

Armed Herders, Unarmed Farmers, and the State: An Analysis of Violent Conflicts in the Middle Omo Valley with Reference to the Cases in Malo, Southwest Ethiopia⁽¹⁾

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Peripheral mountain farmer groups in the middle Omo valley have met sporadic yet massive violent conflicts assumingly brought by lowland agro-pastoralists in the lower Omo valley since the 1970s. This paper focuses on conflicts in Malo, south of the middle Omo River. In March 1976, immediately after the collapse of the imperial regime, nearly half of the Malo land was invaded by unidentified armed attackers. The attacks were totally one-sided. Settlements were heavily devastated and cattle completely looted; more than 1,000 farmers were killed. Similar attacks have ensued over the years. Local farmers claim that the main perpetrators are *golde*, Surmic-speaking agro-pastoralists from the lower Omo valley, with whom they formerly had little connection. As a result of the attacks, numerous settlements and fields near the river have been permanently abandoned. Differential state rule over the lower and middle Omo valleys since the imperial conquest at the end of the 19th century have shaped a great imbalance of power in terms of modern arms possession between these peoples. Continuous state intervention is needed to prevent future conflicts.

Key words: herder–farmer conflicts, Malo, *golde*, middle Omo valley, southwest Ethiopia

1. INTRODUCTION

Southwest Ethiopia, most of which is now administered as the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Region (SNNPR), is a distinctive area embracing the greatest ethnic diversity in the country. Ethnic conflict is one of the central themes of anthropological work in this region, particularly in the lower Omo valley, the extreme southwest area corresponding roughly to the current South Omo Zone of the SNNPR (e.g. Fukui & Markakis 1994; Fukui & Turton 1979).

Located on the edge of the country and remote from state control, this lowland area has been home to intensive ethnic conflict among agro-pastoralists since its incorporation into Ethiopia at the end of the 19th century. Although the conflicts have generally been followed by counterattacks, there is an overall trend of northward movement as a result of gradual territorial shift (Tornay 1979, 1993; Turton 1991, 1994; Abbink 1992). Several agro-pastoral groups who have been pushed out by their southern neighbors have encroached upon neighboring farmers in frequent raids (Fukui 1979, 1994, 2002, 2005; Todd 1979; Abbink 1993, 1994, 2000a, 2000b).

Next to the lower Omo valley in the northeast, but clearly marked by its mountainous topography and higher elevation, is the middle Omo valley⁽²⁾. This area is densely populated by sedentary farmers

who subsist mainly on cultivating root and tuber crops such as enset (*Ensete ventricosum*). It is different from the lower Omo valley not only in topography, population density, and subsistence economy, but also in terms of recent regional history. In the middle Omo valley, numerous kingdoms and chiefdoms flourished and fought for power using such traditional arms as spears and shields prior to Ethiopian rule, but for the most part, local conflicts were halted soon after the introduction of state control⁽³⁾. Although state colonizers such as soldiers and administrative officers often carried guns to defend themselves and to suppress local riots, locals were strictly forbidden from carrying modern arms.

Following the demise of the imperial regime in 1974, most colonizers fled. Soon afterward, parts of the area began to suffer unprecedented violent attacks, a fact generally overlooked in academic writing. Not only are livestock and other property stolen in such attacks, but numerous inhabitants, often women and children, are mercilessly killed. Peripheral settlements on both sides of the Omo River sporadically suffer acute raids. Survivors strongly insist that the attackers are not locals but rather the agro-pastoralists from the lower Omo valley who advance stealthily along the Omo riverbank.

If these claims are correct, the attacks are distinguishable from the raids on the farmers in the lower Omo valley on the following points: (1) There is no territorial contact between the attackers and the attacked, therefore (2) there is no ordinary economic or marital relation between the two groups, and (3) the attacks against the farmers in the middle Omo valley are not as frequent as the raids on the farmers in lower Omo valley, although (4) the former attacks are more numerous and better organized.

Here I give a firsthand report of the violent conflicts encountered by the Malo, among whom I have conducted anthropological fieldwork. I also consider the root causes of these attacks by taking into account the wider context, such as the differential state control of the two areas (middle and lower Omo valleys). Finally, I discuss the consequences of the attacks. For example, due to repeated attacks, a number of peripheral settlements and fields near the river have been permanently abandoned, which has created a large vacuum in the lowlands and made highland settlements more populous.

2. THE MALO: REGIONAL AND HISTORICAL SETTINGS

2.1. *The Malo Regional Setting*

Originating from the country's central highlands, the Omo River penetrates Southwest Ethiopia, eventually flowing into Lake Turkana on the Kenyan border. The valley is occupied by more than 20 ethnic groups who speak various languages classified into the Semitic, Cushitic, and Omotic families in the Afro-Asiatic phylum as well as into the Surmic and Nilotic families in the Nilo-Saharan phylum.

The riverbank is generally unexploited and uninhabited except by those who subsist on riverbank cultivation and fishing, such as the Kara and the Koegu (Matsuda 1996). In Ethiopia, rivers (and escarpments) form geographical barriers to social intercourse rather than provide avenues for communication and trade (Donham 1986: 20). This clearly holds true for the Omo. The riverbank is the most marginal space in the regional setting, which is relevant to the later discussion.

With a population of 30,000–40,000, the Malo, an Omotic-speaking farmer people, occupy a small area at the southern edge of the middle Omo valley⁽⁴⁾. In a mountainous land about 600–3,400 m above sea level, they engage in mixed farming by growing diverse crops, including cereals (e.g., tef, barley, and sorghum) and root crops (e.g., enset, taro, and yams), and by raising livestock (Fujimoto 1997, 2002, 2007). They border the following groups: the Gofa in the east, the Baskeeto in the south, the Dime and Doola in the west, the Ch'ara in the northwest, the Konta and Koysa in the north, and the Dawro in the northeast; all of these are farmer groups speaking Omotic languages (Fig. 1). Until their integration into the Ethiopian state at the end of the 19th century, most of these groups formed autonomous kingdoms reigned over by hereditary kings (*kaate*) for some centuries. However, oral histories and current clan distributions suggest that migrations among these different polities

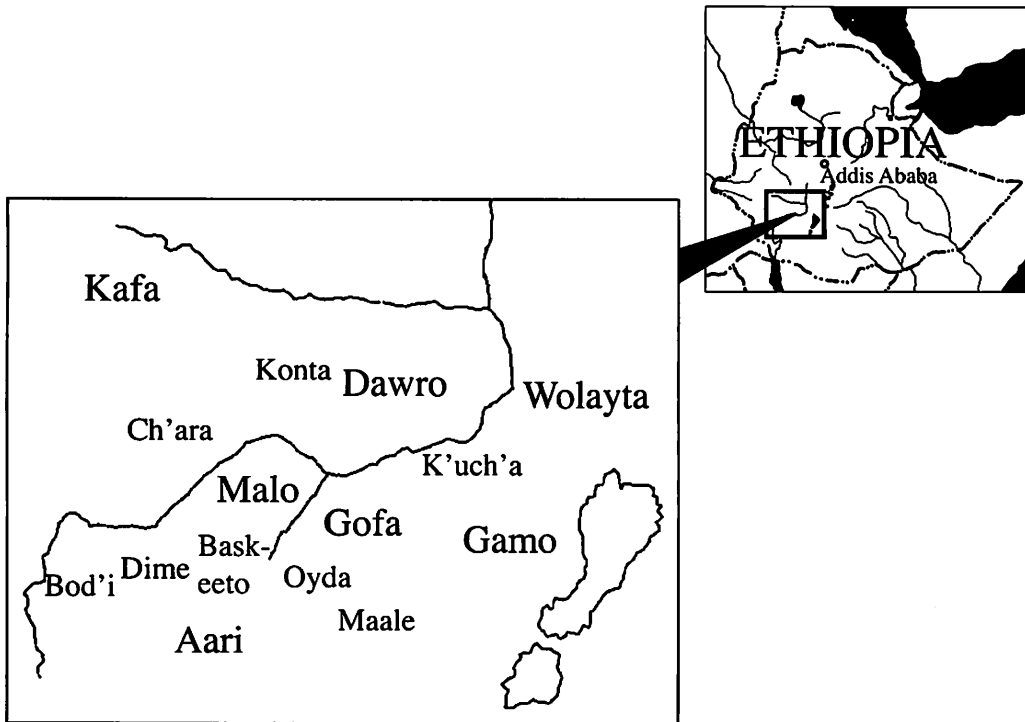


Fig. 1. Malo in Southwest Ethiopia

were common (Fujimoto 2006). Thus, the Malo live next door to groups who largely share linguistic and cultural traditions.

2.2. *The Malo Historical Setting*

Although the Malo were well known as a belligerent, expansive group in the kingdom era (Borelli 1890), their society greatly transformed in the wake of its incorporation into the Ethiopian empire at the end of 19th century.

When imperial troops came into the land by crossing the Omo River, they stationed not in Shaama, the traditional center of the kingdom, but in Banka, a western frontier settlement near the border with Doko-speaking chiefdoms. As the soldiers (*nāft'ānya*) settled, Banka transformed into a garrison town (*kātāma*), although the settlers later spread into the highlands. Banka remained prosperous during the imperial period, but it was subsequently totally devastated and is now only a peripheral settlement. Only a sacred grove that once surrounded the Ethiopian orthodox church remains. The administrative center of the District was thus relocated to Laaha, formerly an independent chiefdom west of Malo kingdom prior to the imperial incorporation (Haberland 1959).

In the early 20th century, a few Malo retained their social status, such as hereditary kings who were nominated by the state as local representatives (*balabbats*), but most others experienced severe hardship. Under strictly controlled migration and consequently fixed residence, local farmers were gradually forced to become *gābbar*, or indentured farmers who were obliged to pay heavy taxes and other frequent tributes in kind (cereals and livestock) to tax collectors and their descendants or to otherwise work for them by farming their fields and preparing their daily food. This period, called *amaara wode* (the Amhara era) after the ethnicity of the dominant settlers, is remembered as the hardest time. Malo farmers were forbidden from carrying firearms and were almost always watched and often frightened by armed settlers.

This period ended around 1936, when Italians and their comrades (*banda*) occupied the land and

the settlers escaped into the lower Omo valley. The Malo felt relatively liberated, but the Italian era (*t'alian wode*) was brief. Former *bandas*, who obtained firearms from Italians as the Europeans left, resisted the return of imperial rule, which was suppressed in a year or so.

Following imperial reestablishment, a new tax system was introduced. Under it, *gäbbar* farmers paid tax not to local settlers in kind but to government officials in cash. Land was measured for the goal of precise taxation, but this caused most *gäbbar* farmers to lose their land and become tenants (*t'iishaynya*) because they could not pay the new tax⁽⁵⁾. Local settlers, descendants of *näft'änya*, became landlords and enjoyed lucrative status. Only a small number of farmers could maintain their status as *gäbbar* (tax-paying farmers) without losing their own land. The time is commonly referred to as *janoy wode* (the emperor era).

After the demise of the imperial regime, most landholders fled from Malo land, some to nearby Gofa towns such as Bulqi and Sawla (Felege Neway), some to Addis Ababa and other remote cities, but others to the lower Omo valley in the southwest. Most Malo farmers who had lost their original plots recovered them and were freed from exploitative control. At the same time, they suddenly began to encounter massive armed attacks. They suffered unprecedented casualties and thorough settlement devastation that they now recall as *ola* (war).

From interviews with survivors, I now report on the attacks that have occurred in Malo and then consider them in a wider context. First I describe the most recent conflict, which I myself nearly encountered in the field.

3. MASSIVE VIOLENCE IN 1999

To my knowledge, the most recent attack broke out in Falaha Koysh administrative village (*k'abale*), northern Malo, on April 22, 1999. I had been there the previous month, interviewing residents about

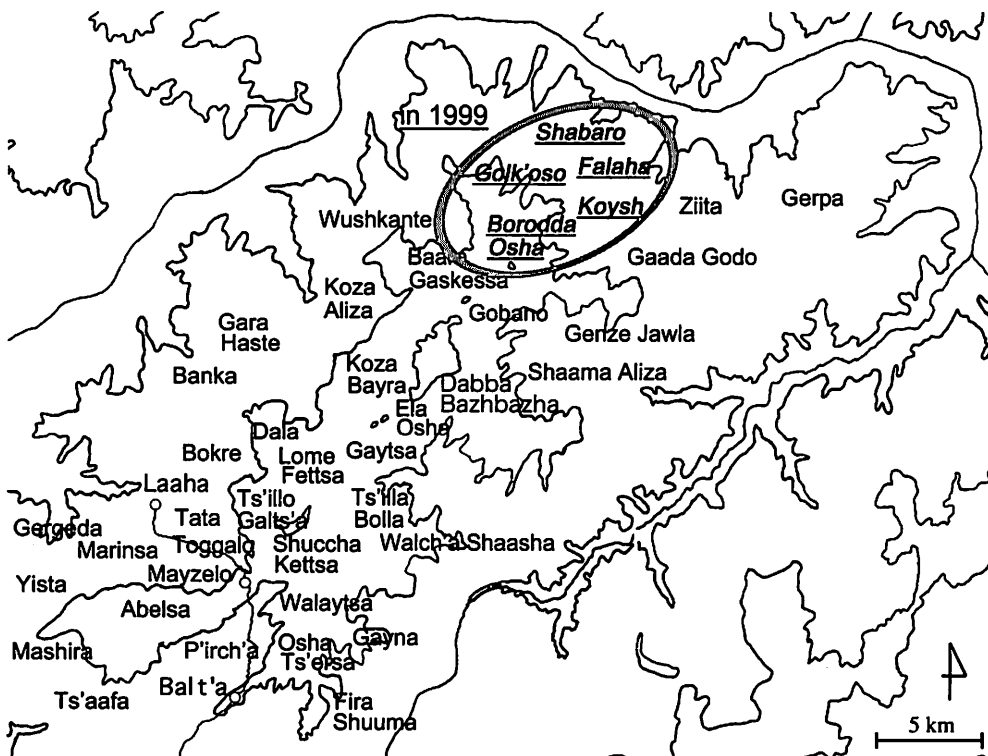


Fig. 2. Area of Armed Raids in 1999

previous attacks. Hearing about this latest attack, I returned in early June. The following description is based on interviews that took place then⁽⁶⁾.

At dawn, piercing gunshots woke the inhabitants of Mella and Shabaro (elevation ca. 1,300 m), both marginal settlements of Falaha Koysb *k'abale* about a 3-h walk from the Omo River. From below (i.e., through the path reaching the Omo River), raiders appeared first in Mella (located to the north) and then in Shabaro (to the south). Almost all of the first raiders carried automatic weapons. Without entering individual homes, they advanced straight into the adjacent Falaha settlements over the small ridge (Figs. 2 and 3). Most of the inhabitants of Mella and Shabaro panicked and narrowly escaped; they took nothing with them and hid in remote thickets.

The first raiders hurried into the main Falaha settlements (roughly 1,400 m) within an hour. Some of them remained there, but others went south. The latter group, passing through Koysb (1,800 m), arrived at the center of the highland Borodda administrative village (2,800 m) before noon. Having heard gunshots, local farmers and officials in both villages had all fled into remote forests and hidden themselves with their livestock and other property.

The first raiders, about 150 strong, found nothing to ransack in Borodda and returned to Shabaro and Mella by a different route than they had come. They and others gathered in Shabaro and Mella in late afternoon and then descended to the Omo riverbank before dark. According to one survivor in Shabaro who witnessed the raiders from afar, their total number was about 500.

The inhabitants who had escaped from these settlements hid deep in the forests for about a week out of fear that they might encounter the raiders; those who had failed to escape had been mercilessly killed in their houses, in inset plots, or on the paths. The victims were two adult men and six adult women (including one pregnant woman) and their nine children, all in Mella, Shabaro, and Falaha. When the survivors returned home, they found more damage. Every bit of property had been ran-

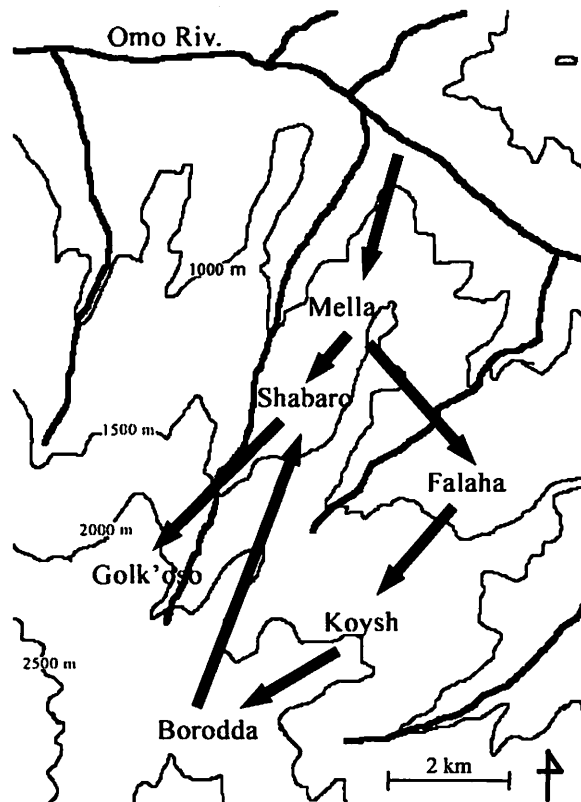


Fig. 3. Routes of Armed Raids in 1999

sacked in Mella and Shabaro, whereas nothing had been taken in Koysh and Borodda. In the former settlements, all livestock, cash, and commodities had been stolen, including clothes, shoes, radios, flashlights, umbrellas, pens, soap, salt and condiments, hoes, sickles, agricultural tools, and even pots. There had never been such a thorough looting. In Falaha, some had escaped with their livestock, but those who had left alone returned to find their livestock stolen. Informants in Mella claimed that the later raiders had included a number of women. Returning to the riverbank after the raid, men carrying rifles herded livestock, and women wore and carried as many items as possible.

It was commonly claimed that the perpetrators were *golde*. *Golde* (*golda* or *goldiya*) is an Omotic designation of Surmic-speaking lowland agro-pastoralists, particularly the Bod'i who live in the lower Omo valley west of the Dime land⁽⁷⁾. But some claimed that the raiders were not only *golde* but also central highlanders they simply call *amaara*, representing the Amhara. They had heard some raiders addressing others loudly in Amharic. They had also witnessed some raiders, although not many, who had looked and dressed like *amaara*. Although it is difficult to confirm these statements, it is certain that the raid was staged under a meticulously planned design of routes, targets, armaments, and role allotments.

The day before, a similar attack had been attempted, presumably by the same or fellow raiders, but it had been repelled by the local inhabitants of Wushkante, another lowland settlement near the Omo River located on another ridge and about one day's walk from the successfully raided settlements. Unfortunately, news of that attempted attack had not yet reached these settlements.

This was not the first attack to have occurred. I also collected information about prior attacks, which I summarize next.

4. MASSIVE VIOLENCE PRIOR TO 1999

4.1. Contact during the Imperial Period

Although the Omotic term *golde* (*golda*) is not new⁽⁸⁾, direct contact between the Malo (and other Omotic-speaking farmer groups) and the Surmic-speaking agro-pastoralists during the imperial period was minimal. Elders, however, remember some brief contact with *golde*⁽⁹⁾. Young *golde* men occasionally appeared in weekly markets at Banka, then an Amhara-settled town in northwestern Malo, but were more commonly encountered at markets in Dimeland. Although the Malo were rarely victimized, Doola farmers living between the Malo and Dime lands in such places as Kotani, later depopulated and now abandoned, suffered cattle thefts by *golde*. When the keeper of the communal cattle, normally a farmer or his boy, was herding roughly 100 cattle, several *golde* men would suddenly appear with firearms and take the cattle. They would rarely shoot at or injure the cattle keeper, attack, or even enter the farmers' settlement. Although the Malo now regard *golde* as merciless, brutal murderers and greedy ransackers, older people remember *golde* as not being as violent as they are now.

4.2. First Occurrence of Massive Violence in 1976

Things changed completely following the demise of the imperial regime. On March 9, 1976, the northern Malo settlements of Wushkante were suddenly attacked. Almost all of the cattle and other livestock were stolen; hundreds of local inhabitants, including women and children, were indiscriminately killed; and local dwellings were totally devastated by fire. The next day, raiders appeared in Shaale, Dala, and Koza, and others attacked a number of Banka Gara Haste settlements. They all returned to the Omo River that day.

This time, they raided Mella, Shabaro, Golk'oso, Falaha, Koysh, Borodda, Ziita, and Gada, which is to say, almost all of the northeastern Malo settlements in both the lowlands and the highlands (Fig. 4). Local inhabitants had never seen such extensive and violent attacks before, and most of them had also never seen *golde*. They did not understand what was happening. Instead of escaping into remote thickets, a number of men tried to protect their dwellings with spears and shields (their traditional

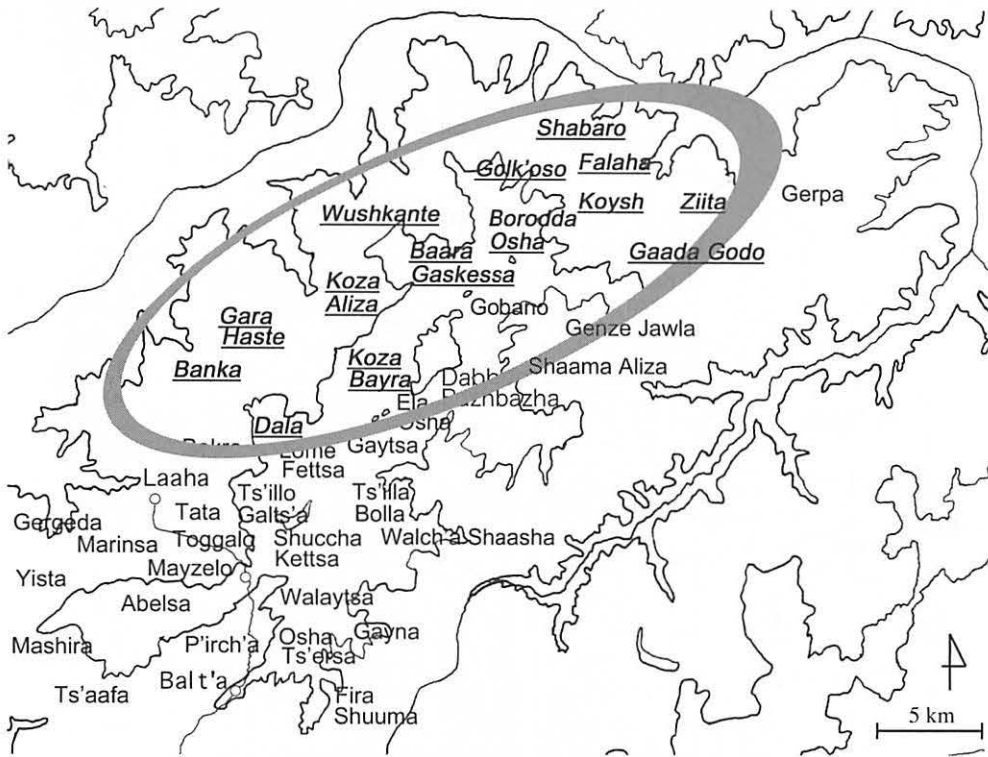


Fig. 4. Malo Area of Armed Raids in 1976

arms) against attackers who were armed with guns and machetes; this resulted in an unprecedented number of casualties. No Malo farmers had any firearms, but the former Amhara landholders who had remained had some arms and fought with them. Although the extent of the damage is difficult to estimate, it is believed that between 1,000 and several thousand Malo farmers were killed in one week. It was a massacre the likes of which the Malo had never before experienced.

People now realize that this was the first in a series of raids perpetrated by *golde*, but they think the raid was not initiated by *golde* but rather plotted as revenge by the Amhara. The Amhara had lost their status as landowners and officials and had fled to the lower Omo valley out of fear of imprisonment and punishment by Malo farmers after the imperial demise⁽¹⁰⁾. People believe that such a large-scale and thorough attack was not typical of *golde* but of Amhara and other highlanders. Survivors witnessed former Amhara landowners among the attackers⁽¹¹⁾.

After this terrible incident, food and clothes were distributed as emergency aid by the government and the evangelical missionary church, although no livestock was returned. Dozens of peripheral settlements near the Omo River were soon permanently abandoned.

4.3. Massive Violence in the Late 1980s

For the next decade, there was no obvious violent conflict in the land. However, in 1988, Abba, a once densely populated but then marginal settlement in northern Malo near Banka, was suddenly attacked by 60–70 *golde* (Fig. 5). No other settlement was attacked. The next year, several small Doola settlements between Malo and Dime were raided and later abandoned. Malo farmers became anxious about the increasing risk of being attacked again.

4.4. Massive Violence in the Early 1990s

The next violent conflict occurred on June 18, 1991, only a month and a half after the collapse of the Derg regime. The route and area of attack were different from those in 1976. Raiders first appeared



Fig. 5. Area of Armed Raids in the Late 1980s

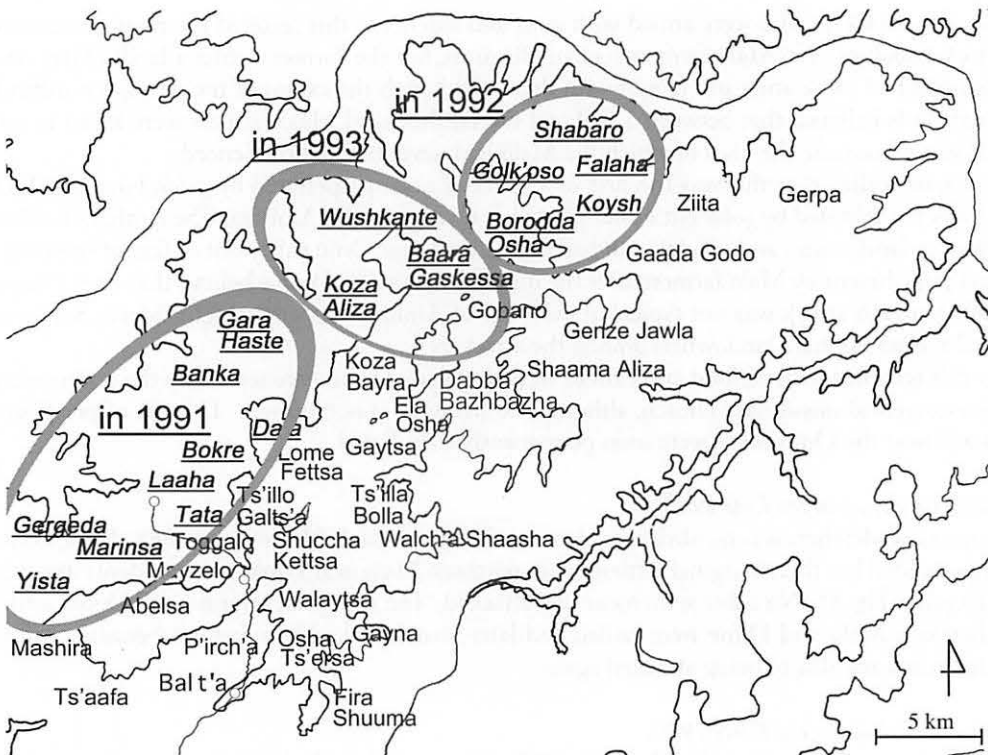


Fig. 6. Area of Armed Raids in the Early 1990s

in Banka. The locals instantly understood what was happening; putting up no resistance, they escaped into the thickets. Nonetheless, 190 farmers were killed. The raiders included some *golde* women and boys, who took away several local girls. At that time, only one old gun (*shurkte*) was kept by a local official. The next day the perpetrators looted the district capital Laaha, which was had no police guard due to the recent political upheaval⁽¹²⁾.

Less than a year later, *golde* appeared in the northeastern Malo settlements of Shabaro/Mella, Falaha, Koysh, and Gok'oso. More than 70 inhabitants were killed in Shabaro/Mella and Falaha. In Mella, 18 dwellings, about half of all dwellings there, were burned to the ground (Fig. 6).

In 1993, raiders appeared in Wushkante and stole more than 200 cattle without inflicting any human casualties. They attempted to attack Banka Gara Haste the next day but were repelled; by this time, local officials and some residents had been given about 30 rifles by the district government for self-defense.

This information was collected in northern Malo settlements but later confirmed by the district government office in Laaha. The office estimates that more than 300 people were killed and more than 1,000 cattle and 700 sheep and goats were stolen during the attacks in the early 1990s.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Formation of a Deadly Link between Groups with Minimal Contact

Because the groups had no territorial contact or direct trade route, links between the Malo (and other mountain farmers) in the middle Omo valley and *golde* (the Bod'i and other lowland agro-pastoralists) in the lower Omo valley were rare until the end of the imperial era. The latter groups (e.g., Bod'i and other Me'en groups) traditionally have used only the generic term *su* to designate the former groups (e.g., the Malo and Konta; Fukui 1994; Abbink 1992), which suggests a slight relationship between the two. Although the lowland agro-pastoralist groups may have stolen some cattle from the mountain farmers, such grievances were not massive.

Some time after the imperial regime collapsed in 1974, the Amhara settlers lost their status as landowners and officials and some fled into the lower Omo valley, where lowland agro-pastoralists lived and state control had never fully arrived⁽¹³⁾. There, the Amhara presumably plotted a war of retaliation and encouraged the agro-pastoralists to join them by providing them with bullets. This was completely different from the anti-Italian guerrilla war, which the Amhara had fought by themselves. It was beneficial for the Bod'i to join in because they had just stopped raiding the neighboring Dime farmers and had also been pushed back by their southern neighbors, the Mursi, in the early 1970s (Todd 1979, Turton 1979). Therefore, the attacks, initiated by refugee Amhara full of vengeance and familiar with the local topography, were in substance carried out by the agro-pastoralists who may have sought potential territorial resources.

In sum, attacks most likely initiated by the Amhara introduced a deadly link between the Malo (and other farmers) and the *golde* agro-pastoralists. The latter arrived for these attacks and returned to their own land by passing through the Omo riverbank, the least-used forested boundary space. There is still no regular contact in the form of trade or intermarriage between the two groups, let alone any reconciliation process such as a peacemaking ceremony. The one-sided attacks constitute the substance of the relationship.

5.2. Patterns of Occurrence of Violent Attacks

After the first attacks in the mid-1970s, no incidents happened for more than a decade, but massive attacks resumed in the late 1980s and continued into the 1990s. There is a clear pattern to their occurrence. First, the attacks were concentrated during the political interregnums of the Ethiopian state (i.e., soon after the collapse of the imperial and Derg regimes in 1974 and 1991, respectively). In these periods, state power weakened or became almost nonexistent because no policemen guarded the country and no soldiers rushed to suppress violence. Modern arms were abundantly supplied to

lowland raiders by traders who had obtained them from displaced ex-soldiers and ex-policemen. In these political interregnums, violent attacks intensified not only in the middle Omo valley but also in the lower Omo valley (cf. Turton 1994).

Second, nearly all of the attacks took place during the season locally called *assura*, that is, from approximately March to May, when the Omo River is at its lowest and is easiest to cross and ford. From December to May, local farmers in peripheral settlements are sensitive to night bonfires in the Omo riverbank that tell of the coming of *golde* scouts for future attacks. The seasonality of the attacks is also related to the lowland subsistence economy, as *assura* is known as the hungry season (cf. Abbink 2000b).

Third, the attackers almost always arrived in the early morning when the farmers were still asleep in their huts. With sudden shooting, they started raiding cattle and other property and rushed into as many settlements as possible, quickly returning to the Omo riverbank with looted livestock before dark. They did not stay even one night in the farmers' settlements.

Fourth, by forming several parties, the attackers often attacked settlements on different routes on the same day or on consecutive days. One party typically included more than 100 attackers. The attackers were multi-ethnic, including not only Amhara and other Central Ethiopians but also Dime and other farmers who were already subject to *golde*, in addition to the majority, who were *golde* (Fukui 1994, 2007).

Finally, and most important, the attacks were completely one-sided, with a clear imbalance of power between the attackers and the attacked. The attackers carried abundant guns and machetes, whereas the farmers lacked such arms. Thus, unlike in reciprocal conflicts waged in the lower Omo valley, the attacked farmers had no means of counterattacking and no opportunities for retaliation.

5.3. Changing Styles and Aims of the Violent Attacks

Although the attacks have followed the consistent patterns outlined in the previous section, they have also undergone noticeable changes in terms of style and aim. In the first attack in 1976, innumerable inhabitants, likely exceeding 1,000, were killed. In the more recent attacks of the 1990s, the number of casualties was much less. This decrease may be chiefly due to the fact that farmers have learned how to cope with the attacks. Lacking modern arms, they learned to flee into nearby forests as quickly as possible instead of trying to defend their houses. Moreover, in the first attacks, local dwellings were thoroughly devastated by fire. In the latest attacks, however, there has been no burning.

In contrast, the number of stolen cattle and other livestock has not remarkably decreased. Rather, the range of looted property has widened. In the most recent attack, almost every item of property, including not only clothes and other purchased commodities but also locally produced items such as pots and iron tools, was looted. It is claimed that the attackers included some women who served as porters.

Fukui (1994: 45) noted that, with the exception of the theft of cattle, the conflict against *su* (mountain farmers) "represents the undercurrent of Mela (Bodi subgroup) expansion." This also holds true for Dime, because some Mela have colonized Dime land. As for Malo, however, the attacks seem to be increasingly concentrated on looting as opposed to territorial expansion. The Malo think of the first attacks as a kind of war (*ola*) but the later ones as merely robberies (*bonkè*).

Another change is the fact that several attempted attacks in the 1990s were repelled by local inhabitants. That is mainly due to the current administration, which allows local farmers to carry registered firearms and hatchets for self-defense.

In sum, in the first raids, the attackers may have intended to do as much damage as possible to subordinate the Malo for future colonization, as they had done to the Dime in the early 1970s. Later however, they narrowed the aims of the attacks to pure looting with less damage to local settlements, because they had come to face growing local resistance.

5.4. Root Causes of Violent Attacks

In spite of the recent changes, there is still a great imbalance of power between the lowland agro-

pastoralists in the lower Omo valley and the mountain farmers in the middle Omo valley. In fact, there is a similar imbalance between the agro-pastoralists and the farmers in the lower Omo valley. The Dizi, Omotic-speaking mountain farmers in the lower valley, have been frequently raided and killed by Surmic-speaking Suri agro-pastoralists living in the surrounding lowlands (Abbink 1994). Does this mean that farmers are generally weaker than agro-pastoralists? Of course it does not. In many parts of West Africa, Fulani herders are killed or deprived of cattle by neighboring farmers in violent incidents (e.g., Bassett 1988; Gausset 2001). Rather, the imbalance of power comes from the differential possession of modern arms. Therefore, one must ask why the agro-pastoralists hold so many more modern arms than the mountain farmers, who often lack them completely. I now examine this in relation to state rule.

It is relevant now to introduce a typology proposed by Donham (1986) that organizes into three groups in terms of center-periphery linkages the area of southern Ethiopia during the imperial rule after the conquest at the end of 19th century: "(1) those areas, previously independent kingdoms, that were made directly tributary to the crown, (2) those areas where the so-called *gebbar* (*gäbbar*) system was established, where northern governors were appointed and local peoples made into near-serfs, and finally (3) those areas in the far peripheries, lowlands inhabited by hunters, shifting cultivators, and pastoralists" (Donham 1986: 37). In this typology, the Malo (and other mountain farmers in the middle Omo valley) are of the second type, whereas the Bod'i (and other agro-pastoralists in the lower Omo valley) belong to the third type.

It is important that Donham (1986: 39) noted the following: "As the name of these soldier-settlers in the south, *neft'ennya*, 'riflemen,' reminds us, northerners by this time were armed with relatively modern weapons. Southerners had almost none, at least in the very early twentieth century." Thus, the fact that local farmers had almost no modern weapons was shaped in connection with state rule at the beginning and continued during the imperial time and well after that, until very recently and perhaps still today. During the imperial period, the Malo were threatened by the Amhara colonizers, who always carried rifles. Even afterward, they did not have access to modern arms.

In contrast, Donham's (1986) third type enjoyed a quite different situation. Here the *gäbbar* system was not introduced and only *balabbat* were appointed: "All in all, the extent of central control over these regions was probably less than in other areas" (Donham 1986: 42). For instance, the Dassanetch at the northern end of Lake Turkana "began acquiring arms from traders and from Ethiopian army deserters" (Almagor 1986: 98) just about a decade after the imperial conquest of the area in 1898. They "acquired firearms and continued to possess a considerable number of rifles in spite of several partially successful attempts to disarm them" (Almagor 1986: 101). "The introduction of firearms radically changed the pattern of inter-tribal warfare and raids. The number of casualties rose, and frequently did, massacre whole unarmed villages" (Almagor 1986: 98). That situation surely holds not only among the Dassanetch but also, more or less, among other groups of the third type.

The Nyangatom, northern neighbors of the Dassanetch, were in a weak position between 1970 and 1976, being continually defeated by the Dassanetch and other groups (Tornay 1993). The situation changed when they acquired automatic weapons from the Sudan. They "engaged in a large-scale war with the Chai or Surma" (Tornay 1993: 147) because the Surma were unable to acquire modern weapons at that time. These cases demonstrate that it is essential for agro-pastoralists in the lower Omo valley to acquire modern weapons for their survival in inter-ethnic conflicts. The "northward movement" of the agro-pastoralists in the lower Omo valley needs to be considered within this context.

From the above discussion, it is clear that the differential state rule introduced following the imperial conquest largely conditioned current modern arms possession for farmers and agro-pastoralists. This is one of the root causes of the consecutive violent attacks discussed here. This also likely explains why the attacks intensified when Ethiopian state power weakened. Therefore, the existence or absence of state control critically affects local conditions. When state control evaporates, various group powers are revealed. Thus, the violent attacks cannot be regarded simply as local ethnic conflicts.

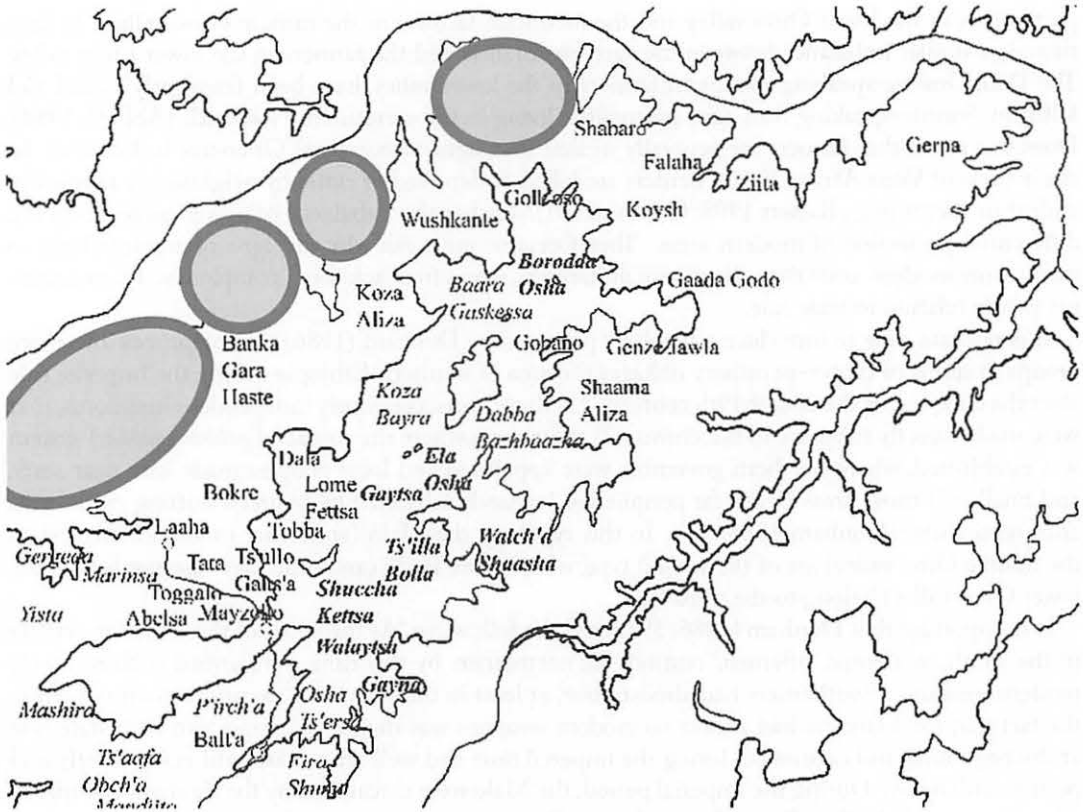


Fig. 7. Area of Permanently Abandoned Settlements

5.5. Social and Environmental Consequences of Violent Attacks

Because of the repeated attacks, a large number of inhabitants have migrated and numerous settlements and fields near the Omo River have been permanently abandoned (Fig. 7), although this process of depopulation started in the Italian period.

Out of fear of future attacks, many farmers living in the lowland settlements are considering migrating into safer areas of Malo highland and Gofa lowland settlements. Because of heavy depopulation, it is difficult to secure manpower to watch remote millet fields for wild animals. During the imperial era, sorghum was the most widely cultivated crop in the lowland fields. However, tef has now replaced sorghum because it requires fewer men to watch the fields. Repeatedly deprived of cattle, local farmers do not have enough oxen to plow the large fields to sow the millet. More and more areas are left fallow in lowland settlements, whereas in highland settlements, land shortages are becoming a serious problem because of the growing population.

Local farmers now regard the riverbank as unsafe and often set fire to vegetation to clear their line of sight. A series of violent attacks has not only changed the lives of inhabitants but has also affected local livelihoods and transformed the use of the landscape and surrounding environment.

6. CONCLUSION

Until the end of the imperial regime, there was little contact between the Malo in the middle Omo valley and the agro-pastoralists in the lower Omo valley. But in 1976, both groups were suddenly linked by violent attacks on the mountain farmers initiated by the Amhara. Similar incidents followed, mostly in political interregnums. Because the attacked farmers had almost no modern arms,

the conflicts were one-sided and no counterattacks followed.

Although the number of human casualties has markedly decreased over time, the looting has intensified. A large imbalance of power persists between the farmers and the agro-pastoralists, but local farmers have gradually repelled the attempts at raids by defending themselves with the support of the current regime. Since 1999, when the regional government ordered the agro-pastoralists to disarm and severely sanctioned those who disobeyed, no obvious attacks have occurred.

In 2005, however, scouts reappeared on the riverbank. Farmers living near the river are once again on the alert. Although they now have some arms, they understand that *golde* will raid them again if state control retreats. They live on the verge of violent attack. As a series of conflicts has taken place fundamentally as a result of differential state rule in the lower and the middle Omo valleys, further state intervention is necessary to prevent future conflicts.

NOTES

- (1) A shorter version of this paper was submitted to the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies held at Trondheim, Norway, in July 2007, and will appear in the proceedings. The present paper is a revised and enlarged version.
- (2) I use the term *middle Omo valley* to refer to the geographical coverage of the former North Omo Zone, which in 2000 split into five distinct units: three zones (Dawro, Gamo Gofa, and Wolayta) and two special districts (Baskeeto and Konta; Vaughan 2006: 193). More recently, Oyda separated from Gamo Gofa zone as a special district (Dereje Feyissa 2007 pers. comm.).
- (3) After “the Gamo Highlands were conquered by Menelik’s forces and incorporated into the nation state of Ethiopia, ... warfare was banned and the slave trade was brought to a halt” (Freeman 2002: 116).
- (4) Their land is currently included in Malo Koza *Woreda* (district), Gamo Gofa Zone, SNNPR.
- (5) Land was measured by a person known as *baasha* Indale. He classified local farmers into three categories according to their holdings: *awchê* (annual land tax = 4 Birr), *bira* (1 Birr), and *alaade* (0.80 Birr). He was referred to as *basha* Andala by Haberland (1959: 196).
- (6) The following interviews informed my description of the attack: a man in his 30s in Borodda on June 1, 1999; a man in his 40s in Borodda on June 2; a man in his 40s in Falaha on June 3; a man in his 30s in Mella on June 13; a man in his 40s in Mella on June 13.
- (7) Those called *golde* by Omotic speakers call themselves *me’ën*. They are divided into seven subgroups: Chirim, Mela, Nyomoni, Gabiyo, K’asha, Bokol, and Baiti, of which Chirim and Mela are usually designated as Bod’i by outsiders (Fukui 1979: 149). They have a generic and derogative designation, *su*, for Omotic-speaking farmers in the middle Omo valley, excluding the Ch’ara.
- (8) The term *golda* is found in European travelers’ accounts dating back to the late 19th century (d’Abbadie 1890; Borelli 1890).
- (9) Interviews with a man in his 60s in Ziita on March 11, 1999, and a woman in her 30s in Haste on August 30, 2004. The woman related what she had been told by her parents.
- (10) Interviews with a man in his 40s in Falaha on June 4, 1997, and a man in his 50s in Haste on August 29, 2004.
- (11) Fukui (2002), who was staying in Bod’i land at that time, was informed that former Amhara landowners supplied 200 *golde* gunmen with five bullets each and guided the route. Six chiefs of seven *me’ën* subgroups, excluding the Bokol, joined in the attacks. Fukui noted that they had attacked Konta settlements to the north of Malo the year before.
- (12) According to Fukui (2005), about 160 people, most of them young men from Bod’i (Mela and Chirim), joined the party. According to Malo informants, just before the attack in Malo, Koysha settlements, including Borodda and Okasha north of the Omo River, were heavily attacked, and at least 100 inhabitants were killed. Fukui (2005) assumed this incident to have taken place on April 16, 1991.
- (13) The Amhara retreat into the lowlands at this time was not their first. Local Amhara concealed themselves in riverine forests and waged guerrilla war against the Italian rule in the late 1930s, although the reality was heavy raiding of peripheral local settlements on both sides of the river (Malo and Konta/Koysha). Some Amhara likely reached the lower Omo valley and made contact with the agro-pastoralists at that time. When they returned after the Italian period, they maintained these relations. Fleming (1994: 451)

noted, "One large Amhara landowner in Malo is widely accused by Dime Amhara of selling guns and bullets to Bodis in exchange for ivory and leopard skins."

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