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Living in the navel of Waag

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South West Ethiopia*

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Introduction

In 1995, I embarked on a study of the material culture of the Daasanech¹ through a research project supervised by Gustaaf Verswijver of the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren, Belgium and sponsored by the Fund for Scientific Research (FWO)². The aim the project was to investigate the relationship between the human body and social identity among three different pastoral groups in Africa: the Daasanech in Ethiopia, the Himba in Namibia and the Turkana in Kenya and to work out a comparative exhibition. The project provided the three different researchers with the opportunity to complete a doctoral thesis. I worked under the supervision of Dr. Hendrik Pinxten of the Department of Comparative Sciences of Cultures at the University of Ghent. Unfortunately, I didn't finish my dissertation in time.

When I arrived in Daasanech-land, I decided to stay in Aoga, a small village about five kilometres south of the small town of Omoraate, near the Omo riverbank. There, I stayed in one of the two abandoned mud dwellings that had been built some years previously by World Vision, a non-profit organization that had operated in the region. The interior of my new home provided just enough space for a bed, a table and a few chairs. Outside, a large fig tree offered shade and relief from the heat. Within walking distance from where I had settled, the Lutheran mission Mekane Yesu had set up a mission some months earlier.

As most other anthropologists, I was not present in Africa at the behest of these other cultures. I had to pay my own way by offering goods and sometimes money in return for the desired information. Over the course of my research, I had to find a balance between

¹ I use a slightly different spelling than Carr and Almagor, who spelled the name as Dasanetch or Dassanetch and than Tosco, who spelled Dhaasanac. The final "ch" in Daasanech and in some other words should be pronounced as in "*touch*" or "*child*".

² This grant, G.0319.95, was offered between 1995 and 1998.

asking questions and trying to live their life. My first translator was Myeri Aarmide, who spoke only a little English but who helped me enormously in those first months, explained to the villagers the purpose behind my stay and aided me in getting acquainted with a few families. Already during my first visit, the men of the village, all in full ceremonial dress, awoke me one night and requested that I kill a goat for them. Through this ritual killing of an animal for the elders of the village and by being anointed with its rumen, I became part of a specific age-set, which entitled me to use a neckrest and the typical hairstyle of a man. I received Lonyanyana as my “ox-name”, which referred to the yellowish hue of the goat killed upon that occasion.

After three months, I returned to Belgium to prepare myself for the research. I returned to the field for a period of ten months spanning 1996 and 1997. Anniek Beernaert accompanied me during the first eight months. She assisted me in photographing various ceremonies. In the field, I divided my time between interviewing and visiting ritual events. Generally speaking, the mornings were allocated for conversation, the evenings for visits to the village and for ceremonies. Initially, I choose my collaborators from among the inhabitants of Aoga and I was totally dependent on Myeri for translation. After a time, I drew on some eloquent speakers from the surrounding villages.

Whenever I had word that rituals were going to be performed, I attempted to be present. In order to participate in some of these ceremonies, I entered into bond friendships with several of the people of Aoga and the surrounding area. Lobaros and Nakhan became my father and mother through the bond of name giving. Nyunyu, an Elele schoolboy, became my son because I supported his back as he underwent circumcision. Loya, a Ngarich man, became a brother through a bond of giving, as did Daale, who belonged to the Oro subgroup. I assisted both of them during the ceremonies for their daughters. But it was my neighbour, Lokwasep, an old bachelor who had lost all of his cattle and was living by fishing, who became my most intimate friend. Thanks to him and thanks to the many children of the village who were so patient with me, I acquired a working knowledge of Daasanech language. Enough, at least, to make for easy conversations with the people I knew and to understand the gist of what was said during my interviews.

My fondest memories are those evenings when the herds had returned from the grazing and women served us porridge and we played games and chatted while the village children surrounded us. Most Aoga villagers were very helpful and I still treasure those times when we were sat around the communal fire or attended the dances. Whenever possible, I obtained objects for the museum’s collection. Most of the items could be bought or exchanged. Others were so precious or rare that I had to request their production from an artisan.

In the beginning, I recorded numerous interviews, but only a few of them were actually transcribed in the end, as it proved extremely difficult to find anyone capable

of doing so. Because of this, I soon started to make my own notations, helped by Myeri Armide and later – when a job in Omoraate deprived me of his invaluable services - by Gosh and Lokono, two young men from the Kenyan side of Daasanech-land who had worked previously for SIL International Bible translation project. By the end of my stay, I was able to question people without the services of an interpreter, but the result was often quite poor as I unable to grasp nuances with my limited vocabulary and no idea about the grammar.

Returning home, I finished my work for the museum on Daasanech material culture before embarking on a fieldtrip in march 1997 to the Toposa together with Gustaaf Verswijver. This foray gave me the opportunity to visit and converse with people of the Pokot, Turkana and Toposa tribes and to look for a common history among them. Unfortunately, we were not able to cross into Ethiopia because of the intense skirmishing taking place between Daasanech warriors and the Gabbra as well as the Kenyan police at the time.

A few months later, I returned once more to Daasanech-land to wind up my fieldwork and answer some remaining questions. During this last period, I was lucky to find a very good collaborator in Mana Yergeleb, an Elele elder, as well as a new assistant translator, named Moses Nanok Yergele. The few months during which we worked together proved optimal. However, upon my return home, the relationship I shared with my partner came to an end shortly after the birth of our child and I found myself momentarily unable to complete my work. That was 1998

In 2002, I became a college lecturer in philosophy but finishing my dissertation was never far from my thoughts. Finally, in August of 2006, I decided to return to Ethiopia to once again pick up the thread of my work. I reached the Omo around the time when the region became world news because of the extraordinary flooding. Dozens of aid workers gathered to witness the disaster. I found the large-scale displacement of people and food drops from helicopters almost surreal. Reporters spoke of hundreds of casualties. The reality of the situation, however, was something else. These people had successfully negotiated previous inundations of the Omo River for over a hundred years. This time was no different. Despite what was reported, there were no mass casualties and the area soon returned to normal.

Back home once more, I rewrote a paper regarding the spiritual causes of human affliction among the Daasanech, which I then presented the following year at the Conference of Ethiopian Studies in Trondheim. It was now clear to me that the ritual and spiritual aspects of Daasanech culture, two topics not yet explored by previous researchers such as Almagor and Carr, would form the basis of this dissertation. Motivated by other researchers I had met at the conference, I decided to take a sabbatical year in order to finish my dissertation and returned to the Omo region for another month in 2009.

It was at this time that I became aware of the huge changes to the Daasanech culture. It was clear that the Daasanech now had less control over their lives. Newly cleared roads had been made and there were a lot more vehicles around, a huge bridge over the Omo river was under construction, schools and health clinics were built in various locations while mobile teachers were trained and either windmills or engines pumped water to small banana plantations. Each village, or *kebele*, had appointed three people just to report problems to the government in Omoraate. Cotton and plastic had replaced traditional dress and traditional utensils and containers. Police enforced laws imposed from outside and a group of men had been trained to intervene when conflicts or killings take place. Traditional authority has been eroded in favour of the government's courts. And while all this was going on, construction of the immense Omo-Gibe dam, meant to provide electricity to the entire nation, continued upstream.

In less than two decades, the Daasanech I had come to know had been transformed from a free people living in the "Navel of Waag" into a marginalized tribe, eking out a living on the margins of a globalized world through the selling of their oxen, by engaging in wage labour in town, by selling off some of their most fertile lands farming to strangers cultivating bio diesel crops and by allowing an industrial fishing companies to harvest the Omo River's abundant piscine population.

The focus of my dissertation shifted between 1995 and 2009. Initially, I started with the assumption that among the Daasanech, different social categories would be represented somehow through bodily ornamentation. I intended to describe all these variations and to look for their meaning or historical origins. Sure, I discovered that certain differences in dress and special markings are indeed evidence of the specific social category or status of a person, but the harvest of such symbolic representations was far less extensive than had been expected. Nevertheless, in the ritual domain, body modification is still very present and rich in variation, with circumcision and the *'dimi* – a feast to bless the fertility of the girls – the most prominent examples. Disease and misfortune form another intersection between the body and social environment. I came to understand that these are quite closely related to social tensions. Therefore, I expanded the parameters of my analysis from the ritual domain to Daasanech spirituality, or religion, in general.

Looking back, three events in particular remain firmly rooted in my memory. The one that made the greatest impression on me was the time I supported Nyunyu's back as he was circumcised. While standing there supporting him, probably much more nervous than he was, the complete calmness with which he underwent the operation astonished me. He sat there without so much as a twitch to betray any discomfort or anxiety. The whole atmosphere surrounding this initiation, the serenity of these young men and the solemnity of the entire process baffled me.

The second image I remember so well came when Loya, one of my closest neighbours in Aoga, who had so many difficulties in arranging a feast for his daughters due to his shortage of cattle, stood there in all his traditional regalia, with his ritual stick high in the air and his head bristling with black ostrich feathers, fierce and silent while tears made dark tracks down the yellow paint on his face. Being able to make this feast for his beautiful daughters was so important for him.

The third moment of awe occurred when I witnessed a meeting of warriors on the other side of the river. First all of the groups of youngsters appeared from different directions, showing their pride and strength by firing rounds into the air and engaging in mock fights. Everyone then gathered around the roasted haunch of a sacrificed ox and started to sing cattle songs with an incredible wealth of shared emotion. This touched upon the very core of what it meant to be a warrior, to be willing to die for their cattle.

In one way or another, these three moments all deal with sacrifice: the sacrifice of one's own blood during circumcision; the sacrifice of cattle and sheep in order to obtain elders' blessings; the willingness to sacrifice one's own life in defence of the herds. They are all religious and they symbolically integrate "models of reality" with "models for reality" (Geertz, 1973: 93), linking concepts and ideas with ritual action. As ritual practices, they connect people both with each other and with the ("divine") source. Looking at the Daasanekh world from the perspective of religion, one begins to realize that beyond the daily chores and tasks there lays an invisible world of emotions and of things that cannot be said, of silence. And sitting here behind my computer, I am forced to admit that I am still not able to understand the terrible and rich world of rituals and spiritual messages. A world I had only glimpsed through the emotions of my companions in the Daasanekh community. I realize all too well that much of the information I collected is in some ways a mere inventory of symbols, carefully observed and described but nevertheless devoid of their deeper, underlying significance or meaning. So be it. The results of my research, for what they are worth, are contained in the following pages.

Before drawing a line under my conclusions, however, I decided to run my descriptions and insights by Moses Nanok, whom I invited to Belgium in March of 2010. Moses was a good choice of sounding board because of his fluency in English, which he gained through studying in Kenya, and the fact that he had returned to live his life as the father of a traditional household. I'm grateful to him for helping me get through my muddled thoughts, continually telling me: "Don't get confused. Keep it simple".

The structure of my dissertation will be as follows. In the first chapter, I situate the Daasanekh in their geographical and historical context and describe their traditional ways of subsistence. In the second chapter I provide a general outline of the different social categories present in Daasanekh society. Both these chapters contain a lot of

material already covered by former researchers, but they are needed for the reader to get a general background. Here and there, I add some new information. The third chapter introduces the main concepts in what one may call Daasanech religion or spirituality. Chapter four presents the different rites of passage undergone between birth death and chapter five deals with rituals that aim at cleaning away the bad and restoring the connection with the Above. I re-examine certain aspects of these themes in my concluding remarks.

Chapter 1.

Situating the Daasanech

1.1 Introduction

The break of the day is heralded by the lowing of the cattle. A man and boy wrap themselves one last time in their blanket before they stretch and get up. A woman blows into the flickering charcoal. When the fire licks the pieces of the dry wood she added, the woman pours water into the black earthen pot and adds a few handfuls of coffee husks. Meanwhile, a girl enters the corral and starts to milk the goats and the sheep while their kids, which are kept away by her small brothers, try to see who can bleat the loudest. A bit later, when the animals leave the tiny entrance of the small corral one by one, the man watches them carefully, paying special attention to those which are crippled or have a scar or a wound. Then, the coffee is ready and all enter the hut. The woman pours two spoonfuls of hot water into the calabashes. The man slowly rocks his drinking calabash while he stares outside into the morning light, which gleams at the entrance to the hut. He takes a sip, spits and blesses his family, animals and land. The others mumble the responses to his prayer.

In the evening, when the bright red ball of the sun sets, activities change as the flocks return to the corral. The girl milks again. The woman sweeps the corral and lights the dung fire. After that, she prepares porridge, while the man plays around with his youngest son. The woman tells a story. On clear nights, when stomachs are full, one hears the sound of clapping hands and singing at the edge of the village. The boys start to sing their cattle songs and the girls join in with the jingling of their bells and rings. A few hours later, everything is silent again. Waag has descended and keeps guard at the entrance of the corral. Life is good.

1.2 Environment

1.2.1 Daasanech land

The Daasanech, an ethnic group of over fifty thousand people,¹ is comprised of a federation of eight subgroups, or sections, called *yenmeto* or simply *yen* (sing. *e*). Daasanech is their proper name, but not much ²is known regarding the origins of this term. They are also referred to as the Geleb or Geleba, Marle or Marille, Merille, Reshiat and Shangilla. They occupy an area of about 3000 km² situated in the South Eastern corner of Ethiopia, spanning the Omo River (*war*) along the North Eastern corner of lake Turkana (*bas*) in northern Kenya. These low lying plains are part of the central Rift Valley, and consist of alluvial sediments deposited by the Omo River and Turkana, about four hundred meters above sea level. The river, which derives its waters from the Ethiopian Highlands some thousand kilometres further north,³ is the lake's only permanent tributary.

The Daasanech say that they “live in the navel of Waag”. I found this expression so arresting, that it became the title of this dissertation. It not only demonstrates the common belief that people usually place themselves in the centre of the world, but it also indicates the intimate relationship between man and the Above, which is so important in the precarious conditions that make up Daasanech life. As we shall see, Waag stands for the sky, the source of life and rain. This metaphor expresses the importance of the Above for life, fertility and wellbeing. Cattle are a gift from Waag to the Daasanech, and they graze in the “lands of our fathers” (*les yaachu*).

Elder Daasanech remember that their grazing lands were vaster in their youth. At that time, just after the Italian occupation of Ethiopia, warriors went to Lodwar, in the southern Turkana region, to raid cattle herds there. They also herded their animals as far away as the Moruankipi Mountains, deep into Sudan, where they had formed an alliance with the Nyangatom and Toposa. This was a time in which the Daasanech where feared throughout the region. However, after the Italians were expelled, the British

¹ The “Summary of the Statistical report of the 2007 population and housing census” of UNFPA (2008) estimated that there were 48.000 Daasanech. However, 6000 to 8000 Daasanech in Kenya were not included. Ten years earlier in 1996, a former census estimated only 24.000 people (see appendix 1), while Uri Almagor estimated them about 15000 Daasanech (Almagor, 1978a: 14) in the late 60's.

² Almagor (1972: 90) mentions a story where the name of the first ox the different groups who found each other and decided to become one was called Daasanech and that this explained the name they took.

³ Since the Kibish and Kerio River are dry most of the year, the Omo River remains lake Turkana's only permanent source of water.

turned the so-called “Ilemi Triangle” into a no man’s land, building police check posts along the border with Ethiopia. Thus depriving the Daasanech of over 10.000 km² of dry-season pastureland, and cutting off a transhumant pattern of herding which is still observed among the Nyangatom.

When elder Daasanech talk about their land, they point to the four mountains and the mountain ridges that enclose it. In front of these ridges lay the so-called ‘*dieto* (sing. ‘*diesom*), often prime grazing land due to the run-off from the surrounding hills. In times of peace, these pastures are shared with neighbouring groups; in times of war, they form a source of conflict.

Mount Kuras to the north demarcates the border between the Daasanech and the Nyangatom (*Odongoro* or *Bume*). Towards the east, the Hamar Hills (*gum Hamar* or *Morikabel*) form the natural boundary with the lands of the Hamar and to the south, Mount Kokai (*gum Kokai*) marks off Borana-land (*les Boron*). At the western side of the lake, Labur Mountain juts forth, as does the stands up as Liwan’s mountain ridge slightly to the north. They are the lands of the Turkana (also called *Bume*). Hence, Kuras, the Morikabel, Kokai and Labur may be considered the “edges” of Daasanech territory. When Lokorikimide, a diviner among the Daasanech and an informant in this research, looked at the entrails of a goat or an ox in order to investigate possible sources of trouble, he saw the outer ring of intestines as these four mountain ridges.

Geography

Karl Butzer studied the geography of the Lower Omo-Plains in the late ‘60’s. He found that the water level of lake Turkana had dropped by twenty meters (Butzer K., 1971). This decline, the result of diminishing levels of Highland rainfall, is still going on today. For example, I was told that Bubua, now over three kilometres from the lake, was situated on its shores in the ‘70’s. Environmentalists such as Richard Leaky warn that the lake will shrink even further due to climate change and fear this process may even accelerate due to the construction of the immense Gibe III dam on the Omo River. If that happens, and the lake disappears as a result, or becomes a salty morass, then the area will lose its climatic buffer. This will lead to further desertification, and it will impact heavily on the quarter of a million people who depend on the Omo and the lake for their survival.

Butzer determined that in the 19th century, the vast majority of what are now the most fertile Daasanech lands were under water. When the waters receded, they left a multitude of ecological niches and habitats behind: sandy half desert (*bakate*), dry savannah (*sirte*), lowlands (*har*), the river forest (*tim*) with its jungle vegetation and the so-called delta “islands” (*kormo*) where green grass is abundant the whole year around. According to differences in altitude, rainfall, geomorphology and the placement of the

Omo and Kibish rivers, Butzer divided the entire region north of the lake into four different ecological subsystems.

The first zone forms the bridge between the Ethiopian Highlands and the Omo Lowlands. This area begins sixty kilometres north of the delta, just beyond Daasanech territory. It is slightly hilly and mainly consists of savannah. The Daasanech's northern neighbours inhabit this zone: the Mursi, the Nyangatom and the Karo. The Daasanech have excellent relations with the Karo, while their relationship with the Nyangatom deteriorated during the late 70's when they fought several large wars with many casualties. The Nyangatom ousted the Daasanech from the area and they did not return until the '90s. The previous settlement pattern was slowly re-established, with many families returning to their former grounds.

The second zone mainly belongs to the Daasanech's Elele subgroup. That region starts about forty kilometres north of the lake. Here, the river twists and turns, creating numerous canals (*kolom*) and swamps (*nabual*). On the eastern side of the river, the alluvial plains are ten kilometres wide, to the west, about thirty kilometres. The soil contains mainly sand with some clay deposits. Along the banks of the river, the forest rapidly changes into low shrubs, dry savannah and grasslands with dispersed acacia. This area is infested with tsetse flies and therefore not suitable for cattle. It is plausible that it was inhabited by the so-called Omo-Murle, a group of agriculturalists who were observed at the start of the twentieth century, but who have since disappeared. West of this zone, Kuras Mountain and its watershed offers abundant vegetation and good grazing possibilities the whole year around. Northwest of Kuras is the Kibish River, which the Daasanech call *Nakua*. This river does not reach Lake Turkana anymore, but it still floods during the rainy season, allowing cultivation. It was here that the Daasanech and Nyangatom came into conflict in the '70s.

The border of the third zone corresponds with the shores of the lake as it was in 1890. Here, the river is straighter and makes its way through sedimentary deposits. The sandy ridges (*sri* or *yuoch*) along its banks are a preferred spot for habitation. This lacustrine plain is about twenty kilometres wide to the east and thirty-five kilometres to the west. The sandy soil with its clay-deposits often leads to tunnel erosion and natural cracks (*mokode*). Here, the river forest has almost entirely disappeared as a result of human activity. However, the woods are still abundant on the eastern side, where an older branch of the Omo River meets them. This river is called the *Mulidhe* or *Oldomo* and it still rises during large inundations and heavy rains, offering agricultural opportunities to the villages in the east. It forms the border between two of the main Daasanech subgroups, the Ngarich and the Inkabelo. The plains here are criss-crossed by smaller riverbeds and natural canals (*kolom*). All over the area, rains leave stagnant pools (*hero* and *jaddo*) behind which provide drinking water. In some riverbeds, the Daasanech dig holes to fetch water (*malgo*, *malgam*) for man and beast.

Butzer's fourth zone corresponds with the river delta. He placed its start where the river split in two, about fifteen kilometres north of the lake, which is nowadays about twenty kilometres. In this region, the river divides into several branches, isolating areas of land called "islands" (*korom, kormo*). This area makes for excellent grazing. Villages are rare here because they could easily be washed away in floods. Hence, only the higher strand ridges (*nytaaba*) are used for inhabitation. Within this same zone, about twenty kilometres west of the river, is a huge clay depression, known as Sanderson's Gulf to geographers and *Baraar* to the Daasanech. The saline content of the soil in this depression is too high to permit growth and so it remains a desert (*bakate*).

1.2.2 Climate

The climate of the Daasanech is hot and dry, with an annual average temperature of 27,5°C.⁴ The average daytime maximum often surpasses 40°C in the shade and at night, the temperature seldom drops below 22°C. Seasonal variations are small at only 3°. Strong winds (*wanich*) routinely blow out of the south and southeast.⁵ The average annual rainfall in Omoraate is 327 mm, peaking between March and May, when the big rains (*ir gudo*) fall. These deluges are announced by whirlwinds (*gaarich*) that blast huge walls of sandy dust across the area. Around October and November, sporadic rains (*gerbolte* or *nyerube*) may occur. Apart from these two periods, precipitation is scarce. Statistical data shows high fluctuations in rainfall over time, much to the dismay of the region's inhabitants. When the big rains fail over the course of two successive years, such as occurred in 2005 and 2006, drought (*shaante*) and hunger (*kuod*) can lead to staggering losses in the herds.⁶

An average rainfall of less than 400 mm is generally insufficient for horticulture, although some families may take their chance to plant after heavy showers during the rainy season. Daasanech horticulture is almost entirely dependent on flood-retreat cultivation. The Omo River floods annually, between July and September, submerging large areas of land along its banks and in the delta. When the waters recede, people plant and crops are ready three months later. That the flooding of the river is considered to be the heartbeat of the country is made clear by the fact that the word *war* means both "river" and "year".

⁴ LUPRO/FAO report, Addis Abeba, 1986.

⁵ South and southeastern wind is called *lokosh*, southwestern winds are called *dheen* and westernwinds are called *labur*.

⁶ According to Müller (1989: 24) who relied upon figures from Lodwar in Turkana land, periods of heavy drought following two or more consecutive years of light rainfall occur approximately every seven years.

The extent of the inundation is also subject to variation. In 2006, the flooding of the Omo was world news. CNN called it a catastrophe, and aired footage of people swimming with their cows across the floodwaters. The media campaign resulted in numerous aid agencies dropping food, evacuating people and resettling them elsewhere. Usually, big floods are welcomed because they submerge larger areas for planting and transform the river delta into lush pastureland.⁷ However, when the flooding is heavy and late and the waters recede too slowly, the crops may not have matured enough for harvesting and they may rot in the fields as a result.⁸

1.3 The peoples and languages of the region

1.3.1 Languages

The language or “mouth” (*af*) of the Daasanech belongs to the Omo-Tana cluster of the East-Cushitic⁹ language family. Cushitic is one of the five Afro-Asiatic language-families formerly known as Hamito-Semitic.¹⁰ Cushitic languages are common in Ethiopia and Kenya, with Oromo and Somali the largest representatives. Other languages of the Omo-Tana cluster are Arbore (*Marle*) and Elmolo (*Hereñ*). The Arbore reside north of Chew Bahir and they share several historical and cultural traits with the Daasanech. The Elmolo tribe was considered “the smallest tribe” of Africa midway through the last century, boasting only a few hundred people. Fisherman on the eastern shores of Lake Turkana, they lost their mother tongue in the 70’s. Other East-Cushitic speaking tribes

⁷ Incidentally, I was present in Omoraate at the time and witnessed the entire operation. These extensive floods happen regularly and people are used to coping with them. Official “sources” claimed that there were over two hundred casualties but according to the Daasanech there was no loss of life apart from some small livestock. Afterwards, it was suggested that the media campaign was orchestrated in order to obtain aid and to get support for the Gibe III dam, which will “regulate” the flooding. Certainly, in 2007, the annual flood was even bigger but this time no aid agencies became involved.

⁸ On top of which, the receding waters increase the number of casualties from malaria and *luoge*, another BBP, or Bloodborne Pathogen.

⁹ Linguists differentiate between five Cushitic sub-groups: (1) Beja; (2) Agau; (3) East-Cushitic; (4) West-Cushitic (f.i. Kaffa) and South-Cushitic (including the Mbugu and Mbulunge in Tanzania). Because West-Cushitic has almost no similarities with other Cushitic languages, some linguist categorize this group as a separate branch.

¹⁰ The other four are Egyptian, Berber, Chadic and Semitic.

living in the neighbourhood of the Daasanech are the Tsemai, who belong to the Dullay-cluster; the Konso (*Konso*) and Dirasha, who belong to the Konso-Gidole-cluster; the Borana and the Gabbra (*Boron*), who belong to the Oromo-cluster and the Rendille (*Randal*), who belong to the Rendille-Boni-cluster.

According to Marvin Bender, the original inhabitants of the Lower-Omo were of East-Cushitic and pre-Nilotic origin (Bender, 1976). Daasanech oral traditions recall, amongst others, the Cushitic Gabbra (*Boron*) as the original inhabitants of their present territory. The eastern neighbours of the Daasanech, like the Hamar, Bashada, Bana, Ari and Dime are Omotic. The Omo-Murle who disappeared during the course of the last century, as well as the small group of Kwegu or Muguji, are categorized as pre-Nilotic or Surmic groups.¹

The first influx of Nilotic pastoralist groups into the area started about a thousand years ago from the plains of Uganda, southern Sudan and northern Kenya and consisted of Surme groups, such as the Mursi, Bodi, Suri and Omo-Murle. A second important migration – which influenced the north eastern migration of the Daasanech – occurred in the second half of the 18th century and was undertaken by different groups of Karamoyong (Nyangatom, Toposa, Jie and Turkana). They either pushed away or enculturated groups of Rendille, Samburu and proto-Daasanech. Since then, the Nyangatom and Turkana peoples became the new eastern and south-eastern neighbours of the group now known as Daasanech.

Another important shift in the area took place around the second half of the second millennium, when Cushitic speaking Somali groups migrated to the south. This movement is still going on. At the same time, Oromo speakers such as Oromo themselves, the Borana, Arsi and Guji migrated to the west. Furthermore, since the conquests of Menelik II and due to Mengitsu's programs, there is a growing influx of Amharic speakers in the region. Recently, some foreigners have even started to settle along the river south of Omoraate.

Most male Daasanech are multilingual and some elders understand up to five of the languages spoken in the surrounding area. They picked them up as youngsters, while herding their stock alongside neighbouring tribes and through friendships formed at the time. Nowadays, Amharic has become the *lingua franca* on the Ethiopian side of the border, while Swahili and English are understood by most of the Daasanech living in Kenya, where children are taught these languages at school. Besides, Bume (the language of the Nyangatom and Turkana) still has a very special attraction for the Daasanech. Most cattle songs are in Bume, as well as a lot of loanwords and ox-names.

People say that the sounds of these languages form a better match with cattle than Daasanech, indicating the superiority of the Bume regarding “cattle matters”.¹¹

As to the Daasanech’s own language, it has been studied by Hans Jürgen Sasse (Sasse, 1974). Jim and Susan Ness, two missionaries working for Wycliffe Bible Translators, have also made a study of this tongue. I received a wordlist from the latter after a visit in 1995. In 2001, the Italian linguist Mauro Tosco published a book on the Daasanech language complete with grammar, texts and vocabulary (Tosco, 2001).

1.3.2 Daasanech and *kidh*

I have already mentioned the different ethnic neighbours of the Daasanech. All of them are called *kidh* (sing. *kidhich*). Most of the translators I worked with rendered this term as “enemy”. However, the term doesn’t have the negative connotations it has in English, perhaps making “foreigner” a better translation. *Kidhich* means anyone who born to a non-Daasanech father. At least some of the neighbouring groups are clearly no enemies. Though they are called *kidh*, they are at the same time labeled as *gaalkinyo* (“our people”). This is clearly the case for the Arbore (*Marle*) and the Karo (*Kerre*), but also for the Toposa who live further away. The Rendille and the Samburu also belong to “our people”, because parts of these two peoples had become incorporated into Daasanech society as subgroups by the end of the 19th century.¹²

Daasanech claim that they are all “one” (*tikide*), and therefore not proper enemies. The unity of these various peoples is ideologically rooted in the belief that killing their members leads to the same moral pollution (*nyogich*) that the homicide of a fellow tribesman would. When afflicted with *nyogich*, the victim will suffer from a swollen belly and this inevitably leads to death if the person isn’t cleansed in the right way.

The other neighbouring peoples may truly be called “enemies”. Especially the four groups living beyond the mountains, like the Hamar to the northwest, the Turkana (*Bume* or *Turkana*) to the south and southeast, the Nyangatom (*Bume* or *Odongoro*) to the northeast and the Gabbra (*Boron*) to the southwest. All were, or still are in some cases, regularly involved in mutual wars and raids with the Daasanech in the last few decades.

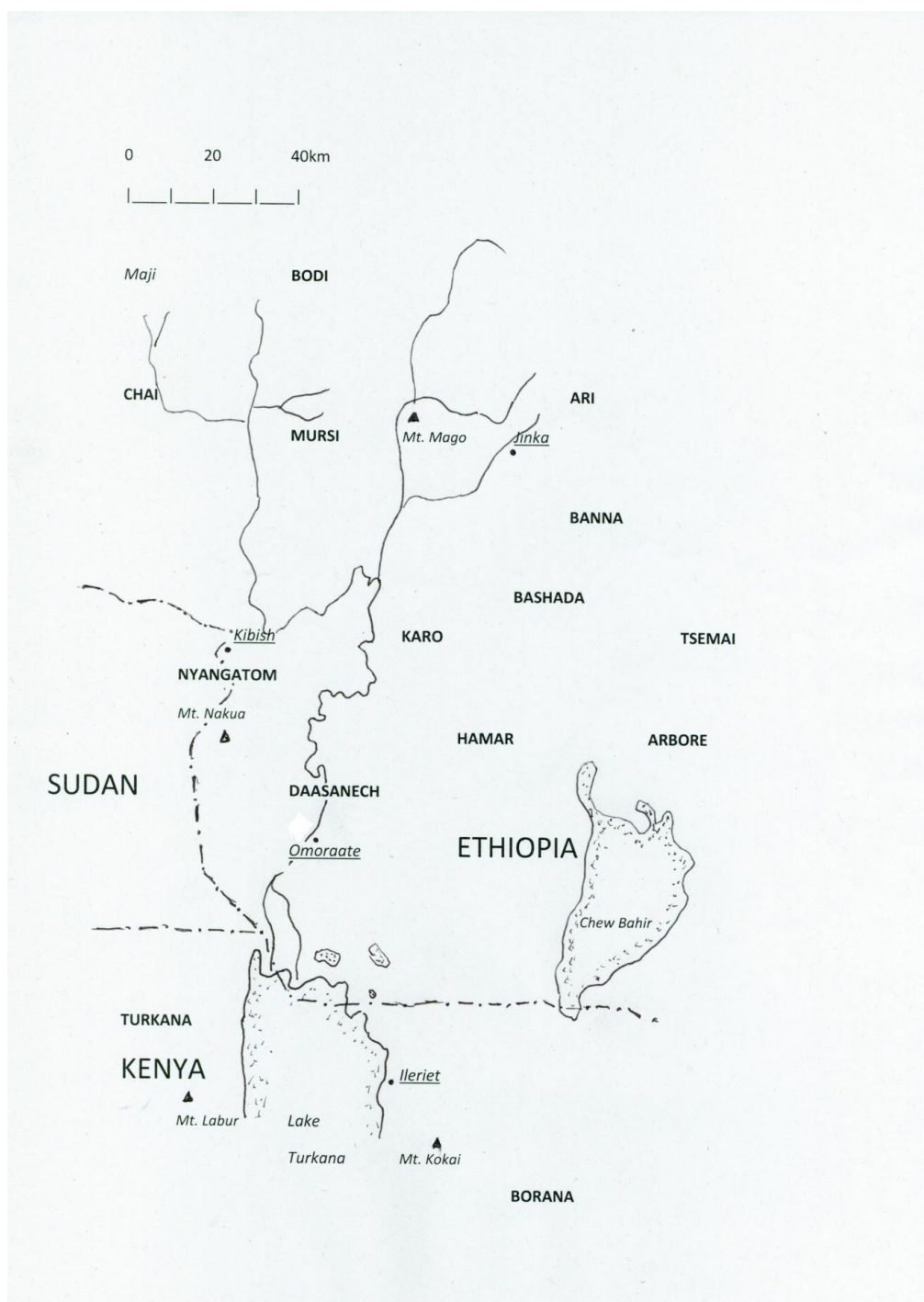
Similar to the way in which the Arbore associate enemies and mountains (Gabbert, 2010: 160-161), the Daasanech also connect their four main enemies with the lands beyond the mountains.¹³ Apart from these adversaries, elder Daasanech remember wars

¹¹ Many of these words are easily recognizable in that they usually begin with *-nyi-*.

¹² These two groups are sometimes called *kidhkinyo*, “our foreigners”.

¹³ Turkana and Nyangatom are both called *Bume* or *Buma*, but they also have more specific names: Turkana and Odongoro.

and raids with the *Muruzu* (Mursi) and the *Tsamako* (Tsemai). Last but not least, Kenyan police and soldiers, as well as the Ethiopian Ushumba or “Highlanders”¹⁴, are also “*kidh*” and killing them is the same as killing a traditional enemy.



Map 1. Approximate location of the Daasanech and their neighbours

¹⁴ Besides the term Ushumba, the Daasanech also use the term Abasha for the non-Daasanech Amharic speaking immigrants in Omoraate.

Raiding and war

Relations with the *gaalkinyo* are peaceful. This means that no communal hostilities (*oso*) take place between them. With the others, however, hostilities may take two forms: a small raiding party (*sulla*) and a big one (*ruu*).¹⁵ According to Almagor, “it is helpful to distinguish between two degrees of warfare. One is a state in which reciprocal raids are normal, and the other, an escalation of the former, is one in which their tempo so increases that grazing areas are affected”. Almagor goes on to explain that the first form of hostility is considered “normal”, as long as it is “governed by certain conventions, namely that the quantities of cattle looted should be reasonable, that casualties should be kept to a minimum and, that the frequency of raids should not be excessive and, finally and most importantly that each tribe may retaliate similarly” (Almagor, 1979: 126).

Almagor was describing the situation between people when there is no peace. When there is peace (*shimite*), pastoralists may graze their cattle together, “rest under the same trees” and share communal places for drinking. During peace, mutual raiding is not allowed. Then, elders firmly disapprove raiding because “breaking the peace” (*shimit mur*) may easily escalate as retaliation and revenge then come into play: “How come you go and kill, if children and cattle are well”, they demand of raiders. “If you go and kill, all our animals should be returned to the islands. Then the children will lack their milk and cry”.

The difference between raiding and war is a matter of violence and scale. In a typical *sulla*, the raiding party consists of a small group with an uneven number. Although the Daasanech prefer even numbers, especially the numbers four and eight, a raiding party should be uneven because one place is reserved for the Above (Waag), who joins in invisibly. Raiders go out at night and their aim is to loot and to kill in order to acquire prestige. In the well-documented literature regarding warfare and its relation with age-systems (Almagor: 1979; Fukui & Turton: 1979; Kurimoto & Simonse: 1998), it has been demonstrated that raids were a means to demarcate the formation of new age groups. In previous times, and among the Daasanech too, new age-sets tried to accumulate prestige and wealth for themselves by raiding. In doing so, they delineated themselves from senior age-sets and demonstrated their strength and bravery.

Before the introduction of firearms changed the ways of warfare thoroughly, youths were not allowed to raid without consulting their fathers and obtaining their blessing. In times of peace, launching a raid against another tribe could result in heavy sanctions.

¹⁵ This isn't entirely true. Oral tradition also speaks of clashes between the Daasanech and the Karo and between the Daasanech and the Arbore, also *gaalkinyo*. The conflict with the Marle (Arbore) caused these people to migrate.

The raiders' animals were confiscated and the men might even be killed. But those days are past, elders say: "Now, we lost control over the youths and they just go out to kill for their own sake to obtain the marks of the killer". Uri Almagor also touched upon this change, when he wrote: "Unnecessary violence has probably been employed only since the introduction of fire arms" (1979: 142). Jean Lydall and Ivo Strecker mention a similar phenomenon within the Hamar:

"Killing was only allowed in defence of cattle and land and, of course, during raids that were ritually licensed by elders and war magicians. Those who had raided and killed without permission would hide from public social control by living with the stolen herds in the bush for a long time. Today, Baldambe says people praise any killer without distinction. Cynically, he imitates the wall with which the women welcome the killer home: elelelelele". (Lydall and Strecker, 1979: 150)

Different from a *sulla*, an all out war or *ruu* is a huge military operation in which tens and even hundreds of warriors (*gaal ruurich*) participate. The decision to go organize a *ruu* is discussed in public beforehand. Elders and diviners license the conflict and warriors are ritually blessed. Big wars have the purpose of annihilating the enemy, confiscating animals and children and even forcing the remainder to leave their territory. They are often organized as a revenge (*hala*), because one group feels offended by the other.

When I arrived in the field in 1995, peace with the Nynagatom has just been restored after more than two decades of mutual killings and – especially in the late 80's – some serious clashes with many hundreds of casualties. By then, most Daasanech at the west bank – who had fled the area because of these hostilities – had returned to their former villages and pastures. During the two years I lived in Aoga, sporadic killings and raidings were reported with Hamar, Turkana and Gabbra. At that time, the government increased their efforts to stop mutual raiding by returning the looted cattle to their owners and catching the raiders and sent them to prison.¹⁶ No big wars happened during my stay. In 1997 however, the Daasanech attacked the Gabbra near Kokai (*ruuη Kokai*) and killed over a hundred people, including some Kenyan soldiers and policemen. A few years later, in 2000, a war with the Turkana, known as *ruuη Kanamagur*, occurred.

According to Toru Sagawa who did research about matters of warfare mentions that the Kenyan government instituted a law to deter future conflict by demanding a fine of fifty (later augmented to one hundred) head of cattle if a member of one tribe kills a

¹⁶ Nowadays, the government is attempting to convince the youngsters to abandon the tradition of killing. UN sponsored projects on peace keeping have been organized and the measures taken against killers have become more stringent. They are actively hunted down and taken to court, even across the Kenyan border. This practice may explain the reluctance on the part of people, nowadays, to kill.

member of another tribe (Sagawa, 2010a: 101). This rule was enforced after an incident in 1999.

During my last visit in 2009, there was a lot of commotion after a Daasanech had killed a Gabbra at Arbore. The local government took the case seriously and mobilized the militia – a group of men from all sections armed by the government to be used as an extra police force – to go and catch the culprit in order to bring him to court. Because this militia was not able to arrest the culprit, his cattle was confiscated and brought to the Omoraate police post. There, the name-ox of the culprit was killed and used as food for the militia. This very provocative deed was received with disgust by the elders, but clearly served as a warning that the local government was very serious in its attempt to make an end to the practice of interethnic raiding.

1.4 Villages and hamlets

1.4.1 A Daasanech village

Most Daasanech villages lay in the vicinity of the river. Map 2 below shows the approximate location of some of the main villages.¹⁷ One can differentiate between two types of settlements: semi-permanent villages called *yeno* (sing. *e*) or *nyere*¹⁸ and cattle camps or *forem* (sing. *forich*). Permanent settlements are always close to dependable water sources such as the river or a deep borehole (*el*, *elam*). Such establishments can easily be recognized by their characteristic sorghum containers, which stand on posts. Goats and sheep are kept, as well as a few milking cows to feed the children and elders. Permanent villages also have a large *naab* (pl. *naabano*)¹⁹, a round square where villagers gather to hold discussions. At the edge of the village, an arbour or a big shady tree provide a favourite place for men to gather in order to nap or chat during the heat of the day.

Each village contains several clusters of huts (*ollo*, *ollom*), grouped in a semi-circle around the common corral (*deio*). Along the west bank of the river, these “hamlets” are

¹⁷ Since the war with the Nyangatom, all villages north of Omoraate are abandoned by the Elele.

¹⁸ *Nyere* is the Nyangatom/Toposa word for village. Typical for these villages is that they are facing an open area. The term refers to permanent villages like Rate, Toltale, Diele Nyimor and Nyimemeri.

¹⁹ The term *naapo* is also used among the Samburu (Fumagalli, 1977: 107) and the Rendille

usually close to each other and surrounded by a high, thorny fence (*'dir*).²⁰ In the majority of the villages on the east bank, the hamlets are dispersed over a larger area and are usually not fenced. The west bank villages are fenced, due to fear from raids by the Turkana.

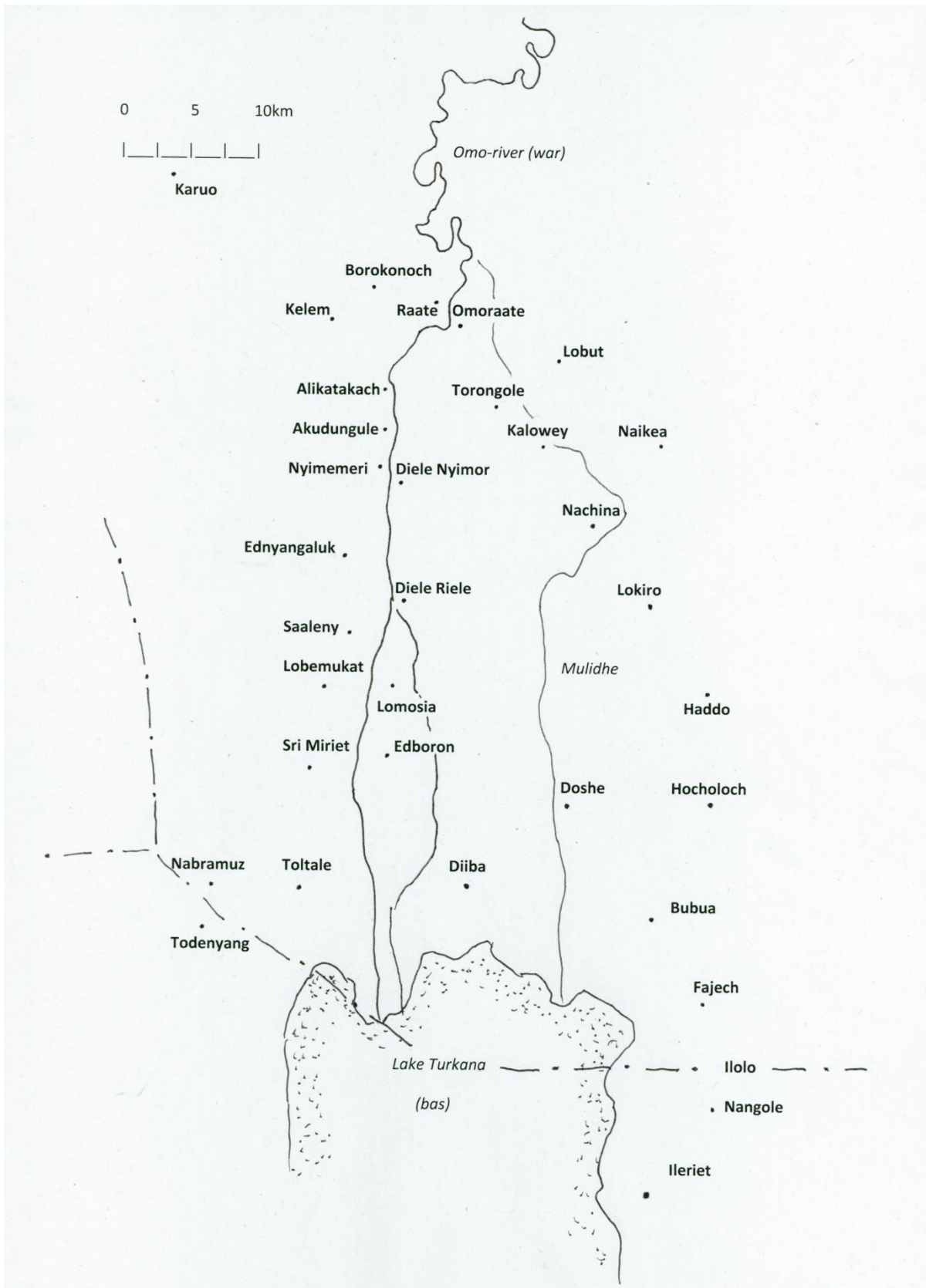
A hamlet may belong to a single family or may be shared by close friends. The huts are organized within these hamlets according to strict rules, with placement determined by the seniority of the family members and the order amongst the clans. The hut of the eldest married son of the first mother is situated “first”, i.e. it is the most to the north. The hut of the second son and the mother’s dwelling follows. Then comes the hut of the eldest son of the second mother, the second son of the second mother and so on. The hut of the youngest wife closes the line. At the back, there may be the huts of friends and sometimes affines. When clans cluster together, a specific order is also respected.

The second type of village is called *forich*. As with many Daasanech words, *forich* has several interrelated meanings, ranging from “cattle camp” to the “grounds surrounding these camps” and also the act of “grazing” itself. The “cattle camp for children” (*forich umo*) looks similar to a normal village, but upon closer examination, one may see that there are no sorghum containers. Furthermore, at night, there is a lot more mooing to be heard. During the rainy season, *forem* may balloon in size to several hundred huts as families migrate in from their permanent villages. A second type of stock camp is called *forich kaabana*. These camps are constructed in the vicinity of wet season grazing grounds, and so only for short periods of time. They contain just a few grass huts and only young herders reside there. They subsist on blood (*fasbura*), milk (*eeno*) or a mixture of both (*faseeno*)²¹, occasionally supplemented by game or sorghum brought to them by girls and women. A more mobile camp variant, one without any shelter, is called *aaṅ watti* or *aaṅ naber*. These are used to keep up with the goats and sheep in order to exploit the fresh pastures to the maximum.

Appendix 1 contains a list of the different municipalities (*kebele*), which I received from the Agriculture Department during fieldwork. One *kebele* may combine several smaller villages together. The map below show the approximate location of these different *kebele* within Daasanech land.

²⁰ The reason why villages on the west bank are more concentrated and fenced is because the threat of attacks of Bume.

²¹ *Nyeriech* is the mixture of blood with cooked butter (*salap*).



Map 2. Approximate location of Daasanech villages

1.4.2 Daasanech dwellings

Of all pastoralist groups in the region, the Daasanech have the smallest homesteads. Each married woman has her own hut, which she shares with her unmarried children and husband. These igloo-shaped structures have a diameter between 2.50 and 3.50 meters and a height no greater than 1.5 meter. They are used for cooking, shelter and sleeping. The skeleton of a *bil* is composed of long, curved branches (*hilo*, *hilte*) from the cordia tree. These are bent inwards and bound together by interweaving other sticks through the frame, horizontally. These are called “wheels” (*gadite*). At the top of the frame, some of the supports are left sticking upwards in order to leave space for smoke to escape.²² In the middle of the hut, stand two larger branches (*bil aar*), interlaced at the top. These are called *aaro*.²³ They symbolize the unity of the married couple. If the couple divorces, the *aaro* are removed during a special ritual called *bil aar fur* (“open the bull of the hut”).

The name of a married couple’s hut, *bil baaro*, refers to the ox-skins (*barich*, *baaro*) that were traditionally used as cover it, together with mats made out of woven grass (*kamate*, *kamasam*). Nowadays, most huts are covered by iron sheets (*kaale*), which are either distributed by the government or bought in town. A married woman ideally constructs her own *bil baaro* after her hair is shaved during her first pregnancy. Married women who are childless remain in temporary huts (*bil ishite*), covered with grass (*ishite*) and leaves.



Image 1.1. Constructing a hut

²² This is not the case among the Randal. This section weaves their huts so that no support sticks are left poking out at the top.

²³ *Aar* in this usage means bull and stands for something strong.

Huts have a small entrance (*bil afo*), which faces different directions according to the clan of the owners.²⁴ Inside the hut, there is a clear separation between male and female space. Looking from the entrance, the left side is that of the women (*bil'da gaal'diet*) and the right side is that of men (*bil'da gaa' ieb*). Directly to the left, is the “back of the fire” (*giet' sugo*), or the woodpile. In front of this are three round stones, which form the hearth (*gecho, gechem*), on top of which are placed black earthen (*ibile, ibilam*) or metal pots (*kaale, kaalam*) when cooking. At the right side of the entrance is the “mouth of the stomach of the hut” (*bil af gere*), reserved for sandals. This area is separated from the main part of the hut (*bil hurte*) by a long wooden rod (*nyokorom*). Behind this division, one or more big cowhides (*lokode, lokodo*) cover the earth. Footwear is not permitted on the hides. When people enter to drink coffee, family-members and guests sit according to their age and their relationship to the head of the family. The wife's place is next to the fire, her daughters at her left. The husband sits opposite his wife, close to the entrance, while the oldest son or the most important guest should sit opposite the entrance, echoing the order outside.

Inside the hut, large pouches (*noono, noonom*) made out of woven leather strips function as storage containers along three sides of the structure, which are also used as donkey panniers when migrating. The pouches at the back contain the ceremonial dresses, loin cloths, body decorations and other important objects such as ostrich feathers (*balaam*) and ritual staffs (*gurriech, gurte*). In the pouches on the male side, the husband keeps his belongings, such as his different staffs²⁵, his neck-rest (*kara, karmo*) and his weapons. On the female side, the bended branches which form the skeleton of the hut serve to hang cooking utensils, the different milk containers (*kurum, kurmo, bangach, bangam* and *kuolich, kuolim*), the big calabash used for churning (*dudum, dudumo*), the different eating and drinking calabashes (*daate, daasam*), a big spoon (*nyabokoloch, nyabokolom*) and smaller eating spoons (*muogo, muogom*) as well as a rearing stick (*kimide, kimidam*).

The milk of each cow is kept in a separate container (*kurum, kurmo*), which is made out of wood or a calabash, and which has a lid in the form of a large cup (*kulu, kulfo*). The husband has his own drinking calabash, while others share the remaining ones. Drinking calabashes are blackened inside with charcoal while those used for food are

²⁴ The entrance of the Turnyerim huts face north, those of the Fargaaro face west. The others face south and east. Gaalbur always face east. This corresponds with “magical” protection against enemies from these directions, not with the lands of origin.

²⁵ Daasanech differentiate between fighting sticks made from hardwood (*alcho, alcham* and *'gul, 'gulo*), sticks to guide the animals; (*lokulele, lokulelem; sanite, sanisam; shar, sharo*) and ritual staffs (*gaasare, gaasaraam*). Besides, some men may have a whip made of hippo-leather (*iyee*).

left natural. A *bangach* is a special container used to keep strong milk (*itach*),²⁶ fresh or cooked butter (*shiebite* or *salap*) or meat preserved in oil (*saap*).

A *bangach* has a different lid than a *kurum*: the *rodoch* (pl. *rodom*) is made from leather instead of wood or gourd. It is especially used to store liquids for blessings, like *erer* (a mixture of water and milk) or oil. Several larger calabashes (*ongolich*, *ongolaam*) have different purposes. They may serve to keep buttermilk (*gamana*) and to make and store the sorghum beer (*bersho*) used during several important ritual occasions.

One may say that the hut is a women's domain. A man only enters to receive guests or eat and, more sporadically, to sleep or make love. Men and older boys usually sleep outside just in front of the hut or together with other men in the central *naab*. Girls always sleep inside the hut. Outside the hut, the same spatial organization is observed as inside: men sit at the right side of the entrance, women at the left.²⁷ Every married woman, and thus every hut, has their own dung heap (*laago*, *laagam*). This pile is swept together every evening and lit after dark to keep away the insects and hyenas. Their smoke is associated with prosperity and hence highly appreciated.

Near the huts are the containers (*buite*, *buisam*) for sorghum. They are set on poles to prevent animal incursions. The round ones are typical for the Daasanech (*buit Daasanech*), while the cylindrical ones with thatched tops are called *buit Buma*. In front of the huts are the different corrals (*deeyo*, *deeyem*), which are fenced with thorn branches (*'dir*, *'dirmo*). These are built and maintained by men. Corrals are subdivided in several sub-corrals (*nu*, *nuumo* or *sum*, *sumo*), where calves, sheep, lambs, goats and kids are kept separately. Milking cows usually remain outside the corral during the night.

1.5 Daasanech subsistence

1.5.1 Introduction

The same word for hut (*bil*, *bilaam*) is used to refer to a Daasanech household. The term *bil* covers the various units that may be translated as “family”. Beginning with the

²⁶ Daasanech make cheese or *nyedoodo* (Turk.) from this strong milk, which is kept apart to be used in times of hunger. Another food in times of need is *'gaaro*, or dried meat.

²⁷ One exception is Waagle clan of the Randal subgroup, where spatiality is reversed.

smallest unit, the mother and her children who live in that hut, and it encompasses a polygamous household, as well as the extended family of brothers descended from the same mother. Furthermore, *bil* also describes the lineage of all families who share similar livestock brands and the same name. All of these entities are called *bil* and its precise meaning depends on the context.

The basic economic unit, however, is the polygamous household, which is sustained by its larger patrilineage. Most Daasanech still depend entirely on indigenous economy and only a small percentage of people are involved in wage labour, although the impact of monetarization is rapidly growing.

Traditional subsistence is a unique combination of pastoralism and agriculture. The Daasanech raise zebu cattle (*aŋ 'guo, 'guo*), goats (*aŋ edech, ede*), sheep (*aŋ wolech, wolo*), donkeys (*'guol, 'guol*) for transport and few camels (*galte, galsam*), especially among the people living in the driest parts in the south. Flood dependent agriculture relies on sorghum (*ruba*) for its main crop, while maize (*nakabuuno*) and beans (*haamite, haamo*) are also grown.

It is tempting to dichotomize Daasanech subsistence into male pastoralism and female cultivation, but the Daasanech themselves do not recognize a strict division. Some tasks (*wojich*), like the defence of the land and herding are carried out only by men. Yet women do assist in herding activities and they play a large role in raising the fighting spirit (*guof*) of the men in times of war. As a rule, only women are allowed to milk, but when there are none present, men may do so. On the other hand, sorghum is said to be “the cattle of women”. Women plant, weed, harvest, dry, sift and store the harvest. Men, however, assist in clearing the fields. They put up the fences and they may also lend a hand during harvest. Women perform most of the main domestic tasks. They fetch water, build and maintain the hut, grind sorghum, prepare coffee, cook, milk the cows, collect firewood and manufacture the leather clothing. Also, women fashion most of the household-utensils.

One elderly woman complained about this imbalance of tasks between men and women: “We (the women) do all the work. Men do nothing. They only bless: *faiya, faiya!* And at night, they chase away the hyena’s with their snoring”. Men are far less involved in domestic chores, but nevertheless, they do some. They carve wooden utensils for the household as well as the outrigger canoes (*kadich, kadu*) and they maintain the fences of the corral. Men also cut the wooden posts that the women use to construct the huts.

Adolescents contribute as well, as one would perhaps expect. Boys soon assist in herding. However, when a man has no sons, some girls may do so as well. Girls help their mother and elder siblings in their daily chores. Before harvest, children are involved in the arduous task of chasing the birds away from the platforms in the fields, armed with a switch (*erite, erisam*) used to sling wet clay balls.

1.5.2 Cattle complex culture

Notwithstanding the importance of sorghum in their diet, the Daasanech are truly a “cattle complex culture”. This denotation, which stems from Herskovits (1926) and became since then a common sense term among anthropologists, refers to the ubiquitous role cattle play in social and cultural life. Zebu (*Bos indicus*) are the main source of economic wealth and social prestige: marriages are sealed by the transfer of cattle and ritual life involves the sacrifice of cattle, because cattle mediate between the spiritual world and man. The importance of these animals cannot be underestimated and is on display throughout Daasanech body decorations, songs and dances.

Cattle (*aaṅ ‘guo*) and small livestock (*aaṅ ayiet*) comprise an important source of protein in the form of milk, meat and blood. The hides, hoofs and horns are traditionally used for the manufacture of clothes and utensils. Oxen and sheep of both sexes are generally slaughtered only during rituals, while goats are consumed on a more day-to-day basis.²⁸ The ratio of goats to sheep is about two to one.

Meat is prepared in two, clearly gendered, ways: men roast their meat, while women are only allowed to boil it. Roasted meat (*so kala*) is reserved for any ritual that may be categorized as belonging to the generation system, or warrior-hood. Animals slaughtered for these occasions are not skinned but roasted with the skin intact.²⁹ Boiled meat or “pot meat” (*so ibile*) is used for those rituals that fall outside the generation system. Both men and women can eat cooked meat and the animals slaughtered for cooking are carefully skinned.

The animals prized the most for sacrificial purposes are oxen (*yir, hiite*) and sheep of both sexes. Sheep, particularly ewes (*shiene, shienu*) but rams as well (*luch, lucham*), are slaughtered for rituals relating to protection, prosperity, procreation and peace.³⁰ Bulls (*aar, aaro*) and cows (*se, ‘guo*) are rarely killed. A bull can only be killed after it is castrated, except during the ceremony of the Bull (see chapter 4) and only barren cows are killed for food. Goats are mostly used for non-ritual purposes, but may be slaughtered during purification rituals. Camels may also be sacrificed for specific rituals, like *suoriyo* and large meetings between. Donkeys, however, are not used in rituals and their meat is reserved for women.

²⁸ Oxen and barren cows may be consumed in times of need.

²⁹ Women are only allowed to eat roasted meat when men offer it to them, using their children as go-betweens.

³⁰ Nowadays, a castrated sheep (*luch*) often replaces the *shiene* as sacrificial animal. However, the animal is still referred to as a *shiene*.

Pastoralists are known to hesitate when asked to give exact figures regarding how many cattle they own.³¹ This reluctance may have to do with fear of misfortune resulting from the discussion of one's wealth. And while a man may know exactly which animals belong to him, the herd is held communally. The head of the family manages it, and only he has the right to dispose of animals. On average, people told me that their herds contained between seventy and two hundred head of cattle. Poor families may own no cattle or only a few head. Rich families are said to own over five hundred head, with three such claimed over a thousand.³²

Boys begin to herd the small livestock in the vicinity of the permanent settlements in their early teens. Later on, they may tend the calves and milking cows. Thereby learning the skills essential for the more arduous herding tasks at more distant grazing grounds. Upon adolescence, they are sent out with the herds to the river delta and cattle camps, often supervised by older peers, or men of their father's generation.



Image 1.2. Young herders driving the cattle across the river

Herding follows a semi-sedentary oscillating pattern of dispersion and contraction between permanent watering places during the dry season and far off rainy season grazing areas. With Sudan cut off, the Daasanech no longer practice transhumance. Due

³¹ The same is true of children. It is not considered proper to ask a woman how many children she has.

³² In 1992, the Ministry of Agriculture estimated the total amount of cattle in the entire district (including Nynangatom) to be 94.200, the number of goats and sheep 205.000 and donkeys 12.500. This averages out to thirty or forty head of cattle and sixty to eighty-five small livestock per household. This sounds reasonable, corresponding as it does with the numbers that were given to me by reliable persons. These figures also match up with Claudia Carr's estimates (Carr, 1977: 177-179). Because the Daasanech cannot expand their territory and the pressure on the environment has already reached its limits, it is very unlikely that these numbers have since increased.

to the unpredictability of rain fall and the threat of conflicts with neighbouring groups, the Daasanech follow no fixed routes with their herds, but families tend to return to their favourite areas year after year, as these places are known best. All grazing grounds are communal and may be used by all the Daasanech, no matter which clan, subgroup or generation they belong to. Only on the islands is grazing space organized according to subgroups and generation. However, others can obtain permission to access these pastures.

The winds from the southeast, the harbinger of the big rains, begin to sweep the region by the end of February. The rains quickly transform the desert into a green carpet. During this period, generation sets organize large military gatherings called *yoi* (pl. *yoiam*). In these meetings, oxen are sacrificed and the elders discuss which areas are good and which areas are dangerous. They bless the young warriors and motivate them defend the cattle. These gatherings signal the women to dismantle their huts and tie them onto the back of their donkeys, while the young men go out to the river delta to collect their livestock.

During the following month, the permanent villages along the river shrink as families migrate to the fresh pastures. There, cattle camps are constructed as a base from which they drive their herds to more distant grazing grounds and temporary camps. Cattle get the best grass. After they have finished, the goats and sheep are allowed to make a pass. Young warriors, painted white, move quickly out of the temporary camps with their flocks in order to derive the greatest benefit from the young grass. They don't return at night but sleep outside, forming a living corral around their animals. They subsist on milk and blood drained from the necks of the animals (*fas kaabana*) or they eat the meat of sick or wounded animals or what prey they can catch.

By the end of May, the rains have stopped. Pools dry up and grass half dries out, becoming "mixed" or *morgoch*, and the men have to see to it that the cattle drink at least once every second day. A day without watering (*arun*) is followed by a day when the animals can drink (*helim*). Some families remain in the vicinity of waterholes,³³ while others return to the permanent villages and the river delta. The flooding of the river, usually occurring between July and September, irrigates the soil and allows new grass to sprout along the river's banks and in the delta. Herds are now taken to the delta, where the grass is green and abundant. For the people, the time of "want" (*mar*) and hunger sets in and lasts until February, when the first maize and sorghum are harvested.

³³ Lochabir near Kibish for the Inkabelo, Kuoro and Randal, Narama and Shoono for the Ngarich and Illol or Lochele for the Inkoria,



Image 1.3. Woman milking beside the dung heap.

Pastoralism in crisis?

Claudia Carr published “Pastoralism in crisis. The Dasanetch and their Ethiopian Lands” in 1977. Carr was a geographer and her goal was to investigate the relation between ecology and economy, between man and his environment. She did so by using a systems-theoretical approach. After having analyzed the Dassanech social organization and their subsistence (S: social system), she evaluated the actual ecological situation (E: ecological system). As the title suggests, Carr believed that a purely pastoral way of subsistence was neither possible nor desirable. Her reasoning was that the ratio of people to animals that the grazing lands could actually support, reduced as it was by external restrictions and overgrazing, was far too small to maintain pastoral production. Carr also pointed to several important aspects within the social organization that helped reduce ecological tensions, such as a well-balanced internal redistribution mechanism, flexible juridical and political systems that could deal efficiently with social tensions and a conglomerate of social groups that ensured balance amongst them.

Nevertheless, Carr feared that further ecological and cultural erosion would lead to problems. She already detected some few signs of this: the traditional forms of redistribution were under pressure, traditional rituals were losing their value and the traditional authority of the age-sets had diminished in favour of that of the clan. Because these feedback-loops had become weaker, she concluded that this could lead to increased tensions and a “S/E system breakdown”. Therefore, Carr thought it necessary to diversify the natural resources utilized and put more emphasis on agriculture and fishing. Which was feasible, because there was a substantial under-production and a high potential for extra labour availability.

The author concluded that certain measures were necessary in order to guarantee the future viability of the community: (1) a reduction in the number of cattle; (2) vaccination of the animals; (3) construction of water collection points; (4) territorial expansion, including the removal of the Ilemi Triangle restrictions; (5) birth control; (6)

in order to assist in the elaboration of alternative forms of production, measures to be taken with respect to ideology, traditional organization and the system of social relations.

Although Carr's conclusions are invaluable, it is hard to believe that measures (1) and (5) could succeed in short term. The Daasanech way of life is based on the adage *aqn burnai, um burnai*, "lots of animals, lots of children" and this ideology is deeply established. Secondly, I believe that the S/E system is in reality much more complex and much less predictable. Many variables have not been taken into account. Nevertheless, I must admit that, since Carr's research in the '70s, there has been a growing input to apply alternative forms of subsistence. This has taken shape in the application of better irrigation and fishing techniques and the use of better seed types.

Pastoral partners

In Uri Almagor's monograph: "Pastoral Partners: affinity and Bond Partnership among the Dassanetch of South-West Ethiopia", the focus lies on the quest of a Daasanech man to form strong and trustworthy relationships through marriage and bond-friendships (Almagor, 1978a). The author analyzed what he called "the structural processes behind the personal success and failure" of each Daasanech male during the course of his individual lifetime. He showed how Daasanech men engage in building these relations through bargaining power. Central in his analysis is the notion of social credit. According to Almagor, this is necessary in order for a Daasanech male to obtain valuable partners who would offer him access to material resources and social prestige. Partners are acquired through affinal ties and through the bond partnerships (*lilmeh*) formed during important rituals, such as name giving and circumcision. The frequent practice of slaughtering cattle for ceremonies functions as a mechanism for reinforcing social ties.

In this process of gaining access to social partners, a man must be careful to avoid behaviour that would erode his social credit such as being overbearing, abusing power and neglecting reciprocity. Almagor also shows that poor people have little chance to partake in this process of giving and receiving and are thereby marginalized.

The book offers a good introduction to Daasanech subsistence, social structure, marriage ways and bridewealth rules. It also offers the reader insight in the mechanisms behind the building of affinal and bond relationships and the many cases described are interesting to get insight into the realm of conflict between kin and affines. Yet I believe that Almagor somehow overestimated the importance of non-kin ties (affinal ties, bond partnerships and age-mates) in the division of labour and herding tasks. In my understanding, patrilineal ties are by far the most important source of labour, especially amongst large and wealthy families. Hence, I do not fully agree with Almagor's

statement that “men place little dependence on kin ties for economic co-operation” (1978: 152).

During fieldwork, I often questioned my informants about this matter and the answer was usually that their cattle were looked after by their sons or by the sons of their brothers. People also assured me that “whenever you are in problems (you desperately need animals to pay your bridewealth or you need a boy to care for your herds), you will go to your *ineegiet* (family linked through blood), not to your *lilmecho*”.

An important feature in which I disagree with Almagor is his claim that a man starts an independent herd upon marriage or more specifically upon the birth of his first child and hence has the right to have his own bull. (Almagor, 1978a: 65-87). The author says “that the marriages of a man’s sons mean their departure with their stock” (Almagor, 1978a: 70). This is – at least among the families I knew – not the case. As I understood, the old father remains the head of the herd as long as he lives. Formal independence from the father comes only after his death and the fulfilment of all the necessary rites. As long as the father is alive, he remains the Bull of the family and he holds the right to dispose of the family herds. True, all his sons have rights of property in the herd, but any decisions concerning cattle should always be discussed with the father before. After marriage, a son gains some provisional independence and he may receive the brand (*gui*) from his father to mark the calves, but it is still his father who owns the bulls and decides which of the male calves should become the next bull. The eldest son remains the caretaker of the family and the family herds. He remains in authority over issues concerning the family and its resources and must be consulted at all times. If the first son of the second wife marries, that one may decide to take away his share of the family herd and raise that herd independently of his brother. Quarrels between the two wives and their children may necessitate such a split.

I think this aspect of Daasanech family organisation is important to understand the organisation of society as a whole. As we will see below, the generations and age-sets within these generations who constitute society are a projection of the family upon society as a whole, with the eldest age-set of the reigning generation functioning as Bulls just like the old father is the human bull of his extended household.

1.5.3 Horticulture

Although the Daasanech may be categorized as “a cattle complex culture”, we shouldn’t overlook the fact that during the greater part of the year, the Daasanech subsist on sorghum (*ruba*) and that meat consumption is almost entirely reserved for ritual

occasions. As discussed above, the lack of rainfall makes the Daasanech fully dependent on the flooding of the Omo River for cultivation.³⁴ Hence, most farm plots are in the vicinity of the river.

There are two kinds of plots: *har* and *diile*. A *diile* (pl. *diilam*) is a riverbank. Such a plot is impregnated with moisture and sediments when the river recedes. Particular families own these riverbanks.³⁵ The owner divides these riverine areas into fields (*rubano*). He reserves the best land for his wives and allocates the other parts to friends and affines. When the river inundates, the water spills over the banks onto the land beyond. These inundated lowlands (*har*, *haram*) do not belong to anybody and may be used by anyone who clears them first.

After the water recedes, the families move to these plots and begin to prepare the fields. Weeding is done with a hoe (*holte*) and the shrubs are used to make a fence to prevent gluttonous animals from devouring the crops. After clearing, seeds are planted in holes made with a special stick called a *yugin*. Maize and beans are ready to harvest after two months, although sorghum needs a bit longer. While the ears are developing, platforms are built on which girls and boys sit or stand, armed with a switch (*rudach*, *rudas*) to discourage the birds.

At the start of January, the first ears begin to ripen. They are harvested with a machete (*nigwolo*; *nigwolam*) and brought to the side of the field, where the families have constructed small huts (*lokol*, *lokolom*). The ears of this first harvest (*rub erkoba*) are sorted into drying piles according to their taste and colour.³⁶ Fertile soil may allow a second harvest (*gabushe*) as well as a third called *duna* (grandmother), which is left for the cattle to graze. The *har* plots, which are sown later, are ready in February. Once the ears are dry, the women thresh the corn by beating it with a flat stick. Meanwhile, new containers for the fruits of their labour are made or old ones repaired.

³⁴ Rain fed cultivation is only possible on clay-soils and when the big rains are sufficient, but these two conditions rarely coincide.

³⁵ This ownership is inherited and goes back to the forefather who first cleared that zone.

³⁶ According to Marco Bassi (Bassi, 1993), the Daasanech differentiate between forty-two varieties of sorghum. Maize comes in but two varieties.



Image 1.4. Chasing away birds with clay balls attached on a whip.

A wife always needs the approval of her husband when she wants to sell or exchange sorghum and she has to take care that enough is left to last out the year. This is rarely the case. Therefore, when rains are abundant, some families will take the opportunity to try rain-fed cultivation.

In earlier times, fresh, surplus sorghum was exchanged for goats with neighbouring groups and vice-versa when the Daasanech were in need of it. Nowadays, selling and buying in town is gaining prevalence. About ten years ago, the Lutheran mission of Nyimemeri started to build windmills to provide increased irrigation. Crops such as onion, chilli, potato and fruits like banana and mango are grown there, most of it for sale in town.

The periodic flooding marks the beginning of a new cycle and illustrates the close relationship between the river and life. The oscillation between the expansion and contraction of the river more or less corresponds with a period of plenty (*hey*) and a period of want (*mar*). In February when the river is at its lowest, abundance comes in the form of the harvested sorghum, providing food after a period in which there was almost nothing to eat. Then, a month later, the big rains turn the desert into fresh green pastures, the grass of which is converted into plenty of milk and butter. From June onwards, both the grass and pools are drying out and milk yields drop. The flooding of the river in August marks the end of the time of plenty, but simultaneously it brings new moisture for the next harvest in January. When the river shrinks, milk and sorghum containers shrink too and *kuod* (famine) comes. During that period, meat and fish become more dominant in the diet and the period of want lasts until the first, fresh kernels of sorghum (*tiishe*) can be consumed.

Sorghum dishes

Daasanech usually eat only once in the evening after the cattle have returned. As the staple crop, sorghum is prepared in numerous ways. *Tiishe* (sing. *tishite*) are the green

kernels, which are very soft and sweet. They can be eaten raw before they ripen. *Woshe* (sing. *woshite*) are the sweet stalks children suck, much like sugar cane. *Galgallo* are *tiishe* that are lightly cooked. *Budbude* is mashed, green sorghum (*nyigilo*). *Akar* is dry cooked sorghum. *Dulo* is the name of the flour ground from dried sorghum. It is the basis of many dishes. *Moshoch* is a thin porridge in which *'dulo* is mixed with water and buttermilk and is frequently served after the consumption of meat. *Walwalo* is thicker and *niaado* is a very stiff porridge to which milk is added. *Niaado* is generally eaten at lunchtime. *Ba'da* is steamed *'dulo*. *Kuulmaate* is a celebration dish. To make *kuulmaate*, balls of *'dulo* are baked in oil, resulting in a kind of cake.

1.5.4 Hunting, fishing and gathering

Before over hunting by foreigners and the introduction of firearms eradicated most of the game (*binich, bine*) in the area, this must have offered the Daasanech an important means by which they could supplement their diet. Now, only gazelle (*ginte, gine*), warthog (*golchi*), ostrich (*neech*) and dikdik (*nootoch*) are occasionally hunted - particularly by the young men out herding the cattle in distant pastures. In songs of praise, the killing of larger animals like hippo (*iye*), lion (*luoch*), rhino (*gure*), elephant (*arab*), buffalo (*garich*) is still honoured. Along lake and river, crocodiles may be hunted and used for food. The hides of colobus monkey (*lol*), leopard (*muor*) or cheetah (*gosoch*) are highly valued for ritual purposes, as well as the feathers of ostrich and the tail of giraffes (*ieŋ*).

The Omo River teems with fish (*beech, bee*).³⁷ Hence, it is relatively easy to catch with nets, hooks and even with spears. However, fish eating is still disdained, especially by wealthier families. Traditionally, fishing was reserved for a subgroup called the Dies and for members of the Riele section.³⁸ In more recent times, a growing number of people are adding fish to their diet in times of need and the negative connotation associated with fish is slowly disappearing.

Wild plants provide a small addition to the diet of Daasanech women and children. This includes wild figs (*kinech, kinam*), a type of red cucumber (*inchire*), the orange coloured berry of the *Cordia* tree (*miede, miir*), the yellow, sweet fruit from *damich*, the black fruit from a tree called *nyede*, roots from plants such as the *lokote, ooro* and *nabilibili*

³⁷ During fieldwork, fish was an important part of my diet. I remember eating *diir* (*n.i.*), *meete* (*n.i.*), *hiichi* (Nileperch), *de'dde* (Tilapia) and *reemech* (Catfish)

³⁸ In 2006, the BBC made a documentary about a family of Dies. Bruce, a British adventurer, went on a night expedition to hunt large crocodiles with a spear.

and a kind of melon called *boote*. Wild honey is also harvested when found, for unlike the Hamar and Karo, the Dassanech don't keep beehives.

1.5.5 Surplus and trade

Before the emergence of a small one in the town of Omoraate, the Daasanech had no markets. Goods were exchanged with neighbouring groups by walking long distances to and fro. Families developed friends (*beelee*) among these groups, which they learned to trust. Butter, surplus grain, cattle, goats, hides and tobacco (*dambo*) formed the main export products of the Daasanech. Their main imports were coffee (*buna*) and later, the husks of coffee (*shoboro*), metal goods (spears, knives, hoes and bells), earthen pots, blankets and beads. Many products came from the Konso and Arbore tribes, who often acted as middlemen in the regional trade network. Blankets, ironware and beads were traded with the Turkana. Clay pots (*ibilam*) were and are still made by the Bashada and were traded for by the Karo. In times of need, when granaries were empty, Daasanech went to the Nyangatom, Arbore or Hamar to exchange their goats for sorghum. Despite a decrease, traditional methods of trading still survive (Sagawa, 2010b), not only in the illegal trade in firearms and ammunition.

Nowadays, this traditional bartering has lost much of its importance due to the introduction of money starting in the late '70s and the establishment of the market in Omoraate.³⁹ Amharic and Somali traders and more recently, some Daasanech, buy cattle, goats, sheep and sorghum and sell it upland for a good profit. In town, small shops sell everything needed and wanted from plastic goods, beads and sweets to ironware. Besides which, there are Daasanech who go from house to house in town to sell butter, a goat or an ox. Some families have also started to grow chickens (*luguti, lugo*), which are highly valued in the Ethiopian cuisine.⁴⁰ Others sell fresh fish they caught upstream as well as the bananas, peppers, mangos and onions cultivated for that purpose. The money is mostly used to buy coffee husks (*shoboro*), cooked in water to produce a drink called *biye kula* ("hot water"), the main beverage of the Daasanech.

It took a while for the Daasanech to learn the real value of their goods and get a fair price for them. Money also led to a spectacular increase of alcohol consumption. *Arage* (a strong distillation of sorghum), *boorte* ("sorghum beer"), *tala* ("beer made from tef")

³⁹ In 2009 the following prices were paid for products and services: an ox: 1200 bir; a sack of sorghum of 50 kg: 220 bir; 20 kg of wood: 13 bir; 1 kg of butter: 50 bir; a big goat or sheep: 350 bir; a small goat or sheep: 200 bir; a donkey: 400-500 bir; a chicken: 20 bir; a small fish: 5-10 bir; a big fish 50 bir; work in agriculture: 15 bir/day; carrying 20 liters of water: 0.50 bir. At that time, 10 bir was worth about 1 Euro.

⁴⁰ *Doro* (chicken) *wat* is a highly favoured dish during Ethiopian festivities.

and *tach* (“honey wine”) are sold in the numerous small bars in town and garner a high percentage of the money the Daasanech earn by selling their goods. Alcoholism became such a huge problem in the last decades that finally, the local government decided to ban *arage*.

1.6 Reckoning time

1.6.1 Spatial time

Daasanech have no word for ‘time’ as an abstract concept. They express time in spatial terms, by adding the prefix *bii*, which means “the world” or “that which happens” to a spatial indicator. *Bii meto* (“world-ahead”) refers to what lays in front of us (the future) while *bii helia* (“world –there, far away”) and *bii el* (“world-back”) indicate the past. *Bii erkoba* (“world first”) points to what comes initially and with the addition of numbers, one may make a schedule. The past is literally cut-off from the present moment, so that if something happened five nights ago, one says “five nights are cut” (*ram chen jitia*). The future is expressed by the “nights that still have to come”, *ram kach hi meta*. “There still are nights” (*hadle ram ‘guo*) was the common response to my questions regarding when a particular ceremony would commence.⁴¹

The past is called *udaare* (very long time ago), *kisso* (before) or “the other side of the day before yesterday” (*geffer legere daatia*). There is a different term for “yesterday” (*geffere*) and for “yesterday evening” (*gessere*). “today” is *barma*, with *bar* indicating “sunrise” and *bario* “the east”. Tomorrow is *brika*, “the day after tomorrow” is *brugelya*, “in a few days” is *brugelya daatia* and “later” is *waasia*. A day is divided into “twilight” (*barrio*), “morning” (*buro*), “daytime” (*kulich*), “evening” (*helga*) and “night” (*chuure*). The night is divided into *uruk*, the period just after sunset when people sit outside at the fire or dusk; *chuure huurta*, the middle of the night; and *naan sibili habunaya* (“the time when the spear is still cold”), just before sunrise or simply *biibirte*.⁴²

⁴¹ The vagueness of this answer was a continuous source of frustration during my fieldwork, as it made me often walk several hours to observe a ritual only to hear that there were more nights yet to come.

⁴² The heat of the day is described as *bii aas kir chieka*, “when the sun gives searing heat”, and the middle of the night with the expression *chuure naan sibil hi aabunawa*, “the night when the iron of the spear is cooled down”.

Nowadays, the Amharic use of hourly intervals has become more convenient, which differs from the Western usage in that 12 is 6 and 6 is 12. The Daasanech express the hours as “steps/feet of the sun”. *Aas gas mia?* literally means “how many steps of the sun?” The respondent answers with either a number or indicates the position of the sun in the sky.

1.6.2 The rhythm of the moon and the river

The Daasanech year follows a lunar system. It is divided into twelve months or moons (*uy, uyam*), all of which have either twenty-nine or thirty nights. During the first night, the moon mother - who is pregnant - gives birth to a new moon: *uy baado gale*, “the moon went”. On the second night, the Daasanech say that the cattle can already see the moon, while the people cannot (*uy 'guo arge*). Only on the third night, is the new moon visible to people (*uy galaat*). This is the time to welcome the new moon and it indicates the start of a new month.

The welcoming of the moon happens at the compound of the eldest son of the first clan of the junior generation. Some age-mates gather in his hut to blow the ritual horn (*farich*) to welcome the new moon and bless the future month by yelling *wolewole*. The moon then appears before the sun for the next twelve days. The days of a growing moon are considered propitious and rituals should take place during this, the first half of the month. After the full moon, the sun appears before the moon and these days are not used to start a ceremony or to perform a ritual. Indeed, a waxing moon is associated with fortune and plenty. Even days, especially day four and day eight of the waxing moon are associated with prosperity. The night of the full moon is considered a night of fortune and is especially favoured for the ending of a ceremony.

Each month has a specific name. Most names are associated with a certain aspect of nature, although the meaning of some has been lost. Below, I have tried to link the Daasanech months with Western months. At least, as far as possible, because the first month depends on the waxing of the river and this varies from year to year.

- (1) *War el takach* or “the first river” (March/April). The river begins to swell. In this period, the first rains may fall. Military meetings are held, oxen are slaughtered and people prepare for migration (*guura*).
- (2) *War el naama* or “the second river” (April/May). The water rises further and people migrate to *forich*.
- (3) *War el seddi* or “the third river” (May/June). The water swells even further. Most of the cattle and youths are now in the cattle camps.
- (4) *War el affur* or “the fourth river” (June/July). The water starts to reach the banks. It is the time when the grass becomes uneven in its coloration (*morgoch*).

- (5) *Sriyaanyu* means “sandy hill of the blue colour” (July/August). This name may refer to the blue surface of the water that can now be observed when looking from the village to the river. It is the time when the river floods and obscures everything from sight.
- (6) *Char*, meaning “snake” (August/September). This likely refers to the fact that a lot of snakes are present. One can see a lot of snake tracks (*heeno*) at this time, especially among the damp shrubbery that is cleared at this time. Sometimes, this month is also called *char simaga*, *simaga* meaning “the first planting of sorghum”.
- (7) *Chadde* or “round-worms” (September/October). This name may refer to the problems many people have with intestinal worms at this time, possibly because more meat is eaten during this period from animals grazing closer together.
- (8) *Gaarmar* (October/November). *Gaar* means border and *mar* means “want” or “need”. At this time, most cows are dry and sorghum containers becoming empty. There are no leaves on the trees and it is hard to keep small, hungry children quiet.
- (9) *Shonoch* (November/December). *Shonoch* is said to refer to a gnu, a holdover from the past when these animals were widely hunted. In this period, small rains (*nyerube*) may occur and the grass, which has fully died by now, begins to recover.
- (10) *Kuoch* (December/January). *Kuoch* literally means “full”, but this was not the connotation expressed by any of my collaborators. Rather, I was told this month referred to the fact that the crocodile eggs hatch at this time. The river is very clear by now and the water level is very low.
- (11) *Gu* (January/February). I could find is no translation for this word. It is the period when the first sorghum is harvested and the *tiishe* (stalks) serve as food. “After Gu, there is no more drought and everybody’s happy.
- (12) *Helle* (February/March). This term could either refer to the fact that the water in the river takes on a reddish cast or that the *Acacia* (*seech*) drop their seeds at this time. The sorghum harvest should be finished by now and the ears of corn dried. Storms from the southeast indicate that the rains are coming. “Helle is the time of the winds. All seeds of the accia fall of”.
- (13) *Helle naama*. This month is added in periods when the river isn’t yet waxing after the previous month.

1.6.3 Recalling the past

The Daasanech do not count years. By and large, it is the generation system and its respective age-sets within that system which structure society and provide it with a cyclical time schedule. Daasanech most often recall a period by referring to the leading generation or age-set within that generation. Besides which, important events are used as hallmarks. For example, they say at the time when the age-set of so and so of Nyimor held power or the time when the fathers of our fathers were in charge. More recent years are often referred to by special events - usually a big war but the marker can just as easily be a heavy drought, an exceptionally large flood or a special ceremony.

One example of this is *Nyibilyanga*, or the big war with the Nyangatom, after which the Ethiopian Government disarmed the Daasanech and sent many of their warriors to prison. This war is eloquently described by Tornay (1979a) and took place in 1972. Other hallmarks in recent history are *Ruuj Bere*, when the Nyangatom refused to allow Daasanech cows to drink from the Nakua River and the Daasanech attacked them⁴³. This was followed by the *Buum aarua*. *Aarua* means “strong” and refers to the counteroffensive of young Nyangatom warriors who were decimated after they attacked a Daasanech village. A few years later in 1988, the *Umbode* or *Hamite*, took place - the revenge war in which the Nyangatom allied with the Toposa and attacked the Daasanech village of Hamite. The next year is called *Os Saalaj*, an attack on Saalaj which decimated the population of that village and made the Daasanech flee to the eastbank of the river. 1990, *os ruuj Lobere* or “the war of Lobore”, was the year of Daasanech retaliation, after they were able to get access to automatic guns through the Arbore. More recently, 1998 is remembered as *Ir ongora*, “black rains”, when heavy rains and a large flood spurred the Daasanech to flee the river delta. 2001 is remembered as *Ruuj Kanamegur*, when the Daasanech attacked the Turkana and killed several hundred people of that tribe. *War muul urrua*, “the flood of the helicopter”, refers to the big flood of 2006, when help came via airdrops.

1.6.4 Ethnogenesis and recent history

1.6.4.1 Old style pastoral communities

According to the secondary literature, before the Turkana moved into the region, there were groups of different ethnic origins belonging to what John Lamphaer has called “old style pastoral communities” (Lamphaer, 1988). These populations consisted of small ethnic groups west of Lake Turkana. According to Lamphaer, these communities formed a patchwork of diverse cultures and languages - they also had much greater ethnic flexibility than is now the case. Ecological factors, such as drought or epidemics, alongside raids or hostility from neighbouring groups as well as internal conflicts, caused continuous migrations to and from these groups and subgroups. Families sought better conditions or useful alliances. In time of need, herders could easily turn into gatherers or fishermen, returning to pastoralism later on when they could regain cattle through the marriage of a daughter or by trade. Between the pastoralists and gatherers,

⁴³ *Ruuj* refers to past events, while the word *ruu* just means “war” or “army”.

there existed cooperative ties, which were necessary to survival. Lamphaer describes this type of symbiotic community as follows:

“In the nineteenth century and earlier, the small-scale societies that characterized East Africa were continuously reshaped as individuals and groups moved, according to their economic status at any given time, between the subsistence mode of pastoralism, agriculture and hunting-gathering and fishing. Prior to the imposition of rigid ‘ethnic identities’ in the colonial period, these small-scale societies were mosaics of once separated groups and individuals that came together to exploit a particular ecological zone. And because many of these societies occupied regions in which low population-to-land ratios were the norm, their loose societal structures were an integral part of their adaptive strategy: they expanded and contracted in response to their changing conditions. (...) From the archeological record, a pattern of complex socio-economic interaction between a wide variety of earlier East African societies, in which multi-lingualism in various Cushitic and Nilotic dialects was probably the order of the day, can be deduced. While ideologically committed to pastoralism, these societies often had to combine stock rearing with hunting and farming to survive”. (Lamphaer, 1988: 31)

Especially in times of disaster, pastoralists have few choices; they either build up new herds with the animals remaining (if any), eventually boosting their numbers by exchange or raiding, or they look for support within other groups, be it non-pastoral or pastoral. Such processes of fusion and fission were predominant until governments began to draw fixed borders, effectively “freezing” the groups within them. Ethnic labels reinforced this new, static state of affairs. As Jan Abbink wrote in 1991, they were “now inscribed in this discourse and will continue to figure as ‘tribal’ labels in national policy” (Abbink, 1991: 13).

Actually, we don’t have to go back that far in time to find this type of socio-economic cooperation. It was still a prominent part of life on the east side of Lake Turkana during the twentieth century. A good example of this are the Ariaal, a bilingual, in-between-group related to the Rendille and Samburu which integrated elements of both into a new identity (Spencer, 1973: 130-144; Schlee, 1979). Also the periodic integration in times of want of groups of pastoral Samburu with Elmolo fishermen⁴⁴ continued until well into the last century. In south-western Ethiopia, where there was less central authority present than in Kenya, such cases abound. Take, for example, the migration of the Kwegu from Karo to Nyangatom during the 80’s (Matsuda: 1994) or David Turton’s documentary of the Mursi’s migration “In Search of Cool Ground”, which demonstrated that the Mursi were changing from pastoralists into cultivators. Among the Nyangatom,

⁴⁴ See Sobania, 1988 on the Elmolo.

Tornay (1979a) described the near split between groups of farmers and others who sought comfort among the Toposa. The same author also highlighted how an entire group, the Omo-Murle, became assimilated by another, the Nyangatom in this case (Tornay, 1980).

The Shir are the main Daasanech subgroup. They recall their forefathers as Nyube and their land of origin as Ger. The name Nyube, refers to the Pokot, a Kalanjin speaking group who reside south of the Turkana. Although I found hardly any evidence – either culturally or linguistically⁴⁵ – to support the claim that the Pokot and Daasanech have similar roots, it is plausible that the group called the Nyube split in two, with one part going north and the other south. And that those who went south joined the Pokot and were remembered as Nyube, while those who went north became the later-day Daasanech.

Long time ago, the grandfathers of our grandfathers came from the Nyube, from a land called Ger. They were Daasanech. They were Shir. Walagul was their name. They carried the *naas*. They came because one ox ate the grass of a hut. There was not enough grass. So Walagul came and moved to this side. From then on, they belong to this land. (Ikamaga, 1996)

The term Shir name suggests a link with the so-called Seker or Siger who were part of these “old style pastoral communities” living near Moru Asiger,⁴⁶ though my informants didn’t make this association. These Seker are also mentioned by Beech as one of the original names of the original Pokot or Suk: “The names of these two trives were Chôk or Chûk, which is the name for a short, sword-like implement, and Seker, which means ‘cowrie shells’. Interestingly, one Daasanech informant also told me that Seker means cowry shell (Beech, 1911: 2). He denied however that the name Shir was derived from Seker, but rather from the word *shiiri*, which is a type of papyrus, growing near the lake.

It is possible that the origin of the name Ger, which the Daasanech situate “far beyond Labur” might refer to Moru Asiger which lies in north Kenya or that it refers to the Kerio river. Oral traditions recall that these Shir as well as the Oro and also the Elele came from the southwest before meeting other groups like the Marle and Borana. These encounters resulted in confrontations with some populations and peace with others. The term Walagul is still used as a name of praise in songs and during speeches to refer to the proper group.

⁴⁵ Pokot speak Kalanjin and Daasanech speak Cushitic. When I checked around one hundred common Daasanech words, with words of the Pokot, I found four similarities: *aso* for “sun”, *telle/tela* for the “skirt” of goatskin worn by men, *met/me* for “head” and *tomon/tamon* for “ten”.

⁴⁶ Note the similarity between Siger, Shir and Seker. In fact the territorial section of the Turkana which are closest to the Daasanech is called Ngisiger.

1.6.4.2 Ethnogenesis from the viewpoint of the sections

The formation of a new Daasanech identity out of several subgroups may be told as the fusion of peoples of different origins, who came together in the late 18th century (cfr. Almagor, 1972a; Sobania, 1980). Around that time, groups of Turkana moved west into the area and pushed the autochthonous populations in different directions. In the north, some of these groups arrived in the Omo River delta where they were met by the groups of hunter-gatherers, farmers and pastoralists already present. Different oral traditions recall these histories.

The oral tradition recall a conflict with a group called the Kor as the reason for their migration. These “Kor”, which is what the Daasanech call the Samburu, also formed a loose confederation of old style pastoralists at that time. The conflict is remembered in the “story of the two cups” in which an ox of the Shir ate from the grass hut of Samburu warriors. This act of vandalism upset the Samburu youths and an enmity arose. That an ox had eaten part of a hut may indicate that a drought had taken place and grazing grounds had become scarce. When the Samburu elders invited the elders of the Shir for a meeting, they ordered the Shir to sit beneath an acacia tree. The area was full of thorns although such gathering places should always be carefully. This act already indicated that the Samburu did not have kind intentions. The next story was offered by an Elele elder:

Before, Elele and Shir lived in Ger, in the lands west of lake Turkana (*bas*). This land wasn't Daasanech land, but belonged to the Ngikor. The youngsters of Ngikor wanted to kill the Elele and Shir. The Ngikor elders called the elders of Elele: “Your outfit is different. Your customs are different. You are different people. That's why our youths want to kill”. They called the big men under the acacia-tree. They called Lolak, they called Gintaach, they called Lokasia. “Sit under the tree, so we can talk”. The elders refused. Under the tree, there were many thorns. “How can we sit under this tree. It's full of thorns. Let's sit on our *kara* (neckrest). Then the Ngikor took two milkbowls. One was filled with the milk of a cow. The other was filled with the blood of an ox. They asked us: “Mix both containers without spoiling them”. But The Daasanech answered: “How can we mix? Both are full”. Four times they asked. Four times they refused. “Our youths want to kill you”. “What can we do, our numbers are small?” “Move from this place, go and take your cattle to other lands”. The elders of Elele, the big men, Gintaach, Lolak, Lokasia and maa shiebkoii listened to the words of the Ngikor elders. What can we do? Our numbers are small”. They choose Gintaach and decided to leave. (Lokwasia, 1995)

The unlikelihood of being able to mix two full containers without spilling something made it clear to the Daasanech that it had become impossible for the two groups to

remain together any longer. And – because the Samburu were the most powerful – that meant that the Shir had to go.

Lamphaer describes the expansion and the cultural dominance of the Turkana vis à vis the “small scale pastoralists” in terms of assimilation, through which the Turkana-language became the lingua franca of the region. Men took the girls of displaced populations as their wives and “Turkanised” their offspring. The original group, or what remained of it, took over the language and, later, the customs of the dominant group. In this way, the Turkana revolutionized the area to the west and north of the lake within the span of just a few generations. Totally reshaping these communities:

“While the centre of the Turkana expansion thus drove the Samburu and their allies west, and then south-east around the lake, a northern and a southern wing of the expanding Turkana swung out from the centre. The northern wing smashed pockets of Dongiro (Nyangatom) at Lorionotom, Mogila and Songot in what was to become north-western Turkana-land, and drove them north into the Sudan. Dodos settlers who had begun to descend to the escarpment into the Oropoi and the Ngimoruitai areas were also attacked and beaten back up the escarpment into Karamoja. The southern wing of the Turkana encountered a community of Kalanjin-speaking Pokot (‘Upe’ to the Turkana) near Losogom in what was to become southern Turkana-land, and split it in two: one group fleeing southwards to the safety of the Pokot hills; and the other trekking northwards across central Turkana-land to the northern tip of Lake Rudolf where they formed the core of the Merille people (‘Marile’ to the Turkana⁴⁷). The Turkana southern wing also encountered an extremely heterogeneous group, remembered in the traditions as ‘Ngisigari’, who lived all around the massif known as Moru Apalon (‘the Great Mountain’) or Moru Asigar (‘the mountain of the Ngisigari’), just below the escarpment, in what became south-western Turkana-land.

Those Ngisigari, who appear to have been a loose confederation of Kalanjin-, southern Paraniotic and Central Paraniotic-speaking elements, were utterly routed by the Turkana attacks, and like the Pokot-Merille group, widely dispersed. A large proportion of them, reeling under the Turkana onslaught and smitten almost simultaneously with a famine caused by a drought, abandoned Moru Apalon and fled to the northwest towards Lake Rudolf. Many of them only reached the area near Moru Eris west of the lake before the group halted, and large numbers died of starvation and exhaustion a place called ‘Kabbosan’ (‘rotten’) still marks the area in which their corpses littered the ground. Some of the survivors eventually reached the lake, while others moved southwards to the Turkwell River, but both groups were soon absorbed into Turkana society where they still

⁴⁷ Unto this day, the Turkana still call the Daasanech “Marle” or “Marile”, while the Daasanech call the Pokot “Nyupe”.

exist as the Ngisigari division (...). In the span of a single generation-set, then, the Turkana swept aside all opposition and occupied a vast territorial area almost equivalent in size to the area they presently inhabit. Their population was greatly increased by the absorption of vast numbers of defeated aliens". (Lamphaer, 1976: 196-197)

Lamphaer shows how lots of smaller groups of "old style pastoralists" became partly or fully incorporated into Turkana society, while others moved into new territories. Raiding for the purpose of cattle poaching took place before the arrival of the Turkana, but it had rarely taken on the dimensions of conquest. However, I do not believe that the assimilation of groups into Turkana-society was only a matter of force and the annexation of new territories. Perhaps the killing of men was the exception rather than the rule, but for those who lost their cattle, the only way to avoid starvation might have been to take part in new raids; a possibility which is also mentioned by Neil Sobania:

"Successful raiders could by the magnitude of their gains become a conquering army absorbing, along with the captured herds as spoils of war, the former owners of stock who were being displaced by their losses". (Sobania, 1991: 138)

Some large groups like the Shir, along with some other proto-Daasanach in all likelihood, resisted Turkana pressure to assimilate and migrated north, where they reached the fertile lands where the Omo River met the lake. There, they came into contact with people they called "Yoo", because they always responded with "yoo" when addressed. These people lived in the forest "like baboons" – meaning that they were a population of hunter-gatherers in all probability. The Shir also met a group the Elele, with whom they could communicate because they both spoke the same (Cushitic) language. "Are you the ones we knew from Ger?", the Shir asked. "Yes we are. We are brothers", the Elele answered.

Different traditions speak of these Elele. Some say that they had settled as farmers near the river and that they had brought sorghum to the Daasanach through the dung of an elephant. Other stories insist that the Elele came from Ger under the leadership of the legendary hero, Gintaach. The Elele who came from Ger however came from the West (To). They followed another route than the Shir and Oro. According to Herek, an Elele woman in her fifties, this exodus took place five generations ago:

The eldest son of Gintaach was called Maniato. He died in the valley (*kole*) Maniato. We call this place Kole Maniato. His eldest son was Akabi. And Akabi's eldest son was called Guoteko. I'm Guoteko's daughter. (Herek, 2006)

Together with a man called *maa shiebkoi* (the "Butter-Eater"), Gintaach made his home in the area and pushed out the Marle and Borana. The reason for the conflict with the Marle was the rivalry between *maa shiebkoi*, who was a well-known Elele diviner, and a

Marle diviner. This conflict caused the Marle cross the river and move to their present homelands, where they united with another group of Cushitic speakers to form the Arbore. Other groups of Cushitic speakers, called the Borana, were told to be present in the area and they were either chased away or became incorporated as clans and lineages. Place names like Edboron (literally: “Borana out”) recall these events.

Different stories are told about the origin of the Oro. Some say that the Oro also came from Ger, together with the Shir, others say that the Shir met the Oro on their way, where still other stories label the Oro as Yoo or Kerime, autochthonous, agriculturalist and hunting groups. These days, the Oro and Shir are very close and this link goes back to history. One story tells of a time when the Turkana had killed all of the Shir men and the Oro men took the Shir widows and went on producing children for them. If true, then the Oro men entered into levirate marriages with Shir after most of the Shir had died as the result of a war with Turkana. In doing so, Shir became strong again and then allowed the Oro to live in their territory.

Regarding the origins of the small subgroup of the Riele, there is unanimity: they were traditionally fishermen who lived alongside the river and the lake when the Shir arrived. In all likelihood, the Riele may be related to the so-called Herej or Elmolo, who formed a separate Cushitic group of fisherman along the lake until they lost their original tongue in the 1960’s. Some also relate the Riele to the Borana. They are not linked with Ger.

Many of the stories told to me were mentioned previously by Sobania (1980) and I imagine that there are many more to be told. What is clear, however, is that over the course of the 19th century, groups of different origins joined together and formed one unity, which called itself the Daasanech, and proceeded to develop a common language and shared cultural traits. By then, the group consisted of at least four subgroups: the Shir, Riele, Oro and the Elele, although some collaborators speak of a fifth group called Eyvere, a name which is also given to the Murle.⁴⁸

At the turn of the century, when droughts and epidemics like rinderpest (*agonyo*) descended upon the area around Lake Turkana, two more groups joined the Daasanech and were spared from disaster. These people came from the Rendille and the Samburu and were adopted as two separate subgroups, called the Randal and the Kuoro.

In the course of the nineteenth century, the Shir were split into three further subgroups: the Inkabelo, Inkoria and the Ngarich. The separation of the Inkabelo and the Inkoria occurred after a dispute between two age-sets within the Shir, the elder one

⁴⁸ *Eyver* is also used for grain which isn’t very well grinded. Carr (1977: 100) also mentions the name Ever as a lost section. The Riele have a clan called Iyeber, which is considered equal to the Murle. Another name for those Murle is Ilmanich.

called Nyikabelo and a younger one called Nyikorio - both within the younger generation. Different reasons for this initial conflict are recalled. Some say they quarrelled about a girl, others say they quarrelled about grazing grounds and still others claim that the young groups were fed up by the unreasonable requests for sacrificial animals made by the elder age-sets. Whatever the reason, the Inkoria moved away to the south and took their cattle with them, starting their own, independent territorial section.⁴⁹

The Ngarich subgroup also belongs to the Shir and has exactly the same clans. The history of this group is quite confusing. According to some collaborators, their roots do not go back to Ger, but rather to a groups which were called Murle and/or Eyvere. These groups were of non-Cushitic origin. By the end of the 19th century, they had been hit hard by the trypanosomiasis (also known as “sleeping sickness”) transmitted by tsetse (*kiisij*). Some of these Murle were incorporated into the Nyangatom as the separate subgroup of the Nyingarich (Tornay, 1980) while another part became Shir. Oral traditions recall the incorporation of the Ngarich into the Shir as “the story of Angarich” (the mother of the Ngarich). According to this story, Angnarich, a widow with several daughters, was of Murle origin. She lived on the other side of Mulidhe (present day Ngarich land) and Shir men of different clans came and married her daughters without paying any bride-wealth. Therefore, they remained at her side and their offspring became the core of the Ngarich. According to one of my informants:

Ngarich are not true Daasanech. One group of Nyangatom is called Nyarich. They come from Murille. One man of Shir fought with them. He killed many and took back one girl. That girl’s name was Angarich (the mother of Ngarich). She married and got many children. Her children married and got many children. When the Inkabelo fought and left Inkoria, her children followed Inkoria. They call the Ngarich Shir, but they are from Murle. (Yergeleb, 1997)

In other stories, it is told that Ngarich, Karo, Hamar and Marle were living together and married each other. Because of conflict between them, they splitted and each of them sought and found a proper place. Many more stories were told about these origins and many of these are mentioned by Sobania (1980). What is clear, is that the Shir group was the most dominant one in the region and its members brought in the Cushitic language and social system. However, at the same time they adopted a lot of cultural elements, like the generation system, from their Nilotic neighbours (the Turkana, Nyangatom and

⁴⁹ Nyikoria and Nyikabelo were the names of these two age-sets. They refer to the colors of the oxen killed at the inauguration of that specific age-set. Later, the “nyi” which is typical for Nynagatom plural forms, became “ln”.

Toposa). This combination of Cushitic and Nilotic elements makes the organization of Daasanech society quite unique among the east African pastoralists.

1.6.4.3 Recent history⁵⁰

Early travellers

When Ludwig von Höhnel reached the northern tip of Lake Turkana (then called Lake Rudolph) in 1888, he brought the Daasanech – who he called “Reshiat” – into contact with the West. Together with Count Samuel Teleki, he led an expedition along the eastern shores of the lake and stayed several weeks among the Daasanech. They were friendly to him and dissuaded him from returning via the western shore because of the dangers associated with such a route. Numerous others followed in the footsteps of Teleki’s expedition and they all documented on the Daasanech: Donaldson Smith (1895), Bottego (1886), Cavendish (1887), Vanutelli (1899), Leontieff (1899), Harisson (1900), Austin (1901), Bourg de Bozas (1902) and Stigand (1909).

Without going into the details of their accounts, it is clear that their testimonies vary. Von Höhnel’s encountered rather wealthy Daasanech, while a few short years later, Stigand describes an impoverished group, on the edge of extinction. This shift in observation was probably not based on a real decline but rather on the season in which the visitors met with the Daasanech; although, it may also be an indication of the pandemics that had stricken the area at the turn of the century. In northern Kenya, in particular, a pox had carried off large numbers of people. As mentioned already, sleeping disease (*kiisijn*) and drought had decimated the Omo-Murle. Even venereal diseases had taken their toll. Amongst the cattle, several epidemics of contagious bovine pleuropneumonia (CBPP - *luoge*) had broken out, as well as cattle plague (rinderpest-*agonyo*), resulting in an astounding death toll of 90%.

At the same time, Menelik II began a military campaign in the south in order to expand the Abyssinian Empire and to counter the expansion of Egyptian Sudan and Great Britain. An army under the leadership of Ras Walda Giyorgis planted the Ethiopian flag on the shores of the lake. A Russian explorer, Leontieff, brought the southwest portion of present-day Ethiopia under Menelik’s control. These conquests spurred quite a bit of resistance on the part of native groups. In marked contrast to their encounters with the early hunters, contact with Menelik’s soldiers and tax collectors was often characterized by extreme hostility. Because of the unequal distribution of firepower between the two sides, their outcome of these battles was not in doubt and some of the

⁵⁰ Cfr. a.o. Donham D. and James W., 1986.

Abyssinian expeditions resulted in pure slaughter. Elder Daasanech still remember what their fathers and grandfathers told them about these conflicts and how their sisters were enslaved. To pacify the region, the central government built fortifications, where they garrisoned soldiers during the dry season. The confiscation of people or cattle became common practice; they were held for ransom during negotiations in order for the government to get what it wanted. In this way, the army slowly succeeded in forcing the local elders to pay the demanded taxes and in guaranteeing peace, but only by dint of arms.

Around the turn of the 19th century, regular, international negotiations were held regarding the “borders” of the Abyssinian Empire and the British territories, while Ethiopian soldiers continuously trespassed to the south and in the east. The Anglo-Ethiopian Agreement Treaty of 1907 changed this situation and the lines were further re-drawn in 1909 and 1911 by Major Charles Gwynn. Finally, Menelik’s death in 1913 resulted in the definitive consolidation of the southern borders. A year afterwards, in 1914, the Ilemi Triangle became a Kenyan protectorate, which put a halt on further westward expansion by Ethiopia.

It was during this period that the Daasanech managed to gain access to guns, when Ethiopian soldiers armed them against the British. In turn, the British gave firearms to the Turkana but that caused them to turn on the Pokot, which resulted in a great deal of social disruption. Therefore, the British decided to launch a large expedition against the Turkana, known as the Labor Patrol of 1918, which broke their hold on the region. This resulted in the de facto supremacy of the Daasanech from the 20’s onwards. An elder I met in 1996 still remembered that he travelled far into Kenya and Sudan (reaching Kulal and Lodwar) to raid animals, guided by the powerful leaders of that time who had strong strategic and magical talents.⁵¹ The Daasanech became so completely dominant that the British administration decided to rearm the so-called “home guards” and install buffer zones between the fighting parties. Police posts were set up in Lokitaung and border patrols created.

The Italian occupation

When the Italians moved into Ethiopia, they built a military post in Kelem, a village on the west bank of the Omo River. They trained the Daasanech and the Nyangatom in

⁵¹ The belief that the Daasanech had very charismatic leaders at that time is echoed by the Turkana who speak of their own charismatic leaders, Lowalel and Ebei (Lamphaer, 1976a). Sobania (1980) mentions Lokwaria, who was a ritual leader among the Inkoria subgroup. In 1996, collaborators still recalled Atomosia of the Elele, Daabo of the Randal, Amunibok of the Inkabelo and Longorumoi of the Ngarich - who died circa 1985.

guerilla-tactics and formed them into armed *banda*⁵² to use against the British, just as the Ethiopians had done a few decennia earlier. The Daasanech gratefully accepted the support of the Italians, who enabled them to gain back their lost grazing grounds beyond Lokitaung, in Turkana territory.

After the Italians withdrew in 1941, the British restored the previous state of affairs and retook Ilemi. Daasanech elders still remember how they were bombed by the British and that they managed to shoot down an airplane. They took some English prisoners, but released them after negotiations. Since then, the elders say “the English have gone”. In fact, the military occupation of the Ilemi Triangle continued unabated and the border was even pushed further north to Kibish, where it became known as the Sudan Patrol Line. Since then, the Daasanech have been prohibited from crossing the border, resulting in a loss of over 10.000 km² of dry-season grazing land. The line also put an end on their transhumance route to the Morankipi-hills in Sudan, which are controlled by the Toposa, allies of the Daasanech. Since then, sporadic skirmishes take place between Daasanech attempting to cross the border and Kenyan soldiers.

The reign of Haile Selassie

After the departure of the Italians, the Ethiopian central administration was restored under the reign of Haile Selassie. The new government strengthened its control on the south through police and army control along the borders and by appointing local officials (*gaal kansich*). These people were to form a bridge between the local government and the pastoral population and to collect taxes, just as they had done before. The fact that beginning in 1958, the Daasanech living under Kenyan rule also had to pay taxes, meant a de facto recognition of a Daasanech presence in Kenyan territory.

The continual border-conflicts, especially in the western part of the region made the Kenyan government put pressure on Ethiopia to disarm the Daasanech. This eventually happened in the 60's and caused a new imbalance in the region. This time, the Nyangatom had the advantage because they had access to heavy automatic weapons they had obtained from the SPLA, who were waging war in Sudan. These firearms, in combination with consecutive droughts, resulted in several heavy clashes with a high number of casualties and the withdrawal of the Daasanech from the area near Kibish.

Elder Daasnech still remember when Haile Selassie visited them in the 60's. He brought clothing and *arage* (strong liquor) as presents, which made him beloved by the people, who still recall him as their great friend. They also remember he had four small

⁵² The treks and mock fights the Daasanech engage in during their present day age-set meetings have their origin in earlier training.

dogs with him, a custom he shares with some of the great Daasanech diviners who also claim they have four puppies in their hut.

The Derg regime and the cotton project

The Derg government of Mengistu Hailu Mariam, who took power in 1977, was the first to try and develop these “backward” areas of the country. The administration was moved from Kelem to Omoraate on the east bank. With the support of North Korea, 200 km² of riverine forest were cleared to make room for a large cotton plantation. Some years later, Mengistu was overthrown. The farm was by then operational but unfortunately the Koreans withdrew their staff and funding.

Nevertheless, the project thoroughly changed Daasanech life. A sturdy road was constructed between Turmi and Omoraate, so-called Ushumba or “Highlanders” were brought in and Omoraate became a small but booming trading centre where small shops, merchants and bars all aimed to turn a profit. Alcohol followed the money and quickly found its way into the daily and ritual life of the Daasanech. Liquor, especially *arage* – euphemistically called lion’s milk (*een luoch*) – became a huge problem, resulting in growing internal conflicts and poverty and several efforts from the government to ban it.

The road to modernity ...

I arrived in Daasanech land shortly after Mengistu was overthrown. After driving through the idyllic landscape of Hamar land, it was disconcerting to see the hundreds of rusty, worn out and abandoned vehicles and irrigation ridges on the way to the town of Omoraate. Omoraate itself gave the impression of being full of alcoholics. At that time, the Daasanech and the Nyangatom belonged to a single *wereda* called Kuras and the local seat of government was Omoraate. Both groups had fought many serious battles in the last decades, but at that time, peace was restored. The government made a lot of effort to set up modern facilities and institutions, such as a school, health clinics and a Ministry of Agriculture. Several non-profit organizations like World Vision and SNV (The Social Network for Sustainability, a Dutch ngo) had made attempts to start projects, before leaving, their work unfinished.

In 1994, Mekane Yesu established a protestant mission in the vicinity of Omoraate and – apart from preaching the gospel – its aim was to improve the situation of women and to establish rural healthcare. In 1997, Dick Swart of the Reformed Church of America (RCA) and son of a former missionary, re-established his father’s ministry on the western bank. His main focus is on irrigation through windmills, which are easy to maintain, while his wife deals with healthcare. At that time, money for development was scarce at that time and the missions did most of the developmental work.

When I returned to the field in 2006 and again in 2008, a lot had changed. Mobile schools and health clinics had been built over the entire area and the number of official employees had multiplied. The Ethiopian Pastoralist Research and Development Association (EPARDA) and some other non-profits concerned with peace were now receiving funds in order to develop the country. Programs like “food for work” were being used to build roads throughout the country.

In August 2006, the Omo River flooded with a vengeance and a large-scale aid-campaign was organized in order to prevent disaster. I was astonished to see several dozen conveyances from various governments as well as non-profit organizations ready to “help the Daasanech”. The flooding became world news and attracted a lot of development money, which was used to strengthen the local government and its efforts to improve the Daasanech’s situation. At the same period, a peace ceremony – part of governmental effort to restore the peace between Daasanech and Turkana – was organised at Nyimemeri by EPARDA and Riam Riam Turkana, a Kenyan ngo dealing with peace matters. Around the same period, the import and selling of *arage* in Omoraate was banned.

Two years later, when I returned to Omoraate for a month, I noticed many changes since my previous visit. One of the most striking ones was that control over internal affairs has passed to a certain extent from the local people to the central government. When problems arose, people tended to go to court instead of consulting the elders. Other indications of change were noticeable in their daily life: much more cars around, Daasanech children dancing and singing the hymns of the various churches, girls wearing cotton dresses and women with bras, a refrigerated building had been constructed in the vicinity of Omoraate to store the fish caught in the river.

By then, Kuras Wereda was split into two different entities, one for the Nyangatom and one for the Daasanech. Many people farming in the vicinity of Omoraate were making use of the motors provided by the government to irrigate their fields. A bridge was under construction across the Omo River, linking southern Ethiopia with Kenya and changing Omoraate into an important border town. I was told that the killing of people from other tribes was under orders to stop. Trespassers were prosecuted by a group of militia armed by the government.

Overall, traditional culture has become synonymous with “backwardness”. The relationship between the Daasanech and the Ushumba newcomers has taken a turn for the worse. The Ushumba look down on them as pagans for wearing animal skins during festivities, not keeping graveyards for their dead, drinking blood and their women for not wearing bras. In recent times, leg rings and leather skirts have been forbidden as “culturally harmful ways” and efforts were made to ban female circumcision and the collective sacrifice of cattle. People were also requested to dig a toilet in the vicinity of the village. The local school in Omoraate, which formerly hosted mainly Ushumba children, has expanded to ten grades and small schools have been built in different

locals. The land cleared for the cotton project was sold to an Italian investor who intended to grow bio-diesel crops. In a movement towards the other end of the spectrum, another portion of Daasanech land had just been purchased by the director of EPaRDA.

Many of these different evolutions are part of the process of globalization and it is clear that things will move even faster when the Omo-Gibe dam is operational and regular inundations stopped. Omoraate, which has attracted businessmen looking to make easy money through trade with the Daasanech, has already grown into a small town of probably over one thousand people, many of them working for the local administration or in small enterprises. For the latest immigrants, a school and a health clinic have been built, while the main focus of the Ministry of Agriculture is the “development of the natives”.

Tourism is a booming business in the region. In exchange for money, balloons, pens or *karambela* (candy) the Daasanech allow the tourists to take their pictures to show around as proof that they have experienced the “real” Africa. In 1995, just one Dutch adventurer with a motorcycle had reached Omoraate. A year later, a few cars came and around Christmas, four cars reached Omoraate in one single day. In subsequent years, the number of visitors grew steadily and from 2000 onwards dozens of vehicles a day during the holidays have been the norm, not the exception.

Nobody yet knows if the Daasanech will be able to integrate these external changes into their society or whether their traditions will be wiped out. Undoubtedly, schooling will alter the traditional way of life profoundly. New beliefs, values and different ways to organize society will develop. Unfortunately, there are not many employment opportunities for educated Daasanech. A many of these youngsters don't return to the cattle, but neither can they find a proper job in Omoraate. As a result, an ever-growing group of half-caste Daasanech, the so-called *dalaala*, are forming. They have poorly paid formal jobs as policeman or guard or informal jobs as go-betweens in negotiations with traders, lorry loaders or as self-proclaimed tourist guides.

1.7 Conclusion

This first chapter briefly situates the Daasanech in their geographical, linguistic, economical and historical environment. As we've seen, the Daasanech consist of a federation of several sections who formed a new identity with a common language and culture over the course of the 19th century. The Daasanech developed a unique form of

subsistence, based on flood retreat cultivation and pastoralism. Cattle plays an important role in the cultural sphere, and is the main source of conflicts with surrounding groups, as animal raiding still takes place. As a border tribe, the Daasanech played a role in Menelik II's conquests and during the Italian occupation, when they fought against the British. The second half of the 20th century made the area more accessible and brought a growing number of "highlanders" (*Ushumba*) to Omoraate. In the last two decades, the government has put an increasing amount of effort into development and education, an evolution which challenges the traditional ways of being.

Chapter 2.

Social fields

2.1 Sections

2.1.1 Sections and their territory

If asked about his identity, a Daasanech will usually first refer to the subgroup, or section, to which he belongs. The backgrounds and histories of these different sections have already been shortly discussed in the previous chapter. Although not all of these subgroups “possess” a certain area in a strictest sense of the word, Daasanech land is divided into four different sub-territories, each with its own name and each corresponding to range of the four largest sections. In those areas, the majority of the inhabitants belong to a same named group. Territories can thus be defined as the area where most of the villages are composed of the people belonging to a particular subgroup, including the surrounding grazing land and area under cultivation.

The Inkabelo comprise the largest subgroup and also occupy the largest territory, which lay due west of the Omo River, stretching south and west up to the Sudanese-Kenyan border and above Kelem up to Kibish to the north. Part of the land that lies between the Omo River and Mulidhe, an old branch of the Omo that dried up some seventy years ago. The Inkabelo are also referred to as the “Shir” a name that they share with the Ngarich and the Inkoria, but colloquially refers to the Inkabelo alone.

The Ngarich live east of Oldomo and their territory borders Hamar-land to the east and Inkoria-land to the south. The Inkoria comprise some four thousand people four thousand. Their lands stretch out from those of the Ngarich into Kenya along the eastern side of the Lake Turkana up to the Kokai area, which is a nature-reserve

bordering Gabbra land. The non-Shir sections are less populous, and often inhabit the lands of other subgroups.

North of the Inkabelo live the Elele. Most of their villages are situated in the vicinity of Omoraate. Prior to their conflict with the Nyangatom, they had resided further north, where the lands they cultivate still lay. They use the same pastures as the Inkabelo and extend to Mount Kuras on the west side of the Omo River. Along the river, the land is infested with tsetse flies and unfit for grazing.

The traditional range of the Randal section is situated north of Inkabelo land. Until the 70's, most of the Randal lived around a village called Lochabir, but they also moved south, to the vicinity of Kelem inside Inkabelo territory after wars with the Nyangatom. The Riele, the smallest section, with less than seven hundred members, mainly inhabit a single village, Diele Riele. This is also within Inkabelo land, where the Omo River forks. The Kuoro, another small section used to reside in a village inside Inkoria territory, but nowadays, they are scattered across Inkabelo-land. Their main village, Karuo, was also abandoned after the Nyangatom wars. The Oro live dispersed among the Inkabelo. Some villages, such as Alikatakach and Kabusiye, have a considerably large population of Oro people. Riele and Oro are sometimes called *Shir baricho* (the "spleen of Shir"), because they live scattered amongst the proper Shir.

Apart from these eight sections, there exist the so-called "Dies". The term *dies* also means "poor" and is also used to refer to a group of particular families surviving as fishermen on the shores of Lake Turkana (the *Herej* or Elmolo). They resemble the other Daasanech and are considered such, but they are not allowed to possess bulls. They only have two clans: Turnyerim and Gaalbur. Unfortunately, I did not come into contact with any members of this group during my fieldwork and have very little information regarding them.

Daasanech villages all belong to one or another of these various sections' territories. The previous government divided the region in thirty-four *kebele* (or villages) and grouped them according to subgroup membership. This division was somewhat superficial, as many of the villages included members of different subgroups, while other villages only exist during the rainy season. Nevertheless, the graph in appendix 1 gives an overview of these *kebele* and their total populations in 1996.

Borders between sections are not rigidly enforced; a member of any subgroup can live and graze their cattle anywhere in Daasanech land. In order to move to another village, a Daasanech need only obtain permission from an inhabitant, either an allied bond friend or an affinal relation belonging to a subgroup residing there. The grazing areas are rather less well demarcated than the living and cultivation areas: the different sections graze their stock in common, dependent upon the availability of pastureland. Because the traditional western pastures were cut off by the installation of a buffer-zone as the result of the conflicts with the Turkana, many Inkabelo began to graze their cattle along the eastern side of lake Turkana, in Ngarich and Inkoria territory. On the west

bank of the Omo River, the Inkabelo, Kuoro and Randal graze their cattle, travelling as far as the area surrounding Mount Kuras.

The various sections function independently on the political, ritual and juridical levels. This is because they each have their own generation system. Only when problems occur that affect many subgroups and require overall measures to be taken, such as large scale conflicts with neighbouring tribes, long lasting droughts, special messages from diviners or major epidemics, are communal meetings held. At such gatherings, notables from other sections are invited as guests to participate in the discussions and make speeches. Before the local government started to play an increasingly important role during crises, there were no formal institutions or persons above the level of the section.¹

Under section-membership, every Daasanech belongs to the same subgroup as his social father, the man who paid the bridewealth to his mother's family. A man cannot alter this membership and is obliged to perform all communal rituals within his proper section, even if he lives in another village or area. A woman may also claim membership in the section of birth, although she becomes part of husband's clan and subgroup after her first pregnancy.

2.1.2 Sections and ritual

All communal rituals are performed on the level of the section.² And while variations in ritual practice between the six traditional subgroups are minimal, they do occur. Take, for example, the *'dimi* ritual, which is much shorter among the Elele. They perform this ritual for every wife they marry, while the Shir and Oro perform it just once for all their wives, including any future brides. During the ritual, other small differences are

¹ The only supra-section role which somehow united all Daasanech is that of the so-called "tail man" (*maa dumiet*). This notable, who belongs to the Inkabelo by tradition, keeps a ceremonial ox tail (*dum*), which symbolizes the unity of all Daasanech. This tail is kept in his hut, which should be in the heart of Daasanech territory. If the tail is removed or whenever the *maa dumiet* has to flee, this means that the surrounding grazing lands has been abandoned to the enemy. At present, I have no idea whether this ceremonial function is still in use, as I never had the chance to meet *maa dumiet* nor to see the *dum*. I was told, however, that during the violent conflict with the Nyangatom during the 80's, when many villages north of Nyimemeri on the west bank of the river were abandoned and people had fled to the safer eastern bank, the tail man resolutely behind in Toltalet, and protected the tail with the assistance of warriors.

² One exception is this is the initiation to become a ritual leader or "Bull" in which members of other sections are "allowed" to participate. This initiation takes place but rarely. The last such Shir initiation occurred in 1985, in Saalej. The Elele's last took place in 1997 at Kelem and this unusual event was attended by people from far and wide.

observed. Only the Inkabelo for instance do cut a tall stick for their ritual leader. But differences in ritual are greatest between the traditional sections and the two newcomers, the Randal and Kuoro. This mainly has to do with the fact that these two groups lack certain social categories and institutions found among the others, like the alternations (*dolo*) or the ritual elders called the *jelaba*. Hence, the Randal and Kuoro cannot perform the *'dimi* – the most important ritual among the other six sections. Rather, the Randal perform two *suoriyom* (sacrifices in order to obtain wellbeing) a year, just like their Rendille “brothers” do (Schlee, 1979: 98-106). At that time, the entire Randal community gathers at a certain place to sacrifice animals for their elders who bless them in return. Other main differences between this subgroup and the others are that Randal girls are circumcised shortly before marriage and that women who become pregnant out of wedlock are excommunicated. The Kuoro’s idiosyncrasies are apparent in their circumcision ritual, which still retains some elements of the Samburu’s initiation, such as the shaving afterwards. In this dissertation, the rituals I describe are mostly those performed by the Inkabelo Shir.

2.1.3 Sections and markings

Simply put, there is no way to visually distinguish the members of one subgroup from another. There are no special markings or styles in dress or body decoration that indicate membership in a certain section. The only difference I observed was in the skirts belonging to Randal women which have leather knots woven in at the bottom, while non-Randal women’s skirts don’t. Another difference is visible in the construction of their homes. The huts of the Randal and Kuoro differ slightly from those of the other subgroups in that they are fully igloo-shaped with a completely rounded top. The huts of the other six sections, the older members of the Daasanech, always have a leave some of the frame’s poles projecting upwards.

2.2 Clans

2.2.1 Clans and houses

Each section consists of several patrilineal clans (*turo*, *tuuram* or *garmo*), which are further subdivided into several lineages or “houses” (*bil*, *bil*). A male child inherits the

name and clan characteristics of his social father, while women are gradually incorporated into the clan of their husband after the birth of their first child. This process begins when her mother-in-law shaves her “parental” hair³ during her first pregnancy. Many years later, when the last bridewealth cows are transferred during a ceremony known as “cutting the oxen” (*hiit galan*), incorporation into the patri-clan is complete and divorce no longer possible.⁴

Exogamy between clans is the rule among each separate section and within the three Shir subgroups. This practice takes the form of a taboo against marriage with someone from a family with similar cattle brands (*gui*, *guiam*) and ear notches (*hedh*, *hedhem*). However, even people who have different brands but belong to the same clan cannot intermarry. Besides, there are few prohibitions on the section level. For example, the Shir Ili and Elele Derich share the same brands but they are nevertheless allowed to intermarry.

Informants told me that clans exist to regulate marriage. These institutions are considered “universal”, as they exist among all the other pastoral groups in their region. Hence, they were astonished to hear that most Europeans don’t have clans. “How do you know whom to marry then?” they asked.

2.2.2 Clans and marks

As with the subgroup, clan-membership cannot be determined by physical appearance. Apart, that is, from the hairstyles of young children, which differ from house to house. Their heads are shaved in different patterns of round (*shuoro*) or circular (*gui*) tufts of remaining hair.⁵ I was told that until the second half of the last century, some clans wore particular beads, like *challaam* (blue stones)⁶ and *biero* (amber stones), but this custom has waned.

Clan-membership is however clearly expressed on their domesticated animals, which bear brands (*gui*) and earmarks (*hedh*) referring to the clan and house. Cattle carry both, while goats and sheep are only earmarked. The brands employed by the different houses

³ After a death, only clan-members are allowed to cut the hair of the deceased, and only people who are shaved can be buried.

⁴ A description of this ceremony may be found in chapter three.

⁵ The vertical “E” is another typical pattern. This is called *almaasjn* and possibly refers to the shape of a cow’s head.

⁶ Von Höhnel mentions the fascination of the Daasanech for this blue beads: “The only things they fancied were the big blue ukuka beads, which, though they had never seen them before, they at once called Tharra or Tchalla” (Von Höhnel, 1968: 157)

within a single clan may differ either slightly or entirely, as can the number and the depth of earmarks. The association between clans and cattle brands is so well established that men discussing a specific clan often outline its typical brands on their own body in order to make it completely clear to their audience which clan they are talking about.⁷

2.2.3 Daasanech *tuudle* and *gedech*

Some people recall detailed stories regarding the origin of their clan, while others only answered my questions by pointing to Waag and explaining genealogy in absolutist terms:

Waag placed eight of us here. First, he placed Turat, then Fargaaro and so on and Tiemle were the last. (Lokasiamoi, 1996)

Other informants point to Ger, the land of origin, and explained me that most of the clans already existed over there.

Turnyerim, Fargaaro, Turat, Edhe, Gaalbur and Ili came from Ger. Tiemle and Murle, we took here. (Lokorikimide, 1996)

At least among the Shir, six of the eight clans (the Turnyerim, Fargaaro, Turat, Edhe, Gaalbur and Ili) recall their ancestry back to the Nyube, while the remaining two (the Murle and Tiemle) were absorbed when the Shir arrived in their new country. The origin of the Murle most probably goes back to the Omo-Murle, while the Tiemle, a very small clan, is said to be drawn from living along the shores of the Omo River. My collaborators often provided more details regarding the origin of their house or lineage and I hope to have the opportunity to go deeper into this matter elsewhere. Here, I just want to add that many of these lineages are able to trace back their origin to a mythical founder like Halachangole of the Shir Ili and Gintaach of the Elele Turnyerim.

With the exception of the Randal and Kuoro, who were integrated into Daasanech community as separate subgroups, immigrants were and still are most often absorbed at the clan level. This explains why every clan consists of different houses. The Shir Turat clan, for example, consists of five houses: the Komaalo, Bontoi, Diire, Yeyamoi and Kuoro. These houses are ranked in a particular way within the clan. In the case of the Turat, the house of Komaalo is considered the first or “big” house (*bil erkoba* or *bil gudoa*)

⁷ This habit is also observed among the Toposa and Nyangatom (Müller, 1989: 46). Among these groups, the word *emacar* serves as both the word for clan as well as for the typical animals brands.

and they are the first Turat or the “fathers” of the other sub-clans. This house “shows the way” during communal rituals. Their members are circumcised first and their houses built “at the back”.⁸ The other houses are called the “sons” of Komaalo and considered the brothers of one another. Three of the five houses (the Komaalo, Bontoi and Diire) share similar brands, while the Yegamoi and Kuoro use other marks.

This shows that the first three houses share a common ancestry, while the other two were “taken in” (*uunij*) by them. Daasanech say that the Komaalo, Bontoi and Diire belong to the Daasanech *tuudle* (Daasanech “of the skin”), while the Yeyamoi and Kuoro are “helpers” (*gedech*, *gede*). This distinction refers to the fact that their ancestors sought refuge amongst the Daasanech *tuudle*, likely because they were either impoverished or had problems in their former community.

The difference between the *gedech* and the Daasanech *tuudle* is observed in that only Daasanech *tuudle* may take on important ceremonial and political functions. Furthermore, I was told that only Daasanech *tuudle* are allowed to sit on a special stone (*gintoot*) during circumcision.

Not all newcomers form a new house within an existing clan. It all depends on whether or not they bring stock (and thus, brands) with them. If so, they retain their brands and develop into a separate house within the clan that “adopts” them. In that case, there are three resulting possibilities: the new house may keep its former name, it may take the name of its founding father or it may be given a name by the other houses. In the above examples, Yegamoi is the name of the founding father and Kuoro is the name of the tribe the first family came from, i.e. Samburu.

Shortly after my arrival, I was adopted into the clan and house of my first translator and guide, Myeri Aarmide. He belonged to the house of Shuomiet of the Edhe clan of the Shir section, although his biological father was a Randal. But his social father, the man who paid his mother’s bridewealth, was an Edhe Shuomiet. Myeri took me as his brother, so I became member of his section, clan, house, alternation and generation. If I had chosen to remain among the Daasanech and build a new life there, I would have been considered an Edhe Shuomiet, just like Myeri. Hence, my original ancestry would have been lost to history. I probably would have borrowed bridewealth cattle from Myeri in order to marry and have children and so I would have taken his brands. If however I should have brought some of my own cattle with their own brands, I would have been the founding father of a new house within the Edhe clan. That house could have been called the house of Houtteman, the house of Ferengi or whatever name my fellow clansmen would have given it and it would have been a house of *gedech*.

⁸ The way houses are ordered within a clan is similar to the order of the houses within a family. The firstborn builds his house at one end, then comes the second son and so on, until the father ends the half circle.

2.2.4 Clan solidarity

Clans and houses are not localized and they form no cooperative units, although they address each other through kinship terms like *lokaaba* (paternal cousin) or *abaya* (brother's father) and *in* (son).⁹ This reveals that there is some sense of solidarity between clan members. Furthermore, refusal to assist clan mates is traditionally sanctioned through supernatural intervention by the clan's ancestors. I was told: "we share the same brands, he is my brother. So, I help him when he is in need".

This system of clans provides a safety net for the community. When a man without any brothers passes away and he either has no sons or they are too young for the responsibility, a fellow clan member should support his family and complete any of the main rituals left unperformed by the deceased, the '*dimi* for his daughters in particular. A clan mate may also take the widow into levirate and go on producing children for the deceased husband with her. People without cattle may request bridewealth stock from a fellow clan member in order to marry and "get rooted" (*hidh*). This loan of animals should later be refunded when the borrower's daughters are married out. Clan relations are also used to gain access to agricultural plots, especially when plots belonging to a family fail to inundate.

During important rituals, fellow house and clan members are stationed next to each other. Clan mates are circumcised together, they share the same knife and "their blood flows in the same hole". After the operation, they are given their own area inside the seclusion hut and assigned a particular gate by which to enter and leave. Also during '*dimi* and during the initiation to become a Bull, members place their huts according to their clan's particular pattern.

2.2.5 Clan observances

The word *nyatal* is related to the Turkana/Nyangatom word *ngitalia* (sing. *etal*), which are translated as "clan observances". Among the Daasanech, the term indicates not just clan observances but all kinds of rituals. The repertoire of clan observances were likely much more diverse before the different clans and subgroups became more integrated over time. The main differences I observed in day-to-day life, as discussed above, were the direction of the doors of the huts – those of the Turnyerim face north, the Fargaaro's face west and the rest face either south or east – and the hairstyle of the

⁹ Clan members of the same alternation call each other *lokaaba* (cousin) and *abaya* (brother's father) or, if they belong to different alternations, *in* (nephew).

children. The Fargaaro and Turnyerim made use of particular stones in their necklaces and observe small differences during marriage ceremonies. Among the Randal, one lineage constructs their huts with the fire at the right side rather than left, and the male and female space inversed.

Some clans or houses possess specific objects and skills utilized by the entire community. The clearest example of this, are the knives in circumcisions. They belong to the Agala clan of the Randal section. This clan also provides the circumcisers. Another example is the large bell (*'duone*) tolled whenever visitors enter the seclusion hut where the circumcised men spend their recovery time. This bell belongs to the bil Geeche of the Fargaaro clan.

2.2.5.1 *Nyerim, the clans of Waag*

Clan observances play a much more prominent role in the ritual sphere, because each clan is believed to possess specific skills considered to be innate “gifts” (*ewi*). These clan specific gifts or talents have totemic characteristics, which refer to different aspects of the environment and enable people to manipulate or influence it. They are inherited, passed from father to child. As I came to understand it, they become activated after circumcision and reach their full potential after a man performs his *'dimi*. Hence, these *ewi* grow with wisdom and elderhood.

The Daasanech differentiate these talents into two categories, relating to the ability to communicate with Waag or not. Members of clans that are able to communicate with Waag are called *gaal nyerim* (sing. *maa nyerich*) and this ability is called *nyerimo*.¹⁰ The origin of the term *nyerim* is unclear. There is also a type of tree with protective and healing qualities called *nyerich*. Pieces of its wood are often plaited into the hair or hung around the neck in order to protect against the evil eye.

This ability to “communicate with Waag” means, in the first place, that these people are able to bless and to pray, because Waag “hears” them. They are also said to be closer to Waag. *Gaal nyerim* are also able to “bring” the rain (*ir 'gieŋ*). Among the Shir, the two clans with *nyerim* are the Turnyerim and Fargaaro. The Elele have four different *nyerim* clans. Oro *nyerim* clans are the Turnyerim and Derich. The *nyerim* of the Kuoro are called the Lukumoi, just like among the Samburu, where this ability is referred to as *lais* (Spencer, 1973: 116). The *nyerim* clans of the Randal are the Agalla and Waagle. This is consistent with the fact that these two clans also have these special capacities among the Rendille, where they originated. There, they are called *iipire* (Spencer, 1973: 62).

Nyerimo is inherited by all a man’s sons, but it is my understanding that only the firstborn son is actually in charge of these innate capacities. At least, he will usually be

¹⁰ Among the Rendille, there is a similar division and they refer to the *nyerimo* as *iibire*.

the one to bless or curse. His power is embodied in specific artefacts kept in the back of the huts. They are given to him by his elderly father, or inherited. “These artefacts follow the same path (of inheritance) as the cattle of the family”, a *maa nyerich* told me. This means that when a man dies, the younger brother inherits them. The wife of the owner smears these utensils every month with oil and when they are worn out, they are burned and replaced by new ones.

These artefacts consist of special sticks called *sharam* (sing. *shar*) and *gurre* (sing. *gurriech*),¹¹ a green cloth called *roof*¹² and - among the Fargaaro - a stone called *gintoot* (pl. *gintotano*). The *shar* or *guri* is made from the wood of the ritual *miede* tree. A *shar* is a simple stick with a round top and is used to bless and to curse. *Gurre* have whimsical (*kuongudo*) forms and are only used to curse. They are searched for in the bush:

We go out to the bush. We see a whimsical branch. It reveals itself. Then we cut. We drink coffee and bless. Then we smear it with butter. It is attached to the noono at the back. Each month, my wife smears it with oil. When I die, my eldest son takes it. It follows the same path of the cattle. (Yerebok, 2009)

The *gintoot* is a special stone with a hole on top of it and is used by *nyerim* as a seat during circumcision. Prior to the operation, the hole is filled with a mixture of cowdung and milk.



Image 2.1. Iyerite, a *maa nyerich* showing two *sharam* (right and middle) and one *gure* (left).

¹¹ *Guri* also means rhinoceros and the horn of that animal. In former times this horn was used to curse, but nowadays, rhinos are extinct in the region.

¹² The green cloth or *roof* is an object surrounded by a lot of mystery and I was not able to see one. The same hold for the four small puppies that certain *nyerim* families are said to keep. I was told that a long time ago, the important *nyerim* had four small puppies, which they kept inside that cloth and fed with the milk of a special cow. For one reason or the other, having to do with jealousy and the evil eye, the cow became dry and Waag took these dogs away and only the cloth is left.

Nyerim are responsible for the ritual fire sticks (*bierich*, *bierim*), which are used to kindle new fires during specific ritual sacrifices called *suoriyom*. As we will see in more detail later, a *suoriyo* is held to call forth prosperity in war or during migration or to stop disasters and epidemics. The “man of the fire sticks” (*maa bierich*) should belong to the first house of the Turnyerim clan. He cuts the *miede* wood used to make the two fire sticks, a male one (*bierich yeba*) and a female one (*bierich ‘dieta*) with a hole.¹³ The man of the fire sticks makes the fire and burns some shrubs to create smoke, which rises up to reach Waag.

Fire sticks also play an important part in raiding. Then, someone from a *nyerim* clan, an uncircumcised youth by preference, should carry them. He travels with the raiders to the enemy lands, armed only with these fire sticks. When the raiders reach the Turkana village, for instance, the boy points the two sticks in the direction of the enemies and shouts: *‘guo buma ‘gaa eeze* (“bring the cattle of Turkana”). When the raiders have seized the cattle, he guides them back, using the two sticks as a whip. When they reach home, this *maa bierich* has the first pick of one of the cattle taken as a gift.

The principle that someone from a *nyerim* clan must always “show the way” is observed in several initiation rituals. By custom, this *maa kariat* (“man of the way”) should be the eldest son of the first house of the Turnyerim clan. When there is nobody of that house available, the next house in line delivers the *maa kariat*. When no Turnyerim are present, a Fargaaro will do. The father of the “man of the way” helps in the exchange of blessings. Usually, he also offers the animal to be sacrificed before the ceremony starts in order to ask for a positive outcome. Another feature of that first house is that they keep the *farich*, the ritual horn that is blown every month when the new moon appears. All *nyerim* then have to smear their shoulders, their children’s foreheads and the front door of their hut with white clay (*kuul*), which shows that they are people of Waag.



Image 2.2. House of *nyerim* smeared with *kuul* at the new moon.

¹³ When he makes the fire, somebody of the Ili clan should hold the *bierich ‘dieta*.

Nyerim are associated with snakes (*char*).¹⁴ Some snakes are considered “messengers of Waag”. They show the *nyerim* what Waag “wants”, just like some birds or star formations do too. People also told me the curse of a Turnyerim is often manifested by the bite of a snake. At the same time, snakebites may also be cured by *nyerim*. In order to cure the patient, they spit on the bite to remove the curse involved. Another curse specific to the *nyerim* is death by lightning.

At the time of this research, one of my collaborators, Koriye, was a renowned *nyerim*. He was frequently asked to bless the warriors when they went for war and to call forth rain. He belonged to the house of Waagshia, the first house of Turnyerim and lived opposite Nyimemeri in a place called Diele Koriye. The following is his story:

The first Turnyerim came out of the lake. My great-grandfather brought the *gure*. His name was Waagshia. His power was very strong because his father was the first Turnyerim. I got my *nyerimo* by birth. I got it from Waag. I got the *gure* from my father. He got it from his father. He got it from his father. The horn of the rhino. Other *gure* are from *miede*. You have it, or you don't. People come and ask. My cows are lost, they come. You bless. The cows will not be attacked by the hyena. People come and ask. There is no rain. I have a long *gaasare*. “Waag, we starve from rain” (*ir nyi chies*). Rain I want. Bring”. I go forward. I go backward. Rain comes. There is one kind of beads, *challaam*. Big beads, they are white, they are blue, they are green. Only Gaalbur and Turnyerim wear it. There is also something in my *noono*. (Koriye, 1996)

That “something in my *noono*” refers to the four small puppies which I mentioned already. He keeps them in his *noono* and they represent his spiritual power.

2.2.5.2 *Mesatich*

Clans who are not able to communicate with Waag are called *mesatich*. Among the Shir, there are six clans of *mesatich*. *Me-satich* literally means “black headed”, but I found no explanation why they are called like that. What is clear is that these *mesatich* do not possess *nyerimo*. However, they are able to bless and curse, although only among their own clan. Nor does this lack of *nyerimo* prevent them from having their own roles to play in ceremonies.

Turat, also known as the Tuzich among the Elele, is the clan of the fire and the ritual *miede* tree (*Tur miede*). Because the *miede* is used to make the fire sticks, the Turat are also the masters of the fire. In earlier times, the Turat even held the power of the fire

¹⁴ The python (*luobal*) was the only “messenger of Waag” I could identify, another one was a small snake called *deemu*.

sticks, but the Turnyerim took it from them by force, claiming that they had the right to manipulate them because they were “closer to Waag”. The Turat, fearing the curse of the *nyerim*, had no other choice then to accept this situation. Nevertheless, they retained their power over the *miede*.¹⁵ This means that during all ritual occasions where *miede* is to be cut, the ax used must be blessed by a Turat man. They bless the axe by spitting on it four times. They can also order others to go and cut the wood, spitting on their foreheads and the right hands. Turat may be asked to call forth rain when no *nyerim* are present. Because of their link with fire, Turat are also asked to heal burns and scalds.

The Edhe are the “clan of the wind” (*Tur waanich*). In former times, they were called upon to bring winds or to stop them. Winds are very welcome when the mosquitoes become so abundant that sleeping is almost impossible. Because eye-diseases are associated with wind and the dust it brings, the Edhe are believed to know how to heal them. Traditionally, the Edhe were not allowed to eat the head of an animal or its eyes, but this custom has waned. Two houses of the Edhe are especially renowned. One is the house of Shuom, which provides the people who make a substance called *shuom*. This is a mixture of clay, milk, cooked butter and sorghum beer used to initiate Bulls and to purify people who have committed a murder. The second is the house of Kamgaye, who are said to possess *muoro*, a kind of magic they use in order to become wealthy.¹⁶ The word *kam* itself refers to earmark typically used on their cattle, which consists of several small cuts made next to one another.¹⁷

The Gaalbur are the people of the river.¹⁸ It is said that this clan was not placed on the earth by Waag, like the other clans, but that they were “born” inside the river. Since then, they have retained the ability to regulate the flooding of the river and to influence crocodiles. In the past, when crocodiles formed a big threat to cattle crossing the river, the Gaalbur took red clay (*maal*) and performed certain ritual acts on the edge of the river, enabling the cattle to reach the other side in safety.¹⁹ The totemic object of Gaalbur is the catfish (*reemech, reem*), which they are not allowed to eat. In former times, the Gaalbur used the fatty stomach lining (*muor*) of that fish to bless others, rather than sheep *muor*. They were also asked to heal malaria, which is called the “disease of the

¹⁵The story goes that when the *nyerim* went to cut the *miede* during ‘*dimi*, a task which was (and still is) performed by the Turat, all its leaves fell off.

¹⁶ This subject is taken up below.

¹⁷ I will elaborate on this in chapter four.

¹⁸ *Gaal-bur* means literally “red people”. Among the Elele, the equivalent of Gelbur is called Tuzich.

¹⁹ In order to keep the river safe, Gaalbur made balls of that clay and smeared some of it on his body. Another practice involved smearing *maal* (soft river clay) around his lips, and spitting water into the river.

pancreas” (*baash baricho*).²⁰ Consequently, the Gaalbur are not allowed to eat the pancreas of any animal and the curse of a Gaalbur may result in either malaria or crocodile bites. The Gaalbur are also different when it comes to their marriage ceremony. When a Gaalbur marries, his bride has to light the fire in the cattle pen upon arriving to join her new family, an observance that is not made by the other clans.

The Murle clan is associated with the tsetse fly, or *kiisjn*. If cursed by one of their number, the victim swallows such a fly and dies. This association with this fly is interesting given that the Murle people were devastated by an epidemic of sleeping sickness by the turn of the 19th century. As already mentioned, survivors found refuge among the Nyangatom as a separate subgroup and among the Daasanech as a clan (the Murle) and a subgroup (the Ngarich). Apparently, their survival made them into the healers of future epidemics. The Murle are also called to assist in healing specific curses called *hirich* (or “needle”).

The Ili have power over scorpions (*geen, geenem*) and spiders (*shaade, shaadam*). To this day, when somebody is bitten, a Ili may be called to take away the pain by spitting on the wound. By custom, members of the Ili should not kill spiders or scorpions. Instead, they should simply spit on them and “ask them” to go away. I don’t know to what extent this is still observed, as I once witnessed an Ili man killing a scorpion with a stick. Some Ili families are renowned for their ability to lift curses from ancestor spirits.

The Tiemle are a small clan and share their abilities with the members of other clans. I was informed that along with the Murle, they have the power to heal *hirich*. They share power over the pancreas with the Gaalbur. The Tiemle can also heal wounds and skin infections; this ability they share with the Fargaaro. They have their own ritual sticks made from the wood of the *kumusich*, a kind of tree with aerial roots. During the ‘*dimi*’ ritual, the Tiemle girls are not smeared with white clay nor do they put the *daale* plant on their head.

Overall, the attention paid to the different abilities of the *mesatich* has waned and is generally only observed during communal rituals.

²⁰ This link between the river and malaria (*baash baricho* or “spleen disease”) most probably has to do with the fact that malaria is endemic after the flooding.

2.3 Alternations or *dolo*

2.3.1 Endogamous alternations

The six traditional Daasanech sections are divided into two endogamous groups or *dolo* (sing. *dol*). One is called *dol gerge*, the other *dol baadiet*. Almagor (1978a:23) and Carr (1977: 105) both translated *dolo* as “moiety”, because they divide the community into two halves. I prefer to leave the term un-translated because moieties are usually defined as exogamous groups of clans. Daasanech *dolo*, on the other hand, have nothing to do with clans and nor are they exogamous. In fact, they are alternations. This means that a child belongs to the opposite *dol* of its parents and to the *dol* of its grandparents, a principle that is also observed within the Daasanech generation system. Simply put: when the parents are *dol gerge*, the child is born *dol baadiet* and when the parents are *dol baadiet*, the child is born *dol gerge*. Hence, in the context of *dolo*, people of the same *dol* address each other as “brother” and “sister” and people of the opposite *dol* may address each other as “father/mother” and “son/daughter”.

The names of both *dolo* have a spatial connotation. I was told that the word *dol* is derived from the verb *dalle* (“to be born”) and that *gerge* comes from *gere*, which means “inside”, “centre”, “womb” or “stomach”. This means that we can translate *dol gerge* as “born from the inside”. By contrast, the word *baadiet* comes from *baado*, which means “outside”. Collaborators considered the outer alternation to be the primary one and *dol gerge* as “born out of *dol baadiet*”. As was explained to me: “*Dol baadiet* was the first. He was not seen. He came from abroad. Waag made him and dropped him on the earth. When he was here, his offspring became *dol gerge*. *Dol gerge* are those born out of the womb of *dol baadiet*”. This event is recalled in the order of the ‘*dimi*, the main ritual in which the *dolo* play a role: *dol baadiet* comes first, then *dol gerge*.

Dol-membership is invisible, no external markings or special clothing indicate to which group a person belongs. Therefore, if one wants to know a girl’s *dol*, one has to ask. This seems odd because the significance of the *dolo* is to regulate marriage. Furthermore, as we shall see below, generation membership is clearly visible in the beads a girl wears. I have no explanation as to why *dolo* are not shown while generations are. I was only told that “this is the way it is. Your *dol* doesn’t matter if you go out dancing in the evenings. They only matter during ‘*dimi*. Then one is not allowed to dance or sing with somebody of the other *dol*”. Nobody is allowed to marry somebody of the opposite *dol*, and that is precisely what is stressed here, which begs the question of why *dol* membership is not displayed. Further questioning on my part didn’t gain me further insight. Rather, I only received an explanation for the *dolo* rule:

The *dolo* were also among the Nyube. Waag gave it to us.²¹ When somebody of *dol baadiet* marries a girl of *dol gerge*, he will die. When somebody of *dol gerge* marries a girl of *dol baadiet*, he will die. Both should remain separate. This is the way. When they come together, it is bad. When they come together, this leads to death. The daughter of the *maa 'dimi* of this *dol* will be given to somebody of the other *dol*. The daughter of the *maa 'dimi* of the other *dol* will be given to somebody of this *dol*. How can you marry your own daughter? They will beat you until you die. When you impregnate her, you will lose your legs. The *jelaba* will kill you. They will sing their songs. (Lokasiamoi, 1996)

As this quote suggests, the overt argument for the presence of *dolo* is that they prohibit “incestuous” marriages between a man and his mother or daughter.²² From a functionalist point of view, this implies that *dolo* eliminate competition for the same brides between fathers and sons and this might have been indeed the case in a context when *dolo* existed as generations with elders and youngsters. Nowadays, however, there is often no longer an age-difference between the members of each *dol*. When I asked my collaborators about the neighbouring Turkana where no *dolo* exist, they answered that among that group, it is possible to marry the wife of one’s own deceased father and hence, give birth to your own brothers:

Among the Bume, somebody can marry the wife of his brother’s father when he dies. This is not possible among the Daasanech because of the *dolo*. Among the Turkana, the little wife of you father may become your own wife when your father dies. Then, your children are your brothers. This is very bad. When she is pregnant, that child will belong to her own father.²³(Losseia, 1996)

Here, my collaborator is referring to the fact that children cannot take the young wife of their father – who they consider as their own younger mother – into levirate precisely because of the *dolo*, while that is – theoretically, at least – possible among the Turkana, an aspect of Turkana culture that they regard with disgust.

²¹ *Waag hi ko shiiche*, literally means “Waag gave it to us “, but I believe it may also be translated as “it is very important”.

²² I placed incestuous in quotations because the Daasanech don’t have a word for it and because our use of the term also covers sexuality between brothers and sisters. According to Legesse (1973: 39) the Borana use the same argument to explain the exogamous rule between moieties. Among them, the rule also prohibits marriages between brothers and sisters.

²³ Consequently among the Daasanech, a grandson may take the youngest wife of his grandfather into levirate. Then, his grandmother will become his “wife” and his children will be his “fathers” or “mothers”.

2.3.2 *Dolo* and ritual

During the '*dimi* or "feast of the girls" (*jila hada*) which proceeds their circumcision, the *dolo* are clearly separated. The participants build two villages next to each other in two huge circles. The village in the north belongs to the parents who are *dol gerge* (and their girls, who are *dol baadiet*), while the village in the south belongs to the parents who are *dol baadiet* (and their girls, who are *dol gerge*). The purpose of this feast is the blessing of the girls by the ritual leaders (*jelaba*). These elders belong to the same alternation as the parents of the girls. They are hosted as the guests of these parents throughout the ceremony, which may take several months. At the end of the ceremony, the *jelaba* bless their daughters and wish them a fertile and prosperous life. Only on the very last day, do the ritual leaders of the other *dol* visit the village of the opposite *dol* (and thus, the girls of their own *dol*). At that time, they receive a gift of live oxen from the fathers and brother's fathers of the girls as a kind of inverse bridewealth.

During my fieldwork, the purpose of these *dolo* greatly puzzled me. The reason why the *dolo* came into existence was explained to me in the following way:

The *dolo* were given together with the '*dimi*. The first man stayed long time without a daughter. His son already had a daughter. She became big, so his son started to cut the *naas* (the ritual tree for performing the '*dimi*). Also his father cut the *naas* (or his daughter who was also born). So, how can you dance with the wife of your son? How can you dance with your own mother? Let the fathers be *dol gerge*. Let the sons be *dol baadiet*. The sons can dance with their own wife. The fathers can dance with their own wife. *Dol baadiet* are the sons, *dol gerge* are the fathers. (Lokasiamoi, 1996)

Here, the origin of the *dolo* is explained as resulting from a situation where father and son had to make their '*dimi* at the same time, because both had daughters of the same age. As they could not mix or dance together, their '*dimi* had to be performed separately. This means that the taboo on sexuality with the opposite *dol* may be expressed as a taboo against "dancing together". And yet, apart from during the '*dimi*, it is not considered bad to dance with somebody of the opposite *dolo*.²⁴

There may be a possible answer to this seeming paradox. The *dolo* could date from a time at which the Daasanech had an age-grading system before they had a generation system. In a system of age grades, like the *gada* of the Borana (Legesse, 1973) or the different *hrelta* among the Konso (Hallpike, 1972: 185 a.f.), people move gradually from grade to grade through initiation, taking on responsibilities and tasks accordingly. The

²⁴ At that time, one is prohibited from dancing with members of the opposite generation.

complex *gada* system of Borana and Galla, for instance, is both alternating and based on age-grades. The grades of the sons depend on the grade of the father. The Konso also have a complex age-grading system, including double alternation. There, each son is born two grades below the grade of his father, which results in a division among two or three so-called alternating *hrelta*. Among the Konso, alternations do not function according to the generations as among the Daasanech, but according to the age of male siblings.

Although further research is needed to explain these complexities, there is evidence to suggest that the Daasanech once had a grading system similar to other Cushitic groups, most probably the Rendille. One piece of evidence that supports a link with the Rendille is that the terms of some of the Daasanech social categories, like *her* (circumcised men) and *jelaba* (ritual leaders) correspond with grades among the Rendille. In that previous system, the *dolo* were probably linked to generations, in which the fathers generation was a few up to several grades higher than the generation of his sons. Over the course of history, the alternating system may have ceased to fulfill the function of dividing grades among the Daasanech.

The break may have occurred through the adoption of their Nilotic neighbours' generation system, which is based on different principles. As we will see below, it operates using age-sets rather than grades. The incorporation of the age-set and generation system into an older age-grading system may have resulted in the unique system the Daasanech now practice.

2.3.3 Symbolic connotations

An interesting and intriguing aspect of the *dolo* is that they are associated with several dichotomies that may easily be linked to one another. The most obvious is of course the dichotomy between inner and outer: *dol baadiet* are those born outside, *dol gerge* those born from the inside. In turn, this dichotomy in turn may be readily associated with gender: outside is associated with male and inside with female. This doesn't only correspond with the fact that the house is the woman's space, but it also aligns with the association made between bull and cow during the preparation for the Bull initiation ritual.

Each time there is a new initiation of Bulls, young man of respected families belonging to both *dolo* travel to Labur Mountain (in present day Turkana territory) to get hold of two pieces of wood called *saaba*. In order to complete the quest, the men of *dol baadiet* return with a piece called *Aar* ("bull") while those of *dol gerge* bring back a

piece called *Se* (“Cow”).²⁵ The expedition leaves in secrecy and I was told that on their way, they are only allowed to drink milk. When they reach Labur, they are “guided” towards or drawn by the wood through the specific sound it makes: the *saaba* of *dol baadiet* roars like a bull, the *saaba* of *dol gerge* lows like a cow. When the men reach the area where it grows, they bless the wood and cut off two fine pieces to be taken home. Once back, a female sheep is killed and the hide used to decorate the *saaba* after the inner substance (*heerte*) of the wood is removed and thrown into the pen for the calves, while some of it is kept apart to be added to the substance used to smear the foreheads of the initiates (*shuom*). During the initiation, the *saaba* is blown every evening to imitate the noise of a bull and a cow. Afterwards, it is used to make the special horn called a *farich*, which is used by the sons of the reigning generation to bless the lands and the people during the new moon, as well as by the Shir to celebrate their ‘*dimi*.²⁶

This dichotomy appears elsewhere in spatial associations. As stated previously, during the ‘*dimi* the *dolo* are spatially organized into a northern and a southern village, with that of the *dol baadiet* always built south of the *dol gerge*. This is echoed by the relationship between north, which is associated with a small lake (*had Kerre*) and south, which is associated with the big lake (*bas*). One man told me that these places are inhabited by certain water creatures called *aaro*, which are involved in the cyclical developments on the river and of the rainy season. My collaborators were at odds regarding their nature and some even equated them with two celestial creatures called *aaro waagiet*. It wasn’t clear if they formed a couple (male Bull and female Cow) or if they lived apart, with the Bull in the south and the Cow in the north. However, all were in agreement that the southern one was good, while the northern one wanted to destroy the Daasanech. These kinds of stories, which I also found among other peoples in the neighbourhood (for example, among the Turkana and Maasai), may be typical of pastoral peoples and the different interpretations may be due to the context or to the clan the speaker belonged to.²⁷

Another spatial association between gender and *dol* is found in the right/left dichotomy. *Dol baadiet* is associated with the male and *dol gerge* with the female. Hence, *dol baadiet* goes with the right side and *gerge* with the left side. This dichotomy is apparent in several situations. To name but a few, during the funeral of a man, his age-mates kill his name-ox and eat it according to their *dolo*: *dol baadiet* eats the right side,

²⁵ When there are eight clans, as among the Inkabelo and Elele, this means that a group of sixteen people will go. There is some evidence to suggest that this wood is actually a type of bamboo in that it is hollow and it grows tall like grass. Furthermore, it is used to construct flutes and horns.

²⁶ I was also told that the instrument is used to make a container for the ritual tail (*dum*), which symbolizes the Daasanech as a whole, so I am not entirely sure on this point and further research is needed. I’m also not sure whether there are two *saaba* made or only one.

²⁷ I will come back to this theme when I discuss the Celestial Bulls in the next chapter.

dol gerge the left side. Secondly, raiding and hunting groups traditionally approached an inimical village or a wild animal from two sides: *dol baadiet* approached from the right side and *dol gerge* from the left. Furthermore, after a successful hunt, the prey was divided and consumed among the *dol baadiet* and *dol gerge* according to this spatial designation.

2.3.4 Hidden structures?

The association of *dolo* with spatiality and gender invite the anthropologist to take a structuralist approach and provide him with a chart by which he can interpret a dual social universe. In this scheme, male, bull, south, outside, good and the lake form one side of the coin, while female, cows, north, inside, bad and river form the other:

Outside -	South	Male -	Bull -	Right -	Lake -	Good
Inside	North-	Female	Cow -	Left -	River -	Bad

It is tempting to weave all these elements together into a universe where masculine and feminine are associated with pastoralism (*aan deep*), rain (*ir*) and the centrifugal against horticulture (*uom fine*), the river (*war*) and the centripetal or with any other combination as shown above. The river is coming from the inside, the rains are coming from the outside. However, the more I took this approach, the more highly speculative conclusions I produced, all of which straitjacketed reality. Whatever combination one makes, there always comes a point where such associations begin to contain anomalies. One of the main problems with such simplistic duality is that both *dolo* are considered equal, while associations with male and female always tend to imply a sort of masculine superiority.

Therefore, I propose that these dichotomies are nothing more than thought exercises. It is clear that these metaphors seem to address two forces or qualities, which share a dual nature that is inherent in everything in the world, where everything has two sides. One may label these dichotomies as female and male, inner and outer or perhaps even yin and yang. But more interesting, and more realistic, than this black and white schematic is the oscillating process behind these dualities. This divides but it also includes, always combining both elements to some degree.

Examples of this are numerous: the river goes up and down, the lake grows and shrinks, the cattle go and return, the sun alternates with the moon, people are born and die, rains come and go, drought goes and comes, things turn out good and things run bad. And all in all, everything that happens contains the seeds of its own opposite within it. In this way, everything in the world may be thought of as a continuous

oscillation between inner and outer. In this process, movement is necessary and good for life (*rubach*) and obstructions are harmful (*kufach*).

2.4 Ritual leaders

2.4.1 *Jelaba* (sing. *maa jelaba*), Bulls or *ara* (sing. *maa ara*) and *haris* (sing. *maa haris*)

Daasanech society is layered according to seniority. The elders of the senior generation-set are the political and spiritual leaders, those “who reign the country” (*Daasanech el toomo* ‘*gaa kaadha*) and act as intermediaries between the Above and the living in matters of fertility and justice. Among the six traditional Daasanech subgroups, these people are called *jelaba* or *ara jelaba*.²⁸ The requirements for becoming an *ara jelaba* are twofold. First, one must be initiated as a Bull (*maa ara*) during a special ceremony and secondly, one must be elected from the eldest age-group of the reigning generation. I presume that before the Daasanech adopted the generation-set system of their Nilotic neighbours, the *jelaba* formed a senior age-grade. At that time, the *jelaba* likely filled a similar function as they do now, mediating between the Above and man. When the age-grading system became incorporated into the generation system, they maintained their authority and remained a separate category - not as an age-grade, but as the most senior of all age-sets.

Almagor only mentions the term *ara* in his research, not the term *jelaba* or *ara jelaba*. He describes these Bulls in the following way: “Power in the age system is vested in a clique of about thirty elders called “bulls” (*ara*), a title conferred upon certain elders elected by and from the surviving elders of the senior generation-set” (Almagor, 1978a: 25). The difference between *ara* and *jelaba* was at first confusing for me, until I came to understand that all people who underwent the initiation ceremony to become a *maa ara* are actually *ara* (Bull), while only those who are elected from the senior age-set of the reigning generation are called *jelaba* or *ara jelaba*.

During the *ara*-initiation, described in detail below, the future Bulls make what is called a “promise to the land” (*dee les eefin*, which literally means “putting the word on

²⁸ The Randal and Kuoro lack this category.

the earth”). This means that they swear to abstain from certain acts, like stealing, adultery, impregnating an unmarried girl or taking revenge against other Daasanech.²⁹ Walking over the hide and head of a sacrificed bull before being smeared with a special mixture called *shuom*, seals the oath.

One may easily draw a comparison with a herd. The people who perform this ritual put their now fully-fledged spiritual gifts at the disposal of the community, just as a steer may develop into a bull. And just as a herd needs bulls to procreate, the Daasanech Bulls are needed for the spiritual procreation of the group. “In addition to being the formal political leaders of the age-system, and thus of the whole tribal section, the ‘bulls’ perform certain judicial and ceremonial functions, and exercise considerable power over the life of every Dassanetch”. As one of Almagor’s collaborators put it: “Without the blessing of the ‘bulls’, his wife will have no children. Without the blessing of the ‘bulls’, his herd will not grow. Their work is with fertility” (Almagor, 1978a: 25).

These bulls may be old and their sexual potencies may have waned, but their spiritual powers have grown and they are involved in all matters regarding cattle and women by virtue of their special relation with the Above. Almagor succinctly described the specific role of the *ara* within the community when he wrote that “apart from structural position, the essence of Bulls’ power rested in the mystical notion that they alone mediated the divine gifts of children and cattle and thus controlled the fertility of both humans and livestock” (1978: 100).

Men not initiated as bulls lack this control and are called *haris*. They didn’t make a promise to the land and remain just ordinary humans without any mystical capacities. Because of this, they are not allowed to enter the *naab* during the *’dimi* nor are they able to bless the girls. Furthermore, they are not allowed to partake in the division of meat and must wait outside the *naab* to see if the goodwill of the *ara* will provide them some. In such cases, the *jelaba* who sit in the *naab* calling and throwing the meat to them as if they were dogs: *kss, kss, aba kade, kom* (“kss, kss, come, eat”!). If the *haris* make mistakes, the consequences are minimal. Therefore, they are used by the *jelaba* to carry out their decisions, often involving the use of brute force.

²⁹ *Ara* may engage in war and kill enemies, but they are not allowed to take part in raiding parties.



Image 2.3. Ara-jelaba during Oro 'dimi.

2.4.2 Characteristics of the *jelaba*

The main *jelaba* are those who lead the 'dimi and there are four for each *dol*. They are called *maa kuul edha* ("those of the white mud") and this name refers to the fact that they paint their head with *kuul* and their body with white stripes (*kaabo*) at the end of that ceremony. Each of these four men have specific tasks during the 'dimi. The "pipe-man" (*maa makaale*) is the overall leader. He is the one who smokes tobacco in a pipe (*makaale*) at the end of the 'dimi, taking the ancestors as witness. His first assistant is called the "man of the hind leg of the ox" (*maa 'guo hergo*); the name derives from the fact that he cuts the hind leg of the oxen slaughtered during 'dimi. He is also responsible for seeing that the sacrum (*tuo*) is cut out properly and that all the meat is brought to the central *naab*. The "fire man" (*maa yiete*) is responsible for maintaining the fire throughout the ceremony. Because of the nature of the job, he should by preference belong to the Turat clan. After him, the "fire stick man" (*maa bierich*) is responsible for lighting the fire. Therefore, he should hail from a *nyerim* clan.

These four people are selected by and from among Bulls of the *eldest* age-set. Candidates should belong to a family "free from wounds and ritual pollution" (*daaf ba nyogich man*). When one of them dies, another is selected to replace him:

"Who do you want to become your member?" "We want so and so". "No, we decided about so and so". Put *kuul* (white clay) on him to show we approved him.

So he becomes one of our four. When I, the *maa makaale* pass away, among the three others remaining, one will replace me. Then they will put another in the empty place before the next '*dimi* comes. Clan membership does not matter.³⁰ (Lokasiamoi, 1996)

jelaba can be recognized by their staff (*gasar'ara*), which is made of out of *miede*. They use this staff as a walking stick, when they speak and to curse. Nobody is allowed to touch it and when a *jelaba* points the top of his staff at a person, this counts as a curse. As one of my collaborators said, "Their staff is very powerful. If they point their stick, they curse, especially during '*dimi*. Nobody is allowed to touch his stick". Apart from this staff and the white clay they paint themselves with during '*dimi*, there are no signs or marks to indicate that somebody is a *maa ara* or *maa jelaba*.³¹

Jelaba are said to speak a secret language, which they call the "language of the birds" (*af kimide*). This secret language remained obscure to me, and I believe that the vocabulary is limited to a few words.³² The *jelaba* also have their own repertoire of songs, called *hogaare*, which indicates "something important". They sing *hogaare* songs after they make a decision or during different ritual occasions. Most of the songs I heard made no sense to me and I was unable to find out what they were about. One example:

<i>Maa gaare le, gaare hegete</i>	The man of the <i>gaare</i> , asking the song
<i>Inyabaluo gaare abba</i>	Father of Nyabaluo, the song of our father
<i>Hogaare</i>	Hogaare
<i>Yir hi chaafich</i>	His ox is grey
<i>Gaare hegete</i>	Asking the song
<i>Gaal 'keya, in maa Nyikoruo</i>	People said: the son of Nyikoruo
<i>Hogaare</i>	Hogaare
<i>Yir hi chaafich</i>	His ox is grey
<i>Gaare hegette</i>	Asking the song
<i>Nyamgayo</i>	Nyamgayo

³⁰ This is not the case among the Elele. There, the main *jelaba* should all belong to the *nyerim* clans.

³¹ Some of the *jelaba* I knew often wore an ivory lip-plug (*sol*), but this was as a sign of beauty and seniority. Not all *jelaba* wore it and non-*jelaba* also wore it.

³² I base this opinion on the claim that all *jelaba* learn this language from a few old men who had to learn it from a few old men and so on. That such a language would have an extensive vocabulary seems unlikely to me. However, the *hogaare* do contain some words that have no meaning in Daasanech language.

2.4.3 Tasks of the *jelaba*

2.4.3.1 Leading the '*dimi* and cutting the sacrum

As told already, the *jelaba* are most prominent in their roles as the leaders the '*dimi*, where they mediate between the Above and the young women. During this ritual, they are housed in the centre of the village, where they are fed and entertained for several months. Besides these guests, every family also takes in a Bull who belongs to the same clan as the hut's owner. They too are provided with food and watch the parents perform their dances daily. They assist the participants as well as blessing the families, the cattle and the animals. When large livestock are slaughtered, other people may come and visit, but only Bulls are allowed to sit in the central *naab* and share out the meat.³³

The cutting of the ox just beneath the tail forms an important sequence in the '*dimi*. This part is called the *tuo* and is the place where the animal's sexual power resides. Only the *jelaba* may handle and eat the *tuo*. When they consume this part of the ox during the '*dimi*, it is as though the *jelaba* are eating the sexual potency of that animal, which they then transform into their blessing.³⁴

Only *ara* who have already performed their '*dimi* are allowed to cut the *tuo* of the oxen offered by the girls' fathers. The first time an *ara* cuts a *tuo*, the knife should be blessed by somebody from their clan who has performed this rite before. In order make the proper incisions clear, the *tuo* is marked with cow dung. The *ara* must be very careful because if he cuts wrongly people believe that this might "spoil the way of the cattle" ('*guo el deeney chia*). After the *tuo* is removed, the rectum (*bude* or *so adhatta*) is cooked and the *jelaba* rub the meat on their foreheads before they eat it.

2.4.3.2 Judging

Besides the '*dimi*, the main task of the *jelaba* is to judge or "cut the words" (*dee mure*) when there are serious disputes regarding bridewealth or when customary laws have been broken. Whenever the involved parties fail to come to an agreement, the *jelaba* are called in to decide. They may be invited to mediate in cases involving divorce (*hol he 'gaa galin*), the impregnating of a girl (*gere ki shia*), rape (*les ki tunij*), disputes about levirate and heritage, adultery (*hergij bura*) and amiss pregnancies – such as a child quickened by people not of the same *dolo*. I was told that the *jelaba* of the opposite *dolo* judge the

³³ The *haris* should remain behind them, at a respectful distance and once in a while, if they feel like, the Bulls may toss them some meat. They do so carelessly, just like one feeds a dog, calling "kss, kss" and tossing it over their shoulders. If they come too close, the *Ara* make a "prrr" sound to chase them away.

³⁴ Daasanech say that girls may only be circumcised if the ox *tuo* is cut during their '*dimi*.

affairs of the other *dolo*. They listen to all of the participants and then make a decision about the fine which should be paid, where the children should go and whether the bridewealth cattle should be returned to the family of the groom or not.

Bridewealth disputes are the most common cases in which *jelaba* become involved. If the bridewealth is not paid, the father usually takes back his daughter and her children. When the *jelaba* are called, their role is to mediate and, if possible, reunite the couple. With adultery, which the Daasanech call *burale* or “stealing”, if a wife refuses her husband and goes off with another man, the *jelaba* of her *dolo* may judge against her. I was told that, if she is found guilty or “bad” (*deen*), they heat cow dung and insert it into her vagina. Then they cut a switch of *miede* to hit her while they sing a *hogaare* song. If a man commits adultery, they may order the *haris*, the enforcers of *jelaba* rulings, to take cattle and give it to his wife’s family. These *ara* may be called in other matters of theft. If everything is returned, nothing will happen. Otherwise, the *haris* may be called to take back what was stolen by force.

However, not all cases are resolved with physical penalties. If an unmarried girl has been impregnated, the *jelaba* may bring the girl to the suspected father and order the man to pay an official fee called *nyakochul*. When a divorce is desired, the *jelaba* come and listen to both parties involved in order to find out who is to blame. Was it the man or the woman who made mistakes? If a divorce is agreed upon, the couple’s hut is dismantled and divided equally between them. The *jelaba* witness this division, which is called *bil aar*, referring to the tearing apart of the two *miede* branches (*aaro*), which were tight together. If the man is considered guilty because, for instance, he had beaten or otherwise badly mistreated her, the woman is allowed to marry again.

2.4.3.3 Castrating bulls

As stated above, the *ara* and *jelaba* are intimately involved in matters involving cattle as well as women. More specifically, they are involved in “every change that occurs in the status of all the bulls attached to the individual herds” (Almagor, 1972: 90). When the father of a household castrates one of his bulls for the first time, the Bulls should be called. They must bless the castrating instrument (*guor une*) so that the father of the household can accurately hit the blood vessels of the testes. This blessing is only required for the first time. Afterwards the father can carry out castrations on his own.

When a bull is old and cannot serve the cows anymore, the Bulls are called in again. A bull must be made into a steer and hence, be castrated before death. This time, the vessels are not cut, but rather the testes are removed entirely. Therefore, the human Bulls not only bless the knife but they put tobacco into the fire to ask assistance from the ancestors as well. The head of oxen that have served as bulls cannot be eaten when the animal is killed. Instead, it is put into the fire and the rest of the meat consumed.

A bull that dies without being castrated is seen as a bad omen. In such a case, castration should be carried out post mortem and again, the *jelaba* are invited. The testes are cut and buried in the ground. Only then are people allowed to skin the animal. That hide is cut into two parts (*dhiro*), one for the owner, the other for the *jelaba*.

2.4.3.4 When the womb comes out (*hiil kadiyeka*)

Uterine prolapse occurs when the tissue of the womb slides out of place and down, into the vagina. In extreme cases it may protrude past the opening. If this occurs after a child or calf is born, it is considered a very bad omen. This is a sign that something is wrong with that family. Then the *jelaba* – not traditional healers – are immediately called to push the womb back inside the belly with their hands.³⁵

2.4.3.5 Restoring peace (*shimite*)

In previous times, the *jelaba* were also involved in peace matters. When people were fed up with fighting, the *jelaba* were sent in to mediate with the other tribes. They also led a traditional peace ceremony – a description of such a ceremony is provided in the last chapter. Nowadays, however, the *jelaba* are usually no longer involved in matters of peace and war. This has become the domain of the central administration. Previously, when somebody broke the peace, the *jelaba* punished him for it: such a person was either killed by the *haris* or his herds were confiscated.

2.4.3.6 Cleaning away pollution caused by murder (*nyogich*)

A special role is reserved for the *jelaba* of the Riele section. They are responsible for purifying Daasanech who are polluted with *nyogich*. As I will explain below, the main cause of *nyogich* is homicide. The killer takes the initial steps in this ritual cleansing. First he and his entire family move to a certain place, where they rebuild all their huts. Then the *jelaba* of the Riele as well as the *jelaba* of the killer's subgroup are called to chase away the *nyogich* by beating the huts with *miede* branches while singing *hogaare* songs.

2.4.3.7 Witnessing during the finalization of bridewealth allocation (*hiit galan*)

During *hiit galan*, when the last cows of the bridewealth are ritually delivered to the house of the wife, eight *jelaba* (four of each *dolo*) are invited to the house of the girl's

³⁵ Further research is needed on this matter.

mother. They sit in front of the hut and the fatty stomach wall (*muor*) from the ox slaughtered for the occasion is placed around their neck, the neck of the wife's father and the wife herself. After that, they give the wife *dhir maata* – two sides of four ribs from the animal. She will take this meat home and prepare it for her husband and his age-mates.

2.4.3.8 Death penalty

When someone is continually “unfair” or trespassed some strong taboos, the *jelaba* may decide that such a person should be killed. The reasons may be that he cursed his own land, broke the peace or killed another Daasanech without going through a purification ritual. In such cases, the *jelaba* gather to discuss the situation and the person in question. Ultimately, a *maa ara* belonging to the same clan should have the last word. If he agrees that the person should be killed, a termite hill – representing the victim – is pulled down (*kuch lap*). This deed indicates that the person is dead. Then the *haris* will be ordered to go out and kill that person. Because killing another Daasanech is *nyogich*, the killing should be the act of a group, rather than an individual. There are different ways to go about this. *Ul chira* involves beating the liver with a stick (*ul*). The “prison of Lusilinyang” (*kaal Lusilinyang*) means a person is bound and thrown into the river so he drowns.

2.4.4 The decline of the power of the *jelaba*?

During my last visit, several people informed me that the role of the *ara* was declining. “The only thing they (still) do nowadays is to sit in the *naab* and eat “, meaning that they don't seem to care anymore about their other tasks. I don't know if this actually the case or if it may be a way to further mystify their role. Throughout my fieldwork it was difficult for me to get information about *jelaba* matters. People always seemed reluctant to talk about that part of their social structure. However, I spent most of my time during this last trip in the town of Omoraate and it was clear that people were taking cases that had formerly been handled by the *jelaba*, to the central government's court. The below interview with Nyakador Longole may serve as an example. Because she wanted to divorce and receive some cattle from her husband, she went to the *ara*, but they didn't care. Therefore, she took her case to the government court.

What has gone wrong?

My father gave me one cow upon marriage and a lot of goat and sheep. Now I want to divorce. True, I belong to him. He has a lot of wives. Even the goats, who belonged to me, he has refused to give. All my sons and daughters died. That's why. Now L. has been arrested because I accused him. I asked three cows from

him. Then, I will stay with my family. These three cows were already given, but after some time, he sent his sons to take them back.

Why didn't you complain to the jelaba?

I went to *maa farich*, I went to the *jelaba*. The *jelaba* took it to my husband. They asked: "The animals with different marks, why did you looted them". He said: "She must return. She's from a small section (the Riele). But I don't want to go back because there are so many problems. L. has many children. When his sons marry, he gives his cattle away.

My big burden is that I don't have any children. L. confused the *jelaba* by moving to other places. He moved to Todenyang and brought a lot of youth to defend him. They are from Nawreeyo, the age-set of his sons. Those are the ones who took the cows. He doesn't fear the curse of the *jelaba*. He is very strong, but he is confronted with misfortune.

I'm his sixth wife. After me, another six. Three have died. But he's only interested in the small ones. The others are dispersed. Because of a curse, two of his sons were killed by Turkana. Only six sons are alive from all these wives. But he has over twenty daughters. Of this six sons, one has three wives. The main problem is bridewealth. Because his sons marry more than one wife. The girls family come and take bridewealth cattle. L.'s daughters are married, but the cattle often get sick and die.

My children died because I was cursed by his other wives. He was so much in love with me and he left the others. He didn't go and meet them. He only stayed with me. After that, he married and went to another place. Then, the family came and took *nyakochul*.

What will you do now?

A woman is a woman. I will see. Even if I see a man who has no cattle, who is cultivating, I may marry him. If I don't, I can stay with my cattle as *shakandgaye* (widow, divorced wife).

Why the age-mates of L. didn't defend you?

This is true. The *kaabana* have to interfere in the affairs of man and wife. They should punish him. If I have sex with others, the *kaabana* will punish me. If I am mistreated, they will punish him. But most of his age-set have died, just a few remained. That's why he is free. That's why he behaves like a chief in his age-set. He is the same age like my father. He is *maa Nyikorio*, the oldest age-set of *Nyikorio*, called *Naworewosine*. His father's ages-sets are finished. The ones who are alive are younger than him. So, nobody to punish him. He is very strong. He just told the fathers: "Now, you go to the islands, if not, I call the Kenya police to shoot you in the anus".

This story clearly shows that the woman in case visited the different people who traditionally have the authority to settle the dispute, but none of them helped her. The last sentence also shows that her former husband has no fear at all for the curse of the elders.

What I also learned during my last visit is that the government uses a system similar to the *jelaba's haris*. They have a group of armed people whom they could order to take action in cases where the individuals involved were stubborn and fought back. During the month I spent in Omoraate, that group twice set out to catch someone who had murdered a Hamar. The second time, they returned with his cattle and killed his name-ox for food, as a way to dishonour him. So while centralized authority may be on the rise, some traditional elements appear to remain.

2.5 Generations and age-sets

2.5.1 Introduction

A typical feature of east African pastoralist and semi-pastoralist societies is their lack of formal political institutions and clear authority and leadership structures. This also holds true for the Daasanech. In many pastoralist societies, authority is organized by often quite complex age systems. These systems have fascinated the anthropologists who study East African communities and a many studies are dedicated entirely to this aspect of pastoralist culture. They deal with the explication of these systems, the rules that govern them, their inherent dynamics, why these systems developed the way they did and how they have either survived or failed under the pressure of modernity. Cushitic speaking peoples, in particular, are renowned for the complexity of their age organization. The *gada* system of the Borana (Legesse, 1973) or the *garati* system of the Konso (Hallpike, 1972) may serve as examples here. Because they consist out of grades, they differ fundamentally from the generation-set systems of the Maasai (Bernardi, 1985) and Ateker groups, like the Nyangatom (Tornay, 1979b), the Turkana (Gulliver, 1955) and Toposa (Müller, 1989).

In order to explain the Daasanech system, I first will clarify the difference between age-grades and age-sets. An age-grade is “a status through which each person passes at some period of his life unless he dies first” (Spencer, 1976:153). Our western categories of child, adolescent, adult and elder could be considered four consecutive age-grades. The Daasanech now differentiate between at least three such categories but might have had many more in the past:

1. *Maa nyigeeñ* (boy) and *maa haarte* (girl)
2. *Maa kaabana* (adult) and *mine* (married wife)
3. *Maa karsich* (elder male) and *karside* (elder female)

These grades may be understood as the rungs of a ladder one climbs from birth to death. Cushitic groups in the region divide their society members into between eight and twelve such grades.

By contrast, age-sets are not the rungs of ladder that every individual must climb but *groups* of “men who are initiated in youth during a definite span of time, and as a group share certain constraints and expectations for the remainder of their lives” (Spencer, 1976: 153). They are often integrated into a generation system. Such a socio-political, based on both generations and age-sets, is called a generation-set system.

Harald Müller has done some extensive comparative work about age-systems (Müller, 1989: 89-95). He collected thirty-three, more or less different functions attributed to age-systems by various authors. He grouped these functions into different levels. Here are but a few examples:

- On an abstract sociological level, the system serves to maintain social coherence and offers a “folk-model” for political theory, philosophy and ritual.
- On a more concrete sociological level, the system offers social cohesion and continuity, socializes and integrates its members, decentralizes authority and makes military recruitment easier.
- On a group level, it offers balance between different interests, regulates generation-conflicts and aggression amongst the youth and divides tasks.
- On a familial level, it emancipates a person from internal familial pressure.
- On an individual level, it offers a person a role and status and a social network that he can use.

It should be clear that many of these aspects are closely related to one another and that different authors link age-systems with political, social and spiritual aspects of life and serve to both integrate people and deal with conflicts. After summarizing these different functions, Müller attempts to explain how the typical generation-set system developed from the pre-existing clan and lineage-systems. According to him, this development must have been the result of the basic conditions inherent to a pastoral way of life and arose out of day-to-day practice as these groups sought to deal with environmental stresses and reduce the permanent competition for animals (Müller, 1989: 91).

In small societies of pastoralists and agro-pastoralists, families are constantly on the move. Because ecological conditions are unpredictable, division into small groups facilitates herd management. This allows herdsman to be flexible enough to either anticipate or react quickly to changing conditions. On the other hand, the danger of enemy attacks favours cooperation. Hence, it is understandable that “neighbourhoods” (*olo* in Daasanech) associate with each other and bring their animals together in defence. Within such an association, people use each other’s know-how and make communal decisions regarding the cattle. More to the point, Müller states that within each cluster

of people who herd their stock together and help each other out, there are always two important generations: the generation of fathers and the generation of sons.

This basic division is what made the emergence of age-sets plausible, as “children band together when they play, and youths must cooperate when they herd cattle” (Müller, 1989: 90). Hence Müller considers the division into age groups “natural” because “the principle of seniority gives the older brothers the chance to harass the younger ones, and there is competition between brothers over their share of the family herd, both in general and for their bridewealth” (Müller, 1989: 90). He illustrates this claim using the example of the Ngikwatela Turkana, where such “gangs” were indeed formalized into age-classes. Müller ends by asserting that “maybe the simple answer is that other forms of social organization just do not work under the given circumstances: mobility of the people and a sufficient availability of land prevents any centralized leadership from becoming effective (at least in pre-colonial times)” (Müller, 1989: 91).

Müller’s main point is that the neighbourhood organization, a division between fathers and sons, became the blueprint for social political organization. One may be critical of Müller’s argumentation, especially his tendency to naturalize cultural traits. He glibly extrapolates existing relations within a specific economical and ecological context into “universal” socio-psychological experiences. He does this, for example, with the relationship between father and son and between elder and younger brothers. Also his claims that gangs of youth are a “universal” phenomenon or that there are “always” tensions between elder and younger brothers are beyond proof and are therefore open to criticism. However, despite these faults, his explanation for the development of generation systems is, nonetheless, convincing.

For Müller, “what seems especially remarkable for generation and age-set systems (of the Toposa/Turkana type) is the limitation placed on power. Through the shifting dynamics of the systems, power cannot be monopolized forever by any group or in any one office” (Müller, 1989: 93). This characteristic can also be found among the Daasanech. Power regularly shifts from one generation to the next and within that generation, from one age-set to the next according to seniority.

2.5.2 The Daasanech generation system

The generation and age-set system of the Daasanech is complex – at least when compared with those of the Karomojong, from which it originates. This complexity has to do with the fact that several features of a former age-grading system became integrated into that newly adopted generation system. I assume that the Daasanech were formerly organized into several age-grades. Categories like the *her* (circumcised men), the *dimi*-men and the *jelaba* (the spiritual elders) were among these former grades. When the Daasanech adopted the age-set and generation system of their Nilotic

neighbours, this led to the decline of the importance of these age-grades in favour of generations and age-sets, but not to the eradication of these categories nor to the loss of the rituals which inaugurated these categories.

Just like among the Turkana and Nyangatom, each Daasanech section is subdivided into two main generations, the Fathers (*Idhaam*) and the Sons or literally the “Children” (*Umo*).³⁶ These units are called *haariam* (sing. *haari*). They can be understood as a projection of the organization of a household upon society. Just like the father reigns his household, the generation of Fathers (*idhaam*) reigns the entire section and the country. And just like the sons have to respect their father and take care for the herds, the Sons or better the “children” (*umo*) take care for the herds of all the Fathers and should obey and respect these Fathers. They have to wait their turn – i.e. until the Fathers resign – to take over their power and become Fathers. Just like the *dolo*, also the *haariam* are endogamous, which means that every child is born in the opposite generation of its father.

Within this system, the Fathers are always considered spiritually superior to the Sons and they take the lead during the main rituals. Among the six traditional Daasanech sections, this ritual superiority is expressed in the fact that the generation of Fathers provides the *ara* or *ara jelaba*. These men belong to the eldest age-set of their generation. This ritual superiority is expressed in the fact that they “hold the *naab*”, the ritual space in the middle of both the ‘*dimi*’ villages, where they are spiritually involved in the blessing of the daughters of the country. Even among the Randal and Kuoro, who lack this category of *ara jelaba*, the elders (*karsich*, *karu*) of the generation of Fathers are the ones who bless.

Because *haariam* are endogamous, every child is born in the alternating generation of his father. In reality, every man only becomes officially inaugurated into a certain age-set within a generation after he speared his first ox for the elders during the *gaal hiliti* ritual.³⁷ This act transforms a young man into an adult (*maa kaabana*), permits him to wear a clay-cap and use a headrest and obliges him to take the responsibilities which go along with manhood.

These successive age-sets are ranked hierarchically, just like the sons of a household are ranked. Initiations into manhood are organized at more or less regular intervals, in my estimation between seven and ten years. Contrarily to the generation-system of the Nyangatom and Turkana, where these initiations – which they call *sapana* – are held until all sons of a generation have come of age, initiations within a certain generation among the Daasanech take a stop among after four circumcisions. At that time, the *her*

³⁶ *Umute* (pl. *umo*) means both “seed” and “child”.

³⁷ This initiation, called *gaal hiliti*, will be described in chapter 4.

leave their hair long, indicating the end of recruitment. This means that children too young to be circumcised by then or children still not born yet, will have to join the generation of their grandchildren and become part of one of their age-sets. They also will be circumcised together with that group. This stop of recruitment within a generation is an important difference with the generation-system of the Karamojong, where age-differences between members of the same generation tend to grow each generation, because men may go on fathering children for an very long period of time.

A second big difference between the Daasanech system and the system of the Nyangatom and Turkana, is that among the six traditional Daasanech sections, each generation is further subdivided into two or even three sub-generations.³⁸ Among the Randal and Kuoro, this isn't the case and they only have two generations: a generation of Fathers and one of Sons. Among the Randal, the Fathers are called Nyinyakibor, the Sons are called Nyimerimong. Among the Kuoro, the Fathers are called Nyimerikobir, the Sons Nyitira.

Among the Riele, Oro, Inkoria and Ngarich, Fathers and Sons are however subdivided into two sub-generations F1 and F2. And among the Inkabelo and the Elele, F1 is once more subdivided into F1a and F1b and S2 into S2a and S2b. For the Inkabelo, the particular names of these generations are as follows:

Fathers:	Sons	(Grandsons = Fathers)
Nyimor (F1a)	Nyolomongin (S1a)	hele Nyolomongin
Nyilemeto (F1b)	Nyikorio (S1b)	hele Nyikorio
Nyigabite (F2)	Nyitaabus (S2)	hele Nyigabite

In this scheme, I added the generation of the Grandsons, which is equivalent to the Fathers and I could have added also the generation of Grand-grandsons, which is equivalent to the Sons. Indeed, the Sons and also the Sons of the Sons do not wait to father children and therefore, these groups start forming their own age-sets. Their names are designated by the name of their generation through use of the prefix *hele* ("sons of") and *hele helele* ("sons of sons of") and so forth.

At the present time, the F1 have resigned or are about to resign (after a long dispute with the F2). This means that the eldest living F2 age-set started to lead the *'dimi* and will handle any juridical problems concerning fertility or marriage problems. They will continue to do so until their resignation. At that time, S1 will push ahead to take over their authority and all the Sons will become the (new) Fathers. During that shuffle, the grandsons, the *hele* of the Sons, will become the (new) Sons.

³⁸ This is also the case among the Toposa.

Again, this is similar to what takes place inside a household. One day, the eldest son of the first house will take over the family herds of his father, just like the eldest age-set of the new generation one day will take on authority over the society.

It is important to note that because a generation easily covers an age span of more than fifty years, the eldest age-sets of the S1 (the Nyolomongin) are actually older than the younger age-sets of the F2 (the Nyigabite), although the latter are considered Fathers. In fact, physical age doesn't count. Rather, it is the seniority of the generation that is important. In actual practice, this means that most age-sets of the Nyigabite have passed away already before the *naab* was transferred to them and the same will happen with the Nyolomongin and the Nyitaabus.

2.5.3 Age-sets

Generation-sets are subdivided into age-sets, who are inaugurated at intervals of approximately six to ten years. Underneath, I offer the explanation of the process which precedes the initiation of a new age-set within a generation.

We are big now. Why don't we go to our *haari* and ask permission to "make the head" (*me tagnasan*)? They say. "Good, we are big enough. We go and bring alcohol, *koot*e and feathers for our elder age-set. So they bring alcohol to the Nyichumakala and give it to them".

After the wives of the Nyichumakala say to their husbands: "Your young brothers have brought gifts for you. Call your friends so and so". They gather. Coffee is made. They go inside the hut and drink their coffee. Then, they sent their children to call so and so from those who gave. "Why did you bring this? What do you want from us?" We say: "Elder brother, we are big now. Look, we have beards. We just brought this in order to ask your permission. We want to become *kaabana*. We want our clay-cap. After, they will say: "You are still young. We were already old when we were having our clay-cap. Why don't you remain with your cattle? Making a clay-cap has no use. They will ask you: give us *siin manich* (a gift of a sheep or goat). They will disturb you. If you refuse, they will beat you. Stay like boys, it's easier. You can stay with your mother to eat. Nobody will ask you to give a goat or a sheep. Nobody can force you to go out on patrol (*riete*). If you want, you can, but if you don't want to, you stay. As a boy, you have nothing to worry about". They will try to convince you not to start this process. But if you persist, if you show you are strong, they will grant permission. Then the process can start.

After they get permission, they go to their group. "We obtained permission. What will we do? Which colour is good for our name? What was the colour of our grandfathers? They select among those names the one they prefer. They talk. They discuss. "We have to go and bring coffee, we bring *arage*, we bring blankets for the father who will give the name". They will bring this to *maa idhaam* (a

father) of an important family. They give him the coffee and blankets. They will eat and sleep there. The next morning, they will spear an ox inside his fence. The whole generation is called. Also the fathers are called. All are there in order to participate in the name giving. The elders discuss inside their house about which name is to be given. After the meat is ready, they come out. The old man will put his *nyakaasia* on top of his head. He will put his on *telle*. He will bring his spear. The boys sit and one plays in front of him. He will come. “My sons, who speared this ox? This ox that is white is called Nyichumakwang, Faiya. *Añ edha* (White ox). Faiya. Faiya”. He will bless them. Then the other will take the spear and bless them. Then we are told to take off our *aaro*. To open our hair. Everybody is scattered. I have my people, I will spear there. You have your people? You will spear there. Then in the next months, all boys spear their oxen in their villages for their *modo* until the process is finished. Every morning, one or several boys spear their ox and become initiated. (Nanok, 2010)

The group of age-mates initiated in this way plays an important role in the early years of manhood. Age-set peers tend to herd the livestock of their fathers together in the cattle camps, they are present when one of them marries, they may decide to get circumcised together, which means they undergo seclusion with each other and they may go raiding other groups together. This creates a bond governed by a strong “ethos of equality” (cfr. Almagor, 1978b).

In that article, Uri Almagor convincingly demonstrated how, in a society that is quite hierarchical in structure, young age-mates form a bond of coevals, or contemporaries, in which reciprocity and mutual assistance prevail. They offer each other hospitality and cooperate with each other in times of need. They also put moral pressure on each other when one of them misbehaves. This is clear from the fact that age-mates may beat one of their colleagues when he mistreats his wife or when he doesn’t show proper respect for customs and rules. Furthermore, age-mates can easily curse each other, which also serves to keep any potential troublemakers in line. The “ethos of equality” that unites an age-set is governed by respect for certain values.

The following list is by no means exhaustive but nevertheless gives an extent to which this ethos plays out between age-mates.

1. *gelmeshich*: “hospitality”. This is the opposite of selfishness or “a rotten stomach” (*gere ‘gaa moddo*). “Even if you don’t know a man personally, when he comes to your house, your wife should cook water (coffee) for him”.
2. *gaal tikide*: “one people”. “Daasanech are one. Everybody is one” (*Daasanech mu takach, Daasanech lulle tikide*). Solidarity is described by the expression of “feeling the same pain” (*he tag hol ki kulla*), cooperation by the term “holding each other” (*hol chiran*)
3. *muursham*: “boasting”. Boasting is considered a negative attitude within the group. By contrast, showing your pride (*bukaam*) is a positive one.

4. *agirint man*: “not annoying”. *Agirinte* means annoying others, bullying and abusing them with words. Age-mats should stay polite towards each other and towards elders.
5. *henaaf* and *gachalte*: “envy” and “jealousy”. These attitudes are considered very negative amongst *kaabana*.³⁹
6. *maarga*: literally, “having want”. Greed easily leads to curses from age-mates.
7. *fargoginte*: “power”. I was told that among age-mates, it is not good to “use your chest” and to throw your weight around. Almagor mentioned this term several times in his work. He translated it as “being overbearing” or “the arrogant use of social power” (Almagor, 1978a: 131)
8. *kaabana* should be honest and truthful (*duule* or *duua*) with each other. Lying (*wodho*) and cheating (*nyimisan*) are not done within the group. They are more acceptable when dealing with a stranger.
9. *shaabga*: “having silence”. This refers to the practice of remaining quiet and sincere in a crisis. When there is a conflict, it is good to remain silent and not over reactive. One may say: *Chab bille af ija*, “silence is at the entrance of his house” or *maa af gallaat manka*, “not speaking bad things about others”.
10. *Kiaan*: “respect” and “fear”. Respect should be shown to elder age-sets in particular.

Between the different age-sets, respect is required and elder age-sets may order their younger “siblings” to work for them. During communal meetings, tasks are divided according to the different age-sets and elder age-sets may correct younger sets through punishment, fines and curses. Only when things really turn out wrong, do Fathers become involved to settle the matter.

2.5.4 Manifestations of generation- and age-sets

2.5.4.1 Introduction

Here, I would like to say a word about the different domains where the generation- and age-sets come to the surface in daily and ritual life. I guess my enumeration is not

³⁹ I was provided with the following examples of the difference between *gachalte* and *henaaf*. *Gachalte*: “If I have a beautiful and nice wife and many cattle and you would like to have them too, it is *gachalte*, it is envy. When you play with others, you talk about my wife or about good food because you want it too”. *Henaaf* is “I have a wife and if you come and talk to her, and I’m angry at her. I become very hot. I cannot accept somebody else talking with her. I want to control her. I don’t like for her to play with somebody else”.

exhaustive, but it nevertheless gives an idea of the multitude of aspects where they play a role.

2.5.4.2 Demarcation

The main feature demarcating the different generations and age-sets is their name. Generations usually take the same name as their grandfathers, although in the case of the Nyilimkorio, the new generation is called Nyitaabus. “We are Nyilimkorio, but we call ourselves Nyitaabus”. The names of the different age-set are more variable, and usually refer to the ox slaughtered during the ceremony when the name was chosen, but it may also refer to a certain exploit.

The names of the present Nyitaabus (which consist out of 10 age-sets) may serve as an example:

Age-set 1: Nyitaabus: this eldest group, called “neck of the calve” (*modo lute*) has given its name to the generation as a whole. The name refers to the “blue” ox with a white head they killed during initiation. They were initiated about 50 years ago.

Age-set 2: Nyichumakala: the Nyangatom name also refers to the ox the group killed during initiation.

Age-set 3: Yirleveri: *yir les veer* literally means “to incline or to lean on an ox” (or elbow)

Age-set 4: Inyaabor: *inyaa(ki)bor* refers to an ox with red-grey spots.

Age-set 5: Ongaat: stems from the English word “Homeguard”

Age-set 6: Nyichumakwang: this Nyangatom term refers to a white ox.

Age-set 7: Kelelte: *kelelte* is the name of the tree where they made their wooden feather containers from

Age-set 8: Chornaake: *chornaake* is the Amharic word for donut. I was told that after this age-set was initiated, the new initiates were fond of going to Omoraate to buy these donuts and eat them.

Age-set 9: Farich: They were initiated when the eldest age-sets started to prepare the ritual horn, the *farich*, for the Nyitaabus

Age-set 10: Nyichumameri. is also the name of a specific ox. In 2010, they were in the process of preparation and will be the last age-set of that generation.

Other than by name, it is not easy to determine which generation or age-set a man belongs to. This probably was different in the past. Indeed, I was told that in older times, each *haari* had their own kind of scarification. They were made on the shoulders and upper arms. The Nyolomongin should have had four incisions on their left arm from shoulders to elbow, the Nyigabite had five horizontal incisions on their right arm and the Nyilemeto had the sign of *almaasjn*, half a circle referring to the sky with a vertical stripe in the middle. At present, some age-sets within a generation still scarify their upper arms or waists to indicate a particular age-set, but this is not common.

Besides, I was told that before, copper or brass armbands denoted Fathers or Sons, but also this custom has waned. Some age-sets within a generation scarify their upper arms or waists to indicate a particular age-set, but this is not common.

For the rest, there are few, readily apparent ways in which to tell these groups apart. Except in the case of those who hold the *naab* and wear the *gaasar'ara* as ritual elders – making it clear that they belong to the eldest age-set. Another clear indicator of membership in a certain generation I observed was the Nyitaabus (S2) custom of carrying a leopard skin when they are circumcised. This symbol seems relate to the belief that they are as strong as *Nyilimkorio*⁴⁰, the name they took from their grandfathers.

Apart from this, certain objects belong to a certain generation. The *farich* (“antelope”) or *arab* (“elephant”) for example is the decorated horn blown at every new moon. Each Father-Son coupling possesses only one *farich*. This symbol is transferred to the younger generation before the Fathers take the *naab*. The *farich* symbolises the responsibility over the cattle and those who keep it are in charge of the herds.

At the time of research in 1997, of the three sub-generations of the Shir, one *farich* of was in the hands of the Nyolomongin (S1a) and one was with the Nyikorio (S1b). At that time, the third *farich* was still in the hands of the Nyigabite (F2). In 2009 however, the *farich* was already transferred to their sons, the Nyitaabus (S2).

For girls and women, the naming works a bit differently. Females are called “daughters of” the respective Fathers (*ini* Nyimor, *ini* Nyilemeto and *ini* Nyibabite) or “daughters of” the respective Sons (*ini* Nyolomonging, *ini* Nyikorio and *ini* Nyitaabus). All girls and women are categorized into two alternations, named after birds. The *ini* Nyimor, *ini* Nyelemeto and *ini* Nyigabite are called *kirach* (“woodpeckers”, *Trachyponus ertocephalus*). While the *ini* Nyolomoning, *ini* Nyikorio and *ini* Nyitaabus are called *nabus* (“Cinamon Chested Bee-eater”, *Merops oreobates*).

Unlike their male counterparts, generation membership is clearly indicated through the beads a girl wears around her head (*murijn me ino*). *Kirach* girls wear red and yellow beads, while *nabus* girls wear green and red beads. Both sets of colours are typical to their respective birds. On ritual occasions, *kirach* girls wear a decoration on their backs called *iejn* and *nabus* girls wear one called *nyiokoli*.

Furthermore, I met several girls and women on their arms and waist who told me that they were made to show that they were friends with other girls who had similar incisions. Whether this habit was expressing membership to a generation or not, I do not know. As far as I understood, girls and women do not seem to be subdivided into named age-sets as their brothers are. I was told that they “follow their brothers” when

⁴⁰ I was told that this means “leopard” in Bume language.

young and “follow their husbands” when married. This means that they somehow inherit the age-sets of their next eldest brother and that of their husband upon marriage. Further research is needed in this matter.

Nevertheless, also the girls and women have a symbol which referst to their generation. This symbol – the female version of the *farich* – is a decorated calabash, called *kob* and the girl who is keeping it has a ceremonial role.

2.5.4.3 The shade (*gaach*)

Usually, at the edge of every village, there are several places where the *kaabana* gather during daytime. Each generation has its onw shade. These places are usually under a big tree. In the absence of an obliging tree, an arbour is constructed. Here, the men recline, chat, and exchange information and news during the heat of the day.

2.5.4.4 Evening dances (*aar laala*)

In times of plenty, younger age-sets regularly arrange evening dances at the edge of the village. When people have eaten and the sun gone down, the young men gather there and paint their bodies with white clay to prepare themselves for the “bull dances” (*aar laala*). They do so according to their generation: nobody of another generation is allowed to attend, nor will anyone attempt to do so – so strictly is this separation observed. During these events, the boys and young men sing songs about their favourite oxen while the village girls join in.

2.5.4.5 Marriage (*een*)

Formerly, Daasanech generations were entirely endogamous units. This meant that the Nyimor, Nyilemeto and Nyigabite could only marry *nabus* girls (those with red and green beads) while the Nyiolomongin, Nyikorio and Nyilimkorio (Nyitaabus) could only marry *kirach*-girls (those with red and yellow beads). However, at some point during the 70’s, this rule was altered. Then, the Nyigabite asked to marry the daughters of Nyimor in exchange for allowing the Nyimor to marry their own daughters. Permission was granted and this meant that from then on, both groups were permitted to marry not only each other’s sisters but each other’s daughters as well. Nevertheless, exogamy within the generation proper remains forbidden; one cannot marry his “own daughters”.

The reason for this change was that fertile girls had become increasingly scarce for the Nyigabite. The Nyimor had snapped up most of them by the time Nyigabite men were old enough to get a spouse. At the same time, a lot of Nyilomongin girls had no partner. Secret sexual relations between Nyigabite men and Nyolomongin girls were common and this meant that the allowance merely recognized the prevailing situation

rather than an abrupt break with tradition. The main argument in its favour was that the *dolo* already regulate marriage.

The loosening of this endogamous rule does not yet apply to the Sons. However, it is widely acknowledged that it will eventually be allowed. In the normal course of affairs, permission will be asked and granted when the Nyitaabus make sorghum beer for the Nyolomongin.

Age-sets play an important role during marriage. Usually, the groom's age-mates open the bride's leg-rings (*muulam gasiet*). At that time, they adopt her into their age-set and give her an ox-name. The new bride leaves the age-set of her brother and becomes a member of the age-set of her husband. From that moment onwards, she must offer hospitality to all of her husband's age-mates, even when he is not present, as their age-set is now her age-set. Hence, a girl is said to "marry into an age-set". Age-set members treat their age-mate's wife in a friendly way, which may be considered as a joking relationship. If a husband wantonly mistreats his wife, they might beat him up as a result. However, as implied above, this relationship is expected to be reciprocal. If a wife doesn't show hospitality towards them, they might beat or curse her husband so that he in turn will beat her in order to teach her to behave properly.

2.5.4.6 'Guol dance

The 'guol is a special generational feast held in two different situations. One is the so-called 'guol baal silisan, where the daughter of a rich family invites all the eligible men as well as her own age-mates for a large feast where she might choose her husband by placing a large, white feather on his head. During this celebration, all the boys and girls of a specific generation circle-dance for four consecutive days.

The same dance is also held after all her bridewealth is paid. This ritual is called *bilforan*. At this time, a mock fight takes place between the age-mates of the groom and the age-mates of the bride for the eating-mat (*raarich*), the symbol of household authority. The girls arrive with the mat and the men ultimately steal it from them.

2.5.4.7 Punishment ('gul)

Besides the father, age-mates play an important role in social control. Whenever a man misbehaves, he might be beaten by his age-mates. In such cases, age-mates gather in the vicinity of the intended recipient and look *miede* switches, which they carefully prepare. Then, they surround the compound of their age-mate, catch him and beat him up. Only afterwards is any explanation given for his chastisement and a further fine discussed. As we shall see later, age-mates may also curse any member of their group who misbehaves, although, they will only do so if corporal punishment has not inspired a change in behaviour. The word 'gul, of punishment, is also used to denote a fighting

stick, which is made out of hardwood. However, such clubs are not used for beating up an age-mate - except in exceptional cases when a man is to be punished with death.

2.5.4.8 Yoi, migration and defence

The *yoi* is a ceremony held shortly after the first rains have showered, indicating that it is time to prepare for *guura* (migration) to fresh pastures. During this ritual, a member of a particular age-set kills the name-ox of his good friend. That name-ox, often together with some other oxen is eaten by the whole group.⁴¹ All other age-sets of that generation and the Fathers (or Sons in case the ox is given by a Father) are invited and sit in a large half circle (*rash*) according to the hierarchical rank of their age-set. The elders sit to the right while the youngest age-sets sit to the left, facing east. Guests of the generation of the Fathers sit to the east, close to the fire. During this ritual, described below, the different age-sets display their strength and the elders dispense blessings and warnings.

Because herders leave the safe areas and travel to the edges of the country during *guura*, they move in larger groups and these groups are always organized according to their generation. Each generation but the reigning one has their own cattle camps. During fieldwork, the Nyolomongin grazed the cattle of the Nyimor, their fathers, the Nyigabite grazed their own cattle, while the Nyitaabus assisted the Nyigabite in their camps. I was told that, when the Nyigabite will have taken the *naab*, the Nyitaabus will have their own camps, where they keep the cattle of their fathers. At that moment, only Sons will be responsible for the herds and only Fathers will “bless and eat”.

Within each generation, the two or three youngest age-sets running the cattle camp usually do the actual herding. I was told that one age-set goes with the oxen, another with the cows and the youngest one with the calves. When they are in the border areas (*dieto*), herders are heavily armed. They may still be advised by members of elder age-sets. The herds of one generation may be defended by more than a hundred of these youths, who return with their cattle to the camps every night.

In literature, generations and age-sets are often associated with the military realm. They are a way to recruit groups. I don't know if this is true for the Daasanech and how they actually recruit in times of war. From what I witnessed during *yoi*, it is clear that these meetings have a military function and that they are organised by a certain age-set within a certain generation. These meetings can be seen as a military parade, to show strength and to motivate.

⁴¹ The owner of the name-ox is not allowed to eat the meat of his ox. The one who spears it will offer a heifer (*maade*) in return.

Raiding parties often consist out of people of the same age-set, but this is not a must. Some raiding parties even group people of different ethnical groups (Sagawa: personal communication). Big wars by contrast recruit of course members of different age-sets and different generations. During the fight, these generations often stick together and choose their own side to attack or defend, f.i. Nyolomongin attack from the left and Nyitaabus from the right. In the process to decide whether or not to join war, age-sets may gather and discuss, but each individual has the choice to participate or renounce (Sagawa, 2009). When men agree to participate, they join a *suoriyo* before they take off. During that *suoriyo*, which is led by a diviner, they walk over the skin of the sacrificed ox together with their age-mates.

2.5.4.9 Circumcision

Circumcision takes place per generation. In the run-up to this ceremony, one may see groups of young men, carrying a tall ritual stick and smeared with butter roaming around the countryside begging for their collective needs (*chuubijn*). Once they have what they require, they will get circumcised together in generational age-sets. Because there are generally eight age-sets and four sessions, each circumcision usually serves two consecutive age-sets. However, men may “jump” and join another circumcision, depending on the age of their brothers and on whether or not they already have fathered a daughter. Therefore, strictly speaking, circumcision has nothing to do with age-sets, but everything to do with fatherhood. If somebody has a daughter and he is not circumcised, he will call his *modo* (age-set): “Our daughter is big and I’m not circumcised. So, why do you not come with me and have a circumcision? Then, some people can join in and we will be circumcised as a group”.

During the seclusion following the procedure, the circumcised men (*her*) live together in one large compound for several months. During that time, they learn each other’s circumcision songs, which they will retain for the rest of their lives. Even when they are old and come together and get drunk, they will sing these songs, probably as a reminder of the good old days when they were circumcised and had nothing else to do then to sleep and get fed by their parents.

In the course of their evolution as a separate generation, each generation organizes four consecutive circumcisions for its members. During the last of these four circumcisions, the men leave their hair long, in so called *hala*, “like women”. After this last circumcision, the generation is closed. This means that no one else may enter its age-sets. Those too young for initiation, or those unborn, must therefore join the first circumcision of the grandsons, skipping a generation.

2.5.4.10 *Buul* or “place for meat”

Buul denotes a place which is cleaned for a meat feast, a place to eat meat and the slaughtering of an oxen by the members of a certain age-set. At a place far from the village, a grass hut (also called *buul*) is built and every participant slaughters an ox in turn, which is then eaten by the others. Such “meat-parties” are very rare nowadays. Previously, they were generally held during times of need or in preparation for an important raid. In the first case, oxen that had become weak and old were slaughtered, as they might as well have died as from natural causes. This provided the men with the necessary proteins during a period in which milk is scarce. Nowadays, this custom has waned because animals are more readily sold for cash rather than killed straight away for food.

2.5.4.11 *‘Dimi*

The *‘dimi* is the most important ritual in the life of a Daasanech who belongs to one of the six traditional sections. During this ceremony, which will be described in detail below, the fathers of young women offer food and songs to the Fathers in order to obtain the blessings for their girls. This ritual has at first sight nothing to do with the generations because members of different generations may join the same ceremony. In fact, clans and *dolo* is what unites the people here. The reason why I still name it here is because the *jelaba*, the ritual leaders of this ceremony, belong to the eldest age-set of the reigning generation. They are the ones who bless the girls in order to guarantee their fertility and prosperity.

One Nyigabite man, who belonged to the eldest living age-set of that generation told me that each generation traditionally leads only four *‘dimi*, before they resigne and hand over the *naab* to the next generation in line. He said that the Nyimor failed to do so – they remained in power far too long – but that his generation will go back to this rule.

2.5.4.12 *Bersho*

An important feature of the generation-set system involves blessing. The basic principle of this, which I will elaborate on in a later chapter, is that the younger generations and age-sets require the blessings of their seniors in order to obtain wellbeing. The elders are the medium through which Waag is brought into contact with all the people. Therefore, on different occasions, *bersho* (sorghum beer) is brewed and animals are sacrificed for the elders in return for their blessings. The *bersho* ceremony is called the “*‘dimi* of the generations”, because just as during *‘dimi*, the principle is the exchange of meat and fermented sorghum for the necessary blessings from the senior generations. Before the *naab* is transferred from one generation to the next, each younger

generations has to prepare *bersho* and slaughter animals for the elder generation in order to obtain their blessing.

2.5.4.13 Death rituals

The last time at which an age-set plays a role is when the name-ox of a deceased age-mate is sacrificed at his funeral. Then, the surviving age-mates come together and divide the meat of this animal according to their *dolo*, incorporating the animal with which their mate identified most into their own beings. Also, his *kara* (neckrest) and other implements of manhood will be divided among them.

2.5.5 Leaders

Within the generation-set system, decisions are usually made through group consensus. Although seniority plays a role and some voices clearly have more influence than others, everybody has the right to take part in communal discussions, to express his ideas and to bless. In this way, problems may be discussed for several days or even weeks until somebody is able to formulate a proposal acceptable to all. When final decisions are made, they are confirmed by communal blessings. This apparent lack of formal leadership covers however a several functions for persons who act as intermediary in conflicts..

I already mentioned the *jelaba*, who belong to the eldest age-set of the eldest generation of fathers and are dealing with problems concerning marriage and fertility. Besides, there are leaders on each level within the generation and age-set system. Two people lead the generation, one is called the “antelope man” (*maa farich*) or “elephant man” (*maa arab*), the other “decorated one” (*maa uraam*). The “antelope man” (*maa farich*), takes care of the ritual horn, the *farich* or *arab*, that symbolizes that generation. When people have a problem, they go to him and he informs the *kaabana*. The name *maa uraam* refers to the special decoration this man receives upon election. He assists the *maa farich*. Furthermore, every age-set has a “spear-man” (*maa naane*). The girls have their own leader as well, who is called “the one holding the symbol” (*maa kob*) or “our head” (*maa kunyo mete’ka*.)

2.5.5.1 *Maa farich*

The name *maa farich* (“antelope man”) refers to the special horn that he keeps in his hut. This horn is constructed from the *saaba* wood that the warriors collected from Labur and the horn of an antelope. It is decorated with small metal beads (*susurte*) and an antelope tail. Amongst the Shir Nyimor and Nyiolomongin, this instrument is also called

arab (elephant). I was told that these generations had previously used an elephant tusk of an elephant to make the instrument. Each ritual horn is transferred from the Fathers to their Sons some years before the Fathers take the *naab* – which means they take over the ritual power -. Those who hold the *naab* cannot, at the same time, hold the *farich*. So, among Inkabelo and Elele, there are three *gaal farich*. All of them belong to the Sons now.



Image 2.4. Blowing the *farich* during *wolewole*

The one who keeps the horn often belongs to a *nyerim* clan. He should be of a respected family and belong to the eldest age-set of his generation. He blows it every month on the first moon to bless the new moon and to guarantee wellbeing. The horn is also sounded when there is argument between generations. It was explained to me that it then serves as a sign that the quarrel should stop and that things should be settled by talk. The following explanation of his office was given:

If somebody enters the hut of the *maa farich* when he commits a mistake, nobody can beat him. His hut is safe. Even when the *maa farich* is not around, the *farich* will act as if he was present. When you don't get your dowry animals, you go and take a cow from his corral. You don't take them straight away to your herd. You change your path and bring it to the *maa farich*. Nobody can take the cow back. It is yours now. (...) They go from hut to hut and beg for decorations for the *farich*. Everybody comes together and sits. When they say: "Let's get up", the *farich* is given to the one who was chosen. They go and place it in his hut. He is called in. His wife is called in. They blow. They blow. They bless him with milk. They bless his wife with milk. Afterwards an ox is killed. (Lokasiamoi, 1996)

When the *maa farich* dies, another man is chosen, as the horn must be blown at every new moon, without interruption. In 1997, the Inkabelo had three horns. This conforms to the fact that they had three sub-generations: one belonged to the Nyigabite (F2), one

to the Nyolomongin (S1a) and one to the Nyikorio (S1b). Sometime before 2009, the Nyitaabus (S2) received the *farich* from their fathers, the Nyigabite (F2), who were on their way to take over the *naab* from the Nyimor and Nyilemeto.

2.5.5.2 *Maa uraam*

Each sub-generation has its proper *maa uraam*. He is usually elected from the eldest age-set of his generation and then decorated by all with beads and feathers. When he dies, nobody replaces him. During meetings, he often gives the first and last speech. In the latter, he formulates the conclusions of the meeting. He also leads the final blessing. After a meeting, everyone circles him four times before they return home. I recorded the following explanation regarding his function:

Maa uraam is big. He is big, bigger than others. Those who committed a crime within the community – when they enter his hut – nobody can touch him. Even if he is outside with the elders and they want to beat him, they will hold in. (...) He's chosen from the eldest age-set. They know already. They talk. Before he is chosen, the *kaabana* go and beg for beads and other decorations (*uraam*). They hold him and cover him with a blanket. They put these decorations on his chest, his arms, his head. So he is a *maa uraam*. Then he sacrifices an ox. They take the chyme and smear his body. They bless him. Now, everybody should respect him. Everybody should respect his children. He fears this task, because the burden of the generation is on his shoulders. He has to advise the *kaabana*. He blesses his generations so they become many. He is rich (*kamerut*), no mistakes (*adaab man*), no pollution (*nyogich man*), quiet (*chaab*). When you swear in his name, you speak the truth. Speaking false words, you cannot swear in his name. (Lokasiamoi, 1996)

2.5.5.3 *Maa naane*

While the *maa uraam* and *maa farich* are the leaders of a generation, the *maa naane* is the leader of a single age-set. He serves as the spokesman for the entire age-set and mediates in conflicts between age-mates or in disputes between men of his own age-set and a younger age-set. His hut is easily recognizable because a spear is placed on the right side of the entrance; hence, his name. People may search refuge in his hut when they are in trouble. He is chosen because of his cleverness (*hinyam*), good-heartedness, mercy and eloquence.

Every age-set has a spear man to deal with problems. When the problem is big, the spear-man will inform another spear-man. When they cannot decide, they will go to *maa farich* or *maa uraam*. When these don't find a solution, they go to the Bulls. The spear-man of an age-set is chosen by the elder age-set. They take the spear. They go to the shade and bless him with saliva (*abarqn lap*). They take his hands and give him the spear. His work is big. He fears (his responsibility). His main

work is in the shade (he is *maa gaach chieta*). When something is decided, they will contact him. He speaks about the problems when everybody is around. He has three assistants (*lalli*). He calls them. He kills an ox. The stomach is cut with the spear. They smear themselves with the chyme. Then they take the spear and put the fat part of the ox (*buode*) on top of it. (Lokasiamoi, 1996)

2.5.5.4 *Maa dumiet, maa telle and maa dudum*

Besides these leaders of section, generation and age-set, the Inkabelo have at least three more special functions, filled by notables. In 1996, all three functions were in the hands of Nyigabite. These three men are called the “tail man” (*maa dumiet*), the “skirt man” (*maa telle*) and “the man of the churning pot” (*maa dudum*). I was unable to find out much about their actual role. I only gathered that they had more importance in the past. Nevertheless, these offices continue to exist. They also seem to need each other in that they form a single unit, which symbolizes the fact that they are responsible for the cattle. The tail-man keeps a ritual ox-tail that could be considered the Daasanach flag. This ox-tail symbolizes the unity of the group and should always be safely kept in the middle of the country. Mana Yergeleb told me about the inauguration of the skirt- and tail-man:

The ox-tail is prepared after an ox is ritually sacrificed. A big fence is made from *dergich* wood and that fence is put into fire. All age-sets come in rows and they have to run through the fire. The *maa dumiet* is chosen from those not circumcised yet not circumcised. The *telle*, made from sheepskin and the tail of a giraffe are brought by the elders. One of the boys who is not yet circumcised gets the *telle* around his neck. In the evening, they bring the tail of a giraffe and put oil on it. They give this *dum* to another man, the *dum* full of oil. Then they put a leopard skin around his neck and give the *dum* in his hand. (Mana Yergeleb, 1997)

During their war with the Nyangatom in the 70's, if the *maa dumiet* had fled his home on the west bank as many others did, this would have meant that the Daasanech surrendered that territory. The tail is “how we get our wealth. It's because of this tail that we have more animals than the kidh”. The *maa telle* keeps a special, small, decorated leather skirt. This is said to symbolize the cattle of Daasanech. In case an epidemic hits the cattle, the *maa telle* is consulted prior to taking magical action. I have no information to impart regarding the *maa dudum*.

2.5.5.5 *Maa kob or maa kuno mete'ka*

Up until now, I have only discussed male ritual functions related to age and generation-sets. Above, I told already that the girls are also divided into generations with an attendant symbol, the *kob*. One girl is responsible to take care for that symbol. This girl

may be seen as the leader of that female generation and is elected during a gathering of many girls of the generation. When they have chosen a girl, they go to her village, call her out and surround her. Then, they decorate her with beads. To protect her against the evil eye, they cover her with a blanket and guide her into her mother's house.

Then, they make the symbol of their generation, called *kob*, a decorated calabash. To do this, they ask somebody of the *nyerim* to kill a sheep for its skin. This is divided into two parts, one for *dol baadiet* and one for *dol gerge*. One after another, a *dol baadiet* girl and then a *dol gerge* girl use a needle to puncture a hole in the skin. Then the decorated skin is put on a calabash. When the *kob* is ready, it is given to their chosen *maa kob* and they sing “*Oyay, He woyaay woyoo. He woyaa woyoo, Yallaa leeya*”. With this song, they invest authority in her. After this, her husband may no longer whip her. It also gives her the power to break up fights. Whenever two *kaabana* fight, if one enters her house, the other must stop. When she dies, nobody will replace her.

2.5.6 Conflicts between and within the generation-set system

Generations and age-sets are, apart from families and - to a lesser degree - the clans, the main cooperative groups within Daasanech society. Therefore, they are much more sensitive to internal strife and escalation of tension than the other social categories. Because of this, there are several mechanisms employed to reduce conflict. Most disputes within a generation and between ages-sets have to do with access to effective and symbolic power. The following are examples of conflicts between the different segments of the generation-set system.

2.5.6.1 Conflicts between sub-generations

As already mentioned, tensions between the Nyimor and Nyigabite – the two generations of Fathers – were already on the rise when I entered the field in 1995. The overt reason for this conflict was the transfer of the ritual power that allows the reigning generation to lead the ‘*dimi*. According to the Nyigabite, the Nyimor had held the *naab* for far too long and the Nyigabite were on the verge of deciding to hold their own ‘*dimi*. This would have meant the complete break up of two generations. The unity would be lost. The Nyimor tried to avoid disaster by inviting their brothers to a gathering, promising them that their turn was about to come and pleading for unity. This conflict is alluded to in one of the speeches transcribed below, made by Lokasiamoi during the 1996 Oro ‘*dimi*.

As discussed above, conflicts can occur between sub-generations regarding the availability of women. Such as the time when no more girls were available for the younger Nyibagite age-sets. None eligible within the endogamous marriage rules

between generations, in any case. This problem was resolved during the *bersho* the Nyigabite made for the Nyimor. The rule was relaxed and the Nyigabite were allowed to marry Nyimor daughters, and vice versa.

I also heard about a conflict between the Nyolomongin and Nyitaabus over a certain grazing area in the islands. The Nyolomongin claimed the land was theirs and thought they would get support from their Fathers (the Nyimor). The Nyitaabus argued that all land belongs to Waag and so anybody may use it. The Fathers sided with the Nyitaabus: land is for the use of everybody. Unity returned shortly afterwards, when the Turkana attacked a Daasanech village.

2.5.6.2 Conflicts between generations

Although there should be respect between Fathers and Sons, conflicts do occur. Fathers often reproach their sons that values are being eroding, that respect and obedience is lacking and that aggression and alcoholism are too prevalent. Fathers also berate their sons for not being alert, having courage and not being fighting-fit or for the opposite, that they are too ill tempered and unnecessarily broke the peace. Sons, for their part, accuse their fathers of blocking change. This occurred in Kabusiye, where the mission wanted to set up a health clinic. The Fathers were against it because they didn't want any strangers roaming about. The Sons were in favour of it. Members of both parties were invited to sit in on each other's meetings, but no consensus was reached.

In the past, the Sons have usually backed down because Fathers can ultimately threaten to curse them and cite tradition: Sons must wait until their time has come. Nowadays, however, the fear of curses is waning and elders are aware that they are losing the power to make decisions to the central government. This may force them to be more receptive to demands made by the younger generation.

2.5.6.3 Conflicts between age-sets

One may understand the relationship between age-sets in terms of the relation between elder and younger brothers. Although this relationship is also based on respect and obedience, tensions arise more easily and more often. Most disagreements within a generation set are settled internally, through a public meeting. When no consensus is reached however, this may lead to a split. This happened twice among the Shir and Elele. In fact, the three sub-generations are the result of conflicts between age-sets within a generation.

The first breach occurred at the start of the 19th century and split the generation of Sons into two groups. The reason of this break-up had to do with access to brides. A second split was caused when younger age-sets refused to give their name-oxen to the elder members of their generation, who they called "sorghum eaters". The elder groups

started a battle and a man was killed. Because of that, the younger group decided to make a *farich* as the symbol for their own age-set and they choose a name for themselves and their children.

Besides these two examples, I was told that also the split between the Inkabelo and Inkoria, which took place at the end of the 19th century, was also caused by a conflict over girls between age-sets.

2.5.6.4 Conflicts within age-sets

Within an age-set, where members are close to each other and a strong ethos of solidarity is at play, tensions are still common. Most of them have to do with breaches of that unity. It is important that people of the same age-set act as one. When somebody behaves a-socially, he will be punished. His age-mates will gather and arm themselves. They catch the offender and beat him with their switches. This act of punishment is called '*gul* ("fighting-stick"). Afterwards, they explain what he did wrong and he is forced to kill an animal as a fee. The Daasanech will usually say of the offender that he "gave us a bad name".

During fieldwork, I witnessed several such occasions. One man was beaten up because his wife didn't prepare coffee for her visitors. One was punished because he refused to give a goat when he was asked for one; another, because he shaved his hair without the consent of his age-mates. One man had misbehaved in Omoraate and didn't care about his livestock. Another was beaten for drunkenness; a different man because he had sold beads that he had stolen. One age-mate was punished for selling his name-ox and another for committing adultery. Clearly, the members of age-sets play a large part in self-regulating the group's members.

2.5.7 The transfer of the *naab*

As far as I was able to determine, there is no special ritual for the transfer of power from one generation to the next. The transfer happens during the '*dimi*, when the new *jelaba* are invited by the resigning Fathers in order to receive their blessings. However, before this hand-over can happen, quite a number of preparations and transfers have already been undertaken. What follows is an outline of this preparation, projected under ideal circumstances.

1. The rule is that when at least one member of an age-set has fathered a daughter, he, as well as all other members of his age-set may be granted permission to get circumcised. In the span of one generation, four communal circumcisions are held, before a generation is "closed". From that moment, people born into that generation

have to join the age-sets of the grandchildren of that generation and will be circumcised with them.

2. About ten to fifteen years after circumcision, the girls of those being circumcised come of age, which means the parents have to perform their 'dimi. This 'dimi is organised according to the *dol* of the parents and the ritual leaders of the 'dimi are always those Fathers who belong to the eldest living age-set. Ideally, there should be four 'dimi, each one serving those men who were circumcised about a decade earlier.⁴² At the end of their fourth 'dimi, the leading generation (F1 or F2) should transfer the *naab* to the next generation (F2 or S1)..⁴³

3. The transfer of the *naab* is accompanied by the transfer of the *farich*, the privilege of keeping a hind leg apart at feasts, the ritual tail (*dum*) and the ritual skirt (*telle*). During the last days of their reign, the leader of the generation about to resign, smears the new leaders with white clay and invites them to the final of the ritual. After their resignation, the surviving members of these age-sets are still respected and meat is saved for them when there are meetings. However, they refrain from speeches and the like. They are now called *ger* and when they die, stones are put on their graves to indicate that their reign is over.

2.5.8 The situation in 2010

If my estimations are right, the Nyimor (F1a) took over the *naab* from the Nyilimkorio in the year 1972. A few years later, the eldest ages-sets of Nyilemeto (F1b) joined them and both became the "holders of the *naab*". When I started my fieldwork 1995, the Nyimor and Nylemeto were still in power, although most of their age-sets had already passed away. When I left the field in 1997, there were already tensions between Nyimor (F1) and Nyigabite (F2), as will be illustrated in the next point. At that time already, the Nyigabite were pushing ahead and asked their "elder brothers" to hand the *naab* to them. The Nyimor postponed this take-over, telling their younger brothers that they had to be patient and that their time would come.

It therefore came to me as a surprise that upon my return in 2006, the *naab* was still in the hands of the Nyimor and Nyelemeto. By then, the tensions were very high and the

⁴² When I asked why there were so many 'dimi but only four circumcisions, I was told that previously there were only four 'dimi lead by each generation. The number of 'dimi grew because the *jelaba* who lead them rather enjoy being served for such long periods of time. The Nyigabite, who began holding their own 'dimi in 2006, have said that they intend to return to the older tradition and only perform four 'dimi.

⁴³ This is the case for the Inkabelo and Oro. I was told that other groups perform a 'dimi every year. It is probable that these are smaller 'dimi, and as such are not recognized as complete ones.

Nyigabite threatened the Nyimor that they would organize their proper *'dimi*, splitting away from the blessings of the senior Fathers. This threat became reality in 2007, when the Nyigabite organised a large *'dimi* for themselves and their sons in Nyimemeri with over 250 participants.

Although this “coup d'état” wasn't joined by the other sections (because they feared a Nyimor curse), it nevertheless spurred the Nyimor into promising to resign. And indeed, when I returned to the field in 2009, all Nyimor of the six traditional setions had agreed to transfer the *naab* to the Nyigabite (F2) during their upcoming *'dimi*.

2.5.9 Two speeches from the *naab*

Below, I have translated and transcribed two speeches which I recorded during the Oro *'dimi* of 1996. Both speeches may serve as examples for speeches in the *naab*. Speeches have often a moral content. They aim to alert the listeners and make him aware of problems. The speeches I heard had the following subjects: not misusing bullets, not drinking *arage*, not to stay home and spent the time in laziness and dancing, cool down and don't go to fithg, discuss big ceremonies and explain what is seen in the intestines.

During this particular *'dimi*, there were tensions between the Nyimor and Nyigabite, between the elders and the people attending the *'dimi*. The first speech was made in the middle of the night by an elder *'dimi* father called Gabuta who complained about the continuous quarrels and asks for respect for the elders. The second one was given by Lokasiamoi, at that time the most important ritual leader of the Inkabelo, who assisted as pipe-man during the Oro *'dimi*. He also alludes to the conflicts and asks the elders to be moderate. His speech includes a typical blessing.

2.5.9.1 The speech of Gabuta

We are all children of the Nyimor. Nyimor and Nyigabite have the same parents. Why do we quarrel? Did we drink too much *arage*? Before, we didn't know *arage*. Our fathers didn't eat it. This bad food creates quarrels. When they drink too much, father and son start to fight. The son is not afraid of the father. He would beat his own father. Before, the son was scared of his father. Now, respect has waned. This is not our way. We learned it from the *arage*.

All Daasanech, from Kuras to Labur, changed their habits. We forgot the best of our traditions. The reason is *arage*. *Arage* changed us. Before, the elders, Nyimor and Nyigabite had a good friendship. They slept in the same place. They told each other stories. Now, they drink too much *arage*. They do not eat with each other. They became like hyenas.

My father died when the river flooded. Every day, my father told me stories. When he was old, he still had a lot of friends. They visited each other and questioned

each other about the village, the children and the animals. Nowadays, the elders do not visit each other anymore. Their friendship wanes. The stories wane. It has changed. I saw with my own eyes that my father had a red ox. One day, the *kaabana* came and asked for the ox. He couldn't refuse. He gave it to the *kaabana*. The women adorned his horns with beads and put a beautiful *noono* on his head. The *kaabana* were his good friends. They ate his name-ox.

The *jelaba* who are in the *naab* now don't like each other. They quarrel. Why? I see it every night. I hear it every night. They don't know our history. They just demand. Give. Give. Give. Give *arage*. Give coffee. Kill an ox. Why? They do not tell any stories. Why? We come out of their skin. We are their children. They have enough. But they became greedy. They go on demanding. Sometimes, I look to our *jelaba*. Today, kill an ox! Tomorrow: kill an ox! The day after, again... When they don't receive, their stomach cries. That is not good for us. When we have, how can we say "we don't give". Look, the fire in the *naab* is beautiful. In our hut, there is no fire. Why? Usually, the fire in the *naab* burns together with our fire. The *jelaba* come for us. Why?

When you hear me, listen to my story. When you don't want, sleep and forget my words. You who listens, place my words in your *noono*. We are all one and the same section of Oro. But you want to split us in two. Why? We are the same *kaabana*. We are the same *dolo*. We are the same *haari*. Understand me. Take care for your mother. Keep her in a good place. Give her a good sleeping mat. When you milk, give the first milk to your mother. After that, you can give to your children. When your father is alive, give him a good sleeping mat and fill his *noono* with coffee. Follow this road. Follow these words. It is good for you. It is good for your life. Mother and father are as big as Mount Kuras. When you are good for them, they bless you and your children.

Maybe you will marry or you are already married. Maybe your wife does not like your mother. Some women like to sleep. They refuse to make coffee. Don't follow this road. Maybe she pushes your mother. Maybe she refuses to give food to her. Maybe she gives too little and she gives first to the kids. Don't allow that. Take care this doesn't happen. Maybe, your wife doesn't like your father because he is old and weak. Maybe, he visits you and asks you something when you are not there and your wife tells him that she's not his daughter and sends him away. This is bad. When you marry, tell your wife that your parents come first.

Follow me. I got this message from my father before he died. He told me: "I will die soon. Maybe you will have four women, you also have your mother. The *kaabana* will visit. Control your wives every day and night. Which one is good for the *kaabana*, which one is good for your mother, which one is good for your children. When she doesn't care, leave her. Such a wife is not good for you. Which wife gives a good sleeping mat to your mother? Look. Which wife gives a good sleeping mat to your father? Look. Call your wife and look which milk container is full. The full one is for your parents. A bad wife doesn't give a full *kurum* to your parents. Don't believe your wife. Look into the *kurum*. Look well. Some women are dangerous for you. Control them. When it is the cultivation season, grow enough sorghum,

maize, tobacco and beans. Your parents don't have that power anymore. Give half to them. They will bless you. They will receive everything from Waag. When they visit you, kill a fat sheep and let them eat. When they go, give a fat part to take with them. They will not live for long anymore. They will become like children. They will become tired. They will get hungry fast. Take care of them".

This story, I got from my father.

2.5.9.2 The speech of Lokasiamoi

We are here. We are satisfied with meat. We can't stand too much meat anymore. We are old. We can't stand too much fat anymore. These people (the 'dimi people) believe us. They asked our permission (to make their 'dimi). We shouldn't ask them too much. They don't like it when we ask too much. We are the elders. We are quiet and silent. We shouldn't ask them too much. They will give from themselves. I'm a Shir. I do not belong to your 'dimi. But I tell you: "Don't ask too much. We are old. Leave greed behind (*Mar hash*).

Follow me. I will bless:

Our naab. Faiya. - Faiya!

The naab of our fathers. Faiya. - Faiya!

The elders. Faiya. - Faiya!

Look at the fire. It is good. Faiya. - Faiya!

The 'dimi-people. Faiya. - Faiya!

Let Waag give them what they want. - Give!

Let Waag sustain them and their animals. - Sustain!

The land of Nyimor. Faiya. - Faiya!

The whole land of Daasanech. Faiya. - Faiya!

Every Daasanech village. Faiya. - Faiya!

I keep between my right elbow (*Yu daan aniet 'gaa arita*). - You keep!

I close them between my legs (*El tomo leha 'gaa kadha*). - You close!

The whole night (*Ki raffa*) - You close!

The whole day (*Ki saania*) - You close!

That our country knows peace every day. - Peace!

Like that? - Like that!

Waag hears us. - Waag hears us.

The land of our fathers is blessed. - Blessed!

Before, our Fathers kept the land like they should. Now it is our turn to take care of the land.

We follow our fathers - We follow!

Waag hears us. - Hears us!

Waag helps us. - Helps us!

Over our land, there is peace. - Peace!

Waag hears us. - Hears us!

Hears us. - Hears us!

Bless Waag (Waag visso). – Bless!

Take care that the people get good things. – Good things!

Take care that they get what they need.

True (*He dua*) – True!

True. – True!

Waag hears us. – Hears us!

Hears us. – Hears us!

Waag hears us. – Hears us!

Hears us. – Hears us!

Bless Waag (Waag visso) – Bless!

Waag doesn't like bad people. Only your hand gives the good. You follow your *makaale*. (He alludes here to the fact that the pipe-man is the most important ritual leader and that the pipe itself forms a connection between the living and the ancestors). You don't forget. Don't forget. You don't follow something else. Leave greed behind. Yes. Leave greed behind (*Mar hash*). The greedy one is small. When somebody is rich, but greedy, he is small. When somebody has no decorations (*yadabich* man, meaning "when somebody is poor") and he shares, he is big. We sit in front of big men. You understand. Look at the meat. Look how abundant it is. When you cut it in pieces, people are not satisfied. When you divide along the rules, people will be satisfied. I go (*Ya galle*).

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I introduced the different social fields a Daasanech belongs to. Each man is born into a certain section and a certain clan and lineage within that section. The sections are the basic political units and all sections have their own rituals. Clans are exogamous groups that regulate marriage and clan members have some sense of solidarity. Each clan has specific characteristics that play a role in the ritual domain. The *nyerim* are the clans of the rain and Waag. The *mesatich* are related to other aspects of the environment.

The political system of the Daasanech is not based on clanship, but on a generation system. This generation system, which was adopted from their Nilotic neighbours, alternates between the Fathers and the Sons. Generations consist of several age-sets who are periodically inaugurated. Generations and age-sets have a similar structure as that of the family. The Fathers have the ritual and spiritual power, the Sons look after the cattle. At the top of the generation system – the oldest fathers – is a group of elders called *ara jelaba*. These *jelaba*, who belong to the eldest age-set of the reigning

generation, are chosen from the group of elders who were initiated previously as “Bulls”. They deal with all matters and problems concerning marriage and fertility, as well as homicide.

Chapter 3.

The Above, the ancestors and the human condition

3.1 Introduction

Before moving to discuss rituals in the next two chapters, it is important to provide some background regarding the main Daasanech religious concepts. East African pastoralist religion has been a recurring theme in anthropology ever since Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard's seminal monograph on Nuer religion (Evans-Pritchard, 1956). Following Evans-Pritchard, many authors have continued in this line, making religion the focus of their studies on these groups. These include Lienhardt, who studied the Dinka (Lienhardt, 1961); Buxton, who wrote on the Atuat (Buxton, 1973), Van der Jagt, who wrote about the Turkana (Van der Jagt, 1996), Visser on the Pokot (Visser, 1989) and Knighton who studied the Karamojong (Knighton, 2005).

In his work, Uri Almagor did not deal with the subject religion, although he mentions several times that behaviour is influenced by the "fear of occult attacks" or that "supernatural sanctions" are involved (Almagor, 1978a: 11, 29, 55, 67, 183, 217). But his focus was not on providing an explanation regarding these notions. Therefore, the concepts and practices I introduce in this and the next chapters are relatively new and may need further research.

The monographs mentioned above all make it clear that east African pastoralist religions centre on a Sky God, Divine Source or Creator. In actual fact, each of these entities' names can be literally translated as "sky". This is also the case for the

Daasanech, who refer to it as Waag.⁹⁸ Although it is tempting to translate this notion simply as “god”, this may be misleading. As Ivo Strecker warns us in his analysis of the Barjo concept among the Hamar:

“When you find a mysterious term in a foreign culture which you can not quite understand but which in some way reminds you of your own notion of 'God' then you translate it as 'God'. In this way you simply substitute the one unknown by the other unknown. But this procedure leads, of course, nowhere, for at the back of the fuzzy concepts lie different social realities. The task of the ethnographer is to illuminate these differences and not to blur them with false equations”.
(Strecker, 1988: 71)

Being aware that the concept of Waag may also share some characteristics with the Western, Christian notion of God, but that it may also have many differing traits, I shall leave it untranslated – while remaining fully aware that it is almost impossible not to relate the two. This is compounded by the fact that Waag often remained undefined by my collaborators. When I was questioning people regarding it, they often expressed a sense of unease. Their reluctance to talk had not so much to do with any disinclination to share their knowledge, but rather because they felt they were not able to say anything definite about Waag. “This world down here is the only one we know”, was a common reply, “about the world of Waag, we don’t know”. Another response I received was: “We don’t know what Waag is. We just know (s)he is”, or “The only world we know is where we live. We live between four mountains. The rest we don’t know”. One person even turned the tables on me and demanded to know “Why do you keep us asking about Waag. You know better (than we do) because you have airplanes”.

But although people find it hard to be explicit about Waag, it nevertheless appears to be omnipresent in Daasanech thought and experience. Attention for Waag starts each morning, when the father of the household blesses his family, herds and the land in the name of Waag before drinking his first sip of coffee. This concept is also present in day-to-day conversation. Expressions of gratitude like *waag hi ko nyodo*⁹⁹ (“may Waag visit you”) and mutual greetings like *waaggudo yedig* (“sit with the big Waag”) or *waaggudo si* (“go with the big Waag”) point to a desire for Waag’s presence among the people. And in the evenings, the expression *Waag hi raffa* means “sleep with Waag”, goodnight.

Waag is routinely credited with creation as well, or at least with having knowledge of it. When I asked questions about the origin of man and the universe, a usual answer was: *Yaa muog, Waag takama og* (“I don’t know, only Waag knows”). *Waag hi shiishe*

⁹⁸ This is similar to other Cushites (the Rendille, Borana and Konso) who all call their deity Wak or Waga.

⁹⁹ *Nyodo* comes from *nuor*, meaning to reach somebody at the right time. It also means “to be good to someone”, to be pregnant and close to giving birth. (Tosco, 2001: 523)

(“Waag has given”) was another frequent quote; an expression that can be taken literally or which may point at the importance of something and the awe it inspires in an individual.

Because of the multivocality of this concept, I cannot give a consistent picture of it. Nor does it appear as though the Daasanech have a clear-cut and consistent view regarding Waag or any other “supernatural” concepts. Different people believe and express different views on these aspects of life that are considered somewhat unknowable, or inexpressible in words. Therefore, I must confine myself to providing the reader with the most prominent usages and meanings encountered during my fieldwork. Where necessary, I will link them with other concepts like *sidha* (“pulse or “life”), other celestial beings and with the ancestors or *gaaram*. I will also discuss the different incantations or verbal actions where Waag is invoked.

3.2 Waag

3.2.1 Waag as an entity

People sometimes say *Waag geleb*,¹⁰⁰ in order to indicate the vast blue sky above. But Waag appears even more prominent at night, when the universe is filled with stars. For example, the visible portion of our own galaxy, the Milky Way, is called *yerich waagiet* (“the way of Waag”). What follows are other associations made with this entity, and stories regarding it.

1. Just like the world (*bii*) here is conceived as the “lands of our father” (*les yaachu*), the world above is described as the “lands of Waag” (*les waagiet*). Those lands stretch out like a huge hide covering this world.¹⁰¹ In the lands of Waag, there are also people herding cattle.
2. The stars (*hidhinte, hidhino*) are the “fires of Waag” (*yeet waagiet*) and are kindled by the people living up there. These people also have cattle and are thought to live an easy life. The four stars called *arbo* are the four fingers of Waag.

¹⁰⁰ When the sky is red or yellow, this is considered a bad sign. Red means that fighting will occur, yellow that there will be no rain or flooding.

¹⁰¹ The hide placed outside for guests is called *lokod ini Sirwa* (“the hide of Sirwa’s child”) after that which went up to the sky after heaven and earth separated.

3. Stories recall a time when Waag and earth were very close. But due to a certain event, Waag ascended and the connection was broken. Before that, people could easily walk up to the sky to become rejuvenated. After the break, however, Waag and the earth remained forever apart. This event is remembered in a story, which is told with many variations. More often than not, the crux of these tales is that Waag was begging for food, but the woman he asked refused and became angry:

One day, there was drought and hunger. A woman was stirring porridge. Waag came down as a beggar and asked the woman for food. The woman became angry and pointed her stick right in the eye of Waag. Thereafter, Waag roared and went up together with the skin the woman was sitting on. Since then, Waag and earth stayed separated evermore. (Lokwasep, 1995)

4. “Children, cattle, everything is with Waag”, *um, aap, lulle waagle hi ija*. Notwithstanding this separation, Waag is said to “care” for his people and to “love us” (*waag muuni gieel*). To demonstrate this, Waag “comes down” every night. He remains at the gate next to the corral and stays with his people: *bii chu rayye, Waag hi ‘gaa galle*. Therefore, one should abstain from beating his wife or from using bad words, because Waag doesn’t like such behaviour.

5. Waag, as a being “above” this world, is clearly transcendent but at the same time, Waag is immanent in all things and beings. Some places are more specifically linked to Waag, like specific stone formations or places with huge trees (“Waag is with these trees”). These places where Waag is present and are preferred for sacrifices in times of trouble. Examples of such sites include Nyetede and Edboron, where acacias (*seech, sies*) and big fig trees (*kinech*) that “never dry up” grow.

6. Waag’s special tree (*‘guor waagiet*) is the *miede*,¹⁰² the ritual tree with so many uses among the Daasanech. I was told: “Man was given the *miede* to help himself. It is used to communicate with Waag. Man prays (*waagvim*) with it”. This tree with its sweet, orange, edible fruit always remains green. Branches of *miede* have a multitude of uses. The fresh leaves are used in rain rituals, during circumcision and *‘dimi*, during the rituals marking the transfer of bridewealth and during the purification ceremonies performed by the ritual elders. *Miede* is also used to make the fire-sticks (*bierich*). These sticks consist of a male and a female part. Aside from these many uses, on various ritual occasions, a thick piece of *miede* is used as the central pole of the communal buildings and people use *miede* staffs as an emblem to indicate their special status. The ritual elders (*jelaba*), the circumcised men, the *‘dimi* daughters and women pregnant for the first time all carry a staff made of this wood. The most special *miede* staff is the *naas*. This rod, up to five

¹⁰² *Cordia sinensis* or *Cordia rothii*.

meters in length, is carried by the *'dimi* men for the duration of the ceremony and may never touch the ground. *Miede* wood connects the carrier with Waag and brings him into a state of bliss. As the Daasanech say: *Waag naaso dhagasana uba naaso Waag dhagasana*. (“Waag looks to the *naas* and the *naas* looks to Waag”). This staff acts like a prayer and protects the owner from harm (*Naaso alla taalala Waago vivisata*). Blessing (and cursing) sticks used by the *nyerim* clans are also made from this wood.

7. The word Waag has a feminine gender, just as it does among the Turkana.¹⁰³ When I asked whether this indicated that Waag was feminine, my collaborators replied in the negative. “Waag is neither male nor female”, the Daasanech would say. “It is just a way of speaking. We only know that Waag is”. Sure enough, Waag takes on both male and female characteristics in certain expressions. For instance, (s)he “delivered” man (*Waag gaal 'gaa dalle*) and “Waag and Daasanech are connected with an umbilical cord” (*Daasanech Waag hi onyir dugudle ke ija*). At the same time, Waag also has some typical male associations, especially when asked for rain. Then, he may be called *Baaba* (“Father”) or *Waag yachu* (“Waag of my father”). Furthermore, the masculine side of Waag is clear from the fact that he is obeyed and respected, two things associated with fathers among the Daasanech. This dual nature of Waag will be discussed further below, in the section dealing with the Celestial Bulls.

8. None of my collaborators – except those who had been trained by missionaries – explicitly stated that Waag “created” the world and man out of nothing. Questions about creation often drew somewhat awkward responses. According to the Daasanech, Waag was “born together with the world”. The world and man were not created or made (*tagniye*), but “brought” or “placed down”: *les hala, Waago hi les 'gaa goyye; Waago gaal les 'gaa goyye*). Once on earth, Waag “gave” (*shiishe*) man all his “belongings” (*shokolich*). He told the people: “Stay in this place. Eat everything you want. Graze your animals. Your place is here”. He gave cattle to the Daasanech; to others he gave fishhooks, circumcision knives. Waag also provided the white people (*ferengi*) with guns and cars. He also “gave” talents (*hiijnam*) to different people as well as “good or bad fortune in life” (*tiele midhaba* or *tiele dedewa*). Furthermore, Waag gave people all their customs (*nyatalaam*).

9. Waag is involved with life and death. Upon conception, when male and female blood joins together, Waag “places” life (*sidha*) inside the womb of the mother. I will return to *sidha* below. I only mention it here to demonstrate the belief that Waag is considered to be the bringer of life: “We live because of Waag” (*Waag he rubach kunyo*). And upon death, Waag “cuts our tree” (*'guorkunyo Waag he muda*).

¹⁰³ According to Vigdis Broch-Due (Broch-Due, 1991), among the Turkana, the feminine gender of *Akuj* has to do with the vastness of that concept. All abstract and vast concepts are feminine in Turkana. In Daasanech language, this is not the case.

10. Rain is considered a gift (*shicho*) from Waag and is closely associated with it. Rain may be called the “urine of Waag” (*Waagle sine* or *sin waagiet*) and heavy showers are said to be “beating from Waag” (*Waag he ‘gaa tune*). At the same time, according to some collaborators, rain and river form a cycle: rain comes from the river and the river comes from the rain. There is also a belief that smoke (*eer*), especially that produced by certain types of wood, provokes rain. At least, smoke is a way to communicate with Waag and the Daasanech burn the leaves from different shrubs and trees for this purpose.

11. “Nice things descent from Waag” (*Daabaan, Waag hi ‘gaa buicho*), while (s)he “refuses the bad” (*Dedew, Waag hi diito*). When man commits bad things, Waag can get angry (*Waag idhane*) and send pests and epidemics (*furso*). Waag may also send storms (*baran*) or earthquakes (*les muutijn*) - either as a punishment or warning.

12. Birds, stars and some snakes may act as Waag’s messengers and some people are able to understand these signs. For example, during a lunar eclipse I observed some young warriors shooting at the moon. They informed me that it was a bad omen. Shooting stars indicate that an elder has either died or is about to die. The bigger the shooting star, the more important the person. Stars are important signs and some people may predict events by investigating the sky at night. Most of the Daasanech are familiar with some constellations, such as the ones heralding different seasons. The appearance of two *halla* (two stars in the south) indicates the beginning of hunger (*kuod*), the *riiblate* show the beginning of the rainy season and the *arbo* mark the time for cultivating and harvesting. When the stars which form the “Southern Bull” (*Aar Urua*) are high in the night sky, it is said that no disease will strike, but when they are low, disease may appear.

13. The entrails of domestic animals (*an nyimere*) are said to “express Waag”. Sheep are considered Waag’s particular because they share its qualities of purity and innocence. In contrast, goats are used when dealing with the ancestors. They are considered cleverer than sheep but not very trustworthy.

14. White clay or *kuul* is associated with Waag. Not so much in ordinary usage, such as when young decorate their bodies for dancing or when they protect their skin with it when they go herding, but on special occasions, like during the *wolewole* ceremony, when the new moon is welcomed. Then, the first man of Turnyerim smears his head and shoulders with it. He also applies it to the leather door and the *noono* at the back of his hut, where he keeps his blessing and cursing utensils. The same substance is also used for the *‘dimi* girls before the ceremony starts. The front part of their head is covered with it “so Waag can see them”.

15. As already mentioned when dealing with the clans, only people of *nyerim* clans can “talk” to Waag.

16. Waag is embodied in all living creatures as their *sidha*. This concept refers to the pulse or life force “placed” in the womb by Waag at the time of conception. Through the *sidha*, we breathe and our hearts beat. Without *sidha* and without Waag, there is no life.

3.2.2 Waag as a quality

As a transcendent and external entity, Waag is conceived as far away or high above as a creative force who brings life, rain and providence. At the same time, Waag is considered near, connected and communicating with man. In even a more intimate sense, it is said that all living organisms have their “own Waag” which is something like their destiny or luck.

Every man has his own Waag to go with. It is with all. When your Waag is with you, it is good. When your Waag is not there, it is bad. On special occasions like circumcision and *'dimi*, this Waag is present. They (the *'dimi* men) are the people of this Waag. (*Hela gaal waagiet*). During *suoriyo*, this Waag is present. Immediately he gives you what you want. (Nanok, 2010)

Thus, *suoriyo* is a way to come near to Waag or to bring Waag near to those who perform it. Behind this desire for Waag's presence is the belief that whenever it is near, things work out fine and when it is absent, man is vulnerable to misfortune. The association of Waag with wellbeing and good fortune shares similarities with the concept Barjo among the Hamar. According to Strecker and Lydall, Barjo is a multivocal and flexible concept that applies to a lot of situations, all having to do with wellbeing, good fortune, luck and prosperity. According to the Hamar, everything has its own *barjo*, just as everything among the Daasanech has its own Waag. This *barjo* emparts the qualities of the Barjo in whatever possesses it - be it people, animals or objects. Lydal and Strecker write:

“I suddenly realised that the strength of the notion of barjo lies in its generality. It has such a general meaning that it can be applied to any specific situation. In its general sense, it means a good act of creation, a good event, good luck, wellbeing. (...) The flexibility the Hamar show in the application of this general notion to particular social actions and actors seems to fit well with their tendency to reject authority. Barjo is accessible to anybody at any time, if he is physically and mentally capable of aspiring to it. Often it is probably seen by others as no more than an indication of the general competence of an actor”. (Lydal and Strecker, 1979: 254)

The same can be said of Waag and it is even more accurate regarding adjective *waagiet*. In literal, spatial terms, *waagiet* means “above”. For example, *muul waagiet* means “iron above” or “iron from the sky”, an airplane. But *waagiet* has an implicit sense as well and is used to refer somebody who is lucky or prosperous. Such a person is wholly “good” (*midhab*) and has no “wounds” (*daafo*), nor any in his family history. This means that neither he nor his relatives have committed any grave errors or *adaab* (see below). People who are silent (*shaabgaa*) are referred to as *gaal waagiet*, which associates silence with wisdom. Wise people are those who do not quarrel and who carry no such tensions

within them: “their head is silent and their voice is silent and when they speak, their words are truthful”. *Waagiet* also refers to people who bless, such as the old and respected and all people who desire good for others and are exemplary. In another sense, the adjective *waagiet* is also applied to innocent and harmless people - small children or those born with a handicap.¹⁰⁴ Because twins (*sheele*) embody luck, they are called *gaal waagiet*. *Waagiet* is also used in the sense of healthy as in *gonchu waagieta ‘gaa* (“my body is fine”).

From a person who is disconnected from his Waag, people say that his Waag “left” him or his family or that Waag “refused”: *Waag hi diite*.¹⁰⁵ In such cases, that person and his environment are vulnerable to misfortune. This appears to be a reflection of the divide created between the Heaven and Earth in the origin myths of the Daasanech and other, neighbouring peoples. The two were once very close until separated by some deed, causing mankind to suffer. In his analysis of the Akuj among the Karamojong, Knighton notes a similar belief regarding the absence or presence of the sacred:

“God is present, not absent and opposed. The rightly ordered world has the divine infused in it. Thus the sacred is not defined by the exceptional, the tabu, the separated and the transcendent so much as by presence in and to humanity, animals, plants, rain, rivers and rocks. The sacred is not conceived of in terms of polarity, but according to intensity. The created order is generally spiritual, not profane, and ceremonial events, above all sacrifice, provide an especially dense moment not merely in some esoteric, mystical religion, but in the whole life and ecology of the sacrificing people”. (Knighton, 2005: 240)

Waag and the adjective *waagiet* refer to a state of harmony, to a state of sincerity, to a state of innocence. As we shall see, this is induced and maintained through blessings and sacrifices. These are commonplace, rather than exceptional. They serve to reinforce the connection between Waag and man and do so constantly. The result is harmony and good things (*he midhaba*). In this world, “Waag loves a good man” (*maa midhaba Waag hi gieel*) while a bad man is “cut off” (*guorle Waag he muda*) or “dismissed” (*maa dewa Waag hi neb*) from Waag’s presence.

¹⁰⁴ This connection between Waag and the disabled was explained in the following fashion: such a person lives only because of Waag. Whatever he eats and however he survives, it is through Waag. Furthermore, such person is not able to make any mistakes and cannot provoke somebody’s anger, in the same way that a small child cannot do either of these things.

¹⁰⁵ *Waag hi diito* is an expression of astonishment or fear and means “may Waag reject”.

3.2.3 The dual nature of the Celestial Bulls

So far, I have only discussed the life giving and sustaining aspects of Waag, the creative side of thing. But, due to its presence in everything, Waag also has somewhat more destructive qualities. As mentioned above, diseases, pests and epidemics, earthquakes, massive storms, drought or a devastating flood are also manifestations of Waag. When they occur, they are an indication that Waag is not pleased with the behaviour of his people - thus giving him the role of an ultimate judge. Waag sends misfortune as a warning or punishment, a feature that is also very prominent in Evans-Prichard's analysis of the Nuer's Kwoth.

When I questioned my Daasanech collaborators about this "dark" side of Waag, the responses fell into two camps. Some totally denied this negative aspect; "Waag is the source of rain, how can he be bad?" Others fully agreed that anger and punishment are also part of Waag. They explained that it is common for a man to ask Waag to pardon (*makan himi*) his mistakes and make sacrifices (*suoriyo*) to him in order to restore peace and harmony.

This dual nature, sustaining the good and punishing the bad, is also observed among the neighbouring groups' conceptions of the divine. Anthropologists often disagree about this duality. The argument is to whether this divinity should be regarded as a single entity, or two. Van der Jagt for instance clearly perceives two entities: Akuj and Ekiye. Akuj is associated with rain and is related to the natural processes of birth, growth and death, while Ekiye is associated with snakes and the unnatural. In this dual view, Ekiye is a malevolent force that punishes people (Van der Jagt K., 1996: 28-31). The same discussion is found among anthropologists studying the Maasai where a differentiation is made between two manifestations of Ngai: Black Ngai is good and benevolent while Red Ngai is malevolent and angry.

From these analyses, it is not clear whether this dichotomization of the dual nature of the divine is an anthropologist gloss, our desire to structure these beliefs and experiences into good and bad, or whether it is really the way the people look at it. The same holds true for the Daasanech. One may easily look at Daasanech cosmology from a dualistic standpoint.

However, I believe that the duality in their conceptualization is not so very visible at the level of Waag itself, but is more prominent at the difference between Waag and *gaaram* (ancestors) or at a "lower" level where Daasanech speak metaphorically about two celestial beings, which are called the "Bulls of Waag" (*Aaro Waagiet*).¹⁰⁶ There are

¹⁰⁶ *Aar*, here, is a metaphor for anything strong or beyond human control.

several stories regarding quarrels between these two forces or creatures. One of them is a variant of the separation myth given above:

Long ago, there was a big moon hanging above the world. There was no forest, no drought, no hunger. Nobody had to work. Everything grew easily. Man and wife were eating porridge. He was called Aar, She was called Angieb. They quarreled. The skin where they were sitting roared and went up to heaven. Then, hunger, disease and drought were part of life. Thunder happens every time they fight. She wants to kill the people but he refuses. (Lokorikimide, 1996)

Both creatures reside in heaven, one in the north (*Aar meles*) and one in the south (*Aar urua*). Sometimes, they are described as two divine camels, one male in the south and one female in the north. Other collaborators described them as two different couples, each consisting of a bull and a cow. Such stories don't always place them in the sky, but rather in the water. One resides in the lake (*bas*) and the other in the waters of a swamp or small lake called Had Kerre to the north, in Karo territory.¹⁰⁷

In some tales, the Aar and Angieb are explained as the two children of the woman who chased away Waag when he was begging for porridge. In other stories, the eastern bull is a transformation of the beggar (Aar) and the western one is the woman (Angieb) who put the stick in his eye. Still other stories speak of an elephant (*arab*) and a dung beetle (*lokolojn* or *diidich*) that quarrelled, and become the origin of thunder and lightning.

Long ago, there wasn't enough grass for the elephant. There was drought. The elephant went to look for grass and left her children. The gazelle also left her children and went to graze where there was enough grass. She gave enough milk. The elephant met the gazelle and became jealous. He asked: "Why do I have to eat branches, while you always have plenty?" Out of envy, he killed the gazelle and her children were left without a mother. After he killed the mother, he also intended to kill the children. He hunted them. The children of the gazelle ran away and hid in the house of the dung beetle. The elephant reached the hut of the dung beetle. "Where are the children of the gazelle?" "I don't know". "You do, they are in your hut". "If you want to fight, let us fight". "You will lose, even if I miss you, you will die under my feet". "I will fight", the dung beetle said. He flew in the nose of the elephant, took his gallbladder and left through his anus. "Small animal, fight", the elephant said. The dung beetle flew in the nose of the elephant and took his kidneys. This went on until he took all his intestines and the elephant died. When the elephant was dead, the dung beetle removed the skin of the elephant and took it outside to dry. The children of the gazelle wanted to sit on the skin. "Don't sit on it". Second time: "Don't sit on it"! Third time: "Don't sit on

¹⁰⁷ This is probably lake Dipa. One informant told me that there were swamps over there, filled with hot water.

it". But no use, the skin roared and went up in the sky. And this skin forms our sky. The oldest child of the gazelle had a big voice and makes the thunder. The youngest one had a small voice and makes the lightning. (Iarbanesh, 1995)

Whatever their image and associations, the common thread of all these stories is a dual positive and a negative aspect. In most cases, the southern creature, *Aar meles*, is associated with the male side and with thunder (*gegete*) while the northern bull is considered female and the source of lightning (*birgach*). The southern bull is usually considered the one who cares for the Daasanech and wants them to be prosperous and well. The northern creature, however, wants to wipe them out and tries to convince the southern bull to abstain from giving them flooding or rain.

The earth is just there. Two bulls are holding the earth. They are people of Waag. One is in the north, one is in the south. One is in the lake, one is in Had kerre. If something bad happens to the earth, they communicate. They have words with the rain. It is they who make the rain to stop. It is they who take care of the flooding. If they disagree, the flood will finish the people. This year there was no flood because they disagreed. If the Daasanech Bulls make a decision, nobody can go beyond it. The same with these two bulls. Just like the *jelaba* elders, these two bulls hold the land Stock and children and the land, the elders all hold them between their legs (*Karu jelaba uba Aar waagiet iini les kitaala. Aay uba umle ta les karu el tomo 'gaa ida*). (Lokorikimide, 1997)

The similarity between the idea that the Celestial Bulls hold the world between their legs, and the idea that the human Bulls hold the inhabitants and land between theirs', is an interesting one. As it was explained, the expression refers to the testes. Just as the legs protect the testes, the Bulls – both heavenly and human – keep everything protected between their legs. Here again, the Celestial Bulls also have a malevolent side, as well as a nourishing one:

They can finish us. For thunder and lightning, the female one makes the sharp, loud noise. If the lightning makes a sharp noise, the one who is close to her is the aar. He makes the female one quiet by saying "rrrr". The female one which we call lightning, when she opens her mouth fire comes out. If she comes down to make noise, the light comes. Always, the bull is controls her, so she cannot harm. She may kill a person. Even her wind is bad. The woman wants to harm the people. The man says no. (Kwaanya, 1997)

The following story explains the same dual aspect of both creatures in other terms:

When there is a shortage of rain, then we pray. Aar Meles says to Aar Urua: "Let us give them more rain, so that the water will finish them". But then, the one of the south says: "No. We cannot do that. If you want, you can do it your own, but I will not join you". But the northern bull is too weak to do it on his own. He lacks the

strength to do so. He is very ill tempered. The southern one is quiet. (...) Things cannot be solved by anger. Things can only be solved slowly, the southern bull says. (Kwaanya, 1997)

Here, there is a clear distinction between an ill-tempered, angry, northern bull and a quieter, wiser, southern one. The Daasanech say that they are lucky because the ill tempered one is weaker and usually not able to convince the other to go along with its plans. But the day the southern bull agrees with the northern one, a big flood, a huge drought or the refusal of the river to flood may destroy everything.¹⁰⁸

All of these stories present a set of metaphors or gestalts that make it possible to explain everything in the world as a continuous struggle between two opposing forces. This struggle is a recurring theme in the Daasanech worldview. It can also be found in myths regarding a conflict between the sun and moon.

Long ago, the nights were long and the sun was walking very fast. The nights were long and fresh and the moon was big and shining above the earth. But the cattle were not satisfied, because of the dark. The moon intervened and there was a quarrel between the sun and moon. The moon took a bush knife (*nigwolo*) and cut off the legs of the sun, who became much slower then. The sun retaliated and hit the moon right in the face. One still can see a scare on the face of the moon.¹⁰⁹ (Lokorokimide, 1996)

Another version of such dual forces of good and bad operating in this world is found among the Riele. They believe the river is inhabited by two water creatures called the Diile, which have the same associations that the divine bulls do. In previous times, the Riele sacrificed goats to them in order to stop calamities and prevent further misfortune.

Malik and other malevolent beings

Apart from this conceptualisation of two forces, one benevolent and one malevolent, which are part of Waag, but not equal to him, some Daasanech introduced me to another: Malik. Unlike Waag or the Celestial Bulls, Malik is not associated with the Above, but rather with the earth. It embodies the bad and dark dimension of life. It personifies evil as an aspect of reality, operating independently from Waag.

¹⁰⁸ The fear of destruction by rising water recalls a myth about a big flood destroyed everything. The Daasanech were playing *buol*, a game using stones, along the lake when the two Celestial Bulls passed by and warned them of a coming flood. The players, however, did not heed their warning and were swept away.

¹⁰⁹ In contrast to the usual association of malevolency with the female, the sun (*aso*) is a feminine noun, while the moon (*uy*) is masculine in the Daasanech language.

Malik is like an ancestor spirit (*gaaram*). It comes when a person is sick. When it cries. That person will die. (Lotol, 2009)

People may encounter it suddenly and if so, it makes a sharp and high-pitched sound. It acts without reason or cause, as if by chance. According to Lokono:

My brother came from Omoraate to Toltale. On his way, he met a drunkard, sleeping in the shade (*gaach 'gaa iifa*). His clothes were next to him and my brother went to help him. He saw no head, but he heard crying. He didn't know where this voice came from. He got a shock. He ran home. This is Malik. (Lokono, 1997)

When the Malik is involved, sheep should be sacrificed, similar to what should be done if a *gaaram* is suspected:

Bring a black sheep. We slaughtered it for him. We threw it that. Then a red sheep. We slaughtered it for him. (Lokono, 1997)

During his review of my work, my collaborator, Moses, told me of still other malevolent forces. He called them "people from the sky" (*gaal waagiet*). The following story is his:

There was a woman, the wife of my mother's elder sister. In the early morning, when people still slept, my abuyo's wife and that woman came out of the hut to urinate. Then, my abuyo's wife sat down. The other stood next to her and she saw four people in the sky. Immediately she became sick and was buried. Especially during the morning hours, we will not look up. (Nanok, 2010)

This is somewhat confusing as the term *maa waagiet* is commonly used in a more positive sense and deals with fortunate, lucky or innocent people. Here, it refers to people who appear in the sky and bring misfortune. This may serve as an example of how different families and individuals all have their own way of explaining misfortune, making use of an amalgam of concepts, gestalts and meanings present in the culture.

3.3 *Gaaram*

"When we go, we go. We never come back", or "when our tree is cut, it is finished", are the usual responses I received to enquiries regarding what happens after death. As well as "when the *sidha* leaves the body upon death only the *riif* (corpse) remains". From this, one could easily conclude that most Daasanech (at least those not influenced by Christianity) have no concept of life after death. Yet, this erroneous notion is at odds

with the role that ancestors play in the Daasanech community. A lot of care is taken to please them and on regular intervals they are offered small gifts of tobacco, salt and milk.

The Daasanech concept of *gaaram* (pl. *gaaram* or *gaaramano*)¹¹⁰ or ancestors, is similar to the Turkana's *ngikaram* concept (Van der Jagt, 1986: 33). At the same time, the term also appears related to the word *gaach* or "shadow", although it is not directly derived from it. According to my collaborators, these spirits exist in a shadowlike state, but are different from shadows. The difference between *gaaram* and *gaach* was explained thusly: "Once a *gaaram* comes into you, we call it *gaach*. He comes like a shadow to you".

Gaaram appear in dreams and may disturb their relatives. Traditionally, if they did this four nights in a row, people smeared their bodies with mud from the river in order to ward them off. Where they spend the rest of their time seems uncertain. It is said that they "the earth, or in specific places like the dense forest near the river, areas with acacia trees (*seech*) or boreholes.¹¹¹ In Elboron, there is a borehole made long ago by the Borana and people believe that the small tortoises (*edhete*) living there represent the *gaaram*. "If you throw a stone at them, they disappear. When you fetch water and look back, the water disappears. Not even wet mud is left". Mushrooms, which are called the "stools of the *gaaram*" (*kara gaaram*), are also associated with them, and termite hills (*kuch, kui a*) as well.

In his analysis of Turkana concepts, Van der Jagt categorised the *ngikaram* as *ngipain*, the singular of which is *ekipe*, the malevolent side of the Akuj. As far as I know, the Daasanech do not have a similar concept - nor would they place the *gaaram* on the same level as Waag. One of my collaborators was very clear on this point: "Waag is above and the *gaaram* are below. We, the living, are in between". But at the same time, he added: "Waag may contact the *gaaram* in order to inform us". Thus, while the living may be in the intermediate position in Daasanech cosmology, the *gaaram* can fill an intermediary role, acting as messengers for Waag. When I asked about the relation between Waag and the *gaaram*, I was told:

For this one, I don't know. It is my own thought. Waag has the power of *gaaram*. If we always bless Waag, *gaaram* will not turn up. All the bad things, may Waag not bring us, may Waag chase away the *gaaram*, may Waag bring good things. (Lokorikimide, 1996)

¹¹⁰ The plural form *gaaramano* is rarely used. A mother may use that when fussing at her children, shouting *Gaaramano sedhiel*, "Go away, devils".

¹¹¹ "The acacia (*seech*) is connected with our ancestors. There is the acacia. These trees you cannot cut. They are there because of them (the ancestors). Also the *miede*. The big tree is the *miede*".

Just as with Waag, the concept of *gaaram* may attune to different realms of experience. They are ambivalent in that they are both feared and used. People know that they are around, but prefer that they do not intervene in the world. On the other hand, they are called upon during several ritual occasions. In fact, every time tobacco and salt are poured on the ground or on the hearth, the *gaaram* are asked to assist, bless or to function as witnesses.

Bless me to become wealthy
Bless me to have good luck
Grandfather, grandmother
Chew this tobacco, chew
Give me the good things

A *gaaram* is not only associated with a direct ancestor. As a matter of fact, the Daasanech seem to discriminate between several types of *gaaram*. The most prominent ones are the ancestor spirits, those who died and are remembered by the living. Collaborators told me that every human being leaves a *gaaram* when he dies. In daily life, only the *gaaram* of the elders (male and female) are feared while the *gaaram* of young people, especially unmarried people and those who didn't perform the '*dimi*', are said to have no power (*fargogint man*). A *gaaram* of an elder often appears as a malevolent force, creating disease and death among their kin – especially if he is angry, annoyed or sad. Therefore, *gaaram* are often addressed and offered tobacco, salt and milk in order to please them and keep them away. On the other hand, as we have already seen, there are situations where they may be asked for help and support.

Like good and bad people, there are good and bad *gaaram*. The good ones don't come and kill. When a man pastures his cattle, it follows him. They walk together but the man doesn't see him. It's the one who protects his family against the bad *gaaram*. (N.N.)

A second type of *gaaram* is called *gaal in edha* or the "white eyed people". They are far more ancient than the ancestor *gaaram* and are not directly related to the living. When they appear in dreams, the dreamer doesn't recognize them as ancestors. They feed on with flowers and live either high in the sky or in the lands of the ancestors, *les gaaram*, under the earth. I met one dream interpreter who told me that these beings communicated with him in his sleep, when he was divining a solution to a problematic situation.

A third type of *gaaram* is referred to as *wanich* "wind" or *gaarich* or "sand-devil". This creature may appear suddenly in the form of a whirlwind (also called *gaarich*) and

snatch someone away.¹¹² In any case, the *wanich* is a bad omen. When I wondered if a *wanich* was the same as, or related to, the Malik, some people agreed while others disagreed. It was explained to me that although the *wanich* usually makes a similar high-pitched sound, Malik appears most often as a bright light, not a whirlwind.

3.4 Man

3.4.1 The human condition

The story that heaven and earth were formerly closely connected, before the sky withdrew and man was left on his own, facing disease and death, is a common one in the region, told in many variations. According to Burton, the pervasiveness of this kind of separation myth may have to do with a trans-psychological experience of man, who all become separated from the eternal continuum of the womb upon birth. As he states, such myths may be related to the “local or universal moment of birth, when two bodies of life once so closely connected, are from that moment divided and distinct entities evermore” (Burton, 1991: 84).

The fact that the Daasanech use the metaphor of an umbilical cord to describe the connection between man and the divine may support Burton’s claim. Surrounding peoples use other metaphors, stating that a big tamarind tree or a rope once connected heaven and earth. However, regardless of the imagery used, in all of these stories the unity between man and the Above has been ended. This discontinuity is usually the fault of man, the result of a struggle for food.

Stories of a wounded deity – the Daasanech beggar was wounded in the eye – are also told among the Atuot. Lienhardt recounts that among these people, there was a time when a single grain of sorghum was enough to feed man. One day, a woman planted more grain than the single seed permitted. She then took a long hook and wounded the deity, who turned back from the people and ordered a bird to pull up the rope that connected both worlds (Lienhardt, 1961: 35). Hallpike describes a Konso myth in which a woman wounded Waga when she was trying to pull fruits from a tree with a long stick. Waga bled and called together all the people and animals. He gave them names and

¹¹² When the *gaarich* are intense, the Daasanech say: “*Si, ya ko veere*” and make a hand gesture, extending their little finger towards the whirlwind in order to indicate that the disturbance should depart or be speared.

appointed the elders as judges or mediators between his world and the world of man. After he finished, he left (Hallpike, 1972: 223).

Should we read as much into this myth as we do with the Christian story of the Garden of Eden? After all, there do appear to be several points of similarity – such as the human error, the involvement of woman and the use of food. When I tried to delve deeper in the matter and draw some philosophical reflections about “original sin”, my interlocutors shrugged their shoulders. According to them, the story simply teaches people that they should be hospitable and share food, even with strangers. It also teaches young children not to sit on a hide drying in the sun as it may float up and take them away. This may reflect a fundamental difference between Western and some non-Western beliefs, in which men are seen as fundamentally flawed in the former, but not in the latter.

Nevertheless, we cannot deny that these myths depict a duality. There is the world of man and another, let’s say better, world over there. This duality is not only expressed by the division between heaven and earth, but also through the metaphor of a river. Such a body of water, which itself contains a dark and unknown realm, marks the boundary between this world where disease and death are in the ascendant and another world where people may be rejuvenated.

When Waag sent me (the Daasanech) to this earth, where I was placed, there was a river. A small river, from here to there. When Waag placed me down, he didn’t place me in that river. I was placed at that side. I will die. The river is small. Waag looks at me from the other side. The people at the other side called: “Stretch your arm, so we can bring you here”. But I could not reach. Then they said: “Bring a stick”. But I could not get one. Waag said: “These people will not die. You, when you die, you will never return. Those over here, they don’t know about disease. When they become old, they rejuvenate”. (Yergeleb, 1997)

The lands of Waag (*les waagiet*), over there, are seen as ideal compared to the world on this side of the river. In these stories, there is a strong sense having been wronged. The separation of the two realms has harmed mankind, diminished him.

This duality can also be found among stories where mankind is compared with serpent-kind. Man’s world is full of hardship, struggle and death and he has to work in the heat of the day. But the world of the snake is an abundant one where he eats what comes across without working for it, and can easily hide in the shade:

When man came down, he came together with Snake (*char*). Waag gave them food. Waag said to man: take this. Waag said to snake: take that. Snake could choose first. Snake took the food of the shade. Man came too late and got the food that was found in the sun. He had to follow his animals in the sun. Snake lives in the trees, where there is shade. That food could have been for man. Now, Snake eats it. Snake and Man have equal power. Even when you kill a snake, he will come

back. His old skin remains. Man however, when he goes, he goes forever. And when a snake bites, it is the curse of the ancestors. (Iarbanesh, 1996)

The snake doesn't die when his head is cut off. The fact that it sheds its skin appears to indicate the possibility to rejuvenate itself and symbolizes the duality between mortality and eternity. Man envies snake and in a way, the snake is depicted as superior to man, because snake lives in the shade and gets everything easily, while man has to suffer in the sun. In another version of the above tale where man and snake choose their food, snake chooses the white buttock of the sheep and man was left with the black buttock. The white buttock offered the chance for new life, while the black buttock caused men to change into ancestor spirits upon death.

3.4.2 The human body

The duality present in these cosmological stories - between mortality and eternity, between this world here and the world above - is mirrored within the body (*gon*). Man fully belongs to the earth, but his life force or *sidha*, which is the vital, pulsating principle of all living organisms, originates with Waag. Among small children, the *sidha* is clearly visible in the *daadich* (fontanel) on the top of the head of a newborn child and later in life one may easily feel it in the neck. Upon death, the *sidha* stops and leaves the body.¹¹³ It returns to Waag. What is left is a dead body (*riif*) and some kind of shadow (*gaach*) which becomes an ancestor or *gaaram*.

The presence of a *sidha* explains why domesticated animals are traditionally slaughtered in a particular way. Instead of fully cutting through the throat, Daasanech men carefully make a small cut in the neck, take out the trachea intact and only then cut the throat - never touching the windpipe. In this way, the *sidha* is not severed abruptly, so it is said, and the animal dies a peaceful death. This *sidha*, which demands respect, does not allow the different species to communicate directly with one another. They "do not understand each other because their thinking (*taweej*) is different".

For the Daasanech, the functioning of the living body (*gon*) is not explained as a mechanical interaction between different organs, as in our bio-medical model. Rather, they conceptualize their bodies in terms of a continuous transformation of fluids and food, generated and sustained by that pulsating principle. The *sidha* is "placed" in the

¹¹³ I was told by somebody that the *sidha* leaves the body through the mouth and that the Daasanech remove the two middle lower incisors to make this escape go smoothly.

womb by Waag, when sperm (*shaant maa'eb*) and female blood (*fas maa'diet*) “see each other”. The meeting of sperm and blood is called *erg* or *erg hidhe*.

One collaborator explained me once that sperm originates in the sacrum (*tuo*) where it is transformed from marrow (*diin*), from there it travels up through the spine (*kerich*) towards the brain where it absorbs the man's mental capacities before moving down again towards the testicles (*'guno*).¹¹⁴ For the woman's part, her female blood clots in the womb, causing her to “get sweaty” (*simis gaya*).¹¹⁵ Menstrual blood then nourishes the fetus (*sigitach*). In the process of growth, the white male aspect and the red female aspect transform the water and food into blood, milk, flesh, marrow, brain and bone.

Fluids are essential. When a person grows older, he slowly changes from wet (*baadon*) and supple (*nyurua*) to dry and hard (*gogo*). The elder, the harder but in a way, also the stronger (*fargogo*). In elderly people, the bones have “eaten” all the marrow and the person becomes totally desiccated and dies. Death is always associated with an absence of moisture, and the remains continue to dry out even after passing occurs.¹¹⁶ For example, the joints of the corpse (*riif*) fall apart and the wet flesh (*gedhgem*) desiccates until only the bones (*lafite, lafo*) remain.¹¹⁷

3.4.3 Thinking and feeling

Daasanech do not have a general concept for “feeling”¹¹⁸ or “emotion”, though several emotions have their own terms, which are often associated with a certain organ. The heart (*wodhine*) is the seat of all emotions and especially of courage. Strong emotions move both heart and lungs (*saamo*). To have “one heart” (*wodhin tikide*) is an expression of bravery. Anger is related to the liver. *Chira ye chies* (“my liver kills me”) or *chira ye kisetete* (“my liver jumps”) are both expressions of anger. When somebody hears bad news, people may also refer to their liver and say *chira ye diite* (“my liver refuses”). *Chira mare hi daalate* (“Which liver is he born from?”) is used to refer to somebody who is easily angered.

Happiness is linked with the stomach (*gere*), like in the expression *gere 'gaa meedhe* (“my stomach is sweet”). A full stomach is cool (*habune*), somebody hungry has a “boiling” stomach (*gere ya boloy*). Greed is also related to the stomach. Somebody with a

¹¹⁴ I received this explanation from one diviner, but didn't get any confirmation from others. How the female cycle works and the way milk is produced remains unclear to me.

¹¹⁵ To “get sweaty” is a polite way to say a woman is pregnant.

¹¹⁶ Plants also have a *sidha*, “because they become dry and hard when they die”.

¹¹⁷ Note that *riif* (corpse or skeleton) is different from *gon* (a body with *sidha*).

¹¹⁸ The verb to feel is called *kimi san*.

good stomach is nice (*gere 'gaa midhab*), somebody with a “bad” or “rotten” stomach (*gere 'gaa diewa* or *gere 'gaa moddo*) is selfish. When you like or love somebody, you may say *gerechu ko fede* (“my stomach wants you”). When somebody has “two stomachs,” it means that they cannot make a decision. The question “which stomach is he born from” (*gere maare hi daalate*) refers to somebody who always refuses things and the expression “my stomach is different” (*gerechu taaka*) indicates you have another opinion.

Honesty is linked to the tongue (*ere*): to have one tongue is an expression of honesty and trust, to have two tongues is to be a liar, as the tongue produces words. “To put words with in front” (*dee met hi diiye*) means to promise, “to cut words” (*dee mure*) means to decide.

The head is the seat of rational thinking (*taweejn*) and remembering (*tabdoon*). Somebody with “no head” (*me man*) or “no brain” (*kantaach man*)¹¹⁹ is stupid and somebody with a “hard head” (*me gogo*) is stubborn. Furthermore, dreams (*amadh*) are not generated inside the head. Instead, they invade it from the outside. That is why people who have bad dreams put a knife next to their head, “to cut away the dream from entering the head”. This is related to the belief that a *gaaram*, who causes bad dreams, dislikes all metal, and iron in particular.

3.4.4 Blessing and cursing

Blessing

When we look at the precarious and harsh ecological conditions in Dassanech land, where drought and hunger are commonplace and raiding is a constant threat, it comes as no surprise that people search for security. That security is found in Waag. Waag is the provider of rain, fertility and peace. Hence, Waag must be present. Therefore, people often address Waag in day-to-day practice. This takes the form of incantations, where Waag is asked to bring the good and take away the bad. At the same time - and to the same end - sacrifices (*suoriyom*) are held to take away the bad and to induce wellbeing (*tieel midhaba*). The main goal in life of most Daasanech is to have a lot of cattle and a lot of children (*aañ burnai, um burnai*). Blessings make this possible in that they ensure the continuity of life and the obtainment of wellbeing.

Blessing and cursing should be understood as two sides of the same coin. Both provide the means to make things happen in the world through mental processes,¹²⁰ the

¹¹⁹ Because marrow (*dijn*) and brain are considered the same, people also say *maala dijn man*.

¹²⁰ This is my interpretation. I doubt that the Daasanech would draw a clear distinction between mind and matter, let alone have separate concepts for either.

former to induce wellbeing, the latter to induce harm. The underlying principle is that positive thoughts (which includes speech and emotions) result in a positive outcome while negative thoughts lead to misfortune. In daily life, blessing is far more conspicuous than cursing. People often bless, both in the private sphere of the household as well as at communal level. In principle, blessings are given according to seniority. In the private sphere, the household head and herd owner is the one who blesses. In the public sphere, the eldest age-set of a generation blesses the younger ones and the elder generation blesses the younger generation.

Blessing is *waag'kivijn*, which means “calling forth Waag” or “giving/bringing Waag”. Jackson Achinya explained me that *waag'kivijn* is derived from *waag - ki - ve*, “to call upon, to call forth Waag for/on behalf of somebody”. He added: “The purpose is to heal, bless and bring prosperity to someone. In order to achieve fertility and prosperity in all spheres of earthly life, one and all must be in the right relationship with Waag”.

In the private sphere, only married men can bless. Every morning, a father blesses his offspring, the herds and the lands before he drinks his *shoboro* (coffee) or *biye kulla* (“hot water”).¹²¹ He does so by spraying saliva (*abaraan du laan*) or coffee in the form of rain towards the entrance of the hut (Sagawa, 2007). This act is usually followed by incantations addressed to Waag. The father then lists what should be brought and those present recall or echo the verb. The blessing typically calls forth plenty over the lands (*les he heyyiyo*: let there be plenty), peace (*les naana rayo*) in the land and asks for fertility and new generations (*haariam*) come.

This quest for a multiplication of people and stock is expressed in many different ways, such as *muu kamur gaal nyerecha shiia* (“give him plenty of black people”), *muu herle 'darmeye* (“make his circumcised men increase”) and *dongol muu dongol shiia* (“let him be given plenty of marriage cows”). He may also “ask” or “beg” Waag (*waag rogono*) to wipe out epidemics from the land: *furs man, les gaabadisia*. Other expressions like *'guo modo fadhe* (“let the cattle have calves”) and *muu deeyele kochoyo* (“let his corral be full”) ask for prosperity among the herds. Greetings often reflect these blessings: *Waag gudoka hi ko deeye ta hi ko naana shiicho* (“may Waag take care of you and bring you peace”). The form of the private blessing is also reflected in the public sphere where most rituals contain phrases that aim to bring forth Waag. Here, elders speak out the incantations and the younger people repeat certain elements.

The example below is a typical incantation. One of the elders (or the father of the household) utters some requests, while the chorus of the participants responds, most often by repeating the last verb or by adding *faiya*, which means: “clear” or “pure”.

¹²¹ *Biye kulla* is made by boiling the husks of coffee beans (*shoboro*) in water.

<i>Waag hele midhaba</i>	Good things from Waag
<i>Urgaa gaza</i>	may he send it down to us
<i>gaagat</i>	send down
<i>Waag yaachu</i>	Waag of my Father
<i>Hay gaal he mizaba shiiche</i>	may he give us good things
<i>hi shiiche</i>	may he give
<i>Um Waagiet hala faiya</i>	may the children of Waag be blessed
<i>Faiya</i>	be blessed
<i>Um hele taa uoka waag hi shiiche</i>	may Waag give them what they want
<i>Waag hi shiiche</i>	may he give
<i>Waag yaachu hai les higita</i>	may our fathers Waag keep the lands closed
<i>he ki higite</i>	keep closed.

Other ways of blessing involve no words. To name but a few, smearing butter (*sjiebit shugudijn*) over head and shoulders is a way to cool a person and make him strong; throwing *erer*, a mixture of milk and water, cleans guests from spiritual dirt and exchanging strips (*muorijn*) of stomach fat (*muor*) connects a pair with each other and with Waag throughout all important steps in life.



Image 3.1. Preparing the *muor*.

As mentioned earlier, each month, the new moon is welcomed through smearing white clay on the hut's entrance and on the forehead while the ritual horn is blown and same substance is also used to initiate the Bulls.

Blessings usually proceed along the levels of seniority. They go from elder to younger, from male to female - although, there are exceptions. As a rule, elderly people from the *nyerim* clans (the Turnyerim and Fargaaro) can bless everybody. People belonging to the clans of *mesatich* are only able to bless their own clan members, except when they are *jelaba* and belong to the eldest reigning generation. Members of a certain age-set are able to bless their coevals and all those belonging to younger age-sets of the same generation and of the generations below. A father is able to bless all his kin and his cattle.

Also the circumcised men – who are considered *gaal waagiet* – are able to bless as long as they wear the typical *aaro* hairstyle, although they will usually only bless women, youngsters and sick people. Nevertheless, this is an exception to the usual hierarchy observed in blessing. Women generally do not engage in overt blessings, except among themselves and when the husband is absent. I was told that they are able to bless their offspring but not their husband. The preferred manner for females to bless is through caring for others.¹²²

Cursing

Cursing (*dorjn*) is the inverse of blessing, although this is not limited to conscious mental praxis. In fact, as I intend to demonstrate below, most curses among the Daasanech happen unwittingly. In fact, the cursing of other Daasanech through speech is highly disapproved and is only allowed under specific conditions. Cursing is first and foremost meant to bring harm to *kidh* (enemies, foreigners). In-group curses, when they do occur, follow the same principles of seniority and clanship as blessings do, although again there are exceptions: firstly, a woman can curse her husband and secondly, younger age-sets can curse elder age-sets of the same generation. A curse may result in *hirich* (literally “needle”), indicating that it may be felt like an itching pain.

The example below is of a typical curse directed towards enemies, in this case the Turkana:

<i>He, maa Buma yiesi</i>	Kill the Turkana
<i>Aas</i>	Kill
<i>Mu Waag hi shiishe</i>	May Waag kill him
<i>Waag hi chiesha</i>	May Waag kill
<i>Mu he dewa argisia</i>	May I show him the bad things
<i>Argisish</i>	Show him
<i>Mu gas met mura</i>	May I cut his legs
<i>Mur</i>	Cut

¹²² I gained this insight from Susanne Epple and was confirmed by Daasanech women during my last visit to the field in 2009.

<i>Mu wodhin 'gaa vere</i>	<i>May I spear his heart</i>
<i>GaaVer</i>	<i>Spear</i>
<i>Mu aas gas gar-zu gaza</i>	<i>May I send him with the sunset</i>
<i>Gar-zu gat</i>	<i>Sent</i>
<i>Ho Kuf</i>	<i>Die</i>
<i>Ho Kuf</i>	<i>Die</i>

3.4.5 Rituals: *he naasan* and *he nim*

The Daasanech word for ritual performances, traditions, customs, laws, rules or taboos is *nyatal* (pl. *nyatalaam*).¹²³ These rituals fall into two categories. One category is called *nyatalaam he naasan*, the other *nyatalaam he nim*. The word *he* means “a thing, something” and the term *naasan* and *nim* stem from the verb *na*, which means to make, to perform something. The form *naasan* means doing or performing in a reflexive way: you perform something for yourself. *Nyatalaam he naasan* are “given by Waag” and people say that during *he naasan* rituals, Waag is present.

Generally speaking, *nyatalaam he naasan* should be performed by everyone, as they consist of the different rites of passage one must take part in over the course of a lifetime. Their aim is to maintain the connection with Waag and the flow of life. They induce wellbeing, peace and fertility. Not performing them inevitably leads to misfortune and the threat of ancestral disapproval serves to ensure that they are. *He nim* rituals are prescribed by diviners in order to restore the broken link with the Above. The goal of these rituals is to heal and to cleanse the victim and his family and to prevent further misfortune. The archetypical ritual here is the “bleeding ritual” (*an fasiet*), in which the afflicted person and his family must pass under a shower of blood from a sacrificed goat in order to take away the bad. Other rituals that aim to restore the broken link with Waag are the Hogaare cleansing rituals performed by the *jelaba* after serious trespasses against Daasanech customs and the cleansing ritual called *armaa chello*, performed after killing an enemy.

Other *he nim* rituals refer to some specific acts or things one does whose sole intention is to harm another person and bring them misfortune. This is normally a member of one’s own in-group - either out of a grudge or pure envy. Sometimes it may be performed against external enemies - for example, during conflicts in order to neutralize their power and any harm they intend. Examples of *he nim* activities include the practice called *dam gil fiin* (“placing tobacco in the palm of a diviner”). If one’s property is stolen, one may consult a *maa nyerich* and give a gift of tobacco. It is believed

¹²³ The term *aada* has a similar meaning.

that eventually the thief will experience some misfortune. One may also take a handful of soil from footprints or the cow dung of another man's cattle to cast a spell by planting an *ilmaarach* tree in it. Another *he nim* is done by smearing black stones with oil and placing them at the back of one's house or burying them under the ground. *He nim* rituals used to curse the enemy include "throwing the magic" (*muor sin*). This is done by taking branches from a *yierite* tree and placing them in the territory of your enemy or by killing a dog and lying it in the path of an enemy. Some of these *he nim* rituals are disliked by the Daasanech and are not considered *nyatalaam*.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter introduced some important concepts in Daasanech religious thought and in how the body is experienced. The main concept is Waag, which may be understood as the source of everything and to which everything returns. Rain and fertility are the main elements associated with Waag. Waag is high above, but descends in the evening and cares for his people. Everybody has his own Waag and a person who is *waagiet* (with or from Waag) is blessed and lucky. An absence of Waag, in contrast, leads to misfortune.

Apart from Waag, the *gaaram* play a prominent role in life. They are considered the guardians of tradition and they may interfere with the living. They are feared. Small offerings are made to keep them away. At the same time, they may be asked for help.

The condition of mankind is one of suffering (*manjan*), especially if compared with snakes who have a life in the shade and do not have to work. All living creatures have a *sidha*, the pulsing principle which sustains life (or is life) and originates with Waag. When healthy (*fuol*), the bodily fluids and the food flow without obstruction. Man may influence fortune through blessings, which call upon Waag. Blessings may take many forms and make use of different substances and verbal expressions. All main rituals may be understood as blessings. They are performed to sustain the link with Waag. Cursing is the opposite of blessing and causes harm. All *he naasan* rituals may be understood as blessings, *he nim* rituals by contrast deal with more occult aspects of manipulating the world. They are made in order to counter misfortune or to induce it.

Chapter 4.

Stages of life, rituals and ornaments

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will describe the traditional stages of life of the Daasanech, as well as the different rites of passage that accompany the transition from one stage to the next. Special attention will be given to the different ways in which the body is modified over the course of these practices. Apart from a detailed description of the main rites the passage briefly outlined in the following paragraphs, I shall also describe the rites of birth, name giving and death as well as the small ritual demarcating the transition from childhood into boyhood.

The main rites of passage among Daasanech men are “entering the people” (*gaal hiliti*) and “arrow” or circumcision (*bilte*). During *gaal hiliti*, an adolescent spears an ox for the elders for the first time and thereby enters into a specific age-set within the generation system. His status changes from that of a boy (*maa nyigeej*) into that of an adult (*maa kaabana*). This transition allows a man to wear the typical clay-cap and make use of a neck rest. This rite has been adopted from the Turkana and/or Nyangatom, where it is called *asapan* (Tornay, 1981: 161).¹

Male circumcision, on the other hand, only changes the status of a man during the ceremony, when he is called *maa heriet* (*her*). Circumcision is considered to be a rebirth. After the entire process is complete, life goes on as before. However, the man has

¹ The ritual called *asapan* or *sapana* is found among all Karamojong and goes along with their generation system.

sacrificed his own blood and thereby entered another spiritual level, opening him up to the spiritual powers of his clan. There is evidence to suggest that male circumcision dates back to an older age-grading system in which the stage of a circumcised man was just one of the several grades a man had to pass through during his lifetime.

The transition of a girl into womanhood is strongly related to her ability to reproduce. It starts with the *'dimi*, a huge ceremony in which the fathers of young women offer food to the spiritual leaders in return for their blessings, which guarantee the reproductive capacities of their daughters. This *'dimi* is followed by female circumcision, which “opens” a girl to marriage. After the union is sealed by her first pregnancy, a wife takes several more steps having to do with her bridewealth transfer, which is finalized in the *bilforan* ceremony. That signals the full incorporation of a girl into her husband’s clan.

After *'dimi*, the reproductive cycle is complete and a man retires into social elderhood, where he is considered a *maa gudo* (big man). At that point, a man may decide to divide his herds under his sons, although this is not a requirement and many richer men chose to remain in charge of the family herds. For some men, there is yet another stage to come - that is to become a spiritual leader or *maa jelaba*. To complete this stage, one must perform the specific initiation ritual to become a Bull. However, belonging to the eldest age-set of the reigning generation is a prerequisite for initiation. As with the category of *her*, this *jelaba* is a remnant of an ancient age-grading system in which it formed the last grade. As discussed above, this age-grading system eventually became integrated into a Karamojong type of generation system.

4.2 Birth and name giving

4.2.1 Birth

4.2.1.1 Childbirth

By preference, a mother delivers in front of her own hut.² When labour begins, she uses the two poles at the entrance of the hut to hold herself upright, while she kneels. A midwife (*maa gaal chichirata*) may be called to assist. If not, women of the family or

² It is common for a woman to return to the security of her mother’s hut for her first birthing.

neighbourhood may aid her. During my fieldwork, I didn't witness any births. Boote Narama, a renowned midwife among the Shir, provided the follow description of childbirth:

The one who gives birth sits on her knees, just in front of the entrance of the hut. She holds the poles. I sit in front of her. I smear her belly with butter and feel the position. When she is smeared, it will not take much longer. She presses. The child comes headfirst. Sometimes, the legs come out first. Then I enter with my hands, smeared with butter. My hands enter. They enter, slowly, slowly. Only those who know by hands can help. The head comes out. When it is the first time, I cut.³ Then I take the head. The child comes out. I put it on my legs. Only the placenta (*kan*) stays behind. When the placenta comes, I cut the umbilical cord. I tie it and I cut. (Boote, 1996)

The umbilical cord will later be tied under the right front hoof of a cow, which will be given to the child. This animal is called the “cow of the navel” (*se onyir*). Girls may be given a *se onyir* or a female ewe (*shiene onyir*). This is the first animal a child receives and its offspring will form the nucleus of his future herd.⁴

Afterwards, the child is washed. The mother will wake up slowly from the pain. The placenta (*kan*) comes and she sits. Then I give the child to the mother. When it is a boy, I put it on her right side, when it's a girl I put it on her left side. Three times, I take it away. The fourth time, it sucks. (Boote, 1996)

This spatialization of the difference between male and female into right and left is a practiced here, as it is often observed in Daasanech ritual practice. This is also true of hesitating thrice before allowing something new; this is a way to focus on a peculiar and important act. Here, both are literally “embodied” for the first time in life. This practice also stresses the belief that “all good things in life are four”, just like the teats of cow's udder.

After the placenta is removed, it is buried in a hole next to the hearthstones. This place, next to the *gechem*, is the same spot where tobacco and coffee are poured for the ancestors. This may indicate that the placenta is a gift for the ancestors. In any case, it stresses the connection between the ancestors and this new life. If the child is stillborn, the body is also buried there.

³ According to Elsa Lindjörn, who worked as a nurse among the women during my fieldwork, the midwives cut up rather than down, as Western trained doctors do. This often leads to perforation of the bladder.

⁴ In some clans, both boys and girls receive a *se onyir*, in others it is only the boys. I was told however that when a girl receives a cow, its offspring will go to her brothers. The father of the household has the right to dispose of the animals as long as he lives, but anyone in the family knows exactly which cattle is “his”.

After the child is weaned, the father kills a sheep. This sheep is called *aqn geyte*. When it is her first child, the mother is not allowed to eat meat. She may only drink the fat of the tail of the sheep (*buode*). I boil the fat. Then, I take the content of the stomach and press out the juice. I mix (the fat with the juice), I mix, I mix. The mother drinks. When she drinks it, everything comes out.⁵ After that, she is allowed to drink soup (*iri*). (Boote, 1996)

The skin of that sheep (*aqn geyte*) will be used to cover the breasts of the new mother and protect her against the evil eye. The leather skirt (*sara*) made out of the goat that was killed before childbirth will be used to carry and cover the child.

4.2.1.2 Recovery

After childbirth, the mother remains secluded inside her hut for four days if she delivered a boy and for three days if it was a girl. During this period, she should abstain from cow's milk and raw butter (*shiebite*). These are similar to the observances undertaken during menstruation (*iro gayo* or "having rain"). A woman is not allowed to have milk or use fresh butter during her periods. She can milk though, but if she do, all of the cows should be standing. The reason for this is that female blood and cow's milk are exclusive of one another, and therefore menstrual blood is considered "bad" (*deen*). It is said to affect the milking cows and may make them barren or sick. Buttermilk and cooked butter (*salap*) are not prohibited because they are manufactured.

Afterwards, a goat is slaughtered. A part of the skin is for my right hand. Another part is for the mother. And the last part is for the child. Three strips. Then, coffee is boiled. I receive two legs of the goat, the head and the skin. I take everything with me. This is it. (Boote, 1996)

One half of this goat is used to pay the midwife, the other half is used to feed the guests. In the weeks following delivery the father of the newborn may slaughter several more goats or sheep for his wife. This goes on until she regains her strength. The child is usually weaned after a full year. Boys are often allowed to nurse longer than girls, but after a few days, cow's milk is already added to the child's diet. During this period, abstinence is practiced.

⁵ Cleansing the inside of the body through purging or vomiting is a common practice. Sometimes emetics and purgatives such as *gudien*, *lomadang*, *nyabakitang*, *dermech* or fat are used to induce diarrhea.

4.2.1.3 Stillbirths and breech births

When a pregnant wife aborts naturally, nothing is done, although a diviner may be contacted in order to find the reason. Normally, stillbirths – children who died without having suckled and without receiving a name – are referred to as “blood only” (*fas takama*). People will comfort the mother by telling her “don’t cry, it is Waag’s will, (s)he will bring you another one”.

If a woman has endured many miscarriages or her children have died shortly after birth, people may start to fear that malevolent forces are at work and the parents may opt for a different delivery place than the wife’s own homestead. By preference, the hut of somebody of a *nyerim* clan will be chosen. This person will be from a family with a good moral reputation and a history of successfully delivering children. A child born in this fashion will be given the name of the hut’s owner and among most clans, the ear of such a child will be cut in order to mark this event.⁶ Usually, the mother will also abstain from shaving the child’s hair for the first time. Instead, their hair will not be cut until after their two lower incisors are removed before puberty.

Breech babies garner a lot of respect among the Daasanech. Men born feet first are circumcised in a separate calves pen, with a special knife, so that their blood does not mix with the blood of the other clans. These men cannot be beaten by their age-mates (*kaabana*) for the rest of their lives and husbands may not beat their breech born wives.

4.2.1.4 Twins

Twins (*sheelech, sheele*) are referred to as “children of Waag” (*um waagiet*). They are considered a sign of prosperity and good fortune. A special kind of decoration called *kob* is given to the mother and her children. This is a leather strap made of ox hide and decorated with two lines of four cowry shells.⁷ The mother wears it for the rest of her life to demonstrate her special status. Her children only wear it until it is worn out – apart from special occasions like circumcision and for a girl’s marriage.⁸ A rather strange aspect of twins is that the firstborn is considered the youngest and the lastborn the eldest. This is important later in life, especially for men, because the order of birth

⁶ This practice is not observed by all clans.

⁷ Before lions became scarce, this was the preferred skin used.

⁸ If the twins are a boy and a girl, then the girl will be present when the boy is circumcised. She comes and sits next to her brother and the cutter will touch her legs with his knife. During her marriage, her twin must go with her to the groom’s house. Both should be blessed. He will sleep there four days with his sister. The following morning, the husband will give one ewe (*shiene*) and one ram (*aar*) to the brother as a gift in exchange for his twinship. Then, the sister can remain with her husband.

has consequences for order of marriage and other rituals and for the allocation of bridewealth animals.

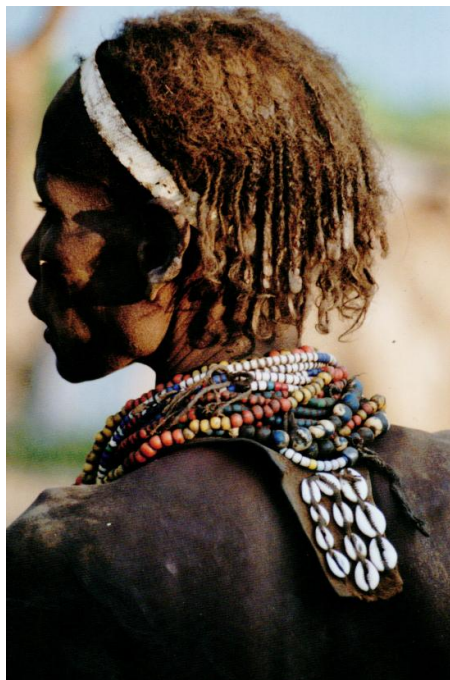


Image 4.1. *Kob* of a mother who gave birth to twins

4.2.2 Name-giving

4.2.2.1 Birth and “pot name” (*me ibile*)

After the umbilical cord of the newborn has dried up, the father is allowed to enter the hut again. At that time, he may invite some family members, neighbours and friends for the name-giving ceremony. During this event, all guests gather around the newborn. The mother, who has prepared coffee in a pot for her guests, pours it into the calabashes. The guests now bless the child and wish it a long and prosperous life: *Gudaano, Waag hi ko deeyo, me sholt hi ko diiyo* (“Grow big, may Waag look after you, may your hair grow”). After that, a name is chosen, and this is called the *me ibile*, or “pot name”.⁹

Before drinking his coffee, the father asks his wife: “Whose name shall we give?” Then he calls out a name, while the visitors call out all of the different names associated

⁹ The term *me* or *meto* mean both “name” and “head”, indicating the close relationship perceived between the two.

with it. In the meantime, the father keeps an eye on the reactions of the child. Names may be taken from somebody else or they may be related to the place or time of birth and any special events, like a big rain shower, a visit, a bird that alighted on the roof of the hut, a plant which grew in the neighbourhood. All circumstances may suggest possible names for the child. A father often pledges to a firstborn son the name of someone else, an exemplary person he wishes to enter into a kind of godfather relationship with the boy.

4.2.2.2 Bond of the name

This partnership is called *lilmech meto* (“bond relation of the name”) and parents may hope that this will develop into a strong bond between the two families or that it may strengthen an already existing relationship, with a son or a father’s brother, for instance. In kinship terms, this turns the name-giver into a “brother” of the child and thus makes him into a “son” of the child’s parents. The relationship involves some formalized mutual obligations and the exchange of gifts. Later on, partners may be included in bridewealth transfers between both families and engage in mutual cooperation when labour or access to agricultural plots is needed.¹⁰

The process of making a relation of the name starts with the visit of the intended partner with the newborn. This usually happens a few weeks or months after the child’s birth. Next, the parents take the child to the village of the partner and bring him coffee. This coffee is used by the name-giver to bless his small “brother”. The relationship is formally established when the partner shaves the child’s first hair (*gosh*). Usually, the host will slaughter a sheep as an act of hospitality. Later on, after the child has survived his early years to become a sturdy boy, the name-giver is expected to offer his partner a heifer (*maade*).

The first haircut is an important event. The child is shaved completely bald to “remove all the hair of the mother”.¹¹ Later on, the new hair is cut in their lineage’s specific style. Each house within a clan has its own specific haircut. These make use of a limited set of forms. Rounded ones are called *guisam*, those that go from ear to ear are called *aaro* and hair cut from back to front is called *shoro*. One very specific style is called *almaasjn*, the vertical E already mentioned before. Typical for boys (and girls from some clans) is a small, round tuft of hair (*quite*) left at the *shurte*, the front of the head. This tuft refers to the father and may only be cut when the father dies.

¹⁰ For younger siblings, this kind of relationship is less common.

¹¹ Children who have lost many elder siblings will not be shaved. The parents will wait until the child is big enough to herd the animals.

4.3 Childhood

4.3.1 Small children

A weaning child remains most of the time with its mother. Each time the mother leaves the compound to go out where strangers might be, she wraps her baby in the leather skirt (*saara*) made from the sheep slaughtered after pregnancy. Its dark colour protects the child against the evil eye, which is considered one of the leading causes of death in infants. Babies also receive an amulet (*nyakeek*). These are made out of the hoofs of small sheep or goats or of the *nyerich* wood. They are placed to on the arm to deceive the evil eye.

Pampers are not necessary for the smallest children. When a baby wets itself, a dog (*cher*) is called to clean the child. Yelling “Tuutu” usually encourages one of the lethargic canines lying around the compound to come running. Young girls wear a small front skirt (*sila*) to cover their genitals. The *sila* of little girls is not made of leather, but out of the bark of the *doshite* (pl. *doshe*) plant.¹² Bigger girls wear a *sila* made from soft sheepskin, bordered with burling (*susurte*). The rear part is covered with a larger skirt of goat hide called a *habuna*. Unlike with girls, it is no taboo to see the genitals of small boys and so they traditionally remained naked until they reach adolescence.

In the evening, family members gather together at the entrance of their hut. Cowhides are pulled out and the children crawl around together. A father may hold one of the younger children on his lap as he waits for dinner. Traditionally, this is the only meal the Daasanech take in a day. After dinner, family members talk about their day or things on their mind. Slowly, one after the other, the children fall asleep and the mother carries them inside, calling the others who are still awake. Older boys may remain outside and join their fathers on a cowhide placed between the cattle and the hut.

When a child grows up a bit and starts to walk, their older sisters or other girls from the hamlet keep an eye on them and may carry them around. Early in life, a clear division of roles is observed and small girls imitate their older sisters, while the boys try out their first weapon, usually a small kind of boomerang called a *basich* or *char*. A larger version of which is used by older boys to hunt small game. Girls sometimes play with a simply constructed doll consisting of a stick with hair made from plaited thongs of cotton or leather. Such a doll is called “daughter” (*ini*) or “girl” (*maa haarte*) and the girls will rhythmically move it up and down to make it dance.

¹² *Calotropis procera*, a milkweed type of plant.



Image 4.2. Girl playing with *ini*.

Responsibilities start early. One of the first tasks assigned a child is to keep back the small lambs and kids when their older siblings open the corral and milk the cows in early in the morning and in the late afternoon. A few weeks before harvest starts, young children are stand guard in the fields to prevent the birds from eating the ripened crops (*ruub moch*). From early morning until sunset, they have the arduous task of chasing away the birds with clay balls flung from their sling (*rudach*), while sitting on platforms under the hot sun.¹³

4.3.1.1 Removing the lower incisors

The appearance of permanent teeth appear heralds the time for the girls go with their older sisters to the river to fetch water and collect firewood. Boys of the same age are ordered to assist in herding goats and sheep in the neighbourhood of the compound. Even the smallest boys might be sanctioned by their fathers or older brothers if animals are missing when they return with their flocks. When the front teeth of the children are fully grown, the mandibular central incisors (*kach balla*) are removed (*kach bim*). Someone of the neighbourhood with experience will handle this operation, usually extracting the teeth of several boys and girls from the village, one after the other. The

¹³ It was surprising to see how precise these boys can aim.

children lay down and are firmly held by the arms and legs, while the man loosens the teeth with a nail or a knife before pulling them out. As astonishing as it may sound, most of the children show not hint of discomfort while this is done.



Image 4.3. Removing the lower incisors

The overt reason for this practice is simply beauty. It is said to be a mark (*hedh*). Just as the ears of animals are marked in order to show to which clan they belong, a Daasanech is marked as a Daasanech through his teeth. The fact that the neighbouring Nyangatom, Turkana, Kara, Hamar and Arbore – amongst others – observe the same practice does not seem to contradict this argument. “Even if they do”, the answer came, “we were the first to use this practice. The others took it from us”.¹⁴ Another reason given for the removal of teeth was that it differentiates man from a donkey or a dog, because these animals have the same number of teeth as people do. A fourth, and rather strange, explanation was that it connects man with cattle, because oxen also lack teeth - though they lack upper teeth. The most special reason given for the procedure was that the elimination of the lower incisors leaves a hole, which makes it easier for life (*sidha*) to leave the body upon death.¹⁵

4.3.2 Boyhood (*maa nyigeen, nyigeen*)

Boyhood is the stage between childhood and manhood. During this period, a boy gains independence from his mother and gradually learns to take up responsibility for the household by herding the flocks of goats and sheep around the compound. His

¹⁴ This is confirmed in Lydall and Strecker (1978b: 3).

¹⁵ I will return on this subject in chapter four, when dealing with life and disease.

newfound independence is traditionally acknowledged by a feast called *aqñ degge* (“stock for the married women”) or *yoi degge* (“meeting of the women”), which refers to the fact that the father of the household slaughters some animals for his wife and her friends.¹⁶ Another name for this feast is *orinkodee* (“lizard”), because a lizard is an animal that a young boy is able to kill. Ideally, it should be the first prey he brings to his mother’s house, proudly proving to her that he is growing up and is able to sustain himself. It is plausible that this feast is a reminder of the time when game formed a much larger share in the household economy than at present, when young men acted more as hunters than herders. The father offers the mother some animals in recognition of the role she played in raising his son. In the same way, the mother of a bride will receive coffee and a sheep called *waqñ* after her daughter’s first pregnancy, which she will eat together with her family members and friends.

A mother invites her sisters, friends and neighbours for the feast. All the women dress up and take part in singing and dancing. At a certain point, they form a large circle and the man comes in the middle of it, together with all his children. Then someone calls out the name of the husband and all the women bless the father and his offspring.¹⁷ At the time of this research, few families still observed this custom. I was told that in the past, a boy received his first loincloth at this time, whereas nowadays - due to Ushumba influence - boys wear clothes much earlier.¹⁸

From this point onwards, a boy becomes much more conscious of his appearance. Strings of beads are made to wear around the neck, *nyeboli* cover the breast and metal or leather bracelets are worn around the arms and legs.¹⁹ The childhood hairstyle is abandoned and locks are not plaited into forms called *aaro* and *gofoot*. The *aaro* style starts with a bow in the middle, with braided hair at the back and the front. *Gofote* are plaits without a vertical strip. The older they grow, the smaller the shaved space between *shurte* (hair at the front) and *shushulich* (hair at the back) will be, and at adolescence the hair of both the *shurte* and *shushulich* almost meet.²⁰

This hairstyle indicates that these young men are ready to join an age-set when the time arrives and that they are ready to make their clay-cap. This will happen during the *gaal hiliti* ritual, which turns a youth into a real man and makes him part of an age-set. During that same period, many boys choose a favourite goat and receive the its name as

¹⁶ The animals killed may include up to six male sheep (*lucho*) or even an ox.

¹⁷ This is the only occasion upon which I witnessed women blessing.

¹⁸ I was told that until a few decades ago, boys remained naked until they were circumcised. A circumcised penis cannot be seen while uncircumcised penises are not considered shameful.

¹⁹ A *nyeboli* is a breast decoration, round or rectangular, usually made out of white and black beads. It is also common among the Turkana. During dancing, it flips up and down. See image 5.5. for an example.

²⁰ The Daasanech don’t give this any symbolic connotation. For them, when *shurte* and *shushulich* reach each other is merely a sign that a boy is ready to assist in the cattle camps.

their own name, eager to imitate their older brothers who have their favourite ox and the ox name (*yirmet*) which comes with it?

4.3.3 Girls (*maa haarte, hada*)

Young girls soon assist their older sisters and mother with the daily chores. These include grinding sorghum (*yerich roon*), fetching water (*biye 'gaa arim*) and firewood (*'guor shunij*), milking the goats and sheep (*aan 'gaa hiilij*), smoking out the milk containers (*kurum 'gaa gerij*), cleaning the goat enclosures (*dei 'gaa heej*), cooking (*uom orij*) and taking care of younger siblings (*um dhagamij* or *um 'gaa yedij*). During the planting season, they help with weeding and harvesting. Young girls may also join their mothers in the cattle camps during the rainy season, where they assist in milking and churning. In the evenings, when the clapping of a group of men informs that they are ready to dance, the girls join their older sisters and other girls of the village for *aar laala* or dancing.

After chores are completed, girls gather together in the shade and braid each other's hair while chatting. Small girls have a hairstyle similar to that of their brothers, but when they grow older the girls plait their hair into braids (*me sun*). Daasanech girls' braids typically end with a ball made out of red clay (*me afhiisan*).

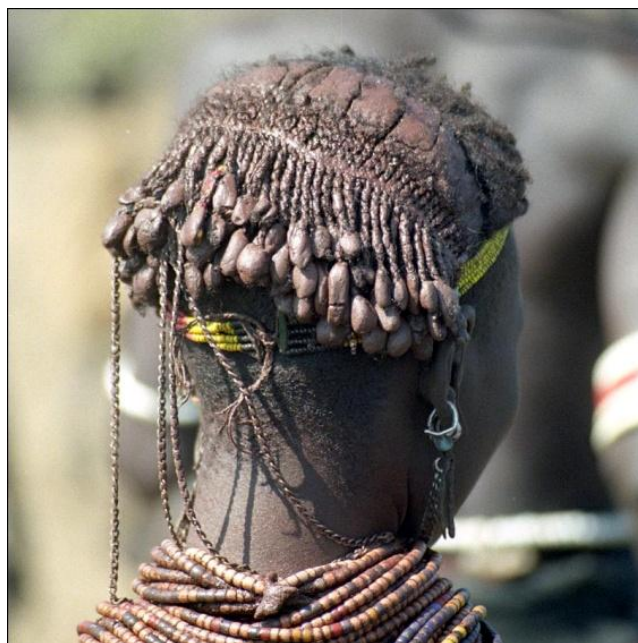


Image 4.4. Hairstyle of girl with clay balls at the bottom

This clearly differs from the hairstyle of their mothers, which is not plaited but roled (*me danij*) and where these balls are absent. A girl's hair is further decorated with

beaded ribbons and with a string of beads, the colours of which indicate her generation. Around their necks, the girls wear *murijn luute*, colourful beads in glass or plastic. A lot of blue and white beads were typical for Daasanech girls at the time of research.

Until the late 90's, almost all girls – except those living in town – wore the traditional, two-piece skirt. Girls put a lot of care in its maintenance, by adding coloured beads to it and smearing it with a mixture of charcoal and butter to make it smooth and black. Mothers were very keen to have their daughters wearing these skirts as a cotton skirt indicated poverty and neglect. Besides this, older girls wore arm bands in either iron (*boolon*) or copper (*mara*), heavy leg bands (*muulam*) and bands made from the *doshe* plant, called *angas* (sing. *angach*), tied across the chest during dancing. Some still wore a strap, called *dhan*, which was made from ostrich shells and the goat hooves, while other girls had a strap called *dhiero*, named after the cowry shells attached on it.

When I returned in 2009, I was quite surprised to see that most girls had replaced their traditional skirt and *angas* with a cotton skirt and that the dress code that had been so important just a decade earlier had been abandoned. Nor were any of the girls wearing the *muulam* around their legs. The main reason for this quick change may be that all traditional clothes and accessories are considered “harmful cultural practices” and community workers were obliged to spread this message and change behaviour. Nowadays, traditional dress and ornaments are kept inside the hut, only to be used at night during dancing.

Before the firstborn daughter reaches puberty, she will take part in the ‘*dimi*, together with all the girls coming of age, as well as their younger siblings.²¹ Shortly thereafter, she will be circumcised and ready for marriage. Therefore, she will try to collect extra necklaces and beads. Girls are very keen to wear the right colours around their head. These *murijn me ino* have to be the green and red for the *nabus* (“bee-eater”), who are the daughters of Nyolomongin and Nyitaabus, yellow and red for the *kirach* (“spotted woodpecker”), the daughters of Nyimor and Nyigabite.²²

In 1985, Almagor published a fascinating article on the symbolic meaning of these birds. He linked the difference between bride givers and bride receivers with the qualities of these two birds, nesting and migrating and presented it as an illustration of the sophisticated way in which the Daasanech observe nature. Sophisticated as it may be, I have my doubts about the symbolic connotations the author made. The main reason being that the generations alternate and bride receivers become bride givers in the next generation, while the names for the birds remain the same. When I presented Almagor’s thesis to my collaborators, they were surprised and told me that the names

²¹ This is the case for the three sections that form the Shir, as well as the Oro and Riele. The Elele perform a ‘*dimi* for each daughter separately while the Kuoro and Randal have no ‘*dimi*.

²² Often, *kirach* is also called *kobir*, which is another bird with a similar color pattern.

adopted only on account of the species' respective plumage. This instance learned me to be careful when analyzing symbolic features.

During special festivities during which the 'guol is danced and upon marriage, the girls wear a specific type of decoration on their backs. *Kirach* girls wear a beaded panel called "giraffe" (*iej*), because of its pattern. *Nabus* girls wear one made of cowry shells called *nyokoli*.



Image 4.5. Kirach girl wearing *nyokoli*



Image 4.6. Nabus girl wearing *iej*

Another typical accessory is the *dhiero*, a belt decorated with cowry shells (*dhiero*) and ironware to give rhythm while dancing.²³ Arm and especially the leg bands (*muulam giliet* and *muulam gasiet*) are also used to create sound during dances. Most of this outfit – including the *iej* or *niokoli* and the leg bands – are taken to the groom's village upon marriage, where it will be divided between his sisters. Only the back of the bride's skirt (*habune*) will be returned.

²³ Previously, this belt was made out of ostrich eggs and goats and sheep hooves. Such a belt was called *zan*.

4.4 From boy to man (*maa kaabana*)

4.4.1 Spearing the first ox or “joining the people” (*gaal hiliti*)

Spearing his first goat or ox initiates a man into a specific age-set within his generation and changes a boy into an adult. Before that, although a boy is allowed to marry, he is not allowed to eat with other adults during meat-feasts or to speak in the *naab*. In preparation, young men of the same generation and age form cliques. When they feel their group is strong enough, they ask permission from the elder age-set (*shad gudoka*) and their fathers to be initiated. This is obtained only after gifts are presented of beads, alcohol and other things.

When permission has been granted, all the youngsters seeking to become initiated look for a nice ox to sacrifice for the older age-sets. They beg for it from a wealthy person of their generation or the generation of their fathers. All painted in yellow and white, and with a lot of noise, they go and sing in front of that man’s house and shout: “We are young, we are the new power, we will defend your herds, we will kill the Bume, you have a nice ox of the colour we want?” Indeed, the animal that a young man will spear should not come from his own herd, but should be borrowed from somebody else. This means that the young man enters for the first time into a relationship of credit (*ew*) with another person.²⁴

This is the beginning of a lifelong process of coping with debts, which is pretty well described by Almagor (1978a). Besides a loaned ox or goat, each initiate also chooses a “relation of the chyme” (*lilmech uro*) who will assist him during the ritual.

On the day, members of the older age-sets come together in the village of the initiates. Wood for the fire and leaves to cover the ground are collected and everything is prepared. The ox is driven inside and the initiate uses his father’s spear to hit the right flank of the animal, behind the third rib, right in the heart. A skilled man may only take one stroke to kill the animal and it is expected that the boy also make a clean kill. The ox should be speared behind the third rib through the heart. When the initiate misses and the animal is only wounded, it is considered a bad omen.

The animal should be lain down on its left side with the head towards the east.²⁵ Then, someone cuts through the hide to remove the rumen, which contains the chyme

²⁴ This credit custom is very complicated and requires further study. Animals may only be returned ten years later and those who loaned are honored in songs.

²⁵ This is the way most oxen are killed. Sometimes, they are also dispatched by slamming a stone onto the forehead. The Daasanech cut the animal’s throat while the head is towards the west only during last rites.

(uro). The rumen is cut open and the bond mate (*lilmech uro*) grabs the chyme and squeezes the half fermented grass above the head of his partner. After that, all the other men anoint themselves with chyme, as well as the new initiates, a practice which expresses the both unity of the group, “being melted together just like the chyme”, and the close connection between men and cattle.

In the meantime, the meat is roasted and all the men go to sit behind the bed of leaves laid down in a semicircle (*rash*) and the initiate takes his place at the end of the row. There, his bond mate offers him a neck rest (*kara*) to serve as a stool. Three times, he should pretend to sit on it, before actually seating himself. After this, he is offered a piece of the roasted meat. Again, three times he refuses the meat before accepting it into his mouth. Having his own neck rest and being allowed to sit in the *rash*, means that he is now a full adult (*maa kaabana*). From now on, he is no longer allowed to milk a cow nor to sip from its udder.

After the meal, initiates are allowed to abuse their older age-mates with insults (*chaarim*), a behaviour which is under normal circumstances not permitted and heavily sanctioned. The initiation ends with blessings. Affluence and prosperity are evoked for the initiates, their age-set, their generation and the whole section. Speeches are given which praise the power of their group.

All *kaabana* who performed their *gaal hiliti* together form a group or age-set called “mud” (*shad*) or “calf” (*modo*). Whenever a man refers to his *kaabana*, he refers to this *shad* or *modo*.

4.4.2 Wearing the clay-cap

After the *gaal hiliti*, a man is allowed to wear a clay-cap. This cap is also called *shad*.or *liwan*. *Liwan* is the name for purple clay in particular..²⁶ The neck rest (*kara*, *karmo*) goes along with the clay-cap, because it protects it from damage when prone. These items demarcate the initiate’s new status as an adult and Daasanech men put a lot of time and care into the decoration of their cap.²⁷ The drawings they make on it are much more intricate than those made by neighbouring groups. The first cap usually incorporates four, separate, small wooden feather-holders, which are called “teats” (*oto*). A clean, white ostrich plume (*nyakaasia*) is placed in one. These days, feather-holders are

²⁶ *Liwan* is actually a mountain ridge west of Shir territory, in present day Turkana land, where the clay is found.

²⁷ It is said that the practice of wearing this cap was learned from the Turkana.

rectangular shaped, with several holes placed in a row – this is called *nyechobe* and it's made from the *doshe* plant and nylon.



Image 4.7. Painting the clay-cap with red ochre. At the back, clay-cap with *nyechobe*.

4.4.3 Ox names

Kaabana don't call each other by their "pot name"; rather, they use the ox name (*yirmete*). A man clearly identifies with this animal. Through his name-ox, a man expresses all of the love and courage he gives to called in general. Here, it is centred on one subject and shown by songs of praise in which he sings about the beauty and strength of the animal and wishes it happiness. The name of this ox becomes his and both are identified as one, unbreakable unit.

Upon adolescence, a boy selects an ox with a specific pattern and colour from his father's or paternal uncle's herd and shouts out: *Heela anchu* ("this ox is mine") to indicate that he will turn it into his favourite coloured ox (*an bisiet*) and that he will take its name as his *yirmete*. The colours, patterns and the horns of the ox are often similar to his grandfather's or that of the person he is named after. Usually, these names are in the Nyangatom language. The man's age-mates of then shape the ears of the ox into a comb (*ne dhierite*) and/or they make an incision in the dewlap under its head, leaving place for a bell. This small piece is called *nyeleya* - similar to what is left after circumcision (cfr. Almagor, 1972: 85). Name-oxen typically wear a large cowbell or *nyakodonte* so that the sound of his ox may be heard everywhere. The left horn is often deformed and bent backwards in defence, "the same as a man engaged in a duel" (Almagor, 1972: 86)

In ox-songs, the owner praises his name-ox, its colour, strength, bravery and beauty. His age-mates will soon learn his songs by heart, although some songs are handed down. During the evening dances, friends tend to go out together and dance next to each other, singing each other's ox-songs. If a man offers his name-ox to his age-mates to let

him be speared for the community, it is considered an act of bravery. The owner will not spear it himself, as this would be an act of suicide. He shares it out and gets a new one to replace it. It is entirely up to him whether he takes one of the same coloration or a different one. However, if he takes a different one, he should also take a new name.

The following ox-song is from Moloko, a Kuoro man who assisted me during my first stay in Aoga by guarding my shed. Unfortunately, a woman killed him a few years later in a drunken quarrel in Omoraate town.

Ooo Moloko,
My ox is red, my ox is white
The son of my father's brother Kuole takes care of my ox
My age-set is Nyitira
They have beaten his horns
His body is spotted
He doesn't like the bad grass,
He only likes the best grazing grounds.

Common topics for ox-songs are praise for the animal's character, colours or horn profile, as well as the dangers men encounter while herding or raiding. These "bull-songs" (*aar laala*) are sung and danced to in the evening by the younger age-sets of a certain generation. Young men put a lot of time and care into their make-up and dress beforehand. Making a new clay-cap easily takes half a day – not to mention the successive days spent painting it with stripes (*gaaro*) of white, yellow and red ochre. They also apply body paint, consisting of white lines and motifs.²⁸ The patterns used are often straight, jagged or vaulted and applied to the arms, legs and breast. On top of this, they put on ornaments like feathers, beads, arm-rings and special decorations with which to accentuate the rhythm like a *nyebolli* (breast decoration) or leg bells (*yuyuraam*). A cotton mini-skirt wound around the waist just like the traditional leather skirt (*telle*).

4.4.4 Circumcision (*bilte*)²⁹

Apart from the initiation of a man into a specific age-set within his generation, circumcision (*bilte* or *idi mita*) is a second main form of initiation. Male circumcision is a collective ritual in which the men of a generation are circumcised one after the other and then stay in seclusion for several months before they slowly return to normal life.

²⁸ Red and yellow are used during other rituals.

²⁹ This ritual (as well as the *'dimi*) has already been described in Houtteman, 2004

During this period of seclusion in the shade of a large, enclosed arbour, the circumcised men enjoy the special status of *her* (sing. *maa heriet*) and are fed and cared for by their family, including their mother, their sisters and their wife when already married. During this time, they *dolce far niente*, hunt birds, sing their circumcision-songs (*meerte*), bless, curse and rest.

A *maa heriet* is readily identified by his special dress and utensils. His neck rest (*kara heriet*) differs from the normal *kara* in its length and it has two or three legs, while the *kara kaabana* has just one. During the initiation, he wears a women's dress (*modoch*) and a band of colourful head-beads (*ingurite*). His hair is plaited in the style of a *maa heriet*. This is distinguished from other styles by the *aaro* (the middle is plaited upwards into a semicircle reaching from ear to ear), which is smeared with red ochre. This hairstyle is said to indicate his special link with Waag, as it covers his head like the Milky Way covers the earth. Now, that he has offered his own, red blood to the earth, he comes into his powers. He may bless, curse, heal and call forth rain. At the same time, every *maa heriet* carries a string of aromatic roots (*gunite*) from the *guom* grass around his waist. He bites off pieces of this root and spitting them towards people who ask for his blessing. This root is believed to cleanse people of disease and prevent discomfort.

Male circumcision is known as *bilte* which means "arrow" or *her musan* ("being circumcised"), and those who undergo this ritual are referred to as *her* (sing. *maa heriet*). This ritual is carried out at the sectional level. Each generation of each section ideally holds four circumcisions, separated by a period of more than a decade, until a new group of *her* is ready to be circumcised and gets permission to do so by the elders. Each of the three generations of Fathers is offered an ox in order to obtain their permission. Traditionally, permission is only granted when at least one member of the age-set has fathered a girl and some men are not circumcised until in their early thirties. Nowadays, however, circumcision is taking place earlier and earlier, some are even being circumcised before puberty.

After the fourth circumcision, a generation becomes "closed". This means that recruitment into that generation has taken an end. This fact is indicated by the hairstyle of the *her* who participate in the last initiation. They wear their hair in long plaits called *haal gasan*, just like women. Considering that there are eight age-sets within a generation, this means that ideally two age-sets are circumcised at the same initiation, although in reality, people of elder or younger generations are allowed to join in. Although circumcision with an older or a younger age group within the same generation is permitted, the oldest brother of a participating family must always be circumcised first.

To a Daasanech man, the preparation, the composing of circumcision songs, the period of seclusion with the other initiated men, and particularly the period afterwards, when they travel from village to village to eat meat, is the sweetest time of life. For a

period of about three months, the *her* are free of pastoral duties and they are waited on, enjoying great respect and prestige. Circumcision makes a man Daasanech and “opens” the power in him to bless and curse according to the abilities he inherits from his clan. This means that circumcision is regarded not only as essential for the perception of identity, it is also to be taken literally: a boy born of non-Daasanech parents becomes Daasanech via circumcision. Indeed, it does happen that some outsiders who wish to join the Daasanech must wait a generation before they are allowed to undergo this ritual. This ritual is what distinguishes a Daasanech from a Hamar, a Nyangatom or a Turkana.

Preparation

Before a circumcision can take place, there is much to be done. The first step occurs when the Fathers give their blessing, and the circumciser is informed. By tradition, the circumciser belongs to the Agalla clan of the Randal section, and thus is not from one of the older Daasanech subgroups. However, I was told that in recent times, Shir men of the Ili clan also “took up the knife” in order to circumcise their section-mates.³⁰

In addition, every initiate must compose his own circumcision song (*meerte*) in which he sings of his favourite animal or the specific power of his clan, or of the relationship between the clan and Waag or the courage that is needed to brave the circumciser’s knife. These are sung so often that very soon all friends who are circumcised together know each other’s song by heart.

The following circumcision song belongs to a man of the Elele section, from the Baado house of the Turnyerim clan. Within his generation, he belonged to the Nyileminyang age-set, more specifically to the clique called Lotikomoi. In his song, he blesses the warriors of his age group who go into battle.

Nyileminyang need the circumciser’s knife
We are the warriors of the limping man
We are used to exerting ourselves
They who stand above the young men
Above the men who fight
The men of Nangole (place where they used to graze their cattle) drive the enemy
apart
Nangole, where there is plenty of grass
We bear the ritual tree of our fathers (referring to the house of Baado)
The *miede*, where Waag abides,

³⁰ A lot of commotion arose when the Shir did this because it was against tradition. But the work of a circumciser provides a great deal of income, as each circumcised man must pay him a goat.

The most spirited clique is Lotikomoi's (the eldest man of that clique)
Warriors of Nagnole, will you let them pass?
I am a man of the house of Baado
I sing my song
The Nyileminyang stand there
My name is Nyilemito (ox-name)
I am a man of Baado, a warrior.

Once the songs are composed, cliques of age group peers travel around, singing their songs. They go from village to village to announce their initiation and beg for their collective needs (*chuubijn*). This is a necessity, because they have to acquire a whole series of items needed for the ritual. For example, the man's mother will make a woman's hide skirt (*modoch*), which he will carry after the operation. The Daasanech say that a circumcised man is like a woman: "*Maa heriet he maa diet, he gil man*" ("a circumcised man is like a woman, he has no hands".) This means, apart from other things, that he is not allowed to touch any weapons. He also has to look for the dried slivers of root from the *gunite* plant, which he affixes to a cord worn diagonally across the shoulders. Furthermore, a particular neck rest (*kara heriet*) and a ritual staff (*gaasare heriet*) of *miede* measuring about one meter and a half are required. Each *maa heriet* also needs three gourds, and will receive a bow and six arrows from his holding-partner. The initiates also change their hairstyle. The new one is embellished with a particular ornament made of coloured beads (*murijn heriet*). Members of the two *nyerim* clans traditionally add a special necklace made of amber (*biero*) or blue stones (*challaam*).

Then, each initiate chooses a partner or "holder of the loins" (*maa kerno*) who will aid him during the initiation. This name specifically refers to his task during the operation, when he supports the lumbar region of the initiate. This partner, who is often a friend of the initiates father, also plays a role both during the preparations and afterwards. The bond created is considered very important and may develop into a life-long relationship, in which they mutually support each other in times of need and extra expenses, as well as sharing the cattle of their daughters. The *maa kerno* is regarded and addressed as "father" of the circumcised individual. There are strict rules of avoidance (*soomo*) between both partners. Among other things, once the ritual is completed, they may neither touch each other nor look each other in the eyes - an expression of respect (*kiaan*).

Migration and construction of the seclusion hut

A few days before circumcision is to take place, the *her* and their families migrate to the village where the circumcision is to be held. Families who live at a great distance take their huts along with them on the back of a donkey and rebuild them near an open, central space. The circumciser's hut is also collected and escorted to the same village.

Each circumcision has a “man who shows the way” (*maa kariet*), traditionally the eldest son of the first house of the first clan, usually a Turnyerim. This family should be “clean” from any ritual pollution (*nyogich*). He sets the example for the others and must initiate each step taken. Therefore, the circumcision ceremony usually takes place in the vicinity of his village.

Before the men enter the village of the *maa kariet*, his mother – as hostess – blesses all future initiates with a mixture of water and milk (*erer*). This is a typical way to welcome and clean visitors before they enter. The same evening a large male goat (*ore*) gifted by a good family is presented as a sacrifice (*suoriyo*). The slaughter of this goat marks the start of the ceremony and at the communal meal that follows, the elders – who have all painted their bodies with yellow clay – bless the initiates. A large fire is made and leaves of *siicha* and *aalany luoch* are burned to send their smoke up to Heaven. As always at a sacrifice or *suoriyo*, the hide is cut into thin strips. In this case, each participant ties a strip around his right thumb. This act marks the group and brings it prosperity.

The following morning, the place where the circumcision will take place is made ready. The same evening, goats, sheep and a large ox, the “circumcision ox” (*aq bilte*), are slaughtered. The meat of this ox is intended for the initiates. This will be the last time the *her* eat meat for over a month. Once the ox has been slaughtered, the initiates don their ritual skirts (*modos*). Each *maa kariet* then goes to the hut of the “knife man” (*maa faade*), which belongs to the Agalla clan of the Randal. Every initiate brings a goat as payment. These animals are left in his corral, while the *her* escort the knife man to the village where the circumcision will take place. The *maa faade* remains their guest during the entire ritual.

The actual circumcision

The following day, in the early morning before sunrise, the *her* assemble to be blessed by the leader’s father. Then, singing as they go, they move in a group to the river, where they wash together. From this moment on, the *her* are not allowed to touch stagnant water nor to swim. It is believed that the rain will not come if *her* touch water. They must also observe the temporary taboos against eating meat or touching weapons. When everyone has washed, the group moves on to the woodland to cut several thick branches of *miede*.

As is customary, the axe is first blessed by a member of the Turat clan. Then a tall, thick trunk is felled. They call this trunk *ini* or daughter. Nobody but the Turat are allowed to touch it. This pole destined to be the central support of the seclusion hut where the *her* will live for the next few months. Next, each initiate cuts a branch that will serve as his own roof prop, next to which he will lay his sleeping skin. Together, the group carries these branches back to the village. Upon returning, they go to the hut of

the *maa kariet* where a sheep (*luch*) is slaughtered for the *maa faade*. The *maa kariet* and *maa faade* exchange the fatty part of the stomach (*muor*) from this animal.

In the village, the group splits up according to clan and each clan slaughters an ewe (*shiene heriet*). The animal's white, fatty stomach wall (*muor*) is cut into thin strips and hung around the circumciser's neck as a blessing. Then the circumciser paints his own body with white and red stripes (*kaabo*), just as a man who kills an enemy has to do when performing his ritual cleansing, as I will explain below.

In the meantime, the leader's father has dug a hole in the middle of the calves' pen (*nuujn modo*) to receive the foreskins and the blood of the circumcised. The use of this pen indicates that the circumcised are offering their own blood to the calves. It also points to the fact that they are still young, like calves. Once the knife has been blessed, circumcision can begin.

Outside the calves' pen, some twenty meters to the east of the entrance, the *her* of the first clan, the Turnyerim, kneel in a row to wait. They sing their circumcision songs. Meanwhile, the "holders of the loins" stay close to their partners, inspiring them with courage or challenging them by casting aspersions on their bravery. These insults are along the lines of "cowardly dogs, you'd be better off back in the womb" and "are you real men, or Turkana?" At the same time, a little further off, the mothers of the initiates sing their '*dimi* songs (*gaaro*).

In turn, each *maa heriet*, accompanied by his partner (*maa kerno*), enters the pen to be circumcised. During the operation, the initiates from the oldest Daasanech sections (*Daasanech tuudle*) sit on a special round stone called *gintoot*. In the upper surface of that stone, a hole is made which is filled with a mixture of oil, milk and ox dung. This mixture is considered to prevent pain. The members of the other clans simply kneel on the ground with their knees apart. After the Turnyerim have been circumcised, the Fargaaro, Turat, Edhe, Gaalbur, Murle, Illi and Tiemle follow in that order. Each clan has its proper pen and its proper hole where the blood drips in.

Throughout the operation itself, the *maa kerno* holds the initiate tightly. The actual operation clearly differs from the customary circumcision practiced in Ethiopia, in which only the very top of the foreskin is cut away. Among the Daasanech, the operation is more involved: only the inside of the double folded foreskin is removed. The circumciser begins at the top and curs around to where the foreskin meets the penis. This incision is the most painful. Once the inside of the foreskin is removed, the foreskin is pulled back over the glans and – apart from the blood – it looks as if nothing has yet happened. But now, a small incision is made at the top of the remaining part of the foreskin and the glans is pulled through. The remaining portion of the foreskin now forms a sort of flap (*nyeleya*) that dangles below the glans and will gradually dry up. This piece of skin is said to be the mark (*hedh*) of a true Daasanech.



Image 4.8. Circumcisor “peels” off the inner part of the foreskin

It is most important that the initiate does not falter or flinch from pain or fear. As the saying goes, a true Daasanech goes through the operation “like a dead body” (*gon hi kuye*). Should he show any reaction, even in the slightest, he is dismissed. This will shame his family and his clan, and bring them misfortune.

Recovery

After the operation, the *her* rest on their ox hide sleeping mats. A hole is made in the skin so that the blood can drain into the earth. Meanwhile, the families of the *her* begin to make the preparations for building the large initiates hut, the *bil heriet*. This is where they will spend the coming months together. The circumference of the hut is determined by having all the newly circumcised men stand in a circle, hand in hand. The first night after circumcision everyone sleeps outside. On the second day, the family members start to build. First, the central sturdy pole called “daughter” (*ini*) is put in place. Then the other supports are added, one for each initiate. The walls and roof are covered with leafy branches. Each clan has its own entrance, and one additional entrance is made, which will only be used when leaving the hut for the daily, ritual cursing. A large bell (*‘duone*) is hung next to the Fargaaro clan’s entrance.

The space inside the hut is divided according to clan and age group – an arrangement used in other rituals. There is not much in the way of furniture; an ox skin to sleep on and three gourds, one for milk, one for sorghum and one for coffee. For the first week, the circumcised men live on a diet of milk and *shoboro*. From the eighth day onwards they are also allowed to drink a light sorghum mash (*moshoch*). Every day, members of the family (mainly mothers or wives) and partners bring food and drink for the initiates. Each time a visitor enters the hut someone from the Fargaaro clan will ring the bell (*‘duon kariat*). At the sound of it, the *her* spray the visitor with pieces of the *gunite* root by spitting it forcefully through the mouth. This is done as a blessing and a token of thanks. They also sing the circumcision song of the initiate the visitor has come to see.

The *her* must fulfil an important task in the period immediately after circumcision. Namely, to bless the land and the people and to curse the enemies (*kidh ‘dorij*). The main

blessing takes place every evening, just before sunset, when the cattle return to the village. Then, the *her* go out through the east and walk four times around the hut, singing their songs and spitting *gunite* root as they go. The cursing takes place after dark (*chuure uruk*). This time, the two *nyerim* clans leave the hut through the western gate, but other clan members may join in. They travel westwards, carrying a special, uniquely shaped cursing staffs (*gurre*), which they point in the direction of the enemies. The other *her* awaits their return and lead them back to the seclusion hut. This goes on for three months.

The hunting and rain ritual

After about a month, the initiates receive a bow and six arrows from their partner. This marks the beginning of the hunting ritual and the end of the prohibition on eating meat and touching weapons. From that moment on, the typical Daasanech clay-packed hairstyle is abandoned and the hair is worn loose. The men “open” their hair and together go to the woods, where they try out their bows and arrows in a thicket of shrubs. They stand in a long row, first pulling back and releasing their bowstrings three times before actually shooting the fourth time. From then on, they will travel in a clique, hunting birds. Nowadays, this seems a very pleasant way to pass the time, but it might recall an era when youngsters practiced bow shooting and attacking strategies as a matter of life or death.



Image 4.9. *Maa heriet* with bow chasing birds

After one month drinking *moshoch*, the *her* go and cut *miede* branches. Before cutting begins, the initiates walk round the tree three times, chewing their roots and spitting them out. A member of the Turat clan cuts the branches and gives it to the Turnyerim *maa kariet*. These boughs are brought to the river and carried over the right shoulder back to the village. Every house receives some of these branches and slaughters animals for food. The *her* are welcomed by the inhabitants, who rub them with butter and offer them coffee. In return, they sing their songs and bless their fellow villagers with *gunite*.³¹

From then on, eating meat is permitted (*he koon heriet*). To celebrate, the leader's father slaughters another ox. The meat is roasted, just as at the initiation to warrior status (*gaal hiliti*). Sharp sticks (*fudam*) are cut to be used as utensils to feed the *her*. Again the leader shows the way. He is the first to be offered a piece of roasted meat. He refuses three times before taking it into his mouth on the fourth offering. The others follow his example.

The following day, the initiates, now well trained in the use of bow and arrow, must catch two birds alive, a "rain bird" (*saalbulu*)³² and a dove (*wolle*). The rain bird heralds the rains, while the dove is considered a symbol of peace (*naana*) and innocence (*deemo*). When the birds are brought back and hung on the central post, the *maa kariet* plucks out the feathers and scatters them in a circle. All *her* put one of these feathers into their hair. This marks the end of seclusion and also prohibits further enemy cursing.

Henceforth, the *her* are free to leave the hut for longer periods and to sleep elsewhere. This step is coupled with the introduction of a new hairstyle. The hair, which has been worn loose, is now braided again in an arc over the crown of the head, spanning from ear to ear and the braiding is packed with red clay. Over this braid, the initiates now place the *huurien heriet*, a white band with coloured beads. The arc in this *aaro* hairstyle can be regarded as a projection of Waag's heavenly vault onto the body. This symbol is also found in the construction of the hut, where the female and male poles are placed tight against one another also forming an *aaro*. As mentioned previously, this *aaro* hairstyle is abandoned at the end of the fourth and last circumcision ritual of a generation, which signals that it is "closed", in favour of a woman's hairstyle, or *hallo*. Now, the generation of the grandsons can start their own circumcisions.

³¹ A similar ritual is used for making the rain. Then, the *her* go out to the river with the branches and return them back into their seclusion hut, putting them under their sleeping mats.

³² Superb starling (*Lamprotornis superbus*)

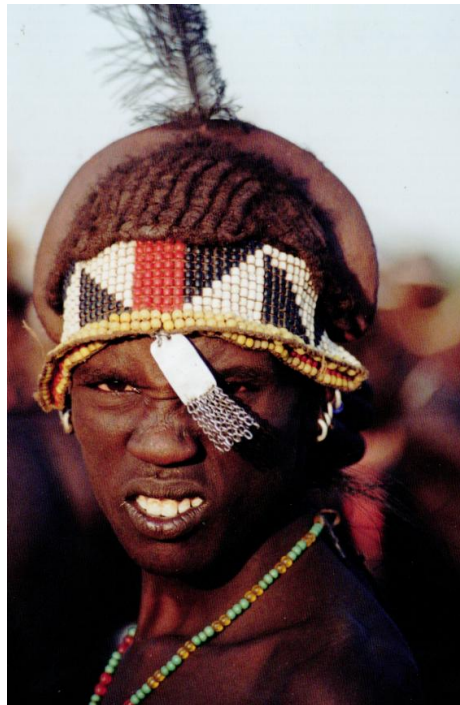


Image 4.10. Hairstyle and head decoration of *maa heriet*.

The visit with the partners and the ritual washing

Adorned with the *aaro* hairstyle, the *her* now go in small groups to visit their respective partners who supported them during the operation. These bond friends slaughter a fat sheep (*luch*) for them. However, the meat is not roasted but boiled. The hide and fatty tail will be used to make the ritual skirt (*telle*) that a man will wear on every important occasion for the rest of his life, and in which he will be buried. The fatty, white, stomach lining (*muor*) is again cut into strips and hung around the partners' necks, in confirmation of the bond between them. These visits of the different partners of a group of friends usually endure for a month or more.

Finally, all partners ritually wash their respective initiates, concluding the circumcision ritual. At this time, the *maa kerno* and his wife visit the hut of the initiate's mother or the hut of the initiate's wife, if he is already married. He brings gifts: one large and several smaller branches of the *miede*, the *telle*, which his wife has made from the hide of the ewe slain earlier, and a small gourd of oil (*salap*). On their arrival their hostess welcomes them with a mixture of milk and water (*erer*) and drags a sleeping mat outside. The visitor places the large *miede* branch next to the entrance to the hut and spreads the remaining branches over the mat. The initiate now stands totally naked on top of the branches and sluices himself with water from head to toe. After this, the *maa kerno* presents him with the ritual skirt and rubs his partner all over with the oil.

Then the initiate's father hands his son the branch that was placed next to the entrance and takes him to the cattle pen, where he points out a cow that is to be his. The son touches the animal four times as a sign that it is his. Only now is he permitted to

enter his mother's – or his wife's – hut once more. Here too, as is customary at such crucial moments, he first hesitates three times before actually entering on the fourth attempt and moving to the centre of the hut. Once there, all those present bless him with coffee. The *maa kerno* then gives him some sage advice, as fathers are wont to do.

The initiate keeps his ritual skirt and the *miede* branch near him for another four days. The long woman's skirt (*modoch*) that he has worn constantly since initiation started, now hangs loose over his shoulder. On the evening of the fourth day all the *her* hold a great closing celebration, the "dance of the *telle*". All the girls of the neighbourhood are invited for that occasion and the dancing goes on late into the night.

Herders of peace

A few weeks later, the initiates visit their partners. Their usual gift is a blanket, generally from Kenya, and a bag of coffee bean pods. Like the initiate's biological father, the *maa kerno* takes his new "son" to his cattle pen and presents him with a heifer. After this, life returns to normal. I was told that formerly, the *her* kept their *aaro* hairstyle until another group of Daasanech were circumcised and adopted it in turn. In this way – so it is said – there was always at least one group in the community wearing the *aaro* preserving peace across the land.

Traditional dress

The daily attire of men and women has undergone a big evolution over the last few decades. Hailu Moroken, who was in his 50's at the time of the research and always very eager to talk to me about the Daasanech past, told me that his grandfathers dressed quite differently. Big changes took place during the Italian occupation, when loincloths and uniforms, arms and other utensils were given out and again when Haile Selassie visited the Daasanech and brought them more uniforms. Among men, cotton replaced leather and plastic beads replaced the amber and glass ones in the late '30s. Since the late '80s, the growth of Omoraate as a small town has made access to cotton and plastic jewellery much easier.

According to Hailu, around the turn of the previous century, the Daasanech didn't yet wear the clay-cap. The Gabarich (Gabar), a name of praise still used in songs to indicate the ancient Daasanech (especially the Shir), wore a hairstyle called *gamar* or *nyabal*. The hair was plaited and left long at the back, like Daasanech boys, Samburu and Maasai still wear their hair nowadays. On top of the hair was a piece of cowhide in which one *nyelem* was placed. This is a round pompom made of black ostrich feathers, and is still worn by some older Ngarich men.

The skirt was the traditional *telle*, which had to be worn after circumcision. This suggests that Daasanech men may have gone naked before they were circumcised. Apart

from the *telle*, they wore a belt, decorated with ribbons or *susur*. This belt was actually quite heavy and was often carried across the shoulders, especially when walking long distances.

Around their neck, instead of a *murijn* they wore an iron ring, “just like the Hamar women”. In the upper part of the ear, a metal disk called a *nyabarbarat* was inserted. Some older people also wore a *nyabarbarat* in their nose, which covered their mouth. On the legs, four iron rings were tightened just below the knee and light iron rings were placed around the ankles. Iron rings were placed around the arms, similar to what the ‘*dimi* people now wear.

4.5 From girl to woman (*mine, degge*)

Peggy Elfmann, an anthropologist who also worked in Aoga for several months, wrote a master’s thesis on Daasanech woman in 2004. Drawing on the perspective of women she came to know quite intimately, she sensitively describes the three different stages a woman goes through in her life: girlhood, bridehood and womanhood. She paid particular attention to body symbolism. Apart from this, she also explores the different tasks both inside and outside the compound that woman is involved with, in the realms of both cultivation and animal husbandry.

Elfmann’s focus on women is of special importance to the scientific literature because thus far, studies of pastoralist groups have been very male oriented. Elfmann tries to fill that gap by giving women a voice. I am fully cognizant of the fact that my own work is almost entirely male oriented. I also started with a framework that assumed the subordination of women to men, and a role division in which women engage in domestic labour for the family, while men engage in political activities and ritual. Almost all of my collaborators were male, except a few midwives and healers, who were respected in their own domain.

Simply put, women marry young and that it takes awhile before they gain a status in society comparable to that of a man’s. As Toru Sagawa has demonstrated, their ability to influence decision-making is restricted to the realm of the hut, where coffee preparation allows them to take part in the discussions accompanying this social activity (Sagawa, 2006). Outside the household sphere and apart from any influence they may exert on their own husband, a women’s role is limited to her daily chores and child rearing. Women readily admit that this is the case. Apart from domestic labour, women however make another important contribution to Daasanech life. Namely, they give

moral support to the men: *Gaal 'diet gaal goguof sia. Guof sin* is done through dancing, the singing of *'dimi* songs and yelling and insulting (*seesh*) when the men go off to war.

4.5.1 Female circumcision

Girls are also circumcised. This happens a few weeks after their main feast, the *'dimi*, is over. At the time of my research, the girls I knew were really looking forward to it although they feared the pain and I was allowed to witness one such operation. The procedure is euphemistically referred to as *gas hiin* (“tying the legs”) or *nee hiriti* (“piercing the ears”). Contrary to the boys’ operation, it is not performed in large groups according to age-set and generation, but remains in the family sphere of one or several neighbouring households.



Image 4.11. Girl ready to enter the hut to get circumcised.

In preparation, one last ox, the *fir*, is killed and its meat divided among family members and neighbours. Like all oxen sacrificed during the *'dimi*, the *fir*'s tail portion must be removed by a *maa jelaba*. The hide, which will be used during the circumcision, is stretched out to dry and afterwards rolled up. The girl will sit on it during the operation. Just like among the men, the girl chooses a *maa kerno* (“holder of the loins”) from the

same generation, who will assist her during the procedure. This woman will remain a friend (*beel*) for the rest of her life.

Girls' circumcisions are confined to the operation itself and are not of extended duration. On the morning of the day on which the operation will take place, the father slaughters a sheep for *muorin*, called *shien muoriti*. This time, the girl's maternal uncle (*abaya*) offers the fatty stomach wall (*muor*). Part of the meat is intended as payment for the circumciser,³³ the rest is used to make strong, restorative broth for the girls.³⁴

When the cattle have returned in the evening, the midwife and several helpers or *lalli* come to the parental hut. Some skins are taken from the roof to give the midwife enough light to work by. After the customary blessing with coffee, the circumciser rubs the breasts and shoulders of the girl with *kabbo*, a mixture of cow dung, butter and milk.³⁵ The girl then sits upon the *fir*, while her *maa kerno* supports her back. The midwife blesses the knife and then cuts away the clitoris (*cholte*) and a small part of the inner labia (*torin*).³⁶ Unlike men, girls are allowed to express the pain while outside the hut her mother and some friends and family-members dance to their *gaaro* ('*dimi* songs) to drown out the screaming.

After the operation, the clitoris and inner labia that were cut away are mixed with cow dung and thrown into the cattle pen, where they are said to turn into a scorpion and a spider. The girl crawls outside her hut and someone ties a leather belt (*saab*) around her legs as a tourniquet. The girl's skirt is replaced by a *modoch*, the skirt of an adult woman, and she places part of it over her right shoulder. Until the wound is healed, girls are freed from their daily chores and she is fed the broth made from the sheep slaughtered the morning of the operation. When she has recovered, nothing is done to mark the occasion. The belt is taken off and the girl puts on her own skirt again, indicating that she is ready to help her mother.

³³ She receives the head, ribs, a foreleg and a hind leg of the sheep, as well as a few amber stones and some other small gifts. Nowadays, money is also used as payment.

³⁴ According to Elfmann (2007: 70) only those girls belonging to the same generation as the circumcised may eat the meat of this sheep.

³⁵ This is the same mixture placed in the round stone (*gintoot*) on which the men of the *nyerim* clans sit during their circumcision. It is said that cow dung minimizes the pain.

³⁶ Almagor states that the hymen is also cut, allowing a young woman to take lovers before marriage (1978: 152). My collaborators emphatically denied this. Virginity before marriage is highly valued and although some girls engage in premarital sex, it is culturally disapproved.

4.5.2 *Shien suoriyo* at first menstruation

Her first menstruation indicates that a girl is now fertile, and thus ready for marriage. The mother, of course, knows first. She calls her husband and says: “Your girl is big now. This night, something happened to her. So, bring a *shiene* for *suoriyo*”. The father will bring a small female sheep, slaughter and skin it. Then coffee is prepared and some age-mates are invited over. They will bless the girl. Afterwards, the father’s brother will cut from the *muor* from the sheep and place it around the neck of his niece. The girl also receives two strips of its hide, which are hung diagonally around her shoulders and waist, just like *angas*.³⁷ These are left on until they fall off.

4.5.3 Marriage or “wife brought in” (*min ‘giyen*)

For a young woman, marriage is a dramatic rite of passage, because it takes her away from a well known environment and puts her into a totally new one, that of her husband. Daasanech marriage is not so much an event as a process that takes many years and different steps. This begins with the bridewealth negotiation and ends with the *bilforan*, during which the bride becomes fully incorporated into the clan of the groom. Each of these stages takes place within a ritual context.

4.5.3.1 Marriage conditions

The Daasanech are polygamous, and the number of marriages a man may make depends upon his wealth. Men usually marry in their late twenties or early thirties. Women are generally a lot younger, some may marry shortly after their *‘dimi* - from the age of twelve onwards. The high age difference is related to many factors. According to Almagor, the high bridewealth forces a groom to gather sufficient stock and alliances in order to make the payments.³⁸ Secondly, a man has to respect the rule of primogeniture. Thus, he must wait his turn while his older brothers and half brothers get married, while a girl can “jump” her elder sisters. A third reason is that a father – a shrewd negotiator when it comes to marriage – prefers bachelors as herders, and this can easily cause a delay. However, a father cannot delay his son’s marriage too long, because this

³⁷ Poor people do not kill a sheep but put *miede* bark around their daughter’s waist instead.

³⁸ The father, the father’s brothers, the mother’s brothers and a man’s own brothers may all help to get sufficient animals together in order to pay the first bridewealth.

might provoke an elopement. People told me that nowadays men marry at a younger age and elope more frequently.³⁹

4.5.3.2 Courtship and betrothal

The norm is for girls to protect their virginity before marriage. They should especially take care not to become pregnant. Although Almagor suggested that pre-marital sex is common, I was told that most girls respected this rule. Marriages are arranged in different ways. The main and most common way to marry is through negotiation by both families. Other marriages take place through elopement or through abduction.

Betrothal (*susjn*)

Susjn is betrothal. This mutual demonstration of an engagement was very formalized in the past and preceded the actual negotiations. In a traditional *susjn*, the father of a boy had to give amber beads (*biedite*, *biero*) to the girl in order to inform her about his interest. The following description is of the *susjn* as it was performed until the early '70s.⁴⁰

When a boy grows up and wants to marry, he asks his father for permission. His father chooses a cow that gave birth once. He takes the milk of that cow and a *biedite* to give her. He goes to the village of the father. His son doesn't follow him. It is a secret. When the father sees the girl, he puts the beads around her neck. She will not resist. She knows. His father will tell her: "You are the wife of my son". When she comes home: "Who is it? Who is it?" Oh, the son of a friend". The girl is still young. This is *susjn*.

When the girl gets bigger and she takes water from the river (when she is big enough to marry), the son's mother will milk the cow (which is intended for her daughter). She takes butter and two sticks. The father puts on bells (*yuyuraam*) around his legs and wears his *telle*. Also the mother wears her ceremonial dress (*ogo*). They go together. Going, the wife carries the two sticks, a container (*kurum*) full of milk and a women's dress (*modoch*), which she has made. The *kurum* is full and butter is added. This is the story of my father about the marriage of his eldest son. Together, they go to the hut of her mother. When the son has two mothers, they go together. The son stays home. They leave when the spear is cold (early morning). The bells sound: Bu, bu, bu.

When they arrive at the hut of the mother of the bride, the latter puts butter in the lid of the milk container (*rodoch*) and smears in on the visitors. She hangs the

³⁹ As a result of this evolution, the gap between generations has become smaller.

⁴⁰ Almagor also discusses betrothal (1978: 162-163).

kurum (which she received as a present) on the stick (*digech*). Her mother prepares coffee. They speak. They speak about the dowry (*fuocho*). They speak, speak, speak, speak. They drink hot water (i.e. coffee). When there is milk, they drink milk. When they slaughter a goat, they eat the meat. If they are far, they stay overnight. Early morning, before the first rooster crows, the mother takes butter and smears her daughter. She puts on all her decorations. The girl stays in the hut of the parents and waits. Then, she follows the parents of the boy.

The parents bring her home. She spends the night in the hut of the mother. In the morning, they slaughter an ewe (*shiene*), which didn't give birth and the fatty wall of the stomach is put around her neck (indicating the marriage is sealed). In the evening, new coffee is prepared. The husband is called inside, while his wife has her *modoch* around her neck. They say "open the front skirt" (*sila*). The husband opens it. Now she is his. In the night, he should go in. She is shy (*kerno gaya*).

Afterwards, the father (of the groom) brings the animals. He takes an *irban* (a cow with a young calf). This one is for her mother. For the brother of the father, he brings an ox. For the brother of the mother, he brings an ox. Eee. This is it. (Mana Yergelbeb, 1997)

Nowadays, this custom of giving beads has waned, although it is still practiced by some Randal and Kuoro families. However, simpler forms of showing interest and engagement are still used by everyone else. This may happen directly, by placing an ostrich feather on the head somebody you love or by giving a necklace. More indirectly, a man may cast a sack of coffee husks (*darmo* or *darach lijn*) inside the hut of the beloved's mother. If accepted, it usually leads to bridewealth negotiations.

Quite often, the parents arrange these marriages. The young bride often has little or nothing to say about the matter. Sometimes the future spouses have never laid eyes upon each other prior to these events. However, it is common during the girl's 'dimi for interested, married men to ask a father for permission to marry daughter. This practice is very disliked by younger suitors, who see their own chances diminished. The girl's brothers also prefer a younger partner for their sister, preferably one of their own friends.

'Guol baal silisan

One type of engagement is called the 'guol baal silisan, which literally means "the 'guol dance to take out the feather". I was quite lucky to have the chance to attend such a feast in 1996 because it is very rare in this day and age and previously, only the richer,

more notable families organized such an event.⁴¹ The name refers to a specific dance, the 'guol, which is also danced during *bilforan* - the ritual who ends all marriage and dowry requirements. The 'guol baal silisan demarcates the start of this huge party to which the father invites all the young men and girls from his daughter's generation. He provides the guests with meat and sorghum and the young people dance for three successive days. During this feast, his daughter is beautifully adorned and wears a very tall, white ostrich feather on top of her head. At a certain moment, she is expected place this feather in the clay-cap of the man who most suits her, thereby showing that he is her preferred marriage partner.

Arim

Sometimes lovers don't wait for their parents to select another partner for them, nor do they wait for their permission. Instead, they decide to elope. This more romantic variant of engagement happens after the boy has wooed a girl during evening dances and they have started to frequently date. This is called "marriage by appointment" (*af holkigeen or arim*). In such a case, the couple agrees upon a day and a place and they make their escape to the homestead of a friend. Upon their arrival, this friend removes the girl's leg rings and gives her a *modoch*, which is the *de facto* expression of their marriage. The girl's family - who are probably out looking for her - are hereby confronted with a *fait accompli* when they catch up to the couple and negotiations will start afterwards, unless the parents refuse to accept the situation and force her to return home.

Saariti

This type of engagement is called "proposal by power" (*hergin fargoginte*) or *saarite*, "abduction". In this instance, the girl is not informed beforehand, but is whisked away by force. Again, the marriage is a *fait accompli* once her leg rings are removed and she is given a woman's skirt. This type of union stands little chance of being recognized unless the girl agrees to it afterwards. Sometimes a girl may arrange her own kidnapping. I heard of one case where a girl told her parents that she was abducted and used by a man in order to remain with him. The *jelaba* were called in and because there was evidence to support the girl's story, they ordered the man to take her as his bride. His only way out was to abstain from sleeping with her in the hope that the girl would eventually accept that he was not interested and return to her parents. But, if the man sleeps with her and

⁴¹ The feast I attained was actually ordered by a healer, because it had been cancelled at the last minute on a previous occasion. According to the healer, this was the reason why the girl remained barren and why she also faced other health problems. By organizing the feast again, the diviner expected that the girl would be healed.

impregnates her, the marriage is sealed and he must pay a bridewealth fee called *nyakochul*. This is set at eight head of cattle.

4.5.3.3 Bridewealth: *Fuocho* and *shebedam*.

The transfer of bridewealth doesn't happen at once. Rather, this is a process that takes many years. The Daasanech differentiate between two types of bridewealth: *fuocho* and *shebedam*. *Fuocho* is a general term and indicates the transfer of cattle in particular, oxen as well as cows or heifers. *Shebedam* (sing. *shebede*), on the other hand, refers to gifts of small livestock and coffee. *Shebedam* are often given beforehand as a way to please the bride givers. This typically consists of two sheep: an *aar* (ram) and a *shiene* (ewe), for the father's brothers, mother's brothers and their respective wives. Nowadays, goats are also acceptable. Whether *fuocho* or *shebedam*, all animals are expected to conform to certain criteria concerning health and looks. They should be healthy and have no wounds and should be horned, but they are allowed to have marks on their skin as well as incisions in the ears.

Quite different from the practice among neighbouring groups, and contrary to what is often thought - that bridewealth is a means by which a man can become wealthy - the father of a Daasanech girl does not actually get the bulk of the *fuocho*. The only animals he receives are a sheep called *luch darach*, which is slaughtered and eaten during negotiations and a milking cow and its calf, which is given to his wife during *galim*, after his daughter's first pregnancy. All the rest goes to his brothers, his sons and his bond mates.

This makes sense when one examines the role a father plays in the negotiations. Because he bears most of the responsibility during this period and afterwards, the fact that he receives nothing helps to prevent self-interested claims or arguments and at the same time strengthens his relationship with the bride-receivers. He only receives indirectly, as was explained to me: "He has many sons, and all his sons get from their sister. And also his wife gets a cow. So, all these animals are in his corral, isn't it?"

The number of animals distributed to recipients follows the principle of primogeniture. The eldest brother may get up to six or seven head of cattle and that number diminishes according to seniority. A second brother gets five or six, a third four and so on. Younger siblings always receive less than older ones. All the half-brothers are counted as a single entity, depending upon where their mother's hut is situated. The father's brothers receive from five to two cattle. The grandmother usually gets one as well. Depending on the specific nature of their relationship, various bond-partners and friends may also receive some animals.

The following example was taken from a wealthy Turat family. When the second daughter of the second house married, the house of her father's first wife, the first hut in the family compound, received seven head of cattle to be shared among all the

brothers of that house. The eldest son of the second house, a full brother, received six head of cattle and his two younger brothers five and four, respectively. If there had been another brother or if the father had taken a third wife, that brother or hut would have received three head of the cattle. The oldest father's brother (*abaya*) received three head of cattle, but because he had already died, these animals remained with the mother and her sons. The mother's brothers (*abuyo*) were each given two animals. Aunts on both sides all received one cow, just like the grandmother. Grandfathers – if still alive – only receive *shebedam*.

Although the above example conforms to the ideal, there are no fixed standards for bridewealth, nor a fixed date or period in which the animals are to be delivered. The status of the families involved plays an important role in deciding all the details during the negotiations preceding the marriage. Afterwards, new negotiations may open up. This happens when new relations are involved or others disappear or when the bride givers feel that they must wait too long.

When both partners are young, the *fucho* payment usually doesn't begin until after the first pregnancy, as a marriage is not sealed unless and until the wife bears children. This first pregnancy obliges the bride receivers to transfer at least five head of stock to the bride givers, including the heifer for the mother of the bride. Older grooms often have to make a payment in advance, and transfers should take place much faster. By preference, a man should have transferred at least twelve head of cattle before he performs the '*dimi* for his daughters.

If a woman happens to remain barren, all *fucho* should be returned, but not the *shebedam*. In such instances the girl is usually returned to her parents, although I came across a case where a barren woman stayed with her husband. She remained *nyakataran*, which means that she will never be given full, married status in society. Male impotence is less of a problem, because men will then allow somebody else – a brother by preference – to impregnate their wife.

***Nyakochul* and divorce**

If a girl becomes pregnant before marriage, the man responsible is obliged to wed her.⁴² If he refuses, he has to pay a fixed fee of eight head of cattle, which is called *nyakochul*.⁴³ This is the minimum amount requested when a child is born. However, this rule normally only applies when girls belong to the same section of their suitor. If a girl

⁴² Among the Randal, such a girl is banished.

⁴³ The Shir generally pay eight. However the Elele only pay seven and among the Shir Fargaaro clan, a *nyakochul* of ten cattle is required.

belongs to another section, no compensation can be asked, but the man may be beaten very badly. As one Shir man explained to me:

We Inkabelo have *nyakochul* with the Inkoria, Ngarich and Oro. We do not have *nyakochul* with the other four sections. If you impregnate such a girl, run away, otherwise they beat you up, they break all your bones. They bring you to your mother's house: "Take your dog. He is here". After, they return. Your father will cry. Your sister will cry. What can they do? Nothing. The only thing they can do is make a *buul* (a slaughter for meat) for you, so you become strong again. (Nanok, 2010)

In case of divorce or *hol he 'gaa galin* ("split together"), which is quite common among Daasanech, the same fee, or *nyakochul*, has to be paid. Afterwards the child or children remain with the father - provided there are only one or two. When there are more, however, the *nyakochul* is said to be insufficient and the father will be asked for more cattle. If he refuses, the daughters may remain with their mother, who may then marry them out later as members her own father's of the sub-clan. In reality, such cases often trigger heated disputes and usually, the *jelaba* will become involved in order to settle the matter and make decisions about regarding the cattle and the assignment of the children.

The divorce itself is settled with a simple ritual in which the hut is dismantled and divided. The *jelaba* witness this division, in which the two main poles or *aaro* that support the hut are taken apart and are divided between both partners along with the *noonam* and any utensils.

4.5.4 From bride (*nyakataran*) to "big woman" (*maa gudo*)

Marriage or *eej*

Among most clans, the main act of marriage takes place when the girl walks from her parents homestead to the new homestead escorted by her parents in law, literally departing from her old life to her new life. Before she leaves her father's compound, her mother smears her with red clay called *hod raara*. Different clans may observe slightly different customs here. Among the Turnyerim, Fargaaro and Gaalbur for instance, the bride is taken into animal pen before she leaves. There, she stands in front of the *laago* (dung heap) facing east, while her mother smears her with butter.

The bride leaves her parental home in full ornament. This means that she wears her girl's skirt (both the front- and backside), all her leg and arm rings, her beads and the back decoration indicating her generation. Traditionally, upon arrival, the age-mates of her husband should be present in order to remove her heavy leg rings. The groom's

mother should already have prepared a *modoch* for her. To seal the union (until the birth of a child, at least), her husband's age-mates slaughter a sheep (*luch kaabana*) and place the fatty part of the stomach around her neck. On top of this, they give her a *yirmete* (ox-name), indicating that from now on, she belongs to them. Different from male ox-names, which refer to the colours of an ox and are in Nyangatom language, the bride's new name is always in Daasanech and may not refer to cattle. For instance, the name given to Nanok's wife was Biichoy ("Latecomer"), in reference to the fact that the date of their marriage was always postponed. She was also called Biifak ("Far place"), because her parents lived far away.

For two nights, she remains as a guest without any duties. After the third night, her hands are blessed to permit her to milk. The father of the groom gives her "the hands of the cow", *se gili he huusjn*. As on so many occasions when somebody gains a new status, the girl has to refuse to do the milking three times, only starting to milk the cow on the fourth touch. After that, she is a *nyakataran*, and assists in the daily chores as a guest. She sweeps the corral, fetches water, carries wood and assists her mother-in-law in grinding and cooking.⁴⁴ Unlike with the Hamar, the Daasanech husband may have sex with his wife from the very first night. In the beginning, the couple sleeps in the hut of the mother, and she may sleep in another hut until the new bride constructs her own. This initial hut is not yet a full sized construction covered with hides. Rather, it is a small building covered with leaves (*bil ishite*). Inside, she is able to cook and invite her husband in, but she has almost no utensils yet. This will remain so for as long as she is a *nyakataran*, a married childless wife. This ambiguous state between girlhood and womanhood is visible to all, as she wears the hairstyle of a girl but the skirt of a wife.

Habun' sijn

Habun 'sijn means "taking back the rear skirt". This happens during the new moon following the departure of the girl for her husband's house. Her parents come to visit her and return home with the rear portion of her two-piece girl's skirt. Her in-laws should fill it with coffee as a sign they are pleased with the girl.

First pregnancy and *gelim*

The marriage is fulfilled only with the bride's first pregnancy. This marks the change from *nyakataran* into *ookoch*, from married "girl" into pregnant "woman". The shaving

⁴⁴ A bride is sometimes given a milking cow, called a *banne*, by her parents. This is a way to show their good will towards their new in-laws. The cow and its offspring remain with the bride's family, but may serve her in times of need.

off of her old hair, the hair that belonged to her father and mother, marks this change. Either her mother-in-law or an older co-wife performs this duty. Afterwards, they smear a mixture of butter and charcoal on her bare scalp to ward off the evil eye.⁴⁵ From now on, her hair belongs to her husband and only he, or another man of his family, is permitted to shave her hair when she dies so that she can be buried properly.⁴⁶ The shaving ends with the sacrifice of a dark coloured goat.

Her new status will also effect a change in her hairstyle. A mother's coiffure is quite different from that of a girl's, which has clay balls at the end of the plaits. Instead, a big plait is made at the top of the head, which is called *gute*. This *gute*, made of four parts braided together, is said to refer to her children. Her new status allows her to build a proper hut made out of hides (*bil baaro*).⁴⁷

The first pregnancy, as the signal of a girl's transition into womanhood, also allows her to wear the ritual dress called *ogo*. This is made for her while her belly grows by her mother-in-law, and, possibly, an older co-wife. This special skirt is what the *telle* is for a man. She will wear it for all the important festivities of her life. It takes a lot of sheep skins to make this dress because it is richly draped.

When the bride is pregnant for the first time, we have to make an *ogo* for her.⁴⁸ Your mother-in-law makes it. In order to make it, one needs a lot of skins, which are collected everywhere. After the *ogo* is ready, my parents will take my wife to her parents' house together with the *ogo*. Her body is fully smeared with butter. This is to tell her parents she's pregnant and to ask their blessings for her new child. This is called *gelim*. Sometimes, this is accompanied by *fuocho*, but it is not a must. (Nanok, 2010)

This *gelim* is the first occasion on which the *ogo* is worn and it heralds the start of the bridewealth payments. The woman's in-laws should start paying the *fuocho*, but as the above statement indicates, this may not be done immediately – nor will it be done all at once. Usually, this payment should at least involve a cow for the mother and another for the grandmother if still alive. During this visit, the pregnant mother is painted with yellow clay and carries a forked staff (*gaasare gaal 'diet*), which symbolizes her new status. At her mother's place, coffee is served and her father blesses her. From now on, bridewealth is transferred on a regular basis as was agreed upon before marriage. This process may take several years but should ideally be finished before her sons reach an

⁴⁵ A typical Daasanech saying expresses this transition: "From now on, only the teeth still belong to the father".

⁴⁶ A *nyakataran* is not buried by her husband. If she dies, her father or brothers should come and do it. If not, her body is simply carried into the undergrowth and left.

⁴⁷ Only the first wife gets a *gute*, not the next ones.

⁴⁸ In case it is a second wife, the first wife may make the *ogo* and escort the bride.

age where they can marry - meaning some twenty-five years later. The last bridewealth payment is ritualized in the *hiit galan* ceremony.



Image 4.12. Ritual shaving of hair at first pregnancy.

Aṅ fasiet

When the young mother returns home the morning after the *gelim*, she and her husband have to go through a bleeding ritual called *aṅ fasiet*. This is done to prevent misfortune. Both walk four times through a shower of goat's blood. The skin of this goat will be used to cover her belly, her breasts, and then the newborn. This covering is called the *sara* and is supposed to protect mother and child against the evil eye. At the time of the ritual, a few strips are cut from the goat's hide to be placed around the couples' necks as a sign they will become parents and that they are cleansed.



Image 4.13. Pregnant woman wearing a *sara*.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ On her head, this woman carries an earthen pot (*ibile*) and in her hand a drinking calabash (*daate*) and a rearing stick (*kimide*)

Hiit galan

Hiit galan marks the last payment of bridewealth and literally means “the cutting of the oxen”, which refers to the two *hiite* (sing. *yir*) or oxen killed during the ritual. This ceremony is no longer common, and only the wealthiest families perform it. This is the result of the primogeniture rule, this ceremony can only be held unless a man’s parents and all his older brothers have already performed it.⁵⁰ Anyone who failed to perform the ritual in the past thereby disqualifies his offspring from continuing the tradition, which may explain why fewer families do it. Therefore, those who do celebrate *hiit galan*, garner a lot of prestige.

The ceremony is held at the village of the mother’s parents. The husband’s family brings the remaining cattle to the village of the bride: three cows called ‘*guo haari*, one heifer and two oxen. Traditionally, each cow has a specific name. For the Nabus generation, the cows are called Muir, Nyessia, Danap. The heifer is called Arab (“Elephant”), and the ox is called Dafar (“Cloth”). For the Kirach generation, the cows are called Farah, Shiene, Uraam. The heifer is called Iej (“Giraffe”), and the ox is also called Dafar. The following description comes from Herek, an Elele woman who married a Shir man, and had just performed her *hiit galan*.

If they (the family of the husband) are saying “let them come, your daughter has been taken and the *hiite* are ready”, they are called. They will come with the *miede* and put on top of each hut. All the father’s brothers (*abaya*) of the girl receive the *miede*. All should come to her father’s compound.⁵¹ If they want to move their huts, they move. If they don’t want to, they take the *noono*. Then they build a tent and cook the water. They move in a row: first the eldest one, then the second one, the third. Where they took the *noono*, they make a tent (*lokol*).

As they arrive and build their huts, that evening, the mothers of the daughter (the wives of the *abaya*) are given a big sheep called *riid*. They follow the sheep with their rhythm instrument (*koote*) and sing their *gaaro*. The next morning, the *riid* is killed and they cook and eat the meat. The father eats the breast. They bless the house. For the family of the groom, a goat is slaughtered.

That morning, the groom, his brothers and *abaya* come with the *hiite*. The men carry the *miede*, the women sing their *gaaro*. When they arrive in the village, they should come from the east. When they pass the house of the bride, her brother or father blesses them with *erer*. All are wearing their ceremonial their *telle*. He blesses them. He blesses them. He also blesses the cattle. When the oxen arrive,

⁵⁰ The same holds for *bilforan* and for the ‘*guol baal silisan*.

⁵¹ If the father and his brothers already died, as was the case here, the eldest son will take his part in the ceremony.

the women light the dung heaps. The dung heaps smoke and the cows sniff the smoke.

The men, who carry the *miede* put it on the different houses of the girl's *abaya*. The women sing the *gaaro* in front of each hut. The groom's mother brings oil mixed with milk to the hut of the mother-in-law. She puts it in the back *noono* of the girl's mother's house. The *jelaba* sit outside when the *hiite* are killed. These *jelaba* belong to both *dolo*, but they must have undergone the *hiit galan* themselves.

Then, the huge hide of an ox that has been speared should be taken outside for all participants to sit on. The elders of the girl sit on the right side, the elders of the husband sit at the left side. The woman who is married out has a butter container (*dudum*) in her left hand and enters her mother's house. Her mother puts oil on all the elders' heads and shoulders. Coffee, tobacco and salt are put on the roof of the house, facing west. The first father's brother divides the coffee for each house and the father of the wife blesses the cattle.

Then, one ox and one sheep are killed. This sheep is called "the tail of the ox". The Bulls cut the sacrum (*tuo*) of the ox and of that sheep. They build a small house for the *tuo*, which is cut in eight pieces. Each piece gets a rope and is put in a pot. In the evening, the elders eat the breast and afterwards, they can eat the sacrum.

After eating, they stretch the hide. They shave the hair and remove the remaining meat. They remove three dorsal vertebra (*morgom*) and put them on a stick to make them dry.⁵² They take the *dum* of this ox and also put it on the stick. This will be taken to the house of the girl: three *morgom*, one *dum* and the skin of the ox.⁵³

After they brought the ox, she wasn't allowed to leave her house. In the night, the father of the wife cuts the *muor* into strips. They exchange the *muor* with each other. One kidney and the udder are left for the wife. She puts it in her *modoch*, so nobody sees that she got it and she goes away.

When she leaves, her father blesses the gate. She passes through it and goes home. Afterwards, the skin of the ox, the *morgom* and the *dum* are worked further by her parents. When they are ready, they will bring them to her house. After the coffee, the father cleans the gate. After cleaning it, he blesses the gate and she passes through it to go home. Early next morning, coffee is cooked for the name giving of the cows. If they give the names today, the elders will not leave. They will wait for the cattle to go grazing for one day. The father's brothers go to the first house and give a name to the cow. They take one mug and bless the cow. They do so for every house. That's giving names. The next morning, you can go and take the cattle with you. (Herek, 1997)

⁵² *Morgom* (sing. *morgoch*) are used for stirring.

⁵³ I was told that she also receives four ribs from each side of each ox. She takes home feeds them to the age mates of her husband.

Thus, the *hiit galan* ceremony is an act in which the close bride receivers (i.e. the groom's father and mother, his brothers and the brothers of his father) all go to the bride's village, taking the last cattle from the bridewealth. A few days prior to the event, the groom's family placed the *miede* on top of the bride givers' huts in order to inform them that the *hiite* are ready. The girl's father can also order them to bring some more cattle for his sons. These animals are called "hand cattle" (*'guo gillo*).

At a certain moment during the ceremony both families sing their proper *gaaro*, as if "both *gaaro* fight each other". When the *dudum* with milk and butter is transferred, it is time for the blessing. The *jelaba*, who are involved in all matters concerning marriage, are present as witnesses; the ancestors are as well, and they are given tobacco and salt. The *jelaba* cut the *tuo* of the oxen, just like during the '*dimi*, and they bless the couple. The bride has to sit in the middle between her own family and the family of her husband, while her husband remains outside. Her father's brothers cut the slaughtered ox's *muor* and place it around her neck. She does the same for them her father. The *jelaba* who performed *hiit galan* also receive a part.

After this ceremony, the status of the wife changes dramatically and from this point onwards, divorce is no longer an option. Now, a wife fully belongs to the clan of her husband and she enjoys status and power similar to his. This implies that she has an equal voice in household matters and may help make decisions on matters of bridewealth and heritage. Furthermore, should her husband predecease her, she is free to choose levirate or not – usually, women opt not to do so. At this point, she is allowed to manage the family herds on her own just as her husband did.⁵⁴ When she dies she will be buried inside the corral, just like her husband; while women who didn't perform *hiit galan* are buried outside the corral.

Bilforan

Approximately one year after *hiit galan*, *bilforan*, which literally means "to move the house", takes place. The crux of this ceremony is that the bride and groom receive a brand new hut including all utensils from the bride's family. *Bilforan* can only be performed by those families who completed *hiit galan*. The ceremony takes place at the village of the couple. At its end, the husband becomes a "big man" (*maa gudo*) and is respected. *Bilforan* seals the bride to the groom's family.

In preparation for this feast, the wife's family collects everything necessary to make an entirely new hut – not only the building itself, but all of the furnishings as well, such as new yokes, a pot, eating and drinking calabashes and different containers. In order to

⁵⁴ I was also told that she can even decide to remarry outside of levirate. Although I couldn't figure out what would then happen with her new children and her status as a clan member.

assist with the preparations, the wife returns to her mother's village. When everything is ready, an ox is slaughtered and all the newly made utensils are smeared with its blood and the fat. The wife receives a very large and beautiful necklace from her father or elder brother, one important aspect of this part of the ceremony. This necklace is called *dammich* and consists of several big stones tied together with a giraffe's tail hair.

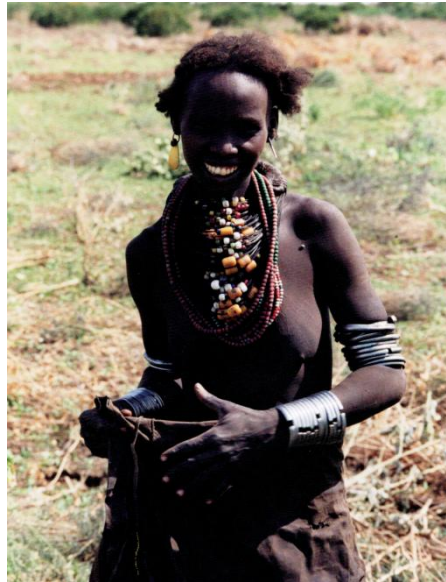


Image 4.14. Woman wearing *dammich*-necklace

When everything is ready and has been anointed, the wife returns to the village of her husband, together with the girls of her generation set. The girls escort the donkeys that carry the new hut and all the utensils. The wife's escorts also carry a newly made eating mat (*raarich*) as well as the *kob*, the symbol of their generation.⁵⁵ Just before they reach the village, her husband's age-mates, conquer the girls and grab their eating mat. This chaotic act is said to express the fact that the eating mat – which serves as symbol for the bride – now fully belongs to their clan. All the participants are painted in a specific way, just like a woodpecker (*kobir* or *kirach*) and the boys are decked out in their finery.⁵⁶ The girls wear their respective back decorations, the coloured one if the bride belongs to the *kirach* generation and the one with cowry shells if the *bilforan* is held for a girl of the *nabus* generation.

When the group reaches the village, the *raarich*⁵⁷ is put on a pole and girls and boys start to dance in a circle around it. This specific dance is called 'guol, similar to the dance organized for richer girls in earlier times. Arm in arm, the young people jump up high

⁵⁵ The *kob* is a decorated calabash, which is made by the girls of a generation and kept by one of them.

⁵⁶ *Kirach* is also the name of one of the two generation-sets of the girls. I don't know if the girls of the alternating *nabus* generation paint their face the same way or if they use other colors.

⁵⁷ A *raarich* is woven (*yugjn*) from the *elgite*-plant

and come down on their heels. At the same time, they move their heads and bodies in a very specific way, stretching them out before moving the head down, so as to allow the energy to flow from top to toe.⁵⁸ This dance may go on non-stop for hours.



Image 4.15. Group of *kaabana* returns to the village after capturing the *raarich* from the girls

The husband and the wife stand in the middle of the dance. The man is wearing *telle* with a *nyakaasia* on his head and a branch of *miede* leaves. An ostrich feather tops off this headdress. The girl carries the *kob* on her right shoulder. Later, they join the dance. A man standing next to them sustains the rhythm by beating two sticks while he sings songs of praise. These songs are also called '*guol*' and usually begin with vocalizations: *oyo yo, oyoyo oh yayo*.

⁵⁸ From a kinetic point of view, this movement made is very stimulating. Perhaps this may explain how the dancers can go on for so long. The dance does not induce a trance, but it does cause the participants to enter a deep state of focus.

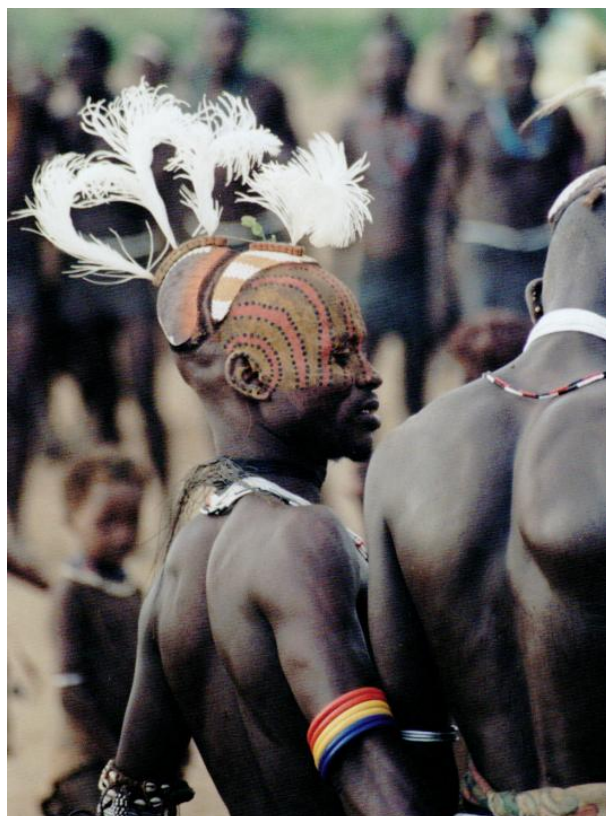


Image 4.16. *Maa kaabana* adorned for 'guol' dance.

In the meantime, the women of both families build the new hut on a new spot. Milk is poured on the ground and the *jelaba* bless the hut. Then, the elders recount the dowry negotiations as they had been performed long ago. After, the marriage is sealed and new fires are made. Traditionally, dry elephant dung should be used to lit these fires. Festivities and dances take three consecutive nights. On the fourth night, blessings are exchanged and participants return home.

During my fieldwork, I witnessed two *bilforan* ceremonies, both amongst the Randal, who perform a slightly different version than that practiced in the other subgroups. The groom receives strips of lion skin to place around his leg and a bond friend cuts his nails.⁵⁹ Among the Randal, every couple must perform the ceremony and they do it shortly after marriage. This is in contrast to the Shir, where only those who have performed *hiit galan* first may do so. A Shir collaborator provided me with the following description:

When the *fuocho* is given, the family comes together. “Are you ready?” “We are ready”. The man informs his age-mates. “Prepare your clay-cap. Make yourself nice, so you can sing my hut”. “Do you have food?” “Everything is ready for you”.

⁵⁹ This bond partnership, called *lilmech konfo*, is considered very strong among the Randal.

The wife informs her age-mates. “Take the kob and prepare yourself. Put on your belt and your cowry shells”. The girls assemble at the hut of her father. The men have painted them with clay. The girls come and bring a piece of leather (*baaro*), sticks (*hilaam*) and calabashes (*kurmo*). They also take the *raarich* and the *kob*.

Our group leaves and will fight for the *raarich*. The village of the wife is constructed at the west. The village of the man is in the east. When they see the dust (because the girls are arriving), the *kaabana* come and steal the eating mat. They keep it high in the air, so the girls cannot recapture it. Then, we put it on the pole (*gas*) and start the dance. The girls are getting excited (*hiijnij*). They dance, they dance, they dance. In the meantime, the hut is built.

All the utensils are smeared with the fat of the ox that is killed the day before. All was smeared with fat. All was smeared with blood. All was smeared with charcoal. The wife wears amber stones (*biero*), she wears blue stones (*challa*). The man has the strings of the lion-skin put around his legs. He wears his *telle*.

The hut is built. His family, her family. First, the branches of the *miede* are laid on the ground. Then, milk is poured around. His family, her family. Branches of *siicha* are placed where the wind blows inside. The hides are put on the roof. The women enter. The first born son will make a new fire with two fire sticks of *miede*. Some dung of an elephant (*gudit arab*) is also needed (this is bought with an ewe). That same evening, animals are killed for the guests. The girls eat goat and sheep, the *kaabana* also eat ox-meat. That meat is roasted. Every age-set gets a goat. They eat and dance again. Next day they dance, next day they dance, next night. Then, the *karu* bless man and wife. They wash them with *erer*. “Waag will offer you a lot of children. All oxen and sheep you killed for us, let Waag give you more. Let peace be with you”. (Kwaanya, 1996)

4.6 The ‘*dimi*

After circumcision, which may take place before or after marriage, a man’s thoughts turn towards the creation or the extension and maintenance of his family and herds. Life goes on in the usual way until the ‘*dimi* or the “feast of the girls” (*jilla hada*).⁶⁰ Only people belonging to the six older Daasanech sections celebrate this festival. The ‘*dimi* is

⁶⁰ The main blessing ritual of the Randal and Kuoro is an annual *suoriyo*. This is also a sacrificial feast at which the elders are the guests in return for their blessing.

a huge ceremony – sometimes over a hundred families take part⁶¹ – and it only takes place when enough men are ready to carry it out. All parents of eligible girls join together and build two circles of huts around two central *naabano* (sing. *naab*), where they will feed and dance for the ritual leaders or *jelaba* for the duration. The length of a ‘*dimi*’ depends on the section and the number of participants. An Elele ‘*dimi*’ usually only takes about six weeks, while the big ‘*dimi*’ of Shir in 2006 took almost eight months.

The main purpose of the ‘*dimi*’ is to induce fertility in a man’s daughters. Among the Shir, Oro and Riele, the ritual only takes place once, while the Elele may make several ‘*dimi*’, according to the number of wives they married and which one bore them a daughter. Only the *jelaba* can act as intermediaries between the ‘*dimi*’ families and Waag. In this way, the ‘*dimi*’ establishes a bond with Waag, and ensures prosperity and fertility. Thus, this feast is a kind of *suoriyo*: animals are sacrificed in exchange for the blessings of the elders. This ritual is also an important step towards respected elder-hood for the girls’ elders. After the ‘*dimi*’, a man is spoken of as a big man (*maa gudo*) and on his death he will be buried inside his cattle pen.⁶²

A father must hold this festival before his daughter becomes a biological adult. If a girl should menstruate before the ‘*dimi*’ has taken place, a curse will fall on the family and a special restoration ritual must be held if the family is not to be cast out of the community. Such a family is “infected”, *nyogich*,⁶³ and will be avoided by other Daasanech. When a father is too poor and nobody is willing to assist him, the father may go to the *jelaba* and offer them a few goats, sheep and sorghum beer instead. No bridewealth can be asked for that girl.

Below, I give the description of the ‘*dimi*’ as I witnessed it among the Oro in 1996.⁶⁴ In appendix 2, I transcribed a step-by-step description of the same ritual which was offered to me by Lokasiamoi who served as ritual leader of that ‘*dimi*’.

⁶¹ The last ‘*dimi*’ of the Shir Inkabelo in 2006 in Nyimemeri had over two hundred participating families. In former times, each generation of ritual elders lead four subsequent ‘*dimi*’, following the four circumcisions held previously. In the last few decennia, the number of ‘*dimi*’ have increased and I was told that the ritual elders are happy for that because it offers them a lot of gifts. In 2010, the next Shir ‘*dimi*’ was scheduled to take place in Lobemukat.

⁶² Young men are buried far from their cattle pens, for their lives have not been fulfilled.

⁶³ *Nyogich* indicates mistakes have been made and the ‘social pollution’ which is the consequence of it. I will come back to this concept in following chapter.

⁶⁴ I gave already a description of a ‘*dimi*’ in Houtteman, 2004.

4.6.1 Preparation

All the men of a particular section who have a daughter between the age of seven and eleven get together and try to persuade their section peers to help organize the festival. The girl's father must have a sufficient number of animals to satisfy the needs of the *jelaba* during the months ahead. Sheep are particularly sought after, although goats may now be substituted, and the total number given out in preparation and during the '*dimi* can top fifty.⁶⁵ Some Daasanech are too poor and therefore have to borrow cattle from friends and relations, pledging that these will be repaid once the daughters are married.

The family also needs a sufficient stock of sorghum, coffee and other gifts such as alcohol for the guests. Furthermore, each participating family must collect the numerous necessary items that will be used and worn during the ceremony. The outfits are most impressive. The '*dimi* father wears an imposing headdress of black ostrich feathers, and either a leopard or cheetah skin (*muor*) tied at the waist with a wide belt of beads. Round his loins he wears the *telle* that he received at his own circumcision, and round his knees are bells (*yuyuraam*) to reinforce the rhythm of the dance. In prior times, *nyobokoi* (white leather strips around the lower legs) were also worn. Round his arms he wears a wide band of metal rings, ten red and twenty white (*gibo*). By scratching them he can attract attention. He wears traditional leather sandals on his feet. Men who have killed a Borana should also carry a round shield called a *yoonte*. The wives of men who have killed a Borana have a *shaasha* (a colourful cloth) on their head as well as a knife (*faade*) woven into their hair.

⁶⁵ Eight are used for the *min gaaro* and her *lalli* who make the '*dimi* song; the 9th is the *luch karu* or *shebed karu* which serves as a gift for the *maa jelaba* who remains inside the hut during the ritual; the 10th is another *kole* called *ayn gellaam*, given to the group of fathers the day before they start to cut the *naaso*; the 11th and 12th are called *aqn naaso*, one is for those who cut the *naas*, the other one is for the *maa jelaba* (*aqn naaso*) who blesses the *naaso*; the 13th is a *kole* for the mothers of the daughter, called *ayn yiet sugo* ("the sheep next to the fire") and for the wives of the brothers (*min abaya*), who slaughter the animal the day after the *naaso* came home; the 14th is used as *aqn fasiyet* ("bleeding goat") from which the leather strips or *geyte* worn by all participants and for the *naas* are cut. After these strips are put on, the family moves towards the '*dimi* place and the huts are rebuilt. The rest of this hide is placed under the *naaso* as protection, because the *naas* is not allowed to touch the ground. About 20 sheep are killed as so called *aqn burnaia* ("many smallstock"). Out of these, one sheep should be killed for each female relative who takes part, be it a paternal aunt, a sister, the daughters of the different paternal and maternal brothers, the wife's sisters, the wives of different bond friends and the wives of the mother's brothers. Three sheep (the 36th through the 38th) will be given for the house of the leader in the middle. One is called *aqn bil naasoa*, the other *aqn karu* or *taabach* and the last *aqn 'guoriet* (for the one who carries the '*guor*). During the ritual, four sheep are killed by each house to feed the elders, two called *biye ko yies* and two called "guests" (*dhiego*). This brings the total up to 42. Another four sheep are killed for those who make the *bersho* for the *jelaba* and other guests. At the end of the ritual, two more are killed and they are called *shien karu* and *shien hada*. That same night, one more sheep, the 49th, is given to the *jelaba* alive. This is the *shiene ini gilme*. Finally, the fiftieth sheep is killed for breakfast on the last morning, before everyone departs.



Image 4.17. 'Dimi wife who's husband killed a Borana with colourful coth and knife.

The 'dimi girls' mothers decorate their hair with colourful strings of beads. They wear the skin of a colobus monkey (*lol*), likewise kept in place by a slightly smaller belt of beads. Around their upper arms, cattle tails (*dum*) are hung, with which they greet people by jerking the arm up and imitating the sound of an ox, just as if the tail had hit another in the face. The mothers also wear bells around the ankles. An ox horn filled with pebbles provides an additional rhythm instrument.

A large supply of yellow ochre (*maaraar*) is needed, with which members of the family will rub themselves twice a day. Yellow clay is traditionally used by the Daasanech as a remedy for serious problems, such as a high mortality rate among family members or cattle, recurring disease, unremitting misfortune – in short, situations and circumstances that indicate a rupture with Waag. In such cases, the entire family rub themselves with yellow clay and undergo various restoring rituals, in which the sacrifice of animals usually plays a prominent part, just as during the 'dimi.⁶⁶

A special song is composed for the 'dimi, as with male circumcision. This epic song is called *gaaro*. A specialist called *maa gaaro*, usually a woman, and a few helpers (*lalli*) are paid to make the verses and fit it into the required rhythm and melody, which is fixed.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ In the context of the 'dimi it seems to me that the use of yellow clay is precautionary, unless the daughters' upcoming first menstruation is regarded as potentially dangerous.

⁶⁷ For the preparation of the song, which takes several months, the 'dimi man easily pays up to five sheep, not including the sheep and goats killed to feed the songwriters when they visit during the ceremony.

The *gaaro* lauds the life of the 'dimi father. It usually speaks of the father's love for his cattle and his heroic deeds. It also includes all those who contributed animals to the feast. There is a long, a shorter and a very short version of every song. The long version (*gaar 'guo*) is sung during the daily dances, the shorter one (*gaar ayiet* or *gaar ibile*) in the mornings, when the wife prepares coffee for the *jelaba*. In fact, there is even a fourth version (*'guo yeru gaaryiete*), which is sung the very last day of the 'dimi, when the daughters are taken into the *naab*.

The below example is a short version of the *gaaro* for a man belonging to the Komaalo house of the Turat clan of the Oro section. He killed two Borana and a Turkana.⁶⁸

His cattle with the Komaalo brand
Eat grass in Kanabode
And migrate to Dies Natajong
The herd of Isamoi's father has two bulls
Their colours are red and white
They are strong as the buffalo
When they pass, the earth shakes
They move to different places
And drink water in Kanajatung
They are wise and refuse bad water
The clay group of Lomorumoi's children
Have red and white colours
Together with his friends from Natyumalinga
He fought against the Borana in Naikoro
The bulls of *maa miede* (the man of the ritual tree)
Go to fight together with other bulls
In the battle he throws his spear
And calls his name-ox
The bell of the name-ox of Lochabel's family resounds
Isamoi, when you kill,
Then the cattle are happy
And listen to your *meerte* (circumcision song)
Himarmare, the ox of Maneewe's son
Loves the *meerte* of Abilangmoi
The ox with the big horns
Sings too when he hears this song.

⁶⁸ Note, that throughout this song (as in all Daasanech songs) the owner is never referred to by his own name but by his ox-name (Abilangmoi), his killer-name (Isamoi), the name of his clique (Natymalinga), clan (*maa miede*) or house (Lokabel), or by the name of his father (Namaawe's son, the son of Nyimor, Lomorumoi's son).

After the song is commissioned and the necessary animals and items collected or borrowed, there is one more necessary task. Each family also must contact a *jelaba*, who will be their guest throughout the duration of the ritual. It is this man and who will bless their daughters. By preference, this elder should belong to the same clan as the girl's father.

4.6.2 The *naas*

The most conspicuous accessory of a *'dimi* man is his staff, which is about four meters in length. This *naas*, made of *miede* wood, is carried during the festival. The *'dimi* man's brothers have the task of searching for a suitable branch, as well as a thick, forked "foot" (*gas*) of the same tree on which to hang his and his wife's clothes and ornaments when not in use. The staff seasoned for four days before its owner trims off the side branches and rubs it with the fat of a specially slaughtered sheep, appropriately referred to as "the sheep of the *naas*" (*an naasiet*).

From that moment on, the *naas* may not touch the ground. Either the *'dimi* man must carry it, or it must be laid on a thick strip of leather next to a specially made hole to the right of the hut. After four days, the *naas* is enough and is rubbed with cooked butter (*salap*) and blessed. From now on, it is forbidden for the *'dimi* man to walk around barefoot. He should always wear his leather sandals. Other rules forbid him to touch raw meat, or carry weapons of any kind for the duration of the ceremony.

4.6.3 Migration and setting up the village

Once the initial preparations are complete, the ritual leader of each alternation, called the *maa makaale* ("pipe man"), is informed that men wish to celebrate their daughters' *'dimi* and a day and a place are agreed upon. Just as in the men's circumcision, the hut of this leader is escorted to the spot where the ritual will be held. The families of the first house of the Turat clan perform this task, and, among the Inkabelo, they cut and prepare a *naas* for him.⁶⁹

The *'dimi* families also migrate to the village and temporarily set up their huts at the edge of the space the *'dimi* village will occupy. Traditionally, the members of the inner

⁶⁹ Only the Inkabelo observe this. The Ngarich and Inkoria *jelaba* have no proper *naas*. It is said that the Shir elders refused to give to them after the Inkoria split off: "We have the same marks. We are children from the same sperm. To preserve the unity, the *naas* remains with us".

alternation (*dol gerge*) start one or two days later than those of the outer alternation (*dol baadiet*) and thus complete all the other parts of the *'dimi* later, too. This migration is called *guura 'dimi*. During it, the forehead of the girls is smeared with white clay (*kuul*) and when their fathers have killed an enemy or big game, they also wear a “flower” (*kaalan*) or *kaalasha* on their foreheads.⁷⁰ Also the grandmothers, who belong to the same alternation as the girls, and the donkeys are also painted with *kuul*. This is done “so Waag may recognize them”, “it is a sign for Waag”.



Image 4.18. *'dimi* girls migrate with their hut to the *'dimi* place.

Upon arrival, the first hut to be rebuilt is the hut of the ritual leader. His hut is build in the centre next to the *naab*. Then, the various wives rebuild their own huts, positioning them according to their clans, around the central hut. The sequence of the clans and houses differs slightly from that of the circumcision. There, the Turnyerim came first, while during *'dimi*, the Turat do. Towards the east, where Turat and Tiem clans face each other, there is a small entrance (*kar*). While this is going on, one of the *jelaba* applies more *kuul* to the foreheads and noses of the *'dimi* daughters. Each girl carries a forked stick (*gaasare*), normally intended for married woman after their first pregnancy, and red clay (*hod bura*) is rubbed into their hair. The *'dimi* father himself takes no part in the building, but stands in full regalia, motionless, until his hut is ready.

When the village is built, several sheep and goats are brought. The *'dimi* men's brothers slaughter these “animals of the *naab*” (*aaṅ naabiet*) and their wives boil the meat. When everything is prepared, all the members of the families involved put on their full array. Singivng the *gaaro* they dance first in front of their own hut, then before

⁷⁰ This “flower” was traditionally made out of the knee of a gazelle. Nowadays, anything white with a tip will do.

the huts of their fellow clan members, and finally in front of the *jelaba* who sit in the centre of the village. In doing so, they invite the *jelaba* to the meal. Either the next day, or a few days later, the inner alternation (*dol gerge*) repeats this scenario north of the *dol baadiet* village. Thus, the entire ‘*dimi*’ village, made up of two separate circles around two central *naabano* – is then complete.

From then on, the same daily routine is followed: the family members don the accessories that hang on the big forked branch in front of their hut. They smear themselves with yellow clay, the ‘*dimi*’ man takes up his *naas*, and groups of families go singing and dancing from hut to hut as described above, ending at the central *naab*. They call to the *jelaba* in a language that doesn’t sound like Daasanech: “*Hu, hu, nyamaka*”. Each *ara jelaba* is assigned to a certain house, where they are given coffee and sorghum.

Often in the evening, animals are slaughtered and the main *jelaba* are served on a special eating mat (*raarich*). The meat is brought to them in the *naab*, where they divide it among themselves. Apart from their ‘*dimi*’ duties, life goes on much as it normally does for the villages’ inhabitants.

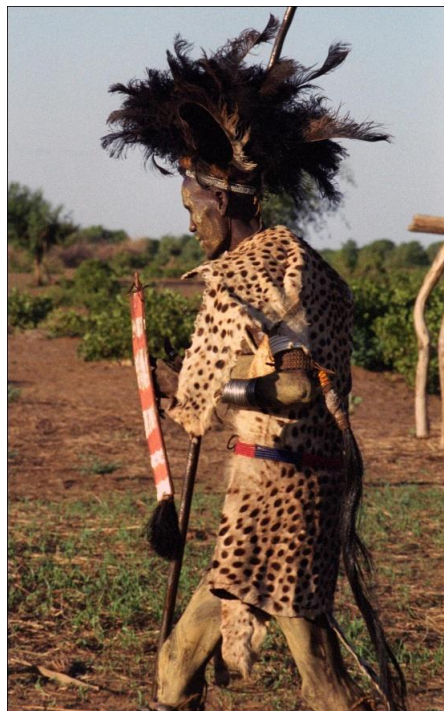


Image 4.19. ‘*dimi*’ father fully adorned.

This routine continues unbroken for the following weeks or months, with the ‘*dimi*’ men taking it in turn to provide the meat. They make sure that the *jelaba* are never stinted, for their displeasure could lead to their dreaded curse and the infertility of their daughters. If the *jelaba* complain “*biye ye yies*” (“the water is killing me” or “I’m dying of too much water”), by which they mean they are discontent with receiving mostly sorghum and coffee, sheep must again be brought. During the day, the *jelaba* do little

apart from watching the dance. This is as it should be, and if something does not go according to their wishes they react with displeasure. For the rest, they usually sit in the shade outside the village and chat. In the evenings – sometimes several times a week – they gather in the *naab*. During these meetings, the land and its inhabitants are blessed, arrangements are made and all manner of military, political and moral problems are raised and discussed.

4.6.4 Preparing the sorghum beer (*bersho*)

After several weeks or months, preferably four days before a full moon, the *jelaba* are asked whether they will permit the brewing of sorghum beer (*bersho*). In making this request, the ‘*dimi* men hope that the *jelaba* are satisfied and prepared to conclude the ceremony. The sorghum beer takes four days to prepare. The dry sorghum is crushed and put in a large gourd to ferment by the Bull who remains in the hut. On the fourth day the thick, white brew is ready. Guests come from all over and the beer is handed round. The alcohol soon produces a festive atmosphere, in which the *jelaba* sing their circumcision songs and call for meat. The same evening, each family slaughters several goats and sheep (*aañ bersho*) to feed the guests.

Now the finale of the ceremony – the blessing of the girls – can begin. The intoxicated Bulls bestow their blessings on the daughters: *Waag hiko um gudo shiisho, aañ gudoa shiisho, hergijn midhaba shiisho* (“May Waag give you a good marriage, may Waag give you many children”). Sometimes, this blessing is accompanied by emesis. This act is regarded as a sign that the blessing is deeply meant, nothing is held back. The mother ensures that her hut’s sleeping mats and utensils are smeared with this sour, blessed fluid.

The following morning the inhabitants of the ‘*dimi* village douse all the fires and throw the ashes away. They clean the central *naab* and demarcate a clear border around it by heaping up a small dike of sand in a large circle (*muos*). In the early evening, the ritual leader begins to make a pipe (*makaale*) from a gourd and a stone with a circular opening. The ‘*dimi* men give him tobacco, salt and a blanket. The members of the Turat clan bring fire sticks. The ritual leader and his assistants use these to make a new fire from which the fires of the huts are rekindled. When this is done, the ritual leader smokes his pipe, calling the ancestors to witness.⁷¹ Each hut slaughters two ewes (*shiene*

⁷¹ The Daasanech traditionally don’t smoke tobacco but they do chew it. Only during the ‘*dimi* is tobacco actually smoked and then only by the ritual leader. Tobacco and salt are traditional gifts for deceased spirits to obtain their approval or ask them to leave the living in peace.

hada and *shiene karu* or *tabach*). One is jointed and kept on the roof of the hut while the other is prepared on the new fire. The *muor* of this animal is cut into strips and the brother of the '*dimi* men place them around the necks of the *jelaba* as a symbol of unity and a wish for prosperity.

4.6.5 The “lungs” (*saamo*)

The following morning – the penultimate day – the sheep that were killed the previous evening are cooked and eaten. After this, several oxen are brought by the brothers of the '*dimi* men. These oxen are a gift of the '*dimi* mother's brothers (*abuyo*) and somewhat contemptuously referred to as “lungs” (*samich*, *saamo*), the animal's least valued organs. The '*dimi* men's brothers skin the animals. Tradition demands that before an ox can be butchered or eaten, the Bulls must have cut out the *tuo*. This is done, and the *tuo* is kept in the skin, together with the ribs. The rest of the meat is kept by the brothers of the '*dimi* man beside each hut. Each Bull receives a hind leg as a gift for his wife or wives, who pay a special visit on that evening and assist their husband in the cooking.



Image 4.20. Cutting out the *tuo*

4.6.6 Planting the *miede*

In the evening, the women build a small hut of grass just in front of the *naab* for the *maa hergo*, who will cut out the hindleg of the oxen killed. This construction symbolizes the dwelling of an elder from the Turat clan, who – as a member of the clan with power over the *miede* – is present to bless the ritual axe and the individuals who will cut its branches. Once blessed, the group of young men, who belong to the *dol* of the other village, go to the woods to cut branches. After a while they return in a long line and approach the village from the east, moving in a spiral like a snake. Meanwhile, some of the *jelaba* make holes in the little embankment (*muos*) surrounding the *naab*. When the young men return they stand around the *naab* and the *jelaba* plant the long branches in these holes (*mied diisij*). Thereby creating a green hedge around the *naab*. An entrance is made on its eastern side. During this sequence of the '*dimi*, the ritual leader smokes his pipe once more.⁷²



Image 4.21. '*dimi* village with *miede*

4.6.7 Cooking role reversed

While this is going on, the women construct a small windbreak before each hut and build a hearth. For once, the cooking will be done outside – not by the mothers of the girls this time, but by the *jelaba* (or their wives if they have performed their *hiit galan*), as if they take on the mother's role for the occasion. When I inquired as to why the roles

⁷² I was told that the term '*dimi* probably derives from the verb '*dimij*, which means "to plant", in allusion to this part of the ritual.

are reversed and why a woman can only cook the meat if she has done *hiit galan*, one of my collaborators informed me that “the smoke of that meat will finish her eyes”. She is not “full”, she is “incomplete” (*maala hodo'de*). Therefore, the husband has to do the cooking, because “he has the power of the cows, he has the *dum*. You see, now, the *hiit galan* made a woman equal to man”. The *jelaba* cook the tail portion and the ribs, and when the meat is ready, the ritual leader blesses it, and everybody can eat.

Just as the brothers of the 'dimi men laid strips of the slaughtered ewe's stomach lining around the necks of the *jelaba* the previous day, they now do the same for their fellow-clan members, who have supported them throughout the ritual. As evening falls, the 'dimi girls cloth themselves as women, as they did on the very first day of the 'dimi. This time it is not their parents who invite the *jelaba* by singing the *gaaro*, but the girls themselves who now take the elders by their hands and lead them to their mother's hut, accompanied by much cheering. Together they enter, and once inside, each daughter is blessed once more by her guest *jelaba* and a piece of *muor* is exchanged.⁷³

4.6.8 The sheep for the girls and *jelaba*

Once again, two ewes are brought out. One, called the “sheep of the girls” (*shien hadda*). This is slaughtered and again the meat is kept on top of the hut. This meat will be the daughters' breakfast the following morning. The other sheep is left alive and tied to the forked branch in front of each hut. This sheep is called *shien ini gilme* and is a gift for the ritual leaders. The pipe-man, the main leader, accepts this sheep by untying the rope and rubbing the animal's head with white clay.

4.6.9 The oxen of the staff (*aan gaasare*)

The following morning, the climax of the ceremony takes place. Just as on the first day, the girls are now attired as adult women, with a cape (*sara*) and forked staff. Up until this point, their elders had nothing to do with the other half of the 'dimi village. Now, they come and take up position at the eastern edge of the village, where they down sit in a row, just like the *rash* of meat feasts.

This is the sign for all 'dimi families to bring in oxen. These are provided by the paternal and maternal uncles as well as by bondfriends. The oxen are then presented to

⁷³ This sequence could well allude to the wish that a daughter will marry a “big man” who lives a long and virtuous life.

the *jelaba* of the opposite moiety. Entering from the east, the brother of the 'dimi father brings a small bag with salt (*makaate*), tobacco (*dambo*) and coffee husks (*esho* or *shoboro*) as a gift for the ancestors. Afterwards, with a piercing voice, he shouts out his ox-name and describes the ox he offers as a gift. They each choose a specimen by tapping it on the hindquarters with their ritual staffs (*gaasare*), hence their name *aaŋ gaasare*. The *maa makaale* hits all the *aaŋ gaasare* with his staff and the animals are taken by the *jelaba* of the opposite *dolo*.

It should be remembered that the daughters of the opposite alternation are potential marriage partners. This means that these future bride takers now receive oxen from the bride givers, while in the future the opposite will be the case. Therefore, the gift of *aaŋ gaasare* may be interpreted as an inverted bride price. It should be noted that the *jelaba* may not add these animals to their own herds but must sell, exchange or give them away.

4.6.10 The oxen of the hind leg (*aaŋ hergo*)

The remaining oxen are now slaughtered en masse and an enormous feast follows. These “oxen of the hind leg” (*aaŋ hergo*) attract a great many guests. One foreleg, the ribs and the liver of each animal are destined for the *jelaba*. The rest is for the 'dimi family, their friends and all other guests who came over.



Image 4.22. Spearing an *aaŋ hergo*

4.6.11 The end: *Haa woyeya*

Meanwhile, the girls from every hut are invited to eat the meat of the ewes that were killed the night before. Afterwards they return to their own huts and then, singing, they go together with their families to the ritual leader's central hut. On their backs, they wear the fleece of the sheep as a gift for the ritual leader. Each girl enters the hut, where she is smeared with the black soot of a cooking pot (*nas ibile*). Again, girls who's father killed a wild animal or an enemy wear a "flower" or *kaalan*.

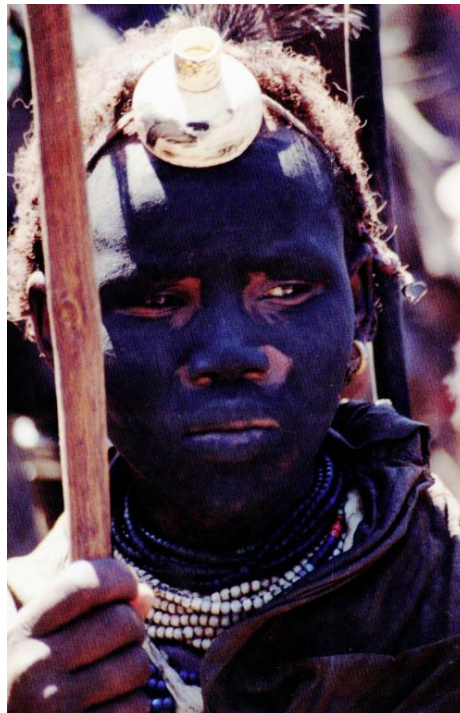


Image 4.23. 'Dimi girl smeared with soot and wearing *kaalan*.

When all the girls have been thus treated, they make their way, shrieking and laughing, to the various huts and sing the following song, called *lor*:

You killed Dung beetle (*Lokolon he chegesse*)
You killed Gungudee (*Gungudee he chegesse*)
Woman with the long neck.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ *Lokolon* is a dung beetle. That animals sometimes plays a role in stories, where it is associated with strength and cleverness. I was also told that *lokolon* is the name for a witch in the Nyangatom language. Just like the *maamur'guo* of the Daasanech, such an individual uses the bones of deceased people to improve his own wellbeing. *Gungudee* is an intestinal illness that causes diarrhoea and is usually associated with jealousy and the evil eye. Daasanech who eat well and are well dressed easily attract envy. The soot smeared on the girls'

When the girls have been round all the huts they run outside the 'dimi village, where their mothers are waiting with gourds of water to wash their faces. The ritual leader and his assistants remain in the central hut and prepare *kuul*, with which they paint in the form of *kaabo* (white stripes) on their upper bodies, shoulders, heads and backs. Then they emerge from the hut and parade slowly to the entrance of the hedge-enclosed *naab*, as they sing in a deep voice the following song:

Haa woyeya. Ho haa woyehya. Mu-uu. Hoo.

*Haa woyeya. Hu-uu. Hoo ki ye.*⁷⁵

The *jelaba* of the opposite alternation, who are not painted, come from the other direction, standing south of the gate. In turn, each group takes a few steps towards the entrance to the *naab* and repeats the song. This continues until both group reach the entrance and form a sort of honour guard to the left and the right. At this, the 'dimi men, their brothers and all the daughters are called inside the *naab*. Also women who performed *hiit galan* may join in, but other women or girls are not allowed.⁷⁶ Then the four *jelaba* of their own *dolo* make a short speech and bless the 'dimi fathers and their daughters for the last time. When the girls finally leave the *miede* circle, with a string of the *daale*-plant on their head,⁷⁷ the elders bang their ritual staffs against their neck rests as a form of applause and the ceremonial part of the festival is over. The elders join their *gaasaraam* and fathers and daughters have to pass under them. The *jelaba* spit on the hands of the fathers, thus lifting the prohibition on touching raw meat or weapons and the fathers can resume their normal lives. They give away the large, black ostrich plumes that have adorned their headgear to the young men.

faces can then be understood as a form of protection against black magic and jealousy. Why this song is sung at this particular time, I do not know.

⁷⁵ These words are neither Daasanech nor any other language from the surrounding area. Rather, it comes from the secret language of the *jelaba*. It roughly translates as "finished, finished. This is the end".

⁷⁶ "Those who are outside cry: 'Why didn't you make *hiit galan* for me?'"

⁷⁷ The explanation of the *dale*-plant I got was: "My father has finished the 'dimi and he is now a *jelaba* like you".

Image 4.24. *jelaba* at hawoyeya

After the elders have received their oxen, the brothers of the participants take their spears and spear one or two oxen, called *aañ abayam*. They skin it and cut the *hergo* which is to be prepared for the elders. The meat is prepared for all guests who came from everywhere to join in, even those who are not *ara*, the *haris*.

The next day, this finale is repeated in the *dol gerge* village, which began the '*dimi* later. Both '*dimi* villages remain standing for four more days before the ritual branches that were planted around the *naab* are pulled up very slowly and laid on the ground, pointing east. The *maa makaale* takes a *miede* stick and makes a big circle around the *miede*. Then the '*dimi* villages are dismantled and everyone returns home.

4.7 Ara initiation

In chapter 2, I already explained about the Bulls. I stated there that I suspect that in earlier times, when the Daasanach kept an age-grading system, the people who reached this grade were considered the society's ritual leaders. Later on, when the age-grading system was integrated with a the generation system, making age-sets important, the *jelaba* still belonged to the eldest reigning age-set. Nevertheless, this status is not offered to everyone in this group. Only those men who have performed the *ara* (Bull) initiation

become *jelaba*. From among these men, only eight – four from each *dol* – become *ara jelaba* - the ‘*dimi*’ leaders.

However, the *ara* initiation is not performed each time the eldest reigning age-set takes the *naab*, but rather sporadically and not by all of the four traditional sections at once.⁷⁸ Therefore, when it does take place, all men interested in becoming a Bull are welcome to join in, no matter which section they belong to and no matter their age - even pregnant women can take part. If their unborn child turns out to be a male, he will be born a “Bull”.

The last Shir Bull initiation was in Saalany, around 1985. In 1997, the Elele organized theirs in Kelem. Unfortunately, I was unaware that it was taking place and therefore missed it. Iyerite, an Elele belonging to the clan of Turnyerim, provided me with the description below. At the time, he was the ritual leader of the Elele.

4.7.1 Preparation

Before the ritual is organised, some preparations are to be made. First of all, a special kind of wood is harvested in advance of the initiation. The tree involved is called *saaba* and it appears to be a large species of bamboo found in the Labur Mountains. In order to obtain it, a group of ritually purified men make an expedition to cut the wood.⁷⁹ They bring several pieces of *saaba* back to the place where the ritual will be held. Certain *jelaba* fashion the wood into a wind instrument, which will be used during the *ara* initiation and later on to make the new *farich* or *arab*.

In preparation, all those who are going to be initiated slaughter a sheep in order to make a *telle*, the ceremonial skirt, which the initiates must wear throughout the ritual.⁸⁰ Everybody also has to compose a Hogaare song, just like a *meerte* during circumcision. The next song is an example of a such a Hogaare song. It was made by Mana Yergeleb and talks about the offering of a shiene in order to become *ara*.

Ho Man of Gaare (the man who makes the *shuom*)
Put a mark on my head. Let me become big.
Ho man of Gaare
Ara of grandfather, without giving (a female sheep) you cannot enter
Hogaare
Father of Maauw, why you prevent me

⁷⁸ All the Shir have but one *ara* ceremony. The Oro, Elele and Riele each have their own rituals.

⁷⁹ I described such an expedition above, in chapter 2.

⁸⁰ Pregnant women wear their *ogo*.

The *shiene* of the son of Aargeleb, that *shiene* I will give
 I see the grandfathers, I see my grandfathers (I'm an *ara* now)
 Hogaare

When the *saaba* are ready, a day is picked and all families who wish to initiate some of their members bring their huts to the chosen place. Each family also brings a fattened sheep and a calabash (*dudum*) full of cooked butter (*salap*). A circular village is constructed, similar to that of a '*dimi*. However, this time the *dolo* are not a consideration; hence, only one circle is formed. The spatial organization is also similar to the '*dimi* in that the Turat come first and the Tiemle last,⁸¹ with the gate in between them, facing east.

During the new moon, when everyone is present and all the huts are built around a central *naab*, a group of young men are selected to go into the bush to cut down a big *miede* tree, as well as branches. Most of these men are from the Turat clan. They spend the night outside the village and in the morning, they cut a very large branch called *mied kolom*.⁸² This will serve as the central post for the building constructed in the center of the *naab*, which the *jelaba* fence off. Most of the side branches are trimmed off this post, but some are left for hanging the rumps from the sheep (*luch*) slaughtered especially for this occasion. The fat drips down onto the ground and is said to please the ancestors and call them to witness this important ritual.

Early the next morning, one of the *jelaba* spears a huge bull, which is called *gaare*. By tradition, this bull should belong to somebody from the Nyokol house of the Fargaaro clan. The skin is removed, with the head, hump and tail attached. This hide is laid out to dry for three days, the head facing east, and the tail to the west. In the meantime, the large arbour necessary for the ritual is constructed. After three days, initiation can start.

4.7.2 *Shuom*

During the actual initiation, the one who will smear the participants with *shuom* (*maa shuomiet*) sits in the middle of the arbour, assisted by two other *jelaba*. By custom, this man should be from the house of *Shuom* of the Edhe clan. In front of him, to his right, is a large hole filled with *shuom*. This substance is a mixture of clay, sorghum beer (*bersho*) and cooked butter (*salap*).⁸³ Each man seeking initiation brought these ingredients to the

⁸¹ It would be interesting to see how the different clans of other sections are integrated into the circle.

⁸² This main post is similar to that which supports the seclusion hut during circumcision.

⁸³ Iyerite himself wasn't specific about which clay is used. Others told me it is a type of clay called *kuch*, which is what termite mounds are made of.

maa shuomiet, who then mixed them. The dried bull hide is placed next to the hole, with the head close to the edge of it. Every initiate enters the arbour according to their clan's order, and slowly strides lengthwise across the hide. They walk from tail to head, looking down. When the initiate approaches, he is not allowed to look towards the central pole. The *maa shuomiet* smears the forehead and nose of every future Bull with his right hand.

After they are smeared with *shuom*, the initiates return to their huts where their mother or wife smears her husband or son with butter on a hide outside. Later, a *jelaba* comes by and removes the *shuom* from his forehead with a wrist knife (*faad gilme*). By doing so, he enjoins the initiated to be "sharp like a knife" in their decisions. When the process is over for everybody, the new Bulls get a whip (*tuoch*) made of *miede*, with a few leaves and leather sandals. This whip is smeared with oil. They carry it when they take part in the Bulls' Hogaare dance held that same evening.⁸⁴ All *ara* are required to attend and sing. While wearing their *telle* and carrying their *miede* whips, the new *ara* jump up and down on their right legs, while trying to hit the others as a kind of game.

4.7.3 Promise to the land

Being initiated as an *ara* means that one makes "a promise to the land". Four moral principles are involved in this oath:

- Not to steal;
- Not to commit adultery;
- Not to impregnate an unmarried girl;
- Not to take revenge nor kill.

Only when a man lives by these conditions, will he be allowed to mediate and judge conflicts between Daasanech regarding bridewealth, adultery and divorce. The burden of this promise might be the reason why some people refuse to take part in this initiation and become a Bull. If these *ara* laws are broken, severe punishment will be meted out. In the worst cases, a person might be killed through a communal beating with sticks. After this, such a person has the fatty part (*buode*) of a sheep's tail placed in his mouth, a *nyakaasia* is placed on his head and his body set against an acacia tree, head facing west, as a warning to others not to behave likewise.

⁸⁴ This is similar to the post-circumcision *telle* dance.

4.7.4 Turnyerim

All the sub-clans of the Turnyerim section that are said to be “born from the water” hold a separate *ara* initiation. This is not held along the river but rather on the shores of Lake Turkana.⁸⁵ During this version of the ritual, these Turnyerim do not go into the bush to cut a big *miede* post for the initiation arbour. Instead, they wait on the shores of the lake for a big branch to appear in the water as a gift from Waag. When one is spotted, men swim out to catch it. Apart from this, the rest of the ritual is similar to that described above.⁸⁶

Another intriguing feature of the initiation into Bulls is that the small clan of the Tiemle of all sections have to join the Bull initiation of the Riele section. This may indicate that Tiem and Riele are related in one way or another. Further research will be needed here.

4.8 Death rituals and inheritance

The Daasanech euphemistically refer to their death rituals as the “killing of the animals” (*aaŋ oso*). The term *oso* stems from the verb *yesijŋ*, which means to kill or to slaughter. During a funeral, the throat of the sacrificed animals is fully cut (*him gisijŋ*). When Daasanech sacrifice animals for other occasions, the trachea is left intact in order to hold the breath (*him*) of the dying animal for as long as possible. This particular way of cutting the animal’s throat during a death ritual is used to show that “all is over”. These death rituals express the status that a man or woman obtained in life. Thus, they vary according to his or her social position. The funeral for a man or a woman who performed all the rituals, including *‘dimi* and *bilforan*, is different from that of someone who did not.

⁸⁵ I was informed that in 2009, the Turnyerim held their separate Bull initiation in the vicinity of Diiba, on the shores of Lake Turkana. The main post (*ini*) of the initiation shed is not cut in the forest, but is “brought” by the waters of the lake.

⁸⁶ I was also told that the fishermen called the Dies also participate in this Turnyerim because they are “born from of the water” as well. However, further investigation is needed on this subject. The Dies are not allowed to own bulls and it sounds awkward that they would nevertheless would have the right to become human bulls.

4.8.1 The funeral of men who fulfilled everything in life

Muorijn

It is good to die fully conscious and after having performed all necessary rituals.⁸⁷ Ideally, when an elder feels his end is near, he calls all his sons and wives. Also, his herds should be brought back into the compound. In the hut of his eldest wife, surrounded by his family, he gives his last instructions. He recites the names of those who still have credit or debts (*ew, ewmano*) and lists which animals should be slaughtered on his grave (*guushich*). Then, his firstborn son should kill a male animal for *muorijn*. The tongue or the fatty part of the stomach (*muor*) is put around the neck of the dying man. This time, exceptionally, the strings should be at the back instead of the front.

When life has departed, or as the Daasanech would say, when the *sidha* has left or the *sidha* is cut off – the women start to cry. The death of a person is often signaled by a shooting star and the Daasanech believe that each human being is connected with a star and at the moment of death, the star fades out. At this point, the firstborn son takes his father's head onto his lap and shaves off all the hair.⁸⁸ In the meantime, another man will start to dig the grave. For a '*dimi* father, this is dug in the middle of the calves' pen, about a meter deep. This is deep enough to prevent hyenas and sorcerers from easily getting at it. When the grave is ready, they dress him in his *telle*, place him in a fetal position and wrap him in an ox-skin (*lokode*).⁸⁹ Then, they carry the body to the grave and remove the *telle* and *lokode* because "a man goes naked". The body is laid in the grave on the right hand side with the hands together and the knees drawn up, and the head pointed to the west, where the sun sets. *Aala*⁹⁰*n* leaves are placed over his ears "to keep the soil away".

The firstborn son then puts the deceased's belonging on top of the body (*kara*, sticks, *dafare*, other clothes, *balaam*) – almost everything, except weapons and milk containers. The man's hair is also placed on top of him. Then his sons open the hair of their *shurte* (fore locks) and cut off a bit of it. Wives cut off all of their hair, even the *gute*. This *gute*, which shows she's married and has children, will however be made anew afterwards. A *nyakataran* doesn't cut her hair because she will be given back to her parents. After the grave is covered, crying should stop. All that hair is also thrown on the grave. Mourning

⁸⁷ To die of old age (*vinam*) with the family around is considered good and shows that a man has lived a good life. Dying young by contrast implies that there are unresolved social tensions.

⁸⁸ If a man has no sons, his brother's sons should do it or another man of his clan. This is very important because if the hair isn't shaved properly, misfortune will strike. In such a case, which is considered a very bad *nyogich*, *bersho* should be prepared for the *jelaba* who will have to chase away the *nyogich*.

⁸⁹ By preference, this hide should come from an ox that died a natural death.

⁹⁰ *Aalaq*n is most probably *Cadaba rotundifolia*.

now entails that family members abstain from smearing oil on their bodies and that they remove all their ornaments.

Slaughtering the animals (*aañ oso*)

If not yet present, all the cattle are called back to sleep on the grave overnight. A few days later, depending on the phase of the moon, several of the deceased's animals are slaughtered. An age mate of the deceased kills these so-called *aañ maa kufia* by cleanly slitting their throats. As a rule of thumb, the number of sacrificed animals depends on the number of women and children, but at least one bull and two cows should be slaughtered. If a man has more than two wives, the number of slaughtered cows should correspond with the number of wives. Male sheep (*lucham*) represent the sons, and female milk sheep (*li*) represent the daughters. The corpses of these slaughtered animals are put in a semicircle, their heads facing west.

None of the family is allowed to touch this meat, let alone eat it. Instead, older, postmenstrual women handle it and they are allowed to take it home. An older man, one who is no longer able to procreate, cuts apart the bull. Even if these people are contaminated through handling the funeral meat, this doesn't pose any danger because – as Daasanech say it – “they are dead already”, meaning that they are not fertile anymore.



Image 4.25 and 4.26. The throat of animal is fully cut during funeral (left), trachea is left intact during other occasions (right).

An age mate of the deceased takes the contents of the cattle rumen (*uro*) and throws it on the grave. That night, the cattle remaining in the pen and may trample on both the grave and the chyme. The fatty part of the stomach (*muor*) is also removed and cut into strips. Every son and wife now takes a small *miede* stick to carry a strip of this *muor* without touching it with their hands and then slowly throws it on top of the grave.⁹¹ After this, the hands are washed with sand. Now, other personal effects of the departed, such as his different sticks, his clothes, feathers and feather holder (*kote*) are also thrown onto the grave. His *telle* is given to his eldest son, and everything else is divided among his age-mates.

Then, all cattle are blessed with *erer* and driven westward around the corral out by the eastern gate, passing the hut of the firstborn. The family members follow the animals, the men empty handed, the woman carrying their household utensils with them. At about the same time, the name-ox of the diseased is slaughtered outside the village. This ox, called *an soshono* or *an kaabana* is roasted and cut into two equal parts. The left is reserved for the age-mates of *dol gerge*, the right side for the age-mates of *dol baadiet*. After the funeral, the houses are dismantled and the family moves their compound further away.

An salap

One or two moons after the burial, all family members gather again and a fat *luch* (male sheep) is slaughtered. This sheep is called the “animal for the oil” (*an salap*), because its rump fat is used to smear the mourners’ bodies. This demarcates the end of mourning. By custom, the eldest sister of the deceased smears oil on all the family members. Male members are only anointed on the forehead and neck, while female members are smeared all over. As a gift for her work, this sister receives a heifer, called *maad’salap*.

The family alone eats the sheep slaughtered for this occasion. As a rule, it is not allowed to chew on the bones and nor to throw them, they should all be burned in the fire. In case some family members are far away, pieces of fat (*gonte*, *go*) are saved and taken to them, so that they are also able to participate.

An geyte

That same night, all of the deceased’s ornaments are soaked in the blood of this animal. The next morning, they are smeared with butter and divided among all the family members. Tobacco, salt, milk and oil are poured on the grave. Now, all are allowed to

⁹¹ Every family member gets a stick. For those who are absent, their younger brother or sister will take a second stick. I was told that this act is invoking wealth in the afterworld.

use oil and wear their ornaments again. The women's hair is shaved in the specific round style. After that, the "bleeding goat" ritual (*aq fasiet*) takes place and everyone walks under the blood four times. The hide of the animal is cut into strips (*geyte, geysam*) and each family member gets a band of it around the right arm, while affines get a band around the left arm.

After that, everyone is allowed to return home. The huts are dismantled and the old place is left, leaving behind the spirit of the deceased. The grave is covered with the sticks and poles from the corral. Anyone passing by is allowed to throw some more sticks onto the grave as a sign of respect. Sometimes, family members even pour some tobacco or milk on it to please the ancestor, especially when plants begin to grow on the grave. Then, a special ritual is held, called *salla*. People fear that the bones of the deceased would depart for Waag, while they should "stay with us". A sheep may be killed on this occasion and milk and blood are poured on the grave and the plants removed.

A woman who performed *bilforan* receives a very similar funeral, except of course that no bull or *aq soshono* is slaughtered.

4.8.2 Funerals of those who didn't perform all rituals

Men who die without having performed their *'dimi* and women who didn't perform the *bilforan* are not buried inside the calves' pen. During their burial, only three sheep are slaughtered. An uncircumcised man's hair should only be cut by his father, mother or father's brother - not by his son. This is "because he is counted as a boy". Afterwards, *aq salap* and *aq geyte* are held but the sister of the deceased only receives a female sheep (*shiene*) instead of a heifer. The name-oxen of such men are still eaten by his age-mates according to their *dolo* - the left is eaten by *dol gerge*, the right by *dol baadiet*. The same goes for young people.



Image 4.27. A sheep slaughtered on the grave of a child. Pieces of *aalany* are dropped on the grave.

A husband cannot bury a childless wife (*nyakataran*). She still has her mother's hair, which can't be cut by her spouse's family. Therefore, whenever a *nyakataran* dies, her parents are called to come and cut her hair. If they are too far away or too late in arriving, her corpse is taken into the bush and left for the vultures and hyenas. A man who died in battle will also be left for the vultures, but his age mates may try remove all his ornaments and cover the corpse with leaves from the *aalan* shrub.⁹²

Stones on the graves

Certain graves have stones placed on top of them. I received three different explanations for this practice. The first was that respected men who died after their generation resigned from the *naab* (the Nyilimkorio at the time of my fieldwork), get stones on top of their graves to express the fact that their responsibilities are over. These resigned *ara jelaba* are called *Ger*, probably after the original homeland of the Daasanech.⁹³ The second was that stones are used only on the graves of people who have performed all rituals (including *hiit galan* and *bilforan*).

During his review of my work, Nanok doubted these explanations and told me that stones are put on the graves of those who became very old and survived all the members of the younger age-set:

The very old ones of a certain age-set, who survived the following age-set, the one who is still alive gets stones. I know one maa Elele called Lokwaita, he cannot walk. After he died, people put stones on his grave. Even now, when people walk near his grave, people put some *aalany* on top of it in order to receive his blessing. Everybody does. He was so old. Never, a man became so old. So he is famous. "Oh, this is Lokwaita". They put green leaves, or grass and go. (Nanok, 2010)

4.8.3 Heritage and levirate

When a man dies without children, his wife may return to her parents along with the bridewealth or she may stay with his brother. If there are children, wives, especially the younger ones, usually pass into leviratic marriage with the younger brother of the husband. Levirate allows the deceased to continue to have offspring who carry his name

⁹² I was told that warriors, if they get the chance, may stretch out an enemy corpse. Turning the face towards the sun and spreading out the legs and arms as a kind of curse. For more practical reasons, they normally remove all their ornaments and their *shaasha*, filled with ammunition.

⁹³ In 2008, when I returned to the field, still four of the generation of Nyilimkorio, who retired in the '70s, were alive. Their age should be estimated above hundred years.

and gives the levir the authority over the herds. A small ritual is held to confirm the new relationship: both have to pass under the blood of a goat and they are blessed with coffee.

This is not the case when a woman has performed the *bilforan*. Then, she may stay with her eldest son or if she prefers, with a younger son or even with a married daughter. Older women often refuse levirate. They prefer to stay independent to take the share of their sons herds to form an independent her. Whenever a woman chooses to return to her parents, the children remain with the father's family, while her family gets at least the *nyakochul* in return. When a wife dies without having given birth, all bridewealth is refunded.

After a father's death and after all rituals are performed, the first born son – the one who shaved the hair of his father – becomes the caretaker of the family herds and carries the main responsibilities concerning cattle matters. It happens frequently at this point, that families split according to the different houses and their respective wives, who then remain with their eldest son. In such case, the herds are divided over the different wives and inherited by the respective sons. Younger, unmarried sons remain under the supervision of their mother and the eldest brother. Widows who have performed '*dimi* and especially those who have performed *bilforan* have the right to dispose of the cattle just like their husband did when he was alive. She will usually do that until her oldest son is big enough to handle the matter.

4.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, I gave a detailed description of the different rituals a person goes through from birth and name-giving to death, with special attention to the ways in which the body is modified. Men undergo two initiation rituals: circumcision, where they offer their blood to the soil and have to sit completely still "like a dead body" during the operation; the other is the spearing of an ox for the elders, through which they become part of an age-set.

For women, the most important ritual is the '*dimi*, which proceeds circumcision and marriage. This lengthy celebration is performed only for the girls in the six traditional Daasanech sections. Throughout the '*dimi*, the elders are fed in return for their blessing, and this may go on for several months. Other rituals for woman mostly relate to marriage and the distribution of bridewealth. Most rituals involve different acts of blessing. A change of hairstyle is common, as hair is often cut in order to indicate a new

status. Different rituals have their own songs. Funerary rites differ between individuals according to their ritual status.

Chapter 5.

Dealing with misfortune

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I described the different rites of passage that a traditional Daasanech undergoes during his lifetime in order to guarantee the continuity of life and to remain in connection with Waag and thus retaining wellbeing. These ceremonies all fall under the category of *nyatalaam he naasan*. In the present chapter, I focus on how the Daasanech deal with misfortune. Serious human affliction and accidents hardly ever happen by accident. People always look for a reason. When things go bad, reasons are usually sought (and found) in the social environment of the victim and the means to heal imply the restoration of the broken social ties. In this section, we will look into the different causes of misfortune, and describe the different actions and rituals performed in order to heal and cleanse. Some of these healing and cleansing rituals are clearly problem-oriented and hence categorized as *nyatalaam he nim*.

These *he nim* rituals may further be differentiated into matters which appear and are tackled at the level of the community, such as long lasting droughts, warfare, pests and epidemics and those which remain at the level of the individual and his or her close family. I will start with the latter and end with some examples of rituals that aim to alleviate a communal affliction.

Above, I introduced the concept of *sidha*, the life force or pulse, which is part of all organisms. This *sidha* is a good measure of whether the body is well or not. A person is *midhab*, “good” or “fine”, when the *sidha* is strong and the flow of fluids and food is not obstructed. A weak *sidha* makes the body hot or feverish, or *kulla*. In the specific sense, *kulla* means hot, but more generally it is used for something “painful” or to describe

somebody sick. Thus, *yu kulla* means “I am sick”. When the pain is sharp or itchy, Daasanech also use the word *hirich* or “needle” to refer to it.

The Daasanech word for disease or illness is *baash* (pl. *baasam*).¹ Disease is perceived as an obstruction in the body’s metabolism. Different imagery is used to visualize the source of pain. For example, “tangling” of the veins from blood clotting may be the cause. Therefore, massaging the painful parts can bring “the veins back in line”, removing the obstruction and reactivating the bodily flow. The passage of food can be obstructed. Food clots, and may remain at a certain place where it becomes “a stone”. Such ossified food can be removed through vomiting or through special techniques such as sucking or knocking out the particles.

Another image used to model disease is called *daaf* or *daafo*, which refers to a bruise or an injury. Internal bruises make the blood sticky, causing a clot. Such bruises may be removed by sucking out the “bad” or “dark” blood or through cupping.² Internal swellings are explained as areas in which the body has become too wet. Because moisture is associated with weakness, such areas should be dried out. This explains why, in order to cure such a swelling, patients are not allowed to drink except a very small amount, perhaps just one spoonful, of water in the morning. That water should be hot, because cold beverages are believed to make the affected area even more spongy and weak, while abstaining from water has the opposite effect: the swelling dries out and shrinks, just like grass shrivels without rain.

If the situation becomes critical, this is called *ayag*. When a person does not recover, his *sidha* ultimately stops and a person dies. The Daasanech may say “his *sidha* is cut off”. At the moment of death, the *sidha* is said to leave the body and travel upwards, towards its source, Waag.³ What is left is a dead body (*riif*),⁴ which disintegrates into bones (*lafite, lafo*). The spiritual essence of a dead person turns into a spirit or *gaaram*.⁵ This *gaaram* is the “shadow” and it differs from the *sidha*. A *gaaram* may appear in dreams as an image of the deceased.

¹ Other words used are *nyedeke* (related to the Turkana word *edeke*, cfr. Shelley, 1985: 163) and *furso*. *Furso* refers more to pests and epidemics that strike groups of people or animals.

² Daasanech cupping, unlike many other traditional forms of cupping, involves bloodletting. Most incisions are made on the shoulders and around the stomach area. At times it is difficult to discriminate between therapeutic and aesthetic cupping.

³ Some say the *sidha* leaves the body through the fontanel at the top of the head, others say it leaves through the space between the lower front teeth – and the two middle incisors are extracted for this reason.

⁴ Note that *riif* – a corpse or skeleton – is different from *gon*, a body with *sidha*.

⁵ Only people who performed their *dimi* are believed to turn into *gaaram*. Children, young men and women don’t.

During my fieldwork I became intrigued by Messing's observation that in some cases, the causes of misfortune are sought in the spiritual or supernatural world, while in other cases, they were considered "natural" (Messing, 1968). I came to realize that the Daasanech maintain a naturalistic explanation only as long as the discomfort is not severe or life threatening. Usually, the natural cause of such minor discomfort is found in excess. Examples include inhaling dust, a sudden change from hot to cold, either too much food or drink, or too little, and consuming polluted water, milk or meat. Messing would not dichotomize strictly between naturalistic causes and causes to be found in the magico-ritual domain. Therefore, he speaks of "interdigitation" between both domains, since overlapping of the two is frequently encountered both conceptually as therapeutically.

Among the Daasanech, the treatment of minor illnesses usually falls to either the mother of the household or to some of the older women from the neighbourhood who know about medicine ('*guor*, '*guoro*'). Such women use preparations from leaves, stems or roots. The Daasanech make use of several types of plants and most women know the various house, garden and kitchen remedies. However, some women, called *gaal 'guor shioga*, have more specialized knowledge. Different types of clay are often used for skin diseases and baby or cow urine as a purgative to clean the stomach. Furthermore, soups made of goat or sheep meat are used to strengthen weak people, as is milk. Other traditional healing techniques consist of rough massages. Although most minor diseases are treated by women, some men are known to set broken bones (*maa laf mamarwa* or "the one fixing bones"), while others specialize in cupping (*maa ched agalokha* or "the one making incisions").⁶

These "natural" diseases (*baasam aada*) are also called "diseases of Waag" (*baasam waagiet*).⁷ At first, I thought the rain – believed to be the cause of some disease – was responsible for this somewhat surprising link between Waag and disease. Then, I came to understand that the adjective *waagiet* was being used here in the context of innocence. Associating a disease with Waag implies that there is nothing to worry about. This may serve as an illustration that the Daasanech do not differentiate between the sacred and profane, but that they rather differentiate between being in connection or not with Waag. When the body is "not connected with Waag" (*gonle waagiet man*), man becomes vulnerable to affliction. Home remedies don't work and the condition of the patient grows worse. When he loses weight, gets a high fever, cannot get up anymore (*les kadoj*) and his *sidha* weakens, the patient and his family start to realize that things

⁶ Incisions have a therapeutic value. They cause some bleeding and remove the "bad blood".

⁷ The same is observed among the Turkana (Shelley, 1985: 169), who differentiate between *ngidekesiney 'gaa Akuj* ("sickness from heaven") and *ngidekeiney 'gaa ekapilan* ("sickness by evil doers, referring to human intervention).

are turning out the bad way (*he deenadhe*). It is at this point, when people start to fear for the life of the patient, that a shift occurs in the perception of the causes from “natural” to “social”.⁸

5.1.1 When Waag refuses...

While the experience of wellbeing is considered to be a state close to Waag, where things are as they should be, the experience of misfortune implies the complete opposite. When misfortune strikes, the Daasanech say that Waag left that person or family or that “he refused”: *Waag hi diite*.⁹ A good man is loved by the Above (*maa midhaba Waag hi gieel*). However, a bad man is “despised by Waag” (*maa dewa Waag hi neb*) and Waag may “cut his tree” (*guorle waag hai muda*). At that point, questions like “why have things turned out the bad way?” arise and people begin to suspect malevolent forces. Causes shift from natural to social reasons.

I call them “social” reasons because they mostly originate in the social environment of the patient. These may be living people belonging to the social circle of the patient or ancestors who passed away but still influence their living kin. They are also spiritual in nature because they are at work in the realm of the spirit or mind.¹⁰ It is important to note that sickness and in a broader sense any kind of misfortune is an indication that something is wrong. Healing involves in the first place a restoration of social harmony and a way to tackle further misfortune. Shelley came to a similar conclusion when dealing with the way the Turkana deal with affliction:

“In Turkana, the phenomenon that afflicted persons attempt to manipulate is not sickness, but rather, misfortune and the protection against misfortune stemming from a wide range of potentially threatening sources”. (Shelley, 1985: 202)

Among the Daasanech, we may discriminate between four “social” sources, although I realize that it is often hard to discriminate between them because they all appear to be linked to one another in some fashion. Therefore, the following scheme may seem a bit blurred or fuzzy, but I have the impression that the ambivalence and the overlap between the different categories is also at work for the Daasanech themselves, who often explain one category in terms of another. The first category covers all diseases labelled as a curse (*dor*). The majority of curses are invoked by close relatives or age

⁸ The same holds true for infertility. When a woman remains barren after massaging and other methods, the causes are sought in the social and spiritual realm.

⁹ *Waaghidiito* is, in fact, an expression of astonishment or fear.

¹⁰ Almagor called them “occult” or “supernatural”.

mates, often without conscious intent to cause harm. Other curses are made intentionally. People who possess specific psychic abilities, such as *jelaba*, witches or people of the *nyerim* clans perform such curses.

The second category of disease includes those caused by a so-called *gaaram*. *Gaaram* take possession of their relatives, often as a warning or a punishment because they dislike the current or prior behaviour of one of their kin.

The third category of malevolent influences relate to jealousy, envy and gossip. Non-kin are often the responsible parties in these cases. This is called the evil eye and evil tongue. Unlike curses and *gaaram* possession, the evil eye and evil tongue leave a living substratum behind in the body.

The fourth category of causes of affliction looks at the victims themselves. Here, disease is the result of a polluted or contaminated state of being. This is called *adaab*. This concept is hard to translate because it denotes both a crime and the result of it. Another, closely related concept is *nyogich*, which refers in the first place to homicide, but in a broader sense refers to all kinds of heavy incursions against Daasanech customary law.

5.2 Social Causes of Affliction

5.2.1 Cursing

In chapter three, we already examined the importance of blessing (*waag’kivijn*) in Daasanech daily and ritual life and introduced the term ‘*dorijn* (cursing) which is the other side of the same coin.¹¹ Both actions are ways to influence the social environment through mental processes, like speech and thought. They are creative acts that may be either beneficial or harmful. Blessings guarantee prosperity and wellbeing. Curses result in misfortune and disease. An important difference between the two – at least from a western viewpoint – is that a blessing is usually intentional, while most curses are usually not. Quite often, a curse occurs without the conscience involvement of the curser. In this sense, it may be defined as a spontaneous consequence of unresolved tensions between people. Curses are often caused by anger (*idho*), which explains why the term *idho* is sometimes used as a synonym for curse. One collaborator told me “like a

¹¹ The result of a curse is also called ‘*dor*’.

stick (*ul*) can cause an injury (*daafo*), anger can do as well”.¹² Apart from this, sadness or “a bad heart” (*wodhin dewa*) or any other form of negative emotion may trigger misfortune.

This means that the Daasanech perceive curses much differently than what in the West is commonly understood as a conscious, psychic act intended to harm somebody else. Overtly at least, the Daasanech disapprove of deliberate curses among fellow kinsmen. Such curses, at least vocalized ones, should be reserved for enemies and in extreme cases, when an individual persists in antisocial behaviour. In reality however, it is commonplace for people of the *nyerim* clans take revenge personal grievances or the grievances of others by cursing somebody intentionally. To do this, they offer coffee and tobacco to an ancestor¹³ or beg Waag to harm someone.

Another important point of difference with the Western notion of cursing is that such curses do not necessarily afflict the individual who caused the problem. Usually, they hit somebody related to him, like his wife or a child. The Daasanech say that anybody “who is held between the legs” of a father may be afflicted by a curse directed towards him. The group of potential victims of a curse consists in the first place of his immediate kin or wives but may also include his cattle. At first, I thought this indicated that all those who are blessed by the head of household may be the victim of a curse by anybody and that such a curse breaches the shield of protection obtained through the blessings of that person. Later, I realized that curses are very often following the bloodlines. This hypothesis was confirmed by a collaborator who stated that all curses “follow the blood” except when *nyerim* or age-mates are involved: “When you are angry because the bridewealth isn’t paid, the curse will still go to your own daughter, not to her husband”.

This following may serve as an archetypical example of a curse between affines:

Aarbabesh was upset by the fact that he didn’t receive bridewealth for his brother’s daughter Nakinech, although she already gave birth twice. Together with his two brothers, he went to ask for his animals, but Loya, the husband of Nakinech, sent them away with the message that his herds are not around and that they should come back later after the big rains. A few months later, Loya’s eldest daughter, Nyerube, became very sick.

¹² Evidence for the hypothesis that thoughts have a manifest power are found in the many narratives that tell about ancient diviners who lived the world, in the daily prayers and blessings household heads perform while spitting coffee or other substances and in the conscious curses made by different men or groups towards their enemies.

¹³ “Grandfather, take this tobacco, play with him, abuse him”.

Investigating Nyerube's illness, a diviner may find that the cause was the dispute between Loya and Aarbanesh regarding the delay in bridewealth allocation. It is likely that Aarbanesh is not aware that he cursed anybody, let alone Nyerube, a girl whose existence he may be entirely unaware of.

5.2.1.1 "A curse follows the blood"

Uri Almagor eloquently documented several different cases of disputes between relatives, both among kin as well as affines (Almagor, 1978a). As can be expected in a complex cattle culture, conflicts often have to do with the allocation and distribution of animals. The right to dispose of herds and ownership of the cattle seldom fall together and a household head has to be careful when allocating cattle that are not his. Also in the context of heritage, one may easily feel mistreated. Almagor didn't go into the matter of curses, but nevertheless often makes mention of "fear for occult attacks" as motivating people's behaviour.

Cattle matters

Quarrels amongst relatives often provoke heated emotions and these may easily develop into a curse. The following case echoes the example above and shows how a delay in the delivery of bridewealth stock, which Daasanech euphemistically call "eating animals", resulted in a curse that led to the death of a child.¹⁴

My firstborn child died because of my sister. She didn't eat any animals when I married. (N.N.)

At the same time, this example illustrates the fact that a curse does not necessarily reach the one responsible for the conflict. Rather, it may harm anybody close to the provoker.

Conflicts involving the gifting or sale of animals that are not actually owned often provoke a curse among blood kin. The below example plays out between brothers, but it could just as easily take place between a husband and wife.

My younger brothers took one of my oxen and ate it far away with his age-mates. I told him not to do that anymore. Again he took two and sold them in Omoraate.

¹⁴ These interviews were conducted in and around Omoraate, Kelem, Aoga, Akudungule and Kabusiye villages between 1996 and 1997. Most data was collected from elders belonging to Shir Inkabelo and Elele-sections, mainly Mana Yergeleb, Myeri, Lokorikimide, Lokwasep and Lokasiamoi. The data was checked in August of 2006 with Mozes Nanok at Niememeri and Hailu Moroken at Omoraate.

What my children will eat? My anger will curse him. Because we have one father and one mother, my anger will go to him. His children might become sick. (N.N.)

Such disputes often occur between a father and one of his sons. In this type of conflict, a mother may defend the rights of her own sons against will of the father, especially if the father uses his unmarried sons' cattle to take another wife.

A son's neglect of responsibility - for instance, if a herder loses animals by mistake - may be a reason for a fatherly curse to occur. In the next example, a father cursed his son because he stupidly lost seven head of cattle. The anger of the father became a curse, which reached the son's daughter and wife.

Lobocho went to Arbore to exchange seven oxen for an automatic gun. He gave the oxen out, but the other one escaped without giving the gun. "Kun kuf, *gaaram, meete?* Kuf. Butup" (Die die, ancestors, what? Die. Disappear). So Lobocho returned home empty handed. His father was stupefied and cursed him in anger. Later on, Lobocho's daughter became sick and died. Afterwards, his wife also became sick. All of the brothers went to the father and asked him to withdraw the curse. The father killed a goat and all family members walked under the blood. Everything became well again. (Nanok, 2006)

Matters of heritage and levirate may trigger curses, as it did in the next case:

When my father died, my mother remained with a lot of cattle. She refused to marry one of my father's brothers. These brothers cursed her when she was pregnant. She died while giving birth. (N.N.)

The widow's refusal of a levirate marriage meant that the herds remained with her and her eldest son and this didn't please the deceased's brothers.

Besides cattle matters, people might also become upset when family members behave badly. A person may provoke the anger of their relatives because of greed, an overbearing attitude, gossip, lack of sexual interest on the husband's part or lack of hospitality - to name but a few of the most common causes. In fact, any form of anti-social behaviour may trigger somebody's anger or sorrow, which may induce a curse.

A man I knew quite well was cursed by two of his wives. They were jealous because he offered all of his sexual attention to a younger wife while ignoring them. He became sick, and experienced a burning pain when urinating. The diviner told him that the curse had resulted in a stony obstruction in his urethra. After repentance, he didn't become better. This was explained as the result of *verente*, a curse that keeps on returning. *Verente* is believed to be typical of women because they are said to find it more difficult to let go of negative thoughts. Finally - because he didn't get better and

was ashamed of his problem – the man committed suicide¹⁵ and this act was considered as a consequence of his mistakes.

Other occurrences of curses between husband and wife have to do with the suspicion of adultery. Adultery may easily result in a curse if the suspicion is actually true. In such cases, the wife of the adulterous partner may suffer from a curse.

Analysing such cases of suspicion and truth, I wondered if a curse always has to be based on facts in order to be effective. Unfortunately, there is clearly no consensus on this matter. My question provoked quite some debate among my collaborators. Some assured me that curses or deliberate spells cast after adultery or theft were only effective when the deed actually took place, while others assured me that anger needs no justification in order to be effective. The next example may serve as an illustration of the latter possibility:

It was drought and I was helping my family. My mother, my brothers wives, all were present. I bought maize from town. For two months, I bought maize. The third month, the house of my big brother had left. But nevertheless, my big brother came and asked my mother for some maize. He ate it and took some maize with him. After that, he sent his wife again. And again he came back after three days. My mother said: “Oh, you came first, then your wife came three days ago, you came today? Why?” Then he cursed my wife. Therefore, the child came out in the wrong position. “Go and call him to bless her”. I was sent to call him. He came with me. He blessed her and she delivered well. (Nanok, 2010)

5.2.1.2 Curses among age-mates (*'dor kaabana*)

Young men are quite often the victims of *kaabana* curses. Even though they are generally not related by blood, age-mates can curse each other badly. The explanation for this is that they are extremely close to one another, having spent so much time with each other. Some herd their cattle together in cattle-camps and have remained together for several months during the seclusion period following their circumcisions.

A curse from an age-mate is called *'dor kaabana*. Here, the reason is rarely a dispute over cattle. The only exception is when an age-mate refuses to offer one of his animals to his age-set or an older age-set after being requested by the group to do so. Rather, the main reason for *'dor kaabana* is antisocial behaviour. What is meant by anti-social behaviour reveals a lot about the values and expectations that exist among age-mates, a feature well described by Almagor in his 1979 article “Ethos of equality among Daasanech age-peers”.

¹⁵ Suicide may be called *'guomo hol aga muure*, to cut oneself away from food. Suicide is considered *feen* as it is the consequence of *adaab* (see below).

Ethos of equality

In that article, the author mentions several forms of antisocial behaviour, such as abuse of power (*fargoginte* and *shalamanti*), a lack of respect for the customs and rules (*kiaan man* or “disobedience”) and especially greed (*maarga*).¹⁶ Greed may result in physical punishment, but that it can also result in a curse becomes clear from the next two examples. One is an old one dating back from the time when ostriches were abundant and ostrich feathers in great demand and the other is a more recent example involving money.

Three times I killed an ostrich. Two times, I shared the feathers with the *kaabana*. The third time, I didn't. I hit the feathers and kept them for myself. That's why they cursed me. The next time I went to hunt ostriches, my gun exploded and my eyes were hurt. The gun was broken. It was a curse of the *kaabana*. (Guyo, 1996)

The following took place during the drought of 2008, when cattle were dying and cheap to buy.

I was buying cows from *kaabana* during drought. I needed them for my bridewealth. Somebody said. “I have a calf, 200 *bir*”. I bought about ten cows. Then pain came to me. And I had an accident with my bike, without reason. *Maa gil onyi* was called. She threw tobacco in the fire. She touched my body. It is your generation, it is two men of your generation. Your hands gave too little. Add more *bir* for them. They collected both of them and came to me. They came to my mother's house. After they had coffee, they blessed me with coffee. I gave them *udho* (alcohol) and some extra *bir*. Then I was healed. (Nanok, 2010)

Not only the age-mates, but also the their wives can be cursed by the *kaabana*, especially if a woman doesn't behave hospitably (*gilmesich man*) when the age-mates of her husband come as guests. In such a case, both the wife herself as well as the husband may be the victim of such a curse. This demonstrates the close relation between the wife and the age-mates of her husband, as the men of an age-set consider the wives of their fellows as theirs.

The general principle behind curses between age-mates was briefly explained to me by the following quote:

Everybody of your own age-set may curse you. This is the curse of the *kaabana*. You are together with them. You marry, you build a household, you grow your stock. When they come as guests, you give them coffee and offer them food. When

¹⁶ *Maar-ga* literally means “having lack”.

you refuse to do so, they curse you. They feel unhappy (*gere 'gaa moddo*).¹⁷ This is how they curse you. They don't use words, they just curse. Cursing with words is '*dor kidhiet*. (Kwaanya, 1997)

It enough for age-mates to feel bad about a certain behaviour that they may curse. Important to note, is the matter raised by Kwaanya here: the *kaabana* never curse one another with words. Cursing with words, he says, is for enemies. One should not curse age-mates deliberately, but one can easily curse enemies by using harmful words - often alongside symbolic acts and materials. As we have seen above, spells are cast against enemies during special military meetings of age-sets (*yoi*) and by the circumcised *her* during their seclusion period. Tribesmen cannot or should not be treated the same way. In the heat of discussion, however, it often happens that one of the parties is so upset and angry that they insult and curse each other.¹⁸ When this happens among age-mates, one often sees others intervene to try and cool down the conflicting parties and order them to be silent so as to prevent cursing.

Also noteworthy here, is that the curse of the *kaabana* is usually directed against the source of the bad feelings and not one of his relatives. This might be because '*dor kaabana* usually occur between unmarried men, but even among married men, an age-mate's curse will generally not hit his family. After all, the general impression is that *kaabana* curses are the main cause of death among young men and that even accidents or deaths in war are often interpreted as the result of an age-mate's ill wishing.

Age-mates also act in their own way as guardians of customs and traditions. Each age-set is very keen to have a good name and is therefore eager to punish any member of the group who besmirches its reputation and shames the others.¹⁹ A dramatic example of this occurred at the end of the 1997 rainy season. At that time, a lot of commotion arose about youngsters who were selected to fight in the war against Eritrea. As future soldiers of the Ethiopian army, they had cut their hair. Cutting one's hair without permission of the elders is against Daasanech custom. Later on, when many did not return from the war and others were seriously wounded, this was explained as the result of a curse from their age-mates.

A frequent reason for action against an age-mate involves misbehaviour towards a wife. Young, married Daasanech men jokingly say that a peer's wife is like their own sister. However, this is not entirely in jest. Although a man is allowed to beat

¹⁷ *Gere ha moddo*: a "bad smelling" or "rotten" stomach is the way in which the Daasanech express unhappiness.

¹⁸ Especially when drunk, Daasanech often swear and use expressions such as "get a disase" (*baash gaa*), "die" (*kuf*), "enter your mother's vagina" (*nyungut iye gaa*). This way of speaking is called *chaarim* ("to abuse") and may develop into a curse when people are related

¹⁹ Daasanech describe shame as "breaking one's backbone" (*kern higidha*).

his wife, and this actually frequently happens, especially with younger wives, he may never do so in an unreasonable way. For instance, using a stick (*'gul*) is not acceptable. If a wife is badly mistreated, age-mates may get her husband and beat him up, using long whips. And if this isn't enough, a curse may follow. You know why the first wife of L. remained barren and why the children of his second wife died? It is because he misbehaves towards his youngest wife. He beats her with his *'gul*. We dislike that. That's why we cursed him. (Lomeribulo, 1996)

Deliberate curses as punishment?

Despite the ideological disapproval of deliberate curses, they do happen, as the above case illustrates. This is especially the case when an age-group is fed up with a member's behaviour. Though the curse will usually not be expressed verbally, some actions may be taken. For example, age-mates may take sand from under a peer's headrest and spit on it, put *okoj* (a special white stone) on his footprints or point their little finger in his direction. These ways to curse an age-mate are usually used only when physical punishment did not result in a change in behaviour. One collaborator told me that cursing was only the third step in the process of sanctioning a straying peer:

The first time, we leave it. The second time, we punish. The third time, we curse. That's how it goes. (Lomeribulo, 1996)

Many of these curses may result in death.

My father was cursed by his *kaabana* and died. He bought guns in Maji and sold them to enemies. His *kaabana* took *okoj* and put it in his footsteps. His legs became sick and he died. (N.N.)

Later in life, when a man marries and his children are grown up, *kaabana* curses become more rare.

5.2.1.3 Curses of the *jelaba*

Ordinarily, people can only curse their kin and age-mates but there are two categories of people who are able to curse everybody, namely the *jelaba* and the *nyerim*. Their ability is proportional to their capacity to bless: the stronger their blessing power, the stronger their power to curse.

Fear of *jelaba* curses have always formed the basis of their authority. Whenever the *jelaba* decided about something and passed their judgement, people did what was ordered because they knew misfortune would strike if they disobeyed. Although fear of

their curse has waned over the last few decades, most people still fear the *jelaba*.²⁰ His staff (*gaasar'ara*), the embodiment of his strength, is especially feared and nobody would dare touch it.²¹ This fear is particularly present during '*dimi*, when the partakers are very attentive to the needs and wants of these respected guests. If they indicate that they are not satisfied, people are quick to get what they want, because they fear that their bad temper might affect the fertility of their daughter or the health of their other children. The following example occurred during the last Shir '*dimi*.

During '*dimi*, they said: "Tomorrow, we have a guest. Slaughter us one sheep for *biye ko yies*. Instead of honey wine, you have to bring *udho* and *bersho*. This is what we want". The father bought *bersho* and *udho*. "Did you bring it?" "Yes". They went in (his hut). "You bought only one liter? This is little". They were not satisfied and they didn't touch the drink: "Take your drink yourself". They went out. After they went, that same night, the wife of the neighbour was bitten by a spider (*shaade*). They asked *maa gil onyi* to heal her. "It is from the *jelaba*, what did you refuse to them?" So he went back to town and bought five bottles of *udho*. (Nanok, 2010)

Ideally, the *jelaba* curse by pointing their staffs towards their victim. When they do so, people know that infertility or other forms of human affliction may come their way. I was told that in extreme cases, where Daasanech customs have been heavily infringed upon, the *maa jelaba* of that clan may even decide to kill the perpetrator. Uttering the name of that person, while at the same time, breaking open a termite mound, seals the decision.²²

The archetypical reason for a *jelaba* curse occurs when a young girl menstruates before her father performed '*dimi*. This curse is considered an act of self-defence because it is believed that a girl who menstruates before her '*dimi* is performed erodes the power of the *jelaba* and this may lead to the death of all *jelaba* belonging to her clan. Some even claim that such an incursion may harm the whole community, not just the *jelaba*.

²⁰ In 2009, I witnessed a case where somebody insulted the *jelaba* outright, not fearing them at all. It seems that their authority has waned alongside the fear of them in the last decade.

²¹ The typical *gaasar'ara* is just like the long *naas* used by the '*dimi* people, which is also made out of the wood from the *Cordia* tree. Both rods form a connection between man and Waag

²² Some collaborators told me that a *maa jelaba* can curse everybody (just like somebody of the *nyerim*), while others denied this and stated that a *maa jelaba* may only curse his own clan members.

5.2.1.4 Curses of the *nyerim*

Above, we saw that some clans have *nyerim*, a specific power related to Waag and which enables them to bless people, to bring the rain and to curse enemies. Some *nyerim* - especially the firstborn sons of a certain lineage - are renowned for their psychic abilities.²³ They are asked to bless warriors before they depart and to make certain artefacts called *muor kidhiet*,²⁴ which are used to curse enemies. Furthermore, the uncircumcised sons of renowned *nyerim* are in great demand for raids, in which they serve as the carriers of the ritual fire sticks.²⁵

The *nyerim*'s power to curse or bless is materialized in the uniquely shaped cursing sticks (*guor nyerim*, *gurre* and *shar*) that they keep in the back of their huts.²⁶ *Nyerim* may use their power on their own behalf, like in the next example, or they may be asked by someone to curse somebody else for them, especially when they are suspected of committing a crime against them.

During a *buul* (meat feast among age-mates), one of my uncle's sons entered the *buul* of thirty warriors. Each day, they slaughtered one ox. One day, it was his turn to spear, but his animals were far out. He couldn't go and come back the same day. So he asked the group: "If you know any fat ox around, please tell me. I will go and spear it and mention my heifer and he can go and take it. (This is a normal procedure when one borrows an ox from somebody else.) They said: "Yes, we know". They went to the grazing. "It is this one". "Who's cow?" They said: "So and so?" "Oh, *maa* Fargaaro? Show another one". "If you don't spear that one, we don't know another one and today it is your turn". After he speared it, they brought the meat to the *buul*. The next morning, *maa* Fargaaro came to the *buul*: "The son of Loworlem should come out". "You want to beat him or not?" "No, I'm old, I just want to see him". He came out. "I have a calf, it is still suckling, this color. Wait until it finishes its milk and then you take it". "You are young and killed my ox without permission and now, your calf is still too small. I will not wait for your calf. Bring me another, bigger one". Immediately after, my uncle's son didn't eat

²³ Oral traditions recall times when the *nyerim* competed with each other to see who had the most power by changing rocks into animals or by killing enemies with a single spell or gesture. Collaborators were aware that these powers have waned in recent years. Reasons given for the decline are too much sorghum in the diet and too much alcohol abuse.

²⁴ The Turnyerim clan curses enemies by putting a stick with a sharp point (*fudeeny*) through the mouth of a death dog. That dog is then put somewhere at the border with its head in the direction of the enemies. Members of the Fargaaro clan smear red ochre on top of an antelope horn that they place in the ground, pointing in the direction of the enemies. The symbolism here is clear: enemies who pass that way will die like dogs and they will be speared.

²⁵ Why this boy should be uncircumcised remained unclear to me.

²⁶ The story goes that some Turnyerim also keep four puppies inside their hut, which symbolizes their power.

the meat of that animal. He was even vomiting blood. People were crying. He was about to die. His mother and father came. “What happened to him?” “He speared the ox of *maa Fargaaro*”. Then, a pregnant cow was given to *maa Fargaaro* and he became better again. (Nanok, 2010)

When *nyerim* use their power on behalf of others, they are compensated for it. For instance, a man may suspect someone of sleeping with his wife or of stealing a goat or a sheep and eating it in secret. He might then take soil from the suspect’s footprints and bring it to a *maa nyerich*, together with some liquor as payment. The *maa nyerich* then takes the sand and curses it. As a result, the suspect will suffer misfortune, at least when the *maa nyerich* is in the right.

5.2.2 *Gaaram* possession

As discussed previously, *gaaram* are ancestors who dwell in a shadowlike underworld. Although the ancestors are dead, they remain involved in the lives of their descendents and may disturb them with diseases, female infertility, epilepsy, madness (*sigire*) and even death. Just as with curses, their reasons for involvement can be manifold.

Gaaram are people who died before. Our grandfathers, grandmothers, fathers and mothers. We give them tobacco and salt and coffee and ask them to stay away from us. “If you want something from me, take this gift and leave us alone”. Sometimes in the night, they appear in a dream.

They are in the ground, where we put the dead bodies. If you have some work to do, ‘*dimi*, your daughter who marries, you give them tobacco, salt and coffee and ask them to go away after taking their part. Other people’s *gaaram* do not come to our fire-stones. (Lokorikimide, 1996)

Different images are used when discussing *gaaram* possession. Some say that they may “sit on top of” somebody, others say that the *gaaram* covered the victim with their “shadow”, that he “closed” somebody or even that the *gaaram* took the sufferer to their land (*les gaaram*). *Gaaram* are believed to enter the body through the heart and the pain of their possession is often situated in the head or at the backside of the neck. Typical symptoms include headache, shivering and high fever, fatigue, confusion, disoriented behaviour and nightmares.

The malevolent influence of *gaaram* explains why the living are very wary of the deceased and don’t like to talk about them. The most influential ancestors are one’s own elders. The more influential they were in life and the more rituals they completed, the

stronger they are. Young people, or, more specifically, all those who had no ability to bless in while alive, remain powerless.²⁷

The *gaaram* are often spoken to in prayers. It is interesting to note that such prayers are often ambivalent. On the one hand, the ancestors are closely connected with the living and may be asked for protection and help, but on the other hand, the living fear their presence and prefer that their ancestors not become too involved in human affairs. The tension between the need for protection and desire to be left alone is clearly visible in the following prayer: *Eshichu, dunchu, damb kom. Sii gaal. He midhaba ye shiish. Ye dee demo.* (“Grandfather, grandmother, eat this tobacco, go home. Give me the good things. Take care of me”).

Indeed, a common way to address a *gaaram* is to pour milk, coffee, tobacco and salt on the ground. A good spot for doing so is near the hearthstones inside the hut, but any place may do. Such small gifts are meant to keep them quiet. When they turn against their descendents, stronger measures must be taken, as, for example, in the following situation:

Adabaana shish (“Give well”). I offer my father coffee, I offer my grandfather coffee. I pour it in front of the hearthstones. When his grave is in the neighbourhood, I will pour some milk on top of it. “Father, bring me the good”. I ask for his help. The same goes for the *gaaram* of other people: when my animals pass their grave and I don’t offer something, my animals may die. The diseased will take an ox for himself. Everything I put on the grave of my father, I will mix with milk and water and pour it out there. When bad things happen, I may slaughter a goat on his grave. (Lokorikimide, 1996)

Here, Lokorikimide refers to cases where an ancestor has caused an affliction in the family. To counteract this, a goat is slaughtered and all family members must pass under the blood of that animal. This is a sacrifice and may therefore be called *suoriyo*, but the unlike a normal sacrifice, it is not addressed to Waag and the meat is not eaten. Instead, it is left out for the vultures or hyenas.

A *gaaram* may even physically appear in the world of the living. In February of 2010, a case occurred just outside Nyimemeri of *gaaram* attacking an old man after a meeting. Their intent was to punish him because he disagreed about the location of the next *‘dimi*.

There was somebody called Lomorumoi. He is *maa jelaba*. He is very old. He is Fargaaro. He is *maa kuul edhka* of the *dol gerge*. They are sitting in the central yard

²⁷ This is especially true for men. Women are seldom involved in blessing during life, but their *gaaram* can have the same power as that of men.

every evening to discuss where the *'dimi* should be. In Edboron, in Saalan, in Nyimemeri. They had *tach*. He went home after leaving the *naab* that evening. After he went back, in between, *gaaram* attacked him. They had whips and called: "Get him, he is the one disturbing our *'dimi*". He was shouting in the bush: "safety". People came: "What happened Lomorumoi?" "Our ancestors came, so and so, those who died". They wanted to make the *'dimi* in Edboron. He was the one disturbing us. That is why they started beating him. They took him to the *naab*. They poured blood on him. After that, he was okay. Now, the next *'dimi* will be in Edboron. (Nanok, 2010)

A *gaaram* can also be called upon by the living to curse somebody deliberately, although this practice is disapproved of. The procedure for doing so is the same as that followed when asking for their blessing. They are given tobacco and salt and then they are asked to do harm to the intended victim.

The living don't always have to wait for bad things to occur in order to realize that the *gaaram* are displeased because the ancestors may give them a sign beforehand. Whenever the shrub called *aalan* starts to grow on a grave, this indicates that the *gaaram* of the person buried there is disturbed.²⁸ It is at this point that the *salla* purification ritual should be performed. In this ritual, all the family members gather around the grave. An ewe (*shiene*) is killed and its blood is spilled on the grave. Coffee, tobacco and oil are also poured on the grave to satisfy the disturbed spirit. Finally, all family members stand and walk towards the east without looking back.

The *gaaram* and the elders share a similar role in that both may be seen as the guardians of morality and traditions. Both may interfere in situations for similar reasons – with the elders this results in a curse, with a *gaaram* it results in possession. I would even say that *gaaram* possession is pretty similar to a curse, certainly it is greatly feared. Fear of ancestral displeasure may explain why, even if a man has died, still all of his necessary rituals must be performed. During *'dimi* for instance, one may often see a small hut placed next to the hut of a *'dimi* man. This hut is that of his diseased brother, who was born "in front" of him. In order to keep him quiet, the *'dimi* man has to cut two large sticks (*naasam*), one for him and one for his diseased brother and his daughters. He also has to offer animals in the name of his brother.

The diagnosis whether a curse or a *gaaram* is involved isn't always easy to make. In the next case, investigation into the misfortunes of a certain family revealed at first that

²⁸ *Aalan* is a common scrubby plant on the savannah. The leaves of this plant are used to cover the grass huts. They also serve to put on the meat during communal meat feasts. Tea of the leaves is used against fever – possibly those associated with *gaaram* in particular – and the wood smoke is used to clean the calabashes and milk containers.

a curse was involved. However, because reconciliation didn't alter the situation, a second investigation was made and it became clear that it was not the living, but the ancestors that were involved.

In Haddo, a wife became barren after the birth of her first child. All her cows aborted too. After a preliminary investigation, the diagnosis was that the wife was cursed by her brother. The brother blessed his sister, but she remained barren, so another reason was behind it. Finally, they found out that her mother was mistreated during the last years of her life. Secondly, during her death rituals, they killed a sheep from the last household and not from the first one. And thirdly, the *muor* was given from the front instead of the back. The shadow said. "I fed you with my breasts, you came out of me, why did you treat me like that?" (Boote, 1996)

In this case, the spirit of the mother was upset because she felt mistreated when she was old and because her funeral wasn't conducted properly. At first glance, it may seem strange that such grievances come up years after the events actually took place, but if underlying tensions were not expressed at the time for various reasons, perhaps it is easier for them – as well as necessary – for this to happen later. In any case, this is a clear case of an ancestor reacting because her kin mistreated her during her lifetime, a common enough explanation for *gaaram* possession. When asked if this really could be understood as revenge (*hala*), a respondent stated "indeed, a man who disturbed his father, who beat his mother, who touched the leg of his father, these people remember this when they are dead".

Just as with cursing, a *gaaram* does not necessarily zero in upon the individual responsible for their displeasure but may touch everybody near to him instead. The next example demonstrates this quite clearly:

Ikaalan took his grandson to the land of the *gaaram*. When he was old and blind, his son didn't care for him. His daughter in law didn't bring him milk. She didn't bring him sorghum. His sleeping mat was worn out. A son, doesn't he have to respect his father? (Iyerite, 1996)

Everything should be done according to the traditions of the forefathers and the ancestors, alongside the elders, are the guardians of these prescriptions. Ancestor spirits might easily get upset because their descendants did not perform rituals in the correct manner, or they didn't perform them at all. Mistakes or deliberate neglect of proper funeral rites are very likely to trigger an ancestor's ire. As we have seen with the above example involving the victim's deceased mother, even the slightest mistakes can trouble the *gaaram* and cause him or her to disturb their kinsmen, no matter how much time has passed.

My father's mother. He didn't perform the death rituals of his mother properly. It went some years, forty years. He was sick. His head was dizzy. He went to a healer. "The disease came from the shadow of your mother. You didn't cut the fore hair of your mother. You didn't slaughter her cow". We had to make a new grave. Slaughter, take the fatty part of the stomach and throw. He opened up his *shurte*, he cut his hair. The cow was killed. This was it. (Nanok, 1997)

Sloppy death rituals may be the main cause of *gaaram* disturbance, but any other ritual not performed correctly may cause an ancestor to intervene. In fact, any infringement of tradition or custom may cause them to become involved, so in some ways their authority is even greater than that of the elders:

The wife of Lokwabus's brother died. He remained alone and brought his children under the household of his older brother. His brother became ill. It began at his legs and went up higher. His body became paralysed. The healer came by and said that it was the shadow of the deceased wife. She wanted (to kill) him because he took her household (away). The family performed the bleeding ritual. After that, Lokwabus's brother was cured. (Lokwasep, 1996)

Even the smallest of mistakes may lead to the anger of an ancestor, like in the next example, when a father gave his own name to his brother's son.

The son of my father's younger brother got the same name as my father. Because my uncle was impotent, my father slept with my aunt. So the child got the name of the real father. Therefore, the shadow of my grandfather became angry and the child died. (N.N.)

The fact that the *gaaram* are such fierce guardians of custom explains, to a certain extent, why many Daasanech are very reluctant to give up certain traditions. Especially nowadays when more and more children attend school and become acquainted with the Amharic lifestyle, misfortune is often explained through ancestral disapproval. These changes have provoked lively discussions in the community²⁹ where the two, large floods of 2006 and 2007, the war with the Turkana as well as the lack of rain are believed to have been a consequence of the failure to keep up with tradition.³⁰ Such reasoning is difficult to negate and it demonstrates that communal misfortune and ritual or social blunders are strongly linked in the Daasanech mind. A loss of tradition will lead to the loss of social cohesion in its traditional form.

²⁹ I wrote with regards to this issue an article, cfr. Houtteman, 2010

³⁰ Amongst others, the main reason for the current communal deterioration is to be found in the conflict between the two main sub-generations of Fathers.

It is not just ill treatment or a neglect of tradition that causes ancestral intervention, they may also decide to act if disturbed by the general behaviour of their descendents.

When brothers or households are continuously quarrelling about the cattle, the deceased father of these brothers or households dislikes this. He comes back and curses. That dead body, to whom you offer tobacco asks: "Why do you keep on quarrelling?" He is angry about that and causes problems.(Boote, 1996)

For instance, greed, one of the main causes of *kaabana* curses, may also trigger the anger of the ancestors:

Anakyericho's brother's son died. He went to raid and brought back animals. Coming back, his brother's brothers asked him for some animals and he quarrelled with them (refusing to share). His (deceased) father disliked that. The brother's son died. (Loya, 1996)

Another reason why *gaaram* may intervene is that the living are unable to let go of their beloved one. It is said that when the memory of a deceased member of family turns to sadness, his or her spirit will not be able to find rest and will ultimately take possession of the mourner. It is only permissible to cry over the dead until the grave is filled in. After that, although mourning is still allowed, when somebody cries, others say: "Be careful, when you keep crying, his shadow will come". The period of mourning when ornaments are discarded and no oil may be smeared on the body is considered especially dangerous. During this time, people should not speak about the dead and they should certainly not mention their name. If they do, they should say that he is sleeping or sick. Using the deceased's name might "call him up". Then people reply: "Hush, let him sleep, don't use his name".

Wandering

During my fieldwork, a special case of *gaaram* possession, touched upon above, took my attention. An Elele boy, whose father I knew quite well, was lost for several weeks just as I was starting to investigate the *gaaram*. People were just about to give up the search when somebody found him lying in the bush near the river. Upon his discovery, he was bewildered and emaciated. He told his family that he did not remember what happened. A diviner was called in to read entrails. The entrails showed that the boy's deceased grandfather had taken him to the land of the ancestors. The reason for his taking the child was the constant quarrelling of his sons. His eldest son, the child's father, received the blame, which indicates that it was his responsibility to resolve the conflict. During the repentance ritual, a black sheep was killed along the riverside and left behind as food for the grandfather. The boy fully recovered.

This may seem like a remarkable event but I heard similar stories later. It turned out that such disappearances are quite common among young men and adolescents. In one of my interviews, a woman alluded to this kind of abduction:

Somebody who did not witness the death of his mother, somebody who did not perform the rituals for her, the *gaaram* (of the mother) is like wind. She may take somebody to the forest and make him disappear. People will say: "Where is our son?" They pour tobacco on the ground. They look but don't find. At the end, he returns home. "Look, there is our lost son". They kill an animal and pour the blood. They sing the circumcision songs and bring him home. (Nakhan, 1996)

To be taken to the land of the *gaaram* can be understood both metaphorically and literally. In the Akudungule case described above, the boy said that he had survived by eating flowers, and others mention drinking goat's milk. Whether these are things they remember doing, or whether flowers and goats are simply part of the landscape in this other land, is not clear. Perhaps these recollections are a mixture of reality and expectation.

The journey is often described in terms of being taken by strangers with long noses and long hair. They usually have to cross a river before they enter in a kind of underworld. This world is similar to the normal world, with cattle and everything, but there is no sun and food is different, milk and meat are always full of sand and people eat flowers.

It is possible that this phenomenon can be explained by examining the state of mind of the lost individual, or runaway, as the case may be. These disappearances are quite likely the result of extreme social pressures. People unable to cope any longer with the strain of constant, social interference may at one time or another go "crazy" (*sigire faane*) in a culturally accepted way. They wander around in confusion and manage to survive somehow until found by their kin and welcomed home, their internal tensions ostensibly resolved – at least for a time.

Sigire and aryaan

Sigire is used to signify any kind of odd behaviour where it appears that "people do not know what they are doing". Often, instances of *sigire* are linked with the ancestors. Some people are born that way, others get it through accidents or after emotional stress. It is said that only the last category can actually be healed. The crazy people I met were always cared for by their family. They have their own hut and food is cooked and given to them. Their hut lacks firestones, because of the danger of burning themselves.

One particular kind of mental disorder is called *aryaan*. Although it is more common among the Arbore, some Daasanech women suffer from it as well and men but rarely. I witnessed a case involving a woman who was originally from Arbore. Somebody with

aryaan starts to speak in tongues as if possessed by an evil spirit. I was told that the disease especially occurs during cold weather. It is also associated with the ancestors, because “*Gaaram* come with the wind”. *Aryaan* is considered contagious. Therefore, people should abstain from looking at such a patient and some people even refuse to eat or drink from the same calabash as a sufferer, fearful that they could catch the disease.

5.2.3 Evil eye (*il*) and the evil tongue (*erbo*)

5.2.3.1 Evil eye

A third cause of human-induced sickness could be labeled the “evil eye”, although in the Daasanech language, it is just called “eye” (*il*). Similarly to other cultures where the evil eye occurs, it’s the result of envy. A gaze full of envy or of jealousy may infect the recipient. Among the Daasanech, *il* develops into a substance or even a creature. It “enters” the body and it “grows” there, until it causes pain. The pain is usually located in and beneath the stomach. Heavy diarrhoea or constipation are typical symptoms, as it obstructs the digestive system.

Eye is some kind of envy (*henaaf*) or jealousy (*gachalte*). When you eat the fatty parts of food and somebody else sees it, you can become sick. You eat yourself, but you don’t invite him. “Why doesn’t he invite me?” he thinks. You become sick. This is Eye. (Boote, 1996)

Unlike with curses, those who cause *il* are often complete strangers to the victim. They may be foreigners passing by. Not everybody possesses evil eye. My investigation into the matter led to discussions amongst my collaborators about who had it and who not. *Nyerim* usually claimed to be free of it but non-*nyerim* sometimes claim that it is actually the *nyerim* who have the strongest “eye”. In fact, no one knows for sure who has it and who doesn’t. However, respondents agreed that the ability is inherited through the father or mother: “When you marry a girl with *il*, you may bring it into your own family”. Furthermore, the Dassanech do not consider the evil eye to be *muoro* (magic), but something entirely different. As such, they do not condemn the person who caused the harm since those who carry it often do not know it themselves.

Mainly, things that make others jealous, like eating nice food, wearing pretty ornaments, being pregnant or having small children can trigger the evil eye. It may be caused by the sight of full breasts or just looking at the baby, and subsequently lead to gastro-intestinal infections and the premature death of weaning babies or toddlers. Among pregnant women, it may lead to spontaneous abortions and to stillbirth. Food is also a very common trigger, especially fatty meat, as the following example demonstrates:

During 'dimi a stranger came to sit next to Liwan while he was eating. The man looked at him. He had envy (*gachalte*). The next morning, Liwan became sick. The moment he chewed and swallowed the meat, it didn't digest. It stayed and grew. Spit was coming out of his mouth and he started vomiting. The thing itself didn't come out. It stayed around the *tomo* and grew. It became hard and round, like a stone.³¹ (Lokwasep, 1996)

People can prevent the evil eye in several ways. Mothers always cover their belly, their breasts or their child against envious gazes with a cape made of a dark coloured hide (*sara*). Toddlers who are too big to be covered in this fashion receive amulets around their arms and neck. These amulets often contain cowry shells and special (magical) wood called 'guor *nyerimo* or *nyerich*. Small pieces of this wood are also plaited in the hair during 'dimi or whenever a girl or women is adorned in a way which may cause envy. A third way to protect against *il* is the use of black soot (*nas*). This is used to cover the faces of the 'dimi girls and the baldhead of freshly shaved women upon their first pregnancy.

5.2.3.2 The evil tongue

Beside the evil eye, the Daasanech also have *erbo*. *Erbo* is the plural of *ere* (tongue) and refers to a disease caused by speech. "It is just the way you talk about somebody which makes him sick". *Erbo* is also believed to be a creature inside the body, but unlike *il*, which is only resides in the gut, *erbo* moves around under the skin, where it itches, "as if a spider is walking under your skin". *Erbo* is also associated with envy, and like the evil eye is not considered a curse.

When I say "you look strong". When I say "you are beautiful" ... or when I say "look at him, he is exactly like his father". When I see you eat and I say "he was eating very fatty food", this may cause *erbo*. It is envy. (Boote, 1996)

Like beauty, food is especially prone to attracting *erbo* and like the evil eye it seems to be associated with jealousy. When somebody compares himself with somebody else who is better or prettier, *erbo* may happen.

The one who walks fast, who sings nicely, who dances nicely. The people will talk about him. These talks affect the body. Once *erbo* enters, he cannot dance, sing or walk fast. All the joints are painful and it itches all over the body. (N.N.,1996)

³¹ The *tomo* is an area just above the navel where the *sidha* is easily felt, just like the *daadich* (fontanel) and *kidicho* (plexus).

The evil tongue can also occur with gossip (*heengeen* or *hem*). Speaking about somebody else may create something, which is also called *erbo*, inside the body of the person spoken about. I heard a story about a person who was talked about so much that he became sick. This *erbo* is also said to move around inside the body, like a spider, causing the victim to itch:

Erbo is like a spider inside your body. It happens when people talk bad about you. It happens when people are jealous. It tickles everywhere. It sucks the blood out of your veins. It comes towards your ears, your neck and your shoulders. When *erbo* is inside, you cannot speak anymore, you cannot sing anymore, you cannot dance anymore. (Boote, 1996)

5.2.4 *Muoro*

Muoro is difficult to translate because it has different, interrelated meanings. It is tempting to translate this term as “magical power” but *muoro* is more than that. Primarily, the term *muor* refers to a leopard and the word is also used for the skin of this animals, which is worn by the ‘*dimi* man and by the generation of Nyitaabus men when they are circumcised. That *muor* associates the one who carries it with the characteristics of that animal.

Secondly, the word *muor* refers to the fat surrounding the stomach. As discussed above, there are several occasions on which the fatty part of the stomach of a sacrificed animal was cut into thongs and laid around the neck as a strong blessing. This is called *muorijn*, which means to connect, to strengthen or to make fat. The association of *muoro* with fat, prosperity and satisfaction is clear but with the notions *muor kidhiet* and *maa muor’guo*, discussed below, it has a destructive connotation.

Used as *maa muoro* (a *muoro* person), *muoro* refers to a man who is able to divine.³² He has the ability to predict the future and to diagnose problems. A *maa muoro* is different from a *maa nyerim* and he may or may not belong to the *nyerim* clans. The ability to heal and to curse, which is usually called *nyerim*, is also called “their *muoro*”. Hence *muor* is also synonymous with *nyerim* at times.

When people speak about *muor kidhiet*, they mean substances or objects used for cursing enemies. These objects are placed in the direction of the enemies and it is believed that they can stop them and make them suffer or die. I was told that Turnyerim use a *fudeen*, a sharp stick, which they place trough the anus or the mouth of a dog killed for that purpose. The dog is then thrown with its head in the direction of the enemies.

³² Note that the word *emoron*, which both the Nyangatom and Turkana use for diviner, has the same root.

Fargaaro, in contrast, put red mud on the horn of an antelope (*lollich*). The horn is put in the ground in the direction of the enemies. Both statements are unequivocal: enemies who pass will be killed and speared like animals.

A *maa muor'guo* (a person “having” *muoro*) is somebody whom people are afraid of. In Western terminology, he would probably be called a witch or a black magician - someone who uses unusual methods for personal gain. A *maa muor'guo* needs to collect a powder made out of marrow and crushed bones (some say it is also made from the brain or *kantaach*) of deceased Daasanech. Therefore, he digs up corpses and carries them whole or in part back to his house. People are very clear about the purpose of such deeds.

It is their *nyerim*. When they use it, they will get many children and animals. They have to do it, because it is their tradition (*hugum*). If they don't, they will not have any children and their cattle will die. (Lokwasep, 1996)

Most probably, a *maa muor'guo* is after the magical properties ascribed to the marrow and brain.³³ The fact that they prefer the bodies and bones of younger people probably has to do with the belief that youth denotes more life force. He grinds these substances into a powder or ointment called *nyakeek*.³⁴ There are several ways in which *nyakeek* is used. I was able to interview one *maa muor'guo* who told me that his “work” was only to prepare the powder and that he used it in the dung fire and the fires inside the hut. He told me that the cattle, his wife and children inhale the smoke and that this brings prosperity and fertility.



Image 5.1. Left foot of this corpse cut off by *maa muor'guo*

³³ Marrow and brain are considered the same substance, most probably because their taste is similar. Both are called *dijn*.

³⁴ *Nyakeek* is also the term used for an amulet. I was told that *nyakeek* is only effective if the user sacrifices something else for it. In the case of a *maa muor'guo*'s *nyakeek*, the sacrifice is the deceased.

However, other people told me that *gaal muor'guo* also use this powder to poison and kill other tribesmen, by preference rich people or people with a special relation to Waag - like freshly circumcised men or *'dimi* people. In order to strike at somebody, they put it under their nails and then touch the intended victim on the head or put it in their drink. When this happens, that person will be paralysed and die shortly after being contaminated. The death is said to result in new life for the *maa muor'guo* and his family.

At first, I was inclined to discount the story of this grave robbing practice as one used to scare children. That is, until the day I witnessed the removal of a boy's corpse from the village where I lived. The body was found lying in front of his parents' homestead, with its right foot missing. On another occasion, I observed how somebody refused to drink from his bowl any further because he suspected that a *maa muor'guo* was in the vicinity. Clearly, even adults were terrified of such practices.

Strangely enough, people seem to be aware of who is a *maa muor'guo*. Traditionally, they belong to the Kamgaye house of the Edhe section as well as to one of the houses of Shadech from Gaalbur. In daily life, people may have friendly contact with them, and nobody seems to fear them. At night, however, people are careful not to linger near their compounds, nor to drink or eat with them. The main feature of this *maa muor'guo* culture is that it follows the same "zero sum game" principle observed in raiding: the gain made good only by another man's loss.

There are many stories told about *maa muor'guo*. When somebody dies, the dung beetle (*lokolon*), which is associated with rebirth, visits the *maa muor'guo* and calls him. When the *maa muor'guo* sees *lokonyolo*, he pours milk on top of it and follows it towards the grave. Once he reaches the spot, he jumps up and down on it and gains strength. He prefers to go when the moon and the river is full ("when everything is full and plenty"). The *maa muor'guo* raises a dust cloud and shouts "like a bull" and engages in other fearsome activities. When the corpse is taken out of the grave, he carries it on his shoulder to the bush. The smell doesn't disturb him. There, he rubs its flesh on his body and takes the limbs with him. After they are dried, he crushes them and puts them in a box for later use.

What follows is a children's song about a *maa muor'guo* carrying a corpse:

Oh Nyelem, Nyelem
Oh Lore, Lore
Don't stand beside me. I'm carrying a heavy thing. Dum - bash - tash
Don't stand beside me. I'm carrying a heavy thing.

5.2.5 *Adaab* and *nyogich* and their relation to misfortune

So far, I have described those causes of human affliction that can clearly be associated with a person, be it a living family-member, an age-mate, a *maa nyerim*, a *jelaba* or an ancestor. Alongside these external causes of misfortune, the Daasanech have two concepts that seem to refer to a negative state of moral being, which can be applied to both an individual and a family. These concepts touch upon the core of Daasanech morality. The first notion is called *adaab*, the second *nyogich*, and although they seem closely related, they are used in different contexts. In his dictionary, Mauro Tosco translated *adaab* simply as “crime” and *nyogich* as “sin” (Tosco, 2001). As with *muoro*, they are difficult to translate since both concepts are much broader in usage than either “crime” or “sin” suggests.

Misbehaviour in Daasanech is simply called “bad” (*deen* or *diew*, pl. *dediew*). To “be bad” (*dedeen*) may refer to any form of antisocial behaviour: lying, stealing, greed, lack of hospitality, etc. Among these, some forms of “badness” are clearly considered *adaab*, while others are not. As far as I was able to understand, *adaab* is used for a breach or intrusion of a broad range of cultural taboos (including *nyogich*), which may have severe consequences for the offender. This misbehaviour may invoke a curse or cause ancestral ire. The most frequent example of *adaab* was a lack of respect towards elders.

Don't mistreat your father. When you see an old man of Gabarich,³⁵ treat him well.
When he walks on three legs, when he walks slowly, cool down and walk slowly.
Don't disturb him. When you pass him quickly, he will stand and ask himself:
“Who passed me as a hurricane?” The man may resent you, like a kind of evil eye.
You committed *adaab*. (Ilotuk, 1996)

Cursing and *adaab* are somehow related. Even if the old man didn't curse you, or couldn't because he was not related to you in any sense, you still did something bad. This isn't exactly a “crime” but nevertheless, it is something that you shouldn't do.

If I may have stolen (*burale*) (had an affair with) somebody's wife and they ask me and I say: “No. It is not me”. But it is you. This is *adaab*. Or if I hit a *maa jelaba* when they go. All these curses will remain with you. (Ilotuk, 1996)

Here, a collaborator makes a direct link between a curse and *adaab*. One can make a mistake by lying, or hitting a respected man, and something negative will “remain” with you. Here, it also seems that lying about committing such an act is considered worse

³⁵ Gabarich is a name of praise used among the Daasanech (especially among Shir).

than the act itself, although adultery is considered *adaab* in its own right. The difference between '*dor* and *adaab*, was explained as follows:

'*Dor* happens to you. *Adaab* are the bad things you committed. You hit a man. You carry blood on your hands. You have *adaab*. (Lokwasep, 1996)

Adaab is the sum of all the bad things you "committed" (*adaab na*) and at the same time, *adaab* is something you "have" (*maalla adaab gaa*). In a similar sense '*dor* not only refers to the act of cursing but also to the curse as such. Somebody with *adaab* committed mistakes against his fellow tribesmen. People may say that his Waago is weakened or spoiled because of it and as a result he and his direct kinsmen became more vulnerable to *feen*. When people commit mistakes, the young men will propose to punish him through beating, but the elders will say: "Leave him, let him carry his *feen*. He will die by himself". Daasanech may say: "a person has *feen*" (*maala feeno gaa*) or "*feen* has entered into this man (*maala feeno hi hiile*).

Feen happens when you have *adaab*. The horns of the bulls come closer and closer until they reach each other. Then you are finished (*kuun beye*). (Lokwasep, 1996)

The image employed here shows that one can accumulate *adaab* until it reaches a tipping point and provokes *feen*, which is a state of moral "death". At this stage, a person is considered as socially and morally "lost". He continues to break rules and taboos without any sense of conscience.

At this stage a person is deemed to be out of control of his moral life. I would see *feen*, then, as a propensity, a tendency or an acquired condition (because of the accumulated *adaab* that inheres and dwells in a person) that propels a person to engage in more acts of *adaab* (*nyogich* included). In another sense, *feen* is also used for someone who has '*dor* and is going through its consequences. Hence *muu feen 'gaa* ("he has *feen*") is similar to *muu 'dor gaa*. ("he has '*dor*"). (Jackson Achinya, 2011)

Feen is a regrettable state. It makes a person vulnerable to misfortune. Indeed, in the Daasanech worldview, no accident happens "accidentally". There is always an underlying reason. When something harmful unexpectedly overcomes you, like death by a stray bullet or from a stroke, this may be caused by *feen*. Also suicide is seen as *feen*, as a condition where your own thinking curses you. The "ideal" examples of *feen* are death by lightning or snakebite, because both are directly associated with Waag. Underneath the notion of *feen* lays the conviction that sooner or later, justice will be done and the wrongdoer will suffer for his deeds. This is apparent in the following example:

You know Yerikar? He was a Randal. He died near that tree over there. The horns of the bulls came together. When he died, he made the sound of a sheep. He died just over there. Everything he had done came to an end. He died far away from his family. They took him away, just like a dog. (Kwaanya,1997)

Yerikar was known as a difficult man. When he suddenly died for no apparent reason, it came as no surprise to his associates: he had made so many mistakes that *feen* took him. The fact that he died far away from his family only confirmed that *adaab* was at the origin. Dying of *feen* is considered a bad death.

This close association between *adaab* and *feen* reveals that justice reigns in the world. Whatever one may do, and even if such misbehaviour may offer some short-term benefit, in the long run it will turn against the transgressor. This view contributes to a somewhat accepting attitude among the Daasanech:

When he steals today, we forget. When he steals again tomorrow, we will beat him and we will force him to give an ox. When he is beaten and he steals again, he will be cursed. When he goes to the wife of his uncle and beats her, this is *adaab*. Now, we will not beat him anymore. We believe that he will die spontaneously. This is *feen*. We will not beat him anymore, because if we beat him and he dies, we will have *nyogich*. Even if the young ones want to beat him, the elders will say: "Leave him. Let him carry his *feen*. He will die anyway".(Kwaanya, 1997)

This response is interesting because it neatly encapsulates the different forms of social control in the Daasanech community. When somebody commits a mistake, others members may close an eye because mistakes are human. However, when misbehaviour persists others may react by punishing the transgressor. First, this may take the form of a beating, and later, a cursing. In the end though, the person is left on their own again because people know that chickens come home to roost and that ultimately, the justice which is inherent in the world and which comes from Waag will prevail: "Ultimately, Waag will take back his sheep".

Because this way of looking at the world also touches upon the philosophical topic of theodicy, I asked my collaborators why some bad people live a long and prosperous life, while good people are taken by Waag when they're young. Respondents agreed that this happens, and explained that the *adaab* of the bad one remains and shall sooner or later affect his offspring, while the unlucky fate of the good man is most probably caused by the *adaab* of his forefathers.

Nyogich is related to *adaab*, but is often used in a more specific sense, namely that of murder. When one murders a fellow tribesman, one gets *nyogich*.³⁶ Because of this, one simultaneously enters a state of pollution. *Nyogich* is related to disgust. It is considered very contagious and therefore no one should eat with a murderer nor touch him physically until they are ritually cleansed.³⁷ Somebody with *nyogich* will die sooner or later. “His belly will swell and swell until it bursts”.

Killing somebody of another tribe is not considered *nyogich* unless he belongs to one of the three groups (the Karo, Arbore or Toposa) that are considered “one” with the Daasanech.³⁸ But – as we will see below – killing a “proper” enemy is also considered dangerous to a certain degree since human blood has been shed. Therefore, the killer still has to go through a purification ritual. When asked why slaying an enemy is a polluting act, it was explained that the sorrow of the victim’s relatives can weaken the killer.³⁹ Therefore, he should spill some of his own blood in compensation for the victim’s blood.⁴⁰

In a broader sense, the term *nyogich* also means violating cultural taboos and in this way, it’s meaning is pretty similar to *adaab*. Although I had the impression that *nyogich* is often used for heavy intrusions. An obvious example of this is “breaking the peace” (*shimit’ muur*). Breaking the peace leads to revenge and casualties among one’s own group. In such a case, transgressors may face heavy punishment, ranging from the confiscation of all their animals to being beaten to death.

Other types of *nyogich* I heard about during fieldwork often had to do with taboos around hair, especially the cutting of hair. Because hair is an extension of the self and of those close to you when it was grown, hair can only be handled by those who have the right to do so. One case that caused a lot of commotion happened in Nyimemeri. A child was born before the mother had performed *galim* and hence before “the hair of her father” was shaved. The rule is that a girl shouldn’t have intercourse before marriage because she might give birth before her father is able to cut her hair. The parents of a girl are not allowed to shave the hair of their own daughter when she is pregnant. Her hair has to be shaved by her mother-in-law or by her husband’s first wife.

³⁶ Murder is not uncommon among the Daasanech. During my fieldwork, I heard about five such cases and one suicide. I knew three of the victims personally. Two, who I knew quite well, were killed by other Daasanech. Two other people I knew committed murder and I was also acquainted with the brother of another. Some of these homicides were the result of quarrels, in others the victim was mistaken for a Turkana.

³⁷ Of those I knew who committed a murder, only one went through the cleansing process, the other escaped and was later killed and one was put in jail before he was able to be purified.

³⁸ I heard of a man who died from a swollen stomach because he had killed a Toposa warrior during the war of Nyibilyanga.

³⁹ One collaborator told me that even killing an enemy is *nyogich*, although not “bad” *nyogich*.

⁴⁰ Both rituals will be explained in detail below.

Another case involved a girl who menstruated before she was circumcised. Because of this, the girl brought *nyogich* upon her family. Marriage with somebody of another *dolo* is also considered a very bad *nyogich*. I was told the next story about this situation:

When a man pregnant his father's wife, when a man pregnant his uncle's wife, the child born will rule and all others will die. A female sheep is thight on the back *noono*, the male sheep is thight on the male *noono*. The man should tie a male sheep at the back *noono* and a female sheep at the women's *noono*. The male sheep is taken out from the hut through the back and is brought to a place where no food prints of Daasanech cattle is found. There, it is slaughtered and left for the vultures. The man comes back, takes the female sheep and ills it and washes the woman he pregnanted with the blood. After that, the child will die and the woman will abort. (N.N., 1996)

Other forms of *nyogich* occur when a family member didn't or improperly performed the necessary rites - especially 'dimi, circumcision or parents' funerals. Also, incorrect animal handling can cause *nyogich*, such as castrating a bull without the permission of a *jelaba*. Improperly butchered meat, such as an ox for boiling that hasn't had its *tuo* removed by a *jelaba*, is also *nyogich*. All these forms of *nyogich* follow their own logic, having to do with the role of the *jelaba* in the sphere of sexuality and with the way the Daasanech perceive the body and the cycle of fertility. However, these cultural aspects - very intriguing as they are - are far from explicit at this stage of research and will need further investigation.

But in general, we can say that all types of *nyogich* may endanger the fertility of women or lead to severe drought, thus obstructing the flow of life in the community. Indeed, Daasanech believe that violating the basic taboos is not only harmful for those who do so, but for the group as a whole. Therefore, *nyogich* should be cleansed properly and if somebody fails or refuses to do so, the group may decide to kill him. I commented on such a case elsewhere, when I described how Losseya, a Daasanech man who escaped to the Turkana after he murdered a Daasanech, was caught killed by a group of people (Houtteman, 2010). The process of communal killing itself will be described below.

Even after *nyogich* is removed by ritual cleansing, people say that *adaab* remains and may cause harm to future generations. *Adaab* is said to remain in the family for three generations, which means that any offspring may suffer from the moral incursions of his forefathers. As a consequence, Daasanech take the past into account when somebody is up for election to a leadership position. They will look for a family without *daafo* (wounds) and without *nyogich* or *adaab*.

Pollution is also the centre of concern in a ritual held after a person returns home from a far away place. Then, the mother sprinkles *erer* (a mixture of milk and water) over the body of her son. Afterwards, a goat is killed and the traveller must pass under its blood. A thong is cut from the animal's hide and he wears it around his arm or neck.

5.3 Dealing with personal affliction

5.3.1 Reading and divining

When it becomes apparent that there is something bad is occurring and the family starts to fear for the life of a patient or when somebody remains barren and all the herbal remedies have failed, a reader or healer is called. This may be a *maa gil onyi* (“the one who know by hands”) or a *maa muoro* (diviner).

Gaal gil onyi are usually women who are also specialists in midwifery. They investigate the body by touch and through kneading (*shala*). *Gil onyi* learn their skills from early youth onwards. They may learn the craft from their mother or grandmother and watched them during their work. Slowly, they gain experience through practicing skills on friends and neighbours:

Waag has given. I was born with it. My grandmother had it too. I learned it from her. When my mother stopped the breast, she gave me to my grandmother. When my grandmother went, I went with her. I saw. Always, I went with her. Always I saw. When I became bigger, she blessed me with saliva. “Take this knowledge. It can help you”. As a girl, I took small children outside the village to practice. I felt, I felt. I manipulated, even barren females. I feel (*kimi san*) baash. Even a person who has ‘dor, I feel the needle (*hirich*): “Somebody cursed you”. A name appears. I tell which relation. Each of us has two sides, left and right. If it is a female, if she is married, there is this path: if it is on the left side, it is the side of her father (of the family she left behind). If it is on the right side, it is the side of the new family. If it is a male, the right side is from his father, his brother, his father’s brother. The left side is from the mother’s side and the uncle of the mother. The back is the curse of the *kaabana*. The navel is the curse of the parents, as is the whole front from the navel to the neck (*onyir lotuglule*). (Herre Koriye, 2009)

A *maa gil onyi* feels the pulse and the painful area (*hirich*), searching for internal obstructions in the bodily flows, or areas hot to the touch. During her investigation, she may question the patient or others present and suggest some possible social tensions that could have caused the pain. By doing so, she uses the body as a map for the patient’s social environment. In general, pain or obstructions on the right side of the body refer to agnatic ties while those on left side are from affinal ties.⁴¹ This right-left

⁴¹ It is tempting to draw a “map” of the body denoting a person’s different social relationships, but I don’t know if how detailed this could be, or if this general lay out is the extent of the discriminations made. One of the women I interviewed on the subject provided me with more details: the elder those who cursed, the

dichotomy reflects the spatial division inside the hut and in the public sphere, the patri- and the matri-side. Problems at the legs and the area around the neck – places where men use their headrests – are usually related to age-mates, while pain in the head and problems in the lower back point towards ancestors.

Guided by this general knowledge and her own intuitions, the healer guides the patient into social introspection and makes him recall past events. Feeling and kneading work together alongside dialogue with both the patient and onlookers in an intriguing investigatory process. This goes on until the *maa gil onyi*, with the support of the group around her, constructs a narrative regarding possible reasons why the patient is afflicted. If her hypothesis is convincing, she may propose a treatment. The result is often a combination of herbal medicines and reconciliation with a family member or an ancestor's spirit.

Diviners are often men. They are called *gaal muoro*. Their ability to divine is also considered to be a gift from Waag. As stated above, *muoro* is not clan-specific like *nyerimo* is, and any clan or house may have diviners. Just like among the *gil onyi*, the ability to divine moves from parent to child, from father to son. Children who have inherited their clan specific potential ability from their father, need to practice and observe their father or father's brother at work until they themselves have developed their skill well enough to start using it for public purposes. I came across four different types of diviners among the Daasanech.

The most respected diviner makes use of entrails, or extispicy. That one is called *maa an gere* ("man of the animal stomach"). When a client wants advice, he should bring a sheep or a goat from his own corral. This is very important because and denotes a spiritual link between domestic animal and the owner. In order to transfer the information to the animal, the night before, the animal has to be smeared with milk from the bowl the client usually drinks from.

After the animal is brought, the owner explains his problem. Then, the animal is slaughtered and the entrails are spread out on the backside of a calabash. When the entrails are laid down, the diviner takes his place in front of them and reads what they say. The client and any others who came with him join him in a semicircle.

higher the place where the pain (*hirich*) was felt. The curse of women was felt around the navel or the breasts. The left-right dichotomy was observed by all.



Image 5.2. Reading the entrails

During the investigation, the extispex looks for different black and white spots and follows the course of the blood vessels in the intestines. The entire gut functions as a kind of map to the client's relationships.⁴² Like the *maa gil onyi*, the entrail reader verbalises what he sees and suggests possibilities. This process, which is well described by Abbink among the Me'en (Abbink, 1996), goes on until one or more acceptable explanations are suggested. When participants agree, the diviner advises and suggests which measures should be taken in order to heal and to restore the unresolved social tensions that caused the problem.

The *gaal mee hi rafanana*, "those with the sleeping head" or "dreamers", are the second type of diviner, and again, are all male. These persons receive messages through their dreams (*amadh*), which are channelled through "creatures with white eyes" (*gaal in edha*). These are ancient ancestors who are considered to be "messengers from Waag". Messages may be brought unintentionally, informing the dreamer about a ritual or a war or warning him about enemy movements or about future disasters.

When it comes to human affliction, the dreamer has to attend to a specific case or a question from a client. In this case, he has to prepare himself in order to get the right answers. Therefore, he should fast for several days, or he may take alcohol, to make the dreams more vivid and eloquent. There is no trance involved in this process. The man simply observes his own dreams. These diviners are more often consulted by elders than by young people. They deal especially with heavy and persistent cases, like those involving ancestors or with *adaab* dating back many generations.⁴³

⁴² An interesting film on extispicy is "Father of goats, sacrificed and divination among the Hamar of Southern Ethiopia" (1996).

⁴³ These matters are considered too difficult for a *maa gil onyi*.

People come from Waag (*gaal waagiet*) and tell me in the night. They tell me. The people believe. They believe. “You didn’t perform this or that (ritual)”. I have the power to see. I see these people from Waag. They have white clothes. They tell me everything. Also things to come. Everybody has his own way. Those who dislike don’t follow my way.

My grandfather gave me this (ability). This power comes from Waag. One day, I don’t drink. Five days, I abstain from food. Dreams come easily. I’m maa Turnyerim. My grandfather came from Ger. There he had this power. For every mistake, there is a way. My grandfather gave them to me. His name was Loyatum. He gave his way to Iyerikar (a man who didn’t have daughters but had to perform the ‘*dimi*). Iyerikar had to bring a young boy, make a skirt and let him perromt his ‘*dimi*. (Longacha, 1996)

A much quicker way to divine involves throwing sandals (*koi doŋ*) or necklaces (*muurin doŋ*). Men throw sandals, and it comes from the Nyangatom, while throwing necklaces is said to be typical for the Arbore, where women also do it. As far as I was able to ascertain, both methods are used in minor cases, for example when items or animals are lost. Sometimes, however, throwing sandals or necklaces are also used for problems involving curses or ancestors. Both methods require knowledge of the basic patterns and possible groupings.



Image 5.3. Sandal thrower in action

During fieldwork, I once engaged in a sandal divination. I had to bring the dung of a donkey. The sandal thrower took the dung and threw it on the ground, while calling out

the names of his ancestors. I sat in front of him and he threw the sandals several times in a row. In general, I had the impression that positive signs related to sandals laying next to each other in the same direction, while negative signs derived from sandals which fell upon each other and formed crosses, but presumably there are other patterns looked for as well.

Beside these three ways to divine, some people can predict the future through the interpreting the position of stars or by augury. I never met a specialist in either field, although ordinary people also speculate a great deal about the stars. Furthermore, many people attach importance to the appearance of specific birds, like eagles, vultures, owls or doves or to the appearance of certain animals like frog, fox and. I also ran across a man among the Randal who specialized in colours. He was consulted about which colours of oxen should be speared during certain rituals. That person was called a *maa aŋ ko dhagasaane* (“a man looking at the cattle”).

5.3.2 Healing (*biisjn*)

5.3.2.1 Moving into mercy (*makan himi*)

When somebody is cursed, the first step may include healing through massage, sucking out the bad blood, cupping, inducing diarrhoea or use of plant remedies. After this, the reason for the curse itself must be removed. To that effect, the one who cursed is called to remove the curse through blessing. This practice is known as *abaraaŋ 'gieŋ* (“going for saliva”) or *waag 'gieŋ* (“going for Waag”). I witnessed a case in which a man was cursed by his age mates and later blessed by them with *erer*. His wife mixed milk with water in a big *bangach* (milk container) and each age-mate in turn smeared his body with it while he sat down in their midst. In order to receive that blessing, the victim of the curse had to confess his mistake. This process is called *makan himi* or simply *makan* and may sound like this:

Yu makano ko 'gaa jiye. Ye duje. Yerik. Yaa hi deeney. (I came to apologize. Save me. Heal me. I did bad). (Lokono, 1996)

After that, the one who invoked the curse blesses the victim with saliva or coffee (*abaraaŋ laaŋ*) and all those involved sit down and talk while drinking coffee. One may say for instance:

I'm angry because you're not willing to give that which is mine. Bring these cows, because otherwise, next time, the same case may occur. Then, I will not come back and spit on your child. I came because it is your child that is affected. When it was you, I wouldn't have come to help you. (Mana Yergeleb, 1997)

In this example, there is clear awareness on the part of the curser that his anger caused the curse and that the other should act as he wants. Otherwise, it wouldn't be his child that would be affected next.

The concept of *makan* is a very interesting one. The same term is used for the haven some people may offer when somebody is persecuted by his age-mates. People who can offer *makan* are the *maa uraam*, the *maa farich* or the *maa naane* - that is to say all the important notables of a certain generation. As long as the victim remains in the compound of that man, nobody can beat him.

Nobody is allowed to beat you then. *Maa farich* will say: "Leave him. He already asked *makan*". Then, a meeting will be held to settle the matter in a peaceful way. (Mana Yergeleb, 1997)

Furthermore, the concept of *makan* is used for the spiritual protection that a mother may receive from a *nyerim* family after she has had a few miscarriages. In such cases, certain *nyerim* families who were lucky with their children offer their own hut as a place where an unlucky mother can deliver. This act is also called *makan*.

At first, the use of *makan* in response to a curse appeared confusing because the opposite response seemed indicated in such a situation, namely that the cursor, as the "guilty" one, should apologize - not the victim. Not so among the Daasanech. People are cursed by their father or mother, grandfather or anybody "above" them or otherwise responsible for controlling the recipient's behaviour. Therefore, the victim is at fault. The anger of those who curse is thus a legitimate "punishment". People who are cursed are usually very humble and perhaps feel relieved because they know the source of their affliction. Through *makan*, things might change for the better. Because curses are usually the spontaneous result of legitimate, unresolved social tensions, the victim realizes that he is responsible for what happened to him or to his child. Instead of hate, anger and revenge, he feels embarrassed and hopes that the blessing of the cursor may release him or his child from further harm.

Hence, investigation into the cause of a curse is not a way to assign guilt - as is the case with sorcery in many West-African societies - but rather, it is the first step the healing process. In this fashion, disease serves as a symptom of broken social ties and opens up ways to restore these ties and to alter behaviour. This is clearly a win-win situation: the afflicted person becomes better and the one who cursed has the chance to express his frustration overtly and hope that the other will alter his behaviour or attend to whatever it was that he formerly neglected. Furthermore, the ability to curse sustains the authority of the elders and lessens the chances of open quarrels and physical fighting.

During *makan*, spitting saliva or coffee usually suffices, although in some cases, the process also involves the exchange of *miede* bark (*boort miede*). Small thongs are torn from the bark, which are tied around the wrists of parties involved. Such bark bracelets

are exchanged simultaneously. Once they are tied with a knot, both parties spit on it as a sign of repentance. Afterwards, the thongs remain around the wrists until they fall off.

Finally, when mercy is shown and the curse removed, action should be taken to settle the matter and prevent *verente*, a curse which keeps on returning. This means, for instance, the actual transfer of any cattle required or expected. The following example conveniently shows all three steps involved in lifting a curse:

When I was young, I was cursed by my father's brother. He had no milking cows, no food. There was famine (*kuod*). He came to ask my father: "Give me an ox for a *buul* (meat feast) for me and my family". The day he arrived, my father was absent. He was looking for a lost donkey. I was small, my father's cows walked over me. I had wounds on my belly. First, the *maa gil onyi* was called. She made incisions to remove the bad blood. I was inside the house of my mother. My uncle blessed me. My father gave my uncle a donkey for *buul*. (Guyo, 1996)

The intensity of the curse and the degree of misbehaviour that provoked it may also lead to extra compensation and the victim may be ordered to pay a fee in the form of gifts:

Sometimes, the elders say: "Now, you have mistreated him, you have stolen his belongings or animal. Bring a blanket, bring liquor, bring a milking cow. Then you will be safe". Also this is called *makan*. (Mana Yergeleb, 1997)

This type of *makan* typically occurs among age-mates. Among them, the victim is often asked to sacrifice an animal, which is then used for a bleeding ritual (*an fasiyet*). During this bleeding ritual, the age-mate and his family have to walk under the blood of the sacrificed animal. This ritual is fairly similar to the one used to calm down the ancestors, described below. The main difference is that the thongs made from the animal's hide to remove a curse are worn in front of the neck, while if *gaaram* are involved, the thongs are worn to the back. Another difference is that the goat slaughtered for the age-mates is usually eaten, while the meat of some goats slaughtered to please the *gaaram* is often left for the vultures or hyena's. After the goat is eaten, all bless the patient in return.

5.3.2.2 Removing the *gaaram*

As pointed above, *gaaram* are soothed by the sacrifice of a bleeding goat (*an fasiyet*). Such a ritual should take place during a waxing moon and on an even day, by preference the fourth or eighth day after the new moon.⁴⁴ The ritual starts by pouring tobacco and salt into to the fire in the hut as a way to make contact with the spirit of the deceased. The

⁴⁴ Four and eight are considered perfect numbers and the waxing expresses the positive.

one leading the ritual may talk to the spirit of the ancestor and ask his or her goodwill. He may say: “Father, grandfather, grandmother, show me the good way.

After that, the family of the cursed one brings in a goat, either red or dark coloured. Its throat is cut with a spear, which is blessed four times by an elder of the *nyerim* clans and the animal is held in the air, head towards the east.⁴⁵ Then the victim and his family have to pass four times under the dripping blood. The blood is said to take the “bad” away, towards the soil, to please the ancestors.⁴⁶ The hide is then cut into small thongs of leather (*geyte*), together with the lower part of the legs and the nails (*konfo*). These thongs are first put in the drinking lid (*rodoch*) of a milk container (*bangach*), which is filled with milk from the victim’s cow. After that, the thongs are worn around the head, the breast, the neck and the big toe of the victim.⁴⁷ The fatty part may be thrown into the fire for the smell and the chyme (*uro*) from the rumen (*geraf*) is used to wash the body or sprinkled inside and around the hut.



Image 5.4. *Maa kaabana* cuts the neck of the goat during *an fasiet* ritual

⁴⁵ This was traditionally the job of people from Fargaaro clans, while Turnyerim people held the animal in the air.

⁴⁶ Another explanation is that the blood is an offer for the ancestors, just as milk and tobacco are.

⁴⁷ I was told that these geysam absorb the bad things. In some cases, these thongs are thrown in the forest at the western edge of a village to get rid of the bad. After that, the body is cleaned with water to which the *yerite* cactus was added.

When the anger of an ancestor was caused by neglected rituals or by ritual mistakes, reconciliation also implies that the rituals should be performed and/or repeated in the right way. The next example illustrates this principle:

Kuute's father became very skinny. He felt weak and dizzy. The dream interpreter was invited and he dreamed that the reason of his weakness was the fact that the eldest son didn't shave the hair of his mother when she died. Also his own *shurte* wasn't shaved. In order to heal, I had to build a hut in the same place where the hut of his deceased mother was standing. Coffee was cooked and the family was blessed. Then, Ikuute removed his *shurte* and shaved it. A cow was slaughtered and the blood was collected in a hole inside my hut. After three days, we washed ourselves with mud of the river. (Herek, 1997)

In cases where the ancestor is angry because he or she was mistreated during her life, the healing involves the use of plants like '*guorlugul* and *bierkerech* and the smell of tobacco. People have to wash themselves with the water in which these plants were put.

In severe cases, an entirely black goat is also killed.⁴⁸ The animal is not to be eaten, but left near the river or in the bush for the vultures or hyenas. Nobody else may touch the meat. With this offer, the people who sacrificed the animal now hope that the ancestor is satisfied and leaves his victim in peace. Hence, sacrifices seem to work according to a tit for tat principle. Only when all debts are paid off – no matter how – do the *gaaram* abstain from further harm. The next example clearly demonstrates the reciprocal nature of this relationship:

Anatuno, who was pregnant, became sick because of *gaaram*. A goat was slaughtered and she walked under the blood. The next day, she aborted. The bad left her body together with the foetus. The blood which washed her, made her good again. The foetus took the death of the mother. (Loya, 1996)

The same principle was also observed in an ancient, dramatic ritual where a hungry *gaaram* is deceived by the sacrifice of a donkey.

When the man reading the intestines doesn't see any other way to heal, they (the family) will take another path. A donkey is brought and slaughtered and its head is put inside a cowhide. The sick one is also put inside the cowhide (in order to ready him for burial). They carry him like a dead one. A grave is dug. They place him inside the grave and pour water on top of him. Then somebody of my clan (the Ili) took the sick man from the grave and put the donkey head in it instead. Then they take him back home and wash him with the blood of a goat. (Mana Yergeleb, 1997)

⁴⁸ Previously, this had to be a black sheep. Nowadays, goats are reserved for the *gaaram* and sheep for Waag.

This ritual was performed by members of the Ili section, especially in cases when *gaaram* were about to take the life of their victim. A donkey was used because that animal has the same number of teeth that a man does.⁴⁹

To please the *gaaram*, oxen may be also sacrificed, but – because it is not possible to walk under the body of such a huge animal – the blood is poured inside a hole made next to the hearthstones.⁵⁰ Only part of the meat will be eaten from these slaughtered animals, the rest is left untouched and thrown to the west “as food for the ancestors”. Afterwards, just as in the bleeding ritual, the hide of the sacrificed animal is cut into tiny long thongs. However, in contrast to the bleeding rituals to remove a curse, these thongs are not worn to the front but at the back.

Chaddo

Rituals to do with the *gaaram* often make use of *kuch*, clay from a termite mound. These mounds – which are common in certain areas in the savannah – are perceived as a protrusion from the world of the *gaaram* into the world of the living and hence seem very appropriate for dealing with the ancestors. This *kuch* is used in a special ritual called *chaddo* (“mud”).⁵¹ During this ritual, the *kuch* is heated up in the fire until it turns red. Then, the hot clay is thrown in a calabash filled with water. Aromatic plants like ‘*guor lugul* and the *bierkerech* are added, and for four days in a row the victim has to sniff the steam rising off the calabash while facing east.⁵² Afterwards, the victim is washed with mud of the river and smeared with butter. Then, a bleeding ritual is performed.

Aṅ tolok

Another very dramatic ritual employed to save a life is called *aṅ tolok*. When the *sidha* or *kidicho* at the sternum becomes very weak and the patient is about to die, a sheep is brought. The healer briefly closes off its nose and mouth, preventing the animal from breathing. Then, he places the sheep just before the patient’s mouth and loses his hold. The animal, desperate for oxygen, takes a deep breath. When it has filled its lungs with air and it exhales, that air is then guided into the mouth of the patient. Soon after, the chest of the sheep is opened while the animal is still alive and the heart is removed. The warm heart is then placed onto the patient’s chest. This method is believed to be very

⁴⁹ The killing of a donkey also comes back in the ritual to get cleansed from *nyogich* (see below).

⁵⁰ This is where the father usually pours tobacco, tobacco salt and milk to please the ancestors.

⁵¹ Dung beetles and black crows are also associated with the ancestors.

⁵² I was unable to identify these plants.

efficient because it transmits the life force of the animal (heart and breath) straight to the patient.

Waanyich

Among the neighbouring Hamar, a child whose upper teeth came in before the lower ones is called *mingi* (“polluted”) and by tradition, such a child had to be killed. Among the Daasanech, children who grow their upper teeth first are also considered a dangerous omen. The Daasanech term for this kind of pollution is *waanyich*, a word that is also used for handicapped children. Among the Daasanech, such children are not killed. Instead, a grass hut is made and the mother’s brother (*abuyo*) is called to assist. He takes the child inside the hut and when both are inside, the hut is set on fire. When the grass hut is burning, the mother’s brother then has to run out with the child on his back, saving the child and putting away the *waanyich*. Afterwards, a bleeding ritual is held and everything is settled.

5.3.2.3 Removing the evil eye and the evil tongue

When the healer suspects that the evil eye or the evil tongue is the cause of disease, repentance is seldom possible, because the one causing it is usually a stranger and therefore difficult to trace.⁵³ Both the evil eye – which results in a food embolus – and evil tongue are perceived as living creatures that grow and feed inside the body. Hence, the only way to get rid of these things is to pay someone to physically remove them. This is done in different ways: the evil eye is sucked out while an *erbo* is “knocked out”. When the healer, called *maa gaal ‘gaa bubusatta* (“the one sucking the people”), locates the clotted food inside the stomach of a victim, she – because they are mostly women – sucks the skin at that place until she captures the food or the creature into her own mouth. Afterwards, she spits it out. What is observed is a dark, smelly lump, which is also called *il*. This process may be repeated for four consecutive days.⁵⁴

Because the *erbo* creature is moving too fast to be sucked out, another method is used by the so-called *maa erb shugunua*, always a man. He takes a calabash filled with water and places it on different parts of the body. At the same time, he raps on the calabash with his knuckles. When the calabash is placed on the right spot, the *erbo* leaves the body and enters the water, where it starts to emit a high-pitched sound: “*chiichiichii*”.

⁵³ I came across a case in which a woman was asked to bless someone because she was believed to have infected a young mother with the evil eye.

⁵⁴ During fieldwork, I underwent this process while suffering from abdominal pain. I witnessed how the healer indeed spat a piece of what appeared to be smelly, rotten meat out of her mouth.

The healer then quickly spits on it, tosses it out of the water and beats it to death with a stick.⁵⁵

5.3.3 Cleansing *nyogich* (*nyogich* 'gaa yim)

As we have already seen, there are several types of *nyogich*. The archetypical *nyogich* is murder. Other forms of *nyogich* are caused by different transgressions. The “small *nyogich*” which is caused by neglect of certain rituals or by mistakes made during rituals often only comes to light after divination by a dreamer or through the examination of entrails. Usually, this kind of *nyogich* can be removed simply by correctly performing the ritual in question.

Other forms of *nyogich*, especially those caused by the infringement of marriage rules, are brought to the *jelaba*, who then decide what has to be done. It is common in such situations that their blessing be required. Therefore, sorghum beer (*bersho*) should be prepared for them, just as during the *'dimi*. Usually, the *jelaba* get quite drunk before they bless. They start singing their *meerte* (circumcision-songs) and may even vomit, indicating a particularly potent blessing. Again as with the *'dimi*, the sacrifice of an ox or sheep is required and the *jelaba* cut out the *tuo*, before the meat can be cooked and served.

Different types of *nyogich* all have their specific ways to be gotten rid of. In one case, a child was born to parents of different *dolo*. Traditionally, this meant that it had to be killed, but in this instance it was allowed to live.⁵⁶ The parents were forced to divorce and both had to undergo a cleansing ritual. In the case the child was born before the mother had shaved her hair,, the child was taken from her mother's breast and left to die. In order to get rid of her *nyogich*, the mother had to divorce from her husband and her hair was shaved.

The “big *nyogich*” is homicide. Homicide is often a very traumatic experience in a small community and may easily lead to endless feuding. The Daasanech, however, have developed quite a unique way to deal with this and to prevent revenge. The argument is simple and clear: if nobody is allowed to kill, then a killer cannot be killed. Instead, the way out is through ritual cleansing.

The case described here happened in 2005. The immediate cause of it was a common dispute over the delivery of bridewealth cattle. L., the brother of a girl who had married

⁵⁵ Shelley describes a similar ritual among the Turkana (Shelley, 1985: 220)

⁵⁶ Previously, the couple could have been killed and the child as well. This baby survived because the mother refused to abandon it and the child took the mother's *dolo*.

about fifteen years before and already gave birth to five children, still didn't receive any cattle, although he had been promised two milking cows on several occasions. Tired of waiting and unfulfilled promises, he went off to the village of his brother-in-law, armed with a gun and a belt full of ammunition. The quarrel between the two ended with L. firing two shots and killing his brother-in-law.

He came, took his gun and went off. This was a very bad *nyogich*. We returned his two cows. We returned the gun he brought. We left the five children of my sister with his family and returned our sister. My brother remained in the bush. He cut his hair. After, he killed a donkey of the house of Edhe Kamgayo (*muor'gayo*). Then, he killed a dog, he broke the cooking pot and we took him to town to shave his hair. After shaving, we brought him home. Before entering the homestead, we washed him with the blood of a black sheep. Then again, before entering the hut, a red goat was slaughtered. After, they put *nyerich* (wood from the magical *nyerich* plant) on a *yaante* (a leather thong) around his wrists and also yellow copper (*gibite*) around his arms.

After two months, we made everything ready for the *jelaba*. The *jelaba* of Riele came. The *jelaba* of Shir came. All our family members built their huts into a big circle. We made *bersho*. In the evening, every house slaughtered a sheep. The *jelaba* came with *miir* (leaves and branches of the *Cordia* tree), and came inside and hit the houses: "*Sii gaal. Eye 'gaa de*" (go out from the houses, go home). After that, they went out in circle and put their *miir* on top of each house. They drunk the *bersho* and song their circumcision songs. Sheep were slaughtered and they blessed us with the *muor*. The next morning, all our huts were dismantled and we left. (Nanok, 2006)

The above story outlines some, but not all, of the steps a killer should follow to be cleaned from *nyogich*. First, the murderer should steal a black, clay pot (*ibille*) as well as a perfect drinking calabash (*daate*), one without a single crack. He should break both of them. The reason for breaking the black pot is that it is as black as *nyogich*. As one person told me: "When you kill a man, you have to run in the dark to hide. To break the pot is to break that dark". Secondly, the murderer should kill a dog and wash his body with its blood. The reason for doing this is unclear. By one account, it changes the killer into a dog, but somebody else informed me that the dog represents the victim because a dog cries like a man when killed. Finally, the killer has to wash away the dog's blood with the blood of a donkey.

That animal has to belong to somebody of the Edhe clan, by preference the house of Edhe Kamgaye or the Gaalbur. The link to these houses probably relates to the occult powers (*muoro*) these houses possess. It may also have to do with the fact that the Edhe clan is responsible for the preparation of the *shuom* used to initiate the "Bulls". The donkey may better symbolize the victim than the dog because a donkey has the same number of teeth as a man. When the donkey is killed, its body should be placed with the

head to the west. The right foreleg should be cut, as well as the belly, and the intestines should be placed on top of the animal. After the man has smeared his body with the blood of this donkey, he may wash it off with water.⁵⁷

After that, the hair of the murderer should be shaved completely off.⁵⁸ Because of the taboo against touching somebody with *nyogich*, the barber should be a stranger, by preference a neutral stranger like a Konso. That is why the brothers took the killer to town. After the old hair is shaved, it is said that the killer is clean enough to return to his homestead, where his family has to perform the bleeding ritual with a red colored goat. Finally, a goat of black hue is killed and thrown to the west. Then his family looks for a special plant called *nyerich*. All the joints of the killer's body should be covered with the inner bark of this plant. This act is to ensure that his victim's joints fall apart and that he cannot become the living dead.

Only after all of these steps have been taken, has a man cleansed himself and his family of *nyogich*. From now on, relations with other Daasanech are normalized except with the family of the victim. By custom, these two families should never again eat together. Even at festivals organized by the generation set, one of the two families should remain absent.

After all this has been accomplished, one final step is still remains and it will be performed about a year later. This is called *bersho* (sorghum beer). The fermented sorghum is drunk and purged afterwards, just as during *'dimi*. This ritual act has to be performed by both families. Therefore, they build a village for all the members of their lineage.⁵⁹ Then, the leading *jelaba* of the Riele section are invited as well as the *jelaba* of the section to whom the murderer belongs.⁶⁰ They are offered the sorghum beer to drink, which was prepared a few days before. Just like during *'dimi*, several animals are slaughtered, cooked and eaten. The *jelaba* eat the meat and bless all the huts and the adults with the *muor*.

During the drinking, the *jelaba* sing their circumcision songs and bless The first *maa jelaba* who vomits has a *nyikaasia* placed on his head. He will take the *isa* (hide) and the *butta* (rump) of the sheep slaughtered at the time.. In the end, all the children are

⁵⁷ I am not sure here, but I think this water should be from another perfect calabash.

⁵⁸ Shaving might refer to a new birth, but further research is needed into the symbolism of hair, which plays quite a prominent role in Daasanech beliefs.

⁵⁹ This means not only brothers, father's brothers and father's brother's sons, but all those sharing the same cattle brands.

⁶⁰ The Riele are the smallest of the eight Daasanech sections. They are most probably the source of the "Bulls", the moieties and the *'dimi*.

invited into a living circle of eight *jelaba*.⁶¹ This is comparable to the last day of the '*dimi*' when the girls and their fathers and uncles are called into the circle of *miede*. Standing stiff to attention in the middle, they face the elders and repeat the word *naaso* eight times.⁶²

Early the next morning, after coffee, the *jelaba* go out to collect branches of the ritual *miede* tree, while the family members remain inside their huts.⁶³ After they have collected these branches, they return to the village while singing Hogaare songs, of which I recorded one example:

This is the song of the father of Ngarich
Your father's tree is in Loyma mountains
The wood is there.
Hogaare!
The decision is taken
The Bulls have the wisdom
They hide their secrets.
Hogaare!

Upon their arrival back in the village, they sing these songs while beating their *miede* sticks on the huts, chasing away all *nyogich*. At the same time, they call out *e ye gaa'de* ("go out"), *nyaanyi ko diite* ("we refuse you"), *nyaanyi ko ye deey che, si galle* ("we sent you out, go to your place") and *kuf* ("die"). The ritual ends with the phrase *pra makalaya*.⁶⁴ Two days later, the temporary village breaks up and everybody return home.

5.3.4 *Aj chelaam* and the removal of a killer's *adaab* (*adaab 'gaa yim*)

Above, I explained that the concept *adaab* is used both for the bad things one commits in life and for the state of moral pollution that is a consequence of these deeds. This makes both the person and his direct offspring vulnerable to curses and accidents. When *adaab* turns into disease, a diviner is called and he will advise what one must do in order to be healed - which depends on whether the *adaab* attracted a curse or the anger of the ancestors. The killing of an enemy is also considered *adaab* and places the killer in a

⁶¹ I was told that this number refers to the eight clans which exist among the Shir, but I'm not sure of this. It is also possible that from each *dol*, four *jelaba* are present, just like during the '*dimi*'. Further research is needed in this matter.

⁶² *Naaso* may mean "Waag be with you". This translation is plausible because the word also refers to the tall, ritual stick used during '*dimi*', which forms the connection between Waag and man.

⁶³ One collaborator did tell me that this happened the same evening and not the next morning.

⁶⁴ Just like *hawoyeya* during '*dimi*', this is said to mean "it is over, we have finished".

dangerous state. That is not to say that the killer of an enemy is morally disapproved nor that he carries *nyogich*, but nevertheless, the person is considered impure and should be cleansed in a ritual called *aq̄ chelaam* because of the white goat sacrificed for the occasion.

When you kill an enemy, it is not bad, everybody is happy because you revenged (*hala kaniye*) the blood, you can eat, no problem. But, if you kill an enemy, you carry *adaab*. Therefore you should kill an ox (*aq̄ yermisam*) to please the *gaaram*.(Lokwasep, 1996)

I did not find any evidence of a tradition among Dassenech demanding that a young man kill an enemy or a wild animal in order to be accepted in a certain social category, as is the case among the Borana (Baxter: 1979) and the Karamojong (Knighton, 2005: 198).⁶⁵

Nevertheless, a man who kills an enemy gains a lot of prestige. The honour he receives from this deed lasts throughout his life and is praised in several songs like particular cattle songs (*'guodib*) and also in his *gaaro*, the song made when he and his wife perform the *'dimi*. The honour is also expressed via the *yirmet kidhiet* ("enemy name") he receives and it is embodied on his chest by ten to twelve rows of small horizontal incisions running from the upper shoulders down to the stomach (*chedam kidhiet*).

These incisions are made with acacia thorns and razorblades. The skin is raised with the thorn and then cut horizontally with a sharp knife or razorblade. Butter is then smeared on the wounds to make them swell. I was told that these incisions are not just a sign of beauty and praise, but that they also have a therapeutic value: "If you kill an enemy, his blood goes in the ground. The blood of the dead body spills. Your blood should also leave, so you will not be left with wounds (*daafo*)".⁶⁶ This explanation shows that the blood of the victim may contaminate the blood of the killer and bring him misfortune. This means that the incisions are also a way to remove the "bad blood" (*fas deen*) caused by the killing.

Another reason given for this operation is that it is meant to counter the sadness of the victim's mother or wife, which is considered to be strong enough to turn into a curse. One collaborator told me that the moment in which the mother cries out in grief

⁶⁵ "Although not now a necessity for initiation or marriage, killing has been significant marker of tribal identity".

⁶⁶ The term *daafo* is not only used to denote physical injuries, but it also indicates the polluting consequences of having harmed somebody else. Another expression the Daasanech use is to have dirt or blood under the nails.

when informed that her child or husband was slain is a very dangerous time. This also might explain why the killer has to sing the following song, called *Aar maa chello*.

Strong bull of mine (*Aar maa chello*)
his mother shouts,
she cries like a dog.
Heeya, heeya (imitates the sound of the dog crying)
She cries early morning.
Her house is in the mountains.⁶⁷
His mother wanted a cow from us.
My father's milking cow.
I like that cow
that cow of the *naas*⁶⁸
the cow my father raided.

Besides this song, several other cleansing acts are performed in order to remove the *adaab* and alleviate the killer's perilous polluted state.

Usually, when men come back from raiding and there are no casualties among their fellow Daasanech, the return is celebrated with a lot of ecstatic yelling and singing and the shrill cry of the mothers' triumph. Those who bring home animals are considered heroes and this is even more so when they have killed enemies. However, such deaths can lead to misfortune if no proper cleansing measures are taken. Therefore, prior to anything else, the mother or wife washes a killer with *erer*, a mixture of milk and water, before allowing him back into her hut.⁶⁹ She does so in full ceremonial dress, wearing her ritual skirt (*ogo*) and her shoulders smeared with oil.

Upon returning, a killer should sing that song *Aar maa chelo*, rhythmically accompanied by his mother and her friends. This is a sign for the girls of the village and his sisters to offer him a string (*torbite*) of their beads. He also gets bells around his legs and marches proudly around the cattle pen, still singing. This goes on for four consecutive days. Then, his father invites the elders and his age-mates for the communal meal of the so-called *an chelaam* ("goat of the white thongs"). This animal

⁶⁷ Cfr. the idea that the enemies live in the mountains in chapter one.

⁶⁸ The cow of the *naas* is a one slaughtered in preparation for the *dimi*, when the long ritual stick (*naas*) is cut and smeared with butter.

⁶⁹ In earlier times, the killer had to stay in the bush and was not allowed to eat or drink with others until he was blessed. Even in the '90s, some families were still ritually cleaning their kinsmen when they returned from a foreign country before allowing them to enter the hut.

should be very large and completely white. Thongs made of the goat's hide are worn around the head and neck, above the elbows and below the knees.⁷⁰

After the goat is speared, its blood is drained into a calabash and mixed with water. This mixture is called *kam* and is taken to the front of the house. There, the witness to the killing, called "friend" (*misso*) or "twin" (*shelech*), smears the killer with the *kam* while he stands naked.⁷¹ Besides red lines, white lines are also painted on his body, in a pattern similar to that made with *kaabo* on the body of the circumciser.⁷² In the meantime, the mother of wife has placed a big calabash filled with water toward the east. Then, the killer runs to the water, throws some water to the east and washes all the blood from his body, calling out "take away the bad" (*hekwa diewa eew*).

Now that he is washed, the mother shaves the front part of his hair (*shurte*), leaving only a small tuft that represents the father. In the meantime, the white skin of the goat is cut into the thongs (*chelaam*) for the killer to wear. The witnesses of the killing and his age-mates also get a small strip (*cheli*) tied around their arms.

Later on, his hairstyle is modified into that typical of a *raarakin* (name used for the one who killed an enemy): the hair of the *shurte* is cut short, while the back (*shushulich*) gains a clay-cap. On the *shurte*, rows or small clay balls are made. This type of hairstyle is called *shurt lulugin* and the whole is smeared with butter and red ochre.⁷³ The girls of the village, especially those who gave the killer a boost (*guof*) and angered him (*idhane*), making his "heart tremble" before he went off to raid may offer him yet more pieces of their necklaces. He is also given a *nyakaasia* or *seech raarakin*, a very long white ostrich feather, which is placed on his head. Neck and head are smeared with more red ochre and butter.

⁷⁰ A similar custom where a white goat is killed exists among the Bume (both Turkana and Nyangatom) and among the Karamojong (Knighton, 2005: 197-198).

⁷¹ This ritual act is very similar to the washing of the circumcised man at the end of his seclusion, when he returns home and is allowed to take up herding tasks once again.

⁷² The main difference is that the red color is from blood here instead of clay.

⁷³ A Daasanach killer does not receive an enigmatic symbol called a *kalasha*, which some researchers call "phallic" because of its form. They are worn by other Cushites such as the Konso or Borana. As mentioned before, the Daasanach also call this symbol *kaalqn* or "flower". It is worn by the girls of a father who killed a big animal during their *'dimi*.



Image 5.5. *Shurt lulugij* and necklaces of honour of somebody who killed an enemy.

When he is fully adorned in this way, the killer is ready to go into the corral to choose an ox (or a goat if his victim was female) to be speared.⁷⁴ The rumen is cut and the chyme (*uro*) is used to smear the warrior and his age-mates and its meat is roasted. The elders eat the roasted meat of the white goat, taking care that the bones are not given to the children or thrown to the dogs. It is considered very bad for dogs or children to eat off them and so they are carefully kept apart and should be burned in the fire. The meat of the ox is eaten by the age-mates. This ox is usually a gift from the man's relatives and its colour may be used for the honour name (*yirmet kidhiet*) that the killer will receive. After the meal, the elders bless him and go home. By custom, the killer also receives a cow called a *se naaso* ("cow of the *naas*") or *se meerte* ("cow of the circumcision songs") from his father or paternal uncle.

It is from this time onwards that the *maa raarakij* is allowed to have the *chedam kidhiet* on his chest. If he already has a set and he kills a second time, another set of incisions can be made on his shoulder (*kuch maran*) or – if he wishes – his first wife may receive these shoulder incisions. This usually happens when her husband's shoulders are already fully incised. Nowadays, however, this custom is waning. One of the first measures the new administration has taken to stop raiding and killing is to forbid the *chedam*. Young men are warned that they will be taken to jail if they are seen with fresh incisions or sporting a *shurt lulugij*.

⁷⁴ In case he killed a woman or a girl, no ox is killed and no *yirmet kidhiet* is given. Also the singing of the *Aar maa chello* inside the corral is not performed. But the white goat is killed, the person is blessed and the incisions are made.

5.3.5 Removing the *muoro* of *maa muor'guo*

I was unable to find out what steps can be taken if a person is touched by a *maa muor'guo*. It is commonly believed that the victim is paralyzed and may die soon afterwards. One collaborator remembered a case where the *maa muor'guo* was made to jump four times over his victim before urinating on him, but I was unable to confirm this with another source. I was told that in most cases, contact with the *nyakeek* (poison) of the *maa muor'guo* is lethal with no hope of healing the victim. Interesting to note is that the *maa muor'guo* doesn't get *nyogich* himself when he kills. The reason for this is "because it is their work" (*wojichle*).

At the same time, any *maa muor'guo* may be killed with impunity during his "work". If observed while digging up a grave or carrying a corpse, he may be killed without risking *nyogich*. Further investigation is needed on this matter.

5.4 Dealing with communal affliction

Just as the cause of individual affliction is individual misbehaviour, communal misbehaviour is the cause of communal affliction. When major disasters strike, such as epidemics, draught or continuous warfare with lots of casualties, the Daasanech say that Waag is involved, that he is angry or that he "refused".

5.4.1 Blessing the new moon (*wolewole*)

Similar to a father who blesses his household in the early morning before drinking coffee in order to guarantee wellbeing and prosperity, a monthly blessing is held by the *maa farich* of each generation on the communal level. This ritual, called *wolewole*, is not a cleansing of the land. Rather, it is a prayer that during the new moon everything will go well. That day the new moon is expected is called '*gumaat*. The Daasanech say *uy dalle* or "the moon is born".⁷⁵ On that day, the *maa farich* invites his friends to his homestead. Coffee is cooked. Then, his visitors start to keep an eye on the sky before sunset.

⁷⁵ *Uy he kufe*, the moon dies.

The first one to see the tiny disk of the new moon appear shouts “wolewole” and others quickly follow his example when they see it as well. In turn, other villagers call out *wolewole* when they spot the new moon. Then, the visitors of the *maa farich* all enter the hut where coffee is cooked and start to sing their circumcision-songs (*meerte*). The *farich* is taken and blessed and some guests blow on it while others go on singing.

In the meantime, the wife of the *maa farich* smears oil on their shoulders, which she holds in a *rodoch* (the triangular lid of a *kuulich*, or milk container). Once a person is smeared, he takes some oil and smears it on the head and the shoulders of the wife. This procedure is then repeated once again.

The *maa farich*, who made a paste of white clay (*kuul*) beforehand, now smears this substance on the hide covering hut’s front entrance. He also anoints his neck and shoulders. *Kaabo* (long lines) are smeared on the forehead of his children. This is said to be a sign by which Waag can “see them”.

5.4.2 Yoi

Another form of communal blessing is the *yoi* (pl. *yoyam*), an annual meat feast that takes place just before migration (*guura*), when families migrate to the grazing camps after the big rains make the grass sprout. *Yoyam* are organized by a certain age set within a generation. *Yoi* literally means “a gathering”. The central event at a *yoi* is the sacrifice of somebody’s name-ox. The aim is to bless and motivate the age-sets, especially the warriors who will defend the land and the cattle. At the same time, elders discuss where to graze and which tactics should be used. It is a time for the age-groups to show their strength and get “the moral” (*guof*). I was told the equivalent ritual among the Turkana, Toposa and Nyangatom is called *nyakidamd*.

Some time before migration, the elders of a generation discuss which of the younger age-groups should offer a name-ox. When this is decided, a group of fully adorned men goes out to the homestead of a man, by preference a wealthy man of good family, to beg for his ox. These men sing ‘*guodib*’ songs in quest of his ox. Day and place are scheduled and the man’s family prepares for this special event.

On the day before, his age-mates offer his name-ox kill some goats or a smaller ox. These are called *gede* or “slaves” and they serve as food for themselves. The same day, the name-ox is brought and fully decorated. The donor is also adorned with colourful clothes. Then, the age mates drive the name-ox through the surrounding villages, followed by the owner. A lot of noise is made. Men use whistles and yell to attract attention and to let the people know that the next day the *yoi* will take place. Everywhere the group passes, people sing and shout in praise.

Early the next morning, preparations for the sacrifice start. Men gather large amounts of firewood to roast the animal and boys collect leaves used as a large eating

mat, laid out in half a circle. This is called *rash* and is a common way of eating roasted meat.⁷⁶ The donor himself is not allowed to kill his own ox, nor to eat it. A member of his age-set should spear the animal. The act of spearing the ox is highly valued.⁷⁷ The one who does the killing is obliged to return another ox or a heifer to the donor. This turns their relationship into a relationship of gift (*lilmech shisho*), in which both partners call each other friends (*shele*).

When the ox is killed, it should fall on its left side with the head towards the east. Then the rumen is cut out and put on the leaves spread in front of the animal. The rumen is cut and the chyme will be used for the guests to smear their chest and legs upon arrival. A fire is kindled and the meat is cut in large pieces. The animal is not skinned. The pieces of meat are placed directly into the fire, except for the right, hind leg (*hergo*), which is kept apart. Usually, especially during a big *yoi*, other oxen and goats may be added, depending on the number of guests expected. Around midday, groups of warriors arrive, armed with their guns and their ammunition belts (*macha koch*). Their faces are painted with red and yellow or in white patterns,⁷⁸ which mime to patterns on oxen heads.



Fig. 5.6. Group of warriors arriving at the village during *yoi*.

Whenever a new group appears, the girls and women of the village go to meet them, also painted and adorned with a *dum* (ox-tail) around their arms, bells around their legs and rhythm instruments made out of ox-horns. This is to escort the warriors when they proceed towards the *rash* in the village. These warriors follow each other in double

⁷⁶ I was told that the *rash* of the Inkabelo faces east, while the *rash* of Inkoria and Ngarich face west, so they form a circle when united.

⁷⁷ In '*dimi* songs or in '*guol* songs, both the giving and the killing of such a name-ox are mentioned.

⁷⁸ There is no specific reason for using this white clay, although some age-groups who have a name referring to a white ox, might prefer to use this tint. The usual colors are yellow and red.

rows, a process which is called *fuuny*. They don't come straight towards the village, but make engage in mock fights and movements just outside the compound. Once in a while, the group stops and the warrior stamp the ground "just like a furious bull". During this act called *gaadamijn*, rounds are fired into the air, trumpets, horns and whistles are blown, and men shout out the names of their favorite oxen. All this is to show that they are ready to go and defend the cattle to a man.⁷⁹ Once in a while, one of the men or one of the women who are watching are "taken by *guof*" – this is an excited emotional state, and means "having the spirit to fight" – and start to jump and shout (*hiijnin*).⁸⁰

This *acte de presence* is performed by every newly arrived group until everybody has reached the *rash* and takes their place according to the order of his generation and age-set. The eldest age-sets sit at the right, the youngest at the left. Guests from the eldest generation of Fathers remain outside the *rash*.⁸¹ First, the fresh liver is given to the elders and respected guests. When the meat is ready, one elder cuts the ear of the slaughtered animal. This is the sign that eating can start. The meat is divided according to certain rules by a few men who walk back and forward from the fire to the groups, until everybody receives a piece to eat.⁸² One group does not eat, but remains seated next to the hind leg. This group is called the "leg of the cattle" and its members are in charge of patrolling and defence. When the meat is gone, young men come together and sing warrior songs for the cattle (*'guodib*).

After the singing, speeches (*dinimijn*) are delivered in which elders give advice and warnings. By custom, the leader of the generation (*maa uraam*) has the first word and afterwards others are free to speak. Speeches are often interrupted by incantations and blessings or by warnings for the youngsters. Different speakers hold different artifacts when speaking. The *jelaba* have their long ritual staff made of *miede*, non-*jelaba* carry a

⁷⁹ This is possibly the equivalent of what the Nyangatom and Toposa call *nyakidamd*. This display of power likely dates from the Italian occupation, when Daasanech and Nyangatom were trained in guerilla warfare.

⁸⁰ *Guof* and *hiijnin* may be seen as culturally accepted ways of dealing with intense emotions. People with *guof* behave like "a bull that is ready to fight". The eyes shift away and the person starts to jump up and down, making a deep sound. This may accelerate to a point where the person loses control and the hands get cramped from taking in too much oxygen. At that stage, bystanders care for such a person, removing his gun if he has one and stretching him out, trying to relax him and regulate his breathing. *Guof* may also occur when two people are in love.

⁸¹ The reigning generation doesn't hold *yoi*, because they do not defend the cattle anymore. Their sons do this, as their responsibility lays elsewhere.

⁸² The brisket (*bal*), head (*me*) and short ribs (*dhir maata*) are given to the fathers (those of the elder generation). The shoulders (*lelich*) are for the first age-set, the next age-set receives the sirloin (*ges*), the third one gets the round (*ijnies*). The heart and kidneys are for the one who speared the animal, intestines and lungs are given to the women. The right, hind leg (*gas*), which was kept apart, will be given to the younger fathers. They themselves are not allowed to eat it because they "are" the leg at the front of the cows.

spear and remove the cover (*tobote*) and young people – if they speak – usually just carry their stick (*gul*). Solidarity, alertness and bravery (*guol dab*, “be brave”) are emphasized while cowardliness and laziness are condemned. Some speakers may humiliate or bawl out the listeners; “you prefer to crawl back into your mother’s womb than to defend the lands” was one harangue that I heard. Another was: “You cowards, during our time, not a single footprint of an enemy was found on our lands. We gave birth to you. How is it possible that you could run away and leave us behind? How is it possible you let your mothers and fathers be slaughtered by the enemies? If you behave like cowards, it is better for us to take your guns and defend our children”.⁸³

After the speeches, the *maa uraam* may resume or take a decision. Then, he will say *waagkikijn* and all participants stand up and walk around the *naab* while singing circumcision-songs. After that, people return to their homes. During some *yoyam*, warriors jump over the fire before they go home. At this point, groups of families start to dismantle their huts and move to the *forich* cattle camps, where they will remain for the next three to four months.



Image 5.7. *Guof* during *yoi*

⁸³ When I asked why it wasn’t enough to motivate the younger age-sets through praise, I was told that this would make them lazy and proud. Praising does happen, but even then, it is often in addition to the condemnation of somebody else. For instance, if the herds are coming back and the udders of one group of cows are full, the father may say: “look, this is my only son. Look, how full they are. Milk is enough. But the rest of my sons, you are nothing. I will give him another ox of color. You get nothing. You are nothing”.

5.4.3 Repenting Waag (*suoriyo*)

A *suoriyo* is request to Waag (*waag roog*) or a repentance made to Waag. During a *suoriyo*, Waag is asked to show pity: “Waag of my father, take away the bad” (*Waag yachu, deen kaeb*). A *suoriyo* is similar to any sacrifice, like that of a *yoi* or even a ‘*dimi*.⁸⁴ To name a few of these commonalities, during *suoriyo*, the participants are also painted in yellow, *miede* branches are brought, a new fire is made and the stomach fat (*muor*) is exchanged. The elders are fed at all these events, as they are the representatives of the community and appeasing them guarantees a good future. The elders eat and bestow their blessings, preventing future problems. A *suoriyo* may be held either as a preventive measure against possible misfortune or as a way to stop actual misfortune. The preventive form is a must for the Randal. Every family of that section holds their own *suoriyo* every year, during the month of the same name.⁸⁵

Individual families may be advised to hold a *suoriyo* when all other healing measures and reconciliations have failed and things have not improved. In this case, all family members should be present and paint their bodies with yellow clay (*wod raara*) as a way to protect. Then, sheep are brought in, speared and roasted. *Miede* branches are also brought and the elders are invited to eat and to bless. The chyme of the rumen is smeared on the body and thrown inside the huts and the hide is cut into thongs (*geyte*) that are worn around arm, finger, neck, head or even around the big toe.

A diviner may advise to organize a *suoriyo* at times of communal misfortune. There are different kinds of *suoriyo* – each according to the type of problem. These include rituals for continuous famine, continuous enemy raids, epidemics (*furso*) of man and beast, extreme droughts (*shaante*) or unresolved conflicts between groups.

The best day for Waag to be with us is *suoriyo*. Then Waag is there. Immediately he gives what we want. There is a *suoriyo* of warriors when they go to attack, there is *suoriyo* to protect the land, there is *suoriyo* when there is a certain disease. Keeping the land safe and getting rid of epidemics are especially big. (Nanok, 2010)

***Suoriyo* against pests (*furso*)**

During my fieldwork in 1996, a big *suoriyo* was held in Toltale near the lake to counter an epidemic of *luoge*.⁸⁶ During that ceremony, one big sheep and several goats were killed. These animals were obtained from people of good families. At least one elder of each

⁸⁴ In fact, the Randal call their *suoriyo* their ‘*dimi*.

⁸⁵ The Randal still have their own names for their months.

⁸⁶ A kind of bovine lung disease called Contagious Bovine Pleuropneumonia, or CBPP.

clan was present. The sheep was sacrificed especially for Waag, so it could only be eaten by the oldest elders (*karu vivinadhiye*) – those beyond sexual activity. During the ritual, Waag was asked to clean the land: *Leskinyo alal*. Below follows a description of a *suoriyo* held to avert epidemics.

People are dying. Cattle are dying. We pray. We, those holding the land between our legs. Only the elders of good families. Those with no wounds (*gil 'gaa daaf man*), those with no blood under their nails (*konf 'gaa fas man*). Two nights and two days. Four days. At night we pray, in the morning we pray, at night we pray, in the morning we pray. The fourth day, they bring *suoriyo* (goats and the sheep). They cut the *miir*. Everybody carries *miede*. They come. On the ground, there are different types of plants, *aalq* they put, *siicha* they put, *miede* they put, *moorte* they put, *kuuty* they put, *aalq luoch* they put, *yerite* they put. They put all, every type of wood. *Maa Turat* makes a new fire. The plants burn, they burn, they burn. The smoke goes up to Waag. This is called *orbiro*.

Then they go and bring *'gunite* to bless the fire. The sheep is killed and put on the fire. Sheep with skin. For the goats, the skin is removed. That skin is cut into thongs. They are used to put around arms, their skin is used to put around finger, their skin is used to put around neck. Then we sing. They sing our circumcision songs (*meerte*) looking at *daa bario* (the east). The *meerte* of Fargaaro, we sing. The *meerte* of Turnyerim, we sing. Also the *meerte* of Edhe. Everybody blesses the fire: *Nyi bisish* (“cure us”)! *Nyi jik* (“wash us”)! Four times, all go around the fire, all men go around. Four times. Four times they go. The sheep, only we can eat, the goats, everybody can eat. What is done in Toltale will spread over the whole land. Eee. (Lokasiamoi, 1996)

Suoriyo to protect the land

When war is a constant plague and people are tired of it, the diviner may advise to have a *suoriyo* to protect the land against further enemy attacks and to prevent Daasanech warriors from retaliating. The different steps of such as *suoriyo* are very similar to that described above. Only the prayers differ and only *miede* is used to burn.

The *suoriyo* in times of war. For this one, they don't cut every tree. They have *miir* (sing. *miede*) and sing the circumcision songs. Just like during *yoi*, the warriors also make *fuuny* (walking in rows) *walking in rows*), but now, they do not sing warrior songs (*'guodib*). For this one, they only sing *meerte*. The goat is taken and speared, the sheep is taken and speared. A new fire is made, no smoke. No smoke. Only fire. They turn right, face east and sit. All are smeared with the butter. Their shoulders. Their neck. Their head. They sing. They call *Maa Fargaaro*. *Maa Fargaaro* comes: “You take west, you take Turkana along the lake”. They call *Maa Turnyerim*. *Maa Turnyerim* comes: “You take north, you take Nyangatom and Hamar”. Then the

clans of *mesatich* are called. “You take east and south”. *Mesatich* take these sides, because there are no strong enemies coming from that side.⁸⁷ (Nanok, 2010)

Throwing the *muor* (*muor sijn*)

If severe disasters occur, a diviner may also advise to “throw away the *muor*” (*muor sijn*). In this ritual, no animals are slaughtered. First, people have to put thongs made of bark (*boorte*) from the acacia or *bilille* plant around their head and diagonally across their chest. Then a *yerite* cactus (*Cissus quadrangularis*) is picked and red mud is put on a piece of leather. The *maa nyerich* draws a line on the ground with his staff and the leather and *yerite* are thrown over this line (*giinia*). In doing so, he puts a curse on the disease or the enemy. Afterwards, all the people go to the river and the *maa nyerich* cuts the *boorte* with a spear. All participants then wash their bodies. That night, they bring small sticks, bind them together and put them in the dung heap of the corral. When these sticks are burning, they pick them up and smash them against each other while shouting *hahaha*. Then, they run away and shout *baash les ye gade* (“sickness go away”), throw the sticks away and return. Finally, they smear their faces and bodies with a mixture of yellow and purple mud.

A variation on this ritual can be found among the Inkoria. If a diviner foresaw that a disaster was about to be inflicted on the herds, he may order a *suoriyo* “to break” the disease. For four consecutive days, river mud is put on the backs of the cattle and three plants (*siicha*, *aalan luoch* and *yerite*) added to the dung heaps to make special smoke. On the fourth day, purple clay (*liwan*) is mixed with yellow mud and the animals are painted with it before being let go.

Suoriyo for war (*ruu*)

Before people go to war, a protective ritual called *suoriyo ruu* is held at the compound of a renowned Turnyerim. In the following account of such a ceremony, it was held at the house of a man called Koriye.

They go to the house of Koriye, *maa* Turnyerim. They bring a goat of yellow or white colour.⁸⁸ They bring to him and then, the young warriors only, fully armed sing ‘*guodib* and smear themselves with yellow ochre. They bring only that goat.

⁸⁷ Note that each of the *nyerim* clans with the strongest blessing and cursing abilities must guard the direction corresponding to the entrance of their huts.

⁸⁸ Generally, dark colored goats are used for rituals where *gaaram* are involved. White and yellow are considered positive colors, red is ambivalent and black is associated with the *gaaram*. At the same time, the white goat killed during the *adaab* cleansing ritual is also to please the *gaaram*.

No sheep is brought. The goat is speared right there. When the meat is cooked, they sing 'guodib. Then the meat is ready. They go and sit in the chyme of that goat. *Maa nyerim* puts on his ceremonial skirt. His body is full of oil. On his head is a white feather. He comes close. He blesses the warriors. Then, a spear (*naane*) is brought. He takes off the spear cover (*tobote*). He holds both *tobote* and spear. He blesses the stomach of that goat with cow dung. Then he cuts the stomach. All warriors smear themselves with chyme. They blow the whistle.⁸⁹ Then everybody has to pass to his right side facing east. They come. Everybody comes. He blesses them. When they are out, they turn to the west and go.

Suoriyo kaabana or bersho

The sharing of sorghum beer (*bersho*) with elders before the blessing takes place is an important sequence during the 'dimi and during the rituals that aim to clean away *nyogich*. The name *bersho* is also given to a special ritual organized regularly by a younger group wishing to obtain the blessing of the older groups. Daasanech call this *bersh gudo* (big bersho). There's also a smaller one (*bersh kaabana*) organised on the level of age-sets.

A big bersho was held during my stay in the village of Chadgayye in Inkoria land in 1997. The Nyicheryese organized it, and they are the equivalent of the Nyolomongin among the Inkabelo. The Nyicheryese wanted to obtain the blessings of the Nyigabite, which they consider to be their fathers' younger brothers. It was scheduled before the Nyigabite took over spiritual authority from the Nyimor (which actually only happened in 2010).

Our fathers, the Nyimor, many have gone, few remain. Therefore, we Nyicheryese decided to make bersho. Our guests were Nyigabite. We asked their blessing. We asked wealth of animals. We asked wealth of children. We asked them to curse the Borana, so when we go to attack them, we may drive their animals to our land.

All age-sets of Nyicheryese and their families came together, bringing a big sack of coffee and milking cows, and a village was constructed in the form of a very big circle. When the huts were built, a huge construction in the middle was erected to provide shade for their Nyibabite guests. They were invited to sleep and rest there. During the daytime, they were received as guests in each hut, where they drank coffee and blessed their hosts. At the same time, several oxen were brought in, slaughtered and roasted.⁹⁰ On the full moon, the *barm* is put in the water to make *bersho*.

⁸⁹ I don't know if this is the *farich*, the horn used during *wolewole*, or if it is just a small whistle.

⁹⁰ Women don't eat straight away, but the boys may be given a piece to bring to their mother.

Four oxen were killed for the first day and two for the second day. These oxen are called “twin oxen” (*aŋ holshleka*) and represent the four teats of a cow. On the fourth day, the Nyigabite of Inkabelo were invited and six more oxen, called *aŋ ziego* (“animals for guests”), were killed.

When the *bersho* was ready, every family invited at least one guest into their house. Just as during the *‘dimi*, on the evening when the *bersho* was drunk, a pregnant female sheep and a large male sheep were killed. The womb, along with the foetus, were taken out and put near the hearthstones, which had been laid outside the hut.

The same evening, the blessing took place. The elders blessed the people inside the hut and exchanged the fatty parts of the sheep’s stomach. The elders blessed: “May Waag give you as many animals as the soil” (*aŋ burnaya yuoch hi ega waago ko shiicho*). The next morning, all the Nyigabite left and only the Nyicheryese remained.

Then, two camels were brought in for a *suoriyo*. One camel red, the other white. These animals were sacrificed as well and everybody got a small piece of the skin and a part of the fat of the *dherien* (hump). That piece of skin was put around the thumb or the neck and the fat was boiled and smeared on the mats inside the house, on the drinking calabashes and on the storage pouches (*noonam*). This signifies that one should have as much fat inside the *noono* as possible, enough to pour over the body like water, and that the cattle should be as big as camels.

After this, four days remained before departure. First, the arbour was pulled down. Then, all of the men walked around it four times before finally everyone packed up and returned home.

Thus, the big *bersho* consists of two parts. In the first sequence, the guests of the elder generation are invited to share oxen and to drink *bersho*. In the second part, the guests have gone and the entire generation remains behind and a *suoriyo* is held. This time, camels, not oxen, are used to make the thongs.

5.4.4 Bringing rain (*ir ‘gieŋ*)

Bringing rain is called *ir ‘gieŋ* or *waag ‘gieŋ*. Only the elders of the *nyerim* clans who belong to the Fathers and hold the *farich* can perform the rain ritual. When there is an abnormally long drought, a diviner may suggest that rain should be brought. When the elders agree, they go the house of someone belonging to a clean Turnyerim, Fargaaro or Turat family.⁹¹ Rain rituals may differ slightly from clan to clan, but all of them involve

⁹¹ All three clans (the Turnyerim, Fargaaro and Turat) are able to bring rain because they all are associated with *miir*.

that the chosen rain man is offered a long, white ostrich feather (*nyakaasia*) and that his neck is smeared with oil. This act signals that he has to call forth rain.

In order to call forth rain, *miede* is required. So the man smears his axe with oil before he goes to the forest to cut the ritual wood. When he comes upon a suitable tree, he circles it four times before lopping the branches from the western side.⁹² Then he takes the branches and brings them to the river. Upon arrival he says: “*Waag yachu, heba kade* (“*Waag of my father, come*”) to the four, different directions and slowly places the *miede* in the water. Then he kneels, takes some water and throws it up into the air. After that, the *miede* is slowly removed from the water, with the tip touching the ground. Going home, nobody is allowed to look at the sky. Once there, the *miede* is put under the sleeping mat and the next morning it is put in the fence.

I also wrote down another ritual which is performed when rain or river are “refusing”. Then, man has to ask “*makan* from *Waag*”. This is done by a powerful diviner to whom the elders present coffee and a big sheep.

They go in group to the river or the lake. They take a pot, a new calabash and a spoon. They prepare coffee and drink. They slaughter a sheep and eat. After that, the fat part (*buode*) is cooked and put in a calabash. When the fat is cold, they take it out and smear it on the grass and the trees. Doing so, everybody keeps quiet. Then, the soup of the animal is drunken. After the soup is drunken, the diviner takes the bones, the tail and the intestines of the animal, takes it to the riverbank and burries it over there.

5.4.5 Killing those with *nyogich* (*alaano ki yiese*)

According to some beliefs, people or families who refuse to cleanse their *nyogich*, represent a threat for the community. Therefore, before the *jelaba* of a particular generation resign from the *naab*, they order the *haris* (non-*ara*, the younger age-groups of a generation) to go and kill all those who have *nyogich*. This practice is called *alaano ki yiese* and probably took place for the last time in the early 70's, when the Nyilimkorio resigned from the *naab* and the Nyimor came in. I was told that during that period of political instability, the *jelaba* of Nyilimkorio ordered these groups of young, non-Bulls to go and kill all the families who had *nyogich*. Families and individuals could of course defend themselves or escape, but their herds were confiscated and divided among the *jelaba*.

⁹² This is also similar to what happens during ‘*dimi*’.

As a rule, ritual killing is performed in a group and carried out through clubbing. The person is caught, tied and then clubbed to death by several people at a time. Another way of killing is called “Kalaap’s prison”. In this method, a person is caught and their hands and feet tied together before they are tossed into the river. Those who perform this task are free from *nyogich*. They only have to wash their hands and call out the name of the dead, saying: “So and so, take your bad with you” (*he kuo dewa, ew*).

During my fieldwork, a friend of mine tragically came to his end via communal killing because after having killed a fellow Daasanech, he refused to become ritually cleansed. Instead, he fled to Turkana land where he stayed with maternal uncles who were Turkana. Later, he was spotted back in Toltale and they thought that he came for his cattle, so the *jelaba* ordered him killed in precisely the above manner.

5.4.6 Traditional peace ceremony

A last way to tackle communal misfortune I would like to mention is through peace ceremonies, where pacts with neighbouring groups are made to stop further raiding and killing. This is one cultural institution that has been taken over by the government. Collaborators informed me that no traditional peace ceremonies have been held in the last several decades.⁹³

The peace ceremonies involving the Turkana and Daasanech in the late 90’s were sponsored by UN organisations and were not held in a traditional fashion. They involved mutual visits, the public slaughtering and eating of oxen and speeches by both parties. They were hardly effective as clashes continued, particularly on the northern end of Lake Turkana.

I was told that with the Borana, peace ceremonies are stopped after a Borana leader called Geeto was killed by a Daasanech during such a ceremony. That incident made the Gabbra swear that they only would make peace with the Daasanech “when the birds sit on a ripe stalk of sorghum without eating a single grain and when the hyena has entered without touching a lamb”.

Traditional ceremonies, in which young girls played a prominent role, were held with the Hamar. The following is an account of one such ceremony.

If people are really tired of war, if people are really tired of dying, they have to cut a very long branch of the *miede* tree, just like the *naas* used during *‘dimi*. On top of this post, a tall, white ostrich feather is placed. This *naas* will be carried by a young

⁹³ The ceremony organized by Ivo Strecker and Alula Pankhurst in Arbore in 1993 is documented in the film “Bury the spear” (2004), but was based mainly on Arbore and Hamar traditional ways of peace making.

girl from a clean family. She walks in front, escorting the elders of her tribe. All elders walk unarmed (no spear, no knife, no gun) until they reach the borderlands where they stay for the night. When they are spotted and the white feather is seen, those on patrol inform a village in the vicinity, where the *jelaba* of the Daasanech are called. A house is selected which is free from *nyogich* to organize the meeting, by preference with a man who has a daughter of the same age as the visiting party. When they meet, they raise their hand: "Where are you going?" "We come for peace". "Give us one man to show us the homestead of the elders". They send one warrior with them and one in front to tell the elders that they will arrive. The elders should come and find a house that has no *nyogich*. "Friend, prepare coffee in your house for the peace". Then, if he sees the strangers are coming, he gets a calabash without any mark or break, takes it, puts in *erer* and adds some oil. He puts on his ceremonial skirt, takes the *soonte*⁹⁴ and goes.

The guests are blessed with *erer* and brought inside the house and are smeared with oil by the mother of the house. First, she puts oil on her husband. Then, she puts oil on the girl. Then, she puts oil on the elders of the *kidh*. Then she calls in the elders of Daasanech. All people of *kidh* sit in the middle. The elders come in. The wife takes the lid, fills it with oil and gives it to the girl. The girl puts the oil on the neck of the Daasanech elders. Then she gives the lid to the wife. The wife then gives coffee to the Daasanech first, and to the girl. The elders bless the *kidh* elders in the middle. They drink only the first mug. Then, they swap places. The Daasanech who blessed go in the middle and the *kidh* sit outside. They are given the coffee. Also the girl gets coffee. They bless the Daasanech elders. Then the Daasanech go out in the *naab*. They are free to drink more coffee there.

While the elders are outside, the girl of the household is called inside where she will remain the whole day with the girl of the *kidh*. Somebody is called to bring an ox that is pure white and has long horns. The owner of the house should bring a pregnant sheep. The sheep is slaughtered, cooked and the fatty part of the stomach is kept in a *kurum*. The girls and the owner get one foreleg and one hind leg, the other meat is given to the elders. After the meal, they exchange the *muor* after it is cut in thongs by the girl and put in milk. The first person to receive the *muor* is the girl. She gives another part to the other girl. After that, the elders exchange the *muor* with each other.

The next morning, they take coffee and the white ox is killed in the corral, not by a spear but by a stone. That ox is killed with a stone. That stone was put into oil that night. A young warrior has to hit it four times. Then they divide the skin into two. One *dhir* is for the owner of the house, one *dhir* is for the *kidh* girl. Also the skin of the sheep is for her. When the meat is roasted, everybody comes to sit in a *rash*. The *rash* is made of *miede*, not *aalan*. Then, they eat the meat. After they have eaten, they talk to each other. They bless the land and make peace. The Daasanech

⁹⁴ Kind of broom made from plant fibres used to sprinkle and to clean the inside of drinking calabashes

bless the homeland of the *kidh*. The *kidh* bless the homeland of the Daasanech. After they all finished, they take some coffee and go to the shade. Then they take the *muor* and do the same as the night before. If meat is left, they can take it. When the first cock crows, the pot is on the fire. They go in and take coffee then they wait till you can see far into the distance. The owner of the house blesses the gate of his homestead. The girl of the *kidh* passes the gate. She goes with the skin of the sheep, half the cowhide and the meat that is left. She goes without looking back. The elders follow her. They don't look back.

Elders say there is peace now. We remain like that, even if a Daasanech youngster destroys the peace, he will not stay many years, he will die. But this kind of peace ceremony is not happening anymore. For now, peace is according to the Amhara system. It is not true peace. Since Mengistu took power, we miss the peace of the feather. (Mana Yergeleb, 1997)

5.5 Conclusion

When Waag is present, rain is abundant, the flooding goes well, the corral is full and children do not cry from hunger. When Waag is absent, life and fertility are absent and misfortune strikes. The causes of misfortune are manifold. They are most often found in the victim's social sphere: social tensions and misbehaviour may induce curses or may call down the anger of the ancestors. Concepts like *nyogich* and *adaab* demonstrate how the Daasanech notion of morality is linked to pollution and spiritual punishment. In the context of misfortune, several types of diviners play an important role in investigating the causes of misfortune and suggesting ways of restoring broken social ties.

All misfortune provides an opportunity at the same time. It makes the protagonists aware of mistakes made in rituals or in behaviour. The basic method of restoring broken social ties or correcting mistakes is by blessing, reconciliation (*makan himi*) and, often, the sacrifice of animals. All communal rituals to prevent or counter misfortune are called *suoriyo*. Frequently, smoke is used as a means of communicating with Waag.

Conclusion

In the previous two chapters, I described the various rituals that the Daasanech perform over the course of their lives. Most of the rituals described in chapter four were rites of passage, following the different steps one must take during life. The last chapter dealt with the rituals held when misfortune occurs. What is common to both types of ritual is that they are all composed of an amalgam of different gestalts, each of which makes use of a specific set of materials and ideas. The spiritual context hereby outlined delineates a universe in which the mental influences the material in a continuous chain of cause and effect. Positive words, thoughts and emotions lead to beneficial results. Negative talk and thoughts lead to adverse consequences. Social harmony and peace of mind provide an escape from this negative chain of effects and brings man closer to Waag, guaranteeing wellbeing and good fortune. By contrast, man is vulnerable to misfortune and disease if cut off from Waag.

Hence, the great importance that Daasanech attach to blessings. Blessing is calling forth Waag, bringer of the rain and at the same time that which supports life, fertility and wellbeing. The simplest and most common form is the spitting or spraying of coffee through the mouth in the direction of the blessed, a custom carried out every morning by the father of the household before the day's work begins. In addition, words are spoken to induce the beneficial and avert negative influences in a manner comparable with the litany of Christian tradition. He who spits, utters the blessing and those present respond with traditional formulas. Thus, to the Daasanech, words manifest power, as indeed do thoughts and emotions. Only adults who are healthy in spirit and body, as well as the circumcised, who have received the mercy of Waag because they offered their own blood to the earth, are able to bless. Status determines who blesses and who is blessed, although blessings are exchanged among age-mates as well. Other forms of blessing involve substances such as chyme, milk, oil and other fatty animal substances such as the stomach wall (*muor*). This way of blessing, called *muorij*, demarcates all-important steps in life.

The opposite of blessing is cursing. Curses are often unintentionally made, but if intentional, should be preserved for enemies. Also, the ancestors may cause adversity if they do not agree with the behaviour of the living. Diviners are consulted to find out the causes of misfortune and to show ways to make things improve. As such, every adversity carries the seed of awareness that the victim committed a (ritual) mistake or had a negative attitude or any other kind of misbehaviour. Every crisis offers a chance to ease social tensions and alter one's behaviour for the better.

Although the Daasanech daily diet consists mostly of sorghum, supplemented with milk and butter, their culture is focused entirely on cattle. Apart from goats, animals are slaughtered for their meat only in exceptional circumstances, such as famine and prolonged drought. Livestock are capital first and foremost, and have an exchange value. Most such transactions are related to marriage. The bride price amounts to several dozen head of cattle and small livestock, divided among the immediate relatives of the bride's father in an exchange that takes place over several years and is ideally concluded with a large celebration. Animals are also used as a means of exchange for grain, coffee and necessities such as pots, ornaments, rifles and ammunition, as well as in payment for special services, such as those of a midwife or a diviner. But above all, cattle serve as sacrifices on ritual occasions. At each liminal phase of an individual's life - birth, first menstruation, prolonged absence, safe return from a raid, illness and death - and upon any occasion of communal feasting, blessing, healing or the successful conclusion of an event, animals are sacrificed to avert danger and to restore the harmony between man and Waag.

In the typical organization of these rituals, a petitioning party provides while another party receives. Younger age-groups give cattle to older age groups and to the Fathers. The cursed gives in order to be healed. Hence, an animal is always offered in the expectation of receiving something in return, be it a bride, an object, a service or a blessing. The adage used by Tornay in his study of the Nyangatom "Il faut nourir les pères" equally applies to the Daasanech. The Fathers, the elders, the *nyerim* and the *jelaba* must be nourished by those who are in need of their blessing. These people mediate between Waag and man in matters of their daughter's fertility, peace in the land, the health of people and animals and good fortune in any endeavour. The role of the ancestors in this respect is ambivalent. In one way, they mediate between Waag and man, but they may also cause misfortune when man does not behave as he should.

There are certain, recurring and striking features in rituals. One is the particular treatment of the sacrum (*tuo*) of sacrificed oxen. The human Bulls (*ara jelaba*) are the only ones who are allowed to manipulate and eat it. This area is the seat of sexual potency and hence associated with fertility, which is the domain of the Bulls.

The ritual tree, the *miede* (pl. *miir*), is another important element in many rituals. This tree remains green during the dry seasons and also bears small, orange fruit. The Daasanech call this tree the "tree of Waag" (*guor waagiet*) and it is the preeminent

symbol of the bond between Waag and man. Its wood is used for a multitude of purposes, some beyond the ritual sphere. Fresh leaves of this tree are harvested during several ritual sequences associated with calling forth Waag and rain. Its timber, in the form of a stick is a standard piece of the equipment for all “blessed” people. The man who performs the *'dimi* has his long *naas*, which he points towards the Above. The *jelaba* carry a staff made of this wood, as do the circumcised men. A girl on the cusp of marriage carries a similar staff, forked at the end because she is female. Even the broad, central posts of the large arbours made on ritual occasions, such as the male circumcision and *ara* ceremonies, are cut from *miede*. The limbs of this tree form the centre of the ritual world throughout such events. Besides this, the fire sticks used to kindle new fires during ritual occasions are also made from *miede*.

During rituals, the body may be modified in either a temporary or permanent way. The *'dimi*, in which men and women are exuberantly painted and dressed, is the most striking example of such a temporary change. The circumcision of both males and females are instances of permanent changes. Another particular way of manipulating the body occurs after an enemy has been killed. The killer gains the right to make several rows of incisions on his chest.

Hair is well suited to indicate changes over the course of a lifetime. Hair is an extension of the self and is shaved after birth (to remove the hair of the mother), after first pregnancy (to remove the hair of the parents) and after the death of a father or husband. The hair of the killer should also be removed because it is polluted. There is a clear difference in hairstyle between girls and women with children and between boys and men who are initiated into an age-set and are allowed to wear a clay-cap. Circumcised boys have a specific hairstyle too, as well as those who participated in the last circumcision of their generation.

During rituals, different substances are smeared on the body or the body is washed or sprinkled with them. Sprinkling with *erer* (a mixture of water and milk) serves as a welcome and cleansing. Different shades of clay (white, red and yellow) may be used “just for beauty” but they often serve a specific purpose. Yellow clay is reserved for *'dimi* and *suoriyo* and shows the bearer is making a request of Waag; red clay is associated with danger and the killing of enemies or white animals; *kuul* (a mixture of white clay and milk), when put on the forehead and shoulders, serves as a signal to Waag. *Nas* (the soot from the cooking pot) is used as a protection against the evil eye. Expectant mothers, who have been shaved, and *'dimi* girls in full ornament, use this. *Maal* (river clay) and *kuch* (clay from a termite hill) is used to counter the *gaaram* or to wash away pollution. Smearing fermented grass from the rumen (*uro*) on the body is a common activity when animals are sacrificed during rituals involving the generation system. By smearing *uro* on the body, the bond with each other and with the cattle is sealed. The most special substance is *shuom* (a mixture of sorghumbeer, oil and clay), which is reserved for

initiating the *ara*. They smear it on their foreheads each time they make important decisions and sing their Hogaare songs.

Songs are an important part of the various rituals. The parents of 'dimi girls continuously sing their *gaaro* over the course of several months to please the *jelaba*. Elders love to sing their circumcision songs (*meerte*) whenever they gather. The young men lift their voices in cattle songs ('*guodib* and *aar laala*) to impress the girls and to show their love for their animals. After the finalization of bridewealth, '*guol* songs are sung in honor of important individuals. All of these songs are filled with allusions to cattle and heroic deeds - especially during *yoi*. After the meat is gone, the young men come together and sing '*guodib* (warrior songs for the cattle) in deep voices. These moments, in which the soloist is answered by the serene, almost timid voices of the warrior chorus, always touched me very deeply. The atmosphere takes on a quasi-religious feeling and they represent what is most important to the Daasanach: to live and die for their cattle.

There are many other gestalts as well. Sorghum beer, for instance, plays an important role in Daasanech life. Its fermentation process resembles the transformation of blood and semen into a child. However, it is not clear that the Daasanech see it in this way, and I prefer to be cautious when it comes to interpreting aspects of another culture. What is clear, is that all these features reveal a world of symbols that all have to do with prosperity, fertility and wellbeing. To live in the navel of Waag is to take part in an ongoing process where everything flows. Food and fluids move through the body, which is sustained by the pulse (*sidha*), which in turn originates from Waag. In the social realm, relationships are mediated through the transfer of cattle, another form of continuous flux. Inner and outer, male and female, cattle and sorghum, wet and dry, Fathers and Sons are all poles in a dualistic universe controlled by the elders, more specifically the *ara jelaba*, who, alongside the *nyerim*, form a link between this world and Waag.

Nor is it possible to overestimate the importance of diviners (*gaal muoro*) and women who "know by their hands" (*gil onyi*). They investigate the causes of misfortune and suggest appropriate ways to counter it and restore social harmony, which is the prerequisite of wellbeing. While making a diagnosis, the patient's body serves as a map of their social relations: pain or obstructions on the right indicates tensions on the father's side, if on the left, the mother's family is involved. Neck implies the involvement of age-mates and back pain is associated with the ancestors. Diviners may make use of different methods: examining goat entrails is the most valued, but throwing sandals or necklaces are also used, as well as dream interpretation.

This was the world that I came to know through my fieldwork. That was more than a decade ago. As I complete this thesis, I'm aware of the large gap in time between then and now. I realize all too well, as James Clifford so eloquently put it, that "cultures do not hold still for their portraits. Attempts to make them do so always involve simplification and exclusion, selection of a temporal focus, the construction of a

particular self-other relationship and the imposition or negotiation of a power relationship” (Clifford, 1986: 10).

Things have already changed greatly since the Ethio-Korean cotton project was set up in the 80’s and Omoraate developed into a small town, bringing in other people with other ideas. People are now working to convince the Daasanech to abandon their “backward” habits in different domains, including education, health care, agriculture and their relationships with neighbouring tribes. In part, this is the result of government policies.

In the last decade, two trends have become apparent with respect to ethnicity in the southern Omo region. Under the leadership of Meles Zenawi, the central government of Ethiopia recognized ethnic diversity in the constitution and called for local communities to govern themselves on a regional level. However, many of the leaders of these local governments – who are often formally educated youths – are committed to the eradication of existing cultural differences. They consider many traditions “harmful” and seek to “Amharize” their fellow tribesmen instead. Many of them believe that they must civilize their illiterate, backward relatives and guide them into the modern world.

This process is accelerating as increasing numbers of parents decide to send at least one of their sons to receive formal education. Their purpose in doing so is to have at least one member of the family involved in the wage earning, which will in turn bring benefits in the future. But the knock-on effect is that their children are starting to question their traditions. I was told that even the role of the *jelaba* is being eroded and their authority being usurped by that elected leaders and the court. The fact that more and more people are dropping out of traditional life, and the coincidence of this trend with growing poverty, alcoholism and other tribulations, reinforces the belief of older Daasanech that “misfortune happens because we are losing our traditions”. It is clear that the younger generation’s ideas on development are at odds with the traditional belief that *all* traditions must be performed properly in order to obtain wellbeing.

There is also growing confusion within the Daasanech community regarding ethnicity because of both the increasing number of children receiving formal educations and the rising number of mixed marriages. Statements like “he is not a Daasanech because he is not circumcised” or “how can I get bridewealth for my daughter if she is not circumcised?” are becoming more and more common. Nevertheless, people readily state that a Daasanech remains a Daasanech no matter what, provided he or she is begotten of a Daasanech father.

During my last visit in 2009, I noticed that even some of the older people were starting to look down on their own practices, just as governmental officials had told them they should: “Our traditions are backward, because we don’t know. We didn’t go to school”. New topics of conversation included whether the circumcision of girls and the slaughtering of large numbers of oxen during the *dimi* shouldn’t be forbidden and

whether these animals shouldn't be sold instead. Scarification of warriors, the girls' metal arm- and leg-rings and even leather skirts were now forbidden. Traditional clothing is only donned on special occasions. Yet there is a certain degree of resistance within the community. When I discussed these changes with some elders, they drew the line at a ban on the killing of oxen during the '*dimi* "because that would finish us".

Despite their ambivalence towards change, people are very aware that it has its advantages. Medicines and easy access to aid in times of need are welcomed with open arms. In the near future, the new highway leading into Kenya via Omoraate and the impact of the Gibe-III dam on the annual flooding of the river will bring yet more challenges. New irrigation programs in need of both energy and maintenance will require greater involvement on the part of the community, bringing ever more Daasanech into contact with outside influence and ideas. Sooner or later, it seems, self-sufficient pastoralism and small-scale cultivation will be replaced by an economy based on money and external aid, thus eroding traditional culture and social organization even further.

The Daasanech are subject to change, as all cultures are. Yet, my observations – made over the span of a decade – lead me to believe that they have not yet changed so much as to render my work irrelevant. I firmly believe that this general description of Daasanech culture may still serve as a starting point for further research. I leave it to you, the reader, to decide whether or not such is the case.

Samenvatting in het Nederlands

In 1995 vertrok ik naar de Daasanech, een herdersvolk levend in het uiterste zuidwesten van Ethiopië, voor een onderzoek naar het verband tussen de manier waarop het lichaam getooid en verfraaid wordt en de sociale identiteit van de drager. Het onderzoek bij de Daasanech kaderde in een vergelijkende studie rond dit thema (ook bij de Himba in Namibië en de Turkana in Kenia ging een onderzoeker aan de slag) en had als uiteindelijke doel een tentoonstelling op te zetten. Gustaaf Verswijver van het Koninklijk Museum voor Midden Afrika (Tervuren) coördineerde het project en het Fonds voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek (FWO) zorgde voor de financiering. Tussen 1995 en 1997 verbleef ik iets meer dan een jaar tussen de Daasanech. Ik woonde in Aoga, een plaatsje ten zuiden van het stadje Omoraate, vlakbij de Omo rivier, en verdeelde mijn tijd tussen het maken van interviews en het bezoeken van rituelen in de buurt. De ideale informant vond ik niet, maar een aantal mensen konden me elk op hun domein behoorlijk wat vertellen. Tegen het einde van die periode sprak ik voldoende Daasanech om eenvoudige conversaties te voeren, maar mijn taalvaardigheid bleef onvoldoende om externe conversaties, speeches en liederen te begrijpen. Daarom bleef ik werken met een tolk. Voor het museum inventariseerde ik in die periode de materiële cultuur van de groep en legde een verzameling aan van de verschillende gebruiksvoorwerpen.

Mijn veldwerk leverde me een tiental schriften vol nota's op over heel wat verschillende facetten van de Daasanech cultuur en geschiedenis. De afwerking van mijn doctoraat verliep echter moeizaam. Ik slaagde er niet in een afgerond verhaal te schrijven waarvan ik tevreden was en haakte - ook omwille van familiale problemen - uiteindelijk af. En hoewel mijn leven nadien een andere wending nam, bleef de intentie om het werk alsnog af te maken bestaan. Uiteindelijk keerde ik in 2006 naar Ethiopië terug in een poging opnieuw voeling te krijgen met de mensen en het onderzoek. Na dit bezoek schreef ik een paper voor de 16^{de} Internationale Conferentie voor Ethiopische Studies die plaats vond in Trondheim. De voordracht werd door de aanwezige collega's positief onthaald en dit gaf me moed om de draad weer op te nemen. Ik nam in 2009

loopbaanonderbreking en keerde in dat jaar nogmaals voor een maand terug naar Ethiopië met een reeks vragen en onduidelijkheden. Tenslotte nodigde ik in maart 2010 Nanok uit naar België om mijn resultaten te checken en aan te passen waar nodig. Daarna kon ik met de eigenlijke redactie beginnen en het resultaat ligt hier voor.

Waar eerdere onderzoekers zoals Uri Almagor en Claudia Carr zich voornamelijk gericht hebben op de sociale organisatie van de gemeenschap en de wijze van levensonderhoud en Neil Sobania een interessante studie heeft gemaakt over de historie van de groep(en) in de regio, zag ik het als mijn opdracht de materiële cultuur en de symbolische betekenis van de diverse vormen van lichaamsversiering en -modificatie te begrijpen. Al snel werd duidelijk dat er over de manieren waarop het lichaam de sociale identiteit van de drager uitdrukt niet zo erg veel te zeggen viel, tenzij in de rituele context en als uiting van sociale spanningen gemanifesteerd als lichamelijke ziekte. Vanuit dit inzicht ging mijn interesse steeds meer uit naar de spirituele facetten van de omgang met de wereld, naar de manieren waarop de Daasanech rituelen uitvoeren en naar de modellen achter de verklaringen van ziekte en tegenspoed. Binnen datzelfde domein manifesteert zich het belang van zegeningen (en vervloekingen), wie kan zegenen en de wijze waarop dit gebeurt. Het resultaat is tweevoudig: enerzijds bied ik een beschrijving van de verschillende rituele praktijken die ik mocht meemaken (of die ik via interviews te weten kwam), anderzijds probeer ik om een aantal belangrijke concepten te beschrijven en te begrijpen. Als titel koos ik “Leven in de Navel van Waag”, omdat deze uitdrukking op een pakkende manier de intieme band uitdrukt tussen Waag en de mens: pas in de verbinding met Waag kan voorspoed zich manifesteren. Ik begrijp de meeste Daasanech rituelen dan ook als het bevestigen van die band met Waag, met de bron van de regen en alles wat leeft.

Vooraleer ik het echter over Waag heb (en over de voorouders), wijd ik eerst twee hoofdstukken aan de context waarbinnen het leven van de traditionele Daasanech zich afspeelt. Hoofdstuk één vangt aan met een beschrijving van de omgeving en een korte uitleg over de taal van de Daasanech en de diverse groepen in de regio. De meeste aandacht besteed ik aan de manier waarop de Daasanech in hun levensonderhoud voorzien en aan de etnogenese. De jaarlijkse overstroming van de Omo rivier laat een unieke combinatie van akkerbouw en extensieve veeteelt toe. Ondanks het grote belang van sorghum in het dieet van de Daasanech, is hun cultuur te beschouwen als een “cattle-complex culture”. Vee, vooral runderen, speelt een belangrijke rol in de sociale relaties en in de rituele context. Op historisch vlak toon ik aan hoe de Daasanech etnogenese zich voltrok in de loop van de 19^{de} eeuw toen groepen van proto-Daasanech zich omwille van de expansie van de Turkana naar het noordoosten trokken en er zich in het gebied rond de Omo rivier vermengden met plaatselijke groepen van landbouwers en vissers-verzamelaars. Uit die fusie ontwikkelden zich de zes traditionele Daasanech secties. Op het einde van de 19^{de} eeuw zochten groepen van verpauperde Rendile en Samburu hulp bij die groep en vormden zo twee nieuwe secties:

de Randal en de Kuoro. Hoewel alle secties ondertussen dezelfde taal spreken, verschillen de Randal en Kuoro op vlak van sociale organisatie en op vlak van gebruiken van de traditionele Daasanech, waarvan de Inkabelo de grootste groep vormen. Sinds het Ethio Koreaanse katoenproject is de invloed van buitenaf enorm toegenomen en komen de Daasanech via scholing en via de invloed van allerhande projecten rond vrede, landbouw en gezondheid voor belangrijke veranderingen te staan.

Hoofdstuk twee geeft een overzicht van de verschillende sociale categorieën. De Daasanech bestaan uit acht (territoriale) secties. Deze secties functioneren autonoom op politiek en ritueel vlak en hebben elk een eigen generatiesysteem. Elke sectie groepeerd verschillende clans, die op hun beurt onderverdeeld zijn in een aantal subclans of “huizen”. Clans zijn exogame eenheden. Ze zijn niet coöperatief, hoewel er beperkte mate van solidariteit bestaat tussen clanleden. De oorsprong van de subclans kan doorgaans teruggevoerd worden tot een bepaalde voorouder die uit het land van oorsprong kwam of binnen een bestaande clan werd geadopteerd. Leden van dezelfde subclans gebruiken gelijkaardige merktekens voor hun vee. Verder wordt aan leden van clans en subclans specifieke kenmerken en gaven of talenten toegedicht. Deze spelen vooral een rol in het rituele domein en elke clan heeft zijn eigen domein. Zo zijn de *nyerim* verbonden met Waag, en worden ze geraadpleegd voor het brengen van regen en ingezet bij het zegenen van strijders. De clans van de *mesatich* zijn verbonden met andere aspecten van de omgeving, zoals het vuur, de wind of de rivier.

De zes traditionele secties zijn onderverdeeld in twee *dolo*, door Carr en Almagor vertaald als moieties. *Dolo* zijn endogame alternaties, want een kind behoort steeds tot de tegengestelde *dol* van zijn ouders. De oorsprong van deze categorie gaat wellicht terug naar een vroeger systeem van leeftijdsgraden, dat typisch is voor Cushitische volkeren. Tegenwoordig spelen deze *dolo* nog steeds een belangrijke rol tijdens de ‘*dimi*, het indrukwekkende “feest” ter ere van de dochters, apart uitgevoerd door elke *dol*.

Naast deze *dolo*, behoort elke Daasanech nog tot een tweede soort van alternatie die de secties in twee deelt. Deze alternatie zijn generaties (*haariam*) en dit systeem is nauw verwant met dat van de Turkana, Nyangatom en Toposa. Ze bestaat uit een generatie van Vaders en één van Zonen. Net zoals de *dolo*, behoort iemand tot de generatie tegengesteld aan die van zijn ouders. Initiatie in een generatie gebeurt via het doden van een os tijdens de adolescentie of erna. Via deze daad wordt een jongen een man (*maa kaabana*), mag hij een kleikapsel en een neksteun dragen, maar krijgt hij ook een aantal verantwoordelijkheden. Elke generatie bestaat uit verschillende leeftijdsklassen die hiërarchisch zijn geordend en elk hun rol hebben binnen het generatiesysteem, vooral dan in verband met het hoeden en verdedigen van het vee. Mannen van dezelfde generatie die in een zelfde periode geïnitieerd zijn, vormen een leeftijdsklasse met een eigen naam. Binnen een leeftijdsklasse geldt vriendschap en solidariteit, daarbuiten speelt hiërarchie haar rol.

De Vaders bezitten de spirituele macht, belichaamd door hun toegang tot de centrale ruimte (*naab*) van het ‘*dimi*’ dorp. De Zonen staan in voor het hoeden van het vee. De transfer van de macht, dat wil zeggen de overdracht van de *naab* door de jongere generatie, gaat gepaard met de uitwisseling van tal van symbolen en zegeningen. Bij de Inkabelo en Elele zijn de generaties onderverdeeld in drie subgeneraties, bij de andere traditionele secties in twee en bij de Randal en Kuoro is er geen bijkomende onderverdeling.

De spirituele leiders van de gemeenschap worden *ara jelaba* genoemd. Deze mensen hebben een initiatie tot Stier ondergaan en behoren tot de oudste leeftijdsklasse van de regerende generatie. Ze fungeren als rechters bij delicten zoals echtscheiding en overspel en garanderen op spiritueel vlak de vruchtbaarheid. Dat enkel zij tijdens de ‘*dimi*’ het vlees van het sacrum (*tuo*) van geofferde dieren mogen aanraken en opeten, is een uitdrukking van hun spirituele superioriteit. Niet tot Stier geïnitieerde mannen worden *haris* genoemd. Zij hebben geen rituele functie, maar kunnen ingeschakeld worden om de bevelen van de Stieren uit te voeren.

Nadat al deze categorieën zijn beschreven, ga ik in het volgende hoofdstuk wat dieper in op een aantal belangrijke spirituele concepten. Ik begin met een beschrijving van de verschillende manieren en contexten waarop en waarbinnen het concept Waag gebruikt wordt. Ik toon dat Waag meer is dan louter een zuivere entiteit buiten en boven. Waag heeft ook iets immanent en kan beschouwd worden als een kwaliteit. Waag wordt vooral geassocieerd met regen en “Waag oproepen” of *waaghivjin* is naar analogie met het brengen van regen een voorwaarde tot voorspoed en vruchtbaarheid.

Afwezigheid Waag leidt tot tegenspoed. Men zegt dan dat “Waag weigert”. De creatieve en destructieve pool van Waag, dat bijvoorbeeld bij de Turkana duidelijk naar voren komen in de tegenstelling tussen Akuj en Ekipe, is bij de Daasanech duidelijk aanwezig in verhalen over de twee hemelstieren (*aaro waagiet*) of andere wezens die bestaan tussen hoger en beneden. Tussen beide hemelstieren woedt een strijd om vernietiging. Dezelfde ambivalentie tegenover creativiteit en onheil vinden we ook terug in de manier waarop de voorouders benaderd worden. Voorouders (*gaaram*) hebben een duidelijke invloed op de levenden en men vraagt hen eigenlijk het liefst om de levenden met rust te laten. Soms worden ze echter ook ter hulp gevraagd.

Wat de menselijke conditie betreft, sta ik stil bij het levensbeginsel dat aanwezig is in elk levend wezen. Dit beginsel wordt *sidha* genoemd en wordt beschreven als de puls, het kloppende beginsel. Van dit principe wordt gezegd dat het bij conceptie door Waag in de baarmoeder is geplaatst en bij de dood het lichaam opnieuw verlaat en naar Waag terugkeert. Gezondheid en voorspoed uiteten zich in een krachtige *sidha*, bij ziekte is de *sidha* zwak. Het pulserende principe bezorgt de dynamiek van alles wat bestaat. Ziekte wordt beschouwd als obstructie van deze puls en houdt in dat het lichaam niet meer naar behoren stroomt. Hetzelfde kan gezegd worden over sociale relaties: wanneer die stromen is het goed, als er obstructies zijn, leidt dit tot tegenspoed.

Vandaar het belang van zegeningen. Het oproepen van Waag dient ertoe om het leven, voorspoed en vruchtbaarheid te garanderen. Elke ochtend zegent de vader zijn vrouw en kinderen, zijn vee en het land en tijdens de communale rituelen zegenen de ouderen de jongeren. Ook de net besneden mannen bezitten een krachtige zegen. De Daasanech kennen een uitgebreid repertoire van manieren waarop gezegend wordt. Eigenlijk zijn alle zogenaamde *nyatalaam* (rituelen) bedoeld om de relatie met Waag te bevestigen, te versterken of te herstellen. Vloeken zijn het tegendeel van zegeningen en veroorzaken leed.

Hoofdstuk vier biedt een overzicht van de passage riten en feesten die een Daasanech op individueel vlak ondergaat tussen geboorte en dood en de manier waarop het lichaam tijdelijk of blijvend gemodificeerd wordt. De twee belangrijkste riten zijn de ‘*dimi* die ik in detail beschrijf. Verder besteed ik ook uitgebreid aandacht aan de verschillende stadia van het huwelijksproces, vanaf het moment van aanzoek tot het feest dat de volledige afbetaling van de bruidsprijs viert en voor de initiatie tot Stier. Wat opvalt is dat diverse sequensen of Gestalts in verschillende rituelen terugkeren. In de meeste rituelen worden dieren geofferd, geroosterd of gekookt en daarna communaal verorberd. Een ander element dat vaak terugkeert is het belang van de rituele boom (de *miede*) bij het vervaardigen van stokken voor ritueel gebruik zoals de lange *naas* tijdens de ‘*dimi* en de *gassare* van besnedenen en Stieren. Ook het gebruik om de *muor*, de vette wand rond de maag, rond de hals van diegene die gezegend wordt te leggen, begeleidt alle belangrijke liminale fasen in het leven.

Het vijfde en laatste hoofdstuk gaat dieper in op de manieren waarop de Daasanech tegenspoed verklaren en ermee omgaan. Grosso modo onderscheiden de Daasanech twee verschillende vormen van ziekte: de ziekten van Waag hebben een natuurlijke oorzaak en zijn meestal niet levensbedreigend, de ziekten die een oorzaak hebben in de sociale context van de patiënt zijn dat wel. De eerste vorm van ziekten kan behandeld worden met eenvoudige plantenremedies, de tweede soort heeft spirituele behandeling nodig. Ik onderscheidde vier verschillende vormen van ziekten die hun oorzaak hebben in de sociale context. De meest frequente vorm is vervloeking (‘*dor*). In tegenstelling tot wat we doorgaans veronderstellen is een vloek bij de Daasanech niet a priori iets dat bewust wordt gepleegd met het doel iemand te treffen. Integendeel, vloeken gebeuren meestal spontaan als gevolg van woede of onbewuste negatieve gevoelens die iemand heeft ten opzichte van iemand anders. Een vloek hoeft bovendien niet noodzakelijk de veroorzaker van negatieve gevoelens zelf te treffen, maar kan in principe elke bloedverwant en zelfs het vee van die persoon treffen. Een vloek is vaak het gevolg van het niet naleven van afspraken of regels, bijvoorbeeld bij het betalen van een bruidsprijs. Vloeken tussen leden van dezelfde leeftijdklasse komen ook voor. Deze vorm van vervloeking is vaak een reactie op ongepast of asociaal gedrag. Clangenoten kunnen enkel andere clangenoten vervloeken, tenzij het om *nyerim* gaat. *Nyerim* kunnen immers iedereen treffen. Het gebeurt dat *nyerim* geconsulteerd worden om iemand

bewust te vervloeken als er een vermoeden is van een misdaad, zoals overspel of diefstal.

De geesten van overleden voorouders (*gaaram*) hebben invloed op de wereld van de levenden en kunnen tegenspoed veroorzaken. *Gaaram* gedragen zich als hoeders van de traditie en kunnen hun nakomelingen straffen voor aangedaan onrecht, voor wangedrag of voor het niet of slecht uitvoeren van rituelen.

Verder kunnen het (kwade) oog (*il*) en de (kwade) tong (*erbo*) eveneens ziekte en dood veroorzaken. Ze hebben allebei te maken met afgunst en jaloezie. Ze treffen vaak mensen die om een of andere reden te benijden zijn, zoals kleine kinderen en zwangere vrouwen.

Een ander begrip dat in verband kan worden gebracht met ziekte en tegenspoed is het begrip *muoro*. Deze term verwijst naar het vermogen om de toekomst te voorspellen of de (sociale) oorzaken van een ziekte of tegenslag te achterhalen, maar wordt ook gebruikt in de betekenis van tovenarij. Zo gebruiken sommige families een poeder uit gemalen beenderen van overledenen om voor zichzelf voorspoed te verkrijgen ten koste van de dood van anderen.

'*Dor, gaaram, il, erbo* en *muoro* zijn allemaal oorzaken van tegenspoed en ziekte die hun oorsprong vinden in de ander, vaak iemand die behoort tot het sociale netwerk van het slachtoffer. Daarnaast kennen de Daasanech ook twee begrippen die te maken hebben met de (morele) toestand van de patiënt zelf. Het eerste begrip is *adaab*. Deze term wordt doorgaans gebruikt om te verwijzen naar de misdaden die iemand pleegde. Iemand die *adaab* pleegde verwerft ook *adaab* als een soort van morele smet. Deze smet kan overgaan in *feen* een toestand van gewetensloosheid en kan blijven smeulen tot het noodlot toeslaat. De term *nyogich* lijkt sterk verwant met *adaab*, maar wordt vooral gebruikt in de context van homicide. Een Daasanech die een andere Daasanech vermoordt pleegt *nyogich* en net als bij *adaab* wordt ook de morele pollutie die een gevolg is van moord *nyogich* genoemd. De buik van iemand met *nyogich* zwelt meestal op en de persoon zal een pijnlijke dood sterven. Maar de term *nyogich* wordt ook in een ruimere context gebruikt. Het verwijst dan vaak naar elke toestand van pollutie ten gevolge van het niet naleven van bepaalde rituele praktijken en het doorbreken van bepaalde taboes, zoals bijvoorbeeld seksueel contact tussen leden van verschillende *dolo*. Meer nog dan *adaab*, is *nyogich* gevaarlijk en zelfs besmettelijk. Daarom dienen de drager van *nyogich* en zijn familie door middel van rituele praktijken te worden gereinigd.

Veel diagnoses naar de oorzaken van ziekten of andere vorm van onheil worden gemaakt door specialisten, waarvan er verschillende soorten bestaan. Bij lichamelijke ziekte consulteert men gewoonlijk een *maa gil onyi*, doorgaans een vrouw, die voelt waar zich spanningen en obstructies in het lichaam bevinden en van daaruit afleidt wie vervloekte en of er een voorouder in het spel is. Andere vormen van diagnose maken gebruik van divinatie of van dromen. De "man van de darmen" leest de ingewanden van een door de patiënt aangeboden schaap of geit. Een eenvoudigere vorm van divinatie

gebeurt via het werpen van sandalen en halssnoeren. Sommige mannen zijn gespecialiseerd in het dromen van antwoorden op vragen naar oorzaken van ziekte.

De manieren waarop elk van deze vormen van ziekte wordt behandeld verschillen sterk van geval tot geval, maar toch zijn er een aantal principes die steeds terugkeren. Zo impliceert het counteren van een vloek steeds een zegening van de kant van de vervloeker. Genezing veronderstelt ook meestal een soort van (publieke) vergiffenis (*makan*) van de kant van het slachtoffer. Bij voorouderposessie moet de woede of onrust van de voorouders getemperd worden, meestal door een offer. De zieke en zijn familie dienen dan onder het bloed van een geofferde geit door te lopen. Wanneer de oorzaak van voorouder-posessie gelegen is in het feit dat bepaalde rituelen niet of niet naar behoren werden uitgevoerd, zal genezing enkel kunnen wanneer deze rituelen dit keer wel op de juiste manier worden uitgevoerd.

De behandeling van het (kwade) oog en de (kwade) tong is heel specifiek. Beide vormen van aandoening manifesteren zich als levende objecten in het lichaam en moeten dan ook verwijderd worden. Bij il door het uitzuigen, bij erbo door het uitkloppen. Ook het verwijderen van nyogich gebeurt door kloppen. In dergelijk geval zijn het de Stieren die de nyogich uit de hutten slaan met de takken van de rituele *miede*-boom. Ik vermeld ook nog het ritueel dat uitgevoerd wordt na het doden van een vijand. Ook dit ritueel kan beschouwd worden als een manier van helen.

Waar hoger genoemde rituelen zich vooral afspelen op het vlak van het individu en zijn directe familie, kennen de Daasanech ook tal van collectieve rituelen. Het *wolewole* ritueel dat gehouden wordt bij elke nieuwe maan en waarbij de rituele hoorn bespeeld worden, is een manier waarop de nieuwe maan voorspoed gevraagd wordt. Hierbij worden geen dieren geofferd, maar worden de betrokkenen ingestreken met *kuul*, een mengsel van witte klei en melk. De meeste collectieve rituelen zijn te beschouwen als *suoriyom*, offers in ruil voor zegeningen. Doorgaans offert een groep een dier aan een hiërarchisch hogere groep of aan een *maa nyerich* in ruil voor diens zegening en dus voorspoed vanwege Waag. Voorbeelden hiervan zijn de *yoi*, een collectief ritueel dat aan de migratie voorafgaat en waarbij een naamos gedood wordt en de *bersho*, waarbij een jongere generatie de oudere uitnodigt en dieren offert in ruil voor een voorspoedige migratie in het regenseizoen. Andere *suoriyom* werden traditioneel georganiseerd om epidemieën te counteren, wanneer men naar de oorlog trekt of wanneer het land in gevaar is. Andere collectieve rituelen zijn het traditionele vredesritueel en de rituelen waarin regen gevraagd wordt.

In mijn besluit kom ik terug op een aantal terugkerende elementen binnen de rituele sfeer. Ik eindig met de vraag hoe het nu verder zal gaan, nu de tradities onder toenemende druk komen te staan en de Daasanech via scholing en allerhande projecten andere ideeën opgedrongen krijgen, terwijl men beseft dat het negeren van tradities leidt tot tegenspoed.

Appendix

Appendix 1. Table with the villages and estimated number of inhabitants in 1996

Section	n	Name	Houses	Inhabitants
Elele	1	Raate	170	823
		Borokonoch	215	1075
		Torongole	145	720
	2	Lobut	205	1057
		Kalowey	134	678
				4335
Ngarich	3	Lokiro	108	540
		Doshe	163	813
		Naikea	174	800
				2153
Inkoria	4	Haddo	186	1010
		Hocholoch	115	575
	5	Herikar	154	620

		Fajech	201	1015
	6	Bubua	126	1124
				3342
Riele	7	Diele Riele	128	646
				646
Inkabelo Shir	8	Diele Nyimor	109	545
		Lomosia	143	715
		Sri Miriet	142	710
		Bajo	80	413
		Edboron	122	640
	9	Akudungule	34	159
		Lobemukat	171	855
		Rukruk	176	887
	10	Kelem	315	1575
		Kolomanyato	140	700
		Harikol	122	610
	11	Ednyangaluk	152	740
		Saaleny	127	635
		Nyimemeri	143	715
				9899
Randal	12	Lochabir	245	1220
				1220
Kuoro		Karuo	140	700
				700
Oro	13	Alikatakach	131	628
		Har Siamoi	105	552
		Gumbubur	165	823
				1808
				24121

Appendix 2. Explanation of the 'dimi by Lokasiamoi, the *maa makaale* of the Shir dol baadiet

Naas. When you cut the *naas*. When you cut the *naas*. Waag gave us. Waag gave us. Before, we couldn't get circumcised before we had a daughter. After circumcision, you took an ox to buy coffee. You bring coffee to the village. The next day, you place a white feather on your *shushulich*. You place the feather. You look for a song maker and give her the feather. The song maker woman. She makes your song and you listen. Your *gaaro*, your *gaaro*. This is for the dances during the 'dimi. She makes your *gaaro*. First, you listen. When you listen and she is ready, you kill a fat goat for her. You cannot make a 'dimi without this song. When she made this song, you can start your 'dimi. After. After. When you finished this. eee.

You call her again. When she comes to your house. When she comes, the dharama-woman, the *darama* woman. She brings her assistants (*lalli*). She sleeps in your house. Then, you can cut the *naas* from the *miede*. This *naas* is not cut by you. It is cut by your brother. You cannot go with him. You have work in your house. You prepare yellow *hod* in front of your house and you wait him. When you have no brother, your father's brother's sons can cut the *naas* for you, anybody from the same clan can. Your father's brother's sons. When they cut the *naas*, you break the yellow stone and make the *hod*. You smear your body with that *hod* and they go. When they bring the *naas*, you smear butter on it and on the *gas* as well. Smear on the *naas*. Smear on the *naas*.

The elders are inside your hut. Elders like me are inside your hut. You give us water. You give us water. Afterwards, the people dance in front of the hut. We call them: come, come inside this house. The elders bless them and bless the ax. They bless the ax. They bless the ax. They bless the ax. We give an ax. Ax. Ax. They give it in my hand. The 'dimi father gives me butter and I smear the ax. I smear. I smear.

When the ax is smeared, they can cut the *naas*. This is our custom. When the Daasanech arrived here, they had the ax and the *naas* with them. It is a present from Waag. Waag gave us this custom. Afterwards, we smear the ax with butter. We smear the ax with butter. We give the ax in his right hand, not his left hand. four times, we bless them. Four times. Four times.

The cattle of the Daasanech, a cow has four tits. We bless four times. Four. Tss, tss, tss, tss. We do not give straight away. First we bless four times. We show four times. He touches. Four times. Then we give. Then we go outside. And the people dance. They dance. The dance in front of his house. They dance the *gaaro*. They dance the *gaaro*. After they danced, we go together with him. We go in front of him to the forest. Afterwards, we come back. We bless him and sit down. Go, cut the *naas*. You have

permission. This *naas*, when they go inside the forest, they can find the *naas*. The straight *naas*. No problem. Straight away.

When they found the *naas*, they cut. We wait in front of the house. We sit. When they return, we are happy and the 'dimi father kills a fat sheep in front of his hut. This sheep is called *aṅ naasiet*. It is killed. The *aṅ naasiet*. When the *naas* and the *gas* is put in the hole of the hut, the sheep is cooked. They cook the meat. The *naas* comes with the leaves. When it arrives, butter is ready. The *naas* is put in front of the hut and butter is smeared on the *naas* en the *gas*. The *naas* is still wet. The *naas* and the *gas* are cut together. They make a hole. They place both in that hole. The *naas* is tied on the *gas*. The elders smear the butter. The elders smear the butter. The elders smear the butter.

Afterwards, we can eat the meat. When we have eaten the meat, we tie *gas* and *naas* together (because the *naas* cannot touch the ground).

Then, we go home. we sleep four days in our home. Four days. After four days, we come back and cut the leaves and the branches (*gurfu*). We cut the branches. We cut. we cut. When all branches are gone, we smear with butter. We smear. We smear. We smear. That day, he cannot sleep there. He has to leave. He takes the donkey and leaves for the 'dimi village. When he builds his house in the 'dimi village, de *naas* and the *gas* is dry now. He carries them. We go with him to the 'dimi place. He collects his ornaments: *muor*, *dum*, *lol*, *raate*. We bless four times: skin of leopard (*muor*), tail (*dum*), skin of colobus (*lol*), shield (*raate*). We place the *gas* in the ground and the *naas* left of the house: Shield: *tsss, tsss*. We give in his hand. *Dum*: *tsss, tsss*: we give in his hand. *Muor*: *tsss, tsss*: we give in his hand; ostrich feathers (*neech*): *tsss, tsss*: we bind it around his head. Afterwards the *naas*. Four times. We give in his hand. He takes the *naas*. He places everything on the back of the donkey. He goes and stops (at the 'dimi place`).

First, the house of the *maa jelaba* is build. Then, the other houses are build around the house fo the *maa jelaba*. First the house of *maa makaale*. Eee.

This afternoon, the *maa 'dimi* and his brothers kill many goats and sheep. They kill. During the drinking, the *jelaba* sing their circumcision songs and bless During the drinking, the *jelaba* sing their circumcision songs and bless in *napiet*. *Aṅ naabiet*. They die. *Aṅ uraam*. They die. Many people come. They come from everywhere. Each clan. Each clan. Each clan. They kill goats and sheep. They kill and cook for the house of *maa jelaba*. We eat. we sleep. In the house of *maa jelaba*, the elders sleep. First, the *maa kariat* gives. When this is done, when we go to *hawoyeya*, the 'dimi begins. Afterwards, we kill and give. "Water kills me". When you have many goats, you kill three, when you have few, you kill tow. When you have none, you buy *arage*, or sorghumbeer, or coffee.

That's what they can do. It is like that. After *biye ye yies* ("Water kills me": the slaughtering of the goats and sheep called), we cannot wait any more. No more nights. The people make the *naab*. The 'dimi man gives the *aṅ galaam*. They give freely. Freely. When the 'dimi starts and they build their huts, they cut the *aṅ galaam*. The Nyimor do

not kill. You kill the animals. You children of Nyimor, children of Nyigabite, children of Nyilimito, you kill. The Nyimor, the Nyilimito and Nyigabite do not kill. They sit in the *naab*. They make the *naab*.

We drink *bersho*. The *maa* 'dimi kill a lot of sheep for the *naab*. In the morning, we prepare the *naab*. In the evening, the 'dimi men cook coffee for us and when it darkens, we make the *naab*. We remain the night. That night, the 'dimi man kill two big (female) sheep, the *shiene jelaba*, *shiene jelaba*. These two sheep are killed. One is called *shien jelaba*, the other "the spear is watching you" (*naan ko dhagasane*).

Next morning, the "lungs" (*saamo*) are killed. Many oxen. People kill many oxen. They cook the ribs in front of their hut. Only the ribs. When the ribs are ready, they go to cut the *miede*. When they come with the *miede*, the sacrum (*tuo*) is cooked. When the *miede* arrives in the village, the *tuo* is cooked. When the *tuo* is ready, the *miede* is in the village. When the *tuo* is ready, the *miede* is in the village. Then, we eat the *tuo*. We eat the *tuo*. We sleep one night. In the early morning, very early, the *shiene* (one *shiene* was killed the night before and kept on the roof of the hut) is brought.

The other *shiene* is not killed. Each 'dimi daughter takes the other *shiene* and gives tit to the *maa jelaba*. This *shiene* is tied to a stick in front of the hut of the *maa makaale*. Each daughter brings me a sheep. The elders open the rope. They open the rope and take the sheep. The *maa makaale* gives. The head of the sheep is smeared with white clay. The *maa makaale*, like me, opens the rope and gives the sheep to the elders. I cannot give with the rope. The rope is removed. "How many do you want?" "Five". "I give you five". This one gets what he asks. The other gets what he asks. The rest is for my children.

I carry the *muor* around your neck. This is the *muor* of the *shiene* and the *an ko dhagasane*. The fat part is for the elders. The 'dimi men place it around the neck of the *jelaba*. It is not for the daughters. It is for the elders. The *an ko dhagasane* is cooked and given to the *naab*. The meat of the *shien karu* is kept on the roof.

When we have eaten the meat, we go to say: "Are you ready? Get up. Prepare the *muor*. Cut the *muor* of the sheep. Cut the *muor*. When there are five elders, we cut five pieces. When there are six elders, we cut six pieces. First, they are put across the neck of the *maa makaale*. Then over the neck of my second one, my third one, my fourth one. After that, they give us the soup of the sheep meat. I bless the meat and the soup. Without my blessing, nobody can eat.

When they eat without blessing, their stomach will become big. When a child would steal the meat, his stomach will swell, he will become skinny and die. that's why we bless this meat first with the soup in the pot. Tsss, tsss, we bless the meat in the pot. Tsss, tsss, tsss. So it is.

The next day. It is like that. When this is done, our woman go with us. They give one leg to him. When your wife is far, you give to the eldest daughter of Nyimor. When your wife is present, you give to her. This man's wife, this man's wife, this man's wife. You

give the mat. One leg, I give to my daughter or my wife. One leg, I give to the wife of my helper.

When we have passed all houses – we started here, we ended their – we go to sleep. The rest of the sheep is kept on the roof. That meat, we cannot eat now. They keep it. They cannot eat without my blessing. Only after I blessed it, they may eat. We bless four times. After this, it is finished.

The next morning, when the sun is still low, they kill the *saamo* after the *shiene* is eaten. Before we eat the *shiene*, they bring the *saamo*. We eat the *shiene*. When they killed the oxen with a spear, we eat the *shiene* in the *naab* houses. We eat, we eat, just like yesterday night. Not all elders can eat. First, I have to bless them. They cannot eat without my blessing. Otherwise, their stomach will swell and they die.

They go together with me to every '*dimi* house and we enter. I bless every elder. All of them. All. Only we have the white clay on our face. Only we can bless. Only we smear the white. Only we carried the *muor* of the *shiene* around our neck. We can bless.

Now the *saamo* are killed. The *saamo* are killed. The *tuo* of the *saamo*, the elders cannot eat. First, the *miede* should be brought. We wait for the *miede*. When the *miede* is put around the *naab*, the elders take the *tuo* and put it under the *miede*. The *tuo* is cooked in front of the *naas* house by the women of the *maa jelaba*. The women of the *jelaba*. The old women cook it. Only the women who performed *hiit galan* can cook.

After this, the next morning, early morning, the elders go in the huts of the '*dimi* fathers. In the early morning, we go inside the '*dimi* houses. The people prepare coffee. They put a lot of water in the pot. When the water is hot and the coffee is cooked, the elders drink coffee.

The elders of each house drink coffee and the *maa makaale* goes into his own house. When he enters his house, he goes to sit in front of the pot. His wife sits at his back, together with the other elders.

Then, the '*dimi* daughters enter. First the Turat daughter. He takes water from a new calabash and pours cold water in it. The Turat daughter comes first. They take her hand and place her hand in the water of the calabash who has no crack. Then, they smear her hand with the soot of the pot. When the Turat daughter is made black, the others come in. Each daughter is made black with soot. It is his hand, his hand.

The skin of a female sheep lies around her neck. I blacken them, I take the skin of the sheep. the sheep of the daughters. The skin with the hair and the four legs. She wears a woman's skirt round her neck. (the black soot is to protect them against evil eye, because the girls look very pretty now, dressed like women). The woman's dress hangs around her neck. On their back, their arms come out of it. Then we take the skin. That is it.

They follow the houses, First the Turat, then the Edhe, Fargaaro, Gaalbur, Ili, Mur, Tiem and last the Turnyerim. When they are finished, they take white clay (*kuul*). I put it on the skin of the ox. I take mil and mix, mix, mix, mix. The *hod* cannot be mixed with

water, only with mil; I take milk in the modch, I mix it with milk. I mix it. I mix it. When I mixed milk and kuul, I smear myself with it. First my face and my breast, then my arms, then the rest of my body. Then I smear my helper. First his face, then his breast, then the rest of his body. He sits next to me. In Amharic, they call such man an assistant.

I smear his body. I smear the others. My helper assists. We smear the elders with kuul. We wash them. This is called *kab gegeny*. Smearing of the back, the shoulders. I do this in my house, the house of *maa makaale*. Then, I leave my house fist. I leave first. I leave first. The others follow. We have a song. We sing that song. We go to the *miede*. Haa woyeya. Hoo haa woyeya. Hoo. Hoo. Haa woyeya. Mu-u. Hoo. Ki ye. Finished. Finished. All elders together. The *dol baadiet* elders in group, the *dol gerge* elders in group. When they go, we stop. When they sop, we go. I go first. The others follow. First *dol baadiet*. They are the fathers. (The *dol baadiet* elders are smeared with *kuul*, the *dol gerge* elders aren't. The next day, it is reversed.)

We call the men of the *naas*. Come slowly. come slowly. They come inside the *miede*. They are with the *naas* and with their daughter. We bless them. We bless them. Under the *miede*. That moment, no other wife can come into the *miede*. Only the women who made *hiit galan*. The other women can't. They cannot come under the *miede*. The fathers take their daughters with the hand to go into the *miede*. the first 'dimi daughter is taken by her father. The other daughters by the father's brothers. when there are no brothers, somebody of your clan. That is it. Also that. It is over. It is over.

Then, oxen are collected. The *dol gerge* takes the "oxen of the ritual stick" (*aañ gaasare*) of *dol baadiet*. The *dol baadiet* takes the oxen of the *gaasare* of *dol gerge*. The *dol gerge* elders go to sit in front of the *miede*. When they sit there, they know everybody, the 'dimi men come and invite them for the oxen. "I give you this ox. This colour, this horns, this marks, this brands". They shout with high voice: "Loka, Iyeti". Afterwards, the elders take their *gaasare* and beat the back of the ox. They beat, they beat, they beat. They know the colour of the ox. *Dol gerge* gives to *dol baadiet*, *dol baadiet* gives to *dol gerge*. This is it.

Then the "oxen of the hindleg" (*aañ hergo*) are killed. *Dol baadiet* kills four, *dol gerge* kills three. The frontleg is kept in the hut of the *maa makaale*. Liver and ribs are kept next to the fire. The *tuo* stays in the skin and the women cook it. We, the elders can eat the *tuo*. We call the elders of every generation and give them the meat of the *tuo*. Only Randal and Kuoro cannot get. They have no *ara*. They have no 'dimi.

After four days, the *miede* is taken away. When it is dry, it is taken away. We place it down slowly, in the direction of the east. The *maa makaale* takes a piece of *miede* and makes a circle around the *naab*. Then, all houses can be dismantled and everybody returns back home.

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