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Introduction

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Warfare is one of those rare topics of anthropological research, the overwhelming practical significance of which is immediately apparent to the non-anthropologist. The discussion of it, therefore, is liable to bring the anthropologist, whether kicking and screaming or beaming with self-complacent pleasure, into the public limelight. Those who kick and scream probably have the right instinct: public interest in warfare, although it presents us with certain opportunities (such as a potentially wide audience and more or less readily available funds for holding international conferences), also has its dangers. For our claim to be discovering generalities of human behaviour is here put to the test in the public gaze and, in trying to rise to this occasion, we may be tempted to palm our audience off with unsupported, and possibly even unsupportable, generalisations. Or, equally dangerous, we may offer them what they at least regard as banal truisms and find ourselves retiring rather hurriedly to the academy, amid howls of derision.1 How, then, are the opportunities to be made use of and the dangers avoided?

The simple answer is that the anthropologist—and here we use the term to mean social anthropologist—should concentrate on doing what he knows best how to do. This means, firstly and fundamentally, providing detailed ethnographic information about warfare in societies of the kind with which his academic specialisation has made him most familiar—for the most part small-scale, face to face and non-literate. Information of this kind is still far from abundant, its paucity, as Meggitt [1977: viii] has recently remarked, contrasting with and perhaps partly accounting for, the diverse theoretical viewpoints and arguments which abound in the anthropological literature on warfare. The plea for more and better ethnographic information is, of course, a familiar one in anthropology, but it would be difficult to argue with Meggitt's judgement that “Despite a few notable exceptions stemming from recently published field research in New Guinea and South America, the bulk of the evidence that polemists have adduced is, in specificity and pertinence, hardly better than that which Turney-High criticized twenty-five years ago” [loc. cit.]. Meggitt himself, in the book from which this remark is quoted, has added significantly to the list of “notable exceptions” through a detailed ethnographic study of warfare among one group of New Guinea highlanders, the Mae Enga. He has also helped to underline the point that what good

1 See, for example, Fox's [1969] review of Fried, Harris and Murphy [1968].
ethnographic data we have on this subject come almost entirely from New Guinea and South America.

Why not Africa? African peoples have been the subjects of some of the very best anthropological monographs, notable among these being studies of cattle herders who are commonly described as especially warlike and aggressive. At least part of the answer may be that the hey-day of anthropological research in Africa took place after the colonial powers had succeeded in controlling, or at least severely inhibiting, traditional forms of conflict and warfare. It may also have been that administrative pressures made warfare, both for the anthropologists and for the people they studied, a sensitive issue. If there was such a pragmatic reluctance on the part of anthropologists to give prominence to warfare in their research and writings furthermore, this would have fitted in well with their intellectual commitment to structural-functionalism, a form of analysis which, at least in its Radcliffe-Brownian form, requires that societies be treated as closed politico-territorial systems, and thus does not encourage either ethnographic or theoretical focus on relations between them.

In the New Guinea Highlands the situation was different. When anthropological fieldwork got fully underway there, after the second World War, the societies studied had only recently been contacted by Europeans and warfare and fighting was either still in progress or fresh in the memories of informants. Theoretical changes were taking place in anthropology, furthermore, which led to greater emphasis being placed on conflict and change as phenomena worthy of study in their own right.

Whether or not this is an accurate explanation of the lack of reliable data on tribal warfare in Africa, we hope that one contribution of this collection of essays will be the modest but essential one of helping to fill some of the gaps in the ethnographic record. The five authors who write about groups living along the River Omo, in southwestern Ethiopia, are in a particularly good position to do so. For they all carried out their fieldwork, during the late 'sixties and early 'seventies, when inter-tribal fighting, exacerbated by some of the worst drought and famine conditions in living memory, was at a high level. Ethiopian Government administration, furthermore, has always been weak in these southwestern lowlands, one indication of this being the easy availability of firearms, which are in widespread and open use by all the Ethiopian peoples described, save the highland Dime.

Since the latter are sedentary agriculturalists, incidentally, the inclusion of an essay on them in this collection requires some explanation. Todd's essay makes a twofold contribution to our theme. Firstly, it complements the accounts given in other essays of conflict among Lower Omo Valley herders, by showing the effects of this conflict on one group of highland agriculturalists. For the Dime appear to be on the receiving end of a chain of violence which includes not only their immediate enemies, the Bodi, but also the Mursi, and possibly even, as Tornay suggests, the Nyangatom and Dassanetch. Secondly, and more generally, it is likely that contrasts of form and function exist between the fighting which takes place between different groups of herders, and that which takes place between herders and agriculturalists.
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It is therefore useful to know how one group of agriculturalists view their herding enemies and are affected by their attacks.

Better data, however, are a means to better theorising. We do not suggest that the anthropologist's role in the study of warfare should be a wholly empirical one: he must make some attempt to meet the challenge referred to above, while avoiding the danger of generalising on a too ambitious scale.

It is at this point that the cry is likely to go up for a definition of warfare, on the plausible-sounding grounds that we cannot sensibly begin the comparative study of an institution until we are able to distinguish it from other, related institutions, in this case such as raiding and feud. Almost immediately, however, the equally plausible counter-cry will be raised that we should not allow ourselves to get "bogged down" in "definitional problems". The way out of this dilemma, as of so many similar ones in anthropology, is to recognise that warfare is not an isolable social institution but a word in the English language which, as Needham [1975] has recently pointed out for such words as marriage and descent, designates a class of phenomena which have the highest overall degree of similarity but for which there is no single defining characteristic or set of characteristics. Warfare is what Wittgenstein called an "odd job word" [NEEDHAM 1971]: it is not an analytical category but a word which allows us to talk, in a more or less rough and ready fashion, about a large number of phenomena which, on closer inspection, may turn out to differ significantly among themselves. The point is that these differences can only be arrived at by inspecting the phenomena, and not by defining the word.

This point can be illustrated by one of the contributions to a recently published collection of highly diverse essays on warfare [NETTLESHIP et al. 1975]. In a piece entitled "Definitions", Martin Nettleship [NETTLESHIP et al. 1975: 80] warns us against assuming that "institutions which appear similar on different levels of complexity are the same institution". He weakens the force of this important observation, however, by using it to support his recommendation that we address ourselves to the question "What is the social institution of war?"; for there is no such unambiguously definable institution (as his own survey of anthropological definitions of war sufficiently indicates) and it is precisely by assuming that there is that we are likely to find ourselves ranging over a wide variety of fundamentally different phenomena in our search for theoretical insights. Thus, his own position is that "war is a civilized phenomenon, different from primitive fighting" [NETTLESHIP et al. 1975: 86] but, realising that such a "definition", if taken seriously, would impose more or less arbitrary limits on analysis, he ends by recommending that we see war as "part of a continuum ranging from individual antagonistic actions to its present theoretically maximum development in nuclear holocaust" [loc. cit.]. Which leads us straight back to square one and, indeed, well beyond it.

The best way to avoid the danger referred to by Nettleship and thus to make progress in the comparative study of warfare is, we believe, to concentrate on culturally and economically similar groups, inhabiting roughly contiguous territories. We may then assume that the phenomena we discuss under this heading are
sufficiently similar to make preliminary analytical distinctions unnecessary. Thus, the term “warfare”, as it is used in this collection, means armed conflict between distinct and politically independent territorial units. We may, of course, find that phenomena we had set out by treating as analytically similar are, in some respects, significantly different, but this is just the kind of progress that is being looked for. The comparision of neighbouring groups is a procedure which was, of course, recommended to political anthropologists by Schapera over twenty years ago. It is particularly appropriate to the study of warfare precisely because this term commonly refers to conflict between independent but neighbouring territorial units. Since the nature of anthropological fieldwork makes it difficult, furthermore, for one anthropologist to gain an equally sure grasp of the nuances of thought and behaviour among two different peoples, especially if they happen to be enemies, the kind of comparative study we are recommending calls, ideally, for the co-operation of a number of ethnographers who have studied neighbouring or near-by groups.

These were the main intellectual considerations which led to the Symposium for which the essays published here were first written. None of us were, or are, under any illusions that this was more than a beginning in the comparative study of warfare among the peoples described, although we hope that it was a potentially fruitful one. It can be stated without more ado that no great discoveries or dramatic theoretical advances were made. The essays are, for the most part, heavily biased towards ethnographic description which is, we believe, as it should be, given the poverty of reliable data on this subject. Most of the authors, however, are prepared to offer more or less general interpretations of the ethnography they present while, as was hoped and expected, a number of common themes are readily apparent. Although the latter were discussed at great length during the Symposium, there is, understandably, little cross-reference to them in the essays themselves, and it may therefore be helpful to the reader if we mention some of them here and comment briefly on the treatment they receive from individual authors.

According to a widely accepted stereotype, the East African herdsman is a bellicerent and aggressive warrior, quick to revenge, ruthless in battle and ready, at a moment’s notice, both to defend his own stock and steal his neighbour’s. Like all stereotypes, this one has some basis in fact, and the reader will find plenty of evidence to support it in the essays which follow. Nor can it be denied that there is what Baxter [p. 78] calls a “cultural fit” between herding and warriorhood, in that the daily routine of a herdsman’s life, by fostering the physical and mental attributes required in an effective warrior, “is the ideal training ground for war”. Although this was written of the Boran, the same could by said of the other herders described, even though there are important differences among them in the extent to which they depend on their animals as a source of day to day subsistence. What they all share is a high social evaluation of cattle and more or less severe environmental constraints which call for mobility, physical endurance and highly developed “bush skills” from the herders.
It does not follow, however, although it has sometimes been asserted, that herders are, in some quintessential way, more aggressive than their cultivating neighbours. This point is directly taken up by Jacobs in his essay on the Maasai, by reputation perhaps the most warlike of East African peoples. From his survey of relations between the Maasai and other peoples who depend in varying degrees on livestock and agriculture, Jacobs [pp. 48–50] concludes not only that “the popular depiction of the Pastoral Maasai as an unusually ferocious people.... is pure myth” but also that it is the more “agricultural-dependent” peoples who have been “the principal source of raw aggression throughout the arid and semi-arid lands of East Africa”. Almagor also questions the common assumption that East African herding societies are, as he puts it, “oriented towards war”, although the group he writes about, the Dassanetch, are, by comparison with the Pastoral Maasai, heavily dependent on agriculture. Despite the fact that they have acquired a fierce reputation, both among their neighbours and with government officials, as fanatical and ruthless warriors, Almagor finds that the Dassanetch cannot accurately be described as “militaristic”. Unlike Jacobs, however, he does not focus on inter-tribal relations but on various mechanisms within the society itself which he sees as preventing the development of a “military professional class”. This leads him to emphasise, among other things, the role of age organisation in helping to control, rather than simply to facilitate and encourage, the use of force by warriors. Finally, Fratkin [p. 66] depicts the Samburu as a people who are “on the defensive”, surrounded by hostile herding neighbours, such as the Turkana and Boran, and contrasts their situation with that of the Maasai (here his remarks seem difficult to reconcile with the tenor of Jacobs’s paper), whose mixed agricultural neighbours “have historically been in defensive positions in regard to the large and organised raids of the Maasai”.

The association between age organisation and warfare is another common theme in writings on East African herders which is well represented in the present collection. Thus, Fukui’s case histories of Bodi raids on the Dime and Mursi make clear the important part played in these raids by groups of co-resident age-mates. His article also shows the indirect significance of age organisation in inter-tribal killing through its connection with colour symbolism and the institution of the “favourite ox”. Tomikawa, noting that the Pastoral Datoga are more energetic in pursuing Maasai raiders than their Iraqw and Bantu-speaking neighbours, connects this to traditional Datoga values centering around “warriorhood”. Fratkin argues that prophets were able to become significant war leaders among the Maasai but not among the Samburu because of environmental differences affecting the local organisation of age-groups and the daily lives of their members.

But, although the values inculcated by the age organisation, and the behaviour it encourages, are obviously highly relevant to warfare in these societies, Baxter and Almagor warn against the simple categorisation of it as a military institution. Boran elders, writes Baxter [p. 80], 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.” The age-set organisation “formalises”, or makes explicit, this opposition between youth and age and, in doing so, provides, among other things, “a convenient series of categories for the description and organisation of warlike actions”. Although Boran age-sets were used for mobilising raiding and war parties, they were not, insists Baxter, designed for this purpose, nor are they a particularly effective means of achieving it. He notes that it is probably only in centralised political systems that age-sets can be used as efficient military units, as they were among the Zulu, by Dingiswayo and Shaka.

Almagor, similarly, focuses on the opposition between Dassanetch warriors and elders, pointing out that the latter have a fundamental interest in avoiding the “escalation” of “reciprocal raiding” into all out war, since this threatens their economic and social standing within the society. He shows how the age organisation may be seen as a mechanism for controlling violence, among other things, because an individual’s progress through its grades depends upon him renouncing the ideals and activities appropriate to warriorhood.

Whether and to what extent a particular age organisation is put to military use, therefore, is a matter for empirical investigation. Baxter’s remark that political centralisation is likely to be an important factor here leads us conveniently to another question which is brought to mind by the essays which follow, namely whether the herding societies discussed illustrate a common stage in the development of military techniques, strategies and organisation. To put the matter in this way is, of course, to adopt an evolutionary perspective, but we make no apologies for this. The fact that methods of waging war have become, over time, both technologically and organisationally more efficient can hardly be denied. In considering warfare in this light, furthermore, we are unlikely to equate progress with moral improvement, as Sahlins [1973: 30] points out when using the evolution of war to illustrate his distinction between specific and general evolution.

An obvious first observation to make here is that the most characteristic, or at least the most frequently reported, military activity engaged in by the peoples discussed is often better referred to as raiding than warfare. The essential characteristics of a raid, as the term is used here are (a) the number of men involved is small (usually not more than twenty, and often a good deal less), (b) success depends heavily on surprise, and therefore on speed and mobility and (c) decision making, both before and during the raid, is on an ad hoc and largely individual basis. It must be added immediately, however, that frequent reference is made in the essays to larger scale actions, in which the number of combatants runs into the hundreds and in which surprise is a less important factor in success. Thus Jacobs distinguishes, following Maasai terminology, between “full-scale wars”, in which the Maasai have sought to annihilate their traditional enemies, and three varieties of lesser confrontation, name-
ly "sporadic battles", "armed fights" and "cattle-raids". Baxter writes of "national campaigns" in which Boran age-sets were mobilised against Guji and Somali. The Bodi and Mursi distinguish, in almost identical terms, between small-scale raids which take place, typically, just before dawn, and large, daylight "battles". Almagor contrasts "reciprocal raiding" which, if kept within certain limits, may not seriously affect inter-tribal co-operation "at other levels", with "all-out war" when "the entire tribe is united in its goal of defeating the enemy" (see his Footnote 12, p. 126). The nearest approach we have, in these essays, to an actual description of an "all-out war" comes in Tornay's survey of fighting in the Lower Omo Valley between 1970 and 1976. In February 1973, for example, "many hundreds" of Nyangatom set out to "exterminate" the Kara, and killed over a hundred of them in one village.

Despite these differences of scale, however, it is still true to say that the warfare described here has more in common with raiding, as defined above, than with the large-scale, set-piece or pitched battles of European history. That is, there is no central decision making process, no standing army of professional, specialised "soldiers" and very little in the way of long-term strategic objectives (a point we shall return to later). The term "escalation", which Almagor uses to describe the transition from raiding to "all-out war" (and which is also used by Vayda [1971] to describe a similar process among the Maring of New Guinea) is a useful one because it emphasises the continuity which exists between the two kinds of fighting involved. We would not wish, however, to rule out the possibility that important structural and organisational differences in the waging of war, corresponding to political, economic and environmental differences, do exist among the peoples discussed. Although they may all be described, politically, as "acephalous" and economically as "herders", these labels (the latter especially) mask wide divergences. It may be that the Maasai wars described by Jacobs, and perhaps also the "national campaigns" of the Boran which Baxter mentions, need to be more carefully distinguished from the raiding, with periodic "escalation", which seems characteristic of the small, "fragmented" and heavily agricultural dependent herding societies of the Lower Omo Valley.

A related issue, which is not directly treated by any of the contributors, is the effect of military technology on fighting methods and war organisation. The main topic we have in mind here is the effect of the introduction of firearms on warfare in the area. It should also be mentioned, however, that one of the groups described, namely the Boran, enjoyed a military advantage which is not shared by any of the others—they possessed horses. Baxter [p. 79] notes that "Horses are particularly associated with successful raids in which Boran horsemen have triumphed over enemy footmen." The advantage of the horse for the Boran warrior, however, seems to have been entirely tactical: he was a raider on horseback, not a cavalryman in the European sense of the term. That their use of horses did not give the Boran a significant organisational advantage in warfare is born out by Baxter's [p. 79] suggestion that their military decline began around 1883 "when the rifle became a weapon in general use
among their enemies and countered the tactical superiority of the Boran horseman”.

What then of rifles? What changes, if any, has their introduction brought about in the conduct, incidence and scale of warfare among the peoples described? It can, of course, be assumed that, if one group has rifles and the other has not, or if they both have them but one is better supplied with ammunition than the other, any fighting that takes place between them will be decidedly one-sided (see, for example, Todd’s account of Bodi encroachment on Dime territory and Jacobs’s reference to the importance of firearms in the late nineteenth century rise to power of the Arusha). But to discuss the question posed here we must assume that rifles and ammunition are equally distributed among all groups, a situation which seems to correspond fairly well with the present-day situation in the Lower Omo Valley, where rifles (mainly the 8 mm Austrian Mannlicher) are in widespread use.

Almagor considers that the introduction of rifles has led to an increase in the scale of hostilities in the Lower Omo Valley since the 1920’s and to the use of “unnecessary aggression” by the Dassanetch. Baxter does not enlarge on his comment that the military decline of the Boran probably stems from their enemies’ use of rifles, but this presumably worked by forcing the horseman to dismount before coming within range of the enemy fire, both in order to present less of a target and to take better aim himself. Once dismounted, however, he would probably have killed, or been killed, with a knife or spear, and not as a result of a long distance exchange of fire. Our experience of Mursi-Bodi fighting is that victims are rarely shot dead from a distance. This is firstly because offensive actions so frequently take place before daybreak and, secondly, because the generally small raiding parties can seek cover, even in broad daylight, effectively and quickly. Indeed, the Mursi say that they rarely even attempt to aim at a raider from a distance, preferring to lay down a more or less indiscriminate barrage (ammunition stocks permitting) which is designed to intimidate rather than to kill. They then attempt to run down the fleeing raiders, killing them, if at all, with knife, spear or club.

In general, we find it difficult to point to significant long term changes, either in the tactics, or organisation of warfare in the area which can be attributed to the use of rifles. It would obviously be foolish, however, on the basis of such tentative remarks, unsupported by historical research, to generalise about the effects of the introduction of firearms in other ethnographic contexts. In different political and economic circumstances their use might well have devastating consequences, both military and social, as Vayda [1970] has argued for the Maori. On the other hand, it is possible that some authors may have jumped too readily to the conclusion that firearms must have made a big difference to traditional methods of warfare, wherever they have been introduced. Our conclusion is that the use to which a particular form of military technology is put, and thus the consequences of its introduction for the tactics

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2 This interpretation is suggested by Ekvall’s [1964] account of the effect of the introduction of firearms on military tactics among mounted Tibetan nomads.

3 See, for example, Epstein’s [1975] conclusion that the effect of firearms on Bemba warfare has been exaggerated.
and organisation of warfare, will depend upon underlying political and economic circumstances.

It is with some trepidation that we approach now the question of the motives and aims of warfare among the peoples described or, as Dr. Tadao Umesao puts it in his General Editor's Preface, “What spurs them on to devote so much energy to fighting?” The most frequently cited objective of individual raiders is, of course, to steal cattle, the terms “raid” and “cattle-raid” often being used interchangeably in the literature on East African herders. Raiding is certainly an important means of repairing stock losses in these societies, where, however skilled and diligent the herders, animals are always at risk from disease, drought and the raids of other groups. Winter [1978] has recently argued that the crucial factor here is the use of cattle as bridewealth which, in societies where polygyny is the norm, creates an “insatiable” desire for stock which cannot be satisfied by the normal process of herd growth. He uses this argument to explain why the Iraqw are almost alone among East African “cattle oriented” peoples in not conducting cattle-raids against their neighbours. Among the Iraqw, bridewealth is low and fixed, and polygyny, although permitted, is rare. Young men are therefore “not prepared to take the risks which accompany raids, and the role of the aggressive, marauding warrior is not stressed” [op. cit.: 59].

It is clear from the essays collected here, however, that it would be a drastic oversimplification to attribute the incidence and intensity of raiding among East African herders to the simple motive of acquiring cattle. Nor is it easy to understand on what grounds Winter is able to treat “cattle-raids” as analytically distinct from, for example, “retaliatory raids” which he says (but does not explain why) “present special analytical problems”. While the primary objective of some raiders may indeed be to steal cattle, others may be more intent on demonstrating their manhood by killing an enemy, any cattle they obtain in the process being an unintended, if not entirely unlooked for, bonus. Thus, Baxter [p. 75] writes that the Boran “raided to kill for trophies and, hopefully, for loot”. Every man was expected, during his period as a warrior, to “acquire at least one trophy and, in the past, a man who did not do so was not welcomed as a son-in-law” [p. 82]. Fukui argues that Bodi attacks on their highland neighbours, and also on the Mursi, are largely precipitated by the desire of individuals to claim victims (in association with the death of favourite oxen), each man’s success rate being notched up on his arms in deep and permanent cuts. This last practice is also reported by Turton of the Mursi, while Dassanetch and Nyangatom warriors who have killed are entitled to bear scarifications on their chests. Tomikawa, referring to Wilson’s discussion [1953] of the killing by Barabaiga warriors of “enemies of the people” (which include predatory animals as well as other tribesmen), notes that these killings were motivated by the desire for prestige, as well

We are indebted to Professor Jacobs for drawing our attention to this article.
as for cattle which, however, were donated, after the event, by members of the killer's clan. Almagor [pp. 123-4] writes that the Dassanetch raid for "cattle, young girls and the prestige and other rewards that come from killing an enemy". But stolen cattle do not boost the raider's own herd: they are "either distributed to close kinsmen with a claim to a share of the loot, or are bartered for rifles and bullets", while "a captured girl is given to a close kinsman of the raider who abducted her". It may be argued, of course, as Winter appears to at the end of his article, that the high social evaluation of "martial qualities" (and hence of killing) is but a device whereby young men are persuaded to engage in the risky business of cattle raiding, but then we are left wondering why, if their desire for cattle is so "insatiable", they need this additional persuasion. The argument, in other words, has undergone a shift: it is no longer based on the motives of individuals, but on the socially adaptive consequences of their actions.

This distinction between motives and consequences is important when we come to consider group aims and objectives, or what Tornay calls "global strategy". Given the highly individualistic nature of the mutual raiding we have discussed so far, we would not expect it to be accompanied by much in the way of publicly pronounced policy. Indeed, as several authors point out, the public stance of elders is predominantly one of opposition to the "undisciplined aggression" of warriors. But at times of "all-out" or "full-scale" war we would expect group aims to become apparent, and indeed they do. They are not necessarily expressed, however, in terms of specific practical objectives and, in particular, there is very little evidence in the essays of wars being fought for the express purpose of acquiring new territorial resources. Rather, the most frequently mentioned group aim is the wholly unrealistic one of "annihilating" or "exterminating" the "enemy". On this subject it is interesting to compare Datoga and Maasai oral traditions, as these are presented in the essays by Tomikawa and Jacobs. Each is the traditional enemy of the other, but whereas the Datoga see the Maasai as a belligerent and expansionist people who drove their ancestors out of the Ngorongoro Highlands, forcing them to engage in a complicated series of migrations, the Maasai see themselves as having fought, over the same period, wars of "self-preservation" against hostile and truculent enemies who were a threat to their continued existence. The "national campaigns" of the Boran, referred to by Baxter, also seem to have been fought, from the point of view of the Boran, as rear-guard actions in defence of water and grazing.

But even if territorial expansion is not the expressed motive of such wars, this may, of course, have been their long term consequence. For first hand ethnographic illustration of this we must turn, once again, to the Lower Omo Valley and, in particular, to the essays by Almagor and Tornay. Hostilities between the Dassanetch and their neighbours did not reach a stage of all-out confrontation while Almagor was in the field, but he nevertheless gives us an account of a debate which took place at a time of "public hysteria" when "young men were mobilised in ways which closely
resembled a state of escalation", following the killing of seven Dassanetch by Kenyan police in 1968 [p. 136]. Although the speakers at the debate frequently called on their listeners to “defend our land” and “crush the enemy”, Almagor discerns beneath the formal expression of “primordial sentiments” the opposing interests of elders and warriors. That is, the problem was as much one of maintaining internal order as it was one of mobilising for external aggression. Tornay’s description of relations between the Nyangatom and their neighbours, including the Dassanetch, between 1970 and 1976, makes it clear that during this period hostilities did reach the stage referred to by Almagor as “escalation”. In January 1972 the Dassanetch “succeeded in exterminating the southern pastoral [Nyangatom] settlements at Kibish”, killing over two hundred men women and children and setting fire to the huts [p. 104]. In February 1973 the Nyangatom moved against the Kara, also intending to “exterminate” them, and killed over one hundred.

These were years of unprecedentedly severe drought and famine, and there was an obvious connection between the engagements described by Tornay and competition for increasingly scarce resources. In January 1972 the Nyangatom refused the Dassanetch access to their dry season water holes, which Tornay sees as an indication of a complete breakdown in their relations. The Dassanetch attack of June 1972 not only cost the Nyangatom many lives and cattle, but it also caused them to abandon the sorghum fields, which were about to be harvested, near the affected settlements. Following their raid on the Kara in February 1973, the Nyangatom “returned...with their wives to take away the sorghum and the pots” [p. 105]. None of these attacks, however, even though they were expressly intended to “exterminate” or “reduce to nothing” the enemy, were followed up by the occupation of evacuated territory. “If these groups have any territorial strategy”, writes Tornay [p. 115], “it does not result in the early occupation of land left vacant by their defeated enemies... Territorial conquest, in fact, is characteristic of sedentary peoples... For nomads or semi-nomads, gaining access to a place is more important than occupying it.”

Widening the time span, however, Tornay does discern a “slow but certain territorial drift”, with the Nyangatom “tribal centre” having moved about 40 km north during the last fifty years, and the Dassanetch “simply filling the space left vacant by the northward progression of the Nyangatom” [pp. 115-16]. Both Tornay and Turton draw attention to the connection between this kind of population movement, punctuated by periodic warfare, and changing ethnic group identities. Here we begin to move far away from conscious motives, whether private or public, and indeed from warfare itself as an activity engaged in by territorially distinct and historically permanent units. Turton sees Mursi-Bodi warfare as one factor in a gradual northward movement of cattle-herding people into the Ethiopian Highlands, where they are destined to become sedentary agriculturalists. This movement shows up clearly in the encroachment by Bodi on Dime territory which is described by Todd, but it is also to be seen, argues Turton, in the peacetime “infiltration” of Bodi territory by the Mursi. This is not a matter of territorial advance by distinct ethnic groups—what has been called the “soldier ant” theory of migration—but of a
movement of population which itself gives rise, through ecological and cultural differentiation, to ethnic group distinctions which thus appear as essentially relative and transitory. The role of warfare in the process, at least between the Mursi and the Bodi, is to precipitate the public redefinition of group boundaries through periodic peace making ceremonies.

In any discussion of war, peace cannot be far behind, and it is appropriate that we end these remarks with a brief comment on peace-making. Despite all the talk of "annihilation" and "extermination", purely military solutions to conflict among East African herders have probably been rare. In fact, one important characteristic of warfare among "egalitarian" and politically uncentralised peoples seems to be that, if and when the parties eventually come to a resolution of their conflict, this only happens after a military balance has been struck. It is because of this that attempts by outsiders to enforce an end to hostilities, before the two sides feel that the account between them has been settled, rarely meet with success. (See Tornay's account of the attitude of the Nyangatom to the "stranger's peace" which the Ethiopian authorities attempted to establish between them and the Dassanetch in 1974.) Peacemaking, in these circumstances, therefore, does not consist in the recognition of the "victory" of one side and the "defeat" of the other. The fortunes of war may wax and wane, with one side gaining a temporary superiority over the other, but the establishment of peace presupposes a relationship of equality between them. Indeed the rules which, to a greater or less extent, govern the actual conduct of hostilities seem designed to prevent one side gaining an "unfair" advantage over the other. This does not mean that, when peace is finally made, it merely re-establishes the status quo ante. It may, however, as Turton argues for the Mursi and Bodi, give formal recognition to a state of affairs which already existed, but only in a de facto sense, before the fighting began. Where these circumstances prevail, military might is clearly not the main engine of change.

This suggests an analogy with dispute settlement in societies where it is preceded (as it is among the Mursi for example) by fighting between the disputants and their supporters. This fighting is highly rule-governed and strictly controlled by referees. No-one expects the outcome of the dispute to be affected by the physical strengths and weaknesses of the parties, nor, when they have been pulled apart and the serious business of discussion and negotiation gets under way, is it expected that the eventual settlement will be confined, in its details and implications, to the particular matter which occasioned the conflict. Relations between the parties, in a whole number of ways, will be permanently and publicly altered.

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