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Boran Age-Sets and Warfare

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The economic and social background of Borana warfare and raiding during the colonial period and up to the present is outlined. It is shown how herding, because it suites aggressive and irresponsible bachelors, fits culturally with warriorhood, and the contrasting roles of senior and junior age-sets, both in symbolic behaviour and in the context of everyday life, are described and illustrated. The final part of the paper is devoted to a description of the organisation of age-sets (*Hariiya*) within the *gaada* system of the Boran, and of the connection between age-set membership and raiding.

The Boran are one of the Oromo (Galla) peoples who acquired, in the sixteenth century, a reputation as fierce and successful warriors with "a readiness to kill people" [BAHREY 1954: 111], which has persisted until today. Boran, like some other Oromo, are notorious through the Horn of Africa for taking the severed genitals of their enemies as trophies. Bartels' succinct comment on the Macha Oromo could be applied equally to the Boran and, I suspect, to all Oromo:

"The honour of a man was bound up in having killed either enemies or big game; that of a woman, in giving life...She braved...the troubles of married life and childbirth—in the same way that a hunter, for the sake of honor, defied the perils of the wilderness and a warrior the perils of battle. In addition, killing on the part of men ensured fertility for the women." [BARTELS 1969: 408]

Killing has a symbolic content and is more than just a neat and sure way of removing enemies.

A major section of Cerulli's [1922] great collection of Oromo folk literature consists of songs and prose texts which are concerned with war. Andrzejewski [1962] has demonstrated, in a sensitive paper, that Boran have a sophisticated vocabulary and complex sets of ideas about raiding and warfare. The texts which he analyses, (and some unpublished ones of my own) include references to varieties of armed encounters including set battles, ambushes, hit and run cavalry raids and

I am grateful to the C.S.S.R.C. who financed my original field research in N. Kenya in 1951-3, and to the S.S.R.C. for a fellowship during the tenure of which this paper was written. HABERLAND [1963], LEGESSE [1973] and BAXTER [1978] give accounts of aspects of Boran culture and society. The first two also contain bibliographies of the Oromo literature.

heroic single combats; they also record a range of emotional responses and attitudes which run from the chivalrous, to the bloodthirsty and to a cold philosophy of total war. Andrzejewski also comments on Boran attitudes to different categories of foreigner and enemy. I shall not therefore be much concerned here with attitudes to war and to enemies nor, because I did not see actual raids or wars, with tactics or with behaviour on raids.

In so far as their warlike reputation implies a determination to defend their grazing, water and stock from similar pastoral competitors, it is one which Boran still merit. But equally Boran are intensely concerned to uphold what they call the "Peace of the Boran" *Nagaiya Borana*, which is, ideally, a condition of active co-operation in accordance with the rules of God [BAXTER 1965].

Boran do not spill Boran blood¹ and believe that to do so would provoke God to withhold the rain. Traditionally a man who was found guilty of offences of such magnitude that his continued presence was unbearable or dangerously polluting, such as murder, impregnating an unmarried girl, buggery or sodomy, was driven away into the bush to die from exposure, to live like a wild animal or to become a dependent herdsman among a less scrupulous tribe. A Boran who was sentenced to be executed was clubbed across the neck and in the groin, but without spilling blood. One exemplary tale tells of an unnatural woman who was buried alive, but with her head protruding, in the gateway to a cattle enclosure and then had cattle driven over her until she died of trampling and asphyxiation. Ideally though, as in folk stories and histories, a man who has become socially impossible is tricked into causing his own death.

The maintenance of internal peace and harmony, simultaneously with a continuously aggressive front against their enemies has been, and to some extent still is, an enduring problem for Boran, as it is for many of their pastoral neighbours. If young men are kept in an almost continual condition of physical and emotional readiness to fight in defence of the stock, elders, women and children how are they (i) restrained from going on the rampage or going on unwanted raids which provoke reprisals and (ii) restrained from utilising their own ebullient force and energies to impose their will and wishes on their own elders? This general problem has confronted many societies, conspicuously those of the Plains Indians, and one solution appears to have been the creation of age-set systems. In some respects the problem has become more pressing for the Boran during this century as they have been eased and edged out of their northern grazing by the Guji and their southeastern grazing by the Somali [LEGESSE 1973: 15; E. R. TURTON 1975].

Their absorption into the colonial empires of Ethiopia and Britain approximately coincided with a turn for the worse in Boran military fortunes. In Kenya, for example, they lost control of, and then all access to, the important deep and permanent wells at Wajir. Exploits such as cavalry raids on the Maasai became cherished folk memories which recalled the days when Boran were powerful, free and the terror

¹ Cf. Thomas [1966: 211]: "Dodoth do not raise their spears against each other."

of their neighbours. Boran look back at pre-colonial days as ones which were good for them and less so for their neighbours and one's in which men were braver and more successful warriors. Such complaints, of course, are not restricted to Boran, even the expanding Macha Oromo make them [BARTELS 1970].

Boranalnd straddles the borderlands of Ethiopia and Kenya and only a few highland pockets of it receive sufficient rain to allow cultivation, but it is good country for low density nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralism. Life is hazardous and hard but Boran speak as if their form of self-sufficient pastoral life was the only proper one and they make virtues of its hard necessities. Cattle are the mainstay of their subsistence and their constant joy and abiding passion. They have lived, and most try to continue to live, almost entirely for and from their stock; gathering, hunting and trading have at some times been important to some men, but I can hardly imagine any man risking the welfare of his stock for the sake of any other activity.

Gathering supplies, and probably also supplied in the past, more food than informants cared to admit, particularly during hard times, and was the source of relished and ritually important dietary items such as honey and wild coffee beans; but I do not recollect ever hearing of grazing plans being deflected, or martial activities initiated, in order to protect, or to claim, or to gather wild food. Before the conquest of Boranalnd by the imperial forces of Ethiopia and Britain game was much more plentiful and hunting certainly provided much more food than it does today, but hunting and gathering were looked down on as occupations appropriate to stockless Warta and not to independent stockholders; even men who enjoyed the "sport" of hunting tended to play down their interest. Bows and arrows were Warta, not warrior, weapons. Hunting and gathering were approved in so far as they either contributed to the welfare of the herds or demonstrated bravery. Giraffe, for example, were rundown from horseback and hamstrung because their hide was by far the best material for water and milking buckets. Lions, elephants and rhinoceri were hunted in part because ivory and rhino horn could be traded but, and much more importantly, because to kill one of them took much the same sort of courage and skills, and therefore counted nearly as highly, as killing an enemy male. Trophy animals and giraffe were usually pursued by small expeditions as time, inclination and opportunities combined; much in the same way as raiding parties formed and acted. The Boran did not compete with neighbouring peoples for game or for ranges, rather young hunters competed with each other as members of a team compete; that is each sought, as it were, the glory and satisfaction of scoring but could only do so if they supported and were backed by members of their team. For our present purposes big game hunting for trophies can be considered as a pursuit that fostered "manly" attributes. A successful hunter was, like a good warrior or a prolific father, *diira* "masculine" or "virile", or *jaba* "tough" or *korma* a "bull". Hunting and gathering, just in or for themselves, neither encouraged nor discouraged inter-tribal violence;



Photo. 1. A Warta posing with his bow and arrow

indeed, in so far as big game trophies had a similar symbolic value and brought the same prestige to the killer as did human genitals (with the minor bonus that they might be saleable), hunting might be said to provide an alternative to raiding as a source of honour.

Boran make the most extensive use of flora for their exquisite and practical material culture (see Plates and Diagrams in Haberland [1963]) but, though the wild grasses and sisals which are used for mat, rope and milk pot making and the aromatic woods used for cleansing and sweetening milk pots tend to be localised, they are not fought over because they are relatively plentiful. I have not heard of internal disputes nor of external conflicts over access to them. Similarly, mineral and salt licks are not a natural resource which can be cornered.

Among Arssi and other Oromo trade used to have considerable political and economic importance, in that "big men" competed with each other, and even fought, to organise the cloth trade and mineral lick (*boji*) caravans, but trade did not have important political consequences for the Boran nor provoke them to fight among themselves or with their neighbours. In pre-colonial and early colonial days, before regular markets and secure trading centres were established,² many Boran engaged

² Jackson's conclusion about markets in the Gamu highlands would, I think, apply also to southern Ethiopia and northern Kenya: "markets prior to 1900..., if they existed at all, must have been fairly small affairs. The whole marketing system, at least in its present form, is clearly of recent origin." [JACKSON 1971: 37]

both in exchanges with neighbouring sedentary peoples and in the long distance caravan and stock trades with neighbouring pastoral people and the Coast. I suggest that the exchanges with neighbouring sedentary peoples complemented the Boran economy and that the long distance trades supplemented it, but that neither type of trade created the sorts of competition which promoted armed strife; nor were they sufficiently isolable or economically significant to generate competitive nuclei of political power. Trade did not affect military organisation, except indirectly in so far as spear blades and butts and unworked iron were components in each trade. Trade was small in volume and did not offer the chances to participate in it, nor to act as guards of it, nor to be predators on it which so affected the military, economic and political organisations of arid zone pastoralists across the Sudan, Sahel, Sahara and the Middle East. Also there is no record nor memory of any men or groups capturing or controlling such trade as there was, or of using spears as a store of political influence and hence of political violence as, say, has been reported for the Azande, Nzakara and Mangbetu [KRAPP-ASKARI 1972; SCHWEINFURTH 1873: Ch. X].

Some Boran bartered small stock for grain, locally woven cotton cloth, tobacco and metal goods with the Burji and Konso to their north and with the Meru to their south. Exchanges with the Konso were particularly important because, although there is an endogamous caste-like group of Boran smiths, Konso smiths were skilled at casting *kalaacha* and other ritual paraphernalia.³ *Kalaacha* were especially important because they are phallic symbols which are worn by men at crucial stages in the *gaada* cycle of rituals which have been, and still are, the central rituals of the Boran; it is believed that if they are not held God will not release the rain. Boran also exchanged small stock for grain with Meru from whom they also received some imported goods such as beads and cowries. Boran have come, increasingly, to compete with the Meru for grazing but the skills and products of the Konso and Burji were, and are, complementary; a useful resource, rather like the wild coffee trees of southern Ethiopia, to be exploited but not destroyed. But, however important such exchanges were, groups of Boran did not develop enduring relationships of mutual dependency, extensive inter-marriage or military alliance with any cultivating peoples such as those, for example, that existed between some Maasai groups and some Kikuyu groups [MURIUKI 1974: 28, 66]. Meru, who were partial competitors, were classified as enemies, *nyaapa*, because they were in competition for grazing and water, whereas neither the Burji nor the Konso were.

Boran have also participated with varying intensity, but more probably as customers and transmitters than as principals, in the long distance trade with the coast and southern Ethiopia. This trade required them to deal with pastoral competitors whom they classified as enemies such as Somali. The "Somali caravan system and the trading systems which were then operating" were such that "by the

³ See Brown [1971]. But Hallpike [1972: 149] reports that Konso obtained their, seemingly identical, *Lallasha* from Boran. Boran also used to exchange small stock for infants with starving Konso whose crops had been devoured by locusts.



Photo. 2. Konso man posing with a *Kalaacha*

end of the nineteenth century Boran was the commercial *lingua franca* of Lugh” on the Upper Juba [ABIR 1970: 132]: but I suspect that the carriers of the language were Ajuran and Garre who were, and frequently are, bilingual in Borana and Somali, and were in the past (and are more likely now) to have been prominent in trade than the Boran. The caravan trade centered on ivory and gum arabic on one side and guns, cloth, beads and other trade goods on the other. But, all in all, “One may conclude...that the dry, difficult and sparsely populated country lying between present day Kenya and Ethiopia...was the limit of penetration of the Kamba or any similar trading system” [ABIR 1968: 108]. The difficulties of access to the area left it very much to its own devices. The Boran were very like those fictional Bedouin portrayed by Samuel Johnson who formed:—“a nation at once pastoral and warlike; who live without any settled habitation; whose only wealth is their flocks and herds; and yet who have carried on, through all the ages, an hereditary war with all mankind, though they never covet nor envy their possessions” [JOHNSON 1976: 60]. Boran elders pray daily for Peace and they welcomed the arrivals of Europeans for the same reasons as did the Sebei, because they seemed to bring a “kind of peace from the incessant warring with neighbouring tribes” [WEATHERBY 1962: 208]. The elders could not have foretold that the coming of the Europeans would do more to destroy the Peace of the Boran than any amount of tribal warfare could ever have achieved.

Boran, like all their neighbours, have become increasingly involved since their

colonisation in the market economy, and have come to depend more and more on an enlarging range of imported consumer goods such as trade-cloth, tea, sugar, edible oils, coffee beans, tobacco, maize, torches etc. and have, in turn, sold more and more small stock in order to obtain them. Indian, Arab and Somali traders have increased in numbers and importance throughout northern Kenya. Already by 1925, for example, the Kenya administration felt that "threats to suspend the supply of tea and sugar" could be used as a political weapon to reduce the incidence of inter-tribal raiding and intra-tribal feuds [SMITH 1969: 35]. In brief Boran were not propelled to fight by external market forces nor to capture control of local markets. Men raided to kill for trophies and, hopefully, for loot; they fought battles for grazing and water.

The inescapable rigours of arid zone pastoralism foster those "manly" skills and values which run closely with, and for Boran include, martial skills and values such as valour, loyalty, dependability, the endurance of danger and discomfort and the cultivation of a nice balance between caution and recklessness. Stock management and military activities both call for careful decision making followed by bold action.⁴

Boran men, women and children, like their pastoral neighbours and competitors, will drive themselves to collapse, endure any hardship and risk any danger in the service of their herds and flocks but regard tilling the soil or selling their labour as undignified and will only do either most reluctantly.⁵ Boran accord prestige and respect to their neighbours according to the extent to which their attitudes to death in war and to pastoralism are similar to their own. But, with increasing momentum, and especially in Kenya during the last fifteen years, Boran have had to modify their behaviour if not their beliefs. Drought, the depredations of Somali irregulars and of the national security forces, grazing restrictions and loss of pastures have forced many families to depend more and more on desultorily farmed plots (in the few places such as the upper slopes of Marsabit Mountain, where it is just possible), or on famine relief, or on remittances from men who work in the towns as night watchmen or in similar poorly paid jobs. Boran have had to accommodate to the fact that political and economic power, both in Ethiopia and in Kenya, now lies with the schooled representatives of sedentary cultivators who disparage pastoral skills and pastoral life. Boran may not all yet recognise that the authorities aim to turn them from subsistence milk producers into, at the best, market oriented beef producers or into a subdued proletariat, but they do recognise that, as a District Officer recently put it quite clearly, "it is Government policy to settle everybody" [FIELD et al. 1977: 1]. Whatever Boran may wish, their modes of life and livelihood are being, and will

⁴ I do not, of course, suggest that only pastoralism cultivates such values and skills, merely that it does so.

⁵ This view was shared by the Orma (Warra'Dai) of the Tana River who boasted, in 1952, that not one of them then registered in Garissa District was in paid employment except as a soldier, a policeman or in an equivalent 'manly' job.

further be, radically altered. Yet they still need the old skills, including the skill and determination to defend themselves and their stock because, even in Kenya, the Administration cannot guarantee their security. Nevertheless, though some young Boran may envy the wealth and power of their rulers, few attempt to emulate their way of life; they say, frequently, simply and passionately that;—"Boran like stock and dislike digging." Some men have been driven to give up pastoral life, or to compromise with it, but few have been attracted away from it because more leisurely or rewarding opportunities have offered. The few who have steady jobs, and the very, very few who have steady and well paid jobs, save hard to buy stock which their brothers herd for them.⁶ One of the small body of salaried Boran told me very recently that he tried to invest just over one quarter of his salary each month to purchase a cow.

The consistent concern, then, of every Boran is to maintain, and, ideally to increase by good management, the herds and flocks in which he has a share. Boran hold that generally stock thrives best, and the grazing and water are most efficiently exploited, if the stock of a family is divided into milking cattle, dry cattle, milking camels, dry camels and small stock, and each such unit is herded separately. This mode of management (see BAXTER [1970]) has some social consequences which are relevant to our present topic:—

- (i) members of a family who share rights in a body of stock are, like that stock, probably widely dispersed;
- (ii) every stockowner is likely to be engaged in a network of social relationships which is extensive in social span and in territorial spread;
- (iii) young men are likely to live with the dry stock *fora* in isolated small camps of bachelors which shift frequently, even daily, through the harshest and most parched areas;
- (iv) older men are likely to be living with the milking stock in mixed age and sex villages *ola*, which cluster on the better grazing and which may move even as little as once a year.

This means that the young men, on whom the main burden of military action is likely to fall, are unlikely to be responsible heads of homesteads, but almost all elders will have spent some years of their late youth and early manhood with the *fora*, and themselves been formed by its hardships. Further, the most attractive villages, from the point of view of a foreign raider, are those which have the milk stock and women and children, but it is these which will have the least cover from warriors. This last has consequences for village construction.

⁶ Keenan [1977: Chs. 6 & 11] reports that many Tuareg of the Ahaggar have been attracted by the rewards offered by boom conditions to give up stock rearing. Cole [1975: Ch. 7] on the other hand reports that the Al Murrah Bedouin of the Empty Quarter strive to keep up a pastoral life, either by proxy through kin or part-time, because they like it and also, prudently, because they continue to see stock as an enduring asset whereas oil based jobs, however remunerative they may be, are only temporary. But both the Tuareg and the Al Murrah have given up raiding and warfare.

It also means, and importantly to our present topic, that men are not likely to be living with, or nearby, those agnates with whom they share rights in herds. This means that for the defence of their herds and flocks, as well as for their daily care, each herder must unite with others with whom he does not share relationships which run with those of property or kinship. They must depend on their neighbours in war as they do for help with such arduous tasks as watering from deep wells. This last is a cruelly backbreaking task which comes just when milk production is at its lowest, so that people are at their hungriest and weakest and raids are most likely. I have seen men in their physical prime hardly able to move for exhaustion after a long day at the wells. The most onerous position in a bucket chain at the well, some of which may be fifteen or more men long, falls first to the men of the junior age-sets, as does the punishing and dusty task of controlling the parched animals as they endeavour to rush the trough. The organisation and endurance required for deep well watering are rather like those required for the organisation of a small campaign; but watering teams are organised and recruited on a neighbourhood, not an age-set basis.

In their dependence on neighbours who are not kin the Boran contrast sharply with their competitors for grazing, and enemies of centuries, the Somali, who do not have age-sets and whose "nomadic hamlets" and camel camps (villages) consist predominantly of agnates and their stock. For support in war and feud, which "occur constantly in northern Somaliland", a man depends on the strength of his *dia* paying group and upon the number and power of his agnates. The "compelling moral force" of agnatic kinship, which Somali compare "to iron or the testicles", is for military purposes among the Boran taken by the obligations of membership of the nation, mediated by membership of an age-set, generation-set or a clan [LEWIS 1962: 6-7]. Warriors who are required to be immediately available must live within hail of each other so a man must depend on his neighbours and workmates but temporary propinquity is an insecure base for military organisation. I suggest that age-sets are more likely to be vested with military responsibilities, and in particular to be vested with the generation of sentiments which will spur men on to face spear thrusts in the belly, when kin and property relationships are not coincident with neighbourhood.

To be a stock herder and to be a warrior then are not separable occupations, because being the former involves being the latter. A herder must not only guide the stock in his charge to good and safe pastures but he must also protect them from predators and raiders. All herders with the *fora*, and any bachelors in the villages (with the exception of a bachelor who is the guest of a married age-mate) sleep alongside the stock with their spears at hand, ready to repel marauding lions, hyenas or enemies.

A herder's life is on the job training to be a warrior; in its daily course it provides many of the features that modern armies go to great expense to simulate for infantry or cavalry training. For a man whose life follows an ordinary course, to be a warrior is simply a routine feature of late youth and early manhood, it is not a specialised



Photo. 3. Young warrior herding

occupation simply because it is one which every male follows for the specially marked period of his life when he is an active herder. During warriorhood features of the male role, such as valour and aggressive virility, are accentuated and others, such as oratorical skills, wisdom and gentleness are subdued because they are appropriate to elderhood. The rigorous life that herders are forced to lead, particularly in the distant camps with the dry stock, is the ideal training ground for war in that it develops stamina, self-reliance, self-knowledge and bush skills such as an eye for ground and for cover. The shared tasks, hardships and dangers of camp life generate intense spirits of mutual obligation, loyalty and trust. Herders in the camps share wind-breaks, sleeping-hides and rations. They herd together and mess together; the milk and blood is shared equally among camp members on the basis of equal work deserving equal shares. In villages, on the other hand, each homestead depends on the milk of its own herd, so that unequal ownership of stock implies correspondingly unequal access to food. Similarly, if an animal dies or is slaughtered in the camps it is shared at a common meal or meals regardless of age or social relationships. Camp life not only enforces camaraderie and sharing but also allows those who will need to depend on each other in combat to get the measure of each others strength, courage, capabilities and characters (cf. Ekvall [1961]).

In short, to be a herder, particularly with the *fora*, fits culturally with being a warrior in that it suits aggressive, fit, fancy-free and socially uncommitted and irresponsible bachelors. Life in the milking stock villages fits culturally with peace-

ful, staid, socially responsible elderhood. The youngsters who live in camps in the bush are frequently compared to wild bush animals (cf. Cerulli [1922: 100]) as opposed to cultured adults who live with the stock. Warriorhood and camps and elderhood and villages are complementary. The complementary oppositions, elder/warrior, village/camp and peace/war are reflected in a number of contexts. For example, the horse, donkey and dog, the three domesticated animals which do not directly contribute to the subsistence of a homestead, are particularly associated with warriors. The association with the horse is a proud one; those with the donkey and dog are light-hearted and ambiguous.

The horse is closely associated with masculine activities and values and with fighting but I do not think that Boran raided for horses any more than they did for trade. Boran do not go as far as the Goths, and many other later European peoples, and hold that "it was more honourable to fight on horse than on foot" [OMAN 1885: 7], but they do appreciate the shock value of cavalry. Horses are particularly associated with successful raids in which Boran horsemen have triumphed over enemy footmen. The military decline of the Boran dates from about 1883 and the time of the re-organisation of the age-sets, which is probably when the rifle became a weapon in general use among their enemies and countered the tactical superiority of the Boran horsemen. Horses take precedence at any well at any time, regardless of who owns the well and even if the rider is a stranger, over any other stock whatsoever. Boran cite their ownership of horses and their cavalry skills as a mark of their superiority, cultural and military, over the non-horse owning peoples to the south and west. They often refer to themselves as *Worra Liichot* "the people of the horsewhips", and all fathers of homesteads own a horsewhip which they carry at all ceremonies as a mark of their adult and active virility. This value is so entrenched that the custom is followed even in Marsabit District where, for all intents and purposes, there are no horses because of the presence of tsetse. The horsewhip, like the spear and the phallic *kalaacha*, incarnate Boran sentiments about proud, aggressive and potent masculinity. But the peculiar relationship between warriorhood and the horse is most conspicuous in the accounts which I was given of the ceremony which marks the formation of an age-set, and which is customarily followed by an enthusiastic raid against a traditional enemy by the newly recognised warriors as an assertion, to their own elders, of their valour. The culminating point of the ceremonies occurs after the set have elected the set-chief whose name they will take as their set-name. The chief then sacrifices one white goat. He then grasps the severed head of the sacrifice and climbs the sacred tree which marks the site of the ceremony and sticks the head in its topmost fork. As he does this his assembled age-mates chant songs in praise of war and the chase. One member of the age-set, usually, but not necessarily, the Chief, then eats a particular medicine, known as *Sagarra*. I do not know what its ingredients are, but it is said to be strengthening, and to endow both the eater, and through him his age-mates, with an increased muscular and sexual strength. So great is the sudden accession of strength that the eater of the medicine becomes insensible and his age-mates have to blow on his prostrate body until he recovers.

As soon as he is recovered the eater spears a horse, and while it is dying all the company chant the war song of the horse. The person who ate the medicines then eats a handful of the faeces discharged from the anus of the panting beast. In the far mythological past, it is said, a captured enemy was thus slaughtered, and it was his faeces that were eaten. Boran abhor horse meat as they do human flesh or faeces. The corpses of horses, like those of warriors, are left in the bush for the hyenas. For the slaughtering of a horse the Boran use the same verb that they do of the slaughtering of any beast at a ceremony, *kalaachu* which means "to sacrifice". I was unable to obtain texts of the prayers offered on this occasion; though, in answer to my enquiries, I was told that prayers were offered to God; but this aspect of the ceremony is not stressed as it is in all accounts of other Boran ceremonies, such as the *Jiila* and the *Gaadamoji*, which celebrate fertility and peace and in which elders play the crucial roles.

The offering of the horse and the associated suggestions of human sacrifice are both unique. As I have not seen the ceremony at which a horse was offered, nor have a good text, I cannot attempt a detailed interpretation of it. But it seems reasonable to see it as representing the incorporation by the young warriors of valued qualities and as a representation of their preparedness to offer themselves.

I do not recollect warriors being compared to horses but they are frequently compared, semi-jocularly, to donkeys and to dogs as well as to wild animals, *binensa*. Dogs and donkeys are both seen as domesticated but socially irresponsible creatures which are useful but unreliable. They are like warriors in a number of respects. Both hang about round the edges of the homesteads but are not full members, as it were, of a homestead, because they do not sleep in the houses but spend the nights in the space between the houses and the secure enclosures in which stock are penned. Both howl and bray discordantly, but both act as sentries who give the alarm if danger threatens from the bush. Both also need constant watching and a firm hand. Both are sexually promiscuous. Both also have bush counterparts or alter egos and are uncertainly socialised. The donkey and its bush counterpart the zebra are both called *harre*, the former with the qualifier *Borana* and the latter with the qualifier *diida* which is used of the bush or the wild. The domestic and wild varieties of the dog *sarre*, are similarly distinguished.

Boran villages, even village clusters, are miniscule islands of peace and culture in a sea of bush which conceals enemies and predators and disruptive forces but which is also the place of grazing and subsistence. The bush, or wild, is necessary but needs to be held in check. Boran elders are constantly conscious of the continuous effort incumbent on them to maintain the "Peace of the Boran" and to keep disorder at bay while utilising the forces which stoke it. They must channel the energies of the wild and the young with artistic precision. They often contrast the *ola* village with the *diida*, and one has only to arrive in a homestead after a night walk through the bush, to appreciate the warmth, comfort and satisfactions of society and how vulnerable they are.

The contrasting roles of senior age-sets and junior age-sets, of the peaceful and

the aggressive, of elders and of warriors is also apparent in the layouts of, and the modes of life in, villages and *fora* camps. Young men with the *fora* literally camp out and rough it. Campers live without homesteads or hearths or families. At most they throw up windbreaks for themselves and just enough of an enclosure to deter the stock from straying. Youths huddle together to sleep on the ground and shelter from the sun under any shade tree they can find, as if they were cubs not humans. If the camp is attacked the stock is scattered to divert the attackers and make its capture more difficult. Camps may move on daily. Day and night, every man has one eye open and one ear cocked for alarms. Men sleep at arms. Camp life is devoid of human and social comforts.

A village, on the other hand, is a centre of cheer and comfort; it consists of homesteads with hearths, families and proper houses. Prayers are usually said daily and, in season, a village is abustle with rituals. The two junior sets are said to take it in turns to herd and protect the distant stock, so that each man has the chance of an alternate rest day, and rest days are extremely rare in the camps. In practice this arrangement based on age is nowadays likely to be overridden by domestic labour needs and divisions, and so is an ideal construct rather than an effective division of labour. But what is important, at the level of social construction, is that loyalties to the domestic herd were balanced by complementary loyalties to the stock of the village, so that age-set claims to labour had equal claim with those of the family. Even villages which move several times a year have an air of permanence. In safe areas people like to build in a line or semi-circle, so that each house can back into the prevailing wind and still face into its stock enclosure. But, where there is danger of attack, a village is laid out like a dartboard. The bull's-eye is a cluster of calf-pens from which radiate the stock enclosures of each homestead. The outer edge of the enclosures are made of heaped and interlocked thorn bushes. The enclosures are circled by the houses, and the houses in turn are girdled by one or two perimeter fences of cut thorn bushes. Entrances and exits to enclosures and perimeter fences are blocked at night. Youths and bachelors sleep between the enclosures and the perimeter, with the dogs and donkeys. If there is an alarm the women run for cover carrying or tugging the house reared calves and the infants. I was only in a village twice when the war alarm was blown on the oryx horn. The first was at night and I did not wake up until after it had been established that it was a false alarm and the women and children were being summoned back from the bush. The other was in the middle of the afternoon at a camel village. A woman collecting firewood had seen camels stampeding and had presumed that it was either a lion or raiders. The response to the horn was breathtakingly swift; old and young grabbed their spears and rushed off to the camels. On arrival we found that it was just that the herd-boy had had a fit and alarmed the camels.

A man's life cycle should, ideally, pass through its progressive stages in time with those of the cycle of the generation-set *luuba* system, which is the Boran version

of the well known Oromo *gaada* system. The organisation and rituals of the generation set system are of considerable antiquity and great complexity, but they have been described elsewhere.⁷ In brief, according to the strict rules of the system a fresh set is formed every eight years and a son is born into the set which follows five sets after that of his father. A son should follow his father through the system at an exact time interval of forty years. There are five patriline of such sets and each patriline in its turn becomes responsible for the ritual wellbeing of the Boran nation for an eight year period. The system is based on the assumption that genealogical generations follow each other at forty year intervals, so that each individual should succeed his father and grandfather at those fixed time intervals. Each forty year span of the recurring cycle is divided into five eight year segments each of which has an appropriate life-stage associated with it. Clearly such arbitrary rules cannot cope with demographic realities, but, for the moment, let us stick with the ideal which is delineated in the genealogical paradigm. Two forty year cycles cover the expected life span of a man. A baby boy born during the first year of his set should be an infant for the first eight years, a boy for the second eight and an apprentice warrior for the third. During that third stage a youth is expected to be unruly and aggressive and to seek trophies and sexual conquests. Since unmarried girls are quite inaccessible, the only sexual partners available are the wives of their seniors and sex with them cannot, by definition, lead to marriage, domesticity or responsibility. Until towards the end of that eight year time segment his set has no name and its members are still classified as children.

For the final two eight year periods a man is a fully fledged warrior and should marry and start to settle down as the second period draws to a close. A generation set, then, ideally, acts as junior military age-set for the first eight year period and as senior military age-set for the second. At the end of the forty year cycle, and as his own father relinquishes active elderhood, our hypothetical warrior himself enters a forty year period of active adulthood before he, in his turn retires. An individual's progress through these stages corresponds with changes in ritual status which are marked by changes in decoration and in hair style. The important stages are naming, acquiring a trophy, having one's wife bear a son, the entry of his set into the second cycle and his retirement.

During warriorhood a man should acquire at least one trophy and, in the past, a man who did not do so was not welcomed as a son-in-law. A man who did kill was given gifts of stock, *sarma*, lavished with sexual favours by the wives of elders (whose attitude to him was therefore ambiguous) and allowed to wear ear rings, special necklaces and heavy ivory armlets *arbora* and, crucially, a successful warrior was allowed to grow a male hair tuft, *guutu diira*, from the top of his head. This tuft was quite explicitly associated symbolically with an erect penis (see Baxter

⁷ There is a considerable literature on *gaada*. See Bahrey [1954], Cerulli [1922], Pecci [1941], Haberland [1963], Legesse [1973] and, especially, the essays by Baxter, Blackhurst, Hinnant and Torry in Baxter and Almagor [1978].



Photo. 4.

Elder with *arboras* ivory armllets which indicate that he had acquired a trophy



Photo. 5.

Warrior with *guutu* in a village; note giraffe hide bucket in centre.

[1965: 72]). Successful warriors were acclaimed wherever they went and their exploits everywhere praised. A young man who had earned the right to “make his head” by erecting a *guutu* was everyone’s darling. Men who did not earn the right were later allowed to grow a male tuft when they fathered and reared a son. The tuft was shaved on retirement into ritual elderhood. Men who had killed were honoured at the ceremonies which marked the entry of their generation-set into political adulthood, at their retirement into ritual elderhood and at their mortuary ceremonies. At each, their exploits were loudly proclaimed and honoured. Military glory was never extinguished. But the primary purposes of the generation-set ceremonies, which were performed by responsible adult heads of households as opposed to warriors, were to maintain and sustain the Peace of the Boran. Boran need that Peace not only between themselves but also at large, to be able to graze their flocks and herds. In order to achieve the latter, and this is their dilemma, they must depend on those aggressive and virile warriors who could threaten that Peace. Warriorhood and aggressive virility, therefore, are restricted to prescribed stages of a man’s life after which they become increasingly inappropriate. One man I knew who had been admired for his hunting and wenching kept on into his forties and came to be regarded as acting in a rather juvenile manner. The opposition of youth and age is clearly signified in a number of ways. Most obvious is the simple fact

that elders are the stock owners and controllers and the husbands and wife-disposers. The young are poor; the rare young man who inherits a herd and family responsibilities early becomes an "elder", regardless of his age in years. Two symbolic associations will illustrate this. When a generation set becomes responsible for the nation, each of its members puts up a phallic *Kalaacha*, which is a symbol of firm but responsible manliness, but when they retire each removes his and puts it to rest dangling in a milk pot. An elder whose generation-set has passed through two forty year *gaada* periods should be cool and not even speak or look in anger, let alone strike out in the heat of passion. One sign of the cool passivity of such elders is that they should not carry spears. Young men, except when they enter a house, seldom have their broad bladed thrusting spears out of their reach. The heavy bladed spears, which shine with fat, contrast with the slender javelins of the boys and the staffs carried by elders. The association of thrusting penis and thrusting spear, which is so extremely widespread throughout East Africa, is particularly strong among all the Oromo.⁸

The *gaada* system appears to have worked as a means of grouping and classifying men for military purposes in Bahrey's time but quite clearly it very soon stopped doing so. At some time between the seventeenth century and the backward stretch of folk memory the Boran adopted a quite different system of grouping men for military purposes. A generation-set title, for example, is Father of the War, *Aba Duula*, but nowadays it is as archaic a survival as the title Queen's Champion (cf. Legesse [1973: 74]). The *gaada* system became, increasingly, a mode of organising ritual affairs and less and less concerned with secular affairs or with grouping men for workaday tasks (see Legesse [1973: 58-60, 76-81]).

The word *hariiya* is used for an age-set and for a member of an age-set and as a term of address between members of the same age-set. I shall write *hariiya* with a small "h" for age-mate, and with a capital "H", *Hariiya*, for age-set.⁹ The nearby Orma of the Tana River used the word *hariiya* to mean "close male friend" regardless of age: they told me that they used to have age-sets called *konkoma*, but that nowadays the word was only used loosely by young men when speaking of their approximate coevals. Boran sometimes use the word loosely to describe friends of other age-sets who are near to them in years, but never to describe even very close friends whose ages are very different. The Borana word for "close male friend" is *jaala*, which the Tana River Orma and the Arssi use to mean the "lover" of a woman, a meaning which it also has in Borana. In all the dialects which I know of *jaaltu*, the feminine of *jaala*, is only used of a mistress. But dialect variations (or perhaps just of spellings) of *hariiya* appear widely in Oromo. For example Tutschek

⁸ Indeed it is so widespread in East Africa that the Acoli poet Okot p'Bitek can assume that his use of spear as a simile for penis will be immediately perceived by readers of his *Song of Lawino*.

⁹ *Hariiya* does not mean warrior (cf. Gulliver [1963: 2]).

[1844, 1845] gives for *hiria* "of the same age", "Kamerad", "aequalis"; Hodson and Walker [1922] give "friend" or "companion". In Arssi I recorded *hiriya* as "lover" or "partner in adultery" and *darabo* as age-mate. *Hiriya* also appears in Guji. Sakuye and Warta, who are Borana speakers and share in the Peace of the Boran, are not members of the age-set system of the Boran tribe, nor do they have age-sets of their own, but they do use the term *hariya* of a person of approximately the same age, and as a term of address to such a person. When talking to strangers they often describe themselves as members of the age-set to which they would belong if they were Boran; but this is merely a convenient way of establishing age status with other persons, or of ascertaining age statuses. Women in Boran are not members of age-sets, but use the word *hariya* loosely of both age-mates of their husbands and of persons of both sexes of approximately their own age.

An age-set can be considered to be fully formed when it has a Chief, *Haiyuu*, appointed, and takes his name as part of its own. Each set is known by a double name, that of its Chief preceded by either *Waaqor* or *Damballa*. An age-set named "X" (the name of its Chief)+*Waaqor* being followed by one named "X" (the name of its Chief)+*Damballa*. Age-sets take their timing from that of the generation-sets *luuba*, men born within the eight year time span of one generation-set form one age-set. Boys therefore know who are their age-mates and into which of the alternate streams, *Waaqor* or *Damballa*, they will belong though they will not know the full name of their set. This is illustrated in the table below.

The eighteen-seventies and 'eighties were bad years for the Boran. They and their stock were ravaged by epidemics and they were under constant pressures from all sides, but particularly from the Somali who were driving them from vital wells. About 1883 a great national assembly was held at which it was agreed that a tighter knit *hariya* system was required and the present two-stream system, starting with *Waaqor Maalu*, was created in place of the then existing three-stream system. Both were based on eight year time units in sequence with the generation-set system. I was not able to ascertain how the three-stream system had worked. Boran insisted that the reorganisation into two, rather than three, streams strengthened them militarily, but I cannot comprehend what difference it can have made; certainly it cannot have mobilised more men, nor can it have achieved any tighter system of command nor improved discipline which was, and is, a major military weakness. It may well be that the older sets were so reduced by disease and so disgraced by loss that the remustering was designed to slough off old disgraces and renew morale.

Youths start to get together for hunting, raiding, dancing and such activities as they reach appropriate age and maturity which is from around the age of sixteen; that is after the set immediately preceding theirs has been named. During the next eight years they form cliques and establish local reputations for themselves. Some individuals will emerge as being equipped by strength, character, temperament and social standing as local leaders, and hence as contestants for formal office in their set when it is named. Local cliques tend to become known as the set of its most prominent young "bull". As the formal naming ceremony approaches, each youth

Age-Sets (*Harriya*) by seniority (most senior towards the bottom)

Waaqor?	8 years	
		Damballa?
	8 years	
Waaqor Liiban (approximately 25 to 32 years old in 1952)	8 years	
		Damballa Guuyo* (Areero)
	8 years	
Waaqor Sora	8 years	
		Damballa Dadaca
	8 years	
Waaqor Diida	8 years	
		Damballa Boruu (Uudan Bokuu)**
	8 years	
Waaqor Maaluu		

* Note this list varies slightly from those in Legesse [1973: 60], and Haberland [1963: 183]; they each give Arero rather than Guuyo. Legesse also gives the names of sets named since 1952.

** Uudan Bokuu is the nick-name by which Damballa Boruu is usually called, even by its own members. It means "Faeces of (the well named) Boku", (literally a species of wild gourd). One day, when watering stock from down a deep well, Boru was attacked by diarrhoea, before he could get out of the well his bowels discharged over the people below him and into the water. The whole well had to be drained and cleaned. Hence the nick-name. Every Boran knew this story, and it was told to me again and again, but few knew the method of the selection of officers or details of the ceremony.

in turn entertains his age-mates to a feast, at which his father offers the beast to be sacrificed. The local community of age-mates assemble at the village of the host's father, where they dance, parade and sing before the adults and then proceed to a bush site to slaughter the given beast and to hold a miniature preliminary replica of the naming ceremony on their own. The elders supervise these meetings in a gently tactful supervisory way. In particular young men boast of their cattle and their exploits and the most active dance themselves into moderately frenzied trances.¹⁰ In 1972 the meetings in Marsabit were held on Saturdays in order to allow school-boys, and youths in employment, to attend.

Age-sets are named at ceremonies specially held for that purpose at various traditional sites and all the members of the age-set to be named should attend at one

¹⁰ Young men are expected to act in a frenzied and possessed manner during the ceremony; such behaviour is most unusual for Boran who do not go in much for spirit possession, and among whom the *zar* cults have made few inroads (see Lewis [1971]). I suggest that there may be significance in the fact that throughout the *zar* region (and in traditional possession cults *jaari* among the Arssi) women who become possessed are described as mares who have been mounted or are being ridden (see Morton [1975, 1976]).

or other of the sites. There is a large tree at each of these sites, as at those at which culmination ceremonies of generation sets are held, but the sites may or may not be the same. The last ceremony held in full prior to 1952, was for Waaqor Sora; I do not know if any have been held in full since. The Italian Administration of Ethiopia banned the ceremony of Damballa Guyo and the Ethiopian Administration that of Waaqor Liban; both Governments did so, say the Boran, because they were afraid of allowing a host of blood-thirsty young men, who were intent on asserting their virility by slaying enemies, to gather together. Boran understand the fear, if they do not approve of the ban; for, they say, after an age-set has been named it spends the next two or three years raiding enemies. It would seem, from the inadequate evidence that I was able to compile, that both the incidence of Boran raids from Ethiopia on the Rendille and of offences under the Kenya Game Laws increase in the years which follow immediately on the naming of an age-set. Between Waaqor Sora and 1952 only the officers of age-sets met to carry out an abbreviated version of the ceremony but I do not know if old practices have since been revived. I met no Chiefs of age-sets, who all lived in Ethiopia, but I did interview, and knew well, a Deputy Chief of Waaqor Dida, and two minor officers of Waaqor Sora, and it is on their accounts that the following description is largely based.

All the members of the age-set about to be named congregate near certain traditional sites during the short rains following the culmination ceremonies of the generation set from which they have taken their timing. There is one site in every Boran district in Ethiopia; at Arero, Borboro, Mega, Yavello, Gar'Tuuka and other places. Boran from Kenya who had aspirations to office, or were very keen, went to Gar'Tuuka, a place which I cannot locate more definitely than that it lies about three days walk to the northwest of Moyale. Most Boran of Marsabit District in Kenya satisfied themselves by holding small local ceremonies of their own, in imitation of those held in Ethiopia. (I do not think that Boran of Isiolo District, who are all Muslims, have held the ceremonies since the nineteen thirties [BAXTER 1966: 235].) During the two months before the ceremony, the Chief, from whom the age-set takes its name, is chosen by a tribal assembly at which the officers of the generation-set which has just "completed its head" should have a major say. Their decision has to be approved by the hereditary ritual leader, *Kaallu*, of the moiety of the candidate who becomes known as the *Haiyu Gudda*, "Big Chief", or *Haiyu Hariiya*, "Age-Set Chief". I was told that, in the past, the *Haiyu* of both age-sets and generation-sets were always of the same clan.

When a decision has been reached by the assembly the news is sent throughout the country with an announcement of the date on which the ceremony is to be held. The assembly also chooses a Deputy Chief, *Haiyyuu Diiqa*, who must be of the opposite moiety to the Chief, and four Assistant Chiefs, two from each moiety. The last are named *Haiyyuu Tiruu*, literally "Liver Chiefs", because they, like the other officers of an age-set, must abstain from liver for the rest of their lives.

To be chosen as Chief of an age-set a young man should have already distinguished himself as a warrior and hunter, be the son of a similarly distinguished

father, be strong and “know words well”, so that he can settle disputes between members of his age set. Conspicuous courage was the most essential requirement. Wealth, which is usually a prerequisite for offices, is not, it was said, essential for the Chief of an age-set and the Deputy Chief I have mentioned, was of less than average wealth and a younger son. As officers only have authority within their set, and therefore are not likely to be put in positions where they might challenge the domestic authority of an elder brother, sibling seniority is not an issue; but if two brothers are members of the same age-set only the elder would be considered for office. Elder members of a set are more likely to be appointed to office than younger men simply because they have had longer to distinguish themselves.

On the day appointed for the ceremony the young men congregate before dawn at the traditional sites, the Chief leading a white goat. The important and prestigious officers have already been selected by the tribal assembly, that is by the elders. The assembled age-set as its first task elects certain minor officers. At sites other than that at which the Chief and Deputy Chief are present, the first officers to be elected are those who will act as local ceremonial surrogates. They are honorifically accorded the same titles as the central officers. Boran do not find this repetition confusing because they refer to office holders by their title plus their name, e.g. Haiyu Dadaca.

The full list of officers at national level then, which is repeated at local levels, is:—

- (i) One Haiyuu Gudda of one moiety.
- (ii) One Haiyuu Diiqa of the opposite moiety.
- (iii) Four Haiyuu Tirruu, two from each moiety.

The ceremony is begun by the Chief severing, with his spear, the neck of the sacrificial white goat, the skin of which is then cut into as many skin wristlets, *mediica*, as are required to provide one for each assembled young man. The Chief takes a wristlet cut from a rear leg which includes the dew claw, *koronyoo*. Boran always spoke of the number of men present at an age-set ceremony as being “hundreds” or “thousands”, but these are terms used in a very general sense to mean a very great number. I was told that however many persons are present only one white goat is slaughtered. I have already described the killing of a horse, which follows.

The first duty of a newly named age-set is to terrorise the enemies of the Boran by offensive raids and to bring back their stock and testicles. Raids are seldom organised by whole age-sets, though campaigns may be; I was told, for example, that four age-sets were mobilised in 1946 to revenge the Oditu *Kaallu* of the Gona moiety who had been slain by the Guji. Legesse [1973: 77–81] reports an eye witness account of that, from the Boran side, disastrous war, and also a brief account of a successful campaign, in which about four hundred rifles and “innumerable spears” participated, against the Marehan Somali. Both were national campaigns but men were mobilised in local age-set companies for the battles. But battles are nowadays infrequent. None have occurred in Kenya since the early nineteen twenties and, as Ethiopian central government became stronger and more efficient,

they diminished there also. Nevertheless in the early fifties most elderly men and many younger men had participated in past battles and many claimed to have killed in them.

In a battle the junior age-set but one goes in as the first flight, with the "Father of the Fight" at their head; followed by the junior age-set as second flight, and the junior but two as third flight. Members of senior age-sets remain behind to guard the villages and herd the stock. Certain doughty individuals, I was told, used to refuse to stay behind and went on raids up to the time their sons were married. A man who has become a retired ritual elder and lowered his *kalaacha* may not, of course, go on a raid.

But most men get the opportunity to "make their heads" on raids and these, unlike national campaigns, often take place against the wishes of the elders who fear that they will provoke haphazard retaliatory raids. But elders are frequently ambivalent in their condemnation of such raids, as they are about the aggressive sexuality of young men, because they recall their own youths. Moreover the prestige of many elders stems from their own undisciplined youthful exploits. The members of an age-set within a neighbourhood spend a great deal of time together, and it is by neighbourhoods that most raiding parties are organised. Neighbourhood raiding groups do not usually have a formal leader, either the strongest person with the most assertive personality takes charge or leadership emerges from situations. Raiding parties are usually small, consisting of between three to twenty men, who travel fast and light and often on horseback. They attack enemy villages several days march from their own, so that they may be less easily tracked back and their own villages suffer retaliation. The usual practice is to lay up outside a village of the enemy until its occupants are asleep, and then swoop in and kill as many people as possible. If stock can be driven away so much the better, but this is secondary to the killing. Trophies are carried back to home villages.

Tactical raids are organised by Boran either when they covet a well or grazing of their enemies and wish to drive them from it, or to deter enemies who, they think, wish to do the same to them. These raids may be organised by neighbourhoods, joint neighbourhoods or districts. Boran young men, particularly those who have not put up their *guutu*, travel great distances in order to assist their age-mates in such a raid. Such a tactical raid is planned at a meeting of all the men in the neighbourhood or district; but only members of the two or three junior age-sets usually take part in the raid itself. For each raid an *Aba Duula*, "Father of War", or "Fight", is elected. He may be of any age-set, but must be a respected, brave and experienced warrior. Each age-set going on the raid elects itself a leader. Before the raid, beasts are slaughtered to feed the warriors, women sing to encourage them, and God's blessings are prayed for.

The obligations which age-mates share in battle are paralleled by those which they should share in daily life. In practice, of course, these obligations diminish with increasing age and increasing social responsibility (see Introduction in Baxter and Almagor [1978]), which coincides with diminishing warrior activity, and hence



Photo. 6. Two young age-mates, the one on the right is letting his hair grow.

life and death dependence on age-mates. Young Boran age-mates should do those things together which have so often been reported of junior age-sets. They should always assist each other in every way in their power. An age-mate may take any personal property of another except stock, for stock may not be disposed of freely by any individual. The exception to this rule is that no age-mate may refuse another age-mate a sheep if it is formally begged. (Generally speaking while men are warriors, they are young and not responsible for family herds.) The loan, but not gift, of a horse like that of a wife cannot be refused to an age-mate.

Age-mates should not bring disputes against each other publicly. Any disputes that arise between age-mates should be taken before a meeting of the age-set, or before an age-set Chief, and not before a general meeting of elders, or the judicial officers appointed by generation-sets. But this rule is only observed by members of junior age-sets, who are very rarely stock owners. Disputes over stock among elders are taken before general meetings of elders because, by that stage in their lives, set membership is often a minor social tie.

Boran resent any verbal abuse, particularly if it contains sexual or excretory references, but age-mates may, and do, freely abuse each other, obscenely or otherwise, without offence. This freedom continues throughout life.

Most strikingly there cannot be adultery cases between age-mates and an age-mate calls the wife of another age-mate "our wife". A visitor should sleep in the house of a married age-mate, and the host, for the first night of the visitor's stay,



Photo. 7. Man posing with his spear and his father's shield

should offer his wife. If a visitor accepts the offer, the husband should vacate his house to the visitor, and sleep either with another of his wives or outside with the young men. An age-mate should not however request this privilege unless he knows his host well, and some husbands, particularly newly married ones, were stated to avoid their obligations and to state falsely that their wives were menstruating. Young men do not like to marry long before their age-mates because of this custom, but men who become heads of homesteads early in their lives, because of the death of a father or elder brother, may be forced to marry.

Age-mates also protect each others interests and wives from men of other age-sets. Most adultery cases of which I heard were brought because age-mates informed on wives who had been unfaithful with men of other age-sets. Age-mates should also go together to dances and dance in the same dancing groups.

Boran call all members of the age-set of their father's, *abeera*, the term used also to address a genitor who is not one's father, or a member of the generation-set of one's father. No Boran may take to wife a daughter of a member of the age-set of his father, grandfather or of his own age-set. Neither should a man have extra-marital sexual intercourse with such a woman, but this is not strictly maintained. Boran say, "Who asks a woman the name of the generation-set and age-set of her father when he copulates with her?" Though any semi-permanent liason between two persons standing in that relationship would arouse the anger and contempt of all the neighbours and would be hard to sustain.

In summary then the age-set organisation does not exist simply as an organisation to provide military leadership or to recruit military units, indeed it is not a very efficient way of organising military units. Nor is it simply a political mechanism which ensures the gerontocratic control of the stock holding elders, though it is in part involved with both those tasks. It is distinct from but co-ordinate with the generation-set system. The age-organisation does not have one single purpose, but one important task it does perform, is to provide a conceptual system which aligns the formal social categories associated with age-groupings and the individual developmental cycle appropriate to individuals, with the actual daily performance of practical roles such as those of son and herder and defender of the herds and flocks (cf. Gulliver [1963: 39]). For example, it formalises the distinctions between youth and age and quite explicitly recognises that youth is a time of bachelorhood, hardship, camp life and social irresponsibility, during which spears are turned against the enemy, whereas social adulthood and elderhood is a time of parenthood, relative comfort, village life and social responsibility, in which the ever ready spear is exchanged for the procreative bed.

It is axiomatic that the words of *successful* elders, that is those whose herds and flocks and families have flourished, should be more weighty than those of youths. It is elders who decide policies. Herding and fighting are suitably left to the young but herding policy and the direction of fighting concern political policies and should be left to elders. War is too serious a matter to be left to the young. The opposition of youth and of age, of responsibility and irresponsibility, are contained within one political system and one value system. Youngsters, in due course become elders. The oppositions between younger and older are relative, complementary and supportive of each other, not conflicting and divisive; as the rains follow the drought or, to put it another way, as the tension of the string and the bow work together.

The *hariiya* not only take their timing from the succession of *luuba* in the *gaada* system but they also accord with it conceptually—indeed, the age organisation permits the generation-set system to continue as the dominating mode of ritual behaviour and thought because it cloaks the demographic contradictions inherent in that system.

Every adult Boran is a member of several formal groupings, such as moiety, clan and generation-set, and is enmeshed in a network of cross-cutting stock-ties with agnates, affines and stock-associates who are territorially very widely dispersed. Membership of an age-set is only one of a number of relationships which contribute to the maintenance of the Peace of the Boran.

One important aspect of age-sets is that they socialise the young into the appropriate youth roles while preparing them for senior roles. Particularly important in this respect for Boran, and I suspect for all age organisations, is socialisation into the role of what Shokeid [1976: 101] has called “the convivial man’ who is guided by an etiquette of sociability and polite behaviour”. The Peace of the Boran demands that men get on with each other in the face of hardships, dangers, difficulties and personal antipathies. Men must stick together and be convivial, sociable and polite and also be responsible for each other. That responsibility means also not letting

one let the others down. Part of an effective *esprit de corps* is mutual regulation of each others conduct and punishment of each others breaches; members of a good military unit also monitor each other. Age-sets and military units both stress shared messing, shared drinking and shared women as well as shared hardship and danger, and both generally regard the active pursuit of arms for glory as inappropriate to grey hairs. Elderly senior professionals who are accorded deference merely because of their rank are, I suspect, a feature of professional standing armies with an officer corps.

Boran age-sets are utilised for the mobilisation of personel for raiding and for war but they are not designed as a military organisation. Dingiswayo and Shaka fashioned the organisation of Zulu age-grades into military regiments of ruthless efficiency and discipline, but Boran age-sets, which coincide with age-grades, are not designed to wage wars; they merely provide a convenient series of categories for the description of, and organisation of, warlike actions. There is no indication, for example, that the reorganisation of the age-sets in the eighties had any consequences for military organisation. Indeed it is difficult to see how age-sets could be so utilised except in a centralised political system. When Boran need to mobilise as a nation, a national assembly is called; this is a slow process and, though it may be both democratic and a means of ensuring consensus, it is not a quick way to get at an enemy. At such assemblies age-set officers are spokesmen who carry weight in debate, but they are neither the disposers of, nor commanders of, a determinable military force and there is no evidence that they were such in pre-colonial days.

The boundaries of political groups are not defined either by age-sets or the range across which any military groups are recruited. The Boran political system is not internally segmented and the generation system and the moiety and clan systems are also coterminous with the tribe.

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**Fold-out Map: The Distribution of Main Tribal
Groups in the Lower Omo Area**

