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Pastoralism and the Pan-Oromo Nationalist Movement

by
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In May 1991, the Mengistu government of Ethiopia collapsed at the hands of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)¹. Mengistu's fall provided the Oromo nationalist movement an unprecedented opportunity to further its agenda. Immediately responding to Mengistu's demise, the United States hastily brokered a transitional government whose core partnership included the EPRDF and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the strongest and most visible Oromo political/military organization. The momentum of the Oromo nationalist movement has exponentially increased in response to this unprecedented opportunity. The future of the uneasy EPRDF/OLF coalition and the larger Ethiopian conflict is far from clear. Nevertheless, the Oromo people, in the context of their emerging modern nationalist struggle face many obstacles, some of which are indigenous to the Oromo nation. One such obstacle is *pastoralism*.

A significant portion of the Oromo population engage in pastoral production which imposes certain constraints and challenges to the emerging Pan-Oromo nationalist movement. Though the Oromo make up the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia- estimates range from forty percent to well over fifty percent of Ethiopia's total population-they are nothing but a homogeneous ethnic group². Oromo diversity largely reflects their historical expansion in the Horn of Africa.³ Following Oromo expansion, "considerable diversity emerged among the Oromo tribes as they adapted to varied material environments and interacted with different cultures in the areas where they settled⁴." Located primarily in Southern Ethiopia, the Borana Oromo (a.k.a. Borana) are widely regarded as the original, core Oromo community and are thought to have best preserved tradition Oromo pastoralism. Though this

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piece focuses on the Borana, pastoralism among the Oromo is not confined to the Borana community for pastoral production was retained by Oromo groups who migrated to similar ecological terrain.⁵ Much of this discussion, therefore, should apply any Oromo communities engaged in pastoral production. Largely a theoretical piece, we open by defining pastoralism in general and clarifying Borana pastoralism in particular. We will subsequently correlate Borana pastoralism and the present pan-Oromo nationalist movement. Portions of Charles Tilly's Resource Mobilization theory will serve as the tool with which to conceptualize pastoralism within a modern nationalist struggle. Finally, we will briefly speculate on the likely fate of the Oromo pastoralists in a future, post-struggle era.

Borana Pastoralism

Pastoralism itself, is not an homogeneous enterprise even for "pure" pastoralists. When classifying pastoralists, scholars commonly consider the pattern of mobility. Salzman distinguishes two types of pastoralist mobility *epicyclical and oscillineal*.

Epicyclical mobility consists of short, random migration, lacking any recognizable or predictable pattern. Oscillineal mobility, on the other hand exhibits extended, predictable migration tuned to the changing seasons. "Both of these basic patterns are subject to concentration and dispersion a contraction and expansion, usually around wells in the case of epicyclical movement, usually during seasonal encampment in the case of the oscillineal pattern."⁶ While epicyclical movement is clearly "pastoral," oscillineal migration could be perceived as "serially sedentary" rather than pastoral. Levine, for example, argues against categorizing the Borana as nomadic pastoralists because they migrate between "semipermanent" camps, do not use pack animals and do not "carry their homes with them from place to place"⁷. Disregarding Levine's use of pack animals as a necessary condition for nomadism, "serially sedentary" and "semipermanent camp" both suggest predictable movement characteristic of oscillineal migration. Nevertheless, Gudran Dahl, in his work with the Borana of Northern Kenya, defines the Borana as epicyclical pastoralists. "The dominant pattern of Borana migration is what Salzman refers to as "epicyclical" a movement in adjustment to an unpredictable distribution of pasture and water. Sometimes the Borana camp can stay in one place for six years, sometimes it must be moved after a number of months or weeks."⁸ The apparent Levine/Dahl contradiction highlights a number of interesting implications

regarding Borana mobility specifically and pastoralist mobility in general. To begin with, what time period should be considered in determining the migration pattern of any nomadic people? As Dahl suggests, climatic and ecological forces may coalesce to provide abundant pasture and water within any given area for years, only to unexpectedly impose severe drought and hardship in subsequent years. The apparent contradiction between Levine and Dahl is partly attributable to the time factor. Generally speaking, because the Borana (and other pastoralists) reside in the notoriously unpredictable climate of the Horn, pastoralist exhibiting oscillineal mobility must retain and eventually exercise the capacity for epicyclical mobility. The indeterminate and variable circumstances regarding Borana mobility deny easy classification as epicyclical or oscillineal. The best method of inquiry, at this point, is to step back and address the causal determinants of mobility.

The primary determinant of nomadic mobility patterns resides at the juncture between climatological/ ecological conditions and the specific needs of livestock. As stated previously, the climatological/ecological conditions in the Horn vary considerably. On the other side of the coin, the demands of livestock also determine mobility patterns. For example, the Somali herd camels whose potential migration range is far greater and more flexible than pastoralists, like the Borana, who exclusively herd cattle. The persistently erratic and unforgiving climate of Southern Ethiopia combined with the limited range of cattle project an image of perpetual migration, of limited range and unpredictable direction. As such, Dahl's classification of the Borana as epicyclical pastoralists appears accurate while Levine's characterization of Borana mobility appears to be short-term and cannot be considered representative of the Borana in general. Thus, this work is based on the assumption that the Borana are epicyclical pastoralists. Before proceeding, the claim that the Borana are not "pure" pastoralists must be addressed, for such an assertion jeopardizes the foundation of this discussion.

Some scholars, including Hamdesa Tusso (an Oromo national), have argued that Borana are not pure pastoralists because they do not subsist solely on pastoralist products⁹. This argument stems from the premise that any group which exclusively relies on pastoral products (not acquired through trade, of course) for its survival should logically stand as "pure" pastoralist. The Borana pastoral diet can be subsidized with other foodstuffs in two ways: agricultural production and trade. The significance of agricultural production by the Borana pastoralists can be easily minimized.

In principle, the sedentary and climatological requirements for significant agricultural production most closely resemble the conditions conducive of oscillineal migration, not the epicyclical migration of the Borana. Furthermore, the needs and requirements of livestock run paramount within the Borana community. Cattle not only stand at the core of Borana subsistence, but also as culturally based symbols of wealth, status, etc.¹⁰ When one considers the harsh climate of Southern Ethiopia and the pivotal role of cattle, agricultural production must be relegated to insignificance for most Borana.

The consumption of agricultural products acquired through trade should not determine whether the Borana, or other nomads, are "pure" pastoralists. The Borana trade their pastoral products for agricultural products of necessity, not because they prefer agricultural products. Nevertheless, this does not diminish Borana pastoral status. Pastoralists who trade their livestock or livestock products (such milk) for agricultural products still rely on pastoral production to provide the commodities the exchange. Along with the mobility requirement, "pure" pastoralism should be determined by the primary "means of production;" in this case, herding livestock. Exchanging a cow or goat for grain does not diminish a pastoralist's exclusive reliance on pastoralist production for subsistence. Even if one holds to the principle that trading for agricultural products disqualifies a pastoral group as "pure" one must address the potential trading base of the pastoral community in question. Pastoral products contain a latent protein surplus. The nutritional protein surplus of pastoral products enables a family, with a herd substantial enough to meet its dietary requirements, to exchange a portion of their commodities from agri-products, such as grain¹¹. Even with the latent surplus, the potential trading base provided by pastoral production is inherently limited and has been historically insignificant

Traditionally, many East African pastoralists were involved with dry-season trade with agriculturists. This usually took the form of direct local trade between neighboring households. When long-distance trade was expanded at the end of the 19th century, the goods imported were mainly luxury consumer goods...which involved little alteration of traditional subsistence¹².

The basic characteristics of a modern nationalist movement must be illuminated before proceeding to Tilly's Resource Mobilization Theory.

Largely common sense, these principles provide a base for correlating pastoralism with the modern nationalist movement.

The Modern Nationalist Movement

Any viable nationalist struggle, be it political and/or military, requires a hierarchical command structure with developed and reliable authority roles. Lacking this, movements spawned from below " peter-out" never realizing their goals or potential¹³. A viable nationalist struggle also requires stable group parameters for it is difficult to mount a concerted struggle when our organization's membership is in constant flux. Finally, the nationalist struggle requires a sufficient productive base of support.¹⁴ This holds true for political and especially military conflicts, such as the on-going conflicts in Ethiopia. Zale historian Paul Kennedy explored the vital link between a stronger (relative to others) productive/economic base and military success.

The "military conflict" is therefore always examined in the context of "economic change." The triumph of any one Great Power [i.e. state] in this period or the collapse of another, has usually been the consequence of lengthy fighting by its armed forces; but it has also been the consequence of the more or less efficient utilization of the state's productive and economic resources in wartime and, further in the background, of the way in which that state's economy had been rising and falling relative to the other leading nations, in the decades preceding the actual conflict.¹⁵

There are two discontinuities between the context of Kennedy's argument and this discussion. Kennedy focuses on competition and confrontation between *state*, whereas this piece focuses at the *inter-state* level. Conventional thinking defines the international relations world as a system in which sovereign entities compete within the anarchic world of state-versus-state competition. It could be argued that because the realities of international relations are unique, Paul Kennedy's thesis does not necessarily apply to the inter-state conflict in Ethiopia. This discussion circumvents this criticism and the intricacies required to resolve it by the following rationale: the billiard modern of international state competition in which states rely on their own productive capacity parallels the framework of this discussion which considers the inherent productive capacity of a single contender within a conflict situation. Kennedy's basic premise should apply to the intra-state conflict in Ethiopia. Kennedy's work also highlights broad economic cycles from which he assessed relative productive strength and weakness. This discussion, on the other hand, presents an aggregate

economic model simply defined in terms of surplus versus nonsurplus productive capacity. Neither theoretical modification, however, should diminish the critical link between productive base and military/nationalist success.

Borana Pastoralists and the Pan-Oromo Nationalist Movement

To gain a conceptual understanding of the pastoralism in the context of a modern nationalist movement, we now turn to Charles Tilly's Resource Mobilization theory presented in his book entitled *From Mobilization to Revolution*. The primary intent of Tilly's theory is to explain group collective action. The framework of this discussion, however, leads us to selected portions of Resource Mobilization. The theory presents a static Polity Model and a dynamic Mobilization Model.

The Polity Model, reflecting the familiar schematic of interest-based politics, is comprised of "a population, a government, one or more contenders, a polity, and one or more coalitions."¹⁶ Tilly accords absolute flexibility in defining a *population*. A *government* controls the principle means of coercion. A group which applies pooled resources to influence the government is defined as a *contender*. Contenders can be divided into *members* --those within the polity who enjoy routine, low-cost access to the government; and *challengers*--those who do not enjoy such amenable relation with the government. The collective action of members and government comprise the *polity*. Finally, a *coalition* is any coordinated effort on the part of challengers and/or governments.

In the primitive, static version of this model, all contenders are attempting to realize their interests by applying pooled resources to each other and to the government. They vary in the success with which they get back resources in return; the biggest division in that regard separates the high-return *members* of the polity from the low-return *challengers*. Among other things, all contenders (members and challengers alike) are struggling for power. In the model, an increase in power show up as an increase rate of return on expended resources. All challengers seek, among other things, to enter the polity. changes in the resources controlled by each contended and by the government, changes at the rates at which the contenders and the government give and take resources, and changes in the coalition structure add up to produce entries into the polity, and exits from it¹⁷.

Before applying the polity Model to the Borana Oromo and the larger conflict in Ethiopia, a predictable criticism should be briefly addressed. As Tilly notes, many scholars, including pluralists, sharply distinguish collective action within the political system--such as voting, lobbying, campaigning, etc.--and actions outside the political system such as terrorism and violent nationalist, separatist and revolutionary movements (to take extreme examples). By accepting this distinctions, the volatile conditions of present day Ethiopia would be incompatible with a polity Model confined to "normal" politics. Resources Mobilization, however, minimizes the "political" versus "nonpolitical" distinction. The distinction between "normal" and "abnormal" political action lies in the power position of the groups involved, not the *modus operandi* of political action¹⁸. In other words, when a group within a given population lacks the power to satisfy its needs or desires within the accepted rules of political action, it may adopt alternative methods, such as violence, to attain its goals. Alternative methods are no less "political" than conventional methods. The motivation driving the collective action determines political or nonpolitical status rather than the method adopted. Resource Mobilization can be applied to the present conflict in Ethiopia precisely because the theory accommodates such a wide spectrum of collective action.

The demarcation of a population can vary under the Polity Model. By identifying a government first, the population is defined as those "over which the government exercise (or claims) control"¹⁹. Alternatively, one can focus on a population and then either (1) identify every government exercising control over the population, or (2) specify a single government as the reference point. Our application of the Polity Model will designate the population within the now internationally recognized borders of Ethiopia (see Figure 1) Although the region contains numerous ethnic groups, political factions, etc., the model only reflects the two major political groups vying for power in the transitional government (the EPRDF and OLF) and the Borana Oromo. The pared down cast of characters keeps the discussion as parsimonious as possible. Furthermore, by focusing on the challenges pastoralism presents to the Oromo nationalist movement, we look at those inherent obstacles imposed by the internal structure and dynamics of pastoralist, regardless of specific external circumstances. The polity Model, in this sense, provides a conceptual framework which can be edited for simplicity.

This application of the Polity Model defines population within the internationally recognized borders of Ethiopia, ignoring elements of ethnic groups residing in other states (such as the Borana in northern Kenya). The present transitional government in Ethiopia stands as the government in our model of the Ethiopian polity. Stipulating the transitional government as our "point of reference" is a departure from Tilly's definition and highlights one of its major weaknesses. Specifically, the Polity Model is static; it does not reflect dynamic government formation (i.e. the demise of one governing institution and its replacement by a new governing body within, in this case, as single state).²⁰ The transitional government consists of an uneasy coalition between the EPRDF and the OLF. Both parties are undoubtedly members of the polity. Furthermore, the OLF, widely acknowledged as the weaker party in the coalition, is placed further from the transitional government, signifying a less responsive relationship than the EPRDF enjoys. The Borana are placed outside the polity with their coalition with the OLF duly noted. The Borana represent a challenger rather than a member of the polity for a number of reasons. First, the Borana have historically followed their own system of government, the Gada, under semi-autonomous conditions, primarily due to their peripheral and "undesirable" location. Second, although senior members of tribe Borana Gada Council participate in the OLF organized Council of Elders, the Council, consisting of influential persons of all major Oromo groups, serves mainly to shore up Pan-Oromo support for the OLF and its efforts. The Council of Elders does not exercise a controlling influence over the OLF or the transitional government.²¹ Thus, our polity model displays a simplified and specifically tailored account of the present situation in Ethiopia. We now turn to apply elements of Tilly's Mobilization model.

The Mobilization Model addresses the actions of a single contender.²² Although not all elements of this model apply to this discussion, we will briefly describe the model, in its entirety, to gain a conceptual overview. There are four major characteristics of contenders: mobilization, organization, interests and collective action. *Mobilization* is the extent of resources under a contender's collective control: as a process, the increase in the amount of resources or degree of collective control. Organization is the degree of common identity and unifying structure among individuals in a given group or population: as a process, an increase in common identity or group solidarity. *Interests* is defined as the probable collective benefits or cost for a group derived from possible interactions with other groups. *Collective Action* is the degree of joint group action in pursuing common end:

as a process, the joint group action itself. The above four elements describe the internal characteristics of the contender and reveal nothing of the contender's relation to the outside world. On the other hand, opportunity "describes the relationship between the population's interest and the current state of the world around it"²³. Opportunity has three elements. *Power* - The degree to which outcomes resulting from group interaction favour one group over others. An increase in power is indicated by an increase in favourable outcomes and *vice versa*. *Repression* the costs of interaction with other groups. As a process, any action taken by another group which increases the contender's cost of collective action. *Facilitation* is the opposite of repression. *Opportunity/Threat* - the extent to which groups are vulnerable to a contender's action which enhances its interest; or action that threaten a contender's interests.

The diagram [See Figure 2] declares that the main determinants of a group's mobilization are its organization, its interest in possible interaction with other contenders, the current opportunity/threat of those interactions and the group's subjection to repression. The diagram says that the group's subjection to repression is mainly a function of the sort of interests. It treats the extent of a contender's collective action as a result of its power, its mobilization, and the current opportunities and threats confronting its interests²⁴.

We are interested in the elements of the model which refer to the contender's internal characteristics. Thus, our defined task is theoretically consistent with Resource Mobilization: "So long as we were examining the internal structure of a contender, we could take its external relations for granted."²⁵ Mobilization, Organization and Interests all relate to a contender's internal structure. Describing these three elements of the model, Tilly writes:

The "mobilization model" describes the behaviour of a single contender in terms of interest, organization power and other variables....We have, however, looked mainly at one side of it [i.e., Mobilization, organization and Interests]: the side dealing with the contender's internal structure....By itself, this portion of the model is inadequate. It deals only with the *capacity to act*, not with the immediate incentive opportunity to act [my italics]²⁶

Since we are investigating the challenges pastoralism poses for the Oromo nationalist movement, we are, by definition dealing with inherent elements

of pastoralism. In essence, we are investigating the pastoralists' *capacity to act* in the Oromo nationalist movement.

Mobilization

Mobilization refers to the extent of resources under collective control. This has two elements. The first, suggested by common sense, is the aggregate volume of resources under collective control. The volume of resource can be derived from the productive capacity of the Borana. Nationalist movements require a surplus-producing economic base and it is in this context that we consider Borana productive capacity. Noted in the opening section, the Borana are epicyclical pastoralists for whom agricultural production is an insignificant productive source. Also noted was that the protein-rich pastoralist products represent a latent surplus of minimal trade potential, and that trade historically played a minor, nonsubsistent role in Borana society. Delving further: Can or does Borana pastoralism produce a usable surplus which could be applied to a nationalist struggle? (It is conceivable to raise more cattle than required for subsistence.)

Although one could logically hold that pastoralism could produce a surplus, Borana pastoralism does not yield the surplus required for a nationalist movement. Climatological and ecological conditions in the Borana areas of Ethiopia do not provide abundant natural resources: higher productive capacity of the land would be exemplified by oscillating migration and/or sedentarized agriculture. The lack of surplus in Borana production can also be attributed to livestock vulnerability. The risk of disaster (decimated herds, etc.) weighs heavily on the Borana. As a long-term survival tactic, they use surplus cattle to create a web of social commitments. In other words, Borana pastoralists use surplus cattle product to develop a "safety net."

East African pastoralists seek to convert stock which is surplus to their subsistence needs into social relationships, through acquiring affines, or by tying clients to them with gifts and loans, thereby increasing their range of social involvement. Like the Kababish, what East African pastoralists seek from their herds is 'the maximum rate of increase in total animal numbers for enhancing social advantage, rather than the optimum rate of off-take for maximizing financial advantage'²⁷

Social advantage for subsistence level pastoralists is the ability to survive in times of severe shortage or tragedy. By developing social ties through giving

or loaning surplus livestock, the pastoralist ensures his/her survival in the long term with the network of commitments which can be tapped when necessary. Pastoral surplus is also limited by labour capacity.²⁸ In Borana society, cattle stand as private property while land is communally owned. If the size of one's herd exceeds the labour capacity of the family, then one unnecessarily courts disaster. Under these circumstances, the pastoralist can either 1) distribute the surplus livestock and further develop social ties; 2) try to extend the labour supply within the family through marriage, etc.; or 3) hire someone to help care for the surplus, an extremely risky venture due to the probability of theft. Cattle are obviously quite mobile. The lack of surplus capacity is compounded by the fact that Borana cultural values oppose the conversion of surplus cattle into a usable (from the perspective of a nationalist struggle) medium. The number of cattle one owns determines wealth and status in Borana society. Even though the highest Gada Council passed a resolution in 1988 advocating the conversion of surplus cattle into money, money has no value for the Borana²⁹ and cultural valuation evolves slowly. Furthermore, converting surplus cattle to money clashes with the long-term survival tactic of developing a "safety-net" of social commitments. Thus, we see that from the vantage of the pan-Oromo nationalist struggle, the traditional, subsistence level Borana pastoralism is a wholly inadequate productive base.

Resource defined as surplus-productive capacity coincides nicely with Kennedy's theory, emphasizing the vital link between relative productive strength and military/political success. Tilly's definition of resources also accommodates, but is not limited to, the concept of resources as surplus product. Tilly's *mobilization* includes a broad spectrum of resources which must be correlated with the nationalist movement. "If we are actually comparing the current mobilization level of several groups, or trying to gauge a group's change over time, we will ordinarily do better to fall back on the economist's factors of production: land, labour capital, perhaps technical expertise as well"³⁰ The lack of Borana capital resources is evident from the above discussion. Nonetheless, land, labour and technical expertise require further illumination. Starting with the last component, the Borana pastoralists pass little technical expertise from the vantage points of a modern nationalist movement. One could argue that the Borana pastoralists well versed in violent encounters such as raiding, could contribute conflict experience that would benefit the pan-Oromo nationalist movement. The Borana and other pastoralists rely on violent raids against neighbours to supplement resources.³¹ This experience could benefit the nationalist

struggle. On the other hand, the present Pan-Oromo struggle for self-determination is a modern movement entailing numerous political and technical requirements, such as administration, logistics, propaganda, education, etc. To this the Borana do not represent a significant resource, for like the majority of the rural Oromo population, the education level of the Borana is extremely low.³²

Land is collectively owned in Borana society and thus, by definition, under collective control. This however, does not fit precisely within the context of Tilly's theory. Tilly's research primarily focuses on the West: private ownership of land under a capitalist market structure plus a distinctly different role than the communal ownership of land under the Borana pastoral system. Furthermore, the barren Borana land is of dubious value for the pan-Oromo movements as its resource potential is negligible. Finally, and land use application that interferes with Borana mobility and pastoral production is likely to be met with fierce resistance from affected Borana communities.

Borana labour has historically proven an extremely plentiful group resource. For example, Borana leadership (i.e. the Gada Council) has mobilized the entire Borana male population in response to acts of aggression against the Borana community.³³ Borana manpower is the only plentiful Borana resource which can be used in the Oromo struggle: any modern nationalist movement would benefit from such mobilization capacity. This, however, is not the whole story. Borana labour mobilization potential introduces two critical questions: 1) under what circumstances will the labour resource mobilize and 2) to what extent will the resource be available? This draws us to the other side of Tilly's mobilization concept, namely, the level of commitment or the degree of collective control over group resources. Tilly writes:

To the extent that all of the resources have well established market values in the population at large reliance on production factors will help us set rates of return for resources expended in the political arena. We can then represent loyalties, obligations, commitments and so forth as determinants of the probability that each resource nominally under group control will be available.³⁴

One of the major factors affecting the degree of collective control is the *loyalty* among members of the group.³⁵ Loyalty, a crucial component to the mobilization concept, has three parts: 1) the range of resources committed, 2)

the volume of resources committed and 3) the varying circumstances under which the resources will be committed. In terms of potential for a nationalist struggle, the only plentiful and valuable resource held by the Borana is labour. Land, technical knowledge and a non-surplus productive capacity were shown to be of minimal potential for the pan-Oromo nationalist movement. Thus, loyalty only applies to Borana labour in this discussion.

The volume of committed resources and the range of circumstances which actuate resource commitment are vitally linked in Tilly's theory.³⁶ For example, commitment to substantial resources only under narrowly defined circumstances indicates little loyalty while delivery of many resources under any circumstance shows great loyalty. The three variables affecting the probability of resource delivery include: competing claims on the affected resources; the type of action requiring resource commitment; and the organization of the mobilized group. "If the resources are free of competing claims, if the action clearly defends the interests of every member, and if the group is an all-embracing moral community, the probability is close to 100 percent. Loyalty is then at its maximum, the probability of departure of contestation-exit or voice-is at its minimum.³⁷ *Organization and Interests* will be addressed in the following two sections, but, if we look at the "extent of competing claims" and the circumstances in which resources will be available, we see that the Borana labour mobilization potential in terms of loyalty is extremely limited. As evidenced above, Borana pastoral production represents an extremely delicate, labour intensive enterprise hovering at the subsistence level. The competing claim of subsistence on Borana labour will severely curtail potential labour contribution to a nationalist struggle. The historic evidence of Borana labor mobilization substantiates this conclusion. Markakis notes the extreme human mobilization potential of pastoralists resides in defensive movements, responding to immediate threats and defending parochial, short-term interests.³⁸ This behaviour pattern does not bespeak high Borana loyalty and human mobilization potential for proactive, offensive movements such as the Oromo nationalist struggle. In other words, combining the precariousness of the Borana productive base and the historically limited, defensive mobilization pattern with the proactive Oromo nationalist struggle, the conflicting elements suggest limited Borana mobilization potential. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that the limited potential of Borana mobilization will transfer to the larger pan-Oromo nationalist movement, or even if it does, that Borana mobility will be a long-term phenomenon (see interests below).

Both totalitarian and democratic, political theorists have often considered the mobilization at one level and at the other to be complimentary. The party, in such an account, accumulates loyalties which transfer to the state. However, there is little guarantee that this harmony will prevail. In the usual situation, the smaller and larger groups compete for the same resources. They may follow well-defined rules of combat, and one may consistently have the upper hand, but they compete nonetheless. Likewise, two more groups mobilizing simultaneously within some larger group which is also mobilizing commonly struggle over control over the same resources.³⁹

When speaking in broad terms regarding pastoralism and nationalist movements, we must go beyond Tilly's definition of mobilization. Resources Mobilization Theory reflects a bottom-up view of collective action and his definition of mobilization, in turn, reflects this. Nevertheless, we cannot discuss the degree of collective control over resources without addressing the inherent role of authority and authority figure within Borana society. Loyalty and authority are two sides of the same coin. This introduces a different concept of power than that used within Tilly's theory. Tilly holds that power reveals itself a priori; beneficial outcome demonstrates superior power. Because we are not looking at specific contentions incidents, we cannot address power and authority as defined by Tilly. Rather, we will assess the inherent role of power and authority within Borana society.

Organization

"Organization" is a dualistic concept entailing both *categories and networks*. Categories are "people who share some characteristic."⁴⁰ A fully developed category consists of: (1) a group whose individuals recognize their shared quality; and (2) outsiders also recognize the shared quality among members of the category. This definition parallels Walker Connor's psychological element of self-differentiation.⁴¹ Tilly also includes the recognition of outsiders as crucial for a "full-fledged" category without fully exploring the implications of this. However, the recognition of outsiders only becomes relevant to a category's external relationships with others, thus exceeding the bounds of our discussion. In other words, because we are not focusing on a group or category's (the Borana) relation to the outside world under any specific circumstances, we naturally disregard the perceptions of others. The other element of organization, *network*, is defined as individuals who are "linked" by a direct or indirect interpersonal relationship. Therefore, the degree of common identity and internal network yield a groups organization:

"CATNESS × NETNESS = ORGANIZATION."⁴²

The ethnographic literature indicates a high degree of catness among the Borana. Levine states that the Oromo historically identified themselves by referring to the smaller Oromo subsets, such as Arsi, Mecha and Borana.⁴³ The degree of catness among the Borana, however, appears to exceed that suggested by the historic Oromo propensity toward subset identification. Dahl writes, "...the 'proper' Borana sometimes refer to themselves as 'Borana Gutu,' thereby alluding to the ritual emblem belonging to the Gada system."⁴⁴ The Borana are the only Oromo group that continued to follow the traditional politico-religious Gada system described below. As the political, judicial and religious foundation, the Gada permeates throughout Borana society and stands as a pillar of Borana culture. Self-identification which references the unique, distinguishing characteristic of the Borana reflects an extremely high degree of catness. Although the specific degree of catness is speculative, certainly Borana catness would strengthen the nationalist movement's organization. In fact, there is evidence that the OLF is attempting to tap into this potential. Liban Filate, a Borana Oromo and member of the OLF, indicated that the Oromo no longer open meetings with reference to the Muslim or Christian deity; rather they reference deities of the traditional animist religion practiced by the Borana.

Determining the degree of netness among the Borana is a far more difficult task than determining catness. Tilly offers suggestions on how to judge the organization of any group.

This notion of organization stresses the group's inclusiveness: how close it comes to absorbing the members' whole lives. (For "inclusiveness" we have our choice of the three related standards" the amount of time, the amount of energy, or the proportion of all social interaction in which the members and other people are taking into account the fact of group membership.) Other features of a group's structure one might want to consider in judging how "organized" it is are its efficiency and its effectiveness - or the structural features presumably affecting efficiency and its effectiveness, such as differentiation, centrality and stratification. I stress inclusiveness on two grounds: (1) the unproved hypothesis that it is the main aspect of group structure which affects the ability to mobilize; (2) the intrinsic difficulty of separating effectiveness and efficiency from the mobilization and collective action we are trying to explain.⁴⁵

Because we are addressing a broad category, the Borana, we will not attempt to specify inclusiveness, even though the vast majority are pastoralists who recognize and participate in the Gada system. Such an exercise would lead

to a speculative quagmire of innumerable variables. Instead, we will focus on the structural factors of Borana society to gauge its organizational characteristics and potential for the Oromo nationalist movement.

Clearly Borana mobility and its organizational implications must be reckoned with for, as Lewis notes, differences in economy and the extent of mobility affect sociopolitical organization. Mobility determined by the aforementioned juncture between livestock requirements and the climatological/ecological: it is here that the physical environment makes its most direct impact on social organization. Necessitous mobility is not universally detrimental to group cohesiveness or netness. The high level of Borana mobility provides a rapid and efficient communication base.⁴⁶ The utility of efficient communication for any nationalist movement is self-evident. Nevertheless, the detrimental implications of high Borana mobility far surpass the potential benefit of communication. Pastoral mobility does not provide stable group parameters or established authority roles. In fact, Salzman states that authority roles and stable group parameters are possible only to the extent that non-pastoral production alleviates exclusive reliance on livestock.⁴⁷ A population in constant flux, in which groups continually form and break apart, does not bespeak high levels of netness. Even though this may appear to broaden the base of social relationships among the Borana people, we must focus on the potential utility of these fluid groups for the modern nationalist movement. Citing the work of Anthony Oberschall, Tilly adds, "Among other things, Oberschall points out that newly mobilizing conflict groups usually reduce their organizing costs by building, intentionally or unintentionally, on existing group structure"⁴⁸ If true, the Borana's fluctuating group structure does not reflect an established, reliable social network and group structure from which to mobilize under a nationalist conflict. Organizational efficacy demands, among other things, a degree of permanence lacking in mobile, pastoral groups. Pastoral mobility is fundamentally incompatible with established authority and group parameters: particularly epicyclical migration exhibited by the Borana Oromo⁴⁹ Thus, on a theoretical level, Borana mobility does not bespeak high levels of organization in terms of group flux and the difficulty in establishing a centralized power structure with efficient and reliable authority roles. This argument seemingly contradicts the empirical evidence of the centralized power and authority in the Borana Gada which is universally accepted among the Borana people. Remember, the Gada council maintains and has exercised its ability to mobilize the entire Borana male population in response to extra-communal threats. Such mobilization

certainly suggests high levels of netness and a centralized power structure with established authority. In order to resolve this apparent contradiction, we must delve further into Borana economic structure, political structure and the role of authority and power within the Borana community.

Economic structural differentiation or specialization, as Tilly implies above, signifies organization efficiency. The Borana economic structure, however, is based on subsistence level pastoral production which exhibits insignificant economic differentiation or division of labour and an egalitarian distribution of wealth. Therefore, from an organization standpoint, the Borana economic structure offers little to the Oromo nationalist movement. Borana political structure, on the other hand, is a far more complex institution.

No pastoralist group in the Horn of Africa has ever established a state. Markakis interprets this fact as indicating the pastoralists in the Horn lack a "political superstructure"⁵⁰ To equate political superstructure with the state or, to imply that the state is a necessary condition for the existence of a political superstructure is a dubious assertion. The Borana possess an indigenous political superstructure founded on the well known Gada system even though they have not created a modern state.

Briefly, the Gada is the core institution within Borana society, serving political, judicial and ritual functions. Hultin continues:

According to the rules of the Gada system, holders of the most important political offices were elected for a period of eight years, after which they had to retire and hand over their offices to their successors. Hence, no man could build up a position of power and authority. The Oromo society of that time was a highly egalitarian society of the same type as the Oromo of southern Ethiopia represents today [i.e. the Borana]⁵¹.

The purpose of this paper is not to relate a detailed account of the Gada system, although much has been written on the subject⁵² It is, however, crucial to recognize that like the pastoral productive base, the Borana political structure is fundamentally egalitarian. Although admittedly sexist, no male is excluded from the system. In its pure form, the Gada system structurally limits the amount of power exercised by any individual or group in two ways. First, the previously mentioned eight year cycles prevent the exercise of permanent, monopolized power by any one group. Second, the Gada system always balances power and position with countervailing power

and position in any one cycle. Third, structural restrictions to power are complimented by cultural normative elements. Inherent Oromo ambivalence to authority dampens the power to influence others such that men of high rank cannot order about anyone other than their wives and children⁵³ Thus, the Borana have an indigenous political system founded on egalitarian principles and practices. In the context of a nonsurplus producing economy, high mobility, self-reliance, the subsistence level pastoralism practiced by the Borana yields a very egalitarian distribution of wealth and, predictably, the Borana political institution exhibits the same egalitarianism. However, structural sources of egalitarianism do not nullify all potential sources of power differentials available to the Borana.⁵⁴

Despite the inherent restrictions against economic and power differentials, control over resources, such as land and water, could conceivably introduce inequitable power within the Borana community. The potential power derived from resource control is curbed on a number of fronts. Random epicyclical migration stands as a significant obstacle to concentrated power.

This is a crucial point, as it would seem that the main difference between these two types of nomadic migration is that in the case of transhumanence a regular route facilitates the control of people through the control of land by landowners either recruited from sections of the nomadic population itself or from sedentary non-pastoralists. The main point to be made here is, however, that in an area with very unpredictable climate, as in the Borana case, land which is useful today may be wasteland tomorrow. Therefore, political and economic dominance cannot be based on control over parts of the migratory route⁵⁵

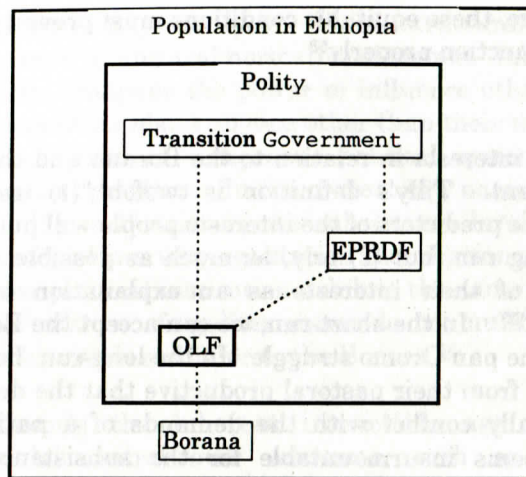
Additionally, land is collectively "owned" in Borana society and, therefore, cannot realistically serve as the basis of inequality, be it power or wealth. Nevertheless, land is not the only vital resource from which to exercise power. For the pastoralist, water stands as a crucial resource and control over it would translate to significant power.⁵⁶ Borana wells are, in fact, regulated under the Gada system, but the power of the officers is limited by: (1) the availability of secondary sources of water, such as streams, and rivers, and (2) the rarity of well sanction imposed by the Gada officials⁵⁷ In summary, under the epicyclical pattern of migration, pure pastoralist production and political rule under the Gada system, power and economic resources are both severely limited and distributed equitably throughout

Borana society. Furthermore, these equitable conditions must prevail for the Borana political system to function properly⁵⁸

Interests

Finally, we turn to discuss interests in relation to the Borana and the Pan-Oromo nationalist movement. Tilly's definition is twofold: "(1) treat the relations of production as the predictors of the interests people will pursue on the average and in the long run, but (2) rely, as much as possible, on the people's own articulation of their interests as an explanation of their behaviour in the short run."⁵⁹ In the short-run, we can accept the Borana's declaration of support for the pan-Oromo struggle. In the long-run, however, Borana interests stemming from their pastoral productive that the demands of pastoralism fundamentally conflict with the demands of a nationalist struggle. The conflict seems insurmountable for the subsistence level productive base which does not accord the flexibility required for a successful nationalist movement.

It is difficult to conclude that the Borana pastoralists will significantly benefit from participation within the Oromo nationalist movement. Granted Tilly's definition of interests does not account for the saliency of ethnic identity and its pursuit as a viable interest. But if we continue with long-term interests reflecting one's relation to the means of production, pastoralism does not stand to benefit from a change in government. Historically, the Borana existed on the periphery of the state and if this isolation continues, a different government will have little impact on Borana life. On the other hand, Borana isolation may dissipate in a post-struggle era. Much has been written on the incompatibility of pastoralism and the modern state. The Borana are in danger of marginalization, serious social dislocation, or both⁶⁰ Borana limitations cited in this discussion remain as salient in post-struggle era of political "normalcy." Furthermore, Borana resource mobilization capacity remains limited relative to other surplus producing communities. According to Tilly's theory and the findings of this paper, political contention in the post-struggle era, regardless of government, will likely favour stronger groups at the expense of the Borana pastoralists.



Coalition

Figure 1: An Application of Tilly's Polity Model (Tilly, 1978:58)

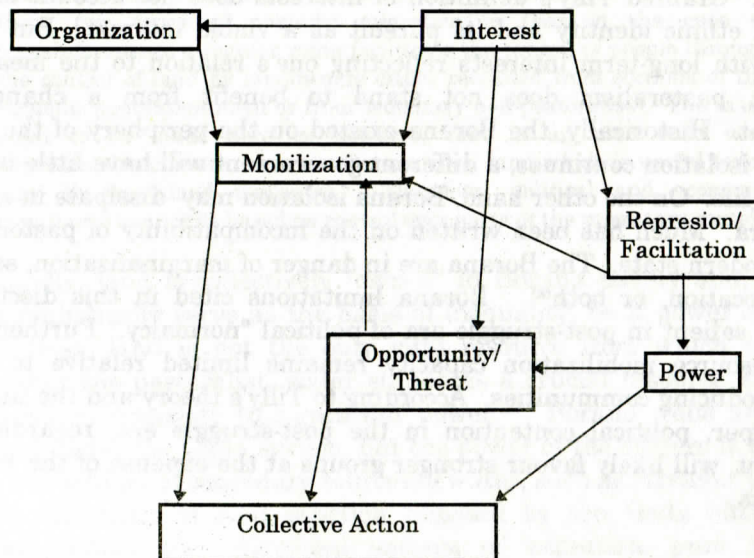


Figure 2: Tilly's Mobilization Model (Tilly, 1978:56)

Notes

1. The EPRDF leadership comes mainly from the Tigrean People's Liberation Front (TPLF)
2. Bereket Habte Selassie, *conflict and Intervention in the Horn of Africa*; New York: Monthly Review Press, (1980) p. 77. For a number reasons, including political. Oromo population estimates varied greatly in the past. Nevertheless, the figure of forty to fifty-plus percent of Ethiopian' total population has remained relatively consistent in recent years.
3. For more detail on the history of Oromo expansion, see: P. T. W. Baxter, " The Problem of the Oromo,": in I.M. Lewis, ed, *Nationalism and Self-Determination in the Horn of Africa* (London: Ithica press, 1983);

Mohammed Hassan, *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History 1570-1860*, (Cambridge: Cambridge university Press, 1990); Jan Hultin, "Inequality Among the Mecha Oromo," in L. Equipe Ecologie et Anthropologie des Societies Pastorales, eds., *Pastoral Production and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); G.W.B. Huntingford, *The Galla of Ethiopia: the Kingdoms of Kafa and Janjero*, (London: International Africa Institute, 1969) and John Markakis, *National and Class Conflict in the Horn of Africa* (New jersey: Zed Books, Ltd, 1990)

4. Markakis, P. 18.
5. Gudran Dahl, "Ecology and Equality: The Borana Case," in Equipe Ecologie et anthropologie des Societies Pastorales, eds, *Pastoral production and Society*, Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1979, p.264; I.M. Lewis. "The Dynamics of nomadism: Prospects for Sedentarization and Social Change" in Theododre Monod, ed., *Pastoralism in tropical Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), p.435; Markakis, p. 18.
7. Donald N. Levine, *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1974, p. 130.
8. Dahl, p. 268.
9. Hamdesa Tusso, Personal conversation with (1992)
11. Dahl, p. 266.

12. Dahl, p. 266.
13. Mark Hogopian, *The Phenomenon of Revolution* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1974), p. 181.
14. We will disregard potential support from outsiders since we are confining ourselves to the inherent capacity of pastoralism
15. Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989, p. XV
16. Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading M.A: Addison-Wesley, 1978), p.52
17. Ibid., p. 54.
18. Ibid., p. 58.
19. Ibid., p. 52.
20. Tilly's convention formulation of the polity defines a government as an interest-free institution for which groups vie for control and influence. This conception of the polity is fundamentally flawed. Rather, we should recognize that governments, as institutions, can have interests and furthermore, that government actions can exclusively reflect government institutional interest, irrespective of the interests of groups comprising the polity. The Shah's government in Iran prior to the Iranian Revolution is a prime example. This alternative view of government and polity parallels the work of scholars, such as Theda Skocpol, who believes the state to be *potentially autonomous*, See for, example: *Bringing the State Back in*, Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, eds., (Cambridge University Press, 1985); Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979).
21. Liban Filate (Borana Oromo and member of the OLF), personal conversations with (1992).
22. Tilly, p. 55.
23. Ibid.,

24. Ibid., p. 56.
25. Ibid., p. 98.
26. Ibid.
27. P.T.W. Baxter, "Social Consequences of Sedentarization for Social Relationships," in Theodore Monod, ed, *Pastoralism in Tropical Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 213.
28. Dahl, 1979.
29. Filate, 1992.
30. Tilly, p. 69.
31. Markakis, p. 33.
32. Tuso, 1992.
33. Filate, 1992.
34. Tilly, p. 69.
35. Ibid., p. 70.
36. Ibid., p. 70-71.
37. Ibid., p. 71.
38. Markakis, P. 34.
39. Tilly, p. 76.
40. Ibid., p. 62.
41. Walker Connor, "A Nation is a Nation, is a State, is an Ethnic Group is a....," *Ethnic and Racial Relations*, vol. 1, no. 4 (October 1978)

42. Tilly, p. 62.
43. Levine, pp. 135-136.
44. Dahl, p. 26.
45. Tilly, p. 63.
46. Lewis, pp. 429-434.
47. Salzman, p. 122.
48. Tilly, p. 81.
49. Dahl, p. 268; Salzman, p. 122.
50. Markakis, pp. 16-17.
51. Hultin, p. 284.
52. See, for instance, Asmarom Legesse, *Gada Three Approaches to the study of African Society*, (New York: The Free Press, 1973); asmaron Legesse, *Oromo Democracy* (Unpublished paper written while Mr. Legesse was at Swarthmore College); Karl Eric Knutsson, *Authority and change. A Study of the Kallu Institution Among the Mecha Gada of Ethiopia*, (Etnologiska Studier 29. Goteborg: Etnografiska Museet, 1967).
53. Levine, pp. 138-139.
54. Power differentials enjoyed by indigenous intermediaries, such as a member of a pastoral community which serves as the state's representative, is well-documented (see, for instance: Daniel G. Bates, "The Role of the State in Peasant-Nomad Mutualism" *Anthropological Quarterly: Comparative Studies of Nomadism and Pastoralism-Special Issue*, Vol. 44 No. 4, 1971).
55. Dahl, p. 268.
56. *Ibid.*, pp. 269-270.
57. Legesse, 1973 p. 87.

58. Dahl, p. 265.
59. Tilly, p. 61.
60. See, for instance, Bates; Baxter; Philip Burnham, "Spatial Mobility and Political Centralization in Pastoral societies" in *L'Equipe Ecologie et Anthropologie des societies pastorales*, ed., Pastoral Production and society (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1979)