Gurage, then, is neither a linguistic entity in and of itself, nor just a cluster of dialects. It is, rather, a complex mix of three languages and their associated dialects, each with a different history which, however, ultimately led to their being isolated together in Gurageland. Since then, there has been an enormous and complicated interplay between the three languages, and they have become closer to one another in many ways, albeit at the same time still retaining their key characteristic features. This may be due to the fact that they came together rather late, and that their different religious and/or ethnic identities helped to buttress and reinforce linguistic separateness. Thus, it should be noted, the Northern Gurage are all Christians, the Eastern Gurage are almost all Muslims, and the Western Gurage are mostly pagans. Together they may well represent an example of 'communal languages' attested also in other parts of the world. If so, Gurage would finally cease to be a puzzle and a problem for linguists and Semitists.

Ethnic Conflict in the 'Tribal Zone': the Dizi and Suri in Southern Ethiopia

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The number of ethno-regional conflicts in the world has grown in intensity during the last few decades as a result of political and economic crises, and one of the unsolved paradoxes of this world-wide trend is that there seems to be a basic contradiction between the two core concepts of 'democratisation' and 'ethnic self-determination'.

This problem is very visible in the Horn of Africa, for instance in Ethiopia, which is being fundamentally restructured after the overthrow of the régime of the Marxist Workers' Party of Ethiopia (W.P.E.), often called the *Dergue*, headed by Mengistu Haile Mariam, and the advent to power in May 1991 of a coalition led by the northern-regionalist guerrilla movement known as the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (E.P.R.D.F.). In contrast to the *Dergue*'s relative suppression of ethno-regional identities and neglect of major politico-economic problems, the current multi-party transitional régime has 'opened up' Ethiopian society in several remarkable ways and created possibilities for a new approach in many fields of policy, especially that of 'ethnic self-determination'.

The significance of the on-going changes taking place in Ethiopia is that this is the first country in the African continent where, in the post-colonial era, a part of the state has been allowed to break away (Eritrea, following the independence referendum held in April 1993), and where the political fabric is being radically rearranged in an authorised fashion 'from above'. In other words, a controversial nation-wide experiment in government and administration is in progress, with power being diverted to ethno-regional units that have rather strict boundaries. Such rearrangements are obviously not being achieved without great difficulties: fights over regional or ethnic 'identity', over rights of residence, and over educational and language policy have been very frequent during the past few years.

Some of the ethno-regional tensions are of an ideological-political nature, while others have emerged because of insecurity over boundaries and over local authority, and in the absence of a strong central political administration they have led to violent confrontations which no-one seems able to check, let alone prevent. Hence the practical importance of analysing, albeit briefly, the possibilities and constraints of the Ethiopian model by highlighting the increasing ethno-political tensions in one 'marginal' area and offering some suggestions for their defusion.

The south-western fringe of the Ethiopian Käfa region was traditionally considered to be a 'tribal zone',[1] outside the purview of national

[1] Cf. R. Brian Ferguson and Neil L. Whitehead (eds.), *War in the Tribal Zone: expanding states and indigenous warfare* (Santa Fe, 1992).

politics.[2] Nowadays, it is the scene of small-scale but persistent raiding and organised violence that may be regarded, in the phraseology of Martin van Creveld, as the 'warfare of the future'.[3] The present, ethnographically informed, discussion is focused on the changing relations between the Dizi and the Suri, and stems from my fieldwork among both groups during 1992 and 1993. Although the on-going 'transition' in Ethiopia has not yet had any real beneficial effects on those who live in this fringe area, this is due in the first place to long-term socio-political and ecological processes not under the control of a provincial or central government, and only in the second place to direct administrative factors. The more general theoretical question, however, is to what extent 'tribal' or ethnic conflicts flare up in the *absence*, rather than as a result (as recently analysed in a collection of studies edited by R. Brian Ferguson and Neil L. Whitehead[4]) of state expansion.

In an era when many other groups in what might be described as the 'Fourth World', including those in Australia, Brazil, and Central America, have their own well-kept lines of communication to the national authorities and/or to the foreign media and international organisations, the Dizi and Suri have no such links. They live in a remote corner of a country where even minor roads are a luxury. They have few spokesmen of their own and no development schemes in their area. The educationally-oriented mission stations of the Italian Consolata Mission (in the late 1930s) and later of the American Presbyterians (in the 1960s and early 1970s) have since long been abandoned, and the handful of Dizi who have reached the top of the national educational system have either remained in Addis Abada or gone to the United States.

South-West Ethiopia: the heritage of the past

The Dizi are an ancient indigenous people in the utmost south-western highlands of Ethiopia, numbering about 23,000. They speak an 'Omotic' language, not related to either the Semitic (Tigrinya, Amharic) or Cushitic languages (Sidama, Oromo, Somali) of the peoples of northern and south-central Ethiopia. Before the incorporation of their country into the Ethiopian state by Emperor Menilek II in 1898, the Dizi were organised in an intricate structure of hierarchic, independent chiefdoms.[5] They were sedentary agriculturalists and had a system of intensive, rain-fed cultivation of grains, root-crops, and *ensete*, mixed with livestock-keeping. Their area was characterised by a relatively high population density and by stone-terracing of fields on the mountain slopes. Their technology was simple: digging sticks,

[2] Donald L. Donham and Wendy James (eds.), *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia: essays in history and social anthropology* (Cambridge, 1986).

[3] Martin van Creveld, *On Future War* (London, 1991).

[4] Ferguson and Whitehead (eds.), op. cit.

[5] See Eike Haberland, 'Caste and Hierarchy among the Dizi (Southwest Ethiopia)', in Sven Rubenson (ed.), *Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Lund 1982* (Addis Ababa, Uppsala, and East Lansing, 1984), pp. 447–50, and *Hierarchie und Kaste. Zur Geschichte und politischen Struktur der Dizi, Südwest Äthiopien* (Stuttgart, 1993). Cf. A. Deguchi, 'Is Dizi a Hierarchical Society? Chieftainship and Social Structure on the Sai Mountain', in *Journal of Swahili and African Studies* (Kyoto), 3, 1992, pp. 79–102.

later also hoes, machetes and, eventually, ox-drawn ploughs. Despite some indications that the Dizi were partly influenced by Ethiopian Christian missionaries in the Middle Ages, they largely retained their own traditional beliefs until the early twentieth century.

The conquest of the Dizi by the northern imperial armies nearly 100 years ago led to their forced inclusion in a feudalist social structure, where soldiers and settlers had the right to claim land and extensive labour-services from the vanquished. Most Dizi became virtual serfs as a result of what was known in Amharic as the *gäbbar*-system. In addition, many thousands were carried away as slaves to the north by traders and bandits, as well as by departing governors and administrators. The ensuing deep crisis in the socio-economic system meant that the traditional structure of chiefdoms was virtually destroyed since their power and prestige were broken by the new rulers.[6] Most of the former chiefs could only maintain themselves as pathetic figureheads. The frequent raids by the northern settlers for cattle and people led to the growing disruption of inter-ethnic relations in the area as a whole.[7]

The Dizi of today still speak about the traumas of conquest, slavery, economic exploitation, and lack of justice, which led to the erosion of so much of their culture. After the Italian period of occupation, 1937–41, during which the *gäbbar*-system was basically broken, the Dizi slightly recovered. A process of assimilation resulted in a blurring of ethnic and cultural (including linguistic) boundaries between them and other highlanders who had come to settle in the area. The incumbents of chiefly families often became local administrators or representatives, usually subject to rulers of northern origin.

Ethnic Relations

To the north live the Me'en (or 'Tishana') people, with whom the Dizi have a relatively good relationship, without violent disturbances. They share certain cultural and socio-economic similarities, and substantial intermarriage has taken place, mainly between chiefly groups. As for those who live to the east, across the Omo River, the Dizi have few if any contacts with, for example, the Ari, the Bodi-Me'en, and the Mursi.

The lowlands to the south and west of the Dizi mountains are occupied by the Suri (their self-term) or Surma (the Dizi term), an agro-pastoral people with whom the Dizi traditionally have lived in an uneasy alliance. The Suri, numbering about 28,000, linguistically belong to the south-east Surmic-speakers (within the Nilo-Saharan group), and their culture is markedly different from that of the Dizi. According to oral traditions, the Suri entered their territory (near Mount Naita, also called Shulugui) about 200 years ago, probably from Southern Sudan. More recently, they have gradually filtered into areas used by the Dizi for cattle-herding, hunting, and bee-keeping.

[6] Cf. Eike Haberland, 'An Amharic Manuscript on the Mythical History of the Adi kyaz (Dizi, South-West Ethiopia)', in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* (London), 46, 2, 1983, pp. 240–1.

[7] See Jon Abbink, 'Tribal Formation on the Ethiopian Fringe: toward a history of the "Tishana"', in *Northeast African Studies* (East Lansing), 12, 1, 1990, pp. 21–42, and 'Famine, Guns and Gold: the Suri of Southwestern Ethiopia, 1985–91', in *Disasters* (Farnham, Surrey), 17, 3, 1993, pp. 218–26.

While both the Dizi and the Suri maintain that their leading families have a common descent and cannot intermarry, they have entered into a kind of ritual alliance in matters of the utmost seasonal importance. While the Suri leaders were ascribed rain-making powers in the lowlands, it is notable that they had to depend, in the last resort, on the Dizi chiefs in the adjacent mountains as the ultimate 'rain-authorities'.[8] Under this 'rain pact', the Suri were permitted to enter the areas claimed by the Dizi in times of drought or other problems. The chiefs of both ethnic groups had a prescribed, ceremonial way of communicating with each other, with a symbolic rôle being played by *ch'eemu*, the stimulant plant known as *catha edulis Forsk*. This important cultural agreement helped to stabilise relationships between the two groups, exploiting different ecological niches which were partly complementary.

In addition, there were, and still are, various opportunities for economic exchange – notably, cattle, pottery, iron products, grain, and legumes – as well as frequent intermarriages, mostly Suri men taking Dizi wives. In the course of time, the Dizi also adopted several customs related to the 'cattle culture' of the Suri.[9]

The Dizi and the Suri: from entente to conflict

While the traditional pattern of more or less normal relations between the Dizi and the Suri should not be glorified, there is no doubt that a very serious break-down of the inter-ethnic peace has taken place during the past few years. Violent conflicts have increased at an alarming rate, and the shared use of resources, including cultivation sites, bushland, pasture, and trees for beehives, has diminished, while intermarriage has almost been halted.

My two-year record of violent incidents between the Dizi and the Suri (omitting those which either group had with *other* neighbours), shows that there were fatal outcomes on at least 38 occasions, with those being killed ranging in number from one to as many as 43. Here is a brief summary of what may be regarded as a typical tragedy:

Early one night in June 1992, I suddenly heard shouting and wailing from Dizi people in a hamlet in the Adikyaz area.

The local chief came to ask for medical assistance for four Dizi girls who were lying on the path outside the hamlet, in a pool of blood. Three with their stomachs ripped open had died from bullet wounds from Kalashinkov assault rifles. The fourth had also been shot but saved herself by pretending to be dead, and she had recognised the two attackers as young Suri men. It appears that they had waited in an ambush to shoot the girls who were returning to their homes with bundles of firewood.

Given the absence of any provocation, and that the motive was not robbery, the Dizi lost no time in concluding that three young women of marriageable age had been arbitrarily killed in a calculated symbolic act of aggression against their very existence as a group in the area.

A messenger was sent to the nearest E.P.R.D.F. forces responsible for overall national security who were stationed in the village of Maji, a four-hour walk away. They arrived the next morning with a small delegation, and the three girls were buried that same day in a moving ceremony that turned into a collective outpouring of grief by the Adikyaz community, with Dizi-speakers claiming that their existence as a people in their ancestral land was being threatened.

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[8] Haberland, 'An Amharic Manuscript on the Mythical History of the Adi kyaz', p. 253.
[9] See Eike Haberland, 'Die materielle Kultur der Dizi (Südwest Äthiopien) und ihr Kulturhistorischer Kontext', in *Paideuma* (Stuttgart), 27, 19 , pp. 121–72.

This was by no means the first incident, nor certainly the last, albeit a particularly shattering experience for the Adikyaz Dizi because it again demonstrated the vulnerability of their dispersed homesteads, and their inability to defend themselves against well-armed Suri, acting with impunity.

Impact of Political and Ecological Factors

What are the reasons for this upsurge in violent behaviour in the Maji area? And, given the lack of public security, why do the Dizi not retaliate?

First of all, it needs to be noted that the Dizi have traditionally not been able to arm themselves as a result of being in such close contact with those responsible for administration in the highland villages: only the northern soldiers and settlers could possess and use fire-arms. At the same time, the more remote Suri lowlanders were always able to acquire sufficient armaments on the illegal market. Indeed, they have lately been able to obtain weapons from the Sudan – initially from members/supporters of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (S.P.L.A.), but more recently, apparently also from troops sent by the Sudanese Government (in the Boma area, across the border).

The defenceless situation of Dizi highlanders in the face of threats from Suri lowlanders has, in fact, existed since the turn of the century, in line with the general pattern in Ethiopia, whereby in other southern areas the local indigenous inhabitants in the highland zones were both disarmed and enslaved by northern immigrants. To give one example only, the Dime (another 'Omotic'-speaking group) have for long suffered from the depredations of well-armed lowlanders. Indeed, in the 1970s, only appeals by Harold Fleming, an American anthropologist, to the local government, which finally sent in troops, saved them from being almost wiped out by the Bodi-Me'en.[10]

But why has the situation been worsening during the last three years? Certainly the legacy of the often seriously misguided policy being pursued by the leaders of Ethiopia during the 1980s has been a factor. All informants (town-dwellers, Dizi and Suri) agree on the often pernicious and unreliable behaviour of the past *Dergue*'s local representatives who were resented, among other reasons, because of their frequent attempts to forcibly recruit young men for the Ethiopian army to fight in a fruitless civil war. In addition, their attempts to mediate in local disputes and to reconcile groups in times of conflict were half-hearted and unsuccessful, thereby giving local villagers the impression that the régime in Addis Ababa did not care about public order, human life, and property. Hence, despite the presence of an occasional helpful and serious local administrator, the state authorities were not willing or able to uphold justice, and suffered from a deep lack of respect and legitimacy, encouraging the use of violence.

Another vital factor has been the slowly changing balance of power between several agro-pastoral groups that have grown in size and number over the past decade. The Dizi are being encroached upon by the Suri because of the threat

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[10] David Todd, 'War and Peace Between the Bodi and Dime of Southwestern Ethiopia', in David Turton and Katsuyoshi Fukui (eds.), *Warfare among East African Herders* (Osaka, National Museum of Ethnology, 1979), pp. 211–26.

of drought and famine in the latter's original area near Mt. Naita, as well as their having to face the steady expansion northwards by the Nyangatom (about 12,000) in the lower Kibish area, which was Suri country.[11] Despite being one of the best armed groups in the region, the Nyangatom in their turn are being pushed in the same direction by the mainly Kenya-based Turkana with the tacit support of the sizeable Kenyan government forces stationed in Kibish town, on what is formally Sudanese territory. To make matters worse, the Toposa (about 35,000) from the Sudan, culturally and linguistically very similar to the Nyangatom, appear to be advancing on the Suri area from the south-west.

Hence, the increasing significance of the wider processes of population growth, and the intensified use of resources (pasture for livestock, bushland, game, water) in politically tense conditions that have been aggravated by the civil war in Southern Sudan. The urge to resolve conflicts with recourse to traditional mediation by leading elders is diminishing, not least because of the wide availability of automatic rifles (and, in the case of the Nyangatom, of some hand-grenades and launchers), which means that more and more people, especially the younger generation, are tempted to use violence as a quick method to solve things their way. The upshot is a mini-scenario for a break-down of law, order, and administration that is beginning to resemble the early stages of the Somali civil war, but that could still be contained *if* government forces do not underestimate what is happening and act decisively to establish normative control.

The small well-armed E.P.R.D.F. force in Maji town has undoubtedly tried to act with restraint and tact in attempting to cope with the upsurge of violence against the Dizi, only to find that Suri elders have no real executive power in their own community. Indeed, family groups are so opposed to each other that if elders or anyone else even gave the names of known or suspected criminals to the authorities, their own families would become the target of revenge from relatives. After the June 1992 incident described above, the E.P.R.D.F. unsuccessfully held three Suri men as virtual 'hostages' for four months in the completely wrong hope/expectation that they could be exchanged for the killers of the three Dizi girls. Sometime later, the E.P.R.D.F. returned to the area to try and clear up another murder, but even before they had returned to their base a group of young Suri, only a few kilometres away, attacked a Dizi compound and stole seven cattle from the owner at gunpoint – almost certainly as a calculated act of mockery of E.P.R.D.F. claims to authority in the area.

In fact, the tension has been further heightened by veiled Suri accusations that the Dizi are always 'inviting' the E.P.R.D.F. to intervene. Be that as it may, more people have been killed in recent months (1993), including a Suri girl by Dizi – which is bound eventually to provoke some retaliatory action from her kith and kin – and even three E.P.R.D.F. soldiers. Indeed, violence has become an almost daily occurrence, especially in the Dizi sedentary villages on the highland rims. In early 1993, the Adikyaz chiefs moved many

[11] The Suri were the victims of a major drought and famine during 1984–5 which took the lives of many hundreds. In addition, they were harrassed and sometimes shot by the Nyangatom, who stole their cattle.

of their families towards Maji town, and claim that they themselves will follow if conditions do not improve, since this may be the only way to secure the continued existence of their people as a whole. Most Dizi chiefs speak sombrely of being faced by a long-term strategy of creeping murder.

The Maji region has always been a backwater of the Ethiopian empire state,[12] and present developments show a notable continuity with the past: frontier problems, lack of state presence, competition for political dominance, unreliable guarantees of basic rights, and above all, the widespread 'private' deployment of violence.

Prospects for Intervention and Change

Although the Ethiopian Transitional Government has been attempting since 1991 to set up new national and regional structures of administration and co-operation that may eventually lead to some form of locally entrenched, ethnic-based democracy, these are not yet fully in place, and will be hard to apply in south-western Käfa. In the Maji area, for instance, only about 20 per cent of the local population participated in the regional elections in 1992 (no Surma, few Me'en). The 'tribal' communities in such formerly neglected regions (especially the relatively inaccessible lowlands) have never been helpfully administered by either the state and/or region, and the legacy of the past does not predispose them to display a positive attitude towards 'external' interference by, say, the members of any majority ethnic group. Geographical, ecological, political, and socio-cultural conditions partly beyond the control of the Government, some of them sketched above, will continue to shape future interaction between local communities, all the more because the state itself, as elsewhere in Africa, is in deep crisis.[13]

But there may be scope for some improvements. In 'pre-Kalashnikov' times, there was a kind of balance between the various groups in the area: there were skirmishes, but no systematic killings on the scale now being experienced. The presence of large quantities of automatic weapons and ammunition creates what can only be described as the same kind of 'abnormal situation' that exists in other parts of the continent suffering from a similar lack of state power and publicly maintained order. Many local people (including Suri) are aware of this and hence likely to be favourably inclined to the suggestion that the rôle of the executive arm of the state (currently the E.P.R.D.F. force stationed in Maji) should be strengthened *before* things settle down into institutionalised patterns of violence. There may, indeed, be a possibility that recourse to violence *is* becoming a regular feature of the political process in both rural and urban areas. Were this to be accepted, there may well be no way back.

Thus, in line with a policy of local crisis-containment – a challenge which many countries, African as well as European, face at this juncture of history – all concerned have to ask what can be done to help the inhabitants of this 'tribal zone' in southern Ethiopia. Can there be a reduction in the number

[12] See Peter Garretson, 'Vicious Cycles: ivory, slaves and arms on the new Maji frontier', in Donham and James (eds.), op. cit. pp. 196–218.

[13] Cf. Jean-François Bayart, *L'État en Afrique: la politique du ventre* (Paris, 1989), published in English as *The State in Africa: the politics of the belly* (London and New York, 1993).

of privately circulating weapons? Can army or police posts be re-established in the area? Can the expansion of the Nyangatom and Toposa towards the Suri be checked in the context of bilateral relations? (Earlier this year, such an arrangement seems to have resulted in a retreat of the Turkana and Kenyan troops from Kibish town.) Can an effective local administration of law and justice be instituted? Finally, as regards the long run: can economic prospects for the region and its peoples be improved? Can development schemes with 'joint ethnic participation' be introduced gradually on the basis of the cultural premises of the populations as well as the market situation? Certainly an effective assertion of authority is needed to preclude the use of weapons in order to steal cattle, crops, and other resources. By all means, violence must be prevented from becoming an economically profitable strategy.

Success will depend, first and foremost, on developments at the national level, notably the introduction of representative political structures, judicial guarantees, and more economic opportunities. But if violence is not contained quickly, the on-going destabilisation of the area will spill into adjacent regions. It may also act as the death-blow for the Dizi, one of the most ancient peoples in the Horn of Africa who have already lost so much of their culture and their people.

In Ethiopia, and indeed elsewhere on the continent, we see that in the interstices of state transformation, where traditional power relations fall apart and new structures of a representative democracy are not yet established, traditional enmities and conflicts of interest are being completely politicised and played out on an ethnic basis. The policy-makers have not yet come to grips with these realities, either intellectually or administratively, not least because they know not how to handle the rising tide of movements for both 'democracy' and 'ethnic self-determination'.[14]

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[14] The worsening situation in the Maji region has been reported to a member of the House of Representatives in Addis Ababa, and publicising the plight of the Dizi in this short article is also done at the request of their increasingly desperate chiefs.

Reviews

Short Changed: Africa and world trade by MICHAEL BARRATT BROWN and PAULINE TIFFEN
London and Boulder, CO, Pluto Press, with the Transnational Institute, 1993. Pp. xx + 220. £35.00. £12.95 paperback.

The key strength of this study by Michael Barratt Brown and Pauline Tiffen is their systematic examination of each sector of Africa's failed economies, complete with detailed documentation of export and cash crops, mineral wealth, fuel and energy resources, and manufactured exports. The message, with a foreword by Susan George, is loud and clear: international trade has short-changed Africa and if present policies, internal as well as international, continue, can only lead to more economic failures. The authors present a cogent picture of past and present wrongs, but are less helpful in pointing the way to the necessary remedies to reverse the dismal decline.

Short Changed: Africa and world trade concludes that colonialism harmfully established externally directed primary-product trade-dependent economies; that most African states have continued to export raw materials for processing elsewhere, and that they have, on the whole, suffered the effects of the collapse of many primary-product prices; that Africa's market shares in international trade have declined; that the policies of the World Bank and the I.M.F. over the years, and their more recent emphasis on structural adjustments and export-orientated growth, have had negative consequences for Africa's economies and hold no promise of reversing the crisis. The authors are also correct in stating that Africa needs debt relief, because under the current burden of repayment any effort to generate economic growth and development is doomed from the start.

However, the trouble with this study and many others with strong ideological beliefs, is that well-documented as they may be, when faced with the dismal statistics of no growth (in reality actual decline), the attribution of blame for the causes tends to be highly detailed while the identification of workable solutions range from the general to the simplistic. Barratt Brown and Tiffen place much of the blame for Africa's ills on the international system, the nature of the trade régime, the transnational corporations, and the policies of the Washington-based financial institutions. Their facts and figures show that the world has either misunderstood or misapplied the lessons learned from the so-called 'development tigers' of Asia, assuming that their success can be translated into export-led growth in Africa.

Given the book's emphasis on the continuing impediments in the international structure and some ill-conceived externally-imposed policies, readers are likely to be reinforced in the belief that despite political and economic mismanagement on the part of African leaders, their countries would be much better off without the misguided policies of the World Bank and the I.M.F. and the obstacles which have blocked trade for African development. The problem with this argument is that while it is relatively easy