

## **Ethnic Boundaries and Development: Speculations on the Oromo Case**

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**T**he Oromo language is spoken as a first language by twenty million or so people, almost all of whom live in Ethiopia where they make up around forty percent of the population and form the largest single "nationality". In the older literature they are usually referred to as the Galla, but this is not a name which any of them have ever used of themselves and is one which now all Oromo resent bitterly. Until they were incorporated into the Abyssinian state (which developed into the Ethiopian Empire) the Oromo consisted of a number of autonomous groups which were frequently in dispute with each other. The best known of these, that is those most frequently mentioned in the literature, are the Arssi, Boran, Guji, Karaiyu, Leqa, Macha, Raiya and Tulama. None of these names are exclusive; i.e. the boundaries of the groups to which they refer are often a bit hazy and always permeable. In the literature there are many variant spellings of the names.

Oromoland varies from well watered farmland to desert, and the modes of subsistence range from intensive farming to nomadic pastoralism. Many Oromo earn their livings as traders or in the professions. It has been reliably estimated by Zitelman that at least half a million Oromo fled from Ethiopia during the Mengistu period, amongst whom were many, probably a majority, of the best educated and politically aware.

There are many local variations in customs across Oromoland but all Oromo share common cultural roots and a common language. Most Oromo would describe themselves as members of Islam, or of one or other of the Orthodox, Roman, Lutheran or Pentecostal churches; nevertheless the daily religious behaviour of most people continues to be rooted in rich and complex traditional forms and expressed in traditional poetic speech. This shows most clearly in the words and allusions used in hymns, prayers and blessings and in ritual forms and demeanours. This use of powerful words as modes of social and cultural construction is, in many ways, reminiscent of those Yoruba usage's which have recently been so elegantly demonstrated by Karin Barber ("I could speak until tomorrow:

oriki, women and the past in a Yoruba town", IAI, 1991). The construction and the expression of Oromo personal and ethnic identities are the products of culturally shaped public words, rather than membership of easily isolable and enduring social or political groupings.

In my experience Oromo exiles feel their sense of ethnic identity very, very strongly indeed ; it really does have intense, even passionate, "moral value" for them. At a lower structural level feelings of identity are even stronger: for example, when I was working among the Boran in Kenya in the early nineteen fifties, (my first field research and I was extremely naive and inexperienced). I was struck by the intensity with which Boran were aware of their cultural distinctiveness from their neighbours, and how often the word Boran was used adjectivally. Naughty children were reprimanded for behaving badly, with the words;- "Borana do not behave like that." Simply, proper mature human behaviour was equated, though without any arrogance, with Borana norms. No one thought it at all odd that I had come to study their culture, because their culture was self evidently worthy of study. They were absolutely correct. Some fifteen years later I found that the Arssi had an equally strong sense of their cultural distinctiveness and of the strengths of their culture despite all the sufferings that their arrogant conquerors had imposed on them.

The essence of Oromo identity is active involvement in Oromo cultural values through local ritual and social performances. As Knutsson noted;- "the overt expression of one's ethnic identity is found in small-scale rituals and feasts with exclusive participation of members of a single ethnic group". ('Dichotomisation and Integration : Aspects of inter-ethnic-relations in Southern Ethiopia' in Barth *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* p 97.). But the incorporation or adoption of strangers, individually or in groups, has been constant throughout Oromo history. One became an Oromo by becoming an accepted member of an Oromo community or becoming a client. (See my *The Creation and Constitution of Oromo nationality*). Both Oromo and Shoan societies were in their own folk theories exclusive but, in practice, both were very open.

First a very brief summary of the creation and development of the sense of a national Oromo identity and, with it, a vociferous Oromo nationalism.

### **Oromo nationalism**

Oromo nationalism, the political expression of an Oromo sense of ethnic identity, was a late starter. It did not really get underway until the late 1960's and not really become a mass movement until the 1970's. Oromo nationalism, like other African nationalisms, emerged and developed in response to colonial rule. It is still developing and changing. It took its shape against the domination of Shoan and Amharic political and cultural dominance. What John Peel writes of Yoruba ethnogenesis applies equally to that of the Oromo, it is "a process or a project, rather than a structure", whose "truest ethnography may well be history". ('The Cultural Work of Yoruba Ethnogenesis' in *History and Ethnicity* ed. by Elizabeth Tonkin et al, Routledge 1989, pp 200 & 213).

Oromo nationalism differs from other nationalisms in so far as the experience of Ethiopian rule differed from that of being ruled by a Western colonial power. Ethiopian colonial power was centred in the country itself and not in some distant metropole. The rulers were also "natives", and did not have immense technological superiority over the ruled nor enjoy vastly superior standards of living. Many of the subject peoples were much better off than their rulers, because the south of Ethiopia is, by and large, blessed with more productive natural resources than the north. Shoan settler farmers intermarried with indigenous. The invading elite made political marriages with the indigenous elite. Indeed, cross ethnic marriages between members of the political elites were an enduring feature of Ethiopian political life; it used to be said that Haile Selassie actually had more Oromo "blood" in his veins than any other!

Just as it was relatively easy to become an Oromo it was relatively easy to pass into the ruling group of Shoans. This could be done by taking on their religion (Orthodox Christianity), their language (Amharic) and certain cultural traits such as pantomimes of deference to the powerful and to officials. I mention this last trait because deference to high position, as opposed to age or generation or ritual office, was one which was particularly contrary to the Oromo insistence on independence in speech, almost regardless of the status of the speaker. Even rich and powerful Oromo have to request their clients to do things politely; Oromo do not take easily to receiving orders or simulating deference. In practice, of course, as in every colonial regime, there were many who bent their knees for the sake of land or wealth or power.

The present political situation in Ethiopia is far from clear. I understand that a committee of enquiry into the drafting of a new Ethiopian constitution is meeting now in Addis Ababa as we meet here. So it would be extremely foolish to try and guess the future, but one change that has occurred would seem to be irreversible. A sense of Oromo national identity has been created and, even though that may sometimes seem to be obscured by internal divisions and disagreements, it is clearly and absolutely established. The Oromo language has been recognised as a public medium and can be used in publications and broadcasting. The Oromo expect to be heard.

These are major changes. Expressions of ethnic identity can no longer be dismissed as "tribalism" or "bourgeoisie deviation" or by other cant words. Whatever die-hard Shoan centralists may still hope and scheme for the old Ethiopian Empire has passed away. The Oromo have decisively rejected Amharisation and are demanding that their language written in Roman script has parity with Amharic. Either the Oromo must become central to the Ethiopian political process or they will actively seek to set up some form of separate Oromia, that is an independent Oromo state. Many political activists declare that to be their aim. The theme of the 1993 Conference of The Oromo Studies Association, which is to be held in Toronto in July, is "Resource Mobilisation for the Liberation of Oromia". Maps have been published, such as the one before you, which, very roughly, indicate the boundaries of Oromia. If demarcation takes place on the ground, and goes further than lines drawn on maps, then it is likely to end up as a bloody business indeed. I have been told, though I cannot verify it, that one of the reasons for the continuing flow of people to Addis Ababa, even though there is no work or subsistence there for them, is from fear of some sort of impending "ethnic cleansing". Ethnic group and ethnic territory are already coming dangerously close to being seen as coterminous.

Whatever happens in the near future there is likely to be some relaxation in the absolute centralisation, in declaration at least, which was such a prominent feature of the old Ethiopian state, and some increasing devolution of power to the regions. These regions are most probably going to be based, as in practice and population they already largely are, on ethnic groupings. If that is so then there will need to be great changes in Ethiopian political culture with which, in their turn, foreign governments and NGO's will have to familiarise themselves. NGO's in particular, if they are to follow current development orthodoxy and build their projects around

local strengths and with the active co-operation of local people, will have to come to understand low-level political systems and low-level political cultures. Oromo, and many other nationalities, will insist on being heard. This will not be easy for the agencies to learn. As Spear and Waller have put it so well;—"Ethnicity provides structures of thought as well as of social action. It is as good to think as to be". (*Being Maasai; Ethnicity & Identity in East Africa*, Currey, 1993 p.138). If the agencies are to have any influence, or to do any good they will have to learn to understand those ways of thinking and those ways of being.

The important identities which outsiders will need to understand are not, I think, going to be macro ones, such as Oromo or Shoan (which may, in some contexts, not be all that distinct) but smaller, local ones; that is in the localised working groups and the congregations which meet for rituals, because it is in those that ethnicity is actually experienced by the actors. In daily practice local ethnic and community boundaries will both overlap and be constantly shifting; i.e., a series of different cores each with different attached participants.

On the assumption that the existence of an Oromo nation is now a recognised fact of political life, I will go on to consider some of the components of Oromo ethnic identity at a grass roots rather than a national level; that is those modes of thought and of behaviour, and those institutions, which may be relevant to either, or both, political and economic development. But first I will take a side glance at the general and continuing passion for clearly delimited ethnic and political boundaries. Remembering throughout that the problem is almost entirely one perceived by observers. The actors themselves know who they are and where they belong. As Knutsson wrote of the Arsi Oromo; "To be an Arsi is to be born one, to be brought up like one, and to live like one." Arssi have an "identity... still fiercely maintained". The Arssi and individual Arssi know who they are. (*Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* p 90 & p 93).

### **The passion for boundaries**

In colonial practice it often followed that where one ethnic group could be distinguished from another, and designated as a 'tribe', that tribe came to have a designated tribal territory; i.e., ethnic boundaries and political boundaries were invented and were often even thought of as coterminous. The very designation of a name and a territory gave body and strength to what had before been

something vague. This confusion of language group cultural group and political group continues to bedevil both post colonial politics and development discourse. Indeed, the mix has become so pervasive that, as you may well have noticed already, I find it hard to keep them separate in my own mind!

The impossibility, indeed pointlessness, of attempting to delimit sharp and enduring ethnic group boundaries has been clear since the publication of Barth's *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* in 1969. Ethnographic mapping, except in the form of vague crosshatchings and unbordered blobs, has long ceased to be a social anthropological activity.

Nevertheless, social anthropologists are still often expected to be able to draw boundaries and distinguish between ethnic groups and cultures. In part this may be because the analysis and interpretation of local small scale political systems has been one of the traditional concerns of social anthropology. Indeed, that has often been considered, I would say correctly, to be one of the strengths of the discipline. This interest has often coincided with a similar interest, though for different reasons, by NGO's and other users of what used to be called "applied anthropology"; although the users have tended to seek more "positive", simple and direct answers than anthropologists have been able to provide. They seek answers that they can understand in terms of their own cultural experiences and their own "structures of thought"; i.e. they seek cultural translation rather than learning to think in a different way themselves. The nature of their immediate task, whether it be an agricultural improvement programme, forming a co-operative or distributing aid, almost forces them to operate in territories which have been delimited by contract between the agency and the national government concerned. Those territories should at least seem to have neatly defined boundaries that can be marked on a map; indeed sometimes, as with the old UNESCO Programme on Man and the Biosphere, Integrated Project in Arid Lands (IPAL), a neat rectangle was marked on the map and no one even seemed to notice that the rectangle had quite arbitrarily enclosed part sections the grazing lands of four different ethnic groups. The officials did not think it an important fact when it was pointed out to them, though they learned later! But normally, in order to feel comfortable, agencies seek for ordered spaces within which, a numbered, homogenous and stable population resides. In this they follow an old imperial and bureaucratic tradition: you will recall that, according to St

Luke's Gospel, Jesus was born while en route to the territory in which the authorities had prescribed that his parents should be recorded for the census, or for census purposes as it would probably now be called.

Post-colonial administrations, just like colonial administrations, seldom ask questions of such a "cultural" nature, they just assume that they "know" the answers anyhow.

The creation of clearly bounded territories in which there are political authorities which are responsible for law and order has become something of a Western obsession. This is rather like the industrial obsession with clock time, as distinct from what in Ghana used to be called "African time"; i.e. with the mechanical rather than with the human. The Vance-Owen peace plans for former Yugoslavia appear to be based on the premise that the first step is to draw the right boundaries on the map. In Somalia the US peace-keeping forces sought to put boundaries around the fiefs of each of the different urban based war lords, which rather than limiting their activities often accorded them a status which they had not had before. Meanwhile, the military ignored the large tracts of the country where local clan elders wrestled with words and prayers to achieve some local consensus, and contrived to negotiate peaceful access to water and grazing as they were needed on a day to day basis. The elders got down to dealing with the distribution of the essentials of daily life knowing that they were working in a political environment in which instability, not ordered stability, was the norm. They may not have welcomed uncertainty and shifting frontiers, but they were accustomed to them. ( See Margery Perham *Major Dane's Garden* 1926 & 1970 ) Most certainly the elders made full allowance for firepower; but they relied on the repetition of familiar and powerful words of reconciliation and of prayer to get agreement: that is on the creation of a moral social order, however temporary it may turn out to be. I would be surprised if any maps were consulted by the elders, (though finger diagrams may have been drawn in the sand) or written agreements drawn up; even though written agreements about joint responsibilities for dia payments have a long tradition among Somali. But dia contracts bind the participants into close and enduring moral obligations which can have heavy consequences.

A comment on maps may be worth making here in passing, because they have figured so often both in the past and in the present, in the guise of reconciling ethnic boundaries and territory

but in practice, as a means to deprive the poor and voiceless of their rights.

The written has been and still mostly is privileged over the oral, so that maps, as a form of literate representation, are almost invariably privileged over memories of traditional land usage or grazing practices. Old maps, however unreliable, are sure to be flourished again as internal boundaries are re-drawn in Ethiopia.

It is pretty obvious why colonial administrations should have been so concerned with demarcating territories and with discovering and naming political office holders who could then be held responsible for those demarcated territories. Simply, they had to find discrete authorities through whom they could rule, maintain law and order, levy taxes and so on as cheaply as they could. They soon learned that multi-ethnic units of administration were often troublesome. Overlapping jurisdictions were an anathema even where, as in the old Gold Coast, they could not be entirely avoided. European and Ethiopian rulers both appointed local officials, i.e. some sort of headman, as intermediaries between themselves and the local people. In some places, such as Kigezi District in colonial Uganda, this system worked quite surprisingly well, (e.g. see *East African Chiefs* ed. Audrey Richards, Faber 1960), but generally it froze change wherever it was applied ; rather as codified "native law" inhibited adaptation to changing circumstances.

It is, perhaps, less obvious why, for a period, social anthropologists should have got involved in trying to isolate localised groups in which low-level political power lay, but in Africa some did. I suggest that one of the reasons may have been the overwhelming influence of Radcliffe-Brown from the nineteen thirties through into the fifties and, through him, the positivism and certainties of Durkheim and of Roman Law. This influence is most conveniently evidenced for our purposes in Radcliffe-Browne's Preface to *African Political Systems*, which was published in 1940. For twenty years or so the book was an influential basic text in British social anthropology courses. ( Interestingly the book is dedicated to C G Seligman, whose theoretical interests were quite different; though he was concerned with the development of Applied Anthropology. I have often wondered what Seligman thought of the volume.)

Radcliffe-Brown, who wrote assertively, and with an apparent persuasive clarity, in a series of obiter dicta, stated;- "Every human society has a territorial structure.... This territorial structure provides the framework, not only for the political organisation....



but for the other forms of social organisation." Now clearly every population must occupy some space and territory does often provide the "framework" for many political and social institutions, but it does not always do so. Indeed, most of the essays in *Tribes without Rulers* (edited by John Middleton and David Tait in 1958), which were written by students of the contributors to *African Political Systems*, demonstrate clearly that many segmentary political systems were not structured by territory; moreover most did not have clearly defined political office holders nor clear territorial boundaries nor clearly bounded ethnic groups.

Not, of course, that it would be just to Radcliffe-Brown to blame him for helping to perpetuate a post industrial folk belief. He is certainly not responsible for those officials and politicians whose senses of hierarchy, order and territorial control are so engrained that they persist in seeking for community leaders wherever they have authority to wield and there are subjects to be controlled, whether it be in Africa, among immigrant populations or in troubled housing estates. Such as they are never dissuaded by contrary evidence.

A side glance at some pre-colonial Oromo states.

In pre-colonial times the Oromo demonstrated a very wide range of political formations, ranging from small nomadic groups of hunters and gatherers to complex, centralised mercantile states. States which maintained a bureaucracy and customs posts at their borders and in which the rulers lived in some style. Mohamed Hassen has recently provided masterly descriptions and analyses of the development and the achievements of the Gibe states of southwestern Oromoland, which were based on a rich agricultural base and the control of long distance trade. (*The Oromo of Ethiopia; A History 1570-1860*, CUP 1990). The unwritten constitutions of the successful Oromo states were rooted in Oromo traditional modes of thought. They differed in structure and in political culture from the Christian states of northern Ethiopia, but rivalled them in dignity and power.

Herbert Lewis's pioneering study of the kingdom of Jimma Abba Jifar, published in 1965, demonstrated how the Oromo creators of that kingdom;- "must have turned to existing patterns of organisation, the ones they were most familiar with, and re-used them and reworked them in new ways", while constantly borrowing "useful concepts, traits and practices" from their neighbours. (*A Galla*

*Monarchy*, U. of Wisconsin Press p. 133 ). The utilisation of existing organisational strengths in combination with pragmatic but discriminating borrowing are not only central to all contemporary development strategies, but they have also been a constant feature in Oromo cultural and political history. There is a pointer here from the past, I suggest, for present and future political and economic development. Certainly development planners and political activists will both be unwise if they ignore Oromo history.

Lewis also noted perspicaciously that the kings of Jimma, like other Oromo monarchs, were not sacralised. He writes ;-"Whereas the Kafa king was a fine example of a 'divine monarch', and the Abyssinian kings were surrounded by the sacred, the king of Jimma was considered to be only a powerful mortal. Clearly he was not modelled after the kings of Kafa and Abyssinia." (p124). Among Oromo, he remarks, leadership roles generally tended to be "functionally specific" (p 128), limited in their powers and in the periods for which they could be held. None were tied to specific territories.

### **Boundaries on the ground**

Most anthropologists of my generation were trained to take a materialistic, sociological view of other cultures. This viewpoint also happened to be in tune with my own inclinations but, over the years, I have reluctantly had to come to see Oromo identity as a cultural construction built out of words: it is maintained largely by the instrumental force of the poetically charged words which are used at both religious and secular events, especially those at which there is a sacrifice. ( That simplistic and ethnocentric division into religious and secular can, of course, be a very misleading dichotomy.) These sociable rituals and feasts are awash with those crafted prayers and blessings from which ethnic consciousness is constructed. But I have written, and am writing, on the instrumental power of Oromo words elsewhere, so I shall, as far as I can, limit myself here to examining some of the more tangible aspects of Oromo ethnicity. So where better to start than with its relation to land and water, the material resources on which the people depend for their subsistence.

Oromo, like many other African people, do not classify land and water, and hence territory, simply as material resources which people can control or use just as they will. Certainly, in the pastoral areas, which are those that I know best, water and grazing should

be open to all, even to foreigners, when they are plentiful, though when they are short people will fight and die for them. When there is violence and bloodshed over water or grazing and one side sees that they can not win, then they often simply compromise, change their ethnic label and become clients of their former enemies. This is an old mode of shifting identities, made use of by individuals, by whole cattle camps and by threatened tribal segments which is still in use. The frequency and history of this process, and the consequences it has for tightly raveling up ethnic identities and confusing cultural exclusivity, has been demonstrated and analysed by Gunther Schlee in his brilliant *Identities on the Move: Clanship and Pastoralism in Northern Kenya* (Manchester UP, 1989).

In normal times, water, browse and grazing also form parts of a cosmological system which requires them to be conserved and shared equitably. Water, grazing and soil are there for use by people only for so long as they pray to and offer sacrifices to God (Waaka) and keep his Peace among themselves. This value is not limited to pastoralists, throughout Oromo the utilisation of all natural resources has a religious dimension because Waaka is involved. To ignore the triple stranded relationship between Waaka, natural resources and people is to invite retribution. In practice this means that the proper allocation and use of natural resources requires the prayers, blessings and sacrifices; that is activities by a ritually bounded congregation not a politically or territorially bounded group. It is in such congregations, I have urged, that ethnic identities are nurtured. It follows that there are still many gaps in the Oromo ethnographic record, so one cannot be absolutely certain but, as far as I can recall, there are no instances of either traditional political offices or social groupings that are defined by a bounded territory. There are many ritual offices which are associated with unbounded territories and which 'belong' to unbounded localities. This has not, of course, inhibited both the Kenyan and Ethiopian administrations from appointing headmen with territorial jurisdictions and instructing them to enforce alien, unpopular and often absolutely impractical regulations designed to control water and grazing.

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We can summarise identity by considering at three levels as follows.

- 1) At the level of the Oromo nation identity is a comparatively recent and still emergent construction, but one to which those who have internalised it, and they are a great and swelling number, hold to passionately as an ideology which explains past wrongs and expresses future hopes. It is not surprising that, in its early formulations, it was expressed in a sort of Messianic/Marxist prose style (see Baxter, 'L'impact de la revolution chez les Oromo' in "La revolution Ethiopienne comme phenomene de societe" ed. J. Tubiana. L'Harmattan. 1990). If and until there is some form of Oromo government at a national or a federal level it would be premature and idle speculation to consider ethnic identity and development.
- 2) At local and intermediate levels identity is acted out in daily life and experienced as participation in community, i.e.. units which, by definition, have boundaries which are both vague and situationally determined. It is at this level that development planners need to be most aware.
- 3) There is an intermediate level that of "people" or, to use a term which is squeezing back into respectable usage, "tribe", that is at the level of Boran or Arssi or Guji.

Oromo culture is much too varied and complex to be analysed as a whole, even if we had sufficient ethnographic data to do so. So to conclude I will cursorily examine one case, that of the Boran.

### **The Boran case**

The Boran graze their herds and flocks on both sides of the Ethiopian -Kenya border; when I first worked among them in the early 1950's they were almost entirely nomadic or transhumant. Now many are semi-destitute and reluctantly sedentarised. As I indicated above, they have a clear and explicit sense of their own distinctive identity. Elders spend a lot of time and money (on the

purchase of coffee beans for sacrifice) on maintaining the Peace of the Boran, 'Nagaa Boraaana'. The word Peace is reiterated in every prayer and greeting. (Baxter 'Oromo Blessings and Greetings' in A Jacobson-Widding and W van Bleek. *The Creative Communion*, Uppsala, 1990). Violence between Boran is extremely unusual and causes waves of moral outrage and horror if it does occur. Sociologically, or so at least it seems to me, the most distinctive feature of Boran is the "Peace of the Boran."

As I have remarked in the 1950's Boran did not think it at all peculiar that someone should want to study their history and their customs. Elders would readily name what it was made them distinctively Boran. The most important of these, though not in any hierarchical order, were as follows. (1) Their love and understanding of cattle. (2) That they "had" Gona and Sabho, the two exogamous moieties into which they are divided. One consequence of the moiety system is that every Boran can address any other as a classificatory agnate or affine. Principles of balanced duality run through Boran social organisation, cosmology and taxonomy. Each moiety ramifies into a balanced structure of clans, sub-clans and smaller segments. (3) That they "had" two major Kaallu, one for each moiety, who are hereditary ritual leaders of divine origin. Ethiopian attempts to turn the Kaallu into Imperial officials were disastrous failures. The offices, though not always their incumbents, are held in great respect. (4) That they have 'luuba' or what I translate as generation sets; that is the Boran version of the famous Oromo 'Gaada' system. These four particular folk markers of their own distinctiveness, even in combination, are not in fact markers of a distinctive identity. Observations in the field show that Boran identity overlaps with that of Gabra, Sakuye, Garre and even Ajuran. Boran are certainly passionate and skilled stockmen, but so (I must reluctantly concede) are other pastoralists. The moiety and clan system is, in part a consequence of incorporation of non-Boran and in part a very efficient device for incorporating non-Boran, as is the associated use of kinship terminology. The Kaallu, by the fact that God sent them to Boran are, on the one hand, indicators of God's concern for the Boran and hence markers of their exclusivity, but they are also utilised as agents of affiliation of non-Boran into a sort of rudimentary Boran hegemony. The Boran are one of the few Oromo peoples to still maintain 'gaada' and many, even devout Muslims and Christians, see the maintenance of its religious activities as essential to the continuing welfare of the Boran. The Boran

gaada organisation is in its organisational form specific to them, but gaada is not unique to them, as generation type systems are not unique to Oromo.

Confusingly the Gaada institution has assumed immense symbolic value to many in the national movement as representing the unique and historic contribution of the Oromo people to the democratic governmental institutions of the world. They contrast it with Amhara autocracy and also see it as a model for a future form of Oromo government. I do not view the last possibility in quite the same way. (See my "The creation and constitution of Oromo nationality").

In short then I do not see that there are any Boran or Oromo groupings based on shared ethnic identity that could be utilised either for administration or for development purposes. Equally, to ignore ethnic feelings of identity and solidarity would be to court failure; but ethnic identity is just a very important factor to be weighed in planning, not a determining fact nor even a point of departure. If we seek viable bases for low level, participatory government and development we need to look elsewhere. Richard Hogg has recently published an account of what appear to be such viable base units for Boran in Ethiopia. These are based on local shared identities and rituals and in shared resources. This seems the way forward. ('Continuity and Change among the Boran in Ethiopia' in *Conflict & Decline in the Horn of Africa*, ed. John Markarkis, Macmillan, 1993).