

# Property and Age Organisation among an East African Pastoralist Group<sup>1</sup>

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ABSTRACT: Studies of age systems in eastern Africa have focused mainly on the rules that govern recruitment, with an emphasis on the way in which political offices and authority are held and the non-military and non-political nature of age systems. While the studies have greatly contributed to our understanding of age organisations in the region they do not deal with the issue of property explicitly and how it forms a major focus for the activities of the age organisations. In fact where mention is made, property is considered to be a matter linked to families and hence pertaining to the domain of kinship.

Discussing a range of cases in which property is handled and dealt with by leaders of a generation/age set and Hor and non-Hor residents of Hor country, this paper concludes that ownership, use and control of resources, is not exclusively a matter for kinship groups but also a central concern of the age organisation. Although there appears to be some ambiguity that emerges from the balanced emphasis Hor put on kinship and age categories and their complementarity in economic, religious and legal matters, data on the Hor show a bias towards age organisation in matters related to (the use of) crucial resources.

The study focuses on the Hor (Arbore), a pastoral people of Southwest Ethiopia.

KEY-WORDS: Hor, Property, age-organisation, kinship, Pastoralism.

In a comment Almagor and Baxter made nearly three decades ago in the introduction to their book *Age, Generation and Time* regarding work on age-systems, they said:

Much of the work on age systems has concentrated on elucidating the rules which regulate the recruitment to sets and the movement of sets within the system, with particular attention to the way in which political offices and

....

authority are vested in sets in acephalous societies. This has frequently led to an emphasis in analysis (a) on age-systems as political organizations, (b) on historical explanations for the current organizational forms which sets take, on age-systems as systems of rules. (Baxter & Almagor, 1978: 2)

A recent work on age-systems in North East Africa focuses among other things “on the antagonistic relation between various social actors -seniors and juniors, men and women, territorial units within an ethnic group, and ethnic groups” (Kurimoto & Simonse, 1998: 3). While explaining antagonism between various social groups this work does not attempt to show whether property or property rights or the desire for power to control property are factors in explaining antagonism between age categories.

A much earlier work on the Turkana and Jie (Gulliver, 1966: 11) on the other hand, while elaborating the relation between property, kin groups and stock-associates, does not suggest that there is any link between property and age/generation sets among these groups and mentions that the age-set organisation of the Jie, for example, has little connection with either kinship or property rights.

While it is true on the whole, that work on age-systems in North East Africa has made a significant contribution to our understanding of age-systems, not much has been published on the link between age organisation and property. However in their work mentioned earlier, Baxter and Almagor elaborating on some features of age/generation sets state that:

a striking feature of sets is that, though they may influence the use of resources and flow of labour, they *neither own nor control* stock nor any other means of material production. They do not even have the vestigial or residual rights sometimes said to reside ultimately in clans or lineages. At the most sets, as sets, only own things which economically are trivia, such as smoking pipes or songs or drums and the rights in club houses or meeting places. (Baxter & Almagor, 1978: 9)<sup>2</sup>

And further on they add: “Rights of ownership in, and access to, cultivable land vary but we can think of no instance in which they are vested in sets” (Baxter & Almagor, 1978: 9).

This position has been echoed by other authors<sup>3</sup>. I certainly do not wish to suggest that those people who have argued that ownership of property among pastoral groups is determined by kinship ties are wrong, but rather that there exists a complementary relationship between age organisation and kin organisation in so far as ownership and control of property is concerned<sup>4</sup>. While it may be the case that the ownership of property is organised along kinship lines among the peoples their studies cover, it certainly is not the case among the Hor of Southwest Ethiopia on whom the present paper focuses<sup>5</sup>.

Based on ethnographic data collected among the Hor (Arbore), a pastoral people of Southwest Ethiopia, numbering some 4,000, I argue that age sets/generation sets in power who are considered to be socially legitimate fathers, are not only considered “owners” of the country, of land and of cattle but have full control over these resources. The idea of fatherhood in both kinship and age terms involves ownership or the power to appropriate<sup>6</sup>. Thus generation sets do appropriate and control resources and this tightens the link between property and age/generation sets.

## **The Hor**

The Hor, also known in the literature as Arbore (Gebre, 1995; Höhnel, 1894; Jensen, 1959; Smith, 1969; Strecker, 1979; Wellby, 1901) occupy the northern edge of Lake Stephanie. They live in four autonomous villages that have independent age organisations, assembly places, separate sorghum plots and grazing pastures. For reasons of security and for various other reasons, the pastures are used jointly by pairs of villages. The Limo River that flows north to south across Hor country separates the northern Hor village of Gandaraba, the administrative village known as Tabya and the Tsamako village of Kuile which is located in Hor country, from the other three major Hor settlements of Egude, Murale and Kulama (Illustration one).

The Hor territory covers the area from Qacha Guleza in the north, along the dry surface of the lake to the Ethio-Kenyan border in the south. Their territory also covers all the plains between the foot both of the Hamar and Boran mountains in the west and east which the Hor name Wando. Their territory does not cover any of the mountainous terrain. The Limo River, the river that originates from the mountains of Gamo and Maale gives life to the otherwise arid environment of the Hor. The Hor, the Tsamako, the Hamar of Wongabaino and Assile .and the Karmet (or Wata Wando as they are known elsewhere) benefit from the floods of the Limo River for growing sorghum and for their stock<sup>7</sup>.

In order of seniority the southern settlement, Egude ranks first, followed by Murale, Kulama and Gandaraba. All major rituals such as the transfer of power from one generation to the next, weddings or the initiation of agricultural work are performed in order of this seniority.

The Hor put balanced emphasis on both age and kinship in most matters. In religious affairs and in particular in matters related to the power to enable things to happen and to prevent things from happening (this relates to things such as crop, human and animal fertility, to rain making or enabling victory in warfare) there appears to be a bias towards kinship but even here age has priority. Age and kinship are complementary in the reproduction of culture and society of the Hor and of their neighbours who depend on them for certain aspects of their own cultural and social reproduction.

The Hor kinship system is based on exogamous clans each of which is headed by a chief. These chiefs are fathers of their respective clans, *ijya biret*. The two most senior clans of the bracelet-wearing group form the leadership of the Hor. Fatherhood in Hor country implies the creative power of a group of initiated male members of a village, a household or of all Hor. It furthermore means being a socially accepted father of children and owner of property (in this case the animals in the cattle enclosure or in the cattle camp). Fatherhood holds the same meaning in kinship and age terms. A woman who is asked to name her

father will instantly respond with her husband's name implying his claim to "ownership" of her because she is brought to marriage by a payment of cattle that belongs to the users of the cattle enclosure which is considered to be the unit of ownership for cattle. Since it is believed that a woman is bought with the "cattle of the father", the husband is considered her "owner". There is no divorce in Hor.

In order for the later part of my paper to be clear I here explain the Hor age organisation in brief (Illustration three)<sup>8</sup>. Hor have a generation/age set system. Each generation set is named during the succession to power. Each generation takes a name from a list of some seven names<sup>9</sup>. A generation set is composed of four named age sets. Every generation set uses these four identical names for its age sets. In order of seniority the age sets of the generation in power now – the Melbassa generation set – are Obbarsha, Gidd'ama, Marole and Wattagna. The retired generation sets Offura and Otgaltcha too had the same number of age sets but the first three age sets belonging to Offura (the generation in power from 1910-1951) have died out though a few women of Wattagna age set remain. The number of Otgaltcha senior age sets (in power from 1951-1991) has dwindled considerably and only a few (mainly female) aged members of Obbarsha and Gidd'ama age sets survive, while there are a good number of both males and females of Marole and Wattagna. The yet uninitiated and unnamed group, currently known as *Morqo* or *Lach'anga*, has not been formed as a generation set yet. It has so far initiated only one age set, Obbarsha in 1995. It needs to formally initiate three more age sets in the coming thirty-five to forty years before it qualifies to succeed the current generation in power as a generation set<sup>10</sup>. A man, and his wife through him, belong to one of four named age sets of a named generation set. Once organised into an age set and initiated into a generation, members stay in it for the rest of their lives. They do not move from one grade to the other, as is the case in the Boran Gada. In Hor a generation set is either expecting to be initiated, is initiated and in power or has retired from power. I now briefly explain Hor clan organisation<sup>11</sup>.

A clan in Hor is considered either bracelet wearing and hence mystically powerful or non-bracelet wearing and dependent on the former for commanding mystical power over others and over situations. The senior and junior Hor chiefs, Qawots, of the whole of Hor have complementary roles as leaders of the land and people. They belong to the clans Garle (Boran equivalent is Oditu) and Olmoque (Boran equivalent is Karrayou) who are both bracelet wearing and considered superior in their ability to command mystical power. Each village has a hereditary chief. He leads in matters relating to the religious life of the village which includes prayers, blessings, making sacrifices, initiating agriculture, cursing and protecting the people, their cattle and warriors from enemy groups. For this reason he is considered the father of the village. In this regard he is a father both to his clan and to the people of the village in which he is Qawot. As will be mentioned later, the age organisation provides him with essential ritual items and the proper ritual context in which his power may be effective<sup>12</sup>. Heads of other clans remain leaders of their respective clans but also remain subject to the authority of the village chief as well as the leadership of the generation in power. While each village chief has autonomy over matters in his village and works in complementarity with an autonomous generation set of the same village, both owe allegiance to the senior and junior Qawots of the villages of Kulama (head of the Garle clan) and Gandaraba (head of the Olmoque clan). These two are acknowledged as the heads of the most powerful clans and are considered to be the senior and junior Qawots of all Hor people. Their power has to do mainly with rain making, blessing and cursing, securing victory in warfare, initiating agriculture, initiating peace, and above all making prayers (“Calling Waq”)<sup>13</sup>. Their power extends both to the Hor as a group as well as to their neighbours who acknowledge the authority of the Qawots and express it with gifts of prescribed ritual items. The relation between the senior and junior Qawots is considered to be that of husband and wife and is complementary.

The generation set currently in power in Hor country is Melbasa<sup>14</sup>. As mentioned earlier the Hor age system encompasses a named generation set. Each generation organises four named age sets (*jim*) that, upon the most junior set's organisation into a generation set, take power from a retiring generation set. In one ritual I observed, Obbarsha, the first senior age set was being organised into an age set in the village of Gandaraba in 1995. (This was the first age set to be organised in Gandaraba after the Melbasa generation set came to power during the two-phase rituals that took place in 1991 and 1993. The first phase of the succession ritual of the generation set, held in 1991 and known as *nger*, enabled the Melbasa generation set to be warriors while the second made them socially accepted fathers able to marry off their children and to own property). The idiom for expressing this succession was "purchasing a cattle enclosure" that belonged to the Kernat, senior leader of the age organisation who is considered to be the wife of the Qawot of the village (note the husband-wife relationship between kinship and age)<sup>15</sup>.

The medium of purchase was a token amount of tobacco in a rag. In the enclosure bought for this token of tobacco from the leader of the generation set, the *Kernat*, initiates slaughter a goat, anoint their foreheads with the blood and dance for many hours. Through the purchase and the accompanying slaughter and dance they become members of a new age set and are entitled to use the eastern section of the assembly place. This section will be the place where they sit to discuss major issues of concern until it is time for their generation to take full control of power, at which time they will also have taken full control of the central section of the assembly place, *nab*.

The process of owning the whole country, its sorghum plots, pastures, waters of ponds and of the Limo River, of cattle and women and of becoming socially accepted fathers is lengthy. It involves compliance with decisions made by leaders of the generation in power, obedience to seniors, and fitting well into the senior-junior and husband-wife

hierarchical relations that prevail in the age organisation. In addition, a continuous supply of cattle, livestock, tobacco, unhusked coffee and honey wine by uninitiated age sets to the generation of parents makes the transfer of power smoother. The idiom used to express the transfer is purchase (*bit*) of the privilege to be initiated. The items listed above are supplied from the date of initiation of the first age set until the time when the fourth most junior age set is organised. This takes between thirty-seven and forty years. The provision of goods reaches its climax after a request for transferring power has been made by the four age sets aspiring to succeed the generation set in power. This “expense” is acknowledged as the cost of accessing ritual knowledge handed down from the fathers who thereby surrender power. The leadership of the generation in power deliberately delays responding positively to the demand of the initiates. The desire for initiation is explained as one of legitimation of fatherhood, which in Hor terms means the ability to arrange marriage for sexually mature offspring. Legitimate fatherhood, legitimised by initiation into the age set is key to setting up house, to owning property and to entering into a range of economic relationships, including the exchange of wives and cattle. It is also key to owning separate cattle enclosures, a fireplace and above all to establishing bond friendship which opens the door to accessing crucial tools of production, ritual items and other gifts. “Fathers” are necessary for owning the greatest of property in Hor terms, the assembly place and the land (including village plots and pastures), cattle and stock, children and wives.

Thus the lengthy process of acquiring fatherhood requires obedience to the generation in power and ritual legitimation by the village Qawot (determined along kinship lines). It is then that a new generation takes control of the assembly place. The control of the assembly place by a generation set implies that the generation set’s leadership (not the clan heads or heads of family) of each village distributes land inundated by floods to members of each village and assigns specific pastures and ponds to herders for a specific duration.



Agriculture and herding are the responsibilities of *Mura* and *Jald'aba* leaders of the age organisation<sup>16</sup>. The *Kernat* mentioned earlier and both *Mura* and *Jal'daba* leaders are legitimised during the initiation ritual but they exercise authority from earlier on (even before they are organised into age sets) which takes place roughly between the ages seventeen and twenty five. *Mura* leaders of the generation set are responsible for the distribution of land and assign agricultural tasks which include work such as digging irrigation canals, clearing distributed land and working according to set schedules (such as hoeing, planting, thinning, building wooden towers for bird scaring, bird scaring and harvest). *Jald'aba* leaders of the age organisation are in charge of the well-being of cattle and livestock in each household (*wori*), in cattle camps and herding areas. They decide on whose cattle should be sold to purchase sacrificial necessities such as coffee and honey and when someone must pay a fine. Decisions to make camps and arrangements with outsiders on the mutual use of pastures and waters are their responsibility. Furthermore, they provide the material context for rituals performed by Qawots for the well-being of the village and of Hor country. Jointly with *Mura* leaders they deal with other groups on behalf of their village and that of Hor in general. The Qawot, who is at the peak of the kinship hierarchy legitimises their activities and does not usually object to their decisions. Although respected for the effectiveness of her/his prayers, blessing, fertility-giving powers and clan specific powers, the Qawot is at the same time feared for her/his capacity to deny these and for her/his power to curse (*fal*). She/he mediates between man and Waq and is responsible for the victory of his/her people against enemies. She/he is also responsible for the victory and well-being of friendly neighbouring groups in wars against their enemies. This relation with outsider mentioned earlier is organised by the leaders of the generation set. This balanced emphasis on both the age and the clan system is the foundation of Hor society. Although there is occasional tension between the generation set and the clan (represented by the Qawot) at times expressed

in threats of curses, there is nothing equalling the tension reported to exist between the king and the *monyomiji* in Simonse's *Kings of Disaster* (Simonse, 1992). In practice, the power of the generation set extends to controlling the activities of the Qawot. On more than two occasions I witnessed the Qawot of Gandaraba seek permission from the generation set to visit Konso and Boran in 1995. On both occasions he asked leaders of the generation set to give him leave and to pray for him, call Waq", before his departure. This shows the comparable power of both age and kinship-based leadership in religious matters.

A third group of leaders of the age organisation, the D'anto floggers enforce the decisions of the age organisation. They enforce flogging and fine people with demands for cattle and money<sup>17</sup>.

### Property/Meh<sup>18</sup>

Cattle, small livestock, "cattle gates"<sup>19</sup> and land are considered the main forms of property. (Illustration four) Rain, which causes the banks of the Limo River to flood and helps grass to grow for cattle and sorghum, is considered to be the result of the powers of Hor Qawots. This involves their effectiveness in the "Calling of Waq" prayer which is further mediated by the sacrifice of small stock organised by the age organisation<sup>20</sup>. According to the Hor, the Limo water is fattened by a sheep's tail buried annually in the riverbed by the Qawot. This act, they say "fattens" (fertilizes) sorghum and the pastures when the Limo floods its banks. Things that can be exchanged for cattle or can be brought as trophy from raids are also considered as property. This includes rifles, spears, ammunition, beads, cowrie belts of mothers, milk pots, cowbells, coffeepots and seats (*keara guda*). In Hor ideas the main form of property, land, belongs to the fathers of the land and they as initiated fathers of the age organisation have the power to give it to Hor and to outsiders for agricultural and herding use. Other forms of property of essentially religious/ritual economic significance including cattle and small livestock

are brought by other groups through the network of friendship in exchange for items the Hor give to them or simply as gifts. For the Hor the organisation of bond friendship is as important in accessing essential items such as tools, coffee or animals, as kinship networks are.

I do not in this paper deal with incorporeal property but mention should be made of the fact that knowledge of interpreting animal entrails is highly valued and the practice widespread. It is used to forecast and to avert personal and communal misfortune. There are very few Hor and other outsiders who perform it both for individuals and for the Hor in general. These services are given without any restriction but the person receiving them is obliged to pay by providing the interpreter with honey wine during weddings or other similar events. The animal for individual consultation comes from the individual's own cattle enclosure while the one for Hor in general is arranged for by the age organisation. In the latter case the interpreter attends a meat meal with elders and is blessed for his services. Such service cannot be refused. Similarly blessings (or curses against others) sought by individuals or groups are not refused but are offered in exchange for prescribed gifts. Other crucial knowledge includes such skills as track finding and mystical knowledge cannot be refused if required for use by Hor and their non-Hor friends. In return such persons are given various rewards ranging from blessing to honey wine.

It is the relations various categories of people have to these forms of property and their power to dispose of property that I would like to explore at this stage. Cattle certainly is the property of a *wori* household which includes a father and mother and their married sons, together with their wives. This unit shares a cattle enclosure and the milk from the cattle. As such, the cattle enclosure is the basic social unit.

Cattle forms a major part of property and is used as the idiom for expressing the transaction of marriage as well as the transaction of ritual items, instruments of labour and items of warfare such as firearms. The "cattle of my father" is an expression that shows not only the entitlement of each Hor male person to milk and blood of animals in cattle camps but also an obligation to die protecting the cattle of the Hor against

an invading enemy. This is indicative of the rights various Hor have over cattle. Sometimes ownership of enclosures is equalled to ownership of cattle. Some *wori*, which do not have cattle, maintain their cattle enclosures and light the enclosure fire every evening before the homecoming of animals. It is a kind of taboo to say that one does not own animals. It is always hoped that animals will for some reason or another enter one's gates. Thus a daughter who is marrying or a son who joins a cattle-raiding group of young men are expected to bring animals. An enclosure is to be kept in good condition with a dung fire burning waiting for the cattle to come in; similar to the way a scented beehive is kept on a tree to attract bees.

Although it is said that *wori* own cattle and share the enclosure, it is the most senior male person in the *wori* who is believed to be the actual owner of cattle and other livestock. This does not however entitle the person to dispose of his cattle or stock as he pleases. In the case of an elderly father, his wife and their married sons sharing the same cattle enclosure, the cattle and stock are owned by the father. He earmarks the cows or small stock he gives to his sons and also assigns milk cows to family members and to himself. Under normal circumstances, each member of the *wori* has the right to milk from a particular cow assigned to him or her. Goat's milk is allotted in the same way to babies and children in the *wori*. When the father of the *wori* grows old, the eldest son takes control of the cattle and decides on who should care for herding and other activities related to herding. Upon death of the male head of family, the eldest son inherits all cattle except the ones earmarked for his younger brothers by the late father. Unmarried brothers and sisters depend on their elder brother for their livelihood, to be married and to be bought a Kalashnikov. On the other hand they contribute essential labour in herding cattle as well as small stock. This is an arduous task, which involves spending days in the scorching desert sun and risking possible attacks and death at the hands of enemy groups. Other near and distant kin have the right to ask for milk from a domestic

milk cow or for butter for anointing though not on a regular basis. When available and when requested, it is difficult to refuse butter for anointing the body whether the person requiring the butter is distant kin or non-kin. Equally, close kin or leaders of the age organisation requiring small stock for the purpose of reading entrails for divination cannot be refused. In a similar way, one is entitled to appeal to kin, affines and age mates for contributions of animals and or ritual items for the purpose of bridewealth. Kin and affines of a deceased person are obliged to contribute animals for the funerary ritual of the deceased, which is performed some four days after death. The meat is shared out between the mourners. Those who do not have cattle contribute small stock, which for this purpose count as cattle. Those who neither own cattle nor small stock may borrow them from kin or other clan members for such events<sup>21</sup>.

Other significant property involves sorghum which unlike cattle is owned by the individual married couples of the *wori*, in particular by husbands. In some instances young men preparing to marry may have their own sorghum which they use to exchange for honey, coffee, tobacco and handmade blankets which are essential for the wedding ritual. The piles of sorghum harvested from the fields are meticulously stacked to display the industriousness of the family and of its head in particular. In the village the barn attached to the home displays the same quality. These sorghum piles in the fields and the barns attract kin, bond friends and affines who need sorghum from the family for various reasons.

Like animals, sorghum is also exchangeable for heifers, goats, Kalashnikov bullets and other essential items. When in lean years animals are wiped out by disease and drought, people energetically resort to the production of sorghum. Bond friends from neighbouring groups such as the Hamar, Konso, Tsamako and Karmet also rely on their Hor counterparts for sorghum and give them essential ritual and subsistence items in return. Sorghum beer forms a ritual drink in the context of weddings. During weddings, leaders of the generation set in power in a village are given a big gourd of sorghum beer, coffee and

tobacco as acknowledgement of their power and fatherhood. The leaders then bring the cowhide for the consummation of marriage into the new house of the bride and groom and order all youth of the village to take part in the dance dedicated to the occasion. Sorghum beer is usually also given to a groom as a present for his wedding. It is part of the response he receives when he organises a honey wine drinking session prior to the wedding when he requests support for his undertaking. In the *dadi* drinking session (or coffee drinking session) which is organised by the would-be groom, each invited person promises the type of support he is ready to offer. Sorghum counts for as much as a cow, small stock, honey, or tobacco.

The labour for the production of sorghum, unlike that for cattle raising, relies on married or older people. At the initial stage of digging irrigation canals, clearing the bush, hoeing and planting, work groups mostly involve mature men and women. Labour then shifts to children who are assigned to the fields until bird scaring time. Adults come back to the fields at the height of bird scaring until the work in the fields comes to an end.

Just as sorghum is exchangeable for the most important form of Hor property, cattle and small stock and all other valuable items, so also are animals used for the purchase of sorghum from elsewhere (mainly D'asanetchland) and for organising *baila* labour<sup>22</sup>. During the clearing and hoeing the workers are provided with *parso* sorghum beer. This is of course only possible for people who own a large number of cattle and not every Hor can afford it.

On the day of the seed harvest any Hor or outsider seeking good sorghum seed is entitled to any heads of sorghum they wish to take. Thus from a plot that belonged to me, two Konso men and a Hamar woman cut three bunches of sorghum heads for seed<sup>23</sup>.

Once thrashing of the sorghum starts on a thrashing floor in the fields, women volunteer to help. If one accepts the offer, it is expected that one should give the woman who has offered her assistance at least two half gourds, (*karam*), of sorghum. People with no kin ties to the owner

of the sorghum can also receive sorghum in exchange for help offered in thrashing. Following the seed harvest each plot owner makes a contribution of yet another bunch of good sorghum head, which is handed by each plot owner to the person who previously initiated the agricultural season.

Hamar, Tsamako, Konso or other bond friends visiting at this time take away a donkey load or two and in some cases an additional human load as part of their share in the network of bond friendship. What is left of the sorghum is used for domestic purposes until the next harvest and if there is still some left it is exchanged for salt, coffee husk, for buying goats or for feeding family and village guests, for brewing *parso* for domestic use and, as mentioned earlier, as contributions to weddings of kin and non-kin.

This briefly is the picture of relations people in Hor entertain with regards to property such as cattle and sorghum. Exchanges of both cattle and sorghum take place within Hor and between Hor and outsiders. These relations revolve around networks of economic bonds that are governed by religious and legal terms. These provide the framework and guarantee protection and security for travelling traders and the goods they exchange. Both the generation set and religious institutions involving Hor Qawots and *Fund'o* are involved in this process and provide their services<sup>24</sup>. The greatest emphasis however is on the age organisation.

## **The Generation Set and Property**

My discussion of property and age must be understood against the background of the literature mentioned earlier which on the whole suggests that the age organisation does not own or control property. In the following I will demonstrate the range of situations and cases in which the age organisation is connected and is linked to property. It should be clear however that I am not arguing that *wori* and families and even individuals do not own property as the explanations on cattle

and sorghum and on how people are linked to each other in relation to them indicates. Instead, I am suggesting that age organisation and kin-based units such as *wori* or families occupy complementary roles with regard to the ownership, control and management of property. Although I do not dwell on it in this paper I would further argue that a third Hor category, that of bond friendship plays a crucial role in the property arena of the Hor and their neighbours.

Before I start discussing the links between property and generation sets, I should indicate that the biggest resource, land, in this case agricultural land, is said to be owned by the senior Qawot of the Hor, the *Wori Garle*. It is said that the village of Kulama whose Qawots come from the *wori* of the *Garle* clan exchanged a male child from the village of Kulama for freedom from the Samburu who had been occupying Hor land. Since this time, other Hor villages send leaders of their respective generation sets responsible for agricultural work, the *Mura*, with token gifts of young ewes to enter the cattle gate of the Garle Qawot before each agricultural season in order to ask for land. However the Qawot's ownership is symbolic and does not entail any return in terms of tax or any particular tribute in the form of yield from the land, though each year four ewes are brought to the Qawot's cattle enclosure when *Mura* of the four villages come to request land for sorghum cultivation. For reasons that appear to be tributary but not exactly linked to the giving of agricultural land, the initiated adult male members of the villages of Kulama and Gandaraba work on the fields of their respective Qawots. The other two villages of Egude and Murale however do not take part in the work.

Ideally each married person hands the *Mura* a young ewe in exchange for land they expect to receive during land distribution. Then the *Mura* of each village take young ewes to the Garle cattle gate. The assumption in giving the ewes to the *Mura* is that these animals will be taken through the cattle gate of the Qawots (Illustration five) to be sacrificed for fattening the plots and the Limo River. In practice however, brewed



coffee with milk (*bicce kullat*) or cash to the value of 50 pence, or a bottle of araki liqueur or the ewe itself is offered to the *Mura*. As described earlier, the *Mura* are given the responsibility of handling agricultural work, land distribution and other juridical work together with the *Jald'aba*, their herding counterparts during initiation of the generation. During their appointment and legitimation, a strip of stomach fat from the slaughtered animal of initiation is placed on them by an elder of the retiring generation. What is uttered during this moment is indicative of the power delegated to the generation set with regards to property.

Son of(...) I call you for the people,  
I call you to be good to the neighbourhood,  
I call you father of the people,  
Administer the public,  
Care (...) for the Qawot,  
Care (...) for the poor,  
Care (...) for the widows,  
Care (...) for elders. (Tadesse, 1999: 185-6)

Empowered and legitimised in public, these leaders are made into fathers of the land. Each year immediately after the floods recede, the available land is divided up between every small domestic unit. Particular attention is paid to the Qawot, the poor, widows and the aged during the distribution of land. Often the newly married couples and a few young men seeking to marry and therefore needing sorghum in order to acquire other items are given plots of land that require more physical work in clearing and are located at the end of the irrigation ditch. Heads of families are given plots according to the number of their wives and co-wives.

The *Mura* do not simply distribute land they also make sure essential rituals to promote fertility are performed and that animals are found from *wori* cattle or stock for sacrifice and prayer. When the need arises to make a sacrifice, the *Mura* send a messenger to a *wori* that owns animals to send to them the specific type of beast of their preference.

The *Mura* also select the person who initiates agriculture and decide on the date of initiation and major agricultural activities as mentioned

earlier. They also decide the date for harvesting as well as when the first sorghum beer of the first harvest is to be drunk. Those who do not comply with the decisions and show negligence in their cultivation work are fined one young ewe, or are denied the right to a plot. Although I have not come across nor heard of such cases in the recent past, the diligence of Hor men and women in agricultural work does not seem to be the result merely of voluntary industriousness. In addition to refusing to give land to those who do not work on it, the *Mura* also seem to employ threats of violence. Flogging is commonly practised among the Hor. The D'anto leaders of the generation set in power carry out these floggings.

Therefore it must be stated here that the age organisation does own the plots as well as individual families. The age organisation has the power to enforce its decisions including the power to deny land to those who do not work according to instructions. In general uninitiated men or women are not given sorghum plots for their own use. In very few instances those who prepare to marry are given plots with a view to exchanging their sorghum for goats to be able to pay for bridewealth. It can be said that the uninitiated deal with cattle in camps under the supervision of initiated adults.

As mentioned earlier, the evidence shows that the Qawot of Kulama is the symbolic owner of inundated plots. He lets the leaders of village generation sets (*Mura*) take land in exchange for ewes and the *Mura* of each village distribute plots to individual families of Hor and outsiders in exchange for ewes and tokens such as drinks, considered in this context as ewes. When we look at the matter closely, the Qawot only superficially appears to be the owner of the fields. Instead what we see is a tribute of ewes entering his cattle gate. The *Mura* of each village, who are legitimised during the transfer of power of the generation set and are entrusted with responsibility for land and people are more properly considered the owners and appropriators of land. The fact that both Qawots and leaders of the age organisation are referred to as

“fathers of the land” could be said to indicate their position as complementary owners of this resource. What we see here is a balanced entitlement of ownership by leaders determined both by kinship (Qawot) and age (*Mura* and *Jald’aba*) though much emphasis is given to the legitimised authority of the generation set. This is yet further evidence against the argument that age/generation sets do not control property. Other than the Qawot of Kulama described earlier, no other clan leader symbolically or otherwise owns or controls any Hor sorghum plots. On the other hand, the power the Qawot is said to have in helping with the growth of sorghum, gives him prominence and makes the role of age and kinship more complementary.

## **Animals**

In earlier work on the Hor I have noted the following, concerning the relation to their cattle:

For the Hor cattle and small stock are crucial as their ideology is primarily a pastoral one in which transactions between individuals and groups are carried out in terms of cattle and small stock or are spoken in this term. Cattle and small stock are the medium of exchange for ritual items, firearms and forms of marriage payment. The colours and the sex of the cattle are the basis for naming newly born children. Names such as Arshall (white bull), Kullo (cow with shaded eyes) are examples derived from domestic animals. (Tadesse, 1999: 167)

As with sorghum, Hor establish many forms of relationships mediated by animals between kin and non-kin as well as with non-Hor outsiders mainly from the neighbouring groups.

Bulls are the medium of payment of bridewealth (*qij*). Bulls are also the gift to a male child during the first shaving ceremony, they are a medium for the purchase of firearms, and for the purchase of essential ritual items such as honey, unhusked coffee and tobacco. Most important of all they are the means through which power is negotiated and acquired

from the generation set in power. Moreover, animals are used for sacrifice during the initiations for transferring power, *nger* and *chirnan*. The idiom used for the payment of ritual cattle, brewing of coffee, honey wine and offerings of tobacco to leaders of the generation in power is *bite*, purchase<sup>25</sup>.

When norms are breached, fines are exacted in the form of animals, by flogging or by the purchase of drinks. The types of offences include negligence in herding activity such as letting one's animals be lost or be eaten by wild beasts. One case, which I observed in 1995, involved a young herdsman named Duba who resided close to the village of Tabya. One night he fired two shots into the air and his case was handled both by the police and the leaders of the generation set. The latter made arrangements with the police to take him out of police hands and later decided that his age set flog him. He was flogged severely and at the same time was told to choose between continued flogging or killing an ox of the size and colour of his flogger's preference. The animal he was required to kill for a meat feast did not even belong to him. He made the second choice. The meat was consumed by the village males seated in a crescent arranged for the occasion (Illustration five). The seating arrangement followed a right-left (senior-junior) orientation with Melbasa, the generation set in power to the right of the crescent, Morqo, the uninitiated generation set on the left end of the crescent and Otgaltcha, the generation retired from power next to Morqo. In the evening the *Jald'aba* ordered Duba's age set to provide Duba with a goat to help him heal from the pain and scars of flogging. By dealing with Duba in this manner, the age organisation was primarily appropriating a member's ox, because of its fat meat, big size and attractive colour as it is accepted that the generation in power owns animals, although the person in whose cattle enclosure the animal lived and who cared for the animal's well-being is a member of a *wori*. It also put Duba's relation to this man in jeopardy as Duba agreed to kill the animal without his consent. This puts the owner in an advantageous situation as he could claim a replacement

animal of his liking, which often turns out to be a heifer. The point I want to make here is that both for such purposes and for major rituals such as the *nger* and *chirman*, which require the killing of four big oxen a day per village for four days, it is the generation set that decides which cattle should be taken for this purpose, and not the clan or even *wori*. Heads of *wori* and cattle enclosures may volunteer to give animals but it does not rule out the power of the generation set to appropriate animals for this and other purposes.

I would like to show briefly the extent to which the generation in power can appropriate, and control animals that appear to be under the ownership of *wori* cattle enclosures.

If a Hor man wants to slaughter an ox for his age mates as is required by tradition to receive a name for example, he must brew coffee and ask leaders of the generation set, the *Jald'aba*, for permission to kill the animal. They may refuse to give permission.

No one in Hor country kills an ox or bull for personal consumption. Oxen, like unhusked coffee, honey and tobacco are a matter for ritual and/or communal consumption. The generation set in power decides on the exchange rate of cattle for firearms. In 1995 the *Jald'aba* of Gandaraba controlled such exchange and those who exchanged for more cattle in markets in Hamar were fined and flogged<sup>26</sup>. Wario Ngakabel, a young man of about 25 was flogged for taking a bull in excess of the set exchange rate (Kalashnikov-cattle) which he hid in Tsamako country.

The *Jald'aba* of each village decide on the number of young men to send for scouting to the peripheral areas where the best pastures are but which are likely areas in which enemy groups may raid cattle. The *Jald'aba* of each village also decide where and for how long cattle should be kept before they are moved on to the next camp. During the annual initiation of the cattle camp season, when leaders of the generation set out for the camps, they are provided with one roast ox a day and strips of stomach fat are put around their necks. The fresh hide of the ox or

bull is slit into 139 long strips, which are also distributed to each initiated person at the end of the feast. Parts of the body of the animal represent the various age sets of the generation and the leaders are entitled to the head; the hump and other tender meat is given to the *Jald'aba* and *Mura*<sup>27</sup>. This is their entitlement as fathers of the land and owners of the cattle. The reception they are then given by junior generation set members is quite comparable to the reception women give to their husbands when the latter come home in the evenings and the women take the rifles and other things their husbands have been carrying. Sometimes a large camp is built for all initiated members of the four Hor villages to camp together.

*Jald'aba* leaders not only control animals, herders and others who deal with cattle, they themselves are also under constant supervision by members of the community. In public discussions that usually follow meat feasts, which are often held after flogging an offender, the male public usually airs its dissatisfaction regarding the way the *Jald'aba* (mainly of Gandaraba) fail in their duty to care for cattle. *Jald'aba* are often accused of spending their days in places where alcohol is sold instead of spending time watching how well animals are kept in the camps. It is considered very important to constantly check animal grazing and watering. In particular, the handling of calves and young small stock needs careful attention and supervision. In the intense desert sun it is expected that herders construct shades for young animals and keep them protected from heat during the parts of the day when it is extremely hot and that they take them to water at regular intervals. To prove that they are worthy of their duty, *Jald'aba* often instruct their D'anto floggers to punish those who do not take care of their animals. One such case involved the flogging of Elema of Gandaraba some ten years back. While herding along the Limo River he left his animals behind for a while and went to his friend's plot to eat green roasted maize. When he came back he could not find his cows where he had left them grazing. One cow disappeared completely and it was later found that a hyena had eaten it. Elema was flogged severely. This

indicates the very serious concern of the generation set with matters of property. It is in fact a concern of the fathers of the land who are considered to be the legitimate owners of the land, of its people (women and children in particular) and of the animals, which are cherished so much as they are considered to be the bringers of women and children<sup>28</sup>.

Scouting and guarding animals from raiders is another area to which serious attention is paid. Ideally, and often in practice, every initiated Hor male person has a right to consider Hor animals as “cattle of the father”, and therefore as his own. If they are in need of healing from illness they can join a cattle camp to consume blood and milk. By the same token it is the obligation of initiated Hor to serve as scouts, and to come to the rescue of animals if raiders appear. Often teams are assigned both from the camp group as well as from the village to scout out suspect areas along peripheral pastures. I twice participated in a scouting expedition in the Chalbi desert by Lake Stephanie. On the first expedition there were two initiated men and on the second there were thirteen. On this second trip we came across a scouting team from one of the camps which had succeeded in shooting an ostrich and was roasting it. While eating, information regarding tracks discovered and their location was exchanged. Tracks of Hamar raiders who had crossed the desert to the Hamar side with twelve cattle from Boran and the tracks of two Boran who appeared to have been pursuing the Hamar raiders to retrieve the lost cattle, were reported. This information was later taken to the *Jald’aba* of Egude at about 10 pm while they were having a meeting in the central assembly place there. The news was delivered by Kammate, one of the thirteen participants who was himself a *Jald’aba* and a mature man of about fifty-five. All the thirteen participants in the expedition were initiated, they all owned cattle, had families and were members of *wori* that had cattle enclosures. Kinship or clan ties were not visible in any way and did not explain any of the events of the two days. Every activity was organised by the generation set with the concern typical of actual owners – not custodians – of property.

## Conclusion

The anthropological literature on age in Eastern Africa attributes property to families and to clans and sees property entirely as a kinship matter. It does not do justice to the importance of generation/age sets as bodies that have influence over property. It is suggested that “(t)he ritual authority of elders waxes as their domestic and economic statuses are enlarged and as their family and herd both increase.” (Baxter & Almagor, 1978: 10) Once own homes and herds have been built the generation/age set ceases to be a unifying factor and becomes a thing of the past.

The data on the Hor however suggests that this is not the case. What Hor say and do is quite different from what we find in the literature. Ideally, and in practice, kinship and generation set are complementary in all major aspects of life and particularly in religious, economic and legal matters. Reaching certain phases of life and changes in status, such as heading a family, or owning cattle does not detach people from participation in age categories and from discharging responsibilities delegated to them. Or more simply, age categories are not a matter for the non-property owning youth. On the contrary, the responsibilities of members and their sense of fatherhood increase, especially with reference to property, after they are married and start building their herds. Furthermore this responsibility is reinforced as one matures and assumes the status of a member of the generation in power. With this status a generation and its members acquire responsibility to be socially acceptable fathers, fathers with rights that are considered rights of ownership and which range from owning to controlling, appropriating, and sanctioning.

Ownership is the main attribute of fatherhood, of being initiated and it lasts until the generation in power retires, a period of roughly forty years. This, of course, is implemented through the balanced complementarity, that exists between generation sets and kinship groups, and between seniors and juniors within the age sets.

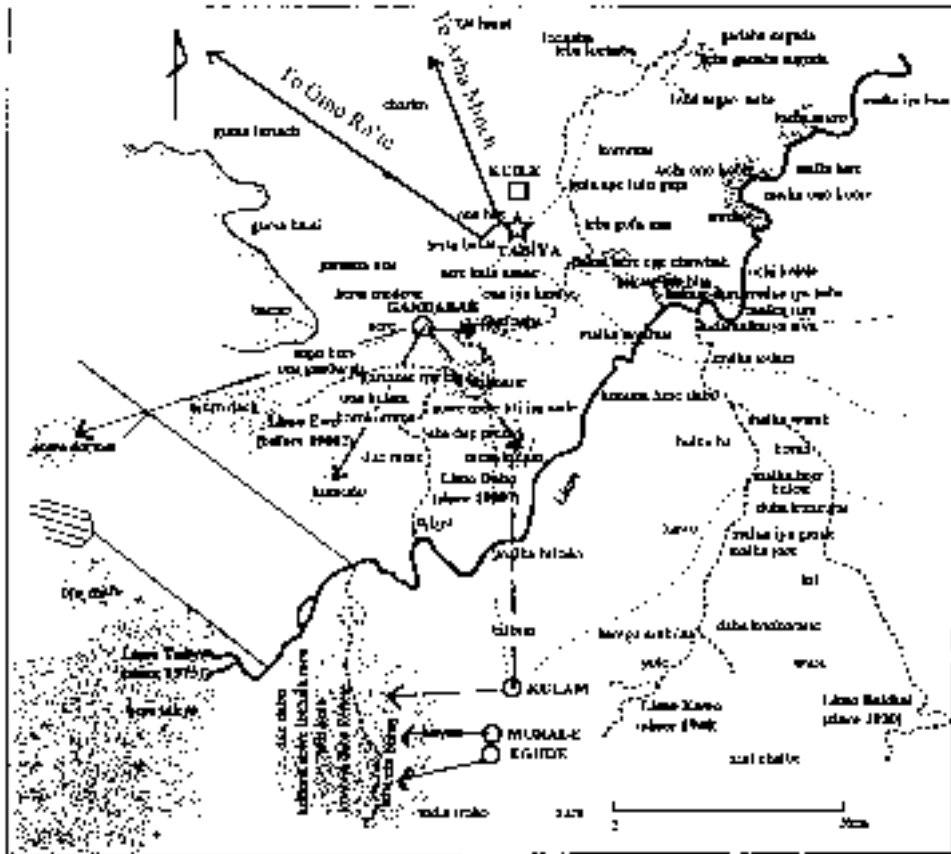


The range of capacities a generation in power possesses as the ideological fathers (owners) of the people, the land and its cattle is in practice exercised in various ways, as is shown above. The cases cited earlier indicate that the generation/age sets have a wide range of powers regarding property. Although it cannot be said that families do not own property, their role may be seen as being subsidiary to that of the generation set.

What the Hor data shows is that it is not enough to see property tenure and property inheritance as features only of kinship. Instead it becomes clear that ge/generation sets are of critical importance in the use control and transmission of property.

## **Illustrations**

1. The Villages and their sorghum fields.
2. Birale plantation sign post.
3. Hor generation and age sets.
4. Cattle gate of the Qawot of the Hor.
5. Meat feast.

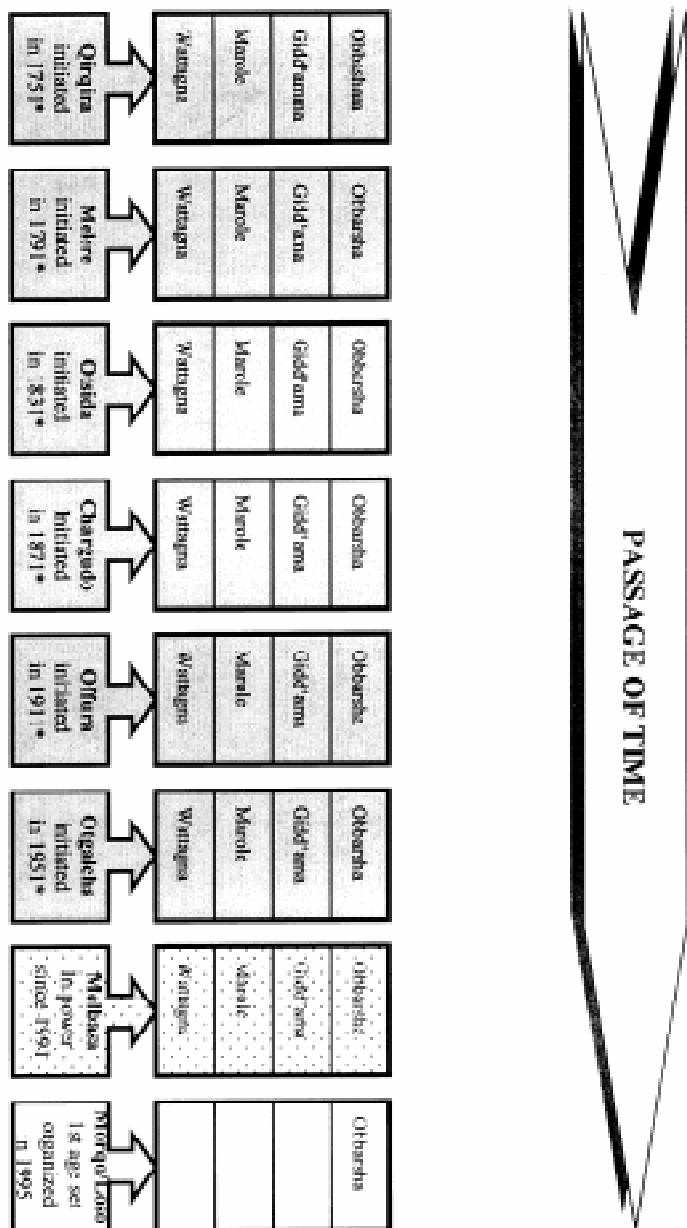


- Weira River (Jama)
- former riverbed (MWA)
- irrigation channel made by NGO
- depression watered by rain (pofa wra)
- isolated flats (simaka/dahante darsa)
- Har settlement
- Tsunuku settlement
- police station
- path
- Village fields

By Y. Mpingwa 1996 & slight modification by Tadesse







\* Calculation is based on generation set being in power for 40 years. In the distant past initiation at short notice occurred according to oral evidence.

## Notas

- 1 W. G. Tadesse, Max-Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, P.O. Box 11 03 51, D-06017 Halle/Saale, Germany, E-mail: wolde@eth.mpg.de. This paper was presented at the 14<sup>th</sup> International Ethiopian Studies Conference held in Addis Ababa in November 2000 under the title “Property and Age Organisation”.
- 2 Emphasis is mine.
- 3 See same opinion in Barnard and Spencer (2000), Lamphear (1998).
- 4 A third category, the network of bond friends, plays quite a significant role in matters of property both in terms of claims from as well as obligations to the Hor.
- 5 Anthropological fieldwork among the Hor was carried out from 1994 to 1996 and in May 2000. I gratefully acknowledge the support received from the Christian Michelsen Foundation, the London School of Economics and the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology.
- 6 Tornay describes similar ideas of fatherhood among the Nyangatom: “Ideally, older adult men are the ‘owners’ of cattle and people. They are the men who initiate their sons and who possess political and religious authority. They are fathers of a family and Fathers of the country, invested with supernatural power” (Tornay, 1998: 105). See Simonse (1998: 53) and for a similar meaning of the term *monyomiji* among the groups their studies refer to.
- 7 Recently however a plantation said to be jointly owned by a central Ethiopian farmer and the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia (BIRALE Farm Share Company) is said to be using most of the river water for irrigating its cotton plantation leaving the groups dependent on the river without enough water for cultivation. Worse still, the plantation is accused of spraying dangerous insecticides. The Tsamako and the Hamar, who depend for their livelihood on honey production in the hills along the plantation and along the riverbank, have lost their bees and a major part of their livelihood. At the same time the Hor, who formerly depended on their neighbours to obtain honey for weddings and other major rituals have become losers in terms of cost, as the price of this very essential ritual item has soared lately. In 1995 there was a serious armed clash involving Tsamako pastoralists and the administration of the plantation. The clash

resulted in nine T'samako deaths and about the same number of victims from the plantation. Armed forces and police were allegedly involved on the side of the plantation. Restrictions on the use of arms and movement of T'samako and other pastoralists' cattle and stock have been introduced as a result. The Hor to this day complain about the small volume of water they are left with by the plantation and also report that river fish have started dying as a result of insecticides used upriver. The relations between the plantation and the groups further down the River Limo/Woito remain tense and volatile. (Illustration two.)

- 8 I find it difficult to fit the Hor age organisation into any of the Kurimoto and Simonse (1998: 5) arenas categories. The authors themselves acknowledge that these arenas are not exhaustive.
- 9 Qirqira, Melere/Melbasa, Otsida, Chargudo, Offura, Otgalcha, Melbassa.
- 10 See Miyawaki (1996) for an explanation of the second phase of the succession ritual *chirnan* and Tornay (1998) on the Nyangatom generation system.
- 11 For a more detailed description see Tadesse (1999: 93-124).
- 12 In matters of power, a careful examination of the Hor Qawot and age organisation indicates a weaving of the Qawot system into the age leadership. Qawots and their descendants are initiated into the age organisation.
- 13 In Hor prayer, Waq, the supreme power is called. Calling someone refers to greeting in every day Hor. Waq also means the blue sky.
- 14 The current generation in power replaced *Otgalcha* in 1991-1993 during the *nger* and *chirnan* rituals of succession to power.
- 15 These initiates of the age set (Obbarsha) and the three other age sets that will be initiated in the future must provide tributary labour to the Qawot by building his cattle enclosure each year.
- 16 Both *Mura* and *Jald'aba* can also decide on who, from among the members of a village, should contribute cattle for tax, for purchase of unhusked coffee or for daily prayers of Qawots, etc.

- 17 There are other officials in the generation set. Only those crucial in terms of property are mentioned here.
- 18 The Hor idea of property is broad and complex. The Hor and their polity represented by elders consider land, animals, river, well and rain water, anything exchangeable for cattle with other groups (all tools of production and crucial ritual items) as property. The Hor believe that the land is part of them and that they are part of their land. Ancestors are believed to live beneath the ground and Waq in the sky. Constant communication between the living, the dead, the land and the sky through religious activities gives the reproduction of culture and society its dynamics. When we narrow our focus to the level of the house, tenure belongs mainly to married and fertile women. Incorporeal property: animal entrails reading, track finding, healing, dancing and song etc. are acknowledged as property and Hor are entitled to their use. Property as used in this paper refers mainly to land, cattle and small livestock sorghum and products of other groups.
- 19 “Cattle gate” represents the animals and small stock of a *wori* household. Whoever inherits it has power and control over members of the *wori*.
- 20 The myth of Asdama, the 1<sup>st</sup> Hor Qawot is attributed with the power of miraculously flooding the Limo River in the middle of a drought he sanctioned by his curses. In a different story it is an old lady who is believed to scoop water with a calabash from a distant lake into the bed of the Limo River.
- 21 Furthermore cattle and small stock may be disposed of to bond friends in which case they are used as items of gift exchange.
- 22 One of two types of labour Hor organise for work in planting sorghum. The organiser of the work provides sorghum beer, or araki liqueur for the group for the duration of work and the team members work with their own tools.
- 23 I was not given a plot by the *mura* because I was not initiated and I did not have a wife living with me. Since I was admitted to the Herruf clan the plot I was given was originally parcelled out for Kammate who was considered my older brother. This in a way indicates that initiation is a route to ownership and rights to use. Outsiders may use Hor land set aside for them. Kallan Ch’are is such



land Hor had assigned to their Hamar neighbours for sorghum cultivation while Sura is an area of pasture for herding cattle. Some outsiders such as Tsamako, Karmet and Konso can be assigned plots with Hor cultivators regardless of their relation to Hor age organisation (see Tadesse (1999) for further details).

- 24 *Fund'o* is a regional institution with local offices responsible for the safe passage and security of traders and goods. It also acts as guarantor for the payment of debts. It uses the kinship and age structures of the Hor to fulfil its duties.
- 25 In a ritual known as *arap*, mothers of the generation set that acceded to power also purchase the assembly place (*nab*) and are considered to be in power. They feed, offer coffee and drinks to their mother's generation and anoint them with butter for two days. This is the price they pay for the purchase of the *nab* and their change in status.
- 26 This decision was made in the interest of Hor trade partners on whom the Hor also depend for their livelihood.
- 27 When the slaughter takes place in the context of a wedding or funeral, the distribution of parts and their link to relationships is different. The bride's mother's brother takes the head whereas in a funeral slaughter the head of the animal and its stomach fat is offered to the deceased. This takes a different form when the slaughter involves smaller stock for domestic consumption.
- 28 To avoid misunderstanding this must be understood in terms of Hor ideas of property and ownership.

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RESUMO: Estudos sobre sistemas etários na África Oriental têm focado principalmente as regras que regulam recrutamento, com ênfase ao modo em que se mantém a autoridade e os cargos políticos, assim como à natureza não-militar e não-política dos sistemas etários. Apesar de contribuírem enormemente para a nossa compreensão das organizações etárias na região, esses estudos não lidam explicitamente com a questão da propriedade e com o modo em que ela constitui um dos principais focos para atividades de organizações etárias. De fato, quando se menciona a propriedade, ela é vista em função das famílias e, portanto, do parentesco.

Apresentando e discutindo uma variedade de casos envolvendo o modo em que a propriedade é tratada por lideranças de um conjunto etário/geracional e residentes Hor e não-Hor do território Hor, este estudo conclui que a posse, o uso e controle de recursos não constitui um assunto que pertence exclusivamente à esfera de grupos de parentesco; trata-se também de uma questão central para organizações etárias. Apesar de haver, aparentemente, alguma ambigüidade decorrente da ênfase equilibrada que os Hor dedicam ao parentesco e às categorias etárias e suas complementaridades em assuntos relacionados à economia, à religião e ao direito, dados referentes aos Hor revelam uma tendência a tratar questões referentes ao uso de recursos cruciais em termos de organização etária.

Trata-se de um estudo sobre os Hor (Arbore), um povo pastoril do Sudoeste da Etiópia.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Hor, propriedade, organização-etária, parentesco, pastoralismo.

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