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Ateker Generation-Set Systems Revisited – field facts and findings, and a systematisation

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Ateker Generation-Set Systems Revisited – field facts and findings, and a systematisation[1]

Harald Müller-Dempf[2]

Abstract

Generation-set systems are seldom accepted as full-fledged socio-political systems,[3] and the fact that they are often subsumed under the category of age only increases the likelihood that they are misunderstood. Another aspect that is often overlooked in this context is the role of generational alternations. This paper aims to explore Ateker generation-sets and show how they are socio-political systems *sui generis*. They reflect and at the same time organise people's lives, and, while they share a common origin, they developed differently in various groups according to emerging needs. The study also provides an update to the basic ethnographic data on the Karimojong, Jie, and Dodoth generation-sets. For reasons of stringency, no reference is made here to related social categories like lineage, clan, stock ownership, etc.

[1] Information for this article is based on fieldwork undertaken from 1982 onwards. Research conducted since 2005 was financially supported by the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology. Special thanks go to Günther Schlee and Christoph Brumann, who reviewed the draft of this paper.

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[3] Cf. Tornay 2001: 9f.

Introduction

Across many parts of East Africa, the male population is organised according to a variety of forms of generation- and age-sets;[4] these systems have attracted much academic attention since the 1930s.[5] Although discussion of the topic has diminished in recent years, it is still worthy of additional study, as some aspects still seem to be unclear and certain misconceptions still persist. In particular, the fact that generation-set systems are often called "age systems" has contributed to misunderstandings.

In an earlier article (Müller-Dempf 2009) I tried to draw attention to my impression that generation-set systems in East Africa are not only a "superstructural" (Tornay 1979) phenomenon, but reflect the basic structures and conflicts of the society they are part of, and are even shaped by events and circumstances troubling these societies. I have shown this for the Toposa in eastern South Sudan. The Toposa are part of a group of pastoral people called the Karimojong Cluster[6] or Ateker,[7] comprising the Bokora, Pian, and Matheniko who together are commonly referred to as Karimojong, the Jie and the Dodoth (all of whom inhabit the north-eastern part of Uganda), the Toposa and Jiye in eastern South Sudan, the Turkana in north-western Kenya, and the Nyangatom in southern Ethiopia. There is no native, emic term for this group of people; for reasons of convenience I shall apply the term "Ateker", which is now widely used in the area.[8]

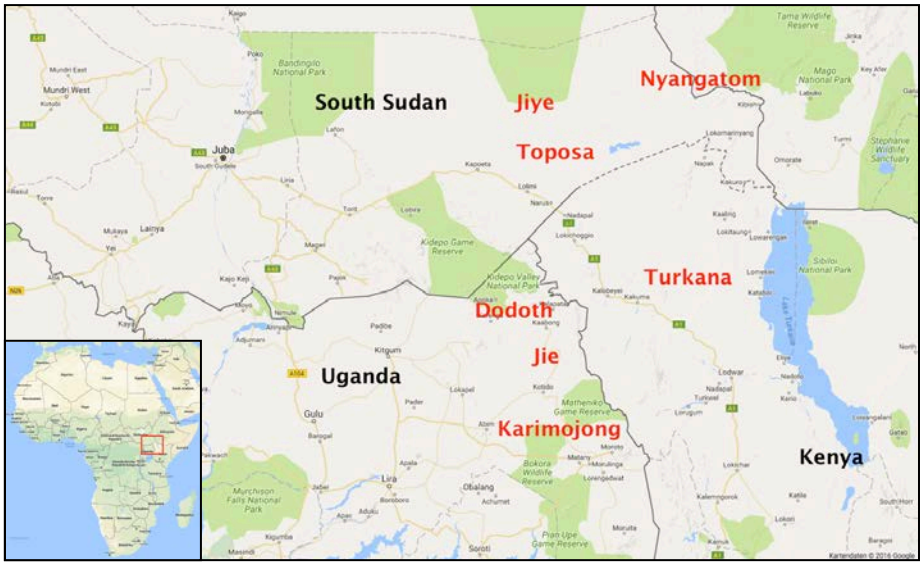

Figure 1: Distribution of the groups in the Ateker cluster

[4] Among the Ateker, girls form age-sets of their own. After marriage a woman is incorporated into the generation- and age-set of her husband. On this occasion, her former female age-set celebrates with her and receives an ox slaughtered by the future husband. The married woman then becomes attached to the generation-set of her husband, and her own age-set is said to lose importance. It seems that women's age-sets are not as intricate and do not have the same political relevance as those of men. However, female age-sets have not been well studied, and on an informal basis they may have much more significance than generally assumed, even after the marriage of their members. For example, in 2008 I witnessed widowed women of more than 90 years of age sing their *female* age-set song in the north of Toposaland. Why would they do so unless these age-sets continue to have some social relevance? This seems an interesting field for further study.

[5] E.g. Baxter and Almagor (eds.) 1978; Bernardi 1985; Eisenstadt 1954, 1956; Evans-Pritchard 1936; Fleming 1965; Jensen (ed.) 1936; Kertzer and Keith (eds.) 1984; Kurimoto and Simonse (eds.) 1998; Legesse 1973; Mannheim 1928, 1952; Müller 1989; Prins 1953; Radcliffe-Brown 1929; Sanders 1968; Schurtz 1902; Stewart 1977; Tornay 1979.

[6] The term was introduced by Gulliver (1952).

[7] The term was introduced by Webster et al. (1973: xxi).

[8] For obvious reasons, the Toposa elite in particular strongly oppose the term "Karimojong Cluster".

This contribution will add up-to-date material on the generation- and age-sets of the Ateker people living in Uganda, as the available information[9] is from the 1950s and 1960s. In addition, I shall compare the systems used by various Ateker groups, providing a broad systematisation.

There are two different kinds of generation- and age-sets in East Africa: those where the duration of sets is governed by "exact numbers" of years (Jensen 1954: 9) and those where the duration of sets is not defined by fixed rules. The most prominent examples with "exact numbers" are the Gada system of the Oromo and similar forms.[10] The Ateker, by contrast, operate relatively flexible schemes in which the duration of sets is not preset and reflects prevailing internal dynamics of the pastoral society.

The Ateker Lifestyle

The environment and the lifestyle of the Ateker are abundantly documented in scholarly literature,[11] and thus I shall introduce them only in a very cursory fashion here. All Ateker are pastoralists or, to varying degrees, agro-pastoralists, i.e. they keep cattle, sheep, goats, and donkeys (and in the case of the Turkana, also camels), and their animals are the basis for their economy, their attitudes and feelings, their social structure, and nearly all aspects of their life. If the local environment and the annual rainfall permit, they also grow sorghum, and to a lesser degree sesame, beans, and vegetables. But the climate is dry and unpredictable, and many years the crops fail. It is safe to estimate that there are crop failures one year in every three, and that approximately every ten years the area faces a drought disaster that affects even the animals, which otherwise survive due to their high degree of mobility. In recent years rainfall patterns have become even more irregular, i.e. the distribution within the year and across years has become increasingly unpredictable, which hampers agriculture even more.

Under these adverse circumstances people can only survive by relying on an intricate system of mutual support, networking, and social ties.[12] These ties are established through the exchange of animals, and they are not only symbolic but also very practical in times of need: for example, after a drought when a man's animals have died, he might ask a more fortunate relative or friend to return some animals to him in order to build up his herd again.[13]

One context where this network of mutual ties is manifested in a special way is marriage. Here, a man marries more than just a wife; he marries her family and relatives. The woman in turn becomes part of the man's family – and also part of his age- and generation-set. The relations of a man with his new in-laws are materialised by handing over livestock, and that is why among these people a proper marriage that does not involve providing animals is unthinkable. No animals, no marriage – or at least no "legal" marriage. We need to keep this in mind, as it is a decisive factor for developments which have taken place in Ateker generation-set systems.

There is another feature of Ateker societies that is relevant for understanding some of the dynamics of the system: the antagonism between fathers and sons. Ateker are polygynous, i.e. men may marry as many women as they want, provided they can give enough animals as a dowry for another

[9] Cf. Gulliver 1953, Dyson-Hudson 1963, 1966.
[10] Cf. e.g. Oromo (Legesse 1973); Gabra (Tory 1978); Rendille and Samburu (Spencer 1973); Konso (Hallpike 1972).
[11] Cf. Gulliver 1951, 1955; Dyson-Hudson 1966; Müller 1989; Tornay 2001; and others.
[12] It has to be mentioned that these coping systems are presently heavily undermined by an encroaching modern sector and by government activities as well as by NGOs (non-government organisations) and international aid organisations, a problem which cannot be dealt with here.
[13] For a comprehensive discussion of networking through animals in East Africa see Schlee 2012.

marriage. Thus the situation may arise – and it often does – that an old man still wants to marry another wife while he has sons of marriageable age who want to have a family of their own. Because of the old man's plan, the sons are deprived of their reasonable wish to marry themselves, and this makes them angry or even infuriates them. But there is not much they can do, as the elders control the younger ones by threatening to curse them, and it is generally believed that these curses work. There is one occasion when the young men might escape the gerontocratic regime of their fathers: the cattle camps. Cattle camps are the place where in the dry season the young men, together with their young wives or girlfriends, take care of the family herd. These areas are often quite far away from home, sometimes as much as 100 to 150 kilometres. And it is of course tempting for the young men, who are strong warriors and in the prime of their lives, to take the cows and their wives or girls and start their own pastoral enterprise somewhere else.[14] Preventing the young men from doing this is a recurring problem for the old men back home, and normally their threat to curse the young men for misbehaviour works like a rubber band that pulls them back home.

Emergence of a Generation-Set System

In order to understand how generation-set systems work, at least those of the Ateker type, I shall describe how a generation-set system may come into existence, using the origin of the Turkana system as an example. Some 250 to 300 years ago there was a drought in what is now called Uganda, and a group of young Jie herders established their cattle camp quite far away from home in what is now Turkana. For reasons which are not known any more,[15] the young men decided to ignore the curse of their fathers, and they started their own new life here instead of returning to their homes.

All the young men of this cattle camp apparently were of the same generation. Conventionally, this generation-set[16] would have a name. The men would procreate sons, and these would be the next generation-set with their own name. The members of this emerging generation-set would play together, would later herd goats together, and would most probably go together on cattle raids against their neighbours. They would still be regarded as youths and not be allowed to marry. But especially the older ones in this generation-set would become eager to marry and have their own families and herds, and they would pressure the previous generation that they be allowed to do so. When the first generation-set finally became old and weak, they would initiate their sons into manhood and hand over the power to them in a ceremony called *asapan*. This second generation would then produce the next generation-set, and so on.

Age-sets have not yet come into the picture at this point. Actually, as time goes on, more and more members would be added to the new generation-set, and the age differences between the oldest and the youngest members would increase, eventually becoming as much as 15 or 20 years. The next stage has been described by Serge Tornay (1998: 102): due to internal frictions, after some time the younger part of the group splits off and gets their own name, and this process continues in

[14] Cf. Tornay 1987: 154f.
[15] Cf. Lamphear 1976: 91ff.
[16] A term used by scientists for a named group of people who are members of the same generation; the Ateker themselves do not have a generic term for this.

the split-off group, and so on, and thus a sequence of age-sets develops.[17] In this way, each generation-set is sub-divided into age-sets.

Therefore, the Ateker systems are *not* systems of age, they are first and foremost *generation* systems. They do include age-sets, but these are inseparable from the generation system, forming a sub-category, a workable sub-division for day-to-day affairs. Cognitively, the generation-set is the prior category.[18] For scholars, this means that much of the vast body of literature and discussion on "age systems" is only of limited value for understanding the Ateker generation systems.

The generation- and age-set systems of the Ateker can be represented schematically as follows:

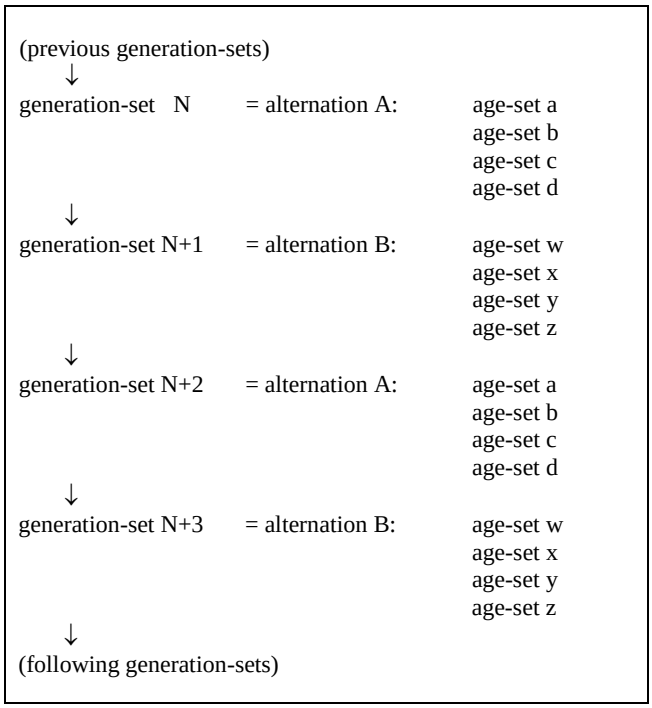

Figure 2: Schematic pattern of an alternation/generation-set/age-set system

There is another important feature of the generation-set systems of the Ateker, i.e. a strong relation between grandfathers and grandsons. Some individuals even take their first names from their grandfathers. On a broader level, generation- and age-sets take their names from their grandfathers' generation. That does not mean that the sequence of age-set names must be in the same order, and the names as such need not to be identical, as a mere resemblance might be enough. The age-set names "echo" those of the grandfathers, as Dyson-Hudson (1963: 360) has rightly put it. Age-sets are generally named after animals, and, for example, giraffes and leopards would be seen as equivalent, as both animals are spotted, and thus their names may be used interchangeably. This also applies to generation-set names, as for example Ngimor (mountains) and Ngitome (elephants) are both enormous and thus may also be used interchangeably.

Reflecting this grandfather-grandson relation, each generation-set takes its name from its grandfathers, and thus a set of two alternating generation-set names develops. For example, Toposa generation-sets are called Ngimor (mountains), the next Ngirisae (leopards), the next Ngimor, the next

[17] This process of the emergence of age-sets in the Ateker generation-set systems also explains why the first age-set of a generation-set is generally only known by the name of its generation-set.

[18] When for example I first arrived in the Toposa area, the first question I was asked was my generation-set. Nobody cared about my age-set. And at any public gathering people generally refer to the generation-sets, not to the age-sets.

Ngirisae, and so on. Traditionally, each alternation has its own distinctive features: for example, one might wear black ostrich feathers and copper bangles, and the other one white ostrich feathers and brass or "white" (aluminium) bangles. The particular features may vary between different Ateker groups, and today in many cases they may be forgotten altogether.

In addition to the alternation name, individual generation-sets normally have what Lamphear (1976: 36ff.) has called popular nicknames which serve to distinguish between grandfathers and grandsons. In some cases, however, only the original alternation name survives.

From all available evidence, it can be hypothesised that the characteristic features of the common "forefather" of the presently existing Ateker generation-set systems were as follows:

1. Every man is member of the generation-set immediately following his father's.
2. There are always three generation-sets in formal existence: the retired elders, the Seniors, and the Juniors, who are not yet initiated.
3. Senior status is handed over at *asapan*, when the Seniors retire and the former Juniors are collectively initiated and promoted to Seniors.
4. (Traditional) marriage is only allowed after *asapan*.
5. Generation-sets take their name alternatingly from a set of two names.
6. Each generation-set may in addition have a distinctive name of its own.
7. Generation-sets are sub-divided into age-sets.

Figure 3: Characteristic features of the primordial Ateker generation-set system

The obvious question is: How and why did this set-up of socio-political relations emerge? Ateker are very pragmatic people without much inclination towards theorising; they thus have no generic terms[19] for generation-set, age-set, age-grade, and so on, and consequently their "system"[20] was definitely not purposely designed by wise men in order to structure their society.

As far back as 1968, Sanders proposed correctly that generation-set systems

> "evolved as a response to the ecological relations of the area; that the East African pastoralists practise mixed economy, relying as much on garden produce as on cattle for their subsistence diet; that shifting cultivation and transhumance in a harsh environment keep the size of settlements small and their composition unstable; that seasonal fragmentation of the basic family unit and the core of incipient lineages was due to the demands of necessary labour specialization. Finally, because of the combination of the factors listed, no corporate unilineal descent groups emerged which could articulate the function of government." (Sanders 1968: 267)

[19] *Asapan* is the only generic term which the Ateker use in this context. This is what makes research on the matter extremely difficult. All Western researchers – including me for quite a while – have occupied themselves with trying to find generic terms used in the context of generation-sets, and informants have been polite enough to offer certain ones, but at closer inspection none of them is widely accepted. The only terms remotely related to the issue are *asepic* (pl. *ngasepico*), designating any group of people; *anaket* (pl. *nganaketa*), a group of coevals ("those who suckled together"); and *anyamet* (pl. *nganyameta*), a group of people who eat meat together. This last term comes closest to the meaning of generation-set, as they eat meat together in *akiriket* (see below), but it does not correspond precisely: two generation-sets might sit together on this occasion. And even the term *asapan* has two different meanings, as shall be shown below.

[20] For lack of a better term, I reluctantly use the word "system", although it evokes the notion of a designed and rigid state of affairs which is not the case here.

Thus, while the generation-set system was not the only possible outcome of this particular constellation of circumstances, it is certainly a plausible one, as it reflects the internal driving forces of this kind of pastoral society. It mirrors the relations within a family on a societal level: obedience towards the elders, a power struggle between adjacent generations,[21] and an amicable relation between grandfathers and grandsons. Age-sets channel the stress between older and younger members of one generation. And the fact that people find themselves in a group gives them strength, as they are not isolated from rest of the society but always have the strong network of their fellows.

However, what looks like a simple and neat system is in fact more complicated. Demographic generations[22] have a feature which distinguishes them fundamentally from age-sets. People within one generation-set are by no means all the same age, and the age spread even increases over consecutive generations.

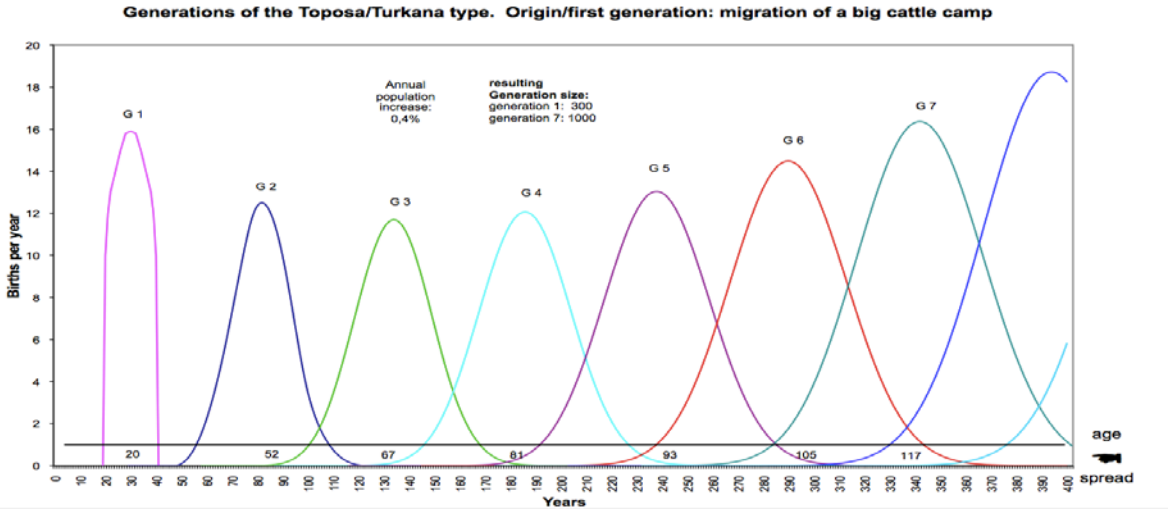

Figure 4: Illustration of the progressive overlapping of consecutive generation-sets over time

Figure 4 is a computer simulation of births by generation-set under Ateker demographic conditions. We do not need to look at it in detail, but it is quite clear that over time the generation-sets overlap considerably. The age spread within one generation-set increases slowly but steadily and has roughly doubled after 250 years. While the generational distance, represented by the peaks of the curves, remains at about 50 years, the age span of its members is much higher and increases over time.

[21] One of the main factors being the access to women for marriage (cf. Hazel 2000).

[22] As early as 1928 Mannheim made a clear distinction between social generations and demographic generations. An exhaustive discussion of the concept of generations can be found in Müller 1989: 72ff.

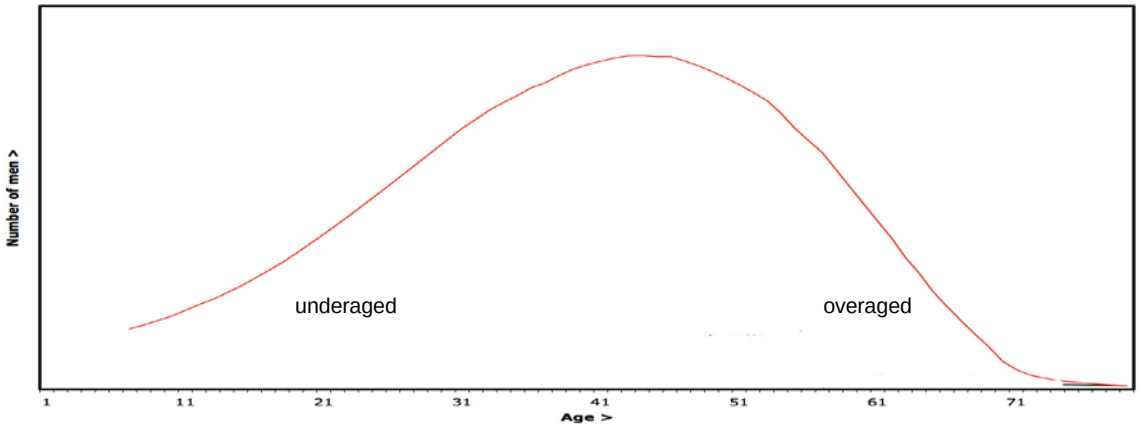

Figure 5: Typical age distribution within a generation-set.

Figure 5 shows a typical age distribution within a generation-set at that point in time when the mean age of the members is around 40 years. As they become older, the peak of this curve gradually shifts to the right, until the generation-set finally vanishes completely.

This spread of ages causes problems which Dyson-Hudson calls "built-in malfunctioning" (1966: 202). At any given time there are both "overaged" and "underaged" individuals. Only those who fall in the middle of the generation-set's demographic curve get their initiation (*asapan*) at the right time, while the overaged are already old men or even dead, and the underaged are far too young or even not yet born. Ateker deal with these problems by means of secondary rules like upgrading overaged men and downgrading underaged ones, thus cutting off the extreme ends of the curve. But the main part of the overlap between generation-sets remains and even increases over time, slowly but steadily.

Overlapping Generation-Sets and Succession

The handover of power from the leading generation-set to the next is always a critical moment in societies of the Ateker type where the moment of succession is not predetermined. This can also be expressed the other way around: it is not necessary to establish fixed time intervals within which succession[23] takes place, as the handover of power is regulated by the changing demographic balance between the two groups. In my opinion, the overlap in age between consecutive generation-sets, i.e. the existence of overaged and underaged individuals, is the dynamic force which ensures that the succession of power takes place at an appropriate moment. At the same time, the overlap in ages ensures a smooth transmission of the society's cultural heritage.[24]

Figure 6 below illustrates how demographic composition triggers such successions.

[23] A succession ceremony took place while Dyson-Hudson was studying the Karimojong in 1956, and he provides what is probably the best account of this rarely occurring Ateker ceremony (Dyson-Hudson 1963: 368ff.).
[24] Cf. Müller 1989: 98f.

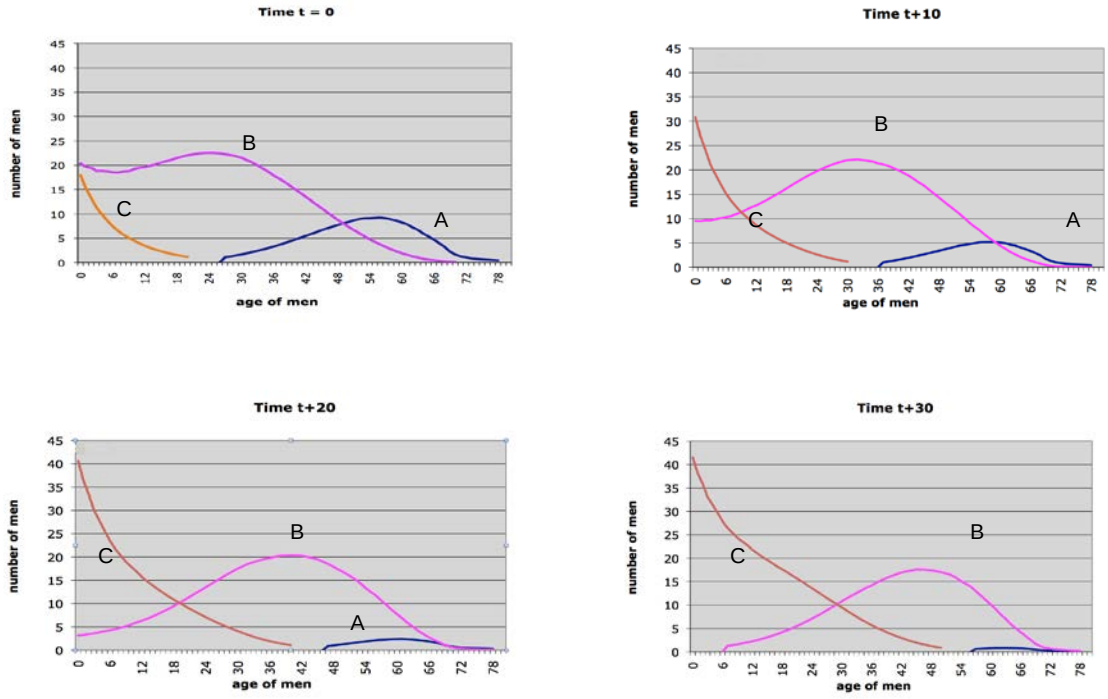

Figure 6: Demographic composition and Ateker succession processes (t = years)

- At time t=0 most elders are from generation-set A, which holds the senior position. Generation-set B is stronger in numbers, but its members are much younger.
- At time t+10 both generation-sets have become older. A have become much fewer, B has already more elders than A and is pressing for the handover of power.
- At time t+20 the situation has become critical for A, but the few remaining elders still hold the power.
- At time t+30 the very few remaining elders of A give in and hand over the power to their sons B. C, the sons of B, are now already rising, and the power struggle will soon start again, and, according to my computer simulations, the next succession should take place roughly after 50 years.
- At time t+50 (not shown here) the situation would be similar to t=0, with C being in the same position as B at t=0 and B being in the same position as A at t=0.

Thus we can see that Dyson-Hudson's "built-in malfunctioning" of course brings problems to the overaged and underaged, but at the same time it triggers the transmission of power between adjacent generation-sets. If, however, for whatever reason the overlap in age between the generation-sets increases beyond a certain limit, problems would arise, and it would become necessary to make changes to the generation-set system. But what could bring about such a dramatic increase of the age overlap between generation-sets?

Causes of Stability and of Change in the Ateker Generation-Set Systems

There is an automatic repair mechanism of the system when a group of coevals splits off and starts a new entity. The spread of age in this group is minimal, and the generation-set system is reset to

its initial stage. This happened with the Turkana, and also with the Toposa, the Nyangatom, and the Jiye, who all split off from the Jie and Dodoth and found new living areas in what is now Kenya, South Sudan, and the south-eastern part of Ethiopia.

One event, however, which can critically hamper the system and may nearly cause a breakdown is a severe and long-lasting drought. To understand this, it is necessary to look at the specific ways that drought affects the Ateker.

Drought is their biggest stress factor. As one Turkana put it:

> "Drought is always, even long years ago. The livestock dies of drought, even people die because of the drought. (...) During the drought we eat [wild fruits as] edapal, edung, ebei, elamac, ngitir [… and others]. That is the food of the Turkana. (...) A long drought comes, and all of the livestock dies. Even before our fathers this happened. When it rains, it rains heavily. (...) Long ago, some years, all livestock got finished. People went to Marille [Dasanec], they went up to Dongiro [Nyangatom]. They ate their sleeping hides, they ate the leather of the donkey carriers. Drought comes and passes." (Icum in Lopuseki, 2.7.1987, translated by Lucy Lokwale)[25]

Drought is part of the people's lives and they face it nearly every second year. Once every seven to ten years it is a disaster that threatens their continued existence. Usually, people manage to cope with it, but there are also centennial catastrophic droughts that overwhelm any coping strategy. It is these drought catastrophes that have an impact on the generation-set system, albeit in an indirect way.

During a catastrophic drought, most of the people's animals die. When there are no animals available, no animal bridewealth can be raised by young men – something that is essential for an orderly marriage among the Ateker. But young people do not stop making love and begetting children, and the non-existence of bridewealth animals might even encourage promiscuity – in any case, they would have no other option under such circumstances. This would continue for many years until the herds could be rebuilt and bridewealth could be given again, resulting in proper marriages. In the meantime, the children born out of wedlock would be deemed to be the offspring of the girls' fathers.

So far, so good – there are no orphans among the Ateker. But for the generation-set system this situation causes severe problems. Since young men usually have sex with girls of their own generation, a girl's father would typically be a generation above her partner. Thus, in the case of an unmarried couple, if the girl gives birth to a boy, he becomes a member of the generation-set below his social father (the girl's father) but not below his procreator; consequently the new-born boy's generation-set would be the same as that of his biological father. In such circumstances men procreate boys into their own generation-set, and thus the duration of this generation-set is extended considerably.

Especially in towns, children born out of wedlock are currently the rule rather than the exception. While generation-sets still exist in towns, the situation there is problematic for the generation-set system in much the same way that droughts are.

To demonstrate the increase of overlap between generation-sets, I have chosen an example from the Toposa generation-set system.[26]

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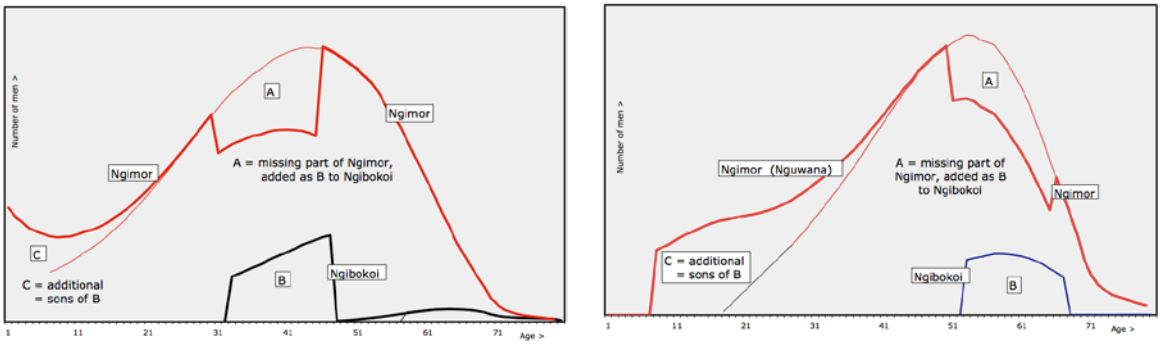
[25] For this citation and the following three paragraphs, cf. Müller-Dempf 2009: 12f.
[26] Cf. Müller-Dempf 2009.



$t = t_1$ $t = t_1 + 20$ years

Figure 7: The Ngibokoi dilemma

Ngibokoi were the fathers of Ngimor. After a disastrous drought the Ngibokoi generation-set produced sons into their own generation-set in the manner described above, (A) who under normal circumstances would have become Ngimor, became (B) and thus extended the lifetime of Ngibokoi. The right-hand graph in Figure 7 shows how after 20 years the regular Ngibokoi had died off, but the "illegitimate" (B) Ngibokoi still existed and prevented the Ngimor from taking over the power. Trouble arose, and the Toposa had to find a way of solving the problem. Their solution will be described below.

Decoupling of Marriageability from Generation-Set Membership

When generation-sets overlap too much in age, the repair mechanism of downgrading the overaged and upgrading the underaged does not work anymore and the situation becomes chaotic. Especially rule 4 in Figure 3, i.e. that men were not allowed to marry before their generation-set had collectively reached the level of seniority, created a dilemma. When over time the overlap in age between adjacent generation-sets had become too high, an increasing number of men of the generation-set of Juniors suffered from the mismatch between their age and their generation-set status. They became grown-up men but could not marry because they were not yet initiated. Their numbers increased, and they revolted.

The solution for this problem was to decouple the initiation of men from the succession in power. Men were individually[27] initiated, and after this they were allowed to marry.[28] Initiation was still done in groups, but not as an entire generation-set as had been the custom previously.

This seems like only a small change, but it changed the setup of the society dramatically. Factually, a new corporate group had come into existence: those men who have families but do not have senior status. Formerly there were only three groups: retired elders, married men who were also the elders, and their unmarried sons. Now there are four groups: retired elders, senior elders, junior (unmarried and married) men, and their unmarried sons. The basic system features have thus changed as follows (changed features are indicated in bold):

[27] According to seniority in their family.
[28] Thus, what Hazel (2000) has described for Cushitic generation-set systems, namely the regulation of access to women through the generation-set system, has ceased to be a function of the current Ateker generation-set systems.

1. Every man is member of the generation-set immediately following his father's.
2. There are always **at least four generation-sets** in formal existence: the retired elders, the Seniors, **the Juniors, and their sons.**
3. Senior status is handed over at **a succession ceremony**, when the Seniors retire and the former Juniors are collectively promoted to Seniors.
4. (Traditional) marriage is only allowed after **individual initiation**.
5. Generation-sets take their name alternatingly from a set of two names.
6. Each generation-set may in addition have a distinctive name of its own.
7. Generation-sets are sub-divided into age-sets.

Figure 8: Characteristic features of present Ateker generation-set systems

This is the basic model of all Ateker generation-set systems, with the exception of the Turkana – see below – up until the present.

The word *asapan* does not appear in Figure 8 anymore, for good reason. Toposa, Jiye, and Nyangatom have retained *asapan* as the name of their succession ceremony, while Karimojong, Jie, Dodoth, and Turkana have changed the meaning of *asapan*, which now designates the initiation of men. In both cases *asapan* does still mean initiation, but in the first case it is initiation of an entire generation-set, while in the second it is initiation of individuals.

Functions of Ateker Generation-Set Systems

A vast number of functions have been attributed to generation- and age-sets.[29] My view is that among the Ateker the basic *raison d'être* and main function of these sets is to separate rivalling groups of society and provide a set of rules of behaviour to organise and settle conflicts within society. In addition, every man has a precisely fixed rank within his society, that is, the rank of his generation-set, the rank of his age-set inside the generation-set, and finally his own position within his age-set. Thus, whenever and wherever men meet, their relative rank is always clear. Secondly, wherever a man goes, he is never lost or desolate. Irrespective of his clan affiliation (although this is also helpful), he can find assistance and support anywhere at any time. And thirdly, when common action is required, these groups are quickly mobilised.

Generation- and age-sets can only be seen when they are in action, for example at festivals, ceremonies and meetings, as well as when men meet under their shade tree close to the settlement, and especially at *ngakiriketa* (sing. *akiriket*[30]), when the initiated men gather to eat meat.[31]

Akiriket

One central component and perhaps the most important visible identity marker of Ateker culture is the *akiriket*, the meat feast of the initiated men.[32] Goats and sheep, or preferably oxen, are speared and roasted on these occasions, which always have a ceremonial character. Almost every ritual is centred around an *akiriket*, and certain procedures must always be observed. An *akiriket* is held by

[29] Cf. a comprehensive list in Müller 1989: 91ff.
[30] Toposa often say *nyakiriket*.
[31] For the non-initiated men and the women and children, meat is cooked at home.
[32] This chapter draws on Müller 1989: 116ff..

a generation-set in a particular area. In theory, all members of the generation-set present have the right to participate, even if they do not come from the area.

Every man is expected by his age-set to supply an ox for an *akiriket* on occasion. A rich man will have to do this more frequently than his poorer age-mates, and in this way transforms his wealth into prestige, as he comes to be seen as a generous man; a rich man who is a miser is not well respected. Honoured along with the donor of the ox is also the "killer" (*ekiaran*), the one who spears it. The latter "compensates" the former with a heifer, which initially remains in the donor's herd. After she has given birth to a female calf and after this calf has been weaned, she is returned to her original owner.

In the dry season, when milk and grain become scarce, *akiriket* is held more frequently. However, occasions are found for the event all year round – it forms the central part of almost every ceremony: initiation, celebration of marriages, making rain, compensation for an offence like adultery, cleansing in case of sickness or after an enemy has been killed, welcoming a visitor, and so on. Often, the junior generation-set offers an animal to the senior generation-set in order to receive their blessings. Every aspect of Ateker life, be it public or private, is connected with the generation-set system: *akiriket*, the central part of every ritual and ceremony, is a thoroughly generation-set affair.

An *akiriket* always takes place at some distance from the settlements, always under a tree and often close to a dry riverbed. Each generation-set has its own special spots where it performs *akiriket*. The participants sit down on the ground in a semi-circle in a prescribed order of seniority, which varies among the different Ateker groups, and fresh green branches are laid out before them.

The animal is killed and cut up with a spear. The stomach is removed and set aside – on certain occasions the participants may be smeared and cleansed with its aseptic content, *ngakujit*.[33] The intestines are removed and spread out over the carcass for reading the future. Then the carcass is cut up unskinned according to prescribed rules and roasted on the fire. There are conventional rules about which parts of the meat belong to the different sub-groups and individuals present, and the distribution of the meat is supervised by the most senior elders.

After the meat is eaten (portions may be reserved for the following day or taken home by the participants to their families) the ceremonial part of the *akiriket* starts. First, speeches are held. Ateker are great orators, and *akiriket* is one of the occasions on which they can display their rhetorical abilities. The speakers take turns talking, and each speech is complemented by *agatta*, prayers to the high god Akuj[34]: "May He bless the giver of the ox, the killer of the ox, their families, may they become rich, may they have many cattle, may they have many children, may there be peace, may there be rain, may there be grain (...)", and each sentence is accentuated by the chorus of all men present, who join in a sonorous repetition of its last words.

An *akiriket* thus presents an opportunity for a man to increase his prestige and regard. He may do so by providing or killing the ox, or he may distinguish himself by his brilliant intellect and rhetorical skills and qualify himself to be a "speaker" for his group at other official occasions.

Each *akiriket* displays the ranks and the social order within this society. As long as the sitting order in the *akiriket* is governed by each participant's relative order in the generation- and age-set system, everybody has to have a good knowledge of how the different groups are composed and ranked. If the sitting order is governed by other categories, as is the case among the Jie and Dodoth,

[33] Interestingly enough, the word *ngakujit* is related to the name of the High God Akuj.
[34] In Toposa: Nyakuj.

we would expect this knowledge to be less important. We shall investigate this when we compare the different systems.

The Present State of Ateker Generation-Set Systems

During my research since 2005 I noted a remarkable rise of a certain "Ateker nationalism", especially among the Ateker intellectuals. Consequently, generation-set systems are seen as a part of Ateker cultural heritage, and in their statements people indicate that they see the traditional initiation into a generation-set as a pre-requisite for being a "proper" Karimojong, Turkana, Toposa etc. man. In town, men generally know their generation-set affiliation, even if they are not yet initiated.

Age-sets, by contrast, are not part of town life and instead connected to the countryside and herding activities. Thus, one finds them in the countryside but not in towns anymore.

The present political situation in Uganda is not beneficial to the existence and operation of generation-set systems. The government discourages pastoralism, is pursuing a settlement policy, and has banned civilians from possessing arms. Where this disarmament campaign was "successful", the generation-set system diminished in importance after people lost almost all of their animals because they could no longer defend them against raiders, who immediately showed up and drove them away.[35] Without animals they cannot perform *akiriket* anymore. *Ngakiriketa*, however, are the prime manifestations of the generation-set system. All ceremonies, marriages, etc. are based on *akiriket*. It is remarkable, however, that young men employed in the modern sector and even Catholic priests are still eager to have their *asapan* initiation in order to be socially accepted. Their knowledge of the system is rather limited, however.

In Kenya, South Sudan, and Ethiopia, state intervention has not been as destructive to generation-set systems. But in all Ateker groups the rhythm of the generation-set system has gotten out of step. For reasons explained above, the age spread and the overlap in the age of generation-set members have dramatically increased, and thus the "impulse generator" that drives it does not work properly anymore. Traditionally, the impulses were the succession ceremonies that occurred when a senior generation-set on the verge of dying out handed over their power to their sons. Under "normal" conditions, this should happen around every 50 years.[36] But as the time span over which a particular generation-set still has living members has increased, the succession is delayed, and now it is more than 15 years overdue everywhere. The affected men who are not allowed to the senior generation-set position, however, are not much bothered about it as it does not affect their daily life. Being in the generation-set of Seniors nowadays has mostly only ritual relevance. The Juniors grumble but do not really press for the succession.

Below I have sketched the layout of the generation-set systems among the different Ateker groups, as compiled from my own research data. There are some information gaps on Karimojong, Jie, and Dodoth, as access to their rural areas was limited for political reasons.

Each man is simultaneously member of an initiation-group, an age-set, possibly also an age-subset, and a generation-set. Names of these groups are used interchangeably and all groupings also have different nicknames. Predictably, when an age-set list is asked for, the names provided are

[35] Cf. Knighton (2003).
[36] In Müller (1989) I have calculated the demographic generational distance for the Ateker at 52 years. This goes in line with the findings of Spencer (1978: 146), who has put it as between 50 and 55 years.

always a mix of all sorts of different groupings, and there are no generic terms to rectify this confusion during data collection. In addition, group names are subject to local variation. Thus, there can never be a definitive correct generation- and age-set list for a given Ateker group. Any list can only be an approximation. The situation regarding generation-sets is much clearer, and therefore only generation-set lists are given below. Complete lists with age-sets can be obtained from the author.

It is also important to note that there are often local varieties not only of generation- and age-set names but also of the system as such.

Karimojong

Like many of the terms designating "tribes", the term Karimojong also has certain own problems. There are the "Karimojong proper", i.e. the Bokora, Pian, and Matheniko (who, however, tend to include the Dodoth into their group as being part of the Matheniko).[37] They would exclude the Jie, whom they consider enemies. Internally, Bokora, Pian, and Matheniko can be quite hostile with each other and would insist that they are different. Towards the outside world, however, they would argue they are one, and, indeed, as an expression of their unity, they share common generation- and age-sets.[38]

The Karimojong generation-set system[39] is relatively stable, because when a generation-set is promoted to the position of authority and is allowed to initiate their own sons, they end initiation within their own ranks. Those remaining of their generation, i.e. the "underaged", are demoted to the next generation-set, thus cutting off the "tail end" of this generation, the remaining young members, who are for the most part illegitimate sons and a nuisance to the system and those who follow them anyway.[40] Thus, the distortions caused by droughts and other catastrophes resulting in an increased number of underaged members are kept to an acceptable limit.[41]

Alternation/ Generation-set	Senior status	Translation (Those of …)	Status
…			defunct
Ngigetei	ca. 1885	Grant's gazelles	defunct
Ngimor	1956	Mountains	Seniors, few alive
Ngigetei		Grant's gazelles	Juniors, still initiating
Ngimor		Mountains	not yet initiating

Figure 9: Karimojong generation-sets

[37] The Toposa, who also refer to themselves as Kara, say they migrated from this area and the Karimojong are the "old Kara". Actually, the forefathers of the Toposa are more likely the Dodoth, and thus the term Karimojong was originally applied to the people of the Pian, Bokora, Matheniko, and Dodoth groups. It was the colonial administration that reserved the term Karimojong for Pian, Bokora, and Matheniko only. There is some sense in this choice, as these three groups share a common generation-and age-set system, while those of Dodoth and Jie are slightly different.

[38] The same segmentary principle applies to all Ateker groups, and I found it remarkably prominent among the Turkana in Kenya, the neighbours of the Karimojong.

[39] Dyson-Hudson first described the Karimojong generation-set system in 1963. Unfortunately some of his assumptions about the structure of the Karimojong system are erroneous, such as the time span for a single generation and the assumed 4 x 30 = 120-year cycle.

[40] There are certain temporary exceptions to this – see Dyson-Hudson 1963:391.

[41] Knighton (2005:157f.) even reports demotion by two generation-sets: "(...) he would become a member of the grandson's generation-set, who are considered as identical substitutes for their grandfathers". He also reports a mechanism for managing the case of overaged individuals: "If a man dies uninitiated, his sons may take their father's place in his generation-set (…) this is an obvious and fast-acting, self-righting factor of the overaging problem" (ibid.).

When Karimojong men sit in *akiriket*, they have to know their generation-set and their own position within it, as the sitting order is governed by seniority. In the half circle of the *akiriket*, the most senior men sit in the middle, and to the left and the right the other men follow according to seniority.[42]

On my last visit in Karamoja in 2010, most informants stated that the handing over of authority from the Ngimor to the Ngigetei was already overdue, as there were only a few Ngimor still alive who could hand over their authority. But there are also certain pre-conditions for the succession ceremony to take place. In particular, there has to be peace in the country, and I heard quite often that the outgoing generation-set would be reluctant to "hand over problems" to their successor generation-set. Problems are abundant: no rainfall for several years, raiding from the neighbours, and simultaneous disarmament campaigns of the government carried out in a brutal way by the army that leave the herders without protection against raiders, thus resulting in livestock loss. "Protected craals" under control of the army do not offer real protection, as the neighbouring Jie are not much impressed by the army protection and still steal the cattle. As mentioned already, the Uganda government discourages the Karimojong traditional pastoral lifestyle and is pursuing a settlement policy. However, if the Karimojong are denied the mobility of their herds, their survival is at risk, and thus it is understandable to hear the Ngimor saying that they cannot "hand over problems".[43] In 2016, no succession had taken place yet, and it seems to be quite unclear whether there will be such an event ever again.

Jie

According to Lamphear (1976) and Wilson (1970) and substantiated by my own field data, the Jie, although they speak the same language as the Karimojong, are not of the same origin and thus they are seen as enemies to this day. Both sides act accordingly, i.e. they raid each other. The difference is also reflected in the fact that they have separate generation- and age-set systems.

Alternation/ Generation-set	Senior Status	Translation (Those of …)	Status
…			defunct
Ngimor	c.1866*	Mountains	very few alive
Ngirisae/ Ngimugeto	c.1915*	Leopards/topis	Seniors, oldest members deceased older members initiated youngest members still initiating
Ngimor/ Ngitome	c.1962	Mountains/elephants	Juniors, older members initiated youngest members still initiating
Ngirisae		Leopards	not yet initiating

Figure 10: Jie generation-sets[44]

[42] Published information on the correct sitting order in a Karimojong *akiriket* is scanty; I was also not able to reliably determine more specific details.
[43] C.f. also Knighton 2005:135f.
[44] Asterisked dates are taken from Knighton 2005: 150f. The 1962 date is from my own field data.

Jie insist that a son must be a member of the generation-set following his father's. There is no downgrading of the underaged,[45] which leads to an increasing overlap in age between generation-sets. As a result, Jie accept parallel initiations of two consecutive generation-sets. Thus, it does not make much sense anymore to have succession ceremonies and they have consequently been abandoned[46] by the Jie, who, however, still celebrate the opening of a new generation-set. On this occasion the Jie do not close initiation into the senior generation-set as the Karimojong do. In consequence, there are members of four generation-sets living at any one time: the "grandfathers"[47] who still have the highest ritual authority, the Seniors who are running day-to-day affairs, the Juniors, and the sons of the Juniors. For a certain time span, both Seniors and Juniors initiate in parallel. Sons of Juniors have to wait for initiation until their generation-set is admitted to it.

By admitting parallel initiations of consecutive generation-sets, the Jie have softened the strict hierarchy between the generation-sets of Seniors and Juniors. This stabilises the system, but it creates a new problem. Hitherto, the Juniors had pushed the Seniors to hand over their power to them, and by doing this they had, without knowing it, ensured that the system did not get out of sync, because at each succession the whole system advanced by one step. It is necessary for this to happen at regular intervals as otherwise the system would lose its dynamic quality and ossify. In the Jie case the youngest generation of the uninitiated have become the ones who press for their access to the system and thus the official opening of a new generation-set, which will then be allowed to initiate their members.

The sitting order in the Jie *akiriket* is different from the Karimojong and resembles the order used by the Toposa, Jiye, and Dodoth. The most senior men sit at one end of the *akiriket* half circle, followed by the other men in order of their seniority. The most senior Ngimor sit at the right end, while Ngirisae start at the left end of the *akiriket*. Town men, however, insisted that the sitting order would be governed by territorial sections of those men present, which indicates that in towns generation-set membership is not as important as before.

Dodoth

Alternation/ Generation-set	Senior Status	Translation (Those of …)	Status
…			defunct
Ngibaanga	1861*	Giraffes	defunct
Ngitome	1899*	Elephants	defunct
Ngibaanga	1959*	Mountains/giraffes	Seniors, older members initiated youngest members still initiating
Ngitome		Elephants	Juniors, initiating
N.N.			not yet initiated

Figure 11: Dodoth generation-sets[48]

[45] In exceptional cases, the Jie also downgrade the very last men of a generation in order to prevent things from getting too much out of hand.
[46] Cf. Gulliver 1953: 157.
[47] My expression
[48] Asterisked dates are taken from Knighton 2005: 150f.

Data on the Dodoth generation- and age-set system are sparse, and during my brief research trip in 2010 I could not add much to it. The above list is made up from a list given to me in 2010 in Kaabong by Japhet Lokidi and from information from Knighton (2005: 152).

Apparently the Dodoth system is similar to that of the Jie, as both groups have parallel initiation of two consecutive generation-sets. As the Jie have initiated members of three generation-sets living at any one time, and the Dodoth have only two, they must have some additional means, i.e. secondary rules, to counteract the increasing age overlap between adjacent generation-sets.

I was told that the sitting order in *akiriket* is not governed by generation- and age-set seniority anymore, but by territorial sections, indicating that generation-sets have lost some of their significance. However, this information is from town areas, and as in the Jie case, matters may be different in rural areas which I was not able to access.

Turkana

The Turkana are a special case. At first glance[49] it seems that they do not have a generation-set system at all, but only a system of two moieties named Ngimor (mountains) and Ngirisae (leopards), which are sub-divided into age-sets. Upon closer inspection,[50] however, it becomes clear that they once had the same generation-set system as all the other Ateker. However, around 150 years ago, a centennial drought hit the area, which for the reasons laid out above – no dowry available, no legal marriages, resulting in increased births in one generation-set – brought the generation-set system into disorder. Two generation-sets, the Ngirisae, called Ngiputiro with their second name, and their sons the Ngimor had almost the same amount of elders, but only the Ngiputiro were in power, and the Ngimor felt disadvantaged. This resulted in trouble and violent conflicts. The Ngiputiro reacted to this, but they did not try to repair the system and stop the increase in the age overlap of generation-sets. Instead, they decided to share the power with the Ngimor and sit together in *akiriket*, the most senior men in the middle, the other men following in descending seniority, with the Ngiputiro/Ngirisae to the right and the Ngimor to the left.[51]

Alternation/ Generation-set	Additional name			Status
Ngimor (1) (Mountains)	Ngipalajam[52]	(Who started everything)		defunct
Ngirisae (1) (Leopards)	Nginya	(Yellow grass)		defunct
Ngimor (2)	Ngipyei	(Wild dogs)		defunct
Ngirisae (2)	Ngiputiro	(Warthogs)		defunct
Ngimor (3)	Ngimampolea	(No clan marks)	in south Turkana	defunct
	Ngisali	(Those who stopped (akiriket))	in north Turkana	
Ngirisae (3)	---			alive
Ngimor (4)	---			alive
Ngirisae (4)	---			alive
Ngimor (5)	---			alive

Figure 12: Turkana generation-sets

[49] Cf. Gulliver 1955, 1958.
[50] Cf. Müller 1989.
[51] Cf. Müller 1989: 139.
[52] This is a name given *ex post*. The original name is forgotten.

This had significant consequences. As the age overlap between generation-sets was not controlled and more droughts affected the system, at some stage there was an age overlap not only between consecutive generation-sets but also between consecutive alternations, like Ngirisae (3) and (4) or Ngimor (4) and (5). Additional names for generation-sets were not used any more, and men were confused about which Ngirisae or Ngimor they belonged to, i.e. whether they were the "grandfather" or the "grandson" generation-set. Factually, a moiety system developed with Ngimor on the one side and Ngirisae on the other. Boys of Ngimor and Ngirisae were initiated separately, but even this distinction is dwindling away today, as there is a trend towards initiating boys of both alternations together.

The Turkana generation-set system has turned into a moiety system. Sons of Ngimor are Ngirisae and vice versa. Seniority is no longer attached to generation-set affiliation; it has become only a matter of age (cf. Gulliver 1958; Müller 1989).

With this change the Turkana eliminated the succession troubles and all other intricacies connected to the generation-set system when it gets out of sync as a result of droughts, large-scale raids, and other calamities. For example, when the British seized hundreds of thousands of cattle from the Turkana in 1918 in what is known as the Turkana Patrol, this could not affect their organisational system anymore.

Toposa

The Toposa had the same problem as the Turkana. The drought that affected the Turkana also hit the Toposa,[53] with equally fatal consequences for the generation-set system. Figure 13 below (which is an extract of the above Figure 7) shows what happened. Instead of producing Ngimor (A), the Ngibokoi had produced more "illegitimate" Ngibokoi (B). Trouble arose between (B) and the Ngimor of the same age who normally should have become the Seniors in the meantime but were blocked by these Ngibokoi latecomers. There was also a struggle between the older "true" Ngimor and the younger Ngimor (C) who were the sons of the (B) Ngibokoi. The older Ngimor could not really fight the Ngibokoi, who were their classificatory fathers, but they fought their younger "brothers".

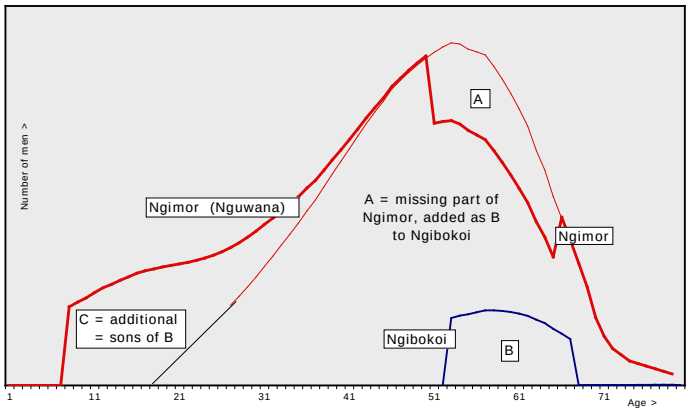


Figure 13: Conflict constellation between Ngibokoi, older Ngimor, and younger Ngimor

[53] Cf. Müller-Dempf 2009 for an exhaustive description.

The situation became chaotic, but the Ngibokoi did not take any action to resolve it like the Turkana did. Finally the younger Ngimor broke away and decided to have their own generation-set name Nguwana, which was tolerated by the Ngibokoi.

By this the Toposa now had created two lines of generation-sets as shown below.

Alternation		**Generation-set**		
		…		
Ngimor (Mountains)		**Ngitukoi** (Zebras) defunct		
Ngirisae (Leopards)		**Ngibokoi** (Tortoises) defunct		
Ngimor		**Ngimor** defunct		**Nguwana** (Natural horns) defunct
Ngirisae		**Ngidongo** (Castrating) Seniors		**Ngikaleso** (Ostrichs) Seniors *asapan* 1930[54]
Ngimor		**Ngimor** Juniors		**Ngingoletyang** (Hartebeests) Juniors
Ngirisae		**Ngitaamo** (Guinea Fowls)		**Ngikurukwa** (Crows)
Ngimor		**N.N.**		**N.N.**

Figure 14: Toposa generation-sets

There are also sons of Ngitaamo and Ngikurukwa, but in small numbers only, as they have not yet really emerged in the public, and my informants had different views on whether they would be re-united into one generation-set or the division of generations should be maintained. Thus, the process may not be finished yet.

As among the other Ateker, names of generation-sets follow a pattern of alternation, here Ngimor and Ngirisae, but in most cases the distinctive second names have taken over. In *akiriket* the most senior members of each generation-set present sit at the far ends of the half-circle (Ngimor to the right and Ngirisae to the left), with the other men following in their order of seniority.

As laid out, the bifurcation of the Toposa generation-set system is not yet completely established. People perceive it this way, but in practical terms there is often only one generation-set line present in many places.

Generation-set lines are a common phenomenon in East Africa, for example among the Konso[55] (two generation-set lines), the Dasanec[56] (three generation-set lines), and the Oromo (Gada, five generation-set lines),[57] but it is not known how they developed. In the case of the Toposa, however, the genesis of this phenomenon is known, and it could be conjectured that among the other groups they developed in a similar way, as a response to internal stress in each society.

Nyangatom and Jiye

I have no in-depth information from the Nyangatom and the Jiye, but from what Tornay (1979, 1987) and Verswijver (2015) have published and from the information that I do have, it can be

[54] Cf. King 1937: 72.
[55] Cf. Hallpike 1972.
[56] Cf. Almagor 1978a, b.
[57] Cf. Legesse 1973; Spencer 1978.

inferred that both groups operate generation-set systems which closely resemble that of their larger neighbour the Toposa, although without the bifurcation into generation-set lines.

As among the other Ateker, generation-sets are named alternatingly, here Ngimor and Ngirisae, but in most cases the distinctive second names have taken over. The sitting order in *akiriket* is the same as among the Toposa.

The Jiye generation-set system is very close to that of the Toposa.[58] They also split one generation-set into two, Ngimor and Nguwana, but apparently this lasted only for one generation-set, as the next one was re-united again.

Alternation		**Generation-set**		
		...		
Ngimor (Mountains)		**Ngitukoi**	(Zebras)	defunct
Ngirisae (Leopards)		**Ngibokoi**	(Tortoises)	defunct
Ngimor		**Ngimor** defunct	**Nguwana**	(Natural horns) defunct
Ngirisae		**Ngikaleso / Ngimerikopir**	(Ostrichs) (Guinea-fowls)	Seniors
Ngimor		**Ngingoletyang**	(Hartebeests)	Juniors
Ngirisae		**Ngitaamo**	(Guinea Fowls)	
Ngimor		**N.N.**		

Figure 15: Jiye generation-sets

The Nyangatom generation-sets also greatly resemble the Toposa generation-set system but without the Toposa bifurcation.[59]

Alternation		**Generation-set**		
		…		
Ngimor (Mountains)		**Ngitukoi**	(Zebras)	defunct
Ngirisae (Leopards)		**Ngibokoi**	(Tortoises)	defunct
Ngimor		**Ngimor / Ngitome**	(Mountains) **(**Elephants)	defunct
Ngirisae		**Ngikaleso / Ngimerikopir**	(Ostrichs) (Guinea-fowls)	Seniors
Ngimor		**Ngingoletyang / Nginyangalim**	(Hartebeests) (Antelopes)	Juniors
Ngirisae		**Ngikosowa**	(Buffaloes)	
Ngimor		**N.N.**		

Figure 16: Nyangatom generation-sets

[58] Cf. Verswijver 2015: 92ff.
[59] Cf. Tornay 1981: 165.

While Karimojong, Jie, Dodoth and Turkana have changed the meaning of *asapan*, which has come to refer to individual initiations, the Toposa, the Jiye, and the Nyangatom have retained *asapan* for the collective promotion of a generation-set to senior status.

The Nyangatom *asapan* has a special feature. The retiring generation-set has to provide the "*asapan* man". This man has to perform certain duties and finally goes to the wilderness, loses his mind, and dies (Tornay 1998: 106). In addition to extended generation-set durations, this is apparently one of the obstacles for *asapan* under present-day conditions, as such a custom no longer seems to meet the standards of today.

Conclusion

Much confusion has beset the study of generation-set systems, and one major shortcoming is that generation-set systems are often seen as distorted age-set systems.[60] At least for the Ateker, however, generation is the first criterion, followed by age. Clans and lineages play roles which for reasons of stringency cannot be described here, but they are secondary to the generation-set system, although current developments could change this situation.

Generation-set systems among the Ateker have developed as a response to their pastoral way of life and use domestic relations as a blueprint: enmity between adjacent generations and amity between alternating generations gave rise to generation-sets with an alternating aspect, and rivalry and opposition between older and younger brothers brought about age-sets. The internal demographic dynamics, aggravated by external factors like drought, make it necessary to create secondary rules and make changes to the system, so that all current Ateker generation-set systems, although stemming from the same origin, now have somewhat different layouts. The major change in the system and the pre-condition for its survival was that at a certain stage a man's marital status was de-coupled from his generation-set status, i.e. the generation-set system no longer regulated men's access to brides and having a family.

One major factor that has affected Ateker societies is the increasing divide between the agro-pastoral people in the countryside and those living in modern town-like settlements. It seems that in the countryside the generation- and age-sets are still functional, but that in the modern individualistic setup of towns the age-sets are disappearing. The situation is especially severe in Uganda, where the cultural autonomy of the Ateker is under heavy pressure. One thing, however, can be predicted based on statements by Turkana, Karimojong, and Jie in the towns: Even in the non-pastoral areas of the Ateker, *asapan* (the Ateker word for initiation) will survive and thus membership in a generation-set will also continue to be relevant. In addition, the connection of the town people to the rural areas will continue to exist, as initiation has ideally to be received from the ritual elders, and they rarely live in towns. Age-sets would not be operational in towns and will likely cease to exist there, but generation-sets would survive, maybe in the long run only as alternations. The Turkana have already arrived at this point.

[60] "(...) with the additional constraint that the set joined by the son is determined by the set joined by the father (...)" (Kertzer 1978: 372). Cf. Also Stewart 1977: 42 ff.

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