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Policies and Boundaries: Perceptions of Space and Control of Markets in a Mobile Livestock Economy

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BIG SHOTS BEHIND ILLEGAL CATTLE DEALS

by Wangui Gachie

The Minister for Livestock Development ... said yesterday the ministry was concerned about certain influential people flouting livestock movement regulations in the country. ... People had been moving livestock from one district to another without necessary clearing, vaccination or testing.

Noting that the practice could lead to the spread of deadly diseases to residents and cattle, the minister decided that the practice cease immediately.

[The Minister said] the Ministry was aware of the illegal movement within the country adding the practice had been exacerbated by the closure of the Kenya Meat Commission.

"The closure of the KMC led to illegal movement of cattle within the country as pastoralists set out to sell them to get money for their needs**, he said, adding that now that the KMC had resumed operations, the practice must be curbed.

... some unscrupulous stock traders ... obtained permits to move cattle from the north and north eastern districts under the pretext that such cattle were destined for KMC.

He noted that many of these cattle ended up in Thika, Murang'a and Nyeri where unsuspecting farmers bought and mixed herds causing disease outbreaks ...

He added that the country had attained a high standard of livestock and the government would not allow anybody to contaminate them. (THE STANDARD, Saturday, August 12, 1989, p. 1, 9)

The text which serves here as an opening quotation stems from a Nairobi daily newspaper where it was the first item containing the main headline. It is written in straight and plain journalese, but the reader who is not familiar with Kenya may require some explanations nevertheless. The Kenya Meat Commission is a parastatal organization which used to cooperate with the LMD, the Livestock Marketing Division. The KMC has held 'a legal monopoly of slaughtering for export and for the urban areas' (Raikes: 191). The LMD did the buying of stock while KMC owned slaughter houses at Athi River near Nairobi and at Mombasa. The LMD succeeded the African Livestock Marketing Organization [ALMO] soon after Independence. It owns and operates all primary markets for slaughter stock, stock-routes and holding grounds (through which it can control the movement of stock) and
operates quarantines and vaccination of slaughter stock. While private traders can use these facilities too, subject to acceptance of the regulations, the LMD carries on most of the direct trade in stock from the northern pastoral areas for canning. (Raikes: 192)

The colonial forerunner of the LMD, the African Livestock Marketing Organization, by its very name betrayed its function of keeping the stock from areas inhabited by African pastoralists in separate marketing channels from the cattle of the ranchers in the 'White Highlands', the European settler colony. The stock owned by Whites were accorded higher grades while the African stock was kept at low price levels. Where these prices were unattractive to the seller — in the 1930s the prices offered to pastoralists were only one-quarter of those prevailing elsewhere (Raikes 119) — de-stocking campaigns were carried out by force. But even at times when their stock were not seized by force the African producers had poor prospects of getting a price comparable to that in the free market of the settler sector since the two production areas were separated by a quarantine belt and movement of stock was closely controlled, not only between the European and the African sector but even within the latter, where the range was divided in tribal grazing areas (Schlee 1984, 1988).

A colonial official writes in 1932 that the pastoral areas were closed off from all major markets 'as if shut up in a tin box made of quarantine regulations.' Eliminating the diseases which justified the quarantines would have been possible, as another official states, by the 'expenditure ... of comparatively small sums on veterinary services' but opening the African livestock producing areas would have had a 'disastrous effect upon the price of stock and stock products within the Colony.'

The existence of some infectious diseases therefore came in quite handy as an excuse for keeping African stock off the European dominated market.

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2 Raikes (1981: 118) after van Zwanenberg (n.d.)
After a period of closure following mismanagement, the KMC, with a new financing plan, was put back into operation in 1989. During the closure, private traders had taken over, but then stock routes were closed again to reestablish the KMC monopoly. I am not in a position to assess the actual veterinary situation and whether the fears of 'contamination' of the stock south of the quarantine belt uttered by the Minister are justified. In this paper I just want to contrast different official and unofficial views of these regulations and boundaries. Nomadic livestock producers and private traders have always viewed the present practice as a direct continuation of colonial policies which still works to the benefit of the remaining white ranchers and the African elites which have taken over the ranches of those Europeans who have left. Circumventing quarantine regulations for them is both a necessity and a type of sport.

The area to which the Minister refers as 'the north and northeastern districts' is the arid lowland part of Kenya beyond the quarantine belt. These lowlands are inhabited by nomads speaking Nilotic and Cushitic languages (Samburu, Rendille, Gabbra, Boran, Somali...). The localities referred to in the next paragraph, Thika, Murang’a and Nyeri, are situated in the Central Province, a comparatively developed, agricultural area inhabited by the Bantu-speaking Kikuyu.

Apart from this newspaper cutting I want to base my argument on two other texts: one is a case history about a lorry driver who was intercepted when trying to smuggle livestock along a closed route, the other an interview with a Rendille elder which aims at finding out whether in the Rendille perception of space there is anything corresponding to our concept of a boundary. As colonial and postcolonial policies heavily rely on criss crossing Kenya with internal boundaries, the question of perception of space and its subdivisions and the different evaluations of policies attached to these perceptions seems to me a central issue at the cross section of cognitive anthropology, economics and politics. The result of this paper is that people inhabiting the same country have quite different views of the legitimacy and usefulness or even the existence of boundaries.

First the case history:
Not long before the article quoted above appeared in THE STANDARD, a Somali lorry driver, a young man of 23 whom for the pleasure of naming we shall call Nasraddin, in a dark night drove south towards the boundary between two of the large districts of northern Kenya inhabited by pastoral nomads. The reasons why references to localities have to remain vague and people be given fictitious names will become evident in the course of the unrolment of our story. Nasraddin carried a load of smallstock which comprised animals belonging to seven men of another ethnic group whose language, however, Nasraddin spoke just as fluently as four other languages, comprising his mother tongue, Somali, the language of his home area (yet another one), Swahili and English (which he had learned at school and on the road). Multilingualism is widespread in northern Kenya but especially pronounced among the Somali traders of the small rural towns for whom, together with the contacts established through it, it is an important part of their social capital.

The lorry belonged to Nasraddin’s father, a wealthy and influential trader and politician, somebody who — at least in a local framework — comes close to the category sometimes referred to in the press as BIG SHOTS. Nasraddin had a perfectly valid permit for transporting livestock to Nairobi; only the starting point of the journey given in the paper was still ahead of him; he was allowed to take a load of smallstock from the district where he was going, not from the one where he had taken the load and which he was about to leave. It would have been impossible to get a permit to move smallstock out of the district his load actually came from, because of a quarantine. Nasraddin regarded such quarantines as a constant annoyance: for him they did not mean that the smallstock had different diseases from the usual ones or from the smallstock elsewhere, but that other people elsewhere wanted to sell their stock first. Luckily, such regulations were easy enough to circumvent. Very soon he would reach the district boundary and after crossing it everything would be perfectly legal, his papers in order, and he would have nothing else to worry about on the 500 km drive to Nairobi.

Behind him, Mustafa was driving. He was from a different tribe, a different town, but he was of a similar social background and through his mother he was related to Nasraddin. Mustafa was ten years older and already had a lorry of his own, carrying a load of smallstock just as Nasraddin’s.

At the district boundary there were some huts, tea kiosks and a police line. The road passed between the kiosks and the police line. Electricity had never penetrated the area and most cerosene lamps had been extinguished. The small locality was asleep. Nobody would stop them. But then the engine of Nasraddin’s lorry started to misfire and with a few bangs, louder than gun-shots, the lorry came to a stand right in front of the police line and no matter how desperately Nasraddin turned the ignition key, the engine would not start again.

Mustafa overtook and disappeared into the night. There was no way to stop right here and help his cousin. He would have to abandon him to his fate.

But other helpers came soon. The policemen, woken up by the bangs, had noticed that there was a lorry in trouble right in front of their camp and approached it with their flashlights. They found the lorry full of bleating goats and sheep and the situation was at once clear to their criminologically trained minds. The only thing left was to find out to whom these smallstock belonged and then to apprehend
the culprits. "Mbuzi ya nani?" - "Whose shots are these?" Nasruddin had to think quickly. There were seven owners plus him, the driver; eight culprits. Eight culprits would have to pay eight fines. If there was only one culprit, the matter might turn out cheaper. "They are all mine!" he said before anybody else could say something different. But still it would be better not to be taken to court at all but to bribe the policemen as usual. Normally some hundred shillings would do. But one of the policemen had had a quarrel with Nasruddin's brother and absolutely refused to be mollified. In the end Nasruddin offered Ksh 1000 (about 100 DM or 35.£) to each of the four policemen and they rejected! This miracle was to be discussed in the whole district for weeks, because policemen who do not take Ksh 1000 had not been seen before.

Engines sometimes misfire and sometimes they don't. Very soon and without any repairs the engine could be started again and ran as smoothly as ever. But the journey now proceeded north, and not south: Nasruddin with his lorry and all humans and ungulates in it was taken back under armed escort to the district capital.

Eleven days later the judge passed a verdict which was more lenient than expected: Nasruddin was fined Ksh 5,000. But to mollify the judge, Nasruddin's family had spent Ksh 10,000 on him which did not appear on any records.

We may now sum up the various transfers caused by this incident and the other effects it has had:

- Ksh 10,000 were paid by a trader to a judge. In economic terms such transfers can be seen as revenue which stems from the private sector and is privately appropriated by members of the state class, thus subsidizing their salaries. But as through this type of payment nearly all policy implementation becomes impossible, they are officially not desired and we can hardly classify such payments as a positive effect of a closed stock route, although the judge might perceive them as just that.

- Ksh 5,000 were paid as a fine to the State who can use them to implement its policies like closing stock routes.

- As quarantines are officially there for stopping the spread of diseases, we may also ask whether Nasruddin's arrest has had any such effect. It probably had not. First of all it is doubtful that the disease situation south of the closed boundary differed in any way from the one north of it; probably there were the same diseases on both sides anyhow. Then Mustafa's lorry and many other lorries had succeeded in circumventing the quarantine, not to speak of the uncounted herdsmen who just drive their animals through the bush and put it on a lorry only after passing the boundary. Even if the quarantine had been justified in veterinary terms, it would not have had any veterinary effect because of lack of proper implementation.

- Nasruddin's social capital had greatly increased. He was the hero of the day. He had taken all the guilt on his shoulders. The seven owners of the livestock gladly paid his fine and promised that in future they would hire only Nasruddin's lorry and nobody else's.
The boundary at which Nasruddin's lorry was intercepted has a history. It dates back to colonial times when it was delineated by the British to separate the grazing ground of one "tribe" from that of another. I.e. it originally had an 'ethnic' justification. But, of course, these boundaries were drawn along the distinctions made by those who drew them. They were based on English notions about African ethnicities, African forms of land use and territoriality. How problematic some of the ethnic categories used by the British were, and how intricate such identities are if used by the pastoralists themselves to establish or reject material claims and social relationships has been described elsewhere (Schlee 1989). There are double affiliations, interethnic clan brotherhoods (i.e. somebody can be of a different ethnic group but the same clan as you) collective adoptions etc. Even if the pastoralists of northern Kenya had had similar notions of territoriality as the English, i.e. that a bounded surface area belongs to a finite set of people, established by rules about membership, that does not necessarily mean that an individual, a household or a lineage would have been greatly restricted in their movements by such a form of territoriality because migrants who can claim membership in more than one group can thereby also claim rights of use of more than one area. But was there such a notion of territoriality and was the perception of space broken down into two-dimensional units circumscribed by boundaries? A word frequently used by speakers of Cushitic languages to denote the concept of 'boundary' is 'mpaka', not a Cushitic but a Bantu word, probably established in this area quite recently through the administrative use of Swahili. Another word which Cushites use for this concept is 'seer', but this term is polysemous, it oscillates between different meanings. In addition to boundary it can also mean 'day of the week'.

**Rendille**

*Maanta a seer oh?*

*Alasmin.*

**English**

*Which seer is today?*

*Monday.*

It is not very probable that the original reference of *seer* is to time not to space. In most languages spatial metaphores are applied to time, not time metaphores to space. But even so we are not sure what exactly the original spatial reference of *seer* was. The words which we find in use for 'boundary' may therefore in this sense be quite recent introductions from colonial times and we do not find an
established term for 'boundary' of which we can be reasonably sure that it also was part of the precolonial cultures. But some thinkers claim that there are 'unnamed categories'. (Others object that this is just a device to impose your names and categories on the representation of a world view which purportedly belongs to somebody else.) If there are unnamed categories, we should extend our quest. Instead of just looking for a word for 'boundary' we should also look for the potentially unnamed idea of 'boundary'. My attempts to analyse spatial representations of northern Kenyan pastoral nomads (Schlee 1987, 1989b) have revealed the importance of holy sites, which are zero-dimensional, and of routes and paths, which are one-dimensional, but a rather strange lack of two dimensional representations, or surface areas, especially of bounded surface areas. Such forms of representation seem very marginal to the way nomads describe spatial relations, and together with the concept of bounded surface areas the nomads often seem to lack the possessive feelings about 'land', so common among other people. This may be one of the factors which explain the weakness of nomad resistance against national parks, establishment of private ranching or other forms of land grabbing.

In this paper I am going to single out one particular interview with a Rendille elder whom I had known for many years and who was enormously patient with my hair splitting and word mincing questions which were necessary to clarify some Rendille concepts which are not discussed or explained in everyday speech situations. The informant is Barowa Adicharreh, age 50, location of the interview: Korr, Marsabit District, date: 14.9.1989.

**Question:**
Worassehi maanta an kiworsad'i a worassehi uluhk. Ulukh ti maanta il dabaris dakhamba kijirto; chi ang'kus lirti, derka ulukh to latabo, chi ang'kus lirti ulukh to adan latabo. Ulukh tuus sarat mah layadeh?

**Explanation:** *Ulukh* is the name for a ritual gate. The Rendille know two types of such gates, the first is built for certain festive occasions at a given spot outside
the settlement, and as the settlements are nomadic and not tied to particular locations, such ulukh do not have fixed geographical coordinates and are therefore not associated with any topographical features. (For such ulukh cf. Schlee 1979: 116–23, 128–31, 1989: 69). Other ulukh are marked by groups of trees etc. and certain ritual acts, to be described below, are performed there whenever migrating herds or settlements or even single travellers pass there. The interviewer asks insisting questions about these gates because he thinks that even if there are no walls or fences there must at least be imaginary lines to be crossed when going through the gates. The interviewer believes that a gate must lead through something. The localities of the various gates and their spatial relationship to each other therefore seemed important to the interviewer, because he thought that by connecting these gates by a line, one might find the boundary in which the gates are the crossing points.

Barowa:
Ulukhe, ti serei ta kijirto, a seiyah. To a tiye NtARGETA bahai hiche, ulukh ti Udam Buramburto iche layadeh. Ti adan a ulukh ti Yoldai. Ti ankhan a ti Suubet. Ulukh ti dabankaas derka a seiyah taas.

The ulukh which are up there are three. One is the one west of NtARGETA, it is called the ulukh of Udam Buramburto. The other one is the one of Yoldai. The remaining one is the one of Suub. So, the ulukh on that side are these three.

Explanation: Korr is situated on an outcrop of hills in a vast plain. From this plain the territory rises steadily towards the east, up the lava slopes of the Marsabit basalt dome. 'Up there' refers to these lava areas to the east. The interview then revolves around references to earlier walks and rides in these lava fields by which Barowa tries to explain the various localities to me. Then he continues:

Barowa:
Tiye adan afarnatet, a tiye Kur ti Rib.

The other one, the fourth one, is the one of Kur Ti Rib (Mountain With Chalk).
Question:
Iche tuuman la intiye uur lakasookoro, serei likoro iche kijiran?

Barowa:
Intas on kijiran. Idaaru, lama tuus idaaru alasoltha.

Question:
Alasoltha, lihtinye goya lakasoltha?

Barowa:
Aa, lihtinye goya lakasoltha. Geedó lisoltha. Tan la weiti malisolthi.

Question:
Derka ch'a yeito, atar taas, ringis katololana?

Barowa:
Ringis katololana.

Question:
Chir bal!

Are they all where one climbs up from the "belly" (the alluvial plain which drains northwards), upwards (east into the lava cone of Marsabit)?

They are just there. A bit, one must walk a bit to reach those two.

One walks, walks between the lava ridges?

Yes, one walks between the lava ridges. One walks a certain distance to get to them. To this one one does not walk far.

So, in your view, are these four standing in one line?

They are standing in one line.

Draw it!
Barowa (draws map):
Tan maanta a ti Buramburto, tan a ti Yoldai. Tan kelei ang'ka isoonokhata, a Suub. Tan maagarto, Ti geeda Jirto, a Kur Ti Rib.

Question:
Korr la intoh? Bal khadaaba magelo?

This one now is the one of Buramburto, this one the one of Yoldai. This one comes a bit towards this side, it is Suub. Don't you see this one, at a certain distance, it is the one of Kur Ti Rib.

And where is Korr? Or does it not fit onto this paper?
Barowa:
Korr --- a tan. Maagarto?

(Interviewer starts to write the names next to the circles drawn by Barowa, mumbles Buramburto, Yoldai ... Barowa interrupts:)

Tan (Buramburto) torro Torri Gei Dañare sooyeita. Torri Gei Dañar kaachë bahai, iliche ka.

This one (Buramburto) now looks towards the Plain With The Acacia Tree. Here, to the west, is the Plain With The Acacia Tree, below it.

Question:
Hald'aayan la?

Barowa:
Hald'aayan derka, Kur Ti Rib ka, kallà, bas.

And Marsabit?

Question:
Inti derka "serei" kasoo-anz-o, inti derka d'ag ka deid'aayan kasoo-anz-o minya "serei" tadehin?

Marsabit, now, from Kur Ti Rib, there it is, voila.

Barowa:
Intaas, inti d'agañ heedaadka kagoo'o, iche serei nadeh.

Now, where the "uplands" begin, where the black rock begins you say "uplands", isn't it?

Question:
Intaas torro chir, inti d'agañ kaas kagoo'o.

There, where the stones stop at the sandy plain, we call it "up".

Barowa (drawing the lines on the bottom, right side of his sketch):
Waha derka, wahá aargartá? A heedaad. Wahá la d'agañ on katola. Inta a serei, tan la a heedaad. Tan maanta bahai soochhiran a heedaad derka --- serei,

Now, draw where those stones stop.

Now this, do you see this? This is the sandy plain. And on here stand the rocks. Here is "up", and this is the sandy plain. Now, this which is drawn to the west is the sandy plain ... up, so here is "up. So where one starts to
taäché iche derka. Inti derka d’agah la ka-anz-o, ch’ a heedaad kashahi at d’agah darte, serei korte.

**Question:**
Inta la? Intoñ kasooanza d’agah?

(Points to the Buramburto area to induce Barowa to draw a line around the whole lava field. Barowa marks the border between plain (heedaad) and uplands (serei) again by a very short line for just that particular area.)

**Barowa:**
Inta a inti Geí Dahar minya? ... Inta. Iche lakaanza. ... Heedaadka la, uuus intaka laanzo, dagah weiti laleekora.

Inti makhaballe nañ isooromate magarati, maant’ inno rukub khabeñ?
Makhaballe ti gei inno chai kakarsanne, ko Tanyaki ileh, ch’ inno kahanne, inno saga minya ikahanne, uu inno kahanne intaas rubeicheeda ikhubannes, inno derka d’agah geedñ kasoñ-orne?


walk on the stones, when you have been walking on the sandy plain and touch stones, you have climbed "up".

and here, where do the stones start?

Here is the place of the Acacia Tree, isn’t it? ... here. Here one starts [to walk on stones]. And from the plain, when one starts from here, one climbs up the rocks steeply. Don’t you know where the elders came to sit down with us, when we had the riding camels? The elders with whom we cooked tea under the tree, the one of the lineage Tanyaki and so, when we got up, we left towards this side, isn’t it?, Just when we left there we came down towards that very place. Haven’t we ridden fast among the rocks for quite some time? It is a bit far [from the plain]. Also that one is just far from [where] the stones [start], the one of Buramburto is also remote from where one comes to the stones. The one of Kur Ti Rib is also far from there. The one which is close to where the stones start is this one (Suub).
Question: Ti uur isoodowe a Ti Suubet? The one which is close to here, to the "belly" is the one of Suub?

Barowa: A Ti Suubet. It is the one of Suub.

Comment: Throughout this phase of the interview, the interviewer tries to persuade Barowa to draw a line around an area, the borderline between the low plain and the lava fields, but Barowa does not do so. Instead he draws the paths which one takes to move from the one type of landscape into the other, and these lines, of course, are vertical to the geographical boundary of which the interviewer was thinking.

"And on here stand the rocks. Here is 'up'..."

"where one starts to walk on stones...

"This is the sandy plain"

Question: Maanèhiche derka a mehe, ulukh taas? So, what is the meaning (from Swahili: maana) of these ulukh?

Barowa: Ulukh ta maanèhiche - ulukho ha maant' iche soobeheen Waakh on garta, Waakh icho doodi goorat us isoobehe on garta, wehi haagiche. Hor Rendille ulukho ha, afarta garta?, weiti gaal kabaachcha. Injirré, hor geedi farad gaal khaato, injirre baa malakadhiné, hoola

The meaning of these ulukh — when these ulukh came into being only God knows, only God and the people to whom they first appeared know what made them. Before, the Rendille used to take the camels often through these ulukh, you know?, These four. Never, before, when the horse (mounted Boran
To a tuus Rib minya? To a tan a? To
la a tuus. Seiyahcho [later corrects:
afarchoda] nyirakhiye ulukh tabe
malakhaatin. Maant' iche soobehe'n la,
inno la magarrani, an la maanta
magard'il, idaas ahaye makaadeh. Et
yadeh lakka mele.

Question:
Inenyet gaaso kolosoho maah eesaya:
iluus sarat a miige, farad derka matabo,
ch' u ulukh khabo icho ch' u ulukh
ikhabin' lakka, farad intuus weiti
mayamit, baa madiho.

Barowa:
A been. Sereika lakka baa adthan.
Rendille ch' us yeyeedo maah eesaya:
kan idu walah matah gesso a farad
Salgi? Salgi, ilI Salgi Rendille yede, a
seri on, Hali Guudan berrehisa. Hali
Guudan berrehis margina? Torro
kakauto to weiti milige mahe ladehya:
Kauto Ti Farad Kajebe. At margina
goorat?

Interviewer:
Aa, aa, [...] speakers, the enemy '(cavalry') used to
take camels, the people were never
raided there and no animals were taken
there. Got it? At these four ulukh. One
is the one of Rib, isn't it? And one is
this one? And one is that one. At these
four not even a camel calf which had
passed the ulukh was taken. And how
they came into being, we do not know,
I do not know either, I do not say to
you it was like this and like that. And
nobody says so.

Some people might say: the terrain up
there is difficult, that is why horses
cannot pass there, so whether there
are ulukh or there are not any, the
horses cannot come there easily to raid
the people.

That is a lie. Even up there people are
raided. When the Rendille talk they say
[about an aggressive person]: This one
who runs his head into things, is he
the horse of Salgi? Salgi, the place
which Rendille call Salgi, is just in the
uplands, it is east of the Red Mountain.
Haven't you seen [the area] east of the
Red Mountain? And one very difficult
stony area is called: the Boulder Field
Where The Horses Broke [their legs].
Haven't you seen it?

Yes, yes, [...]
Barowa:

Question:
Ki yeelan?

Barowa:
Aa eti yeelan maleeimatan.

Question:
Rendille, eti toor sido lakka aleeyamit on minya?

Barowa:

[...] All over there the Horse used to take stock. And also that terrain is just a difficult terrain with stones. In the whole area the Horse used to take things. Now, in these areas with these ulukh, leave the horses aside, not even a man with a spear has come through there. They have not raided the people.

A stranger?

Yes, no stranger has come through there.

If a Rendille carries a spear he can come through there, isn't it?

Yes, he comes through there. Strangers have never raided people at these ulukh, they have not come through there. The Turkana, the Boran, the Somali, all these were enemies with whom one raided one another. The Maasai, all these people, the only area they have never come through is this one.

Comment: Barowa praises the ulukh as a ritual protection for all herds which have moved through them. The interviewer, interested in boundaries, wants to find out whether one can define a protected area by drawing a line connecting the ulukh. He fails again in this renewed attempt to induce Barowa to circumscribe an area.
**Question:**
Derka, kelei ulukh idi arliit minye? Iche laa arliit on.

**Barowa:**
Aa idaas, idi arlilet, meel lama idaan minya? Iche tuuman la arliitó a ti berri kadisan, to la a ti saga. Ulukh tuuman la bañalicheda on laléeyamit. [berri liikabaha]. [...] 

**Question:**
Derka tiiye reemet arge, d’agah la kokorcho. Eti berri ikoro minya d’agah korcha bal?

**Barowa:**
Eti berri ikoro.

**Question:**
Eti intuuus kasooeyeego la? D’agah makorcho?

**Barowa:**
Akorcha. U la aléeyamitoné, [khar leemara, berri ikabaha].

**Question:**
Ulukh derka kelei idi arlilet minya? Arliit on derka. Arliit la oot goya minye kijirta? (Demonstrates on paper) Oot la ’ang’kis ko a sum, ang’kadan la a khar.

Now, an *ulukh* is a bit like a gate, isn’t it? It is just a gate.

Yes, that’s how it is, like a gate, two places like this, isn’t it. But of all [gates in profane fences and enclosures], some are built in the east, some on the other side. And in the case of all *ulukh* one just goes around to their western side and through them to the east. [...] 

Now, I have seen the one of what’s the name? [Yoldai], where stones are put on top [of piles of stones deposited earlier]. So somebody who goes up the east puts stones on there or what?

Somebody who goes up to the east.

How about somebody who comes down from up there? Does he not put stones [on the piles]?

He does. Also he passes there, [he goes around outside and through it to the east].

So an *ulukh* is a bit like a gate, isn’t it? It is just a gate. And a gate is in a fence, isn’t it? And on one side of the fence is the enclosure and on the other side the outside. So the meaning
Arlit derka maanahis a mehe ya: inti khar lakayamite, sum lakagelo. Idā minya?

Barowa:
Aa, maanahiche idas. Arlit on kasoogetè, derka uram gele.

Question:
Arlit derka sum lakagela, uram lakagela, intó lakagela. Warro to lakayamit, to adan lakagela, Idā minya?
Ulukh derka, ch'a kabahtè, maha kabahtè, tornro mañie gesse?

Barowa:
Iche dow on ibahta [dow hi dakhanon]. Dahcheeda on leetamite, ulukh la ch' a kabahto, sei akorissa.

Question:
D'ag ko lakka?

Barowa:

Question:
Maan malakachibo?

of a gate is: a place where one comes from the outside and enters the enclosure. Isn't that how it is?

Yes, its meaning is like that. Come through the gate and enter the court.

So, through a gate one enters an enclosure, enters a court, enters somewhere. One comes from one area /"earth"/ and enters another. Isn't it?
So, if you have passed an ulukh, where have you come from and where have you entered?

You just emerge to the plain [the empty ("white") plain]. You pass between [the piles which mark the ulukh], and when you come through the ulukh, you put a votive gift on there.

Even a stone?

A stone, grass, a [twig of] gaer (Cordia sinensis) is the means to pass. The Rendille just put there grass or gaer, and when camels pass, fire is drilled there. The fire is drilled, fire appears. At both sides fire is made. Then the camels pass.

Is no milk poured over there?
Barowa:
Haan malakachibo. Chi dab lawaiye, doodi nuchule mogto ikhabine, dab ikhabin, u la haanu kichiba, haanu kichiba dolo hiche tolossata. Derka gaal kabaha. [Kibrit malakabolkhicho.]
Eti keleie, inno derka hoola mawino minya, hoos on soobukhinna, korinna. Omos hoos maagarroba, d'agah korinna. D'agah afar.

No milk is poured over there. When there is no fire, then the young people who have no firesticks [matches are ritually unsuitable], who have no fire, pour milk over there and stand to the sides [of the ulukh]. Then the camels pass.

People alone, if we are not driving animals, we just pluck out some grass and put it on there. Or we do not see any grass and put stones on there. Four stones.

Question:
Lama ang'kō, lama ang'kadan?

Barowa:
Lama ang'kadan. Eti kabehe la, iche la idi ariitet, uram tuus baladan us kasohti ibaha on minye, to u gelo soojeissso jirto mele.

Two on one side, two on the other?

Two on the other side. And when one has passed there, [although] it is like a gate, one just emerges into the wide court where one walks about [the world], there is no court which one enters and by which one is confined.

Question:
Derka inti koote at chiirte, iche tuuman ischiirar kijiran minya?

Barowa:
Ch' an ang'ki gurot leeimi, Ti Kur Ti Ribe lassoogela, lakasoobaha, ti Yoldai lagela, lakabaaha, ti Udam Buramburto lagela, lakabaaha, ti Suubet eti isoo-nokhti iche kelei a bahai.

Now, in your drawing, they [the ulukh] are all in a line ["one at the loins of the other"], isn't it?

When I come from the south, one first comes to the one of Kur Ti Rib and out of it, then one enters the one of Yoldai and comes out of it, enters the one of Udam Buramburto and comes out of it, the one of Suub is somewhat to the west and one would have to diverge [from the line] towards this side.
Comment: Here, finally, Barowa connects the four ulukh by a line, but not by the type of line the interviewer had in his mind. He describes the path of somebody who walks from one ulukh to the other, while the interviewer was thinking of the line connecting the four ulukh as a border line separating an area outside the gates from an inside area. Such a line would not have been a path but a boundary crossed by paths. Almost desperatly, he takes up the metaphor of a court which one enters through a gate once more:

**Question:**
Uram tiche derka me? Chi iche arilt tehe, uram ti baladan lakagelo.

**Barowa:**
Ti baladane lagelo a harra tuus libohon.
Tuu baladan libohon.

**Question:**
Mpaka mele?

**Barowa:**
A. a. mpaka mele.

**Question:**
Derka mpaka tiye ulukh kabsahne, harra to adan gelie melayadeh?

**Barowa:**
M. m. Malayadeh.

And where is their court? When they are gates, [where is] the wide court which one enters through them?

The wide court which one enters is just the country to which one emerges. That wide one to which one emerges.

It does not have a boundary?

No, no, it does not have a boundary.

So one does not say 'we have passed the border of the ulukh and entered another area'?

No, no. One does not say so.

Comment: From the way in which the gates are passed it becomes clear that they are not meant to separate 'western' from 'eastern' areas. Even such gates which are on routes which lead in a north-south direction are passed in a west-east direction whereupon one resumes one's way south or north:
Question: Ulukh ti Kargi Magga la? Uur minya kijirta?

Barowa: Aa, Geyohi Dahar.

Question: Ang'koh lakabaha taas?

Barowa: Berri.

Question: Gaali ang'ki miiget kiyimi, berri ikabaha torro gurro inokhta?


Question: Gaali jiti gari kasoofulo la, jiti gari mabujo, jitas on taba?

Barowa: Jitason taba. Tola, gaali jiti gari on lagata. Ki buurenye tola an argo. Hor la, ch' u Worrti Magade kasoofulo ulukh on taba.

How about the *ulukh* near Kargi? It is in the "belly", isn't it?

Yes, the Acacia Trees.

To which side does one go through there?

East.

The camels which come from the north go through it to the east and then turn south again?

The camels which come from the Soda Well, if they do not pass to the west of the trees, go through it to the east and then proceed to the south. They just pass between the trees and then turn south.

And the camels which come from the water along the car track, do not leave the track, they just follow that track?

They just follow that track. Nowadays the camels are just driven along the car track. In my view most of them. Before, when they came from the water of the Soda Well they always passed the *ulukh*.

Comment: There is one *ulukh*, the one of Siginte, which is near a pass through a mountain range which separates predominantly Samburu from predominantly Rendille.
grazing areas. The interviewer, with his Western bias, had always perceived this *ulukh* as a kind of boundary marker between the two areas. Barowa, however, rejects this interpretation.

**Question:**
Ulukh ti Siginte la? Iche la berri on likabaña?

**Barowa:**
Ulukh tuuman berri on likabaña.

**Question:**
Ulukh Ta Siginte maanta maanehiche a mehe? Iche la a idi weisi ho gaal liwesti bal ili Rendille lakasoogela, chi ili Korro lakiyimi?

**Barowa:**

How about the *ulukh* of Siginte? Does one pass it only to the east, too?

One passes through all *ulukh* only to the east.

What is the meaning of that *ulukh* of Siginte? Is it also like a prayer which is prayed for the camels or does one enter Rendilleland through it when one comes from Samburuland?

That is not how it is. Also about that *ulukh* only God knows when it came into being, I cannot tell you 'that is when and how it came to be'. But through that one the camels are only driven in the morning, they do not pass there in the evening and then spent the night there. [The camels which approach the *ulukh* in the evening spend the night near it and pass it in the morning. The camels are driven to it only in the morning and pass it. It has got a kind of courtyard where one can spend the night. Only the *ulukh* of Siginte has got a court. Before, when God made everything, He also made that one the way it is.
Question:
Uranto d'egheñet?

Barowa:

Is it a court of [=surrounded by] rocks?

It is a court surrounded by rocks. As wide as from the plot of your father-in-law to here and all around. [Several hundred meters in diametre.] [At first, when the camels come, they enter the court and sit down. The people smear themselves with chalk [on the forehead], also the camel bulls are smeared with chalk. It is wettened and lines are drawn on the hump like with the blood of a sorlo sacrifice (Cf. Schlee 1979: 103). Then fire is drilled and the camels pass the ulukh. When they have passed, they do not spend two nights in the same place until they reach the settlement. And they do not mix up with other camels. When they have come to the settlement, a young female sheep is slaughtered at the naabo [the assembly place of the elders in the centre of the settlement]. The camels are marked with its blood. Skin strips are tied to [the necks of] the camels. The other ulukh which has chalk is the one of Kur Ti Rib. The clan Saale has been found there [first appearance in the origin myths, cf. Schlee 1979: 228ff]. Near to it there is a place called the Clearing Of The Camels Of Saale. Saale get chalk from there very much, to
chiche angagantehe la inenyet makhabati.] Ulukh-harra tuuman kijirta, Meite lakka kijirta.

smear [on their foreheads] on new moon. If people have passed the ulukh when it has rained and the chalk is wet, one smears it on one’s forehead. It is a red earth [the term rib refers to consistency rather than colour and in this case ochre might be a better translation than chalk] and when it is dry it does not stick to people. There are ulukh al over the country, one is at Meite, too

Comment: We here jump the description of the ulukh of Meite and the discussion of other such gates at localities called Losodani, Kiberók, Goli Hanja, to come to the conclusion of this part of the interview.

By passing these gates one might move from one ritual state into another (classical rites de passage of the smaller, everyday type) but we cannot define any areas left or entered by passing through them.

"Ili Rendille", "harra ti Rendille"

The last part of the interview, which we here render in a summary form, revolves around a different topic.

As the inquiry about ulukh, the ritual gates which do not enclose any defined areas, had not revealed anything which might be interpreted as the Rendille concept of a bounded territory, I continued my search for such a concept by asking Barowa about the terms "ili Rendille" (roughly: Rendilleland) and "harra ti Rendille" (the earth of the Rendille) which seem to evoke the idea of a bounded surface area, or at least in their English translation do so. Wehiye atin 'waha a ili Rendille', 'waha a harra ti Rendille', atin eelatan, intoh? — "When you say 'that is Rendilleland', 'that is the earth of Rendille', where is that?" Barowa reacted with an enumeration of localities where Rendille can be found now, not with a description of the course of boundaries. This enumeration comprised also locations in Samburu District. In recent years Rendille cattle have crossed the Ewaso Ng’iro twice, and that made
even a part of Isiolo District "Rendilleland" in this sense. *Mpaka ti jirto a ti uwol-et on.* - "The only boundary (*mpaka* - a Swahili word which has been introduced to the area by the colonial administration) there is, is the one of fear." I.e. the Rendille can take their animals as far as they dare. The limits to these movements are the Boran threat in the north and north-east and the somewhat incalculable Somali in the east. When I pointed out to him that the Samburu District starts just where Marsabit District ends, and asked him how that relates to "Rendilleland" and "Samburuland", the reply was *iskijiran* - "they are inside each other" or "they are mixed up". Many Rendille elders are named after places of birth which are far north of the present Rendille range in an area now exclusively occupied by Gabbra. These places were once *ñarra ti Rendille* but at the same time they were *ñarra ti Gabbra*. Boundaries of tribal grazing areas were only drawn by the colonial administration.

*Goorat hor, mpaka malakhabo, geedi Sirgal imatan* - "Before, there was no boundary, for as long as the Government had not come." In the earlier decades of this century the Rendille, less numerous than now, just formed one settlement cluster. This settlement cluster was very mobile and covered large distances when threatened by Boran raids or following the clouds which indicated local rainfalls. "Rendilleland" thus, at any given time, was wherever this settlement cluster happened to be. Even sites of ritual importance are not permanently within the range of movement of Rendille herds and settlements. From Gamura, a cluster of waterholes north of the Chaibbi salt pan, palm fibres need to be collected which are used for the *fañán* inauguration, a senior grade in the Rendille generation set system. In times of interethnic friction special arrangements need to be made to enable a Rendille delegation to go there, because the area is now occupied by Gabbra (cf. Schlee 1979: 87, 245ff, 1989: 41).

The only point which has never been given up and which cannot be given up and compensated by access to some other area is Worr Ti Magade - 'The Soda Well', a cluster of waterholes which is especially healthy for the camels. A ewe is taken there before the camels drink the water of these holes for the first time in the incipient dry season by members of the lineage Gaalalle of the Tubcha clan and ablated there with milk from the camels of that lineage. When the Rendille camels have moved elsewhere, also the Gabbra take their camels to Worr Ti Magade. Nobody,
however, will succeed in excluding the Rendille from the use of these waterholes. Only the Laikipiak Maasai (in the 19th century) deprived the Rendille of Worr Ti Magade for a while by capturing them with their herds and moving them south. But they were annihilated by the Rendille in a legendary battle south of Merille, which is in the southern reaches of the present Rendille pastures. Worr Ti Magade, uu lasoobbehe, sagi lakhaato mele. Harra Ti Rendille weiti ruumat a Worr Ti Magade.
- "The Soda Well, since things emerged [the beginning of the world], there is no way to take it away. The very true earth of the Rendille is the Soda Well."

Here, as in examples from other nomad societies discussed elsewhere, we have possessiveness about a place, i.e. a zero-dimensional spatial entity: the well which is connected with Rendille origin myths and which is so beneficial to the health of the camels because of its mineral content. Claims which have no extension can easily be contended or reduced to the domain of the symbolic if land competition increases. No matter how adapted to a mobile way of life Rendille representations of space may have been in the past, the Rendille should become aware the sooner the better that other groups with other interests have quite different forms of tenure and territoriality. Not being possessive about territory they might otherwise soon lose out to those who are.


