
6 Returnees in Mooyyale District, Southern Ethiopia: New Means for an Old Inter-Ethnic Game

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The large numbers of refugees,¹ returnees and displaced peoples in the Horn of Africa testify to the current crisis in East African pastoralism.² The creation of concentrations of destitute pastoralists is primarily related to armed conflicts rooted in colonial and post-colonial state policies, recurrent droughts and competition over scarce resources. Violence may also destroy infrastructure and hamper services that have been established with great efforts by the international community, as in the case of the Second and Third Livestock Projects in southern Ethiopia, seriously hampered by the military and social upheavals recently occurred in Southern Ethiopia (Desta

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1 The information presented in this chapter is updated to November 1993.

2 On returnees' movements in the Horn cf. UNRISD (1993).

1993, 26). Before the 1990s, in the Horn of Africa, armed conflict used to involve the states directly with their regular armies or organised militias, often against ethnic-based insurgency and guerrilla activities. During the 1990s, in line with post-Cold War trends towards the ethnicisation of such conflicts, large numbers of destitute pastoralists were forced to move to seek relief as a consequence of either inter-clan conflicts in Somalia or of local inter-ethnic warfare in Ethiopia, hence clashes involving people against people. However, even these recent clan and inter-ethnic conflicts are rooted in national political processes and are highly influenced by international aid agency policies. This is the case of the conflict between the Borana and Garri described in this chapter, whose affiliation along pro-Ethiopia and pro-Somali factions during the 1960s and the 1970s was largely determined by a long-standing dispute over access to pastoral resources.³ The present confrontation is still largely motivated by the same dispute, but placed in the post-Derg context of Ethiopian state reconstruction along ethnic lines.

When large numbers of ‘refugees’, ‘displaced’ or ‘returnees’ find themselves without the means to survive, international and national agencies become involved in funding, coordinating and implementing relief and rehabilitation activities.⁴ However, because of the emergency nature of these interventions,⁵ these agencies often ignore local knowledge systems and practices, so fuelling decades-old inter-ethnic divisions. International aid becomes just a new resource to be manipulated by local groups in the interests of old political and economic cleavages. The following case study concerns the effects of aid and changing state policies on Borana, Garri and Gabra Migo relations in the Mooyyale district of Southern Ethiopia. I argue that international aid has exacerbated deep-rooted inter-ethnic conflicts over access to pastoral resources in the area and that the inter-ethnic competition for scarce resources is now reformulated and reframed in the new State context.

³ There is an analogy with Ngok Dinka/Humr conflict in South Kordofan (Sudan) described by Mohamed Salih, where motivations related to the wider civil war between North and South Sudan overlap with a long-standing inter-ethnic confrontation regarding the 18th and 19th century slave trade and the more recent competition over pastoral resources (Salih 1993, 16).

⁴ UNHCR, which has the international mandate to assist refugees, returnees and displaced, is usually the main donor, implementing the operations through GOs and NGOs. The coordination of all activities is normally made in cooperation with the appropriate and specialised national agencies.

⁵ Refugees and returnees affairs have been described in terms of “permanent emergency” (UNRISD 1993, 1).

6.1 The Borana, the Garri and the Gabra

Borana oral historians agree that the Borana expanded from *Liiban*,⁶ the area between the Ganale and the Dawa river, into *Dirree*, to the south-west of the Dawa river,⁷ during the *gadaa* Abbae Babbo,⁸ which roughly corresponds to the period 1656-64 (see map 1 for main localities mentioned in the text). With this movement, the Borana displaced the Wardai, another Oromo group living in the area at that time. They can be identified with one of the moieties of the Orma Oromo, today living on the lower Tana River valley in Kenya. In Borana songs and poetry *Dirree* is referred to as *Tulaa Sallan*, meaning the 'nine deep wells', that is the nine most important groups of wells in the area. The nine groups of *tulaa* wells are the following: Meel-banaa, Irdaar (also called Egdar), Goof, Lei, Dhaas, Weebi, Waacille, Hiigo and Gaayo.⁹ Later the Borana expanded from their Ethiopian heartland into Northern Kenya. By the 19th century, they had established a network of alliances which included both the Garri and the Gabra.¹⁰ From the second half of the 19th century, however, they began to suffer from repeated raids from Somalis to the east, which forced them eventually to retire from their easternmost territories in today's Kenya.

In Ethiopia, from the end of the 19th century, Somali groups started to encroach into the easternmost part of Borana grazing areas. Bòttego's map based on his 1892-93 expedition clearly shows the Borana occupying nearly the whole of *Liiban*, with the exclusion only of the southern corner close to the Dawa-Ganale confluence (Bòttego 1895, map II). At the beginning of the 20th century, Gwinn reports a southwestern movement of Somali and their arrival in the area between the Ganale and the Dawa rivers under the pressure of both Abyssinian and the Mullah's raids (Gwinn 1911, 123). This movement might have brought Somali groups into what is now the Dolo Oddo district. The Borana claim that due to intensive raiding

⁶ The name has been adopted as a district name in Borana province (Sidamo region). The southern part of the area between the two rivers was under the Dolo Oddo district in the same province. In this chapter the italic style has been used to distinguish the traditional geographical category from the administrative district.

⁷ *Dirree* has also been adopted as a district name, in Arero province (Sidamo region), smaller than the area traditionally referred to as *Dirree*.

⁸ Borana chronology is based on the famous *gadaa* generation system, described by Asmarom Legesse (1973) and Baxter (1978). The chronology proposed by Asmarom Legesse (1973, 191) has been slightly adjusted here, taking into consideration the intercalary month (Bassi 1988b).

⁹ The last two have recently lost economical relevance, due to a drop in the available water.

¹⁰ More details in E.R. Turton (1969) and Goto (1972). See also Schlee 1989, 38-9.

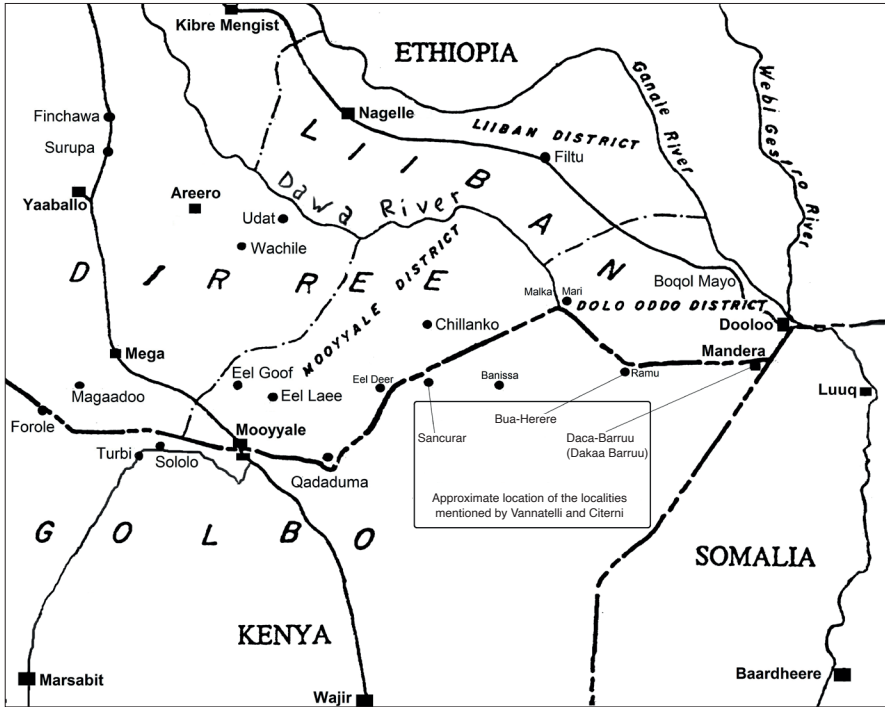
by Somalis after the death of Menelik II (1913), they were temporarily forced to leave the eastern fringe of their territory. This was followed by a time of intensive looting in the area, started by a group of elephant hunters who had gone to Borana from the North. Being well armed they started to rob the pastoralists. Hodson, who wrote at length about them, states them to be Tigre, a name having no reference to the Tigre country in north Ethiopia (1927, 71). However, it was mainly during the Italian occupation that various Somali groups were allowed to permanently occupy large parts of the eastern Borana pastures. Most Muslim pastoral groups, especially Somali but also Oromo, indeed supported the Italian troops by joining the so-called Banda, the military units formed by indigenous troops. They were rewarded by facilitating their settlement in the new area, at the expense of pastoral groups that were still practicing the Oromo traditional religion. Borana oral tradition is confirmed by the 1939 *Africa Italiana Orientale* map, showing the Degodia (a Somali clan) occupying a wide bend of the Ganale at approximately 41° east (Dardano 1939) in *Liiban*; the same area occupied by Borana as late as the time of Böttego's expedition (Bottego 1895, map II).

The Garri are a Muslim pastoral group speaking both Somali and Oromo. They are genealogically related to the Hawiya clan family of the Somalis. Having expanded southwards earlier than other Hawiya clans, they have been classified by Colucci as belonging to the Pre-Hawiya clan family (Colucci 1924, 87, 90).¹¹ Their economy is primarily based on camel and small-stock pastoralism, but they also keep cattle wherever the environment allows. Trade is an important economic activity (Kassa 1983, 11-14). The Garri have historically found themselves squeezed between the Borana and other Somali clans. In their struggle for survival, they have managed to establish cultural, sociological and trade linkages with both groups (Kassa 1983, 17-21), alternating between peaceful relations and outbreaks of conflict.

The Garri are divided into territorial sections as well as into genealogical segments (moieties, clans, sub-clans, ...). The same genealogical segments cut across the territorial divisions (Colucci 1924, 114). The first territorial section is found in Somalia, in the Audegle district (Barile 1935, 32-3; I. Lewis 1955, 27). This group, speaking only the Somali language, is known in Ethiopia as Garri Kofar. The Garri Gallana are the second territorial section. They have their territory in Kenya, roughly in the area between Melka Ree and Ramu to the north and Eel Waaqa to the south. The Garri Liiban are to the west of the Garri Gallana, living both in Kenya, in an area including

¹¹ Colucci's classification has been accepted by most other scholars, including Ioan Lewis (1955, 27), Haberland (1963, 146) and Kassa (1983, 5).

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Map 1 Borana and Arero provinces of Sidamo Region (until 1991) and main localities mentioned in historical sources

Takaba and Banissa, and along the border up to Qadaduma, and in Ethiopia, in eastern *Dirree*.

The Garri Gallana and Liiban can speak both Somali and Oromo, but while the Garri Liiban tend to speak Oromo, the Garri Gallana prefer to use Somali as their first language (Zaphiro 1909, 71; Haber-land 1963, 147).

Ioan Lewis indicates a fourth group, spelt 'Gurra' and classified as Somali by Böttego (1895, 105-12) and other authors, speaking Oromo as their main language, living between the Webi Gestro and the Webi Mana (I. Lewis 1955, 27). Haberland, however, clearly differentiates the 'Gurra' from the Garri (1963, 338). Böttego spells the Garri proper as 'Garra' (1895, 340). According to other sources the Gurra should be considered proper Oromo, as suggested by Citerni who participated in the Böttego expedition (Citerni 1913, 87).

The Gabra are an Oromo-speaking pastoral group whose economy is based on camel and small-stock pastoralism. They also keep cattle. Most of them live in the Kenyan lowlands, traditionally known

as *Golboo*,¹² between Lake Turkana to the west and the Garri area to the east, with Marsabit Mountain to the south. The Gabra are also found in pockets in the Ethiopian Borana highlands. They are divided into five politically autonomous units, called phratries by Torry, who trace their ancestry to different neighbouring ethnic groups (Torry 1978, 187-8). Another classification is provided by Haberland (1963, 170). He divides the eastern Gabra, Migo, from the western Gabra, Malbe. While the Malbe have maintained very good relations with the Borana, the Gabra Migo have generally supported the Garri in their conflict with the Borana. This alliance has been encouraged by the recent Islamisation of the Gabra.¹³

6.2 From Diplomatic to Armed Confrontation

The inter-relationship of these three pastoral groups is characterised by continuous competition over water points and grazing land. The attempt by the Garri to gain access to new pastoral resources in Borana-controlled territories and the attempt by the Gabra to strengthen their rights to the resources they jointly exploit with the Borana have been the *leitmotiv* of their historical relations over the last century.

The early relations between the Borana, the Garri and the Gabra are described by Zaphiro, a Greek selected by the British to chart the frontier¹⁴ between British East Africa and Ethiopia (Clerk 1908, 42). Reporting oral traditions, he writes that when the Borana took possession of the highlands they commenced to raid the Garri. This possibly refers to the war of expansion already mentioned at the expense of the Wardai, in the 17th century. After a period of war, the Garri submitted and accepted to pay a yearly tribute to the *qaalluu* of the Sabboo moiety,¹⁵ with the understanding that no Borana should inhabit Garri country later on. However, many Borana went as far as Eel Waaqa using friendly relations and intermarriage with Garri (Zaphiro 1909, 71).

The term 'tribute', which is often used in the literature to express the relations between Borana and their 'vassals' exaggerates the

¹² It is a Borana Oromo term derived from *golba-iti*, meaning 'valley', 'place without mountains', 'space between' (Leus 1988, 260), or 'place without tall trees'. It is used to indicate the lowlands south of the escarpment which roughly separates Ethiopia from Kenya.

¹³ At the beginning of the 1960s, Haberland wrote that in one generation's time there would be no trace of the old religion (1963, 142).

¹⁴ The 1907 treaty stipulated that the frontier between Ethiopia and British East Africa would be demarcated on the ground.

¹⁵ The *qaalluu* are ritual dignitaries whose title is hereditary. The Borana have five *qaalluu*, two of whom are associated with the exogamous moieties called Sabbo and Gona.

degree of inequality. As Haberland emphasises, the use of the term in the context of Borana inter-ethnic relations cannot be compared with the taxes and other obligations paid by feudal lords in Ethiopia to the Emperor (Haberland 1963, 41-2). The payment is better described in terms of a ritual gift, symbolically representing the alliance between the Borana and each 'tribute-giving' ethnic group. As in the case of the *muuda* pilgrimages to the *qaalluu* made by the Borana themselves, the gift givers are blessed by the *qaalluu*, thus participating in the *nagaa Booranaa*,¹⁶ the Peace of the Borana, implying, among other things, a ban on feuds and intra-tribal fighting.

Before the end of the 19th century, the lowlands to the west of Garri territory were inhabited by the Borana and the Gabra together. Zaphiro reports that for the past two generations, the Borana had been living in *Golboo*, raising camels and goats (1908, 47). This statement is confirmed by Haberland, who writes that the Gabra were distributed in the Borana territory, with the largest concentration to the south of the border, between Mooyale and Lake Turkana (1963, 143). During the dry seasons, the Gabra were allowed access to some Borana water points in the highlands (Zaphiro 1908, 46). Like the Garri, the Gabra were paying symbolic tribute to the Borana *qaalluu* (Haberland 1963, 141 and 143) to stress the alliance between the two groups. Their relations, however, were perceived by Borana as asymmetric, the Gabra being considered of inferior status to Borana (Gwynn 1911, 124; Haberland 1963, 142-3). The Gabra living among the Garri were also found to occupy a similar status (Gwynn 1911, 124).

The partitioning between Ethiopia and British East Africa of the area under the Borana sphere of influence put an end to the latter regional supremacy. The Borana seemed to be perfectly aware of the consequences of the treaty between Ethiopia and the British. Indeed, the *qaalluu* of the Borana strongly complained to Zaphiro (Zaphiro 1908, 47-8). The Borana were divided from their clients, the former being assigned to Ethiopian rule, the Garri and the Gabra to British East Africa. The Borana of Eel Waaqa and Golboo in Kenya were forced to return to the highlands (Zaphiro 1909, 71). Zaphiro estimates that nearly half of the population to the north of the frontier were born in Eel Waaqa and Golboo (Zaphiro 1909, 71). Since this figure seems overestimated, he was probably referring to some of the Borana localities in the highlands rather than to Borana territory as a whole. The British administration assigned a distinct tribal territory to the Gabra (Haberland 1963, 143).

The colonial situation gave rise to the diplomatic phase of the confrontation for control of land between the Borana and the Garri.

¹⁶ The concept has been presented by Baxter in several papers (1965; 1978; 1990).

Already in 1907, the border officials had been called to Addis Ababa with Borana elders. The reason was that the Garri were claiming territory as far north as Gulgullo and Biddem in Ethiopia, whilst the Borana were claiming Eel Roba, Gebel Udder¹⁷ and Takaba¹⁸ on the Kenyan side (Holer 1907, 74).¹⁹ The separation of these two ethnic groups between two different colonial states had made access to cross-border grazing increasingly difficult.²⁰ Guba Gulgullo is indicated by Zaphiro as an area traditionally utilised by the Garri Liban (1909, 71). Haberland mentions that before 1924 part of the Garri were living in Ethiopia to the east of Borbor, therefore in the area around and north of Jarra and Eel Roba, more or less in agreement with the British sources, and in 'Gilbabo' (1963, 338). The presence of the Borana in 'Chokorso', to the northwest of Chilanko, hence in eastern Dirree, is testified by Gwynn (1911, 134). Similarly, the Borana were using pastoral resources in Kenya. Zaphiro mentions that despite the massive movement to the highlands they managed to keep camels and goats both in Golboo, in the area assigned to the Gabra, and in places such as Takaba and Jarra (Zaphiro 1908, 47), in Garri country.

During the 20th century, the Garri managed to expand their presence in Ethiopia. Haberland writes that from 1924 a great number of Garri settled in Ethiopia (1963, 338). Getachew Kassa mentions that the movement of many Garri from Kenya to Ethiopia was led by Gababa Mohammed Guracha (Kassa 1983, 39). Borana's oral sources claim that the Garri at first stayed in Qadaduma, a place which, in 1908, was regarded by Zaphiro as a Borana area (Zaphiro 1908, 47).²¹ According to Borana's oral sources, Hassan, Gababa's son, established good relations with Musse Sawa, *Ras Desta Damtew's* assistant, who had built a trade road between Nagelle and the Garri area.²² *Ras Desta* was Governor of Sidamo and Borana Province for a long period before the Italian occupation. Because of this friendship, Hassan Gababa received the Ethiopian military title *graztnatch* ('Commander of the left wing') just before the Italian invasion.

¹⁷ I was unable to identify Biddem and Gebel Udder.

¹⁸ Spelled Takubba in the source.

¹⁹ Eel Roba is now on the Ethiopian side. There was a border re-adjustment later on.

²⁰ There was probably an attempt to restrict each ethnic group to its side of the border. In a letter to Sir Edward Grey, Holer writes: "the Borana, seeing that they are to be left on the Abyssinia side of the line" (Holer 1907, 81).

²¹ The Garri, instead, were inhabiting the area to the south of Qadaduma (Zaphiro 1909, 71). In another passage it is mentioned that the Borana were permanently in Qadaduma, whereas the Garri were utilising the water sources only during the dry season.

²² Elephant hunting and ivory trade were still very intensive.

According to Borana's oral information, during the Italian occupation, the Garri were able to win control over eastern Dirree pastoral resources, including important water points such as Eel Deer.²³

In 1941, Hassan Gababa was imprisoned by the British. After his release, 3 years later, he went to Addis Ababa to meet Emperor Haile Selassie (Kassa 1983, 41). As a result of the trip, the Governor of Sidamo Region appointed him as administrator for Waacille *mekkettel wereda* (sub-district).²⁴ Symmetrically a Borana, Halake Guyo, was assigned as administrator of Chilanko, in Garri country. The Borana assert that Hassan took the opportunity to allow the Garri into Waacille and other areas from which they were previously excluded. This version is confirmed by Haberland, affirming that after long negotiations with Ethiopian authorities, the Borana areas of Waacille and Walena were assigned to the Garri (Haberland 1963, 338). From that period to the 1974 revolution, the Borana regularly sent letters of complaint to Emperor Haile Selassie.²⁵

From the 1960s the phase of diplomatic confrontation between the Borana and the Garri gave way to armed conflict within the frame of the Somali irredentist movement in the south-east of Ethiopia. Immediately after the independence of Somalia, the political relations of this country with both Ethiopia and Kenya became increasingly tense, with border clashes occurring as early as 1960 (I. Lewis, \$5, 153). The Somali government started to support guerrilla activities, the so-called *Shifta* movement, both in south-eastern Ethiopia (Harge, Bale and Sidamo provinces) and in north-eastern Kenya. In Ethiopia, this movement involved not only the Somalis but also the Muslim Oromo, particularly the Arsi, who took the opportunity to rebel against the central government. In Borana province (Sidamo region) guerrilla activities started in 1963. In the first phase, the Borana were sympathetic to the irredentists, but soon they switched sides. As mentioned by Markakis, they "were armed by the imperial regime in the early 1960s to help stem the westward advance of the Somali in southern Sidamo province" (1993, 14).

The Garri fought both in Kenya and Ethiopia. In Borana province, decisive clashes occurred in 1969, with the Borana playing a decisive military role in defeating the Garri guerrillas. During the 1970s the guerrilla movement became more organised and militarily more effective, under the coordination of the WSLF (Western Somali

23 Analogously, Somali groups such as the Marrehan and the Degodia had an opportunity to expand into Liiban.

24 At that time, the administrative set-up was a *toklai-gisaat* (governorship or region), hierarchically divided into *azvraja* (provinces), *wereda* (districts) and, eventually, into *znekkete wereda* (sub-districts). Borana province was part of Sidamo region.

25 Oral information by Borana elders.

Liberation Front), an organisation based in Mogadishu having the objective of establishing Somali sovereignty over the Hararge region and other parts of southern and eastern Ethiopia. Military training for guerrillas was organised in Somalia. It is probably at this time that the Gabra Migo also became increasingly involved in the guerrilla campaign.

In 1976 the Muslim Oromo founded the Somali Abbo Liberation Front (SALF), a movement closely allied to the WSLF (I. Lewis 1980, 414), to differentiate themselves from the Somali proper. Most of the Borana had maintained their traditional Oromo religion. Accordingly, they did not join the SALF, except for a few Muslim individuals. In 1977 the WSLF and SALF fighters were supported by the invading Somali regular troops, which were defeated only in 1978 by the Ethiopian regular army, also supported by Cuban soldiers and USSR military advisers. The Borana, again, played an important military role, flanking the Ethiopian troops against the SALF guerrillas.

The Borana decision to support the central government against the Garri and Somali can largely be explained in terms of local inter-ethnic competition over pastoral resources. The Borana shared with these other groups a similar anti-government sentiment. Being neither Christian nor Muslim, they had no religious reason to side with Ethiopia. Rather, they were afraid to lose their land to Muslim pastoralists if Somalia won the war. The intrusion by the Garri into Waacille and Walena after World War II had been a warning to them. A Somali victory would have seen the Degodia and the Marrehan (two Somali clans) expanding their grazing areas into the *Liban* district, the Garri into *Dirree*, and the Gabra Migo taking over key Boran wells in *Dirree*.

After the Somali war, many Garri and Gabra Migo were forced to seek refuge in Somalia and, to a lesser extent, in Kenya.²⁶ Many stayed in refugee camps and irrigation schemes along the Juba River, where more than 200,000 Somali and Oromo refugees had concentrated. Other Garri and Gabra Migo stayed in Ethiopia and some continued to use pastoral resources jointly with the Borana, the Garri in Waacille, Eel Lei and further east, the Gabra scattered in several localities throughout Boranaland.

6.3 From Repatriation to the 1991-92 War

Due to civil war and conflicts between local Somali clans, especially Marrehan, within the refugee camps in Somalia life became

²⁶ By 1981 there were up to 600,000 refugees in Somalia (UNRISD 1993). Another source indicates 1,500,000 Ogadenian refugees in Somalia and 400,000 in the neighbouring states (Dolal 1992, 187).

increasingly insecure for many refugees. From 1986-87 large groups of refugees started to return home to Borana province assisted by UNHCR. Returnees were sent to several sites scattered throughout Borana province, via Nagelle, the provincial administrative capital, where they were receiving a rehabilitation grant of 1,150 ETB per family,²⁷ a ration card for nearly one year, agricultural implements and other provisions from UNHCR. The reception sites were decided based on the returnees' statements about their ethnic identity and place of origin. The Garri were sent to new settlements in Eel Laye, Chamoq, Hudet, Chilanko, Katame, Mooyyale, Qadaduma, Eel Deer, Melka Mensa, Jarra, and Melka Marri. The Gabra were also sent to settlements in the Borana area. Already at this early stage, some disagreements arose between the returnees and the local administrators, who were mostly Borana, over the returnees' claims. For example, the Garri were not allowed to return to Eel Goof as they had requested, as only Gabra and Borana returnees were settled there.

From the end of 1990, and especially after the fall of Mogadishu at the beginning of 1991, the flow of returnees and Somali refugees into Ethiopia greatly increased (UNRISD 1993, 3). Between February and March 1991, 30,000 Ethiopian returnees from Somalia were found in the Suftu camp and 100,000 in Dolo-Oddo.²⁸ A small grant²⁹ was offered for spontaneous return to the area of origin, plus a one-month food ration and a ration card for 11 months. Many of the refugees claimed to have originally come from Mooyyale district. Destination sites were the outskirts of Mooyyale town, Tuka, Eel Lei, Eel Goof, Qadaduma, Chilanko, Hudet, Waacille, and Arero. There were also some Somali citizens, settled in Qadaduma and some Somali Marrehan,³⁰ settled in Liiban district near Hudet.

This relevant increase in the flow of returnees was aggravated by increased competition over pastoral resources due to local drought. The collapse of the Derg regime in 1991 flooded the area with cheap automatic guns, a combination of factors that resulted in serious armed conflict, described as "the biggest humanitarian catastrophe in the region's history" (TLDP 1992). Below I try to summarise in chronological order the main events that have led to this conflict.

- A power vacuum occurred between the fall of the *Derg*, in May 1991, and the arrival of EPRDF (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary

27 This amount was progressively reduced.

28 Data obtained from various NGOs' documentation. A similar situation was reported in the camps in Northern Ogaden, with 600,000 refugees and 100,000 returnees in June 1992 according to UNHCR figures (UNRISD 1993, 3).

29 100 ETB per family plus 50 ETB per each family member besides the first two adults.

30 Including ex-soldiers of Siad Barre.

Democratic Front) forces in the area, in June 1991. For many months afterwards, there is instability in the area.

- In July 1991 Garri returnees moved with their camels into several Borana areas, both in *Liiban* and in *Dirree*, including an important Borana ceremonial site, the *ardhaa jilaa* (ceremonial site) connected to the *gadaa* ritual near Arero.³¹ Such an intrusion was interpreted by the Borana as an explicit attempt to take over their pastoral resources.
- In September 1991, in preparation for national elections to be held in June 1992, the OALF (Oromo Abbo Liberation Front) opens offices in Yaaballoo, Mooyale and Meegga.³² The Borana note that the insignia on the OALF flag is the same as that of the Somali Abbo Liberation Front, the organisation which in the 1970s attempted to take over control of Borana areas. They also observe that the main support for the party comes from Gabra Migo in Yaaballoo and Garri and Gabra Migo returnees in Mooyale, that is the same people that the Borana had been fighting with during the 1970s. The opening of the OALF offices had therefore strengthened the Borana interpretation that there was a concerted effort to undermine their control of pastoral resources in key parts of their territory. A demonstration is organised in Yaaballoo to close down the offices, and meetings are held in Yaaballoo between Borana and Gabra elders to avoid conflict. Some Gabra openly claim ownership rights to Borana wells and threaten the Borana with taking over control in Dirree, with the Islamic brothers' support.³³ The OALF leader agrees to close the new offices.
- Tension, however, is running very high. during the second half of November 1991, a serious clash occurred between Borana and Gabra in Yaaballoo town and in a village close to the town, where the Gabra had gathered. Many Gabra were killed. Many flee to Finchawa, in the Gujji-Oromo country; protracted armed conflict starts between Borana and Gujji as well.
- By the beginning of 1992 the war has extended to the Mooyale district, where the combined Garri and Gabra Migo forces fight against the Borana.
- In April 1992, the EPRDF succeeded in organising peace talks, but the *abbaa gadaa* of the Borana³⁴ was shot on his way home (EPPG 1992a, 1). As reported by EPPG, since then and up to

³¹ Information provided by local elders.

³² They are the three largest towns in Dirree.

³³ Personal communication by elders in Yaaballoo.

³⁴ He is a very prestigious traditional leader, the symbolic guide of all the Borana. He managed to escape.

June 1992 the Borana were attacked by the Garri-Gabra Migo 6-8 times, with serious clashes at the end of June. The battle started on June 26 in Chirecha, expanding to Tuka and Hiddilola before being stopped by EPRDF intervention. About 200 Garri-Gabra have been killed (EPPG 1992a, 1). The Garri-Gabra forces are reinforced by returning Garri and Gabra from Somalia and are probably financially supported and equipped by allied Marrehan and Islamic interests (EPPG 1992a, 1).

- In July 1992 Jaatani Ali, a prestigious Borana member of the fallen *Derg* administration and former administrator of the Borana region, is murdered in Nairobi.
- The war coincides with a serious drought in 1991 and 1992. The concentration of cattle in 'safe havens' leads, in combination with the drought, to serious overgrazing and almost total loss of livestock in these areas.³⁵ The inhabitants of the conflict areas flee to Kenya, mostly to Walda and Banissa,³⁶ two new refugee camps assisted by UNHCR-Kenya and other organisations.³⁷ The remaining population is assisted with intensive food relief in their home areas by CARE International and Norwegian Church Aid.

Everything seems to indicate that the 1991-92 war was just the most recent violent episode in a long-standing inter-ethnic dispute over pastoral resources between competing ethnic groups. The massive return of returnees and refugees supported by UNHCR had merely been the trigger for renewed confrontation between them.

6.4 A New Wave of Returnees and the Somali Claim

From December 1992 to July 1993 UNHCR, in collaboration with the concerned national agencies and local administrators, assisted the repatriation of 44,294 people from Walda camp inside Kenya to Mooyyale district.³⁸ The returnees were settled in Dukiso, Eel

³⁵ In Meelbanaa area, to the south of Meegga, where I was in 1990 and in 1993, the loss was over 90%.

³⁶ At first the Borana moved to Sololo. They were later taken to Walda (EPPG 1992a, 1). The Garri and the Gabra fled both to Walda and to Banissa.

³⁷ Official figures vary from organisation to organisation and from time to time. In July 1992 in Walda there were 38,000 registered refugees (EPPG 1992a, 2). In Banissa, in August 1992, 35,000 Garri were registered. In the same period 48,601 and 10,800 Borana were further assisted in Mooyyale shelter (EPPG 1992b, 2). The EPPG's own estimation was lower than the reported population (EPPG 1992b, 2-3) and in a later registration by UNHCR/Banissa 18,322 people were found in Banissa (ARRA 1993, 2).

³⁸ Some of the refugees had already returned home spontaneously.

6 · Returnees in Mooyale District, Southern Ethiopia

Lei, Eel Goof, Ardha Olla, and various localities around Mooyale (Mooyale town outskirts) (ARRA 1993, Annex 1).

Table 3 shows the estimated Mooyale district population by various localities, according to UNHCR documentation updated to June 1993 [tab. 3].³⁹

Table 3 Estimated Mooyale District Population According to UNHCR, June 1993

| Location | Inhabitants | Kenyan Refugees | Total |
|------------------|-------------|-----------------|---------|
| Moyale Town | 44,470 | | |
| Moyale outskirts | 21,693 | | |
| Eel Lei | 14,531 | | |
| Eel Gof | 8,909 | | |
| Chilanko | 4,000 | | |
| Qadadu ma | 4,208 | 3,200 Adjuran | |
| Kata ma | 1,800 | 1,400 Adjuran | |
| Dukiso | 4,049 | | |
| Ardha Olla | 2,203 | | |
| Tuka | 11,624 | | |
| Others | 7,953 | | |
| Total | 125,440 | 5,100 | 130,540 |

The left-hand column includes residents and returnees, that is, all people who are considered as belonging to the district. The comparison with the 1984 census is interesting. According to the latter, the population in Mooyale district was about 27,000. At the natural rate of increase estimated at 2.9% (EPPG 1992b, 1), the population should be less than 33,000 people in 1993. These figures indicate that returnees exceed the residents by about 280%.⁴⁰ Even considering a large measure of under-reporting during the 1984 census and UNHCR over-estimation of the 1993 population through double counting, it is evident that many people originally not belonging to the district had joined the 'returnee' group. During the 1970s, the environment simply could not have sustained such a large number of people. Even through the 1980s, after the refugees' departure, national and international organisations have been repeatedly forced to assist with food distribution and rehabilitation programmes between

³⁹ Data provided by UNHCR office, Addis Ababa in September 1993.

⁴⁰ In fact, out of a total of 125,440 people only 33,000 have been in Mooyale district through the 1980s. The difference, some 92,440 people, have come into the district between 1986 and 1993.

1,000 and 1,500 destitute Borana families in Dollolo Makala and associated centres (RRC, UNICEF, Band Aid 1989). In the same period, the Garri and the Gabra Migo had the opportunity to split their polygynous or extended families, placing some members in the rural areas in the eastern part of Mooyale district and others in the cross-border assisted camps. Rural herders could, in this way, get indirect access to food distributed in the camps.⁴¹

It was feasible in the early 1990s for Kenyan Garri and Gabra, and Garri from Somalia, to join the Ethiopian refugee/returnee group. They could, in fact, easily be accepted by the Ethiopian Garri by exploiting their kinship links. Regarding acceptance by authorities in the camps it can be noted that UNHCR registration and repatriation procedures were simply based on each individual's statement of identity.⁴² Although the Garri Kofar could potentially be identified because most do not speak Oromo, the Garri Liiban and the Garri Gallana can speak both Oromo and Somali, while the Gabra all speak Oromo.

Pastoralists from Kenya and Somalia are likely to have joined the Ethiopian refugees/returnees group in various phases. Already in the late 70s, many guerrillas are said to have entered Ethiopia from Somalia and Kenya. Under economic stress, they may have chosen to join the Ethiopian refugees to be assisted in the camps. In the late 1980s, the incentive of the repatriation grants no doubt opened the way for the 'return' of people not originally belonging to Borana province. Later on, when the grant was reduced, food rations could still play an important role for poor pastoralists. The serious Somali crisis, the 1991-92 drought and occasional clashes in Kenya were further reasons for Kenyan and Somali citizens to be registered in the new camps.⁴³ The status of returnee anyway assures, at least in theory, long-term assistance by the UN and other agencies, with special emphasis on food security, health care, school facilities, future participation in development initiatives and hence access to natural resources.

The individual motivations of pastoralists also overlap with old political goals based on ethnic lines. By transferring as many Garri-Gabra 'returnees' as possible into the administrative units of the Borana zone the old goal of getting access to Borana-controlled resources may have been achieved. Such a strategy can only be explained in the framework of the changes in the administrative settings of the

41 Cross-border trade of grain from UNHCR refugees camps in Somalia to Ethiopian rural areas and of livestock in the opposite direction remained substantial throughout the 1980s (UNRISD 1993, 13).

42 For example, the phenomena of double registration and double 'repatriation', in order to get the rehabilitation grant twice, was very common already in the 1980s. Similarly, external pastoralists may have joined the group with false statements.

43 Suftu, Dolo Oddo and, later on, Banissa and Waldo.

regions. At the end of the 1980s, the old administrative organisation of the south was rearranged, with the establishment of the Borana Administrative Region. The new region included the former districts of both the Borana and Arero provinces of the Sidamo region. After the fall of the Derg regime, the Ethiopian state was reformed with the introduction of federalism and decentralisation (Doornbos et al. 1992, 4). New ethnically based regions have been established, with strong autonomy over land use and land allocations within their respective regions. However, the regional borders are still not yet entirely demarcated, and they are a source of potential conflict. Borana Administrative Region, with minor adjustments, has been renamed Borana Administrative Zone, a subdivision of Region 4 (Oromia). Region Five (Somali) has already officially claimed Mooyyale and Liiban districts and other areas temporarily assigned to Region 4 (Oromia). The regional affiliation of the Mooyyale district will greatly influence the destinies of the three ethnic groups. If it is assigned to Region Four, the Borana are likely to maintain control over their wells and surrounding pastures, otherwise they will probably lose these resources to the Garri and Gabra Migo.⁴⁴

The Proclamation on the Establishment of the Regions, published in the *Negarit Gazeta* (1991),⁴⁵ indicates that the regional affiliation of disputed administrative units will depend on the results of the 1994 national census. In controversial cases, the councils of the two regions may jointly agree on a solution. The organisation of a local referendum is one of the possibilities which are presently being talked about.⁴⁶ In both cases, census or referendum, the presence of many 'returnees' in the district is likely to greatly influence the outcome. The Garri, with their dual Oromo and Somali identity, will play a crucial political role.⁴⁷ Again, as in the 1960s and 1970s, the Somali objective of territorial expansion overlaps with the specific Garri-Gabra Migo desire to get a larger share of Borana pastoral resources. In the present context, however, the dispute is placed within an inter-regional rather than international arena.

The conflicting Oromo and Somali interests over where the border should be drawn between their respective regions have affected the OALF. The Garri, who form the majority of the party, have for long felt under-represented. During a recent internal party crisis, the

⁴⁴ The same applies to the Borana and other Somali groups in Liiban district.

⁴⁵ The *Negarit Gazeta* is the Ethiopian official gazette of laws, orders and notices.

⁴⁶ The referendum has already been experimented elsewhere by Region 4.

⁴⁷ The Garri may not present a compact front. Those who have been staying in Borana area living side by side with the Borana may chose an Oromo identity, while those classified as 'returnees', mostly affiliated to the OALF, are likely to support the Somali claim.

OALF Arsi Oromo leader,⁴⁸ Siraji Haji Isaq, was temporarily suspended from the Council of Representatives in Addis Ababa. He was formally reinstated in April 1992 flanked by Sheik Ibrahim Abdallah, a Garri representative who had previously been living in Somalia. It is reported, however, that presently Siraji is only partially involved in national politics. The crisis and the change of OALF leadership may well indicate a shift in party policy from a pro-Oromo (Arsi) to a pro-Somali (Garri) orientation.

By 1993, the 1984 Mooyale district population, which was already unable to sustain itself, had grown about four times. Such an extraordinary demographic increase in just ten years can only be sustained through food relief. We can therefore conclude that international aid is part of regional and local political strategies.

The experts employed by international and national humanitarian organisations tend to base their planning on interviews with local political leaders and government officials. Very seldom does the planning process reach down to the grassroots.⁴⁹ The local administrators have considerable institutional means at their disposal to exercise pressure on the formulation and implementation of relief and rehabilitation plans. In Mooyale district all activities related to the returnees and refugees are coordinated by the Moyale Task Force, a body formed by representatives of the responsible international and national agencies and all government organisations and non-governmental organisations implementing activities.⁵⁰ The Task Force is chaired by the local District Officer.

Local politicians are thus, informally and formally, enabled to address international aid agencies based on their political strategies. Such an opportunity gives them enormous influence over poor pastoral families facing serious survival problems. It is probably not by chance that the largest concentration of returnees is found in Mooyale district, where Garri and Gabra candidates won the election under the banner of the Oromo Abbo Liberation Front (EPPG 1992a, 1).

That the manipulation of international aid has become a new instrument in an old inter-ethnic game fought over control of natural resources will become increasingly apparent in the next section, which discusses UNHCR rehabilitation plans for 'returnees' in the

48 The Arsi are another large Oromo section, living north and north east of the Borana and the Gujji, included into a different region during the Derg, and now in a different Zone of Oromya region.

49 The problem has been pin-pointed at the 1992 Symposium for the Horn of Africa on the Social and Economic Aspects of Mass Voluntary Return Movements of refugees: "It is unlikely that this information will be gained from brief field visits by overworked and inexperienced staff" (UNRISD 1993, 21).

50 ARA (Administration for Refugees Affairs), RRC (Relief and Rehabilitation Commission) and UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) play the major role.

area, and the likely impact of these plans on traditional Boran resource management strategies.

6.5 Borana Land Tenure and Pastoral Practices

Despite growing involvement by the Borana in agriculture, especially after the 1983-84 drought, pastoralism is still the dominant economic activity in the area. In the region, there are only two permanent rivers, the Dawa and the Ganale, in the northeastern corner of Boranaland. Over the rest of the area, except in the extreme west, the Borana can only rely on traditional wells⁵¹ for watering their stock during the dry season.⁵² In *Dirree*, wells are found in localities where the aquifers are reasonably close to the surface. A group of nearby wells, hereafter called 'well complex', and the surrounding grazing area is called *madda* in Borana (Hogg 1993, 69). The relatively short distances between well complexes - normally between 20 and 40 km⁵³ - in combination with Borana herding practices allow for a highly efficient form of cattle pastoralism in *Dirree*.⁵⁴

Helland (1980, 60-1) and Upton (1986, 23) suggest that dry season water supply is probably the critical limiting factor determining livestock carrying capacity. Consequently, the Borana management system mainly regulates ownership of and access to permanent water points, especially wells, rather than the pastures themselves. The people utilising a particular well complex live in small villages dispersed throughout the *madda*. The villages are mostly situated within a 16 km radius of the wells, a distance which allows the cattle to go to and back from the water in a day (Upton 1986, 23). Their livestock can graze freely throughout the rangeland⁵⁵ and, if conditions are favourable, they usually cultivate a small plot near to the village. Except for the more intensively cultivated areas around the main towns, such as Yaaballoo, Arero, Meegga, Hiddilola and Mooyale,⁵⁶

⁵¹ Borana traditional wells may be more than 40 meters deep. They have been admired by many travellers since the end of the 19th century (Smith 1897; Vannutelli, Citerni 1899; Hodson 1927). Technical details on structure and water productivity are given in ILCA reports (Donaldson 1983; Cossins 1983).

⁵² The crucial importance of these 'deep' wells has been underlined by Helland (1980, 62-3).

⁵³ Maps of the well complexes are provided by Helland (1980, 74) and Cossins (1983, 6-7).

⁵⁴ On the rangeland see Helland 1980; Cossins 1983; Upton 1986.

⁵⁵ With the exception of cultivated plots and limited 'reserve' areas (Hogg 1993, 70).

⁵⁶ Urban centres have grown up, since the incorporation of the area into the Ethiopian Empire at the turn of the last century, in those 'better watered' places suited to

land for cultivation is easily available⁵⁷ and plots are not subject to permanent ownership rights.⁵⁸ As access to wells indirectly means access to the surrounding pastures and farm plots, rights in land are indirectly defined in terms of rights in wells.

6.5.1 Rights in Wells

Well digging or re-digging,⁵⁹ which requires considerable labour investment, is normatively distinguished from, but related to, the rules regulating access to and utilisation of wells.

The work required in digging the well is promoted and coordinated by the *konfii*.⁶⁰ In the past, it was the mobilisation of manpower and the heifers, bulls or oxen necessary to feed the workers which was particularly burdensome. More recently, due to the availability of machinery for hire and the possibility of paying daily workers in cash, cash contributions are becoming an increasingly important part of the work. After termination of the work, the *konfii* will be considered the *abbaa eelaa* ('father of the well'). The *konfii* slaughters the first heifer at the well site. Other animals will be contributed by other lineages or by the associated clan. Each successive heifer, or cash of an equivalent value, is alternatively provided by members of each clan or lineage contributing to the excavation of the well.

During the dry season, Borana cattle are watered every third day. Consequently, the utilisation of wells is characterised by a three-day rotation, each day being utilised by different herding units. Ideally, each day of utilisation should be assigned to a different clan which institutionally participated in the excavation. The daily utilisation of the well is ordered by reference to set positions, each position being assigned to a different herding unit. All positions, except for the second and the last, are reserved for the descent sections that originally invested in the well digging. A particular position in the watering roster therefore indicates the nature of that individual's clan's title to the well.

Ownership, however, does not imply exclusive rights of access. The second and the last positions in the watering roster are always

agriculture. While some cultivation may always have been practised by Borana, the major impetus came from the Amhara who settled in the area after Menelik's conquest.

57 The limiting factor is rather the availability of oxen for ploughing.

58 Land is neither sold nor inherited.

59 During the rainy season earth tends to fall into the wells. If not regularly maintained the wells will soon become unusable.

60 In case of re-digging the *konfii* should obtain permission from the *abbaa gofe* ('father of the collapsed well').

reserved for people who did not participate in the original well investment and who may belong to different descent sections or even to different ethnic groups.⁶¹ Position two must be given either to a traditional leader (*hayyuu*), to a member of a defined group of clans (*sunsum*) or in-laws (*soddaa*). The latter should preferably be a real in-law of somebody holding ownership rights, or, secondarily, in a classificatory sense, any person belonging to the wife-giving moiety of the *abbaa eelaa*. The last position is reserved for a person in an emergency. Rights of access inherent in positions second and last are only temporary and not inheritable; they are lost when the well-user leaves.

The work needed to operate a well is jointly provided by all herding units utilising it on a given day. The manpower requirement is high, water being lifted by a human chain of up to 20 men or more. Regular maintenance work is jointly undertaken by all well users. The coordination of all activities regarding a given well and problems of access are discussed at the *kora eelaa* ('assembly of the well') (Bassi 1992c, 329-30; app. 1).

6.5.2 Division of the Herd

To allow for the different needs of their livestock, Borana split their herds into *loon warraa* (lactating cattle) and *loon foora* (dry cattle). The lactating cattle are kept in the main village, providing milk to the residents. The dry cattle mainly consist of those animals either temporarily dry or beef cattle. *Warraa* herds always have priority over *foora* herds regarding both access to water and pastures. The *foora* herds are kept in mobile satellite camps by young herders. During the rains, they are ideally sent to the lowlands, where highly nutritive seasonal grasses become available. During the dry season, they tend to return to their home *madda*. Due to high demand by the *warraa* herds, *foora* herds are not allowed to be watered in several of the wells complexes. Among the nine deep well complexes in *Dirree*, *foora* herds are only allowed at Irdaar, Dhaas, Weebi, Eel Goof and Eel Lei.⁶²

⁶¹ Any person belonging to any ethnic group can anyway utilise a well by joining the herding unit of a person enjoying rights of access.

⁶² Data collected in the field in 1989-90.

6.6 UNHCR/RRC Rehabilitation Plans

The returnees settled in Mooyyale district have mainly been assisted by food relief and health care.⁶³ It is, however, planned to shift from relief to rehabilitation. For this purpose, RRC (Relief and Rehabilitation Commission), in collaboration with other agencies, has elaborated a proposal based on joint UNHCR/ARA and joint RRC/UNHCR/ARRA/WFP/WSSA missions between April and June 1993 (ARRA 1993). The proposal includes two major components, the repatriation of the 18,322 refugees still living in Banissa camp and the rehabilitation of 85,273 returnees and displaced in Mooyyale and Arero districts (ARRA 1993, 3). The repatriation is to be implemented by ARA complemented by UNHCR: the returnees are to be settled in 9 localities in Mooyyale and Arero districts, with large numbers in Chilanko (10,140), Eel Deer (2,202), Hudet (2,202) and Waacille (2,164) (ARRA 1993, 7 and Annex 1).

The rehabilitation programme is intended to be coordinated by RRC and includes the following major sectors: health care, water supply, school rehabilitation, grinding mills, agriculture and road rehabilitation. Food will continue to be distributed for one year to Banissa returnees and for 6 months to the others (1993: annex 8). The agricultural component is the most relevant one, with a requested budget of US\$ 3,306,290. It includes the distribution of various agricultural inputs⁶⁴ to all sites except Mooyyale town and a restocking programme (1993, 12, annexes 3, 4 and 5). The main objective of the programme is to settle pastoralists by promoting agriculture,⁶⁵ a common strategy in East Africa after drought. However, Hogg observes how government policies emphasising settlement and agriculture have encouraged population and livestock concentration causing increased desertification (1987, 47) and vulnerability to drought (1987, 57). Knowledge already built about this area places a serious question mark over the sustainability of the proposal. The potentiality for agriculture in the Borana area has been discussed in detail in *Ecological Map of South Western Sidamo* (Assefa, Bille, Corra 1984),

⁶³ International agencies, particularly UNHCR, are the major donors: RRC, ARA and UNHCR are all playing a coordinating role with EPPG entrusted to perform monitoring. Food distribution is implemented by Mekane Yesus, a national NGO, assisted by ARA staff; Médecins Sans Frontières has been assisting the Ministry of Health in health care provision, by rebuilding damaged infrastructure, providing medical equipment and drugs and running feeding centres; AICF (Action International Contre la Faim) has recently installed two motor pumps in Eel Goof and Eel Lei and EWWCA has built a water system for Mooyyale town by pumping water from Eel Goof aquifers.

⁶⁴ Hand tools, oxen, seeds, fertiliser, pesticides, etc.

⁶⁵ The restocking component, limited to one goat, one ewe and one heifer per family to half of the assisted people (1993, annex 5 and 6), cannot be seriously taken into consideration for reconstituting a viable herd within the suggested rehabilitation time.

an ILCA (International Livestock Centre for Africa) study which, unfortunately, was not extended beyond 39° east, including only the western corner of Mooyyale district. This publication suggests that some expansion of agriculture should be allowed, but only within specific limits and under certain conditions (Assefa, Bille, Corra 1984, 28). From the climatic point of view only in the sub-humid (annual rainfall around 900 mm) and in the upper semi-arid zone (annual rainfall around 650 mm) (Assefa, Bille, Corra 1984, 19-20) may agriculture be expected to be successful, with possibilities of crop failure in the latter zone (Assefa, Bille, Corra 1984, 6). The same limits are indicated by Bille in his climatological study which includes the whole of Mooyyale district. He claims that, given the bimodal pattern of rainfall in the area and the high variability and irregular spatial distribution of annual rainfall, "limited cropping could be tested in these areas with a rainfall over 700 mm, and may be possible, with an accepted risk of total failure in some years, in areas defined by the 600 mm isohyet" (Bille 1983, 27).

Based on the likely isohyets drawn by Bille (1983, 12) - which are only approximate for lack of reliable data - in Mooyyale district there is no sub-humid area, while only the area around Mooyyale town itself falls within the upper semi-arid category, with a yearly rainfall higher than 600 mm. Areas such as Waacille, which are intended for agricultural expansion under the rehabilitation plan, are well below the limit.⁶⁶ Eel Goof and Eel Lei, where large numbers of pastoralists have been settled, are just on the limit, but the composition of the tree and shrub communities⁶⁷ corresponds to the vegetation of the lower semiarid zone as described in the 1984 ILCA publication, hence outside the recommended climatic zones. The optimism shown by some development experts regarding the potentiality for agriculture in Eel Goof and Eel Lei may be the result of short-sighted judgment based on exceptional post-drought rains in the area.

An ILCA environmental study of Eel Goof and Eel Lei shows that the area is intensely eroded (Bille, Assefa, Corra 1983, 26) because of over-utilisation which has lasted for centuries, "long enough for all top soils to be destroyed and washed away" (Bille, Assefa, Corra 1983, 18). Bush clearance and direct soil exposure to water runoff, associated with cultivation, can only accelerate the process of land degradation.

⁶⁶ During 1981 and 1982, two exceptionally rainy years, Waacille received respectively 399 and 551 mm. Mooyyale, which is characterised by a 704 mm average annual rainfall, in the same years received respectively 1,144 and 2,512 mm (Bille, Selassie 1983, 10, 12).

⁶⁷ In Eel Goof and Eel Lei *Commiphora spp.* and *Acacia bussei* are dominant (Bille, Eshete, Corra 1983, 21).

The Borana Integrated Rehabilitation Project,⁶⁸ which started life as a relief project in 1981, offers an interesting example of a similar approach to the proposed RRC rehabilitation plan in the same environment. The rehabilitation component of the project started in 1985, intending to encourage settlement based on crop farming (RRC, UNICEF, Band Aid 1989, 1). Like the present RRC rehabilitation proposal, assistance entailed the distribution of hand tools, seeds, oxen and other agricultural inputs and the installation of a mechanised water system. In the early days, a tractor was also used (RRC, UNICEF, Band Aid 1989, 47-50). By 1986, 1,540 families living in Dollolo Makala (500 families) and another six settlements,⁶⁹ had been assisted. By 1988, despite the location of all the sites in either the sub-humid or upper semi-arid zones as defined by ILCA (1984), it was evident that the over US\$ 750,000 provided by the donors⁷⁰ through RRC had failed to achieve the desired objective. The agricultural activities, in fact, 'were not producing any measure of food sufficiency' and the families remained on food rations provided by NCA (Norwegian Church Aid) (RRC, UNICEF, Band Aid 1989, i). Even the livestock distributed to farmers were dying at an excessive rate (RRC, UNICEF, Band Aid 1989, i). An evaluation carried out for RRC, UNICEF and Band Aid concluded that "the strategy of settling nomads (and turning them into farmers) which underlies the project, is not workable, considering agro-climatic, land, and cultural factors" (RRC, UNICEF, Band Aid 1989, i). In 1993 I visited Dollolo Makala. Only a few huts of the old settlement were remaining. I was told that most of the people had moved to the new assisted camps around Mooyale. If this is the result with only 1,500 families settled in a 'better watered' area, what can be expected of the 11,858 families to be settled by RRC in an even less suitable area?

6.7 Replacing Traditional Rights

Perhaps the most worrying aspect of the repatriation and rehabilitation proposal does not lie in the technical aspects of the plan, but rather in the implications for resource use and inter-ethnic conflict.

Historical sources indicate that during the last century, the Garri have progressively achieved greater access to Borana-controlled pastoral resources. In the first phase, this was achieved by using diplomacy in colonial settings. Later they failed with direct military action. Now they have succeeded by using international aid. As a result

⁶⁸ During the initial phases this initiative was known as Dollolo Makala Project.

⁶⁹ These six settlements are Gonbissa, Mio, Chobi Mena, Argane and Tuka (two sites).

⁷⁰ Band Aid, UNICEF, the Italian, Swiss, Japanese and British governments were the major donors (RRC, UNICEF, Band Aid 1989, 24).

of this, the Borana are reported to have retreated to the east of the Mooyale-Waacille road, abandoning important well complexes such as Eel Goof and Eel Lei.⁷¹ This may have a potentially devastating impact on Borana's adaptive strategies.

Borana herd management is based on wide-ranging access to pastoral resources. Eel Goof and Eel Lei are two out of the nine well complexes to which *fooraa* (dry cattle) herds could traditionally be sent during the dry season. The permanent loss of these wells or even their environmental degradation will seriously affect the viability of the Borana pastoral system.

There is little doubt that the 1991-92 war, with its destructive effects on all those living in the southern rangelands, was partly caused by UNHCR repatriation operations in the area over the last decade. Despite that experience, the lesson has still not been learnt. The repatriation policy has still not changed. More and more Garri and Gabra Migo returnees are being brought to live in the Borana area.⁷² If the current operation will successfully be implemented, it will lead to the permanent replacement of one ethnic group by another.

At the end of 1993, an extremely tense situation prevailed in the Mooyale and *Liiban* districts. Borana pastoralists, in retaliation for the massive resettlement of Garri and Gabra Migo in their territory, prevented the implementation of the repatriation programme in Banissa camp and warned UNHCR officials not to take returnees to Waacille and Hudet. The situation is likely to deteriorate further over the coming years as Boran livestock herds build up to their pre-drought population levels.⁷³

6.8 An Alternative Policy

The present impasse in *Dirree* has its roots in long-standing inter-ethnic competition over pastoral resources between pastoral groups. Whatever the political choices facing government and humanitarian organisations, what is certain is that it is extremely difficult to differentiate residents from returnees and real from infiltrated returnees. In this context, the role that international and national agencies can play should not be underestimated. Above all their interventions should avoid:

71 Personal communication by UN officials and Borana pastoralists.

72 One of the first UNHCR conditions for assisting refugees to repatriate is: "there must have taken place a 'substantial and permanent' change in the conditions which led to the original refugee flow" (UNRISD 1993, 13).

73 Already in the 1960s Haberland had commented how the handover of Waacille and Walena Borana territory to the Garri had exacerbated already difficult inter-relations between the two groups (1963, 146).

- degradation of natural resources, which in the long run will lead to increased poverty and food dependency;
- further inter-ethnic conflict, which is the main cause of both the present crisis and the failure of previous development projects in the region.

These goals can hopefully be achieved if development and rehabilitation activities:

- are based on a sound knowledge of the environment and the existing production system;
- preserve long-established and efficient mechanisms of control over the exploitation of natural resources;
- are based on broad inter-ethnic consensus.

History demonstrates that the Garri, Gabra, and the Borana can co-exist harmoniously. Firstly, they share a common language. Secondly, they have been collaboratively utilising pastoral resources, dating back to at least the end of the 19th century. Thirdly, intermarriage between the Borana and Garri communities is widespread.

As there cannot be any development without inter-ethnic peace, solutions have to be found to the current inter-ethnic conflict over access to local resources. Traditional rights over resources are a key issue. In the early 1960s, Haberland wrote that the Garri who had gone to Waacille continued to consider themselves temporary users of Borana-owned wells (1963, 146).⁷⁴ The Borana's normative correlation between investment in well digging and ownership rights, as well as the distinction between ownership rights and temporary right of access, was acknowledged by the Garri pastoralists. Over the years, the Garri and Gabra have shared the utilisation of wells and pastures with the Borana, and there is a possibility that the former have contributed to the maintenance of these wells. Consequently, there exists a solid historical foundation to encourage dialogue between these groups.

⁷⁴ He added that the Garri were failing to maintain the wells, which were progressively collapsing unless the Borana carried out the work (1963, 146).

