

# Governing violence in the pastoralist space: Karrayu and state notions of cattle raiding in the Ethiopian Awash Valley

Alemmaya Mulugeta (1), Tobias Hagmann (2)

(1) Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Basel, Switzerland

(2) Department of Geography, University of Zurich, Switzerland

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Based on recent fieldwork this article examines how cattle raids involving Karrayu pastoralists are governed by the local administration and customary authorities in Ethiopia's Upper and Middle Awash Valley. It argues that the regulation of violent conflicts in areas marked by weak state presence and legitimacy must be understood as a function of multiple social orders, actors and norms. The authors draw attention to the evolving rationales of inter-ethnic cattle raids, highlight the incomplete nature of state expansion into the Karrayu pastoralist space, and scrutinize the ambiguities of government and community peacemaking.

*Key words:* cattle raiding, pastoralism, conflict resolution, governance, Karrayu, Ethiopia

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Pastoralist frontiers in Ethiopia and elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa have never been fully incorporated into the nation-state as customary and non-state authorities have resisted the centripetal drive of the Imperial, socialist and contemporary regimes.<sup>2</sup> Although the Ethiopian central state has a long tradition of intervening in its semi-arid peripheries by appropriating land, co-opting elites and reconfiguring collective identities, its bureaucratic apparatus has only recently been 'decentralized' to the most local level (Clapham 2002, Hogg 1997, Turton 2006). And yet in the country's hinterlands the Ethiopian state has not managed to fully assert control over and impose its norms on mobile livestock keepers. This holds particularly true for conflict resolution in pastoralist areas where individuals and groups regularly circumvent, replace or appropriate the

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2 Pastoralism', 'pastoralists' and 'pastoral' refer to rural dwellers whose livelihood depends predominantly on transhumant livestock or agro-pastoral production.

power of local administrations. In doing so, they manage inter-group violence through idiosyncratic means of governance, which regularly develop outside of the legal-rational cosmology of the nation-state.

A case in point is the Ethiopian Upper and Middle Awash Rift Valley inhabited by Karrayu, Afar, Argoba, Ittu and Issa pastoralists and settler groups from different parts of the country. Territorial encroachments, cattle raids and associated small scale warfare between these groups have been ongoing since the 1960s when commercial agricultural enterprises alienated important tracts of land from local pastoralists (Bondestam 1974, Gebre 2001a, Harbeson 1978). The Upper and Middle Awash is not physically remote from the federal government as only 100 km separate it from Addis Ababa. Despite this geographical proximity to the capital, few state organs such as police stations, courts or schools are present in the hinterlands of the Awash Valley. Concomitantly, among the Karrayu and other pastoral groups in the region customary authority enacted by elders, age-set generations or religious leaders, which once played key judicial and political roles in public affairs, is losing its former prominence (Abbinck 1997, Ensminger 1990, Gebre 2001a, Unruh 2005). Inter-generational differentiation, economic diversification, commoditization of livestock, increasing urbanization and the expansion of modern state politics are among the historic trends eroding customary authorities in the pastoral areas. With neither state nor non-state actors fully in charge, the question arises as to how inter-group conflicts are regulated in a context where statutory law has little influence and customary authorities are increasingly challenged.

To elucidate this question we scrutinize contradictory notions of conflict as evidenced in cattle raids and accompanying efforts to resolve conflict between Karrayu and their neighboring Afar and Argoba pastoralists. We consider cattle raiding as a distinct form of conflict, the understanding of which reveals the 'structures, norms and codes' and recurrent actor strategies (Olivier de Sardan 2006:189) of a social group such as the Karrayu. Violence among pastoralists has for a long time been associated with primordial group identities or natural resource scarcity. However, recent work demonstrates that contemporary pastoral conflicts in Ethiopia are strongly linked to ongoing processes of state expansion in the framework of ethnically defined federalism (Markakis 1994, Schlee & Shongolo 1995, Turton 2006). As we have argued elsewhere, post-1991 administrative decentralization has politicized kinship relations, reconfigured spatial relations between pastoral groups and their territory, and co-opted customary authorities and peacemaking (Hagmann & Mulugeta 2008).

Periodic cattle raids observed in the Ethiopian lowlands are indicative of at least two failings that give lie to the self-proclaimed sovereignty of the state; its shortcomings in terms of protecting rural dwellers' property rights and its inability to enforce legal jurisdiction in cases of homicide (Donovan & Assefa 2003). The literature on legal pluralism has emphasized the interconnectedness of plural social orders and has drawn attention to how the coexistence of state law and other normative repertoires provides opportunities for forum shopping (von Benda-Beckmann 1981, Merry 1992). However, few authors have explained why and how pastoral groups such as the Karrayu have managed to deflect

state power in the domain of conflict resolution over a prolonged period of time. We thus seek to contribute to a wider discussion about the ability of non-state political orders to prevent bureaucratic apparatuses from becoming dominant governance providers.

We argue that the regulation of violent conflicts in areas marked by a weak state presence and challenged state legitimacy must be understood as the outcome of interactions between multiple social orders, actors and norms within a particular spatial setting. We utilize the term ‘pastoralist space’ to conceptualize this political and social arena in which the Karrayu interact with neighboring pastoralist groups, state officials and international development organizations. The pastoralist space comprises a territorial and a symbolic dimension. Geographically, it designates the incessantly contracting borders of the Karrayu home territory and the bitter struggle to defend rangeland resources against encroaching adjacent groups, agro-commercial interests and conservationists. Symbolically, it refers to a landscape of meanings that is driven by governmental and outsider recognition of and herders’ identification with ‘pastoralist identity’ in post-1991 Ethiopia. In line with the transnational indigenous peoples’ movement (Igoe 2006) and capitalizing on the ruling Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Revolutionary Front’s (EPRDF) discourse of developing the country’s hitherto marginalized minority groups, representatives of the Karrayu (and other Ethiopian pastoral groups) make strategic use of the ‘pastoralism’ label to claim collective rights and benefits from local and regional governments as well as international organizations (Lister 2004).

The bulk of the empirical data of this paper was gathered during doctoral fieldwork among the Karrayu by the first author between 2003 and 2005 (Mulugeta 2008). Data collection concentrated on the Karrayu inhabited districts of Fentalle and Awash Fentalle, which are located in Oromiya and Afar regional states respectively, and was complemented by several research stays in different localities of the Karrayu hinterland. In addition to participant observation and focus group discussions with Karrayu, Afar and Argoba pastoralists, the author held a series of formal discussions with state officials including various law enforcement units.<sup>3</sup>

In the following sections we expound the driving forces and moral context behind cattle raids and associated violence in the Karrayu pastoralist space, and examine recurring responses to such events. The evolving practices and rationales of cattle raiding in East Africa are discussed in the next section. In the third section we recapitulate the impact of state expansion and subsequent regime changes on Karrayu livelihoods and politics. Conflictive inter-group relations between the Karrayu, Afar and Argoba are summarized in section four before we analyze competing notions of conflict and conflict resolution by the Karrayu and local administration in the case of violent cattle theft in the fifth section. In the concluding section, we draw attention to the shifting power configuration in the Karrayu pastoralist space and the contradictions of the dual state and non-state conflict regulation mechanisms.

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3 See maps at the end of this article.

### **Evolving rationales for cattle raiding**

Cattle raiding can be defined as a group invasion or forceful attack by an outside pastoralist group with the main objective of stealing cattle rather than seeking territorial expansion. Increasingly violent and destructive instances of raiding among East African herders have been recorded in the past two decades (Mkutu 2001) and are often, but wrongly so, associated with resource scarcity in the region's semi-arid lowlands (Bogale & Korf 2007). Classical anthropological works on the subject as summarized by Fleisher (2002) point to the reciprocal nature of community approved cattle theft (Fukui & Turton 1979), the ritual importance of acquiring enemy livestock as a proof of masculine warrior hood (Bollig 1990), and the human-ecological herd management and redistribution functions of cattle raids (Sweet 1965). In the Horn of Africa's pastoral peripheries cattle raids have been intertwined with strongly militarized conflicts such as civil wars and cross-border disputes. These often involved rebel movements with a nomadic background (Fukui & Markakis 1994). Cattle raiders are driven by symbolic, pecuniary, and economic motives. Raids occur in retaliation to prior attacks in order to (re-)acquire stolen stock and to replenish decimated herds or they are simply deployed to intimidate enemy groups.

Historically, cattle raids were carried out by groups of young male warriors who form closely knit raiding parties (Almagor 1979). Most scholars reject the idea that present-day cattle raiding continues to serve the purpose of maintaining group solidarity or accumulating prestige (Blench 1996).<sup>4</sup> A case in point is that of the Kuria herders inhabiting the Tanzanian-Kenyan border. Fleisher (1999:238) describes their evolving livestock raiding practices as follows:

*'Kuria cattle raiding is by no means a new phenomenon, but it has undergone a profound transformation in the course of this century – from its pre-colonial roles of demonstrating the mettle of new warriors and enlarging the community cattle herd to an illicit, oft-times quite violent, cash-market-oriented enterprise'.*

Almost identical interpretations are provided for the Pokot and Turkana (Hendrickson *et al.* 1996, 1998), the Datoga (Ndagala 1991) or the Karamoja (Ocan 1994) pastoralists of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. Hendrickson *et al.* (1996) make a distinction between more redistributive and more predatory livestock raiding. Redistributive raiding occurs among groups predominantly involved in subsistence animal husbandry and does not pose a threat to their livelihoods. As Oba (1992) demonstrates in his account of Turkana land use conflicts, raiding livestock of one's traditional enemies is a means to expand rangelands, restock herds and improve social status. Raiding campaigns by young warriors had to be sanctioned by elders and evolved 'according to strict rules governing preparation, engagement, disengagement and conflict resolution' (Hendrickson *et al.* 1996:21).

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4 This and the following paragraph draw heavily on Hagmann (2006).

More recently, cattle raids in East Africa have become increasingly predatory in form, often implicating actors external to the pastoralist space such as businessmen, warlords, security personnel or government officials. Ocan (1994: 128-129) asserts that the finality of cattle raiding in the volatile Sudanese-Ugandan-Kenyan Karamojong cluster had mutated from herd restocking and accumulation to 'sell[ing] livestock for money or for more weapons'. Increasingly sophisticated weaponry and military tactics employed by raiders, widespread looting and indiscriminate killings during cattle rustling in North-west Kenya led Osamba (2000:8) to identify 'cattle warlordism' as the new phenomenon of the 1980s. As a result cattle raids were transformed from an adaptive into a maladaptive and violent strategy, thereby increasing male adult mortality, famines and epidemics among pastoralist groups like the Karimojong (Gray *et al.* 2003). In parallel the social and economic costs of conflict increased considerably, leading some authors to conclude that 'large-scale raids seem to be a major cause of destitution among pastoralists' (Krätli & Swift 2001:13). Although it is debatable as to how far weaponry can act as a 'change agent' (Mirzeler & Young 2000), there is reason to believe, and with few exceptions (Knighton 2006), that the widespread availability of small and light arms in the pastoralist lowlands is partly to blame for this trend (Mkutu 2007).

Cattle raiding is a widespread and long standing form of violence among many Ethiopian pastoral communities. Unlike in neighboring Kenya where the existence of British colonial records makes it possible to reconstruct historic violent incidents (Roba & Witsenburg 2008), past cattle raids among Ethiopian herding groups have gone largely undocumented. It is thus difficult to validate Unruh's (2005:230) assertion that 'violent confrontation has become more frequent'. Since 1991 the rapid escalation of pastoralist conflicts in the country's peripheral regions is progressively interwoven with attempts to control territory more permanently and to claim political representation on ethnic grounds (Hagmann & Mulugeta 2008). The decentralization of the Ethiopian state and the expansion of its institutions at district and *kebele* levels have drawn the state's attention to the uncontrolled violence occurring in its pastoral areas.<sup>5</sup> Violent confrontations between pastoralists often occur in frontier regions that host armed rebel groups such as the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) or the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) who pose a direct threat to the ruling EPRDF regime. Despite hopes for increased regional autonomy and greater subtlety in engaging with indigenous norms that deviate from codified criminal law, regional states have shunned harmonizing customary and statutory law (Donovan & Assefa 2003).

### **Expansion of the Ethiopian state into Karrayu pastoralist space**

Before reviewing the consecutive expansion of state authority into the Karrayu pastoralist space, some brief background information on the Karrayu are in order.<sup>6</sup> The Karrayu belong to the Cushitic speaking Oromo ethnic group, which makes up an estimated

5 Established by the former *Derg* regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam, the *kebele* or peasant association is Ethiopia's lowest administrative level.

6 For a more comprehensive ethnography of the Karrayu the reader is referred to Gebre (2001a).

40 percent of Ethiopia's population (Jalata 1998). The big Oromo rubric is divided into two major clan federations called Borana and Barentuma. While the Borana inhabit the central, southern and Western parts of today's Oromiya regional state, the Barentuma Oromo occupy the eastern and Rift Valley parts of former West Hararghe. The Karrayu trace their descent from Oromo through Barentuma whom they regard as their genealogical father while they consider the Ittu as their genealogical brother. According to popular belief Karrayu begot two sons known as Dullacha and Basso, which represent the two major genealogical groups within the Karrayu. The Karrayu consider a location called Meda Wollabu, a natural lake located between the Borana and Bale areas, as their place of origin. Oral tradition has it that the Karrayu settled around Fentalle mountain where they had been residing around lake Basaqa, in the Sabober plains and the Metahara area for the past 200 years (Gebre 2001a).

The Karrayu largely depend on raising cattle for their livelihood and fundamentally define themselves as a pastoral community. Cultivation has become an increasingly important source of income as the encroachment of large scale farming and the establishment of the Awash National Park have curtailed mobility and encouraged more sedentary lifestyles. Prevailing settlement patterns reflect this trend; while the Dullacha and Basso groups used to inhabit distinct territories within the Karrayu space, displacements and population movements have led the two to intermingle.<sup>7</sup> Although Islam gained a strong footing among the Karrayu with the in-migration of the Muslim Ittu in the 1970s, a majority of the Karrayu share an animistic belief in the supernatural *waqefata*, literally 'believing in God' (Gebre 2001a:155) with other Oromo groups. Another important communality is the Karrayu's adherence to the *gada* system, an ensemble of customary rules of self-rule based on generation sets, which alternate responsibilities every eight years (Legesse 1973).

The evolution and resolution of violent conflicts in the Upper and Middle Awash Valley must be understood in the context of historically contested relations between the Ethiopian state and the Karrayu. The subjugation and forceful incorporation of the Oromo and numerous other ethnic groups into the Ethiopian Empire through the 'southern marches' during the 19th century represents a case of internal African colonialism by the dominant Amhara and Tigray aristocracy (Donham & Wendy 2002 [1986]).<sup>8</sup> Despite the remarkable state- and nation-building advances by emperors Yohannes, Menelik and Haile Selassie, Ethiopia's peripheral areas were never fully incorporated into the national body politic. Furthermore, neither the Haile Selassie nor the Derg government were able to offer a lasting solution to the 'national question', which triggered the armed ethnopolitical conflict that eventually brought the EPRDF to power.

7 In earlier times Basso territory extended from the Dega Iddu vicinity east of Mount Fentalle to the areas presently occupied by the Awash National Park and the 'small Fentalle' while the Dullacha lived in Chercher, Melka Ijlo, Kogne and Arole.

8 This viewpoint is rejected by nationalist Ethiopian discourse and historiography, which emphasizes the greatness and continuity of the Abyssinian state. It portrays the forced state incorporation of Oromo groups such as the Karrayu as a defensive stratagem that successfully prevented indigenous peoples becoming subjects of European colonizers.

During the 1950s and 1960s the Haile Selassie regime's policy towards the Rift Valley was driven by an economic agenda rather than a policy of political encapsulation. Land dispossession of Karrayu, Afar and Arsi pastoralists by state owned or backed enterprises often led to serious incidents of violence and local resistance. Although the Imperial order claimed sovereignty over its pastoral hinterlands, the Karrayu remained for a long period autonomous in terms of natural resource management and regulating family and interpersonal relations in rural areas. Government interventions concentrated on trade, taxation, military conscription and the management of inter-ethnic relations in towns (Bassi 2005 [1996]). A number of Karrayu elders appointed by the Imperial order as local chiefs (*balabats*) acted as intermediaries between the state and community, collecting tributes and restoring law and order. And yet, during the Imperial period internal clan conflicts were mostly handled by local chiefs through blood compensation known as *guma*, retaliation and violence (Gebre 2001a).

This situation broadly remained unchanged after the coming to power of the socialist *Derg* regime in 1974 whose policies were guided by an agricultural mindset and thus focussed on settled cultivators. Relatively little interactions occurred between government officials and the Karrayu during this period although the *Derg* established pastoral committees, which aided state repression and control (Gebre 2001a). Cattle raiding was considered a strictly internal affair, organized within the normative framework of the Karrayu community and regulated by clan chiefs and elder councils. The Ethiopian state was neither involved in local conflict resolution nor did it contribute to pastoralists' economic welfare. When asked about this period, Karrayu informants closely associated state authorities with repeated incidences of land dispossessions, which are remembered vividly today. They are part of Karrayu's collective memory and shape the image of the state as an instrument of resource commandeering in the interest of external individuals.

### **Conflicts in the Karrayu, Afar and Argoba triangle**

Violent conflicts and cattle raids are a regular occurrence and a major characteristic of the contentious relationships between the Karrayu and neighboring groups such as the Afar, the Argoba, the Arsi and occasionally the Issa Somali.<sup>9</sup> A survey conducted among 80 Karrayu households by Gebre (2001a:246) demonstrates that a total of 83 Karrayu had been killed and 560 cattle, 546 camels and 506 small ruminants raided by neighboring Arsi Oromo, Afar and Argoba between 1976 and 1990. During fieldwork and in conversations with Karrayu it became clear that none of the informants remembered a time period when such rivalry had not existed. Stealing an enemy's cattle was seen as a courageous act, particularly when raiders succeeded in looting animals directly from an Afar or Argoba pen or *kraal* (livestock enclosure). Most Karrayu portray their relations with the Afar and Argoba as driven by 'eternal enmity' that has persisted since the time of their forefathers. In anthropological terms, raids and counter-raids between the Karrayu and their

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9 A complex web of conflictive interactions characterizes the Awash Valley, including disputes among Oromo groups (Karrayu-Ittu, Karrayu-Arsi), between Oromo and Somali (Ittu-Issa) and between Afar and Somali (Afar-Issa). In this paper we limit our analysis to conflicts involving the Karrayu.

neighbors express an ongoing process of marking difference between ‘us’ and ‘them’ through which identity is constructed collectively (Schlee 2004). The fact that homicides among Karrayu and Oromo in general carry heavy moral penalties, while physical aggression against ethnic ‘others’ is symbolically rewarded, supports this observation.

The persistence of mutual cattle raids between the Karrayu, Afar and Argoba, however, does not signify a continuity of the social context in which these raids are embedded nor the institutions that regulate them. Concerted Karrayu cattle raids known as *orea* (literally: invasion), which traditionally involved several clan lineages, the approval of elders and considerable preparation and coordination, have become rare events. According to Karrayu informants only two large-scale *orea* have been staged since 1991, partly because of fear of government reprisals. Instead the predominant type of cattle raid is the small-scale theft planned and carried out by small groups of young men who belong to the same village and who target herders from a different ethnic group in a neighboring settlement. This type of raiding is more often than not organized without the knowledge of clan elders. The tendency of young pastoralists to bypass elders in this matter can be attributed to internal and external dynamics. Among them are an increase in population size that obstructs the social control characteristic of small demographic groups, the reduced ability of elders to command authority over young herdsmen, and the easy access to firearms. Most importantly, the individualization and progressively disconcerted nature of contemporary cattle raids reflects a growing societal heterogeneity among the Karrayu in terms of interests, social positions and generational preferences. As a result of the consecutive attempts by the Imperial, the *Derg* and the EPRDF regimes to co-opt Karrayu clan leaders, customary authorities became more diversified, which in turn contributed to the erosion of the social norms that underlie customary inter-ethnic peacemaking with the Afar and Argoba (Gebre 2001a).

The Afar are the north-eastern neighbours of the Karrayu and the predominant group within the Afar regional state (Kassa 2001). The Karrayu often refer to the Afar as their long-standing or ‘eternal’ enemy and inter-group disputes are driven by competing claims over water points and rangeland resources. Narratives of violent encounters with the Afar and mutual retaliations are particularly widespread among the Karrayu.

*‘We are different from the Afar. Our reconciliation with them never lasted long. We soon resort to fighting again. We never stop fighting with them even during Haile Selassie’s time and the Derg time. We pay compensation but then never stop fighting with them’.*<sup>10</sup>

The establishment of the mechanized concession farms Melka Worer and Melka Sedi in the 1960s alienated the Afar, particularly its Weima sub-branch, from important tracts of rangelands. This further increased resource pressure on the Karrayu as Afar encroached on their territory. Resource competition is highest during dry seasons when Afar and Karrayu pastoralists compete over scarce resources surrounding the banks of

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10 Author’s interview with Karrayu pastoralist, Bulga, 3 June 2005.

the Kesem river at Sifie, Silkie, Tafie and the Awash National park where the Beleadi, Aroretti and Dinkuku ponds are situated (Gebre 2001a). Importantly, cattle raid and associated violence between the two groups is not merely the result of relative resource scarcity. It is also reproduced through positive sanctions within the two groups as a young man's failure to confront the ethnic 'other' is seen as shameful and, conversely, aggressive attitudes towards the 'traditional enemy' are recognized by members of the respective group. In recent years a growing commoditization of Karrayu-Afar cattle raids has been observed (Hundie 2008).

The Argoba are sedentary agro-pastoralists inhabiting the north-western hills of the Karrayu with whom they interact mainly around Arole hills and near the Kesem river. With their rich pastures and major water points these border areas have been the site of recurrent conflict between the two groups. Sporadic resource sharing between the Karrayu and Argoba exists through bond relationships and prior agreements, making it possible for households and individuals to gain access to pastures within territories claimed by the other group. This said, the Karrayu perceive their relationship with the Argoba as one based more on violence than peace with cattle raids having occurred between the two groups ever since the Argoba expanded their territory and increased their herd sizes. The Derg period witnessed intense reciprocal raids, which caused high numbers of fatalities on both sides (Gebre 2001a). The Karrayu consider the cultivating Argoba as 'highlanders' and feel threatened by their expansionist tendencies. In areas where the two groups border each other it is land possession rather than seasonally incompatible resource claims that represents the major bone of contention between the Argoba and Karrayu. Following the Ethiopian state's demarcation of territories of administrative entities in the process of ethnic-based decentralization, raids have been on the increase as a means to compensate for land lost to the neighboring group.

### **Karrayu and state notions of cattle raiding and peacemaking**

This section sheds light on the contrasting moral conceptions of the Karrayu and the Ethiopian state with regard to cattle raiding and their strategies to deal with the legacy of raids, namely efforts to retrace stolen animals, identify wrongdoers and pacify inter-group relations. It is important to emphasize that at a local level Karrayu pastoralists entertain highly diverse positions and interests with regard to conflict with other groups. Homogenizing the Karrayu for analytical purposes is only sensible when discussing relations between them and external actors such as the Afar, state representatives or NGO staff of different genealogical descent.

With the creation of regional states on an ethno-national basis under the stewardship of the EPRDF, the Karrayu became part of Oromyia region. Post-1991 decentralization not only increased the visibility of the Ethiopian state in more peripheral territories, but also raised people's expectations of local government (Turton 2006, Vaughan & Tronvoll 2003). While the educated Karrayu elite hoped to gain employment in the newly established district administrations, hopes were high that 'ethnic federalism' would bring about the infrastructure and services that had so far eluded Ethiopia's pastoralist

population. Public resources were disbursed locally through a number of channels such as conflict resolution and peacebuilding training, community mobilization and a wide array of capacity-building workshops. Access to these opportunities is determined by different factors including an individual's formal education, ethnic affiliation and personal experience. Since few Karrayu benefited from prolonged school education, employment in one of the offices at district, zonal or regional state level is rarely an option. However, participating in *ad hoc* dispute resolution activities in the aftermath of clan conflicts and cattle raids provides an opportunity to access state and NGO controlled resources outside of formal public administration.

Like other Ethiopian pastoral groups Karrayu herders are armed primarily because they shoulder the task of protecting physical assets and ensuring personal safety. The militarization of pastoralists is partly the result of successive regimes' inability to provide security and to uphold a monopoly of violence in its semi-arid hinterlands. From the perspective of young Karrayu herders, armed conflict and cattle raids are essential to the safeguarding of collective property. The Karrayu perceive these activities as legitimate forms of retaliation to counter the aggressive actions of neighboring groups and as a means of retrieving stolen livestock. Contrary to the view of government and party officials who discursively frame cattle raids as a security problem, young male Karrayu herders rationalize raids from the viewpoint of their dominant emic norms. When justifying retaliatory cattle raids it matters little for Karrayu raiders whether the targeted stock belongs to them, their family or clan moiety nor is the specific moment in history when their cattle was stolen by the enemy a concern. Rhetorically, other arguments are provided to explain attacks such as:

*'you raid the cattle from your enemy because you need to test their capabilities for counter attack, fetch some cattle to your stock, you also can do it as a way of amusement, to boost your image as a man while you attend your cattle.'*<sup>11</sup>

In contrast to elders co-opted by state institutions or NGOs who refer to cattle raiding as a major threat and security concern for the community, young Karrayu and Afar herders ascribe less threatening meanings to stock theft and the accompanying violence.

The Karrayu rely on different mechanisms to redress tensions and conflict after violent raids. Conflicts are mediated by Karrayu elders who rely on the customary body of rituals known as *arrarra* for inter-ethnic peacemaking. The *arrarra* is an integral part of the *gada* system and relies on prominent community elders as well as incumbent and former *gada* leaders who mediate peace agreements with neighboring groups. Central to the *arrarra* institution are activities such as, the participation of neutral third-party mediators, oath-taking rituals at the conflict site, the slaughtering of a bullock and the negotiation of blood money (Gebre 2001b). If reconciliation is successful compensation follows a

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11 Author's interview with Karrayu pastoralist, Roba, 3 December 2004.

two-pronged approach; loss of human life and physical injuries sustained during violent confrontations are compensated by the payment of *guma* blood money and stolen cattle are retrieved by their original owners. According to Gebre (2001b) the effectiveness of the *arrarra* peace-making institution has decreased gradually over time as a result of government interference. With the exception of government sponsored and endorsed *arrarra* initiatives, little customary inter-clan mediation has occurred in recent years, as witnessed during fieldwork between 2003 and 2005. Unlike other pastoral groups in the Horn of Africa whose conflict regulation mechanisms are threatened by the pervasive use of semi-automatic arms, the Karrayu are increasingly drawn into armed confrontations in which their enemy enjoys an advantage by receiving the support of its local government. According to Karrayu perception district administrations from both Oromiya and Afar regional states have frequently provided logistical support and troops, namely police and militia, to their kin taking part in inter-ethnic conflict. An increasing imbalance of power between the two parties has resulted from the asymmetrical conflict involvement by the two regional states to which the Karrayu and Afar belong.

Local government officials monitor cattle raids in the Awash Valley with a mixture of indignation and helplessness. Since regional states claim the power to adjudicate disputes and monopolize physical violence on their territory, the recurrent flare-up of violence in pastoralist areas defies the image of the state as the sole guarantor of law and order. Legally and practically, bureaucrats conceive of cattle raids as theft, which requires judicial prosecution in accordance with the Ethiopian civil and criminal codes. According to statutory law homicides must be dealt with by the court system, which excludes the possibility of paying compensation for murders without prosecuting the individual murderer. The Fentalle district administration regularly attempts to prevent cattle theft and arranges the return of stolen cattle within Oromiya region. Yet it has no jurisdiction over territory falling under the Afar and the Argoba inhabited areas. While a Neighbouring Region's Affairs Bureau (situated within the regional security department and tasked to address cross-border conflicts including cattle raids) had been established within the Oromiya regional state, a similar bureau within the Afar regional administration had not materialized by 2005. At a local level collaboration between the two regional states concerning cattle raiding matters is thus severely hampered. According to data obtained from Fentalle district's security department in 2004 the Oromiya region had handed over a number of convicted Karrayu raiders to the authorities in the Afar capital Asayita, but the latter refused to reciprocate by extraditing its Afar raiders.

Limited administrative outreach of the Fentalle district organs is the main reason why so few cattle raids are contained and resolved by local government. Until 2005 the district police of Fentalle maintained a presence in only two of its 20 *kebelles*. In order to alleviate their insufficient policing capacity in its rural areas, the district administration established so-called Peace and Negotiation Committees at the *kebelle* level. These committees are composed of ten to twelve members; the district administrator, the head of the militia and the police commander are permanent committee members while the remaining members are chosen among local clan elders. These elders are appointed by the

district administration and are well versed in and reproduce government discourse.

‘We fight among ourselves because we are backward and we need to change this violent behaviour’ is a very common statement made by elders who regularly participate in conflict resolution meetings with local state administration. They occupy an ambivalent position between the communities from which they are drawn and the government that nominated them in the first place. Membership in a Peace and Negotiation Committee puts them half way between their community and the local administration, thus their role as mediator is arguably less between rival groups than it is between their community and state authorities. Committee members are expected to provide detailed information about instigators of cattle raids and the whereabouts of stolen cattle in their locality. The committee chairs then pass this evidence to the Fentalle district police for further investigation. Oromiya’s Neighbouring Region’s Affairs Bureau regularly meets with the various local Peace and Negotiation Committees after major cattle raids or conflict incidents. District administration offices or hotels in bigger towns regularly host such meetings and conferences.

The district administration attaches great importance to the identification and prosecution of raiders and the returning of stolen cattle. Its ability to arrest perpetrators depends largely on whether local government appointed elders are willing to unearth compromising details about members of their community. Because of their loyalty to the ruling Oromo People’s Democratic Organization (OPDO), government appointed Karrayu elders have earned the nickname luke or informer. This indicates their loss of moral standing in the eyes of their own genealogical group. Pressurized by the district administration to provide names of perpetrators to the police on the one hand and obliged by their relatives to remain silent on the other hand, government appointed elders of the Peace and Negotiation Committees often chose to facilitate the return of stolen cattle, but avoid giving up names of individual raiders. Because of these obstacles most cattle raids involving homicides and physical injuries are not processed by the courts as district officials lack the evidence to file charges against what the state considers criminals. Consequently, as in other remote pastoralist areas of Ethiopia (Gemechu 2007, Hagmann 2007, Tafere 2006), most violent inter-clan conflicts in the Awash Valley are managed outside the realm of statutory law and formal state institutions.

### **Conclusion**

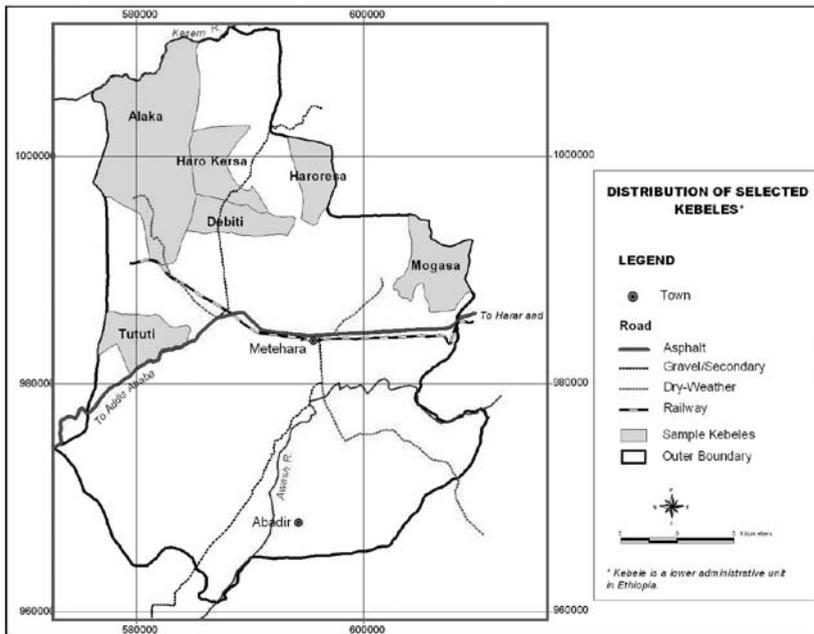
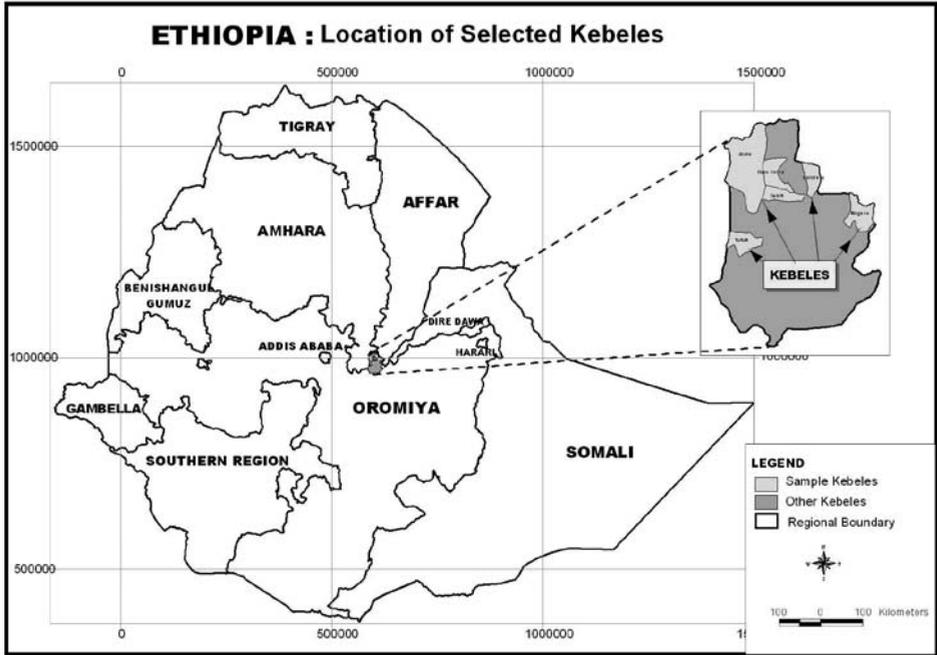
Cattle raids represent an interesting analytical lens through which local state-society interactions can be grasped in territories neither fully controlled by the government nor by customary or non-state authorities. The persistence of recurrent violent cattle raids in the Ethiopian Upper and Middle Awash Valley points to an ambiguous co-existence of competing notions of conflict and conflict resolution by the Ethiopian state and Karrayu pastoralists. On the one hand, state institutions criminalize and condemn raiding, yet they are unable, both administratively and politically, to suppress violence in the hinterlands. Historically, state efforts to control and ‘pacify’ pastoral communities by forcing them into the realm of legal-rational governance have contributed to the undermining of

customary institutions that once effectively regulated inter-group violence. On the other hand, Karrayu notions of cattle raids highlight the symbolic and economic benefits and imperatives of forcefully (re-)appropriating livestock from neighboring pastoralists. Yet in the current context of increasingly bitter resource competition triggered by the encroachment of external resource users and the involvement of administrative entities in inter-ethnic disputes, customary conflict resolution is severely challenged. Three points that illustrate different and often contradictory facets of these shifting power relations in the pastoralist space deserve particular mention.

First, the continuous process of state expansion into the pastoralist space – of which ‘ethnic federalism’ is only the latest phase (Hagmann & Mulugeta 2008) – accelerates customary authorities’ growing internal differentiation. This differentiation manifests itself in competition between urbanized elders recognized by district administrations and community elders based in more remote settlements. While government appointed elders benefit from their proximity to the district administration, they are not in a position to hand over their male relatives involved in violent raids to the local police. Another effect of this internal differentiation is the increasing turn to more negotiated peace agreements, which replace consensus-based decision-making.

Second, a review of the work of the Peace and Negotiation Committees reveals the instrumentalist rationality of both state officials and elders in governing violence in the pastoralist space. Upon invitation by the local administration community representatives such as elders are often willing to engage in government sponsored conflict resolution activities. Yet their participation in the Peace and Negotiation Committees serves not only to help bring an end to conflict, but also to gain information about the intentions of law enforcement with a view to anticipating government interventions that are potentially damaging to their relatives and kin. Concomitantly, sensitive details about imminent raiding parties and enemy groups or the planned retrieval of cattle are obtained by elders who maintain close relationships with the local administration.

Finally, in much of the periphery of the Upper and Middle Awash Valley the state’s weakness is not as much of a problem as is the omnipresence of its incapable institutions. Ethiopia’s regional administrations claim exclusive jurisdiction over their respective territories, but are unable to enforce statutory law through their bureaucratic apparatuses whose outreach is, in the borderlands, confined to towns and their immediate surroundings. This discrepancy, the co-optation of pro-government customary authorities and the selective nature of government interventions aggravate rather than mitigate conflict in the pastoralist space.



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