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War, Peace and Mursi Identity

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Three kinds of conflict between territorial groups in the Lower Omo Valley are described and analysed from the point of view of their contribution to the creation and maintenance of separate political identities. While a permanent state of war exists between the Mursi and the Hamar (in the sense that these two groups never come into peaceful contact), an alternating pattern of war and peace characterises Mursi relations with their northern neighbours, the Bodi. The actual conduct of hostilities between the Mursi and the Bodi, furthermore, is governed by rules and conventions which do not apply to Mursi-Hamar warfare. The third kind of conflict is yet more rule governed and consists in duelling between members of different local divisions of Mursi society itself. Consideration of these three cases leads to the suggestion that, the more rule governed the conflict between local groups, the more important this conflict is likely to be in creating and maintaining the distinctions of identity which *appear* to give rise to it. Mursi-Bodi hostilities, for example, are seen as part of a long term and, from the point of view of the people themselves, imperceptible process by which new territorial divisions, and hence political identities, are constantly being created.

Because the term "war" is used almost only of conflict between autonomous territorial groups (whether these are called nations, states or tribes) there is a tendency to treat the existence of such groups as given and to see warfare as a kind of behaviour through which they compete for territorial or other advantages. In this essay I want to look at one particular case, that of the Mursi of southwestern Ethiopia, from the opposite point of view. That is, I want to treat warfare as given and consider how it may contribute to the emergence and continued existence of the very groups which appear to be competing by means of it. My argument is therefore about the connection between warfare and territorial organisation or, to put it another way, about the role of warfare in helping not only to maintain but also to create separate political identities.

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It follows that I do not have in mind the true but obvious point that warfare reinforces group solidarity, for such an argument obviously takes for granted the pre-existence of the groups in question. Nor do I refer to the purely logical or definitional use of warfare to define a particular level of political organisation, although this does come closer to my meaning. Perhaps the most famous example of this use of warfare is Evans-Pritchard's definition of a Nuer tribe as "the largest group the members of which consider it their duty to combine for raiding and for defensive action" and within which there is "a moral obligation to settle feuds and other disputes by arbitration" [1940: 120, 122]. Although this does introduce a welcome relativity into the *concept* of tribe, the actual collectivities so defined still have to be accepted as given because there is no attempt to show how they are affected, over time, by the warfare in which their members engage.

In order to examine warfare in the way proposed it is necessary, firstly, to see it as part of a continuing relationship between two territorial groups. If, for example, this relationship alternates between war and peace, then it will not be possible to make sense of periods of war if they are seen merely as momentary aberrations or arbitrary "break-downs" in "normal" (i.e. peaceful) relations (cf. Vayda [1971]). Both war and peace must be seen as two sides of a single coin. (By peace I do not refer simply to a lull in hostilities but to social contacts and exchanges which, by their very nature, preclude hostilities). Such a relationship of war and peace between two groups, A and B, needs to be distinguished from a permanently hostile one which either, or both of them, may have with one or more other groups. A second requirement of the kind of analysis proposed here is that we should not treat war as a discrete phenomenon. There may be different kinds and degrees of warfare, governed by different rules and conventions, within the same ethnographic context, and these will need to be distinguished. Thus, group A may accept and observe rules for limiting death and destruction in its hostilities with group B, but not with group C. The killing of women and children, for example, may be ruled out in the one case but not in the other. Here we come up against the shortcomings, for analytical purposes, of our English word, war. Anyone who has learnt the English language knows what this word means, but once we start making analytical distinctions between different *kinds* of war we may find ourselves faced with the question "when is a war not a war?". If we are primarily interested in conflict between territorial groups, for example, it might seem an arbitrary limitation on our analysis to exclude from it a kind of conflict in which violence is so governed by rules that the ordinary English speaker would normally classify it as sport.

All these points are illustrated by the ethnographic case which I describe here. The essay is divided into three parts which correspond to three different, because increasingly rule-governed, kinds of conflict between territorial groups. Firstly there are the hostilities in which the Mursi engage with people living to the east of them and whom they call Hamari (i.e. Hamar). They are separated from the Hamar by a wide expanse of uninhabited country and they never come into peaceful contact with them. Instead, mutual cattle raiding and/or killing is the order of most years, there being no

restriction on the scope and magnitude of the violence that may, theoretically, occur. Secondly, there are the alternating periods of peace and war which characterise Mursi relations with their northern neighbours, the Bodi. During periods of peace these two groups live in close proximity and engage in much mutual visiting and economic co-operation. When at war their hostilities are governed by strictly observed rules, the most important of which is that women and children are not legitimate victims. It seems fairly certain that, as a result of this process of peace and war, the Mursi are moving northwards at the expense of the Bodi, and the main purpose of the second part of the essay will be to present the evidence for this northward movement. It cannot be explained, however, without examining a third kind of conflict which takes place within Mursi society itself and to which the term war cannot sensibly be applied; I call it ceremonial duelling. The weapon in duelling is a pole a little under two metres in length, and the contestants are unmarried men of roughly the same age but of different territorial sections. I argue that this third kind of conflict completes the picture of Mursi-Bodi relations, allowing us to see these two groups as temporary products of a large scale and long term movement of cattle keeping peoples around the fringes of the Ethiopian Plateau.

I

In my account of Mursi relations with their neighbours, both in this and the following section, I shall inevitably be presenting a view from within Mursi society, since it is only among them that I have carried out fieldwork. War is an activity which, perhaps more than any other, causes those engaged in it to entertain different—usually dramatically opposite—views about why they are doing so. Indeed this is why it provides a particularly clear-cut demonstration of different political or ethnic identities, and since a group's identity is, by definition, subjective, it is inevitable that views expressed by its members about other, enemy, groups will not be objectively truthful. The Mursi present themselves to outsiders—or, at least, they presented themselves to this particular outsider—as an unwarlike people who want nothing more than to be left alone to herd their cattle in peace. I am not sure whether this is a genuine self-image, or whether it was purposefully fabricated for the benefit of one who was known to have contacts with the administrative authorities. I am certain that, in individual combat, they are as violent and bloodthirsty as they accuse their enemies of being and that they engaged, individually, in more hostile activities against their neighbours, whether to steal cattle or merely to kill, during the course of my fieldwork than was ever brought to my notice. One indication of the scale of these activities is provided by the horseshoe-shaped cuts which a man has made on his arm after he has killed a member of another group (see Fukui's article in this issue pp. 171–2). These marks symbolise the dead man's soul or ghost, which is said to "belong" to the killer. For a male victim the marks are made on the right arm and for a female they are made on the left. Some men I met, having had both their arms covered with such marks, had started to have them made on their thighs.

I am equally certain, however, that the Mursi genuinely see themselves as occupying an embattled position ("in the middle" as they put it) surrounded by potentially or actively hostile neighbours, highly motivated, like themselves, to acquire cattle by raiding. The fact that they are a relatively small population, occupying a territory which is both small in extent and geographically very well circumscribed, obviously contributes to this embattled mentality. To the west and south the River Omo provides an effective defence against cattle-raiders, while to the east of them lie the Mursi Mountains and, beyond these, the uninhabited valley of the river Mago. Their northern frontier, with the Bodi, is by far the least well-defined, geographically, and it will be shown in the next section that it has been moving, and is continuing to move, northwards. Except when they are at war with the Bodi it is from the east that they see themselves as being in greatest danger of attack. During every dry-season, when their herds have to be taken eastwards to the valley of the River Elma to find water and grazing, and when the Mago is easily fordable, they are constantly on the alert, small parties of scouts being sent regularly into the Mago Valley to look for signs of would-be raiders.

Raiders coming from across the Mago Valley are usually referred to by the Mursi as "Hamari", although they know that they frequently include members of other groups, culturally similar to the Hamar, such as Banna, Bashada and Kara. The Hamar number about 15,000 and, together with the Banna and Bashada, "form a single cultural unit in which one language is spoken, intermarriage is free, war is prohibited and most rituals and institutions are the same" [LYDALL 1976: 393]. The Kara (called Kera by the Mursi) are a much smaller group, numbering about 600 individuals, who speak a dialect of Hamar [LYDALL *loc. cit.*] and who live on the east bank of the Omo, south of its confluence with the Mago. The Mursi also know that the Kara, although small in number, play a very important part in the organisation, if not in the execution, of so-called Hamar raids through the provision of intelligence. The Kara seem to have survived, for most of this century, by making themselves useful to the larger groups which surround them: acting, for example, as traders and middlemen in the arms and ivory traffic (cf. Tornay [1978]). They have been able to do this by capitalising on their geographically strategic position at the confluence of the Omo and Mago, the valley of the latter river being historically the most important route into the Omo Valley from the Ethiopian Highlands. Also, since they are permanently settled on the east bank of the Omo, they have been able to provide a link with the west bank through the construction and navigation of dugout canoes, both of these being specialised tasks with which their herding neighbours are, for the most part, unfamiliar. The same factors have probably led them to adopt, or to have forced upon them, the role of dealers in information and with it the dangerous game of playing off their more powerful neighbours, one against the other. Thus, although in this section I speak only of Mursi-Hamar relations, it must not be thought that the latter term refers to an internally undifferentiated group. I use it because to do so simplifies the description, because it corresponds to broad cultural and linguistic realities, and because it is the term most frequently used in this context by the Mursi.

I now set out what details I can of fighting which took place between the Mursi and Hamar while I was in the field. For reasons already given my information on Mursi raids into Hamar country is very scanty, but I was able to make a fairly accurate record of Hamar raids on the Mursi during the 1969–70 dry season. I also observed directly the defensive measures which the Mursi took in response to these raids. I give this information in the form of a chronological account taken more or less verbatim from my fieldnotes for the period.

25th December, 1969: Alaka¹

News arrived in the afternoon that a raid (*luha*) had taken place during the early hours of the 24th on a cattle camp in the Elma valley. The camp was occupied at the time by a man, his two sons, aged about 7 and 13, and his teenage brother. People living near-by heard one shot, but they assumed that hyenas were worrying the cattle of this particular camp. In the morning, however, it was found that the man had been shot dead, while his two boys were lying where they had been asleep, with their throats cut. The teenage brother had disappeared and all the cattle had been taken. From their tracks it appeared that there were only three or four raiders, and it was assumed that they were Hamar.

29th–31st December: The Elma Valley

I left Alaka on the afternoon of the 29th to visit the cattle camps in the lower Elma valley. Sleeping *en route* I arrived at the camp of a friend (who was herding my donkeys with his cattle) on the morning of the 30th. This was one of the most northerly Mursi camps and was acknowledged by its occupants to be in Bodi country. There had apparently been another Hamar raid in the area during the night (one shot had been fired, but there were no casualties and no cattle had been taken) and the atmosphere in the camp was tense. One man sat under a rough shelter with a rifle between his knees: it was loaded and the safety catch was off. The cattle had been taken out to graze and most herd-owners in the area had converged on a common watering point in the bed of the Elma to discuss what action to take in the face of this second Hamar attack in a few days.

It was decided to evacuate the Elma valley and to take all the cattle to the Omo. Here they would be protected from further attack by the dense bushland thicket which borders the east bank of the Omo to a width of about 10 kilometres. If raiders followed the cattle to the Omo they would have to drive them back through the bushbelt along one or two narrow paths, which would so slow them down that the pursuing Mursi would be able to get ahead of them with ease and ambush them in the plain as they emerged from the bush. By taking their cattle to the Omo, however, the Mursi were exposing them to other, almost equally serious dangers, and this showed how seriously they took the Hamar threat. The few pockets of grazing there were at the river would last only a few weeks, after which the cattle would have only "wood" (i.e.: trees and woody plants) to eat. Worse than this, the probability of their contracting

¹ A cultivation site on the west bank of the Omo in northern Mursi country. For the place names and physical features mentioned in the following account, see Fig. 1.

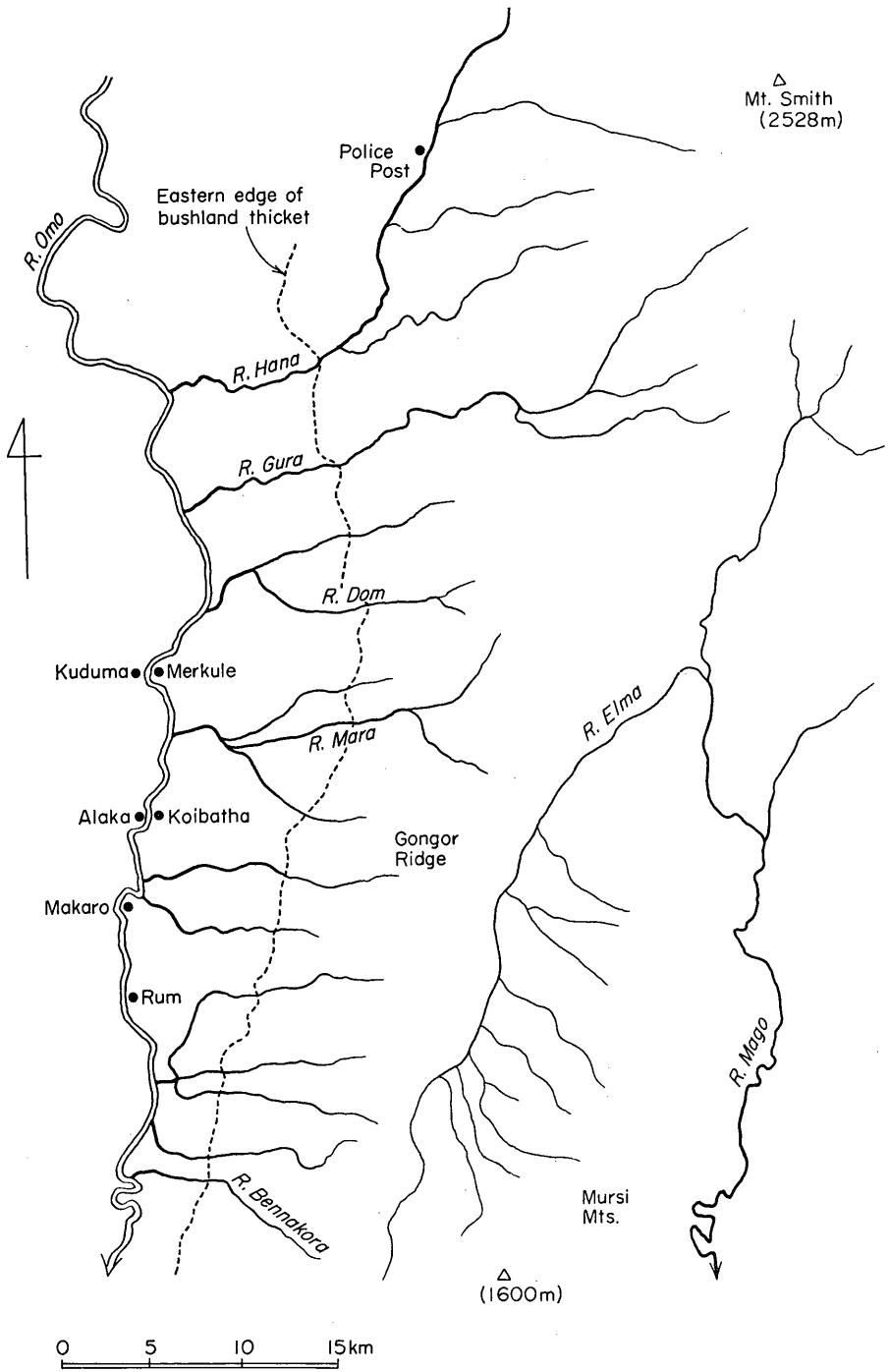


Fig. 1. The Mursi-Bodi Border Area

sleeping sickness would be much increased, since the bushbelt is full of tsetse flies. In the late afternoon of the 30th the "retreat" to the Omo began. Herd boys were driving the cattle, their slight bodies bristling with the meagre impedimenta of the mobile cattle herder, such as gourds, milk pots, tethering cords and bows and arrows for blood letting. A few girls (most of the women and girls were at the Omo looking after the crops) carried such things as earthenware pots, baskets and grinding stones rolled up in a hide sleeping mat. Some older boys and men were carrying calves and children, who were too young to walk. We stopped well after dark (there was, as yet, no moon) at a settlement which had been unoccupied for several months. The cattle were tethered in the compounds of this settlement, no fires were lit, and people settled down to sleep until the moon came up. At about 1.00 a.m. a rifle shot, which appeared to come from close by, sent everyone into a rush to get out of the compounds, picking up rifles and children as they went. But it was a false alarm: a rifle at full cock, had been kicked by a calf. We started again, with the moon, an hour later and soon met other groups of men and cattle converging on the same route through the bushbelt to Alaka. Information about the state of the path and the distance to the Omo was shouted to those who had come from the south and were thus unfamiliar with this part of the country. Even those who knew it well, however, had difficulty in driving the cattle, no more than two abreast, along the narrow winding path, making sure that none were trapped in the dense thicket on either side.

3rd January, 1970: Alaka

Cattle have been arriving at Alaka for the last two days. There are now said

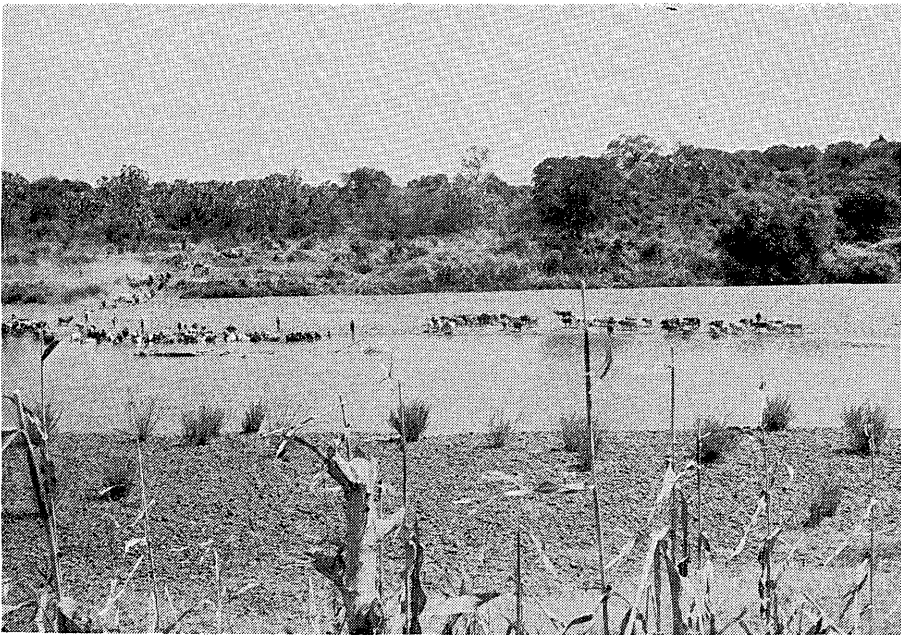


Photo. 1. Cattle drinking on the east bank of the Omo, opposite Alaka, January 1970

to be no Mursi cattle in the Elma Valley. Most have been brought to the Omo, wherever there are pockets of grazing, while some are on the edge of the bushbelt, drinking from water-holes in the bed of the Mara. The harvest is under way at Alaka where, on most evenings, the young herdsmen come down from their camps on the cliff-tops above the River to dance with the local girls. At a debate this afternoon the intestines of a slaughtered cow (already sick, the journey to the Omo had virtually finished it off) were examined by the older men who gave dire warnings of further Hamar raids. Boys were dispatched to warn those whose cattle were still on the edge of the bushbelt to take them north into Bodi country.

4th January: Alaka

Another debate took place, at which it was generally agreed that, the grazing at Alaka being virtually finished, the cattle still here should be taken to Makaro after a few days.

5th January: Alaka

A report arrived from the south that the cattle stolen on the 24th December had been seen at the Kara village of Dus, on the east bank of the Omo, south of its confluence with the Mago. The rifle stolen in the same raid had also been seen — in the possession of a Kara man, known by name to the Mursi since he had married a Mursi woman.

6th January: Kuduma²

I moved north to Kuduma, where the harvest is somewhat later than at Alaka.

15th January: Kuduma

The cattle are now beginning to leave the Omo, going via Kuduma and the bed of the Mara. Because the Elma valley is still not considered safe, and because there is a shortage of water in the Mara water-holes, the most popular destination for the cattle is the River Gura, well inside Bodi country.

21st January: Kuduma

More cattle are moving through Kuduma *en route* for the eastern grassland. The Bodi at Gura are apparently objecting to the arrival of more Mursi cattle. The cattle now on the move will therefore go to Mara or, if there is insufficient water there, to the Lower Elma Valley.

26th January-11th February

I was out of the field during this period. On returning I discovered that there had been another Hamar raid, on the 28th or 29th January. The short January rains had produced some temporary pools on the Gongor Ridge, which divides the Elma from the Omo's westward flowing tributaries. Tempted by this new source of water, some herders had moved their cattle eastwards from the Mara, where the water-holes were under very great pressure. A few days later two neighbouring cattle camps on the Ridge were attacked, two Mursi killed (one an adult man and the other a herdboys, about ten years old) and "many" cattle driven off. A large party of Mursi caught up with the raiders beyond the River Mago where, thinking themselves safe from pursuit, they had killed and were about to eat two of the stolen animals. There was a short engagement in which there were apparently no casualties on either side. The raiders, being heavily outnumbered, made off, leaving the cattle to be driven back by the

² The northernmost and one of the largest Mursi cultivation areas at the Omo.

Mursi. The talk now is of the need to prepare cultivation areas along the eastern fringe of the bushbelt in readiness for the first heavy rains, which are expected within a month. But people are nervous of starting this work until the Mago rises sufficiently to deter Hamar raiders, several small parties of whom are assumed to be hiding out, for several days at a time, in the Elma Valley and even closer to the bushbelt, looking for further opportunities to make off with cattle and/or to claim more Mursi lives.

26th February: Koibatha³

Two rifle shots were heard in the early hours by women as they went up onto the cliffs to urinate. The shots came from the direction of the eastern grassland and two men left almost immediately to investigate.

27th February: Koibatha

A man arriving at midday from the cattle camps near the Mara confirmed that the two shots heard yesterday had been part of a Hamar raid. There were no casualties and no cattle were taken. The raiders' tracks (which indicated that there were four of them) were followed to the River Ngurog (the next river south of the Mara) where it is thought that up to twelve Hamar are hiding out. No one was seen.

3rd March: Koibatha

Shots were heard today from the southeast and later from further north. I counted five in quick succession around 10.00 a.m. All the adult men here left early to take part in what was assumed to be a large scale engagement (*kaman*, as opposed to *luha*) with the Hamar. The women and children are to sleep in the bush tonight, away from their huts, for it is thought quite likely that the raiders will come as far as the Omo.

4th March: Koibatha

News came today that, in the last few days grain has been stolen from a grain store on the Omo, at the mouth of the Mara. Hamar raiders, hiding out in the bush, are suspected. The first news of yesterday's *kaman* is that 19 raiders were killed as they made for home, two Mursi were killed and at least two wounded.

5th March: Koibatha

More news of the *kaman*, as the men from here who had taken part in it return. The raiders were a mixture of Hamar, Kara and Banna, and even included some Nyangatom (Bume). They came via the Kara village of Dus. They left 26 dead and three rifles. Two Mursi were killed and 8 slightly wounded. One Mursi rifle was lost. The raiders were apparently poorly armed. Their ammunition was quickly exhausted and many of them carried only spears and knives.

8th March: Koibatha

Everyone is still sleeping in the bush. Footprints of supposed raiders have been seen on the cliffs above the river and one woman claims to have seen a Hamar, who made off at her approach.

9th March: Romos

I moved to the cultivation areas on the fringes of the bushland thicket due east of Koibatha. Preparations for planting are going ahead and a large

³ A cultivation site on the Omo opposite Alaka.

“communal” cattle settlement has been established at Romos, on the very margin of, and partially hidden by, the bushbelt. It is recognised that this huddling together in the bush, which is entirely a response to the danger of further raids, is bad both for men (because it increases the risks from infectious diseases) and cattle (because of exposure to tsetse flies). Were it not for the threat of raiders, cattle settlements would be scattered on higher ground, around the headstreams of the Omo’s westward flowing tributaries.

10th March: Romos

The first heavy fall of rain came last night and planting began today.

18th March: Romos

The communal settlement is beginning to break up into smaller herding units, and new settlements are being established further from the bushbelt, though not more than an hour’s walk away from it. There are two main reasons for this: the arrival of the cool damp weather has exacerbated the tsetse fly problem, while, as the level of the Mago rises, the danger of further Hamar raids is receding.

There were no more Hamar raids that year. Although the period which I have just described was regarded by the Mursi as a particularly trying and difficult one, there is no reason to believe that it represented anything more than a relatively serious example of a recurring problem. In some years there may not be any raids, but they are always expected. Thus, in the 1968–9 dry season no raids took place, but in January 1969 the cattle in northern Mursi country were taken to the Omo because the tracks of supposed raiders had been seen in the Mago Valley. The following information was given to me by the Mursi about Hamar raids in the years immediately preceding my arrival in the field. Between January and February 1968 there was a raid in which twelve people were killed, including five “children”. Later the same year there was another raid and at least one Mursi death. There were no raids in 1967. In May 1966 a large Hamar raiding party entered Mursi country. The Mursi scattered to the south and north, many taking their cattle as far as the River Hana in Bodi country. The raiders continued into Bodi country and were eventually repulsed, with heavy losses, by the Mursi and Bodi together. Many wounded Hamar were finished off with spears or knives and at least one (who had been shot but had received only a flesh wound in the thigh) was beaten to death with duelling poles. “Many” Mursi women and children were killed by the raiders.

Hostilities between the Mursi and the Hamar, then, are permanent, not in the sense that they are always actively in progress but in the sense that, at certain times of every year, they are more or less likely to occur. The Mursi and Hamar are therefore at war in the sense defined by Hobbes when he wrote that “the nature of War, consisteth not in actual fighting; but in the known disposition thereto during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary” (*Leviathan*, Ch. XIII). Between the Mursi and the Hamar there is no means of initiating periods during which there is such an “assurance to the contrary”, and this is obviously an aspect of the general absence of rules governing the scope of the hostilities themselves. These two closely connected features of Mursi/Hamar hostilities—permanence and freedom from rules—are the

most significant ones for the purpose of this essay and I now consider them in the light of the above description.

Hamar raids are regarded by the Mursi as one of several hazards to which their lives and prosperity are regularly subject, such as drought, epidemics (whether affecting men or cattle) and crop pests. They know that such hazards can be more or less severe in their incidence and consequences, but they do not regard them as threatening their continued existence as an autonomous group. This is illustrated by the fact that the word in their language which is closest in meaning to "raider" (*mirogi*, pl. *miroga*) is also used of the insect pests which regularly threaten the crops. They have tried and tested ways, both instrumental and ritual, of coping with these problems. The instrumental means they adopt to deal with Hamar raids are evident from the above account, and they have equally instrumental (though obviously different) ways of dealing with, for example, drought and outbreaks of cattle disease. On a ritual level, however, they deal with all such threats in an essentially similar fashion: through divination and through the intervention of a religious expert (*komoru*), or priest.

The most common and trusted form of divination consists in the inspection of the intestines of a large or small stock animal. This takes place whenever and for whatever reason an animal is killed, but particular attention is paid to it when it forms



Photo. 2. The intestines of a stock animal are examined in divination.

part of a public event, such as a debate or religious ceremony. The intestines are laid out on the ground and oriented with features of the physical environment exactly as we would a map. When raiders are expected, special interest is shown in that part of the intestines which represents the Omo-Mago watershed. Blood spots are looked for in the vicinity of passes across this watershed which raiders are known to use most frequently. From the distribution of these marks certain men, with acknowledged divinatory skills, predict the direction and intensity of future raids. This is a "general purpose" kind of divination, for at the same or different sessions information may be gleaned about, for example, the approximate timing of the rains, the extent of the Omo flood and the health of local (un-named) individuals and their livestock. But there is another kind of divination, practised by men who are usually also experts in the reading of intestines, which has to do exclusively with impending enemy raids. This consists in interpreting the flight patterns of certain night birds, especially when they fly close to the settlements. It is a common occurrence during the dry season for warnings to be sent to the cattle camps from the Omo by older men who "know about birds", warnings which certainly have the effect of increasing the vigilance of the herders, and, in particular, of persuading them to engage in the irksome and generally unpopular task of scouting in the Mago Valley.

It has often been pointed that in many non-industrial societies a particularly close link is thought to exist between the natural and social orders, such that untoward events in nature follow from and are thus evidence of the unsatisfactory state of social relations. The Mursi are no exception to this. They believe that if only people could live in harmony with each other, according to traditional norms and values, their land would not only flow, literally, with milk and honey but it would also be safe from raiders. The main way in which they attempt to set the natural order to rights, once it has been upset by a disturbance in the social order, is through priestly ritual. A priest is the ritual and symbolic head of a territorial division of the society and at the time of my fieldwork there were two in office, one in the north and one in the south of the country. By standing, so to speak, half outside the world of ordinary men, a priest is able to personify for his congregation the order of the universe. Thus, when natural events go awry this is often attributed to the priest's just indignation at some more or less specific and more or less recent example of a failure to observe the traditional norms of the society. At priestly rituals—whether they are held to end drought, control crop pests or make men and cattle immune from raiders—the emphasis is as much on healing internal conflicts and disputes as it is upon bringing the priest's ritual powers to bear on the outside world.

The annual threat of Hamar raids, therefore, is treated by the Mursi in the same way as they treat the various natural hazards of their environment, hazards which they can only hope to control by ritual means. Hamar raids are an external threat to Mursi society, therefore, not just because they come from another group, but because they come, in a sense, from outside society itself. That is, they are governed not by social conventions mutually accepted by the parties concerned, but by environmental factors which are outside the control of both. It was clear from the accounts

I received of Mursi/Hamar fighting, not only that women and children of all ages are frequently killed, but that this is regarded as normal practice by both sides. When news arrived at the Omo of the raid that took place on the 24th December 1969, the fact that one of the victims was a seven year old boy evinced no special surprise or horror. On one of the rare occasions when a Mursi spoke to me of his own exploits on a raid into Hamar country he claimed that he had shot and killed a young man and a girl as they made love. Yet despite the "no holds barred" nature of Mursi/Hamar hostilities, their scope, in terms of the number of people killed by raiders, is limited. Firstly, there is the physical distance which separates the two groups. This makes it extremely difficult for raiders, even if they have successfully attacked a settlement and made off with cattle, to get safely home before being overtaken by a pursuit party. Partly because of the distance which separates them, and partly because they have no peaceful contacts, each side is, secondly, relatively unfamiliar with the other's territory, a fact which goes a long way towards outweighing the raider's chief advantage—surprise. Thirdly, it is only during the dry-season that the river Mago can be easily forded and at this time of the year the Omo provides the Mursi with a safe, if temporary, retreat for their cattle. By the time they are forced, by mud at the Omo and by the general dampness of conditions in the bushbelt, to move their cattle back to the eastern grassland, the Mago will have risen sufficiently to make Hamar raids unlikely. There exists, therefore, a kind of military stalemate between the Mursi and the Hamar, and in so far as it makes sense to speak of war as a kind of social relationship, then there is also a social stalemate between them. Here it is significant that the Mursi are not particularly interested in distinguishing the different groups who make up "Hamar" raiding parties. The Hamar are, for the Mursi, essentially "people who raid us". This conception of the Hamar obviously plays a part in defining, for the Mursi, their own political and ethnic identity, but it is a timeless, or static identity. What I mean by this can only be made clear by considering a different kind of war, and one which is perhaps more properly so-called because it alternates with peace: that is war between the Mursi and their northern neighbours, the Bodi. In the next section I argue that alternating periods of war and peace between these two groups are to be understood as part of a long term process of change in the territorial and political boundaries between them.

II

The Bodi, who call themselves Me'en, live immediately north of the Mursi and east of the Omo (see Fukui's article in this issue). They number between three and four thousand and are thus a somewhat smaller population than the Mursi. The languages spoken by both groups, though not mutually intelligible, are very similar and many northern Mursi can at least understand Bodi well. They make use of the same range of natural resources—the Omo banks and bushland for flood and rain cultivation respectively, and wooded grassland east of the bushbelt for cattle herding—and their settlement patterns and transhumance movements are essentially the same.

There is, however, one difference in their respective environments which is important for the argument which follows: that of the Bodi is, on the whole, better watered than that of the Mursi. It can be seen from Fig. 1 that the westward flowing Omo tributaries in Bodi country, especially the Gura and Hana, have more extensive catchment areas than the corresponding tributaries further south. The largest of these tributaries in Mursi country, the Mara, flows for only a few weeks in most years, water being obtainable during the dry-season only in more or less limited quantities from deep holes in its bed. But the Hana flows the year round in all but the most severe droughts. This is because much of its catchment area lies at a sufficiently high altitude to benefit from the heavy and prolonged summer rains which characterise the rainfall regime of the Ethiopian Highlands. The Bodi are also able to benefit directly from this improved rainfall by cultivating the lower slopes of Mt. Smith and the Dime Mountains, and they consequently enjoy a significantly more favourable environment for both cultivation and herding than the Mursi.

For most of my first period of fieldwork among the Mursi (1969–70) relations between them and the Bodi were peaceful. Not only were they not raiding each other but a great deal of economic co-operation and mutual visiting took place between them. Most northern Mursi had one or more Bodi associates to whom they may have given or lent stock in the past and from whom they could expect help of one kind or another in the future. Some Mursi were cultivating with their Bodi friends in the latter's cultivation areas north of the Mara, taking their stock with them into Bodi country for perhaps half the year. Indeed, there seemed to be a kind of peaceful infiltration of Bodi country by "immigrant" Mursi, an infiltration which was decidedly one way, since I never came across any Bodi living even for short periods south of the Mara. Evidence of this "infiltration" is contained in the account given above of Mursi-Hamar hostilities. Thus, in 1966, Mursi moved with their cattle as far north as the River Hana, before joining forces with the Bodi to repel Hamar raiders; the Mursi cattle camp I visited at the end of December 1969 was acknowledged by its occupants to be in Bodi territory; and in January 1970 Mursi cattle were being taken well into Bodi country, both to escape from Hamar raiders and to take advantage of the more plentiful water and grazing in the vicinity of the River Gura.

This latter presence, however, was not entirely welcomed by the Bodi. On the 21st January I noted that the Bodi at Gura were beginning to draw the line against further Mursi "infiltration", and from this time until I left the field in October 1970 relations between the Mursi and the Bodi steadily deteriorated. By the beginning of May 1970 the Mursi were predicting that fighting would break out between them and the Bodi after the wet season harvest (June/July). No particular occasion or cause was given: the feeling seemed to be that it was simply time for a fight. On May 7th I recorded in my notebook that several groups of Mursi had been up to the highland villages, east of the Omo, taking cattle to exchange for ammunition—explicitly in order to prepare for the coming conflict with the Bodi. On the 1st June a Mursi youth was shot and killed by a Bodi near the river Dom (the next river north of the Mara) where he and his father had been living and cultivating together with the Bodi.

On the 2nd June all the cattle in northern Mursi country were taken south as far as the River Bennakora, although the cultivation areas along the Mara remained fully occupied—mainly by women and children. There were no further incidents for several months but the Mursi did not take their cattle back to the Mara for the remainder of the wet season. In November some Mursi youths killed and ate a stray Bodi cow, the fact that it was pregnant making this a particularly provocative act.

The Mursi acted quickly to defuse this new situation, handing over a cow by way of compensation in a matter of days. This did not settle the matter, however, for the Bodi claimed a goat and a cattle bell had also been stolen. The Mursi denied all knowledge of this. I was told on the 7th November that fighting would begin with the small rains, known as *loru*, which were due at any moment. The word used for this fighting was *kaman*, which refers to a large scale daylight engagement in which the element of surprise is not important and which therefore contrasts with *luha*, a word which I translated earlier as “raid”. The favoured times for a *kaman* are the rainy periods of November and March when the cool conditions greatly reduce the problem of thirst.

After an absence of three years I returned to the Mursi in November 1973 and found that they had been at war with the Bodi for two years. Both groups were also just emerging from the worst drought and food shortage in living memory, a situation which presumably exacerbated the deterioration in their relations which had begun in 1970. I was given the following account of how the fighting began.

Towards the end of 1971 the Bodi accused the Mursi at Mara of having stolen a black calf and a ram. The Mara people denied this, saying that the culprits were southern Mursi. A group of Bodi came to Mara to discuss the matter and while this discussion was in progress a Mursi boy arrived with news that a party of Bodi youths had stolen four cattle from a cattle camp on the Gongor Ridge. This set the already heated discussion alight and a Mursi shot and wounded one of the Bodi. The Bodi made off and, on the same day, the Mursi at Mara took their cattle to the Omo. Meanwhile some Mursi went north and stole a Bodi ox, and a party of Bodi went as far south as Bennakora in search of Mursi cattle. Not finding any (they had all been taken to the Omo) the Bodi returned home. On the way they came upon a Chachi⁴ who was returning from a visit to the eastern highlands, where he had gone in search of grain. The Bodi told him to take a message to the Mursi: they were coming to the Omo to eat their cattle and drink their children’s milk. A week later a large war party of Bodi arrived at Koibatha, where most of the northern Mursi had collected their cattle and there ensued a full scale *kaman*. The Bodi made off with a large number of cattle and succeeded in driving most of them through the bushbelt to Mara, despite the continued harrassment of the Mursi. (The narrow path through the bushbelt from Koibatha became so littered with human corpses on that day that it has since been known as the

⁴ The Chai (sing. Chachi), who speak the same language as the Mursi, live west of the Omo and south of the Maji Plateau. As noted later in this essay, there is much inter-marriage between Mursi and Chai.

“rotten” or “stinking” path.) Having reached the Mara waterholes and quenched their thirst, the Bodi began arguing among themselves about the division of the cattle they had stolen. They killed and ate one of the stolen animals while the Mursi, desperately thirsty but by now very short of ammunition, watched from a distance. When the Bodi eventually left, with the cattle, the Mursi went down to drink and found, as they had expected, that the water-holes had been fouled with human excrement.

Although the Bodi made off, on this occasion, with a large number of Mursi cattle, they had suffered much heavier casualties than the Mursi—as far as I could establish only one Mursi had been killed. There were further Mursi deaths over the next two years, the victims mainly of Bodi snipers who lay in wait along the path up to the eastern highlands where many Mursi were forced, by hunger, to take cattle, rifles and even animal skins to exchange for grain. But by the time I returned to the field, towards the end of 1973, the balance of deaths had not been restored and it was for this reasons that, according to the Mursi, the Bodi would not be interested in an early end to hostilities. There was no question, again according to the Mursi, that they themselves would be the first to sue for peace and, throughout my second period of fieldwork (November 1973–September 1974) killing continued on both sides. There were now no Mursi cultivating alongside Bodi associates, and a temporary no-man’s land, 40–50 kilometres deep had opened up between the two groups. This last, however, applied only to the eastern grassland—that is, to the grazing areas. Throughout this period there were no Bodi cattle settlements south of the River Gura while, for most of it, the Mursi kept their cattle either at the Omo or at least twenty kilometres south of the Mara. Across this no-man’s land small raiding parties, consisting of no more than half a dozen people, went regularly to and fro, a favourite tactic being to lie in wait for potential victims beside a path of near a watering point. The northern Mursi behaved as though the long grass was alive with Bodi and avoided using well worn paths as much as possible. Those who wore ivory bracelets took care to smear them in cattle dung so as to reduce their visibility when travelling, as people preferred to do, at night. Pastoral activities therefore were seriously affected by the war and the Mursi, because they are relatively worse off than the Bodi for dry season grazing and water, were probably put at a greater disadvantage by these arrangements. In particular, they were unable to make use of their dry season grazing areas in the Lower Elma Valley and had to keep their cattle at the Omo for long periods. Cultivation, on the other hand, was relatively unaffected because of the convention that women and children and, by extension, cultivation areas, should not be attacked.

The essential point of contrast, then, between Mursi-Hamar and Mursi-Bodi hostilities is that the former are part of a permanent *state* of war, in a Hobbesian sense, while the latter are part of an alternating pattern of war and peace. I believe that this latter pattern is associated with Mursi encroachment on territory formerly occupied and/or presently claimed by the Bodi. Since I have presented the evidence for this

view in detail elsewhere [TURTON 1978; in press], I will give only a brief summary of it here.

According to both Mursi and Bodi oral history, the former, after crossing from the west bank of the Omo in the south of their present territory, have been pushing northwards at the expense of the latter. Both sides agree that Mursi began to cultivate at Kuduma and along the river Mara, their present northern boundary, only in living memory—when the fathers of those who are today middle-aged were young men—and that both areas were formally occupied by the Bodi. The Mursi still regard the south as the heart, or “stomach” of their territory. When, in 1896, an Italian expedition, led by Vittorio Böttego, followed the left bank of the Omo as far as Lake Turkana, the greatest concentration of Mursi was indeed found between the southwestern extremity of the Mursi Mountains and the junction of the Omo and Mago [VANNUTELLI and CITERNI 1899]. There is no doubt, however, that most Mursi today live in the north, at what they themselves regard as the perimeter or fringe of their territory, the historical pre-eminence of the south being kept alive only in a symbolic or ritual sense. That is, certain ceremonies which affect the society as a whole—such as the installation of a new priest or the formation of a new age-set—must be held in the “stomach” of the country.

But if there has been such a northward movement of Mursi-speaking people, how has it been achieved and, in particular, what part has warfare played in bringing it about? The most obvious explanation is that the Mursi have expanded at the expense of the Bodi through force of arms, but this is not convincing. In this kind of warfare, conducted for the most part by small raiding parties on “hit and run” missions, the Mursi can gain no particular advantage from their numerical superiority. Each side has equal access to arms and ammunition and each is subject to more or less identical environmental constraints. It cannot be said that the Mursi are more “warlike” than the Bodi, even in their own estimation. There appear to be no differences in the territorial and political organisation of the two groups which could account for the ability of the Mursi to “expand” at the expense of the Bodi. Nor is there a difference in ecology which could give the Mursi an “organisational” superiority in raiding, along the lines argued by Glickman [1972] for the Nuer. Both groups inhabit more or less identical territories which they exploit by means of the same subsistence activities and transhumance movements. A more satisfactory answer to this question begins to emerge, however, if we concentrate not on the hostilities themselves but on the way in which they are brought to an end and on the intervening periods of peace.

Peace-making between the Mursi and the Bodi is accomplished by means of two successive ceremonies, one held by each group, at each of which a stock animal is killed in the presence of the other group’s representatives. What really matters is not whether one side has lost more men than the other in the preceding conflict, but where these two ceremonies are held, since each side is supposed to hold its ceremony in its own territory. Thus, when I was last in the field and spoke to both sides about the conditions under which they would be prepared to make peace, the Bodi insisted

that they would do so only if the Mursi withdrew from Mara and Kuduma—that is, if the Mursi held their peace-making ceremony south of Mara and they, the Bodi, held theirs at Mara. The Mursi were equally adamant that any beast they killed by way of peace-making would be killed at Mara, although they admitted that at the end of their last war with the Bodi⁵ they had held their ceremony about twenty kilometres south of Mara, at a place called Moizoi. It did seem totally unrealistic of the Bodi, however, to expect the Mursi to withdraw from their cultivation areas at Mara and Kuduma even though they may have been theirs in only a *de facto* sense. When peace was finally concluded in 1975, after we had left the field, the Mursi did indeed hold their ceremony at Mara thereby establishing this as their *de jure* northern boundary.⁶ Thus, holding a peace-making ceremony at a certain spot may be a way of making (and having acknowledged by the other side's representatives) a claim to *de jure* ownership of territory which was formerly owned only in a *de facto* sense. In which case, it may be said that the purpose of the fighting is to bring about a peace-making ceremony, and that the purpose of this ceremony is to give legal ratification to a territorial encroachment which had already taken place, peacefully, before the fighting started.

My suggestion is, therefore, that the Mursi are exerting a subtle demographic pressure, rather than a crude military one on the Bodi, and that the main function of the periodic wars which take place between these two groups is to precipitate public redefinition of their respective political identities. This interpretation is supported by the fact that, during the period of peace which preceded the last war, there was much Mursi "infiltration" of Bodi country, but none in the opposite direction. It seems likely that, if the present process were to continue unchecked by external controls, the Mursi would eventually establish a new *de facto* northern boundary north of the Mara and possibly along the river Dom, where some Mursi were already cultivating before the last war.

This interpretation is obviously hampered by a lack of sufficiently detailed and extensive historical information. The suggestions I have made, however, seem to me plausible on the basis of my observations of Mursi-Bodi relations, both in peace and war, while I was in the field. In any event, I have no doubt that in order to understand these relations it is necessary to see periods of war and peace as interconnected parts

⁵ As far as I could ascertain, from information given me by the Mursi, their last war with the Bodi ended around 1954, having lasted three or four years. Some external confirmation of this is provided by Haberland [1959] who made a brief visit to the Bodi in May 1951. He describes the Mursi and Bodi as "arch-enemies" and the fighting which takes place between them as particularly fierce and destructive. It seems likely that the fact that the Mursi and Bodi were at war at the time of his visit led Haberland to assume that there existed a permanent state of war between them. (He may also have been misled by his Dime guides, for his comments on Mursi-Bodi hostilities appear to reflect more accurately those between the Dime and the Bodi. See Fukui's and Todd's articles in this issue.) Fukui, on the other hand, received accounts of fighting between the Bodi and Mursi in 1958 (personal communication).

⁶ Katsuyoshi Fukui, personal communication.

of a single process. Without more historical data it is impossible to offer suggestions as to what factors govern the rhythm of this process. I am certain, however, that the sort of events which immediately precede, and appear to cause, an outbreak of war are merely proximate occasions and do not represent underlying causes. These underlying causes are more likely to be associated with population movements which go far beyond the present Mursi and Bodi populations in both space and time. In other words, it is these movements which bring about periodic wars, and not the wars which make possible the movements.

It follows from this that we should not treat the Mursi as an autonomous group which has "expanded" because of features which are proper to its internal organisation. It is not so much that the Mursi *have* expanded but that they *are*, if one may so put it, expansion. In order to elucidate this somewhat elliptical statement it is necessary to consider the third kind of conflict which was mentioned at the beginning of this essay, namely ceremonial duelling, which takes place between local divisions of Mursi society itself.

III

Duelling is a single combat sport of physical skill in which the weapon is a pole (*donga*) a little under two metres in length and weighing about 800 g. To land a blow the *donga* is gripped at its base, the left hand above the right, while in parrying the left hand slides up the shaft. The end of the *donga* should never be pointed at an opponent. Contestants do not depend solely on their skill to protect themselves from injury, for they all wear protective clothing. This consists of a basketwork helmet and a guard for the right hand, bark or cotton cloth to protect the neck and shoulders, rings woven from sansevieria fibres to protect the right arm and right knee and shin guards or greaves, of animal skin. A leopard skin and a hide skirt cut into strips are also worn, and a cattle bell is tied around the waist. Having put on these various accoutrements (collectively known as *tumoga*) a contestant's behaviour immediately becomes stylised. He prances around the duelling ground chanting praise songs and war cries and works himself up into an almost trance-like state through "shivering", to the apparent unconcern and disinterest of the onlookers.

A further important element of formality and regulation is introduced into duelling by the referees (*kwethana*) whose job it is to control the beginnings and ends of bouts. A referee holds a duelling pole between two contestants as they stand glaring at each other ready for the fray, and as soon as he has removed this pole from between them they set about each other with the utmost seriousness and determination. They appear totally bent on causing each other the maximum possible injury in the shortest possible time. If, for example, a contestant's helmet falls off, his opponent will immediately attempt to land a blow on his head, and one man I met had had an area of bone about 5 cm in diameter removed from his skull (by a local expert) following such an injury. Bouts are normally brought to an end by the intervention of a



Photo. 3. Ceremonial duelling: A contestant prepares for his bout.

referee, and in those bouts I timed, this intervention came between twenty and forty seconds after they had begun. Bouts are therefore short and furious. The contestant who is getting the worst of it shows conventional reluctance to stop and often has to be restrained by several men who shepherd him off to the edge of the field and help him out of his *tumoga*, which another aspirant for glory is impatiently waiting to don. Very occasionally a contestant manages to demonstrate his superiority conclusively by knocking over his opponent before a referee intervenes, and such a victor is carried round the field on the shoulders of his team-mates.

I speak of "team-mates" because duelling contests take place between the young men of different local groups, so that each contestant represents a particular local community. Complete sets of *tumoga* are not individually owned, although individuals may own separate items, such as a helmet or hand-guard. Each local team has to put together at least two complete sets from the separate items owned by its members, since, due to the short duration of bouts and to the length of time it takes to don

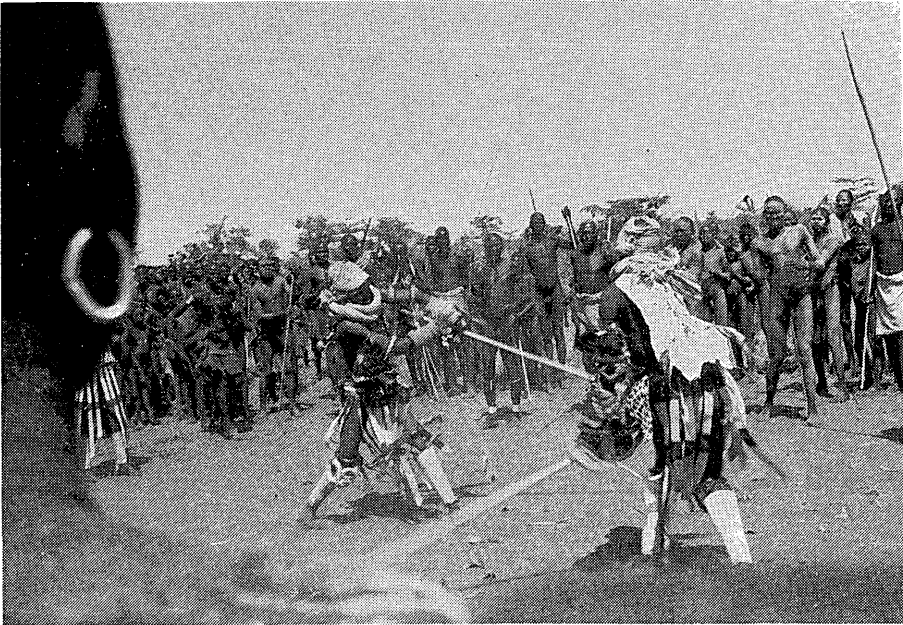


Photo. 4. Ceremonial duelling: a bout in progress

all the accoutrements, the next two contestants have to be ready while a bout is in progress. Thus, each contestant has a group of supporters, who help him in and out of his *tumoga* and who provide a chorus of praise songs, which appears to assist him in achieving a high state of nervous tension before his bout. There is no formal system of matching group champions against each other, however, and since bouts continue from sunrise to sunset, sometimes on several successive days, any individual who wishes to take part is able to do so. While any two contestants always belong to different local groups, they must belong to the same age-grade. Although married men often told me that they would take part in contests, I never saw them do so except as referees. There is no doubt that duelling is associated, first and foremost, with unmarried men. Indeed, duelling is the principal culturally valued means by which a man seeks to attract the attention of unmarried girls. The Mursi themselves draw a contrast between their own customs in relation to the sexual assertiveness of young men and those of their permanent enemies, the Hamar. One explanation they give for the attacks of Hamar cattle raiders is that a Hamar girl may refuse to accept the advances of a would-be lover until he has proved himself by killing a man. Their own girls, however, will taunt a young man for cowardice in not taking part in duelling contests. Thus, from the point of view of an individual contestant, the important thing is to take part, and it appears to be just as honourable to sustain injuries as to inflict them.

It is difficult, from my limited experience, to make a general statement about the frequency with which duelling contests are held. The existence of a relatively abun-

dant food supply seems, however, to be a necessary condition, and my impression is that contests are expected to occur at least once annually, at the time of the wet-season harvest (June/July). They may also take place, on a smaller scale, at the time of the Omo harvest (January/February) and after the "small rains" (October/November) have improved the milk supply in the eastern grazing areas. As far as I know, they took place on two occasions only while I was in the field, at both of which I was present. The first of these lasted only one day (31st October, 1969) while on the second the contests continued for eight successive days, at the time of the wet-season harvest in 1970 (26th June–3rd July). On both occasions the contests were preceded by what can only be described as a mounting "*donga fever*" among the young men of the areas in question, which was most noticeable in the care and attention they were devoting to the preparation of new duelling poles. On the second occasion the contests, once under way, considerably affected the daily life of the community and clearly absorbed the interest and attention of all age groups and of both sexes. They were held at a duelling ground (*gul*) on the right bank of the river Bennakora in what was a fairly densely settled area. The contests began at sunrise and continued all day. At about midday women would arrive from the cultivation areas with food (sorghum porridge and gruel) which they had spent the morning preparing and which was consumed by contestants and spectators alike. The *gul* thus became a focus of the social life of the local community for the period during which the contests continued. On the first occasion I witnessed them, the contests were held a few weeks after the cattle settlements had broken up, in October 1969, when most married men were at the Omo, helping their wives with clearing and planting. The unmarried men, left in charge of the cattle in the Elma Valley, appear to experience at this time a sense of liberation from the social and physical constraints associated with age, marriage and cultivation. Their high spirits and enthusiasm are also related to the sudden increase in the milk supply which results from the improved grazing conditions in the Elma Valley and which comes at a time when the demands made upon it are greatly reduced by the movement of women and married men to the Omo. On this occasion the contestants were from two local communities, one from the north and one from the middle of the country. The contests took place in the vicinity of the latter group's cattle camps, on the 31st October, the northern team having to travel for about three hours to reach the *gul*. I was told that there would be a return match in the north a day or two later, but this never took place. The reason given was that one of the contestants received a serious knee injury on the 31st, and that such an event always causes the cancellation of further duelling.

Duelling is therefore a highly rule governed and stylised form of conflict which takes place between locally based sub-divisions of the population. In this essay, warfare has been viewed not as an activity in which groups, already established as autonomous political units, compete with each other, but as one which helps to define the separate political identities of the very groups which take part in it. Such a view obviously emphasises the changing and relative nature of group boundaries and identities and I have suggested how this applies to Mursi-Bodi warfare in the previous

section. The implications of the comparison between Mursi-Hamar and Mursi-Bodi relations is that the more rule governed hostilities between two local groups are, the more likely it is that these hostilities will be part of a long term process of change in group boundaries, both territorial and conceptual. This implication is fully and explicitly born out when we come to consider ceremonial duelling, for we find that the local sub-divisions of Mursi society which it brings into conflict can only be defined in terms of it, and are thus defined by the Mursi themselves.

The Mursi term *buran* (pl. *buranyoga*) refers to a collectivity of people who live in and exploit a common territory. It may be used of the whole Mursi population or of the occupants of a single settlement. Between these two extremes lie a number of segmentary levels which permanently divide the population into separate named units on a territorial basis. (This does not apply to the occupants of a single settlement since those found living together and herding their cattle together in one year may well be found living apart in the next.) The lowest order of segmentation is based upon the one relatively fixed subsistence resource of the Mursi—flood land at the Omo. Access to this valuable but limited resource is more strictly governed by rules than is access to bushbelt cultivation or to pastoral resources, and people habitually return to the same sites along the Omo, year after year. People who cultivate at the same place along the Omo form a *buran*, and those who share the same settlement during the wet season often cultivate at the same site along the Omo. In general, people who cultivate at the same or near-by sites at the Omo will occupy the same or near-by settlements in the wet season. A higher order segment is formed by people who cultivate different but contiguous Omo sites, and at this level we reach a division of the Mursi population into five main *buranyoga*, or sections, which can be shown on the map with fair accuracy by marking off appropriate stretches of the Omo. These sections are named, from north to south, Mara (after the River), Mako (after the River), Biogolokare (red-eyed cattle), Ariholi (white ox) and Gongulobibi (big boats). Fig. 2 shows how the Omo can be divided up into stretches on this basis, and also indicates the relationship between section membership and area of wet-season settlement in 1970.

Although there is thus a clear basis in local contiguity, and therefore in economic co-operation, for the division of the population into named sections, membership of a section does not entail rights to the exploitation of particular natural resources. A section consists of an aggregate of people who are brought into relatively frequent contact by reason of their exploitation of certain tracts of land, but it does not incorporate this land. Section membership is inherited, but by going to live permanently in a different part of the country an individual may become a member of a different section. The most frequent explanation given by individuals for such a permanent change in their section membership is that they have moved “by a girl”. That is, they have moved to a part of the country which is associated with the section of their wife’s close patrilineal kinsmen. On the other hand, a man may make a change of residence yet continue to describe himself as a member of his natal section, stressing his intention to return to that part of the country associated with it in due course.

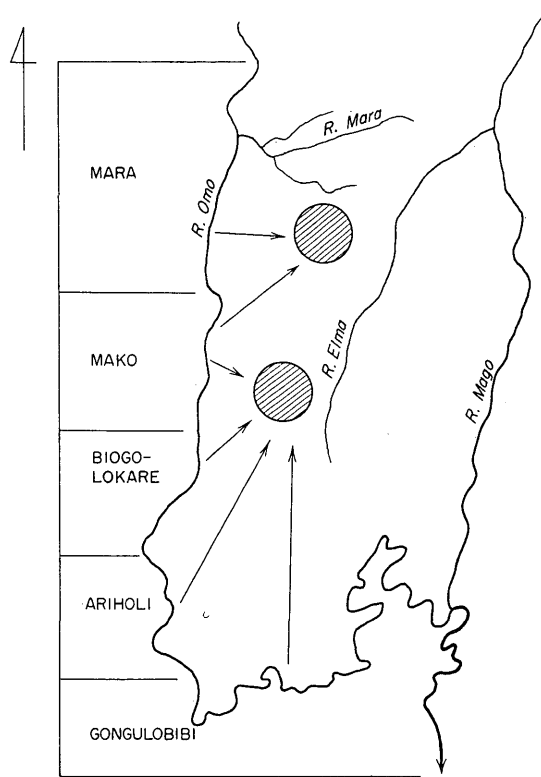


Fig. 2. Territorial Sections and Areas of Wet Season Settlement, 1970

The only characteristics which a section possesses which have anything to do with "corporateness" are its continuity in time and the fact that its members think of themselves as forming a unit in opposition to other sections. Perhaps the most characteristic, and certainly the most frequent, social activity which takes place between the occupants of neighbouring settlements is the killing and eating of a sick stock animal of one of the neighbours. Such a meat-eating often gives rise to, or is made the occasion of, public discussions, or debates, at which policy decisions are made on matters which effect all the residents of the local settlements. Clusters of neighbouring settlements also form the typical catchment areas for the onlookers at the public settling of disputes. But such activities are not necessarily exclusive to one particular section. The same applies to religious ceremonial: although sections form religious congregations in relation to one or more priests, these congregations, since there are more sections than priests, cut across section boundaries. Thus, there appear to be as many factors tending to blur the distinctions between sections as there are serving to emphasise them.

Duelling, however, is one form of ceremonial activity in which sections engage and which is, by definition, sectionally exclusive. The teams which take part in it are always drawn from different sections. Indeed, so characteristic an activity is this

of sections that they cannot be defined without reference to it. The five-fold division of the population I have described and to the units of which I have given the name sections, is a model which can only be maintained by means of ceremonial duelling. For, at least two of these sections (Mara and Mako) are divided into smaller, named *buranyoga*, while Mara, Mako and Biogolokare form a single, larger, *buran* called Dola. The Mara section is capable of division into four smaller named *buranyoga*—namely Mara proper, Ambio, Makaro and Rum. These subsections are made up of people who cultivate along the Omo at Kudama, Alaka, Makaro, and Rum (about five kilometres south of Makaro) respectively. It is possible to view them as being contained within the larger Mara section because of the function of ceremonial duelling in defining different levels of territorial segmentation. The five units I have termed sections are structurally equivalent because ceremonial duelling takes place between them but not within them. Thus the constituent *buranyoga* of the Mara section are identified, when it comes to ceremonial duelling, through their common opposition to the other sections: they are “one” because they do not duel between themselves, but only with Mako, Biogolokare, Ariholi or Gongulobibi. It can be seen from Fig. 2 that the members of the Biogolokare section must have more frequent daily contacts with members of the Ariholi and even Gongulobibi sections, at least during the wet season, than they do with the Mara section. Yet, as was just noted, Biogolokare, Mako and Mara form a single *buran*, called Dola, in opposition to the other two. Just as the constituent *buranyoga* of a section never provide rival teams in ceremonial duelling, so the constituent sections of Dola only provide rival teams at contests in which the two southern sections are not represented. Thus, the contests I witnessed in October 1969 were between two Dola teams—Mara and Biogolokare. In July 1970, however, at Bennakora, although contestants from both of these sections took part in the duelling, they did not fight each other. Contestants on this occasion were aligned as follows: Ariholi and Gongulobibi versus Dola (the latter being represented mainly by Biogolokare and Mako).

How are we to explain this “nesting” or “massing” of the three northern sections? According to the Mursi, Dola was originally a single section, the population of which grew in size and spread northwards, pushing back the Bodi in the process. But we have already seen that the nature of Mursi-Bodi warfare is such that its outcome is unlikely to be affected by the numerical superiority of one side. This explanation, furthermore, leaves unaccounted for the growth in population of one particular Mursi section. This latter problem only exists, however, for as long as we think, with the Mursi, of an historically “original” Dola section and of an historically permanent Mursi society. A more satisfactory explanation of the “massing” of the three northern Mursi sections emerges if we broaden our view to take in not only the rest of present day Mursi society but also other groups, living west of the Omo and south of the Maji Plateau, who speak the same language as, and inter-marry with, the Mursi. There is strong evidence that the nearest of these groups, the Chai, is “infiltrating” Mursi country through inter-marriage. That is, while I came across many Chai, both men and women, who had come to live with their Mursi spouses, I am fairly certain

that there is no equivalent movement of Mursi, westwards, into Chai country. I therefore believe that the northward movement of Mursi already referred to is simply part of a much larger movement of peoples from the low-lying fringes of the Ethiopian Highlands into the better-watered, and therefore ecologically more favourable, foothills of these highlands. This movement shows up in northern Mursi country through the creation of new territorial sections, lying across the three bands of natural resources which flank the east bank of the Omo—floodland, bushland and wooded grassland.

The “massing” of sections in northern Mursi country may then be explained by the need to hold on to territorial gains already achieved and to make new gains possible. The maintenance of particularly close ideological links between the sections immediately behind the frontier facilitates the northward drift of population and therefore the gradual, peacetime encroachment on Bodi territory which, I have argued, is the main mechanism of Mursi “expansion”. During periods of hostility, furthermore, cattle have to be kept as far back from the frontier as possible, since the further raiders have to go into enemy territory, the greater the chances of their being overtaken on the way home and any cattle they may have stolen being retrieved. Thus it is cattle of the Mara section which, on the Mursi side, are most at risk during Mursi-Bodi wars, and at such times these cattle may be sent south to be looked after in the territory of the Biogolokare section. According to this interpretation, then, Mursi “expansion” at the expense of the Bodi is indeed a matter of population pressure, but the source of this pressure is not to be found within present day Mursi society itself but in a large-scale movement of cattle-keeping peoples which is governed by geographical and ecological factors. We should not therefore see the Mursi as an autonomous and historically permanent unit which has been able to expand from its own resources, whether demographic or military. The Mursi, as I have summed this up elsewhere [TURTON in press] “did not make a journey: a journey made them.”

APPENDIX

The purpose of this Appendix is to describe the circumstances surrounding one particular Mursi death during the last Mursi-Bodi war. I am not so much concerned with the actual killing as with the way in which news of it was received by the Mursi and with the issues which arose in the public discussion, or debate, which followed it. A summary of the proceedings of this debate, with selected extracts from the speeches, should help to illustrate the general points made about Mursi-Bodi hostilities in the above article.

On the 9th of January, 1974, a large party of Mursi, consisting mainly of women and girls, travelled north to a recently established police airstrip on the river Hana to which the Ethiopian Airforce had flown famine relief. While the grain was being distributed a Mursi man, about forty years old, was shot dead by a Bodi on the river bank, about a quarter of a mile from the police post. The Mursi returned overnight, and the news reached Mara at dawn on the 11th. The cattle which remained there were immediately moved through the bushbelt to Koibatha. Opposite Koibatha, on the west bank, a crop of sorghum was

almost ready to be harvested, but most of the herd owners who had come from Mara had their cultivation areas at Kuduma, about three hours walk north of Koibatha, where the harvest was not due for another six weeks or so. They had brought their cattle to Koibatha firstly, because this took them further away from the Bodi than if they had taken them to Kuduma; secondly because there was better grazing at Koibatha, though still not much; thirdly because the path through the bushbelt to Koibatha provided the easiest and quickest means to get to the Omo from Mara; fourthly because there was grain available at Koibatha, even if not their own; and fifthly because some cattle were already there, with the owners of which it would therefore be possible to confer. The people from Mara began arriving at Koibatha, with their cattle, in the late morning of the 11th. Among the first to arrive was Karatiolugu, a married man between forty and fifty years old, who was one of the few men who had gone to Hana on the 9th. As they arrived the cattle were taken down to the Omo to drink, while the men began to collect under a large shade tree on the bank. Those men who had just arrived from Mara were, by 1.00 p.m., either sitting under the tree, recovering from their journey, or seeing to the watering of their cattle. Others had come across from the other side by dugout to hear the news. After about 40 men had collected under the tree, and after a period of subdued talking, during which most people heard the gist of the news, either directly or indirectly from Karatiolugu, an expectant lull descended on the gathering. The first formal speech was made by Karatiolugu, acting as the "word-bringer". After a fairly brief account of what had happened at Hana, he spent the major part of his nine-minute speech emphasising that he was enthusiastically in favour of immediate retaliatory action being taken. He pointed out that he had argued for action to be taken while they were still in Bodi country, and indeed at Hana itself:



Photo. 5. A debate in progress at Kuduma, January 1974

'Yesterday, up at Hana, I told everyone, "Should we just have a drink and go back? Should we just leave? Should we just leave our age-mate lying here in the grass? Do you want to attack the Gura people? They had nothing to do with this, and the Hana people dislike them as much as they dislike us. Its these fat idiots at Hana who are responsible. We should make them pay, shouldn't we? We've plenty of ammunition. When the rest start back a few of us should hide here in the long grass."'

'That's what I said and if you think I am lying ask the rest when they get back here. I said it to everyone, and when we got to Keteli [half way between the Gura and Mara rivers] I said it again, "Let's go; should we just forget about our age-mate? Is he to lie there alone?'"

But despite the fact that he spent nearly two-thirds of his speech dwelling on the need to retaliate, Karatiolugu was in fact urging restraint on his audience, telling them not to launch an indiscriminate attack, but to be selective. He ended as follows.

'Its a matter of raiding—of just going up there and killing them. They are taking revenge for all their people who died in the long grass here at Koibatha. If we wipe each other out, so be it. But let those fat fools at Hana suffer. They're so fat they can hardly walk, those people at Hana. May their dead bodies stretch from here to over there, and may their mothers and fathers shave their heads. Do you want to attack our Bodi at Gura? If we do that, those at Hana will never keep to any peace agreement later on. They will say, "If we attack the Mursi, they won't hit back at us but at the Gura people." They will be saying that even as they make peace with us. Let Hana suffer!'

The next speech, from an age-mate of Karatiolugu who had not been at Hana when the killing took place but who had close peacetime contacts with the Bodi, was an indiscriminate call to arms. The speaker, Karamalkabanya, pointed out that the people at Gura were just as much Bodi as those at Hana. He ended his speech by saying that he didn't care if his crop [at Kuduma] was lost as a result of hostilities, because the Bodi [at Merkule, on the opposite bank from Kuduma] would also lose theirs, and they too would be hungry.

'The man we are talking about is dead. He is being eaten by vultures. I'm waiting for something to be done about it now—today.....Are we just going to let ourselves be wiped out?'

'I don't care if my crop is lost, along with that at Merkule—then both we and the Bodi will be hungry together.'

In fact, the Mursi stood to lose a great deal more than the Bodi from this policy, since the cultivable area at Merkule is minute compared with that at Kuduma. This was therefore an extreme view, and Karamalkabanya's long-standing Bodi connections may be relevant in accounting for it. In 1960 he had been cultivating along the river Dom, in a Bodi cultivation area about an hour's walk north of the Mara, and he named a Bodi territorial section as the one to which he belonged. His "hawkish" sentiments, therefore, may have been at least partly due to a desire to reduce any ambiguity that might have attached to his allegiance. There followed two speeches which, while dwelling fully on the culturally valued norm of retaliation for its own sake, nevertheless generally supported Karatiolugu's call to direct this retaliation exclusively against the Bodi at Hana. The third speaker ended his speech as follows:

'Only don't attack their cultivation areas—anyone who does that hasn't any guts. This must be said clearly, so that even a half-wit will get the message.'

Karatiolugu is right: follow the dead man's footsteps and revenge him at Hana. If we were men we would do it today. What's got into you? Let's get everyone together and start moving. And if we have to abandon the Kuduma crop, then we'll abandon it. If we do the same as we did when Kennodorosi's son [the Mursi youth killed on the 1st June 1970, by Bodi near the River Dom] was killed—just talk—then don't bother to make another speech. Don't make another speech, Karatiolugu. We Mursi are always hungry—when will we ever get enough to eat?'

Encouraged, or perhaps goaded, by these remarks, Karatiolugu rose again to make the fourth speech, which he directed at the second speaker, Karamalkabanya.

'Did you mention Merkule, Karamalkabanya? Is that where the corpse is lying? Weren't we still at Hana this time yesterday? Didn't we start out from Hana when the moon rose and come straight to the Omo, here at Koibatha? By now their men will have all gone to the cattle. If you talk about Merkule and some fool goes and kills a woman there, what then? Kill men only. As for women...what about Dakale's wife? When a Bodi raider tried to break off her necklace she just dodged and came back along the path. And Donuge's daughter: the murderer [at Hana] actually passed her on the path. After firing a shot he went to look at the body and, as he was coming away, he passed the girl—she just stood back and he went by, without harming her. Don't forget that!'

'Don't go along the banks of the Omo: go out, altogether, into the plain, then go north, kill someone and come back along the bed of the Mara. Let the people at Kuduma go on watching their crops. If we abandoned Kuduma, would it end there? Wouldn't they come and attack us here as well? We ought to make sure that only men get killed. Do the Bodi ever kill women? Isn't it only men they are interested in?'

'If they lift a spear against one of our women, then we'll know what to do. If they attack here at Koibatha, and kill women, then we will do the same. Otherwise kill only men, so that when peace is made none of our women will have been killed. The same goes for herd boys: if they kill ours then we will go and kill theirs.'

Although he thus reiterated that they should not attack the Bodi at Merkule or Gura, Karatiolugu did not state squarely the practical necessity of taking in the Kuduma harvest—the first reasonable harvest in northern Mursi country for three years. In his first speech his argument had been that an attack on the Gura Bodi would be no deterrent to those at Hana. This time he argued that to attack the Bodi at Merkule would be tantamount to involving women in the hostilities. He did not, however, explicitly state the clear practical side to the convention that women should not be involved. He still spoke, in this second speech, more in terms of a code of honour than of economic advantage. Two speeches later, Karamalkabanya rose to make a second speech in which he accepted Karatiolugu's view, which was clearly becoming that of the meeting as a whole. He spoke very briefly.

'Karatiolugu: I was het up when I spoke before. But since there are still only a few of us here, keep it to yourselves—don't let it go any further. If the Bodi leave their crop to the baboons, they'll do so of their own accord. We'll attack them outside—yes, I agree with that.'

There were two more speeches, generally reiterating the view first expressed by Karatiolugu, and then the oldest and most authoritative man present, Mitatu, rose to make the tenth and

penultimate speech.

He began, in a fashion characteristic of the experienced public speaker, by reminding the younger members of his audience that he was old enough to remember how debates were conducted in their grandfathers' days:

'I saw how people used to take it in turns to speak—they didn't just sit in silence. In those days there were times as bad as this. But you people don't know how to behave.'

He then spoke of the period when, having lost most of his cattle from rinderpest, he had been forced to live on grain, at the Omo and in the bushbelt cultivation areas. But during this time he had not ceased to care about the cattle: he sent "warnings and advice" to the cattle camps, this being a reference to his prowess as an interpreter of the flight patterns of birds.

'When I lost my cattle I went off and cultivated in the bush. My children were born in the bush. And when there was any trouble I sent warnings and advice. When the Hamar attacked and we had to retreat to the other side of the Omo, I made speech after speech. It was I who said where the cattle should be taken. You saw all that.'

More recently, and despite his years, he had remained with the cattle in the eastern grazing areas and had played a leading part in the many debates which had taken place at Mara to discuss the Bodi threat. But his advice had been ignored.

'I made so many speeches that I had hardly any words left. I told the youngsters to go scouting, and yesterday morning I spoke against going up to get that grain at Hana—didn't I explain by drawing in the dust? I wanted only Girabithela and Dumar to go. Why did the rest of you go? Didn't I tell you that I could see that the land was rotten and that we were in danger of being wiped out?.....Did I eat anything when the crops failed last year? Did I eat at anyone's shade tree? I only know about cattle.....When you ask a man who knows about birds what the situation is, and he says that the birds indicate such and such, then you move—you dive into the bush.'

Mitatu was thus presenting himself as a man of superior wisdom and experience, who had given all the right warnings but who had not been listened to. He then spent the remaining third of his speech underlining, in the most unambiguous fashion, the need to limit retaliation to Hana. He even went so far as to suggest that the Mursi send a message to the Bodi at Merkule, ostensibly to find out who was responsible for the killing, but in fact to come to an understanding about this limitation of hostilities.

'If you are real men, get on your feet and go up there now, this evening.

If they haven't yet heard the news at Merkule, tell them:

—"You people over there!"

—"Eh?"

—"Who was it who did the killing?"

—"What killing?"

—"Up there at Hana. Was it the Hana people or those at Gura?"

—"It was nothing do to with us."

Now get hold of a boy and send him up there.'

Being old enough to ignore the norm of revenge and immediate retaliation which constrains the public utterances of younger men, Mitatu was the only speaker to state baldly the overriding need to save the Kuduma harvest, and he quoted a precedent from an earlier Mursi-Bodi war to show that they and the Bodi could still take in and store their respective harvests, despite the war.

'As for those at Merkule, tell them the news and weigh their intentions. The only good crop we have now is at Kuduma. If we go to war now and lose that crop we are finished. I've been doing all I can to keep the boys from going up there. They told me they would stay at Mara, with their cattle, but as I speak now they are probably already at Dom, sweating. Those people at Gura just take pot-shots at people on their way to get grain. They are not seriously interested in war. So go and strike at the Hana people. If they want war, then let it be as it was last time, when we were cultivating at Udulum. There were some Bodi cultivating there as well, but we stayed on and stored our crop at Mara—they stored theirs at Jana. That is all I have to say.'

All the speakers in this debate were agreed at the outset that some retaliatory action must be taken against the Bodi, but there was disagreement as to what form this retaliation should take. The disagreement was resolved in favour of Karatiolugu's position, it being accepted by all in the end that saving the Kuduma crop was more important than keeping ahead of, or even up with, the Bodi in the tit-for-tat of the present war. All the speakers thus accepted that the Bodi at Merkule would have to be left alone. There was not quite such unambiguous agreement about whether Gura should also be exempted from attack, but since the people cultivating at Merkule kept their cattle at Gura, this logically followed. There was also some ambiguity about when any retaliation should take place—immediately after the debate or after a ceremony of mourning for the dead man had taken place on the next day. Thus, if any decision was made at this debate, it was a decision not to attack the Bodi at Merkule.

But there was no completely effective way in which this decision could be enforced. The problem was that of preventing some young hothead from going north to kill the first Bodi he encountered, wherever he encountered him. And this is in fact what happened, although no attack was made on Merkule, and although the Kuduma harvest was taken in at the end of February. On the day after the debate, while the ceremony of mourning for the dead man was taking place, a young man, about 17 years old, went north and killed a young Bodi man, of about the same age, at Gura. Short of killing a Bodi woman at Merkule, he could hardly have acted less in accordance with the prevailing view at the debate—that retaliation should apply only to Hana, and only to adult men. He had inflicted what the Mursi call a "skin wound", which did not settle the score—because the dead Mursi was a married man—and which went dangerously close to breaking the conventions of Mursi-Bodi hostilities. It was nevertheless open to the Bodi to treat the act, if it suited them, as not reflecting "official" Mursi policy, as, for example, it had suited Mitatu, in his speech, to interpret the killing of Mursi on their way to the highlands, by Gura people.

In fact, the Bodi appear to have been as anxious as the Mursi to avoid an immediate escalation of the war. On the 15th January the Bodi priest at Gura, Kori, came to the Omo, opposite Kuduma, and shouted across a message to the Mursi, the gist of which was that, with the killing of the Bodi youth at Gura, the account should be treated as temporarily settled. They were all very hungry and no further action should be taken by either side until the Omo harvest had been taken in and people had moved back to the grazing areas. This is indeed what happened. There followed a month or two in which no raids took place and then, from about March until we left the field in September, mutual raiding continued. Mursi raiding parties went as far north as Hana, while the Bodi attacked cattle camps south of the River Bennakora. No cattle were taken in these raids, by either side, but the death

toll continued to rise. There were, however, at least on the Mursi side, no deaths among women and children.

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