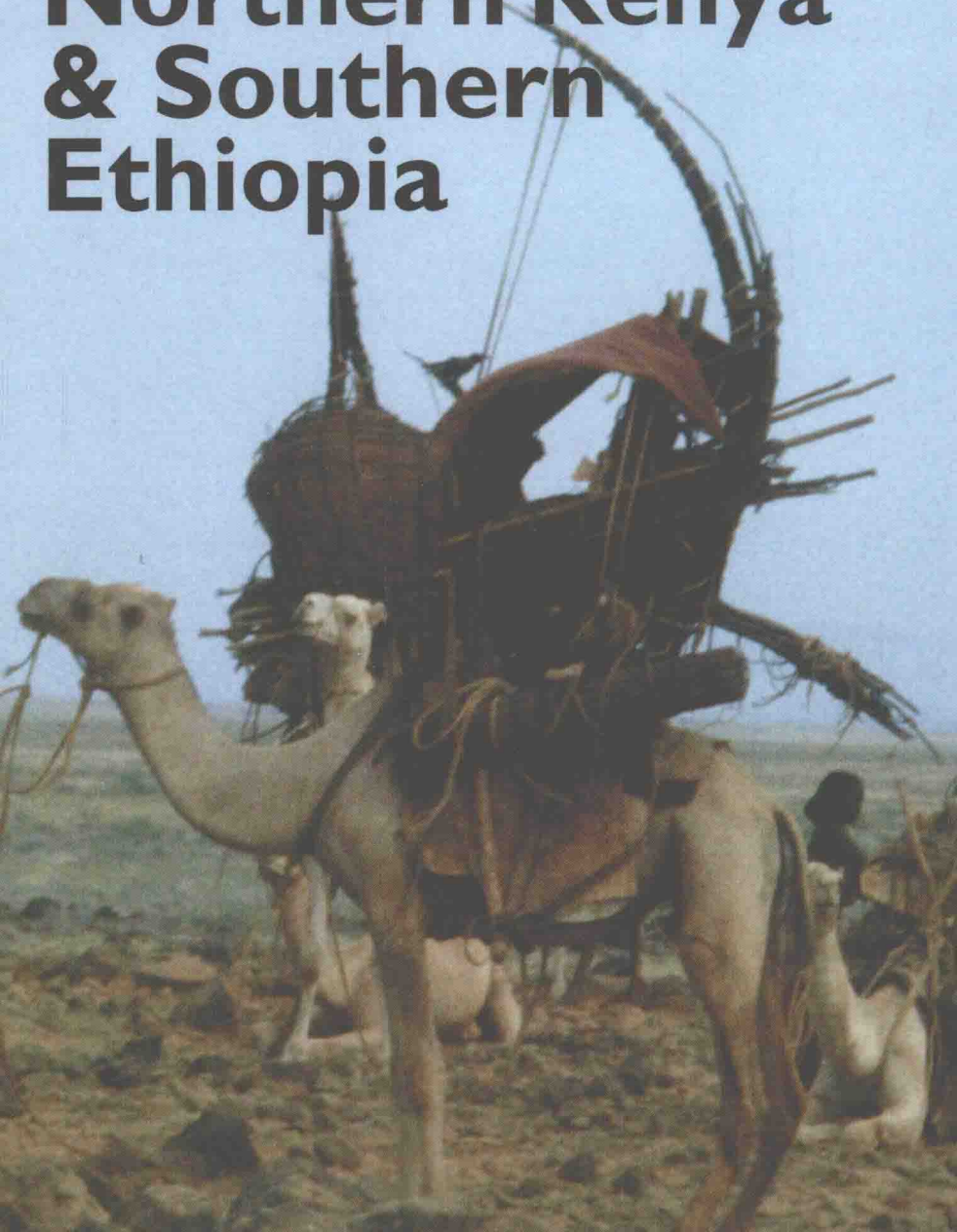


Günther Schlee & Abdullahi A Shongolo

# Pastoralism & Politics in Northern Kenya & Southern Ethiopia



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GÜNTHER SCHLEE  
& ABDULLAHI A. SHONGOLO



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## List of Abbreviations

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AU	African Union
B.	Boran (Language)
BORE	Boran/Rendille
CDF	Constituency Development Fund
CIFA	Community Initiatives Facilitation Assistance
COPEP	Community Peace Programme
DC	District Commissioner
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
FORD	Forum for the Restoration of Democracy
GGA	Gumi Gaayo Assembly
IDP	Internally Displaced Person(s)
KANU	Kenya African National Union
Ksh	Kenya Shilling
LASDAP	Local Authority Service Delivery Assistance Programme
LATF	Local Authority Trust Fund
MP	Member of Parliament
NARC	National Rainbow Coalition
OALF	Oromo Abo Liberation Front
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
OCPD	Officer Commanding Police Division
OPDO	Oromo People's Democratic Organization
PARIMA	Pastoralist Risk Management
PISP	Pastoralists Integrated Support Programme
PC	Provincial Commissioner
PRS	Proto-Rendille-Somali
R.	Rendille (Language)
REGABU	Rendille, Gabra, Burji (suspected ethnic coalition)
SACCO	Savings and Credit Cooperative Organisations
SALF	Somali Abo Liberation Front
Som.	Somali (Language)
Sw.	Swahili (Language)
TOLs	Temporary Occupation Licences
TPLF	Tigrayan People's Liberation Front

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# Introduction

## GÜNTHER SCHLEE

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There is no need to worry about the future of pastoralism. Pastoralism came into existence thousands of years ago, not long after mixed agriculture from which it has derived as a form of specialization. It can be temporarily obstructed, oppressed, or abolished but it will always re-emerge. The reason for this is simple: about one third of the land surface of the world and two thirds of Africa (United Nations 1997) are arid or semi-arid and cannot be used for any other form of food production.<sup>1</sup> Low rainfall and its erratic distribution will always require herd mobility. If the groups utilizing these areas now, the so-called 'traditional' pastoralists are exposed to political and economic conditions which reduce them to poverty and force them into sedentarization or if they are destroyed by military force, others will take over. 'Modern' pastoralists of urban or agricultural origins might play that role, assisted by satellites (remote sensing, GPS) and other modern communication technologies. The existing groups of pastoralists can be expropriated, marginalized, expelled, or decimated. But then non-pastoralists will become, as they have done again and again throughout history, the new pastoralists. The question is not whether also in the future there will be a mobile form of livestock production. There will. The question is to whom it will belong.

In the case of Kenya, huge areas of former pastoral land belonging to the Maasai were cleared of Maasai and given to white ranchers. In the First World War, the British and Africans from Kenya, then the British East Africa Protectorate, had been fighting side by side against the Germans and 'their' Africans in Tanganyika, but when demobilization came and soldiers had to be settled, land belonging to the Africans was given to the Whites. Pastoral land became ranch land. After independence some ranches were sold to the new Kenyan elites, who – unsurprisingly – were of almost exclusively sedentary background, not of pastoralist background, and stemmed from more developed, more densely populated parts of the country with better educational facilities and more economic and political clout. But the new ranchers soon discovered that their ranches

<sup>1</sup>Food production in this sense refers to the activities which date back to the Neolithic revolution and the domestication of plants and animals. Hunting, gathering and fishing, according to this definition, are not food production but food acquisition, since the organisms put to human use in these modes of livelihood have not been assisted in their proliferation and growth by the efforts of humans.

were too small to balance the risks involved in rain falling in one place and not in another. Universally, the amount of rainfall is correlated to patterns of distribution. The lower the precipitation the more erratic it is. There is no reliable minimum. The ranchers soon started to lease pastures to each other and to trek or truck cows across the country. Livestock production resumed its nomadic nature. But cows now belonged to the ranchers, not to the Maasai. Settler families sent their children, typically two or so, to expensive boarding schools in England. The land on which hundreds of low-cost Maasai children were raised now served to earn the fees for two children and these fees were payable abroad. So again, the question is not whether livestock production is mobile or not but to whom it belongs and where its proceeds ultimately go.

In Kenya it is largely the northern half of the country plus much of the hinterland of the coast in the east and the Masai steppe in the south which is arid or semi-arid and used by pastoralists. Also, the Ethiopian highlands are surrounded by pastoralist lowlands on all sides. The present volume is concerned with those in the south which geographically and ethnically form one zone with northern Kenya.

Although this vast lowland covers the larger part of the surface of Kenya, in the minds of many people it does not really form part of it. When weary travellers, shaken up on a lorry from Moyale<sup>2</sup> or Marsabit after hundreds of miles of rough, corrugated dirt road reach the tarmac at Isiolo and the shaking suddenly stops,<sup>3</sup> they say, with an element of irony: 'Now we are in Kenya!' Also the central Kenyans do not really perceive of the north as a part of their country and often do not have the faintest idea about its nature. When once, hitting town thirty years ago, I tried to explain to a group of ladies in a bar in Nairobi that I did field research among camel herders in northern Kenya, they wanted to make sure that I was not talking about Arabia. They were surprised to hear that there are camels in Kenya. The problem is not with these ladies. The problem is that the political class in Kenya often does not have a much better appreciation of the character of these remote areas of their country and the issues at stake here.

Over the decades I have had a huge number of similar experiences, but I have not systematically documented them. To some extent the press-cuttings collected by Abdullahi Shongolo, a selection of which we quote in this volume, mostly in the chapter on 'Moi Era Politics', make up for this. In many of these one can find stereotypes, misrepresentations and expressions of ignorance in the minds of central Kenyans about the pastoralists in the north of their country. Lacking a detailed documentation of misrepresentations of pastoralists by non-pastoralists from my own experience, let me cover this aspect of the Kenyan social reality by pointing to the work of Saverio Krätli (2006).

<sup>2</sup> Following some maps, here we use Moyale for the town as a whole or, more specifically, for the Kenyan part of the town, and Moiale for the Ethiopian part

<sup>3</sup> For the last couple of years the tarmac has been pushed northwards and now, 2011, it reaches the southern end of what used to be Marsabit District.

Krätli (2006 pp. 123–8) addresses the question whether the poverty of pastoralists – in this case he studies the Turkana and Karimojong on both sides on the border between Kenya and Uganda – can be found to have cultural roots. The answer is ‘yes’ but with a new twist. While common wisdom attributes poverty to the ‘traditional’ or backward ‘culture’ of the impoverished marginal groups themselves, Krätli finds the problem in the ‘culture’ of the mainstream. There is a culture of misrepresentation of pastoralists in the popular, political, and ‘development’ discourses of the dominant society which has detrimental, marginalizing and impoverishing effects on those talked about.

Mainstream culture in school books, press reports, policy statements and NGO discourses depict pastoralists as warlike, primitive, and backward – if they are discussed at all. Taxi drivers in Kampala appear to have as vague an idea about where Karamoja is located as the Nairobi ladies cited above have about where to find camels.

A particularly illustrative example about a certain normative image of modernity held against pastoral mobility is what Krätli reports about corrugated iron sheets. Corrugated iron sheets for the roofing – and sometimes also for the walls – of immobile homes seem to be the epitome of modernity which is as closely linked to a sedentary form of life as nomadism is – wrongly – identified with an early stage of development. Krätli describes how some tarpaulins from lorries from a closed down World Food Programme outpost had found their way into Turkana land. The pastoralists found them very practical for the construction of temporary shelters and wanted to buy more tarpaulins. This idea was ridiculed by a Turkana official who said that his tribesmen should procure themselves corrugated iron sheets rather than tarpaulins (Krätli 2006 p. 131).

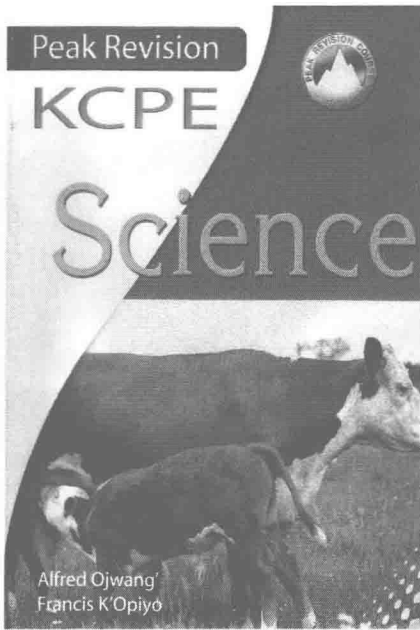
Contrary to the image of being conservative and hostile to innovation, Krätli found pastoralists very receptive for things which they find practical, like rain coats. I can confirm this, as many other observers can. Mobile phones in the early 2000s made rapid progress in pastoral populations in Africa. The possession of phones spread faster than the networks. Where the networks on the ground were too weak, people climbed trees<sup>4</sup> or hills or went to specific locations where, for unexplained reasons, the telephone connections were better than in the immediate neighbourhood.<sup>5</sup> There must now be thousands of places across Africa which are called ‘Network’.<sup>6</sup> Where the network was weak close to the ground, people ingeniously hung phones from the ceilings of their huts, put the loudspeaker of the phone on in order to hear the other participant and stood on their toes to answer.<sup>7</sup> There was certainly no conservatism at work which slowed down the reception of this particular

<sup>4</sup>Oral communication by Elhadi Ibrahim Osman about Mbororo Fulbe along the Blue Nile in the Sudan.

<sup>5</sup>Own observation from Sennar State, Sudan.

<sup>6</sup>Own observation from Kenya and the Sudan.

<sup>7</sup>Own observation, Sudan.



**Figure 0.1** Peak Revision, KCPE Science book. This Hereford cow from the cover of a Kenyan Primary school book may send the pupils, including the children of pastoralists, the signal that the ways African cows are managed on African dry lands are not worthy to be studied or are not part of the knowledge needed in the modern world. Education which does not relate to the pastoralist reality alienates the children of pastoralists from the pastoralist way of life and way of production, not just because it is provided in a sedentary form rather than being brought to the pastoralists, but also because of its content. (Source: Krätli and Dyer 2009 p.53)

modern technology.<sup>8</sup> We can only agree with Krätli's finding that pastoralists are fast in adopting innovations which are useful to them and that their reluctance to adopt other innovations might have to do with their lack of usefulness.

In contrast to the backward image projected on them, pastoralists do not perform so badly along a number of parameters. Citing Scoones (1995 Table 6.1), Krätli points out 'in Kenya and Uganda returns per hectare and per animal are higher in "traditional" systems than in ranching' (2006 p. 127). Farmers in industrial countries receive huge subsidies, even in spite of the disadvantages to which they are exposed (like 'quarantines' favouring the ranchers whenever pastoral competition on the market is too strong (Schlee 1990b)). This juxtaposition leads to serious questions. Who is better? Which system of production is more efficient? In a similar context, Krätli points out that the subsidies to farmers in OECD countries exceed the GDP of Africa (Krätli 2006 p. 134). Subsidized

<sup>8</sup>Hussein A. Mahmoud (2003) stresses the importance of mobile phones for livestock traders. Cf. the chapter on 'Ecology and Politics' in Schlee with Shongolo (2012).

farming leads to overproduction in OECD countries. Excess grain then is sometimes sent as food relief to Africa.<sup>9</sup> This food relief is perceived as a humanitarian intervention and an indicator of economic failure. The subsidies, however, which have led to global inequality and distorted markets, are neither seen as humanitarian intervention nor as indicators of failure. Why not?

Krätli gives many examples about stereotypes which misrepresent pastoralism and lead to their marginalization and to misconceived development intervention from his experience in Kenya and Uganda. He could well have adduced more examples from the same book (Dyer 2006) in which also his own contribution, cited above, is included. The chapter by Carr-Hill (2006) abounds with unverifiable stereotypes which have wide currency in development circles.

In his chapter, which is about 'Educational Services and Nomadic Groups' in six East and North-east African countries, Carr-Hill seems to regard the poverty of pastoralists as an unquestionable given. After defining nomads he moves on straight to defining poverty, a concept which does not even appear in the title of the chapter. Not a single line is wasted on explaining why a discussion of nomadism should lead to a discussion of poverty. Apparently, this happens automatically.

The data given is then used to make the point that pastoral economies have been marginalized and have become dependent on remittances from family members in town. Still, there is a bias in reporting pastoral poverty, making it look worse than it is. If it is such an unrewarding way of life, why do even impoverished and sedentarized nomads proudly maintain a pastoral social identity and put a high value on having herds, as Carr-Hill also reports (2006 p. 39). Monetary income (GDP per capita) is compared and found to be only half as high for the pastoralists as in the national average,<sup>10</sup> and subsistence agriculture is briefly mentioned as an economic factor in the lives of agro-pastoralists (Carr-Hill 2006 p. 41). But the obvious fact that herd owners derive subsistence from their herds, that they drink milk and slaughter their own animals, at least on ritual occasions, is not mentioned at all, apparently because this subsistence use of animals is normally not expressed in monetary terms. A similar 'modernist' perspective informs the statement that 'lack of high-grade stock' (Carr-Hill 2006 p. 40) is one of the problems pastoralists have. High performance breeds from Europe have been extensively used in Africa and, by cross-breeding, their genes have spread widely in higher and lower proportions. Breeding for special performance features, whether on the basis of European breeds (called 'exotic' in Africa) or of local stock, however comes at a price. Fast growth comes with higher demands and lower resistance to deprivations. Nomads in arid environments (and even

<sup>9</sup>The 'good practice' of food relief would be to buy grain from areas as close as possible to the areas in need of it so as to minimize the adverse effects of free distribution of food on food production in a region. This practice is not always followed.

<sup>10</sup> 100 USD as against 200 USD for Eritrea (Carr-Hill 2006 p. 40).

villagers who use unimproved pastures around villages) therefore often have preferred to keep their local unimproved breeds or have reverted to them after acquiring experience with 'improved' stock.<sup>11</sup>

## DECONSTRUCTING THE ARCHAIC PASTORALIST

Popular perceptions of pastoralism, including perceptions by politicians and development planners, too often seem to be informed by theories which date back at least to the eighteenth century. The classical evolutionist three-stage-model of the type hunters-herders-farmers had nomadic livestock production developing straight out of hunter, or as we would now say hunter-gatherer, forms of livelihood. Mobile herders were believed to precede sedentary agriculturalists with a mixed economy and were thus more 'primitive' than these latter. E. Hahn (1891, 1892, 1896, 1911, 1913, 1925, 1927) may have been the first to doubt this sequence. He pointed to something rather obvious, namely that it is difficult to domesticate herbivores in a hunting economy. To feed captured young animals, at least some early form of agriculture is required. The only apparent counter-example, discussed in the older literature, the domestication of reindeer by taiga hunters, may not have happened independently but may have been derived by stimulus diffusion from the steppe where cattle and horses had been domesticated for a long time (Vajda 1968). For quite some time now, the consensus that the domestication of ungulates has never and nowhere taken place independently or prior to the domestication of plants has been very broad. Directly or indirectly all forms of livestock keeping have been found to derive from mixed farming. Rather than being 'primitive', mobile pastoralism is a comparatively recent and rather sophisticated specialization out of a mixed economy.<sup>12</sup>

There is a more recent debate which seems to rehabilitate Montesquieu and the idea that nomadic pastoralism is a very old form of production. This debate relates to the question of independent domestication of cattle in the Sahara and whether or not it preceded the domestication of cattle elsewhere and – more importantly – whether or not it preceded the domestication of plants and crop production. If the latter is confirmed, the eighteenth century theorists who portrayed 'nomadic' pastoralism as directly evolving from 'nomadic' hunter-gatherers would, after all, be right.

This is how Homewood (2008) summarizes the new finding about the eastern Sahara:

From around 12000 BP, perhaps driven by changing climatic and environmental conditions, people in north-east Africa, south-west Asia and the southern part of East Asia all independently invented the domestication

<sup>11</sup> Oral information about Kenaana cattle in the Blue Nile area of the Sudan by Awad Karim Tijani. Cf. also Schlee (1988b) on Rendille and Somali camels.

<sup>12</sup> For a fuller discussion see Schlee 2005.

of animals and plants for food. In each case, the process seems first to have centred around the domestication of a focal animal species, with local pre-agricultural traditions of wild plant management later refined into production of domesticated plants. Over the next few thousand years another 7–10 independent centres of domestication arose world-wide, including several more in Africa. The present discussion focuses on the origins of the livestock species which underpin present-day African pastoralist societies.

African ecoclimatic zones and conditions of 12000–11000 BP resembled those of the present day. Between 11000 BP and 9000 BP climates were warm and wet, Lake Chad reached its maximum extent, and perennial watercourses flowed from the Central Saharan Tibesti and Hoggar massifs. During this period, Khoisan-speaker traditions were found throughout the eastern and south-eastern wooded savannas. The Afrasans were associated with Mediterranean climate regions throughout Northern Africa and the Red Sea Hills. Sudanic-speaking Nilo-Saharans spread north as savanna vegetation expanded northward into the Sahara. Coming into interaction with the Afrasan peoples, they adopted the use of wild grains, and transposed the techniques of wild sedge and grass collection and preparation to new species of wild cereals including fonio, and wild forms of sorghum and pearl millet. The moist warm period also meant a southward extension of Mediterranean climates, habitats and faunas including *Bos primigenius africanus*, the wild ancestor of African (and European) indigenous cattle domesticates, and present in North Africa into historical times. The Saharo-Sahelians of the Middle Nile are thought to have domesticated cattle first. They left domesticated cattle remains dating to 9400–9200 BP, alongside evidence of North Sudanic wild grain use (Nabta Playa – Wendorf et al. 1984, 1987; Wendorf and Schild, 1998, 2001; and Bir Kiseiba: Egypt – Gautier 1986, 1987; Marshall, 1994; MacDonald, 2000; Blench and MacDonald, 2000). These pre-date the first food-producing economies of the more northerly Nile Valley and Delta (Holmes, 1993; Stanley and Warne, 1993), and the first domestic cattle in south-west Asia, by a thousand years or more (cf. Russell et al. 2005). Nilo-Saharan invention of ceramics (before any Middle Eastern or European pottery) underpinned their development of cooked porridges and gruels (in contrast to the Afrasan baked breads).

North Sudanian culture and demography were gradually transformed by their cattle keeping. Between 10000BP and 9000BP these Sudanic people began cultivating sorghum and millet derived from their wild grains, and later gourds and cotton as well, developing spinning and weaving. (Homewood 2008 pp. 14f)

This account is debatable on several levels. We start with Homewood's central point, which is also the one which has the most far-reaching implications for what we have said so far about pastoralism being a form of specialization out of mixed agriculture which included plant cultivation. Homewood diametrically contradicts this position by claiming chronological anteriority of the domestication of livestock. She does this on a world-wide scale, including the Eurasian centres of domestication. In each case the domestication of a focal species of animals is said to precede the domestication of plants. She gives no references whatsoever to underpin this far reaching claim. She focuses on the African case. As there were no other sources to check, I therefore checked the sources she cites for the domestication of cattle in north-east Africa.

Her sources do not say what she claims they say. Rather than claiming that the early pastoralists (whom Wendorf and Schild perceive in their remains in the Egyptian Sahara) predate agriculture, they state: 'Preliminary chemical analyses by infrared spectroscopy of the lepids [sic; lipids?] in the archaeological sorghum show closer resemblance to some modern domestic sorghum than to wild varieties' (Wasylikowa et al. 1993). Along this same line it is interesting to note that the distribution of the sorghum in the houses suggests that sorghum was treated differently from the other seeds. The significance, however, is not in whether or not the sorghum was wild or domestic, but that the sorghum and other plants were being intensively harvested and stored for future use. One may conclude that plant foods comprised a significant portion of the El Nabta diet' (Wendorf and Schild 1998 p. 104).

In a later publication (Wendorf, Schild et al. 2001 p. 8) the statement that 'sorghum was treated differently from the other grasses and may have been cultivated, although it was morphologically wild' is reiterated.<sup>13</sup> In fact, the point Wendorf and his colleagues always wanted to make is that both plant domestication and the domestication of cattle are old in the Western Sahara and independent of other centres of domestication, apart from the nearby Nile Valley, not that one predates the other (Wendorf et al. 1992).

In fact, they do not even locate the domestication of cattle in these Saharan site at all but 'suppose that these cattle were first domesticated at an earlier, but unguessable, date in the Nile Valley' (Wendorf et al. 1987 p. 447). In the sources I could check I have not found a single line indicating whether the people who first domesticated cattle ate wild or domestic grain or both.

What is clear, however, is that the Saharan cattle keepers had lots of grains and tubers and legumes and had surpluses to store beyond their immediate needs. If the so far inconclusive debate about whether the grains included products of cultivation should one day come to the conclusion that all these plants were wild, and that also the original domesticators of cattle in the Nile Valley were not cultivators but hunter gatherers, our earlier statement that pastoralism is a specialization out of earlier mixed agriculture would indeed have to be qualified by an exception. On the other hand the collection of wild grass seeds (grain) among all forms of gathering is the one which comes closest to agriculture. In the Sahel even today wild grain is collected by swinging baskets across the stand of the tall grasses. Some grains fall into the baskets while others bounce off and are spread all around. This is a symbiosis between humans and grasses, both helping each other to proliferate, which comes very close to agriculture.

Our point against the early evolutionists, who claim that nomadic

<sup>13</sup>The argument about domestic traits of the plant remnants seems to be debatable. Cf. Mathilda's Anthropology Blog (2009).



pastoralism evolved directly out of an economy of hunter-gatherers, was that animals cannot be domesticated by hunting them. One needs surpluses from agriculture to raise young animals one has caught. We cannot decide whether a pure gathering type of economy can generate enough surpluses beyond the needs for human consumption to make this possible. But we do know that the people of the early Holocene period in the Western Sahara did have enough grain to store it, irrespective of whether they grew or just collected it.<sup>14</sup>

When Homewood characterizes *Bos primigenius africanus* as the 'the wild ancestor of African (and European) indigenous cattle domesticates', she cannot possibly mean that European cattle derive from *Bos primigenius africanus*. From *Bos primigenius*, the aurochs, yes, but not specifically from *Bos primigenius africanus*. Some specifically African mitochondrial genes have been found in Iberian cattle, but these have not shaken Ajmone-Marsan's and his colleagues' assumption that European cattle derive from cattle domesticated in Anatolia which has subsequently interbred with wild *Bos primigenius* within Europe, and this seems to be a widely held view among archaeologists. The African genes found in Iberian cattle 'can be traced back to either the Moorish occupation or pre-historic contacts across the Strait of Gibraltar' (Ajmone-Marsan et al. 2010 p. 150, giving four sources). There seems to be no evidence that European cattle in general derive from stock domesticated in Africa.

On the whole, it must be said that, irrespective of the still open debate about independent domestication of cattle in Africa and its anteriority to other centres of domestication (as an Africanist I sympathize with the idea), there seems to be nothing to support Homewood's statement that cattle domestication in Africa and elsewhere preceded plant domestication, i.e. agriculture. We can therefore, until compelled by evidence to the contrary, maintain our position that nomadism and other forms of mobile pastoralism are a specialization out of a more diverse economy, namely mixed agriculture. Mobile pastoralism is a highly sophisticated and strategic form of use of often rather extreme habitats. There is nothing archaic about it. Specializations always develop out of more generalist ancestral forms, and mobile pastoralism is just one more of these specializations, and a rather elaborate one. I think basically that is also the point Homewood wants to make, although the flow of her writing and its overflow sometimes lead her astray from that perspective.

<sup>14</sup> There seems to be a way to raise young large herbivores without any plant fodder. Rendille told me (I have never actually witnessed it) that in case the mother of a young camel calf dies, her meat can be cut in thin stripes and dried, so that it lasts for months. A soup of it can then be fed to the calf: if there is no mother's milk, mother's soup will do. The amount of meat seems to be roughly nutritionally equivalent to the amount of milk over a lactation period. The Rendille have large earthen cooking pots in which they cook soup. If the first domestication of cattle, assumed by the authors we discuss here to have happened in the Nile Valley, was carried out in a similar way (killing a wild cow and raising the calf with her meat), this presupposes pottery. Especially for the early parts of their archaeological record Wendorf and Schild (1998 p. 100), however, speak of pottery being rare and a luxury item.