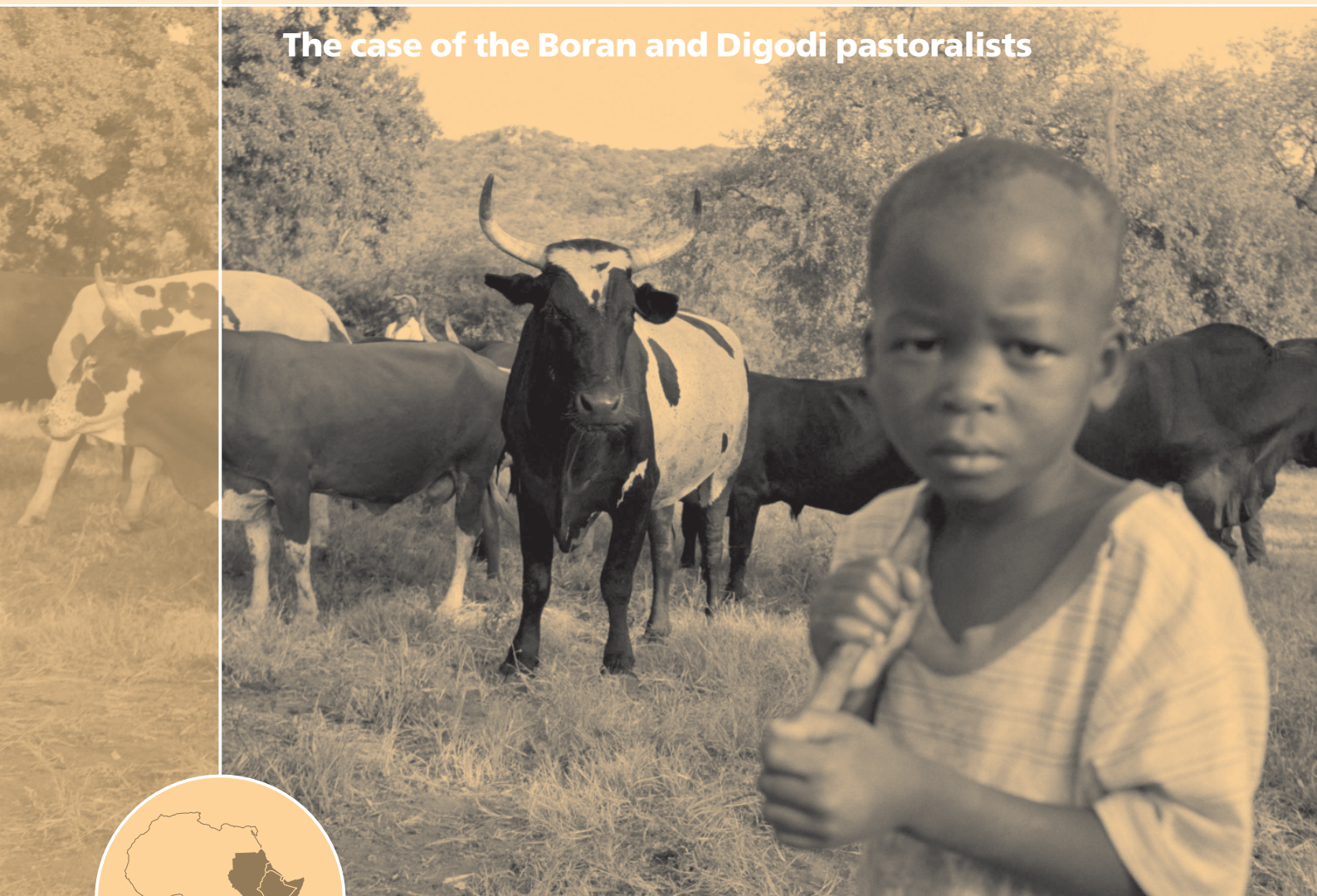


The changing nature of pastoral conflicts in south-eastern Ethiopia:

The case of the Boran and Digodi pastoralists



Mohammud Abdulahi

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AFRICA PEACE FORUM, PASTORALIST CONCERN ASSOCIATION ETHIOPIA,
INTERAFRICA GROUP, SAFERWORLD

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Objectives and methodology

This paper assesses the changing nature of pastoral conflicts in south-eastern Ethiopia, with particular emphasis on the conflicts between the Boran and Digodi ethnic groups. It makes recommendations to the Ethiopian Government and donors to ensure that their interventions in pastoral regions contribute to peace-building.

The first part of the paper discusses the circumstances of pastoralist communities in Ethiopia and outlines the main causes of pastoral conflict between the Boran and Digodi. The second part provides an historical overview of violent conflicts between the Boran and Digodi from the colonial period to the present. This includes a discussion of the impact of the changes in the federal structure of Ethiopia since 1991 on the conflicts. Finally, the paper provides an analysis of the efforts made to resolve the recent conflicts between the Boran and Digodi and puts forward recommendations.

In this research both primary and secondary data have been used. Interviews have been conducted with various social groups and local officials from the Boran and Digodi groups. The primary data collected was analysed in light of the existing literature and legal documents.

The draft report was presented at a workshop organised in Addis Ababa in August 2004.¹ The meeting brought together 55 participants including district council members, police commissioners, community elders, young people, women, relevant sub-district and regional state officials. In addition, participants from Addis Ababa University, Ethiopian NGOs, media and the Ethiopian Ministry of Federal Affairs attended. The discussions and comments received during the workshop have fed into the report.

Acronyms

EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
EU	European Union
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
NGO	non-governmental organisation
PCAE	Pastoralist Concern Association Ethiopia
RCCHE	Research Centre for Civic and Human Rights Education

¹ The workshop also included discussion of a research report conducted by the Ethiopian Pastoralist Research and Development Association, entitled 'Addressing pastoralist conflict in Ethiopia: The case of the Kuraz and Hamer sub-districts of South Omo zone'. This report has been published separately by the Africa Peace Forum, EPaRDA, InterAfrica Group and Saferworld. The workshop report was published by the same organisations and PCAE.

Executive summary

THE CONFLICTS BETWEEN THE BORAN AND DIGODI PASTORALISTS are as old as the relations between these two groups. However, the nature of the conflicts has changed over the last decade. Grazing land is shrinking as a result of many internal and external factors, including the expansion of cultivation, and human and animal population growth. Changes in climate and environmental degradation have also caused recurrent drought. There is no doubt that all these factors intensify competition over pasture and water in the area among the pastoralists, resulting in frequent armed conflicts.

There are many problems that have fuelled the Boran/Digodi pastoral conflicts. First, there are conflicts of interest among the local government officials in the areas. This means that the conflicts are not merely between the Boran and Digodi ethnic groups, but between the two administrations of the Oromia and Somali regional states. The 1995 Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) Constitution guarantees the equality and rights of ‘nations, nationalities, and peoples’ to self-administration, but this principle has been abused by some local officials to advance their own interests. Many of the local officials take official positions that protect the interests of their kinship groups even if this is at the expense of the interests of other groups – a situation that has worsened conflicts between ethnic groups in the area.

Second, there is a lack of timely intervention and resolution by the federal government due to the absence of commitment and in-depth knowledge. The current regime may also be reluctant to intervene because it has sought to distance itself from the legacy of the monarchy and Derg, who were perceived as being biased in their involvement in the Boran/Digodi conflicts. Over a decade after the adoption of the present state structure, border disputes between the two regional states still persist and fuel armed Boran/Digodi conflicts. Even though their cases were brought to the House of the Federation (one of the two chambers of the federal parliament composed of nations, nationalities and peoples and in charge of addressing such problems) many years ago, the disputes have not been addressed.

Third, traditional authorities, including mechanisms for resolving conflicts, have been undermined. The establishment of local administrations has affected traditional authorities. Traditional leaders who act as representatives of their respective ethnic groups feel they possess decision-making powers. On the other hand, young government officials from the same ethnic group (the ethnically-based elite) possess the state power and claim to have decision-making power.

As a consequence of the conflicts, a large part of prime grazing land together with essential pasture and water points are deserted. This has aggravated the scarcity of pasture and water as well as overgrazing in other areas. The result is environmental

degradation and infestation of parasites causing animal diseases. In addition, many pastoralist families have been displaced and have become vulnerable to starvation. The flow of displaced people has contributed to the destruction of the already fragile environment. It has become a question of survival for the displaced to cut and burn trees for firewood. The two pastoralist groups have also become good markets for arms smugglers, as there is a great demand for weapons.

These conflicts can only be solved through ongoing collaboration between the government structures (at the federal and local level), traditional leaders and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or social organisations working in the area. The issue of the demarcation of administrative boundaries needs to be addressed and traditional mechanisms to regulate the shared use of common natural resources need to be supported to function effectively. Additionally, the consequences of previous conflicts, such as displaced people, reparations or prosecutions of those responsible for killings and destruction, need to be addressed. And development programmes should be implemented in parallel with peace-building programmes to ensure that the root causes of conflicts are addressed and active reconciliation promoted. In this regard, conflict-sensitive development and the prioritisation of conflict issues should be central to external assistance to Ethiopia, including within the European Union's (EU) Country Strategy Papers under the Cotonou Agreement.

1

Introduction

CONFLICTS BETWEEN PASTORALISTS IN SOUTHERN ETHIOPIA have existed in different forms for centuries and are not new phenomena. However, these conflicts have intensified and changed over the last decade due to a range of factors including environmental degradation and changes in the federal structure of Ethiopia. The Boran and Digodi pastoralists share common pastoral resources not only in Ethiopia, but also across the border in Kenya. They dwelt in one administrative province in the pre-federal Ethiopia and lived in peace for many years, though they experienced occasional conflicts over access to resources. In their long-lasting relationship, they developed a common approach to shared resources, culture and governance systems.

Since the adoption of a new, more ethnically-based federal structure, the two ethnic groups have been separated by administrative boundaries.² Violent and deadly conflicts have emerged in recent years in the Liben district of the Borena (now Guji) zone of Oromia regional state and the Filtu district of the Liben zone of the Somali regional state. These conflicts can hardly be labelled as ethnic conflicts, but their causes, degree, intensity and forms have changed recently. New issues include the emergence of a local ethnically-based elite and claims over land ownership rather than resource use rights. The dynamics of pastoral life are undergoing intensive changes in the study area in the absence of meaningful development to optimise pastoral production systems.

Pastoral communities in Ethiopia

The Horn of Africa is home to some of the world's major pastoral communities. By virtue of its climate, the bulk of the territory outside the highlands has been the pastoralists' domain, representing a large share of the sub-region's population. The pastoralist livelihood requires both extensive use of land and freedom of movement. Every herd must have access to ecologically specialised and seasonally varied grazing lands and watering points. This is needed to provide for the varied foraging needs of different livestock and to afford a margin of safety against the vagaries of rainfall. So the best protection against unreliable rainfall is control over extensive territory, preferably containing a regular supply of water. Such a grazing system requires considerable space.

Pastoralists in Ethiopia occupy 61 percent of the total territory of Ethiopia and are estimated to represent 12 percent of the population. This amounts to 6.5 million people.³ Ethiopian pastoralists are minorities made up of 29 different ethnic groups

² In 1995 the new federal Constitution was adopted. Ethiopia is a Federal Democratic Republic comprising the Federal State and the state members. Regional member states of the Republic are: Tigray; Afar; Asmara; Oromia; Somalia; Benshangul (Gumuz); Southern People's; Gambella People's; and Harari People. The Federal State and the regional states have legislative, executive and judicial powers.

³ Gedamu F, Ethiopian Institute for Peace and Development, 2001

belonging to Kushite and Nilotic speakers. The majority of pastoralists in Ethiopia belong to the Somali, Boran and Afar groups. There are also the Karayu, Ittu, and Jille Oromo that live near and along the Awash National Park in the centre of the country.⁴ Most other groups of pastoralists, notably the Boran, Afar and Somali, live at the peripheries of the country, bordering neighbouring countries. There are also some other small groups of pastoralists and agro-pastoralists in western Ethiopia.⁵

The Ethiopian pastoral areas contribute to national wealth by making dry land productive. Most of the livestock population in Ethiopia comes from the pastoral areas. According to some studies, the pastoral areas account for 28 percent of the cattle in Ethiopia; 26 percent of sheep; 60 percent of goats and 100 percent of camels. The pastoral areas are also rich in natural resources including surface and ground water, minerals and a wide range of flora and fauna. The deposit of natural gas, geothermal, metallic and non-metallic minerals as well as the existence of many national parks and wildlife sanctuaries are clear indications of the rich resource potential of pastoral areas. Therefore, these parts of the country should not merely be considered as producing exclusively livestock. They have multiple economic and social purposes such as livestock production, irrigation, minerals, tourism and important bio-diversity. In spite of existing and potential resources, the pastoral areas are the most underdeveloped areas in the country. These regions are prone to drought, famine and conflict. Pastoralists are actually the most marginalised communities, both politically and economically.

The Ethiopian pastoralists face further threats to their way of life and survival. They have undergone changes, such as population growth, loss of prime grazing lands, displacement and an influx of refugees. External factors play a key role in posing these threats to their way of life. Even interventions that have been intended as positive have resulted in serious damage. The constriction and degradation of their habitat, loss of complementary economic activity and lack of supplementary sources of income have critically affected the pastoralist economy.

These factors have been fuelling pastoral conflicts in Ethiopia. Some of the causes of conflicts involve regional and inter-state border clashes and ethnic conflicts. There is a long history of conflict among various pastoral groups, which pitted sections of clans, of tribes and ethnic groups against each other. Inter- and intra-ethnic conflicts between pastoralists have also occurred more recently following the formation of the nation state during and after the colonial period.

Pastoral conflicts in the past were less devastating as they mainly involved the use of traditional weapons such as bows, arrows and spears. However, the widespread availability of small arms and light weapons has significantly increased the lethality of these conflicts. Indeed, the pattern and forms of the recent violent conflicts in pastoral areas indicate that they have involved large-scale livestock raiding, seizure of the neighbouring ethnic group's territories by military force and what has virtually become warfare.⁶

Communities used to settle their conflicts effectively themselves but, although many of these traditional structures still exist, they have become less effective and are sometimes actively undermined by newly emerging ethnic elites or local government officials with their own agendas.

⁴ Hogg, R S (ed), *Pastoralists, ethnicity and the state in Ethiopia*, (Haan Publishing, 1997).

⁵ Getachew K, 'Conflict prevention, management and resolution in pastoral areas of Ethiopia: An overview of South Omo area pastoral conflict', presented at a workshop for the senior policymakers of the Regional States of Ethiopia (2003).

⁶ *Ibid.*

Boran and Digodi pastoralists

The Boran and Digodi pastoralists live in south-eastern Ethiopia. They share common pastoral resources not only in Ethiopia but also across the border in Kenya. There are two major ethnic groups in the locality under consideration, the Oromo and the Somali. The Boran belong to the Oromo group, while the Digodi belong to the Somali. The two pastoral groups, who originate from the wider Kushitic family, dwell in the same administrative province, called Borena Awraja, before Ethiopia adopted an ethnically-based federal structure following the overthrow of the Derg regime in 1991. As a result of the new federal structure, the Boran and Digodi were split between two regional states, Somali regional state and Oromo regional state.

The Boran pastoralists now dwell in the Guji and Borena zones of the Oromia regional state with a relatively large population in the Borena zone. Both zones border on the Liben zone of the Somali regional state. Digodi pastoralists live in the Liben zone of the Somali regional state, in general, and the Liben district (*woreda*), in particular, where they have tribal reserve land and pasture.

With regard to resource management, both the Boran and the Digodi pastoralists consider land and pasture as the communal property of all of the members of their group. Pasture is considered as a gift from God (*Waaqa* for the Boran and *Allah* for the Digodi), and it does not belong to specific individuals. Land and pasture are managed by the traditional authority with the power to supervise the management of communal resources. Individuals and groups have usufructuary rights (rights to use) over the land and pasture. For instance, as quoted from a Digodi elder, the rules (*xeer*) for the use of resources apply throughout the Digodi land in Ethiopia and Kenya. The same is true for Boran pastoralists. Within both the Boran and Digodi pastoral groups, rights of access to rivers and rainwater are free to all, including neighbours. This is typical of pastoral communities throughout south-eastern Ethiopia, where rights to access water points depend primarily on their availability. In the case of borehole water, individual right of access is not free. The prevailing livelihood is based on mobile pastoral production.

The Boran pastoralists are comprised of the *sabbo* and *goona* sub-groups. In both these two categories of the Boran pastoralists, there are several named clans with extended kinship units. The Boran pastoralists name their traditional leader *Abba-Gada*. The Borans also have their own traditional religion with a traditional name for God: *Waaqa*, however Islam has also become influential in Boran society in the last few decades. The Boran economy and way of life is organised around cattle rearing. The formerly taboo camels have become increasingly important among the Boran pastoralists.

The Digodi pastoralists group themselves into ten named clans (*reer*) that are themselves split into smaller lineages (*jilib*) and extended kinship units. The structure of the Digodi is based on co-operative resource-sharing by settlement (*degma*) and neighbourhood (*bell*). *Degma* is a territorial unit represented by closely built nomadic shelters and livestock enclosures. Each Digodi clan has one principal leader. Leaders of all ten clans of the Digodi form the Council of Clans. One paramount chief (the *Wabar*) leads the Council of Clans. The *Wabar* is the chief of the Digodi, a hereditary position taken only by a person from the *Abreshe*, one of the ten clans. The *Wabar* has no absolute power over the affairs of the Digodi, rather he exercises his power jointly with the Council of Clans and other religious leaders.

Decision-making processes are democratic and are made after debates in assemblies. The *Wabar* and the Council of Clans administer the Digodi according to customary laws. The leaders derive their legitimacy and power from their position within the patrilineal descent ideology of the Digodi and recognition amongst their clan members. During the monarchical regime, the *Wabar* were both traditional political chiefs and government-appointed native authority (the *balabbat*). The traditional authority and functions have been maintained and still exist, though they are weak.

Causes of conflict between the Boran and Digodi

The conflicts between the Boran and Digodi, as well as other pastoral groups more generally, are not caused solely by ethnic divisions or disputes. As described above, the two principal ethnic groups in the area are the Oromo and the Somali. The Oromo pastoral groups include the Boran, Arsi and Guji while the Somalis include the Digodi, Garri, Marehan, Gurra, Karranle and many other small groups. The conflicts between these pastoral groups are not solely based upon their ethnic affiliations with these two ethnic groups. One cannot find a pastoral group that supports another group in conflict, solely on the basis of ethnicity. Rather, pastoral groups have formed more fluid strategic alliances with other groups throughout history. For instance, when the Derg regime began to collapse, the Boran and the Garri pastoralists had bloody conflicts, but no other pastoral groups in the locality had joined sides based on their ethnicity. The same was true of the conflicts between Boran and Marehan in this period. There have also been cases of alliances between pastoral groups from different ethnic groups. For example, during collapse of the Derg, there was also a strategic agreement between the Boran and the Digodi pastoralists to form a kind of alliance, and relations between them were smooth. By the same token, as quoted from informants on both sides, the Marehan (Somali) forged an alliance with the Boran (Oromo) in Boran/Digodi in more recent conflicts since 1991. This clearly shows that the Boran/Digodi conflicts cannot be reduced to an ethnic divide.

Competition over pasture and water and livestock raiding have been ongoing causes of pastoralist conflicts. The movements of the two pastoral groups vary according to the distribution of pasture and water. During the dry season, the Digodi pastoralists move to the dry season reserve areas along the lower banks of Genale and Dawa rivers and the areas outside the riverbanks. The Boran pastoralists also move during the dry season to the banks of the upper Dawa river. During the wet season, both groups migrate to the Ellele Plain grassland, east of Diid Liben. This migration brings them into contact with each other and triggers conflict between them. There has been raiding and counter-raiding between the two groups since the earliest period of their relations.

This competition over resources is shaped by economic changes related to both internal and external factors. For instance, the Boran pastoralists are now becoming camel herders, which was never the case in the past. Moreover, access to trade routes is an emerging source of competition. This is particularly true of the trade route from the Kenya and Somalia borders to the major market centre in Negelle town.

Furthermore, cultural practices have been an underlying cause of conflict. For example, one of the causes noted by informants from both sides, is a Boran cultural practice of homicide, which is a prerequisite to the attainment of adult status and to marriage. As noted by an informant from the Boran pastoralists:

“A boy, when he reaches the age of 6–8, is encouraged to kill butterflies and is rewarded by his father or other relatives with a cow. The purpose is to encourage him to become a hero. When he grows up and becomes young (between 10–14) he will be given a bow and arrow to kill a rat-like wild animal named Ilaada. If he kills the Ilaada, again he will be rewarded with a cow. All these are culturally done with the same intention – to inspire him to become a hero. Towards the age of attaining maturity, this boy is expected to kill a man from another group of people in the locality. This is a pre-condition for him to get married and be respected by his fellow Borans.”

This cultural practice had to be adopted by every Boran young man grouped as *Hariya*, in order for him to be valued, respected and eligible for marriage. This was the main cause of conflicts involving the Boran and other pastoralists in the locality.

In addition, the conflicts between the Boran and Digodi have been intensified and shaped by political factors, particularly, the interventions of the government and local administrations, changes in administrative boundaries, and wars between Ethiopia and Somalia.

2

The history of conflict between the Boran and Digodi

BOTH HISTORICALLY AND IN THE PRESENT DAY, livestock raiding and cultural practices have played an important role in fuelling conflicts between the Boran and Digodi. However the nature of the conflicts has also been shaped by broader political dynamics, most notably, changes in state and administrative boundaries that resulted from regime changes, the interventions of government and local administrations, as well as by conflicts between Ethiopia and Somalia. In order to understand these dynamics, it is important to examine how the history of Boran/Digodi conflicts relates to these changes.

Boran/Digodi conflicts prior to 1991

The monarchy and the colonial period

Ethiopia is the oldest independent country in Africa, having largely escaped colonisation by European powers. This independence was briefly interrupted by the invasion of Italian fascist forces in the 1930s, which forced the emperor into exile for five years, however his power was eventually restored. Nonetheless, European colonialism had fateful consequences for the pastoralists in the area, as it redefined the state boundaries throughout the Horn of Africa. With few exceptions, colonial boundary lines ran through the lowland habitat of the pastoralists. The result was the partitioning of pastoralists between several colonial states.

The existence of fixed boundaries created by colonial powers limited the mobility of pastoral communities. After World War II, the territorial imperative of sedentary society was asserted and reinforced by the capitalist concern with market control. The concern to control markets and the fear of political subversion due to the rise of African nationalism resulted in increased efforts to control border crossing.

Therefore, the pastoralist way of life, which is based on movement, was seriously affected by the boundaries set by the colonial states and border disputes became the cause of many conflicts in the sub-region. After independence, provincial boundaries further divided pastoralists. The administrative, security, fiscal and political imperatives of states during the colonial period and thereafter were alien to pastoral communities. Provincial administrative boundaries and tribal grazing reserve areas

were designed to limit the scope of pastoralist movement. Pastoralists were threatened with heavy fines and confiscation of their livestock if they did not stay within the area allotted to their group.⁷ However, pastoralists had never recognised borders and administrative boundaries and therefore challenged the newly established states in the Horn of Africa. As a result, the opposition to administrative boundaries and the limitations imposed on border crossings became a frequent cause of conflict. The state also tried to expand cultivation as part of its development efforts, which often entailed withdrawal of pastoralist grazing land, which was considered 'no man's land', for the purpose of agriculture.

The state's claim to all unoccupied land did not initially impact on the area occupied by the Boran and the Digodi pastoralists. This was due to the fact that neither private nor state investment was made in this area. However, tribal reserve grazing lands were introduced in the 1950s for security reasons and as a result, the state and individual landholders introduced grazing fees in some areas.⁸ The monarchy recognised or appointed leaders of the Boran, Gujii, Digodi and other Somali groups to work closely with government officials in the 1940s. These leaders, or *balabbat*, shared the land resources as well as the taxes collected from the people.

During the Italian occupation in the 1930s, clashes took place between the Boran and Guji on one side and the Digodi and other Somali pastoralists on the other side. In the late 1950s, with the rise of Somali nationalism across the border, the Ethiopian Government became suspicious of Somali pastoralists. The monarchical regime began arming and supporting the Boran and Guji pastoralists in their conflicts with the Digodi and other Somali pastoralists.⁹

The interventions of the monarchy also contributed to sparking ethno-nationalist uprisings in the area. The provincial administrations took sides in the Boran/Digodi conflicts, which played a role in fuelling conflict and aggravating the hostility between the two groups. In 1959, the monarchy declared contested areas that had been subject to dispute by Boran and Digodi, and other Somali pastoralists as Boran hereditary property and withdrew recognition from the Somali *balabbat*. Consequently, the Digodi and other Somali pastoralists were told that they would be represented only by the Boran *balabbat*¹⁰. As a result, the Borans, supported by the government, became increasingly aggressive against the Digodi and other Somali pastoralists.

During the 1960s, all Somali pastoralists, including the Digodi, were ordered to move to the Filtu area and beyond. This incident led the Somali pastoralists to join the growing rebellions against the monarchy in the area. The regime responded very harshly and intensified the pressure on them through the extermination of herds, restriction of movement and imposition of heavy fines. It was actually this repression that forced the Digodi and other Somali pastoralists in the area to seek support from the new state of Somalia, which was anxious to spark an uprising due to rising Somali nationalism. Thus, the local conflict between the pastoralist groups was linked with and intensified by the war between Ethiopia and Somalia.

The Derg period

The provincial administrations continued to exacerbate Boran/Digodi conflicts during the military-style Derg regime, which seized power in 1974. The power and influence of the Boran in the provincial administration during the Derg regime further exacerbated the Boran/Digodi conflicts, as the Digodi and other Somali pastoralists felt that the government was biased against them. The Derg regime undermined the power of the clan chiefs in the area. The areas occupied by the Boran and

⁷ Markakis J, *National and Class Conflicts in the Horn of Africa*, (African Studies Center, Cambridge University, 1987), p 30.

⁸ *Ibid*, p 194

⁹ *Ibid*, p 195

¹⁰ *Ibid*.

the Digodi pastoralists were in the Borena Awaraja (province) of Sidamo Kifle Ager.¹¹ Due to the Ethiopia-Somalia war in the 1960s, there was a strong Ethiopian military presence in Borena Awaraja, with Negelle town as the major military base for southern Ethiopia.

Moreover, in order to introduce modern ranching, the Derg regime enclosed large grazing lands, mainly used by the Digodi and Boran pastoralists, which resulted in shrinking grazing land and intensified competition over resources. After the Ethiopia-Somalia war of the 1970s, the Derg regime was able to reduce violent conflicts in the area. This was possible due to the strong presence of the military forces and sweeping autocratic power that characterised the regime. However, this did not bring a lasting solution to pastoral conflicts in the area.

During the late 1980s, many Somali pastoralists who had taken refuge in Somalia and Kenya in the 1970s, due to the war between Ethiopia and Somalia, returned to their homeland. Their return fuelled resource competition. Furthermore, the civil wars in the northern part of Ethiopia had eroded the strength of the government administration in the area, and it was very weak by the end of the 1980s. This situation gradually ended with the creation of a power vacuum when the regime collapsed totally in May 1991. During this power vacuum, dormant conflicts erupted among pastoral groups such as the Boran and Garri, as well as between the Marehan and Boran. In the absence of anyone to stop the killing and raiding, the situation turned into total anarchy. These conflicts were never resolved formally or informally and this undoubtedly aggravated the hostility between various pastoral groups in the locality.

Boran/Digodi conflicts since 1991

When the Derg regime was overthrown in 1991 by the forces of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), the new government established an administrative structure devolving governmental powers to regions. The collapse of the Derg regime was the result of a persistent struggle staged against it chiefly by ethno-nationalist movements.¹² The Transitional Charter was promulgated shortly after the fall of the Derg regime, by a national conference that gathered almost all opposition parties. The Charter put a high premium on human rights, based on the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and recognised the rights of 'nations, nationalities and peoples' to self-determination (Article 2 of the Charter). In fact, decentralisation was a bold move in a country whose immediate past was marked by a strong emphasis on the inviolability of its unity coupled with a highly centralised power.

Consequently, a law was issued in 1992 to establish 'regional self-governments'.¹³ This law makes explicit the fact that the formation of regional and local governments is based on 'nation, nationality and peoples'. Ethnicity was not explicitly mentioned in the law. Accordingly, 14 regional self-governments, whose borders were determined on the basis of the settlement structure of nations, nationalities, and peoples, were established with autonomy.¹⁴ The Transitional Charter and the 1992 law established a system that could be seen as merely the forerunner of a more ethnic-based federalism, which was to emerge in the 1995 FDRE Constitution. In a country where political institutions had been based on highly centralised power, decentralisation was seen as a threat to historical unity. Federalism, diversity and pluralism had been more or less alien to Ethiopian politics.

¹¹ The Derg changed the name of administrative areas from Teklaygizat to Kifle Ager.

¹² Tsegaye R, *Elbemic Federalism and the Right to Self-determination as a Constitutional Legal Solution to the Problem of Multi-ethnic Societies*, LL.M. Thesis, (Law Faculty, Amsterdam University, 2003).

¹³ Proc #7/1992

¹⁴ Article 3 and 4 of the Proc #7/1992

The federal structure created by the 1995 FDRE Constitution is based on a division of powers between the federal and regional state governments (Articles 46, 47, 51 and 52 of the Constitution). Nine sub-national states were recognised as constituting Ethiopia (Article 47) thereby reducing the number of administrative regions (states) by five. The nine-state structure not only took on an ethno-national colour, but also reserved the right of states to secede from the federation (Article 39).

The study area was already in a situation of bloody conflict between various pastoral groups by the time the state structure was decentralised in 1992. The ethno-nationalist uprisings in the region had weakened administrative structures, leading to a situation of lawlessness in which pastoralist conflicts intensified. Under the new administrative structure, Borena Awaraja province was split into two and fell under the authority of the Somali and Oromia regional states. The Digodi and other Somali pastoralists fell under the administration of the Somali regional state while the Boran and other Oromo pastoralist groups were incorporated into the Oromia regional state. This is due to the fact that the established regional administrations are based on the settlement of nations, nationalities and peoples. It is unfortunate that neither the 1992 proclamation nor the 1995 FDRE constitution nor any other law said anything about how the administrative boundaries should be demarcated.

As a result, the new state structure introduced since 1992 has changed the face of the Boran/Digodi conflicts from resource competition to administrative boundary issues. The two groups compete over shared grazing lands that are under their own administrative control – Borena (now Guji) zone of Oromia state and Liben zone of Somali state. These competing claims over ownership and exclusive use rights to the prime grazing land and water points have led to armed conflicts. A conflict normally starts as a confrontation between individuals, which then leads to raids and counter-raids until it becomes a full-blown war. This is actually where the emerging local tribal elite has attempted to base conflicts on ethnic lines. The local tribal elite has played a great role in weakening both the formal and informal systems of governance in the two communities.

The recent Boran/Digodi conflicts have involved large-scale mobilisation of armed men and the use of modern arms and ammunition. They have resulted in damage to property, loss of life, injuries and displacements.

The Liben District Bureau of Neighboring Regional States' Affairs in the Guji zone of Oromia prepared a report in 2004 assessing the conflict situations from 1992 to 2004.¹⁵ The report includes 15 *kebeles* of the district that all experienced conflicts during this period. Since 1992 the Boran/Digodi conflicts have increased in frequency (two or three in a year) and become more violent with killings, looting, destruction and displacement.

In all the conflicts, the major causes were said to be border disputes between Boran and Digodi pastoralists – struggles for exclusive use rights and claims of sole possession. In the conflicts between the two groups since 1992, unlike the past conflicts, there has been large-scale damage to property, loss of life, injury and displacement. According to the report, more than 20,000 animals were looted, deaths and injuries were counted in hundreds, and more than 11,000 people were displaced, lost their means of livelihood and ended up in the slums of various towns and feeding centres in the district.¹⁶ No reports or data from the Liben district of the Somali regional state have been available but as quoted from some of the informants and from the observed presence of displaced people camped in Filtu, Siiro and Haya Suftu towns, it is obvious that there has been large-scale damage to property and human life.

¹⁵ This report was submitted to the line office at zonal level on 6-8-1996 Ethiopian Calendar.

¹⁶ This assessment of the approximate damage was made only from the Oromia state by the concerned district office. One can easily imagine the extent of damage on both sides if the approximate estimate could also have been obtained from the Somali state.

3

Efforts to resolve the Boran/Digodi conflicts

The role of the state

AS DISCUSSED ABOVE, the state structure has been changed since the overthrow of the Derg, with the modification of administrative boundaries. The Boran and Digodi pastoralists have found themselves on the opposite sides of the administrative boundary between the Oromia regional state and the Somali regional state. The new state structure has not addressed the issue of who should now administer the areas that were previously shared by the two groups. This situation has changed the nature of Boran/Digodi conflicts from one caused primarily by resource competition, to one in which boundary issues play an increasingly important role. With such changes in the conflicts, the administrations on both sides have found themselves directly involved in the conflicts.

Since the introduction of decentralisation and self-administration in 1992, everyone in the locality has been demarcating borders on their own, according to officials on both sides of the administrations.¹⁷ Most of the informants mentioned that since 1992, local government officials have been directly involved in the Boran/Digodi conflicts, by employing government (public) resources and force. As quoted by an informant in Negelle town, members of the police are killed while fighting with one side against the other. These facts were discussed and reflected in the recent peace conferences held in Negelle and Filtu towns, which brought together government officials and elders of the two pastoral groups.

Between 1991 and 1998, interventions by the regional administrations and the federal army had not been very successful in resolving the conflicts and bringing lasting solutions. The federal army usually intervened after many casualties had already happened. The interventions of the army sometimes had the effect of escalating the conflicts by making one group or the other feel that the army had taken sides.

Furthermore, the two regional administrations were reluctant to show commitment to peacefully resolving disputes between the two groups. Violent conflicts often result from minor incidents, because early action is not taken to resolve the dispute. For example, in 1998, an armed Boran man confiscated the rifle of a Digodi herder in Waleysalaman. The disarmed Digodi man informed elders of his group and leaders of the peasant association, who then visited the Boran elders requesting the return of their rifle. The Boran elders denied the robbery and the case was taken to the government administration. With the involvement of the two local governments, the elders

¹⁷ Interviews conducted in May 2004.

from both sides met in Negelle town, but when the Boran elders continued to deny the robbery, no further action was taken. This dispute remained unresolved and the government officials from both sides failed to make further commitments. As a result, the relationship between the two groups became tense.

Subsequently, a Digodi man took revenge by confiscating a rifle belonging to a Boran herder. This Boran man then retaliated by confiscating a gun from some Digodi men in the same way. Two days later, the Digodi man whose rifle was confiscated had done the same thing to an armed Boran man. At this stage, elders from both sides intervened and tried to de-escalate the conflicts over the confiscation of rifles. While the elders were trying to mediate, a group of armed Boran men confiscated the rifles of two Digodi men and on their way back, they robbed Digodi livestock and property. All this time the elders from both sides were trying to end the dispute. Then two young Borena men were killed and their rifles were confiscated. Following this incident, the Boran in Liben district intensified their raiding campaigns on the Digodi, incidents that escalated into a war. Informants interviewed in Filtu described the situation at that time in the following manner:

“On 22/1/1990 [Ethiopian Calendar] hundreds of heavily armed Borans attacked the Digodi herders in Waleysalaman killing 51 – mostly women, children and the elderly – and took about 18,000 head of livestock. Then five days later again they invaded the Digodi, killing 11 people and looting about 10,000 animals. It was after all these incidents that the government troops started to intervene and government administrations from both sides made nominal efforts to put pressure on the Boran to return the raided animals to the Digodi. The Digodi gave time to the efforts of government, but the government efforts bore no fruit and the Digodi’s patience ran out. As a result, on 10/3/1990, in retaliation, the Digodi counter-attacked the Boran and killed an unconfirmed number of people and took hundreds of Boran livestock.”

Although the regional administrations made efforts to find solutions for these conflicts, the efforts occurred late – after the dispute had escalated into a violent conflict. Furthermore, the administrations lacked commitment and in-depth knowledge. It is now clear that traditional mechanisms for conflict resolution and management have been substantially weakened. This has created a gap, however the formal government systems have failed to fill it effectively. Moreover, the emergence of a local ethnically-based ‘elite’ within the local administrations has exacerbated the conflicts and has even blocked the formal state system from filling the gap.

However, since 1998 the government has taken stronger action to resolve the conflicts between the Boran and Digodi. This was initiated by the federal government, which requested that the officials in the two regional states take all necessary measures, together with military interventions, to resolve the conflicts. Peace conferences were held in Negelle and Filtu and a Joint Peace Committee was formed temporarily to settle the conflict through negotiation. The Joint Peace Committee was composed of local government officials and elders from both sides, and therefore provides a good example of co-operation between traditional and formal systems. The Committee organised a series of meetings and succeeded in its peace negotiation efforts. Relations between the two groups have improved as a result, however, there remains a risk of future conflict between the two groups because the Committee was not made permanent and has a limited mandate, amongst other reasons. Nonetheless, this is a clear indication that the government can play a positive role in resolving the Boran/Digodi conflicts.

The role of PCAEE and other NGOs

NGOs can directly or indirectly contribute to the settlement of the conflicts and longer-term peace-building processes involving the two groups. In this regard, PCAE and other NGOs such as Research Centre for Civic and Human Rights Education (RCCHE) and Save the Children (USA) have contributed a lot. PCAE has played major role through development programmes focused on mitigating resource-based conflicts. PCAE works on the Digodi side and Save the Children (USA) works on the Boran side.

PCAEE is also working in partnership with RCCHE on conflict resolution in the locality. RCCHE was able to organise peace conferences and democratically establish peace councils within the two groups. PCAE has played an important role in facilitating these peace conferences and processes.

The other area of work is advocacy. As pastoral communities are marginalised, advocacy is one key instrument that can make a difference. For example, Pastoralists Day was initiated by PCAE and brings representatives of pastoralists, policymakers, and NGOs together once a year. It is also a forum that gives pastoralist elders the opportunity to have continuous discussions and dialogue on various issues, including conflicts.

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Recommendations

A NUMBER OF LESSONS CAN BE LEARNED from the case of the Boran and the Digodi for conflict management in the region among pastoralist communities. The Joint Peace Committee is a positive example of co-operation between local government officials and traditional leaders to resolve the Boran/Digodi conflicts and can provide a model for co-operation in other areas. However, the Committee was only established temporarily, and although relations between the Boran and the Digodi have improved as a result of its efforts, there continues to be a risk of conflict between these two groups. Consultations with a wide range of stakeholders have highlighted a number of priorities for addressing the root causes of conflict and promoting sustainable development among the Boran and Digodi, as well as other pastoralist communities in Ethiopia:

- A permanent mechanism for promoting dialogue and resolving disputes between the Boran and Digodi is required. This mechanism should promote co-operation and co-ordination between formal and traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. The Joint Peace Committee is a positive example of co-operation between the local government officials and elders from the two groups. It should be made permanent to ensure lasting peace and stability. Furthermore, the Committee should be given the power to handle any incident or conflict between the two groups. The Joint Peace Committee can also provide a model for co-operation between traditional and formal institutions to resolve conflict among other pastoral groups.
- The administrative boundaries between the Oromo and Somali regional states should be demarcated in a way that ensures the freedom of movement of pastoral groups and does not exacerbate resource competition between them. Furthermore, institutional mechanisms need to be established to manage shared pasture and water points in a way that minimises conflict over resources. It is encouraging that a decision has now been made to hold a referendum to determine which state should administer the disputed areas. However, boundary demarcation should not merely imply designating the grazing land of the two groups or limiting the movement of the pastoral groups into the commonly shared grazing lands. The management of commonly shared pasture and water points in the area needs to be agreed by the two groups through traditional means, within the parameters of agreed rules submitted to the government. The government should play a role in this regard to make sure that the agreement is implemented accordingly.
- Horn governments and donors, including the EU, should work to strengthen cross-border efforts by regional institutions such as the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development and the regional Conflict Early Warning and Response mechanism in contributing to providing lasting solutions. Because both Boran and Digodi

pastoralists live across the border in Kenya as well as in Ethiopia, the conflict has implications beyond Ethiopia.

- Donors and NGOs should increase their support for peace-building and conflict-sensitive development interventions that aim to address the factors that cause or contribute to the conflicts, including livelihood insecurity and poverty. Development interventions should be designed in a conflict-sensitive manner, with input from affected communities, so that they do not exacerbate tensions. For example, agricultural and rural development programmes should be informed by a conflict analysis, which draws upon the perceptions of pastoralist communities, so that they can be designed in a way that does not exacerbate conflict. In order to enable this, donor frameworks, including the EU's Country Strategy Paper and Ethiopia's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, should contain explicit provisions for conflict prevention, conflict-sensitive development and peace-building.
- Donors and NGOs should support programmes to promote reconciliation between the Boran and Digodi and to address the consequences of past conflicts. There is a need to develop systems of law and justice that can bring people to justice for past crimes, hold people accountable for killings and raiding, and compensate victims. Strengthening systems of law and justice is therefore important to preventing future conflicts. Furthermore, mechanisms need to be established to address the needs of refugees.
- Donors should support activities to improve the capacity of local government officials to address conflict. The local government administrations on both sides lack capacity and staff, and do not have the resources and skills to manage conflicts. Furthermore, they lack an understanding of their constitutional responsibilities under the FDRE Constitution. Donors should support awareness-raising and training on conflict prevention policies and conflict-sensitive development for local government officials (including the House of Federation), as well as support for orientation on constitutional responsibilities.
- Donors should support political freedom, including freedom of the press, so that people are better informed about the existence of conflicts and the steps taken to resolve them.

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Mohammad Abdulahi is a lecturer at the Law Faculty of the Ethiopian Civil Service College and researcher on legal and policy issues related to the environment, development and pastoralists.

Africa Peace Forum (APFO), based in Kenya, contributes to the prevention, resolution and effective management of conflict by engaging state and non-state actors in developing collaborative approaches towards lasting peace and enhanced human security in the Greater Horn of Africa and beyond.

InterAfrica Group (IAG) is an independent regional organisation based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, which focuses on advancing peace, justice and respect for humanitarian law in the Greater Horn of Africa.

The mandate of Pastoralist Concern Association Ethiopia (Pcae) is to bring positive changes and sustainable development in the lives of the poor and marginalised Ethiopian pastoralists. Researching key issues faced by pastoral communities became one of the major objectives of Pcae. The work of Pcae focuses on participatory development intervention and has a strong relation with pastoralists, leaders and community members while benefiting from state support.

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**InterAfrica
Group**



Africa Peace Forum
PO Box 76621
Nairobi
Kenya
Phone: +254 20 574096
Fax: +254 20 561357
Email: sabala@amaniafrika.org
Web: www.amaniafrika.org

InterAfrica Group
PO Box 1631
Addis Ababa
Ethiopia
Phone: +251 1 537602/4
Fax: +251 1 509241
Email: timnit@yahoo.com
Web: www.interafrica.org

Pastoralist Concern
Association Ethiopia
PO Box 41757
Addis Ababa
Ethiopia
Phone: +251 1 661374 or 661214
Fax: +251 1 661197
Email: pcae@telecom.net.et

Saferworld
The Grayston Centre
28 Charles Square
London N1 6HT
United Kingdom
Phone: +44 (0)20 7324 4646
Fax: +44 (0)20 7324 4647
Email: publications@saferworld.org.uk
Web: www.saferworld.org.uk

PO Box 909-00606
Nairobi
Kenya
Phone: +254 (0)20 3743830/3743840
Fax: +254 (0)20 3749780