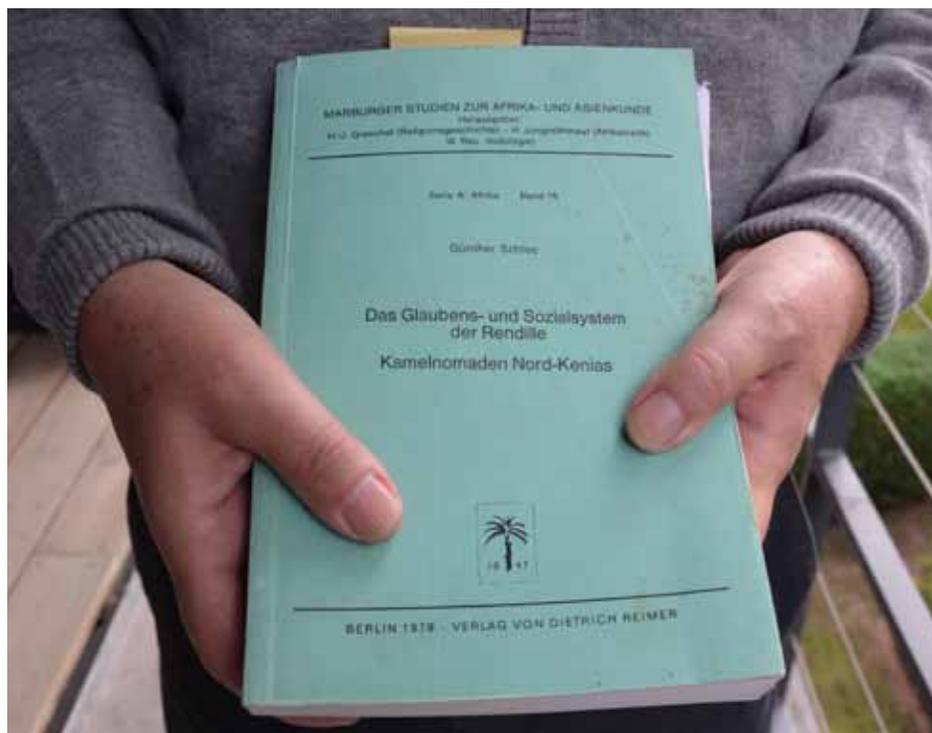


# THE SOCIAL AND BELIEF SYSTEM OF THE RENDILLE

CAMEL NOMADS OF NORTHERN KENYA

[Günther Schlee]



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# SERIES EDITOR'S PREFACE

(GÜNTHER SCHLEE)

## ABOUT THE SERIES

This series of *Field Notes and Research Projects* does not aim to compete with high-impact, peer reviewed books and journal articles, which are the main ambition of scholars seeking to publish their research. Rather, contributions to this series complement such publications. They serve a number of different purposes.

In recent decades, anthropological publications have often been purely discursive – that is, they have consisted only of words. Often, pictures, tables, and maps have not found their way into them. In this series, we want to devote more space to visual aspects of our data.

Data are often referred to in publications without being presented systematically. Here, we want to make the paths we take in proceeding from data to conclusions more visible by devoting sufficient space to the documentation of data.

In addition to facilitating critical evaluation of our work by members of the scholarly community, stimulating comparative research within the institute and beyond, and providing citable references for books and articles in which only a limited amount of data can be presented, these volumes serve an important function in retaining connections to field sites and in maintaining the involvement of the people living there in the research process. Those who have helped us to collect data and provided us with information can be given these books and booklets as small tokens of our gratitude and as tangible evidence of their cooperation with us. When the results of our research are sown in the field, new discussions and fresh perspectives might sprout.

Especially in their electronic form, these volumes can also be used in the production of power points for teaching; and, as they are open-access and free of charge, they can serve an important public outreach function by arousing interest in our research among members of a wider audience.

## ABOUT THE BOOK

This book is not representative for this series because it is not about a project, nor is it a mere documentation of data. It is a translation of a book published a long time ago which has quite a long history of reception as well. One half of a book by another author is based on it. In *Grundzüge einer Ethnologie der Ästhetik* by Sylvia M. Schomburg-Scherff (Frankfurt/N. Y.: Campus, 1986) the Rendille are one of the two ethnographic cases presented. But with the growing numbers of scholars who are interested in Rendille and with the decline of German as an international language of anthropology, we came to the conclusion that time has come to plough this book back into the research process in an English version.

# PREFACE TO THE TRANSLATION

This book was part of my doctoral thesis, which was submitted to Hamburg University in 1976 and accepted in 1977. Originally, it comprised also parts on grammar, vocabulary and more linguistic samples, but these were published as a separate volume (*Sprachliche Studien zum Rendille*, Hamburg: Buske, 1978). My initial idea had been to write on linguistic anthropology, but the publishers only wanted one of the two, linguistics or anthropology. So I took my thesis apart again. This translation aims at being a very close translation (no later insights incorporated) of the major, the anthropological part of my thesis, which was published as *Das Glaubens- und Sozialsystem der Rendille* in 1979. Many of my later texts about Northern Kenya and other parts were inspired by my original doctoral work, although layers and layers of later field research settled on top of it. Unfortunately, being in an undeciphered Central European language, this earlier work of mine has never been accessible in full to a wider academic public. I think this justifies a mere translation rather than a new edition or re-writing of the book in the light of later experience. In any case, this later experience only adds to my findings from the 1970s rather than contradicting them. For an update of the references also to the valuable work of others, the reader can easily consult any of my more recent writings.

The few corrections I made comprise things, which have been on errata sheets in the original publication (which usually get lost). Furthermore, the sister volume, *Sprachliche Studien*, has been announced under a different title. I here only use the title under which the book actually appeared. Apart from these details, I leave the text as it is, as a historical document. The translation was done by Astrid Finke to my full satisfaction. I have never been able to translate a text of my own. It bores me to tears. I always end up writing a new one.

One chapter (2.10) has been omitted. It dealt with interethnic clan relationships and anticipated elements of my later book *Identities on the Move*, which superseded the dissertation chapter. The latter was a first try and it comprised too many mistakes.

A substantial part of chapter 4.5. has been omitted here because it has just been reprinted in Volume II of this series (Schlee, Isir, Beleysa Hambule, and Günther Schlee: *The Moiety Division and the Problem of Rendille Unity: A Discussion among Elders*, *Korr*, 21<sup>st</sup> January, 2008).

Fredrik Barth once told me that the young person who wrote *Nomads of South Persia* no longer appears to him to be himself. To me, the author of the present book appears to be a much younger and much more vigorous version of myself but still myself. I have always been doing my thing, it has

always been basically the same thing, since I went to live among the Rendille at the age of twenty-three, and it has always grown. I have been putting one stone on the other. I thank my Maker for this. While the lives of my father and grandfather were cruelly disrupted, I have grown up in peace, in a loving and protective environment, feeling so secure that I actually went out to seek adventure. For decades now, fortunate circumstances allowed me to do precisely what I wanted to do. And I even got paid for it!

Since I wrote this book, intellectual fashions and language games have changed many times. I have never cared too much about such changes, but of course I am not unaffected by them. Standards of political correctness have also undergone inflation. Nowadays, I would not write in this manner any more. Maybe I could not, if I tried. Still, I think that my 1979 book offers a perspective on Rendille that deserves to be represented. Many things have changed since, so this work can also be used as a base-line for the study of change.

Much of the diction of this book may sound a bit dated. To do justice to this work I ask those who want to cite it to include the original year of publication, e. g. (Schlee 2014[1979]).

#### A NOTE ON SPELLING

For the name Rendille we have kept the usual spelling in English. In Rendille the proper spelling is Renḍille. In the text Rendille spelling have been updated with the help of Francis Letiwa Galboran. The clan list has been corrected, too. Apart from that, the original text is presented here.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My special thanks go to Anders Grum. He did research with the Rendille before I did and he opened my eyes to many things. He generously provided me with information, even with key information, which has had decisive influence on the course of my work. As the one to enter the field at a later time, I was able to return this generosity only to the smallest degree.

Very helpful to me was Paul Spencer's book *Nomads in Alliance*. In quite a few instances my results contradict Spencer's; for that reason I will be criticising him on various occasions. But I must emphasise that my research has benefited considerably from Spencer's comprehensive work. If my criticism of Spencer has a slightly polemic tone at times that is because I let myself be carried away by the verve of reasoning. I am sure Paul will forgive me.

Adelheid Möhler always supplied me with board, lodging and kindness when I went to Nairobi.

There is not enough space to thank all my Rendille friends. Let this book itself be my thanks to them.

My mother typed large parts of the manuscript.

Furthermore I would like to thank the *Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes* (German National Academic Foundation), the grants of which enabled me to finance my research.

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# 0. INTRODUCTION

## 0.1 AN OVERVIEW OF THE RENDILLE AND THEIR HABITAT

### 0.1.1. LINGUISTIC CLASSIFICATION<sup>1</sup>

The Rendille speak a Cushitic language. Linguistically, their closest relatives are the Somali. Other languages of the Cushitic language family<sup>2</sup> include Oromo, which is spoken, among others, by the Gabbra and the Boran – neighbours of the Rendille – and a number of other Ethiopian languages. The Cushitic languages are a subunit of the Afro-Asiatic or Erythraean languages, which also include the Semitic languages. These Erythraean languages form an extensive and geographically rather self-contained linguistic area on both sides of the Red Sea, to which this language family owes its name. Geographically at the other extreme of this same language family we, therefore, find Hebrew and Arabic. The linguistic similarities to the Arabic language are still so considerable that, for instance, the consonant structure of derivational morphemes (person/gender) of the verb is identical. The question of whether this linguistic relationship corresponds to a cultural relationship attributable not only to the similar nomadic pastoralist lifestyle of the early Semites and today's Cushites, but also to a common heritage, is a very interesting one which, however, we will not discuss in the present work.

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### 0.1.2. ORIGIN

There are no large-scale migration stories indicating that the Rendille as a whole have at one point migrated into their present tribal territory from somewhere else.

According to some Somali, the Rendille descend from them and were once Muslims. This, however, shows all signs of a post-hoc explanation of the linguistic similarity. More likely to be true is the reversed hypothesis, that in fact the Somali are descended from proto-Somali who were very similar to the Rendille and may have been identical to the proto-Rendille.

The myths of a clan of Rengumo tell that this clan had originally come from the western part of Lake Rudolf and had existed among the Dassanech, too. Back then, Lake Rudolf is said to have been small, and only later did it separate Dassanech and Rendille from each other. Another clan's (Gaalorra) myth implies a relation to Dassanech and Boran.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Schlee, G.: "*Sprachliche Studien zum Rendille*", which serves as an appendix to the text at hand, contains a grammatical sketch as well as a glossary of the Rendille language. Details on the spelling of Rendille words used in this text can also be found there.

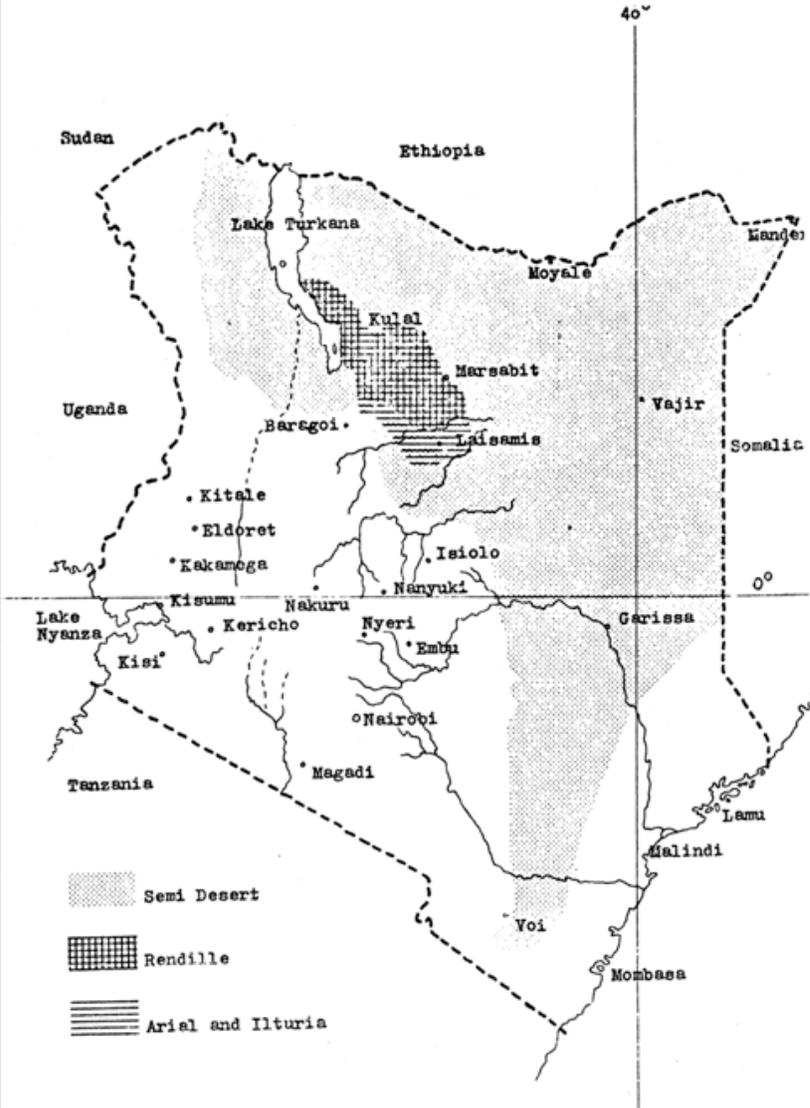
<sup>2</sup> These languages used to be called "Hamitic", a term which was abandoned due to the confusion it caused.

<sup>3</sup> These and other clan relations will be discussed in the second excursus: "Is there an old pan-Cushitic clan structure?"

The oldest clans of the seniority order, however, believe their ancestors to have come out of the ground in specific places within their present tribal territory. I was shown two sites (Faarre and Algaas) between Kargi and Marsabit, which are surrounded by big circular stone settings and in the centre of which erect stones denote the places of origin of the clans Dubsahay and Adisoomele.

Considering the great historical depth of other narrations and the otherwise rich mythology, the lack of migration stories indicates that the Rendille have inhabited their present tribal territory for a very long time.

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Map 0.1 taken from: Anders Grum, Rendille Habitation

### 0.1.3. GEOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

#### *BORDERS OF THE TRIBAL TERRITORY*

The Rendille live 600 kilometres north of Nairobi in a relatively flat semi-desert. To the west, their territory is delimited by Lake Rudolf – the now official Kenyan name is Lake Turkana – and the mountains of the Ndoto and Matthews Range, and to the north by the Chalbi desert. In the east it reaches Mount Marsabit, and in the southeast it stretches into the plains east of the Nairobi – Addis Ababa road (here: Laisamis – Marsabit). Situated in the south, Laisamis can be seen as the centre of a transition area to the Aryaal, i.e. a mixed population of Rendille and Samburu, as well as to the Maasai-speaking Samburu, who are friendly with the Rendille. These borders are not fixed, but rather continue to be redefined by a “balance of terror” with hostile neighbouring tribes – the Turkana in the northeast, the Gabbra in the north, and the Boran in the east and south.

#### *CLIMATE – VEGETATION*

All of northern Kenya – north of Isiolo – is arid, rough, trafficable only by off-road vehicles, fit only for camels and smallstock, at its edges to some extent also for cattle. The vegetation ranges from dense thornbush (which is, however, less frequent in the Rendille territory because that area is too dry) to sparse umbrella acacia savannah, low shrubs and desert.

#### *LAVA FIELDS*

A striking feature of the landscape in Rendille territory are the lava fields – densely covered with big chunks, partly forming plateaus – which rise up many metres above the surrounding plains and are, on top, as flat as the surrounding area. The lava fields serve Rendille groups as escape routes from enemies. “You walk over the rocks” where you leave no footprints.

#### *RIVERS*

The two dirt roads leading into the centre of Rendille territory, the one from Laisamis and the one from Logologo (between Laisamis and Marsabit), pass through temporary rivers which are dry for most part of the year, but after the torrential, often very short and local rains typical of the wet seasons in November and April turn into rapid streams and completely disrupt the little traffic there is. Since the River Malgis, a river frequently carrying large amounts of water from higher areas of the Samburu District, intersects the road from Laisamis, the road from Logologo goes back to being trafficable quicker after rains. The Malgis provides many Rendille with water. Even during the dry season they dig for water in its bed. The wooded river plain of the Malgis – inhabited by many elephants and rhinos and in general a biotope standing out against the surrounding dry savannahs and semi-deserts due to its biodiversity – is important for the Rendille because the poles they use for house building are cut mainly there.

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## MOUNTAINS

Similarly important as a source for house building materials are the higher parts of the mountains, like Illem and Baayo, where wild sisal<sup>4</sup> used for roof mats is cut.

In the river plains of the Merille River south of Laisamis, *ilaalle* is cut, a reed made into floor covering for the sleeping spot.<sup>5</sup>

Apart from that, the remaining area is used, for one thing, as pasture for the camels and for sheep and goat herds. There are only very few cattle. The reasons for this are, firstly, that cattle need grass, while the pasture in this area primarily consists of low bushes, and, secondly, that waterholes are scarce. Further uses of this area include gathering firewood and, occasionally, fruits, which are eaten in passing – a *quantité negligible*. Vegetable foods can be neither cultivated nor gathered systematically. That makes livestock the only food source.

## VILLAGES AND TOWNS

The villages in this area are all of the same pattern: police station, mission, school, mosque, and some shops, mostly owned by Somali, single-story, round timber-framed, clay-plastered buildings that offer cloths, maize flour, chewing tobacco, tea, sugar, torch batteries. The bigger shops also sell Coca-Cola, salt, washing powder, kerosene lamps, wheat flour and a few other items. The missions are surrounded by squalid huts of people who, in favour of receiving charity, have given up on dealing with the harsh environment.

Marsabit additionally has a district administration and a gas station, but the gas prices are so high there, that it is smarter to stock up in Nanyuki, a day's journey further south. In the rainy high valleys surrounding Marsabit a little farming is done – although not by Rendille – and in the town itself there is a market in which agricultural products are sold. Marsabit has roughly 5000 inhabitants. Thanks to the nearby national park with its particularly large elephants, there is a little tourism, too. Where there are people earning salaries as well as tourists, prostitution always flourishes.

Marsabit and its surroundings are very different from the pastoral-nomadically used thornbush steppes and semi-deserts. The area is made up of comparatively rainy isolated mountains of volcanic origin, covered by big craters, densely forested and cool. Some of the farmers are immigrants from Ethiopia; it would not have occurred to the Rendille to engage in that activity. Laisamis has a few hundred inhabitants, Logologo – apart from some nomads settling in front of the mission and waiting for food – only a few dozens. Basically, Logologo consists of a row of shops.

<sup>4</sup> 'Wild sisal' is botanically not correct. Rendille: *eyma* is a *Sanseveria* sp. Footnote added 2014.

<sup>5</sup> In fact, *ilalle* is the spinal stem of a palm leaf. Footnote added 2014.

Apart from these – according to the characteristics listed above – complete villages, there are some incomplete ones, too. Incomplete villages consist of: school, shops, no mission (examples: Illaut, Kargi), or police, mission, no school (example: Korr).

Korr presents an exception in that there is not one single solid building. Rather, it is an agglomeration of Rendille dwellings of a mobile build gathered around the camp an Italian missionary, who drills wells and provides cheap maize flour, has built from poles and mats.

#### *WATER*

These six villages and towns also make up almost all of the permanent water-holes in Rendille territory. Only in these places can water suitable for human needs be found even during the worst drought. The highly alkaline water of the seventh spot is highly beneficial to camels, as long as it is used alternately with other watering places, to avoid excess. As far as human consumption is concerned, this water has the reputation of being a laxative.

#### 0.1.4. SOCIAL UNITS AS DEFINED BY WAR AND MARRIAGE

Rendille society consists of exogamous clans which, together with brother clans, partly form even bigger exogamous units. These exogamous units exist most of the time within the two moieties of the tribe and do not cut across the boundary between the moieties (*Belel*). Thus, marriage across the *Belel* line is much more frequent than within the *Belel*, since too many girls of one's own moiety are considered sisters and therefore not eligible as brides.

The small but ritually very important O'doola group consists of small exogamous units which intermarry with each other. Marriages between O'doola and other Rendille are very rare. (For O'doola, see 3.1.)

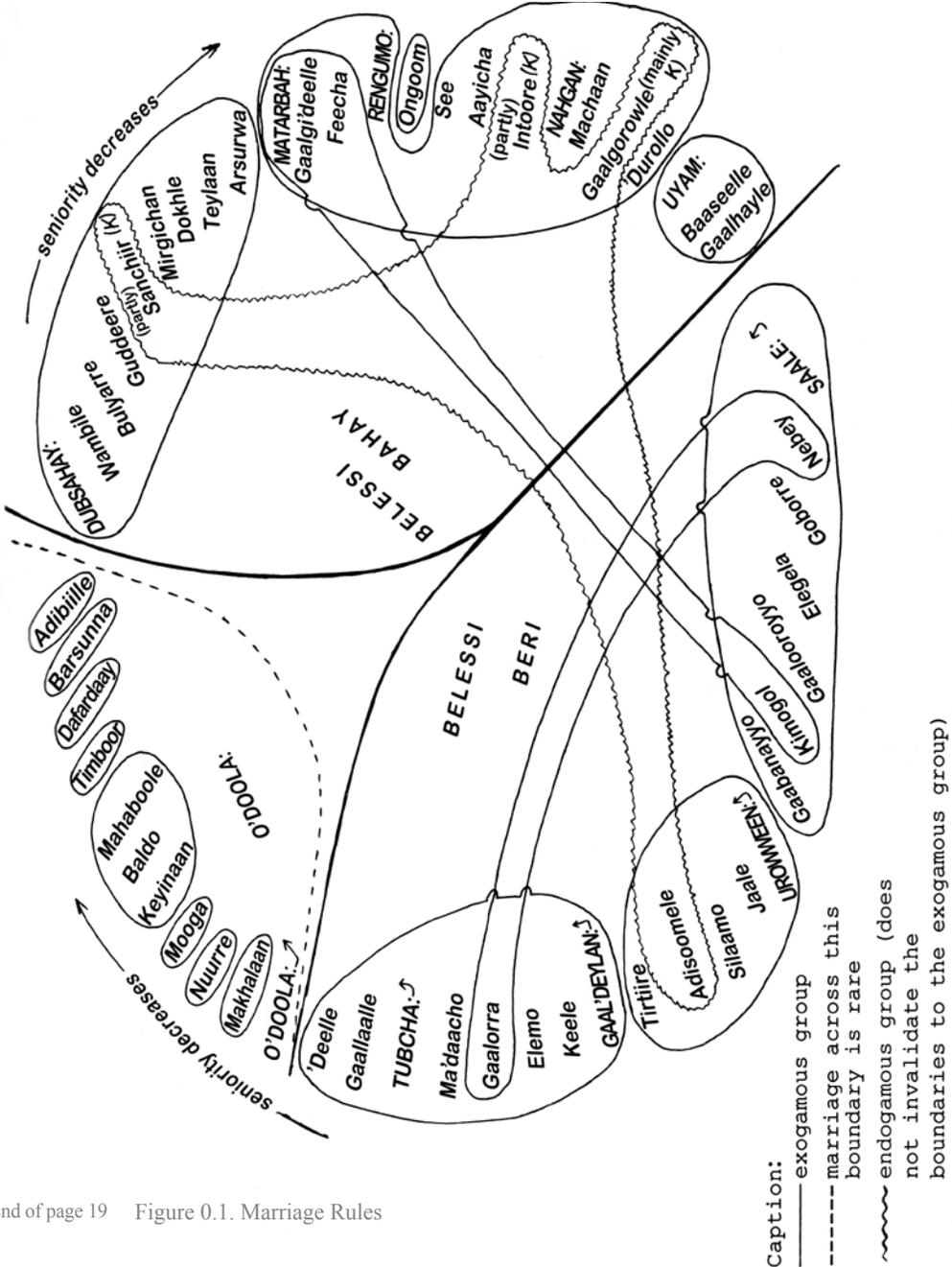
Absolute endogamy is the case among the "K" group, or at least marriages between non-"K" Rendille men and "K" girls are impossible, the reverse highly improbable. (For the "K" group, see 2.4)

Marriages to Aryaal and Samburu are quite common. Since most of the Aryaal are originally Rendille, however, who only adopted Samburu age-grade rites and cattle husbandry but did not give up their Rendille clan membership, to them the same marriage rules apply as to Rendille. Therefore, a Rendille man also has sisters and non-sisters among the Aryaal. (Aryaal are not really a separate, third group next to Samburu and Rendille, but belong to both tribes equally. Their clan affiliation is also dual: They are therefore Lukumai *and* Tubcha, for instance, or Long'eli *and* Saale.)

The Rendille form an alliance with Aryaal and Samburu. Although homicide does happen occasionally, this kind of conflict does not result in escalation, but is resolved through mediation talks and purification ceremonies. This large internally peaceful unit is confronted by other internally peaceful, but externally aggressive units like Turkana and Gabbra/Boran. O'doola,

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however, is related to a group in the Gabbra phratry of the same name. In the event of war, the O'doola of both tribes avoid killing each other. Likewise, by the way, should Rendille and Dassanech as well as Rendille and Somali avoid killing each other, because in these cases the killer is believed to lose his mind: he spilled his own blood, as these tribes consider each other kin.



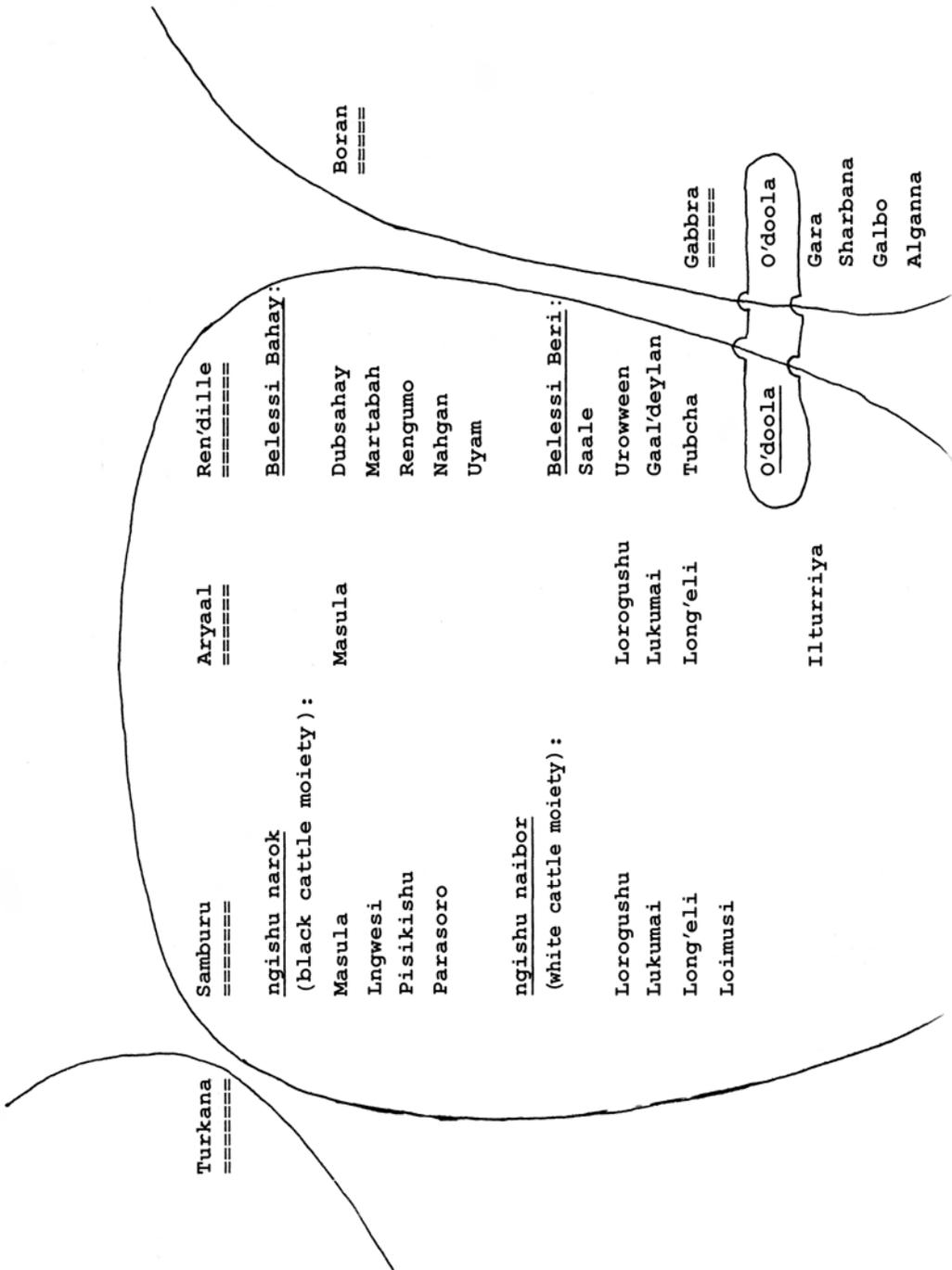


Figure 0.2. Internally peaceful groups



## 0.2. CHRONOLOGICAL ACCOUNT OF MY RESEARCH STAYS WITH THE RENDILLE

*“The clever man evades the stick,  
but the stupid man gets hit by the blow.”*

Rendille proverb

I would prefer to relate only the blows I have been able to evade. But instead I will, for honesty's sake, also talk of the ones that hit me.

I hope that this way, the description of my research will provide information in three respects: Firstly about the Rendille, secondly about the fieldwork situation among them, i.e. about the circumstances of data collection. And thirdly, I want to describe the reactions of an average European to certain strains, with the aim of developing techniques to improve these reactions.

Difficulties overcome look smaller than imminent ones. But I will try to think back and attempt to describe everything in the context of its time and its situation.

It started with my travelling East Africa for three and a half months in the summer of 1974, from one mission station or one research project to the next. The hospitality, the means of transport, and the willingness to provide information of European contact persons were very helpful to me in this endeavour.

Deciding on a field of work, my interest quickly began to shift away from the densely populated Bantu areas, which are Christianised and in the process of economic integration. I was looking for a contrast to our own society. I wanted to get to know a different extreme of the development possibilities of human societies in order to study under, for us, foreign conditions how, for us, foreign systems of thought work.

This has nothing to do with the quest for an “untouched” or “primordial” culture. There is no such thing. Due to wars and trade, every East African tribe has been in contact with the outer world for times no longer datable. What I was looking for was a culture in which this outer world is not necessarily shaped primarily by the Europeans.

I travelled the territories of the Maasai and the Samburu. In Maralal, I met Elliot Fratkin, London, who was gathering data for a doctoral thesis. The inspiring discussions with him had a decisive influence on the further course of my search. He directed my attention to the Rendille and also took me in his Land Rover to an Aryaal<sup>6</sup> settlement south of Illaut which was to be the centre of his research. There I packed my backpack.

Another important stop was Korr, where the Italian Father Redento and his co-workers, students and other volunteers, have built a camp from poles,

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<sup>6</sup> Aryaal are bilingual groups acknowledged as fellow tribespeople by the Samburu as well as the Rendille and with identification points in the clan structures of both tribes.

sackcloth and mats. What they are doing there – in the heart of a widely scattered conglomeration of temporary Rendille settlements – is humanitarian and, at least in their own understanding, developmental work.

Without Elliot and Redento it would have been practically impossible for me to keep in touch with the Rendille. If you do not have your own off-road car, the journey to Korr is lengthy and uncertain.

It takes a certain sense of determination to get to Korr – or chance. Only seldom adventure tourists heading for Lake Rudolf arrive there when they followed the wrong track. – “Is this Kargi?” – “No, this is Korr.” – “Well, good-bye then.”

In Korr, there are no solidly built houses. The mission, its dispensary, its cooperative shop, the Somali shops – they all make do with temporary constructions in the Rendille style. A great number of “blacksmiths” live here, a population group separated from the Rendille by a marriage constraint who, apart from smithery and pottery, work for the mission doing all types of work, like repairing the “roads” after rains.

Also part of the scene are the catechists, young men who completed a few years of primary school and are summoned to Korr once a week to report from the Rendille settlements where they are stationed. The mission’s material help is gladly accepted, but the Bible classes of the catechists are regarded more as an entertainment.

Neighbourhood is a relative term here; the settlement cluster of Korr, where at times most of the Rendille settle, has a diameter of up to 25 kilometres, and further smaller agglomerations of this type even lie at a distance of 20, 30, 35 and 40 kilometres from Korr. Yet, mainly due to the water and – ever since Redento’s arrival four years ago – the famine relief he has organised, Korr has developed into a settlement and communication centre.

During my orientational and preparatory stay in the summer of 1974 I went to Korr twice. During my second stay I recorded substantial language samples, grammatical paradigms and example sentences, based on a list of 600 words (basic vocabulary)<sup>7</sup> on a tape recorder, with Lawrence Larrion Alyaro, a young man of twenty who had an incomplete secondary school education, as my main informant.

During the winter in Germany I wrote a provisional grammar and started to learn the language. Some financial and organisational problems also had to be taken care of.

In March, 1975, I was back in Kenya. The difficult purchase of a Land Rover took me six weeks.

In late April, I drove out to the Rendille. My vehicles were an “adult car” and its “foal”, as the Rendille used to call it: a long station wagon, in the back

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<sup>7</sup> This word list was drawn up by Prof. Dr. W. Möhlig, Cologne. It was written in English and Swahili and was meant to be used for the Bantu sphere. Since the vocabulary of pastoral nomads is, of course, specific in other areas than that of farmers, this list could only serve as a preliminary guideline.

of which I had stowed a small motorbike I often used for shorter distances, to save gas.

### *FIRST CONTACT IN THE FIELD*

First I spent a few days in the mission camp with Lawrence Larrion Alyaro and James Digir Turruga, the then chief catechist<sup>8</sup>. Here, I could without any difficulty communicate in English or Swahili and select an interpreter and a settlement group where I wanted to live.

Larrion introduced me to the seventeen-year-old Simon Soba Alyaro whom I chose as interpreter. Soba had completed seven years of primary school, was unemployed and spoke English. He belonged to the Uyam clan, but lived, together with his father and his father's three brothers, with their affinal relatives in a settlement group of the Gaal'deylan clan, about 5 kilometres from the mission camp.

Had I known then how special the ritual status of Gaal'deylan was, I might have shied away from going there, as I strongly believed in the general principle that it is always better to start with the standard and typical before taking an interest in special statuses. Maybe with certain subject matters, the reversed maxim is just as good.

But the only selection criteria for which group to live with I had and to make an informed choice back then were:

1. It should not be a group of poor people entirely dependent on the mission because that would have denied me access to information on the Rendille's subsistence economy.
2. It should not be an Aryaal group because they spoke too much Samburu for me to learn Rendille quickly.
3. It should not be a despised group of low status because my attention to such people might have offended people of higher social status and made them turn their backs on me.

These criteria were met by Gaal'deylan. Larrion, having grown up in this clan and a "brother" (FaBrSo) of Soba, introduced me to the people there. I explained my request: I had come to learn, not to teach them anything or to change their way of living in any way. Like anybody who sets out to learn new things, I could be expected to make many mistakes in the beginning. Instead of believing this to be done out of malice, I hoped for them to be frank with me and to point my mistakes out to me. Then I asked the five or so elders<sup>9</sup> present for permission to take up residence in their clan. This permission was granted immediately. Larrion, the interpreter, told me that

<sup>8</sup> In the meantime he has broken with the church because he married a second wife.

<sup>9</sup> Elders are the married men (in Rendille: *makhabale*, in Swahili: *wazee*) in contrast to the warriors (in Rendille: *her*, in up-country Swahili from Maasai: *morani*).

my speech had struck the right note. Particularly the point of my not wanting to change anything had met with appreciation. That was the end of my first flying visit.

In the next two days I built, assisted by a number of women and elders as well as two paid helpers from the mission camp, a big round hut from of bent wooden poles, roofed with some sacks which were sewn together. (A month later, the settlement group moved on and all that effort had to be repeated. From then on, my dwelling became smaller and more mobile with every move, until it was finally reduced to Rendille dimensions. This first hut, however, was a palace of 5 metres in diameter.)

The settlement pattern basically follows seniority. The “first” family settles in the west, the one next in rank follows in northern direction. In this order the dwellings are erected clockwise in a circle up to the last one, which is the first one’s southern neighbour.

At night, after my hut was finished, Haldeeti, wife of Naarugo, whose house was the first in the seniority order, prepared tea for all the elders of the settlement group. My house was located in the same position of the seniority order as that of Haldeeti in whose care Larrion had placed me. It stood a little outside of the circle of houses, to the same direction (west) as Haldeeti’s as seen from the *naabo*, the centre.

All the elders – there were 20 of them – came to my house, and after they had drunk their tea, I repeated my first speech, elaborating it a little. I was assured that from now on, I was a member of the clan, they wouldn’t move on without me, and they would only migrate to places where my camel (car) could follow, that means no place enclosed by big rocks. Also, my camel was very useful for the transport of their houses, since many of their pack camels had died during the long drought. The latter hope I tried to fend off by pointing out that my camel drank larger amounts of expensive gas. Furthermore they assured me they would do their best to answer all my questions. After that it was time for prayer.

My euphoria, caused by this good start, the apparent willingness to cooperate, my fast “adoption”, lasted a few weeks. I worked on my language skills, did some first interviews, used my car to help the women get water, occasionally gave away tea or sugar, later also cloths and blankets, and was in turn given gifts of meat and milk. At first I wanted to pay for the milk. But that, I was told, was not customary among clan brothers. It was shortly after the spring rains, milk was abundant and tasted just as well without my paying for it. What kind of policy it was that underlay this strict refusal of any payment I did not fully realise until later. If no payment is agreed on, you pay more dearly. There are people who make clever use of the system of informal mutual “help”, and there are others who are not practiced in that skill. I belonged to the second type.

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### PROGRESSING INTEGRATION

At least regarding obligations on my part, my clan membership was from the very beginning expected to have behavioural consequences. The first time this became evident was the following incident: After a livestock raid that had led 130 Rendille warriors deep into Turkana territory in late April and in the course of which 17 Turkana had been killed, everybody was afraid of a counterattack by the Turkana, particularly the groups living west of the Korr cluster, like ours. Once, two Turkana scouts were seized by government soldiers, of whom an increased number was stationed in Korr.

The western groups pondered moving away, settling closer to other groups. This was the most frequent topic of discussion during the elders' evening meetings in the *naabo*. The women, who have to do the bulk of the work when moving – erecting and dismantling the houses, loading the camels with houses and household goods – often did not know what was going to happen because the elders did not bother to inform them.

As early as Friday, May 9, the group had intended to move on. This had been decided on Thursday night. Then, on Friday morning, with everybody expecting to set off, order came from the *naabo*, where the elders gathered again, that the houses were not to be packed. Not all the elders had been successful in acquiring pack geldings from neighbouring groups, and no group can manage the entire transport using only their own gelded camels. (Using a lactating milk camel as pack animal is unthinkable, apart from the fact that these camels are not trained for the purpose.)

Saturday and Sunday are unfavourable days for migration. Then, on Monday, some considerations arose which made us stay for a while. We – a small delegation of Gaal'deylan – went to visit a neighbouring group (Dubsahay Goob Wambile) to inquire about their plans. There we learned that Lengeewa (?), a *moro* (diviner) had requested all Rendille to stay where they were. There was no danger, he had said. Also, with regard to an oncoming malaria outbreak, it was better not to weaken man and beast needlessly. The general latent uneasiness, however, remained. Only one day later, on Tuesday morning, within moments the whole settlement was in uproar. Men raced to get their spears. And in a flash, younger elders and warriors with spears, clubs and swords piled into my car. A cry of alarm was claimed to have been heard in the east. Quick! I was to drive them there. There was not much time to think. Should I go? What chance does a carload of Rendille have against 200 Turkana? Frantically, I tried to find decision criteria. The best I could think of was that it was a waste of taxpayers' money to die a foolish death so shortly before completing my expensive studies. On the other hand, I was going to have a hard time in my future fieldwork if I left the impression that my solidarity could not be relied on in extreme situations. Furthermore, I was told, I was a clan member and had been drinking milk for free for ten days. So off

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we went. I counted sixteen people in the car. Other people we met on the way were informed through the open window. Every male being headed towards the danger at full speed. It did not seem to be heroism, rather an automatism that had been triggered. Nobody seemed consider maybe slowing down a little to avoid being the first one to arrive at the scene.

Behind the mission camp, a group of blacksmiths and catechists, armed with clubs and spears, came our way. It had been a false alarm, they said. Only a petty theft. Two Samburu had slashed the bellies of two goats, slung them over their shoulders and run away. That was why the children herding the smallstock had screamed.

The armed conflicts also had advantages for my research, however. On the next evening I was able to observe how a group of killers wearing the white chalk paint marking this special ritual status between killing and purification ceremony were welcomed to our settlement; I saw the ritual pointed hut on which the cut-off genitals of the slain Turkana were kept, and I recorded a long ballad in which the killers narrated their raid and mocked their enemies.

That was my first insight into the institution of *meeraat* (cf. 3. 3.). This tape recording was, incidentally, made possible by the mediation of Baarowwa Adicharreh, who later became my brother.

#### *ADMISSION INTO AGE SET AND LINEAGE*

When I started to speak Rendille, everybody was as delighted as they would be about the first words of a child. My learning the language was greatly encouraged by everybody. Patiently, and assisted by much gesticulating, everyone kept talking to me. As early as during my first week, when I took Baarowwa, a young elder, to the mission camp on my motorbike, he jokingly pretended to be offended when I tried to employ a Swahili speaking catechist as interpreter because of communication difficulties. Among brothers you did not do that, he told me.

As Baarowwa, emissary and mediator of the whole group, always well-informed and very talkative, was at that time my main informant and I could see no reason to not intensify contact with him, I did not mind at all to be considered a member of his lineage Adicharreh. Gradually, what had been a sort of joke at first was beginning to be accepted as a given. Social relationships are not expressed in any other way than by age and kinship. Therefore, it is perfectly reasonable to look for an identification point in this frame of reference.

Age-set affiliation is determined by Ego's age and the father's age-set affiliation. My own father was born in 1904, I was born in 1951. That would have made my father a member of the age set of Irbaallis and me one of the younger members of Ilkichilli, the "sons of Irbaallis", the current warriors. According to that, I should have stayed at the camel camp with the warriors. But the decision processes I was interested in were the responsibility of the elders, who stay in

the settlement. For that reason I pretended to be seven years older. I was thirty, I told them, and adjusted my father's age accordingly. Moreover, all my age-set mates in Germany were long married, I claimed, and I was only an exception because it was too difficult to take a wife and children with me on my constant travels.

By this fraud I just about managed to bridge the 15-year age gap to the younger members of Irbaandif. The only other unmarried man of Irbaandif was "Bukha", whose wife had left him (cf. 2.8.8.1.3.). I was often mockingly compared with him. I do not know to what extent my assertions were actually believed. Once an old man intently felt my upper arm and then declared that really I had to be a warrior, because the muscles of elders were flabbier.

Later, when everybody had got used to the forms of interaction with me, the formal criterion of age did not matter much any more. My position depended on my social age, not on a number of years. And this social age I owed mainly to the usefulness of my occasional services and assistance.

These new identifications became important for the first time during the *almodo* festival (cf. 0.6.7.2.). I took part in the whole ceremony as a member of "my" age set, instead of keeping far away from the events along with the warriors. Also, parts of the ceremony are strictly limited to clan members.

#### *DRY SEASON*

The *almodo* festival took place in our second settlement site, the first *soorriyo* festival in our third. I had already been with the Rendille for three months. There had been one shower of rain in May and one in July. The dry season more and more began to make itself felt.

For the *soorriyo* festival (cf. 0.6.7.1.), all the camels have to be present in the settlement. The entire camel camp including all the warriors has to be moved there from the often distant good pastures. Every household slaughters one head of smallstock. The camels are milked, and from time to time, the neck of one of them is constricted and, by shooting an arrow into the protruding vein, a few litres of blood are tapped. For a few days we all feasted on meat, milk and blood.

After that, the times got back to being lean. Warriors and girls had taken the smallstock to better pastures south of Merille at a distance of 80 kilometres. The camel camp was located at first 30, later about 60 kilometres to the northwest in a region called Hafarre. Only few milk camels had remained in the settlement.

From the very beginning I had frequently been asked for tea and sugar, and as long as this did not get out of hand, I didn't mind much. I had occasionally handed out blankets and cloths to people who had helped me, as gifts. All this was now demanded of me to a greater extent.

As I was often using the hours of the afternoon heat, when most of the Rendille lie sleeping in the shade, to write letters and review my notes because

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at all other times there was a coming and going in my hut, I would sleep an hour longer in the morning. But as soon as the sun rose in the morning, the first visitors came. “He is sleeping”, I heard a female voice. “What, he is still sleeping?” answered a louder voice from outside. They come to my bedside to check up on the facts. “Ginta?” – that was the Rendille version of my name. A little louder: “Ginta?” These investigations are continued until their volume has secured that I am not asleep anymore.

“Give us some tea and sugar!” As the neighbouring tribes, who regard the Rendille as habitual beggars, scornfully point out, the Rendille language has no words for “please” and “thank you”. The grammatical category of “asking” for something is the unadorned imperative. *Isii!* – give me!, *nah sii!* – give us! With a curse, I get up from my bed and hurl a sandal after the women who are running away. That is, of course, a rather ineffective “punishment”. To chase away women and children is no problem; it is seen more as a general amusement. With the men one has to be more careful.

Thanks to my loud swearing and the shrieks of the women, the whole settlement knows I am awake now. Further applicants appear. The interaction starts by everybody greeting each other at length.

Petitioner: “Where is my cloth?”

I: “Your cloth? I didn’t even know you had a cloth.”

Petitioner: “The one you wanted to get for me in Nairobi when you went there the last time.”

I: “I was not going to get a cloth for you.”

Petitioner: “But I told you, I need a cloth.”

I: “But I never promised to get one for you. I don’t have enough money to give everybody cloths.”

Petitioner: “But you gave cloths to the whole settlement. Why am I the only one who does not get one?”<sup>10</sup>

I: “I can only help the people who have helped me.

One chief characteristic of such negotiations is their long duration. This impression I cannot convey here for lack of space. It is quite common among the Rendille to ask each other for “gifts”. For the person asking, this is not degrad-

<sup>10</sup> I do not advise anyone who wants to live with the Rendille to ever give away cloths. New colourful hip cloths are so conspicuous that they arouse the jealousy of the entire tribe. Such gifts might earn you the friendship of the receiver, but to the same extent also the animosity of those who repeatedly feel unjustly passed over. It is better to give away money. It makes the receiver happier because he can hide it from his relatives. A new cloth, however, is often sneaked from him. To demand back a cloth that was taken away is very impolite; from elder people it is absolutely impossible, particularly if they asked whether they could keep it. Gifts of money are best combined with asking the receiver not to talk about it to anyone so that he or she feels particularly favoured.

ing at all. “Asking is the first-born.” The one who asks is the guest. “*Sulhaal*” is the guest who has come to demand help. “*Sulhaale kiimi*”: I have come as a guest, or: “I have come because I want something from you.” A vital aspect of the relation to fellow tribesmen – particularly clan brothers – is to ask and be asked for “gifts”. Whoever asks first has a certain claim which the other one needs a good reason to deny. It is very impolite to immediately confront the one asking with counter-demands. Such demands cannot be put forth until later and are not openly set off against earlier gifts or services. Everybody does the accounting in the backs of their minds. However, the bargaining position of the petitioner is stronger if he is able to refer to previous gifts – even if the gifts were smaller and their value more of a symbolical type – which have a morally obligatory effect.

The petitioner for a cloth who, after the discussion described above which took much longer than the small fraction I presented, had left frustratedly might resume negotiations at a later time as follows:

On the day before he announces that he will have a *sulhaal* on the next day, i.e. he will visit me to ask for a gift. “A really big *sulhaal*.” When making such announcements, one does not modestly stress the insignificance of the occasion, but instead its magnitude, in order to prepare the other person for the worst.<sup>11</sup>

On the next day:

Petitioner: “Do you know who put the milk on your table yesterday when you were out?”

The purpose of the question is as easy to guess as the answer:

“Your wife.”

Petitioner: “I thought, we have to do something for this man. The dry weather must be hard for him, too. From dawn till dusk his house is full of guests. Everybody wants something from him. Nobody ever thinks of him. So I said to my wife: ‘Bring him that milk, will you.’ Yes, the dry season is bad. Do you know where our smallstock is?”

I: “Merille.”

Petitioner: “And our camels?”

I: “Hafarre.”

Petitioner: “Is that nearby?”

I: “No, it is not.”

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<sup>11</sup> The European pattern for borrowing money would work along the lines of: “Can you help me out? I only need 50 Dollars until Monday.” One avoids the word “money”, one avoids the impression it might be a big sum. The possibility of the petitioner not having any money on Monday to be able to pay back his debt is not mentioned. The tactics employed by the Rendille are the reverse: “I want money, lots of money.” This is followed by a detailed presentation of a compelling need. If in the end the sum turns out not be as large as expected, the prospective creditor feels relieved and coughs up the money.

Petitioner: “We only have two camels in the settlement. When they are thirsty, in the days before the watering, they barely give enough milk for the tea. And the money for the maize flour, where am I to get that? What can I do?”

At this point, the conversation could lead to a request for money to buy maize flour for the petitioner’s children, at least that is what is always claimed: for the children. In any case that would be a logical continuation of the conversation. This opening might, however, also serve to generally get me in the right mood, to imply that he is a destitute, but good-hearted man to whom I absolutely must give something. All of a sudden, the conversation can turn from his hungry children to the already familiar request for a new hip cloth.

Petitioner: “What is that?” (He shows me his hip cloth.)

I: “A cloth.”

Petitioner: “What does it look like?”

I: “It is beautiful!”

Petitioner: “No, it is not, it is full of holes. It is very old.”

(In the course of the months, the threadbare blankets and cloths of half the tribe must have been held up to my nose reproachfully. This is the part of Rendille material culture that I know best.)

I: “I have no cloth to give to you.”

Petitioner: “But you have been to Nairobi again. I told you: cover my body! Why did you not bring me a cloth?”

I: “I was only able to bring cloths for very few people who had been helping me before. I had promised them cloths and I had written their names in my book.”

Petitioner: “Why was my name not in your book?”

I: “Because you had not helped me.”

Petitioner: “But I am bringing you milk.”

I: “It is very good of you to bring me milk, but today was the first time.”

Petitioner: “Who was in your papers there that you gave the cloths to?”

I: “Is it your custom to ask that? In my country it is very bad to ask such a question.”

Petitioner: (Disgruntledly remains silent for a while because I have addressed a behavioural norm that indeed also applies to Rendille. Towards foreigners, however, some Rendille tend to show a more casual understanding of their norms. Then he says:) “Are there no more cloths left?”

I: “Yes.”

Petitioner: “Then give me your cloth.”

I: “And what about me? Am I to go naked like a Turkana?”

(An imitation of the usual Rendille complaints about lack of clothing.)

Petitioner: “But you have trousers.”

I: “They are too warm here.”

Petitioner: “Then give me your trousers.”

I: “But I need them to go to Nairobi.”

After two hours – frequently interrupted by other petitioners – and lengthy explanations on my part of having to end my stay with the Rendille soon if my money was spent prematurely and in that case being of no use whatsoever to them, the man continues:

Petitioner: “Then bring me a cloth next time you go to Nairobi.”

I: “Maybe. But I will not be going for the next few weeks.”

Petitioner: “Then write my name in your book!”

I: “No, I cannot promise that.”

Petitioner: “Come on, write my name in your book.”

I: “No, I will not.”

The petitioner repeats his demand several times, and I am starting to ignore him because I am sick of the issue. (It must not be forgotten that my report of these negotiations has, for lack of space, been abridged to the point of distortion.)

Petitioner: “Come on, write my name in your book! Do you understand what I’m saying?”

To reply to the question “*a daagta* – do you understand?” with the word “*a daaga* – I understand” can lead to complications. That’s because this phrase can also be misunderstood – or deliberately misinterpreted – as an expression of consent. In that case, the next discussion of our petitioner after another trip to Nairobi could be about as follows:

Petitioner: “*Ginta, nebey on bariite* – Günther, have you spent the night in peace?”

I: “*Nebey on. Alla nebey on bariite?* – Solely peace. Have you also spent the night in peace?”

Petitioner: “*Aa nebey on. There is only peace. Goytaah a nebey ona?* Are you very in sole peace?”

I: “*A nebey on. Only peace.*”

Petitioner: “*Dafarteey mee?* My cloth is not here?”

I: “*Dafartaah ma soakhaatin.* I did not bring a cloth for you.”

Petitioner: “*A idoh? Goarat ma icheekina?* Why not? Didn’t you tell me you would bring me one? *Kol geeddoh toolla iekkeysatte?* How many times have you betrayed me now? *Goob dakkhan dafar a siisse.* You have given cloths to the whole settlement. *Ani kalday ma isiin.* Only me you haven’t given one.

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*A idoh idiiida? Why do you hate me? Idaas mejel mee. No man is like that (a man does not act like that). At mejel mee. You are no man.*<sup>12</sup>

At this point, there is not much left to do but point out to the petitioner that the conversation is over and that this is not the way to talk to you. He will leave and agitate against the researcher within the settlement. He will say that the foreigner is mean, unfair, has no respect, and only recently – and at this point the imagination is let loose to make up atrocities – treated a warrior roughly, stalked the women, etc. The causes might be trivial, but the elaboration will be dramatic. The disappointed petitioner will not achieve anything by that, however, particularly not with those who have already received a hip cloth from me, consequently consider me an epitome of “manhood” and will come to my defence.

But the better strategy is not to give away any hip cloths in the first place.

### *FIELDWORK TECHNIQUES, PART I*

The researcher among the Rendille can chose between two fundamentally different approaches. He can pitch his dwelling outside of a settlement and surround it with a thornbush fence. The fence has the advantage of preventing the constant stress of children and teenagers fiddling around with the technical equipment. Rendille have great skills in breaking everything they touch. Another advantage of such a fence is that small utensils disappear less frequently from the “house”. Also, the fence presents, even with an unlocked gate, a symbolic exclusion zone which even children recognize as such. This approach will be called model 1.

Model 2 is to largely adjust to the Rendille regarding housing style. This was my first course of action. That means everything is public. As compared to model 1, it means a disproportionately increasing wear and tear of nerves and materials.

A researcher who consistently realises model 1 will buy milk and meat instead of obtaining them as gifts. This will put him in the position to refuse requests by the Rendille much more rigorously and without lengthy negotiations. He saves vast amounts of time, which he can instead invest in his work. He will only give, and have to give, gifts to people who helped him with their

<sup>12</sup> *Majel* has many similarities to our words “man” and “male”. One of them is that it can mean a number of rather different things:

1. it means “male gender”, in a neutral way,
2. it refers to the positive characteristics which make up the meaning of “masculinity”. These characteristics are combined in the term *mig*: strength, meaning physical strength as well as armed force and wealth. Wealth is therefore tightly linked to the idea of masculinity, and wealth manifests itself in generosity. At least that is the ideal. In practice, all gifts are obtained through tenacious negotiations and/or are given calculatingly, leaving little room for generosity. This makes *majel* a flattery for someone you have just taken something from, and *att'a majel me* – you are no man – an abuse for someone who would not yield.

information. The difficulty in that, however, will probably be avoiding the impression of a direct payment. Payments of this kind might induce informants to tell the researcher what he wants to hear. His research techniques will mainly be limited to interviews as a considerable part of direct observation will be obstructed by this approach.

Using model 2, however, the researcher joins the network of reciprocity, of mutual help, existing among the Rendille. For a Rendille, taking part in this system is much easier than for an outsider. The economic situation of a Rendille is largely known to his fellow tribespeople, the goods he can be asked for belong to a narrowly defined canon. The behavioural expectations and sanctions are set and known. A European wanting to take part in this system will encounter more difficulties. He is believed to be immeasurably rich.

A researcher of model 2 must define his boundaries himself. Conflict is inevitable. There is permanent involvement, extremely close contact. The integration is so complete that it feels like too much. This also has its advantages, however: The language is learned very quickly, people's requests and occasional services provide new contacts and insights. One example: You are asked to drive a group of elders to marriage negotiations in a distant settlement group. This is a great opportunity to observe such negotiations which otherwise might have gone unnoticed. The second approach is possibly the more promising one, if you make it through.

#### *A CASE OF CONFLICT*<sup>13</sup>

In late August, my initial euphoria had entirely vanished. The purely commercially determined relationships, the confrontation with the perpetual begging all predominated friendly relations in an unbearable way. My brother Baaroorwa was an exception. He was just as interested in my background, in European life styles, as I was in information on the Rendille, which he kept either giving me himself or arranging to be provided to me on his own initiative. We each understood what we wanted from the other. The fact that he sometimes asked me for material assistance, too, was almost no nuisance. How much more pleasant was this than the constant struggling with petitioners who, without the least advance or return service, tried to squeeze assistance from me by being persistent and patient, by displaying submissiveness or making tactical accusations. No doubt I took the situation too seriously. Had I only listened to these negotiations with half an ear and only after my visitor stopped talking refused in a polite, but firm way, I surely would have

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<sup>13</sup> The following incident is only meant to present an example. More things of that sort happened later. But this first conflict felt threatening to me because being as yet so unexperienced, I could not react adequately. Later I had my advocates just as the opponents had theirs, and I always managed to either talk the conflict to the point of exhaustion or to end it with my "rehabilitation". Among themselves, the Rendille love to argue, too, in order to escape idleness.

spared my nerves. But these mechanisms of self-protection I had not yet developed at that time.

Furthermore, there were strains the Rendille are not responsible for. My not receiving letters told me that some bridges had been burned behind me.

All this accumulated to sullenness and irritability, particularly as it was not possible for me to freely, truly talk things out. I realised that I would have to try and assert myself more firmly – and these attempts were in part going to be done in the wrong way.

My neighbour N., who had in the beginning been helpful and had been given many gifts by me, had turned out to be useless as an informant, dishonest and constantly and annoyingly begging. As my services and donations just vanished in his house like in a bottomless pit and his wife H. made full use of the fact that I let her prepare tea for me by embezzling as much sugar and tea for herself as possible, I had started to let Nabeheeyya – who lived by herself and was the wife of my FaBrSo Kulamole Adicharreh who worked near Marsabit – make the tea for me instead.

She gave me milk, washed my clothes and was generally not only very helpful, but also agreeable. As a consequence, my occasional assistance to the N.'s household stopped and instead benefited Nabeheeyya and her children.

When N. started to suspect that my visits to Nabeheeyya's house were not limited to tea drinking alone, he went and took his allegation to the "communication centre" of the mission camp. After the story had spread sufficiently among the customers of the mission shop, the local news board, he brought the rumour back to our settlement. By now, the story went along the lines of: everybody knew that the white man from Gaal'deylan was after all the women of this tribe. But as people who live in glass houses prefer not to throw stones, nothing further happened for the time being.

One morning I drove to the mission camp in my car, of course not without taking a few passengers who either wanted to go to the mission camp or liked to ride in cars. The maybe 24-year-old Lorrowuan belonged to the second category, as he also rode back with me. On the way back we passed the well and loaded the car with the water containers of the women of our settlement. Now the car was crowded with women, children and the full, heavy containers. I was sure it was overloaded. I explained the situation. From earlier disputes of this kind, my passengers already knew that it can indeed happen that a car that is too heavy breaks down. They complied. I also asked Lorrowuan to walk the 800 metres back to the settlement. He did not react. After he had ignored my request for the third time, I hit him on the upper arm with an irritated sweep of the hand. Lorrowuan did not say a word and left.

Had I been more patient, I would have given my passengers a number: only this many people could ride in the car with me. Then I would have waited until the car had emptied to that point. This method works. It does, however,

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require having more patience than the Rendille have. And this kind of patience is hardly conceivable for Europeans.

One important point which I had not sufficiently taken into consideration was that Lorrowuan is a son of N..

Later, in the settlement, Lorrowuan approached me waving a long stick. He told me to watch out in the future and not hit him again. Since he was brandishing his stick uncomfortably close to my face, I grabbed it and pushed him away from me. Later people would say I had knocked the stick out of his hand. He dropped the stick and ran to get his spear. His spear raised, he burst into the arms of an elder who had stepped between us and held Lorrowuan in a tight grip.

I tried hard to look casual and went into my house, while the raging Lorrowuan was led into his mother's hut by the witnesses of the scene.

Not much later, a group of warriors came to my hut and, uttering threats and brandishing clubs, demanded that I leave. *Guur!* Go away! I told them I first wanted to discuss the case with the elders.

A group of elders who were in one of the neighbouring settlements to negotiate something was informed by the warriors and came to my house in the afternoon. The constellation was unfavourable; my main informants and friends, including Baarowwa and the *dabeel* (cf. 3.1.) Malkach Gambarre, an influential ritual specialist, was not present. It was a group of four men who had little reason to spare me. My relationship with these men was marked by mutual neglect. Among them was N..

I was asked to narrate the event. The usual patience and affability did not last long. I was soon interrupted. What I was telling them were only lies, they said. As I had never asked their opinion, they saw no reason to listen to mine. The only persons of the entire settlement whom I seemed to regard as important, they said, were a young man (Baarowwa) and a woman. Did I consider this woman the most important old man of the clan? Everybody knew, they said, that I was only friends with women and children. But the important old men, the big old men (they themselves) were neglected by me.

“By the way, who gave this woman to you? What was the bridewealth you paid for her? You’ve rubbed our noses in your shit and now you shouldn’t be surprised that we don’t like the smell.” Now, they said, I had “killed” the son of one of them. “*Guur!* – Go away! Pack your things and go away! Do you see those warriors over there?” I peeked through the whole in the sackcloth that was my door and saw the group of warriors sit in some distance to my hut. “They cannot wait to kill you. So far we have held them back. If you do not leave, we cannot help you anymore.”

There was no point whatsoever trying to defend myself by correcting the account of the incident. My words would have fallen on deaf ears. So, I changed my tactics. To make up for my lack in language skills, I continued the discussion via my interpreter, Soba.

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My mistake, I said, was so big that I could never make amends.

I was going to pack my things now and leave them forever. I was sorry that our time together ended this way. But all the unpleasant things I was sooner or later going to forget. Instead, I was going to remember them as the people I had so many pleasant memories of. "I will forget, Yeloowwa Alyaro, that you are now turning me out. But I will always be grateful for the long interview I recorded ..."

I addressed one after the other in this manner and dredged up a pleasant memory for each one of them, even though it was not always so easy to think of one.

When the elders realised that I was serious about leaving, the looks on their faces told me that this had apparently not been their intention. So I made my farewell speech sound still a little more final and more dramatic, until I finally provoked some protest.

"Do you really have no idea how you can make amends?"

"No, I don't, my mistake is much too serious, I can never make amends."

"Then we will leave you alone with Soba now so you two can deliberate."

They left.

"How much do they want?" I asked Soba. Given the threats, we decided on 100 Shillings (30 DM, about 13 USD) as an adequate sum.

After I had given Lorrowuan a down payment, we formally made peace. N. told me that now everything would be like it used to. I should ask him for advice, he was going to help me, and I was to help him. Also, I was to keep away from Nabeheeyya and instead H., his wife, could prepare my tea like she used to. And I could use his children as servants, etc.

So the true reasons behind the manoeuvre were revealed: a restoration of the previous structures of dependence and exploitation. The continuation of begging by other means.

I agreed on the points that could not be avoided and decided inwardly that I had to gain the upper hand over this man or terminate my fieldwork.

#### *THE OFFENSIVE TACTICS OF SELF-PRESERVATION*

N. unwillingly assisted me in my intention to undermine his influence. The other elders wanted half of the compensation money to be divided among them. But N. – who had a temper which often did him harm – begged them to let him keep all of it. They gave in, but this earned him some contempt.

Furthermore, I took every chance to tell other elders my version of the story and particularly to emphasise that the money had been extorted by threats and next time something like this happened I would be leaving for good.

Malkach, dreaded as a ritual dignitary, listened to the story and then said N. had let his son manipulate him. He had listened to his children and this way had made himself a child. His wanting to keep all the money was also undignified.

I did not forget to give Malkach some money as a gift.

After that, I went to Marsabit for a while to review my field notes, to collect myself, to make my clan brothers feel my material value by the inconvenience of my absence. It was the dry season. To make my exit even grander, I gave away a sack of maize flour to be distributed. I told them I'd be away for a week, but really stayed three and a half.

A few days later, N.'s wife H. visited me in Marsabit. The wind had blown my house over again, she told me. My things were in the open air. Nobody had looked after them. She wanted to rebuild the house, but she needed 10 Shillings for maize. I gave her the money.

When I returned, I was welcomed to the settlement like a lost son. The therapy had been effective. It turned out that the story of the house had been a lie. I told everybody who would listen that H. had cheated me out of 10 Shillings. People started to take an interest in other aspects of the case: "How many cloths have you given the family of N. during your first months here, how much money?" To many, the events now took on a different complexion: "Günther has been very generous to these people, and in return they wanted to kill, blackmail, threaten and betray him. This is how the family of N. thank him."

I wanted to build myself a second house. A few weeks earlier, I had transported some poles for myself and also for a few women of the settlement by car from Malgis. It was easy to exchange them. H. had tied my poles around a tree to bend them into the right shape. When I wanted to start building, I noticed that the number of poles was correct, but the best and longest had been exchanged for shorter ones. H. was suspected of being the culprit. Worguut Taarween (the Taarween family was the next in the settlement order) wanted to solve the case quickly. From a distance of 30 metres he shouted out to H. to immediately untie her house, into which she had recently fitted new poles, and give me back my poles. The answer was angry protest.

I called the elders into my house. N. tried to turn the tables. I had accused his wife, he claimed, to have stolen my poles. How dared I, and how could I prove it. I corrected him, I had accused no one, I said. I had only noticed that the poles lying on the ground outside were not mine, and mine had disappeared. I had no idea who stole them. Precisely to find out who had done it I had called them together, I said. They had previously asked me to inform the big old men if women, children or warriors did me wrong, instead of getting into a fight with them. Exactly that, I said, was what I was doing now.

The discussion took place on two stages. Inside, the elders negotiated, outside, the women argued loudly.

Nabeheeyya, the woman who had prepared my tea for a while, insulted H.. This caused N. to intervene, and he hit Nabeheeyya with a stick. Nabeheeyya, not a very calculating person anyhow, lost all composure and screamed abuse at N., crying. He had divulged that she was after the white man, she yelled,

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etc. Certainly, it was as unnecessary as it was silly to mention that. Everything Nabeheeyya had been bottling up for months came gushing out. The raging N. had to be held by three other elders, while Nabeheeyya told him she wished him into the grave. Bathed in sweat and with a squeaky voice N. screeched that for seven dry seasons now he had been accused of being a bad person. And now even a woman had the audacity to insult him ...

The screaming N. was dragged into the house by the other elders and, gently but firmly, sat on the ground. You do not negotiate standing up. The faces of the elders surrounding him showed silent contempt.

If you have to live closely together with someone, you avoid accusing them directly. I think nobody was interested in proving that H. had stolen my poles. Not to mention the fact that this would have been difficult. In the end, everybody agreed on the formula that my poles had been stolen, but by whom was unknown. To compensate for my loss, all the women together were to try and build the best possible house for me with the available materials.

The house was built. General opinion turned against the household of N.. The tide had turned.

Again, I want to call to mind the time factor. This shortened account of the events might leave the impression I had mastered this conflict quite competently and confidently. But this dispute had worn on for about 5 weeks, and during that time I did not feel competent or confident at all, but downright lousy.

With this second house I later moved to a different clan, Nebey, 24 kilometres away. I now owned two houses and was able to shuttle back and forth. Both settlement groups courted me because they could not be sure of my presence. The women argued in front of the mission shop whether my car was the “car of Nebey” or the “car of Gaal'deylan”. I scooped from two wells and information flowed amply. The social conditions also improved. To make oneself scarce has its advantages.

In this second clan I partly realised what I have called “model 1” above. Around my house, Soba's tent and the “parking space” I had a thornbush fence, which had originally been recommended to me because of the lion plague in that area. But the fence had the further advantage that, after getting rid of all disturbers and troublemakers, you can bar the entrance from the inside with a thornbush and then read or sleep in peace and quiet. Also, I bought milk at a price which enabled the seller to feed twice as many persons with maize porridge with the proceeds. Finally I was able to satisfy our minimum need of about 3 litres per day again, after the “gifts” Gaal'deylan had, due to the dry season, become very scarce and the requests for return gifts excessive.

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## *FIELDWORK TECHNIQUES, PART II*

Maybe some of the lessons I learned from my mistakes are suitable for recommendation.

Everybody makes mistakes; the fieldwork situation in a foreign culture makes that inevitable. The mistakes will lead to conflicts, and the conflicts, at best, to psychological strains or, at worst, even to a danger to life and limb. To provide the budding fieldworker with the socio-technological tools to solve every conflict imaginable is impossible. Precisely these tools he will acquire at some risk while in the field.

Even if during the first stage of his research the fieldworker lacks the knowledge of his social surroundings required to manipulate these surroundings in his own interest if necessary, he should try to acquire sufficient knowledge of *himself* to be able to manipulate his own psyche and this way avoid obvious mistakes.

Important goals and tools of self-manipulation are:

### *CORRECTING EXPECTATIONS*

Whoever goes to live in the desert for a year or longer will hardly expect to find only exertion and strain there. If he expects that, he would surely stay home. Instead, he expects to be able to feel comfortable at his destination and to find a substitute for all the human relations he destroys or damages by his going away.

This hope is not altogether unreal. Certainly he will establish social ties in the new place, which will be painful to leave behind in the end. But these kinds of expectations will make it hard for him to adapt to a situation as dominated by stress, defensiveness and bargaining for selfish profits as my role as a guest among the Rendille was. Someone who sets out expecting to enjoy himself will hardly last through weeks and months of intense discomfort.

Assessing difficulties realistically

One might rightly assume that heat, dust, dirt, physical exertion and a lack of water for washing can hardly harm oneself under normal circumstances. Even if one's car breaks down far away from the next repair shop, it will cost time and effort, but it does not necessarily have to be a drama if it is not taken too seriously. But what happens if all that coincides with fever attacks, private worries, mental stress?

To assess difficulties realistically might be helpful to achieve the correcting of expectations postulated above. If one pictured the working conditions rather negative, he can only find himself pleasantly surprised.

The best attitude is that of a diamond seeker: goal-oriented. A diamond seeker doesn't go into the desert because he enjoys digging, sweating, being thirsty and suffering from sore feet, but because of his goal: the diamonds.

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### *SELF-OBSERVATION*

Whoever constantly operates close to his physical and personal limits should know these limits very well. What should not happen is that too much strain makes him lose his self-control and destroy the relationships it took him so much effort to establish by acting rude. If one has reacted too loudly or too roughly once or twice, one should immediately take a break from fieldwork to collect oneself and recharge one's batteries in a different place.

### POSTSCRIPT 1976

The time from the middle of December, 1975, to the middle of March, 1976, I spent back in Germany to work on my thesis. After that, I returned to the Rendille until late August, 1976. During this last stay, I encountered far less problems than during the previous one. The reason for this is that by now the Rendille and I had gotten used to each other, that I was fully accepted and respected and was more and more experienced in dealing with everyday problems. This time was for me – in spite of the ongoing drought and general hardship – absolutely worth living. When finally my time and resources were used up, the separation was painful.

Had I not written down the above account of my experiences a year ago – I probably would not today. Problems, once solved, are quickly forgotten.

But still I think it is better to also describe unpleasant and embarrassing things because it is precisely those experiences which others might learn from, although one researcher's situation in a certain group will probably never recur. And it is the difficulties and failures that are usually not talked or written about, I suppose.

During this time I had several European visitors. Dr. Alfred Plett, a biologist from Kiel, spent two weeks there, Elisabeth Hoerner and Stephan Toth from Hamburg were there from June until August. Their status was that of guests of mine, and I also served as interpreter in case of confrontations so that they did not have to encounter the same kind of difficulties I had had to face in the beginning. Apart from that, my guests were, to different extents, patient, undemanding and willing to adapt and thus managed to live with the Rendille rather well.

For a few days in June and then again in July and August, Anne Beaman, an anthropologist from Boston, stayed in my settlement group in order to get to know Rendille society, which was to be followed by a research of her own.

The drought continued unabated. Two more rainy seasons failed almost entirely. For the first time in Rendille history, all the livestock, camels as well as sheep and goats, were driven by the young people to distant satellite camps where pastures were still sufficient, but where the settlement including houses, women and children could not follow due to their lack of mobility. The majority of the population lived exclusively on the sale of smallstock, which,

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however, fetched lower and lower prices. (A truck would have been needed to transport smallstock to the more densely populated areas.) With the profits, they bought maize flour, which was also obtained from occasional relief supplies delivered by the government or the church. I once had to distribute my share of a charitable milk powder supply among my fellow clan members which they had put in my hut during my absence. I do not know if I was successful in explaining to them why I could not accept it.

In May, almost all the men who were still able to walk longer distances stayed in the camel camp with the warriors and older boys, where they feasted on milk and blood, while the women remained in the settlement by themselves. This settlement could not have followed the camel herd as too many of the gelded, trained pack camels had died and there was no water near the camel camp. I also followed the camel herd for a while, in order to finally have access to animal products again, but not without leaving the woman I shared a household with and her five children sufficient staple foods.

For the *almado* festival I had to transport milk for the ritual acts from the distant livestock camps in my car as the pastures near the settlement could not have sustained a larger number of animals even for a short time.

Understandably, given the general hardship and the resulting latent aggression and tenseness of many Rendille, I continued to be threatened with murder or expulsion if I had to turn down a request by someone. But now, all the elders of my age set stood behind me as one man, and the conflicts were resolved in Rendille way to my advantage and the angry petitioners were put in their place. I also enjoyed the friendship of a ritual specialist with a potent curse whose threats, muttered under his breath, stopped any disrespectfulness towards me.

In June and July I made two trips to neighbouring Somali groups. A Somali trader who also spoke Rendille served as my interpreter. (I had long before dismissed my Rendille /English interpreter with my thanks because I no longer needed him and was running out of money.) What I was interested in was to prove the existence of clan brotherhoods transcending tribal and linguistic boundaries, like they were claimed by Rendille and Somali and like I discuss them in my excursus “Is there an old pan-Cushitic clan structure?” [Not part of this translation].

From the area around Wajir, a group of Dogodía and Ajurán Somali had migrated to pastures near Salmate, southeast of Marsabit, to herd their camels there. Our camel camp was only 40 kilometres to the west. So the situation had to be investigated and a peaceful joint use of the pastures in between agreed on. For that purpose I took an elder and two warriors with me as a delegation. It took us quite a while to find the scattered settlement of the Somali. We discussed our concern, exchanged information about the state of affairs in the smouldering conflict with the common enemies Gabbra and Boran and agreed that Rendille and Somali were basically brothers and occasional

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homicide quickly forgotten, in short – it was a very pleasant conversation. One of our warriors wore a white killer necklace which he had acquired in confrontations with the Gabbra – the best possible letter of recommendation. A giant billy goat was slaughtered for us and we were almost drowned in milk. The women and girls in their long garments shyly kept their distance and watched the half naked warriors curiously. They had never before seen such strange savages with body adornments and ornamental scars, who, in spite of their looks, communicated among themselves in a language so similar to Somali that they could even understand some bits and pieces.

I was tired from the long drive through the bush and fell asleep early under my acacia, but around 11 p.m. I woke up. Five Boran, armed with rifles, had stolen 170 heads of cattle while they were being driven to the distant watering place. One of the two herders was missing. Messengers had been sent to the neighbouring settlements to mobilise all the spears and rifles available. Since I had a car, I was to inform the police in Marsabit on the next day. That was the only way, it was said, to intercept the raiders. (The safe route would have been the opposite direction.) I had been looking forward to conducting interviews on the next day and was accordingly irritated, particularly as I doubted that I would ever get another chance like this because the Somali would possibly retreat back to Wajir just as quickly as they had come.

But there was no way I could refuse the request as I had before accepted the friendly hospitality of the Somali.

At sunrise we set off: two Somali, the interpreter, three Rendille and I. The drive up the Marsabit Mountains was difficult, as there was no suitable road. It cost me two tyres, a loss which, owing to my limited budget, I feel to this day. For the last part of the way we had to leave the car and arrived in Marsabit after a seven-hour walk. That was still early enough, however, not to give the police any excuses to remain inactive. They sent off a truck with the task force on that same day. I stayed in Marsabit with my Rendille friends.

The two Somali accompanied the task force.

Every time the police tried to call the operation off because of the “impassable road” – as they have the habit of doing when their adversaries are well armed – the Somali urged them to drive on because Günther had managed to negotiate it, too.

This way, the task force was actually successful in surprising the raiders and recovering 120 heads of cattle. One Boran was killed, one injured.

Some weeks later in a second try, after long, expensive odysseys, I managed to find the Somali again who had by now moved on. With me was one of the two Somali whom I had taken to the police in Marsabit in my car. It was Sheikh Osman, an old and widely known man.

Our reception in all of the Somali groups was overwhelming. My companions – there were five of us – and I were fed ample amounts of meat and milk. Wrongly, but flatteringly, they called me the “man who returned our

cattle from the Boran”. Everybody did his best to provide me with the best information and was generous in every respect. While helping the Rendille usually only encouraged them to increase their begging, with the Somali I experienced an extent of gratefulness I had neither expected nor deserved.

The ritual calendar of the Rendille put an end to this Somali research. The date of the *naabo* ceremony, which preceded the weddings of the Ilkichilli age set, was approaching. All of the turbulent events connected to this ceremony, including previous history and aftermath, I describe in the chapter “Chronology of the conflict over the marriage rites of the Ilkichilli age set”.

To tear myself away from this work and Rendille life, which I had grown fond of in so many ways, was dictated more by my running out of financial means and the obligation to write this thesis than by my inclination. The Rendille are people whom you only need to have lived with for one and a half years to miss them. They are harsh, sometimes brutal, usually blunt and often overwhelmingly friendly. Most of all, however, they are a brother to everyone who wants to be their brother. Still, you do have to show them your teeth once in a while. Maybe that is true generally, only with the Rendille, it is more obvious.

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#### POSTSCRIPT 1977

In March and April of 1977 I once more spent some time with the Rendille to provide the photographer of a geographical magazine in Hamburg, Germany, with the opportunity to document the Rendille and my relationship with them. I was best man, i.e. witness and fellow bridegroom, to Mbono, Baaroorwa’s and my younger brother, at his wedding. As this is only possible among clan brothers, I gratefully consider this event a sign of successful integration (cf. *Geo* 2, 1978).

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### 0.3. METHODOLOGICAL INTRODUCTION

#### 0.3.1. DEFINING THE TOPIC OF THIS WORK

The topic of this work is the belief system of the Rendille, particularly also the social system as part of the belief system, i.e. what the Rendille believe about their social system.

Essentially, the work focuses on three different topics:

1. *Clan-specific* behaviours and the mythical and ritual reasons given for them. Ritual powers of single clans, clan-specific curses and ritual roles.
2. Data which are specific for *special ritual functions* occurring in different clans: age-grade offices, a men's society with special ritual tasks and a specific power position, a deadly curse, etc., rules and avoidances for people in transitional stages, the mythical and ritual reasons for all these phenomena.
3. *Group rituals*. These are best described in their internal context, but essentially provide information on the above mentioned main topics of this thesis.

Moreover, the overall theories of the Rendille have to be described: reasons given for the custom (*hügum*), mode of operation of the curse in general, etc.

These are the subjects of the second and third main sections which form the core of this thesis. In addition, the chronological description of my research (cf. section 0.2.) and the first main section provide facts which serve to introduce and impart illustrative background knowledge.

#### 0.3.2. DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO SUCH A SUBJECT: EXTERNAL PERSPECTIVE VS. INTERNAL PERSPECTIVE

The description of foreign cultures shifts between two extremes: the external and the internal perspective. Both forms of description serve different goals and have different advantages and disadvantages. Both are inevitably selective.

##### 0.3.2.1. EXTERNAL PERSPECTIVE

This approach is based on the observer's theories. If different observers make the same basic theoretical assumptions, they will collect comparable data and this way will be able to achieve an intercultural testing of their theory. The disadvantage is that data collected in this manner can prove internally inconsistent because even if the collection was complete with regard to the aspect of comparability, some fundamental factors of the cultural system under investigation might have been disregarded as they were irrelevant in the other cultures studied.

##### 0.3.2.2. INTERNAL PERSPECTIVE

This approach is based on the theories of the group observed and interviewed instead of the observer's.

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Its advantage is that the most important variables of the foreign culture's system can be described in their interdependence. The disadvantage is that there can be less or no intercultural comparison as different cultures are described.

### 0.3.3. MY APPROACH

#### 0.3.3.1. THE PARTS DESCRIBED MORE FROM AN EXTERNAL PERSPECTIVE

In the chronological account of my field research and in the first main section I proceed mainly in a way that is often disparagingly called "impressionistic".

My selection of data in these sections of the text is in large part determined by what strikes the observer of the Rendille as "foreign" and "odd".

Does this approach lack theory? If "theory" is understood as an exact system of statements: yes. If theory is seen as presuppositions influencing the data collection: no. The underlying "theory" in the second sense of the word largely remains unsaid: it consists of assumptions about "normality" which originate in the culture of the observer and against the background of which the foreign appears "foreign" and remarkable. For the most part, this type of account will meet with a response from members of the researcher's own culture because he shares the experience of "normality" to which he contrasts the foreign culture with them. So, for instance, they will find the information that a Rendille man may beat his wife any time he feels like it remarkable because in our society, husbands beat their wives far less frequently. A Rendille reporting on his own culture would, however, hardly mention this fact.

Nevertheless I use this mode of description in some parts of the present work. It serves to convey illustrative background knowledge for the central parts of this study. Its further purpose is to evoke a healthy astonishment in the readers by confronting them with the "foreign", an astonishment which may be able to disrupt or bring to mind the "normality" against the background of which the foreign culture is seen and this way to open up their perception for a better understanding.

My real objective of description, however, is a different one. It is coping with the internal perspective.

#### 0.3.3.2. WHY DO I TRY FOR THE INTERNAL PERSPECTIVE IN MY SECOND AND THIRD MAIN SECTIONS?

1. I was not intending to test a general theory of belief systems on the basis of Rendille beliefs. Although intercultural comparability is desirable, it could in this case only be achieved to a limited extent. I gave preference to other aspects which defy intercultural comparability.
2. With respect to a future intercultural comparison, in my view it makes sense to describe the Rendille belief system as a – as it turned out – internally con-

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sistent system, which so far has only been done very rudimentarily.<sup>14</sup>Which variables it makes sense to isolate, simplify and equate with variables of other systems is left to later considerations.

3. There are certain possibilities of turning theories of the group under study into theories of the observer; insofar as prognostic parts of such theories can be tested and confirmed empirically. I, however, did not have nearly enough empirical data to make any general statements about the connection between Rendille theory and Rendille behaviour. I only have an illustrating case history here and there.

In part these theories are of a definitional nature so that an empirical test would be tautological.

Yet other statements are normative. They could be followed by the question of whether this norm is generally observed. As this study, however, is interested in belief systems and not in theories about deviant behaviour or other violations of norms, such an investigation would be beside the point.

In the case of prognostic statements, the modern European will hardly wish to try to substantiate Rendille predictions empirically, but will rather reject the expressed beliefs as irrational and unempirical, for instance when the deadly potency of the curses is presented by them as a main tool of social control. Most of the readers will probably not ask whether it is empirically correct that a Rendille can blow off another person's head through his half-closed fist, but rather, how it is possible that there are people who actually believe such a thing. This type of belief is, in our view, magic and only interesting in a sociological respect.

In all these cases I describe these beliefs in the original language with an annotated translation and abstain from any comment on whether there is "something odd" about it or whether we are dealing with the "supernatural" here, which for most readers is equivalent to a perceptual disturbance. I leave it to the readers and their sense of probability to either stick to their agnostic or Christian etc. beliefs or to convert to Rendille. I did not convert. There is a lot I do not believe, and I have my reasons for it. But I do believe that the Rendille believe all of this just as they told it to me. Furthermore, I gathered sufficient quantitative impressions from conversations with many different persons to assume that what my main informants believe is accepted in this form by most of the Rendille.

#### 0.3.4. NOTES ON WORKING WITH THE INTERNAL PERSPECTIVE

##### 0.3.4.1. RECAPITULATION

Recapitulating the requirements of describing a belief system from an internal perspective: The selection and combination of data is done according to criteria originating *in* the group under survey. Where this is not the case, where the

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Spencer 1973.

researcher intervenes, it must be marked as a relativisation of the approach.

Such a critical reviewing would not be necessary if one claimed to have achieved a total understanding of the foreign culture and one's description was, therefore, automatically "authentic".

I, however, neither achieved nor intended or even believed in the possibility of "going native" and total understanding. But I did have a passive grasp of the language pretty soon and, after a few months in the field, was able to largely do without the interpreter. Apart from that, I engaged in participant observation. A partial integration, more precisely: the maximum of what is achievable (there are limitations due to the group under survey as well as the observer) therefore took place. Such a partial integration is indispensable for the work, but it does not provide the researcher with the ability to provide information out of his own sense of correctness.

Because this is impossible, it is necessary to remain critical of oneself and one's findings. This requires relating the history and justifying the thematic restriction to the aspects described as central in the second and third main sections of this work. Furthermore, the way the interviews were arranged and conducted as well their attendant circumstances have to – at least generally – be described.

#### 0.3.4.2. GATHERING THE DATA

In the beginning of my research, my thematic interest had been a different one. I had wanted to meet diviners because I thought they were particularly influential persons within the tribal community. This idea, however, I had to relativise once I was in the field. Although certain predictions of *moro* (diviners) actually are much discussed, they are no political authorities who intervene in inter-clan conflicts.

The Rendille directed my attention to other things. In my introductory speech I had told them I had come to learn their language and their "custom". Custom is *húgum* in Rendille. It has been in the world from the very beginning, and God let *húgum* come out along with the first humans. What *húgum* is in detail follows from what the elders, who often crowded my hut, told me about *húgum*.

So a mutual influencing took place which resulted in my modifying my research question in the field.

As far as I could tell, my informants did not seem to have any interest in distorting the information they gave me. Partly, the elders' interest in these talks was based on wanting to maintain good relations with me so they could ask for material help (although I never directly paid my informants), and partly on the fact that the elders, who hardly do any work, just have the habit of sitting together and talking.

##### 0.3.4.2.1. DATA OFFERED SPONTANEOUSLY

These first conversations were unstructured and their topics determined by my informants. Recurring issues were clan-specific behaviours, ritual specialists,

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group rituals – in short: what I have in the above described as the main focus of this work and what will be discussed in detail in parts two and three. All of this my informants considered to be part of the concept of *húgum*.

One reason for the high level of spontaneity and openness of my informants might be the fact that Kenya's north never has been colonised in the same way as central Kenya was. The British seemed to be interested mainly in military control over this area, in having a buffer zone against Ethiopia and Italian Somaliland. But they apparently were not interested in changing the tribal system. The missionaries were also not allowed into this area. As a result, the Rendille talk very candidly about things other tribes would be embarrassed to tell, fearing the Europeans might brand them “pagan” abominations. If Rendille are told that the European calendar works differently from their own, they promptly answer that their own calendar is the right one and the Europeans are “stupid”. Their self-confidence is unshattered.

#### 0.3.4.2.2. DATA NOT OFFERED SPONTANEOUSLY

So far, we have regarded the fact that a topic is much discussed as a relevance criterion for the belief system of the group under survey.

But tabooing and embarrassedly avoiding a subject can also be a relevance criterion:

One exception to the general readiness to talk is the “K” family (cf. section 2.4.). The name of this group of persons, segregated by a marriage barrier, is – other than in an abusive context – unspeakable, and everything connected to this group of persons is taboo.<sup>15</sup>

Discretion was also necessary when dealing with the issue of *dabeel*. The ceremonies surrounding the initiation of these ritual specialists are strictly closed to people not involved. None of the information I will describe with regard to the *dabeel* is esoteric or secret in the sense that it would put a person in danger if it became known that he had that kind of information; but every *dabeel* seems to be expected to not let outsiders in on this knowledge, just as it would be inadequate for a non-*dabeel* elder to press a *dabeel* for such details. So my main informant, an exposed *dabeel* himself, was afraid something might happen to him if others found out that he was talking to me so openly and showed me forbidden places, which was why he asked me not to talk about it.

Further details of the not spontaneously offered type are the ones relating to the misconduct of the respective informant himself. This is hardly surpris-

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<sup>15</sup> In front of strangers, any reference to the “K” family is avoided because one is supposed to only talk about “good things”, not about “bad things”. I was suspected of maybe intending to write a book about something as “bad” as the “K” family. Books, however, are not to be written about the “badness” of the Rendille, but about their “goodness”. To acquire information on the “K” family, therefore, requires a good deal of tact and discretion.

ing as everywhere people prefer to talk about other people's misconduct, rather than their own. A further topic only talked about among confidants was the sexual sphere – but this, of course, is no different in our society.

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#### 0.3.4.2.3. SELECTING DATA

Since the Rendille offered me information so spontaneously – apart from the mentioned taboo matters – I have certain criteria for what they themselves regard worth mentioning about their own culture, what they consider important, what reasons they frequently give for their behaviour, etc. This determined my selection criteria.

So the topics of parts two and three of this work were not chosen accidentally. After this initial phase of orientation, however, I purposely limited the thematic scope of my research. I now asked key questions particularly about the issues I had decided on, in order to be able to paint a picture as complete and internally consistent as possible.

On the other hand, the issues of “K” group and *dabeel* seemed interesting to me precisely because they were largely kept secret.

#### 0.3.4.2.4. INTERVIEW TECHNIQUE AND SITUATION

During the initial phase, my way of questioning was to ask the elders of different clans to tell me the histories of their clans from the very beginning, from the time everything “appeared” until this day. Time-consuming as this method may be, it has the advantage of reducing the role of the interviewer to a minimum. My interventions were limited almost entirely to clarifying details I was not sure I had understood and cross-checking reports of other informants. Accordingly, I asked the holders of special ritual offices general questions, like how had they achieved their special position, what had the initiation rituals consisted of, what did they have to do, etc.

The interviews mostly took place in some distance from the settlement in my car in the shade of a tree by a river bed. This was, on the one hand, to induce the informants to speak more freely, on the other hand to avoid the constant disruptions in the settlement. To this spot I also often withdrew with my interpreter, Soba, to transcribe tapes, and so it was soon generally accepted that this tree was my place of work.

So what I tried to achieve in this work is to let the Rendille speak freely and reduce my role to reporting what they told me.

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#### 0.3.5. EVALUATING THE DATA

When investigating the internal perspective, the problems of evaluation are, compared to a study of the external perspective which is concerned with general theories, relatively minor. They are mostly problems of data reviewing and mode of description. There are, in my view, two possible ways – loopholes, so to say – by which an author-specific trait might, unnoticed, find its

way from the outside into the description. These are the problem of structuring and the problem of translation.

#### 0.3.5.1. THE PROBLEM OF STRUCTURING

The structuring of Rendille society presented in section 0.5., on which also the structure of this text is based, was devised by me. In that section I am describing a three-dimensional identification grid consisting of the dimensions of

1. age and gender
2. clan and subclan
3. special ritual status,

in which every individual Rendille can be assigned one grid point, but not every grid point an individual.

This classification network is subject to the usual criteria of valuation, like unambiguity and conciseness, and is the best I could think of. Whether it is also “authentic” and corresponds to Rendille ideas, however, I cannot say because the Rendille do not comment on such abstract questions.

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#### 0.3.5.2. THE PROBLEM OF TRANSLATION

Distorted information or contents are often caused by translations. I hope to provide the reader with maximum control by adding explanatory footnotes, glossary and grammatical appendix.<sup>16</sup> The conceptual ranges of the German and Rendille languages differ greatly. Many of our concepts imply a dualistic world view, distinguishing “natural” from “supernatural” or “profane” from “religious”. Rendille do not make such distinctions. For instance, the word “religion” will not once be mentioned in this text, although much of what I am describing would, in our understanding, naturally belong to the category of “religion”. The level of most of my conversations, however, was very concrete so that philosophical contradictions of this kind only rarely played a part. But if it should, in spite of this, prove difficult at some point to find an adequate German translation, the best possible German term has to be redefined on the basis of a morphological and semantically comparative context analysis of the Rendille equivalent. [In this translation, the same applies, of course, to English.]

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<sup>16</sup> Published separately as *Sprachliche Studien zum Rendille*.

## 0.4. RESIDENCE AND DEMOGRAPHY

### 0.4.1. CLAN AFFILIATION AND SETTLEMENT GROUP

Of the approximately 16.000 Rendille speakers, about 9.000 are members of the tribal community as defined by common initiation rites. The rest are Aryaal who observe Samburu initiation cycles.

The settlement group is based on clan affiliation. That means people who settle together belong to the same clan. In former times, when the number of Rendille was still smaller, the reverse was also true: a clan formed one settlement.

But this principle of uniform clan affiliation is frequently violated. Many families settle matrilocally, i.e. men settle with their brothers-in-law, their wives' brothers, because they get along better with them than with their own brothers.

A large number of the warriors, boys and girls do not spend the dry season in the settlement as the herds must be driven to new pastures at short intervals and far away from the water holes, and the cumbersome settlements of houses, old people, women, and children cannot keep their pace. As a result, the group splits up into *gob* and *for*: settlement and satellite camp.

As a demographic example, I will give the settlement group in which I spent most of my time in the field.

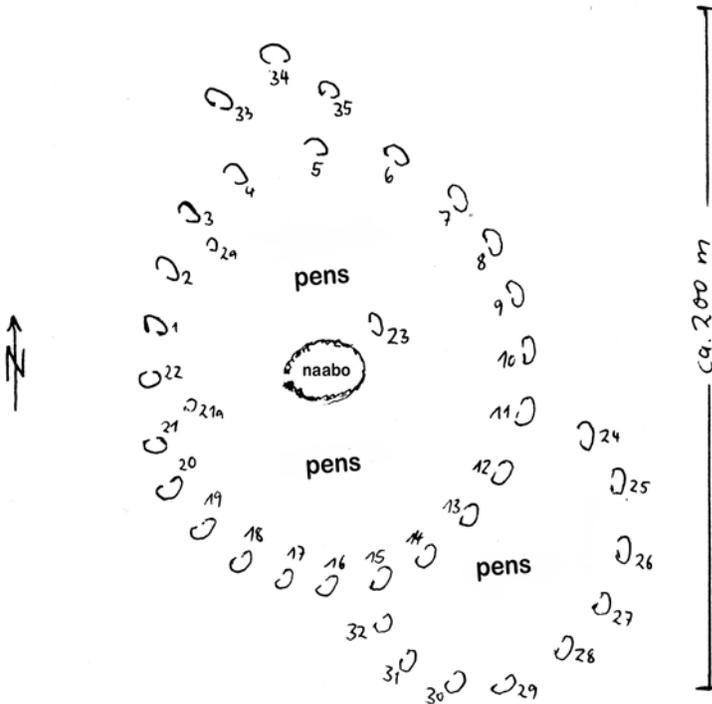


Figure 0.4. Settlement group in which I did my fieldwork

#### 0.4.2. DESCRIPTION OF THE GAAL'DEYLAN SETTLEMENT NEAR KORR, 1976

In April, 1976, this settlement group consisted of 185 inhabitants in total, 90 of which were male, and 95 female. Hardly ever do they all live in the settlement together, however – the older boys, the warriors and the girls spend most of their time in the satellite camps. The children are only counted in as long as they are not married; as for married daughters, they have their household in a different settlement, while married sons are likely to have a household in their settlement of origin and are, therefore, counted in as it is.

The settlement comprises 35 households, which is probably close to Rendille average. Although the number of houses ranges from 3 to more than a hundred, my estimate is that most settlements consist of 15 to 50 houses.

With only 35 houses, a comprehensive description is the most economic and informative form of description. I will describe the households in the sequence of the settlement order according to the following pattern:

Consecutive number, individual name of the man, lineage subclan or clan, age, age set, wife's clan of origin, age of the wife, sex and age of the children.

1. Yeloowwa Naarugo, Gaalorra, 57, Libaalle,  
wife from Saale, 40

sons: 27, 24, 15, 10

daughters: 21, 19, 13

2. Úrri Taarween, Gaalorra, 70, Irbaallis,  
first wife dead

after her death: wife from Long'eli, 37

by first wife: warrior (Ilkichilli) 40

boy: 22

(daughter: 29, married, see No.3)

by *mingessi* (woman married in place of first wife):

son: (24, lives with MoBr in a different settlement)

daughters: (26, married), 24, 22, 14, 12

3. Government soldier from Saale, Irbaandif, does not live in this settlement,  
wife, 29, daughter of No. 2

daughter: 2

4. Worguut Taarween, Gaalorra, 57, Libaalle,  
wife from Nahgan, 38

sons: 24, 30

daughters: 27, 22

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5. Second wife of No. 4, clan ?, 32  
son: 5

6. Name must not be mentioned, because dead  
lineage: Ukkuro, Gaalorra, age set Deefgu'do,  
widow from Gaabanayyo, 70

children married, e.g. wife of No. 8

7. Second wife of No. 6, O'doola, 65  
sons: warrior 29, boys 22, 15  
daughters: 24, 18

8. Boya Alyaro, Uyam, 47, Irbaandif,  
wife is daughter of No. 6, Gaalorra, 35  
son: 12  
adopted children:  
1. SiSo of Boya, 24  
2. girl, Gaabanayyo, daughter of Libaalle, 19

9. Man dead, was from Sawween, Libaalle,  
widow from Rengumo, 40  
sons: 25, 12, 5  
daughters: 23, 20, 0

10. Parents both dead, father was Selengey from Saale, Irbaallis,  
household run by daughter, 32  
also: warriors 39, 37

11. Siraayoon, Saale, 45, Irbaandif,  
wife from Tubcha, 35  
sons: 8  
daughters: 12, 10, 4

12. Nkurle, Ma'daacho, Gaal'deylan, dead, Irbaallis,  
wife also dead  
household run by daughter, 40  
also: warriors 38, 35, 32

13. Eysimgaa'di, Ma'daacho, 59, Libaalle,  
wife from Dubsahay, 50  
sons: 26, 22, 15, 12  
daughters: 20, 18

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14. Mbiyo Maḍaacho, 70, Irbaallis,  
wife ?, 55  
sons: warriors 39, 35, boys: 26, 15

15. Sineheeyya Taarween, Gaalorra, 62, Libaalle,  
wife from Dubsahay, 43  
sons: 24, 11  
daughters: 26, 22, 20, 15, 2

16. Malkach Gambarre, Gaalorra, 45, Irbaandif,  
wife from Dubsahay, 30  
sons: 13, 1  
daughters: 11, 9, 5

17. Mother of No. 16, from Uyam, 65

18. Kukute Gambarre, Gaalorra, 42, Irbaandif,  
wife from Baargeeri, Saale, 30  
son: 7  
daughters: 4, 2

19. Man dead, Eysimgalboran, Gaalorra, Irbaallis, first wife dead,  
*mingessi* married in place of the first wife: woman from ?, 60  
by dead wife: warriors 39, 36  
by *mingéssi*: boys 26, 25, 12  
(daughter is wife of No. 20)

20. Yeloowwa Alyaro, Uyam, 62, Libaalle  
first wife dead,  
*mingessi*: daughter of No. 19, Gaalorra, 24  
by first wife: sons 27, 21  
daughter: 23  
by *mingessi*: son 3  
daughter: 0

21. Second wife of Yeleewwa Alyaro:  
from Goob Orre, 32  
daughter: 16

21a. Mother of all local Alyaros, widow of a man of the Irbaanguḍo age set, 87

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22. Gaalchiir Taarween, Gaalorra, 53, Irbaandif,  
wife from Uyam, 32  
sons: 14, 7, 4  
daughter: 10

23. Hirleewwa Alyaro, Uyam, 59, Libaalle,  
first wife from Lukumai or Tubcha, resp., dead,  
*mingessi*: from ?, 29  
by first wife:  
sons: 21, 19, (13, does not live in the settlement), 11  
daughters: 26, 15  
by *mingessi*: (no children)

24. (Nobody can call him by his name) Eysimmoonte,  
Gaalorra, 81, Irbaallis,  
first wife dead  
Second wife Aryaal, 50  
by first wife: one married daughter  
by second wife: warrior 25  
daughters: 28, 15

25. Baarowwa Adicharreh, Gaalorra, 45, Irbándif,  
wife from Gaabanayyo, 30  
son: 13  
daughter: 8

26. Mother of No. 25, from Matarbah, 70, husband of Deefguḍo,  
sons: (No. 25), warrior 29  
(married daughter in Gaabanayyo)

27. Karawwe Eysobeyle, Gaalorra, 49, Irbaandif  
wife from Urowween-Aryaal, 32  
son: 8  
daughter: 2

28. Mother of No. 27, from Gaabanayyo, 70  
husband was Deefguḍo  
daughter: wife of No. 31

29. Second wife of No. 27 from Lorogushu-Ekkaal, 28  
son: 0  
daughters: 4, 2

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30. Gaalbeytu Eysobeyle, Gaalorra, 35, “jumped” from Ilkichilli to Irbaandif, wife from Saale-Kimogol, full sister of the wife of No. 34, 27

son: 2

daughter: 4

adopted: Gaalbeytu’s SiDa, from Gaalooroyyo

daughter from Irbaallis, 19

31. Gaalyego Alyaro, Uyam, 52, Libaalle,

wife is daughter of No. 28, Gaalorra, 40

sons: 22, 19, 11

daughters: 24, 26, 14, 4

32. Man dead, was Guureeyya, Gaalorra, Irbaallis,

wife from Rengumo, 64

sons: warriors 39, 35, 30

33. Keele, Gaaldeylan, 57, Libaalle,

wife from ?, 42

sons: 26, 25, 22, 17, 13

daughters: 21, 19

34: Kulamoole Adicharreh, Gaalorra, 49, Irbaandif,

wife from Saale-Kimogol, 30

son: 6

daughters: 13, 11, (9, does not live in the settlement), 2

35. Haayle Medeero, Ma’daacho, 75, Irbaallis,

wife from Rengumo, 60

sons: warriors 38, 35

daughters: 29, 23

## POPULATION PYRAMIDS

### *CAPTION*

= married man

1 = first wife

2 = second wife or mingessi (= woman married in place of dead first wife)

i = warrior of the Ilkichilli age set, marriage year 1976

s = *sabadde* (daughters of the Irbaallis age set, who marry one age-grade cycle later than they would according to the rules of other age sets. Daughters of the Gaalorra subclan do not become *sabadde*.)

u = uncircumcised boy, uncircumcised girl

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*ANNOTATION*

The first diagram shows the total population. As Anders Grum<sup>17</sup> rightly points out, the lower part of the pyramid can be expected to broaden as soon as the present warriors have married. Since the last mass weddings happened 14 years ago, the number of small children surely must be low at the moment. But this shortage is due only to the age-grade cycle and does not indicate a long-term demographic development.

In the following diagrams, the population is broken down into age-set memberships of the men. Listed are the men and their wives and unmarried children. Households in which the man died but had belonged to the respective age set are also included, as are foster children and working children whose father belongs to the respective age set, even if he lives in a different settlement.

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*1. THE SETTLEMENT GROUP IN TOTAL:*

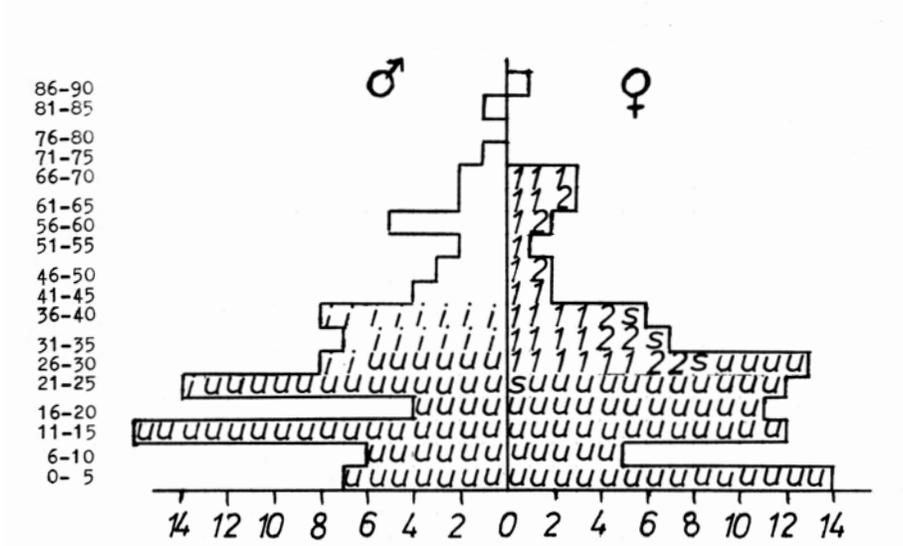


Figure 0.5.1. The settlement group in total

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<sup>17</sup> Grum, Anders: Rendille Habitation, A Preliminary Report, Nairobi, 1976, unpublished.

2. BROKEN DOWN INTO AGE SETS  
(EACH INCLUDING WIVES AND CHILDREN)

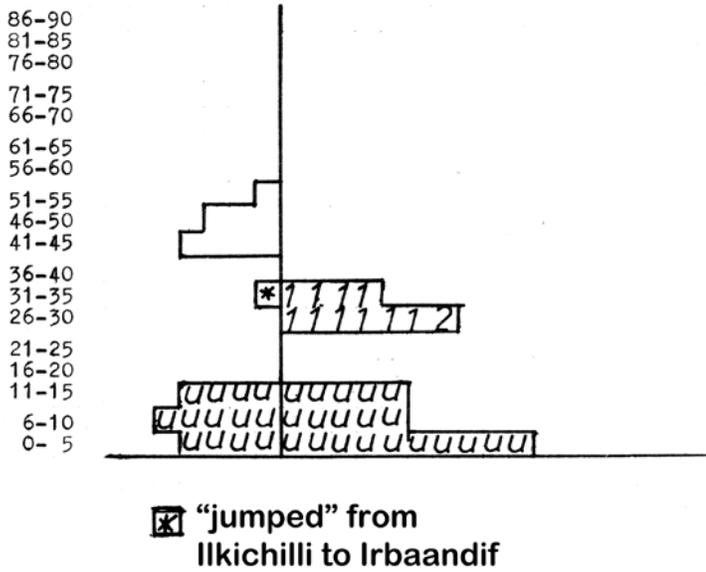
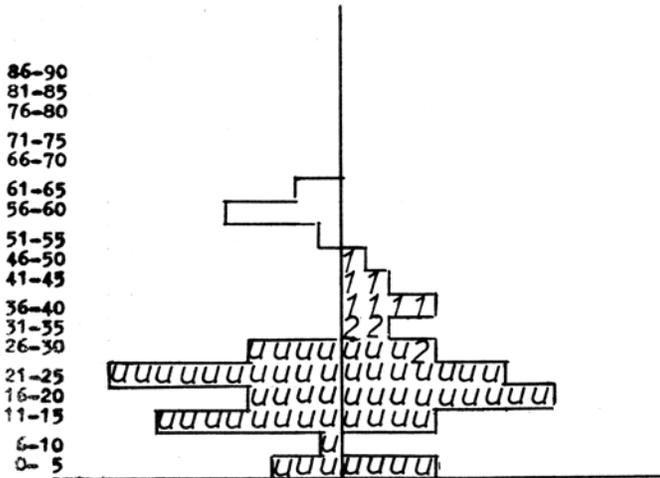


Figure 0.5.2.1. Irbaandif (marriage year 1962) and children



End of page 74 Figure 0.5.2.2. Libaalle (marriage year 1948) and children

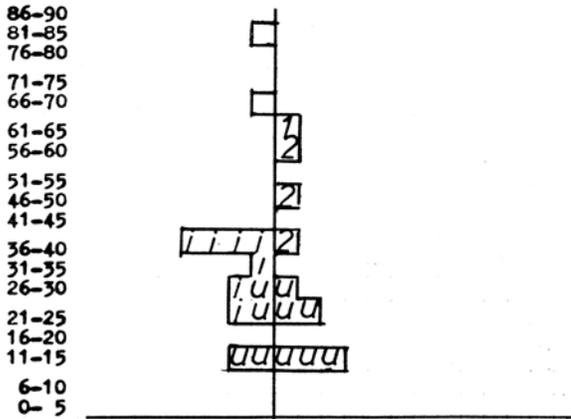


Figure 0.5.2.3.1. Irbaallis (marriage year 1934) and children (additionally broken down into clan membership): Gaalorra-Irbaallis

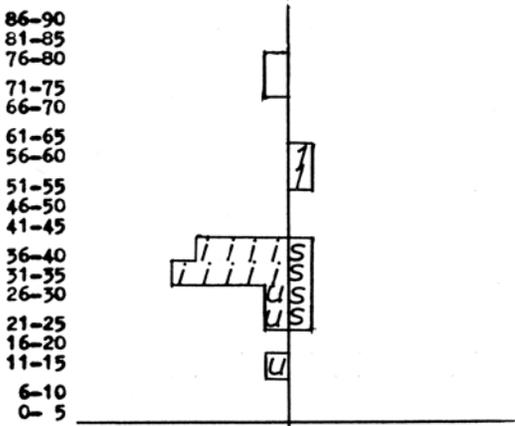


Figure 0.5.2.3.2. Irbaallis (marriage year 1934) and children (additionally broken down into clan membership): Non-Gaalorra-Irbaallis

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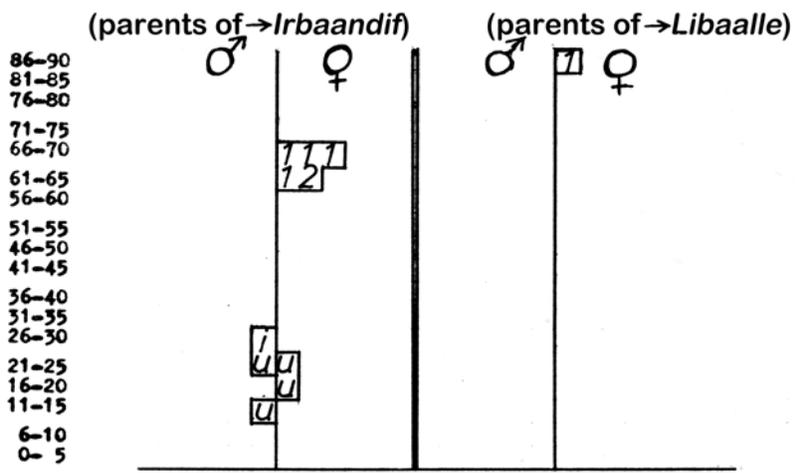


Figure 0.5.2.4. Difgudó (marriage year 1920)

Figure 0.5.2.5. Irbaangudo (marriage year 1906)

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## 0.5. STRUCTURAL PRINCIPLES OF RENDILLE SOCIETY

On the face of it, Rendille society appears to fulfil ideals of liberty and equality like hardly any other society does. There is no government authority, no (traditional) chief, no schoolmaster, no prison. Complicated forms of deference and status-linked pronouns of address are unknown.

In the centre of every settlement there is a round space (*naabo*) in which the men gather to make unanimous decisions after long discussions.

The people show no psychosomatic impairments caused by work, constant rush, pressure to perform, there is no nervousness. Here, the people are healthy, balanced, independent, self-reliant, autonomous.

A closer inspection reveals that the apparent freedom is strongly limited. The custom (*húgum*) not only prohibits what is not allowed, but also seems to dictate in detail what makes a good elder, a good warrior. Hardly anyone seems to even attempt to break free from any sort of role expectations. (Could that be because people feel the roles are acceptable?) Rituals take place with a high precision, although hardly anyone is able to give reasons for performing them in this of all possible forms.

The appearance of equality also dissolves. There are a lot of differences, acquired by birth, between the clans, even if no one exercises power in our sense of the word. Particularly the endogamous castes of the blacksmiths and diviners, the “bad people”, do not match the ideal of equality. I once overheard the following dialogue: “All men are equal.” – “What, you mean the blacksmiths, too? But they are proof that not all men are equal.”

So much for a first glance and second, closer look at the Rendille. This study is meant to present a third look.

The Rendille are an acephalous society, i.e. there is no institutionalised political power. Nobody has the right to use violence against another person without the latter being allowed to defend himself.

Exceptions are men, who may beat their wives, and women, who may beat their children (although they rarely do). That leads us to a sphere outside of general equality: differentiation by age and gender. This is one principle of structuring Rendille society which cross-cuts other structures (in every clan there are persons of different age and gender). This differentiation provides us with the topics of the next four chapters: Women, elders, warriors, girls.

Within these groups, for instance among elders or warriors, the members are indeed equal in the sense of coexisting free of domination. But here we will also find distinctions. The reasons for these distinctions might be quite obvious:

For many equal persons to live and work together peacefully, they might need to each perform distinctly different tasks and responsibilities. If two persons do the same thing, there is competition; coexistence, and cooperation even more, requires a differentiation of tasks. This process of differentiation

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within an acephalous society can be compared to the biological principle of the ecological niche.<sup>18</sup>

This differentiation among the Rendille is not of an economic type – they all herd camels and smallstock and get along with each other (mostly) peacefully, in spite of limited resources of grass and water. The differences between them are a highly subtle “superstructural phenomenon”.

Like many other tribal societies, the Rendille tribe is separated into two moieties, within which exists a seniority order of the individual clans. Within the clans, then, there is a seniority order of the individual lineages based on the birth order of the sons of the clan’s mythical progenitor. The principle of seniority even extends into the individual families. Clans subordinate in this respect are not secondary or without rights, however, but instead have special powers and forces at their disposal which fully compensate this political disadvantage.

The Gaaldeylan clan in which I lived holds a low position in the seniority order (apparently theirs was a relatively late immigration of Boran-speaking groups). Its special significance, however, is that Gaaldeylan – or rather: its strongest subclan Gaalorra – has a powerful curse over people with unpierced earlobes, i.e. Boran and Somali. And so, consistent with that logic, we were expected to settle at the eastern end of the settlement cluster, near the wells of Korrr, where the danger of Boran raids is biggest. (The connection between Boran origin and effective curse against Boran is noticeable. Like witchcraft, the curse also seems to be most effective against members of one’s own group.) All other clans have, just like Gaaldeylan, special ritual powers securing their particular position and ascribing them particular tasks.

The curse, or rather: the curses, as there are all sorts of curses which are acquired or inherited in different ways, play an important role in the distribution of power and in securing the rights of the individual. Nobody would ever think of doing something to someone which could in turn cause the latter to blow into his half closed fist or to think evil thoughts “in his belly” and then to say “We will meet tomorrow”, or whatever form a curse may take on.<sup>19</sup>

The clans and their subunits, therefore, make up a second structural principle of Rendille society, next to gender and age.

<sup>18</sup> Ecology also provides us with useful models about the coexistence of different tribes. For instance, in northern Kenya, armed conflicts are most violent between tribes living on the same basis of subsistence. Camel pastoralists fight camel pastoralists, cattle herders fight cattle herders. The result is that the, culturally and linguistically very similar and intermarrying, Rendille and Gabbra decimate each other dramatically. In a way, they are simply too much alike to be able to get along well. Rendille (camel) and Samburu (cattle), however, are allies in spite of considerable linguistic differences. Gabbra (camel) and Boran (cattle) also coexist peacefully.

While the conflicts appear to be about livestock theft, defending pastures of one’s own might actually also play a role in them.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. fourth excursus, section 3.8.

Yet another structural principle is made up of special ritual positions, i.e. positions a person does not acquire by birth but by special personal circumstances or a ritual office.

These include, among others, the killers (*meeraat*), the circumcision candidates (*lakhandiita* – an exception in this context, as the entire male population goes through this state), the *hosoob*, *guidur* (age-grade offices) and *dabeel* (a kind of order recruited from the elders of different clans).

These structural principles can be imagined as three overlapping levels.

1. Age and gender
2. Clan, subclan, lineage
3. Special ritual status

Even more apt than the image of overlapping levels might be that of a three-dimensional grid to identify the social and ritual position of each individual Rendille.

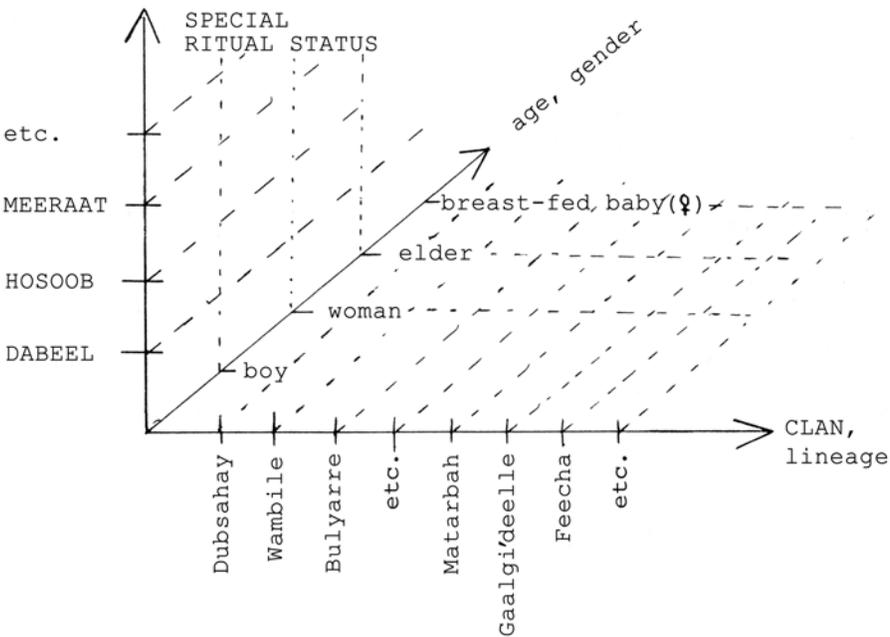


Figure 0.6. Three-dimensional grid to identify the social and ritual position of each individual Rendille

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In this three-dimensional grid, not all grid points can be filled. The special ritual statuses can – with certain qualifications regarding the time immediately after circumcision – only be held by male individuals; furthermore a boy or warrior cannot be *dabeel*, members of certain families cannot be *ho-soob*, etc.

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This study is structured according to these three dimensions.

## 0.6. FIRST EXCURSUS: TIME AND TIME GIVERS

For the Rendille, the calendar is not only a practical instrument to calculate time with, but the heart of their belief system, with various cosmological, ritual and social references. This makes it indispensable in its form: The Gregorian calendar, for instance, which is also a tried and tested instrument to orient oneself in time, could never take on the numerous functions of the Rendille calendar. Since the European months, the “government months” (*hayti sirgaal*) do not correspond to the lunar cycle, they are simply considered wrong. It would be impossible to ascribe the same cosmological and ritual meanings to them.

By different multiplications of the solar year, which always contain the factor 7, the Rendille create the time frame for their age-grade system and their historical philosophy, which both are of a cyclic nature. This makes up the general order. The more detailed structures do not depend on the sun but on the moon, which determines the dates of periodic festivals.

The awe and intense ritual reaction of the Rendille to a lunar eclipse shows how great and psychologically fundamental the significance of the celestial bodies is to them, apart from their function as time givers. They are not only the basis of calculation, but active creators of the system, manifestations of the sky/heaven, which is referred to by the same word as the concept of “god”. “Sky” and “heaven”, physical and metaphysical, are the same thing here.

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### 0.6.1. MOON AND SUN

The Rendille have a cycle of 12 months which are identical with the Gabra’s 12 months.

Gabbra <sup>20</sup>	Gabbra <sup>21</sup>	Rendille
Som Dera	sombder kara	Soondeer
Som Dera ege	sombder egge	Soondeer
Somu	som	Soom
Som Fura	furam	Furam
Didi Yala	didial	Dibyaal
Arrafa	arafa	Harrafa
Yaka	yakaa	Daga
Ragarra	ragara	Raggar
Ragarra ege	ragara	Raggar
Faite	fayte	Hayti keleye
Jia Bora <sup>22</sup>	jibor	Hayohi borbooran
Jia Bora ege	jibor	Hayohi borbooran

These months start with the first appearance of the crescent moon at sunset and last for about 15 days, until the moon does *not* appear at sunset for the first time. The time after that, until the next new moon, is the “darkness”, the time in between two months.

Whether the similarity of the names is due to a common origin or to borrowing, I cannot decide. If, however, the words are loan words, then they are likely to have been borrowed by the Rendille from the (Gabbra-)Boran, and not the other way around, as the *m* in “Som Dera” can, in that point of articulation, assimilate to the following (dental) *d* and change to a (also dental) *n*. This way, “Som Dera” can become “*Soondeer*”; the reversed process is not likely.

The month of *Somu* or *Som* is identical with the Muslim Ramadhan. And “Soom” simply means “fasting”.

Like the Muslim months, the Rendille and the Gabbra months can coincide with every season. Since the span of 12 months is slightly more than 11 days shorter than one (solar) year, each month starts, as compared to the solar year, 11 or 12 days earlier each year than in the previous one.

The Muslims call the period of 12 months one year. That way, their year can begin in every season of the solar year.

<sup>20</sup> After Tablino, Paolo: Note sui Gabbra del Kenya, Catholic Mission Marsabit, 1974.

<sup>21</sup> Torry, William J.: Subsistence Ecology among the Gabbra: Nomads of the Kenya/Ethiopia Frontier, doctoral thesis, Columbia University, 1973.

<sup>22</sup> One of the two names was probably derived by calque from the other one: *jia* (Gabbra-Boran for “moon, month”) is *hai* in Rendille.

This equating of 12-month cycle and year is not done by the Rendille and Gabbra. Their “year” is entirely independent of the course of the moon. Instead, it refers to the time span from one spring rain to the next, therefore indirectly depending on the sun.

That makes it pointless to ask which month is the first of the 12-month cycle. This kind of numbering carries no meaning at all. The only thing one needs to know is that Soom is followed by Furam, and Furam is followed by Dibyaal, etc. Similarly pointless is asking which month is the first of the year. The answer would probably be that only God can know. Which human would dare predict the start of the unreliable spring rains to the month? An answer to this question can only be expected from the diviners (*moro*), if at all. The word for “spring rain” is the same as that for “year”: *gu*.

The *gu* rains (around April) are followed by *nabhayi deer*, the long dry season, which in turn is followed by the *yer* rains (usually November/December) followed by *nabhayi gaaban*, the short dry season. The Rendille fully realise that the succession of seasons is connected to the position of the sun. During the long dry season, the sun is in the north, making the shadows point south at midday. During the short dry season the shadows point north.<sup>23</sup>

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#### 0.6.2. DAYS OF THE WEEK AND 7-YEAR RHYTHM

The names of the Rendille days of the week are, quite clearly, Arabic (probably via Somali).

<sup>23</sup> In the literature, lunar months are occasionally equated with the months of our solar year. Usually, this is accompanied by the qualification that a particular lunar month corresponds “roughly” to this and that month of our calendar. What is overlooked, though, is the fact that the differences are not caused by inaccuracy, but by a fundamental dissimilarity.

In William J. Torry: *Subsistence Ecology of the Gabbra*, one table, for instance, equates Gabbra months with our months without any further discussion of the problems, making Arrafa February, etc.

A similar equation can be found in Paul Spencer, 1973. As Spencer had been in the field a few years earlier than Torry, he, of course, paralleled other months with ours than his successor. In his version, Haráfa is not February, but June (Spencer, 1973, p. 69). If I were to make such an equation based on my field notes, I would claim that Haráfa is December.

Unlike Torry, Spencer (1973, p. 125) intricately ponders on the question of how the of the lunar cycle could be adjusted to the solar year, which is pointless, however, as such an adjustment does not happen. He thinks there must occasionally be three Ragárr or Haibórborán months, instead of the usual two. The Rendille would consider it blasphemous to change the sequence of months, that has existed from “the beginning of time”, on their own authority.

For Spencer, the main piece of evidence justifying such an equation is the fact that in 1948 as well as in 1959 and 1960, the *sorio* festivals, which only take place in certain months, took place in June and July. The only explanation for this which I can think of is that in 1948, the festivals in question had not been the *sorio* of Háráfa and Dága, but the two special *sorio* of Sondeer.

Rendille		Arabic	English
Gumaad	يَوْمَ الْجُمُعَةِ	[yaumul-jum'ati]	Friday
Sabdi	السَّبْتِ	[yaumus-sabti]	Saturday
Ahað	الْأَحَدِ	[yaumul-ahadi]	Sunday
Alaasmin	الْاِثْنَيْنِ	[yaumul-ithnaini]	Monday
Talaada	الثَّلَاثَاءِ	[yaumuth-thalatha'i]	Tuesday
Arbah	الْأَرْبَعَاءِ	[yaumul-arba'a'i]	Wednesday
Khamiis	الْخَمِيسِ	[yaumul-khamisi]	Thursday

The day begins at sunset and ends with the next sunset. According to our system, “Gumaad”, therefore, begins on Thursday night and ends on Friday night.

This kind of definition seems to have once been widely used and can also be found in the Bible: “And the evening and the morning were the first day.” (Moses 1, 1:5)

The years are named after the weekdays and, accordingly, combined to cycles of seven. The idea of the cycle is the same as in our culture: the underlying concept being the circular shape or motion. A particular weekday “comes around” after a week (*teeba* = “seven”).

- asoo-mar-ta = “comes around”
- a – initial sound if the preceding word ends non-vocally
- soo – a locative prefix: “to/towards the speaker”
- mar – verb stem: “to turn”
- ta – third person singular

In the same manner, months, years, age sets and historical periods “come around”.

### 0.6.3. THE 2 X 7 ANNUAL CYCLE

The interval from one Friday year until the next but one Friday year, i.e. 14 years later, is the time span between two boys’ circumcisions. In a Friday year, the “boys”, who might by that time be as old as 29 years, become warriors. The next 14 years are, retrospectively, often referred to as the time when the members of one or the other age set were warriors. The space of time between two initiations is not monotonous or unstructured, but divided by various festivals (cf. 1.3.3. and 4.6.).

#### 0.6.4. THE 3 X 2 X 7 ANNUAL CYCLE

The word for “father” (the term of reference, not the term of address) is *ooyo*, pl. *ooyenye*. And *ooyo* is also the word for generation. Two *ooyo* are one *aacchi* (“grandfather”, interval between a particular event in the life of the grandfather and the same event, like circumcision or marriage, in the grandson’s life).

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One *ooyo* can be counted from any given age set of fathers to any given age set of sons and always amounts to 42 years because sons (at least ideally) are initiated into the third age set, i.e. 3 x 14 years, after their fathers’.

One particular *ooyo*, with a fixed starting point, is the *fahan*. The *fahan* is opened with a particular age set and closed with the third one after that. Each age set, therefore, has its own fixed position: the first, second or third in a *fahan*. We could also say that *fahan* is the *ooyo* in the first position of which there is always a *teerya* age set (cf. sections 0.6.5., 0.6.6., and 4.9.).

The *fahan* is proclaimed by a man of the Tubcha clan in a special ceremony (cf. 2.8.8.1.2.). When one *fahan* is completed with the age sets 1, 2 and 3, a new *fahan* is started by circumcising age set 4 who, according to the ideal pattern, are the sons of 1. This new *fahan*, however, is not proclaimed until it is finished, i.e. when age set 5, the sons of 2, and finally age set 6, the sons of 3, got married and completed their time as warriors.

Elders belonging to a finished *fahan* have a special ritual status. If their stick lies on the ground, one must not step over it. If one does step over it by mistake, this action must be reversed and repeated correctly: Backwards, one has to step back over the stick, pick it up, rest it against the wall of the hut and may only then continue one’s way. If someone breaks the wooden headrest or the stool of a *fahan* elder, drastic compensations have to be paid.

The time at which the *fahan* is proclaimed means for our example that

- the age sets 1 and 4 have to wait two 14-year cycles
- the age sets 2 and 5 have to wait one 14-year cycle, and
- the age sets 3 and 6 have to wait no 14 year-cycle until they obtain *fahan* status.

Corresponding to the combining of cycles to generations, the names of age sets often recur after two, five or eight age sets in the same or a similar form.

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The last eleven age sets which were initiated are<sup>24</sup>:

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<sup>24</sup> After Spencer, 1973, p. 33, slightly supplemented and with orthographic changes by me.

No.	Age-set name	Samburu equivalent	Rendille year of initiation <sup>25</sup>
1	Irbaandif	(Il)kipayang	1825
2	Ilkibigu	(Il)kipeko	1839
3	Libaalle	(Il)kiteku	1853
4	Dibguḍo	(Il)tarigirik	1876
5	Desmaala	(Il)marikon	1881
6	Irbaanguḍo	(Il)terito	1895
7	Deefguḍo	(Il)merisho	1910 <sup>26</sup>
8	Irbaallis	(Il)kiliako	1923
9	Libaalle	(Il)mekuri	1937
10	Irbaandif	(Il)kimaniki	1951
11	Deefguḍo	(Il)kichili	1965

The Samburu names are very common. In general phrasing, Dibguḍo are the “fathers” of Deefguḍo and the grandfathers of Irbaandif, etc., although that does not in every individual case correspond to the actual family relations. If an old man has very young sons which are at the time of the initiation of the third age set after that of their father too young for circumcision, they can wait for another 14-year cycle. If, the other way around, a relatively young man has grown-up sons, they will wait until the third age set after their father’s is circumcised, but might then be able, under certain conditions, to skip one age set.<sup>27</sup> So, ideally, the same names keep reappearing in the age sets of grandfathers, fathers, sons, i.e. in one age-set line. For instance, the original intention was to call No. 11 Desmaala. But since the warrior time of Desmaala, from 1881 to 1892, had been a hard time for the Rendille, they did not want age set No. 11 to receive this unlucky name. So it was called Deefguḍo, although that is a name from a different age-set line (4, 7, 10, 13). To avoid confusion, this age set is usually called by the name of its Samburu equivalent, “Ilkichilli”.

Spencer assumes that there is a similar explanation for the Samburu name of age set No. 2, “Kipeko”.

#### 0.6.5. DAAJJI – THE PERIODICITY OF HISTORY

*Daajji a soomara – daajji* comes around. After two  $3 \times 2 \times 7$  annual cycles, i.e. two generations or one “grandfather” (*aacchi*), all events recur. The present drought is identical with the one 84 years ago; there is war now because the place of the war 84 years ago has come around again.

Let’s have Yeleewwa Laafte from the Saale clan and Laago Ogoom (cf. 2.4.6.) describe these facts in more detail:

<sup>25</sup> The horizontal lines are *fahán* lines. Apart from the last three, for which there is historic proof, the initiation years are inferred from the theory.

<sup>26</sup> Was postponed because of drought.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Spencer, 1973, p. 34.

The topic of this conversation is the fact that, at an earlier time, there had been just as much war as today.

*Laafte: Wahaas a kholota. Isla'dabbaache ichoowka ebba meessiis leefirde.*

That was this age set. (Ilkichilli, the present warriors, i.e. their “grandfathers” Desmaala) They destroyed each other, until everybody ran from his own place.

*Seley latabe. Ichoowka Rendille, 'Okkhoow', weeste, Waakh wahte, 'Okhoow, miig nah ikeen!'*

They moved away from each other. Until the Rendille prayed “God!”, called (to) God, “God, give us strength!”

*Okkhoow! Il a suujowe, eti miigenye nah gargaaro nah ikeen, yidah.*

*Maantaas sirgaal yimiy. Inti u' leeyimiy et arge la mele.*

“God! The world has turned bad. Give us someone who is strong, who helps us!” they said. At that time, the government (the British) came. And no one had seen where they had come from.

*Maantaas sirgaal yimiyye deerka il haagsate. Haagsate ichoowka toro albe islakadiste. Kholoti chele oraakka injire haagi idaase la ma argin.*

At this time the government came and the world turned good [again]. Turned good, until they [the Rendille and the Gabbra] married each other's girls again. And during the past age sets [while the following age sets were warriors] the Rendille have never [again] seen something as good.

*Ba'he ila on kakahta ichoowka Meyte iratta, ila on kakahta ichoowka Hali Murrallah dirihiis iratta. Inta on kakahta samacchaar on yaakhta ichoowka Waasso iratta.*

The people set out from here and walked to Meite (near Mt. *Kulál*), set out from here and walked past the mountain of Muralle. From here they set out, grazed slowly, until they reached the Waso [Ewaso Ngiro, the river near which Archer's Post is situated].

*Geedda dakkhan enenyet tuumman isgoya raaha. Ichoowka uu' kholotan títah inti goorat diho soomarte.*

All this time all the people wandered together [the tribes mixed together]. Until, since this age set has started [Ilkichilli, the present warriors], the place of the past war had come around.

*Isliikahe deerka enenyeti is'dabbaacho on laarga, ichoowka il a kan toolla atin laka agartaan, kholotane minan disatta il deerka haagsata.*

*Maanta herti Rendille tuumman mindischo a soodowwaatte toolla.*

Then they began, it was seen that the people destroyed each other, until the world had become like this, now you see it, too. When this age set marries [literally: builds houses], then the world will become good [again]. Today the marriage of all the Rendille warriors has come close.

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*Maanta tolola hoolahi Rendille ichoow wihi Booraaánto toolla isgoya kijiraan dabankaka. 'Deerka kola nebeyti il soohaagsati, a soodowaatta kola. Rendille goorat 'daajji' iche yadeh, waha a 'daajji'.*

Today, just now, the livestock of the Rendille and of the Gabbra are grazing together [among each other] in this direction [north]. Then, this time, the peace with which the world turns good again comes near, this time. The Rendille used to say 'daajji', this is 'daajji'.

*Ogoom: Daajji a soomara.*

Daajji comes around.

*Laafte: Yeedi kootte at nah worsatte, aacchinyetiinna, at tidah, a idaa. Yeedaas ooyenyetánya kadaagne, chirrinki iche yeyyeeddo.*

This is the speech you've asked us for today, "of your grandfathers" you said. This speech we heard from our fathers when they talked.

*Wihi goorat iche nah idowto dakkhan a yitaaheen. Nebeyta kaldaye idaaruu ankhaane iche laka a soosohatta. Goorat maantaas laka a lamiskiin one hoola lawaaye, hattoka isliikahe.*

Everything they used to tell us has come [true]. Only this peace is yet to come; it is now approaching. In the past, at that time, we became poor, too, we lost livestock and began to steal.

*Herti Rendille miige laka yib gesse, shifita titah. 'Doodoo laka nabhay yib on ka dabbaacha. Maalim on, chirrinki iche hoola agarte kisarta, khaatta, taham.*

The strong warriors of the Rendille also went into the bush [and] became bandits [shifita]. The dry season killed other people in the bush, too. In broad daylight, when they had seen livestock, they stole it from you by force, took it, ate.

*Ibeen deerka saggane ifiddiita hertaase gaal tahame. Gobassih deerka alohoo khabo ibeenki nool fiddiya, alohaase lakabahsataa.*

In the night, they sat there [because of] these warriors who eat camels. The settlement groups who had some few camel mares<sup>28</sup> kept watch [literally: sat] the whole night [so that] these camel mares would [not] also be taken from them.

<sup>28</sup> Note about the translation: I used to think that in German horse terminology is applied to camels (Kamelhengst, Kamelstute, Kamelfohlen), while in English cow terminology is applied. The translator, however, translated my horse terminology straight into English (camel stallion, camel mare, camel foal). I managed to change the camel stallions to camel bulls, but abstained from changing all mares into she-camels or camel cows and all foals into calves when I consulted Google and discovered that also the way proper speakers of English use these terms is quite inconsistent. The "mares" mentioned in this book are she-camels, the foals are camel calves and "bulls", not stallions, are the male counterparts of "mares". These inconsistencies are not to be blamed on me but on the English. By the way, according to Google, also the German use of terminology nowadays is quite inconsistent. There appear to be thousands of people writing about Kamelbullen and Kamelkälber.

*Adi la lawaaye, loolyo lawaaye, aloha kaldaye lakhaba, enenyetaas alohaas maalinka hankane gana toro sahtaka hanka gana.*

The smallstock was lost, too, the cattle were lost, only these camel mares were had. Those people bled those mares on this side today and again on that side tomorrow (points first to one, then to the other side of the neck).<sup>29</sup>

*Yeedi goorat deerka ewween nah idowo. Nkubuubbu lakayaham. Saahka Waakh chi' u' doo'd gargaaro, Alaasminti chele kutte, waakh uu' deyeka harra buuhiche, medeer bahe, dommoge bahte.*

The speech from past times which the great people told us. They also ate boiled blood of it. On the next day, when God helped the people, in the last Monday year [i.e. in its place in the past daji cycle], God rained and filled the earth. *Meder* [the fruit of *gaer*, cf. 5.7.] grew [came out], *domóge* [another yellow fruit] grew.

*Harra deerka desse. Malab bahe, gurnaanki addan dakkhan bahe. Wahaas on deerka layuhum. Wahaas on layuhumye, nabhayi nool waha lakhucche ichoowka enenyet dakkhan ruuse.*

Then the earth gave birth, honey grew, all other fruits grew. Only this was eaten then, that was the food of the entire [following] dry season, it lasted until all people became healthy [strong, fat].

*Maantaas doodi goorat dakkhan yib gele, soobahe, harrataase deerka Rendille noolaasse. Aloha goorat enenyet khabo, deleen.*

At that time all the people came out who had before gone into the bush; that earth had made the Rendille recover. These camel mares which the people had had before gave birth.

*Enenyet dakkhan deerka isineybe, nabhaya goorat isliineybe, Booraanto ichoow Rendille isgoya soogeleen.*

All the people then turned peaceful, in this dry season they turned peaceful with each other, Gabbra and Rendille moved together [settled among each other].

*Koorro laka goorat a liiskabahsata, iche laka sooguurte, enenyet dakhamba isgoya gele. Loolyota maanta Koorro lakeele. Adi la goorat Booraanto leesoo 'hadde, Booraanto lakagatte. Maantaase hoola toro la'hele.*

The Samburu had before stolen from each other, too, they also came, all the people moved together. These cattle were purchased by the Samburu, and the smallstock, of which the Gabbra had some left, it was bought from Gabbra. At this time, animals were purchased again.

*Úus hoolaha la'hele injire nabhay ma laargine ichoowka nabhayi cheletteet laarge. Daajihii goorat makhaaballeta wewween nah idowto nah kadaagno kaache.*

Since this livestock has been purchased, never again was a drought seen, until this drought that has just passed [yesterday's drought] was seen. That is

<sup>29</sup> Normally, adult camel mares are not bled at all.

the *daajji* of which the great elders told us, about which we heard from them.

Believing in the *daajji*, in the fact that after two generations everything repeats itself, is not merely a “philosophical belief”, like our believing in the Big Bang, which does not have much influence on our everyday actions. Without this belief in the *daajji*, the long dramatic, sometimes bloody conflict about the marriage rites of the Ilkichilli age set (cf. 4.) could never have happened. We will get back to the concept of *daajji* several more times.

Viewed from an empirical-critical distance, one might get the idea that consistencies of the historical course of events with the principle of *daajji*, as reported by Yeeleewa Laafte in our example, are based on a retrospective changing of the past in people’s minds, at least in the sense of a selective remembering of facts matching a certain situation. This may in part be true. Partly, however, the Rendille see to it that, through self-fulfilling prophecies, the course of history adjusts to *daajji* – the conflict about the Ilkichilli marriage rites suggests that. But apart from all that, it is indeed objectively, and unaffected by psychological factors, true that history repeats itself after exactly six age-set cycles. This is not a miracle, but work of the human mind. The Rendille age-set system was constructed this way.

Next to the various correlations between age sets already mentioned, there is another correlation of this type: the one between two consecutive age sets. Rights usually only due to a person within his own age set are transferred to the age set with which he is associated in this way. This means there is a two beat rhythm in the sequence of age sets, which overlays the three beat rhythm already discussed.

But not even each of the three age sets of one run of a cycle of three are equivalent to one another. Not only regarding name and position in the *fa-han* but also with regard to a number of other characteristics, each age set is similar to the third age set preceding or succeeding it. If we name the age sets equivalent to each other in this respect by the same letter, we will therefore get a continuous sequence of abc abc abc. All the “a”-s form the age-set line of A. One of these age-set lines stands out in Rendille society: the *teerya* line, which we will call C for our purpose.

In almost every Rendille clan, the daughters of men of *teerya* age sets cannot, like the daughters of the other age sets do, marry when the second age set after that of their fathers marries, but have to wait for the third. As a consequence, the brothers of these *sabadde* (as these girls are called) have a particularly large number of women to choose from when they marry, that is to say the girls of the age set following their own, as is the usual case, plus the girls of their own age set. Conversely, for the age set preceding a *teerya* age set, finding a woman is very difficult and finding two women even more difficult, as many girls who otherwise would have been eligible, are *sabadde*. The differences between the other two age sets are not as considerable; the age-set line which is set apart is *teerya*.

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In the following illustration, this *teerya* line (being Ilkichilli, Irbaallis, Desmaala) is represented by a dark square.



Figure 0.7. Illustration of *teerya* line

Now, if this sequence of three is overlapped by a sequence of two, the resulting structure will look like this:

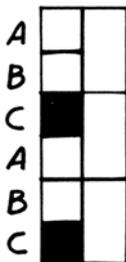


Figure 0.8. Illustration of overlapping sequences

Age set A, at the top of the illustration, is correlated to age set B. This has a number of practical consequences. The members of B can address the members of A – provided they belong to their own clan – as “older brother” (*mboo*) instead of choosing the more respectful address “younger father’s brother” (*abaayya*). Also, A men must not take offence if B men occasionally have affairs with their wives.

So it does indeed make a difference whether one’s own age set takes up the older or the younger position in such a group of two. Let us call these two possibilities 1 and 2. Apart from that, one can either be *teerya* (dark square) or non-*teerya* (white square). Let us call these two possibilities D (dark) and W (white). Which possible combinations of these two pairs of characteristics are there now? They are, in the order of our illustration:

- a) W 1
- b) W 2
- c) D 1
- a) W 2
- b) W 1
- c) D 2

After that, it starts over.

So we can see that there is only one constellation D 1 in six age sets, just like there is only one D 2 constellation. Actually, the other constellations are

also unique: The men of the first W 1 have no troubles marrying because the girls of the age set following their own are not *sabadde*. The men of the second W 1, however, are confronted with exactly this problem. What we can see is that each of the six age sets has sexual rights and marriage chances different from the rights and chances of all other five age sets. A particular constellation of rights and chances is, of course, accompanied by particular possible conflicts after six age sets. In that respect, history indeed does repeat itself after exactly two generations.

0.6.6. MARRYING THE GRANDFATHERS' BONES

Rendille do not marry their sisters. "Sisters" are all the girls from one's own clan or a brother clan. They also do not marry into their mother's clan nor into the clan of their father's mother. A preferred choice of partner, on the other hand, would be to choose one's bride from the clan of one's father's father's mother.

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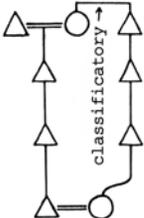


Figure 0.9.

This is called marrying the grandfathers' bones (*lafaacchi*). If this rule was strictly observed, it would result in a stereotypical three-part cyclic sequence of clans of origin of the women for each patriline. The rule,

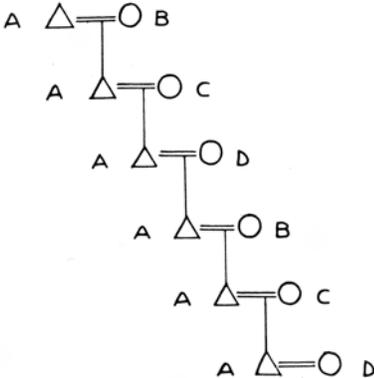


Figure 0.10.

however, is not observed strictly; it is merely a preference. If the rule is observed, the emerging picture looks like this: If my FaFaFa married a girl of – say – Rengumo, then my FaFa is a DaSo of Rengumo. DaSo is called *eysim* or “remnant”. You ask your *eysim* for help when you are in economic troubles and the *eysim* draws part of his identity, like character traits, from his mother’s clan. Rendille rarely call each other by their names – but everybody is fully identified if he names lineage, age set and “*eysim* of such-and-such”. By marrying “my grandfather’s bones” I make sure that my son will be exactly like my grandfather in all the aspects determined by the *eysim* relation. This way I show a certain respect for my grandfather.

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#### 0.6.7. PERIODICAL FESTIVALS

##### 0.6.7.1. THE *SOORRIYO* FESTIVAL

Four times a year, in the two Soondeer months and in the months of Harrafa and Daga, the *soorriyo* festival is celebrated in all the Rendille settlement groups.<sup>30</sup> The first two and the latter two *soorriyo* each form pairs. Ideally, every family member should take part in the *soorriyo* of his or her own household or, if he or she is unmarried, their mother’s house. The minimum requirement is participating in *one soorriyo* of each of the two pairs.

Not only the people, but all the livestock has to be in the settlement for *soorriyo*. The recurring chief ritual element of *soorriyo* is a blessing for man and animal using different symbols.

What is just as important as a detailed analysis of the ritual in order to understand this festival is the general mood: Joy. All the livestock is in the settlement, every household slaughters, even if the animals are not in the best physical condition there is milk in abundance because all the dairy livestock is in the settlement. After having spent weeks or months away from their parents, the warriors and boys return from the camel pastures and the girls, warriors and boys from the smallstock camps.

Another, rather formal, main feature of this festival is *perfection*. At no other time of the year so much care is devoted to outer appearances, like the immaculate condition of houses and fenced enclosures. But what is not allowed is to merely build Potemkin villages solely for this occasion: After the festival, all building materials used for a *soorriyo* settlement have to remain in this settlement position until the group moves on. If a girl marries at a *soorriyo* site, she must not leave the settlement group she comes from until that time; only then can she move in with her bridegroom’s clan because her house was built with materials of the *soorriyo* position.

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. Spencer, 1973, p. 57 ff. Due to his incorrect understanding of the Rendille calendar, the details Spencer gives on the timing of the festivals are misleading. The rest of his description is correct. The following account is in accord with Spencer’s description.

The rich and impressive symbolism of this festival gives us first insights into the “grammar” of Rendille ritualism which will later make it easier for us to understand other rituals.

There are slight differences between the various *soorriyo* festivals. In the following, I will describe the first *soondeer* in Gaaldeylan Goob Naarugo, “my” settlement group, on July 20, 1975. For the *soondeer*, no camels are slaughtered. Apart from that, most of the following description can be generalised to all *soorriyo*.

Gaaldeylan, July 18, 1975

In the last few days women kept untying their houses and re-building them. Everything has to be in the best possible condition. The men dragged thorn-bushes along, enlarged old enclosures for livestock (*sum*, pl. *sumam*) and built new ones. The previous *sumam* were calculated for the minimum stock kept in the settlement during dry season.

Tonight the camels were driven here. The smallstock, which had also been in a distant pasture camp (*for*), and the girls came, too.

July 19, 1975

Today is the ninth day of the moon. Today the Dubsahay clan, and with it the entire moiety *Belessi Bahay*, the “western” *Belessi* (cf. 2.6.) holds its *soorriyo*. This is the reason why our livestock was already driven here yesterday. One part of the Rendille does *soorriyo* today, and that is reason enough for all the Rendille to have to have their livestock in the settlement. Our turn will be tomorrow, on the tenth day of the moon, together with the entire *Belessi Beri* moiety.

July 20, 1975

In the morning, at the usual time, the livestock is driven to the pastures. During the day, women clean their houses. Clothes are washed at the well. (Everyone who owns one washes his cloth. The leather things of women and girls do not get washed.)

around 4 p.m.

Warriors and boys put on fresh paint of red ochre, *ilkaarya*, on forehead, temples, back of the neck. The hair and the stripe of the front hairline is painted with coal (charcoal or coal from disused flashlight batteries), or with *ilkaarya*, to one’s own liking. The girls paint their breasts and shoulders with *ilkaarya*, some women use *ilkaarya* for their necklaces (*bukhurcha*), but most use fat.

Some men shave each other’s heads and oil them. All of them put on *khalli*<sup>31</sup>, strips cut from the fur of animals slaughtered for a previous *soorriyo*, which they wear as headbands.

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<sup>31</sup> Derived from a-khǎll-a – “I skin”.

The women gather *gayyer* branches (*Cordial sinensis* Lam., cf. 5.7.), which still have green leaves, and pin them to their houses, over the doors.

Then they put on the *okko*, a leather strap trimmed with cowry shells and bells which is never worn but on special occasions.

5 – 5.30 p.m.

For the actual ceremony the camels must be within the enclosures. Now they are driven here in small groups, grouped by owners, and brought into the respective enclosures. Some elders have their own enclosures, others share one with brothers. *Soorriyo* is the only opportunity to make quantitative estimates of the number of camels per individual household. At all other times the herd is split up, and asking would be very impolite. My guess is that there are about 10 adult camels per elder on average; but there is considerable variation.

Many boys and warriors carry a shiny black stick around, called *gumo* (pl. *gumoyyo*). *Gumoyyo* are taken from the trees *ejer* (not identified) or *kulum* (*Balanites* sp.). As these trees are rare, not everyone owns a *gumo*; firstborns should have one, however. The *gumo* is freshly oiled for each *soorriyo*. On one end, the *gumo* has a frill of *khalli* – see above, the elders' headbands.

To hit a camel with a *gumo*, or to use it for any other practical purpose, is unthinkable. In the time between the *sorio*, the *gumoyyo* are, like the *iibire* sticks of the Gaalorra clan (cf. 2.8.9.1. and 2.3.), stored at the back wall of the house for everyone to see.

All Rendille clans have *gumoyyo*, except for the O'doola clan.

The women gather rocks and lay a double row with them around the outside of the enclosure, leaving an opening at the gates. Furthermore, every woman lines the path between her gate and that of her left-side neighbour (left and right always as seen from the centre of the settlement) with rocks. This double row will be completed to a row of four at the second *Soondeer soorriyo* a month from now.

So the settlement is now twice enclosed: It has a thornbush fencing, which it usually does without in areas with only little predators and which in these areas is only built in *soorriyo* and *almado* settlement positions; and outside this fencing there are the rows of rocks, which also surround the whole settlement.

about 6:30 p.m.

#### *KILLING OF THE ANIMALS*

In front of every house an animal is slaughtered for *soorriyo*. This is the job of the entire male population, from the hardly weaned boy to the old man; women and girls, however, must stay in the huts during these proceedings.

An animal – for this *soorriyo* it may be any head of smallstock – is led to the right side of the door, as seen from the house. An elder or warrior holds the animal's head. If members of the Uyam clan (cf. 2.8.7.) belong to the settlement group, then – in theory – a man of this clan could be asked to hold

the animal's head because this clan has special powers over everything that is "head". But I have never observed an Uyam man being called just for this purpose, although several Uyam families live in the Gaaldeylan settlement group. The connection of Uyam and head is more relevant for other animal sacrifices, like *ori lagooraho*, for instance (cf. 5.4.).

Another elder pours a little milk from the lid of the ritual milk container *maḍaal* (cf. 0.6.7.2.3. and 3.0.) onto the right of the two cow hides forming the door of the house, then onto the left one. The animal is given a little milk to drink, some milk is smeared onto its belly, then on its back, then the tail is dipped in milk, and after that milk is smeared on the forelegs, first the right one, then the left one. Then the *maḍaal* lid (*inanki maḍaaleet* – "son of the *maḍaal*") is stuck in next to the *gaayer* branches over the door.

This treatment with milk is called an ablution (*a-la-dikh-a*: it is washed, from *a-dikh-a*: I wash).

After that everybody brushes his (ordinary) stick (*ul*, pl. *ulo*, fem. gender) and his *gumo*, wet with milk, over the back of the animal twice. Those who have no *gumo* do it only with their *ul*. If someone has no stick at all (for instance little boys or I), he uses his right hand. This is accompanied by saying "*soorriyo*".

Then some elders or warriors hold the animal by the head and legs. An elder slaughters the animal in the usual way: He cuts open the skin around the throat, pierces the neck behind the throat and severs the blood vessels. The others have to hold the animal in a tight grip because this is not a quick death. If it is an ungelded male animal, the blood runs into the hole in the ground. Milk is poured from the *maḍaal* lid on the blood drained into the ground. Female and gelded animals are bled into a pot. Milk is poured into the pot, too. Then the *maḍaal* lid is put back to the *gaayer* over the door.

Sand and blood are, together with an *eyma* (wild sisal fibre), mixed into a lump. Even if the animal is bled into a pot, a little of the blood is dripped onto the ground to moisten the *eyma* sponges with it. Warriors and boys make these *eyma* blood sponges for themselves, but chiefly boys.

If it is a male ungelded animal, all the blood of which is spilled onto the ground, everyone sticks their *ul* and *gumo* in the blood puddle. The blood is left to dry on the tip of the sticks.<sup>32</sup>

Everyone present is marked with blood on forehead and breast.

The neck of the bled animal is tied up with a rope. Then the group moves on to the next house. Meanwhile, the dead animal is taken into the house, skinned and cut up.

The boys and some of the warriors walk around inside the enclosures and, with their *eyma* blood sponges, mark cattle – provided there are any – on the right side of their backs by smearing the mixture of blood and earth on them.

<sup>32</sup> In 1976, no ungelded goat bucks could be slaughtered for *sorio* in our clan because a warrior had died. For that reason, the spermatic cords of the ungelded animals were bitten through right before slaughtering.

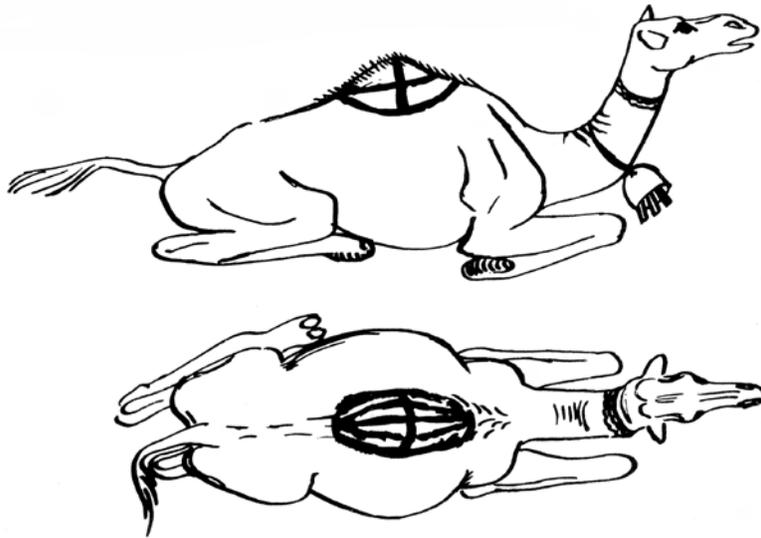


Figure 0.11. Camel bulls are painted with rather elaborate markings with blood on the hump. Other camels are only marked with a stripe on the side

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After the sacrifice, the elders involved move on to the next house. The elders walking from house to house together all belong to the same age set. They slaughter in front of houses of age-set mates. The order of the slaughtering is determined by the seniority order, so they walk around the settlement clockwise and, where settlement pattern and seniority order do not correspond, they walk crisscross through the settlement. The groups of elders of other age sets, who might simultaneously be at the other end of the settlement, must be watched, however, as younger men doing their *soorriyo* in front of their older brothers of a higher age set must be avoided. Who does the killing, i.e. who actually wields the knife, is rather arbitrary, but it must be one of the elders.

Spencer<sup>33</sup> writes: “Women and girls may not see this part of the ceremony and should remain inside their huts. ... As soon as an elder son marries, he performs *soriu* on behalf of his father and family, even when his father is still alive. This is a unique instance among the Rendille where the eldest son deputizes for his living father: in all other respects and on all other occasions, the father retains control over his household and herds as long as he is able.”

The facts are correct:

1. Women and girls sit in the “huts”.
2. If a father and his oldest son are both married, the son does *soorriyo* in front of his house, but the father does not do it in front of his own.

<sup>33</sup> Spencer, Paul: *Nomads in Alliance*, London 1973, p. 58.

I, however, do not agree with Spencer's interpretations.

If women and girls watch the slaughtering of an animal in front of a neighbouring house from a certain distance, that is absolutely acceptable. While they would never join the men, as it is not their business, the slaughtering of the *soorriyo* animal is nothing that needs to be hidden from them. Only when the slaughtering takes place in front of their own house must they be inside, and that is for the simple reason that the animal is slaughtered in front of the left doorpost, with its head in eastern direction, i.e. in the direction of the women and girls who are staying in the left half of the house and to their ritual benefit. If they were not sitting there, the ritual would be directed into an empty space.

The *soorriyo* takes place especially for the *mother*. If a married son performs *soorriyo* in front of his own house, it is also done primarily for his mother. This makes it unnecessary for the father to perform a *soorriyo* as someone is already doing it for the woman in his house. In my opinion, therefore, the substitution relation is exactly the other way around from what Spencer suggests: The married son does not deputise for his father, but instead performs his own *soorriyo* for his own mother. The father does not need to do a *soorriyo* because his mother is probably already dead. The father only performs *soorriyo* as long as his son is not married, deputising for him. He does *soorriyo* for his wife who, in this context, is not so much relevant in her capacity as a wife, but rather as a mother to his son in whose place he acts.

A warrior whose mother is dead performs *soorriyo* in front of a small symbolical hut. Explanation: “*Abarteey a tumuy – intoh kasoorriisda?*” – “My mother died – where [else] should I do *soorriyo*?” Such a hut could be equipped with: sticks, 1 mat, 1 sack, 4 (instead of 6) hearth stones, *golog* bushes as ground covering (instead of *golog* + *ilaalle* + skins), 1 small goat skin. That is all; so it is an extremely reduced version of a house, just about big enough for one person to crouch in. Before the slaughtering any older girl is sat in this “house” to stand in for the mother. This “mother” can, just for fun, also hold a toddler in her arms to complete the substitute family. Before the slaughtering, the “mother” hands a (borrowed) *madaal* lid with a little milk on it out so that the necessary milk ablutions can be performed. Then an elder cuts the throat of the sacrificial animal, this way proving Spencer wrong who wrote “Women and girls may not see this part of the ceremony”, for this happens in full view of the substitute mother. As only a symbolical mat serves as roof for the “house”, it is transparent. After this, the substitute family has done its duty and leaves. After dark, the orphan sits in cramped position in “his mother’s house”, skins and cuts up his sacrificial animal, cooks it in a borrowed clay pot (*diri*), and nobody knows what he feels. Not until the 14-year cycle between two marriage years is completed will he be able to perform a *soorriyo* in a real house with a real woman. Then he will no longer perform *soorriyo* for his mother, but for the mother of his sons.

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In the other houses, the same thing happens: everybody skins, cooks and fries. The rest of the day is spent eating. Pieces of meat are exchanged among neighbours.

At midnight, a dance (*gir'daam*) is held in the centre of the settlement by the *naabo* (cf. 0.6.7.2.4.). It is mainly warriors and girls who participate, but the first part is run by two younger elders of the Irbaandif age set (Baaroo-wa and Haandoon). This first part is a special *soorriyo gir'daam* (*gir'daanki soorriyo*), in which the rhythm is beaten with sticks. Then the dance changes into a regular *gir'daam*, and the atmosphere livens up.

*Soorriyo* takes place on the ninth and tenth day of the moon, respectively. That means *soorriyo* nights are always moonlit. There is a lot of dancing in the following nights, too. People stay up until the early morning hours.

The skin of the *soorriyo* animal, like that of the other slaughtered small-stock, is stretched between the house poles (*utubbe*) inside the hut. It is used to cut fresh fur strips (*khalli*) for the headbands of the elders and the fur frills of the *gumoyyo*. Boys also often wear *khalli* on arms or legs after a *soorriyo*. And *khalli* are tied around the necks of one's favourite camels.

During the next two days, the lower two front teeth of children can be prised out in order to create the tooth gap in the lower jaw characteristic for Rendille.

#### OTHER SLAUGHTERINGS SIMILAR TO SOORRIYO

The word *soorriyo* is by no means confined to this festival. It refers to all sacrificial acts of this kind.

One such *soorriyo* is the killing of an ox which boys perform in the Thursday year before their circumcision (cf. 1.3.3.); further *soorriyo* are the slaughterings of camel bulls (cf. 5.4.). The *soorriyoti herreet*, which are not tribe-wide but performed by the warriors of individual clans according to their clans' schedules, are also an example (cf. end of 4.9.). And, finally, the slaughterings during the *naabo* ceremony (cf. 4.9.) are counted among these occasions.

We will take a closer look into the symbolism of these acts in the chapter on context-comparing symbology, in the sections on "*kulum and ejer*" (cf. 5.6.) and on the camel bull (cf. 5.4.).

Furthermore, a *soorriyo* slaughtering on the occasion of the inauguration of the *dabeel* will be described in the section on the *dabeel* (cf. 3.1.2.).

On the occasion of the big warrior ceremony *gaalgulamme* (cf. 1.3.4.), the oldest elder in the seniority order provides an ungelded billy goat for the warriors of each clan. The ablutions with milk are reserved for the elders (the warriors will not be allowed to do the washing of their *soorriyo* animals themselves until the *naabo* ceremony shortly before their marriage, cf. 4.9.). After that, each warrior strokes the animal's back with *ul* and *gumo*, his two sticks (*naf gumoyyo lakahariirta*). Some warrior slaughters the animal with his sword and smears blood from this sword onto the foreheads of his fellow

warriors. Later, the *soorriyo* dance (*geeyi soorriyo* or *gir'daanki soorriyo*) is danced. We can see how the individual forms of the ceremony are modified, but its essential features can still be recognised.

There are also *soorriyo* slaughterings for births and weddings.

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#### 0.6.7.2. THE *ALMA'DO* FESTIVAL

##### 0.6.7.2.1. SETTING THE DATE

The *alma'do* festival takes place once a year. Since the calendar, at least regarding the possibilities of a subtler setting of dates, is based on the moon and the solar calendar of the Rendille only allows for rough seasonal orientations, the date of this festival – which is to take place once per solar year and at about the same time as in the previous year – is determined as follows: You count twelve months from the previous festival and add a little more. The following rules apply:

1. The *alma'do* festival can take place on the 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> day of the “white” (*dakhnaan*) or of the “dark” (*mug'di*). According to this rule, therefore, there are eight possible dates for *alma'do* between two new moons.
2. The *alma'do* cannot take place at an earlier date than in the year before. If it was celebrated on the ninth *dakhnaan* of the second *haytii booran* in the previous year, it cannot take place on the seventh *dakhnaan* of this second *haytii booran* this year.
3. The *alma'do* takes place on the weekday following the weekday of the previous *alma'do*. If it was performed on a Saturday last year, it is performed on a Sunday this year.

So the date for the *alma'do* is determined in the following manner: You wait for the date of the lunar calendar on which the previous *alma'do* took place. If this date coincides with the weekday following the weekday of the previous *alma'do*, the festival can be held; if not, you check whether maybe the next possible date of the lunar calendar will fall on the desired weekday. The interval to this possible date amounts to an average of 3.6 days, i.e. the duration of the month (29 days) divided by the number of possible dates (8 dates). Each of the possible dates will fall on the right weekday with a probability of 1:7 (because there are seven weekdays). So, if you want to use the earliest possible *alma'do* date, counting from the date of the lunar calendar corresponding to the previous *alma'do* day, with a probability of 1:7 you have to wait zero times the 3.6-day interval; with a probability of 1:7 you have to wait one time the 3.6-day interval, with a probability of 1:7 you have to wait two times the 3.6-day interval, etc. The dates of the same probability, therefore, are either 0 or 1 or 2 or 3 or 4 or 5 or 6 times the 3.6-day interval later than the previous *alma'do* date. So the average frequency of these intervals – always provided you want to hold the *alma'do* as early as possible – is

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$$(0+1+2+3+4+5+6+) : 7 = 3$$

An average of three times will the 3,6-day interval pass before you can celebrate *almádo*.

This way, on average, the earliest possible *almádo* date is twelve lunar months plus

$$3.6 \times 3 = 10.8$$

later than in the year before. An almost perfect approximation to the solar year! Although not one single Rendille is able to do the calculation above.

So much for theory. While the festival can, because of a severe drought, be postponed, there is, to my knowledge, no possibility of holding it earlier, so that the *almádo* will, in the long run, certainly tend to take place more than 10.8 days later than in the previous 12-month cycle. In extremely hard years like the year of 1976 it even happens that different clans hold their *almádo*, in a minimal version, at different dates.

#### 0.6.7.2.2. MEANING

The *almádo* is probably a fertility ceremony. This can be deduced from the wording of the prayers and from the context-comparing semantics of the symbolic acts which are, essentially, prayers converted into action. Accordingly, warriors and girls are not involved in the ceremony, because no fertility is expected from them as yet.

They do not have to gather in the settlement, as is desired for the *soorriyo*. All the more the ceremony refers to married women and livestock, particularly the camels.

#### 0.6.7.2.3. COURSE OF EVENTS

The *almádo* is meant to take place in three consecutive weeks on the same weekday each week. On the morning of the first day, when the camels are still inside the enclosures (without the camels present, none of the bigger festivals can take place), the elders gather in the *naabo*, offer sacrifices of milk from the *jiijjo* container (a smaller version of the *mádaal* container) and pray. A week later, these prayers are repeated, only this time the milk sacrifices are offered from the *mádaal*. In the third week then, there are prayers without milk offerings. In the afternoon of that same day, a gate is built from thornbushes, the *ulluukh*, through which women and livestock – necessarily the camels – pass. On the following day, i.e. three weeks plus one day after the beginning of the ceremonies, the elders again gather in the *naabo* in the morning, pray and offer milk sacrifices from the *jiijjo*. The women prepare a hot drink called *tig* in their earthen pots (*diryo*, sing. *diri*), which is a rather complicated procedure and a demonstration of housewifely skills. After that

the men gather in groups and go and visit every woman of their age set, drink her *tigand* pray for woman and house.

In dry years, when the camels cannot be kept in the settlement for so long, the entire proceedings can, however, be condensed into two days without leaving any of the elements out. Both times I took part in the *almado*, it was the shortened version. This two-day course of events I would like to take a more detailed look at in the following.

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#### 0.6.7.2.4. AN ACCOUNT OF THE COURSE OF THE FESTIVAL ON THE FIRST DAY

For days, milk has been saved for this day. Today, all the containers are filled with milk in different states of sourness and solidity.

Early in the morning, a wooden trough made from a tree trunk (*dar*) is placed by the entrance to the *naabo*. Next to the *dar*, a *kunni*, a small wooden milk pot, is placed. Milk is poured into both containers. Additionally, some *haru* cedar (bark), four lumps of smallstock dung and four lumps of camel dung are put into the trough (*dar*).

Before or meanwhile, the women have picked *gaayer* branches and pinned a bundle over the door of each of their houses and given a branch each to their husbands. *Gaayer* probably is the ritually most significant, or at least most diversely used, tree of the Rendille. Its significance we can, however, only estimate by comparing the different contexts of its use (cf. 5.7.).

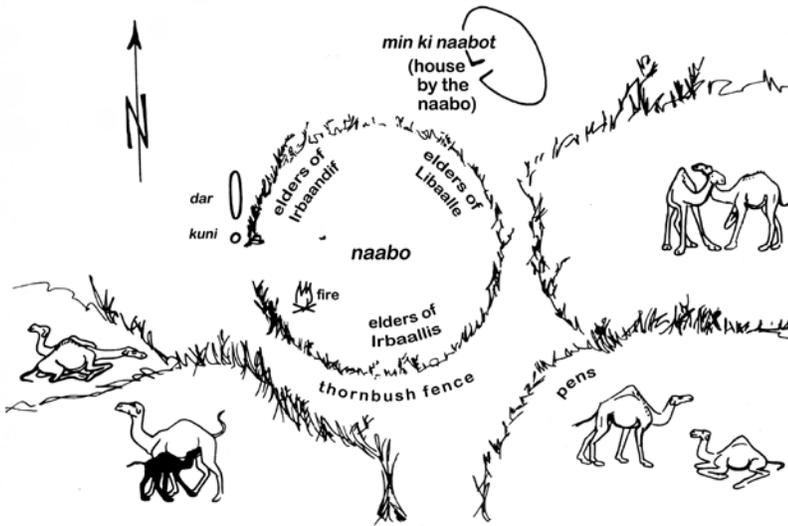


Figure 0.12.

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With these *gaayer* branches in hand, their obligatory shepherd's staff (also made from *gaayer*!) and fur strips (*khalli*) cut from previously sacrificed *soorriyo* animals as headbands, the elders now walk to the *naabo*. Before they enter the *naabo*, they “wash themselves” (*isdikhta, dikhnaan* – to wash, washing) by moistening their fingertips with the fluid in the trough (*dar*) and touching their foreheads, breast and knees twice each. While doing this, they say “*darooow feyya*” (*dar* = trough, *feyyan* = health).

After that, the elders take a seat in the *naabo*, on their stools, which were carried in by children. While normally only the three-legged headrests (*komborti matah*) are taken into the *naabo*, now everybody has his four-legged carved stool with a round seat with him.



Figure 0.13.

As soon as all the elders have gathered in the *naabo* – the youngest age set just left of the gate, the next oldest behind them clockwise, etc. – one by one the women, having dressed up for the occasion and wearing the festive adornment trimmed with cowry shells (*okko*), approach. From a *ma'daal* lid (*inanki ma'daaleet*) they pour a little milk into the *kunni*, then into the *dar*, then they take off their shoes, enter the *naabo*, and throw some *halalle* wood (*Bowellia hildebrantii* Engl.), which gives off an aromatic fragrance when burnt, into the *naabo* fire. The men are meanwhile waving their *gaayer* branches and shouting: “*her dakh, her dakh, gaal dakh* – raise warriors, raise warriors, raise camels!” (meaning: have warrior sons who will bring camels). Then the woman gives a bundle of tobacco to one of the men, who in turn distributes it among the men sitting around him. Now the woman leaves the *naabo* and, repeatedly dipping a tuft of grass into the trough, like the elders before dabs her forehead, breast and knees twice each with the tuft, saying “*darooow feyya*”.

Now every man walks to his own house and gets a *jijjo* full of milk for himself. Widows bring a milking container (*murub*) filled with milk which

is to substitute the milk container of their deceased husbands. This *muruub* is placed where the deceased would be sitting according to his age-set position; so there are many *muruubbe* in the southern part of the *naabo*, where the oldest men sit, too. This oldest age set of men still alive also take a *muruub* instead of the *jiijo* to the *naabo*. In this stage of the milk sacrifice, therefore, the *jiijo* is reserved for the men who are still expected to procreate. (A woman should not bear any more sons if her oldest son has already been circumcised<sup>34</sup>; due to the low rate of polygamy among the Rendille (cf. Spencer, 1973), this obviously has an effect on the men's behaviour. The oldest sons of Irbaallis (who are now bringing *muruubbe*) are Ilkichilli, the current (circumcised) warriors.) Everyone pours a little milk into the lid of his *jiijo* and empties this lid into the *jiijo* of the man sitting next to him. The old men also pour the contents of their *muruubbe* into the other ones'. This is called *iskamaalnaan* – milking together; so the milk turns into jointly milked milk. Then everyone takes a small sip of milk, spits a little of it onto his breast and pours some more milk into the sandals lying before him. After that, there are prayers. One after the other each age set provides the prayer leader. The chorus of the remaining men, who after every other line say *Amiin* (Amen), are waving their *gaayer* branches. The prayers sound about like this:

*Okkhoow nah bariiso*

God, let us spend the night [in peace],

(?)

*Almadoha nebeye agarre*

We have seen your *almado* in peace,

*wihi yomboot nebey nah eleeli*

let us reach the later one in peace.

*haaggaah a agarre*

We have seen your kindness,

*haaggi yomboot nah eleeli*

let us reach later kindness.

*hoolahenyo nah leebariiso*

Let our livestock pass the night with us.[= bless our livestock with us]

*Nyaakhutenyo nah leebariiso*

Let our children pass the night with us.

*nah isooyag*

Come down to us

*hir nah ikeen*

give us rain

*Gaalenyoki foor bariiso*

bless our camels of the satellite herd

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Spencer: Nomads in Alliance, 1973, p. 42.

*baatenyo bariiso*  
 bless our people  
*naabotenyo gādab geli*  
 Put a puddle in our *naabo*.  
 or:  
*Okkhoow nah bariiso*  
 God, let us pass the night [in peace].  
*Waakkhi barye*  
 God [=sky/heaven] who became morning  
*haag leebarye*  
 became morning in kindness  
*haaggi a' leebariite nah kaaso*  
 let the kindness with which you became morning stay with us during the day.  
*gaal yaakhi*  
 Keep watch over the camels  
*ersim yaakhi*  
 keep watch over the herders  
*adi yaakhi*  
 keep watch over the smallstock  
*loolyo yaakhi*  
 keep watch over the cattle  
*nah isoodeylam*  
 let them return to us in the evening.  
*Nebeyti iche leefoofeen*  
 who went to the pasture in their peace  
*uranticho keen*  
 bring them back to their fenced settlement.

For a second round of this kind, the two younger age sets (Irbaandif and Libaalle) bring *mādaalo* (sing.: *mādaal*), the more important variant of the milk containers, into the *naabo* instead of the smaller *jiiijo*. The *mādaal* is used very seldom, it is set apart, sacred (*alagantahe*) (cf. 3.0., 3.7.). The old men (Irbaallis) now bring a *jiiijo* instead of the *muruub*. So the milk containers are distributed among the age sets as follows:

	Irbaandif procreation	Libaalle desired	Irbaallis procreation not desired
1. round	<i>jiiijo</i>	<i>jiiijo</i>	<i>muruub</i>
2. round	<i>mādaal</i>	<i>mādaal</i>	<i>jiiijo</i>

When the current warriors (Ilkichilli) will have married and the sons of Libaalle have been circumcised, the distribution will be as follows:

	Ilkichilli procreation	Ilkichilli desired	Libaalle procreation	Irbaallis procreation desired
1. round	<i>jijjo</i>	<i>jijjo</i>	<i>muruub</i>	<i>muruub</i>
2. round	<i>maḍaal</i>	<i>maḍaal</i>	<i>jijjo</i>	<i>muruub</i>

Regarding their association with fertility, the three types of containers can be arranged in the following hierarchy:

1. *maḍaal*
2. *jijjo*
3. *muruub*

After the milk blessings are completed, milk is poured into some *muruub-be* for the small boys who have gathered expectantly. On leaving the *naabo*, everybody pours some milk on his stool. On his way back to the house every man spills some milk from the *maḍaal* lids in the livestock pens (*sum*, pl. *sumam*). Then the men stick their *gaayer* branches in with the other *gaayer* over the doors. The women now each tether a ewe in front of their houses, let it drink from the *maḍaal* lid, wet backs and tails of the animals with milk (“wash them”) and pour the rest of the milk onto the skins serving as doors to the houses. If the sheep urinates during this procedure, which is considered very positive, the girls and women smear some of the wet earth onto their foreheads. After that, the sheep is untied, and all the livestock kept in the fencings until this moment is driven to the pastures.

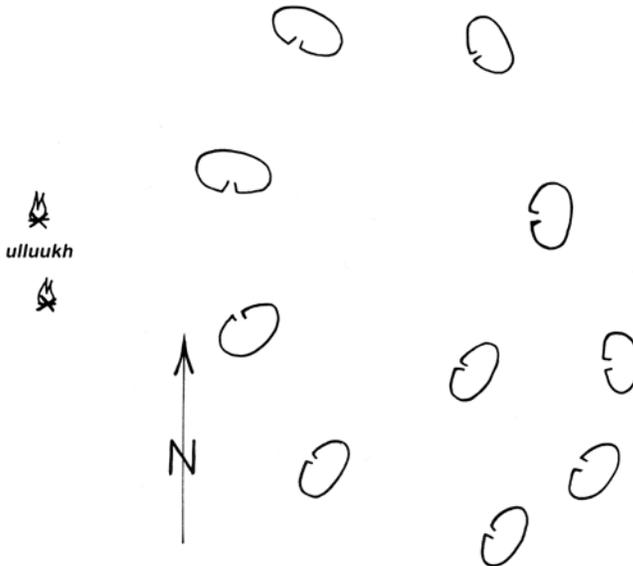


Figure 0.14.

### THE ULLUUKH GATE

Late in the afternoon, around 5:30 p.m., two piles of thornbushes are stacked up west of the settlement, roughly where the lines of sight from the doors of most of the houses converge. These piles form a symbolical gate situated in front of the gate of the first house of the settlement order in western direction. It is called *ulluukh*, pl. *ulluukho*.

The *ulluukh* preferably consists of branches of the thornbushes *dowwahadaado* and *andiikha*. If those two plants are not within reach, umbrella acacia (*dahar*) or *geey kuukku* might also be used.

If there is an elder of the Uyam clan in the settlement, he is asked to cut the branches because Uyam is, through clan mythology, closely connected with the axe and is furthermore – as the ritually most powerless, most harmless and therefore most innocent and purest of all Rendille clans – particularly suited for such lucky acts (cf. the chapter on Uyam, 2.8.7.). If no representative of this clan lives in the settlement, some other elder from the category of *waakhkamúr*, i.e. those who do not have command of the dreaded *iibire* curse, is given the task (cf. the chapter on *iibire* and *waakhkamúr*, 2.3.). Only if no *waakhkamúr* at all belong to the settlement, it is done by the *iibire*. Once the cutting of the branches has been started by the most propitious category of elders, other elders can help.

The *ulluukh* bushes are weighted down with big rocks.

Then a fire is stirred up at the *ulluukh* with the fire-sticks (*magto*). This fire is equivalent to the *naabo* fire in that elephant dung (*saali arab*) is used as tinder (cf. the chapter on context-comparing symbology, 5.1.). Corresponding fires are lit by the women in front of all the gates in the thornbush space surrounding the settlement. Then a white female lamb with a brown head is tethered in front of each of the piles forming the *ulluukh*. Next to this lamb, milking containers (*murubbe*) filled with milk are deposited. To the right, axe and *khonjor* (a tool used for handling thornbush branches without getting hurt) are deposited, interlocked. So the *ulluukh* now consists of two arrangements of this kind:

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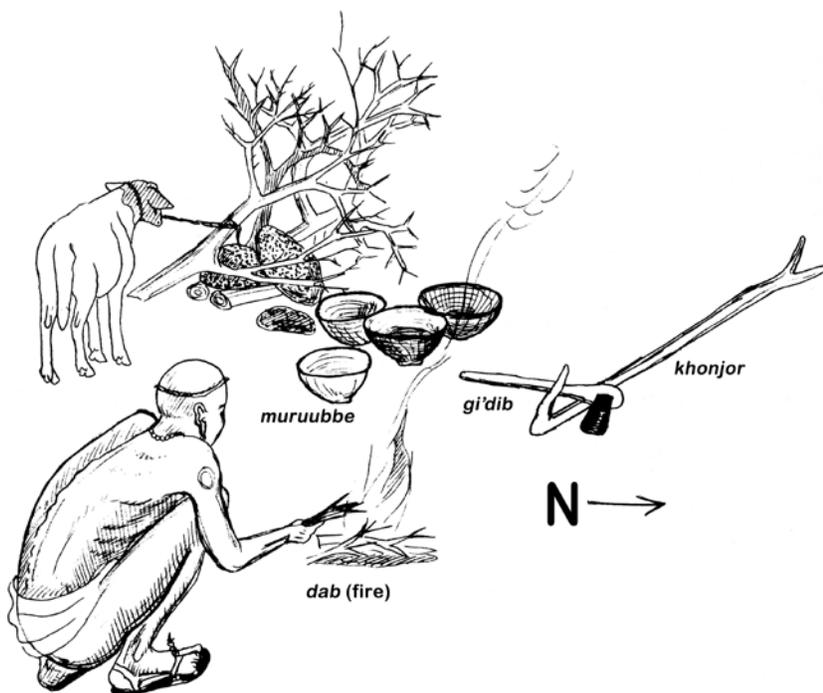


Figure 0.15.

People sing:

*alley baale*

The settlement is like clouds [everything in it is numerous]

*alley kumiseey baale*

Fill this settlement so that everything in it will be as numerous as clouds.

(The phrasing is that of a solemn ritual language.)

Elders owning a kudu horn now blow it eagerly. No melodies can be produced on the horns, but the sound will get higher and more piercing, depending on the skill of the player.

The kudu horn is called *arab* (= elephant), so it receives its ritual value from being a substitute for the ivory wind instruments which only few families own (cf. the section on elephants in the chapter on context-comparing symbology, 5.).

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man blowing  
kudu horn

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Coming from the settlement in two groups, the women now walk around the *ulluukh* on both sides, then turn around and pass through the gate. They carry a tuft of grass and the lid of a *madaal* filled with milk and are wearing the *okko*, the festive sash trimmed with cowry shells.

While the group of women passes through the *ulluukh*, the men bless them by waving their herder's staffs and *gaayer* branches to the rhythm of the blessings. Part of this blessing is the following dialogue between one man asking questions and the chorus answering, this way conjuring fertility by presenting the desired state optimistically as a fact.

Question: *Oboorri mululya?*  
 Are the women pregnant while they are still suckling?  
 Chorus: *Aa mulul.*  
 They are pregnant while they are still suckling.  
 Question: *Aa 'yidah?*  
 Who says that?  
 Chorus: *Waakh.*  
 God [or: sky/heaven]  
 Question: *Ichoow?*  
 And? [Who else?]  
 Chorus: *Harra.*  
 Earth.  
 Question: *Maantoh?*  
 When? [On which day?]  
 Chorus: *Maanta.*  
 Today.  
 Question: *Maantoh?*  
 Chorus: *Maanta.*  
 Everybody: *Okkhoow!*  
 God! [Term of address; emphatic shouting while waving sticks.]

Usually it is not considered desirable to get a woman pregnant while she is still suckling a child. In this situation, either abstinence or coitus interruptus is practiced. Furthermore, the women are afraid the sperm might spoil their mother's milk and are, as breast-feeding mothers, consequently not very fond of the thought of sexual contacts. Compared to being childless, however, it is so much more desirable to be pregnant while still suckling, and in this dialogue – to which the women display a rather amused response since they will, in most cases, know better who is suckling and/or pregnant than heaven and earth combined – fertility is conjured in its extreme form and at all costs. So the hierarchy of the values is very plain: Fertility as such is valued higher than regulated fertility and its limitation to certain desired times; in other words: As long as you have many children it doesn't matter so much if they are born in the desired intervals.

When the women are back in the settlement, the men wait for the herds to be driven home. Every time a herd passes through the *ulluukh*, it is blessed in the manner described. Greatest care is taken, however, to prevent the inedible, ritually inferior category of domestic animals from passing through the *ulluukh*: Whenever dogs or donkeys come too close to the *ulluukh*, they are driven away with sticks and by throwing rocks.

Before the camel herd is driven through the *ulluukh*, all the fires must blaze up brightly once more. Apart from the women's passage, this is the second important moment.

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For the camels, the fertility request is expressed in a dialogue similar to that of the women.

Question: *Gaal mululya?*

Are the camels pregnant while they are still suckling? [Camel mares are also usually not covered again until their foals are weaned.]

Chorus: *Aa mulul.*

They are.

Question: *Gaal miragya?*

Are the camels on heat?<sup>35</sup>

Chorus: *Aa mirag.*

They are on heat.

Question: *Gaal nebey gelya?*

Do the camels come to the settlement unharmed?

Chorus: *Aa gel.*

They do [phrased nominally].

Question: *Gaal ruusya?*

Are the camels fat?

Chorus: *Aa ruus.*

They are fat.

Question: *Aa 'yidah?*

Who says that?

Chorus: *Waakh.*

God [= sky/heaven].

Question: *Ichoow?*

And?

Chorus: *Harra.*

Earth.

Question: *Maantoh?*

When?

Chorus: *Maanta.*

Today.

Question: *Maantoh?*

Chorus: *Maanta*

Everybody: *Okkhoow!*

God!

The grammatical forms ending in *-ya* are part of a special ceremonial language (cf. *meeraat*, the killer's poetry, 3.3.2., 4.4. or *afi O'doola*, the language of O'doola used by the *dabeel*). A form like *aa gel* is an archaism or an ar-

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<sup>35</sup> Camels are very sensitive in their willingness to mate. In dry years, they skip entire rutting seasons.

chasing, too. Colloquially the verbal phrasings *gele* or *gesse*, *geleen* would be used. Preserving ritual texts in archaic form is not alien to our own culture either.

Knowing colloquial Rendille is hardly sufficient to translate the songs sung by the elders when they return, in small rhythmical steps and in close formation, to the settlement after dark.

On their way, they have to stop once in order to give the two tethered lambs milk to drink and to wash them with milk.

The songs sung on their way go like this: (The persons the songs are about are the elders themselves, paraphrased in various ways.)

1. *Gaal ersinkiis a lalaja.*

*Ai kamuridoi Dalambo.*

The camel herder is seen from afar, oh, Marudo of Dalamba. [Marudo is a camel name among Saale and Matarbá. In Saale, there was once a rich man called Dalamba, *kamur* means “rich” (pun?).]

2. *Guđumaay irbaan kondisso,*

*bayabayabaya*

*rrrrrrrrrrrr*

The elders received suckling camel mares [the second and third lines imitate the sound of rain].

3. *Arame timiyye, timiyye ...*

*ti yelal harto*

The tightwads have come, have come ..., they who sweep the riverbeds [= who serve their guests only dust. Originally, this was meant jokingly and self-ironically, but unfortunately, in the present state of crisis, it has come closer to reality].

4. *Ebba goobicho*

*nebey a leegelo.*

May everybody walk home in peace.

#### 0.6.7.2.5. AN ACCOUNT OF THE COURSE OF THE FESTIVAL ON THE SECOND DAY

In the morning, the elders go and take their *jijjo* or *murub* to the *naabo* – like they did in the first round on the previous day.

But the main part is played by the women today. *'Diryo lakarcha* – the earthen pots are cooked. What is prepared in the earthen pots is called *tig*.

As soon as the day breaks, the *'diryo* (sing.: *diri*) are filled with water and whole maize kernels (*nchaba*). These maize kernels are boiled until afternoon. *Khabdo* (the fruit of the umbrella acacia (*dahar*)) and coffee beans (*bun*) are added, later also sugar and milk.

This is the *gololi goorat kolooraat Waakh Rendille tuse*, they say, the dish God showed the Rendille first, in the very beginning.

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*Koli-oraat* (first) is not necessarily to be understood literally, as *tig* had been known to the Rendille longer than *banjo* (mixture of blood and milk), for instance. But what it is to say is that the ingredients listed have been part of the Rendille diet since primordial times, since the origin of mankind. In fact, older people report that, in pre-British times, the Rendille used to take camel caravans to the River Omo (northern end of Lake Rudolf, Dassanech area) and to the *Hali Boronidaadi*, the “mountain of the Meru” (= Mount Kenya), to get farm produce, which they themselves – at least as long as their traditions go back – did not produce, from sedentary tribes.

The order in which the ingredients are added, relative cooking times and keeping the heat of the fire steady for such a long time – all this requires considerable skills.

Accordingly, the women feel that the subsequent meal of the men is a test.

But for the moment the men are still sitting in the camel pen and shaving each other’s heads and beards. His pubic hair everybody shaves himself. The men also like to shave on occasion of the *sorriyo*, but at the close of the *almado*, it is obligatory.

Late in the afternoon, the elders gather at the western end of the settlement and group themselves into age sets. All the men of one age set then walk around together and visit all the houses of age-set mates in the order of the settlement pattern, to try the *tig* in every house and to pray.

When drinking *tig*, the drinking vessel is raised to the lips twice and the drinker spits some of the *tig* onto his own breast. After that, the *tig* is poured back into the pot, given out again and drunk at pleasure. *Tig* is also handed out through the door to children gathered there in clusters. Finally, the woman gives her husband, who sits nearest to her, i.e. the left, side of the house, a pack of tobacco which he in turn distributes among his age-set mates, as well as the bowl of fat for everybody to grease their freshly shaved heads. Then they pray, for instance like this:

*Alasoodeylama*

It is time to drive [the livestock] home

*in Waakh leefoofte*

God has kept watch over the livestock

*Okkhoow, soodeylam,*

My God, let livestock [and people] return home,

*keleyyaakhto*

they who graze alone [camel foals]

*sodeilam.*

let them return home.

*Gooba la*

And this settlement

*buur furte*

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has stayed for a long time  
*lakafurte iche yahe.*  
 let it be a place to stay.  
*Kindasiis la*  
 And its hearth stones  
*Ma khoboobo.*  
 may never be cold.  
*Her a khaba*  
 It has warriors,  
*ikasookhay!*  
 give it even more!  
*Gaal a khaba,*  
 It has camels,  
*ikasookhay!*  
 give it even more!  
*Gaal a baale*  
 Camels are [numerous] as clouds  
*baaliis leebariiso.*  
 bless its clouds.  
*Adi a khaba,*  
 It has smallstock  
*adi la*  
 and smallstock  
*a dahano*  
 is hands [something to give away],  
*dahanohiis la*  
 and its hands  
*ortiis isooholi.*  
 give back what is before them [let gifts pay off through gifts in return].  
*Gooba la*  
 And may this home  
*geeyi dahar*  
 [be] an acacia tree,  
*tihim kijiro*  
 by which there is a permanent waterhole,  
*lakanaso*  
 where you rest  
*iche yahe.*  
 [be].  
*Dabanti gu*  
 Puddle of the spring rain  
*'deddeyatti*  
 that seeps from ground

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*iche yahe*

be it.

*Gaal ruus*

Fat camels,

*gaal harbad*

milk-rich camels,

*jiro timiy*

Life has come,

*hir yimiy*

rain has come,

*haag yimiy.*

good has come.

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#### 0.6.7.2.6. WOMEN'S ACTIVITIES AT THE *ALMA'DO*

So far we have described the *almado* how it presents itself to a man. Seen this way, everything is a sequence of events clearly referring to each other. For the sake of this chronological coherence, however, we had to neglect the activities of the women which are detailed below.

Before the ceremony, the women place two rows of rocks around the fencing of the settlement, each woman outside of her own house, leaving gaps at the gates. After the first milk blessings of the men, they form a third and fourth row. If there are no rocks to be found in the area, a double row can be replaced by a double line drawn with the forked end of the *khonjor* (cf. section 0.6.7.2.4.). The same rows of stones are formed for the *soorriyo* (cf. section 0.6.7.2.1.).

To the inside of the back wall of the house the women pin branches of *geey kuukku* (*Cadaba farinosa* Forsk. ssp. *farinosa*, Capparaceae), *geey dbool* and *succha* (*Barleria eranthemoides* C.B.Cl., Acanthaceae). (Cf. chapter on context-comparing symbology 5.10.)

The women put on a twisted string of the inner white bark (*hab*)<sup>36</sup> of the umbrella acacia like a sash. They have applied fat and fresh red paint to their bodies. Their hair is freshly braided and starched with fat or ochre. A woman who might otherwise be wearing a practical, but often threadbare cloth worn out by her husband will today put on her skirt made from untanned skin and trimmed with pearls (*sakkaal*).

The children wear the same bark strings as the women around their wrists.

Twigs of acacia are placed on the ground in doorways and gates. They are called *khonjor*, like the hooks to handle thornbushes with.

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<sup>36</sup> The inner part of the bark is called *hab*, as opposed to *nyirim*, the outer bark and also the whole bark. Acacia means *dahar*. So the part used here is *habi dahar*, inner bark of the acacia.

#### 0.6.8. RULES FOR MOVING ON DEPENDING ON THE FESTIVALS

As long as the heads of the men are still red (skin-coloured) and their hair has not grown back, the settlement should not move on. If it does move on, the entire group must pass between two fires also called *ulluukh*. This *ulluukh* must not – not even years later or unintentionally – be passed in the opposite direction.

For the next *soorriyo*, at the latest, the settlement must have moved to a new site, even if that new site should be only a few hundred metres away so that the women can carry their possessions there on their backs instead of first having to summon back the camels.

#### 0.6.9. OTHER *ULLUUKH* CEREMONIES

The custom of *ulluukh* is not limited to the *almado*. There are a number of permanent *ulluukho* gates which have to be passed whenever they happen to be near the route of a migrating settlement group.

The *ulluukhti geeyohi Gaseet* south of Kargi is made up of two big acacias treated like an *ulluukh*. Other *ulluukho* can be found in the two valleys leading to 'Hoori Bahay (South Horr) from the east and in the very north of the tribal territory. It might be a promising enterprise to draw up a complete map of all these *ulluukho* in order to be able to establish rules determining which kinds of places are singled out in that way, and which aren't.

In the morning after a lunar eclipse, an *ulluukh* ceremony entirely analogous to the *almado* ceremony is performed. Here, the strong blessing emanating from the *ulluukh* apparently serves to avert imminent harm. The reaction to such an event shows most clearly that the sudden disappearance of the moon – the most important time giver and personalised as the eye of God – is perceived as a threat.

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#### 0.6.10. LUNAR ECLIPSE

Time: 2 a.m.

All the women let the fires in their houses blaze up brightly, shout out to their neighbours to wake them, stand in their doors, sing and implore God with loud shouting for hours. More than other women is Haldeeti, the first woman in the seniority order, responsible for making everyone show this kind of zeal.

Women: *Okkhoow, goobaah amiit!*

God, come to your settlement!

*Okkhoow, gaal isooreyo!*

God, look after the camels!

*Okkhoow, nah sooyey!*

God, look at us!

*Okkhoow, gaal isoohamaad!*

God, be kind to the camels!

*Waakhaayaaw, daddaab nah kori!*

My God, spread a blanket over us!

[singing in Samburu:]

*Ngai ai tiblyu, Ngai ai keru tiblyu!*

[meaning?]

*Waakh serey kijiro haayaaw!*

Our God who is above!

*A kihawwaassanne.*

We implore you.

*They sing: Aysaba ng'ole, aysaba ngujita,*

*Aysaba baate, aysaba ngujita,*

*Syombe aee wale syombe*

*alelaleyai āē*

*Loko roisyo liro lodo riyong'ai*

*aye olyoei armaisyo.*

[meaning?]

*Okkhoow, nyaakhutenyo bariiso!*

God, bless our children [who have gone with the herds]!

*Okkhoow, nyaakhutenyo uuraah geli!*

God, put our children in your belly.

*Okkhoow, nyaakhutenyo agar!*

God, look at our children.

*Okkhoow, soodiib!*

God, give it!

*Okkhoow, nyaakhutenyo nebey nah ikeen!*

God, bring our children to us in peace!

*Okkhoow, a kihawwaassanne.*

God, we implore you.

*Okkhoow, kamuranyaay!*

God, our mighty one!

*Okkhoow, nyaakhut sooulluukhi!*

God, lead the children to us through the *ulluukh*!

*Okkhoow chimbirohaah ilaah kiriiro agar!*

God, look at your birds who underneath you are calling for you.

[Birds are unclean; so this self-designation is also a submissive self-incrimination.]

*Okkhoow, a kihawwaassanne, hawwaassi daag!*

God, we implore you, listen to our imploring!

*Waakh teeryateey!*

My God [of the beginning] [of the *teerya* age-set line]!

*Waakh miskiin!*

God of the poor!

*Okkhoow, afenyoo daag!*

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God, hear our mouth.

*Urgudi Waakh afuyuuge.*

The women of God who say good things.

*Indo ittaawhaayaaw!*

Our many-eyed one.

*Uuraah nah geli!*

Put us in your belly.

*Okkhoow, nyaakhutenyo naabotaah geli!*

God, put our children in your *naabo*!

*Dahanti haanu khabto kisoogne.*

We hold out our hand holding milk to you.

*Okkhoow walahtuummangartihaanyaaw,  
nah walah nah garanni mele,  
sujoon anah leeraahin.*

Our God who knows everything, we know nothing at all, do not pursue us because of our wickedness.

*Okkhoow nyaakhutenyo*

*issi bukhurcha kasookhaduudi.*

God, guide our children to us through the eye [= hole] of a woman's pearl.  
[Guide them on a path where enemies cannot follow.]

Finally, the women gather to dance to the new moon song Emeilalo. The men sit in the *naabo*. On the following morning, the women again dance Eymalaalo, while the elders make the few camels present in the settlement pass through the *ulluukh*.

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# FIRST MAIN SECTION: AGE AND GENDER

## 1.1. WOMEN

Rendille girls do not marry, they *are* married. There is no marrying within the clan. Marriage is a contract between a group of married men of the courter's clan and the bride's clan. On the side of the courter, the prospective bridegroom himself is also not a prominent speaker. Even during the courting of a (formerly) married man I observed that the courter himself did not once speak, but left that to the older and more respected men of his clan whom he had brought with him as reinforcement. The rule that father, brother or any other close relative of the girl cannot promise her to a courter of his own liking unauthorisedly is enforced particularly strictly. During the negotiations, the bride's father does not need to make an appearance any more than the petitioner. Furthermore, his settlement group – even if it consisted of 30 or more respected elders – cannot bindingly give consent but refers the courter to the other settlement groups, there might be 3 or 5 of that clan, who also have to give their consent. So, long before the bridewealth is paid, the prospective bridegroom has to win over a large number of “fathers” of the bride with gifts like tea, sugar, tobacco but also cloths or blankets, before he even knows whether these investments will lead to a successful outcome. So the men of the potential bride's clan have – apart from the status of having to be asked – an understandable interest in not being passed over in the negotiations. And this interest can be asserted in the following manner:

A younger married man, Buleeyya Madaacho from Gaaldeylan Elleemoyyo (the settlement group of the Gaaldeylan clan where the Elleemo lineage lives) promised his sister to people from Iturriya, an Aryaal clan, without consulting anyone. Such a decision is common practice and neither good nor bad. For his acting unauthorisedly, however, Buleeyya was insulted and abused by his fellow clan members so violently that, not knowing what else to do, he grabbed the leg of a much older man in a childlike gesture of seeking protection. That stopped the abusing. Buleeyya's decision was accepted, albeit grumblingly.

Later, however, when the incident had got about, the men of our Gaaldeylan settlement group were outraged by Buleeyya's improper behaviour – in part certainly motivated by materialistic interests. All together they went to Gaaldeylan Elleemoyyo and demanded payment of a fine. In the ensuing discussions, Buleeyya was sentenced to pay 100 Sh to each of the other Gaaldeylan settlement groups as well as to his own:

Gaaldeylan Elleemoyyo	100 Sh
Gaaldeylan <i>Goob</i> Naarugo	100 Sh
Gaaldeylan <i>Goob</i> Eysimfeechea	100 Sh
Gaaldeylan <i>Goob</i> Tombooyya	100 Sh
	<hr/>
	400 Sh

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This fine means a severe loss of smallstock, which must be sold for the money. From our point of view, therefore, it is understandable that Buleeiyya, after this forced payment, did not feel much inclined to shower his fellow clan members with gifts. Accordingly, he was criticised by many when, on the day of his sister's circumcision, he only gave little of the sugar, tea and tobacco the bridegroom's party had brought him out to other clan members.

So, the forthcoming marriage is discussed with many people, but not with the bride. When she learns of her "good fortune", she has no other choice but to comply or run away – if it is not already too late for the latter and the circumcision knife, which transforms her from girl to woman, has already started to cut.

Lukhundeer Dokkhe of the Irbaandif age set, i.e. a married man from the Urowween clan, wanted to take a girl of Bagajjo, Nebey, as his second wife. Everything was arranged. On the evening before the wedding, the bridegroom and his people arrived in Nebey. Now the girl was told that she was to marry and to be circumcised on the next morning. But the circumcision never took place as the bride had disappeared in the morning. "She doesn't like Lukhundeer ('Long Neck', after a mountain); she wanted to stay with her boyfriend."

So the elders of Nebey offered Lukhundeer another girl, the daughter of Birriga. Her father, 'Dubbeewwa Birriga, first refused his consent, but the others insisted because else it would be a big disgrace, they said. "We have promised this man a girl, and if we don't give him one now, we would be liars."

The majority had their way. On that same afternoon, the substitute bride was circumcised. The bridewealth was, as is common practice, fixed on the next day so that this incident caused no delay.

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The run-away bride can venture back soon after the circumcision of her replacement. No punishment awaits her. For her it certainly was the most elegant solution in order to escape the marriage. A married woman with children carries a much stronger social stigma should she run away.

Since marriage negotiations are a matter of two clans, not two families and much less bride and bridegroom, the bride as a person is not so significant; she can be replaced.

A catechist of the mission in Korr was told at the last moment that other plans had been made for his prospective bride. As a substitute, a 10-year old girl was offered to him. Since the negotiations, particularly the procuring of the bridewealth among relatives, had already progressed to a stage which made it difficult to call them off, he accepted.

Another case history concerning courting and marriage which illustrates some of the points mentioned here I will describe in detail in the context of the Tubcha clan because it is also illustrative in that context.

Marriage not only changes a girl's social status, her clan affiliation and obligations, but also her nature. She enters the phase of reproduction, she may, she must bear children. This change is made possible by her circumcision.

Only children of circumcised parents are accepted. If one or both parents are uncircumcised, the child is aborted. (The method of abortion consists in beating and kicking the pregnant woman's abdomen.) For women, a further condition of accepted motherhood is being married. *Sabadde* (cf. 1.2.4.) is the only category of girls who are circumcised but not permitted to bear children.

A child from an adulterous relationship between a married woman and a warrior, i.e. a circumcised but unmarried man, is allowed to live, however, the woman's husband of course being regarded as the father of her child. Schematically, these conditions can be shown in the following manner:

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(c = circumcised, -c = uncircumcised, m = married, -m = unmarried)

<u>father</u>	<u>mother</u>	<u>child</u>
-c, -m	-c, -m	aborted
c, -m	-c, -m	aborted
c, m	-c, -m	aborted
-c, -m	c, -m	aborted
c, -m	c, -m	aborted
c, m	c, -m	aborted
-c, -m	c, m	aborted
c, -m	c, m	lives
c, m	c, m	lives

Or: father<sub>c</sub>      ∧      mother<sub>c,m</sub>      →      child survives

To give a detailed account of the different animal sacrifices and rituals of different clans on the occasion of a wedding at this point would be inappropriate as the woman probably hardly takes any notice of all that, or in any case has no active part in it.

The part of the wedding concerning the bride directly is the following:

In the morning after the arrival of the bridegroom's party, at around 5 or 5:30 a.m., the bride is circumcised by an elder woman from the clan of the bridegroom. What is done is a clitoridectomy. This results in heavy blood loss, which also explains the weakness of the bride and her lack of interest in the further proceedings in which she is not involved anyway.

The circumcision is (according to male informants) preceded by instructions from an older woman. What the bride is told in this conversation cannot be found out. Men are not admitted, and they would never ask a woman, for instance their wife, questions about such private matters of the female sphere.

The circumcision takes place in the hut of the bride's mother, i.e. in the bride's "parental home". Here she stays until late afternoon and rests.

Meanwhile in front of the hut, the meat of sacrificed animals is distributed, guests arrive from neighbouring settlements to drink tea and pray, women in festive attire (*okko*) bring gifts of milk. In the afternoon, the bridewealth is negotiated, the site where the bride's new house will be built is covered with green *gaayer* branches and sprinkled with milk – so, there is a hustle and bustle all day, which the bride is oblivious of.

Marriage is *mindischo* – house building. *Usu mine diste* – he built a house = he married. The paraphrasing of marriage as “building a house” even generated the expression *usu inantoo diste* – he built = married a girl. Each married woman has a house, and, vice versa, there is no house that does not belong to a married or widowed woman.

In the afternoon – in one case observed at 4:30 p.m. – the house is dismantled around the bride by several women, the bride's mother and some neighbours, and disassembled into its component parts. The mats made from wild sisal (*dulbe*, pl. *dulbenye*) are taken down, the *utúb* (tent poles; the Rendille house is constructed like a tent: a frame of poles covered with mats and lined with skins) are untied. During the entire process, the bride stays concealed underneath two big cowhides which used to line the back wall of the house. Only once she leaves her hiding place, to leave the *goob* (clan, settlement, pl. *goobab*) accompanied by a girl – probably to relieve herself. The mats, poles, skins lie around the site of the former house. It is discussed which parts are to be used for the new house. To make two houses out of one is difficult. Before long, other houses in the whole *goob* are also in a state of partial disintegration. A mat is taken from here, a pole from there.

In particular the mats are objects of value. They are made of *eyma*, the leaves of the wild sisal plant (*Agave sisalana*)<sup>1</sup> which, in Rendille territory, only grows high up in the mountains. The women make expeditions of several weeks to cut these leaves, the tips of which tear infectious wounds into the skin. The cut leaves have to be scorched, dug in and watered until the tissue between the fibres rots away. After that, the fibre bundles have to be cleaned by beating them. Finally, after long days and weeks of hardship far from any settlement, the women have to carry the heavy stacks down the steep slopes. Back in the *goob* then, the time-consuming work of weaving the mats begins.

Of these scarce goods the bride is given as much as can be spared, particularly at the expense of her mother's house which can, after being rebuilt, look rather droughty and tattered and is sealed up provisionally with cardboard and sacks.

But first the bride's house is built – immaculately and without any make-shift arrangements, and in the style of the bridegroom's clan. This is different from the Aryaal who are closely linked to the Samburu and where a Rendille

<sup>1</sup> Note added in 2010: This information is wrong. The plant in question is a *sanseveria* from which sisal-like fibres are extracted.

woman builds a Rendille house, but a Samburu woman builds a desert variant (with mats) of the Samburu house (which, in colder reaches, is covered with cow dung and earth from termite mounds). Some Aryaal women just build the kind of house they like best and which can be transported most easily with the means at her disposal. The Rendille, on the other hand, follow the bridegroom's clan when building a house. Therefore, in the case observed, a two-frame standard Rendille house without base poles was built, instead of the Gaalorra house which has only one continuous frame of heavy round poles to which the other poles are fastened, and short base poles at the back wall of the house.

The new house is fenced in. The thornbushes are brought by brothers and classificatory brothers of the bridegroom and are then joined to a fence with the help of people standing about. It is the only house in this *goob* to have its own fencing. Even the round fence around the whole *goob* is often done without. It is only indispensable for festivals like *almado* (cf. 0.6.7.2.) and *soorriyo* (cf. 0.6.7.1.). To build such a functionally unnecessary fence means: adding the finishing touches, perfection.

Like the house, the woman from now on belongs to the husband's clan and must submit to its customs. What she keeps are the spiritual powers of her clan of origin. For instance, the women of our clan once spent the night on Baayo Mountain in the wilderness, where they had been cutting *eyma* during the day, when they were disturbed by a rhino. At once the daughters of the Saale clan below them blew through their cupped hands (curse gesture) to drive the rhino away. The *iibire* curse of Saale is effective through the rhino: the rhino kills the cursed one. So there is a close relationship between rhino and Saale; they came into being together (*isleesoobaheen*) and do not kill each other.

On the other hand, the woman is subject to all the food taboos of her husband's clan. For most Rendille clans this makes no difference as their food rules are identical. If, however, a girl marries into Gaalorra, a subclan of Gaal'deylan which, unlike other Rendille, observes the rule of not eating game, especially not giraffe, then her mouth must be washed out with a mixture of boys' urine, sheep and goat urine and smallstock dung, to cleanse her of all the game she has ever eaten up to her marriage.

The house is owned by the woman. This property requires constant work and, in contrast to the men's property, the livestock, it does not yield any profit.

It is part of the women's work to go on the laborious *eyma* expeditions to cut the wild sisal as well as to cut tent poles (*ut''ub*, sing. *utub*) in an equally distant forested river plain like Malgis ("Malgis" on the map) and to process both materials. The *ut''ub* have to be decorticated, bent and tied around a tree and dried. After that they are blackened with a mixture of dung ash and water to protect them against termites. The strips of torn-off bark are braided

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into ropes. Other materials used for ropes are *eyma* and strips of animal skin. Every time the clan moves on, it is the women and girls who have to load the entire house onto camels and rebuild it in the new settlement location. Furthermore, they are responsible for cleaning the milk containers, for weaving milk and water containers, the big *haanan* (sing. *haan*) which probably hold 20 litres or more, and for fetching water every other day, which is hard work, especially for the ones whose pack camels died during the long drought of 1968-1975. Some women transport the *haanan* on donkeys, but in some settlement groups most of them carry them on their own backs. Women prepare the meals, make tea and cook maize porridge, blood and meat; women bear the main burden of child-rearing, even though the older siblings, particularly the girls, also tie the toddlers to their backs and look after them.

This should be sufficient for now. Modes of production and gender-specific division of labour are not the topic of this work. For further information on this issue, Torry's book on the Gabbra is useful, in which almost identical conditions are described in detail.<sup>2</sup> Let us just take note of the fact that in total, the women's workload is considerably heavier than that of the men, not only regarding the expenditure of time, but particularly regarding intensity.

The men appreciate this: "A woman is like a camel mare. ["Camel mare" is the highest praise of usefulness as camels give milk twice a day.] Every day anew she feeds the children, the husband, the whole house is built by her, etc."

The comparison of woman and camel can, however, take on different forms, too.

I had once offered to fetch a load of *eyma* fibres which the women had cut on Mount Baayo. We had agreed that the women would deposit the *eyma* on this particular morning at a settlement of the Rengumo clan about 25 kilometres away.

On the previous evening, two old men, Naarugo and Worguut Taarween, strongly advised me to set out as early as possible so as to be there by 7 a.m. I didn't much like the idea, but they insisted because the women, they said, would be waiting for me there, each one wanting to watch until I had safely stowed her *eyma* bundle in the trunk, no one daring to leave for fear another woman might steal from her. They had to set out early because they had a long day's march to walk.

When I suggested that they should all walk on and leave one guard with the *eyma* whom I could then give a ride in the car, was rejected as unrealistic; it would only result in suspiciousness and quarrels. (According to my personal experience, this assessment is realistic.)

As an excuse for this sort of behaviour of the women, Worguut points out: "The women in your country might be different. They go to school and university and even know how to drive a car. But our women are like children.

<sup>2</sup> William J. Torry, 1973.

You have to tell them everything. They are bad. There was once a man in Gaaldeylan who said: 'If this camel mare could bear children for me, I would kill my wife.' Whenever the women do anything together, they fight and make a lot of noise. It would be a disgrace for us if people were to spread in Rengumo how our women fought over *eyma*."

This remark gives expression to an attitude which not only reflects Worgu-ut Taarween's opinion, but can be observed on a regular basis: Women are treated like children and patronised, notwithstanding their usefulness. If I was bothered by anything, I was told, if women, children or warriors got on my nerves, I should just tell the elders and they would take care of it. Beating women is not unusual, it happens all the time. "Don't you beat the women in your country?" You sit up when you hear wailing, but when someone explains such-and-such is beating his wife, you relax. The age difference between women and their husbands is hardly ever less than thirteen years, for second wives it can easily be twice as much. This often results in a disregard for women and later, when the sexual drive of the aged men declines, to sexual frustrations on the part of the women.

This sexual frustration in turn leads to the women readily committing adultery. This may occur somewhat less frequently than one might imagine in this constellation. This is due to clan life being a rather public affair and to the sleeping arrangements. If word gets out that a man is away and his sleeping-place is free, it will soon be occupied by girls who have returned from the goat herd in the bush to spend a few days in the *goob* or by adolescent children who have been sent away by their parents because the latter are tired of having to suppress their sexual needs until the children have fallen asleep. But where there's a will, there's a way.

This frustration can furthermore find free expression in loose talk, in sexual provocations and in mocking remarks about aged husbands. While the latter behave so prudishly towards all other men but their age-set mates that, unless one knows them very well, it is absolutely impossible to address a sexual topic even in its social aspects (for instance by asking a question like "What happens to warriors who got a girl pregnant?"), these issues come up almost naturally with women, also with regard to other aspects.

Childlessness is always considered the woman's fault, even if the husband shows clear signs of old age and an observer tends to assume different causes. In most cases, however, the Rendille are probably right as, due to the relatively lax morals, the possibility of a pregnancy does not depend so very much on the husband.

Various ritual specialists can pray for childless women (cf. the sections on *hosoob*, *dabeel*, *guḍur*). Often, the house of a childless woman is situated in the centre of the settlement in close proximity to the *naabo*, a round space surrounded by thornbushes which serves as a meeting place for the elders and in which a fire burns that needs to be stirred up anew with two sticks immediately after moving to a new location – even before the houses are

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rebuilt – and from which all households receive their fires. Conversely, the *naabo* fire is rekindled every night with some embers from the hearth of the first house in the seniority order of the clan. The *naabo* plays an important role in the *almado* festival described above (cf. 0.6.7.2.). From this *naabo*, and in particular also from the men’s prayers which are said there on every meeting, emanates a strong blessing of fertility.

Some widows live with a younger brother of their deceased husband. A widow can, however, also move away and lead a comparatively free sex life, as long as she is discreet about it. Independently of their biological fathers, the children will be attributed to the deceased husband.

A similar case are women whose husbands are away for longer stretches of time.<sup>3</sup> Legitimacy is not an issue in these cases, either – children of married women are always legitimate and belong to their husbands, just like children of girls are always aborted.

Preferred and most likely to be tolerated as lovers (*dumaassi*) are clan brothers of the same age set as the husband, but younger than the latter. The “co-marrier” (*eti min leedisio*), i.e. the best man or witness to a marriage who ritually duplicates the bridegroom at the wedding, is particularly *dumaassi*. The husband would surely let him get away with sleeping with his wife. (“*Dumaassi*” is also a term of address for every person structurally eligible as (female or male) lover without there having to be an actual love affair.)

<sup>3</sup> An old man once phrased this fact sarcastically in the following manner: “*Dubi oboorri a iidi afi kararre; wihi u'khato ma waayo.* – The buttocks of a woman is like a dog’s snout; it always grabs something.” To avenge the women let me add that they were convinced this man was past expressing sexual interest with anything but his hands.

These remarks should not give the impression that the Rendille are a particularly lascivious society in which it doesn’t matter much who makes love to whom. Of course the husband does have the right to fight back.

When I was having a conversation about leopard skins with a poacher, he told me the following episode: After having warned his wife’s lover repeatedly, a husband announced to be going away for a while. He placed a spring trap for leopards in the door of his house and left, but did not go any further than the other end of the settlement, where he slept in a hut until he was woken by a scream. Judging from the tenor of the story, the shattered ankles of the lover aroused more amusement than compassion.



Figure 1.1. Gaalorra woman

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## 1.2. GIRLS

### 1.2.1. POSITION IN THE CLAN

“What did your wife give birth to?” “A lost leg<sup>4</sup>” – meaning a girl, someone who will leave the clan. Since girls will later marry away from the clan, it is not important for them to observe the food taboos compulsory for their clan of origin (e.g. Gaalorra, cf. 2.8.9.1.). They may even eat rabbits they might have killed by throwing rocks at them while gathering firewood in the bush. No other Rendille would touch that kind of food.

But that does not mean that the girls are not members of their clan. As such, they are marked by details of their jewellery and body adornments. The girls of Gaaldeylan, for instance, wear little peaces of ostrich eggshell, threaded onto strings, around their hips. They also use the “strong words” specific for their clan to express irritation or astonishment, i.e. the clan names for poetic or ritual use also used as exclamations of surprise. So, for instance, a Gaalorra girl might shout “Galhasooy!” when the car hits a pothole.

Another such exclamation, which, unlike the clan names, is used by all Rendille girls, is “uur abartaaya” – “belly of my mother!”, signifying amazement or fright rather than irritation. No male being would ever use that phrase.

The opinion mentioned above of girls being lost to the clan should not be misinterpreted to the effect that the relation between fathers and daughters is less close and affectionate than in other cultures. Little boys might accompany their fathers more often and sit with the elders for informal conversations, while their fathers tickle them or play with their penisses. But in the houses, the little girls climb about on their resting fathers’ stretched out bodies just like their brothers do.

Once I saw a man crying when his about sixteen-year old daughter returned after weeks of uncertainty about her whereabouts. Tellingly, these emotions were expressed without a word or a gesture. At a young age, the girls are already requested to look after their younger siblings and to help their mothers. At about ten years of age, most of them start to migrate, together with older girls as well as some boys and warriors, with the smallstock camp, from then on living almost entirely outdoors. They spend their days bantering in the shade of a tree or standing in the sun, their eyes roaming the widely scattered herd.

### 1.2.2. CONCUBINAGE

A few years later, a warrior of a different clan will start giving her glass beads. They are the red beads which the girl works into a wide collar resting on the shoulders (*ilkiriba*), and the white ones which she will pile up above this collar up to the chin (*soommi*). If the girl receives an excessive amount

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<sup>4</sup> Better: weili be-et: “a child for the people”

of beads, she will pass them on to younger girls who do not have a boyfriend (*maamir*) yet. Her warrior boyfriend will also ask her parents for permission and give them a few heads of smallstock. These gifts to the parents are made repeatedly over the years. This way, a tolerated and socially accepted stable concubinage develops between a warrior and a girl that often lasts for years. Out in the smallstock camp there is plenty of opportunity to consummate this concubinage (cf. 0.4.1.). The concubinage lasts until the girl learns she has been married, which terminates the relationship rather roughly. Not very often does she still have the chance to run away with her boyfriend.

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### 1.2.3. TYPE AND IDEAL

The Rendille girls are often very robust and steeled by heat, thirst and long walks as well as by long nights of dancing with the warriors. Since they spend almost all of their time in the smallstock camp and have plenty of milk, blood and meat, they put on muscles and fat. That is not to say, however, that this lifestyle creates a heavy type of built; rather, I would describe these girls as athletic.

Married women, in contrast, are much more often of a delicate, Ethiopian type. If you were to disguise them they could be taken for Somali women. At first glance, this difference between girls and married women is so astonishing that it is hard to believe it is not due to race but solely to an age difference of a few years and a different way of living. The diet of the women living in the semi-permanent settlement is scantier (because during the dry seasons only few animals are kept there), and they get less exercise like long walks or dancing. The pregnancies and the long nursing periods probably also wear them out. Still, we can hardly speak of a state of dietary deficiency: Their bodies have simply adapted to the new demands. Whether the muscular girls would be in an ideal bodily state to bear children might be doubted. A Rendille once summed up these differences in the following way: "Women are different from girls because they have given birth." He might have named the chief factor with his statement, but hardly all the reasons for this striking remodelling of the female physique.

The girls, on the other hand, might appear almost masculine in some cases, if the impression of their strong bodies was not thoroughly compensated by their behaviour. The stiff collar that is worn up to the chin limits the mobility of head and shoulders. The distance of the lower jaw to breast and shoulders has a very high minimum, so the girls can lift their shoulders or lower their heads only to a limited extent. For that reason, the upper part of the girls' bodies look statuesquely rigid and a little helpless. This impression is increased by their often speaking with disguised, high-pitched and hoarse, voices that make them sound childlike. Their pitch when singing is the head voice, which exhibits these elements even more distinctly.

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#### 1.2.4. SABADDE

The average age for girls to marry is about eighteen to twenty. But the daughters of every third age set marry one full 14-year cycle later than their contemporaries. These girls are referred to as *sabadde*<sup>5</sup>. The circumcision of the *sabadde* is performed rather informally in a *soorriyo* month of a Monday year.

That means, all the *sabadde* are circumcised at the same time and not, like the other girls, on the occasion of their marriage. The 1975 *sabadde* circumcision took place ten years after the circumcision of the Ilkichilli warriors, their lovers – that is the space of time from one Friday year to the Monday year after the next.<sup>6</sup>

The lover of the girl crafts two identical sticks richly ornamented partly by carving, partly by burning, one of which he gives to the girl's family, keeping the other one for himself to walk around with. (No male Rendille ever walks around without a stick, spear or club. Even if it is an ornamental stick like the one just described – they need to have something in their hands at all times.)

He also holds this stick while dancing. This kind of stick is called *ussi albe*, girls' stick.

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#### 1.2.5. CIRCUMCISION

Except for *sabadde*, the category of girls who marry later (cf. 1.2.4.), girlhood ends with circumcision which is, next to the building of a house, an essential component of the wedding.

Like the circumcision of boys, that of girls is the beginning of a second life (*jirnaanki lammaatteet*). The difference to a boy's circumcision is, however, that it is done individually. This difference is emphasised ritually by performing girls' circumcisions on Sundays, Mondays and Saturdays (except for the daughters of the Gaalorra subclan who are not circumcised on Mondays), while boys' circumcisions take place on Fridays and, in case there are too many circumcision candidates to finish in one day, are continued on the following Saturday. According to my informant, this difference in possible dates is evidence that they are two different things: "*ma isidow, a yeerar* – they are not near to each other, are different." A common element of the circumcision of both sexes is, however, that the blood that flows opens up a second life.

For the girls, the birth symbolism is more pronounced.

*Idi deyyohoti desso, albehi lakhandiyo huggunkiis lahaaggicho.*

"Like women who give birth the custom of the girls who are circumcised is done."

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Spencer, 1965, p. 35

<sup>6</sup> Spencer, 1965, p. 35, predicts the next *sabade* circumcision, the one of the daughters of Irbalis, to take place in 1966. It did not happen until 1975, however. Some of the girls married as soon as few months later.

So, circumcision is *modelled* on birth. Central part of the analogy is the blood flowing abundantly from the genital area. Furthermore, circumcision – like birth – takes place on the right side (as seen from the door) of the house, the men’s side.

Just like after a birth, all the *golog*, the shrubs used to pad the ground, which are now soaked with blood, are burnt when the household next moves. (This has no hygienic reasons, as the site is abandoned as it is. Rather, this behaviour seems influenced by the general reluctance to expose any human substances separated from the body – hair, fingernails, excrements – in a way where they might invite being used to cast evil spells (*tibaato*). For births, just like for weddings, *moor* is used (fatty tissue covering the intestines). We will learn more about *moor* as one of the most important transition symbols in the chapter on context-comparing symbology. Fur strips (*khalli*) of the *moor* animal – the animal slaughtered for its intestinal fat – are slipped on the arm of the woman in *childbed* or the bride, respectively. For a woman in *childbed*, the *khalli* are taken from the right hind leg, for a bride from the animal’s head. (The head, like circumcision, is a unique thing, whereas birth, like the leg, is a serial thing.)<sup>7</sup>

The analogy to birth seems to me to be twofold:

1. The girl is being reborn as a woman, as becomes apparent in the phrase of the “second life”.
2. It is an act which ritually makes the girl capable of bearing children (if one of the parents is uncircumcised, the child must be aborted) and favours future births through ritual anticipation. The circumcision is carried out by an elder woman with many children, but never by a childless woman. Fertility, the capability of bearing children (birth, capability of bearing children, fertility all are called *del*) is, therefore, transferred from the circumciser onto the circumcised.

The circumcision is done with a shaving knife (*min’diila*). The clitoris is cut through. A complete removal is not necessary. An erectable stump can remain.

This operation does not – or at least not much – impair the women’s sexual initiative and their ability to feel sexual pleasure. The sexual oppression of women, which circulates through feminist literature in this context, is not seen as such by the Rendille. On the contrary, female circumcision marks the starting point for a sexually much more carefree life, which some women make use of to the point of promiscuousness because they now do not have to be afraid of an abortion should they become pregnant. On the contrary –

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<sup>7</sup> This explanation occurred to me while I was writing this text. I did not check whether the Rendille share it.

pregnancies are wanted, and the question of paternity is handled liberally, as long as the father is not an uncircumcised boy, a blacksmith, a member of the “K” group (cf. 2.4.3.) or a clan brother. Without having to fear punishment, she may get in contact with any clan brothers of her husband’s age set, if the husband is not present. Sexual contacts to members of different age sets are not approved of, but conveniently overlooked.

### 1.3. BOYS, WARRIORS AND ELDERS

#### 1.3.1. THE MALE CYCLE OF LIFE

The female life cycle is made up of two parts, the male of three.

During this life cycle, the individual is moulded into different forms of which some are in strong contrast to another. The constancy of the individual is, therefore, strongly limited by consecutive age-appropriate norms revoking and replacing one another. You would, I think, have to know a Rendille you once met as a warrior very well to recognise him twenty years later as an elder. In any case, the different stages a Rendille passes through in his life differ more strongly from each other than the stages most of us Europeans pass through.

These differences are expressed as radically in outer habitus as in behaviour. They are most distinct between warriors and elders, while small boys and elders are similar to each other in a number of traits.

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#### 1.3.2. BOYS

Ritually, the birth of a boy is handled differently from that of a girl.

While for a girl, a female lamb (*subeen*) is slaughtered as *moor* animal<sup>8</sup>, for a boy it is a male lamb.

Spencer reports that after the birth of a son the mother should drink camel’s blood for four days and not drink milk for four months.<sup>9</sup> I don’t have anything to add to that except for the fact that, while I was there, the Rendille women who had given birth had neither blood they could have drunk nor milk they could have done without. Spencer continues: “These and other associated practices are similar for the birth of a girl except that the frequent use of the number four is substituted by the number three.” In the case of a new-born girl, therefore, it would have to be three days of blood and three months without milk.

The same symbolism of numbers we find in the handling of the umbilical cord:

With the shaving and circumcision knife (*mindila*) the umbilical cord is cut by an elder neighbour. If the newborn is a boy, the mother carries the cord, wrapped into a corner of her skirt made of untanned skin (*sakkaal*), with her for four *soorriyo* – that is for more than a year.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. the chapter on context-comparing symbology (5.13.). The ceremonies of the life cycle are also described in Spencer: *Nomads in alliance*, London, 1973, p. 41 ff.

<sup>9</sup> Spencer, *ibid.*

After that, the umbilical cord is tied to the right foreleg of an – ungelded – camel bull with an *ergeeg* fibre (the root of a wild asparagus species). (These processes are described in more detail in the chapter on context-comparing symbology, in section 5.2. on the Grant’s gazelle.) Then the boy is passed around the camel’s hump four times counter-clockwise. The camel bull will walk around with the umbilical cord tied to its leg until it will eventually lose it: So the cord is not directly destroyed or removed by human hand.

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Very similar things are done for a newborn girl. Only that in this case, the mother will carry the umbilical cord around with her for only three *soorriyo*, and after that it is a ram to the right foreleg of which the navel string is tied and which will carry it around and eventually lose it in the bush.

So the difference is that with boys, everything is done four times or lasts for four time intervals, while with a girl the number three takes that place. As a consequence, the ceremonies connected to a boy are more elaborate by a third than those related to a girl. Furthermore, for girls a head of smallstock takes the place of the camel for a boy. This can also be paralleled to what Spencer tells us about the afterbirth: If the baby is a boy, the afterbirth is buried in the camel pen, and if it is a girl, it is buried in the smallstock pen. This anticipates future gender roles in herding: Boys will spend their time primarily in the camel camp, girls in the smallstock camp. There can be no doubt that this division of labour is not egalitarian: Everything related to camels is valued higher, even if the economic significance of the smallstock might be as big or bigger.

“A hair style in the form of an elegant crest (*dookko*) is proudly worn by all Rendille wives whose first-born is a boy.”<sup>10</sup> This applies to all clans except for Gaalorra and O’doola whose women wear their hair in tight braids until they reach their menopause.

The reason the Rendille give for the special significance of the first son of the first wife is that once upon a time, a father had farted and been laughed at by one of his younger sons. This made the father very angry, and from that time on, the first son has been inheriting the biggest part of the herd. The explanation Spencer gives – that the camel herd is to be kept together, a key element of Spencer’s reasoning which according to him is also the reason why so many younger sons transfer to Aryaal and Samburu – is, however, certainly more pertinent than this story.

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A boy should be breastfed for two years, for a girl one is sufficient. (I could not find confirmation for Spencer’s calculation of the nursing period, but that, of course, does not mean there could not be women who observe the rules<sup>11</sup> described by Spencer.)

The first years of his life a boy will spend hunting for lizards, insects, mice and other small animals with a little bow and toy arrows (simple sharpened

<sup>10</sup> Spencer, 1973, p. 42.

<sup>11</sup> Spencer, 1973, p. 42.

sticks without a metal tip, *lah*"aw, in contrast to *baldo*, the hunting arrows of the adults). Depending on his temperament, he will run away from approaching whirlwinds (dust devils) or run right into them. He will be playing "marriage" with the girls and build houses. If at the age of about five he will make his first sexual attempts, he won't be scolded because it was too early, but because it was a clan sister.

Unlike the older boys and the warriors who have their own separate world, he will spend a lot of time with the elders, too. While the fathers sit together and turn over tribal political problems, they play with the penisses of their little sons, lost in thought.

"One custom associated with boyhood which is perhaps unique among the Rendille must be noted. When they are about eight or nine, the father or some other male cuts into the skin round their navel. This is done in a series of snicks over a period of months until the circle is complete. As the wound heals, the skin contracts over the navel until it is covered by a hole only one-quarter of an inch in diameter and is barely visible. The Rendille are proud of this disfigurement provided that it has healed successfully. But if the healing is only partial or leaves some other disfigurement, then it is known as *bajo* and is a matter of shame and derision. A man with a *bajo* will always wear his cloth high so as to cover his navel and he will want to fight any person who makes any reference to it. The worst insult possible would be to say to him: 'You commit incest with your sister – you have a *bajo*.' The Rendille do not elaborate on this point: they deny that a man who commits incest necessarily develops a *bajo* or vice versa, and they deny any mystical significance in the custom. They do not relate it in any way to cutting the navel-string at birth or to any later social separation between a boy and his mother. It is a custom which seems to suggest any of these possibilities. At most one can say on present evidence that committing incest and having a *bajo* are both matters of shame, and that it is the shame that is emphasised by informants.

A Rendille girl who is approached by a youth who wishes to be her lover may ask to see his navel to reassure herself that the operation has been performed and that it is not a *bajo*. It is said that when a man with a *bajo* lies dying, his hand goes to his navel to cover up the ignominious disfigurement rather as if his last living act must be to conceal it."<sup>12</sup>

Another artificial physical alteration the boys (as well as the girls) are subjected to is the prising out of the two lower front teeth during adolescence. Also, circular ornamental scars are cut into stomachs and upper arms. The pattern of the stomach scars is the following:

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<sup>12</sup> Spencer, 1973, p. 44. All this agrees with my information. All I want to add is that I personally have never seen a *bajo*: so the men apparently are very meticulous about hiding it.

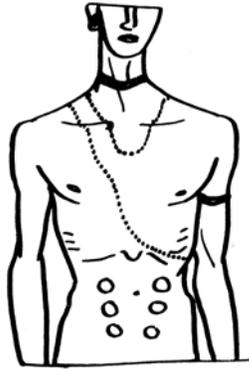


Figure 1.2.

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Furthermore, boys' earlobes are pierced and gradually stretched by increasingly large wooden plugs.

The essential alteration, however, which finally turns the boy into a fully-fledged man – if only into a warrior without permission to marry – is circumcision. The exact time of circumcision depends, as we have seen, not on the age of the boy but on the age-set affiliation of his father and on the specific point in time of the age-set cycle. Only in exceptional cases may these principles be violated.

Most of the “boys” will have to spend years as biologically fully grown young men in the satellite camps with the camels, cattle or the smallstock. There, they will bear the main burden of herding and are ordered about by the warriors who themselves do not exactly volunteer for the work. They will milk the camels because the warriors, having sexual contacts, are not allowed to. If people who have sexual contacts milk camels, it is bad for the foal. So the boys are treated like sexual neuters, whether they behave like it or not.

From his adolescent years on, a boy will collect the wing-sheaths of large beetles and thread them on a string. These strings he will then wear for his circumcision.

### 1.3.3. INITIATION

Spencer writes: “It is in the initiation of an age-set in particular that the Rendille follow the lead set by the Samburu. After the Samburu have performed the ceremony of killing the boys' ox, the Rendille boys perform a similar ceremony known as *herhladaha*. A bull foal is begged from the Samburu Nyaparai phratry and killed in the bush. The right-hand side of the carcass is shared by the boys of the Upper Belessi moiety and the other half by Lower Belessi boys. Inedible parts are entirely burned.”<sup>13</sup>

We interpret “*heere ladaaha*” as *herhladaha* (an ox is begged) or better still: *maanti heer ladaaho* (the day on which an ox is begged). At least, in

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<sup>13</sup> Spencer, 1973, p. 45.

this form the name makes sense in Rendille language. Apart from that this expression describes what, according to my information, actually happens. In any case, it is not a bull calf but a gelded animal, which agrees better with the linguistic and ritual association between warriors and oxen. According to my information, it is not the Nyaparei phratry either who give the animal, but the Loggol lineage in Lorogushu-Aryaal who originally were Rendille from Urowween. This also weakens Spencer's argument that the Rendille are only following the Samburu age-grade succession, as Spencer claims several times. More likely, this custom was once a borrowing of the equivalent Samburu ritual but the Rendille are in no way dependent on the Samburu in performing their age-grade rituals. As we have seen in the chapter on "Time and time givers", the Rendille system of time reckoning can work entirely independently. The fact that the Rendille do everything a little later than the Samburu is not due to the Rendille waiting for the Samburu in order to get a lead for their own schedule, but simply means there are two cycles of the same duration but with different starting points.

I was told this ceremony is called "*maanti heer lađuro*" ("day on which it is danced jumpingly because of the ox" – *durna* is a special dancing style: you jump up, pull one leg up a little and then, after the other leg has hit the ground, stamp the second foot firmly on the ground to produce a syncopated rhythm similar to the sound of the forelegs of a galloping animal). On this day the boys must not drink "black", i.e. pure, water (*bicchehi daayan*), but are offered *badah*, a mixture of milk and water, in Loggol. There, the boys dance the *gir'daanki soorriyo*, the dancing song we have heard about in the section on the *soorriyo* festival (cf. 0.6.7.1.).

Actually, the following slaughtering is a *soorriyo* which the Rendille categorise as such, too, and which has, apart from situational modifications, all the essential elements in common with the settlement's *soorriyo*.

Before the animal is slaughtered somewhere in the bush (*yib*, the preferred place for warriors to be) it is, like the sacrificial animal for *soorriyo*, "washed". Since they have no milk here, some of the boys spit into their hands and stroke first the belly, then the back of the animal with this hand. *Hanjuf lakadikha* – it is washed with saliva.

After slaughtering, everybody smears blood onto his forehead: "marks himself with blood".

The remaining details are described by Spencer (see above).

After the last remnants of the ox have been burnt, the boys go to Dubsahay *goob* Wambile, the settlement of the first man in the seniority order of the tribe, and dance the *soorriyo* dance there.

Ostrich feathers are worn during the entire ceremony', a similarity to the *Gaalgulamme* ceremony, two years later (1.3.4.).

## CIRCUMCISION

“The initiation ceremonies (*khandi*) follow two or three years after the Samburu”, Spencer writes. We can specify: They take place in the first *Soondeer* month of a Friday year on a Friday, independently of the date when the Samburu perform their circumcisions. If there is not enough time to finish all the circumcisions on Friday, they can continue on Saturday<sup>14</sup>.

As for the rest, Spencer’s description is – as far as I know, since the year of my stay with the Rendille was also no circumcison year – correct and valuable.

One important detail is that after the circumcison, during which the candidate is sitting down, the circumcised boy does not have to get up immediately but can – singing – request camels of his kinspeople. The resulting heated debates protract the whole process while the subsequent candidates have to wait in the sun for hours – drinking is not allowed on this day – until it is finally their turn and the real psychological strain – to not show any pain – begins.

In the chapter on the *Lakhandiita* (cf. 3.4.) we will describe the time after circumcison more closely. Also to be compared in this context is the section on the Tubcha clan which the circumcisers belong to (cf. 2.8.8.).

At this point, I only want to describe the method of circumcison, which is much more elaborated than that of other cultures. It was explained to me by the man from Tubcha who circumcised the Ilkichilli age set.

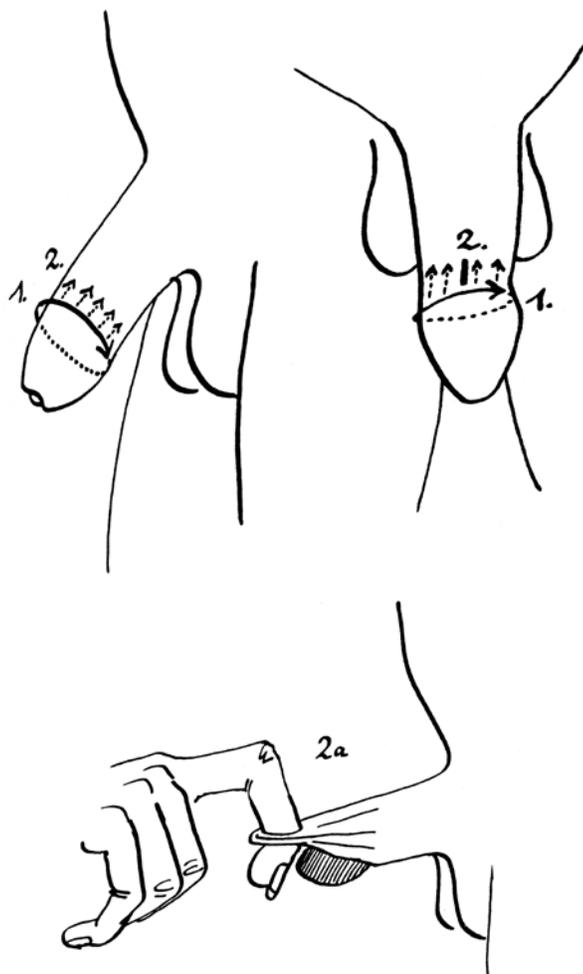
First, the foreskin (*nyirif*) is severed with two cuts – one counter-clockwise, one clockwise – of the *mindila*, the shaving knife also used to cut umbilical cords. Then the skin around the shaft is loosened a little, but not removed. So the front part of the penis shaft is still covered by its skin, but without being attached to it. An incision is now made into this loose end from the upper side, creating a hole. Into this hole, the circumciser sticks his bent index finger and pulls at the skin until he can push the glans through the hole. The front part of the skin of the penis shaft now forms a drop-shaped sack hanging down from the underside of the penis, called *mahal*.

Now the circumcised boy can start his negotiations for camels.

There is not special meaning to the *mahal*. The simple circumcison, as it is performed by neighbouring Muslim tribes (pulling at the foreskin and cutting off the end which juts out beyond the glans) is acknowledged by the Rendille as a circumcison, if only as a method secondary to the *mahal* variant like it is also practiced by the Samburu.

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<sup>14</sup> Note added to the translation: This is not correct. As observations in later years have shown, circumcisions take place on different days of the week.



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Figure 1.3., 1.4., 1.5.

Wisecrackers claim as the reason for the *mahal* that it produces rhythmic sounds with the friction in the vagina – what is a bell without a clapper?

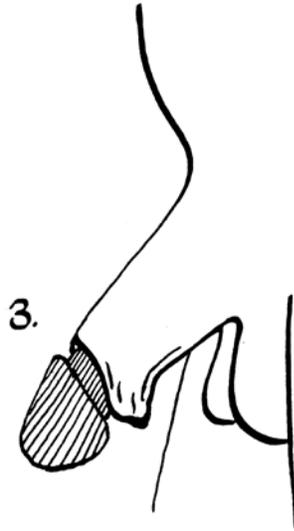


Figure 1.6.

After the cuts have healed, the boys have become fully-fledged warriors. While their role in the camel camp has de facto already been that of a warrior for three years, ever since the preceding age set had married, they now have the sexual rights of a warrior, too. They can have girlfriends, *maamirte*, from the same age set of girls which their future wives belong to. (So for each *teerya* age set, there are two age sets of girls to choose from: their own, whose marriage was delayed by one cycle, and the next one after them (cf. 0.6.5.; 1.2.4.). They can, if they are discreet, also go after the married women, which their husbands can respond to with anger, but not with sanctions.

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#### 1.3.4. THE *GAALGULAMME* CEREMONY AS AN EXPRESSION OF THE SENIORITY ORDER

In the great Saturday year after the circumcision, the big *gaalgulamme* ceremony is held.<sup>15</sup> In the Libaalle age set, the *gaalgulamme* had to be postponed for seven years until the next Saturday year because in the first Saturday year after circumcision, a warrior had died; except for that, I know of no deviation from the rule.

The *gaalgulamme* is one of the big occasions on which the tribe-wide seniority order finds its expression in an all-encompassing settlement order. All the clans move to a site on the eastern shore of Lake Rudolf and form a circle of houses with a diameter of – according to Spencer – about two miles. At its western end Wambile settle, clockwise subordinatedly followed by the rest of Dubsahay, the other clans of Belessi Bahay and, finally, Belessi Beri. On the part of Belessi Beri, the principle of the seniority order is, due to political considerations, broken in the settlement order.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Spencer, 1973, p. 46f.

A discussion of this settlement pattern would lead us right to the problem of the frail balance of force fields of the individual clans and therefore too far away from our present topic (cf. 2.7.).

*Gaalgulamme* or *maanti Gaal laguulo* means: “Driving or chasing the camels”. But the name gives a wrong impression. The camels are handled with care on this festival, like usual. But, like every ritual mass meeting, this festival takes place in the presence of the camels.

The warriors wear *torgos* and *rukumba*, brown and black ostrich feathers, on their heads and dance with their two sticks, the *ul* (herder’s staff) and the *gumo* (the black *soorriyo* stick). (See the sections on the ostrich and the *gaayer* tree as well as on *kulum* and *ejer* in the chapter on context-comparing symbology, 5.)

Moreover, a bath is taken in Lake Rudolf. After that, a large circle, *naabo*, is built with rocks (probably lava), just like for the *naabo* ceremony (cf. 4.9.).

Out of this *naabo*, a man of Gaalnahgaalle from Nahgan of the age set of the warrior’s fathers proclaims the name of the age set. What he has in common with other ritual specialists is his wearing a headband made of the asparagus root *ergeeg* as permanent emblem (cf. 3.0., 5.11.). In the case of the age set of the warriors circumcised in 1965 and generally called Ilkichilli, its official Rendille name was “Deefgu’do” (see the chapter “Chronology of the conflict etc.”, 4.). The wording of the proclamation was:

*Yeedi Waakh daage,  
harra laka daagte,  
magahiche – a Deefgu’do.*

“Words which God [= sky/heaven] heard,  
the earth heard them, too,  
its name – is Deefgu’do.”

Another main component of the *gaalgulamme* ceremony is the installation of the 44 ritual leaders of the warriors, the *hosoob*. The *hosoob* we will discuss in a separate section though (cf. 3.5.).

Furthermore, there are sacrificial slaughterings (cf. *soorriyo*, 0.6.7.1.).

Enough of the age-grade ceremonies for the moment: the camel slaughterings (*ori lagoorraho*), which, while not relating to the age set, are linked to the age-grade cycle in their timing, will be described elsewhere (cf. 5.4.).

On clan level, there are the *soorriyoti herreet*, warriors’ *soorriyo*, which take place in specific years. For these festivals, each clan has its own rules, though, and we do not want to lose ourselves in details. Regarding their essential meaning, we refer to the chapter on *soorriyo* (0.6.7.1.).

As we will have to describe the ritual conclusion of the warrior stage in the life of an age set in detail in the “Chronology of the conflict over the marriage rites of the Ilkichilli age set” (cf. 4.), there is no need to do it at this point.

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### 1.3.5. AN IMPRESSIONISTIC COMPARISON OF BOYS, WARRIORS AND ELDERS

Life begins and ends in the settlement, the *goob*. Between these two phases in the settlement lies the time in the bush (*yib*), where older boys and warriors live.

While the habitus of the settlement residents is measured, understated and inconspicuous, the inhabitants of the bush are bursting with muscles accentuated by bracelets, with various body adornments, body painting and elaborate dyed red hairstyles. There are also three different ways to walk, three “attitudes<sup>16</sup>”:

1. Children move from one place to another. Their walk is not meant to express anything either consciously or semiconsciously. If anything, it expresses the immediate emotion not learned and not trained. Their “attitude” is no “attitude”.
2. Elders move in a shuffling, grave walk, their heads bent thoughtfully, often holding their sticks with both hands across their shoulders.



Figure 1.7.

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<sup>16</sup> “Allüren” in the original. This word, derived from French (*allure* from the verb *aller*) renders the idea of a connection between what one thinks of oneself and the way one walks very well.

3. Warriors do not drag their legs holding their feet at a wide angle, like the elders do, but roll their feet markedly over the balls of the foot so that the heel rises higher. Touching the ground they appear to be bouncing back slightly. This creates a bobbing movement with the head jiggling forward and the spear-carrying arm swinging back and forth. To Europeans, who, from their streets, are used to passers-by moving bowed down with grief and in hurried little steps, this way to walk looks almost provokingly complacent.

It is obvious that a man with this kind of walk cannot pass by a group of women without exchanging some suggestive remarks with them.

The basic type described can be varied with all kinds of extras. Older men can be persuaded to show all kinds of walks which used to be fashionable in past age sets.

The warriors wear red ochre in their hair, which they often wear in long twisted plaits (there are no ritually prescribed shavings for warriors; the only exception is the death of an age-set mate of the same clan), they wear ivory ear plugs, face paint for festive occasions, bead-trimmed leather bands around arms and necks, long strings of beads worn like a sash, necklaces, from which often an amulet (*intassim*, the Samburu word for spell) dangles, and bracelets.

The elders' jewellery is modest in comparison. The ear plug has been replaced by a small metal ring, they wear one or two necklaces and bracelets made of brass or other materials, depending on the clan, and that's it.

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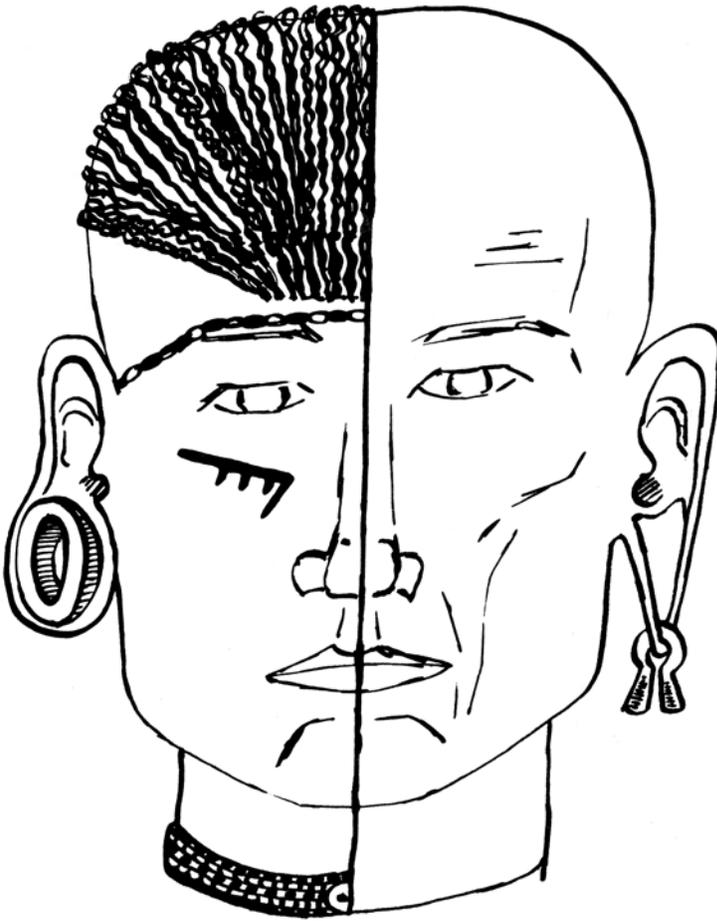


Figure: 1.8.

As weapons, a warrior always carries two spears, one club and a sword, while an elder usually only has a stick, on longer walks sometimes a spear. The spears also pass through a cycle the beginning and ending of which come close to each other.

The Rendille spears consist of three parts. They have a wooden shaft sharpened on both ends. On the one end of the shaft the head piece and blade are put, on the other the base used for planting the spear into the ground and serving as a counterweight to the blade in flight. So the spear is made up of two metal parts and one wooden part. As for a warrior's spear, the wooden part is short, just long enough to serve as a handle, and the metal parts are accordingly rather long (the total length of the spears varies slightly) so that the spear has a large weight and high impact. Boys' spears are very similar to that but lighter, as the wooden shaft is longer. The elders' spears have the same proportions, only their blades are often unnecessarily big. The total weight, and therefore the impact of the weapon, is low; the big blade looks rather pretentious.

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Warriors have no family to support and little personal property. For that reason they are not often in the position to ask each other for material aid. Consequently, there is no need for a lengthy and long-winded style of speech. Their verbal culture is not so strongly developed. They also are reputed to tell less lies.

Warriors resolve their conflicts with violence. If one rapes the other's girlfriend, he is beaten up with clubs. Next to naturally gnarled sticks, short clubs are popular, to which big screw nuts from pumps (built with the help of the church) are attached for weight. If a warrior is afraid to revenge himself on a physically superior opponent, he goes and finds reinforcement. This form of confrontation must not, however, be carried out with spears; spears are reserved for war with neighbouring tribes.

For elders, among themselves and in conflicts with warriors, the curse takes the place of open violence as the most important means of fending off all forms of injustice.

So, while warriors are strong and violent, elders are – at least in the abstract ideal – physically weaker, but have a more powerful curse at their command. The physical weakness of the elders, however, is not always put down to their older age, as one might think; elders regularly have sexual contacts and so the “women have drained them”. Occasional excesses of the warriors do not affect them as much because they get lots of milk and blood in the camel camp.

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### 1.3.6. THE WARRIORS' WANTING TO BE WILD

The social norm demands opposite characteristics of warriors and elders. Someone who used to excel as a warrior will not necessarily be as respected as an elder. Elders are expected to be patient and conciliatory, warriors to be instantly ready to react violently.

If you should accidentally step on a sleeping warrior's foot, you can be sure he will wake up with a startled cry and grab his club.

A warrior, a good friend whom we had once on a trip left in the car as a guard, confused my European guests by asking them in a very friendly manner not to touch the car in the night because otherwise he might inadvertently kill them.

Particularly during the nightly dances in the settlement, in the presence of the girls, it happens now and then that a raging and crazed looking warrior has to be held down by two age-set mates until the raging stops and he hangs limply in their arms. At a certain point, aggressive and sexual excitement, possibly coupled with frustration, seems to easily change into this state of rage (*kinta*) in warriors.

The state of *kinta*, however, is seen neither as embarrassing nor as ridiculous, but is actually regarded as chic and warrior-like. It is, therefore, favoured by a behavioural expectation and in some cases might even only be

pretended to some degree (which, of course, can auto-suggestively lead to a genuine loss of control).

*Kinta* is believed to be linked with the rich diet of the warriors, particularly the *banjo*, the mixture of blood and milk, as well as with the long stretches of water deprivation, which especially in combination with the consuming of blood results in a sensation of heat in the stomach, as well as the use of *dollo*<sup>17</sup>, a low-growing lignified Euphorbia, and other drugs. All this is meant to give the warriors a euphoric feeling of strength and make them capable of furiously attacking approaching lions or enemies. “You feel as big as that mountain over there.” It is also supposed to immensely increase sexual prowess. The warriors returning from the camel camp have about the same reputation as, in our society, sailors returning after a long voyage.

So the raging and shaking of over-excited warriors during a dance indeed can be seen as an objectless releasing of an, in other contexts (enemy attacks), perfectly appropriate excitement.

Sometimes warriors can be observed to tremble violently for minutes at a time in unreleased aggressive excitement. This, for instance, happened to a warrior of my settlement group after a playful wrestling match with a stout German student who had hitchhiked to come and visit me. The warrior had won because of his superior fighting technique, he took it as a joke, too, was laughing cheerfully and was fully able to control himself, but he continued to shake all over for a long time. Being latently ready for aggression, which is certainly fostered by social behaviour expectations, seems to result in extremely high amounts of adrenalin being released in Rendille warriors very quickly in fighting situations. This surely is a survival benefit in a situation so threatened by war.

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<sup>17</sup> *Dollo* is also believed to be an aphrodisiac, affecting women who did not even use it themselves: *deyyoho bolkhissa cha'at hawwoosse*: you inflame the women when you speak with them.

## 2. CLAN STRUCTURE

### 2.1. SEGMENTATION AND SENIORITY

The Rendille know, when asked about their history, three time levels. The first one consists of the mythical primordial times, to them absolutely real, when the objects came into being or better: came out, appeared (*soobahe*). The third one is the time level on which events can still be dated in terms of age sets or generations: the modern age, as it were. The furthest you can trace events back in this manner without tormenting the informant is about three generations. So, Baaroorwa (age set: Irbaandif) explained to me how the name group “Eysimfeechea” in Gaal’deylan/Gaalorra split off from his name group “Adicharreh” three generations ago.

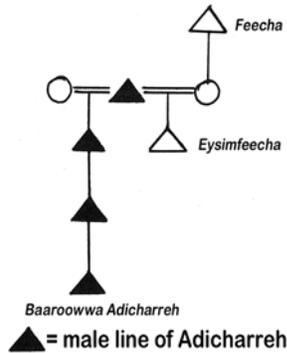


Figure 2.1

Between primordial times and modern age lies the time “in the middle”. Nobody pretends to know how long this time in the middle lasted.

The stories by which the present clans’ relations to one another are explained, i.e. the explanative myths, take place on time level No. 1. Their protagonists are the people who appeared (*soobahe*) first – who came out of various mountains in the area, for instance, or out of holes in the ground – and their children. The entire social reality of the Rendille seems to be programmatically laid out in these myths – or is it reflected in them? We want to leave this question open – it is the question of the chicken and the egg. Most likely it is a mutual process.

The ones who first appeared out of the mountains or the holes in the ground take precedence in the seniority order over the ones who came after them. So this is not a seniority order based on the birth order of the sons of a mythical progenitor, like it is the case with other tribes, like, for instance, the biblical People of Israel. The Rendille have not been brothers from the beginning; they “found each other on the way”. In individual cases they “became brothers”. This form of socialisation was also open for the immigration of other tribes.

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My own “immigration” also fits the pattern:

*'Deerka doo'd isiyimiy; iduu isele; et addane il kijiro mele. Yimiyye deerka, -innoha, chirrinki inno iselle, innoha maanta walaal minya? Bal? Ati iloooh katimiy? Inti idowweneynan. Saggaas on isieleen.*

*'Deerka idi Gaal'deylan goorat ma daagina? Saggaas on kalla yamiite. Toro la "walaal"! Layadehe, islakhaata. Saggaas on islii 'hele ichoowka deerka enenyet dakkhan uroo kalday iyitah.*

“Then the people came together, this is how they found each other. On earth there was nobody else. Then they came, – we, who we found each other, are we not brothers now? Right? Where do you come from? A place far away from here. Just like this they found each other. Well, have you not heard about Gaal'deylan? That also happened exactly like this. And again it was said “brother!”, and they accepted each other. This way they found each other until all the people became like one belly [like out of one belly = siblings].”

Within the individual clans, the seniority order mostly follows the birth order of the sons of a putative progenitor, however. This seniority order changed “in the middle” through the branching off of individual lines and adoption.

But how can the splitting of the Rendille into two moieties – *Belessi Bahay* and *Belessi Beri*, the “western” and the “eastern” Belel – be explained?

The Dubsahay clan is the first in the seniority order of Belessi Bahay. Dubsahay's first family is Wambile. Wambile's progenitor *Faarre* was the first man to come into the world. He appeared out of the ground in a spot of the same name: *Faarre* (northeast of Kargi).

The progenitor of *Nebey*, the senior clan of Belessi Beri, appeared near *Buuro*. His name was *Fooffeen Gaaldaayan*, “The one staying at the camp with the black camels”.

The myth of how these two men met explains today's relation of their two clans to one another. We will come back to that in more detail later in the text (cf. 2.8.1.).

*Maanti Wambile [= Faarre] ichoow Fooffeen Gaaldaayan isele, kooba intoo kasoobahe. Isisooshteene, deerka iseleen. Kooba deerka meessiis furte. Kooba deerka Rendillehi addane dollo kasoobahe, kooba deerka ki us ele mehe yeele: “Kan a kaaya, kan a kaaya.” Saggaase toolla Rendille ijira. Kooba ankiis khaba deerka.*

“When Wambile [= Faarre] and Fooffeen With the Black Camels found one another, each came from a [different] place. They walked toward each other, then they found each other. Each of them untied [his houses] [from the camels] in his place. [Each of them], the other Rendille who came out from all sides, each of them (Faarre and Fooffeen), what did he do with the ones he found: “This one is mine, this one is mine.” This is how the Rendille live now. Each one has his side.”

Each one has his side – i.e. belongs to one of the two moieties.

We will discuss this in more details further down. First we would like to present an overview over the entire seniority order of the tribe.

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## 2.2. LIST OF CLANS<sup>1</sup>

In the following list, I noted down, among other things, whether the particular segments are *iibire* (cf. 2.3.) or members of other special categories. I also made a note if traditionally a member of the particular subclan or name group holds an office, irrespective of the possibility that the holder of this office might have died recently and, therefore, there will be a vacancy until the next initiation.

The indications used are:

- *iibire* – *iibire* (cf. 2.3.)
- “K” – “K” family (cf. 2.4.)
- 2 hosoob – these families provide two hosoob (cf. 3.5.)
- *Duub* – has a holder of the *duub*, a *dabeel* (cf. 3.1.)
- *Guḍur* – the respective *Guḍur* (cf. 3.6.) belongs to one of the two groups marked in this way
- Tumaal – blacksmiths who claim to hold this position in the seniority order, even if this claim is not acknowledged by all “real” Rendille
- *Door* – *Door* is a special category of camels (cf. 3.7.)

Remarks referring to the whole subclan are noted in brackets in the column “subclan” underneath the name. Remarks concerning the individual families are noted in the right column, in the corresponding line.

The meanings of names are listed in inverted commas in the column “remarks”.

The sequence of all units is determined by the seniority order.

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<sup>1</sup> The first draft of this list of clans was made by Anders Grum, who unselfishly gave me a copy. In part I adopted this draft, in part I supplemented and reorganised it. Should the following list contain any mistakes, I am entirely responsible for them.



Clan	Subclan	Lineage (name group, family)	Name of the camels	Remarks
Dubsahay	Mirgichan (2 hosooob)	Mirgichan Eysimgaalgidele Korante Bokor	Chargit Chargit Chargit Chargit	
Dubsahay	Dokhle	Dokhle Hajufle Harrawo	Kasse Ilal ( <i>door</i> ) Kasse	
Dubsahay	Teylan (= Fur ti bal- ladan)	Gaalmag'al Arandiide Kirab Guta Hoso Orguile	Khandaf Khajer  Galido Galido	
Dubsahay	Asurua	Asurua	Chargit	They are Ariaal, perform <i>ilmugit</i> , live in Lukumae, where they are called Barger  End of page 173
Rengumo	Batarr: See	Ruuso See	Birfe	
Rengumo	Batarr: Aayicha	Aayicha Intore Arbele Sahado Adisomo Chudugle		
Rengumo	Ongoom	Chana Suber Sas Barnat Harabore Gargule		End of page 174

Clan	Subclan	Lineage (name group, family)	Name of the camels	Remarks
Matarbah	Gaalgidelle (2 hosoob)	Gaalgidelle Gaasot Eysimgaalnabal Eysimmunyate  Kaato	Attire Lilimog Attire Attire  Lilimog	(1 hosoob) (1 hosoob)    (1 hosoob)
Matarbah	Feecha (1 hosoob)	Feecha Meyte Baargul Baaltorr Bahasi	'Diinta 'Diinta 'Diinta 'Dorre 'Diinta	
Nahagan	Machan	Gaalnahagalle Machan	Haile, Lagde Haile, Lagde	(1 hosoob)
Nahagan	Durolo	Durolo Leba Maringo Omare Timo Sori Eysimlesebe Hadaa Isaakh	Banto Banto Banto Banto Banto Banto Banto Banto Banto	
Nahagan	Gaalgorowle = Gaaldaayan	Arboy Bokodow Gaaldaayan Iljalla Indirigam Eysimdebele Karraw Urich Bartigo Kichaagi Gaalmagalleh Gaadi Nabahgaan Waangana	Siicho (like Urawen) Siicho Siicho Siicho Siicho Siicho Siicho Siicho Siicho Siicho Siicho Siicho	

Clan	Subclan	Lineage (name group, family)	Name of the camels	Remarks
Nahagan	Eydimole	Munyate Mirkarkona Nyaruga Ngusa Mindaye Eydimole	Ardowa Ardowa Afyera Afyera Afyera Afyera	
Uyam	Basele	Basele Eysimsanchir Farrogaan Leede Adile Kombe	Ruuso, Surrahween Ruuso, Surrahween Ruuso, Surrahween Ruuso, Surrahween Ruuso, Surrahween Ruuso, Surrahween	
Uyam	Gaalhayle	Alyaro Khalankhalle Gaalmagar Gaalworsi Rabhayo	Afyera Boortile Kumaal Kumaal Orsama	Camel name cf. Nahagan  End of page 175

MOIETY: BELESI BERI

Clan	Subclan	Lineage (name group, family)	Name of the camels	Remarks
Saale	Nebey = Fofen	Neybichan Reiko Jilbogalle Ilkede Dammal Ilwas = Herleh Berrika Garawahle Bagaajo Buroya Eysimmirdana Eysimbasele Torruga Geleban	Herleh Borohule Gaalkitán Kunte	
Saale	Elegella	Obeyle Orkhobesle Khobes Sarrehe	Liksam	Dub  End of page 176
Saale	Gaaloroyo ( <i>iibire</i> )	Gúdurro Eysimekalo Beylewa Kakuhe Deygarr Eysimgalaja Baaro	Markera, Gaalgilim Markera, Gaalgilim Markera, Gaalgilim Markera, Gaalgilim Markera, Gaalgilim Markera, Gaalgilim	<i>Gúdur</i>
Saale	Gooborre ( <i>iibire</i> )	Inde Orre Ngoley Eysimgalalle Orahle Ilkibayang'i Nobosu Indilaalo		



Clan	Subclan	Lineage (name group, family)	Name of the camels	Remarks
Saale	Gaabanayo ( <i>iibire</i> )	Elimo Ribayo Eysimbaltor Orsorio Sahmal – Bullo Nahiro Lafte Orkholam Liito Eysimbulyar Daharo Nkuchi	Gaalgura, Gaaldayan Gaalgura, Gaaldayan Gaalgura, Gaaldayan Gaalgura, Gaaldayan Gaalgura, Gaaldayan Gaalgura, Gaaldayan Gaalgura, Gaaldayan Gaalgura, Gaaldayan Gaalguudan Gaal Eidimoot Gaal Eidimoot Gaal Eidimoot Gaalguudan Gaalguudan	<i>Dub</i>  Gaal Eidimoot  <i>Dub</i>
Saale	Urawen	Jaale Ubane Ikimirre Isandab	Ruso  Yaakhiche. Orogaal	
Saale		Silaame Adisoomele	Siicho	
Saale		Tirtire Dokhle Mirkoro Arigele	Gorfaay Galfaay Koble like Ong'eli	End of page 178
Gaaldeylan	Keele	Keele Burcha		before this <i>tumaal</i> : Igar Sugut
Gaaldeylan	Elemo	Elemo		



Clan	Subclan	Lineage (name group, family)	Name of the camels	Remarks
Tubcha	Gaallaalle ( <i>ibire</i> )	Gaallaalle Orboora Eysimharraawo Gaalfurre Bolo	Guto, Gaaldehy- daayan	Boys' circumciser
Tubcha	'Deelle	Lühmoroogo Ortooyya Gaalwaab 'Dirgel Haanu Nayyaba Fahanto Eysingaabana	Muguraan, Gaaleydimoot	Boys' circumciser

#### Outside the two moieties

Clan	Subclan	Lineage (name group, family)	Name of the camels	Remarks
O'doola		Makhalan	Artina	
		Mahabolle		
		Timbor	Hisi Birdás	
		–		
		Dafardai		
Mooga (Adibille)	Artina			
–				
Nurre	Ubar			
Keinán				
–				
Bursunna				
Gaerre				

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### 2.3. IIBIRE AND WAAKHKAMÚR

Some Rendille clans have a particularly dreaded curse at their command. These Rendille are, unlike the others, the *waakhkamúr*, called *iibire*. Physically, the *iibire* curse is localised in the saliva, *hanjuf*.

Especially old people of the entire tribe often bless someone by spitting. A frequent gesture of blessing is to spit into the opened hands of the person to be blessed, after which the latter says “*amiin*” (Amen). So generally, not only in the *iibire*, blessing – as well as destructive – forces are also localised in the saliva. Of persons with a particularly potent curse and blessing people say “*hanjufa khabta*” – they have saliva.

The *iibire* power is handed down within the clan and is never passed on to people belonging to a different clan from an *iibire* one. In addition to descent, however, a second condition must be given in order to be *iibir*: The saliva must have been passed on.

This is done in the following way:

An elder who is *iibir* spits onto *'hiir*. *'Hiir* is a piece of ivory, about as long as a hand, carved into a conical form, which the *iibire* use in their new moon ceremonies (see further below). The old man rubs the *'hiir* over the forehead of the toddler to be made *iibir* in an upward movement. A warrior's sword is brought and the elder brushes the flat of the sword first over the child's forehead, then his shoulders and heels. After that the child's lips are touched first with honey, then with a poisoned arrow (cf. *hosoob*, 3.5.). In this context, people like to talk of *lahaw*, children's arrows, which are used to shoot lizards. But in fact they are *baldo*, poisoned hunting arrows for adults. Then the elder spits into the child's mouth and says: *Ideey ateeh!* Become like me! This is how the children get *hanjuf* = saliva. This spitting into the mouth is also called sucking the tongue: *harrab lanuugiche*.

What is interesting is which clans the old men called to “suck the tongue” belong to.

For a child of Nebey it is a man of Gaalorra.

For a child of Goob Orre it is a man of Gaalorra.

For a child of Gaalorra it is a man of Nebey or Goob Orre.

For a child of Tubcha-Gaal'deydaayan it is a man of

'Dubsahay-Kullali Oraat.

For a child of Dubsahay-Kullali Oraat it is a man of Tubcha-Gaal'deydaayan or Nahagan-Machaan.

For a child of Nahagan-Machaan it is a man of Dubsahay-Kullali Oraat.

The tongues of children of one of the other *iibire* subclans of Saale (see 2.2.) or of Rengumo are sucked by a man of their own clan, but not their father. So the following groupings of *iibire* emerge through this mutual tongue sucking:

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Nebey ↔ Gaalorra ↔ Goob Orre

and

Tubcha ↔ Gaal'deydaayan ↔ Dubsahay Kullali Oraat



Nahagan-Machaan

### THE STICKS

Most important insignia of the *iibire* are sticks: *ulohi iibire*. These are, like the *gumoyyo* (cf. 5.6.) taken from the trees *kulum* and *ejer* and are, tied to a bundle, stored at the back wall of the house. The Gaalorra subclan of Gaal'deylan stores this bundle in front of the cow hides (*niibo*) lining the back wall of the house for everyone to see, all other *iibire* put them behind the lining. The procuring of these sticks is done without great ceremony. Every *iibire* may cut the sticks for himself at any time, for the first time on the occasion of his marriage. A little milk is spilled and prayers are said. *Iibire* sticks are also called *ulohi haru*. But there is no direct link to the *haru* leaves from the tree of the same name (cedar, cf. 4.11.) which give off an aromatic smell when burnt. The mental connection to the *haru* leaves only consists in both being significant for the prayer.

*Iibire* sticks are *ulohi weysi*, prayer sticks. They embody a strong prayer, i.e. a prayer effective by itself.

The *iibire* sticks are kept in their bundle for years. They are not used for anything. The significance lies in their presence alone.

If an *iibir* man marries, whether for the first time or a second wife, he cuts sticks for the new house, no matter whether the woman comes from an *iibire* clan or not. A Gaalorra man, however, cannot carry the bundle of sticks into the new house until he added an *iibire* stick from a house of the Nebey clan. He takes such a stick for himself without asking because it would never be refused him. The man from Nebey will go and cut himself a new stick to recomplete the bundle. Vice versa, he will get himself a stick from a house of Gaalorra in the same way for his own marriage.

Should these sticks get lost somehow – in a fire, for instance, or stolen by enemies – new ones can be cut without it being considered a big misfortune. But under no circumstances should a non-*iibire*, a *waakhkamúr*, have the audacity to cut such sticks. There is a deadly curse on that behaviour. And according to Eysimmirdaana from Nebey, this is how it happened:

*Ren'dille goorat usu tuumman ulo a khabe on, koloo ulo a khabe on, goorat ulo a khabe. 'Kaaleya! Uloha ankhar a kachibno!' liidah. 'Deerka ulo lasookhaate, ebba ðeerka koloo diiche. 'Koloo kalday ðeerka diinno!' liidah. 'Diicha!' liidah. Ren'dillehi addan dak-khan diiche. Nebeye ðeerka ulo khabatte, ichoow Dubsahay, Kullali oraat, goob Wambile, ichoow Gaalorra. Koottela ðeerka Gaal'deylan*

*adiinna inidah. 'Deerka Rendillehi addan goya kachibe. 'Deerka saggaase ulo iwaayte.*

“In the past all the Rendille had sticks, once they just had sticks, they used to have sticks. ‘Come on! Let us all drop these sticks in the crater!’ it was said. Then the sticks were brought, everyone was supposed to drop them at the same time. ‘All at once we want to let go’ it was said. ‘Drop it!’ it was said. All the other Rendille let go of their sticks. Nebey [still] held sticks [in their hands] and Dubsahay, Kullali Oraat, [i.e.] the Wambile subclan, and Gaalorra. For before we had told Gaal’deylan [here = Gaalorra] ‘Don’t let go!’ Then all the Rendille had thrown [their sticks] in. Well, that is how they lost their sticks.”

Question: Why did you betray the other Rendille like this?

Eysimmirdaana: *Eneyet dakkhan ibirrenye matakkiiska sohta. Sag-goo iche kalday ikahookhto doonta. Khara iche isleemaranta.*

All the people were *iibire* and had it their own way. They [i.e. Nebey etc.] wanted a way how they alone could mount [i.e. dominate] [all the other Rendille]. They wanted each other’s cleverness [i.e. they wanted to see who of them was cleverer].

Question: Why did they let Wambile in on it? [Given the rivalry between Nebey and Wambile, it seems amazing that the latter should have been let in on the conspiracy, cf. 2.6.]

Eysimmirdaana: *A kase.* – They knew it [by themselves].

After that, all ex-*iibire* were cursed, in case they should cut new sticks for themselves.

Eysimmirdaana: *Etiyye ulohoo addan soogooste meel on irte.*

He who cut himself other sticks only went to one place [= died].

As another reason why today’s *iibire* clans treated today’s *waakhkamúr* clans so badly, Eysimmirdaana names the fact that only *waakhkamúr* can be selected for the age-set offices of *dablakabiire* and *arablagate*, which are fraught with bad luck. It is a kind of human sacrifice without a killing. The victims only go insane [cf. 4.5. to 4.11.].

*Iibire ma lakahaagsati. Kaaleya, dooða gaaso a bujinno! 'Dee huggunki inno yomboka kasossohanni, a yowanni. 'Uloha deerka dood tuumman maanti goorat lasoogoste; Fooffeen Gaaldaayan ulo sogooste, iche tuumman isyeyte ulo sogoosatte.*

*Saakta tossatte, 'dooða idoh nidaahe?' tidah. Chi 'iche tuumman ulo sookhaatatte, saggi inno intassim ihaagsanni mele!*

With *iibire* it [the custom] cannot be done. Come on, let us separate a few of these people! Then let us look after the custom which we will follow after that [literally: with which we will go after that]. These sticks now, before

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[one day] they were cut by all the people [for themselves]; Fooffeen With The Black Camels had cut himself sticks, they all [i.e. all the other Rendille] looked at each other [and] cut sticks for themselves. On the next day [meaning: sometime later], they [Fooffeen, Gaalorra, etc.] gathered, said ‘how can we deal with these people? They all have got sticks for themselves, there is no way how we can do the custom.’

More about these customs of sacrifice in a more appropriate section (see 4.5. and following).

Another man of Nebey, Eysimbaaselle, senior, explained the necessity of some Rendille having to be done out of their [deadly effective] *iibire* power in the following manner: “In the beginning all the Rendille were *iibire*. They were about to wipe out each other [*ismassissa* = to end each other]. Then they tied their sticks together and said, ‘let us throw them into this crater!’ ...” In this version of the story, the future *iibire* also deceive the future *waakhkamúr* by breaking this agreement and not dropping their sticks.

To the question of why the *waakhkamúr* do not have a prayer (that is as effective as that of the *iibire*) – *Waakhkamúr, a idoh weysi ma khabto?* – the answer can be

*ulo raahe* – it followed the sticks.

Non-*iibire* are furthermore needed to perform camel sacrifices (*ori la-goorraho*) as the camels used for that purpose are always from *waakhkamúr* clans. So it is mainly unpleasant tasks the *waakhkamúr* are indispensable for.

They do not, however, have any say in these rituals because Nebey and Wambile (Dubsahay) alone decide when and where such a sacrifice will take place (cf. 5.4.).

In Eysimmirdaana’s view, Fooffeen (Nebey) and Faarre (Wambile) had been from the very beginning as God had let the custom (*húgum*) come out with them. They only did not know how to carry out these customs because they lacked the non-*iibire* for it.

Eysimmirdaana: *Saggi iche intassim<sup>2</sup> ihaagsatti, iche waayte.*

They did not know [literally: they missed] how to make the custom.

Question: But why did they want to ‘make’ *ḍablakabiire* etc.?

Eysimmirdaana: *Haaggiis ma garanni, daba. Goorat maanti lasoo-bahe, wihis ma garanni. Uus lasoobahe, iche iskuurrowte, ‘húgum saggoh ihaagsanni’ iche isworsatte, ‘saggoh iyeello; iibire tuumman.*

“We don’t know what it is good for, this fire [by which a human is made a *ḍablakabiire*, see 4.5. and 4.7.]. Earlier, in the beginning, we know nothing of it. Since they have come out [since the beginning of the world], since they

<sup>2</sup> *Intasim* here is used synonymously with *huggum* = “custom”. The word also frequently refers to a counter-spell sewed into a little leather pouch, a protective medicine which can be bought from the Samburu’s *loibonok* (diviner priests).

have come together<sup>3</sup>, they asked each other ‘How can we carry out the custom, how can we do it; all [these people] are *iibire*.’

#### *NEW MOON CEREMONY OF THE IIBIRE*<sup>4</sup>

On the evening of the first sighting of the new moon, all the *iibire* perform a domestic ceremony in which elders, boys and women, but not the girls, take part.

*Haru* (cedar leaves) is thrown onto the fire, where it burns giving off an aromatic scent. Everybody holds their open hands into the *haru* smoke and then touches their forehead, again the smoke, then their breast.

After that, the same is repeated with the *'hiir*, the conical piece of ivory (cf. 5.1.): first into the smoke, then on the forehead, again into the smoke, finally on the breast, with the tip pointing upwards.

This action is called “*a haruusta*” – “they take *haru*, they *haruise* themselves”.

In Gaalorra I observed that afterwards, some embers were taken from the hearth fire (which now also contained *haru*) and laid on the ground in front of the door of the hut; then the milking container was put over it by the elders in order to *haruise* it. All this is also, with the same perfection, already done by small boys.

To better be able to imagine this whole ceremony we have to keep in mind that the doors to all Rendille houses point west, where the new moon can first be seen and shortly afterwards sets. All this takes place in the face of the moon, so to speak. And to answer the ignorant observer’s question, what this was all about, it is sufficient to point one’s finger out the always open door:

“*haye delatte* – the month was born.”

On the next morning, the women and girls gather to dance to the song *Emeylaalo* (also called *geeyi Waakh* – song of God). This happens in the space between the *naabo* and the first house of the seniority order.

#### *THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE IIBIRE ON CLANS*

So far we have, for the sake of simplicity, been talking of *iibire* clans. But on a closer look we see that no clan consists solely of *iibire*. In all the cases they are in fact *iibire* subclans forming a clan together with *waakhkamúr* subclans.

To get a better overview, let us look once more at the list of clans in a concise form. For every clan, I listed the *iibire* subclans by name and added the number of *waakhkamúr* subclans. I also noted if the respective *iibire* have “K” status (cf. 2.4.). The numbers in front of the names refer to the rank in the clan’s seniority order.

<sup>3</sup> Up to this point the literal translation is: “Its good we don’t know, this fire. Earlier [in the day], when it was come out, they came together ...”

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Spencer, 1973, p. 62.

## MOIETY: BELESSI BAHAY

	Clan	Subclan
I.	Dubsahay	1. Wambile (Faarre) + 6 <i>waakhkamúr</i> subclans
II.	Matarbah	2 <i>waakhkamúr</i> subclans
III.	Rengumo	2. See 3. Aayicha "K" + 1 <i>waakhkamúr</i> subclan (1. Ongoom)
IV.	Nahagan	1. Machaan + 2 <i>waakhkamúr</i> subclans, one of which is an important component of the "K" group (see 2.4.)
V.	Uyam	2 <i>waakhkamúr</i> subclans

## MOIETY: BELESSI BERI

	Clan	Subclan
I.	Saale <sup>5</sup>	1. Nebey 3. Gaalooroyyo 4. Goob Orre 5. Goobanay 6. Gaabaneyyo + 1 <i>waakhkamúr</i> subclan (2. Elegela)
II.	Urowween	3. Adisoomole "K" + 3 <i>waakhkamúr</i> subclans
III.	Gaaldeylan	3. Gaalorra + 3 <i>waakhkamúr</i> subclans
IV.	Tubcha	1. Gaallaalle + 1 <i>waakhkamúr</i> subclan

According to this count, there are 17 subclans in each of the two moieties. Of the 17 subclans of Belessi Bahay, 4 are *iibire*, in Belessi Beri there are 8. So the divergence is not big enough to justify talking of a *waakhkamúr* Belessi and an *iibire* Belessi.

The distribution of *iibire* and *waakhkamúr* on clans is also even. There are only 2 clans (both rather small) consisting solely of *waakhkamúr*, and none in which everybody is *iibire*. The rest of the clans are mixed. There are no

<sup>5</sup> Some of the subclans of Saale are very big and have a number of characteristics of independent clans. So we will from now on occasionally also be talking of the "clan" of Nebey etc.

mixed subclans, however. *Iibir*-ity, therefore, is a characteristic of the custom (*húgum*) of a subclan, not of a smaller and not of a larger unit.

Of the two chief components of the “K” group (the only two components of the “K” group having subclan status and practicing divination), Adiso-mole (Urowween) and Gaalgorowle (Nahagan), the former is *iibir*, the latter *waakhkamúr*.

In the seniority orders of the clans Dubsahay and Nahagan we find *iibire* in the first positions and apart from that only *waakhkamúr*, suggesting a connection between *iibire* power and a high seniority status. (Incidentally, in Aryaal groups we can observe the phenomenon that Rendille emigrants coming from *iibire* groups hold the higher positions in the settlement pattern, before *waakhkamúr*.) But in other cases *waakhkamúr* subclans occupy a higher seniority position than the *iibire* of their clans. In Gaaldeylan, the *iibire* subclan Gaalorra, large in number and ritually powerful, is only third in position, subordinate to two very small *waakhkamúr* subclans. In Saale, which consists almost entirely of *iibire*, the only *waakhkamúr* (sub)clan Elgela holds the second position in the settlement order.

As we can see, the difference between *iibire* and *waakhkamúr* seems to cut across all the other differentiations we can make for Rendille society. This makes it difficult to arrive at any explanatory statements by correlation.

So there are *iibire* and *waakhkamúr* in high positions and in low ones, there are rich and poor people here and there, and there is intermarriage to the full extent between both categories. Therefore, we cannot refer to the *waakhkamúr* as an oppressed class or even caste.

Where the *waakhkamúr* indeed are at a disadvantage, it happens in a very subtle way. No less important than an actually pronounced curse seems to be the possibility of it being pronounced: a Damocles’ sword. The fact that, every 14 years, the *waakhkamúr* lose two young men who are forced into the inauspicious age-set offices of *arablagate* and *’dablakabiire* probably does not inflict too much damage on their group. Much more important seems to be the latent threat emanating from each single *waakhkamúr* knowing that his son could be selected for one of these offices next time, particularly if he makes himself unpopular in Dubsahay.

#### *CURSE ANIMALS AND OTHER CURSE AGENTS*

*Iibire* have a potent curse which is deadly in some way – under the prerequisites we will hear about in the excursus on the curse and its mode of operation (cf. excursus IV). It is assumed that a person who was cursed by an *iibir* will die from something or even without any obvious reason. There are plenty of stories about sudden unexpected deaths as a consequence of cursing.

In spite of this general effectiveness, each *iibire* clan is connected with some special means of killing. The victims of the Wambile curse, for in-

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stance, die of *nabhaaro*<sup>6</sup>, an illness which makes patches of skin turn white. But other causes of death are also possible.

“*Iibir dakkhan waha dakkhan a khaba, toro wihi’ iche weyti khabaan a nabhaaro.*” (Baroowwa)

“All *iibire* have all this [i.e. all the means of killing listed in the following], but what they [Wambile] especially have is *nabhaaro*.”

The preferred means of killing of Saale is the rhino. “*Saale ichoow wejel a isleesoobaheen* – Saale and the rhino came into being together [literally: came out together].”<sup>7</sup>

Gaalorra in Gaaldeylan has the horse. The Rendille know horses mainly as a crushing offensive weapon of the Gabbra<sup>8</sup>. Only since they were disarmed by the British do the Gabbra carry out their raids on foot, too. A Rendille settlement which starts a fight with Gaalorra runs the risk of falling victim to the next Gabbra attack.

Just as these curse objects can be used by the *iibire* as a means of killing, the *iibire* can also protect themselves and others from these curse objects. They have power over the respective object.

So Wambile can also heal the *nabhaaro* disease through its blessing.

Saale can drive away rhinos by blowing through their cupped hand. (Saale people are not at all immune to the rhino, however: one can curse the other so that the cursed one is in danger of being killed by the rhino. Whether this actually happens depends on who of the two has more power. (Cf. excursus IV).

Gaalorra can effectively pray against Gabbra attacks and hurl their curse (a handful of dirt) at the Gabbra in battle.

I will discuss this topic in more detail in the sections on the individual clans.

For the sake of completeness, these are the means of killing of all the *iibire* groups:

Wambile (Dubsahay)	<i>nabhaaro</i> (skin disease)
Rengumo	<i>rafle</i> – puff adder
	<i>ebeesayyo</i> – (other type of) snake
	<i>bahassi</i> – lion

<sup>6</sup> Note from 2010: *Nabhaar* is a fungus disease. The plural *nabhaaro* refers to different kinds of it. *Nabhaar* is bothersome and ugly, but not actually fatal.

<sup>7</sup> Spencer, 1973, p. 64, calls this relation “totemic”. But, at least in the stricter sense of the word, it is not. In Rendille perception, it is not a relation of descent or kinship, no more than it is between Wambile and the skin disease.

<sup>8</sup> Note from 2010: Here, primarily the Boran are meant, whom the Rendille conflate with the Gabbra under the term Booraanto.

Macchaan (Nahagan)	According to Spencer: “Lions and general bodily illnesses” <sup>9</sup> ; according to my information an unspecific curse.
Saale	<i>wejel</i> – rhino
Adisoomale “K” (Urowween)	unspecific
Gaalorra (Gaaldeylan)	<i>Farad</i> – horse, also transferred to cars and planes. People without widened holes in the earlobes, i.e. <i>doodi dafareet</i> = “people with clothes”: Somali, Boran, Gabbra, foreigners in general.
’Deelle (Tubcha-Gaaldeydaayan)	<i>arab</i> – elephant

*Waakhkamir* are also connected to curse objects, although their curse is generally dreaded less than that of *iibire* (an exception might be Uyam).

Dubsahay Kullali daheet (i.e. all of Dubsahay except for Wambile subclan persons)	<i>illeemarcho</i> – a disease which makes the affected continually walk in circles the and miss their aim.
Uyam	<i>matah</i> – head. Cause and heal diseases of the head by cursing or blessing. “Blow the head off”.
Tubchati Gaal Eydinot (i.e. ’Deelle)	Food. (All the Rendille can curse the food, but particularly Deele.)

This association of curse objects with certain subclans is so general that it provides fabric for jokes.

So, for instance, Baaroorwa jokingly claimed that the dung beetle was the curse animal of the family of my interpreter Sooba. If you picked a fight with them, he said, you had to be prepared for all the scarabs in the area to unite and roll dung balls into your house until it was uninhabitable.

Other groups were said to have connections to scorpions – and to rabbits.

<sup>9</sup> Spencer, 1973, p. 64.

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## 2.4. THE “K” GROUP

### 2.4.1. THE NAME

The name of this group of persons is a taboo word taken by everyone called by it, be he a member of this group or not, as a mortal insult. Even among non-“K” people it is not advisable to use the word in any context. It is considered indecent, a bad word, like referring to genitals by their names. The word is “Kaassigela”. This will be the only time I write the name out in full. Out of respect for people who provided me with valuable information and who I do not have any cause to offend I shrink from using the word again and again in every line. According to Rendille standards it is just about reprehensible enough to even write about the subject matter.

My brother Baarowwa, when asked by me once whether a certain family was “K...”, reacted by putting his hands over his mouth and telling me that I must never again use this word. In order to veil the issue, I began to use the phrase “K family” when talking to my interpreter. (Which is how I will be paraphrasing the concept from now on.) Baarowwa enjoyed this word so much that once in a while he would jokingly point to one of the numerous guests who constantly sat around in my hut and say (of course wrongly) that he was a “K family”. That reminded me of the coy delight taken in erotic topics in some milieus. The stronger the taboo, the more fascinating the violation.

I did not find any Rendille who could give me an etymology of the K word. It has no meaning other than the group of persons it names. And that is indecent enough.

“K... *sam dakhan khabo idi ehel*” – “K... with a white nose like a donkey.” Although I have never seen a “K” man with a white nose, the sentence above is the worst insult a Rendille can possibly imagine. They can much easier bring themselves to say something sexually rude.

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### 2.4.2. COMPOSITION OF THE “K” GROUP – MARRIAGE CONSTRAINT

This group includes the entire subclan of Adisoomela (Urowween) and the biggest part of the Gaalgorowle subclan (Nahagan). Of the eight lineages in Gaalgorowle known to me, it is the six lineages ranking lower in the seniority order which belong to this category.

Gaalgorowle: Gaaldaayan  
Gaalмагаalleh  
Indomele “K”  
Waangana “K”  
Eydimoole “K”  
Busaale “K”  
Nabahgaan “K”  
Gaalgorowle “K”

The “K” group is segregated from the remaining Rendille by a strict marriage barrier. In this point it is comparable to the blacksmiths (*tumaal*). The consequence is that Gaalgorowle chiefly marry girls from Adisoomele, and vice versa. This breaks an important marriage rule of the other Rendille, namely that a man is not allowed to marry either into his mother’s or into his father’s clan but only into the clan of his grandfather’s mother, FaFaMo.<sup>10</sup> The “K” group, on the other hand, is forced by the marriage constraint “to mate among each other like the smallstock in the enclosure”.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, Adisoomele as well as Gaalgorowle have the camel name Siicho which – even in Ogoom’s (Adisoomele) opinion – suggests a common origin of the two groups. If you accept this theory it means, for a Rendille, that the “K” people marry “their sisters”, i.e. incest.

Apart from the two larger groups mentioned above, a few smaller family groups from other clans belong to the “K” people.

They are:

Clan	Subclan	Family
Dubsahay	Guddeere	Sanchiir
Rengumo	Aayicha	Intoore
Túbcha	’Deelle	Kirrima

Some people think that these people had once married a “K” girl, had been expelled from their clans and now live with their “K” brothers-in-law.

Others, however, hold the view that this is hardly possible as anyone who marries a “K” girl will die after a few weeks or months.

#### 2.4.3. SEXUAL CONSTRAINT

The isolation of the “K” people is not limited to marriage but also extends to premarital concubinage and adultery.

Adultery, of course, is not equally popular with all the persons affected as it is. But, like in other societies, this is more a matter of conflicting interests between husband and lover than a question of principle. The general attitude to this problem is not a moral, but a sporting one. “*Inno tuumman a mejel* – we’re all men, after all”. (See also 1.1.)

This attitude towards adultery entails that children conceived in adultery are had and raised as a matter of course. (Unless it is known that the father is an uncircumcised boy.) The question of legitimacy does not even arise, biological paternity seems to be secondary. Like widows, women whose men

<sup>10</sup> This latter option is even a preferred choice of partner. This way, one marries *lafa aacchi*, the grandfather’s bones (cf. excursus I, 0.6.6.).

<sup>11</sup> Similarly malicious remarks circulate about the O’doola clan, the marriage rules of which (clan endogamy) are incomprehensible to the other Rendille.

are absent for longer stretches of time continue to have children and this way multiply their husband's name (cf. 1.1.).

But not if the lover was a "K" man, which is not likely to happen due to the consequences this would have. As far as I know, this case exists only in theory. A child of such a union would be aborted. Considering the usual method of abortion – kneeling on the pregnant woman's abdomen – this probably effectively deters women from entering into such a relationship.

Analogous to that – in the Rendille's own words, too: "exactly like with humans" – a camel bull belonging to a "K" man will never be used to cover the she-camel of a non-"K" person, although the mating of camels is otherwise subject to only few restrictions.<sup>12</sup>

Adisoomele and Intoore are "K" and *iibire* simultaneously. This explains the phrase of there being "*iibireti katiti suuje khabto – iibire* with bad piss." "Bad piss" is a derogatory expression for the sperm of "K" people. (Normally, sperm is called *bicchehi mejel*: men's water).<sup>13</sup>

This "bad piss", now, is believed to have the effect that children conceived extramaritally by "K" men with non-"K" women kill other children. The killing is not done by indirect violence, however, but by accidents and the like. So these children are unpropitious, *bidir*.

(This is paralleled by the idea that children conceived in the same way by blacksmiths bring bad luck to the herds.)

Unlike all other traits, being "K" is largely passed on in the female line!

If a "K" man has a non-"K" mother and in his turn marries a non-"K" girl, his children are non-"K". By twice marrying non-"K" women, "K" is "cast out" (*a lakabahcha*).

One example of this is the family of Chief Laago Ogoom, of whom we will hear more in this chapter.

One of Laago's wives is from Nahagan, and a son from this union married a girl from Gaabanayyo; his children will be non-"K".

Marriages of this kind are very rare indeed, though. Laago Ogoom, a respected and powerful man, probably is an exception.

A certain mutual contempt of "K" and non-"K" is expressed in the behaviour towards warriors who made a girl pregnant. As we have seen, a pregnant girl is forced to have an abortion. If the attempts to abort the embryo are not successful right away, which, given the method, probably is the rule, the

<sup>12</sup> A camel bull is only kept away from his mother, but not from his daughters.

Everybody can borrow it, without any return service, to cover his she-camels. The *maal* system of borrowing female camels (see Spencer, 1973, p. 37-40), however, also exists between "K" and non-"K".

<sup>13</sup> Spencer obviously thoroughly misunderstands a few sayings about the "K" group. He thinks, "bad 'iipire'" refers to people with a curse of a particular kind: a "rather vicious and easily provoked curse". "Bad", however, these people are only because of their "K" status. No difference is made between "good" and "bad" *iibire* curses.

pregnant girl calls the embryo by its father’s name in order to persuade it to come out. So the biological father becomes known. Such fathers, now, are dealt with in the following manner:

1. If a non-“K” made a non-“K” girl pregnant, no other warrior will from then on touch leftovers of his food, use his headrest or let him use his own headrest.
2. If a non-“K” made a “K” girl pregnant, nothing at all will happen. The fact will be overlooked by other non-“K”. He has burdened himself with guilt.
3. If a “K” made a “K” girl pregnant, other “K” will apply the avoidances described under number 1.
4. If a “K” made a non-“K” girl pregnant, this has no consequences on the part of other “K” (analogous to case no. 2.).

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In table form:

Warrior gets	girl pregnant	Avoidance?
non-“K”	non-“K”	yes
non-“K”	“K”	no
“K”	“K”	yes
“K”	non-“K”	no

or:

$\text{man}_{(+K, -K)} = \text{girl}(+K, -K) \rightarrow + \text{avoidance}$   
 which implies:  
 $\text{man}_{(+K, -K)} \neq \text{girl}(+K, -K) \rightarrow - \text{avoidance}$

Another biological idea is connected with the marriage rules of “K”. The majority of “K” are, as we will see, diviners. “*Moro jid goya kijirta* – divining is in the flesh”. It is furthermore – independently of which means it employs (stone casting, haruspektion) – an inherent trait. If, then, father and mother come from diviner clans (like Adisoomeme and Gaalgorowle), the child is expected to be particularly gifted as a diviner.

2.4.4. ATTITUDE TOWARDS “K”

The official version you get if you ask an elder you don’t know very well about “K” – which can obviously only be done by the most cautious paraphrasing – is that they are perfectly normal people, Rendille just like everybody else. This information, however, aims at a veiling of facts – with a stranger, you should only talk about “good things”, not about “bad things”, particularly if there is a risk that this stranger is writing a book.

If you are more intimate with the person you ask, you learn that “K” are “bad” (*a suuj*). This being “bad”, however, should not be interpreted in a moral sense.

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I was not successful in trying to elicit any accusations from my informants, in which respect the “K” people were behaving in the wrong way. They are neither more avaricious nor less trustworthy than other Rendille with which they carry out the usual livestock transactions. Their “badness” is embodied in themselves and does not need to manifest itself in their actions. The rules of conduct towards them are cited as the only evidence: You must not marry them, you must not give them your daughter for a wife; – is that not sufficient proof of their “badness”?<sup>14</sup>

#### 2.4.5. DIVINATION

The fact that their two main groups, Adisoomle and Gaalgorowle, are diviners might shed some light on the isolated position of the “K” family. The former have inspired dreams, the latter practice astrology.

Again, a comparison with the blacksmiths (*tumaal*) seems to present itself. Both are involuntarily endogamous occupational castes.

The isolation seems to be linked to a fear of their differentness, their special skills and their power. Particularly in past times, I was told, the other Rendille had been afraid of them because of their divining.<sup>15</sup> “They have a

<sup>14</sup> So these views form a self-contained system with built-in falsification barrier. Since the badness of the “K” people is taken essentialist (they “are” bad, independently of their behaviour), a “K” man can do whatever he likes; never will his behaviour cause others to change their opinion. In this respect, it might be compared with the recent European anti-Semitism. If the apodictic assumption of “the” Jew “as such” possessing certain negative features enters into a system of thought, then all contradictory observations would be interpreted as “mere outward behaviour” which only serves to veil his “real nature”. The system is, therefore, formally falsification-proof. Every intended empirical refutation is interpreted in conformity with the system. Similar processes are known from the witch-hunts. A “witch” is a “witch”, no matter what she does.

In every other respect, a comparison between the attitude towards “K” people and anti-Semitism would be exaggerated; there have never been pogroms among the Rendille. Also, the negative assessment of “K” hardly has any moralising component. Rather, it is a kind of ritual impurity like we will hear about in other contexts later.

<sup>15</sup> This explanation for their special status seems to me the most plausible one. Two other explanations seem to be post-hoc attempts at justification which might even have been told to children and foreigners and spread this way. The English-speaking informant quoted in the text said: “There was a time when there was a serious infectious disease. Many people were killed. K... wanted to get married quickly. That’s why they just exchanged girls with each other.” – And why should they have retained this method of choosing their partners? Anders Grum (who took a critical point of view himself in this respect) told me a story according to which the “K” families had once been very rich and had refused to help their suffering fellow tribespeople during a severe drought. For that reason they had been cast out. What seems to be correct is that there once were extremely rich “K” people for whom divining was a profitable business. In its core, however, the story is believed to be untrue by my informants. There had been “K” since the origin of the world, they said, ever since the mythical primordial times.

tactics to say things indirectly and to influence people” an English-speaking informant told me. “In the past their influence was very great, but now it has declined. They just pray for barren women.” Today, however, their “praying for barren women” is not their only activity, either: their predictions are much discussed, particularly with regard to rain and enemy raids: two classes of information which influence decisions on migration.

At this point we want to conclude our overview and go into more detail using accounts in the original language.

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#### 2.4.6. LAAGO OGOOM – PERSONAL DETAILS

The Rendille call the year of 1944 *Gumaaddi Andeeri lakhaate* the Friday year in which Andeeri was taken away. Until 1944, Andeeri from Rengumo was chief of the Rendille, appointed by the colonial administration, but then he took sides with people who refused to pay camels as GPT (Gradual Person Tax). The British unseated him from his office and put him in prison for three years. (This is the Rendille version of the incident; I did not question any British about the matter.)

In his place, Laago Ogoom was appointed. This happened against the will of the Rendille. Ogoom is said to have loyally followed the instructions of the British, which probably did not advance his good reputation with his fellow tribespeople as the relationship between the Rendille and the colonial administration was rather ambivalent: On the one hand it was said that the British *dooð khardabte* – “walked all over people” because they confiscated a lot of livestock grazing in the forest reserves established by the British. In the eyes of many Rendille, the British only set up these reserves to be able to acquire livestock. The Rendille were also not exactly happy about the colonial administration taking livestock the Rendille had stolen from neighbouring tribes away from them. On the other hand it was, naturally, noted on the plus side when the same happened to neighbouring tribes and the colonial administration intervened to return stolen livestock to them. After the colonial administration had departed, this positive aspect lingered in their memories longer and today, as the Rendille are pressed hard by neighbours owning illegal rifles, they sing the Englishmen’s praise because the English had not shied away from pursuing livestock raiders armed with rifles, the Rendille say, while the present police forces are reputed to only chase thieves carrying spears (i.e. Samburu and Rendille) because an enemy armed with rifles seems to them too dangerous (there are, however, *audiatur et altera pars*, occasional counterexamples).

But at the time when Laago Ogoom became chief, there was yet no glorifying the English and it is not hard to imagine that Laago was caught between two stools.

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In 1950, Ogoom’s reputation improved. After the *gu* rains, large parts of the Rendille (Gaaldeylan, Gaabanayyo, Urowween) settled near Boholo not

far from Wanguure, north of Marsabit. There, one day, four Boran suspected of being spies were caught by Rendille elders and warriors. One of them had a rifle. There was no fight because the Boran tried to appease the Rendille and claimed not to have come with hostile intentions. Ogoom, however, did not waste much time listening to them but stabbed the one carrying the gun to death with his spear. This was met with general approval. Ogoom passed through the usual ritual stages of a killer and received the *ayti magah*, the camel mare of the name, the reward for killers, from his mother's brother. (All this implies that he must have castrated the dead body.) He is also said to have received a reward from the colonial administration. After the departure of the British, Laago Ogoom continued his political career as an elected member of the City Council.

#### 2.4.7. ORIGIN OF ADISOOMELE

The following conversation was about clan origin myths in general. The fact that the family of Ogoom, the boy who came out of the hole in the ground mentioned in this tale, is part of the "K" group I did not realise until later. Worguut Taarween from Gaalorra is the one talking:

*Laago a garatta?*

Do you know Lago?

*Chief Laago, Ogoom?*

(Laago Ogoom was appointed chief by the British colonial administration, today he is an elected member of the City Council.)

*Goobicho harra goya kasoobahe. Geeyoo dollo layadehe yaakhaan.*

Their family appeared from the inside of the earth. They used to eat a bush called dollo.

(*Dollo* is a small thorn plant (*Euphorbia* sp.) which is chopped up and eaten by warriors. It is said to give strength, sexual prowess and wildness, as manifested in the shaking, for instance (cf. 1.3.5).)

*Geeyane yaakhe, a moro.*

He ate that bush and is a diviner.

*Saahka yeele sooeyatte. Chirri yele sooeyatteka, inankoo 'minkiin adi khassa dee jid ikeen', iyidah. Yeele isabteen, ulla ibe kijira. Mees-sala mehe layadehya: Algaas, inti u' kijire.*

One day, boys who were hunting, came [literally: boys hunted thither]. When the boys came there on their hunt, he, the boy Ogoom, said to one boy: 'Your house will slaughter one head of smallstock, bring me meat then!' [So] the boys met, and he lived in the wilderness. And that is the name of the place where he lived: Algas.

*Lum on kasoobaha, yeele leeysata. Chi'yeele goob iratteka, ulla nokhta geey irta.*

He used to come out of a hole to hunt with the boys. When the boys went home, he also returned [and] went to [his] tree.

*Inankoo iche isleedesseen. Kolooraat iche isleedelatte. Lunkaka saggi us ibaabe ma garanni. Lunka igelo, mandaankiissa eheet.*

A boy, they were born together [i.e. he had a brother]. In the beginning they were born together. How he had got lost at that hole we don't know. He who lived in the hole [literally: went into the hole] was his twin.

*Kan deerka il on kijira. Lunkoo gele. Geeya hiyyasihiis nuuge chi' nucchul yahe.*

And that is right inside the earth. He went into the hole. This tree, he sucked its roots when he was little.

(Question: *Dollo?* (see above, name of the "tree"))

Taarween: *Aa.*

Yes.

*Saahka Goobicho soogure ki goorat kaguure.*

One day their settlement group (that of the hunting boys), which had before moved away, moved there.

*Anna saggi goorat us ibaabe ma gardi. Saggoo goorat us ibaabe inti u' gele ma garanni.*

And I don't know how he had got lost before. How he had got lost before, [before] he slipped in here, we don't know.

*Saahka yeele sooeysatte. Yeele eysataane, ulla yeele iyamiite yeele leeysata. Chi'yeele goobicho iratte, ulla nokhta, saggi minkiiis taba.*

One day the boys came hunting. The boys hunted, and he came to the boys [and] hunted with the boys. When they went home, he also returned and went in the direction of his house [i.e. the hole where he lived].

*Harrata yaham. Toro a enenyet.*

He ate this earth. And still he is human.<sup>16</sup>

*Saahka inam iyeyye: 'kaale, goobenyo a iranni!'*

One day one boy said to him: 'Come on, let's go to our [exclusive] settlement!'

Question: *Inanki goorat usu 'jid ikeen' iyidahya?*

The boy whom he had told before 'bring me meat'?

*Aa.*

Yes.

*'Minkenyo kootte adi khasse. Kaale, a iranni! Minkenyoaka jid a soonumhe.'*

Our house has slaughtered a head of smallstock today. Come, let's go! In our house we want to eat meat.

<sup>16</sup> A little boy of my settlement group who had fallen in love with my car sometimes licked the dust of the rims. For that he was once beaten roughly by an elder. The reason for that, I was told, was that it would make his breast swell up which seems to me to be factually incorrect. In any case eating earth seems to be a horror for Rendille. The only mineralic foodstuff they consume is soda (*magaad*, Swahili: *magadi*), which they take with their chewing tobacco, and occasionally some salt (*chimbi*, Swahili: *chumvi*) in their maize porridge.

(Boy Ogoom:) *'Nyaam! Anna meessey irda. Iro, deerka jid ikeen!'*  
 'Go on! I am also going to my place. Go, then bring me meat!'

*Yimiyye, jid sookhaate, dafar sogessate, ileeyimiy.*

He came, brought meat, had put it in his cloth, he came with it.

*Wihi u' garti dakkhan deerka iyeyye, 'ambala kisoochecheeka, geeddi an jida aham. Alla walah iwowworso'. Jid on gosta, 'wahaas a idaas ichoow idaas!' Yadeehe, imora. Jid on goosta, imora.*

Everything he knew he told then, 'I will tell you [*iterative*] while I eat this meat. And you also, ask me something [*iterative form of "ask"*: interrogate me!] He was cutting the meat [and] said: "this is like this and like that", he was divining. [While] he was cutting meat, he divined.

*Chu'us jid dabbaacheke, 'jidaah a debbeeste, moroteey laka a debbeysatte, nyaam iro!', iyidah.*

When he had finished the meat he said: 'Your meat is finished, my divining is also finished, go!'

*Saahka yeele cheekte: 'Inaanko a nah leeysata one, deerka ankuus taba.'*

One day the boys said: "A boy goes hunting with us. Afterwards he goes into that direction there."

*Naffoo lasookhaate inta worran u' fiddiyo, lakhale. Ulla yeele raahe, eysi irte. Chi' u' yimika yeele kasonokhteka, dood meelee fiddiya lakhabte.*

An animal [i.e. a head of smallstock] was taken to the place where he normally stayed and was slaughtered. And he had followed the boys, had gone hunting. When he came, returned from the boys, there were people in the place. He was caught.

*Anahe deerka riire. Lakhabte, deerka goob lageeche. Goabaas saggaaase isoobahe.*

He was afraid [and] screamed then. He was caught and taken to the settlement. This is how this family started.

There is a distinct element of mockery in this tale about the commercial aspect of divination. "The meat you brought me is finished; my divining is also finished, go away!" It is interesting to compare this to the interview with Yeleewwa Alyaro (see 3.0.), who is sceptical towards ritual specialists and believes them to have more business acumen than prophecy or effective blessing. Like in other societies, there are conflicting ideas of belief and scepticism which do not, however, split up into different denominations or philosophical schools. *Hugum*, the custom, is binding for everybody, and people keep their scepticism to themselves.

I also asked Ogoom himself, the man Ogoom, chief Laago, about the origin of his subclan Adisoomele.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> The exact wording of this tale is included in the materials volume.

What made the interview difficult was that I had to conceal from Ogóm that I knew of his “K” status because this topic is taboo and such frankness would have compromised my informants. So in the end the conversation was a beating about the bush for hours.

The story is about two boys living on their own in a whole in the ground. Nearby, a settlement of Faarre (Dubsahay) was set up. Boys of Dubsahay went hunting in the area, with the boys from the hole in the ground sometimes joining them. Finally the boys told their people at home about the two boys living in the hole. So they were caught, cleansed by making them vomit, and raised by Faarre. Until today the site of Algaas, where this happened, is venerated by spilling milk and tobacco there. A group of Boran warriors who once entered this site unauthorisedly (it is a round stone setting), were miraculously killed by the Rendille. The relationship of Urowween and Faarre, which was established by this incident, also still finds its ritual expression in the *ori lagoorraho* ceremony. The two boys dreamt and divined and that is what their descendants still do today.

Laago wants to be a perfectly normal Rendille. He himself does not believe in his own ability to divine which is ascribed to him because of his subclan affiliation. He leaves the inspired dreaming to his brothers of whose abilities, however, he also does not seem to think very highly.

Accordingly, he downplays the unusual aspects of his clan origin in his tale: the divining, the dollo drug. In particular he denies the commercial aspect of divination which Worguut Taarween (see above) mockingly emphasised.

Instead, he embeds the history of his subclan into the history of the Rendille as a whole. He does this, however, in a different way from Silaamo, a non-“K” from Urowween (cf. below and in *Sprachliche Studien zum Rendille*).

So which points of his explanation are suspicious, if we start from the hypothesis that Ogoom reinterprets his origin?

For one thing, it is surely the close relationship to Dubsahay which Ogoom keeps emphasising and which is relativised – and ironised – by other Rendille. Another question would be why the two foundlings were adopted in Urowween and not in Dubsahay if the latter had first taken the boys in, according to Ogoom’s description.

A second contradiction becomes obvious when we compare the two versions so far known to us: According to Taarween it was *one* boy living in the hole, according to Ogoom, however, two boys. Furthermore, the role of this second boy is not described in a very conclusive way, and the description is immediately followed by the assertion that there was nothing to hide, which leads us to assume that indeed something is being hidden. Here the interview passage:

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Question: Were both boys diviners?

Ogoom: *Koo on weyti issilloota* – only one of them dreamt a lot.

Question: Is he your ancestor?

Ogoom: *Iche dakkhamba* – both (which is impossible if the clan is exogamous!).

*Lammacheba a taanya one, toro koo on weyti issilloota. Wihi lad-agcho mee. 'Doo'd goyake laka, a kahawwoosso, makhaaballe laka daagto, a haaggantahe.*

Both are ours, but one particularly dreams. There is nothing to hide. You can talk about it among people, too, let the elders hear it, it is good [= there is nothing bad about it].

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Particularly the two contradictions are clarified (*not* in support of Ogoom's version) in the following story of an elder of Silámo from Urowween, therefore a non-“K” from Ogoom's clan. This version also sheds light on how Ogoom was separated from the rest and the “K” category was created, as well as on how other descent lines were later incorporated into this group.

In order to understand the story we first have to explain a few things about twins. (Why, incidentally, did Ogoom avoid saying that the two boys were twins?)

First-born twins of sheep are killed or put in the gateway to the camel pen to be trampled to death by the camels. They are believed to bring bad luck (*bidir*).

Human twins have their earlobes pierced later than other children, and it must be done with blood arrows (*gancho* arrows otherwise used to scratch the veins of animals and draw blood) made by blacksmiths (see 2.5.), while for other children blood arrows hammered unheated by non-blacksmiths or any other tools can be used as well. Also, their two lower front teeth are taken out later than those of other children. (Similar regulations apply to breech births.)

Furthermore, some twin children are sent to live with relatives so that twins do not grow up together.

Spencer<sup>18</sup> writes that first-born twins are sometimes killed. I could not find confirmation of this, which, of course, does not rule out the possibility of Spencer's information being true for at least part of the Rendille and/or past times.

All this suggests that twins are, or were, regarded as ritually problematic, especially if they were male first-borns. So, the phrase of a “lost” twin in the following tale might well be a euphemism for an “abandoned” twin.

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Silaamo tells<sup>19</sup> of a woman of Silaamo, his own subclan, who had once given birth to twins. One twin was lost. Later, a foreign boy went hunting

<sup>18</sup> Spencer, 1973.

<sup>19</sup> The full wording of this story is included in the materials volume.

with Rendille children. As his ritual name, when he dealt the deathblow to the game, he called “Siicho, my father of Algaas, earth eater”. (Siicho is also the ritual name of Silaamo.) The boy was caught in front of his hole and identified as the lost twin. His captors covered him in intestinal fat (see 5.13.), which marks a new life stage. They shaved him because he had a lot of fuzzy hair, and made him vomit. He vomited earth. Later, his ability to divine manifested itself in his accepting camel mares as gifts that were pregnant with female foals and his refusing mares pregnant with male embryos. Because there was some doubt about his ancestry, however, it was difficult for him to find a bride. But finally he managed to marry a girl from Sanchiir whom he had predicted to bear seven sons. Later he predicted rain and war. But he and all his offspring and his in-laws were separated from the Rendille under the name of “K...”.

Let us, on the basis of the different versions of the story, recapitulate in brief the factors justifying – due to their being ritually impure, eerie, antisocial or the like – such a separation:

- a twin believed to be dead
- a hole in the ground (association: death?)
- eating earth
- *dollo* drug.

All this might only be the mythical preparations for the really frightening gift of divination.

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#### 2.4.8. POLITICAL INFLUENCE: OGOOM AND HOSOOB

Spencer gives (without reference to its source) the following information about Ogoom (i.e. his ancestor): “... an influential diviner, regarded by early travellers as the most powerful man in the tribe ...”<sup>20</sup>

This information is confirmed inasmuch as the role of the family of Ogoom is generally said to have once been greater than it is today.

Yeleeewa Laafte, an elder from Saale who was present at the interview, and, understandably, Laago Ogoom himself enthusiastically agreed with Spencer. Both see Laago Ogoom’s role as Government Chief and Councillor as a continuation of this family tradition.

*Ogoom: Chirrinki at ‘Ogoom’ daagto: Matakki Rendille a Ogoom. uu’ lasoobahe, Rendille soobahe, goob Ogoom on Rendille weya. ... Chirri goob Ogoom Rendille ortiis raaho, taabu ma argin. Injire goob Ogoom baati u’ kijire baatoo rucchul ma eheynane, a Rendille tuumman, weyti buure. Usu on ba’he raahata, inti latabo dakkhaan, usu ón ‘inta tabno’ yadeeh. Goorat maanti Sirgaal iimatan laka, eti laraaho, dood woywoyo a usu on.*

<sup>20</sup> Spencer, 1973, p. 65.

When you hear ‘Ogoom’: The head of the Rendille is Ogoom. Since the Rendille emerged from the ground, only the family of Ogoom has led the Rendille. ... As long as the family of Ogoom led the way of the Rendille, they have not seen hardship. Always the people who were with the family of Ogoom were not few, they were all Rendille, very many. Only him the people followed; wherever they went, it was only he who said: ‘We go this way.’ In past times, when the government [the British] had not yet come, it was also only he who led the people.

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From this he proceeded straight to the significance of his own person:

*Ani kuratiyye Councillor kol lamma kijire. Guwassihii goorat chane-nye kute. Chane. Maanti kura liiguddo ani Marlale jira.*

I was elected Councillor twice [literally: was in the elections twice]. The past five years. Five. When I was elected, I was in Maralal.<sup>21</sup>

After that, Ogóm starts a polemic against his political adversaries who, notably, rally in Dubsahay around Wambile with whom he claims to have such a close “brotherly” relationship. But more about that in the context of the conflicts between the two moieties Belessi Beri and Belessi Bahay (see 2.6.).

What might have been the basis of such great power of the Ogoom family in past times? Certainly it can hardly be seen independently of divination. Apparent and still noticeable today is the influence of the *goob* Ogoom on the migration pattern of the Rendille: They predict where it will rain and where there is a danger of war. It might only be a small step from that position to that of a war chief. The influence the *loibonok* of the Maasai and Samburu exert on warfare by way of their warnings of enemy attacks and their predictions about success and failure of the military expeditions of their *moran* (warriors) is not insubstantial, which caused the British to regard them as “chiefs”. The historical role of the *goob* Ogoom might be similar.

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What seems to support this assumption is that it is Ogoom who installs the *hosoob* (see 3.5.), a council of 44 warriors. So some people express the view that the *goob* Ogoom had in the past controlled the war efforts of the Rendille through this council of warriors which it influenced by its predictions.

(At least today, however, the warriors make their own decisions largely independently of the *hosoob* which have a purely ritual role and internal administrative function – much to the chagrin of neighbouring tribes who have to learn that there is little point in making peace with the Rendille elders as the warriors may take up their raids for livestock and genitals again in their own authority any time they please.)

<sup>21</sup> According to other sources, he was not gloriously elected while being absent, but had to woo the voters by all means: he was an old man, he told them, who had committed himself to the Rendille all his life. Now they should not rob him of his only source of income and let him keep his seat in the City Council. This might be true or it might not. If it is true, it might be considered undignified behaviour. But, on the other hand, it is greatly to his credit that he actually seems to depend on the payment for his political office which means he did not first of all provide for himself financially, like other politicians in comparable positions do.

Others, however, claim the warriors had always made their own decisions and Ogoom's ancestors had never been war chiefs. Also, it had never been the job of the *hosoob* to make military decisions.

This latter point of view is also taken by Laago Ogoom. (Although one must take into consideration that a “progressive” (if illiterate)<sup>22</sup> Kenyan like Laago is probably hardly interested in being regarded as a traditional war chief.)

He portrays the *hosoob* and his own relation to them, which he limits to the opening ceremony, in the following manner:

It is not good, he says, to talk to foreigners about the relations of his family to the *hosoob* (why not?), but he wants to tell me “everything” because he approves of my writing a book about the “custom” (meaning the “nice” one, as can be deduced from other contexts) of the Rendille.

*'Dooða hosoob layadeeh a jira, matakki Rendilleka. Wihi suuje laka ma taham. Keley yumuy. A idi muslim. Kunni laka gaal ma kafurto. Adi laka ma maasso.*

There are these people who are called *hosoob*, the head of the Rendille.<sup>23</sup> Bad things they don't eat [either], what died of itself. Like Muslims. Also, they don't untie the *kunni* [milk container] from the camel [neck]. Also, they don't milk smallstock.<sup>24</sup>

*'Dooðaas ðeerka maanti uus waha khaatti, ani iyamiite, haru dab ikichiba, ðeerka maanti us hógumkaas khaateka, ðeerka iratta. 'Deerka iratra, hógumnki kootte iche dondoonten, ðeerka iratta haagsatta. Hógumeta goyaka a ittaaw, wihi iche haaggisso, ðeerka liiharuucha, naf lakhala, ulohiche lasubha, ðeerka iratta ðeerka ba 'h dah kagoossa.*

*Chi' at hógumnkiyye dabankeey doonto kaas a ðdaas.*

Now, if the people take that [if they take on these avoidances, at the time of their installation], they come to me, I throw *haru* [cedar leaves, see 2.3. and 4.11.] into the fire, then, when they have accepted this custom, they go. Then they go, the custom which they have been looking for before [on that day], they go and do it [they go by it, carry it out]. This custom consists of many things [literally: within this custom are many things]. What they do, now, they are censed with *haru*, a head of smallstock is slaughtered, their sticks are greased, then they go and walk around the settlements. If you want a custom I handle [literally: a custom of my part], *voilà* [or: that is it].

<sup>22</sup> In fact, as I learned later, Ogoom was not illiterate although he never went to school. As an autodidact, he had learned to read and write Swahili. Footnote added 2014.

<sup>23</sup> Ogoom seems to be rather generous with this title.

<sup>24</sup> More details on the prohibitions of the *hosoob* can be found in section 3.0.

## 2.5. TUMAAL (BLACKSMITHS)

The *tumaal* (blacksmiths) are an occupational caste. There is no connumbium with them. If, nevertheless, a non-*tumaal* woman should get pregnant by a *tumaal*, the child has to be aborted, people say, because it is “bad for the livestock”.

There are three *tumaal* groups who have been associated with the Rendille for a longer period of time. These count themselves among the clans of Dubsahay, Urowween and Gaal'deylan. The rest of them call themselves Ilkonono and speak mainly Samburu.

The name originates in their typical occupation, the blacksmithing (*a-tuma* – I forge, I beat). But by social position everybody is a *tumaal* whose father was one, no matter if he actually works as a blacksmith or, for instance, works for Redento, the Italian missionary, doing road repair work.

### *ECONOMIC ROLE*

Blacksmiths make the metal parts of spears, swords and knives. Grips and sheaths are made by the buyer himself or by a more skilful friend. The blacksmiths also make the earthen *diryo*, singular *diri*, cooking pots for meat and soups which are ritually significant in that the *almado* drink *tig* (cf. excursus I, 0.6.7.2.5.) is prepared in them. (Maize porridge and tea are prepared in the *subbura*, in Swahili: *sufuria*, the aluminium pot imported from other parts of the country.)

### *RITUAL ROLE OF FORGED OBJECTS*

The blacksmiths bless every manufactured piece by spitting on it. Accidents involving iron tools or weapons can be put down to their curse.

The significance of this blessing, which is ultimately derived from the Tubcha clan who once authorised the blacksmiths to perform their craft (see 2.8.8.), becomes particularly obvious in the blood arrows (*ganjo*). These blood arrows serve to pierce the constricted jugular veins of an animal in order to bleed it.

The tip of this blood arrow can easily be forged unheated without bellows and hearth and can – and indeed is the only iron tool which may, too – be manufactured by everyone.

Blood arrows are also needed to pierce the earlobes of twins, which is done at a later age than with other children and ritually more elaborate. (For other children, simple needles are used.) The blood arrows made by blacksmiths are thought to be “better” (although you can tell no difference to other arrows by looking at them), and only those special blood arrows are used to pierce the earlobes of twins (cf. 2.4.7.).

Why?

*Waha dakkhan iche goorat leesoobahte. Chi'iche haaggisse, a katufta.*

They are the ones who came out [came into being] with all of that. When they have made [the blood arrows], they spit on them.

### ATTITUDE TOWARDS TUMAAL

The clan affiliation with Dubsahay, Urowween and Gaal'deylan – and in the latter case in the first position of the seniority order – claimed by the *tumaal* is referred to by Rendille as *yeedi tumaaleet*, “prattle of blacksmiths”, and declared irrelevant.

The Christian or Muslim dogma of the equality of all men is countered by citing the blacksmiths as solid evidence against such a thing.

People say the *tumaals*' circumcision is a spectacle reminding of the girls' circumcision because they allegedly scream loudly. (To the girls' credit it must be stressed that they often do not bat an eyelash, although, unlike the warriors, they are allowed to.)

The curse of the blacksmiths – apart from their ability to cause accidents involving iron tools – is said to work in the most indirect way. They expose other people to the temptation to sin against them.

*Falohi tumaaleet a hadaab. Chirrinki at walah tiratte, at jahte. Iche a tamiit one, hoola ma khabto, atiha fiddiito on , kaaorrommatta. Chi' at maaruus siisse, iche la heeruus maranta. Chirrinki at maartuus deyyah siisse, iche la saehtuus ween maranta. 'Deerka hol yateeh. Eti tumaal jahe toro a uskulo. Walah tuumman laka iche 'dood' isoo Haag-gissa.*

*Falohi tumaaleet a hadaab.*

The curse of the blacksmiths is sin. If you deny them something, if you hit them. They just come, they have no livestock, you sit there, and they come and sit with you. If you have given a male foal, they want the ox over there. If you have given a female foal, they want an adult cow. This way, there will be fights. But somebody who hits a blacksmith is bad. They make all things for the people. The curse of the blacksmiths is sin.

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## 2.6. BELESSI BERI AND BELESSI BAHAY: OPPOSITION AND COOPERATION OF THE MOIETIES

Put in simple terms you could say that the Rendille tribe is internally peaceful. This peace is not limited to the Rendille alone. The biggest internally peaceful<sup>25</sup> unit comprises both *Belel*, O'doola and all the Aryaal and Samburu and is therefore considerably larger than one *Belel*. This unit is confronted with other internally peaceful and externally aggressive units of a similar size – the Turkana on the one hand, and the Gabbra and Boran on the other. This makes it necessary for such a large unit to cooperate militarily (see 0.1.4.).

While within the Samburu-Aryaal-Rendille alliance theft, murder and killings do happen, these conflicts usually do not escalate because after every incident of this kind the elders meet and try to find a peaceful solution.

The number of conflicts is particularly high along two internal borderlines of this alliance:

The first one is the tribal boundary between Samburu and Rendille where even occasional armed livestock theft happens like it usually only takes place between different alliances. According to our definition, therefore, the largest internally peaceful unit would be violated temporarily in this case – but there are mechanisms of restoring peace.

The second hotspot of conflict is located at the social boundary between the two Rendille moieties. There is no geographical boundary.

This is also a point of friction where occasionally “war” in our definition takes place: a group fight with deadly weapons. Although the Rendille themselves would never call this war, but merely a brawl.

What ultimately keeps this “largest internally peaceful unit” together or restores it is:

1. The genitals of the slain victims are not cut off.
2. The elders meet to restore peace, which can be achieved by appropriate rituals by mutual agreement.

So there is a hotspot of conflicts at the Belel line. On the other hand, this is where the frequency of marriages and concubinages is highest.<sup>26</sup>

This is connected to the marriage rules: There is no marrying or cohabiting within the clan. Most of the clans and subclans, however, have brother

<sup>25</sup> An internally peaceful unit is one within which no war takes place. “War”, in our understanding, are conflicts between *groups* which are carried out with *deadly weapons*. An individual act of murder with a deadly weapon or a group battle carried out with clubs, therefore, are examples of incidents which will not be regarded as war (clubs are not considered deadly weapons in our context because the victim survives in most cases).

<sup>26</sup> According to rough estimates based on my own observations, which agree with Rendille estimates and the explicit marriage rules.

clans within their own Belel. So, for a man from Nebey, a girl from Gaalorra is his “sister” and therefore is neither eligible as bride nor as concubine. So in every Belel there are exogamous units much bigger than the clan. A man from Nebey can, within his own Belel, only marry a girl from Urwén or Túbcha or the smaller subclans of Gaaldeylan.

His choice of bride in Belessi Bahay, on the other hand, is not restricted at all.

What, now, is the connection between marriage and armed conflict? The first model that comes to mind when looking for a link between women and male use of violence is the following: Women are to be seen as scarce goods, leading to violent rivalries between men: the men brawl over women. But this model would result in very different consequences from the ones we can observe among the Rendille: Most conflicts would be expected to take place between clan brothers because the number of potential brides and concubines shared by this group is the highest and they are therefore most likely to be competitors.

The competition between members of different Belel, let us call them warrior A and warrior B, would then be expected to be lowest because the potential brides and concubines of B are highly likely to be sisters of A, this way not being of interest for the latter in this respect anyway.

But in fact it is exactly the other way around. The following model is more promising: the connection between frequency of conflict and frequency of marriage is not a direct, but an indirect one.

There is no brotherhood between the two Belels. This implies two things: 1. There is less obligation to keep peace. 2. Sexual relationships (marriage/concubinage) are not incestuous.

Seen from A’s point of view, his relation to warrior B, therefore, is roughly the following: (arrow: implication)

B is not my brother	→	it is not so very bad for me to hit B.
	↘	B’s sister is my potential bride/concubine.

These two aspects of non-brotherhood between the Belel are indeed regarded as connected to each other:

*Khokhoom isgelissa, toro isdisatta* – They hit each other with clubs, and on the other hand they marry each other,

*toro ma isdiiddo* – but they don’t hate each other.

So in spite of occasional deaths, these fights are not based on hatred but comply with the usual behaviour among gentlemen.

In fights with “enemies” (*chiy* – enemy, member of a foreign tribe) the men do not use clubs but spears and swords. Or, at least, these deadly weapons are meant to be used exclusively in conflicts between different “largest internal peaceful units” as depicted in our diagram in section 0.1.4. (For an exception to this rule cf. *dablakabiire*, 4.7.).

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According to informants, however, the conflicts between warriors have at times reached higher levels of escalation. They have “always been killing each other”, I was told.

When the Libaale age set were warriors (1937–1948), Gaal'deylan warriors had once killed “a lot of” people from Rengumo in a fight over the use of a well, it was said. They had all been cleansed.

This cleansing is done by both sides sacrificing animals, followed by ritually washing the men with milk and praying together.<sup>27</sup>

So much for conflicts between warriors. After such interruptions of peace it is the role of the elders to seek balance and understanding. This does not mean, however, that there cannot be a traditional opposition among the elders of Belessi Beri and Belessi Bahay, too.

In the following origin myths, this opposition, which comes to a head in the relationship between the two oldest clans, Nebey and Dubsahay, continues to turn up.

What is remarkable is that the opposition between the two Belels turns out to be a decisive factor in modern politics. Both the region's Member of Parliament (Kholkholle Adicharreh, Gaalorra) and the representative in the County Council (Laago Ogoom, Adisoomela “K”) are from Belessi Beri. They cooperate well. Both had rival candidates in the last elections: both of the rivals were from Dubsahay and were considered candidates of Wambile.

In the parliamentary elections, the front ran (apart from minor deviations) along the Belel line. As Belessi Beri outnumbers Belessi Bahay, they won. Consequently, this election was perceived by the Rendille as a power play between the Belels:

Elders from Nebéi said to Wambile (related by a man from Nebey):

“You drop our man and promote your own one. How can we follow you? (*Ati etenyo a lugudda, etaahla dissa, saggoh kisooraahno?*) You are at the head of Belessi Bahay and I, Fooffeen, am at the head on this side. So go ahead, go your way, and let's see who goes down.”

But in spite of all opposition the two Belels depend on each other ritually.

When the *dablakabiire* is seized, the warrior who is to fill an unlucky age-grade role, the clans of both Belels collaborate – or at least that is the ideal (cf. 4.7.).

Dubsahay selects the victim. Warriors of Nebey pray for his capture (which is dangerous because the victim is allowed to defend himself with sword and spear), Rengumo warriors capture the victim, supported by warriors of Dubsahay.

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<sup>27</sup> In theory, every murderer is excluded from every sort of community with the other Rendille: He must not use objects of personal use of others, does not eat with them, etc. According to Spencer, 1973, p. 60, he might even have been stoned in the past. In practice, however, these measures are not likely to be taken at all because there is the option of the cleansing ceremony.

At the periodic camel sacrifices (*oori lagoorraho*) a warrior of Nebey must wield the sword, warriors of Matarbah hold the ears of the sacrificial animal, Uyam holds the head. The camel bulls (*oor*) are, in regular succession, provided by the clans of Dubsahay, Tubcha and Uyam, i.e. by the *waakhkamúr* segments of these clans (cf. 2.3. and 5.4.).

During the *oori lagoorraho* of the last Wednesday year (1970), there were some deviations from these rules. Nebey refused to perform the sacrifice, saying that the drought was not severe enough yet.<sup>28</sup> So Dubsahay performed the sacrifice alone, with a warrior of Dubsahay wielding the sword. Furthermore, Matarbah had been denied holding the ears, I was told. The result of this conduct was that many warriors died.

The camel bull for this sacrifice was from Dubsahay. After the negative outcome of the sacrifice it had to be repeated, again with a bull from Dubsahay. (Meaning the first attempt was declared invalid.) At the repeated ceremony, I was told, everything had been done correctly. After that, there had been lots of rain.

The *gudur* (cf. 3.6.), an important age-grade office for the entire tribe, is from Saale (Belessi Beri). His inauguration takes place during the *naabo* ceremony (cf. 4.9.), with the warriors of the entire tribe being involved.

All other special ritual functions we will deal with in part 3 also cut across the Belel boundary and, this way, constitute a binding element.

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<sup>28</sup> So you wait for the time of the greatest need for the sacrifice, i.e. until the end of the dry season when the general hardship is most severe. At that time, of course, the success of the sacrifice is most likely.

## 2.7. SETTLEMENT ORDER AT THE *GAALGULAMME*

At big, tribe-wide festivals like *gaalgulamme* (cf. 1.3.3.) the seniority order of the clans is realised as a settlement order. The smallest separable unit is the subclan or the *kullal* (shared campsite of the warriors in the camel camp and, for instance, at the *naabo* ceremony (cf. 4.9.)). The settlement order is as follows:

<u>Dubsahay</u>	1a)	Kullali Oraat (1. <i>kullal</i> ) (Wambile)
	1b)	Kullali daheet (middle <i>kullal</i> ) (Bulyar, Mirgichan, 'Dókhle)
	1c)	Kullali yomboot (subordinate <i>kullal</i> ) Guddeere, ('Deylaan, Arsurwa)
<u>Matarbah</u>	2a)	Galgideelle
	2b)	Feecha
<u>Rengumo</u>	3a)	Ongoom <sup>29</sup>
	3b)	See
	3c)	Aayicha
<u>Nahagan</u>	4a)	Machaan
	4b)	'Durolo
<u>Uyam</u>	5a)	Baaseelle
	5b)	Gaalhayle

So much for Belessi Bahay, the “western” Belel settling on the semicircle from west to east. In the Belessi Beri, whose part of the circle stretches from east to west, the settlement order deviates sharply from the seniority order determined by supposed kinship relations. This might be true for Belessi Bahay also, but I have not heard anything about it. Differences of this kind are not easily detected by a semi-informed observer (like I am in the case of Belessi Bahay) because

1. the seniority order is largely defined by the settlement order and the question of seniority order is usually phrased, linguistically, in terms of settlement order as well (“who is settling first?, who follows?” etc.). This way, the question of deviations of these two orders tends to be circular;
2. the seniority order frequently is no genuine seniority order based, for instance, on the order of birth of a mythical progenitor’s sons. Instead, it is often based on adoption and it is futile to ask whether a certain subclan is “entitled” to a settlement position due to the seniority order or was only allocated the position out of politeness or other motives. For in any case the position is merely allocated.

<sup>29</sup> Ongoom, however, is hardly represented at ceremonies like this because they almost all do *ilmugit*, i.e. follow the Samburu age-grade rites.

In the Belessi Beri, however, I know of a number of cases in which the settlement position of a subclan during *gaalgulamme* is described as deviating from its real position, and political motives are given as reasons for this.

### BELESSI BERI

<u>Seniority order</u>		<u>Settlement order</u>	
1. Saale	1a) Nebey 1b) Goob Orre 1c) Elegela 1d) Kimogol 1e) Gaabanayyo 1f) Gaalooroyyo	3. Gaal'deylan	3a) Keele 3b) Elleemo 3d) Ma'daacho 3c) Gaalorra
		1. Saale	1c) Elegela 1a) Nebey 1b) <sup>30</sup> 1d) Kimogol 1f) Gaalooroyyo
2. Urowween	2a) Jaale 2b) Silaamo 2c) Adisoomele 2d) Dokkhe	2. Urowween	2a) Jaale 2b) Silaamo 2c) Adisoomele 2d) Dokkhe
3. Gaal'deylan	3a) Keele 3b) Elleemo 3c) Gaalorra 3d) Ma'daacho		
4. Tubcha	4a) Gaallaalle 4b) 'Deelle	4. Tubcha	4b) 'Deelle 4a) Gaallaalle

This rearrangement of the order took place during the mythical first *gaalgulamme*. Gaalorra had been adopted as a brother by Nebey and in turn had adoptively merged to one clan with Keele and Elleemo. As Nebey had to feel guilty because of the circumstances of this adoption (cf. 2.8.9.1.2.), the Gaalorra with their powerful curse were granted Nebey's position of honour. But since within Gaal'deylan Keele and Elleemo were superordinate to Gaalorra, this constellation as a whole was put at the head of the settlement order so that now Keele are settling in the first position in Belessi Beri. Although Ma'daacho are a branch of Gaalorra through their maternal descent (see 2.8.9.), they associate themselves more with Keele and Elleemo (also, for instance, in the spatial distribution in the camel camp) because they share with them the characteristic of being *waakhkamúr*.

<sup>30</sup> Goob Orre follows the Samburu age-set rites and is not present.

The other Saale were not willing to tolerate Elegela as the only *waakhkamír* subclan of Saale between themselves and Nebey. So Nebey, as peacemakers (cf. 2.8.1.), permitted Elegela to settle between themselves and Gaal'deylan. This was the only substitute position imaginable because nobody must settle between two Saale subclans or between Saale and Urowween.

In Tubcha, 'Deelle do not settle in front of Gaallaalle because they were granted a position of honour by the latter but because, due to their mythical association with Wambile, Gaallaalle want to settle next to Wambile and this way form the western main gate of the entire settlement order together with Wambile; so they take the place where the circle closes and where the last clan of Belessi Beri and the first clan of Belessi Bahay are neighbours.

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## 2.8. ABOUT THE INDIVIDUAL CLANS

In the following, I will investigate the mythology, the ritual peculiarities of the clans and their interaction. Regarding the sequence of the individual clans, I broke the seniority order according to descriptive points of view. The differing length of the sections is not determined by the importance of the clans but by my state of knowledge about them, which varies considerably.

The myth of origin is one single long story believed by all Rendille clans, with different elements being emphasised. This story I took and chopped it up into pieces in order to create sections about the individual clans. In some places, however, I will be preserving the narrative context in which several clans play a part. To avoid repetition, I will in other places of the text only be referring to the respective passages.

I hope it will become clear that the strong ritual differentiation established by this myth is not detrimental to Rendille society, but constitutive. The collaboration in tribe-wide rituals, as it is accounted for in the myth, makes the cohesion of Rendille society obligatory. Every violation of this order would result in unforeseeable disaster of extra-human origin. The different obligations and ritual powers, including the curse, ensure that a complicated balance of forces is maintained.

What we have here is the mechanism of functioning of an acephalous society. The model cannot be transferred randomly; but it is one possible form of organisation of human society, and not the simplest one.

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### 2.8.1. THE FIRST RENDILLE: DUBSAHAY, NEBEY, GOOB ORRE

The first man who "came out" was Faarre. Faarre is the founder of the Dub-sahay clan. This happened near the road from Kargi to Marsabit, a little west of the edge of the lava field. The spot where he came out is also called Faarre. I was shown a circle of stones in the centre of which there is an erect big rock – this is Faarre. Next to the big rock, there is a smaller one and a very small one: wife and child. Faarre had two ivory horns – one of them is the infamous one which is used to turn the *arablagate*, the holder of the negative age-

grade office (see 4.9.) into what he afterwards is, for the horn of Wambile, as the highest subclan of Dubsahay is called today, can make people stupid. (Malicious gossip has it that the original horn was lost and a new one was purchased some time in the last century from the Laikipiak Maasai.)

Further details on Faarre's first hours will be presented in the section on Uyam (2.8.7.).

Fooffeen With The Black Camels, on the other hand, came out near Buuro, a hill northwest of Logologo. He was all wet, had light soft skin and was very weak. Only later he became a little drier, stronger and darker in the sun. Around him were his "black" camels. (Camels with a slightly darker fur shade and black hairs on their humps and tails are classified as "black" by the Rendille.)<sup>31</sup>

One of Fooffeen's sons was very light-skinned and was for that reason called Garawwahle. Garawwahle is also called Ilwaas or Herleh. Other sons of Fooffeen are Neybichan (the oldest), Bagajjo (the second youngest) as well as one, the youngest, who got lost and returned later as "Orre". This Orre is the progenitor of Goob Orre, the "clan of Orre", another subclan of Saale which today is Aryaal-ised, i.e. adapted to the Samburu in their age-set rites.

A man from Gaalorra relates:

*Goob Orre ichoow Nebeye a isleedesseen, lammacho a isleedesseen. Inankoo Goob Orre irt. 'Doodi hoola laa khaate, walaal kayeesse. Inam 'deerka a Nebey, ki daheet menye, a ki nugul. 'Doodi inam khaate magahiis Orre yidah, Orro Koorro mehe tadeehya: Iltorrobo, Rendille la: Orro. Maanti inam soobahe, maanti us goobiche isoonokhte, mehe layadeehya: Orre. Goob Orre liidah. Gaalorra 'deerka geeddi Nebeyeet iskarooro. Maanti goorat Nebey ichoow Gaalorra is'helleen, Goob Orre ma lakhabo.*

Goob Orre and Nebey are brothers. The two are brothers. A boy of the [future] *Goob Orre* left. People without livestock took him in, made him their brother. So the boy is from Nebey, not the middle one, the young one. The people who took the boy in, their name is called Orre. Orro, the Samburu call it: Iltorrobo [hunter groups without livestock in the mountains], and the Rendille: Orro. On the day when the boy [re-]appeared, when he returned to their clan, something was said: he is Orre. *Goob Orre* was said. So Gaalorra and he feared each other just as much as [Gaalorra and] Nebey. [Between Gaalorra and Nebey, there is an adoptive brotherhood based on great respect, cf. 2.8.9.1. and 2.8.] When in the past Nebey and Gaalorra adopted each other, there was no *Goob Orre*.

[So in the myth, all this happened years or decades later; if it does correspond in any way to reality, generations or even centuries might actually

<sup>31</sup> Fooffeen is the progenitor of Nebey.

have passed. Let us return to the beginning because Nebey and Dubsahay, who had come into the world each in their own place, have yet to meet. Their camel herds, however, were already grazing towards one another and soon came within sight of each other.]

*Abba, gaal a agarre!*

Father, we have seen camels!

*Aranki Fooffeen irte, gaal dahtiis chiire, ulka, ul il kachiire. Waakh inta u' chiire kakutin waaye. Baataas waakh waaye. 'Deerka timiy. Subeen khabtaayi. Ma islagarti gon. Makhaabali Fooffeen "subeen ma nah liikeeno, laaba!" Subeen hidde, 'deerka timiy. Khare fiddiya. "Mehe nidaahe chirrinki inno leeyeeno. A fooffanyahe. 'Fooffeen, nebeeheyta' nidaahe." Saggaas isibariitisse. 'Deerka isworsatte. "Mehe gaal kamaalataan?" "Muruubetoo goorat latolo." "'Dab a khabtaan?" "Aa." "Idoh tadeehiin?" "A biirra." Inankoo wahe magto sookhaate goobiiska. "Biira!" yidah. Eti Ubanela leekhuccha. Ubane. Urawween. 'Dab soobahe. Garach, dab gaal Jille. Jille amehe? A jiti kootte us soorahe. "Gaal a kaarga, eti yeelanla ma kiargo." "Atin a ki lakhaatti bal a koh?" "Ki lakhaatti mee, nah a buure."*

The man Fooffeen went, drew with his stick between the camels [his own and those of Dubsahay], drew [a line] with his stick on the ground. God [i.e. the rain] could not pass the place where he had drawn. At any rate, the people missed rain. Then they came. They had a ewe with them. They did not know each other. The man Fooffeen said: "Why are we given this ewe? Take it back!" They tethered the sheep, then they came. They sat down outside the enclosure. "What should we say when we speak to him? He is staying [i.e. is grazing his livestock around a permanent pen for the night without moving on], let us say: 'Staying one, are you peaceful?' That is how they greeted each other. Then they asked each other. 'What do you use to milk the camels?' Back then, a milking container was sewn [by Uyam, cf. 2.8.7.]. 'Do you have fire?' 'Yes.' 'How do you start it?' 'We drill it.' He called a boy, he brought fire-sticks, from his house. 'Drill!' he told them. One of Ubane also held on. Ubane, Urowween. The fire appeared. Garach, the fire of the camels of Jille (Dubsahayi). What does Jille mean? It means that he had come walking up on this day. 'The camels will see you, but a foreigner [= enemy] must not see you.' 'Are you people for adoption?' 'Not for adoption. We are many.'

So this way Dubsahay passed the tests – he knew how to light a fire, he had a *muruub* milking container into which he milked the camels, he was, in other words, a proper human.

But Fooffeen's offer to adopt him he refused because he was already too numerous. So each of them stuck to expanding their own clientele, and today's rival moieties formed, which are being held together with considerable

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ritual effort, which intermarry, threaten each other with their curses, and beat each other up.

Apparently, it was not sufficient to withhold the rain from Dubsahay by magic methods in order to prove Fooffeen's superiority. Some other time Fooffeen took the *ruuf* away from the man Bulyar (now a subclan of Dubsahay). *Ruuf* is a dark green cloth like first-borns wear it over their shoulders on ritual occasions, for instance at the *ulluukh* on *almádo*. Bulyar retrieved it from Fooffeen. Suddenly it caught fire. Startled, Bulyar dropped it. Fooffeen spat on it, the fire went out, and he took the cloth with him.

Both stories, rendered here in the form told by Nebey, were confirmed to me as "true" by Wambile (Dubsahay). Wambile, however, would probably portray "himself", i.e. his ancestor, as less timid and subservient.

### NEBEY AS PEACEMAKER

The name "Nebey" means "peace". There is good reason for that. Both externally, with regard to the neighbouring tribe of Gabbra, and internally, in case of quarrels among the Rendille, Nebey has a peacemaking function.

The descendants of Neybichán, the 'Daammal family, provide a ewe, also called *neybichán* (peacemaker), to make peace with the Gabbra. The last time this is said to have happened was during the age set of Desmaala. The negotiating, however, is done by Saale-Kimogol. (Nebey seems to be so superior ritually that they are not wasteful with their power.) Because of the peaceful role of their section, warriors of 'Daammal should not take part in warfare. Incidentally, all the warriors of Nebey are expected to restrain themselves in this respect. While they do participate in raids, they should not cut off the genitals of the first enemy they slay. (If, in the heat of the moment, they do it anyway, they are to throw them away unceremoniously without first acquiring the special ritual status of a killer.) The count only starts with the second enemy so that, in the past, there probably used to be fewer killers discernible as such in Nebey than in other clans. (To proceed like that would be highly unpropitious for members of other clans; so it requires a high degree of ritual immunity.)

Today, however, this restraint has fallen into oblivion. Turruga, an elder from Nebey, was killed by Gabbra<sup>32</sup>. This led to an escalation. In the Saturday year of 1966, a warrior of 'Daammal killed a Gabbra and castrated him. Ever since that time, Nebey warriors have killed just like other Rendille. The

<sup>32</sup> A note added 2010: In fact, the perpetrators were probably Boran from Marsabit.

The Rendille lump Gabbra and Boran together under the term Booraanto. Turruga was chief at the time and a Muslim, living with other Rendille Muslims in the first and only nomadic hamlet composed of Rendille Muslim families. This hamlet moved up and down the southern slopes of the Marsabit highland. Islam among the Rendille suffered a serious setback due to the devastating Boran attack. Rendille warriors from the wider area retaliated by setting Boran houses in Marsabit town ablaze.

older elders in Nebey put this down to the fact that Ilkichilli is the unlucky age set (every sixth age set is unlucky, cf. *daajji*, cf. excursus I, 0.6.5., and 4.2.). Whenever in the cycle of time the place of Ilkichilli “comes around”, there is war and moral decline.

Within the Rendille tribe, Nebey also has the role of peacemaker (at least in the ideal). Their ability to act as arbitrators is based on Nebey generally behaving very restrained in matters of internal tribal politics, with the result that Nebey are less frequently involved in quarrels about trifles, and that if they do intervene, it is all the more effective. (This, at least, seems to be the intention.)

*Chirrinkiyye tol jiro, eti Fooffeene la yeyyeedin doono ma tolossati ma yeyyeedo. Chirrinki u' tolossate, u' tolol kayeyyeede, enenyet il isooyeye, enenyet dakkhan a tuuma.*

If there is a discussion and someone from Fooffeen wants to speak, he does not stand up when he talks. If he stands up, speaks standing up, looks down on the people, then all the people die.

As examples of Nebey's peacemaking you can hear stories about elders of other clans fighting over livestock so bitterly that eventually they threatened each other with death. Nebey was called, came, admonished, threatened (with an implied curse), had both parties slaughter a sheep, greased them, prayed for them. Apparently, the quarrel is not actually decided in such a case, which amounts to maintaining the status quo.

### 2.8.2 THE STRUCTURE OF SAALE

Saale as a whole consists of the six subclans Nebey, Elegela, Gaalooroyyo, Goob Orre, Kimogol (also called “Goobanay” or, simply, “Saale” in the narrower sense) and Gaabanayyo. These units are on the same level, between subclan and clan. While they do not marry each other's daughters, they do sometimes marry the daughters of the daughters of other (sub)clans of Saale, that is girls who call them *abiyyo* (mother's brother), which would normally be impossible with daughter's daughters of one's own clan, i.e. classificatory sister's daughters. So for that reason people say this address of “*abiyyo*” is only used “with the mouth” (*afka*), and therefore they are not real sister's daughters.

So the (sub)clans of Nebey, Goob Orre and Kimogol marry the *eysim* (descendants in the female line) of each other. Goobanay, however, does not marry the *eysim* of Elegela, Gaalooroyyo and Gaabanayyo.

This relaxing of marriage customs is put down to the fact that Saale has increased greatly in numbers, so they cannot find enough non-related girls, according to the old marriage rules, any more. The story goes that when at one time girls had been particularly scarce due to an epidemic, the people said: “*Kaha holoolo a dubanni*” – “Come on, let's go and roast our stomachs!”, then they prayed for each other and married the *eysim* of one another.

Maybe what we can observe here is the slow evolving of a clan schism: a clan grows too big and divides up into several parts.

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### 2.8.3. UROWWEEN

One part of Urowween we have already met in the chapter on the “K” family: the subclan of Adisoomele.

About the other parts of Urowween I know only little.

They and Saale call each other joking names (Spencer calls it a “joking bond brotherhood”, although there is not much of a “brotherhood”).

A man from Nebey (Saale) told me:

“*Iskofna* – we banter with each other. *Islalagda reem laka far islagessa*. – They throw each other [the girls of the respective other clan] on the ground and stick their finger in the thing, too.”

*Ma iskahollowaan*. – They don’t become angry with each other for that.

So Spencer is right to speak of horseplay in this context (more about this in Spencer, 1973, p. 30 f).

Poor people of Saale and Urowween intermarry. While the bridewealth still has to be paid, a refusal is more difficult than towards members of other clans.

Saale seems to be more dominant in this relation. The practice of abducting brides by force, which used to be very popular in Saale, was pursued with particular bravura against Urowween.

I was once told the anecdote of a Saale warrior who had invited himself to the wedding of a girl of Urowween, participated in the feast (*wahari okko* – buck of the festive adornment) and then abducted the bride.

At a ritual meeting like *gaalgulamme* nobody is allowed to set up camp between Saale and Urowween. This is one of the factors involved in determining the settlement order of *gaalgulamme* (cf. 1.3.4.).

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### 2.8.4. RENGUMO

Rengumo consists of the three subclans Ongoom, See and Aayicha. Rengumo, however, is not a clan in the usual Rendille sense, although it is treated as such in every respect – except in the factor otherwise constitutive for a clan: the marriage rules.

Rengumo is the only “clan” which is not exogamous. See and Ongoom intermarry. They did not do so in the past. But during one age set of Libaalle “very long ago” (*ti goorat oraat*), since when the *daajji* has come around three times (that would be the great-great-great-great-grandfathers of today’s Libaalle elders; although in these dimensions the time specification probably gets a little imprecise), a warrior of See had abducted a girl of Ongoom and married her (*miige kakhaatte* – took by force). It is said that, in order to sanction this marriage, people prayed for each other, and ever since then the two subclans have intermarried. According to this marriage rule, Aayicha must be considered a part of See because Ongoom and Aayicha also intermarry. Aayicha and See however, are close “brothers”, they “are one, do not marry each other – *Aayicha ichoow See a koo kalday, ma isdistaan*.” See and Aayicha are *iibire* and have sticks.

Ongoom, on the other hand, are – at least today – *waakhkamír*. Most Ongoom live as Aryaal and follow Samburu age-grade rites.

Maybe some time in the future nobody will speak of Rengumo anymore but of the two clans See/Aayicha and Ongoom. That would mean the end of a clan on Rendille side which might be older than the ethnic differentiation into Dassanech and Rendille and therefore reach back to a time when these two ethnic groups, who are now so different, still had a common language and a common settlement area. The origin myth of the Rendille Rengumo suggests that; maybe one day research among the Dassanech will confirm it.

Kuraawa in See is a diviner with inspired dreams. In rank, however, he is second to Ogoom (Urowween, cf. 2.4.5.). All the men in Ogoom are more or less gifted with divining skills. But in See there is only this one man.

*THE ORIGIN MYTH OF RENGUMO AS TOLD BY GAALYAHARO –  
DAUGHTER OF RENGUMO, WIFE OF MA'DAACHO,  
THE SUBCLAN OF GAAL'DEYLAN*

In the past, Gaalyaharo says, a Rengumo warrior could not water a camel bull if he had not killed an enemy. So one time a Rengumo warrior had to perform the hard work of passing up the water out of the well to his brother-in-law, while the latter poured it into the trough for the camels. After the warrior had finished the work, he furiously climbed out of the well and struck his brother-in-law, his sister's husband, dead to finally become a killer.

This happened west of today's Lake Rudolf because it was there that Rengumo had come into the world, had "come out". Afterwards, the murderer had to leave his clan and moved east.

When he moved east, the lake formed and this way cut him off from his people. (*Leeba goosso* – the lake that cuts.) The man came to the eastern shore and the other Rendille. The other Rengumo stayed in the west and became Geleba (Dassanech). There were very many of them. Back then the Dassanech Rengumo, like all Dassanech, did not have circumcision.

Rengumo are very many people, Gaalyaharo says, nothing to laugh about, and they are represented in many different tribes. There are even Rengumo in the Somali tribe of Marrehán.

As Rengumo come from out of the water, they always long for the water. When they pass a water-hole, they cannot hold themselves back.

When they go to fetch water, the daughters of Rengumo always try to go first and jump the queue. Once, when Gaalyaharo herself wanted to scoop water, someone was watering his camel. All the other women waited. But, undeterred, Gaalyaharo went up to the water. The men wanted to rebuke her; but when they learned that she was a daughter of Rengumo, they let her have her way.

Rengumo are "bad people" and can ruin the whole country. They send (via their curse) snakes, lions and all kinds of beasts. But their anger dies down

quickly and then they go back to being good friends with the people who had enraged them before. They have little bellies in which they cannot keep many evil thoughts.

#### 2.8.5. MATARBAH

According to my information, Spencer's assertion that the lineage "Kaatu" (Kaato) in Matarbah has "a potent diffuse curse as *iipire*"<sup>33</sup> is wrong. I was told there are no *iibire* in Matarbah.

What is correct is that Matarba and Nahagan regard each other as brothers and do not intermarry.

Apart from that, I neglected the clan of Matarbah in my research.

#### 2.8.6. NAHAGAN

The non-"K" part of Nahagan, consisting of "good" people, has three prominent ritual functions:

The subclan of Machaan attends to the *gudur* (cf. 3.6.) during his installation at the *naabo* ceremony (cf. 4.9.). 'Duroollo provides a camel mare the milk of which is the first milked for the *gudur*.

2. *Munyatte* (*munya* = excellent, favourable, outstanding) in the 'Duroollo subclan provides a camel bull for a ritual slaughtering in the Saturday year after the circumcision. This bull sacrifice is thought to be particularly important for the wellbeing of the *hosoob* (cf. 3.5.) who are installed during the *gaalgulamme* ceremony shortly after.

3. At the *gaalgulamme*, a man of 'Duroollo, marked by an *ergeeg*-headband (cf. 3.0.) as a ritual specialist, proclaims the name of the new age set (cf. 1.3.4.).

So the ritual functions of Nahagan are all closely linked to the age-grade cycle.

Furthermore, in Nahagan there is the Gaalgorowle subclan consisting for the larger part of "K" people (cf. 2.4.2.) and diviners.

#### 2.8.7. UYAM

Uyam is a clan with a unique history. Next to Faarre (Dubsahay), Fooffeen (Nebey) and Gaallaalle (Tubcha) it belongs to the four original clans (i.e. the Rendille who "came out first") in the mythical narrative. Faarre (Dubsahay) had "come out" (*a soobahe*) first. After that, he met Gaallaalle who had also just come out. Faarre intended to incorporate the people who had come out after him with their camel herds into his own people (the future Belessi Bahay). When Gaallaalle "came out", Faarre said: "*Gaal suuno!* – Drive the camels in!" Gaallaalle answered: "*ki lasuuno mee, a ki gaali alaale khabo.* – These are not ones to be driven in [incorporated], they belong to someone

33 Spencer, 1973, p. 64.

with camels of his own.” (*Gaali alaale* was then contracted to *Gaallaale*, so a camel name became the name of a subclan.) Later, Uyam with his camels came out. Again Faarre said: “*Gaal suuno!*” But Uyam answered: “*ki lasuuno mee, a ki gaali worsileh khabo.* – They are not ones to drive in, they belong to one who has blackish camels.” (Again a new clan identity and autonomy was founded on a camel name, “*Gaalworsi*”.) The three set out together and at dusk were looking for a place to sleep. *Gaalworsi* (Uyam) had an axe (*gí'dib*) “with which he had come out” (*leesoobahe*). So *Gaalworsi* cut branches off thornbushes to fence in the camels. Meanwhile Faarre (*Dubsahay*), who had “come out” with fire-sticks (*magto*) stirred up a fire. When this first fire flared up, Faarre said: “*Garach, dab gaal Jille, gaal a kiarga, eti yeelan ma kiargo.* – *Garach*, fire of the camels of *Jille* [*Dubsahay*], may the camels see you, may no foreigner [enemy] see you.”

(Until this day the herders in the camel camp live with this hope: That the camels heading for the pens after dark see the *kullal* fire, but possibly roaming spies do not.)

So the origin myth presents Uyam as independent from and equal to *Dubsahay*, they complement one another – one has an axe, the other the fire-sticks – and each one keeps his camels to himself, paraphrasing the fact that no one adopts the other one in the sense of a clan brotherhood.

How accurately these myths are still staged in today’s rituals will be described in the section on the *naabo* ceremony (4.9): Uyam cut bushes, *Dubsahay* drill fire ...

According to another myth presenting a logical contradiction to the above (which is no Rendille specialty; our own Book of Genesis also shows such contradictions) Uyam was the first clan owning camels, before the other Rendille even received their camels. The intended explanation of the following passage is a different one from ours at this point: it wants to explain why Sunday is a special day.

*Dubsahay maanti u' soobahe, enenyet on soobahe, ki magto khabo. Makhaabali Uyameet, maanti u' soobahe, aytoo khaba. “Ayta maantoh 'hesse?” “Sabdi on arge, Ahádka soodowe, gobeey bariite.” Saahka Rendillehi addan soobabbahe. Maanti us soobahe, gaal ebba maanti Waakh siiche, Sabdi arga, ibeenki Ahadeet goob goya barya. Gooba maanti Waakh siicho deerka idaas. Toro Saahka adi la'hele. Adi toro maanti Waakh dood siiche mehe laargeya: Ahade laarge. Alaasminka lasoodowe, goob goya soogele. Gaal maanta Ahád dood ma lasiicho. Haanuhi gaal Ahad ma lakhaato gooboo addan ma lageecho. Adi la Alaasmin dood ma lasiicho. Haanuhiis la gooboo addan ma lageecho.*

When *Dubsahay* came out, only a man came out, who had fire-sticks. The man of Uyam, when he came out, had a camel mare. “When did you receive this camel mare?” “I saw it on Saturday, on Sunday [i.e. Saturday night af-

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ter dark] I drove it here and it spent the night in my settlement.” Later the other Rendille came and came out. When they came out, when God gave everybody his camels, he saw them on Saturday and they spent Sunday night [Saturday night] inside the settlement. So it was like this for every clan when God gave the people [camels]. Later everybody received smallstock. But the smallstock, when God gave it to the people, when was it seen: It was seen on Sunday, was driven in on Monday [Sunday night] and entered the settlement. Today, camels are not given to people on Sundays. On Sundays, camel milk is not taken to another settlement. And smallstock is not given to people on Mondays. And its milk is not taken to another settlement. [Accordingly, by the way, the special day of the cattle is the Saturday.]

Considering the crucial role the camels have for the Rendille, the significance of the myth’s message that of all the Rendille, God gave the first camels to Uyam, must not be underestimated. And another important item reached the rest of the Rendille only after and via Uyam: the milking container (*muruub*).

*Uyame muruub leesoobahte; Rendille derricka ka’hele. Rendille goorat muruub ma khabaan. Uyam deerka maanti iche soobahte, uruub ichoow gidibi worran oot lakagoocho ichoow aytoo a khabta.*

Uyam came out with the *muruub*; the Rendille then received it from him. Before that the Rendille had no *muruub*. So Uyam, when he came out, had a *muruub* and the axe to cut thornbushes with, and a camel mare.

This element is also repeated ritually today.

During the *gaalgulamme* ceremony, warriors of Uyam first of all make a *muruub*.<sup>34</sup>

At the *naabo* ceremony (cf. 4.9.), the warriors bless themselves from a miniature *muruub* (*tuhum*) provided by the Uyam clan. This container was made by little girls. The blessing has distinct elements of a cleaning of sin (*hadaab*).

“*Uyam a waakhkamúr; uskeel ma khabto.* – Uyam are *waakhkamúr*, they don’t have anything bad.” And what could be more innocent than little girls from this harmless *waakhkamúr* clan of Uyam?

The element of innocence is significant for Uyam’s ritual role in other ritual contexts, too. If in a settlement there are elders of Uyam, even if they are only a minority, it is they who have to cut the bushes for the *ulluukh* (*ulluukh* being the ritual gate through which women and livestock have to pass on *almádo* (cf. 0.6.7.2.4., excursus I) or on a lunar eclipse; a fertility blessing). Of course this also matches Uyam’s role as original owner of the axe. But the fact that their harmlessness as people without *iibire* curse predestines them for a lucky role results from the following relation of equivalence: If there are no Uyam elders in the settlement, they are not substituted by just anyone, but, if possible, by other *waakhkamúr*.

<sup>34</sup> I think they just bring it along. Footnote added 2014.

As far as people know, Uyam is the only Rendille clan to ever have changed moiety (Belel). The myth of origin tells us that the four subclans claiming oldest age are Wambile (Dubsahay), Nebey (Saale), Uyam and Gaallaalle (Tubcha). The three latter were to become part of Belessi Beri, while Belessi Bahay, in the eyes of Belessi Beri, consists only of Dubsahay and the people “Dubsahay picked up later”. It appears that Belessi Beri originally defined itself negatively, as all the people who did not want to be adopted by Dubsahay. (Of course, this could just as well be an expression of future animosities, transferred to the past.)

In later times, Uyam suffered greatly under the pressure exerted on the *waakhkamūr* of Belessi Beri by Dubsahay and Rengumo, who are responsible for forcibly filling negative age-grade offices (*ḍablakabiire* and *arablagate*, cf. 4.6.). In the three age sets Desmaala (marriage year of 1892), Irbaangudo (1906) and Deefguḍo (1920), one of these offices was each staffed by a warrior of Uyam. (We will describe these interrelations in more detail in the section on “Conflict over the marriage rites of the Ilkichilli age set, see 4.6.)

In the Deefguḍo age set a warrior named Alyaro, Uyam, had originally been seized as *ḍablakabiire* and this way been socially degraded and made an idiot. Out of revenge, this warrior committed an extremely inauspicious act: he killed a ewe with his spear and burned it with wood of the *mullehenyo* bush. His aim was to cast a deadly curse on those who had seized him and forcefully practiced the harmful magic (*tibaato*) on him. After this horrible deed everybody said: “*Eta a bidirrowe, min ma kadisanni*. – This man has turned into a bringer of bad luck, with him we don’t build houses [=don’t marry; the capture of the *ḍablakabiire* is part of the ritual preparations for the weddings of one age set].” So they left Alyaro alone and instead captured a warrior of Issandaab (Urowween) as *ḍablakabiire*. Elders of Belessi Beri successfully prayed for Alyaro to get his mind fixed up. But this did not change the fact that in the same age set, a warrior of Uyam became *arablagate*.

After warriors from Uyam had been selected for one of the unlucky offices in three successive age sets, Uyam had had enough and decided to try and get admitted by Wambile (Dubsahay) to Belessi Bahay in order to change from the camp of the victims to that of the actors and their allies.

By the *gaalgulamme* of the Irbaallis age set, Uyam already migrated with Belessi Bahay and sang their song. Not until Libaalle were warriors, however, were Uyam ultimately admitted to Belessi Bahay. So Dubsahay made Uyam keep the role of petitioner for 24 years.

What’s curious is that Uyam did not need to alter their ritual settlement position at festivals like *gaalgulamme* and *naabo* when it changed to Belessi Bahay. Now it had the last position in Belessi Bahay (behind Nahagan); before it had, as a powerless and sinless *waakhkamūr* clan, held a position of

honour in the first place of the settlement order of Belessi Beri (with permission of Nebey and Gaal'deylan). (Not unlike the “ladies first” motto in Europe: compensating a subordinate position by means of extra politeness.) But the first position of Belessi Beri and the last one of Belessi Bahay coincide spatially at the eastern end of the circle.

As non-*iibire*, Uyam also does not command a particularly dreaded curse. Since there is, however, “no human being who cannot pray (and therefore curse)”, the question of which is Uyam’s curse is legitimate. It is the head. Someone cursed by Uyam will get a headache. In Uyam’s own words, their curse cuts the head off. Conversely, you call on Uyam to cure all kinds of illnesses of the head with their saliva.

So Uyam has power over the head. Accordingly, they hold the head of the sacrificial animal in tribe-wide animal sacrifices (*óri lagoorraho*), while someone else performs the lethal cut.

In the night after new moon, guests are not entertained in Uyam. They have to stay outside the settlement and get neither water nor food or tobacco. How this custom came about I do not know.

#### 2.8.8. TUBCHA

Tubcha consists of two parts: the *iibire* subclan of Gaallaalle and the *waakhkamúr* 'Deelle. Gaallaalle had a “black” camel bull, 'Deelle a “reddish one”. Consequently, Gaallaalle is also called Gaal'deydaayan (= black camels), 'Deelle is also called Gaal eydimoot (= reddish camels).

Gaallaalle was among the first Rendille of which the origin myth tells (cf. the chapter on Uyam, 2.8.7.). He gathered the other Tubcha around him. A poor man by the name of Bolo, progenitor of the lineage of the same name, came out without “camels”. What he did have, however, when he came out was a shaving knife (*mindilla*) with which he circumcised the other Rendille. (He himself was circumcised by his twin brother and his twin brother by him.) He also had blood arrows, *ganjo*, i.e. arrows used to open up the veins of animals to draw blood. Later, when the Rendille became numerous and Bolo could not manage circumcising them all by himself, he brought in 'Deelle to help him.

'Deelle tell that story the other way around. According to them, their ancestor came into this world with knife and arrows and later brought in Bolo as second circumciser.

According to their version, this is what happened: Gaallaalle came out. Later, 'Deelle appeared. 'Deelle had blood arrows, shaving (circumcision) knife, axe.

Gaallaalle said: *Et suuno!*

Drive the man in! [Incorporate him into us!]

But 'Deelle said: *Eti lasuuno mee.*

*A kiyye ganjotiis khabo,*

*Mindiilatiis khabo,  
Gidibiis khabo.*

This is no one to incorporate. He is someone with his own blood arrows, his own shaving knife, his own axe.

*Gaallaalle: Kaale gide, inno a walaale!*

So come, we are brothers!

So 'Deelle became an equal brother to Gaallaalle instead of being integrated by the latter.

Later, 'Deelle took pity on the poor Bolo and gave him a shaving knife so he could circumcise people.

*Oo, mindiilataah.  
'Doo'd khandiye, hoola kadondoono,  
kanoolaaw!*

Here, take your knife, may you circumcise people with it, gather livestock with it, get well with it!

But 'Deelle was the first to circumcise people and appear with blood arrows, they say; still today they spit on camels which have been bled so they do not come to any harm.

To provide further iron tools apart from the first tools with which 'Deelle or Bolo had come out, the existence of blacksmiths was necessary.

It is not surprising that Tubcha, the clan of boys' circumcisers, have a special relationship with the segregated caste of the blacksmiths. It was Tubcha who ordered the blacksmiths (*tumaal*) to forge. He spat on them and this way blessed them for this work. If Tubcha curses a *tumaal*, the latter cannot carry on his craft.

## 2.8.8.1. RITUAL FUNCTIONS OF GAALLAALLE

### 2.8.8.1.1. GAALGULAMME

Although Gaallaalle is the higher subclan in Tubcha, they settle behind 'Deelle at the *gaalgulamme* ceremony. The reason for this is a close relationship to Dubsahay. The first and the last clan together form the western main gate of the large ring which all the Rendille pass through. By moving behind 'Deelle in the settlement order, Gaallaalle therefore end up not in a subordinate, but instead in a more prominent position.

At the *gaalgulamme* all the warriors come to the house of Gaallaalle. Gaallaalle throw cedar leaves into the fire for them and pray for them. Then they go and take their bath in Lake Rudolf.

### 2.8.8.1.2. FAHAN

In the section on "time and time givers" we explained what a *fahan* is (cf. excursus I, 0.6.4.). Put in simple words, *fahan* is the combining of three consecutive age sets to one "generation". But these "generations", of course, differ from the natural generations (*oyo* – 'father') in that they each comprise three

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specific age sets, while the natural generation comprises the space of time of any age set of fathers to the third following age set, the age set of the sons.

After three age-grade cycles, that is every 42 years, there is a *fahan* ceremony.

For that purpose, elders of all the clans gather at a big, permanent water-hole, like Sanng'al (?) or Lake Rudolf. About 10 men from each clan attend, also from O'doola. They all wash themselves. Then they go and cut sticks (*ulo*) for themselves. With these sticks they go to the settlement of Gaallaalle. They give their sticks to Gaallaalle. On the next day, Gaallaalle skin a ewe and tie fur strips (*khaalli*) to the new sticks. The old staffs of the elders are stuck into the thornbush fence of the camel foal pen. There they will be left when the group next moves on.

As we have described, one must never step over the stick of a *fahan* elder lying on the ground – this then applies to all the elders of the respective age set, not only to the ones having participated in the ceremony.

The *fahan* ceremony cannot take place in a *soorriyo* month, but it can take place in the second half of the moon (*mugdi*). For the scheduling of about every other Rendille ritual, the exact reverse is true. Gaallaalle are dreaded by the elders of a completed *fahan* because of their curse.

#### 2.8.8.1.3. CASE HISTORIES ON THE FEAR OF A *FAHAN* MAKER

A certain elder of Gaal'deylan was called *Bukkha*, “short grass” or “little grass”, by the girls. He was short, weakly and coughed a lot. A woman whom I had once teased by suspecting she had slept with him laughed at me and told me, she had once observed *Bukkha* washing himself. His tool, she said, was like that of a hyena. She bent her index finger in a characteristic gesture. (Hyenas are believed to be hermaphrodites and to fertilise themselves.)<sup>35</sup> *Bukkha*'s wife had run away. It was a little difficult to find another wife for him although he had very many camels.

*Bukkha* had asked for the hand of a girl in Nahagan-'Duroollo. But the older sister of this girl had been abducted and circumcised by a man from Gaallaalle, the *fahan* makers. Nahagan had somehow managed to get the girl back. So now she waited, circumcised and therefore devalued, in her parents' house until the elders agreed on what would happen to her. Although Gaallaalle was still interested in the girl, 'Duroollo and Gaallaalle did not reach an agreement.

*Bukkha* would have preferred the younger sister because she had not yet been circumcised.

“*Ti liidarine doonna.*”

“We want the one who has not been touched.” In Rendille context, “untouched” is “uncircumcised”. “Virginal” would be “*liidesin*” = “unpunctured” and is a phenomenon only to be observed in very young girls.

<sup>35</sup> This was also believed in Europe in the ancient times and still is among the Somali, cf. Paulitschke: *Ethnographie Nordost-Afrikas II*.

But the 'Durolo now insisted that the older sister marry before the younger one, and Bukkha was content with this substitute bride.

*Weeli enenyet, chi doodi leh dood siiche, saggoh liidiida?*

If the owners give a human being to the people [the ones asking for the bride], how could one refuse?

But Gaallaalle objected although they did not stand much of a chance any longer. They informed Bukkha: "You will not enter through that gate." So they barred Bukkha with an implicit threat of curse from returning to 'Durolo.

Bukkha discussed this with his clan brothers:

*Kuus maanta ani la meel a itire. Anna kootte etoo addan eheneekka, goorat a disde. Saggi an idiso: Chirrinki kootte iche Nahaganki addan laka tahe, saggi an idiso: naf seyyah loolyo bahcha.*

That one has ruined my chances today. If I was a different man, I would have long since married her. I would have married her in the following way: Even if she was from that other [more distant] Nahagan, I would have married her like this: I give three head of cattle [in addition to the bride wealth].

*Ibeenka chaay geecha. Tuma dee disda. Chirri an idisanla mala. Chele la, tolola guno laka ma khabo, ma leeyyeedo toolla, toolla ma leeyyeedo.*

Tonight I would have brought sugar and tea. I would have worked them and then married her. The time of the wedding has been delayed. And yesterday, and now they [Gaallaalle] do not even have the livestock for the bridewealth, they do not negotiate with them, they do not negotiate with them.

So with these words Bukkha laments how Gaallaalle stole his chance without being able to take it themselves. But why does he not go to Tubcha himself to discuss the problem with Gaallaalle? His clan brothers are willing to support him in this.

*Bukkha: Amehe? Goobaas a hiyyaaya, "mboowe" iyadeh. Maanta a karoore. A karoore. Kootte hoola daaha, maanta afi an kaleeyyeedo ma khabo. A karoore.*

Why? This clan is of my root. They call me "older brother". But today I am afraid. Otherwise I could have asked them for livestock, [but] today I don't have a mouth to talk to them with. I am afraid.

Because of his fear Bukkha suggests to his clan brothers to go to Tubcha without him. At the very most he would be willing to come along if they spoke for him. He could answer questions. So it is obvious that all his fighting spirit is gone. The reasons are the following:

*Naarugo: Wihiyye nah Tubcha, wihi nah "isooweesda" ikadowne, hugunka worran lahaagsati, minkaase haaggicha. Fahanka maanta fahan leessi. Ussa liidallaabsan. Goob Gaallaalle worran fahan yeeda.*

This is why we tell Tubcha “pray for us”, that custom which is usually done that house does. This *fahan* who is called *fahan*. These sticks one must not step over. The family of Gaallaalle makes [“talks”] the *fahan*.

*Baarooowa: Waha laka, koow dah! Nah ichoow Tubcha a idi walaale toro isiiggin. Albe ma iskadisanni. Yeedi suuje laka ma isinadeeh. Nah deerka wihi nah iskadoonno: isiweysanni, a wahaas.*

This also [is true], say: firstly! [And secondly:] We and Tubcha are like brothers, and still we are afraid of each other. We do not marry each other’s girls. We don’t say anything bad to each other. What we want from each other is to pray for each other.

But there was too much fear, so nobody went to Gaallaalle to ask for their prayer and their consent to Bukkha’s plans of marriage. None of the two rivals married the daughter of ’Duroollo. She was probably given to a warrior in the following year, the marriage year of the Ilkichilli age set, because Ilkichilli is not part of a *fahan* yet and will not be united with the following two age sets to a *fahan* by Gaallaalle until 28 years from now. By then the whole affair will have blown over.

A few months later Bukkha married a *sabadde* girl (cf. 1.2.4.) from Urowween who was already a little older. As he was in a hurry to marry he accepted having to pay a fine for bride kidnapping although such a kidnapping had never taken place. It was pure blackmailing. Rumour had it that the first miscarriage of this woman was caused by her sleeping with too many men. A mixture of too many different kinds of sperm is believed to harm every embryo. In summation, we wish Bukkha more luck with women in the future.

#### 2.8.8.2. TUBCHA’S RELATIONS TO OTHER GROUPS

In the ancient times, before Lake Rudolf grew big and divided the people into two parts, the Geleba (Dassanech) on the one side and the Rendille on the other, Bolo lived in the same settlement with Gaalorra for a while. From Gaalorra, Bolo adopted the *amomisa*, a piece of plaited material, like a miniature mat, under the roof, as well as the custom of only offering milk sacrifices on *gooban* and *hogdeer*, the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> night of the moon, and the jewellery made of ostrich eggshells for their girls. Today, there are Bolo both among the Dassanech and among the Rendille, people say, and both have these distinctive features originating with Gaalorra.

A different type of relation exists between Gaallaalle and Orboora in the Aryaal section of Lukumai.

A man from Gaallaalle once had two wives. The first one was barren, the second only had one little son. Later he took a widow with three grown-up sons for another wife. He bid her build her house between that of his first and that of his second wife. When he was old, the widow’s sons tried to take possession of the camels of the son of the second wife by force.

So Gaallaalle chased them away:

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“*Nyaama! Walah an atin kahaagsadi mele, nyaama, baaba!*”

“Leave! I have nothing to do with you, leave, get lost!”

The youngest son of these three brothers, however, Gaallaalle kept with him. The descendants of this boy are Orboora in Lukumai, where they later emigrated. The descendants of the second wife’s son are still Gaallaalle today.

### 2.8.9. GAAL’DEYLAN

Gaal’deylan’s oldest subclan is Keele. It is said to have been in Rendille territory for the longest time and to have gathered the other subclans around itself.

Elleemo are said to have come from the Boran [Gabra] and to have been taken in by Keele.

Gaalorra’s origin myth will be presented in great detail further below.

Ma’daacho are said to be descended from Gaalorra. In Gaalorra there once was a crippled girl with deformed legs (*luhlo made*) who could not be married. So she was made a woman anyhow by circumcising her and giving her a house. A Tubcha man begot the boy Ma’daacho with her.

Keele consists of seven houses (Keele in a narrower sense: 3 houses, i.e. married women, Burcha: 4 houses). Elleemo has 11 houses. So the two highest subclans are very small and hardly present a real power factor. Ma’daacho with its approximately 30 houses is, compared to Gaalorra, also small.

Keele, Elleemo and Ma’daacho are *waakhkamúr* and not different from other clans in their form of house, their women’s hairstyle and other features.

If something like standard average Rendille exists, they are it.

The *iibire* subclan of Gaalorra is a totally different matter.

### 2.8.9.1. GAALORRA

#### 2.8.9.1.1. DISTINGUISHING FEATURES OF GAALORRA

The subclan of Gaalorra, which took me in, probably differs more from the other Rendille clans than they do from each other. (Still it does not seem legitimate to me to contrast these others as “standard Rendille” with Gaalorra because all the clans draw their identity from their differentness and the social system lives on these complementary differences.) I don’t regret having lived with a somewhat atypical clan because this enabled me to extend my research deeply into the past and far beyond the Rendille. Maybe I now know better what a “clan” actually *is* in that part of the world than if I had lived with some other group. (But maybe I would write the same if I had indeed lived with another group.)

Without claiming this list to be exhaustive, the outward distinguishing features of Gaalorra are:

Their houses are different from those of other Rendille. An expert observer does not notice this difference without having been made aware of it:

They consist of a different arrangement of the pole framing supporting the mats. The Gaalorra house has one continuous frame running the width of the house instead of two. The middle three of the poles running from this frame to the back wall and further down to the ground rest on base poles because otherwise their length would not be sufficient.

By the door in the roof of the house, between the pole frame and the mat coating, the *amomisa* after which the subclan can also be named is stored. So “*amomisa*” is also a – if uncommon – synonym of “Gaalorra”.

The *amomisa* is a woven flat ribbon of palm fibre which serves no practical purpose but is occasionally greased with the brains of slaughtered animals (which no Rendille would ever consider eating) and fat.

The girls wear strings of small round discs of ostrich eggshell on their belts – *intoore*, plural *intooreyyo*<sup>36</sup>. Apart from Gaalorra, only Bolo in Tubcha have these *intooreyyo*, and they are said to have copied them from Gaalorra a long time ago.

In their fertile phase the Gaalorra women let their hair grow long and have it done in many small braids which are dyed with red ochre and fat. Only forehead, temples and back of the neck are shaved, while other Rendille women either shave their entire head or – if their first-born is a son – wear the *dokko*, a stiff hairdo in the form of a crest.

Every man wears a brass bracelet which was slipped on his arm when he was still a small child by a man from Nebey who “sucked his tongue” to make him an *iibir*. About the origin of this custom we will hear a myth further below.

Further peculiarities include things not visible:

A ritual name of Gaalorra is Riyyo'diiddo, the “goat avoider” or “goat hater”.

As the story goes, Gaalorra used to neither drink goat milk nor eat goat meat. This avoidance was dropped. Only on ritual occasions, like the *naabo* ceremony (cf. 4.9.), the Gálora warriors slaughter a ram instead of a billy goat. The women's skirts are still exclusively made of sheepskin, while those of all the other Rendille are made of goatskin. (Although women past the child-bearing age sometimes bow to necessity and take whatever is available.)

What is observed strictly is the avoidance of goats with regard to the milking containers (*murubbe*). Avoidances concerning milking containers usually refer to camels: the camels are protected from something, are special camels like the *door* camels (cf. 3.7.). In the milking containers of Gaalorra no goat meat must be put, although meat is often stored in *murubbe*. Also, goat intestines cannot be spread on an upended *murub* for reading, if you want to do some divining alongside the home slaughtering. And of course nobody would ever fill goat milk into a *murub*.

<sup>36</sup> Letiwa's version. I heard *intoorenye*. Footnote added 2014.

Unlike other Rendille Gaalorra do not eat game, neither antelopes nor giraffes.

What Gaalorra men rub on their foreheads and noses at new moon is not white (chalk), like with other Rendille, but reddish: it is chalk mixed with the extract of a special root, the “root of Gaal’deylan” (*hiyyi Gaal’deylan*).

And another special feature is connected to the moon: only on the last two evenings of the “white” (*dakhnaan*), *hogdeer* and *gooban*, do the Gaalorra spill milk sacrifices (*sadaka*, from Swahili) in front of their houses. Other Rendille do this every day.

Obviously people presenting so many mysteries are asked where they come from. But the answers do not make them any less mysterious.

#### 2.8.9.1.2. ORIGIN OF GAALORRA

The following myth consists of six different tales compiled and contrasted: three (thematically separate) tales of Baaroorwa Adicharreh (Gaalorra), one of Urri Taarween (Gaalorra), one of Eysimmirdaana (Nebey), and one of Eysimbaaselle, senior, (Nebey). As to me it seems more important whether in a story Gaalorra are describing themselves or are described by another, i.e. Nebey, I will not label them with the individual names of the story-tellers but with their clan names:

- 1. text of Baaroorwa: (Gaalorra 1)
- 2. text of Baaroorwa: (Gaalorra 2)
- 3. text of Baaroorwa: (Gaalorra 3)
- text of Urri Taarween: (Gaalorra 4)
- text of Eysimmirdaana: (Nebey 1)
- text of Eysimbaaselle: (Nebey 2)

*Gaalorra maanti usu soobahe, Leeba kamiy. Aram lamma. Koo Khallu raah (khallu a walaalinye tiissa), kaaddanla anki Rendille leeyimiy. FooffeenKi Gaal Daayan isoobahe.* (Gaalorra 2)

“When Gaalorra had come out, they came from the lake [Lake Rudolf]. Two men. One followed Khallu (Khallu were his brothers), the other one came [through to] the Rendille side. He found Fooffeen With The Black Camels [= Nebey].” [Among the Gabbra-Boran there is the office of a dignitary named *khallu*, also transcribed as *xallu*, *kallu* and *qallu*, the holder of which is recruited from certain families.]

In a different version, Gaalorra itself is called “Khallu”.

*Khallu, ani laka, baatenyoti kasoobahte, arraagan, ekkees on daagna, ekkeesi nah daagno, mehe leessey: Khallu, maanti u’soobahe, áram lamma isleedelatte, iche seley bahte, koo Kulaal leeyimiyye, inantoo Rendille diste, ki sagga tabe, Booraanto gele, inanti Booraanto diste.* (Gaalorra 4)

Khallu, I too, from our people who came from there, a long time ago, we only hear the tale, and the tale we hear, what does it say:

When Khallu came into being, two men were born together [brothers] who went their own way. One came over Mount *Kulal*, the other one went to Dirre [in southern Ethiopia]. The one who came through here married a Rendille girl, the one who went that way married the Boran girl.

Yet another version:

*Gaaldeylan maanti usu soobahe, Khallu kamiy. Kulaale leeyimiy. 'Doodi kolooraat soobahe: et lamma. Idi silaame. Haanuhiyye riyoot ma danto. Haanuhiyye iyaaat ichoow wihiiyye gaal ichoow loolyo. Riyyo laka jidiche ma taham. Baati yeelan icheon gaaliche taham. Binahiyye Worrán yib kajiro laka ma taham. A lagantahe deerka. (Gaalorra 1)*

When Gaal'deylan [here synonymous with Gaalorra] had come into being, he came from Khallu [obviously taken literally here – which is not unusual, though: place X is often where the people X are]. He came through [i.e. over] Mount *Kulal*. The people who had come into the world first were two men. Like Muslims. They don't drink goat's milk. [They drink only] sheep's milk and that of camels and cattle. Goat meat they don't eat either. So they are ritually safe [ritual state of *door* camels and holders of special ritual statuses. The avoidances listed here are not shared by Muslims. The statement “like Muslims” therefore only refers to the fact that there are things which are strictly avoided at all.]

Let us follow the fate of the brother who had gone to the Rendille.

*Maanti u' Fooffeen isoobahe, Fooffeen óor daahe. 'Oor lasiiche. Fooffeen yeeletii: "Arankaas óoroo siiche, dee, chi' gaal foofe, chi' gaal sagga kadulo, ani 'yuuy!' idah. Jilakh asooroganna! iyidah." 'Deerka "yuuy!" yidah. Gaalorra jilakh soorogte. Saggaas sooyeye, idi geeyu kaahame, intaas on kayumuy. (Gaalorra 2)*

When he had met Fooffeen, he asked Fooffeen for a camel bull. He was given the bull. Fooffeen said to his sons: “I have given that man over there a bull. When the camels are driven to the pasture, when the camels go over there, I will say 'yuuy!' I tell you: ‘Don't turn around!’“ Then he said “Yuuy!“ Gaalorra turned around. He stayed that way, stood like a tree and died in that spot.

*Fooffeen la oriiskiiyye u' Gaalorra siicho ma doono. A ibire a laka-roora. Oor siiche deerka, toro fale, yigis. Chi' óor lasiiche, iibir on liikaroore. (Gaalorra 2)*

Fooffeen had not wanted to give his camel bull to Gaalorra. [But] the *iibire* power was dreaded [= the curse by which Gaalorra could have taken revenge for a refusal]. So he gave him the bull, but he cursed, he killed him. If the bull was given to him, [then] only [because] people were afraid of his *iibire*.

Told by Nebey, this same episode sounds as follows:

*Gaaldeylanla a aranka kalday on, aramela a weynaatte, del mele. Aram la ma liiggo. Faloka ma liiggo. Usu icho Fooffeen a idoo kalday on. 'Oor daah yimiy. "Nyaam, dow!" liidah. Chirrinki gal intuus irteka, intaas on ka il kakaahе. Tolol on kayumuy. Arame soon-yante, min gesse. Del mele, del a waayte goorat. "Nyaam, soogur!" iyidah. Goob goya timiy. "Minki aranta igela", yidah. Arame inam desse. haad lasoobahche. Weel gesse. Harrab lanuugiche. Gaaldeylan maantaase ki gooba yitah. Iche la intaase iskeesse. Walaal deerka, inam a ki gooba gone. (Nebey 2)*

And Gaaldeylan, that was this man alone, and the wife was already old, barren [literally: no birth]. And the man was immune, immune to curse. He and Fooffee were [in this respect] exactly the same. He came to ask for a camel bull. "Go and drive it away! [Take it!]" he was told. When the camels walked over there, he left him standing there on the ground. Standing he died there. The wife came running and went into the house. No birth, she had not given birth before. "Go and move here [= fetch your house!]" he [Fooffeen] said. She moved into the settlement. "Go into the house of this woman [= visit her, if you want to]!" he said. The woman gave birth to a son. A brass bracelet was brought out. He slipped it on the arm of the child. The tongue was sucked [transfer of the *iibire* power, cf. 2.3.]. On this day Gaaldeylan became a clan member [of Nebey!]. The boy just is of the clan.

The idea behind it is roughly the following: Usually it does not matter whether a child was fathered by the mother's husband or one of his clan brothers. In any case it is a child of the clan. This woman, now, was indisputably the wife of Gaalorra who had paid the bridewealth for her. Nevertheless, according to the procedure described, Nebey can also claim right to part of the paternity. So Nebey acted like a brother of the older Gaalorra and made Gaalorra – in the person of this child – his son or, seen from a different generation, his brother.

But what did the brother who had gone to the "Boran" do in the meantime?

*... inanti Booraanto diste. Min barye. Maanti arame uurowte, Booraanto wahe, "minkeey agelina!" iyidah, "walaaleeykoo yowda, minka agelina!" Sossohte, iloo saggee, chi'u' soogelo, haloo suunte, hal khallihoo lukhum kakhaba. (Gaalorra 4)*

He married the Boran girl. He slept in the house. When the woman was pregnant, he called the Boran. "Don't go into my house!" he said, "I go and look for a brother of mine, don't go into this house!" He went here, in a place, when he went in there, he found himself a pack camel, a pack camel which had fur strips [of sacrificial animals] around its neck.

*Chu'us Rendille goya yamiit – walaaliis goorat min a diste, arankoo Neb"eye a yigis, a fale, yigis – deerka "etaas a mehe agarteen?" "Goorat mine diste, arankoo us 'oor daahe, oori us gaal idiicho, arankaase fale, yig" is." Rendille gorat manti us soobahe doodi uskul a buuha. (Gaalorra 4)*

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So when he came among the Rendille – before, his brother had married, a man of Nebey had killed him, cursed [him], killed [him] – [he said]: “Have you seen the man [my brother]?” “Earlier he had married, and a man whom he had asked for a camel bull, a bull he wanted to let to the camels, this man cursed, killed him.” In the past, when they came into the world, the Rendille were full of bad people [people with a powerful curse].

In a different version:

*Chirriyye u' yumuyka, walaaliiski goorat Khallu irte, daage. Walaaliis yimiye, “Eti goorat walaaleey yigis, itusa!” “A Fooffeen” liiyidah. “Ati walaaleey tigus? yey, anna isug!” Walaalaaw, iigaasane, iifaline, iskhatanni.” 'Deerka hawwaaste. (Gaalorra 2)*

When he [the brother who was with the Rendille] had died, his brother who had before gone to [or: to the] Khallu heard of that. His brother came. “Show me him who killed my brother!” “It is Fooffeen” he was told. “You killed my brother, look, wait for me!” “My brother, don't kill me, don't curse me, let us adopt each other!” This was how he pleaded.

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In another version of Nebey it is not quite so easy. And Gaalorra does not behave as imperious.

*Aranti Gaalorreenye aram lakayigis, arankiyye Fooffeen minkii gesse. Isleefidiyeene ichoowka weel kadele. Saahka Gaaldeylan yimiye. Makhaaballe khare fiddiita, Gaaldeylanla yimiyye, min gele. “Nyaame!” inanki goorat aranti Gaaldeylan desse, makhaabal worran “abba” yadeehe, “nyaame, ‘abaayya’ idah, abaayya, abarteey a kiwahta, idah.” Gaaldeylan mine fiddiya. (Nebey 1)*

The wife of Gaalorra whose husband had been killed went into the house of the man Fooffeen. They stayed together until he bore a child out of her. Later Gaaldeylan [the brother from the Boran side] came. The men sat outside [the settlement], and Gaaldeylan came and went into the house. “Go!” [he said to the] boy the wife of Gaaldeylan had given birth to [and who] normally called the man [Fooffeen] ‘father’, “go!, say ‘younger father’s brother’, my mother is calling you!” Gaaldeylan stayed in the house.

*Inam soosohte, worran makhaabal “abba” yadeehe, “abaayya” yidah. “Hay!” kaaddan jilakh soorogte, “ay, inanka, eti idaas yatehe, inankeey ‘idaas dah’ iyidah, a ayyo?” Arame soonyaante, Fooffeen dabar khabatte, “Fooffeenkaaw, inankeey iigaasan!” ‘Deerka “nyaam gidé! Amba dahantoo khabda, alla dahanti addan khabo!” Iche idaase eheneet, inam deerka Gaaldeylan khaate. Inanki Gaaldeylan a kaas. Saggaase deerka isi’heleen. Inam goorat maanti u’ desse, harrab a lanuugiche, dahan haad lagesse. Haada toolla iche isleegessatti, harrab isleenuugsatti, intaase katimiy. (Nebey 1)*

The boy came, said ‘younger father’s brother’ to the man he otherwise called ‘father’. “Hai!” the other one [Fooffeen] turned around, “ai, he who made the boy like that, who said to my boy: ‘say this and that’, who is that?” The woman came running, laid her hand on Fooffeen’s back: “Dear Fooffeen”, so [Fooffeen said]: “Go, then!” [Now apparently speaking to Gaal’deylan:] “I hold the one hand and you, hold the other hand!” So it happened, and Gaal’deylan took the boy.

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This is how it was with the boy of Gaal’deylan. This is how they [Fooffeen and Gaalorra] found each other. The boy, he had before, when he was born, had his tongue sucked, the bracelet had been slipped onto his arm. This bracelet which they [Nebey and Gaalorra still] put on each other now, the tongue they suck each other, this is how it came to that.

So this is the mythical reason given for a clan brotherhood. In all aspects the behaviour towards members of one’s own clan is transferred to the other clan. Gaalorra men can sleep with the same category of women in Nebey as it is their right to do with the women of their own clan. The same applies to Nebey men who visit Gaalorra. The daughters of the respective other clan, however, are avoided like one’s own sisters. Fear and respect as a behavioural norm are stressed even more strongly towards the other clan than within one’s own.

*“Iskhaatanni, walaal nitaahē. Idi doodi isleedesse nitaahē.” ‘Deerka iskhaatatte, Fooffeen ichoow Gaalorra saggaas isikhaatteen. Koo kaldey yitaaheene ichoowka harrab isleenuugsataan. Weyti iskarooraan. Albe laka ma iskadistaan. Ma isleelleyaan. ‘Deerka walaale yahiin, dooda deerka maanti Waakh soobahche, saggaase isleesoobaheen.*  
(Gaalorra 2)

“Let us adopt each other and become brothers, let us become like people who were born together.” So they adopted each other, Fooffeen and Gaalorra adopted each other in this way. They became one until they even sucked each others tongues. They fear each other very much. They do not marry each other’s girls. They don’t have affairs with each other. So they were brothers, these people, when God let them appear, they appeared together like this.

Gaalorra is then said to have taken in the wife of his killed brother and to have had more children with her. But what happened to the family-to-be he had left with the “Boran”? (Gaalorra 4) has the following to tell:

*Baata an ahe maanta, uskulo. Wihi indo kayeyte laka, a tigiis. Arankaas maanta Khalluhi kootte at iworsatti, “minka agelina” yidahye, - chi’ chirdeer lasookaho, arám rafle kuudurta, arame saggi iche ikahto waayte, reeme intane fuussa.*

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Now, the people whom I belong to are bad [dangerous, having a powerful curse, evil]. They kill what they only look at with their eyes, too. Now, the man, from Khallu, about which you have asked me today, who had said: ‘Don’t go into this house’, – when everybody rose in the morning, there was

a puff adder [large viper] sleeping on the wife, the wife didn't know how to get up, the thing lay here [points to breast].

*Saah lasoomaale, a chi' leessi, ul lakasoohide, liiooge. Chi'iche haanu anguumatte, haanuhoo rucchul dibheen, iche la haanu lajje, kakhubte, dante, yagte, intuus orrommatte, bas, katabte 'deerka. Gel-ebka hoola soogeleen, haanu on soomaasse, kakhubte, haanu dante, khatatte 'deerka, meel ilaabte. Aranta 'deerka sohatte, maanti iche desseka, inankoo desse. Chi'iche inam desse, daakkoo koorrommatte, chi'iche dagah korrommatte, 'deerka, ma desso.*

A cow was milked for it [the puff adder], so it is told, [the milking container] was tied to a stick, was given to it. After it had tasted the milk, some milk spilled, and it licked up the milk, more was spilled, it drank, came down [from the woman's breast], sat there, enough, so it left her. In the evening the livestock was driven in, only milk she [the woman] milked for it, spilled it [the milk], it [the puff adder] drank the milk, then she took it in [adopted the snake], laid it in a place. So this woman walked [= lived on]. When she gave birth, she gave birth to a son. After she had given birth to the son, she sat on a rock, and then she did not give birth any more.

*Inanka 'deerka a sohtaane, ba' dista oboorri dista. Loolyoti goorat aram leeyimiyla, loolyotoo addan goya ma lagesso. Keley on yaakhta. Ma ittaawtola. Ti addan dakha. Ittaawta. Iche la weyhoo kalday on. Inanka on menye, etoo addan makhaatti. Chi'iche foofte, arit a loota.*

This boy, now, lived on, married people, married women. And the cattle with which the man [his father] had come are not kept together with the other cattle. They graze by themselves. And they do not multiply. He also herds others; they become numerous. They [the cattle of the first category] are only one single herd. Another cannot take it away, only this son. When it is driven to the pasture, the gate is closed [after him; i.e. the empty thornbush enclosure is shut].

*Eti arittaas isooyisissil, eti "an a Gaal'deylan" yidah, "an a Katebo" yidah, "aritta faha" layadeeh. Aritta leeamii. Ki ekkeeste la, arite ma fahananto.*

Someone who goes to stand by the gate, someone who says "I am Gaal'deylan", says "I am Katebo" [so Katebo is the Boran equivalent of Gaalorra], for him it is said: "Open this gate!" He comes through the gate. To someone who lies they don't open the gate.

*Toolla, 'dood' 'ilaase kayamiite, haanuhi gaal idamine, wih riyyoot idamine, ono kalday liimaalo, Booraanto goya buuha.*

Nowadays the Boran are full of people who come from that country, who do not drink camel milk, do not drink goat milk, for whom only sheep are milked [he is talking of the Gabbra who hardly keep any cattle and can therefore give such people only sheep milk as the other types of milk are avoided by Katebo].

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*Chele cha'an delde, ani riyyo ma aham, gaal ma aham, haanuhi gaal a dama, wihi riyyoot la ma damo, ichoowka chele inkoo annaka idowe on hoolahaas uhum. 'Doodaas toolla, chi'us sulhaal nah kiyimiy etoo inta yimiy, chi'u' "Wahaas ma huno" yidah, "Oh! Atin a Katebo! wor Katebo."*

Yesterday, when I was born [meaning: relatively recently, when I was still young] I did not eat goat, I did not eat camel, [but] I drank camel's milk, and did not drink goat's milk, until recently, at a time, I also, of my own accord, ate these types of livestock. These people now, when they come to us as guests, [when] one comes here, when he says "I don't drink that", [we say:] "Oh! You are Katebo, people [in Boran language] of Katebo."

*Iche loolyo, adi, farad, seyyahta on, ladakhta.*

For them cattle, smallstock, horses, these three are herded.

*Arankaase kaha, inanka kalday ladela, goobi tuumman disa, ded-delatta, lafiddiya, dee berri toro inti aacchi kasoomare, toro inanti goobaas ladista. Inanta toro ma khufto: inankoo kalday on dessa.*

That man stands up, only the one boy is born. He marries a whole clan, [his women] give birth and give birth, they stay. Later, in turn, at the point where the grandfathers come around, again a girl of the clan is married, and this girl does not fail: she bears only one son.

Like the Rendille preferably marry *lafo aacchi*, the "bones of the grandfathers", i.e. a woman from the clan of their father's father's mother, the Katebo also – probably in the line of the first-born – marry a woman from the same clan after two generations. And each of these women only has one son who in turn fathers many children with many women.

*Isseey ma argine, nabahtiisti an daago, Sadaam [sadam] laka eti dab khabo goya ma yamiit, gooba goya ma ladaaro. Chele maanti Sadaam dood ma idow, minan goya koodooti, ma liirti. Wahaas deerka chi'iche weesteen, enenyet a chiikhichaan on.*

My eye did not see it, his ear that I heard: In Ethiopia even a man with a gun cannot enter it, the inside of this settlement is untouchable. Yesterday [= recently], when the Ethiopians or "Sidamo"? pressed the people, shat in the houses, nobody went near it because if they [Katebo] pray, they destroy people [kill by prayers = curse].

*Toolla Booraanto, Alganna, a fiddiita, chi'iche guwa yaakhte, fool-asihi khoodo khabo lasaaha, ladowa, ladowa, ichoowka liigeecha. Chirri liikageenne, meessiis kutte, gaal, uus soogelo, Looto, ibeen maaha baaba.*

Now the Boran [or Gabbra], Alganna [= a Gabbra section], stay [sit, live]; after they have grazed for a few years, young camel bulls with testicles are gathered together, driven, driven, until they are taken there. If they were not brought, if the time has passed, some get lost in the night after the camels were driven in and fenced in.

Gabbara informants confirmed to me that the Alganna section in Ethiopia has a ritual house in which snakes are kept. If one pursues these two leads –

1. who controls the snake house?
2. to whom does Alganna pay a camel tribute?

– I could imagine that you find those mythical Katebo in reality. The following directions might prove helpful:

*Galaas geleb ichoow saah, Alganna gaal a baaba. “Banne manatano. Chiitame, ibeenkiis massate, kola gaal urmo ma gelo, geleb ichoow saah”, Alganna oriita, Booraantoti addanla samacchaar on dakhatta. Ichoowka dee foolaso lasaaha, ladowa, liigeecha, Dirre ankiiski diri jira, Dirre ma idow. Foolaso ladowa, liigeecha. Maanti foolaso ladowe, liigeeche, ussoo dood isoogoocha. Ussaas eti us isoogooche, deerka hoola mujjum dakhta. Idaas a idaas.*

These camels, at night and in the morning Alganna loses camels. “We are doomed, what can we do [in Boran language]? This tribe [Katebo], its deadline [literally: its nights] has expired, now the camels don’t go into the fenced-in settlement any longer” Alganna worries at night and in the morning. The other Boran [= Gabbara] calmly keep watch [over their herds]. Until camel bulls are gathered, are driven, are taken there, it is beyond Dirri, not near Dirri, bulls are driven, taken there. After the bulls were driven, were taken to him [Khallu], he cuts a stick for the people. This stick – the one for whom he cut it afterwards herds his livestock properly. That’s how it is.

(Elsewhere about the woman who only has one son:)

*Weyla kaldaye ladela. Chi’iche desse deerka taas ma layeedo. Weyloo addan ma desso.*

*Arankaas on oboorrihi ittawe dista. Loolyotiisti addan la saggaka ma weynanto. Matah seyyah ichoow geedda tateeh. Yeletaas on il itabta, Algannata, Alganna leessi, a iche on, yaafta on. Baataas deerka, injire buurti geeddee ma argin. Saahka toro lasossohayye, toro maanti arankaas itoollin mehe layeela: Goorat Dirreka ma lahawwaalo.*

*Arankaas chi’u’yumuy, a lasoobaha, lagirdaama. Lagirdaamaayi, il iskhabta, seley lataba. Saahka chirdeer lasookaho, intaas ma kajiro.*

Only that one child is born. After she has given birth to it, she is not talked about any more: She bears no other child. Only the man [this child when it is grown-up] marries many women. His cattle do not become many there. They become three or so many [signals 4] heads [= pasture locations]. And these sons [his many sons] spread over the earth. These Alganna, who are called Alganna, they only consist of this tribe [the sons of Khallu]. So these people, never have so many been seen. After that everybody walks around again [= goes on living without anything special happening], but when this man is not standing up any more [= has died], what is done? In the past, at Dirri, he

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was not buried. When this man has died, everybody comes out, dances. They dance, it becomes dark [literally: the world holds itself, i.e. sky and earth take each other's hands], they part.

On the next morning everybody rises, and he is gone.

*Ma looyo. Sohte. Chele geeddi nah her kanaheka, cha'an daago, et geeddane lahawwaale. Hawwaassa amehe ikeene: ooytim. Eti looye, iche chirdeer, chi' lasookahoka, kalla jiifa. Lakhaate, lahawwaale. Ki toro sookhucche, inanki u' dele, lahawwaale. 'Dooði addan a lahawwaala one, doo, diyye aranta desse, ma lahawwaalo. Rendille toolla lafo aacchi ma essi? idaas. Inanki aranta desse. 'Dooði addan, Booraantoti addan, chirrinki u' diste, u' laka dele, idi Rendille on a sookhubaan. Gooba, aranta on inam lamma idelin.*

There is no crying. And more: Yesterday [not long ago], when we were warriors [Irbaallis], if I heard it right: So many people [signals 2] were buried. And what has brought these burials on? The crying. Someone who was cried about lies there when you get up in the morning. He is taken, buried. Who follows then, the son he bore, is buried. Other people are likewise buried, [only] those who this woman gave birth to are not buried. Don't the Rendille say now "bones of the grandfathers" [something returning every other generation]? That is exactly how it is: the son this woman gave birth to. Other people, other Boran, when they have married, when they have children, they spill themselves like Rendille [= proliferate]. Only this family, only this woman does not bear two children."

It is obvious that very colourful tales surround these strange Khallu/Katebo. We do not want to present these in detail. In part, these tales seem to have been spun under the motto "as fanciful as possible". Another element seems to be that with these people, all that is normal must be reversed. In case other researchers might find a group about which similar things are said which possibly contribute to the identification of this group, or in case these narrative elements own a deeper meaning I did not uncover, I want to briefly mention them:

They do not geld animals by cutting or beating, but by touching their backs with a stick and saying: "you are an ox" or "you are a wether", etc.

If they want to meet, they walk around the settlement backwards (*dub waraaba* = hyena's butt; hyenas are, in Rendille belief, different in every respect) and past each other until they can see each other's face.

Their settlements are filled with tame puff adders which move around as freely as the dogs of the Rendille.

The following story indicates that not everything regarding those people is pure imagination but that there are people outside of Rendille society who at least share the avoidances characteristic of Gaalorra:

*Koo kalday on maantoo agarre.*

(Question: *At?*)

*Ani kalday mee. 'Dooda maanta ... Tuummamba gaal goya a kajiirte. Goorat, gumaaddi nah khandiyanne Ankuus maanta miigeete kijirre. Aranki Booraantotoo leejire, nah bariite. Booraanto a geeddi et chantoo ichoow lihe, a sulhaale nah bariite. Ibeenka deerka dood goollinne. Il a roobe, haanu lasiiche. Arankoo haanu diide. "Haanuhi gaal ma doono" yidah. "A idoh?" "Haanuhi loolyo ichoow wihiiyye adi on damma. Adi laka, haanuhi iyyaat kaldaye dama" yidah. Leehawwoonne. Chi' nah yeyno, idi Gaaldeylan maanti us soobahe. Iche uluba saggas on ijirta. Chi' usu wor nah siicho, ilicho uluba a idaas. Diigag idamine, haanu idamine, jidassihi gaal iyumhan, idaas. "Gaal a khabtaan?" worsade. "Gaal ma khabno" yidah. "Amehe khabtaan?" "Adi icho loolyo." "Riyyo a khabtaan?" "Aa." "Haanuhiche a dantaan?" "Albehenyo a dama, nah la ma danno." "Jidichela atamhiin?" "Albehenyo a yahame, nahla ma naham." 'Deerka chi' u'yeyyeedo, idi goorat maanti Gaaldeylan soobahe. Arankaas a idaas rubeyticheeda. (Gaalorra 3)*

Only one we saw one day.

(Question: *you?*)

Not only I; those people, like ... [names two age-set mates]. All these people were in the camel camp. That was a long time ago, in the Friday year when we were circumcised [1951], we were there in the north. The man was with some Boran [or Gabbra] and spent the night with us. About five or six Boran spent the night with us as our guests. So in the night we gave them to eat. It was leafage time [the time after the rainy season, when the plants have leaves], milk was given. "I don't want camel's milk" he said. "Why?" "I only drink cow's milk and smallstock milk. Of the smallstock I only drink sheep's milk" he said. We talked with him. As we saw it, he was like Gaaldeylan when he had come into existence. They still live in this way. The way he told us it is still like this in their country, they don't drink bloods [the blood of no type of animal], don't drink milk, don't eat the meat of camels, that's how it is. "Do you have camels" I asked. "We don't have any" he said. "What do you have?" "Smallstock and cattle." "Do you have goats?" "Yes." "Do you drink their milk?" "Our girls do, we don't." "Do you eat goat meat?" "Our girls do, and we don't." So when he talked it was like in the past when Gaaldeylan had come out. That's how [literally: the core of this meaning] this man was.

An attempt to clearly identify these mythical Khallu-Katebo with any dignitaries of the Boran or other Oromo tribes using Haberland's book about the Oromo<sup>37</sup> fails. But what does become apparent is that there are a number of

<sup>37</sup> Haberland, Eike: Die Galla Süd-Äthiopiens, Stuttgart 1963.

possible correspondences and that the stories of our Rendille informants, which at first seemed so fanciful to us, do have a considerable realistic background.

A thorough investigation of Haberland's description would be worthwhile, but we will limit ourselves to a few key points.

How much sense it makes to identify the "Khallu" of the Rendille myth with certain groups of persons called "Kallu" by the Oromo, is doubtful.<sup>38</sup> There is some indication that, on the time level of the possible historical background of Gaalorra's Khallu myth, the Oromo groups with their different patrilineages of Khallu dignitaries had not or not yet been subdivided in their present form.

The fact that many of the clans which the Kallu of very different Oromo tribes come from have the same names suggests that these Kallu clans have one common origin or, at any rate, only very few origins.

Our informant (Gaalorra 4) identifies the mythical Khallu with those Kallu to which the Gabbra phratry of Alganna pays camel tributes. According to Haberland, this is the *Kallu sabbu or Kallu karayu*, one of the two *qallu* of the Boran residing in the east or southeast of the Yavello.<sup>39</sup> Situated south-east of Yavello is the extensive plain of Dirre, in which our informant also believes his "Khallu" to be. But maybe we are not doing justice to our source by demanding accuracy in the wrong place. While it is, for instance, perfectly reasonable to claim some kind of relationship between Angles and Saxons on both sides of the North Sea, it makes no sense at all to ask in which families existing today such a kinship might be certifiable.

In different instances Haberland's description corresponds to that of our informants, which proves that our informants were not so ill-informed.

The old Kallu of the Oromo were believed to have been translated to heaven after they died.<sup>40</sup> If a Kallu of the Oromo tribe of Gugi dies, every person present starts to cheer and dance with joy.<sup>41</sup>

Haberland also repeatedly reports of the difficulties of unauthorisedly entering the kraal of a Kallu, which is locked in a special way.

Almost all *qallu* have a special relationship with snakes, keep them in their houses, partly in sacks, partly, it is believed, moving around freely like dogs and obeying on command. Some Kallu are said to have been fathered by snakes.

Even the Rendille story of the Khallu only being able to approach each other backwards seems to have a factual background. The two highest Kallu of the Boran are not allowed to look each other in the eye. "At major consul-

<sup>38</sup> Rendille: kh (x) corresponds to Oromo: k; Rendille -khal (to skin) = Oromo - qal (slaughter).

<sup>39</sup> Haberland, 1963, p. 155.

<sup>40</sup> Haberland, 1963, p. 160.

<sup>41</sup> Haberland, 1963, p. 308.

tations the two Kallu can speak with each other, either sitting back to back or separated by a partition or a curtain in the house.”<sup>42</sup>

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## 2.9. A CASE OF CONFLICT TO ILLUSTRATE THE RELATIONS BETWEEN GAALORRA AND NEBEY

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of July, 1976, early in the morning, it turns out that Koreeyya, Worguut Taarwern's (Galorra) daughter, has disappeared. She had been promised to her long-time boyfriend (*maamir*), but has now apparently fallen out with him. Now she is thought to have walked to a Nebey settlement about 15 kilometres away. Of course she could never have married a warrior of Nebey because they are her brothers. But in this settlement group there lives a man of Istoor, Saale-Kimogol, whose son was her new boyfriend. He is said to have spoken with her the night before at the well. So this Istorr junior has stolen her, some say, “of late the girls steal themselves” is stated by others.

People gather around my car because I am to drive a delegation, including Worguut, to Nebey. Only by returning the girl the disgrace (*lakhaanyo*) can be averted from us. A warrior of a different settlement group of our clan, who has some business in Nebey, is supposed to join us, too. I am delaying the departure a little to increase the gratefulness if in the end I do drive them and to give Koreeyya the head start necessary for this case history to come about because otherwise we might catch up with her before she reaches her destination. This way there is, in my estimation, no danger of the operation being successful, in which latter case I would feel guilty towards Korreiya.

In Nebey we sit under a tree with some of the elders there. They explain that no foreign girl has been seen in the settlement. But if one comes, they will not circumcise her, but instead let us know. We do not believe a word, rightly so. The subclan of Kimogol, as another subunit of Saale, is a brother clan of Nebey. So Nebey are obliged to act loyal to Istoor. On the other hand, we as brothers of Nebey have no means at our disposal to lend weight to our demand. We have to love and fear Nebey. So this conflict is only possible because our brothers' brothers are not our brothers, but instead potential marriage partners. A conflict of this kind would be impossible with Nebey because Gaalorra and Nebey do not intermarry. The close brotherhood would in this case have a conflict-reducing effect.

But, indirectly, a conflict of bride kidnapping has arisen between us and Nebey now because they are backing the kidnapping of the bride by their (not our) brother Kimogol. As long as Nebey, however, protect Kimogol we cannot possibly act as rude (forcibly enter the house, grab the girl, leave) as we might have considered behaving towards Kimogol as non-brothers.

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<sup>42</sup> “Bei großen Beratungen können die beiden Kallu miteinander sprechen, sie sitzen dabei entweder mit dem Rücken gegeneinander, oder sie sind im Haus durch eine Zwischenwand oder einen Vorhang getrennt.” Haberland, 1963, p. 155.

We pretend to believe Nebey's explanations and take our leave. Our warrior stays. We tell him we will come back shortly after sunset. He is told to give Koreeyya a false sense of security by pretending to be on her side.

As soon as he sees the headlights of the car he is to grab her and wait for us. (This suggestion presupposes that Nebey could not have forced him to let the girl go because Nebey has to fear and love Gaalorra just as much as vice versa. This mutual fear seems to have the effect that whoever behaves rudely first goes unpunished because the rudeness cannot be paid back in kind. "If they take my spear, I cannot demand it back", etc.)

We spend the afternoon in a settlement group of Long'eli a few kilometres away. After dark we come back. The warrior meets us and tells us that the girl has been there all day. She is in Istoor's house. He has not been able to lure her out of there, he says.

The elders of Nebey don't seem to be surprised that our leaving was only feigned. Lying is part of the game.

Again everybody gathers for a talk. We are told that we can take the girl with us. On one condition: We are not allowed to hit her within the *uram*, the fenced-in settlement site. This is an encoded *no* because all my companions think it is impossible to remove a struggling girl from the house and out of the settlement against her will without the use of force. And, indeed, our question how we are supposed to manage that is left unanswered. On the other hand, the apodictic form of the condition "*uram goya ma lakajaho* – within the settlement she is not hit" – is the indirect threat of a curse. For a while we discuss technical problems – who is to hold her arms, who the legs, etc. – but again and again come to the conclusion that it would in any case result in an ugly scene which would, firstly, be disgraceful and, secondly, violate the condition.

The elders of Nebey retire for dinner and one by one come back. The conversation continues for hours and goes around in ever tighter circles. We are told they have slaughtered a ram; first we should eat. I tease Worguut by saying he is about to exchange his daughter for a roasted ram because as soon as he has been fed, he cannot assert any more claims. He agrees and opts against roasted meat. But we are all hungry and the majority wins.

During the meal Worguut keeps saying that, if all this had not happened in Nebey of all places, he would have taken his daughter home this very morning.

After the meal the discussion is continued. We have no chance but to surrender. It is agreed to hold the wedding in Gaalorra so that everything looks as normal as possible. Koreeyya, of course, stays in Istoor's house as a pawn. In the morning, we return without her.

How Worguut justified himself to Koreeyya's deserted bridegroom, I don't know. The latter, incidentally, was from Saale, a clan brother of Istoor's. Worguut might have pointed out to him that the culprit was to be found among his own clan brothers.

[2.10 skipped. As explained in the introduction, the first attempt to describe interethnic clan relationships contained too many impressions deserved to be reproduced here. Interethnic clan relationships have been the topic of many of my later writings, including *Identities on the Move*.]

## 2.11. THIRD EXCURSUS:

### WHAT THE RENDILLE BELIEVE ABOUT HUMAN BIOLOGY

There are *dooḍi guḍuūdan* (red people). This has nothing to do with skin colour. The red people include the subordinate subclans of Dubsahay. The clans of Matarbah, Elegela and Gaalorra also belong to them. The daughters of this clan are said to have particularly short pregnancies of only seven months (counted from the time when the menstruation fails to set in, the time “waiting” for menstruation is not counted).

The clans Uyam, Urowween and Tubcha, on the other hand, are *hayyaan*. (So these are exactly the clans which the myth claims have “come out” first, together with the Faarre (= Wambile) subclan of Dubsahay. They are particularly tough. They can endure ten days in the bush without food and water before they die. The pregnancies of their daughters and the daughters of Rengumo last particularly long, ten or even eleven months.

All the other Rendille are *dooḍi daddakhan* (white people). Their daughters have average pregnancies.

It is tempting to assume that these convictions are based on inaccurate calculations because, due to clan exogamy and the resulting intermarrying of all clans, the Rendille form a biological unity. But they are believed as irrefutable facts. So the ritual differentiation of the clans corresponds to the belief in their different biological nature.

A particularly drastic example of this believing in differences in human biology we already discussed with regard to “good” and “bad” people, i.e. non-“K” and “K” people. The child of a “K” man and a non-“K” woman has to be aborted because it would bring bad luck to other children. This “badness” is localised in the sperm. “K” people have “bad piss”. Similar is true for the blacksmiths (cf. 2.5.).

But the Rendille probably do not see any difference between biological and ritual categories of humans. The child of an uncircumcised “boy” also has to be aborted. Circumcision changes the nature of a person.

This distinction between “red” and “white” people according to clan membership is not to be confused with the distinction between “red” and “black” people with regard to their actual skin colour. The Rendille classify the different bronze tones of their skin according to these two categories. If, now, a “red” person has a skin disease like *nabhaaro*, he will go to a “black” person and have him cure the disease by spitting on him, and vice versa. The general belief is that a person has more power over a member of the other category of skin colour than over one’s own.

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### 3. PERSONS IN SPECIAL RITUAL POSITIONS

Our observations about the ritual differentiation of the individual Rendille clans and subclans, adding complementarily and, in part, compensatorily to the organisation according to seniority, as we have described them so far, caused us to assume that in the acephalous Rendille society, not knowing any organised political power, the differentiation of spiritual forces, the different curses and the fear of them, are a central organising principle. Apart from the differentiation of descent groups in the patriline and the functional division according to age and gender, there is a third level (cf. 0.5.) on which behaviourally relevant distinctions between persons are made, either for short transitional stages connected to rites of passage or for decades. We will discuss the special ritual positions belonging to this level in one single context, although in a conventional ethnographic monograph the following observations would very likely be dealt with under quite different headings. The reason for this is that the persons described in this section are mentioned in the same context by the Rendille and felt to belong together and that in the sphere of ritual symbolism, particularly of avoidances, there are striking parallels between them which are seen and described as such by the Rendille, too.

So how does Yeleewwa Alyaro, Uyam, about 60 years of age, see the connection between these special ritual positions, and what are the people like who feel they are equipped with special powers and/or exposed to particular dangers?

*Rendille et geedda [4] a 'hoole, yidah. Goob geedda [4] iidaahane.  
Et geedda [4]: 'Doo'daas duubab khabo. Meeraat. Maanti lakhandiiti.  
Ichoow toro doo'doo addan.*

Among the Rendille so many [signals 4] [categories of] people are difficult [or: hard] [difficult means they have the right to demand gifts and it is difficult to refuse them something]. Don't say so many [signals 4] clans. So many [signals 4]: These people with *duub* [*dabeel*], *merat* [warriors who killed an enemy]. At the time of circumcision. And other people, too. [Question: Who?] *Hosoob* (cf. 3.5.). [Question: What kind of people are they?]

*A doo'denyokoo idah. 'Doo'daas hissaabtiis a ummanki muslim. Wihi yumuy ma yaham. Wihi iche fooliche igaran dakkhan ma yeesso. Binahi Yibaat laka ma layaham. Wah la uweso [Swahili: uweso] lasiiche.*

“They are of our people. They are similar to Muslims [their attribution is Muslim-like]. What died [of a natural cause] they don't eat. Everything [the face of which] they don't know they don't do. Wild animals are not eaten, either. And that is the power which was given to them.”

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And *that* (i.e. the food avoidances) *is* the power which was given to them! Surely this alleged identity relation between ritual avoidance and power is a simplifying description to instruct a clueless foreigner. What type of relation this really is – certainly a close one – we will investigate later (see 3.7.). For now let us note: this category of persons has a number of *avoidances* in common. And they also share a kind of *power* which is considered to be connected to it. What does this power involve? Given the harsh living conditions and the way Rendille values are strongly influenced by the stomach, the answer is not surprising. One important aspect of this power is being able to request livestock.

On certain occasions, the *dabeel*, a group of ritual specialists consisting exclusively of married men and appointed and inaugurated by the O'doola clan, go and visit the settlement groups of other clans with their sacred drum, *jibaanjib*, dance and pray. Whoever refuses them a head of livestock on these occasions submits himself to the probably strongest curse the Rendille have to offer.

*Meeraat*, warriors who can present the genitals of an enemy they killed, receive a she-camel from their uncle (mother's brother) if they are first-born sons. If they are younger sons, their older brother must provide this camel.

Immediately after their circumcision the young warriors, *lakhandiita*, receive, if they are the oldest sons of a woman, a camel from their oldest mother's brother; younger sons will be given one by their father and/or other kinspeople from the patrigrup. If they are not satisfied with the number or quality of the camel(s), they refuse to stand up after the operation and this way protract the whole procedure as only one candidate is circumcised at a time.<sup>1</sup>

*Hosoob* are an exception in this respect. Their power is not related to being able to claim livestock. Rather, it is an age-grade role of the warriors, *her*, 44 people equipped with an effective curse and prayer against whose will the remaining warriors can take hardly any decisions. Gifts of livestock do, however, play a part with the *gudur*, an age-grade functionary of the younger married men, the age set preceding the respective warriors. The ritual correspondences between *hosoob* and *gudur* are so numerous and the Rendille themselves so much aware of it that we also set the *gudur*, who is actively responsible for the ritual wellbeing of younger married men and has an effective curse and blessing over them, into this context. The *gudur* is "powerful" in the sense mentioned above. When he is installed at the *naabo* ceremony of his age set (cf. 4.9.), a herd consisting of 52 camels is assembled for him by all the sections, and if one of these camels dies, he is entitled to request replacement from the previous owner.

The following list of the most important rules and avoidances is meant to illustrate the degree to which these five categories of people are treated as equivalent in ritual symbolism. Not all of the avoidances can be referred to all five categories in a meaningful way, which is why a number of explana-

<sup>1</sup> Spencer, 1973, p. 45 f.

tory footnotes (numbers in brackets) are necessary. “+” means that the rule or the avoidance in the respective line has to be observed by the class of persons in the respective column, “-“ means it does not have to.

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	<i>dabeel</i>	<i>meeraat</i> in the critical phase of “ <i>rib</i> ”	<i>khandi</i> until recov- ered	<i>hosoob</i>	<i>Guḍur</i>
Does not eat animals who died of natural cause	+	+	+	+	+
Does not anoint himself with their fat	+	+	+	+	+
Does not eat animals with a docked tail	(3)	+	-	+	+
Animals killed by lions or leopards can be eaten like slaughtered ones	+	(4)	(4)	+	+
Does not eat meat of the head (1)	(5)	+	+	+	+
Does not eat game	+	+	+	+	+
Does not eat “hot things” (2)	(6)	+	+	(6)	(6)
Cannot drink from <i>inanki kuul</i> , the lid of a certain milk container	+	+	+	+	+
Cannot tie or untie <i>kunni</i> , a certain milk container, to or from the neck of a camel	(7)	(8)	(8)	+	+
Can only drink camel’s milk if camels are within the enclosures	(9)	+	+	+	+
Cannot hit a camel on the head	+	(8)	(8)	+	+
Cannot run after a camel fast	+	(10)	(10)	+	+
Cannot slaughter	-	+	+	+	+
Has to drink some pure milk before drinking milk mixed with blood	+	(11)	(11)	+	+
Cannot draw blood from animals	+	(12)	(12)	+	+
[Must not touch food with hand	-	+	+	-	-]

- (1) “Head” also includes the “head of the liver”, an appendix to the liver (*matakki heleessi*), the “head of the heart” (*matakki weyna* (*weyna* = heart of an animal in contrast to *rubey* = heart of a human)) and the “head of the breastbone” (*matakki 'higeet*), the fat on the sternum.
- (2) The category “hot” (*kuleel*) has only little to do with temperature. It includes, for instance, blood, roasted meat, tea and maize porridge.
- (3) *Dabeel* can eat animals with a docked tail if the wound is healed up. But they do not anoint themselves with their fat.
- (4) *Meeraat* and *khandi* cannot even eat such animals. So to them, a stricter version of the rule to only eat slaughtered animals applies than to the three other groups of persons.
- (5) For the *dabeel* this prohibition is restricted to the “head” of sheep and goats. Cattle’s and camels’ heads they are allowed to eat.
- (6) *Dabeel*, *hosooob* and *gudur* are only forbidden to eat “hot things” during the first 4 days after their installation, but afterwards may eat them.
- (7) To *dabeel* this rule applies in a laxer form. They can untie the *kunni*, but have to use a certain appeasing method, by first pinning grass to the *kunni* etc. Cf. the chapter on *dabeel* (3.1.).
- (8) *Meeraat* and *khandi* may not even come near the camels. Therefore it is pointless to debate whether they are allowed to untie the *kunni* or to hit camels on the head or not.
- (9) *Dabeel* have to drink a little of the milk of the camel mare milked first in the morning in order to symbolically conform to this rule. After that, during the day when the camels are in the pasture, they may continue to drink milk.
- (10) *Meeraat* and *khandi* must not go near the camels. *Meeraat*, incidentally, are never allowed to run, not even when in acute danger. For the freshly circumcised it makes no difference whether they are or are not allowed to run because they don’t feel like it anyhow.
- (11) *Meeraat* and *khandi* do not drink blood, i.e. to them this rule applies in a stricter form; they must not consume anything “hot”, like blood, at all, while *dabeel*, *hosooob* and *gudur* content themselves with alleviating the heat of the blood by first drinking something “cold”, namely milk.
- (12) *Meeraat* and *khandi* are not allowed to even come near the livestock.

#### THE SYMBOLISM OF THE ERGEEG

*Ergeeg* is a plant fibre (root of an asparagus species) which is woven into a milk container, *madaal*.<sup>2</sup> This milk container is only to be used by married men. When I once wanted to draw a *madaal*, I was not permitted to remove the one I was using as a model from the house. The *madaal* is made before

<sup>2</sup> In addition, other fibres can be used to plait (or rather sew, because it is done with a needle) the *madaal*.

a girl marries and has to last for her entire married life. In each house there is only one *mādaal*. On occasion of the *almādo*, the men carry the *mādaal* to the *naabo*, the sacred thornbush circle in the centre of the settlement (cf. first excursus, 0.6.7.2.1.). Milk blessings are performed using the lid of the *mādaal* (*inanki mādaaleet*) at *almādo* (see 0.6.7.2.) and *soorriyo* (see excursus, 0.6.7.1.) as well as at weddings.

A headband made of *ergeeg* is worn by old women past child-bearing age, substituting the beaded jewellery they no longer wear.

So the ritual meaning of *ergeeg* and *mādaal* connotes on the one hand sacral importance, on the other age, seniority.

What is notable in our context of special ritual positions is that *meeraat* and *hosoob* (as long as they are still warriors) as well as the *gūdur* (as long as he is in office, i.e. until a new age set is initiated) wear a headband made of *ergeeg*. It serves to set them apart – if we interpret the symbolism correctly – from other warriors by giving them an insigne connoting seniority and status.

*Hosoob* are the only members of their age set who are allowed to drink from a *mādaal*. In this point they are equal to their fathers with whom they share this drinking vessel.

So we see that the correspondences of different special ritual positions are not limited to rules and avoidances

(cf. the chapter on context-comparing symbology, 5., 5.5., 5.11.)

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### 3.1. INSTRUCTION BY A *DABEEL*

The following was not an interview, but a conversational lesson carried on for weeks and months with me being the student. The subject was always determined by the “teacher”, which I did not mind because the whole matter was so alien to me that I would have run out of questions rather quickly.

The “teacher” kept asking me not to play the tapes to anybody (i.e. no other Rendille; for academic purposes everybody is free to use them) and generally not to talk about these lessons. I will therefore not use his name unnecessarily. (If someone can prove a legitimate research interest, I am willing to disclose this man’s identity.) For now I will simply call him G.

The reason for this confidentiality was G.’s being afraid his frankness to me could incur the displeasure of the other *dabeel* and this way expose him to their curse.

G. is one of the ten *dabeel* of the Rendille who are not from the clan of O’doola. So he is a *dabeel* co-opted by O’doola. To explain these matters some further information is necessary.

The small clan of O’doola, which belongs to none of the two moieties (according to its marriage rules it is a phratry, according to its number of members it is a rather large lineage), has many things – for instance its origin – in common with the phratry of the same name of the neighbouring Gabbra tribe. Their houses are very similar to those of the Gabbra, i.e. according to Rendille understanding they are laterally reversed: the men’s side is left of the entrance, the women’s side on the right, the water container on the left side, the hearth stones on the right. O’doola women wear Gabbra braids and the aluminium jewellery common among Boran and Gabbra. As with the Gabbra, all the men become *dabeel* at a certain time and acquire the cylindrical head-gear made of thick cloth, the *duub*. There are, however, crucial differences in the meaning of this custom, which we will describe further down (cf. 3.2.).

The individual O’doola families claim to be originated in other Rendille clans. Furthermore they maintain that the entire Gabbra phratry of O’doola is descended from the Rendille O’doola. (This would imply that one should find many Rendille clans in Gabbra-O’doola.)

Their ritual insigne, which in the eyes of the Rendille lends them seniority over the Gabbra phratry of the same name, is the drum *jibaanjib*, a materialised concentrate of ritual power and dangerous curses.

The principal (*eti ween* = big man) who awards the other men the *duub*, is from the Makhalaan family whose origin is said to lie in Gaal’deylan. (The clan origins of the other O’doola families were listed in the list of clans (see 2.2.).)

The individual O’doola families intermarry. This is justified by originating in different clans, as marrying within the clan would be considered incest by the Rendille. Whether the alleged descent from different clans might be an invention to justify their marriage rules is therefore difficult to decide.

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At each *dabeel* initiation, some initiands are selected from other Rendille clans, partly according to worthy behaviour, partly influenced by payments, too. Many men would like to be *dabeel* because it involves a high degree of power and prestige.

Usually *dabeel* are selected from the first-born families of the clans, preferably if the candidate's father also had the *duub*. But if the aspirant is exceptionally qualified, this rule might well be broken. The decision is O'doola's alone.

So the *dabeel* are a society of married men who are in their majority recruited from O'doola itself, while a small portion comes from other clans. The dates of the initiation are loosely linked to the Rendille age-grade system. The initiation can only be performed in a Friday year and only on married men. For a man of the age set of the elders married only recently, however, it is difficult to acquire this rank; older men are preferred.

The custom of the *dabeel* includes a rich symbolism of animals and plants constantly inviting to stray from the mere description of the procedures and digress into the realm of meanings and backgrounds. In this respect our informant G. shows an ability to intellectually grasp these correlations which is far superior to that of most people. What is also astonishing is the lapidary and simple form in which he is able to make a total stranger understand complicated systems of thought.

The best will be to let him speak without much commentary on our part.

G. explains the origin of the power of the *dabeel* who, like no other Rendille, are capable of exerting power by threatening with curses. This power originates in several sources:

1. In the bestowers of the *duub* being direct successors of the first *dabeel* put on this earth by God (cf. origin of the *duub*, 3.1.1.).
2. In the utilising of curse power hidden in various dangerous animals. G. provides a system of explanation for the different qualities of these animals (animals with "custom" and those without, 3.1.4.; the use of snakes, 3.1.7.; lion killing, 3.1.8.).
3. In the ritual drum *jibaaanjib*.

Furthermore G. describes, in the details of the *dabeel* initiation (cf. 3.1.2.) and the making of the *jibaaanjib* drum (cf. 3.1.12.), the procedures by which this power is utilised for the *dabeel*.

He also describes the cosmological background of this theory of power (The origin of the power, 3.1.10.).

We will try to summarise these interconnections in the section on "Summation of the power" clearly – and inevitably simplified.

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### 3.1.1. ORIGIN OF THE 'DUUB

*Maanti goorat kolooraat Rendille soobahe, Waakh weyli enenyet il tololiche, O'doola Waakh soobahche. Maantaase Waakh aranki O'doola 'duub khabo il tololiche. 'Duub 'deerka maanti laleesoobahe, Waakhe soolug'de. Waakh on leesoobahe.*

When once, in the beginning, the Rendille came out [came into being] and God put people on the earth, he also let O'doola come out. On this day God put the man O'doola, who had a *'duub*, on the earth. So when it was come out with the *'duub* [when O'doola had come into being with the *'duub*], it was God who dropped it. Only God [himself] came into being with [the *'duub*].

This man O'doola initiated the next generation into the office and so the present-day *dabeel* have ultimately received the *'duub* in direct succession of this man.

### 3.1.2. BESTOWAL OF THE 'DUUB<sup>3</sup>

Ideally, the initiation of new candidates takes place every 14 years in a Friday year in the clan settlement of O'doola. The last inauguration, during which our informant was admitted to the society, was in 1965. On this occasion all the recently married elders of O'doola and selected elders from other clans who were, however, mostly older, were asked to gather in the clan settlement.

There, a big house which had room enough for all the persons to be inaugurated was built by the *naabo*. The seclusion of the initiation candidates and their being shielded from the looks of the uninitiated is an important element of the ceremony.

Central component of the initiation is the preparing of a poison which is believed to kill unauthorised persons.

For that purpose a trough-like hole in the ground is lined with clay. This clay is from the valley of 'Hoor (South Horr in Samburu District), just like all the water used during the ceremony. The reason for this is that it must be water from an inexhaustible well.

This water is used for ritual ablutions.

On the following day, milk and 'Hoor water are poured into the trough hole. Teeth of dangerous snakes and big predators are added: house snake, python, puff adder, a smaller viper species, a further snake not identifiable (Rendille: *goida*), lion and leopard. Furthermore arrow poison, a plant toxin, is added to the mixture.

This mixture is touched by the prospective *dabeel* with their tongues. The saliva forming after that is swallowed. (Presumably no real poison is ingested in this procedure: the arrow poison is probably only effective if it is gets

<sup>3</sup> The exact wording of the tape transcriptions on which sections 3.1.2. to 3.1.9. and 3.1.12. to 3.1.15. are based are included in the materials volume.

directly into the bloodstream. The snakes' teeth, which indeed could lead to internal injuries are not swallowed and are likely to be free of effective traces of toxins. More important than the question of an actual poisonous action, however, is the fact that usually no Rendille would dare touch such a dangerous fluid with his tongue.)

It is assumed that these ingredients provide the *dabeel* with their dangerous curse. "The curse of the *dabeel* are these teeth of all kinds of animals. What they have cursed will not live to see the next morning."

In the further course of the process some of the teeth are put into the ritual drum *jibaanjib*. The remaining teeth are wrapped into the various layers of the stiff cloths wound into the *duubab* (plural of *duub*). So the most important insignia and means of the *dabeel* power are equipped with these teeth.

For four days now the newly initiated are prohibited to consume "hot things" (see table in section 3.).

To conclude the ceremony a ewe is slaughtered. Everybody cuts fur strips (*khalli*) for himself which he ties around his stick. (The sticks of the *dabeel* are another instrument of great curse power, cf. 3.1.13.)

After that the novices wander around the settlement in a procession singing, with all the uninitiated having to stay in their houses in order to avoid the sight of the *dabeel*. To look at them is believed to make a person go blind.

### 3.1.3. FIRST TOUR OF THE NOVICES WITH THE *JIBAANJIB* DRUM

An essential object of the *dabeel* is the drum *jibaanjib*, the only drum within the tribal territory. It is filled with lions', leopards' and snakes' teeth. We will hear more about the making of this drum later (cf. 3.1.12.).

By means of the drum and for it, the *dabeel* can and must demand animal sacrifices from other Rendille. This is a duty, because "*jibaanjib* needs fat" to be anointed with, and at the same time a privilege providing the *dabeel* with plenty of meat. These tours to other clans in order to ask for livestock gifts can take place any time "whenever they [the *dabeel*] want", except for the time of the waning moon (counted from the day on which the moon has not yet risen at sunset).

The first tour of this kind is done immediately after the initiation. Together the *dabeel* visit the settlements of every one of them and stay for a night each.

They pick a household where they expect to be feasted particularly well.

First of all they throw *haru* (cedar leaves, cf. 4.11.) into the hearth fire, go back out and dance and sing to the beating of the drum from late afternoon until the time when the herds return home.

"Who is calling me? I pray to God for him,  
come before me, I pray to God with you."

In others songs and prayers the household is blessed. On the following morning, the *dabeel* take the piece of livestock intended for them, usually

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probably a sheep or goat, and leave. If the animal is not to their liking, they will request a different one.

#### 3.1.4. ANIMALS WITH “CUSTOM” AND THOSE WITHOUT

The *dabeel* wear the teeth of dangerous animals in their headgear, the *ḏuub*. Teeth of the same species are found in their drum *jibaanjib*.

In the following, G. gives reasons why certain animal species are used and others are not.

The difference he makes is that between animals having *húgum* (“custom”) and those not having *húgum*.

The concept of “having *húgum*” is rather complex.

1. It means that the respective animal is used in some kind of ritual context.
2. It can mean that the respective animal is superior to other animals due to behavioural traits, which it “knows” more than other animals.
3. The term implies that the respective animal must not be killed by those for whom it has a special ritual significance.<sup>4</sup>

The ritual contexts, i.e. the different types of *húgum* in which these animals play a role, can be illustrated using the example of the lion.

One-year-old boys receive shoes made from lion hide on the occasion of getting rid of their umbilical cord, which is kept until that time (cf. sections 5.2. and 5.3. in which further ritual uses of lion hide are listed).

*Dabeel* are not permitted to kill any of the animals the teeth of which are included in the poisonous drink and the *jibaanjib* drum.

The hyena, on the other hand, is a counterexample for this: It has no “custom”. Its teeth are therefore not used in this context. The hyena is “unpropitious, bad”. The same is true for the *dowwoho* (fox, jackal). “Somebody who sticks hyena’s teeth [in his *ḏuub*] becomes [like] a hyena; somebody who brings fox’s teeth becomes a fox. Somebody who brings the teeth of a lion becomes [like] this lion. He has the custom.” (Cf. text to 3.1.5., *Sprachliche Studien zum Rendille*.) If a hyena soils a campsite, a ritual cleansing is necessary. This is not the case with lion and leopard.

#### 3.1.5. A STORY EXPLAINING WHY SOME ANIMALS HAVE *HÚGUM* AND OTHERS DON’T

G.: “The lion, the leopard, the hyena, the fox: these four were told: “Today a head of smallstock is slaughtered. All of you, close your eyes!” Lion and leopard covered their eyes with half-closed fingers and watched through the cracks

<sup>4</sup> Interesting comparisons can be made between the ritual animal-human-relationships of the *dabeel* and the curse animals of the *iibire* (cf. the section on “Curse animals and other curse agents” under 2.3.).

how the animal was slaughtered. Fox and hyena, however, covered their eyes entirely so they did not see anything. For this reason, lion and leopard to this day grab their prey correctly, at the throat. But fox and hyena did not watch the slaughtering until they were permitted to, and that was just when the slaughterer was cutting open the belly. So, still today, they first grab their prey at the belly. That is why lion and leopard have custom, but fox and hyena don't."

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### 3.1.6. ANIMAL KINSHIPS

This differentiation between animals with "custom" and those without "custom" corresponds to the assumed kin relations between the animal species (apart from that they largely concur with the classifications we would make in our zoological system due to their relative closeness).

On the one hand, fox/jackal and hyena are "brothers", on the other hand lion and leopard are.

*Ebeesa*, a small viper, and puff adder are – likewise agreeing with our concept – grouped together, while the python is granted a special position.

### 3.1.7. THE USE OF THE SNAKES

"With them [the snakes] people are cursed. Killed. If someone hit a *dabeel*, he [takes a snake's tooth between two fingers, holds it in front of his mouth and] blows on it. Then, in that night, this person is bitten by a snake.

When the *duub* is bestowed, puff adder comes, house snake comes, viper comes, *goida* [another snake species] comes, [python comes]. They come near the place of the bestowal.

These animals are killed. Not the *dabeel* kill them, but other people. The teeth are taken out [for the *duub* of each candidate, for *jibaanjib*, for the poisonous drink]. These teeth [in the poisonous drink] do not kill the *dabeel*, but they would kill other people. Such is the custom of the snakes."

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### 3.1.8. LION KILLING

At the behest of the *dabeel* other people set out to kill a lion. The prayer of the *dabeel* prevents the lion from harming people.

The teeth for the inauguration and the drum as well as the fur strips around the *duubab* are taken only from male lions.

### 3.1.9. FOOD AVOIDANCES

*Dabeel* do not eat game and no animals which died of natural causes, they would not even use the fat of these animals to grease their shoes. They only eat animals slaughtered in the proper way, by cutting their throat. In this respect they are like Muslims, people say (cf. above, 3.0., where the connection between avoidance and power is discussed in a more general way and people in different special ritual positions are compared to each other in this respect; see also 3.1.10., where G. links these avoidances to extra-human sanctions.)

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### 3.1.10. THE ORIGIN OF THE POWER

*At laka geeddi deere Rendille goya bariite.*

You have spent your nights [lived] for a long time among the Rendille, too.

*Idi maanta dabeel wohoo addan orche itololin at laka a agarte.*

You have seen how nothing else stands before the *dabeel*.

*Falohiche a rum on. Idi iche rum iyehiin: maanta chi' kaamun kakahte, idi 'doodi goorat at gaari kakhaattuu, wihiat 'doonto, heer eheetteey, dufaanki gaal eheetteey, ma waayto.*

Their curse is true. It is true in the following way: If you now set out in a group, like the people you once gave a ride in your car [from the O'doola clan settlement to Laisamis], then you will not miss that which you want, be it an ox, be it a fattened camel gelding.

*Us, ettiyye maanti kaldache u' kahe, dufaanki gaal soodowo, heeri lo-olyo soodowo, urhaal soodowo, etaas la goorat hoola idaahin, etaas maanta ma lakarooro? Iche, wihiche a idaas.*

Somebody who in one single day on which he sets out drives a fattened camel gelding here, drives a cattle ox here, drives a heifer here, and this man had not asked for livestock before, is this man not feared? That is how they are. [Question: How does the curse work? Like a prayer? Do the *dabeel* pray to God and God executes the curse?]

*Waakh dabeele khaba.*

God [= sky/heaven] has *dabeel*.

*Dabeessi Waakh a jirta.*

There are *dabeel* of the sky/heaven [= of God].

*Dabeessi Waakh icho tuummamba a too kalday on.*

The *dabeel* of the sky/heaven [= of God] and these here are one [= of the same kind].

*Hugunka maanta dabeessa khabto, Waakhe goorat 'dood isoodiibe. Worran chiiyye inno ibeen sohanni, ebeesatoo laka hagga tabna, inno ma agarro, Waakh la inno kalaaba, wohoo la indo inno tusa, isohan-na one, chi' inno idowwaaneka, Waakh inno tusa.*

This custom, now, which these *dabeel* have, God once gave the people. Usually, when we [inclusive: you and I, he puts himself in the place of non-*dabeel*] go our ways in the night and go near a viper we don't see, and God saves us, and God shows our eyes something else, and we approach it, and when we have come close to it, God shows it to us, then we run away, "My God, be always like this!" [Show us the future dangers, too!]

*Iche la maanta, chi' iche Waakh wahatti, dabeessi Waakhe wahatta.*

And they [the *dabeel*], when they call upon God, they call upon the *dabeel* of God.

[Question: Do the *dabeel* pray to the *dabeel* of God and they in turn tell God?] [This question seems to be formed too much on the model of catholic saints. It apparently can be answered neither in the affirmative nor in the

negative. Why should one part of the heaven ask another a question? In G.'s view, something else is essential:]

*Iche ida on il isoo'deydoossa.*

They [the *dabeel* of the heaven] look down on earth [like that].

*Worranla, chi'iche binahi ibaat iumhan, ti Waakhe agart'a.*

And if they [the earthly *dabeel*] usually don't eat game, the ones of God see it.

*Chi'iche naffichekoo hoolaate yumuy tuhum, ti Waakh la a agarta.*

If they eat one of their heads of livestock which died of a natural cause, the [*dabeel*] of God also see it.

*A labuja.*

It has to be avoided.

*Dabeessi Waakh a lagarta; hũgumnkiyye goorat dabeele ikajirine, goorat Waakh "buja!" yidah, a labuja.*

It is known of the *dabeel* of God; the custom which had not included the *dabeel* until God said "avoid this!" is observed. [Literally: ... the custom in which the *dabeel* had not been before, in the past God said "avoid!", it is avoided.]

*Chi' ankaa kisooyigis laka ma taham.*

Even if the hunger kills you, you don't eat it.

*A wihiiyye goorat maanti at duub hidatte on.*

This is this [the rules given to you] of the day when you tied the *duub* to yourself. [The length of cloth is first put around the head for a test, before the actual *duub* is made.]

[Question: Does everything you do here [all your power] come from the *dabeel* of God?]

*Dabeessi Waakhe kayimaateen, bicchehaas layabhuube kayimaateen, goorat maantiyye at mihiytaas af ka'daarte, mihiri af ka'daarte, maantaase waha dakkhan uur goya kiirteen.*

It comes from the *dabeel* of God, it comes from this water that is drunk [the allegedly poisonous drink]. Once, when you touched these teeth with your mouth, touched the poison with your mouth, on this day all this went into your stomach.

*Kobti worran niibeete, inta desan, hilal intaase lafura.*

The shoe made from cowhide which normally has a hole here, its strap is untied in this spot.

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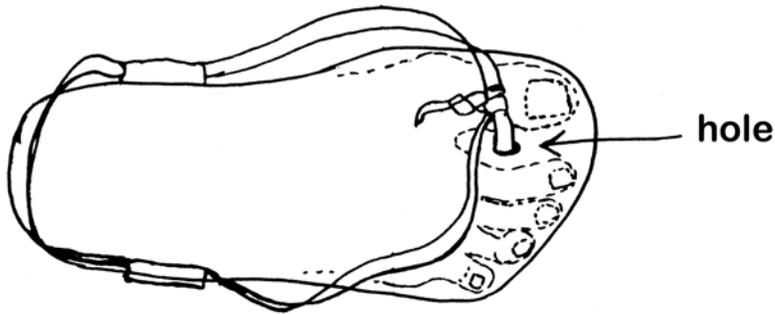


Figure 3.1.

*Eti at fasso, issuus ida tadeehe, etaas inti kootte u' tabe kakhabatta.*  
 Somebody who you curse you do this to with this eye [“eye” = hole in the shoe. He demonstrates it by holding his shoe in front of his eye and peeking through the hole.] and with it you grab the man there [you aim at the place] where he walked along today.

*'Deerka etaas a tigis.*

Then you have killed the man.

*'Duuba laka enenyet a yagiis.*

This *duub* also kills people.

*Etiyye kuabaare*

Somebody who insulted you

*at ida tidahye, kasaate.*

you do this to [makes the corresponding gesture] and throw [the *duub*] to him.

*Inti kootte usu isohti laka ma eleelo.*

Not even where he just wanted to go will he arrive.

*Dabeel wihiche tuumman a kuleel.*

All the things of the *dabeel* are hot.

*Falohiche a kuleel.*

Their curse is hot.

*Idaas.*

That's how it is.

[Question: But who was it that killed the man you cursed, was it you, was it these people in heaven, was it God?]

*An on igis.*

Only I killed him.

[Question: Does the curse come from your belly, from the *dabel* of God or where does it come from?]

*Annaka Waakhe iwahda.*

I, too, call upon God.

[Question: Did God give you the power to pray to him in this way? –

*Waakhe miigtaas kisiiche deerka at saggaas iweysatti?]*

*A. Usu goorat maantaas ileejire.*

Yes. It was back then, on that day, with me.

[Question: Is it true that God does [executes] everything you do? – *A ruma, Waakh wihi at yeesse tuumman a yeela?*]

*Hm, hm.*

Yes.

[Question: So, if someone who is no *dabeel* wants to curse someone else, he can look through the hole in the shoe like a *dabeel*, and if God wishes, he helps him. He does not even need the hole in the shoe; he can simply pray, and if God consents, he kills his enemy.]

*Weyli enenyet dakkhan et falo laa mala.*

Among all the people there is not one who is without curse [power of curse].

*Toro wihi dabeeleete weyti kuta.*

But the [curse power] of the *dabél* is very superior.

*Saggi iche ikutaan, a saggi 'doo'd 'dakkhan maanta ikarooro.*

It is so very superior that now all the people are afraid of it.

*Sirgaal laka a garta.*

The government also knows it.

[Question: Are the *dabeel* and God like someone you usually give something to and who in turn helps you – *dabeel ichoow Waakh maanta a idiiyye eti worran walah at siisso toro u' laka kigargaaro?*]

*Aa, Waakh laka maanta, u' laka 'doo'di 'duub khabo jira, ki ikhabin laka a jira, 'deerka isgoya on islafiddiya.*

Yes, with God [= sky/heaven] there are people with *duub*, also ones without, so they live together.

[Repeating the last question.]

*Dabeele Waakh walah iche sitso mele, dabeessi Waakh on walah siiss'a.*

The *dabeel* don't give God anything. It is only the *dabeel* of God who give them something.

[Question: Do the *dabeel* of God live up there?]

*Waakh on goya fiddiita, iche laka.*

They also live inside God [= the sky/heaven].

*Isleefiddiita.*

They live together.

[Question: Are there also people in the sky/heaven who are not *dabeel*?]

*Ki addan, Rendille, bal?*

Others, Rendille, or what?

*Bal ki Waakh?*

Or of the sky/heaven [=God?]

*Ki Rendille il on fiddiya gon. A ideenkan on usu.*

They of Rendille only live on earth. They are like you and me.

*Ki inno wahanni la serey on jira.*

And they who we call upon live above.

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[Question: Is it like here on earth, do the *dabeel* of God have a principal (*eti ween* = big man)?]

*Iche laka eti weene khabta, 'duub 'doo'd kahido.*

They also have a principal who wraps the *duub* around the people.

[Question: How many *dabeel* of God are there?]

*Ani laka ma argine, maantiyye worran duub lahiitila a tamiit.*

I, too, have not seen it, on the day when the *duub* is bestowed they come.

[Can you see them?]

*Aa.*

Yes.

[Question: Are they like humans – *idi enenyet a?*]

*Iche idi enenyet mee.*

They are not like humans.

*Goob goya ma soogesso.*

They don't come into the settlement.

*Ootti kharaate fiddiita.*

They sit on the outer fence.

[Question: What do they look like?]

*A yoossa maanta dakhan.*

They are these white *a yool* [Egyptian vulture].

*Inta on fiddiita, maanti ba 'he seley tabte, iratta.*

This is where they sit, and when the people part, they leave [too].

*A lih.*

They are six.

[Question: Are the *dabeel* of God like these birds or like humans – *dabeessa Waakh a idiyye chimbirohaasa bal a idi enenyet?*]

*A chimbirohaas.*

They are these birds.

[Question: Is their body like these birds – *sartiche a idi chimbiroot a?*]

*A idi chimbiroot.*

Like birds.

[Question: Are they like humans inside their hearts – *rubeyticho goyaka a idi weyli enenyet a?*]

*A idi chimbirohaas .*

Like these birds.

[Question: So is the life of these birds like birds or like humans – *deerka jirotiyye chimbiroha a idi chimbiroota bal idi weyli enenyet?*]

*Maantiyye goorat dabeele duub hidatte, eti goorat enenyet soodondoone, enenyet isiorronte.*

When at that time the *dabeel* put on the *duub*, they went and sat with the humans, [like] someone who is looking for people.

*Idi enenyet, menya?*

Like people, right?

*Ibeen gedda [4] iche laka intaas bariite.*

So many nights [gestures 4] they spent there, too.

[Question: Can they fly to God in heaven?]

*A. Harrati iche fiddiyaan, saggi iche iiratti deerka, ma lagarti.*

Yes. The land where they live, in which direction they go, is unknown.

[Question: Do they die?]

*Omoot ma argin.*

[Their] death I have not seen.

[Question: Do they breed – *a delaan?*]

*Wihiiyye an arge dakkhan a wihiiyye ekkee on.*

All I have seen are of the same size.

*Injire weyliche ma argin.*

Never have I seen their young.

*Wihiiyye israaho dakkhan a ekka.*

All those who follow each other are of the same size.

[Question: Do they not get old – *ma ararrowana?*]

*Ti araarree laka ma argin.*

I have not seen old ones either.

[Question: So, in your opinion, when you see them they are the same ones who have lived since the beginning [the beginning of existence] – *deerka keele chirrinkiiyye at yeyto, ati ikhaatto, deerka waha on u' goorat lasoo-bahe waha on jira?*]

*Waha on jira ma ararrowaan sarka, a Waakh gone.*

Only these live, do not age physically, they are God, after all.

*An, ma ararrowaane, an idah.*

I would say they don't age.

[Question: Do the *dabeel* pray to these birds?]

*A iweysatta.*

They pray to them.

[Question: Do they also pray to God or only to these birds?]

*Wahaas a ergaanoti Waakh.*

These are God's messengers.

### 3.1.11. BIRDS OF THE DEAD

*Weyli enenyet worran chiiye u'yumuy, maanti kaassintiis haggalaleeyimiy, a geeyoh? A chimbir.*

A human, usually, when he died and you pass by near his grave one day, what is he then? A bird.

[Question: Is a bird sitting there – *chimbire intaas fuussa?*]

*Aa.*

Yes.

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[Question: So far the Rendille have always told me that a dead man is just dead and there is no afterlife. You are the first one to say that dead people become birds.]

*Rendille, eti goorat araarowe, maantiiyye lafiddiya, guwasohoo dakhana layaakha, deerka intaas lafurta, dufaanke gaale ladowa.*

When among the Rendille a man had grown old [and died], and when after that you live on and graze whole years, and then you settle there again [near the settlement position where the man died and was buried in front of the door of his house], then you drive a fattened camel gelding [there].

*Warabi adi ladowa.*

A gelded ram of smallstock is driven [there].

*Holahaas lakakhala.*

These animals are slaughtered there.

[Question: There by the grave – *intaas, kaassintaaska?*]

*Aa.*

Yes.

*Chi'deerka lasoodulo, chimbire tuulla kaassim fuussa.*

So when you approach the site there is a bird sitting on the grave.

*Ichooowka ichooowka ichooowka intaas haggaa layamiit.*

Until, until, well, until you come near.

*'Deerka intaas haanu lakachiba.*

Then you spill some milk there.

*'Doo'd tuumman.*

All the people.

*'Deerka lakasootaba.*

Then you leave the site.

*Enenyet, chimbirtiis idaas maanti u' yumuy.*

A human, his bird is like this when he has died.

*An a arge.*

I have seen it.

[Question: Is that the reason why the Rendille don't eat birds – *jeentetaase Rendille worran chimbir iumhan?*]

*Ma laleesoobihimba, Rendille u' soobahe dakkhamba chimbir ma yaham.*

They did not come into being [with the custom of eating birds], all the time since the Rendille came into being they have not eaten birds.

[Question: Are these birds like other birds?]

*Aldi chimbirohi addan mee.*

[These birds] are not like other birds.

[Question: Do they die?]

*Wahaas intaakka fiddiyo?*

That which is sitting there?

*Ma gardi deerka, mehe yagiis, goorat ma umaatana?*

Well, I don't know that, haven't they already died before?

*Wahaas a enenyeti goorat yumuy.*

This is the man who died in the past.

[Question: If a *dabeel* dies, does he become a white bird like the *dabeel* of God?]

*Kaas uluba an ma argine; ki addanla chimbirti tahe a arge.*

I have not seen this yet; and the others, what kind of bird they are, I have seen.

[Question: Did the bird run [or fly] away when someone approached it – *chirrinki liisoodowwaate, chimbirtaas a anyante?*]

*Ma nyaanto.*

It doesn't run [fly] away.

[Question: Until the milk is poured onto the grave – *ichoowka haanuhaas kaassim lakachiba?*]

*Ichoowka haanu lakakhuba.*

Until milk is spilled there.

[Question: It just stays there – *iche a fiddiita ona?*]

*A fiddiita one ichoowka haanu lakachiba.*

It stays until the milk is spilled.

*'Deerka kahta intuus iratta.*

Then it leaves and goes back there.

[Question: When the milk was spilled – *chirrinki haanu lakakhuba?*]

*Aa. Chiyye eti kolooraat haanu kakoddiche iche la kahta.*

Yes. The first time someone has sprinkled some milk there, it leaves.

[Question: Is it only one [type of] bird or are there different ones – *a chim-birtoo kaldaya bal a yeerar?*]

*A too kalday.*

Only one [type].

[Question: What is its colour – *Duhiche a koo mehe?*]

*A too booran.*

It is brown.

[Question: Like a domestic chicken – *idiiyye lukku?*]

*Idi lukku.*

Like a chicken.

[Question: Is its beak short – *af'a wohoo gaaban a?*]

*A wohoo gaban.*

It is short.

*Barbarretoo rucchule khabta.*

It has small wings.

[Question: Does it fly – *serey a inyaanta?*]

*Weyti ma nyaanto.*

It doesn't fly much.

[Question: Do the *dabeel* believe that they will turn into these white birds after they die?]

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*Wihiiyye Waakh kayeelo, Waakhe garta.*

What God makes of them, God knows.

[Question: Someone who usually behaves decently, will he receive a good life after he died, and the bad person a bad life after he died – *etiyye worran intaka mujjum sossotti, maanti u' yumuy, jiroti haaggane 'hela, ki suuje la maantiyye u' yumuy jiroti suujenye 'hela?* Is that what you believe – *wihiiyye atin rummeysattaan, a idaas a?*]

*An ma argine, a leessala. Ebba wihi goorat u' yahe iche on yateeh.*

I have not seen it, but that is what people say. Everybody becomes what he was before.

[Question: If someone was killed by an enemy and eaten by a hyaena, does he also turn into a bird?]

*Waraaba yateeh.*

He turns into a hyaena.

[Question: And this hyaena cannot die? He will stay a hyaena forever?]

*A. Usu waraabihii worran "hu!" essi adi khaato yateeh.*

Yes. He becomes a hyaena which usually says "Hu!" and steals smallstock.

[Question: So he will not die – *deerka ma yamuuta?*]

*Ma yamuut. Waraaba.*

He will not die. [He is] a hyaena.

[Question: If a killer, someone who killed an enemy, dies, what does he turn into?]

*Hadaabe khaba, meleyka laka ma doonto, Waakh la ma doono.*

He has sin. *Meleyka* does not want him and God does not want him, either. [(*Meleyka* = *maleika* is Arabic and Swahili for "angel". "Angel", i.e. ghost of the dead, is considered something negative and in the Muslim and Christian context (which are both known to the Rendille from hearsay) denotes the devil. *At a meleyka* – "you are an angel" means: you are malicious and have a temper.]

[Question: Killers do not live after they die?]

*Iche ma yateehiin, ma lahawwaaline.*

They do not turn [into the birds], [their victims] were not buried.

[Question: If a Rendille was killed by a tribe mate, he is not buried?]

*A lahawwaala kaas.*

That one is buried.

[And if an enemy killed him?]

*A lakasootaba.*

He is left lying there.

[Question: Do the killers, when they kill, not think of that they will not live on after their death?]

*A kasoo 'helaan.*

They think of it.

[Question: If someone got a girl pregnant and the child is aborted, will he become a bird?]

*Ma yateeh.*

No, he won't.

[Question: Are children buried?]

*Idi Koorro mee.*

[We are] not like Samburu.

[The Samburu lay out most of the dead for the hyenas.]

[Question: Do women also turn into birds after they die?]

*A. Et weyli enenyete dakkhan, et chimbir iitaahan mala, eti toor lakayigis kalday.*

All the people become birds, only he who killed with the spear doesn't.

[Question: If someone kills another Rendille, will he, the murderer, become a bird later?]

*Ma yateeh.*

He won't.

[Question: All the murderers – *eti ogoós khabo dakkhanla?*]

*Ma yateehiin.*

They won't.

[Question: Not even if the victim was buried?]

*Kiiyye eti lahawwaale dakkhan a yateeh.*

[The killer] of someone who was buried becomes [a bird].

[Question: If someone of the people [a Rendille] kills a Rendille and he was buried, will he [the murderer] become a bird – *chirrinkiiyye etoo reerinnee etoo Rendill'e yigis, etaas lahawwaale, us chimbir a yateeh?*]

*A yateeh.*

He will.

A note to this dialogue:

Most of the Rendille have very vague ideas about death. This matter is not much discussed; it is about as tabooed as in post-Christian European society. Especially warriors killed by enemies (who are eaten by hyenas) are not glorified, but their fate is embarrassedly kept quiet about. They have never existed.

If you comment – only in general, of course – on that topic, you hear, for instance, that the dead are “not there”, “are not alive”, etc. Only God knows the particulars. Others have heard from still other people that they saw herds of ghost camels, driven by the shouting of invisible herdsmen, run through the bush with invisible bells in the night. Someone even claims to have heard the two *ololo* shouts elders start their evening prayers with near a long-abandoned settlement.

The ghost of the dead, called *ginda* or *meleyka* (from Arabic, Swahili, Somali for “angel”), is strictly evil. For that reason people avoid saying the names of the deceased so as not to call them.

A boy once dreamt in a fever that dead members of his clan had asked him to come with them. He was convinced that he would not have recovered from his fever if he had followed this instruction.

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On the other hand, the dead are honoured by performing sacrifices of tobacco and milk by their graves.

I suspect that G. communicates his personal system of belief in this section. It is, however, an elaborate system and not simply an idea made up on the spur of the moment.

If	then after death
Buried	bird
killed in battle, not buried	hyena
killer whose victim was not buried	nothing because he is sinful and nobody wants him

So: Everybody who was buried and is not to blame that another was not buried turns into a bird.

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### 3.1.12. MAKING AND USE OF THE DRUM *JIBAANJIB*

Cutting the tree from which *jibaanjib* is made is the job of the Harrawo lineage in Dubsahay. The mythical first *dabeel* of O'doola, the man with the *duub* whom God put on the earth, already asked Harrawo for this service. At least Harrawo must wield the first four (or three?) blows. After that, others can share in the work, too.

A thick slice is cut from the stem, hollowed out and smoothed. Four days are devoted to this work. Afterwards, the workpiece is carried to the clan settlement of O'doola.

There, a ewe belonging to Harrawo is slaughtered. Fur strips (*khalli*) of this animal are cut for *jibaanjīb* (to bless it, like the frills on sticks and human limbs). Its meat is consumed together.

Another four days later a young camel bull is slaughtered. It has to be an intact animal. The drum is covered on one side with the wet hide from the animal's ribs. Now the lions', leopards' and snakes' teeth are put into the drum.<sup>5</sup> All the *dabeel* belonging to *iibire* clans spit in the drum. This way the curse power of the *iibire* is incorporated into the drum, in addition to the dangerousness of the wild animal. Now the drum is closed. The skin dries and sticks tightly to both sides. After that the drum is not reopened. Not until four age-set cycles, i.e. 56 years later, a new *jibaanjīb* is made.

Now the finished drum is brought to one of the houses of O'doola to be kept there. It is always a member of the younger elders, i.e. the age set married most recently, who is made guardian of the drum. Inside the house *jibaanjīb* is hung up on a rope made from the hide of the same bull the hide of which covers it. A sheep is slaughtered and *jibaanjīb* is greased with its fat.

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<sup>5</sup> A piece of buffalo skin is also put inside the drum or fixed to it.

*Jibaanjīb* must always be greased. As soon as the fat is used up and the drum becomes “white”, it is carried to some Rendille settlement where the *dabeel* dance and pray and are given a wether. This animal they take to the house of the guardian of the drum. The tail fat of the wether is put into the *jibaanjīb*’s own fat container. (These containers are called *udaam*. The fat for *jibaanjīb* is stored in a special *udaam*.) (Some fat also remains for the guardian’s family, apart from the fact that meat is not scarce on this day.) Just like the *dabeel* themselves *jibaanjīb* must not be anointed with the fat of an animal that died of natural causes. An animal with a docked tail can also not be used for this purpose.

Whenever they want, and whenever the moon cycle permits it, small groups of *dabeel* can take *jibaanjīb* to a settlement of their choice, dance and pray and request the slaughtering of a wether or even an ox. These sacrificial animals are, however, consumed together with the hosts. The animals are always gelded ones. “Its [*jibaanjīb*’s] custom is not made with testicles. Its is only that which has fat.”

The night of the new moon *jibaanjīb* can only spend in O’doola. During the trips of the *dabeel* to other Rendille settlements the place where the drum spends the night is also subject to restrictions. It cannot spend the night in the bush but has to be taken to a place “where there is livestock”, namely a settlement, for satellite camps, where there are no houses, are classified as “bush” (*yib*). In a foreign Rendille settlement, *jibaanjīb* spends the night in the house of a *dabeel* or a daughter of O’doola married into this clan.

When the O’doola clan settlement moves on, *jibaanjīb* is stowed on a pack camel “with testicles”, i.e. a bull (Pack camels are usually gelded; but for certain loads of ritual importance intact animals are necessary, cf. section 5.4.).

The tree used to make *jibaanjīb* enjoys a special kind of protection. It is assumed that the area around such a tree teems with snakes. Should someone lay hands on that tree all the same he exposes himself to O’doola’s curse and has to pay a high fine in order to avoid disastrous consequences.

What is also not accessible to unauthorised persons is the abandoned settlement position of O’doola in which the last *dabeel* initiation took place. It is assumed that it is full of puff adders and other snakes. I visited this settlement site together with G. G. himself is protected by the puff adder’s tooth in his *duub*. In addition he rubbed some dust from a snake track onto his forehead. The fact that indeed we did not catch sight of a single snake is put down to this magic protection by G. While this protection might have been reinforced by the fact that snakes as poikilothermic animals hole up during the heat of the day, the area is indeed said to be full of snakes, the many mouse-holes I saw there make that quite likely. For that reason only O’doola and Rengumo settle there, two clans allied with snakes.

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### 3.1.13. THE STICK OF THE *DABEEL*

Every *dabeel* has a stick, which shares many functions with the *gumo* of ordinary men (cf. 5.6.). At *soorriyo* slaughterings the *dabeel* stroke the back of the sacrificial animal, wet with milk, with this stick (*hariirnaan*, cf. excursus I, 0.6.7.1., 5.6.). *Khalli* (fur strips) of *soorriyo* animals are also tied around this stick. Unlike with the *gumo*, however, old *khalli* are not removed from the *dabeel* stick so that it is soon fitted richly with fur frills.

One means of cursing of the *dabeel* is to point this stick at an enemy who will then “not even make it to that tree over there”.

It should also be avoided to carelessly step over such a stick when it is lying on the ground. That would result in a speedy death. If this consequence is to be avoided, the *dabeel* has the person who stepped over the stick come to him and touch the stick, then he spits on him (blessing), prays for him and dismisses him. “He stepped over the stick inadvertently. So the stick cannot do him any harm.” (Cf. the stick of the *fahan* elders, 2.8.8.1.2.).

### 3.1.14. PUNISHMENT OF PERSONS UNWILLING TO PAY

*Dabeel* announce their livestock requesting visits ahead of time to give the host the chance to prepare himself. Only when they are informed that everything is ready do they turn up with the drum. The host is expected to approach them dancing and to receive and entertain them appropriately.

If the host does not comply with these requirements, he exposes himself to a curse which will decimate his livestock and offspring. (Vice versa it is assumed that a *dabeel* ceremony performed to satisfaction will further and augment people and animals.)

The curse pursues the person refusing to pay in the male and female line so that he will also have difficulties in marrying off his daughters.

G. tells of two lineages who became victims of the *dabeel* curse. In one case the *dabeel* could be persuaded by high fines of livestock to revoke the curse, in the other case the victim of the curse pleaded in vain: “Come on, the people who chased you away back then are not alive anymore, we are tired of ourselves, we are doomed, come on, pray for us!”

### 3.1.15. *DABEEL*, *HOSOOB*, *GU'DUR*

The similarities of the behavioural rules and avoidances of the holders of different special ritual positions, which caused us to discuss these positions jointly in this third main section, are also discussed by G.

An essential difference between *dabeel* on the one hand and *gu'dur* and *hosoob* on the other is that the latter are age-grade offices. Other points largely concur though: If *dabeel* or the *gu'dur* visit a house, the lady of the house pours some milk on their shoes and sits on them.

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The prayers of all three special status holders have a positive effect on female fertility (see also the prominent role of the *hosoob* at the *naabo* ceremony, i.e. the preparations of the warrior age set for their weddings, 4.9.).

*Hosoob* (section 3.5.) touch a poisoned arrow with their lips at their installation on the occasion of the *gaalgulamme* ceremony (1.3.4.). This is how they receive a curse power similar to that of *iibire*. (People say that all the *hosoob* are *iibire*, even the ones from *waakhkamúr* subclans; cf. *iibire* initiation, 2.3., *iibire* and *dabeel*, 3.1.12. (*iibire* spit in *jibaanjîib*)). The similarity to the poisonous drink of the *dabeel* is obvious here.

### 3.1.16. SUMMATION OF THE POWER

The philosophers' stone as the European Middle Ages imagined it was no complicated, but actually a simple object. Its use was not believed to be very difficult, either: Every tolerably smart person could have produced gold with the help of it. If only it could have been found.

Even before the age of the alchemists it was a commonplace of European thinking that what is good, true and effective must be simple. Someone puzzling over a mathematical problem has the ideal of a solution characterised by "simplicity". He is looking for the *clue*.

Out of this tradition of thinking developed the style in which we would like to solve mysteries: Coming, seeing, saying "aha!" and knowing. We want the mystery to be clear and brief, a formula which can be written on a piece of paper and swallowed in a capsule. We want it – every scientific hypothesis is expected to achieve that – to explain a great variety of phenomena in a simple way.

This is the reason why complicated mysteries which take thirty pages to describe are so unsatisfactory for us. We suspect there must be something simpler behind it.

The *dabeel* do a number of things which are a mystery to us: They request tributes of livestock from other Rendille, who in general all much prefer making requests to fulfilling them. Without saying or doing much they spread fear and exert power. To solve this mystery we are looking for a key – the key to power. But instead of one key we find a whole arsenal. There is not one uniform origin of power but an accumulation of many different powers, a summation of the power. There is not one single crucial point where the lever is positioned, but many levers are positioned in many places.

This makes us, in our stern tradition of thinking, feel uncomfortable: We do not want many explanations, we want one, and that one is to be sufficient. The belief system of the Rendille seems to have a different structure, however: its motto is "two are better than one" (and three are even better).

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There is one uniform origin of all power: God, the sky/heaven (*waakh*). God-sky/heaven has made everything appear; even today he can intervene in everything that happens. However powerful a curse may be – it is, ultimately, only a prayer and against God’s will it will never be effective.

As a European person intent on rationalisation you want to suggest a simplification of their belief system to the Rendille: to abandon all the animals, teeth, poisons, sticks and other vehicles of curse and to ask God directly: Kill my enemy. If God agrees, his power is, according to Rendille ideas, sufficient to grant this wish. God knows everything and can do everything – even if the concepts of omniscience and omnipotence have not lead to as far-reaching and contradictory consequences as in the European tradition. Just like the curse the prayer might also be simplified: omit all the rituals and sacrifices.<sup>6</sup> In our eyes, this would be consistent; but the Rendille practice of, on the one hand, allowing great power to God and the sky/heaven, an entity which can well be addressed directly, but on the other hand in ritual acts dealing mainly with objects which only received their power from God and cannot contain more than a pale reflection of divine power, feels like a contradiction to us. Why all the complicated encodings and detours if we could express our wishes directly?<sup>7</sup>

We will hardly be able to bypass this logical contradiction: but it is no problem to live with it. For – unlike in the heads of philosophers – logical contradictions in belief systems sustained and handed down by many people do not necessarily press for solutions. Christianity has also existed for quite a while with the logical contradiction between God’s omnipotence and human guilt. Determinists and indeterminists might have argued and attacked each other passionately; but in spite of all this, the contradictions have survived the advocates of these irreconcilable positions by centuries and still show no signs of exhaustion. Only by now the public has stopped upsetting itself about the fact that they indeed are contradictions. So, if even the Europeans with all their professional thinkers are capable of living with logical contradictions for an unlimited amount of time, how much easier must it be for the Rendille who hardly ever waste a conscious thought on an abstract problem?

<sup>6</sup> Similar suggestions could be made to Europeans, too.

<sup>7</sup> This thought does not claim any originality: From the prophets of the Old Testament to Mohammed, this tendency to simplicity has repeatedly been advocated to people who were very similar to the Rendille in some respects.



So (for a Rendille) both is true:

1. God is powerful and can answer the prayer of every human. That is why the Rendille are convinced that there is no person without curse.
2. Nevertheless it is thought to be safer to surround oneself with instruments of power like ritual sticks, snakes' teeth and lion's fur strips, all possessing power – if only a power that ultimately comes from God and can be thwarted by him any time He chooses.

If a non-*dabeel* had the idea of arming himself with snakes' teeth and lion's fur strips, he would probably not be called *uskul* ("having the power of curse"), but *bidir* ("unpropitious, bringing misfortune"). He violates, taints the custom (*húgum a suujoocha*) and this way provokes drought, disease or other misfortunes. When in the age set of Deefgu'do a warrior from Uyam performed a private ritual to invoke a deadly curse on those who had made him *ḍablakabiire* (cf. chapter on Uyam, 2.8.7.), people were not concerned primarily because the curse was thought to possibly be effective, but because it was against the general morals, outside the customary, the *húgum*, and therefore unlucky. "*Eta a bidirrowe, min ma kadisanni* – This man has turned into a bringer of bad luck, with him we cannot build houses", i.e. we cannot use him for our marriage rituals. So the objects used ritually are not effective in themselves but only if they are used in the way ritually prescribed, in the way created by God as *húgum*. So, God equipped various objects with power and also showed the humans by way of *húgum*, custom, how to use this power; now it is the humans' job to utilise this power by performing the *húgum* perfectly and accurately. But even a perfectly performed ritual is ineffective if it is against God's will – God keeps a veto, in a manner of speaking.

In the light of this ritual perfectionism, the reason why ritual specialists – the *dabeel* as well as people in dangerous transitional stages like the freshly circumcised, or killers not yet cleansed – and also ritual age-grade specialists like *hosooob* and *guḍur* subject themselves to particularly strict avoidances becomes clear.

"*Wihi iche fooliche igaran dakkhan ma yeesso* – Everything they don't know they don't do." The power lies not in creativity and innovation, but in strictly observing traditional instructions and prohibitions. If the earthly *dabeel* do not keep to their avoidances, the *dabeel* of God, on whose support – or on God's support, as the sky/heaven (*waakh*) is a unity – the *dabeel*'s power is ultimately based, will see it.

These aspects were disregarded in our illustration. It is complicated enough even in its very simplified form. It summarises what an abundance of power factors finally adds up to the dreaded *dabeel* curse – provided that all rituals serving to accumulate this power, like the preparation of the poisonous drink, the making of the *jibaanjīb* drum, the bestowal of the *ḍuub*, were carried out by the authorised persons at exactly the right time and in exactly the way G. described to us.

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### 3.2. *DABEEL* OF THE GABBRA AND *DABEEL* OF THE RENDILLE: AN INTERCULTURAL COMPARISON

The institution of the *dabeel* extends far beyond the tribal borders of the Rendille. The Gabbra have an institution of the same name which is identical to that of the Rendille in many of its ritual details. Another institution also named in the same breath is the *Gaddamoji* age grade of the Boran.<sup>8</sup> G., our main informant with respect to the *dabeel*, equates these “*dabeel*” with those of the Rendille. The differences he lists essentially aim at emphasising the similarities: The *dabeel* of the Boran also carry the teeth of wild animals around, only not in the *duub* or in the sacred drum, but in their belts. To me, however, this equation seems to be based on an ethnocentric sort of partial blindness. As similar as ritual details in the context of the Rendille *dabeel* might be to those of their neighbouring tribes, as much as such a comparison might be able to contribute to explaining the ritual symbolism – in the form of heuristic clues, nota bene; its meaning a symbol only receives through its various uses in the social context of one and the same society – as obvious is the fundamental difference between the positionings of the *dabeel* in the spiritual (and therefore material) power structures of these different societies. The *dabéla* of the Gabbra as well as the *Gaddamoji* of the Boran present an age grade which has been referred to as “ritual elders”<sup>9</sup>. In other words, the *Gaddamoji* of the Boran (which we will disregard in the following) and the Gabbra *dabéla* have a prominent position, a special power by means of curse and prayer, as compared to younger men not yet initiated into this grade, but they are in no way distinguished from their age mates, who have all received their new status and their new insignia at the same time as they themselves have. Everything that amazes the observer of the Rendille, that causes him to ask in disbelief:

How is it possible that a group as insignificant in number and economic respect as O'doola can award a position as dreaded and sought-after as *dabeel*?

How is it possible that a handful of people who dipped their tongues into a probably utterly harmless non-toxic fluid are able to enforce their, not in the least modest, claims to all the other Rendille with such authority?

All these questions referring to the special position of the *dabeel* in the framework of society as a whole are irrelevant with the Gabbra. The Gabbra *dabéla* hold a special position in the vertical age structure, but not with respect to their age mates in the horizontal structure of the society as a whole. Also, there is no section of the Gabbra which could be connected in a special way with the *dubo*, as the Rendille O'doola are. While the Gabbra phratry of O'doola, not only bearing the same name as the Rendille section but also

<sup>8</sup> Torry, William I.: Subsistence Ecology among the Gabra, Columbia University, 1973; Tablino, Paolo, Note sui Gabbra del Kenya, Marsabit, 1974.

<sup>9</sup> Torry, 1973, p. 358.

related to it, does have *dabéla*, it shares this institution with all the other Gabbra phratries.

This central point of the comparison might easiest be illustrated by what William Torry has to say about the “ritual elders” of the Gabbra (p. 358 ff).

“When men leave the Political Elder grade and become Ritual Elder, they undergo a dramatic social metamorphosis, retiring from active participation in the political domain and in raiding and hunting expeditions to become ritual functionaries, somewhat similar to priests.”

In comparison to this let us remember that Wambile, the “first-born” of the Rendille, wear the *duub*. The fact that Wambile are a central character in the political power play of the Rendille we have described elsewhere (2.6.). Their behaviour does not always accord with “priestly” standards any more than that of politicians in other countries. What the *dabeel* of both tribes do have in common, however, is the fact that it is not part of their behavioural ideal to take up arms. Torry continues:

“Although those Ritual Elders formerly holding offices in the Political Elder grade do not abandon these positions the authority attached to them becomes greatly attenuated. Their occupants assume a sort of emeritus or titular status, being called upon by their successors in the Xomicha [= Political Elders, G.S.] grade for advice and counsel. The control of assembly meetings on all levels of organization rests in large measure in the hands of Political Elders.”

Added is the footnote: “As will become apparent, in order for men to be installed as Political Elders, they must be married, by which time they are at least in their early thirties and their fathers in the sixties. Even if their fathers are still alive by this time and hence in control of the family estate, the married sons nonetheless represent the family in most public affairs in political import.

“The installation or *gada* grade ceremonies, ideally conducted every eighth years, are known as Jilla. During these ceremonies, Ritual Elder initiands enter a large, completely closed *naabo* and remain secluded in this sanctum for either four or seven days, depending on the rules of the particular to which they belong.”

As we have heard, for Rendille *dabeel* initiands this seclusion lasts for four days, but at the final ceremony on the fifth day, during the procession around the *goob*, one element of the seclusion continues, namely not being looked at. Whoever watches the *dabeel* during their procession goes blind. Padre Venturino<sup>10</sup>, who observed the *dabeel* initiation of the O’doola section of the Gabbra, makes this point very clear:

“Parenti e familiari dei nuovi *dabéla* avevano dispostole loro capanne a forma di ampio cerchio attorno al recinto sacro, detto *naabo*, recinto pres-

<sup>10</sup> In: Tablino, P.: Note sui Gabbra del Kenya, Marsabit, 1974; underlining by me.

sapoco circolare, circondato da una siepe di rami di un arbusto spinoso detto sigirso, disposti in modo da impedire anche la stessa vista dall' esterno. ... Nell' interno del nabo una grossa capanna ...” (The Rendille do not build this hut inside the *naabo* but in close proximity, east of the *naabo*.)

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“D’ ora in poi, sino alla conclusione della festa, essi [the initiands] restano tagliati fuori dalla vita del loro villaggio e non vengono avvicinati se non da un vecchio che fa da intermediario tra loro e le mogli che vengono a portare il cibo. I dabéla non debbono vedere nessuno, ne essere visti durante la festa: il loro sguardo porterebbe male a persone e ad animali.”<sup>11</sup>

Torry continues: “It is at this time that they are formally ordained into this sacerdotal role, assuming priestly functions. When confined to the *naabo*, they don a special cloth headpiece, or *dubo*, into which are bound such *materia sacra* as ribbons of lion or leopard skin along with *xumbi* (a type of incense) and tobacco. The *dubo* is the insignia of their status and immediately distinguishes them from other men. Investiture into this grade endows men with *garoma*, a state of special virtue or piety conferring the ability to make powerful blessings. Ritual Elders are often collectively referred to as *nami nagayya*, or men of peace.

The principal activities of ritual elders involve blessing persons, particularly at individual transition rites and at public ceremonies, viz., when a child is born; at wedding ceremonies when both the newlyweds, their stock, and the foundation of their house is blessed; at mortuary and circumcision ceremonies; at the rites of newly dug wells; and at all *naabo* ceremonies. The *garoma* of Ritual Elder is solicited when stock have run away and the owner desires prayers for their safe return and when sterile women wish to beseech God for fertility. Thus, the formal functions of this status are associated with the establishment and maintenance of peace and fertility through prayer. Ritual Elders are proscribed from participating in such disruptive activities as hitting other people, arguing, cursing<sup>12</sup>, sleeping with wives of men from other grades, and stealing. To strike a Ritual Elder, an offense which Gabra I had interviewed claim never to have witnessed, would be construed as an extremely grave sacrilege.

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<sup>11</sup> In English this reads about like the following: “Relatives and confidants of the new *dabela* had built their huts around the sacred enclosure called nabo in the form of a spacious circle. The nabo is an almost circular closed space, surrounded by a fence made of branches of a thornbush called sigirso, which are arranged in a way that not even the eye can penetrate them from the outside. ...

Inside the nabo a big hut ...

From now on until the end of the festival they [the initiands] stay secluded from the life of their village, and except for one old man taking on the role of mediator between them and the women bringing food, nobody comes near them. The *dabela* must not see anyone and, during the festival, must not be seen by anyone: their sight would bring ill to man and beast.”

<sup>12</sup> ‘Cursing’ here is probably used in the sense of abusive language, not as deliberately, formal curses. Footnote added 2014.

In contradiction to the masculine, bull-like qualities associated with Political Elders, Ritual Elders are regarded, euphemistically, as women, being referred to by feminine forms of pronouns and by feminine gender of verbs. Like women, they are prohibited from burning the earth, from holding their genitals when urinating, from wearing any form of trousers, and from travelling at night. They cannot participate in water extraction activities at wells, and they are enjoined to walk behind their male travelling companions. At *Soorriyo* ceremonies they sacrifice only sheep and gelded stock, categories of domesticated animal associated both with the female sphere of life and with peace. In fact, many of the ceremonies Ritual Elders are expected to perform, *ex-officio*, involve the safety and welfare of women (including wells which are classified as female entities), whereas both women and ritual elders are proscribed from participating in rites carried out by political elders. I am not suggesting, however, that Ritual Elders are expected to behave in an effeminate manner or that they are forbidden from marrying. They are simply expected to remain aloof from male-oriented rituals and from certain types of decision making process, just like women, and that is where Gabra make an association between the two.”

The ritual symbolism, the *materia sacra* mentioned by Torry, we will discuss in detail later in the text. In order to be able to interpret the different symbols of Rendille and Gabbra better, let us first have a closer look at the social position of the *dabeel* in both societies.

The “Ritual Elders” of the Gabbra are – as far as we understand Torry – due to their age and the status received with it above hot-tempered rage, violence and verbal lack of restraint and whatever mistakes the youth might have. They are the men of prayer and blessing.

In all of these points they are similar to their Rendille age mates, with or without *duub*, the old Rendille men as such. The old ones, who are hardly involved in production processes anymore, who according to European concepts of efficiency uselessly sit around in the shade all day, who only, if at all, verbally concern themselves with the livestock while leaving the grazing and watering to others, these old men are the “true herdsman”, without them there would not be “anything good”. Their blessing is stronger than that of younger men. It would never occur to a younger married man to want to spit in someone else’s hands to thank him for a gift, it would be presumptuous to attach any noteworthy effectiveness to this blessing. But the saliva of old men (and women) is a strong blessing. Their function in cases of dispute is, ideally, to provide balance, and younger men can appeal to older ones to protect them from insults. Their beneficial effect on the fertility and health of animals and humans corresponds to that of the Gabbra *dabêla*. They can, of their own accord or when requested by others, pray on all the occasions when their Gabbra age mates are entitled to (the wells, to which the Rendille attitude is rather practical, seem to be an exception). But the Rendille of the

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higher age grades (at the moment Libaalle and Irbaallis) share this beneficent power with some prominent positions of younger age grades. The *gūdur* from the youngest age grade of married men (at the moment Irbaandif) and even the forty-four *hosooob* from the warrior age set (at the moment Ilkichilli) can be asked by childless women to pray for their fertility. So the old Rendille men share ritual functions with younger ones. Vice versa, the old men are in no way excluded from the discussion of political day-to-day matters, they do not at all assume an “emeritus” or a “titular status” as long as they do not feel their mental faculties or their delight in discussion decrease. In that latter case they are, during debates, only woken for prayers.

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In spite of these differences the most striking parallel between Rendille and Gabbra surely is that of the Gabbra *dabéla* to the old Rendille men, and not to the Rendille *dabeel* who can also belong to the grade of recently married men.

Regarding the service function of the Gabbra *dabéla* – and their Rendille age mates – meaning the fact that they are called and asked for prayer and blessing, the Rendille *dabeel* are very different.

The Rendille *dabeel* are not called, at least not as a rule, but they come of their own accord. And whoever refuses these imposed visits, which always involve a request for livestock, exposes himself to the sum of all curses invoked by various curse animals, by poison and teeth and, ultimately, by God himself. Neither his family nor his livestock will ever be numerous. If he does, on the other hand, meet the demands of the *dabeel* and entertains them, then their dance and their prayer will be beneficial for him and his possessions. “They pray for the animals, for the children ... Someone who did not have much livestock before ... his livestock will be as numerous as these grains of sand.” At least this is how one *dabeel* (G.) sees it; other Rendille can be heard to express more sceptical views: that the *dabeel* only wrap this sheet around their heads in order to take livestock away from other Rendille, that maybe they used to be poor people who wore the *duub* for begging; but people are afraid of them, “all these canine teeth, ptuh, ptuh! This *iibire* spit!” (Yeleewwa Alyaro, 3.0.). In any case, the service offered by the *dabeel* cannot simply be bought (and even less be had for free like that of the Gabbra *dabéla*), but it has to be sold to the recipients by force. Of the carrot (the blessing) and the stick (the sanctions imposed on persons who presume to decline this blessing) the Rendille *dabeel* have at their disposal, the stick is certainly the more effective.

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It would require longer fieldwork among the Gabbra, intensive participation and a profound familiarity with the Boran language spoken by them to compare the ritual balance of forces among the Gabbra on the one hand and the Rendille on the other. In this context we can only name some of the most obvious and well-documented facts and draw cautious conclusions from them.

The Gabbra are no acephalous society like the Rendille. They have no need to keep up a complicated balance of power among equals like the Rendille do. They have hierarchies of chiefs. Each Gabbra phratry has its “capital” in the form of a mobile camp in which, ideally, four “High *Xallu*”, one per eligible age set (Political and Ritual Elders) from each of the two “sub phratry” of the phratry, settle together. The office of *Xallu* is, in certain cases, hereditary. Apart from that, *Ya’a* – as this settlement as well as the group of people united in it are called – has at least one *Hayyu*, an office which is also hereditary but subordinate to the *Xallu* because the highest *Xallu* has to install the *Hayyu* in his office. Internally, the different *Xallu* are also organised hierarchically according to seniority of their family. Furthermore the *Ya’a* includes a considerable number of Ritual Elders, *dabéla*, who time after time – as far as I was able to investigate – seem to be selected from the same families, i.e. they do not belong to the *Ya’a* only due to their being Ritual Elders. And, last but not least, there are the offices connected with ritual objects: the custodians of the drum, of the horn and of the fire-sticks.<sup>13</sup>

The *Ya’a* is the “administrative centre” of the phratry, which is considerably larger than a Rendille section and, unlike the latter, not exogamous. Here, age-grade and other rituals are decided upon, legal disputes are settled, sanctions up to exclusion from the tribe imposed. Foreign affairs of the phratry are also managed by the *Ya’a*: It is responsible for peace negotiations with neighbouring tribes<sup>14</sup> as well as affairs between different Gabbra phratryes.

Matters which among the Rendille are regarded as solely concerning the persons involved are, among the Gabbra, negotiated with the collaboration of *Ya’a* functionaries as well. “*Jallaba* preside over meetings to decide who will donate stock to an impoverished agnate.” (Torry, p. 397) *Jallaba* are the lowest level of chiefs, nominated by the clans and confirmed by the highest *Xallu* of their phratry. They have extensive political and judicial functions elaborating on which would take us too far from our present topic. One issue mentioned in Torry’s description is of significance for us at this point:

Legal disputes which cannot be decided by the *Jallaba* are passed on to the *Hayyu*. In the most severe cases, like murder, the *Xallu* and the custodians of the ritual objects can also be appealed to. So we find among the Gabbra a worked-out hierarchy of courts which the Rendille lack.

“When the camel is brought back to the camp of the *Ya’a*, it is sacrificed in front of a large crowd of spectators. The left side of the beast is consumed by members of the Ritual and Political Elder grades while the right side can be eaten by all pre-grade males and Political Elders. As the *Ya’a* sacrifice a beast solicited from one man for the benefit of everyone in the phratry, then

<sup>13</sup> According to Torry, William I.: *Social Ecology of the Gabra*, Columbia University, 1973, pp. 378-404.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

to refuse a request of the *Ya'a* for an animal is interpreted by the Gabra as a disavowal of one's allegiance and responsibility to other members of his phratry community, encompassing perhaps many hundreds or thousands of people."<sup>15</sup>

What is expressed in the last few lines is probably another important difference from the Rendille *dabeel* who make requests of livestock by means of *jibaanjūib*. With the Gabra, it is an animal sacrifice performed by a phratry institution for the benefit of the entire phratry, so the person providing the animal is likely to have other motives than mere fear – the sacrifice is also done for himself, after all. Furthermore, the members of the *Ya'a* do not in every case request a sacrificial animal from outside their own circle – they might as well provide one themselves.

The interview with G., on the other hand, leaves the impression that the main motivation for the Rendille *dabeel* to request an animal is to satisfy their own appetite at the expense of other persons, outside their own group. The ritual use for the person giving the animal, however, is secondary and is doubted by non-*dabeel* among the Rendille.

So it is not surprising that animal symbols like the teeth of predators, snakes, etc., which have an intimidating effect through their connection with the curse, are not found among the Gabra to the same extent; neither in connection with *Ya'a* nor with *dabéla* do the Gabra seem to have that sort of thing.

Despite all similarities we must keep in mind that their power does not primarily originate in the *dabeel* rank and that the *dabeel* rank is incorporated – and not even in a prominent position – into a hierarchical structure of offices so we don't rashly equate the ritual functions of the *Ya'a* described in the following with the Rendille rites surrounding their sacred drum *jibaanjūib*.

“The *Ya'a* have the privilege of requesting stock for a public ceremony from anyone in their phratry except *Xallu* and *Hayyu*. From time to time the Drum Custodian will ask for a sheep to be slaughtered and smear its fat on the sacred drum to keep its leather binding supple or the Horn Custodian may want a goat sacrificed to “feed” its blood to the horn. If phratry men put pressure on the *Ya'a* to sacrifice a camel during a very good *Soorriyo* month and the *Ya'a* lack a suitable one among their own herds to slaughter, they will meet to select from among the Cheko [the “mass” of those not belonging to the *Ya'a*] an individual to “donate” a *dufal* (meat ox). The procedure, known as *luboma* (the endowment of life), is to send messengers to the camp of the prospective donor to inform him that some of the *Ya'a* will be coming to visit him, bless him and take away a camel of his and to remind him that he should be ready with gifts of tobacco and coffee beans to honorably receive these important visitors when they arrive at his camp. They exchange bless-

<sup>15</sup> Torry, 1973, p. 394 f.

ings with him, and he feeds them with milk and feasts them on the meat of a large ram sacrificed for them. The next day the visitors are ceremoniously presented with the dufal or meat ox, and they bless the host by spitting incense and tobacco upon him, a highly revered honor.”

The categories of the different dignitaries united in the *Ya'a* partly overlap with those of the *dabéla*. So one can formulate the hypothesis that the power of the *Hayyu*, *Xallu*, etc. is based primarily on their status as *dabéla* and therefore regard this as a parallel to O'doola and the Rendille *dabeel*. But the power of the *Jallaba*, at least, seems rather to decrease instead of increase by their promotion from the age grade of the Political Elders to that of *dabéla*. “Once appointed to this office, the incumbent remains in it throughout his life although his authority will substantially diminish when he graduates out of the Xomicha grade.”<sup>16</sup> Where functionaries, thanks to their status as *dabéla*, hold a prominent position over other occupants of their office, this prominent positions seems to be ritual rather than political. (To separate the ritual from the political in this manner would, among the Rendille, be futile.)

“*Hayyu*, as long as they are in the Ritual Elder grade, are considered to embody the procreational powers of the phratry. For this reason they are referred to as the bulls (*Korma*) of the tribe, and when important rituals are performed, they are anointed with the blood of sacrificial bull-stock by their subclass mates.”<sup>17</sup>

“The High *Xallu* from the Dabéla grade of the Yiblo sub-phratry is considered the leader or ‘father’ of the *Ya'a* (for as long as he occupies this grade) or the spiritual leader of the whole phratry.”<sup>18</sup>

The custodians of the ritual objects, which are comparable to the High *Xallu* in status, also consist of members of the Political and the Ritual Elders. Such a status is, therefore, not tied to the *dubo*.

In order to substantiate this point it seems to be worthwhile to have a closer look at the animal symbolism of the Gabbra, which is comparable to the *dabeel* initiation of the Rendille. I could not find anything about this topic in the literature. My own sporadic investigations among the Gabbra produced the following findings.

At the *dabéla* initiation of the Alganna phratry in their traditional Jilla (age-grade ceremony) area in Ethiopia, *moor* (abdominal fat) of a ewe is laid out and some milk poured over it. Then – I must ask to put aside scientific reservations; what I am reporting here is a belief of the Gabbra the origin of which I have no explanation for – python (*Jawe*) and lion come, lick the milk of the laid-out fat and – in a different version – eat the fat itself, too. Everybody may watch this, I was told. Afterwards both animals urinate in this spot

<sup>16</sup> Torry, 1973, p. 379.

<sup>17</sup> Torry, 1973, p. 385

<sup>18</sup> Torry, 1973, p. 389.

and disappear. One part of the *dabéla* initiation, now, is for the initiands to smear earth wet with urine onto their foreheads.

The Alganna phratry is furthermore said to have a house in Ethiopia in which a large number of small snakes of a species called *buti* are kept and fed. Nobody was able to give me a reason for this – apart from the explanation that such was the custom. Of this Alganna phratry and their snakes we have already heard in the context of the Rendille subclan of Gaalorra (cf. 2.8.9.1.).

Another phratry – Gara – replaces this ceremony by burning a camel bull, the ashes of which the initiands rub onto their foreheads; so the predator symbolism of Alganna does not apply in general and is not constitutive of the *dabéla* status.

In summary we can say that there are many similarities between the animal symbolism of Gabbra and Rendille. But this symbolism is used in different institutions and with different interests. In spite of the differences in the significance of the *dabéla* institution among Gabbra and Rendille, the *dabéla* initiation is, in its details, so similar to that of the Rendille that they let appear some of the Rendille ritual details in a sharper outline. The same is true, for instance, for the *sorio* of the Gabbra.<sup>19</sup>

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### 3.3. MEERAAT – THE KILLERS

After the retreat of the colonial power tribal wars rekindled in northern Kenya on a low level of escalation. Livestock raids are conducted by gangs of young men who, on the side of the Gabbra, Turkana and Somali, are partly armed with rifles (the Turkana even have an institution very similar to an army) and on the side of the Samburu and Rendille with spears. In the chapter “Chronology of the conflict over the marriage rites of the Ilkichilli age set” we will discuss this problem in more detail.

These confrontations claim many lives – men as well as women and children – and prior to the marriage of the Ilkichilli age set one sometimes met groups of warriors of whom every third or fourth wore killer beads. I was told of as many as 201 cases of enemies killed by members of these age sets, but I did not investigate this matter systematically, so the actual number might be higher. On the other hand, some of the accounts included in this number might have been exaggerated as they sounded like reports from the front. So, all in all, the dimension might be correct, after all. Considering the small populations we are dealing with, this is a considerable death toll. The majority of the victims of the Rendille are Gabbra. If you see a Rendille warrior with killer ornaments you can with some certainty assume that he killed a Gabbra. So it is sometimes astonishing how casually the killers wander around among the Gabbra of Marsabit “city” wearing their killer insignia.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Paolo Tablino: Note sui Gabbra del Kenya, Marsabit, 1974.

Only very few killers are arrested. The ones who are arrested are convicted to six months of heavy labour (digging irrigation ditches) on beans and maize porridge in Isiolo. Probably even fewer killers from the other side are arrested because they own rifles and the police respectfully keep their distance to them.

### 3.3.1. RITUAL REGULATIONS FOR KILLERS

At a nightly surprise attack on an enemy settlement – the typical act of war – women and girls are killed and disregarded. But every male has their genitals cut off.

A man belongs to the person who first touched or injured him, even if another one deals him the deathblow. The killer, i.e. the one who according to this rule takes the credit, cuts off the genitals and in this very moment starts to sing the killer's song. If the fighting prevents him from giving an extensive performance, the least he must do is sing the wordless refrain.

After returning with the looted livestock, the killers pass through a temporary ritual state containing strong elements of seclusion and ending with a ceremony of a cleansing and liberating nature. This state lasts until at least the first Friday after the next full moon.

The killers paint themselves all over with white chalk, wear bells (*daamam*), a white and a brown ostrich feather (*weelya* and *torgos*), one on the forehead, one on the back of the head. They also wear strings of clinking metal pieces strongly reminiscent of girls' jewellery. In general their get-up at this time has clear female elements.

When the killers wander from settlement to settlement in groups to perform their killer's song and receive food and drink, first of all the girls gather around them and give them strings of their necklaces of glass beads, *soommi*. These *soommi* the killers will eventually pass on to their respective girlfriends. But during this time of ritual seclusion, the time during which they wear *rib* (chalk paint), the warriors wear *soommi*. The girls also lend them their red bead collar *ilkiriba*.

The killers are only given foodstuff classified as "cold". "Hot foods", like roasted meat and blood, they must not consume. Their diet consists solely of milk and the meat of ewes browned in fat and then boiled in water. If a killer has received the red bead collar of a girl he fixes some intestinal fat (*moor*) to it (cf. chapter on "context-comparing symbology) and gives it back to the girl.

In each settlement in which the killers are staying, a pointed hut (*minki meeraat* – house of the *meeraat*) is built for them from some mats and the straight poles of the front parts of the houses, where they can spend their nights secluded from everyone else. They are not allowed to have sexual contacts, either. On top of this pointed hut the genitals of the slain enemies are stored.

Each killer is given a female camel as a gift. For first-borns the mother's brother provides this camel, for younger sons the oldest brother. This camel is *ayti magah* – the camel of the name. It will wear a rope (*heeraar*) around its neck like a bull. If it foals, the women perform a dancing song like the one on new moon, a ewe is killed and a fur strip (*khalli*) of this ewe is tied around the camel's neck.<sup>20</sup>

On the next Friday after full moon, a man from Dubsahay or a daughter of Dubsahay who might be married to a man from the killer's clan takes on the task of throwing away the captured genitals (*khomoo'd*). As a reward this person receives small gifts like tea and sugar. The killer is freed from all insignia of the *rib* phase and now dons a necklace made of white beads (*ballo*), a headband made of *ergeeg* (cf. 3.0.) and brass bracelets. From that moment on these are his status features. When he gets married he will only keep the bracelets.

After four *soorriyo*, that is at least one year later, the killer will go to the top of a mountain and slaughter a ram, roast it, eat the whole of it and even destroy the bones by burning them. (Cf. the *naabo* ceremony where we find

<sup>20</sup> Very similar things, regarding the mother's brother and also the camel mare, are done by the Gabbra. William I. Torry reports in *Subsistence Ecology among the Gabbra*: "When a man goes to battle, he takes the spear of his mother's brother, leaving his own at home, and if the mother's brother has a horse, the sister's son takes that with him as well. If the young warrior returns successfully from the raid, he must hand over to his *abbuya* all the booty (*bogi*) he has captured, which may include several head of cattle. He presents his mother's brother's wife (*arera*) with one of the most prestigious trophies of the battle, the penis of the murdered enemy (*magera*), and she ritually burns it. The mother's brother in turn sacrifices goats for the hero and entertains him in a four-day feast climaxed by the presentation of an infant female camel (*sarma* – see p. 95.) which will become part of his *guma* or inheritance."

Elsewhere: "*Sarma*. A *sarma* is a female camel given to a man by his mother's senior brother when the latter receives the booty that sister's son presents him after returning from a successful raid on an enemy camp. *Sarma* etiquette is followed only as long as the owner is alive. Neither the owner nor anyone of his *luba* sub-class (see Chapter IX) can eat the flesh, drink the blood or milk or sit on the hide of a *sarma*. Separate milk storage vessels (*chicho*) are used for *sarma* so that their milk will not be drunk accidentally by the owner or his age-mates, and like *doro*, they also have separate milking vessels. The original female camel given to the sister's son or if it dies its oldest living female issue is considered *sarma*, and when a female is born to a *sarma*, a special rope is made (called simply rope, or *hadda*) and placed around its neck. On these occasions women spend the day singing and eating coffee beans, as when an infant is born, Gabbra say. As with *doro* stock, its afterbirth is placed on an object resting beyond the reach of dogs. Water containers are not loaded on these animals, and only in emergencies will they be loaded with tentage when the household moves. Those of their male offspring which become *roycho fahille* (burden camels) can carry water, but neither the owner nor his age-mates can drink it. When *sarma* become too old to reproduce, they are not killed. Like senescent bull camels, they are led to pasture to die. And boys in the camel camp who misbehave may escape punishment by touching them." (Torry, 1973, p. 95)

similar food rites, 4.9.) After that there is, finally, nothing he has to do or refrain from. But at big age-grade ceremonies he will wear his bells again.

### 3.3.2. THE POETICS OF THE KILLER'S SONG

**Origin:** The form of the killer's song is, as we will see below, given. Because of its ritual function neither the poetic structure nor the melody can be altered. As early as on their walk to the raid, which often lasts for days, the future killers ponder on how they will phrase their actions. On their way back then the chronology of events is completed.

**Reception:** The first singing of the *meeraat* is ritually significant and takes place without (living) addressee. A minimal version is performed while the genitals are severed. After their return the killers wander from settlement to settlement during the *rib* phase and perform the killer's song for hours at a time. This is directed mainly at the girls. From this ensues the function of the *meeraat* as a triumphant self-presentation.

**Content:** The killer's song describes the military expedition in all geographic detail, it alludes to the acts of killing and contains extensive insulting of the enemy. Reported are also the march back home, possible conflicts with the police, lengthy cursings of police and government, etc. Furthermore the killer's song directly relates to the actual situation, addresses the girls listening, etc. A complete killer's song will be presented in the context of the "Chronology of the conflict over the marriage rites of the Ilkichilli age set" (see section 4).

**Form:** A wordless melody recurring a different number of times is sung by all the killers, who usually wander around in small groups, together. The style of presentation is not loud, booming, boasting, but rather a little hoarse and feignedly casual, i.e. a cleverer variant of boasting. This recurring melody is interrupted by individual presentations of verses reporting the personal adventures of the respective singer in the first person.

The central poetic figure of the killer's song is the pun, playing with near-homonyms, i.e. words of similar sound, but different meanings (this, incidentally, applies to all of Rendille poetry).

The typical text unit can best be noted down in two lines, the caesuras of which each form a pun together:

A	A'
B	B'

The following examples narrate a retaliation of Rendille warriors in response to a Gabbra attack in 1969:

*Garar khabto soouwwissa, geeddi gaari yeede,  
daraaro toorkajahe, soommi on ikatore.*

You who you have bullet cases<sup>21</sup>, agree with me I talked as fast as a car<sup>22</sup> in the morning I plunged the spear, shower me with white beads.

Or:

*Aytenyo ma duusso, ki sooduule diidda,  
afkayaakho diida, nabahaflehtenyo.*

Our female camel does not go on a raid, him who approaches hostilely it hates, him who grazes with his mouth [the enemy who lives on game during his raid] it hates, our sharp ear [female camel with incised ears which form two sharp edges as a clan mark].

Allusions of this kind to camel names and clan-specific property marks are a recurring element.

*Aranki gaal maalo, Gaalooro kadowe,  
ayu yabar gesso maalo, YabarGal kadowe.*

To a man milking camels [something Rendille men are only allowed in exceptional cases] I shouted Gaalorro [i.e. I called out my clan name to him in the moment of killing], to someone tying up a female camel with a rope and milking it I shouted Yabar-Gal [ritual and camel name of Gaalooroyyo].

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The form of the verse permits slight variation, for instance a further sentence added after the two puns if a piece of information is still missing.

For instance a killer who was arrested and taken to the police in Marsabit and eventually to Isiolo to prison sings the following:

*Ani Haldaayane, halhal liikabahche,  
Liiguuriche, gurro liimiinche, ichoowka hali Sollo orrahe.*

In Marsabit they cut off my long hair, I was taken away, taken south, to the sun-drenched mountain of Isiolo.

A warrior who had returned from prison asks his mother whether she kept the genitals of his enemy for him because he still needs them to complete his *rib* phase which was involuntarily prolonged by six months:

*Guusi barbar gelo, bartiis a jirta ona,  
Guyato iid mele, wohoo muglaasso<sup>23</sup>, guuseey a jira ona?*

Family of her under whom I put my shoulder, her livestock is [still] there, mindless Guyato [mother's name] who loses everything, is it still in my family?

*Guusi barbar gelo, bartiis a jirta ona,  
gor'khoob islikabahche, an khoboobin waaye.*

Family of her under whom I put my shoulder, her livestock is here, back then they set out together to spy, I have still not cooled down.

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<sup>21</sup> Girls wear bullet cases on long strings hanging down their backs to produce a clattering while walking.

<sup>22</sup> That means: "I walked as fast as a car", a different reading is: *yeeede*: went.

<sup>23</sup> ex: *muskulaso*.

### 3.4. LAKHANDIITA

We have already described circumcision in the context of the male life cycle (cf. 1.3.2.). What is important in *this* context now is the time after circumcision – the special ritual state of the freshly circumcised until they have recovered.

They share all the avoidances of other ritual specialists (cf. 3.0.), so they must not eat “hot things” etc.; they live isolated in a hut built for them especially, etc. Maybe their hazardous state of health – there is a risk of serious infections because the knife does not get cleaned – explains these avoidances in part. Such avoidances have the value of a prayer in that they present a particularly laudable and well-pleasing behaviour which might induce God to help.

Also comparable in this context is the girls’ circumcision (cf. 1.2.5.) which, in spite of all differences, does show some similarities.

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### 3.5. HOSOOb

At the *gaalgulamme* ceremony of an age set (cf. 1.3.4.), one year after the circumcision of the warriors, the *hosoob*, the forty-four ritual specialists of the warriors, are appointed. They receive a headband made from *ergeeg* (cf. 3.0.) and all of them, whether they are from an *iibire* or from a *waakhkamúr* subclan, receive the *iibire* curse by the *iibire* among them spitting on the *gumoyyo*, the *soorriyo* sticks (cf. 5.6.) of the *waakhkamúr* among them. They also touch poisoned arrows with their mouths, a custom similar to the respective customs of the *dabeel* and *iibire* (cf. 3.1.2. and 2.3.).

The relationship of the *hosoob* to Ogoom in the subclan of Adisoomele (“K”) has already been discussed elsewhere (cf. 2.4.8.).

The *hosoob* have a powerful curse against and a strong prayer for other warriors, so they present a moral authority. At the same time, they are a power factor in the sense of segmental seniority because it is the oldest families of each subclan who provide one or two *hosoob*.

The prayer of the *hosoob* extends to infertile women, too, to pray for whom they, like the *dabeel* and the *gudur*, can be asked.

At future age-grade ceremonies they are of an outstanding significance. We will see that in the case of the *naabo* ceremony (cf. 4.9.).

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### 3.6. GUDUR

Spencer calls the *gudur* the “ritual leader”, a problematic term which is only acceptable for want of a better one because the *gudur* does not conduct any rituals, nor does he lead anyone. On the contrary, he is *being* led and guided and in many aspects has a very passive, almost female role.

The *gudur* embodies the wellbeing of the age set of the younger seniors, so he has a lot to do with marriage and fertility. His installation takes place at the ceremony of *naabo*, shortly before the weddings of his age set. How passive his role in this ceremony is – he is carried, taken care of, fed – will be discussed in the description of the *naabo* ceremony (cf. 4.9.).

In every third age set, in the *teerya* line (see excursus I, 5. and 4.9.), the *gudur* comes from the Guḍuro lineage in Gaalooroyyo, a subclan of Saale, but in the two other age sets of a cycle of three he is from Kimogol, another subclan of the same clan.

The *gudur* of a non-*teerya* age set receives 52 camels provided by all the clans (Dubsahay 10, Matarbah 4, Rengumo 8, Nahgan 2, Nebey 4, ELEGELA none, Gaabanayyo 4, Goob Orre none because they participate in the Samburu age-grade rites, Kimogol 4, Urowween 4, Gaaldeylan 6 (Gaalorra 4, Elleemo 1, Maḍaacho 1), Tubcha 4<sup>24</sup>). The *gudur* of a *teerya* age set also receives camels, but these are collected solely from families who have always, from the father to the son, only belonged to the respective age set of the *teerya* line. These families are called *gob teerya – teerya* family.

If one of these camels dies, the *gudur* can request it to be replaced by the previous owner. So the wellbeing of the *guduur* and his herd seems to represent that of an age set.

The *guduur* is very important for the women’s fertility. He is asked to pray for infertile women of his age set. He is not allowed, however, to get involved in their fertility in a practical sense because he is, in some aspects like the respect shown to him, treated as if he belonged to the age set above his own. So he avoids all the women of his own age set – apart from his wife, of course – but is not kept from the women of the next older age set.

The *guduur*’s office ends with the marriage of the following age set. Then he can begin to shave the hair on his head again which until that time he wore long and tangled, and then he can take off his collar (*biro*) made from giraffe’s hair (*debeti geri* – otherwise used for female jewellery). He can wear men’s shoes with straps tied to a long row of knots instead of shoes like they are made for recently married women, like he used to as *guduur*. He takes off his headband made from *ergeeg*. He also gives up his numerous avoidances as we have described them in the introduction to this section (cf. 3.0.).

<sup>24</sup> These numbers are in part a little lower than the ones listed by Spencer 1973, p. 50. The numbers listed here were given to me by the *gudur* himself who really should not be interested in giving numbers which are too low.

When he visits women of his age set they will no longer observe the custom of pouring milk into his shoes. And he in his turn will no longer observe the rule of avoiding these women.

Sogotey Kimogol, the *guḍuur* of the Irbaandif age set from Saale-Kimogol once told me that he did not want to become *guḍuur* at first because he was afraid not to be able to adhere to all the avoidances for fourteen years and this way to provoke gossip. But the large number of camels convinced him because, as a younger son, he would never have been able to acquire so many animals.

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### 3.7. THE TERM “LAGAN” AND THE DOOR CAMELS

*“Hosoob alagantehe idi dórret  
Hösob are lagan like door.”*

*Door* are a special category of camel which in many respects can be regarded as a camelid counterpart of the human ritual specialists discussed in this section.

The term *lagan* was once translated for me by my interpreter as “safe”. This probably hits one, but only one component of the term. After listing the food avoidances of the *hosoob* one informant said “... *a lagantahe deerka* – so they are *lagan*.” The state of *lagan*, therefore, is a consequence of strictly observing avoidances. So the persons who are *lagan* are “safe” from weakness and contestation. Another component of the term shows in the treatment of the *door* camels: The milk of these camels is milked into a separate milk container, a *murub*, which is marked by a cowry shell sewn to its outside. This milk is not mixed with the milk of other camels. Therefore, “*lagan*” also implies: separate, isolated, special.

These components are also contained in our terms “sacred” and “sacral” which, however, due to their Christian context include many – for instance moral – elements the term *lagan* does not include. But *lagan* – this it does have in common with the term “sacred” – is in any case positive, salutary. Something graded negatively or ambivalently – “K” group, blacksmiths, donkeys – would never be called *lagan*.

What is also called *lagan* is the milk container *maḍaal* because it is not used by everyone in any context they choose. Its meaning we have discussed in the sections on the *almado* festival (cf. 0.6.7.2.) and the “symbolism of the *ergeeg*”. The *ergeeg* symbolism plays an important part in marking people who are *lagan*.

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#### DOOR

The quality of a camel to be *door* is transmitted in the female line. (Descent in the male line is not much controlled with camels.) The avoidances related to *door* have to be adhered to even if the camels are not one’s own posses-

sion but borrowed as *maal* camels. (In the *maal* system, the one borrowing the animal gets to usufruct them and keep the male offspring, while the giver keeps the right to female offspring.) Independently of their current owner these avoidances are observed. So they do not relate to certain subclans or families, as Spencer assumes, but to certain camels.

“Certain lineages avoid certain objects which are thought to be associated with some past disaster. These are known as *door*. Thus Gaalgideelle (Matarbah clan) avoid goat’s meat, Hajjufle (Dibshay clan) avoid milk from their own camels, and Kudere (Dibshay) have certain camels which must not go near a spot where a woman has recently given birth to a child.”<sup>25</sup>

Gaalgideelle in Matarba, Hajjufle and Guddeere in Dubsahay are indeed lineages owning *door* camels. The “family name” of the camels of Gaalgideelle is Attire, that of Hajjufle Ilal. All *door* have in common that their milk is not mixed with that of other camels. Furthermore, all *door* are subject to the same goat avoidances as the camels of Gaalorra (cf. 2.8.9.1.). The people, however, do not have to avoid goats in any way. Of “past disasters” I have never heard in this context.

What Spencer writes about Hajjufle (“Ajofole”) also has to be specified a little more precisely.

The milk of Hajjufle’s *door* camels cannot be drunk by women of Hajjufle. This is how it came about: Hajjufle was walking along when he saw a she-camel sitting in a big hyena’s den. That was at the time when the animals still spoke. The camel refused to come out. So Hajjufle tried to lure it with promises:

“*A kilaga, soobah, amba kilaga.*”

“I will make you *lagan*, come out, I will make you *lagan*.”

But the camel stayed in the hole. So Hajjufle continued to make promises:

“*Soobah, muruubi riyyo bicche lakasiicho, ma lakaamaalo, soobah!*  
*Uluba a diidda on.* “*Soobah, chirri at uram kajirto, diri hagga haanu ma lakeeno!*” *A fiddiita uluba.* “*Soobah! Haanu oboorri lakalaaba, oboorri ma kidamo*” *liidah.* ‘*Deerka soobahte.*’ *Deerka oboorri ma daaro.*”

“Come out, you will not be milked into a *muruub* with which goats are watered!” But still it refused. “Come out, when you are in the settlement site the milk will not be taken near the earthen pot [i.e. into the house].” Still it did not get up. “Come out! The milk is kept away from the women. Women will not drink you.” That was when it came out. So women cannot touch it.

So much for the tale. So with these *door* camels, the usual distance between women and female camel (“*deyyoho gaali deyyah ma daarto* – women do not touch female camels”) is increased.

Women can also not carry the calves of the *door* of Hajjufle. The meat of male offspring has to be given to strangers; Hajjufle are not allowed to con-

<sup>25</sup> Spencer, Paul, 1973, p. 63.

sume it. An infertile female animal cannot be used as pack camel, as it would happen with other she-camel, because that would mean it was touched by women. It just grazes until it drops dead.

Spencer's claim that the *door* camels of Guddeere must not go near a spot where a woman has given birth I was not able to confirm. But that might be due to a lack of investigation on my part. Torry reports of the *doro* camels of the Gabbra, an institution largely identical to that of the Rendille. He also writes of a "ritual opposition between these animals and women".

How great the similarities to the Rendille are in this respect can be seen in the following passage:

"Only female stock can be *doro*, and all the female issue of *doro* themselves become *doro* ... the milking vessel of *doro* cannot be used for other stock ... Although there are no prohibitions on giving *doro* away in exchange transactions, the recipient must always be notified of the *lagu* status of the animal."<sup>26</sup>

"*Lagu*" is most likely to be "*lagan*" in Rendille.

### 3.8. FOURTH EXCURSUS: THE CURSE AND ITS EFFECT

*Chirrinki worran isladiho, chiy intuus onka islaarga. Chi' islaargeka, isliifoofa. Chiy harra kaguudda. Iche la meessicheka a idaas on. Isliifoofa, 'deerka ankiyye Waakh serey leekeeno, leekeena. Ankiyye us il gato la gata. Dagah lamma islakaseye; ki jebe a jebe, ki soo 'hade la so 'hade.*

"Usually, when you fight with enemies, the enemy groups see each other from some distance away [literally: the enemy, just over there, you see each other]. When you have seen each other, you blow towards each other. You strike earth to the enemy [i.e. you blow earth from your cupped fist in the direction of the enemy]. They also do the same thing in their place. You blow towards each other, then God brings the side up which he brings up and directs the one down which he directs down. Two rocks were thrown against each other; the one that shattered, shattered, the one that remained [intact], remained.

So the curse is no automatism. While a curse or an act of cursing is thought to have a specific immediate effectiveness, as our numerous examples show, this effectiveness is attached to certain conditions. If the curse meets an equal counter-curse, God decides. In general, God is the one executing the curse, just like he is the one answering to prayers.

I: "The curse animal of Saale is the rhino. Say, for instance, you are from Saale and want to curse someone. Does God send the rhino in order to kill your adversary or who sends the rhino?"

<sup>26</sup> Torry, 1973, p. 93 f.

Baarooowa: "Only God sends the rhino. No man drives the rhino from behind with his stick."

So God does not only have a veto or the function of tipping the scales, but without his active intervention the curse is not effective. Still it is assumed that God will most likely execute the curse because, after all, he is the one who equipped the people with the ability to curse in a certain, often clan-specific, way.

This shows how much the curse has in common with the prayer, actually one might say it is a prayer, wishing not beneficial, but detrimental events upon the ones affected by it.

This element of the curse – to require God's consent – makes it an almost moral institution. For this divine consent is only given if the curse is justified, i.e. if it was uttered in honest and just anger. In that case, however, it is believed to find its victim almost automatically and unerringly and destroy him. Only the one who uttered it can, if he hurries, deactivate the curse.

*Goobenyo a idaas: Chu'us enenyet abaaro, iche ---- yadeeh. Wahaas a nyamaan one. Matah on goochaan. Walah addane layadeeh mele.*

Our clan [Uyam] is like this: If they curse people, they say ---- [blows into his half-closed fist]. That [the curse] runs [or jumps, flies]. It cuts the head off. Nothing else is said. ["Cuts the head off" means that the victim dies suffering from headaches.]

*Riiraan 'deerka. Lasoouwwicha. 'Deerka enenyet lawaha. Ki kootte fuf yidah, lakhabta. Bicche af lakaluulukhta. Ptuh ptuh ptuh. Koo khaate, ki buure la toro a soonokhtaan.*

Then you shout. You shout at him [who sent the curse on its way]. Then the man [the cursed one] is called. The one who said *fuf* [the one who blew = cursed] is held down. The mouth is rinsed out with water. Ptuh, ptuh, ptuh [spits]. One is destroyed, many come back again. [Meaning: After the mouth which uttered the curse was cleaned some of the people cursed can still die, but many will recover].

The fact that the curse can be justified morally also has the effect that one might even talk openly about having killed another person by cursing. This can, however, hardly be considered proof of the objective efficiency of the curse as the statistics are likely to be distorted: Cases in which someone unsuccessfully tried to kill someone by curse are very probably not talked about.

(Question: Can you tell me a story of how someone was killed by curse?)

*Madaakkino! Uskulo.*

Outrageous! That is something bad.

(I repeat the request.)

*Kol tuumman a goonna. Annaka a gooche alah.*

We cut [the head off; it is the same informant from Uyam] every time. I have also cut.

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(Question: Why?)

*A ðiida. Toolla chi' inno isikahne isihollowne, a kuyeela la idaas. Ma kiekkeesdi, a rum on. Chi' maanta inno isjahne, ati ikahataatte, ati nguvu khabto, ikahataatte, ani nguvuheey a koh?*

I hate it. If we now stand up against each other and get angry with each other, I will do the same with you. I am not lying to you, it is just true. If we now beat each other up and you hit me, you who you are strong have hit me, I – what is my strength? [By way of an answer he points to his mouth.]

(Question: For what reason did you curse someone in the past?)

*A isjahne.*

We had a fight.

(What about?)

*Bicche isleemaranne.*

We wanted to get to the water at the same time.

*Bicchehi hoolaat, wortoo.*

Water for the livestock, at a well.

(Question: From which tribe was the other one?)

*Uyam. Goobaanya.*

From Uyam. Our clan.

*Mataare, Mataare. 'Daroo kalday menya orran? A Mataare. 'Daroo menya? geeddaas on. Laisamisla chirraas ma ðulo. Bicchehaas isleemaranne. Isjahne. Isjahne, weyti isjahne. Ilagde, matahla jebche. Inta ikhabte.*

Mataare, Mataare [name of a waterhole]. Isn't there usually only one trough? It is Mataare. Only one trough, no more. And at that time Laisamis did not flow [the river near Laisamis was dried-up]. About this water we fought. We beat each other, we beat each other badly. He pushed me to the ground, his head was injured. He held me here [points to his throat, speaks with fake strangled voice].

(A different one explains:)

*Kur lakhabte lameerrehiche.*

The throat was held and wrung.

*Anna kootte guddudoo onka matah jebche. Ulla bolkhe. ... Koli burenye ani ilagde, usuhi bolkhe weyti. Matah a jebche. Ulla koli us i'hele, ilagde.*

I had injured him on the head with a blow. It hurt him ... Many times he pushed me to the ground, he whom it hurt very much. I had injured him on the head. And he, when he caught me, threw me on the ground [holds his hand over his mouth to indicate how the other one strangled him].

*Ma iigaasan leheyman a, bal?*

Would he not have killed me?

*Lasoorye, liikabahche. Annihiiyye annaka umuyye.*

People came running, freed me. I who had also [almost] died [breathes heavily].

*Rumanka 'deerka, ma kiekkeesdi.*

Really, I am not deceiving you.

*Eta 'deerka ... idahye.*

To that man I said then ... [makes the curse gesture: blows through his half-closed fist].

*Ichooowka 'deerka yumuy. a khoboobe. A idaas. Geddi addane diri jirto mele. A geeddaas on.*

In the end he died. I recovered. That's how it is. There is no more behind it. Just that much.

(Question: What would have happened if the other one had cursed him, too?)

He doesn't know, he says.

*Ebba ibeenki Waakhe khaba.*

Everybody has a day of God.

(Question: Everybody his own day? – *ebba ibeenkiissa?*)

*Aa.*

Yes.

*Waakhe garta 'deerka. An ma gardi. Maanta boon ma lakisoo'diicho, bal? 'Deerka walah dakkhan a idaas on. Waakh ma kibahcho? Jiro dakkhamba a idaas on.*

So, God knows it. I don't. Is it not possible to drop a bomb on you now? That's how everything is. Does God not help you out? That's how your whole life is.

[During World War II, the Italians dropped a bomb on Marsabit. That is why people have an idea of *boon*.]

This story should not lead us to believe that the curse is always said openly. Many stories are told in which the cursing is done in secret. That the effectiveness of a curse depends on the terror it evokes in the victim is contested strongly by the Rendille.

All the different curse agents and insignia of curse power found among the *iibire* (cf. 2.3.) or in the *dabeel* context are essentially unnecessary because the curse is assumed to be effective without them, too. The curse can consist of having malicious thoughts “in the belly”, it can be transmitted by a mere look, it can be cast verbally or with the help of gestures and ritual objects.

This contradiction of cultivating an elaborate ritualism which, if the underlying ideology is taken literally, is not even needed, we find elsewhere too, for instance in Christianity. Nevertheless the ritualism is cultivated, and the curses dreaded most are those of people possessing visible insignia of their curse power, like *iibire* and *dabeel*. These insignia are also employed in the act of cursing, so they are used as a magic means. Still, curses accompanied by magic acts do not differ from curses performed without magic acts in any fundamental characteristics. So the magic – the Rendille do not even have a word for it in this sense – is a category which can well be subsumed under the “curse”.

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### *HARMFUL MAGIC*

A difference is made, however, between the morally justifiable curse and harmful sorcery (*tibaato*). Like the curse, *tibaato* can also either use material devices or do without them. So it comprises what is defined separately as “witchcraft” and “black magic” elsewhere. This is, by the Rendille, regarded as one and the same, too.

Believing in the immaterial variant of *tibaato* can, for instance, manifest itself in a woman suspecting her neighbour of having caused the illness of her child. She does not necessarily have to suspect her neighbour of having done it with bad intent; the neighbour may not even know she has so much *tibato*.

A different thing is the *tibaato* “medicine”, a mysterious mixture which every woman claims not to know, while allegedly almost every other woman has it.

*Tibaato* can be carried around under one’s fingernail and flicked into the face of an adversary, it can be sprinkled into shoes, etc.

Women like to suspect their fellow females of using items of their own household in order to perform magic acts on them. So, a woman will often eye a neighbour she does not like and who has come over to borrow some embers from her hearth or a cup or a pot with suspicion. If then the toddler steps on the fire the next day, her suspicions are confirmed.

The Samburu diviners earn part of their living by clearing up suspicions of *tibaato*, another part by selling charms protecting from *tibaato* (*intassim*) and a third part by selling *tibaato*. But all these are mainly women’s matters – men go to a diviner if they want to learn about future pasture conditions, rains, imminent enemy raids, disease or death.

### *ENVY*

On the borderline between justified curse and witchcraft lies the harm one can do to others through envy (*inaaf*). The means for inflicting this kind of harm is the look. People take great pains to avoid eating under the looks of older men whose curse is, as everybody knows, particularly powerful. One must either offer them something or hide the food quickly and hope they will leave soon. Eating outdoors, for the whole settlement to see, is therefore absolutely impossible. That would probably be deadly. Europeans are much marvelled at for their ignorance of these matters.

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## 4. CHRONOLOGY OF THE CONFLICT OVER THE MARRIAGE RITES OF THE ILKICHILLI AGE SET (1976)

### 4.1. BACKGROUND

In the Friday year of 1881 the age set Desmaala was circumcised. The following years are summed up as the time “when Desmaala were warriors”. Desmaala are – if the rule was observed that a son must be initiated into the third age set after his father – the grandfathers of Ilkichilli, who were circumcised in 1965 and married in 1976. The fate of Ilkichilli repeats the fate of Desmaala. Ilkichilli takes the same position in the cycle of history – only one cycle of 84 years (*daajji*) later.<sup>1</sup>

In the Friday year of 1888, right in the middle of the initiation cycle, many camels died after a long drought. The drought was to continue.

The Saturday year of 1889 finds most of the Rendille south of Marsabit. A large part of this area is *sussukh*, a bumpy dry swamp where water collects after a rain before it dries up and turns into red dust from which bumps of half a metre in height rise around the rootstocks of low shrubs at every step. To cover one hundred meters horizontally here you have to walk the same distance vertically as well: one step uphill, one step downhill.

The Rendille are in a hurry; they suffer from thirst (maybe they had expected to find water at some place but only found a dry hole). When the situation gets alarming, it is decided to leave the smallstock, which is too slow, behind and to move people and the remaining camels on to Marsabit as fast as possible.

In Marsabit there were Laikipiak-Masai who, as the stronger tribe, could afford to never really wage war on the Rendille; they simply took what they liked. The Rendille avoided them and moved on to *worti magaaide*, the soda water well (Korolle), half-way to where today Kargi lies. When the few remaining heads of smallstock were watered there, a Samburu group came from the southwest with their leader Lemartile and drove the smallstock away.

The Samburu had lost their herds to rinderpest and, at this time, lived off robbery.

The Rendille moved north to Halimuralleh and finally to Kulamoole near Moyale by today’s border to Ethiopia. It had rained there, and the water had collected in puddles. The Rendille were now in enemy territory and had to

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<sup>1</sup> The facts of this section “Background” are largely taken from an interview which Neal Sobania conducted with an elder of Silaamo and in which I took part as interpreter.

ask the Gabbra-Boran for peace. They made a deal with the Gabbra which was profitable for the latter but severely jeopardised the Rendille herds: They exchanged young camel mares (*khaalim*) for fat geldings (fattened gelded camels: *dufaanki siiban, foalas*) at a ratio of 1:1. The geldings were slaughtered and eaten; there was nothing else to eat.

Many girls ran away and joined the Gabbra. So did warriors. The girls offered themselves, the warriors their manpower.

Then there was no more water and the Rendille moved south again. The drought there continued unrelentingly. Driven by hunger, the Rendille kept moving around the country. Even warriors had to be left behind to die in the shades of trees, exhausted and thirsty. By now most of the camels were dry. Long periods of drought make camels turn into asexual beings; they skip rutting seasons, do not foal and have no milk.

Then it rained, it was the Aha'd rain, the rains which were counted as the start of the Sunday year of 1890. Everything turned green and bloomed. And with the blossoms there came the honey, and after the blossoms the fruit. Roots were dug out, too, peeled and cooked: *sumeleele, hinaadi, kahabile*. There was still no milk, but everybody started to put on weight. Then the camels got pregnant.

In the Monday year of 1891 the camels gave birth. They had so much milk that they could be milked twice every morning and every evening and they gave twice the amount of milk.

The Tuesday year of 1892 was Desmaala's marriage year. There were not enough pack camels to carry the new houses, there were not enough fattened camels to be slaughtered. The camel calves of the previous year were given as bridewealth.

The next age set, Irbaangu'do, who were circumcised in 1895, annihilated the Laikipia-Masai, fought the Turkana at great cost of life and had been warriors for five years when a smallpox epidemic (*sugeri chaarreh*) killed most of the Rendille. But a drought like the one of Desmaala never happened again, until its place in history had "come around": Now, with the Ilkichilli age set. All this time the herds had grown continuously. Now, for the first time since then, they have been decreasing again.

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## 4.2. ILKICHILLI

In the Nahgan clan the patriline of 'Durolo provides a man for an office one is inclined to call unnecessary. After the initiation of a new age set he proclaims the name of this new age set. But usually each age set is named after the sixth previous one, i.e. after that of its members' grandfathers. So the function of 'Durolo seems to be a "merely ritual" one.

In the case of "Ilkichilli", who were circumcised in 1965, this rule was deviated from. The grandfathers of this age set were Desmaala. Desmaala, however, was a *kholoti bi'dire* – an age set bringing bad luck. This bad luck sticks to Ilkichilli anyway, as it will stick to their grandchildren and their grandchildren's grandchildren. To add to that by burdening them with the name of "Desmaala" could only have provoked further disaster. So the age set was officially named "Deefgu'do" and is usually called "Ilkichili", after their Samburu equivalent.

But "Deefgu'do" is an outright fraud. "Deefgu'do" is the name of the fathers of Irbaandif and will probably be that of their uncircumcised sons. "Deefgu'do" comes from a different age-set line.

If we number an age-set sequence consecutively (1, 2, 3, 4 ...), the age sets 1, 4, 7, etc. are always called either Desmaala or Irbaallis, and only the age sets 3, 6, 9, etc. receive names like Irbaandif, Dibgu'do or Deefgu'do.

The age-set line 1, 4, 7, is called *teerya*. The first people God had "come out" were all circumcised at the same time and formed age set number 1. Their sons were circumcised in due time and became warriors 42 years later. If a generation is seen as a sequence of 3 age sets or cycles of 14 years, then this first cycle had, according to Rendille theory, two blank spaces. It took the younger sons who were circumcised in the fourth cycle after their fathers and still younger sons to eventually fill the age-set lines of 2, 5, 8, etc. (Irbaangu'do, Libaalle) and 3, 6, 9, etc. (Irbaandif, Dibgu'do, Deefgu'do). The original and therefore most venerable age-set line, however, is 1, 4, 7, 10, etc. (Irbaallis, Desmaala): the one in which the principle was never violated, the *teerya* line.

But the *teerya* line is afflicted with alternatingly every other age set attracting bad luck to themselves and the tribe. Furthermore it is special in that its daughters marry one age grade later than other girls, they are *sabadde*, the old girls, often worn-out before they are allowed to have children, and looked down on by other women with pity.

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#### 4.3. WAR AND FAMINE

When Irbaandif married in the year of 1962, Ilkichilli factually took over the warrior role. While they were, physically, still “boys” who were to remain uncircumcised for another three years and did not have full sexual rights yet, they started to sleep on the right side of the *kullal*, the sleeping spot in the camel camp, like Irbaandif used to, and their previous position on the left side was taken by the sons of Libaalle, who would stay boys for fourteen years longer than Ilkichilli.

At about the same time as Ilkichilli entered upon the warrior role, the tribal wars rekindled. This might have been linked to the retreat of the colonial power and Kenya’s independence, and the resulting decrease in effectiveness of police control. The Rendille themselves also accept this explanation and yet it does not lessen their conviction that Desmaala’s bad luck repeats itself in Ilkichilli, for political events like a change of governmental power are, after all, also subject to the principle of *daajji*, the periodicity of history, and support its realisation.

In 1963, *arbahti Saale Booraanto bakkiche*, the Wednesday year when Saale killed “Boran”, the Gabbra raided a settlement of Saale-Kimogol and killed a girl. By way of retaliation, Ilkichilli attacked a Gabbra cattle camp and killed 15 male Gabbra. (In Gaal’deylan, five people sang the killer’s song, in Long’eli four, Saale held the record with six killers.) As a result, the government confiscated 15 camels per *wey* (management unit, often a union of several households, often of brothers). Only Long’eli escaped this reprisal because their camels were not watering in *Worti Magaaiide* and were nowhere to be found. The Rendille’s anger was directed only at the government because Ilkichilli’s action was approved of as a justified counterstroke.<sup>2</sup>

In the Thursday year of 1964 the Rendille achieved that some of these camels were given back. Half of this Thursday year was spent being afraid of Gabbra revenge, and warriors and camels were kept near the settlement (which of course resulted in a suboptimal use of pasture).

In 1965, Ilkichilli were circumcised. For this occasion the Rendille had gathered in large settlement concentrations. Here, they felt safe, particularly as soldiers were stationed nearby. Otherwise the Gabbra would have been expected to take advantage of the situation of all the warriors being weakened simultaneously to wage an attack.

In the Saturday year of 1966, some Rendille clans – among them Gaal’deylan – settled near Yeli Dabar Deer, the riverbed running east of Mount *Kulál* in southwestern-northeastern direction. All the livestock was in the settlements. Such a concentration of people and animals was possible because the pastures were in good state after the spring rains. One night 90 Gabbra are said to have approached this settlement cluster but were spotted by look-

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<sup>2</sup> My only information was supplied by Rendille who are, inevitably, biased.

outs. The Rendille waited until the Gabbra had lain down to sleep near their target, as is common practice in warfare, to start their raid at dawn. Around midnight, the Rendille forestalled the sleeping Gabbra. Thirty of the killed Gabbra are said to have had rifles, another fifty spears. (The numbers are too high and too round to be true.) According to the reports, ten Gabbra escaped. In Gaal'deylan, eight people had

captured penises (which might be true because this information was supplied by a man from Gaal'deylan).

The year of 1967 is called *Aha'ddi Kaakurro layigis*, the Sunday year in which Kaakurro was killed. Kakurro allegedly was a Turkana chief who died at Rendille hands. I never asked about the background of this though.

So far the Rendille appear to have fared rather well. But we only received selected information. Failures are most likely to be withheld. Once a warrior told me about an unsuccessful raid on the Gabbra which resulted in seven Rendille being shot to death. The remaining Rendille, among them my informant who told me this story like some sort of joke, had run from the Gabbra from dawn until four o'clock in the afternoon to stay out of rifleshot range.<sup>3</sup> At that time they had encountered a police unit and, because they presented the lesser evil, had allowed themselves to be disarmed and sent home. On their way, my informant told me, they had gathered sticks like they are normally used for firewood because they didn't know how to walk without spears in their hands. They had not dared to return to their mothers' huts until late at night.

Apart from all that war is, of course, disadvantageous to everyone involved, in northern Kenya like in any other place. The main disadvantage in this case is that pastures are restricted because people do not venture out to the peripheral areas. This was going to prove fatal in the following dry years.

*Alaasminti urboore tuunte*, 1968, the Monday year in which the camel calves died. In this year, young camels and cattle calves died from a disease which made the liver swell up.

1969, *Talaadati Baargeeri layigis*, the Tuesday year in which Baargeeri was killed. Baargeeri was a Deefgu'do elder of Saale-Kimogol (his son is the constant companion of the *guduur* of Irbaandif, Sogotey Kimogol). A woman and a girl were also killed by Gabbra. (Note the role of Saale in previous conflicts.)

The place where it happened was Kalem, a waterhole east of the road from Marsabit to Maikona. Other Rendille were settling there, too. Jointly they followed the footprints of the Gabbra which led to a site near a settlement cluster. They killed 93 persons (these operations are always surprise attacks),

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<sup>3</sup> "*Kolkoossoyya* – may they have sore feet!" is one of the worst curses the Rendille have to offer. Who wants to know why may try to imagine fleeing from their enemy with their feet rubbed sore.

50 of them male. So 50 warriors sang the *meeraat*<sup>4</sup>. The livestock captured by the Rendille was returned to the Gabbra by the police. Five of the killers were imprisoned in Isiolo for six months each (and could not go through the cleansing ceremonies until afterwards).

All of the Tuesday year Kimogol, Gaabanayyo and Gaaldeylan settled and migrated together, their camel camps and warriors always nearby, because they were afraid of a retaliatory strike by the Gabbra.

1970, *Arba'ddi Booraanto bahay goobab isoorrommatte*, the Wednesday year in which the Gabbra sat down west of the settlements.

In this year the Gabbra made an attempt to strike back. A large group of Gabbra was spotted near Rendille settlements. But the Gabbra fled before attacking because the fire-stir oracle had turned out badly. (Warrior groups of Rendille and Gabbra have the habit of stirring up a fire near the site where they are planning a raid. If they succeed in doing this, they will attack, but if, for instance, the stirring stick breaks in two, they will withdraw.)

During the long dry season of the Thursday year of 1971, the Gabbra attacked the camel camp of Nebey and killed a boy.

Because of the increasingly severe drought which made more and more waterholes dry up and this way restricted the mobility of the warrior groups, the next two years the fighting seemed to abate somewhat. Everyone had enough problems of their own.

In the Sunday year of 1974, the pack camels died. Female camels died, too, but mainly pack geldings, which are under more strain. Of a sample of 20 pack camels a family group had had before, 16 died. This happened during the (much too meagre) spring rains. Main symptoms were swollen lymphatic glands.

This was what restricted mobility more than anything else. Without pack camels the settlements with their houses, women and children were unable to move to good pastures in areas far away from water. There were not enough means of transportation for houses (people had to try and borrow pack camels in neighbouring settlements) and for water. For that reason the herds could only stay near the settlements for the smallest part of the year, and the women and children began to suffer great need.

1974 was also *ahaddi loolyo lakhaate*, the Sunday year in which the cattle were stolen. In October, the Turkana raided Rendille cattle camps in Ilbarta (plains around Baragoi), Samburu District, and stole 7,000 animals, the biggest part of the total stock of the Rendille. Herders were killed, too.

In April, 1975, the Rendille warriors set out to get back at the Turkana. They were the surviving cattle herders and had, released from their herding duties, for the past six months not had anything to do but plot revenge.

<sup>4</sup> Footnote from 2011: This conclusion is wrong. Some warriors may have killed more than one male enemy. There is no one-to-one relationship between killers and victims.

Shortly before there had been rains so that the waterholes were filled and it was possible to walk in northwestern direction in manageable legs. (Although the rains were not sufficient for the pastures to recover.) 7,000 heads of smallstock were captured, the biggest part of which was confiscated the police, however, when the Rendille warriors tried to drive them home.

#### 4.4. A KILLER'S SONG

The details of this raid are best described by the killer's song of the warriors who successfully returned.

I recorded this killer's song on May 14, 1975, when, in the settlement of the mother's brother of one of them, four killers were presented with beads by the girls of the settlement. The killers had not been cleansed yet and all wore killers' insignia (cf. 3.3.1.). When, after sunset, a sheep was being skinned for them, they went and sat in front of the pointed hut (*minki meeraat*) which had quickly been built for them and on which the captured genitals had been deposited, and sang for the girls sitting around them and for other occasional listeners to the *meeraat*.

(Please understand that I don't want to specify the persons involved.)

1. *Goobaah ma olloiddo, goobaah ma darraawto.*

*Goobi lakiiliiliche, ile ma ikiilloddo.*

Your family will be filled [abundant, numerous], you will not find anything bad with your settlement. [Addressee is the mother's brother.] The settlement in which it is sung, the livestock will be healthy.

2. *Goobaah ma olloiddo, goobaah ma darraawto,*

*goobaah, holahi at tunto, lohob ile tumaan.*

(like No. 1) ... your settlement, the livestock you drive to the pasture, the udders will always be full.

3. *Guusi baabaatoyya, abbaheey ma diido.*

*wihi an yeele, guusi yeele.*

Family of those who may be lost, my father cannot refuse what I have done to them, the family of the boys [i.e. of the uncircumcised; the Turkana do not practice circumcision].

4. *Borotile boorreey soomaale maanta,*

*weyla liikachuukhe, uruub kasooweele.*

My age set has milked Borotile [camel name of Rengumo] for me today, the ostrich feather was pinned to me, fill the milking vessels!

5. *An goobaah a mismise, goobaah a misowe,*

*moro dakkhan a kikuccha, uram is Leekuti.*

I made your family rich and healthy [through my blessing], I let you surpass the whole tribe, enclosed place of the family of Leekuti.

6. *Mote, goorat firdo, ma firdo idaago,*

*kharkaboro, Borotile idaago.*

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Mote, the fearless [paraphrases his father], shall not hear that I ran away; that I hesitated Borotile [camel and ritual name of Rengumo] shall not hear.

7. *An goobaah a mismise, goobaah a misowe,  
inam siyyeet, muruub khaatto, urantaah fiddiita.*

(like No. 5) ... eight sons who hold milking vessels in their hands will sit inside your fence.

8. *Hidaaddiiyye uunto, herre isleeunte,  
ichoowka halassihi irgsan, herre irrigise,  
ichoowka halassihi marmarsan; meeraat kadowte.*

Through the smoky [dusty, dismal] dry bush the warriors walked together, up to the mountain range [the lined-up mountains] the warriors walked in a row, to the mountains surrounding them; there they sang the killer's song.

9. [Repetition of No. 8]

10. *Guto lakadowye, Teerre lakadowye,  
Marnaanchiirro lakadowye. 'Darleemartotenyo.*

There I shouted "Guto", there I shouted "Tere" [ritual names of Rengumo], I shouted out the place of our camel brand, of our going-around-the-trough [allusion to the oracle Rengumo killers are submitted to, in which a camel bull is given water. If it accepts the water, the claim to have killed an enemy is justified].

11. *Ehel riirya, eehi'is kariirya,  
eehiiskiiyye bar leewoyo. Baar Haruche iweyya.*

The donkey [Turkana] screamed, screamed for his father, his father with whom he drove the livestock. Brothers-in-law of Rengumo instructed me [trying to flatter the hosts?].

12. *Ehel riirya, eehiis kariirya,  
eehiiskiiyye dar leesido. 'Darleemarto iweyya.*

(like No. 11) ... screamed for his father who carried the trough with him. The ones going around the trough [Rengumo] instructed me.

13. *Ehel riirya, eehiis kariirya,  
eehiiskiiyye mara'd yaham. Maraa'deey iweyya.*

(like No. 11) screamed for ... his father who eats brain [eating brain is detested by Rendille]. My age set guided me.

14. *Tooreey af il gate, afdesano dihe,  
goorat an Waamba kasookhaate, Wambile icheekya.*

I pointed my spear with the mouth [the tip] at the ground, I fought against the ones with the holes in their mouths [Turkana pierce a hole into their lower lips], [my spear] which I had fetched from Wamba earlier, [later] I told Wambile [most important elder in Dubsahay] about it.

15. *Sugub ma idaa'hane, ankaa ma idaa'hane,  
teeba kasootabin waaye, orrah teeba fajfajan, herre isfaajjite  
baryo soodowwaatteka, meeraat kadowe.*

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I did not talk of thirst, I did not talk of hunger, one week I did not desist, seven suns like knife cuts when lancing ulcers, the warriors consulted with each other, and when the morning came, I sang the killer's song.

16. *Tooreey af il gate, afdesano dihe,*

*ichoowka ewweenki goorat baabe, baaticho lakeenya.*

I held my spear downwards, I fought with the hole-mouths until the old man who had been lost before and abducted to their people ... [the construction is muddled here; the logical continuation seems to be: was avenged].

17. *Tooreey af il gate, afdesano dihe,*

*haraambee lakasookhaate, goorat aram dabe.*

(like No. 16) ... what was brought jointly [*harambee* is Swahili for “heave-ho!” and the motto of the State of Kenya], the elders had forgotten it [meaning: the elders had not sufficiently been convinced that it was necessary to get the cattle stolen by the Turkana back by force or to get other animals to compensate for them].

18. *Tooreey af il gate, afdesano dihe,*

*goorat minkenyo dabe, min sookhaayya.*

(like No. 16) ... what our house had forgotten [lost sight of], I brought it back home.

19. *Halassihi irrigsan, herre irrigisse,*

*sarcho gimballeyte, her lisoogimbatyiya,*

*iliyye an bartiis iargin, Barle lakadowya.*

At the mountain range the warriors walked lined up, on their peaks with howling wind the warriors were startled [both words contain *gimbat* = the sound the many feet of a group of people storming near make: the wind makes such a sound and the warriors feel threatened = stormed. The English word “storm” contains a similar double meaning, only the original and the figurative meaning are reversed in Rendille], in the land the livestock of which I have never seen I shouted “Barle!” [ritual name of Uyam].

20. *Herre a jirta, herla laleejira,*

*sirgaal on Waakh kareye menye, reya a sookhaate.*

There are warriors, and something [God] is with the warriors, [if] only it wasn't for the government, which God may bring down, they [the warriors] would have brought [back] smallstock.

21. *Sirgaal on Waakh daayiyya, riiti daayan laabta,*

*goorat likakoolin leheet, kolkoossoyya laabta.*

May God make the government [police etc.] black [= let them die], they bring the black goats back [to the Turkana], [the goats] which would have done me honour, they who may have sore feet bring them back.

22. *Tooreey af il gate, afdesano dihe,*

*goob lih 'dollo iskakhucchisso, 'Doolle lakadowya.*

I held my spear downwards, I fought with the hole-mouths, in six settlements which lie one behind the other I shouted “‘Doolle!” [Rengumo].

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23. *Chiyti Waakh kareyo, reya ikalaabte,  
goorat urgut laka dargin leheet, urantiche gessa.*

The enemies who God may fell [police], they took away the smallstock from me which could otherwise have fed women in childbed, too, they drove it into their enclosures.

24. *Ida eenna haage, ida eenna deyto,  
herti goorat halal leemarte, marnaankicho marcho.*

There, this is wonderful, this is great, the warriors who circled the mountain, their girls circle them.

25. *Ida eenna haage, ida eenna deyto,  
herti goorat halal dibte, halankicho marcho.*

There, this is wonderful, this is great, the warriors who covered the mountains, their girls circle them.

26. *Nyaakhuti Libaalle, her leesoolibanne,  
alla afaf soorrommo, afka ileekhaate.*

Children [daughters] of the age set of Libaalle, sing with the warriors, you too, sit by the door, take up [the melody] with your mouth with me.

27. *Nyaakhuti Libaalle, her leesoolibanne,  
alla Borotile ma diiddo, her leesooboroode.*

Daughters of Libaalle, sing with the warriors, Borotile [Rengumo] does not reject you either, make rutting sounds with the warriors!

28. *Nyaakhuti Libaalle, her leesoolibanne,  
alla ida a ibba one, abbala ma diido.*

Daughters of Libaalle, sing with the warriors, you too, this way or that, father does not refuse it either.

29. *Ida eenna haage, ida eenna deyto,  
herti goorat Kulate dihte, lakasookulmo.*

There, this is wonderful, this is great, the warriors who fought at Kulate, around them everybody should gather.

30. *Herti halal dihte, halamoow gargaare,  
ayti uur kigarti dakkhan, ??urgetanayi dahe!*

The warriors who fought by the mountains, my girls, help them, all the words the belly knows [literally: the word of the knowing belly], each one, our little ones, say [sing] it!

31. *Herti halal dihte, halamoow gargaare,  
ayti uur kigarti dakkhan, uuryaawine, dahe!*

(like No. 30) ... all the words the belly knows, don't be ashamed, sing them!

32. *Aranki bar khabo, Barle lakadowye,  
aranki keera on uur kichibo, uram ladaayiyye.*

The man who has livestock, "Barle!" [Uyam] was shouted at him, the man who pours fresh milk into his stomach, his enclosure was blackened [emptied].

33. *Boori akaboorine, idi chele halam 'Dommuu,  
ayti an doono wahe.*

Women [girls], don't be afraid like the girls of Dubsahay yesterday, shout the word that I like!

34. *Hafarre gaal haaggan, haggaa lakakahya,  
sarcho gaggaamatti islakagamayya,  
kotobi il jiifo herre jiiif'diidae,  
hidaaddiiyye uunto herre isleeunte,  
Weylaay toorar yeyto, herre toorar afkadowatta,  
halassihii irrigan herre irrigan,  
orah faffajmekaa herre isfaajjita,  
baryooy haw soodowwatteka meeraat lakadowya.*

Near Hafarre with the good camels they set out, above, where the ground water constantly seeps back, they gathered, by the water collecting on the ground the warriors refused to rest, through the smoky dry bush the warriors walked together, near Weylaay, which looks onto the treeless steppe, the warriors sharpened their spears, at the mountain range the warriors walked in a line, under the burning sun the warriors consulted with each other, when at the riverbed the morning dawned, they sang the killer's song.

35. *Ani ankaa mailaabo, sugube mailaabto,  
barbar deere ma ijeyisso, Barle kadowe.*

Hunger did not make me turn around, thirst did not make me turn around, nothing held back my shoulders, I shouted "Barle!" [Uyam].

36. *Deri her ma laabto, sugube ma labto,  
inanki uuriis on kakhuufo, khufnaan ma kijiro.*

The thirst did not make the warriors turn around, [did not make them] return, someone who only erred towards his stomach cannot miss his goal [literally: there is no missing].

37. *Albehaanyaay Uurweyno, ayu uur iilaabanne,  
albehaanyaay Waakh atin lagti, lagaide, dahe!*

Our girls of Gaal'deylan, don't put the word back into the belly, our girls, God bless you, bend it and say [sing] it!

38. *Riitaas daayan a kadaayattaane,  
eti khaate, sunkiis koote, oot on itateehe.*

Those black goats will make you [police] black [make you die], the one who took them, who fenced them in in his pen, only the fence will remain with him.

39. *Riitaas daayan a kidaayissa one,  
goorat ati ikalaabte, lab on kitateehe.*

The black goats will make you black, what you have taken from me shall be the burnt offering for your funeral.

40. *A kidaayissa one, eti nyaakhutiis imaale,  
A kamaalatta one.*

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They will make you black, someone who milks them for his children, they will not let you come home at night. [Threat against everybody who might buy the confiscated smallstock.]

41. *Hali bicche tumaan, hali bicche garar jahaan,  
ayyo haggā 'daare?*

*Gumassiche gaal iyoog, herre gaal kakeente.*

The mountain which the water forges, the mountain against the foot of which the water beats, who has been near there? Its camel-like hills, from there the warriors brought camels.

42. *An goorat ma ur'dine, lakadure keene,  
inkoo an furuur keeneka, baabaatoyya furte.*

I did not sleep, I brought what you dance about [booty]. When I had brought it near the settlement sites, they who may be lost took it from me.

43. *Waakheen a misa one, waakheen a wa'da one,  
yombuu halaah ma araabto, haab on waraabta.*

Our God will give us pasture and water, later you will not fetch water with your pack camel, you will scoop behind your house [from rainwater].

44. *Aayooy, hali at rarto, yombuu ma araarrowo,  
dakkar fool ma korto, Aayooy, hali at korto.*

Mother, the camel onto which you load the house will not age, the horseflies will not sit on its face, mother, the camel you mount.

45. *Goobaah ma ollo'ddo, goobaah ma 'darraawto,  
"inam siyyeet, eysinti Gaal'deylane,  
gaal khakkhaatto, dele.*

Your family will be numerous, you will not find anything bad with it. Eight sons, daughter's sons of Gaal'deylan who send you camel's milk, she will give birth to [addressing the host].

46. *Goobaah ma ollo'ddo, goobaah ma 'darraawto,  
goobaah baatiiyye uur doono, lakaduro yahe.*

(like No. 45) ... your settlement will be a dance floor for people with pleasure in their bellies.

47. *Moroteen, a kamoratta one, sirgaali luhlo daayan a daayissa on.*

Our tribe, nothing bad will be predicted for you, the government with the black feet will turn black [die].

48. (Repetition of No. 47)

49. *Moroteen, a kamoratta one,  
sirgaali Waakh reecho la, yombuu ma isireyti.*

(like No. 47) ... the government which God will make fall over will never again laugh together.

50. *Gaari leereyya, reya ikalaabta,  
riiti daayan ikalaabta, sirgaali waakh daayicho.*

They whose car may flip over are withholding the goats from me, the black goats they are withholding from me, the government who God may blacken.

51. *Riitiiyye Sugeet, sum liiote a rum a?*  
*kaarreti haaroleh, Kargi kootte a rum a?*

The goats of Sug, is it true that a pen was fenced in for them, that the uncircumcised dogs built fences for them near Kargi?

52. *Riitiiyye abaare, barwaaytooyya khaatte,*  
*intiiyye yeletiiyye iskuul ??solo kootte a rum a?*

Those who may lose their lives have taken the mother goats, is it true that they built a fence at the place of the schoolchildren [Kargi has a school]?

53. *Gaari leereyya, reya ikalaabta,*  
*Waakh faano leegoocheyya, geeddi nah falleka.*

Those whose cars may flip over are withholding the goats from me. May God make the steps in their well collapse, so much have we cursed them.

54. *Ani ewween kakooliche, baatenyo kakooliche,*  
*weyli irbaan maalo laka, sare iriibta one.*

I sing for the elders, I sing for our people, also for the child milking the camel mare which has just foaled, be their bodies healthy.

55. *Riitiye abaare, barwaaytoyya laabte,*  
*goorat an tooreey kasookhaate, Baaltoore ikalaabe.*

Those who may die took the mother goats from me which I had brought with my spear, Baaltoor [a Rendille soldier in government service] took them away from me.

56. *An goorat toor kakeene, an Gumam kasookhube,*  
*Wakah goocheyya laabte.*

What I had brought with my spear, what I had driven through Gumam, those who God may cut took it away.

An elder interrupts, suggesting to the warriors to sing the following:

*Kiiyye an baateey keene, baabaatoyya laabte,*  
*an Hafarre leesogooche, hafar khaatteyya laabte.*

What I brought for my people, those who may be lost took it away, that which I had crossed Hafarre with, they whom the wind may scatter took it away.

The killers continue:

57. *Hoola laabteeyka laka, 'haassey a bahe,*  
*Urgudiiyye an reecheka, reyat ma kijirto.*

Even if they took the livestock back, I had my revenge; the women I did in, there is no laughter.

58. *Hoola laabteeyka laka, maanta 'haassey a bahe,*  
*geeddi an bakhsimeka, yombuu ma bakhsatti.*

Even if they drove the livestock back, I've had my revenge today; I looked out for them for so long, they will never again stick their heads out.

59. *Jilahti an korcheka, yombuu ma isjilhaatti,*  
*yombuu beri ma sooyeyto, baryoti an geleka.*

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The coal I put on them, they will not find themselves beautiful any more in the future either, they will not be able to look east in the future either, [since] the morning when I charged in among them.

60. *Geeddi an bakhstimeka, yombuu ma bakhstatti,  
yombuu ila ma tamiite, geeddi an kiiliiliche.*

So long I looked out for them, from now on they will not stick their heads out, from now on they will not come to this country, so much I screamed at them.

61. *Sirgaal waakh daayiyya, riiti daayan laabta,  
goorat liikakoolin leheet, kolkoossoyya laabta.*

God will blacken the government, they take the black goats away which would have done me honour, they who may have sore feet take them away.

62. *Ani ichoow Faldiiddo a falla one,  
maanta gu'ha ma kutinno, a guwinna one.*

I and Fal'diiddo [= Nahagan] will curse them, now, before this year is over we will wipe them out. [This promise was not kept; the Kenyan government still exists.]

63. *Geeddi an bakhstimeka, yombuu ma bakhstatti,  
meeraati daraaro indo a dargiche.*

(like No. 60) ... the killers in the morning satiated the eyes [the eyes of those who venture back into the settlement later and find their killed relatives].

64. *Hoola laabteeyka laka, miigka maanta ani on sarche jira,  
guusi maradtamho.*

Even if they bring the livestock back, as far as strength is concerned I am superior to them today, tribe of the brain-eaters.

65. ----- *herre a soojiitte,  
halal gimballehka, her liigimbatiiyya,  
dagah marmarsanoka, meeraat lakadowya.*

[Certain name] pulled the warriors with him, by the stormy mountains the warriors were exposed to an assault [felt like that], by the place which is surrounded by rocks the killer's song was sung.

66. *Korfiddiye, Semeydeero iskorche,  
'haassi loolyoti Sigiraat, sigar ikaseye.*

People of Korr, I burdened myself with the Turkana, the revenge of the cattle of Sigira [where in the previous October the Turkana had captured the Rendille's cattle], don me with beads!

67. *Nyaakhuti Libaalle, her leesoolibanne,  
bili herreet khabo, herteen sookooliche.*

Daughters of Libaalle, sing with the warriors, you who you have beads of warriors, sing with our warriors.

68. *Nyakhute Libaalle, her lesolibane,  
alá idás inno ikunno, [conjectured:] alkuma tagis.*

(like No. 67) ... you too, when we take turns [cursing the Turkana] like this, [conjectured:] kill bignoses [Turkana].

69. *Nyaakhuti Libaalle, her leesoolibanne,  
Semeydeero albehicho a korinne, albehaanyaay dow!*

Daughters of Libaalle, sing with the warriors, we have packed the Turkana onto their sisters, our girls, sing!

70. *Nyaakhut Korfiddiyoo, chiy a liiskorche,  
'haassi Sigiraat a bahe, sigar ikachibe!*

Daughters of the people of Korr, they burdened themselves with the enemies, the revenge for Sigira is here, shower me with beads!

71. (like No. 26)

72. *Nyaakhuti Libaalle, her leesoolibanne,  
allá, ur'dumme a walahba, herteen leesoo'dure!*

Daughters of Libaalle, sing with the warriors, for you there is no sleep either, come dancing in jumps to meet our warriors!

73. *Nyaakhuti Libaalle, her leesoolibanne,  
alah, eti labujo mele, mujjum on sodowe!*

(like No. 72) ... you too, nobody is excluded, go on and sing!

74. *Amba kikoolicha, alla akolkoolanne,  
maanta af ma isilaabo, afaf soorrommo!*

I sing for you, and you, don't hide, today I do not close my mouth, [come and] sit here by the door!

75. *Nyaakhuti Libaalle, her leesoolibanne,  
maanta ani wihi (?) haaggan yeele, haggeey amiite!*

(like 72) ... today I did a good thing, come close to me!

76. *Galtaántiyye Waakh kaalo, sartaah a kalkaassa,  
minkey khariis soobuhisse, goobi buuho gele!*

Ladies who God may bless, your body is always good [not clear whether blessing or compliment], you [gram. sing, meaning plural] fill the space around my house, go to a full [= rich] settlement [when you marry]!

77. *Her leesoolibanne, minka afaf soorrommo, chiita a isleefallo.*

Sing with the warriors, sit by the door of this house, let us curse these enemies together!

78. *Her leesoolibanne, alla idi inno isidey'doonno, aabba laka a doona.*

Sing with the warriors, you too, the way we look at each other, father also likes this.

79. *Ida eenna haage, ida eenna 'deyto,  
herti goorat hal isaaha, halankicho marcho.*

How good this is, how great, the warriors who went to the mountains [?], their girls surround them.

80. (like No. 10)

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81. *Guto lakadowye, Teerre lakadowye,  
reenti Kulate kijirto, Kuulano kadowe.*

“Guto!” [Rengumo] they shouted, they shouted “Teerre!” [Rengumo], at the thing which is at Kulate [meaning: Turkana] I shouted “Kuulano!” [Rengumo].

82. *Hidaaddiiyye uunto, herre isleeunta,  
halassihiiyye irigsan, isleeirrigissa,  
ichoowka sarchomarmarsano, meeraat lakadowya.*

Through the smoky dry bush the warriors walked together, at the mountain range they lined up, finally, surrounded by peaks, they sang the killer’s song.

83. *Herti riif khabto, ilkiriba a diidde,  
geeddi deere soonte, sommi soobihiche!*

The warriors with the long hair, they don’t want red bead collars [which they would have to give back to the girls], you have studied for a long time [maybe alluding to the catechism lessons which are, regarding the situation, similar to this recitation of the killer’s song: young men talk, girls listen], hand over the white beads [already]!

84. *Arbo ooye, arbohi chiyeet ooyta,  
arbohi chiyeet ilinsata, Aayooy, iliiliche!*

Mothers are crying, the mothers of the enemies are crying, the mothers of the enemies are shedding tears, my mother, rejoice!

85. *Teerre lakadowya, Jille lakadowya,  
Kuulano lakadowya, Kulate sarcheka.*

“Teerre!” [Rengumo] was shouted there, “Jille!” [Dubsahay] was shouted there, “Kuulano!” [Rengumo] was shouted there, above Kulate.

86. *Herti goorat soonte, sommi kuluguḍe,  
herti goorat il bissaasse, ilbissa geliche.*

[?] ..., shower them with white beads, ... [?] ..., put *ilbissa* on them! [*Ilbissa* are bead strings hanging down the back].

87. *Teerre lakadowye, Jille lakadowye,  
Markeera lakadowye, guusi marattamho.*

“Teerre!” [Rengumo] was shouted there, “Jille!” [Dubsahay] was shouted there, “Markeera!” [Dubsahay] was shouted there, at the tribe of the brain-eaters.

88. *Chi’ati ibarinwaayte, abarooyi seyo,  
at kaache baataas on kamarmarta, marnaanoow, iseyo!*

If you don’t have any beads for me, my mother will have to give me some, you there who you are walking around the people, girls, give me [beads]!

89. *’Dinaar lakadowya, ayu lakadowya,  
ayu aabba lakadowya, guusi baabaatooyya.*

“’Dinaar!” [Nahgan] was shouted, the word was shouted, father’s word was shouted, at the tribe of those who may be lost.

90. *Guusi aabbakiyya, aabbaheey ma 'diiddo,*  
*wihi an yeele ma 'diiddo, guusi aabba yeele.*

Tribe of those whom I have killed (?), my father does not mind what I did to them, to the tribe whose fathers are boys [= uncircumcised].

91. *Toori af ladowe afdesno ma 'diiddo,*  
*goorat ooyo khuf'laan [conjectured] sohte,*  
*khufnaan ma kijiyo.*

The sharpened spear does not mind hole-mouths, [if] the owner was walking without blemish, he cannot miss [literally: there is no missing].

92. *Jilahti an korcheka, Yabahleyte ma soodaarto,*  
*geeddi an yabhicheka.*

The coal I put on them, they will not reach the shrub-steppe, so much ... (?) [roughly: so much harm did I inflict on them].

93. *Ida eenna haage, ida eenna 'deyto,*  
*marnaankenyo iliilicho, ile laka 'doonta.*

There, this is wonderful, this is great, our girls, sing! The eye likes that, too.

At this, one of the girls in the audience starts:

94. *Hertiiyye rib khabto, Okkhoow chiy karibe,*  
*iskortoyya karibe, burrassi Koreetka.*

The warriors with *rib* [chalk as mark of the killer], God, protect them from the enemies, protect them from those who may mount each other, near the hills of Korr.

95. *Okkhoow, herti rib khabto, chiy karib gide,*  
*Iduu marnaan bil kichibe, biliis karib gide.*

So, the warrior with the *rib*, God, protect them from the enemies, like the girls have showered them with beads, protect them also from the police.

The killers take up again:

96. *Gaal Hasooy, gaalaah a iweesda one,*  
*foofaahkiyye at tunto, lohob ile tuma.*

Gaal Hasooy [Gaal'deylan], I pray for your camels, the livestock you drive to the pasture, their udders will always be full.

97. *Weysattitenyo a kiweysatta one,*  
*chiy on nNebey waayte menye, nNebey khaate gide!*

Our prayers we pray for you, only the enemies are missing peace, so take peace!

98. *Gaal Hasooy, gaaleen a iweesda one,*  
*maanta meeraate ka'dure, gambar a 'duraane.*

Gaal Hasooy [Gaal'deylan], I pray for our [common] camels, I have danced to the killer's song today [in fact, he only sang], the humps will be full.

99. *Gaale liweesta one, maanta rib khabto a iweysatte,*  
*sare iribta one.*

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For the camels it is prayed, today the *rib* bearers [the new killers] have prayed for them, the body will be healthy.

100. *Gaal Hasooy, gaalaah a iweesda one, aytaahiiyye lamaalo, ersim ma malmalo.*

Gaal-Hasooy [Gaal'deylan], I pray for your camels, your female camel<sup>5</sup> which is milked, [their] herder will not be late.

101. *Gaal-Hasooy, gaalaah a iweesda one, gaalaah, harratiiyye u'yaakho, harkahe ikayeele.*

(like No. 100) ... your camels, the ground where they graze I have made fat for you.

102. *Gaal Hasooy, gaalaah a iweesda one, dahan yeelan ??lalaje, laka ma sooeleesso.*

(like No. 100) ... the foreign hand that scourged, the scourge will not reach here.

103. *Riitaas daayan a kadaayatta one, goorat an Uur leekeene, urag kitateehe.*

The black goats will blacken you, the ones I have brought here through Uur will make you ill.

104. *Riitaas daayan a kadaayatta one, goorat herre leekolkoosse, a ??kalahane.*

(like No. 103) ... for the sake of whom the warriors walked their feet sore, they will make you weak [*kol* is a treatment for which soups are administered to strengthen the patient].

105. *Chiita booran dakkhan, Barle lakadowya, keera kalday uur kachibo, uram ladaayiyya.*

At all these brown enemies it is shouted "Barle!" [Uyam], who only pours fresh milk into his belly, his pen is made black [= empty].

The girls' prayer (verse 95) to God to protect the killers from the police did not work to a full extent. Some were arrested and probably sentenced to six months of heavy labour in Isiolo (at least that used to be the penalty in 1969).

And after this raid everybody was not as confident of victory and as unworried as the killer's song wants to make the audience believe. Even near Korr false alarm was given once due to the constant fear of a counterstroke (cf. 0.2.). This fear also led to virtually the entire area west of Illaut, north of South Horr up to Lake Rudolf, being considered unsafe territory where no settlement was set up. Most of the camel camps also kept a safe distance to the mountain range and stayed well east of it. So this apparent success (7000 heads of smallstock captured, the majority of which were confiscated, 20 camels and 57 donkeys captured, 10 male and 7 female Turkana killed) resulted *de facto* in a loss of

<sup>5</sup> "The Belly": The depression through which the seasonal rivers of Rendille land flow north towards the Chalbi saltpan. Footnote added 2011.

territory. The Turkana, however, also did not venture far east so that the already wide stretch of no man's land became even wider. (Incidentally, vegetation and game seem to recover well within this stretch.)

In Marsabit I asked a Rendille politician, whose name I can obviously not name here, about these events.

Question: Why did the people wait until April to strike back at the Turkana when the Turkana had already stolen the Rendille's cattle in October?

Answer: Because of the drought; before April the warriors could not find water on the way.

Question: Was that the only reason or did they also wait for help from the government (to recover the cattle with the aid of police or military)?

Answer: *Nah ma sugine, gargaar sirgaal ma kasugin, ma jiroba.* We did not wait, we did not wait for government help, there is none, nobody.

Question: Did nobody apply for this kind of help?

Answer: *A worsanne, tolola ma jiro, yomboka laka ma jiro.* We did ask. Now there is no [help], later there is also none.

Question: Who asked?

Answer: County councillors [regional parliament].

Question: What was done from government side at all?

Answer: *Hoolahiiyye Semeydeero on laabeene, wehenyola irteen.* They only returned the Turkana's livestock, ours is gone.

further down:

*Maanti Rendille duul irte, iche la lacheeke. 'Deerka ambus lagele. 'Deerka dabat laarge, 'deerka dabat lasookhaate. 'Deerka ili Rendille dahtiis onka, intoo Hafarre layadeehka, at laka a garatta, intaakka 'deerka la 'hele, 'deerka ladihe gon, sirgaal 'dabe khaba, wihi lalebahsate, lalebahsate, wihi lakhabte, a lakhabte, ... Rendille goorat, maanti us duul irte, lacheeke. Toro yeeda la Korr on kimiy. An chirrinkaas hafis on kijira. Maanti goorat robboot (re port) yimiy, et geeddoh kayimiy? Et seyyah. Goorat biliis kakahe.*

When the Rendille went to war, they were denounced. So they [the police] set up an ambush. The footprints were seen, the tracks of the livestock were followed. Then, in the middle of the Rendille territory, in an area called Hafaré, you know it, too, that's where they were found, then they [the police] attacked them [the warriors], the government [police] has rifles, that with which they ran away they ran away with, that which was captured was captured ... When the Rendille went to war, they had been betrayed. And this message came from Korr. At that time I was in the office. When the report came, how many people came? Three people. So the police set out.

[The Rendille are rather helpless in the face of people spying for the police. There are no executions of informers or other measures to protect secrets. Because of the general state of destitution, many Rendille can be bought for little money.]

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further down:

Question: Where did the raid on the Turkana take place?

Answer: Ilbargeeti.

Question: Where is that?

Answer: Right in the middle of Turkana District, north of Lodwar.

Question: Why so far north?

Answer: After the Turkana stole the cattle they all moved north. There are only few Turkana near Wamba, and they didn't want to fight them. The warriors attacked six settlements. They passed five, attacked the sixth and from there went backwards to attack the remaining five.

Question: Is it true that 10 men and 7 women were killed?

Answer: We don't know about the women because they are not counted.

[Further down he tells, much to the general amusement, how various holders of public offices, including the informant himself, stole animals for themselves before the herds had been counted up. But this loot was in turn taken away from them by Rendille warriors so that it changed hands for the fourth time. A part of the persons involved felt – in hindsight and after some time had passed – that this was justified.]

Question: Why did the Rendille's effort to legally retrieve the cattle captured by the Turkana fail?

Answer: We were told the cattle had been taken to the Sudan. But, to tell you the truth, they are all still here in Kenya. The government [administration, police] also knows that. And these animals will not be returned.

Question: Why not?

Answer: *Sirgaala la dihota iche massatti ma 'doono. Kenyata a rucchusahe, yaafohi goya kijiro a buur. Utawala dakkhanla yaaftoo kaldaye dahan kakhabta. Yaafohi addan tuumman khar on tololaan. Chirrinki isliineybe, 'dee 272iweynaane 'doona. Chirrinki diho iduu sohattila, et sirgaal woriis yaham mele. Ebba wihiiiski lakhaate rirriha, maantiis u' laka walah khaata.*

This government does not want this conflict to be ended. This Kenya is small, and there are many tribes in it. The entire constitutional power is in the hands of one tribe. All the other tribes are left out. If there was peace, everybody would want to gain the leadership. If the war continues, nobody is concerned with the government [literally: nobody eats the news of the government). Everybody runs and runs after his stolen property, and in due time he himself will steal, too.

*Yaaftoo kaldache uhuru dahan kakhabto, ichela khaaw il katabhuub.*

*Sirgaalla goorat dihota idooninka, arraagane dihota massatte.*

One single tribe is in control of the independence, and it [this tribe] drinks everything on earth [feasts abundantly]. If the government did not want this conflict, it would have long been ended.

...

*Boliis laka ila dakkhan a kijira one, chirrinki diho, ulla amur a buuhi-cha one, orya.*

And in this whole country there is police, and when there is a raid somewhere, they also carry out their orders and run off [ironically].

*Jiti gaarila gaari ma bujo, lariha ichoowka Loyengalani laka daara. Chirrinkiyye dabati hoolaat jit dabar gooche, ma lasooyago, ma lakhaato, gaari ma lakayago.*

And the car does not leave the road, it is rushed, even as far as Loyengalani. If tracks of livestock cross over the back of the road, they do not get out, do not pursue the tracks, do not leave the car.

*Amehe? Hoolahaase ichehi gelo laadoona. At laka, atihiratti walah sookhaatto laadoona.*

Well, what? They want these animals to enter [to be driven into the pens of the thieves, i.e. to remain stolen]. You too, they want you to go and fetch something.

*Waha dakkhan mapangoti yaafti kaldaye sirgaal dakhatti, dahan kakhabto.*

All this is the plan of the tribe who all alone guards and controls the governmental power.

One of the men present comments:

*Waakh on wahanna, ebba maantiis walah khaata.*

We pray to God, and everybody steals at his own time.

In the following, our informant explains that the real problem of the Rendille is being armed with spears only, whereas for the tribes near the border, like Gabbra and Turkana, it is much easier to smuggle in rifles from Ethiopia and Sudan. This is the reason, he says, why they have to ally themselves with the Somali, because the latter can provide the Rendille with rifles from Somalia.

Asked about the Shifta war<sup>6</sup>, when the Rendille had sympathised with the Somali while the Samburu, whom they are traditionally allied with, took the side of Kenya, the informant says that, in his view, the enmity between Somali and Samburu has to end. [It is easily imaginable that otherwise the Rendille will experience conflicting loyalties.]

Question: Is there no danger that, in the event of a war between Kenya and Somalia, the Rendille and the Aryaal will break up because the latter might side with the Samburu and Kenya?

Answer: Look at these two things [referring to tape recorder and microphone]. They do the same work, catching the voice. This is what it is like with Rendille and Aryaal. They belong together.

<sup>6</sup> In the 60s, Somali from Kenya and from Somalia had tried to annex Kenya's North for Somalia.

So the raid described in this chapter only on the surface ended with a Rendille victory; on closer inspection all parties involved suffered a defeat. The raid was only possible and doable because the spring rains of the Monday year of 1975 had been quite good and the warriors had found water in different spots on their way. These rains, however, were the first fairly good ones after the year of 1968, and the last ones until today (August 25, 1976). So, in the long run, they did not make much difference.

As early as in June, 1975, almost all the smallstock had to be sent to satellite camps, which often moved away up to a hundred kilometres from the settlements, because the pasture conditions around Korr had deteriorated. This is where the smallstock still is today. In June, 1976, the milk blessings for *almádo* were performed on animals which had never before seen their owners; they had been born and raised in the satellite camp. The same was true for the animals slaughtered for *soorriyo*.

It was hardly different with the camels. This is why especially women and children, who remained in the settlements near the waterholes, suffered from a lack of milk.

Our informant had advised the Rendille to ally themselves with the Somali. Despite the Rendille not being Muslims, which makes the Somali regard them as “lost brothers”, the relationship between them is good rather than bad. The linguistic similarity is considerable, and both groups are aware of this kinship. It is said that a Somali who killed a Rendille will die young. The Rendille believe the same vice versa. Although the Somali look down upon the ignorant Rendille a little, they are lenient towards them in the knowledge of their own strength. Some Somali even develop a folkloristic interest in the Rendille and ask themselves whether their own ancestors might once have painted themselves with red ochre and walked around half-naked.

So what did Ilkichilli, the “unlucky age set”, do to the Somali, with whom they had originally wanted to ally themselves?

April, 1969

The cattle camps of Dubsahay, Rengumo, the Aryaal clan of Lukumai and some people from Matarba had already grazed pasture that undisputedly belonged to the Rendille. Driven on by the drought, they moved further and further south.

In the area of the now dry river of Koom and the Ewaso Ngiro, which still carried water, there were at the time many Somali. The biggest group was the Ogadén tribe. Here, the pasture conditions were still acceptable.

The Rendille depended on getting along well with the Somali. The latter could easily have robbed Rendille and Aryaal of their cattle. They had enough rifles; but maybe they were not interested in the skinny, small Rendille zebu, which are no real breed, but a form of degeneration.

The warriors explained that their pastures were exhausted, they asked the Somali for permission to graze their cattle near the Somali herds, asked for mercy. They offered to persuade Samburu who might be planning an attack on the Somali to turn back, and if they did not succeed, to warn the Somali in time. The Somali in their turn offered to keep a watchful eye on the Boran, traditional enemies of the Rendille. So a symbiosis was decided.

For some time the two groups grazed their herds side by side peacefully.

Then some 15 warriors instructed the boys, who do most of the herding, to hurry and drive the livestock back north to the Merille. They themselves went to a Somali settlement and spent the night there. Somali from this same settlement had been guests of the Rendille before. And it was not the first time for Rendille warriors to kill time in this settlement. On the following morning the warriors said they wanted to return to their cattle camp. But what they did was follow the tracks of the Somali livestock that had been driven to pasture, attack the herders, kill three men and two girls and drive the animals to Merille by an indirect route.

The Somali did not pursue their own livestock but followed the trail of the cattle camp of Lukumai, assuming, rightly, that Lukumai – as they had cleared off – must have participated in the raid.

Around the 16<sup>th</sup> of April they attacked a Lukumai cattle camp, supported by the police, but only found the boys there. They gave them a thrashing and, together with the livestock, drove them to the police post in Serolevi.

On the same day, a different group of Somali, without police support, took the livestock of another Lukumai camp. One warrior of Nebey, who had been looking for lost foals nearby, heard the screams and came running with his spear, was killed.

On April 19, the police confiscated the cattle of Dubsahay and Rengumo and drove them to Laisamis. A part of these animals belonged to people whose sons had not taken part in the raid on the Somali. With the help of this pawn, and because many Rendille did not approve of the raid and did not want to mess with the Somali, the police successfully tried to ascertain the names of the warriors involved in the raid. A number of them had already been arrested when the police confiscated the livestock.

Except for their western borderline, the Rendille are surrounded by enemies on all sides. Only with the Somali they used to get along reasonably well. And that had, too, had now been risked unauthorisedly by 15 warriors. The result of actions like these is that pastures considered safe continue to shrink and – as the number of animals remains the same – are increasingly overgrazed.

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#### 4.5. THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE MOIETIES BUILDS UP

It was not only the fault of the warriors and their highhanded act of violence that the prophecy of Ilkichilli being the unlucky age set was proved true.

And it was not merely a result of the drought and the livestock diseases either.

It was the elders who contributed to the conflict over the marriage rites of Ilkichilli intensifying to an extent unseen in datable times.

Warriors and elders both were involved in this development in equal measure. There is a background story to this, too.

[Considering page 396–424

The core of this chapter, a history of the marriage rites and the symbolic human sacrifices involved and the murderous conflict about the age-set Ilkichilli, has been rendered in volume II of this series (*The Moiety Division and the Problems of Rendille Unity*, pp. v–xxiii).

Belesi Berri, who thought that the Rendille age-set rituals had gone thoroughly wrong, planned to revive an old ceremony called *orisoomot*. According to the Belesi Berri, they had performed this ceremony, which does not require participation by Belesi Bahai, a long time ago.]

#### 4.11. ORI SOOMOOT

The *orisoomoot* sacrifice planned for the time after my departure was to be performed in the following manner:

A large round enclosure is fenced in for the camels. A black ram from Segelan (Kimogol), a bull buffalo's head and *oddob* are brought. *Oddob* is a fibrous substance of palm bark, *meydahti baar*, namely of the palms of Gaamura (*baari Gaamuraat*). Gaamura is a region north of Kargi, south of Halimuralle.

The black sheep, *orisoomoot*, is not "washed" and blessed in the *soorriyo* manner, but immediately slaughtered. Its blood is collected in a milking container (*murub*) and not stirred. So, unlike with blood intended for consumption, the fibrin is not separated. Then the fibre bundle (*oddob*) is dipped into this blood and waved around, spraying blood on all persons present. After that the animal is skinned.

Of course the camels are present the whole time, like they are at each of the bigger rituals.

Now everybody enters a *naabo* made of thorn branches, i.e. a smaller circle without camels in it in the centre of the huge camel pen.

In the eastern part of this *naabo* lies the buffalo's head (*matakki gasareet*). Everybody parades past it, first touching the buffalo's head with their hands and then rubbing their hands upwards over their foreheads and then over their right pectoral muscle up to the shoulder. (Just like the *iibire* do on their new moon ceremony with the ivory piece *'hiir*.)

The buffalo is symbolically linked to marriage. On her wedding the bride should have shoes made from buffalo skin. If that is not possible, then at least a piece of buffalo skin must be fixed to her collar (*bukhurcha*).

The boys and the warriors now eat the meat of the *orisoomoot*.

A woman from Istoor (Kimogol) is brought (the only woman present?). She renders the tail fat in her *diri* (earthen pot; usually a metal pot, *subburya*, would be used today). Afterwards she is anointed with this fat. (? For this purpose, actually, a second woman would have to be present – but maybe the woman rubs the fat on herself.) All the boys and warriors also anoint themselves with this fat. *Khalli* – a fur ribbon – is brought and placed around the woman's waist.

Incidentally, this woman has to have a son; if she does not, some other little boy has to take on this role [this has been questioned by some interlocutors].

Fat is taken to the elders who are staying outside the *naabo*. (So the ritual benefit of this ceremony is clearly directed at boys and warriors. But why the boys, too? Could this form of the ceremony originate in a time when no difference was made between boys and warriors in the Rendille age-grade system?)

All the boys and warriors now receive *khalli* of the *orisoomoot* which are tied around the wrists of their right hands.

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The remnants of the *orisoomoot* are burnt in the *naabo* fire. The brittle bones are retrieved from the ashes and ground. Everybody rubs the ground bones onto their foreheads, like they do with chalk on new moon.

Now everybody gets up. They all look east, like they do during the *ololo* shouting in the settlement's *naabo* in the evenings. The boys are standing in the very centre, the warriors around them, and the elders are forming a ring around the outside of the *naabo* fence.

A lot of *haru* (cedar leaves) is sprinkled into the fire. It is obtained from four different places:

*haruhi Ndootoot* – *haru* from the Ndotos

*haruhi Ng'iroot* – *haru* from Mt. Nyiro

*haruhi Kulaaleet* – *haru* from Mt. *Kulál*

*icho haruhi Nguruniteet* – and *haru* from Ngoronit

(all of this in the western mountains).

Additionally, *malab* (honey, in this case entire honeycombs) and *hallaala* (*Bowellia hildebrandtii* Engl., Burseraceae, gives off an aromatic smell when burnt) are thrown into the fire. Another scent used is *malmal*, the resin of a tree growing near Kulamoole and Moyale. *Malmal* connotes good health. (*Sartaah a malmal?* – Is your body healthy?)

All this is thrown into the fire at once, which makes it give off big clouds of smoke. Everybody stands facing east, their backs turned to the fire, their sticks wedged in between big toe and index toe, nobody says a word, everybody's eyes look down. Only the man with the ivory horn (*árab* = elephant) of Saale-Kimogol is standing west of the fire and watches it. When the fire has died down, he blows the horn.

Now eight elders pray, one after the other. Waving their sticks, they all say in chorus "amiin" (Amen) in all directions.

All the *iibire* clans of Belessi Beri pray:

- Gaalorra (Gaaldeylan)
- Nebey
- Goob Orre
- Kimogol
- Gaabanayyo
- Gaalooroyyo
- Urowween (Silaamo)
- Gaallaalle (Tubcha)

Then the boys and warriors leave the *naabo* and dance the *gir'daanki soorriyo*, the rhythm of which is beaten with sticks, like at *soorriyo* or at *gaal-gulamme*.

All this takes place on one single day, *hogdeer*, in the middle of the month.

This ceremony blesses Belessi Beri for their marriages and renders Belessi Bahay infertile.

POSTSCRIPT

When I returned to the Rendille in March, 1977, the *orisoomoot* had already been postponed two times because the scheduled dates had each become unpropitious due to the death of women from Saale.

The marriages of Ilkichilli presented a pattern which ran counter to previous marriage behaviour. Belessi Beri did not marry any girls from Belessi Bahay. In Gaal'deylan only three marriages of this kind had taken place (Gaallaga'ddo Taarween, Guuto Eysimfeechea and Eysimmoonte). All the others had practiced Belessi endogamy. In order to make this possible, an agreement with the elders of Saale to further relax marriage rules had been reached: All subclans of Saale are now permitted to marry classificatory mother's brother's daughters and father's sister's sons (*eysim*), respectively, of each other.

This marriage boycott forced Belessi Bahay to also marry chiefly endogamously because Belessi Beri's own need of brides was too great.

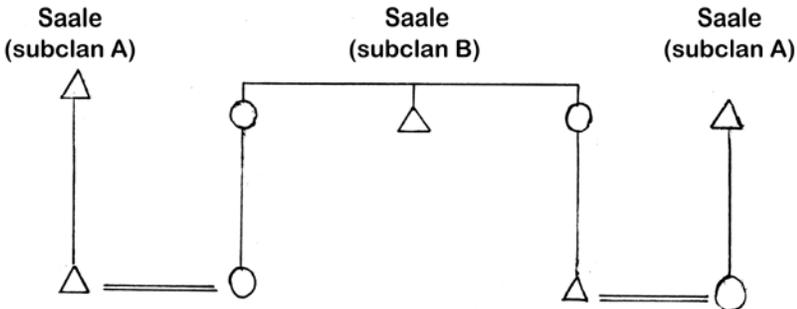


Figure 4.2.  
(The parents not listed here are, of course, non-Saale.)

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## 5. CONTEXT-COMPARING SYMBOLOLOGY

Asked about the meaning of some specific ritually used object, the Rendille usually answer by referring to some other ritual use of this same object. A frequent answer is also that this is the custom and has always been this way. Only few informants provide exegetic descriptions, i.e. explanations of ritual acts. But very many informants are able to give complete lists of ritual and other uses of certain objects. On a non-verbal level, they obviously realise the meaning. The object carries – analogous to a word – the meaning itself, which makes verbal explanations unnecessary. If he wants to work out the semantics of such symbols, the interpreter has to deduce their meanings by assembling the different uses of these objects. (The reader is free to agree with these interpretations or to draw different conclusions from the data presented here.) Where we do receive verbal explanations from our informants these can provide valuable substantiations of the hypothetical meanings extracted by comparing the contexts.

### 5.1. ELEPHANT, IVORY

We find the elephant in a number of contexts connected to the *iibire* and their curse.

Ivory in Rendille is *'hiir*. This is also the name for the hand-sized, conically cut piece of ivory used by the *iibire* in their new moon ceremony and for transferring their *iibire* power to small children. (Incidentally, Saale with the rhino as curse animal also have *'hiiro* from the rhino horn. This equivalence suggests that, to a certain degree, the elephant is for all the other *iibire* what the rhino is for Saale: an ally, next to their other curse agents.)

In particular, the elephant is the curse animal of Tubcha-Gaaldeydaayan, the *iibire* of Tubcha.

Baaroowwa explains to me:

*Arab a binahi biidire. Chirrinnki arab laarge, Rendille wihi u'yadeeh:  
"Tubcha inno fasse bal doodi iibireenye worran 'hiir chirti, iche inno  
fale bal mehe inno fale?"*

Elephants bring bad luck. If they see an elephant, the Rendille say: "Did Tubcha curse us or the *iibire* people who mark themselves with ivory, did they curse us or whatever cursed us?"

The elephant also plays an important part in the installations of the two age-set offices *dablababiire* and *arablagate*, which are equivalent to a very powerful cursing.

The *dablababiire* is robbed of all his jewellery when he is captured; the hair of an elephant's tail is placed around his neck instead. Executors are the

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*iibire* of the clans Dubsahay and Rengumo, victim is a *waakhkamúr*, a non-*iibire*, who therefore cannot expect to count the elephant, the bringer of bad luck, among his allies.

“*Arablagate*” literally means: “he at whom the elephant was pointed” or “he who was bought with the elephant”. “Elephant” in this context is the name of the ivory horn of Wambile which is blown during the proclamation of the *arablagate*. Other horns not made from ivory, the kudu horns which are blown on new moon, are also called *arab* and are, therefore, substitutes for ivory horns.<sup>1</sup> The persons owning ivory horns (’Duroollo, Gaaldaayan, Wambile has a second one for new moon ceremonies, etc., Kimogol) also use it on all occasions on which other people use their kudu horns.<sup>2</sup>

Elephant excrement (*saali arab*) is important for starting the *naabo* fire, both after a settlement moved to a new site and at the *naabo* ceremony. A fire kindled with elephant excrement has much more *húgum* (custom) than one started with zebra excrement.

What is certainly significant for this ritual role of the elephant is the fact that it is an unclean animal. It is not an even-toed ungulate and therefore not edible. Apart from that its physique is odd and different from all other animals as its “hand” is *above* its mouth. (If someone imitates an elephant eating, he touches his breast with the hand holding the food.)

Symbolic contents: Bringer of bad luck, curse agent of the *iibire*, transfer agent of *iibire* power, most important instrument in the ritual segregation and harming of people (*ḍablakabiire*, *arablagate*), associated with the power of the elders via the *naabo* fire. The overall effect is ambivalent, which can probably be said of the “power” as such; used for harmful magic, but for the official practicing of harmful magic.

<sup>1</sup> While we tend to call every wind instrument of a certain kind “horn”, independently of the material it is made of, the Rendille call all such wind instruments “ivory”, even when they are made of horn. So the linguistic mechanism of transfer is formally similar, but different in content.

<sup>2</sup> When *Desmaala*, the unlucky age set, were warriors the horn of Wambile is said to have been stolen during a Turkana raid and replaced later by a horn bought from the Laikipia. The other ivory horns are also said to come from the Laikipia. The official theory is, however, that in the beginning of time (“when it was come out”) the *goob* Wambile (= Faarre) appeared with two ivory horns which can neither be lost nor broken.

## 5.2. GRANT'S GAZELLE

*Hoole weyti sugeer mele* – antelopes do not get ill often. Furthermore they are even-toed ungulates and therefore edible for everyone allowed to eat game.

Small bull calves are caught or chased and killed with the stick. *Toor ma laka 'huno, ul on lakayagiis*. – They are not wounded with the spear but killed with only the stick.

After the birth of a son the umbilical cord is cut with the shaving knife (*min'diila*). The mother wraps the cord in her skirt (*sakkaal*, made from goat or, in Gaalorra, sheep skin) and carries it with her for four *soorriyo* (more than a year). After that time the umbilical cord is tied to the right foreleg of an (ungelded, nota bene) bull camel with an *ergeeg* fibre (cf. 3.0.). Now the child is passed around the camel's hump four times counter-clockwise. On this occasion the child is dressed in shoes made from lion's hide and in an *utukki hool*, an antelope hide.

At the *naabo* ceremony and at the *gaalgulamme* some warriors wear antelope hides as well.

Symbolic contents: Imparts good health, used particularly on marked occasions of the male life cycle.

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## 5.3. LION

For the significance of the lion see the section on “animals with ‘custom’ and those without” (3.1.4.). Unlike hyena and fox/jackal, the lion has “custom” (*húgum*) because it knows in which part of the prey's body it has to sink its teeth – namely the throat.

The *dabeel* put teeth of the male lion – all of the following refers to the male animal – into their *jibaanjib* drum. They also wear strips of lion's hide (*khalli*) on their headgear, the *duub*. They do not kill lions.

At a ceremony on the occasion of getting rid of the umbilical cord previously carried around by the mother, one-year old boys wear shoes made from lion's hide (cf. the section on Grant's gazelle, 5.2.).

For his wedding the bridegroom wears strips of lion's hide around his ankles.

Lion killers also adorn themselves with such fur strips for the *naabo* ceremony and other occasions.

As a means of killing for *iibire* the lion is used, apart from the *dabeel*, also by the Rengumo clan (in both cases together with poisonous snakes).

Symbolic contents: Connotes strength which is conveyed, for instance, by wearing fur strips. As a dangerous animal it is also used as a means of killing (it executes curses) by *dabeel* and Rengumo.

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#### 5.4. BULL CAMEL

Both as pack animals and for slaughtering the Rendille normally use geldings. If for one of these two functions an intact male camel is used, this is a sure sign for a special ritual significance of the occasion.

The sacred drum of the *dabeel*, *jibaanjib*, can only be transported on an intact male camel.

The same applies to:

- a newly built house after a wedding when first moving to a new site
- a house with which a group of courtiers settle among the clan of the prospective bride for a while
- the house with which the mother of the future *gudur* moves to the *naabo* ceremony.

#### CAMEL SACRIFICE

Four times in each age set a tribe-wide ceremony called *ori lagoorraho* (cutting the throat of a bull) is performed.

It is a *soorriyo* slaughtering differing, however, from the four *soorriyo* per year performed in the settlement in some special features.

The *dikhnaan*, the ablution of the “bull” (actually a male calf some fourteen months old) is done in the following manner:

The animal is offered milk from a *murub* (milking container), then a thin line is poured from the head over the back to the tail. This is done by four elders one after the other: Haanu in 'Deelle (Tubcha), Harraawo (Dubsahay), Gaalgi'deelle (Matarbah), Ma'daacho (Gaal'deylan). This is the order, if the bull to be sacrificed is from Haanu in Tubcha. If the bull is from Dubsahay, the first and second ablutions are performed by Harraawo (Dubsahay), the third by Gaalgi'deelle (Matarbah), and the fourth by Ma'daacho (Gaal'deylan).

Then each of the warriors present puts his index finger into the camel's mouth (between lip and jaw) and smears the saliva onto his own forehead. After that, each warrior brushes over the animal's back with his ritual stick (*gumo*) and says: “*soorriyo, soorriyo*”.

Then the elders do the same with their herder's staff (*ul*). The actual killing must be done by the warriors: the legs of the foal are tied up with a *heeraar* rope, like the one the stud bulls wear around their necks, and the foal is forced to the ground. Uyam holds its head, Matarba its ears, Nebey wields the sword. The blood on this sword is used to mark all the warriors on their foreheads. Then the animal is burnt. The smoke rises up to God.

The following four clans provide a sacrificial camel bull for such tribe-wide ceremonies. Two of the sacrifices take place on a fixed date, the other two are performed when needed:

1. Tubcha: *oori kholo*, “the bull of the age set”. The first bull sacrifice after the circumcision of a new age set, performed in that same Friday year.
2. Nahgan: *oori mindischo*, the “marriage bull”, slaughtered in the Wednesday year after the weddings of an age set.
3. Dubsahay: *gaalr’ib* (*oori gaal ribo*), the “camel saviour”, is sacrificed *maanti nabhay miigowe*, “when the drought has become severe”.
4. Uyam: *maanti chiy laulooti*, when you are afraid of enemies.

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The father of Laago Ogoom, Adisoomele “K”, Urowween (cf. 2.4.7.), used to be consulted because of his divining skills as to when it was necessary to slaughter a bull of the third or fourth kinds. No more than two bulls of the same kind can be sacrificed consecutively.

We notice that all the persons involved in this ritual – the provider of the foals, the elders performing the ablution, the warriors helping with the slaughtering – are *waakhkamúr*, except for the one actually wielding the sword; he is Nebey and therefore very high up in the seniority order and also *iibir*. (See the chapter on *iibire* and *waakhkamúr*, 2.3.)

Of the bull of Tubcha, which is also called *oor haanu* or “*oor Haanu*, Sogotey Kimogol, the *gúduur* of Irbaandif, says that its name is owed to the fact that it gives so much milk (*haanu*) after its slaughtering that one single camel mare fills a whole milking container (*murub*) in one milking. A different etymology has it, however, that the Hanu lineage in Tubcha provides this camel bull. (It is, however, possible that these two etymologies do not exclude each other and that the name of the Haanu lineage is owed to them having provided the *oor haanu* for ages.)

Of the bull of Dubsahay, *gaalrib*, the “camel saviour”, Sogote tells the following story:

*Goorat maantiyye Rendille ichoow Booraanto ichoow chiyohi addan isdihaan, orassohoo lagoorraha. “Oori gaal ribo goorraha bal oori her ribo,” liidah. “Kaha! Oori gaal ribo goorraho.” “Kaha! Oori her ribo goorraho,” koo la yidah. Koo la: “Kaha! Gaal ma leelo, chirrinki gaal inno lakakhaate, kaha!, oboorri her furi noole lafurti oboorri a dela, kaha!, oori gaal ribo goorraho,” lidah. Ki gaal ribo lagoorrahe. Oraas “gaalribe” layadeeh.*

Once, when the Rendille fought against the Boran (Gabbra) and other enemies, camel bulls had to be slaughtered. “Do we slaughter the bull which saves camels or the one which saves warriors?” it was said. “Get up! Let’s slaughter the bull which saves camels!” “Get up, let us slaughter the bull which saves warriors” someone said. And one: “Get up! The camels are not enough, if the camels are stolen from us, get up! In each place where we settle [in each place where (the camel loads) are tied up] women bear warriors, get up, let us slaughter the bull which saves camels!” The one which saves camels was slaughtered. This bull was called “camel saviour”.

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Camels are also slaughtered for weddings (cf. 1.1.) and for the *soorriyo* of the settlement in the month of Harrafa (provided the people can afford it).

Symbolic contents: Used on special occasions as pack animal instead of a gelding. A bull is preferred *jeenteti u' delo* – because it gives birth (= is fertile).

Most valuable sacrificial animal.

## 5.5. OSTRICH

White ostrich feathers are called *weelya*, *weelya* or *weelya*, black or brown ones *torgos*.

*Weelya* is worn by killers during their *rib* (the stretch of time during which they are painted with chalk, cf. 3.3.1.) on a headband made from *ergeeg* (cf. 3.0.). Later they wear *weelya* together with other insignia of the *rib* phase (the *daamam* bells) at all the important transitional rites and all other occasions on which the *sorio* sticks (*gumo*, plural *gumoyyo*, cf. section on *kulum* and *ejer*, 5.6.) are carried: *soorriyo*, camel slaughterings (*ori lagoorraho*), *naabo*, weddings. At the wedding ceremony they wear them for the first four days until the *wahari okko*, the “ram of the ornamental belt“ is killed.

At the *gaalgulamme* (cf. 1.3.4.) all the warriors wear *weelya* and *torgos*.

After a man from the Adisoomle subclan of Urowween has married, the head of the ungelded (!) bull camel (cf. 5.4.) onto which the house of the first relocation is packed is decorated with *weelya* and *torgos*. The girl who leads this bull and who must be from the Baaselle subclan of Uyam is also adorned with ostrich feathers. (This relation to Baaselle is said to originate from Adisoomle acquiring the marriage song (*gurro*) from Baaselle by making use of a relationship of mutual trust.)

Ogoom (Adisoomle):

*Chirrinki inám ladise, maanti lagurrooti, óor nyooro lakahida, torgossa daayan ichoow weelyata dakhan lamureera idi matakki enenyet lakayeela. Weelyati dakhan lakachuukha, óor matah lakahida.*

*Inantiiyye oor woyto laka lakodkoodicha, karraw lagessa, weelya lakachuukha. In'am Baaselle laan la ma ladowo; chi' goob Baaselle maayil kud seyyah kijiro laka a liirta one ichoowka iche lasookhaata.*

“When a girl was married, when they move on, bells are tied to the bull, this black *torgos* and this white *weelya* are tied to it, it is decorated like a human head. The white *weelya* is fixed [to the rope] and tied to the bull's head. The girl leading the bull is also adorned, she is wrapped in a colobus fur, a white ostrich feather is pinned on. And without the girl from Baaselle it [the camel bull] is not driven; even if the settlement of Baaselle is three hundred miles away, they go there and eventually bring her.”

It was also the custom to take a white ostrich feather *weelya* and a *gaayer* branch to the peace negotiations with the Gabra, after the successful conclusion of which the *neybichán* sheep (cf. 2.8.1., sub-section “Nebey as peace-

maker”) from Nebey was slaughtered. The *gaayer* branch is an obvious symbol of peace and good luck. But the ostrich feather has associations of war. We should, however, not forget that the ostrich feather is not first and foremost proud insigne of the killer in the sense of a medal or badge of honour but is connected to the unclean *rib* phase, which is marked by strict avoidances, and is afterwards only worn on special occasions. It rather seems to symbolise an uncertain transitional stage, as its use in age-grade ceremonies and weddings suggests, too. So the ostrich feather has elements of a symbol of transition.

This thought is actually not so far off if you look at the animal providing the object. Although the ostrich has feathers, it cannot fly, so it is somewhere between a flying animal and a ground dweller. So it is contradictive in itself, like the thing or idea it possibly symbolises.<sup>3</sup>

#### 5.6. KULUM AND EJER (THE RITUAL STICKS)

*Kulum* (Balanites sp. cf. *B. orbicularis* Sprague) and *ejer* (botanically not identified) are used alternatively as *ulohi iibire* (*iibire* sticks, cf. 2.3.) and *gumoyyo* (sing. *gumo*).

The *iibire* sticks, also called *ulohi weysi*, prayer sticks, are a visible demonstration of *iibire* power. They are always in the house. Owning them is, therefore, tied to owning a house and with it to being married. At weddings, certain clans exchange individual sticks of this type, which, apart from the mutual help in initiating small children into *ibire* status, is behavioural evidence for the existence of specific kinds of *iibirri-ity*. The *iibire* power of such clans is equivalent. “*Ibiriis a koo kalday – their iibir is one.*”

The relative lack of power of the *waakhkamúr* is, mythically, explained with their being defrauded of their sticks by today’s *iibire*.

Made from the same material as the *iibire* sticks, only in contrast to them carefully carved and smoothed, are the *gumoyyo*, which have a “head” on one end underneath which there is a notch. (The *glans penis* is also called “head”.) The *gumoyyo* are ritual sticks for boys and warriors, both *ibire* and *waakhkamúr*. Each has his own *gumo*.

*Gumoyyo* are used at the *soorriyo*, at all *soorriyo*-like sacrificial rituals and all age-grade rituals.

At the *sorio* the *gumo* comes into contact with the sacrificial animal in three different ways:

It is brushed over the back of the “washed” (= ritually cleansed with milk) animal (*naflakahariirta*), it is dipped into the animal’s blood, and fur strips (*khalli*) of the sacrificed animal are tied around the notch underneath the head of the *gumo*.

<sup>3</sup> This consideration was taken from a conversation with Elliot Fratkin who, however, drew different conclusions matching a Samburu context. I failed to ask the Rendille whether they would agree with this interpretation.

During other slaughterings in *soorriyo* manner (see the section on *soorriyo*, 0.6.7.1.) the *gumo* plays a similar part.

Crucial for an interpretation of the *gumo* is, therefore, the action of brushing over the “washed” animal’s back with it.

*Chi’ naffi hoolaat haanu lakadikho hadaabe labahcha.*

“When a head of livestock is washed with milk sin is taken away.”

But animals have no sin; they can be ritually unclean, unlucky (*bidir*), although *bidir* is a characteristic which even-toed or tylopod domestic animals cannot possess. No animal, however, not even the unpropitious elephant, can be sinful. This is a state reserved for humans. The sin that is taken away must, therefore, be the sin of the humans, partly embodied in tools which can be used to perform sin.

This is exactly what happens when someone brushes over the back of the sacrificial animal with the herder’s staff, the *ul* (*naf ulka lahariirta*). The stick with which he has or could have hit people is cleansed of sin.

Something analogous is true for the *gumo*. Although nobody would ever use the *gumo* as a weapon or tool for some practical action, it is also a harmful instrument and, therefore, potentially sinful. The *gumo* can be used to curse people by pointing at the victim with the end around which no fur strips are tied and verbally expressing the curse.

The *gumoyyo* are also needed for the occasions on which fellow tribe members are killed socially – when the involuntary candidates for the negative age-grade offices of *dablakabiire* (cf. 4.5.) and *arablagate* are seized. These actions are regarded as harmful magic, *tibaato*, and as belonging to the same category as the magic killing of a child by envious female neighbours etc. So the *gumo* is not at all an innocent instrument.

In one case the *gumoyyo* even present a direct equivalent to the *ibire* sticks with their powerful curse. At the *gaalgulamme* ceremony, all the newly installed *hosoob* (cf. 3.5.) are made *iibire*, even the ones from *waakhkamúr* subclans. This is done by their fellow *hosoob* from *iibire* subclans spitting on the *gumoyyo* of the men who are to be granted *iibire* power.

The wedding is the last ritual occasion on which everybody carries his *gumo* with him. After that he doesn’t need them any longer, until he has a son to whom he can transmit it. The *gumo* is also rhythm instrument for *soorriyo* dances. But other than in this ritual context it is not used.

Symbolic contents: Curse; in the case of the *gumoyyo* also emphasising of festive occasions without the *gumoyyo* being rendered harmless. The use of the *gumo* marks all age-grade ceremonies and is, in the context of these ceremonies, also used for curse-like tasks.

### 5.7. GAAYER (CORDIA SINENIS LAM.)

The most important tree of the Rendille is, due to its numerous practical and ritual uses, *gaayer* (*Cordia sinensis* Lam., Boraginaceae).

Its fruits are called *medeer* and are virtually the only fresh vegetable food-stuff of the Rendille. This small, yellow, very sweet and sticky fruit surpasses all other fruits of desert shrubs in significance although it can only be found after good rains, which occur seldom enough.

The Rendille distinguish two varieties of *gaayer* of which I cannot tell whether they are habitat varieties, subspecies or even species. There is the tall *gaayer*, also called *koh*, which grows in river plains and supplies the poles used for house building (*utub*, plural *ut''ub*), and there is the smaller dry-land variant. The fruits of both varieties are considered identical and called *medeer*, which at least suggests close relatedness.

Not only in the domestic sphere *gaayer* is used in a prominent position, by forming the frame of the house; it is equally important for the outside sphere which is dominated by men and livestock.

*Ulohi hoola lakayaakhicho* – the sticks with which the livestock is herded are made from *gaayer*. How much the stick contributes to male identity can be seen in the *fahan* custom. It is highly imprudent to carelessly step over the stick of certain men when it is lying on the ground (see excursus, 0.6.4.). A man in our settlement was said to have been bitten by snakes several times as a boy. Not until it was discovered that he had stolen the stick of an elder from Rengumo could the evil be remedied. One of Rengumo's curse animals is the snake. The stick was hastily returned.

By its being used in house building as well as for "herding the livestock", *gaayer* is associated equally with *goob* and *yib*, with the settlement and the bush, the female and the male sphere. Its numerous ritual uses probably result from this.

At *almado* and *soorriyo*, *gaayer* branches are pinned to the house, over the door.

At weddings, the ground where the new house is to be built is first covered with *gaayer*.

The branches are then sprinkled with sacrificed milk. (Incidentally, from the lid of the *madaal*, cf. 0.6.7.2.4., 3.7.). These branches are cut by the mother's brother of the bride (i.e. her *abti*, the man she addresses as *abiyyo*).

When this new house is transported to a new settlement site for the first time, a *gaayer* twig is pinned on top of the load of the camel bull used for this purpose.

So much for the rites relating to houses, i.e. women. But *gaayer* is also ritually used with reference to men and livestock.

If someone goes to another settlement to ask for livestock (*eti hoola daah irte* ...), preferably to a daughter's son of his clan, an *eysim*, he will present him with a *gaayer* branch he has spat on. In return he hopes to be given a head of livestock.

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If he goes to someone he wants to ask for a camel mare as *maal*, i.e. a camel borrowed for his own use, then he will present the chosen giver with a *gaayer* twig and grease his head. These are two symbolical benefactions meant to put moral pressure on the potential giver to make him hand over a mare, for the giver is rather at a disadvantage in this transaction. The male offspring of a *maal* camel belong to the recipient, and while the female offspring can be demanded back by the giver, this can only be done if he can prove his need to be more urgent than that of the recipient. The conflicts resulting from this practice are not hard to imagine.

Killers in their *rib* phase, i.e. the time of avoidances before the captured enemy genitals are thrown away, eat their meat with little *gaayer* skewers because they must not touch any food with their hands.

Located on the borderline of the two spheres are the following uses:

Burning *gaayer* pieces are often used to smoke out (*khadiid*) and clean milk containers (which are not washed).

During *almado*, *gaayer* twigs, called *khonjor* like the “hook forks” (for want of a better word) used for handling thornbushes, are laid on the ground in the doorways of houses and the gates of pens.

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#### 5.8. UMBRELLA ACACIA (*DAHAR*)

*Goobala*  
*geeyi dahar*  
*tihim kiji*  
*lakanaso*  
*iche yahe*

“May this home be an acacia tree by which there is a permanent waterhole where you rest.” (Prayer on *almado*, cf. 0.6.7.2.)

A great part of Rendille life, particularly of the men, takes place under these trees.

For the *almado* festival (see 0.6.7.2.) the women and children put on strings of *habi dahar*, the inner white bark of the umbrella acacia.

The *khonjor*, the little twigs laid in doorways and pen gates on *almado*, are also taken from the acacia.

Acacia wood is favoured as firewood and gives the roasted meat a good taste.

The connotations of this tree are, therefore, peace, wellbeing and rest.

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#### 5.9. DAHARGAAB

*Dahargaab*, “short acacia”, is a low, almost creeping thornbush of the acacia genus. It is a fertility symbol; *dele lakadoona* (“with its help you want birth = fertility”). Accordingly, *dahargaab* is ritually used for births, weddings and the *naabo* ceremony, which in many respects anticipates the marriage symbolism.

#### 5.10. *SUCCHA* (BARLERIA ERANTHEMOIDES B. B. CL., ACANTHACEAE)

*Waakh succhakki nyaakhutaah kieleelicho* – “May God let you reach the *succha* of your children!” The *succha* shrub in this context represents marriage. So the blessing means: May God let you live long enough to see your children marry! At the wedding, a *succha* twig is fixed to the roof of the newly built house.

Accordingly, *succha* has its place in the anticipated marriage symbolism of the *naabo* ceremony (cf. 4.10.).

At the *almado*, a *succha* twig is fixed to the back wall of the house.

These contexts allow of the interpretation that *succha* is a symbol of domestic wealth and fertility.

#### 5.11. *ERGEEG* (ASPARAGUS ROOT)

The symbolism of *ergeeg* has already been discussed in the context of persons in special ritual positions (see 3.0.).

At this point it needs to be added that the man from Nahgan-’Duroollo who proclaims the name of an age set at the *gaalgulamme* ceremony (cf. 1.3.4.) wears a headband made of *ergeeg*. This position is also a special ritual function.

The ritually prominent milk container *midaal* is entirely or partly made of *ergeeg* fibres (cf. excursus 0.6.7.2.4.).

In summary it can be said that *ergeeg* connotes age, status, importance. It is furthermore linked with objects which are *lagan* (safe, sacred, isolated) (see 3.7.).

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#### 5.12. ARROW POISON

The poison for hunting arrows (*baldo*), obtained from a tree, is probably effective only in the bloodstream, a characteristic it shares with snake poison. The Rendille, however, administer both kinds of poison orally (it is touched with tongue or lips) to initiands who are to receive certain ritual roles. In this context the poison serves as proof of special powers or immunity, which requires a belief, or pretended belief, in its oral effectiveness. The Rendille claim that every normal person would have to die if he was given this poison in the same manner.

The initiation of the *dabeel* has already been described in detail (3.1.12. and *Sprachliche Studien zum Rendille*). The “poisonous drink” of the *dabeel* also includes arrow poison.

The *hosooob* (cf. 3.5.), the ritual leaders of the warriors, also touch a poisoned arrow with their tongues during their initiation.

The same type of arrow is used to transfer the *iibire* curse power to small children by touching their lips with it.

What strikes us is that in all three cases a powerful curse is bestowed. The *hosooob* are said to all be *iibire*, independently of their possible origin in

*waakhkamūr* subclans. (Making it the only case in which *iibire* power is not tied to a descent group but is granted individually and non-hereditary.)

This might be based on two beliefs:

It is obvious that this is a demonstration of power and ritual superiority (*lagan*) because the persons involved survive unharmed what is assumed to definitely harm other persons.

Furthermore one might assume that the Rendille imagine an analogy between the modes of action of the curse and the arrow poison. Concerning the *dabeel* we were told explicitly that all the dangerous material components of the initiation go into the stomach of the initiands and embody their curse power there.

### 5.13. INTESTINAL FAT – MOOR

The fatty tissue covering the intestines is the transition symbol *par excellence*. Defining for this meaning is probably the role it plays for births, on which the other occasions of its use are modelled.

When a child is born, a white sheep with a brown head is slaughtered. If the newborn is a boy, it is a male sheep, if it is a girl, a female sheep is slaughtered. So a difference is made between

*heleenki moor* – ram of the intestinal fat

and *subeenti moor* – ewe of the intestinal fat.

This animal is slaughtered in *soorriyo* manner, mother and child are marked with blood and receive fur strips (*khalli*) (cf. excursus 0.6.7.1.). The fatty tissue is fixed to the mother's necklace.

A girl's circumcision at her wedding is regarded as an analogy to birth. *Moor* is put on the collar of white beads (*sommi*), i.e. the girl's jewellery, of the bride (cf. 1.2.5.).

*Moor* is also used at a boy's circumcision as this event starts a "second life" (*jirnaanki lammaatteet*), too, and therefore employs the birth symbolism. One month after circumcision a ram is slaughtered for each circumcised boy and intestinal fat is fixed to his necklace – so the procedure is always the same. Then the circumcised boys eat the meat as *jidi meeraat*, as killer's meat, i.e. cooked in the only way permitted to the freshly circumcised and the not-yet-cleansed killers: browned in its own fat and boiled in water.

Killers during their *rib* phase (see 3.3.1.) also put *moor* on the beads given to them by girls. Analogies between killers who are not yet cleansed and men who are freshly circumcised are obvious – the *rib* phase it is a transitional stage to the killer status.

*Moor* is also put on the freshly shaved head of the *gūduur* during his installation. Incidentally, it is taken from a ewe, which corresponds to some other feminisms of the role of *gūduur*. Afterwards, the piece of fat is rendered and the fat rubbed onto his scalp with red ochre (*ilkaarya*).

As I am writing this, it strikes me that the tough thin elastic tissue covering the intestines in fact has some similarity to the amniotic sac sticking to newborns. Possibly the symbolism has its origin in this realistic comparison. But now it is too late to ask the Rendille whether they also see this similarity.

Whatever the reason may be – *moor* is a symbol of birth and is, based on this model, also used in other contexts: If two men had a violent fight, they each slaughter a ram for a reconciliatory feast and tie each other the *moor* of the two rams around the necks. *Moor a wihi Nebeyeet. Wihiiyye kute a lakakuta.* – *Moor* is part of peace. It is the thing with which one leaves the past. – *Es algo para pasar del pasado.*<sup>4</sup> This makes it the symbol of a new beginning.

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#### 5.14. CHALK – *RIB*

Ground and moistened white chalk is used for body paintings.

At new moon, all the men and boys use it to paint their foreheads, the bridges of their nose and sometimes their cheekbones.

Customers visiting the diviner Ogoom are painted in a similar manner (see 2.4.5.). The diviner also throws cedar leaves (*haru*) into the fire. So a divining session with Ogoom has two elements of the new moon ceremony.

Killers are painted with chalk all over in the time after their killing until they throw away the captured genitals of their enemies.

Interpretation:

The regularity of the lunar cycle is the basis of the Rendille calendar and makes them feel they can live a carefree life because everything is running its usual course. Accordingly, a lunar eclipse (see excursus I, 0.6.10.) deeply upsets them. White chalk on foreheads on the morning after new moon is a visible sign of their coming to terms with and being determined by this order. Therefore: security. So they use this symbol particularly in situations where they miss this kind of security: Chalk establishes a connection to the cosmic order.

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<sup>4</sup> Spanish idiom.

# SUMMARY IN ENGLISH

## THE SOCIAL AND BELIEF SYSTEM OF THE RENDILLE – CAMEL NOMADS OF NORTHERN KENYA

[This is not a translation but the original English summary of the thesis with some orthographic corrections of Rendille terms.]

(The numbers in brackets refer to the respective chapters)

(0.1.1., 0.1.2., 0.1.3.) *The Rendille, their linguistic affiliation, their origin and habitat.*

The Rendille speak a Cushitic language. (The language is described separately from the present work.) Their closest linguistic relatives are Somali and Galla (tribally spoken e. g. Boran, Gabbra and others). The Cushitic languages belong to the same major group of languages – spoken in a wide radius around the Red Sea – as Semitic languages like Hebrew and Arabic at the other geographical extreme. Although lexically rather different, the similarity between Rendille and e.g. Arabic is visible even to the layman: the consonantal structure of personal affixes to the verb is the same as in Arabic, just to mention the most striking example. The question of whether the cultural affinity between recent and historical nomadic Semites and the Rendille is due to similar adaptive demands or in addition to an ultimate common origin must remain open.

The Rendille language is spoken by maybe 15,000 people, 9,000 of whom are members of the Rendille tribe, as defined by common performance of initiation ceremonies. The remainder are Aryaal who follow the Samburu initiation rites and are mostly Maa- (i.e. Maasai language, of which Samburu is a dialect) and Rendille bilinguals. Their clan affiliation is doubled, i.e. they belong to both Rendille and Samburu social units. Their economy and other aspects of their life are described by Spencer (1973).

Rendille, Aryaal and Samburu form an internally peaceful association, an “alliance” to use Spencer’s word. Conflicts between warriors, i. e. the age-set of unmarried grown-up, circumcised males, mainly consist of individual or small group rivalries about girls, priority of access to wells and the like, and are carried out only with clubs, while spears are the typical weapons for serious warfare. The occasional homicide is mostly accidental and is dealt with by talks and ritual purification instead of vengeance and escalation to war.

This internally peaceful unit of Rendille /Samburu/Aryaal is confronted by similar major units of ethnically different stock such as the Turkana and the Galla-speaking Gabbra/Boran unit, who are equally internally peaceful and externally hostile. War with these groups takes the form of armed raids – carried out by the Rendille with spears and by their enemies also with guns, which are smuggled across the Ethiopian and Sudanese borders. The

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Rendille, who are cut off from the border, compensate this advantage of their enemies by launching surprise night attacks on non-participant enemy settlements instead of attacking well-armed raiders directly. They are therefore feared adversaries and a kind of military balance is established. With respect to direct face-to-face combat this warfare, which includes indiscriminate killing of women and children, is very cruel; but it is less cruel in terms of destructive potential and the number of victims than European warfare with its anonymous character. The aims of a raid are the acquisition of livestock and of trophies. The taking of such trophies, which consists of cutting-off the genitals of male enemies, is needed for promotion to the honoured *merat*-or killer status (3.3.). Warfare also has the side effect of defining tribal boundaries by a balance of threat, since no nomadic unit would like to move to a region in which they do not feel safe.

The Rendille have no oral traditions about past migrations from altogether different regions. The sites they point out as places of origin of some of their mythical clan ancestors are well within their present tribal territory. Because of their elaborate time reckoning and the apparently great depth of their oral traditions this seems to suggest that the Rendille have been living in and close to their present location for a very long time.

Some Somali claim that the Rendille descend from Somali-speaking Moslems. To me this seems like a post-hoc explanation of the linguistic and the many other similarities and is probably of an ideological character (in the sense of a pleasant but wrong belief which fits well into somebody's self-perception), as it provides a kind of superior status to the Somali.

In reality it could have been the other way round: The Proto-Somali of pre-Islamic times may have been identical to the Proto-Rendille and these common ancestors of both peoples could have been more similar to the present Rendille than to the present Somali. If this were the case, the Rendille would be the "elder brothers", although presently the Somali tend to view them as a kind of "drop-outs" or "runaways" who have abandoned their people and the true faith.

The knowledge of a common origin, however, is present on both sides: it is believed that a Rendille who has killed a Somali will go mad. Among the Somali similar beliefs probably exist, as the relationship between the two is comparatively peaceful.

Similar beliefs exist with respect to the Dassanech at the northern end of Lake Turkana (formerly Lake Rudolf), to whom some Rendille clans claim to be agnatically related. (This, however, can soon lead into speculations, hopefully fruitful speculations, on a possible "pan-Cushitic" clan-structure. This is discussed below. Cf. the insertion "Is there a pan-Cushitic clan-structure?", in 2.10.)

The Rendille tribe consists of two moieties (Belisi Bahai and Belisi Beri) which have some influence on marriage rules. The first consists of five, the

second of four exogamous clans. Some clans have bond brotherhoods or brotherhoods by putative descent with others. Exogamy extends to brother clans. Usually such brotherhoods exist within moiety boundaries.

Outside of the two moieties we find the small and atypical but ritually very important clan of O'doola, which consists of small exogamous units which mostly intermarry with each other. O'doola has a key function for the *dabél*, a powerful association of selected elders with a potent curse and important ritual functions.

The *habitat* of the Rendille is mostly semi-desert. Denser growth of acacia is found only along the mostly dry river beds. The vegetation consists mostly of thorn bushes. The scarcity of grass leads to an economy which relies heavily on camels and small stock rather than cattle. Some areas of the Rendille's country are almost void of vegetation. The area of more frequent migrations' comprises about 16,000 km<sup>2</sup>

0.2. is a personal *chronological account of my field-research*, my difficulties, sorrows and joys and the like.

0.3. is a *methodological introduction*.

0.4. is on *demography and residence*. 0.4.1. gives a detailed demographical description of one Rendille settlement group.

The first insertion (0.6.) is on *time* and the way it is structured. The Rendille calendar is very elaborate and based on both a cycle of 12 empirical months and the solar year. These two cycles are independent and equally important for the timing of ritual events. The larger scale time structure consists of a cyclical age-set system. An age-set is constituted by common circumcision and consists ideally of males born in the 14 subsequent years. In reality, however, the span is longer, because exceptions are made. A youth should ideally be circumcised into the third age-set after his father's.

Age-sets are grouped together according to different principles. There are pairs of two and cycles of three, which result in the fact that a given age-set and the seventh following age-set, i.e. the age-sets of grandfather and grandson, have the same structural position according to both principles. Ideally these two sets should have the same name as well, and grandfathers and grandsons behave in many ways like age-set mates.

The Rendille philosophy of history fits well with this cyclical age-set system: It is believed that historical events like wars and famines repeat themselves or "come around" after 84 years, i.e. six age-sets or two generations.

This philosophy of history is exemplified by oral traditions (0.6.5., 0.6.6.). Periodical festivals are also discussed in this context of structured time (parts 0.6.7., 0.6.8. of this insertion).

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### 0.5. *Structural principles of Rendille Society*

In this general outlook I give three dimensions which I use for ascribing a position to every individual in Rendille society.

These are 1.) age and sex, 2.) clan and lineage, and 3.) special ritual state. In the resulting three-dimensional network not every knot corresponds to a category of individuals, because e.g. some ritual offices cannot be held by women, but every individual can be ascribed one knot.

These three dimensions give the order of the present work. So the three major sections are 1. Age and sex, 2. Clan-structure, 3. Persons in special ritual states.

#### Section 1. Age and sex

The chapter on *women* (1.1.) gives a short account of the non-ritual aspects of marriage. Three case-stories are told, each showing that marriage is less of a personal matter than in Europe, and that decisions on marriage are a clan affair more than an individual affair. The lineage position of the bride is – at least from the point of view of the elders who ultimately decide – more important than her individual identity, so that in the case of difficulties, e.g. if a bride has run away, she can easily and as a matter of hours, be replaced by a classificatory sister. Run-away matches are the response of young people to this state of affairs.

The importance of circumcision of men and women is discussed in terms of Rendille beliefs about society and biology. Uncircumcised girls are allowed to have intercourse but not to become pregnant. Married women are allowed to have lovers, especially among those who share their husbands' clan and age-set position, and children of such a union are accepted as the husband's. Uncircumcised boys, however, even if mid-or late twenties, do not have easy access to married women. As a general rule it can be stated that a child has to be aborted if one parent is uncircumcised.

Further the domestic and social roles of women are discussed.

Female fertility is highly valued and its absence requires ritual remedies, if tacitly tolerated sexual license remains fruitless.

A similar chapter is about *girls* (1.2.).

General appearance and attitudes, economic and sexual roles are discussed. Female circumcision and its symbolism are described at some length. A parallel exists to birth and its ritual requirements. The symbolism of female circumcision and child-birth overlap to quite a degree.

The male life cycle (1.3.)

The female life cycle consists of two parts, the male life cycle of three:

unmarried		married
uncircumcised	circumcised	
boy	warrior	elder

These three categories of males are described in terms of their visible characteristics such as their hair dressing and bodily adornments, their tasks, their social and sexual rights and aspirations, and their expected behaviour. Behaviour expectations can overlay each other on different levels: e.g. warriors should – according to the explicit opinion of the elders – be obedient, respectful and the like and are criticised for being violent, hot-tempered, unruly, yet it is implicitly clear that the Rendille are proud of their warriors for what they are. The far-reaching and restless sexual activities of warriors are regarded with the same ambiguity: “officially” negative, “unofficially” positive. This is similar to the belief occasionally heard in Europe that minor breeches of rules are characteristic of “real” men.

Life cycle and age-set ceremonies are described in this context.

The second major section (2.) is on *clan-structure*, i.e. the total of Rendille society being structured by moieties and clans, and the structure of clans. This section, more than the rest of the present work, is based on Rendille oral traditions, and especially clan myths which are rendered in the original from tape transcriptions with annotated translations.

It is a very emic view of the matter, because social behaviour is governed more by belief about history more than by possibly different historical truth. History is what we make of it.

The account begins with the mythical appearance of the ancestors of the senior lineages of the first clans in the seniority order of each moiety. These founders have later “collected” other people, adopted them, and thus laid the foundations of the two Rendille moieties. It is at this social border line (not geographical) that most internal tensions of modern Rendille society arise.

The order of seniority is the chronological order of the “coming out” or appearance on earth of the respective clan ancestors and the order of birth of their sons and descendants.

Apart from this chronological order the attributes and material possessions of these mythical figures are relevant: One clan ancestor, the most senior of all of them, is said to have “come out” with the fire-sticks and thus introduced fire to human life. In certain tribe-wide age-set rituals (*gaalgulamme* (1.3.4.), *naabo* (4.)) this clan (Dubsahay, 2.8.1.) through the present day is the first to kindle a fire. Another clan (*uyam*, 2.8.7.) has “come out” with the axe and was the first one to cut thorn bushes for fences and has to do so even now at these rituals. Still another clan (*Tubcha*, 2.8.8.) has “come out” with the circumcision knife and remain the circumcisers of all Rendille warriors. Thus every clan has its special role. Subordinate clans in terms of the senior-

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ity order are by no means less important for the whole than those at higher positions in this order.

Each clan has its own tradition and contributes with its special ritual role to successful ceremonies and the well-being of the whole. Clan specific prayer-powers and curse-powers are each differentiated and by their differences provide an effective means of non-violent social control; – each clan is more afraid of the other clan's curse which, being of a different nature, cannot be balanced by its own ritual means. Cultural differences are therefore not necessarily indicative of a lack of unity but may in fact have the opposite effect. Being alike leads to competition and is therefore potentially disruptive; being different can lead to co-operation, where one's abilities supplement those of the other. There is no Standard-Average-Rendille. The whole lives on internal differences.

The striking peculiarities of one clan's customs are therefore not sufficient reason for assuming that they have recently migrated from somewhere else. They might have been on the spot (socially, if not geographically) for a thousand years and nevertheless have maintained their peculiarities, because they perform a special role and their special traditions are highly valued by themselves and by others and are therefore positively re-enforced in each generation.

This principle is comparable to the one of the ecological niche which, as with all living systems of all orders of complexity, can also be observed in intertribal relations: e.g. cattle-owners are hostile to camel-owners and friendly to camel-people and vice versa.

Peace and unity is never achieved by indiscriminate assimilation, by making alike in all aspects, but by differentiation and co-operation.

The myths, which contain this social order *in nucleo*, richly illustrate many Rendille custom and institutions, e.g. the bond-brotherhood, the rules of the present-day power-play, types of social links and types of social conflicts. The whole life: competition, passion, love and hatred become visible. To give an adequate impression of this, would exceed the limits of this brief summary.

A list of clans and lineages is given under 2.2. On the lineage level this list is in some places very detailed, providing many minor units, although not detailed enough in other places. The length of the list is therefore not a good measure of the number of lineages or people of a given clan.

Characteristic features of certain subclans which are grouped together in categories which cut across clan-boundaries, are also discussed. Such a category of people who can be found in different clans are the *libire* (2.3.). *libire* acquire their special characteristics by birth, i.e. by subclan membership. In most Rendille clans there are both *libire*- and non-*libire* subclans.

The *libire* have a potent curse which is symbolized in certain material objects (e.g. a bundle of sticks). The decision making groups in age-set rituals

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are all *libire*, while those about whom certain decisions are made, e.g. who is to be made mad as a kind of sacrifice by magic means, who is to give an animal for sacrificial slaughter, and the like, all lack this power.

There are many associations of special subclan-specific types of *libire* power with dangerous animals, diseases and the like, which serve as means for carrying out the curse.

The nature of curse is discussed in detail in this chapter (2.3.), in the third insertion (chapter 2.11.) and in another context in part 3.

Another category of sub-clans and lineages which overlap the structure is what I have called the “K-group”. This is a taboo theme which requires considerable care. Mention of it in the wrong place can provoke violent responses. The “K”-people do not intermarry with other Rendille, and they are not given hospitality involving sexual favours by Non-”K”-women, due to the other Rendille regard their offspring as unpropitious. They consist of influential diviners and those who, contrary to the rules, have intermarried with the diviner lineages. Feelings towards “K” are strongly ambivalent. They are considered powerful and important for special functions (2.4.).

Another category of people, also feared but less respected, who are equally unpropitious, are the blacksmiths. They also practice involuntary endogamy (2.5.).

The second insertion (chapter 2.10.) is about the question “*Is there a pan-cushitic clan structure?*”

The expression “pan-cushitic” is to be understood *cum grano salis*, and a pretty big one, too. Of course the whole Cushitic cluster is a bit too large, including Old Egyptians and the like, to justify claims about traceable remains of a former common clan structure, but there seems to be good evidence that a wide range of present day distinct linguistic and ethnic groups once shared such a common clan structure: I would tentatively include Rendille, Somali, the Galla-speakers, El Molo and Dassanech. This list, however, is not exclusive. Starting at a different point one might be able to extend it in a new direction.

The examination of this started with the Rendille enumerating their clans and asking me whether the same clans exist in Germany as well. The idea that the same clans exist in culturally and linguistically different groups is most normal and natural for Rendille. It then proceeded to careful examination of Rendille origin myths (which as stated above were already being examined for the above mentioned descriptive aims). Some Rendille clans are said to have originated at sites in the present tribal territory, others are said to have come from somewhere else r e.g. Boran. Still others, including some overlap, are said to exist in Dassanech as well, because the Rendille and Dassanech are believed once to have been one people, before the Lake (Lake Rudolf or Turkana) widened and separated them. It is also common knowledge (or belief) that those who are believed to have originated at places

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in the present tribal territory, partly marked with stone-circles, including the highest clans in the seniority order, have equivalents in Somali.

Different hypotheses are discussed to explain these equivalents. One is that it is advantageous to have clan brothers as possible hosts or partners in neighbouring tribes. This is too evident to be rejected. Pleasant beliefs are always truer than others. Recent migrations of refugees of war and famine can also account for some clan equivalences. The claim for an old clan-structure common to all groups mentioned is therefore shaky, unless we define very rigid criteria for maintaining it, criteria which exclude alternative explanations.

We proceed in two steps: 1.) attempt to establish the equivalence, 2.) look for criteria to determine its existence prior to the present ethnic divisions.

Criteria for a clan equivalence are:

1. The equivalence is believed by the members of both clans. *A* say they are “brothers” of *A'* and vice versa.
2. Their names are similar.
3. They share characteristic material items, not common among members of other clans of their respective ethnic groups, or ritual practices, e.g. food avoidances and the like, which are significantly numerous and exclusive.
4. Camel brands and/or other property marks are similar or identical.

If three of these conditions are given, I would regard the equivalence as proved. The next step is to exclude all explanations other than our hypothetical wide-ranging common clan structure of a more-or-less homogenous proto-group (or a spectrum of proto-groups with continuous many-sided interaction): In other words, recent migrations of single groups and ad-hoc bond-brotherhoods or adoptions of unrelated groups have to be ruled out. (Such phenomena exist all over the place: the Rendille-Aryaal-Samburu continuum with its many double affiliations is the best example.)

I would suggest strong evidence for such a wide-range old clan structure exists, if a clan *A* is equivalent to a clan *A'* in a different ethnic group and *A'* is equivalent to *A''* in still another ethnic group and the latter (*A''*) claim to be brothers of *A*.

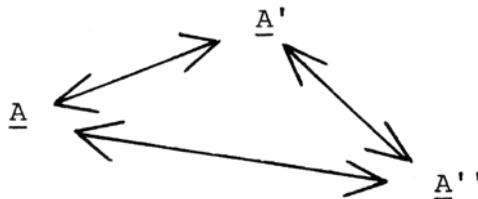


Figure 5.1.

Similarly strong evidence exists if  $A$  and  $B$  are in a given relation, e.g. subclans of the same clan, in the society  $X$ , and their equivalents  $A'$  and  $B'$  are in the same relation to each other in a different ethnic society  $X'$ . Then the division between  $A/A'$  and  $B/B'$  seems to be older than the differentiation between the two ethnic groups  $X$  and  $X'$ , because migrating groups mostly (but not always!) split along kinship boundaries and not across them. Thus it is unlikely that a part of  $A$  and a part of  $B$  would split off from the rest of their clans and shift away together, later to be adopted by a neighbouring tribe. This evidence alone, however, is not sufficient.

With different degrees of certainty, hints for a “pan-cushitic” clan structure in the sense defined above, have been found in the following clusters:

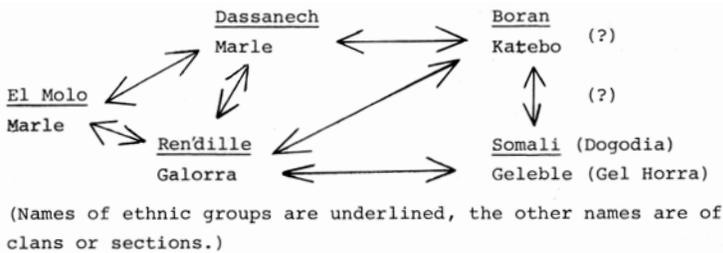


Figure 5.2. (Names of ethnic groups are underlined, the other names are of clans or sections.)

In the Somali tribe Dogodia there seems to be an equivalent of the Rendille clan Galdeilan with equivalences traceable in four different subclans.

A similar relation seems to exist between Sale of Rendille and parts of the Ajuran-Somali.

Equivalents of Rengumo (2.8.4.) could possibly be found in Dassanech, Somali and perhaps others.

The careful examination of other clans might reveal similar results.

In this field much remains to be done.<sup>1</sup>

The many striking similarities of popular ritual practice between Rendille and Somali, which are obviously pre-Islamic, make it appear possible, that the distinction between the two groups is not older than islamization.

A further insertion (chapter 2.11.) is on *Rendille beliefs about human biology*, e.g. different length of pregnancy, different resistance to thirst and hardship etc., according to clan membership. These beliefs are empirically wrong, because the continuous intermarriage of exogamous clans makes the Rendille biologically homogenous. On the level of belief, however, these convictions are therefore no less real. Also beliefs about different ritual categories of people, which make them “good” or “bad”, propitious or unpropitious, have a quasi-biological character.

<sup>1</sup> We are, luckily, not left alone, because Neal Sobania is doing research in this field, starting from the Dassanech.

Skin colour is important for healing power. “Red” people can heal “black” ones and vice versa. (“Red” and “black” being different shades of brown.)

The major line of the present thesis then continues with section 3, which is on *Persons in Special Ritual States*. (This is the above mentioned third dimension of our identification network.)

A person can be in a special ritual state for two reasons: he can be in a danger or he may be powerful, gifted with a potent curse and prayer. Mostly both conditions exist in varying degrees. A special ritual state involves power *and* is critical, i.e., requires special rules and avoidances to minimize risks and maintain power. People in such special states are *lagan*, which can be translated as “saved”, “safe”, “apart” or “sacred”. We are therefore not wrong to call it a “special” state.

Such states can be temporary, e.g. the freshly circumcised, killers in the critical period immediately following the killing of an enemy; they can last many years, e.g. certain age-set roles; or they can be permanent, like in the case of the *dabeel*, a powerful league of elders.

The major part of this section is on *dabeel*. An elder of this league who was one of my best friends in the field, has taught me the ritual practices of the *dabél* in long sessions over the course of months. Here I render mostly tape transcriptions of these sessions and their translations. A whole complex of techniques to derive powerful elements (as in dangerous animals, plant-poison) from nature and to make them at the disposition of man by magical practice is described. All this is aimed at concentrating as much power of curse and prayer as possible in one category of people: the *dabeel*. Because curse and prayer are ultimately dependent on God (=“Sky”) and it is God who has given power to things, this whole power-technique is not purely man-made magic but has in addition a cosmological and ethical aspect: without the will or at least the consent of God or Sky nothing works. To secure this consent ritual rules must be followed and avoidances kept, and the curse or prayer has to be legitimate: An arbitrary or unjustified curse does not work.

This men’s league also has a social and economic aspect: The selection of candidates and their inauguration is done by the small and atypical O’doola clan, all elders of which are *dabeel*. Among all other Rendille only worthy members of senior lineages are selected, also wealth is required, and only occasionally a candidate is chosen uniquely on grounds of great personal ability and dignity. In the gross average one can say that the *dabeel*-league adds power to those who are influential anyhow. *Dabeel*, however, is not a means to become rich: Only occasionally are sacrificial animals, which are then used for food for the performers of rituals and for the anointing of sacred objects, demanded from Non-*dabeel*. To refuse such a demand, however, would mean to expose oneself to the most dangerous curse. The ritual activities of *dabeel* are considered to be propitious for everybody. But as elsewhere there are believers and sceptics.

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These three sections (1. age and sex, 2. clan-structure, 3. special ritual state) have given us a basic understanding of the different categories of people in Rendille and their partly co-operative, partly competitive interrelationships.

Part 4 can therefore be considered a mere addition of largely illustrative value. It is a single case story – with a time depth of a century and a culmination point in 1976 – of the misfortunes brought about by the unpropitious age-set Dismala Ilkichili which recurs in the cyclic movement of time once in 84 years. This age-set always brings war, famine and internal struggle. In 1976, the year of marriage for the present reoccurrence of this age-set, this misfortune has taken the shape of a conflict between the two Rendille moieties (overlaid by the distinction of *Ibire* vs. non-*Ibire*) over certain marriage rites. These rites involve quasi-sacrificial actions, which result through magical means in the victims becoming mad. In 1976, for the first time in Rendille history, the vengeance of the victims has led to murder and suicide. Finally, even marriage rules have been changed to allow everybody to marry, because one moiety boycotted the girls of the other, so that largely moiety-endogamy had to be practiced by this age-set.

In the course of describing these dramatic events, about all the social and ritual rôles discussed in the earlier chapters are illustrated. We see the whole of Rendille society, each playing his part: a fortunate experience for the anthropologist, a sad occurrence for the relatives of the victims, and a bad event for tribal unity and internal peace.

Part 5 re-examines much of what had been said earlier from a new perspective. It is called *Symbolology by Context-Comparison*. Items, mainly plants or animals, of importance for the yearly cycle, the life-cycle and other rituals described in the respective chapters are ascribed semantic interpretations by comparing the different contexts in which they their parts or their derivatives are ritually used. Exegetic responses to questions about meaning are occasionally obtained, but mainly the semantic interpretation has to rely on context-comparison, because questions about meaning usually only evoke the description of more and more contexts of use. The symbolic meaning is rarely verbalized, since the symbols are understood without any verbal link of interpretation. The symbols convey meaning in the same way words do, they are an alternative means of expression and therefore do not need to be verbalized.

In this way five animals (elephant, Grant's gazelle, lion, camel-bull, and ostrich), seven plants (*kullum* (Balantides sp.), *eijer*, *gaer* (Cordia sinensis Lam.), *dahar* (acacia), *dahargab*, *sucha* (Barleria eranthemoides C.B.C1.), *ergeg* (asparagus sp.) and three other items (arrow-poison, intestinal fat, chalk) are analysed.

The last part, section 6, printed in a separate volume, is a *Linguistic Appendix*. It includes a *grammar* and a *vocabulary list* (Rendille-German, German-Rendille) with 1133 Rendille items to which I have tried to ascribe as much

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of their actual range of meaning as possible, in many cases, by giving several German equivalents. The German-Rendille part gives the number of the Rendille item only so that it can be looked up in the Rendille-German part, where it is dealt with at some length if necessary, and where it often can be found next to derivations and similar or etymologically related forms, so that another structure of Rendille expression becomes visible. The sources for the word-list are the tape transcriptions (which were translated in the beginning with the help of an interpreter) and my passive and active knowledge of the language acquired in the course of the research. The word-list has the advantage that it does not stem from asking people to translate single words which name European things and concepts, but rather originates from natural Rendille language, spoken in a Rendille situational context.

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# CURRICULUM VITAE

I, Günther Schlee, was born on July 10, 1951, to Volkert Schlee (teacher) and his wife Anna in Heide in Holstein.

From 1958 to 1962 I went to the local elementary school Lüttenheid, from 1962 to 1970 to grammar school at the Gymnasium Heide.

Since autumn, 1970, I have been studying Anthropology at the University of Hamburg with Prof. Dr. Hans Fischer. My minor degree subjects are General Linguistics and Romance Language and Literatures.

Since autumn, 1973, I have also been studying Biology.

In 1974, 1975 and 1976 I spent a total of 18 months in East Africa for research.

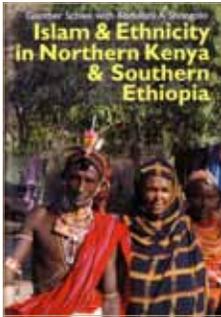
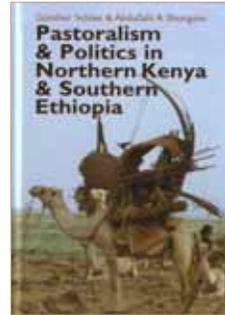
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Schlee, Günther, and Abdullahi A. Shongolo  
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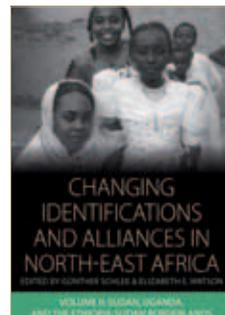
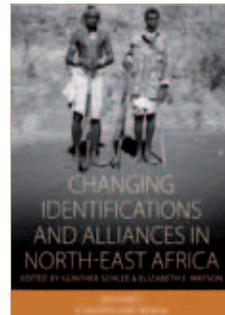


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FIELD NOTES AND RESEARCH PROJECTS IX

# RENDILLE AND ARIAAL

A LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL APPREHENSION

(Two Authors and One Other Author)



LOOXILOGO: SABAMBA, ODOOLA, MANSAYTA RUI,  
NAMAREI, ONI'ELI, LOMORUT,  
HAKUGURA, ILMONGORA,  
OOOB LINGGIMA, KORB, BONNA, LIDGORA,  
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