintaining buffer zones category.

During the 1990s the Borana acquired weapons facilitating counter-raids across their border. This led to a politically-brokered non-aggression pact of sorts with the Degodia several years ago, and the active peacemaking efforts of the current crop of pastoral parliament ministers reduced other Boran-Somali grazing-raiding conflicts, while defensive aggression has largely neutralized the Garissa Somali threat to Isiolo during the last two years. Access for weapons have therefore restored a measure of parity. But the delicate equilibrium achieved after decades of instability has been offset by Samburu acquisition of modern weaponry.

The Samburu purchased their guns from the Borana, ostensibly to defend themselves against Turkana incursions. But during 1996 they attacked Degodia encampments of Degodia who had shifted into Isiolo in search of pasture, reportedly to preempt potential Somali expansion into their grazing lands.

People were killed and the Somali's claimed compensation but negotiations bogged down in the presence of recriminations and high levels of political noise. The Samburu were willing to agree to cease hostilities, but they were not willing to pay compensation as they considered the score to be even at this point.

Neutrality in the presence of third party aggression can also advance one's cause. The Borana remained aloof from the negotiations. This self-interested neutrality angered the Samburu, who later attacked the Borana in Merti, killing sixteen people. The usual machinery for mediation involving clan elders, elected representatives, and the district administration was activated. The MP for Isiolo South expressed Borana sentiments when he said that guns were new to the Samburu, who apparently did not realize the potency of their new toys. He advised them they should go practice on wild animals before raiding people. The Borana later revenged the attack, stealing substantial cattle while making a point of not shooting people. The Somalis also retaliated later that year.

These clashes still represented a manageable variation on localized conflict up to this point. But the severity of the attacks as presented in the press, coming after a series of violent conflicts to the north, created something of a national uproar. The most publicized event was a massive raid by a large contingent of armed Turkana that continued to receive exposure after fleeing raiders holed up in the remote Suguta Valley shot down a helicopter carrying the Samburu District Commissioner.

Local clashes making national headlines receive serious administrative attention. The government machinery went to work, but it appears the raids on the Samburu were exaggerated and the damage blown out of proportion. One inside source even said the

pictures of burnt manyattas that featured in *The Standard* were faked.

This last observation illustrates the problems arising when grass-roots sources on up who regularly distort information are amplified. Local and national politicians exploit raiding and rustling between communities for their own purposes, while the state elite exploits these politicians to advance their own aims. Localized conflicts become proxy battles fought on different levels of the system. The cattle connection camouflages the political interests served by voices within the government who maintain that cattle rustling is a way of life in certain parts of the country.<sup>22</sup>

Indirect competition and shadow boxing in various socioeconomic domains is a well-established technique for forestalling public confrontation in Kenya. Antagonists will knowingly tolerate fictionalizing to establish common ground for negotiation, as the anecdote about the Rendille-Somali conflict illustrates. This example of indigenous information massaging to promote conflict resolution, however, stands in direct contrast with on-the-ground information problems that impede public security.

Because cattle rustling is a team enterprise, the victims always identify their attackers in ethnic terms, but conceal their own violators. This obfuscates the already fuzzy border separating criminality and political violence, complicating law enforcement. Opaqueness and the manipulation of information on higher levels is a dangerous game that sometimes perpetuates reciprocal raiding and long-running local conflicts. It becomes even more dangerous game, however, when it assumes an international dimension, as the repression of Ethiopia's Oromo demonstrates.

Ethiopia's state policies of decentralization and regional autonomy disguises the Tigrean political leadership's methods for enforcing their domestic hegemony. Though Oromo are appointed to head regional administration in their home areas, the real decision-making power resides in the military units attached to the district headquarters. Tigrean control of local commerce in these areas is the more serious problem. The government waived duties and taxes on imports for the northern region, citing the need for reconstruction after their long struggle against the Mengistu state. The flow of these goods throughout the country, however, has allowed Tigrean merchants to take control of local economies, marginalizing the Oromo and other potential ethnic threats to the government.

The net outcome is greater ethnic polarization under the guise of democratic governance, with attendant ramifications for northern Kenya. Formerly vibrant trade across the border has stagnated, and the formerly friendly ambience joining Moyale Kenya and Moyale Ethiopia has evaporated. Rising Oromo nationalism in Ethiopia is complemented by a corresponding sympathy for the concept of an independent Oromia in Kenya, and claims that Ethiopia has used traditional enemies of the Borana to extend their anti-Oromo campaign into

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<sup>22</sup>Kwendo Opanga analyzed the political manipulation of banditry and rustling in a column (Outburst Sign of Deeper Malaise) appearing in *The Sunday Nation*, March 9, 1997.

kenya under the guise of raiding.<sup>23</sup>

The Burji are agriculturalists from the southern Ethiopian highlands that sttled on Mt. Marsabit in 1923. They have parlayed their agricultural production into a formidable commercial enterprise spanning Nairobi, Marsabit, Moyale, and the Ethiopian interior. Where Borana-Oromo trade has been frozen, they continue to import Kenya manufactures into Ethiopia and transport of cattle out to more lucrative Kenyan market. Land issues in Marsabit that place Burji-Borana relations on testy footings for some time erupted in violence during late 1996. This was followed by a spate of particularly brutal 'shifta' attacks on the Isiolo Marsabit road. to incidents of violence. The trucks that came under attack were exclusively Burji, and the raiders are believed to be Borana.<sup>24</sup>

Relations between Kenya and Ethiopia have been on an even keel for over three decades, even durring the Ethiopian revolution and the radical Afro-Marxism that followed. This is no longer the case as the consolidation of Tigrean-Eritrean condominium in the north poses a serious threat to ethnic equilibria in the south. The call by Kenya's deputy speaker of the house for compensation from the Ethiopian government for Kenyan deaths marks a significant shift in scale from local pastoralists claims for the same some months earlier. In the end state manipulation of ethnic sub-nationalism has curtailed the small-scale regional trade essential for reinforcing private sector linkages that offset dependence on subsistence strategies.

#### Turkana Rearmament of the 1990s

The modern Turkana situation highlights the larger regional influence on local security and conflict. The Turkana were the first pastoral group to promote a shift from tribal warriors to a professional militia, a development culminating out of changes instigated by political prophets. These modern warriors achieved an impressive record of battlefield success during the early years of colonialism, but they eventually self-destructed in a destructive orgy of internal plundering once neutralized-by an enhanced British response.

After independence the revival of armed raiding established *ngoroko* (cattle raider) alongside *shifta* as part of the new Kenyan vocabulary. Ngoroko subsided during the post-Kenyatta era with the influx of aid resources and developers who virtually made Turkana the ward of international agencies and NGOs. This coincided with the Moi government's strategy of incorporating Rift Valley tribes into the ruling coalition, which created the informal KAMATUSA (Kalenjin-Mace-Turkana-Samburu) Nilotic alliance similar to the role of the Bantu GEMA (Gikuyu-Embu-Menu Association) during Kenyatta's rule.

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<sup>23</sup>Kenyan parliamentarians from Marsabit and Isiolo implicated the Ethiopian government in the well coordinated attack by two thousand well armed Dassennech and Amarkakoke tribesmen that resulted in the death of sixty civilians and sixteen security personnel.

<sup>24</sup>These details were reported by Menu traders plying the route.

Before commercial trade made rifles available in Kenya over the past several years, government enforcement of gun controls placed Kenyan pastoralists at a considerable disadvantage vis a vis their counterparts living across the Ugandan, Sudanese, and Ethiopian borders. The Turkana were not able to carry weapons like their enemies in neighbouring countries could, yet the state could not insure security of borders either.

This made the Turkana, especially the more 'domesticated' southern population, particularly vulnerable to traditional antagonists like the Karamoja, Toposa, and Murille, and other non-traditional raiders based in Sudan. To make things worse, political exigencies accompanying the leadup to political pluralism in Kenya left them highly exposed to raids by their traditional but now armed Pokot enemies operating under the protection of their hawkish cabinet minister, the Hon. Francis Lotodo.

Until recently Turkana's national politicians have been a passive lot not inclined to make noise about their constituents predicament in parliament. This led the Turkana to abandon their dependence on the national government. They started looking north to Lokitaung instead, rearmed, and started giving as good as they got, as the following account illustrates.

#### The Attack on the Didinga<sup>25</sup>

The Turkana have died in great numbers over the past decade. Now we have a leader who speaks out on our behalf (Turkana South MP Francis Ewaton), and we place our interests before KANU, whose leaders were only interested in using us. We started looking to the Turkana in Lokitaung who have never given up Turkana ways when we got tired of being attacked by others, including the Pokot who steal our cattle, and take some of them to Tugen. When we raid them back, government helicopters came and massacred our people as they drove the cattle back.

So people started buying guns from Sudan, which enable us to go after the cattle we have lost over the years. The Turkana raided the Pokot last year, but hid the cattle; four hundred men with AK-47s disguised themselves among rock outcrops. When the helicopter came, they fired all at once and it crashed.

During the last dry season a large number of Turkana from this area, maybe a thousand men-most whom had rifles, got together and trekked to Sudan. The Didinga are just like the Turkana. Though they are not many, they too raided us during the recent past. We walked

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<sup>25</sup>This account of a Turkana raid into Sudan is based on details related to me by two Turkana school leavers in Lodwar in February of 1996. It represents pieces of informal conversations taking place over two days cobbled together for expedience and coherence. The narration was candid and matter-of-fact, even during the account of the attack, which sounded truly horrendous. The narrators hardly looked like the feared *ngoroko*, or even especially Turkana in their western clothes, and they otherwise conveyed concern for practical issues like employment and social harmony articulated by Kenyan youth.

and walked, and arrived near Didinga Hill late at night. We quietly surrounded their settlement without alerting them, then, during the hour before dawn, we started shooting into their midst.

We shot and shot and shot without regard for bullets, which are cheap these days. They never had a chance to fight back, and the whole place was covered with blood, lots of blood! When the sun came up we moved in and took their cattle. It was everyone for himself, and each person drove his cattle back to Turkana by themselves, and following different routes. I got four heifers, but some people didn't get any. I made it back to my father's place (outside Lodwar), gave him one and sold the rest. After all, I am not a cattle herder myself.

The story reveals several reoccurring themes of modern cattle raiding: the role of unemployed youth and non-raiders; disenchantment with the government; indiscriminate killing not sparing women and children; and acquisition of commercial resources.

Little in the way of ethnic ideology or Turkana nationalism figured in general discussion of the local situation. Other than an indirect reference to age set influence, this raid's organization appeared ad hoc and motivated by an opportunism legitimized by the violence inflicted upon the Turkana during the recent past.

Lokichoggio, the small town near the Sudanese border serving as the logistical base for the United Nation's Operation Lifeline Sudan, also supports a small commercial sector and expanding informal settlement. Didinga agro-ero inhabiting an ecologically favorable micro-niche now produce foodstuffs including onions, tomatoes, and even miraa for this market. One can only suspect that the measure of prosperity naturally converted into cattle is what prompted the raid.

It is hard to talk about development working to prevent this type of conflict. For several decades Turkana has receive international development assistance that even the most benevolent Kenyan government could not match, including a new tarmac road that the government did provide. Though most of these grand schemes failed miserably, they did reduce considerably the district's isolation, and may yet appear benign compared to the gold rush now in progress.

Lately Oxfam and the governments of Kenya and Uganda have collaborated to implement a well-informed and innovative program to reduce the weapons fueling Turkana-Karamoja raiding. Its success has been reported widely. During the intensifying drought conditions of 1997 both sides somehow reacquired firearms suddenly and resumed hostilities. But guns may not be the cause in any event. Several months before the Pokot laid seige to Kainuk, the trading center on the border of Turkana and West Pokot Districts, for three days running. Two security people were among the casualties. The Pokot have raided Kainuk many timers, but never terrorized the town for more than a few hours. Moreover, for reasons best known to themselves, or perhaps to make a point, they left their guns behind and used bows and arrows in their place.

#### Markets and Ties that Bind

Up to this point we examined how the role of firearms as inputs into cattle production and

trade has reinforced the commercialization of criminality. The cultural context of criminality has catalyzed further acquisition of guns for defense and territorial expansion. Enhanced firepower has increased the incidence of inter-group violence, and swelled the ranks of bush criminals previously limited to Somali shifta and *ngoroko* rustlers once prominent in Turkana areas.

Now we look at the third category of markets by returning to miraa in order to assess the impact of social consumption. Miraa distribution is an efficient business famous for its record of surmounting barriers that deter other forms of trade. Its status as an indigenous social commodity highly valued by pastoral peoples allowed miraa traders to pass through bandit infested areas.

Informal protocols formerly governed the relationship between shifta and miraa transporters, who carried extra miraa and cigarettes for any shifta who might stop them en route. Other Menu traders moving between the Nyambenes and the NFD at worse expected to be peacefully robbed when a raised rifle on isolated roads signalled them to stop. The driver and passengers would then abandon their landrover and possessions to the highwaymen, who took what they wanted and disappeared back into the bush. With the indiscriminate violence accompanying the rise of commercial banditry these protocols have broken down. Still, traders only started shipping miraa to Wajir, Mandera, and other distant towns by plane when forced to by administrative edict.

Khat-chewing technicals waging war in Mogadishu brought miraa into the international spotlight. Western media labelled miraa a drug of war, and assistant Secretary of State, Cohen, described them as khat-crazed Rambo's getting pumped up for evening raids on McNeill-Lehrer News Hour. First impressions are important. US Customs recategorized cathine as a controlled substance in order to halt the small quantities of miraa finding its way into North America's Somali, Ethiopian, and Yemenese communities. Some Western European governments restricted it as well, not because of the cathine or its pharmacology, but because of the nuisance created by Somali traders clashing over shipments arriving at airports.<sup>26</sup>

Back in the Horn of Africa, however, miraa was finding new acceptance among the Westerners as well as Somalis enduring the chaotic conditions in the war zone. Physiologically, *Catha edulis* discourages physical exertion. Labor-intensive miraa consumption typically induces chewers to clump together and verbally expand for hours across the full spectrum of social topics. Associating miraa with Rambo-esque behaviour is tantamount to labelling Toyota (maker of the Landcruisers Somali warlords converted into battlewagons) a defense contractor. Mutual dialogue between users and critics over miraa's role among the urban poor, medicinal properties, and links to criminal activity will only

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<sup>26</sup>Listing cathine, or nor-pseudoephedrine, found in miraa as a schedule 4 substance (i.e. drug requiring a physicians prescription) seems to contradict the fact that it is a common ingredient in many over the counter cold and asthma medicines. Miraa markets in many places assume the appearance of rugby matches upon arrival of the miraa.

become productive when its detractors recognize it as a dependent variable in most situations.<sup>27</sup>

Miraa, as noted earlier, generates an easy-going attitude towards social intercourse that identifies its social consumption as facilitating multicultural interaction. Weir devotes an entire volume to analyzing its integrative effect in Yemen's tribally and socially stratified society. Krikorian and Getahun note its role in promoting social connections across religious, ethnic, and class lines in Ethiopia. Miraa consumption certainly encourages the same in Kenya, and social opposition has softened as it spread out of the Swahili-Somali ethnic ghettos to embrace the nation's greater social diversity.

The *Njuri Ncheke* derived legitimacy miraa enjoys in Nyambene society in part mirrors its salutary influence in deliberations aimed at resolving conflicts--characteristics that have seen informal miraa baraza evolve as nodes for arbitrating communal conflict in many other places. Councils like the Njuri administered justice through a process aimed at arriving at consensus. All the representatives of disputing parties were allowed to speak, the council then adjourned to discuss earlier precedents and details relevant to the dispute. In the case of doubts the process was repeated.

British administrators keen on incorporating the Njuri into local governance found such long proceedings exasperating. Justice to them, was supposed to be speedy and determined through precise evidence bearing on the case. Indigenous African justice, in contrast, used elders to 'cool' the disputants and manipulated procedure in order to give the parties in conflict time to settle affairs among themselves. In many instances the third party ruling was made only after the failure to do so.

When resolving conflicts is the order of the day miraa gatherings function according to a similar dynamic. Miraa draws individuals from different cultural groups discussed here together in camps, towns, and cities. These mixed fora are common settings for political debates that proceed in the same manner, third parties intervening to cool the discussion when it becomes too heated. *Catha edulis* is part of the complex of social change that convert traditional enemies on the range like Somali and Borana into allies in other settings.

Miraa facilitates information flows at the same time it reinforces social relations. This has seen miraa join Islam as one of the north's ranking social institutions promoting social ties that can transcend ethnicity. Not surprisingly the main opposition to miraa comes from within the Muslim community. The most common interpretation of Islamic sharia categorizes miraa as *makruh*, neither illegal nor approved. The more fundamentalist position is that miraa is *haram*, or forbidden. This was the stance of Iranian agents operating in Mombasa who launched a concerted anti-miraa campaign waged in mosques and in their publications during the early 1980s. The campaign had little impact on consumption, though it may have wakened many local Muslims up to the hard-line realities of the Iranian revolution. Miraa discourse tends to reinforce Muslim identity, and serves as a barrier

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<sup>27</sup>These issues are discussed in "Miraa: Time to Enter Into a Dialogue," (Paul Goldsmith); *The East African*, May 27-June 2, 1996.

against alcohol in modernizing situations. In this sense miraa is associated with a more secular and practical Islam buffering the appeal of radical religious ideologies among Kenya's historically marginalized Muslim communities.

Reversion back to Islamic order in areas of Somalia can only be viewed as positive against the backdrop of post-state Somalia's brutish anarchy. Not only miraa, but cigarettes are banned in Ikhwan controlled areas along the Kenya-Somalia border, where controls on the carrying of guns in public has contributed to restoration of order and law. This has encouraged the trade underpinning social peace in Mandera, and cross-border disputes are now often settled along indigenous, i.e. Islamic principles.

Several months ago raiders killed a shopkeeper in El Wak. The deceased clan elders lodged a suit against their counterparts in Somalia, demanding the offenders be handed over. This happened, but the locals did not turn the accused over to the Kenya police. Instead the case was tried locally, and the joint jury of elders decided upon a large fine. This was paid, the offenders were returned to the custody of his clan, and the money paid to the widow and children of the deceased should be able to support them in place of the murdered husband. It case of this kind establishes a gichiaro-type bond facilitating the resolution of future conflicts.

Trade helps bind such communities together over the long-term, and that miraa is chewed on the El Wak side of the border points to the future direction of convolutionary change most likely to stabilize the region. There are many examples of this kind recommending that Western donors relax their rigid opposition to Islam as a radicalizing and anti-Western influence, and tailor their policies according to local developments and the complex variables influencing them instead.

### **Part III. Conclusion: Trade, Security, and Conflict Resolution**

Trade generates competition and conflict, but also reinforces mechanisms of conflict resolution. Market-driven economies are thus associated with more democratic governance where conflict is rationalized and transferred to economic arenas. Political rules governing the socioeconomic system are set by governments and the legal superstructure of the international economy. Indigenous conflict resolution is geared to work within the local system of checks and balances. Modern conflict resolution, in contrast, involves centralized structures, external legal principles, and policing from above. Neither working alone represents a solution to the insecurity in the north. We can, however, assume that the social and political environment will select for complementary components of both as socioeconomic transition proceeds.

The parallels between adaptive indigenous technology and techniques and African governance that continues to defy conventional political wisdom extends the ITK paradigm to indigenous conflict resolution (ICR). On the ground mediation requires intimate knowledge of the circumstances and the ability to improvise and fine tune solutions. The re-configuration of indigenous systems within exotic political orders operating within artificial boundaries nevertheless deems ICR a rather problematic proposition.

In general, we can state that ICR is effective where pre-existing structures or linkages exist. The *Njuri Ncheke* was able to settle the conflict at Kya Mwituu on the basis of historical



evidence. It was not as effective when the Tharaka from the lowlands on the other side of the Nyambenes invaded Igembe in 1995, probably because the historical connection (on the *njuri* level) was not as strong, and because there appeared to be high level political input on each side.

Managing conflict under conditions of social diversity and economic inequalities is not a matter of prevention, but one of damage control and containment within the local arena they occur. The example of the Igembe-Tigania hostilities notwithstanding, Kenya's ongoing administrative sub-division that is reshaping district, division, and location borders along ethnic and clan boundaries will probably facilitate such compartmentalization of local conflicts.

In this case study, though the overall impact of trade is positive, its significance for regional conflict varies according to commodity and market structures. Free markets for weapons have promoted trade through the commercialization of raiding, and not the modernization of livestock production. Gun markets support the evolving parity among groups also reinforce the shift from group conflict to predatory criminality. As indicated by the Somali and Turkana examples, what initially begins as a form of social banditry eventually turns into an internal pox on the land and its people. At this point in time it has effectively put large areas of northern Kenya off-limits to headers and traders alike.

Trade presumes production, and to paraphrase Ndege's conclusion in his surveying of Kenyan pastoral development during this century, the development of range livestock production is reducible to the expansion of agriculture.<sup>28</sup> It should suffice to say that Kenya's agriculturally oriented post-independence governments have not prioritized pastoral development.

Ecological research and anthropological evidence now confirm that traditional pastoral transhumance is the most adaptive land use for ASAL regions. It may be as ironic as unfortunate that the kind of state initiative directly responsible for Kenya's prosperous small holder coffee, tea, and dairy production have fallen victim to SAPs just as the sector appears to be reaching the threshold of implementing viable technological innovations and social programs. The scope for achieving similar results through private sector input is at best limited; the prospects for local NGO-international research sector collaboration to enhance production are considerable, but the resources for doing so are limited.

Colonial administrators often admired their pastoral wards, but grossly misunderstood the nuances and more subtle underlying dynamics of pastoral cultural systems. Development agencies operating in marginalized environments saw problems through their own specialized filters, and together with the government adopted inflexible methodological approaches to the 'pastoral problem'. Other advocates of ITT development have at times come under the influence of their principals' cattle fetish. This analysis suggests that although livestock are

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<sup>28</sup>Ndege, George Oduor (1992), "History of Pastoralism in Kenya," in *An Economic History of Kenya* eds. W.R. Ochieng and R.M. Matson, Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers: pp. 93-109.

the northern region's primary economic resource, animals are not necessarily the key to economic growth. This is based on the balance between environmental carrying capacity and demographic growth, internal sectoral trends supporting large herd owner dominance, and problems associated with the commercialization of banditry likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

Optimizing production though desirable, stabilizing production by minimizing the effects of drought is a more realistic goal. Under these circumstances *it is highly unlikely that the livestock sector can generate either the income generation or income distribution necessary for regional development to take off on its own*. Even the prospect of rising livestock prices over the foreseeable future is not likely to counter demographic pressures on existing resources.

It may be that conflict within the livestock sector has actually accelerated urbanization and economic specialization that would have otherwise occurred more slowly. Half the population of Isiolo District now resides in Isiolo town. Other formerly small administrative-commercial outposts in NFD have mushroomed into large towns. Historical examples of convoluted syntheses versus mono-cultural dominance favour the prospect of progress catalyzed by the human resources, commercial linkages, economic potential, communications, and other factors concentrated in these urban nodes.

In the presence of poor educational performance and limited acquisition of skills, however, many pastoralists poised to become economically active will face the choice between safe but low paying employment, like providing for others security, or the considerably riskier but more remunerative criminal options. These vectors highlight the fact that there is no substitute for effective state security. The prospects for trade generated economic activity are considerable, though this will likely depend upon the expansion of commodity circulation into the wider regional shell including portions of Somalia, Ethiopia, and Sudan. Without skilful political guidance on the part of national leaders this may be problematic.

#### The National Security Equation

Many analyses of ethnic conflict trace blame to the state. The state is invariably culpable by virtue of government action or lack of action in some cases; simply by virtue of just being there in others, and as of late, by virtue of not being there. This theoretical approach assumes the state is both capable of and responsible for policing the populations within national borders, and defending the nation against external threats. Africa's cultural diversity makes this more difficult, and national borders that divide ethnic communities more so.

State enforced security has tended to create as many problems as it solved in the north. The record of state policing in the NFD has led to a consistent record of repression and human rights abuses perpetuated on all populations of the north. The record of home guards has been better, and dovetails with many pastoral victims view that employing their own people represents the best option for effective police protection. Free circulation of modern rifles has achieved similar results, but creates new problems both in respect to reinforcing centrifugal ethnic proclivities and through the implications for urban crime.

British colonial policy sought to contain Somali expansion by consolidating the Somali within

one contiguous block. They demobilized the Borana calvary by banning horses, which they defined as weapons. In the process they undermined indigenous conflict control predicated on intersecting orbits and periodic contact among groups, and were unable to maintain the Somali line.

Today's condition still require the threat of deterrence provided by a police presence. Though experienced police officers who have served in the area maintain that with proper equipment and moral-boosting support the force is capable of ensuring security, a shift in this direction is not likely to happen in the near future. When the states on Kenya's borders stabilize, a well-planned police dragnet across districts and ethnic groups may be able to sanitize the region of weapons. Until that time the police will have to rely on current ad hoc approach.

During his tenure as Kenya Police Commissioner the recently retired Shadrack Kiruki advocated society-police cooperation as the basis of more effective law enforcement. Examples highlighting internally regulated group relations that bypass the state legal institutions highlighted by developments in Manderu District project this policy a step further.

Such indigenous dynamics belie Laiten and Fearon's (1996) observation that ethnic cooperation often prevails over the potential for conflict in Africa.<sup>29</sup> The authors outline two pathways of inter-group equilibria relevant to the problem at hand. In-group policing maintains peace by subjecting individual violators upsetting inter-group equilibria to internal control--the other group defers to the violator's own people possessing more accurate information of the "opportunists" to balance relations. The spiralling regime of group equilibrium is based on the mutual costs incurred by provoking deterrence.

Traditional conflict resolution conforms with these models.<sup>30</sup> Ethnicity and its sharply defined social boundaries is positive in the internal control context requiring dense social networks provide intelligence. Outside deterrence in the northern Kenya, however, has worked mainly to punish the innocent. Both models highlight the importance of information, and neutral mediators whose access to information from both sides engenders trust among conflicting parties.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>To quote from the abstract of their recent article analyzing how formal and informal institutions work to contain or cauterize disputes: "Though both journalists and the academic literature on ethnic conflict give the opposite impression, peaceful and even cooperative relations between ethnic groups are far more common than is large-scale violence."

<sup>30</sup>Cultural groups maintained strong social boundaries, and local councils mediated inter-group conflicts via mechanisms that included internal punishments for those who violated pre-established 'rules' regulating cooperation, raiding, etc.

<sup>31</sup>Mediators who rose to positions of prominence during the nineteenth century include traders like Masaku among the Kamba and different Mace *laiboni* acted as interlocutors. Current

Three sets of actors are critical for police-community cooperation to work along these lines in Kenya. Local MPs are the key middlemen who can either mediate or amplify the 'noise' created by incidences of individual and group transgression.<sup>32</sup>; district administrators, especially district officers, who in this author's humble experience are generally competent and dedicated grass-roots administrators committed to their work; and the area's ranking police officers (OCPD, OCS, et al).

The majority of northern MPs are conscientious peacemakers stressing information over noise. All three groups are vastly under-compensated for the responsibilities they shoulder, but the police who stand in the line of fire most often are also under-equipped and poorly housed. The head of the Marsabit County Council equated police lack of transport and support to "a lion without teeth; the columnist John Githongo's observation that "we treat them like animals and they do the same to us" sums up the latter problem. Toothless lions prey on the disadvantaged and weak. Taking action to rectify these demoralizing conditions are the logical first step in any policy to stem the flow of blood and increase the circulation of goods.

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leaders require political skills to negotiate with the center and the cultural sophistication to fictionalize and make effective use of symbols and metaphor.

<sup>32</sup>Noise is defined as mistakes, misinterpretations, drunkenness, sudden passions, or unobservable payoffs from encounter to encounter.