# **ANNEX 3**

# LIFE AMONGST THE BORANA OF ISIOLO DISTRICT OF NORTHERN KENYA

# Reconnaissance Report of field visit May - July 1992

THE PURPOSE of this visit was to look more closely at the pastoralist group known as the Ewaso Borana, updating the information gained 5 years ago which led to the decision to use them as a basis for a study of Appropriate Development for Nomadic Pastoralists.

THE RESULTS

 1. Experience gained during the visit of May -July 1992 showed the Borana still provide a viable case study even if not possible in Garba Tula division of Isiolo District as originally envisioned. The influx of Somali shiftas (raiders) with their automatic weapons not only made travel around Garba Tula extremely hazardous but had caused most of the pastoralists south of the Ewaso Nyiro river to flee to other areas.

 North of the river in Merti Division security was found to be much better with no reports of any shifta attacks. Unfortunately the drought situation in Merti was severe as there had been no significant rainfall for more than 13 months. The consequent lack of grazing and serious losses of livestock may be partly responsible for the lack of interest on the part of the Somali shiftas.

 2. Good relationships were established with several key people most involved in the development of Merti division. Foremost among these are the Catholic priests in Merti town, Fathers Pius and Luciano who made us welcome in their guest house and also gave us valuable background information. Father Pius has been there for more than 25 years.

 It was Father Pius who also recommended the home stay situation where we could gain the best exposure to Borana life. This turned out to be an excellent experience, living in one of the few manyattas not abandoned because of the drought. The head of the house was a former senior chief, called Dida Kalacha who retired 3 years ago with a pension allowing him to survive relatively well through the drought whilst still depending on his surviving animals. It was helpful to have the company of my wife as this allowed us both to live in a socially acceptable manner in the compound of one of ex-chief Dida's wives. The use of the plural personal pronoun in this report indicates that my wife was present as my research assistant giving valued insights from the woman's perspective.

 As chief Dida Kalacha and his wives only came down from Ethiopia within the last 30 years he was renowned for his knowledge of Borana tradition yet well acquainted with Kenyan government policy and practices since Independence.

 Through these two primary relationships we were able to add a good number of other contacts with leading elders, political figures and prominent herdsmen. Relationships were established with a number of chiefs and government officials which we hope to build upon when we return in early 1993.

 3. The decision to limit the length of this visit in 1992 to 3 months was made primarily because of the severity of the drought and the difficulty of living close to people who are struggling with serious famine. We sincerely hope the rains will return in October and November which should transform the situation.

 Another three months, January to early April 1993 will hopefully give experience when the grazing is good. We also hope the security situation in Isiolo District will have improved by the time of our anticipated return in January which would make field research considerably easier.

EARLY IMPRESSIONS

These are inevitably preliminary observations, open for revision as a result of subsequent opportunities for field research.

A. Ecological and Economic

These two aspects of life amongst Pastoralists are so closely related as to be inseparable.

 1. During the period of these observations, May - July 1992, the drought had been so severe that average losses of cattle during the past 12 months were put at about 50%, small stock between 75-90%. In the area surrounding our manyatta the grazing was completely gone - the bare soil being carried away from between the remains of the root systems of plant life and beginning to form into sand dunes wherever there was a solid object to block the wind. This was particularly the case in the small towns of 20 or so mud built square houses which have sprung up in recent years as government policy encourages the people to move nearer to the schools.

 Those who were able to afford to build these mud houses with metal (mabati) roofs also seemed to maintain their traditional grass domed houses a mile or more away. These typical Boran manyattas are spread across the skyline in an almost continuous row usually several hundred meters apart. They are set back approximately 2-3 kilometers from the flood line of the Ewaso Nyiro so as to minimise the effect of the mosquitoes that come with the water.

 These manyattas are obviously fairly permanent although at the time of our visit probably 95% of them were not occupied. They were furnished with all fixed amenities and accessories that presumably are considered desirable luxuries to Borana - simple cupboards, folding chairs and glass lanterns. The people had moved in 2 directions. The majority of the animals - mostly the dry cattle known, as the fora herds had gone far away to the boreholes where there was still some dry season grazing. The women and children and a few men had moved to temporary dwellings in the flood plain of the Ewaso Nyiro river.

 2. The Ewaso Nyiro river is such an important feature of life for the Borana of Isiolo District that it warrants much more attention. The river has its source and supply in the Western slopes of Mount Kenya, the north eastern end of the Aberdares and particularly the Wamba hills west of Merti. The rainfall pattern in these areas is quite different from the lowlands of Isiolo District so the river flow has created some unique adaptations for pastoral life for the Borana who live on both sides of its flood plain.

 The river is seasonal but usually more predictable than natural rainfall in the arid Garba Tula and Merti grazing lands. We were told that it flowed for nearly all of 1991 when both the long and short rains failed in Merti division. The river ends in what is known as the Lorian Swamp which provides grazing for hundreds of thousands of animals, both wild and domestic when the water flows. This swamp is clearly receding as it used to extend far beyond Isiolo District into the neighbouring district of Garissa to the east which is occupied almost completely by Somali herdsmen. As the grazing afforded by the swamp moves further west there is an inevitable tendency for the Somalis to push deeper into Isiolo District, competing with the Borana who have occupied this area almost exclusively over the last 90 years. The consequences of this conflict and the current exacerbation of it due to inter-clan fighting amongst the Somali will be addressed further in the next section of these early impressions.

 3. Another local effect of the Ewaso Nyiro River on the Borana of Isiolo District is the opportunity it affords for cultivation along its low and usually level banks. As the whole flood plain is comprised of alluvial sandy deposits the productivity of the soil is poor compared with most of Kenya to the south. Enough good top soil from the fertile upland areas has reached down to the flood plain to afford some areas worth cultivating. These are usually indicated by places where large trees and dense brush have grown up, probably a small fraction of 1% of the land area of Isiolo District. It is of course ecologically unfortunate that these tiny riverine forest are cut down but presumably economically inevitable if humans are going to survive. The changing attitudes of the Ewaso Borana to cultivation and the possible causes thereof will be dealt with in the following section on social and political observations.

 There are several large scale irrigation schemes in eastern Isiolo District which will be considered in the section on development issues. Even before these began about 20 years ago, we heard that a few Borana used to plant maize in the flood plain of the river. Now these unofficial "shambas" are much more evident. Whole communities join together to dig a channel which will bring the flowing water to their fields - some of them up to 4 or 5 hectares per family. There are places where these adjoining fields cover several kilometers with some people beginning to claim particularly fertile areas as their personal property. This is clearly a major social and economic change in traditional Borana thinking.

 4. We noted several main features of this emerging farming lifestyle. It is normally practiced by some members of the family with others taking care of the animals - even though few in number. Those who plant the shambas are obliged to move at least part of the family down to guard them. We observed that this usually meant that most if not all the milking cows and shoats were moved into temporary bomas made from the abundant acacia thorns growing in the flood plain. We were told that one of the reasons for moving the cattle down to the relatively dense vegetation is because it was too cold for them at that time of the year on the open plains where they usually spent the night with no boma fence around them. There are apparently additional problems with keeping animals on the flood plain as during the time we were there an elephant attacked a neighbour's temporary manyatta on the flood plain and killed a cow and several shoats. The previous year our host had also lost more than 60 shoats when a rabid hyena attacked his herd grazing in the Lorian Swamp.

B. Social and Political Comments

 It would appear that:-

 1. The Borana of Isiolo District have lost many of the traditional cultural distinctives of the Borana of southern Ethiopia from whom they came at various times during this century. They seem to have been most influenced by Islamic practices learned from their Somali neighbours.

 2. The relationship between Borana and Somali has seldom been peaceful - mostly because of the inevitable conflict over grazing and watering rights. The Borana elders quote many of the place names now completely under Somali control as being Boran words which were once very important to them. e.g. Arba Jihan meaning forty elephants in Kiborana. Even Hargeysa, the capital of the northern Somali territory is claimed to be a Boran word with no meaning in Somali language.

 3. There was one brief period when the Borana were allied with the Somali. The consequences of that alliance are still seen as the most disastrous experience in living memory of the Borana. The story was told to us over and over again by older men who lost vast numbers of animals as a result of what is usually referred to as the Shifta Wars of 1963 -69. These began at the time of independence when British Colonial rule was coming to a hasty and ill planned conclusion.

[Historical Note re the shifta wars. The Colonial government was alleged to have promised the people of northern Kenya, then known as the NFD, that they would be allowed to choose which country they wanted to belong to - Somalia or Kenya. As most of the NFD is arid or semi-arid land and the people nomadic pastoralists, many of them naturally felt that they had little in common with the southern Bantu farmers. The Borana of Isiolo District in particular appear to have readily assented to the persuasion of the Somalis to join forces and resist the imposition of the Bantu administration. There were several who told us of the meeting held near to Sericho where all the Borana leading men met with the Somali representatives to plan their resistance movement. There were some interesting alternative versions which told of the attitude of the Borana women who strongly disagreed and pleaded with their menfolk not to join forces with the Somalis against the much better armed Kenyan forces. Inspite of their protests more than 800 Borana men went to Somalia to collect guns. Some of the Borana claim that the British betrayed their trust when they responded to the request of the new Kenyan government to help them defeat the attempt of the Somalis to tear off about one quarter of the land area of the newly independent Kenya.

 The suffering of the Borana at that time was appalling. All those who did not flee to Somali were rounded up into 3 strongly fenced concentration camps - several thousand people in each. It is reported that 842 people died in one month in the Merti camp. There were only 2 or 3 gates in the barbed wire through which the Borana herdsmen could pass to graze their animals - strictly limited to no more than 3 kilometers from the camp. Of course this was hopelessly inadequate to provide grazing for anything more than a tiny fraction of their herds so approximately 90% of the animals were lost at that time. Some of the old men tell of the days before the camps when they used to have camels. All camels were regarded as potential means of transport for anti-government rebels so any that were not taken to Somalia were inevitably slaughtered. Truck loads of cattle, sheep and goats are alleged to have been hauled off to sell in markets in the south of the country. One man told of his feelings as he sat inside his concentration camp at Garba Tula and watched the soldiers bring in some of his own cows to be slaughtered and eaten. He and his people got none of the meat.]

 This is a subject warranting more study as the economic and political impact of those years has clearly made the most lasting impression on the Ewaso Borana.

 The relationship between Somali and Boran was also affected by the experience of those Borana who tried to escape the concentration camps by going into Somalia. Of those who survived to return and tell their stories we heard nothing but negative reports. They were abused and cheated by the Somalis - losing most of their animals by trickery or outright cattle stealing. This unhappy subject is clearly pertinent to the question as to why the Ewaso Borana have accepted Islam which they acknowledge they learned from the Somalis. Our initial enquiries as to why and when they adopted Islam left us with little doubt that the two main reasons were-

 a. That it is perceived as a suitable religion for nomads as opposed to Christianity practiced by the southern Bantu Kenyans - the settled farming people.

 b. Islam allows a man not only to marry several wives but to divorce his wives. This last feature seemed to be most important to some of the older men who claimed to be Muslims. Traditional Borana culture does not permit divorce.

 4. Another related issue we heard from various quarters is the current strife between the Catholic Fathers and the leader of the Merti Muslims, Sheikh Abdullahi. This man has been for training in Pakistan and Sudan and came back several years ago as radical as any Muslim militant. The conflict between him and Father Pius in particular is so strong that it appears to affect every aspect of social life in Merti and all the development efforts currently being made. As an example of the state of antagonism prevailing it is alleged that Father Pius was asked to help transport stones for a new mosque being constructed in Merti town. He did this personally with 6 or 7 loads in his pick up. When the Sheikh who had been absent for a while came back and found what had happened he was adamant the stone could not be used, being contaminated by that white Christian Father.

 This state of mutual hostility has developed to the point that whatever project one attempts the other will object to. The Sheikh does not seem to have much more interest than in building large mosques and Muslim schools but Father Pius has been instrumental in bringing several large scale development projects to Merti. Most conspicuous is an expensive irrigation project under construction just outside of Merti town in which all the expatriate personnel and equipment are housed in the Catholic Mission. Whether this project is technologically viable remains to be seen but there is little doubt that the Sheikh has done everything in his power to resist and denigrate the efforts being made.

 5. A lot more study should be done on the value and effect of such projects as the large Merti scheme. It appears there are definitely a number of Borana who are willing to work on the shambas provided by these irrigation schemes if and when properly implemented. We saw for ourselves how eagerly and effectively several hundred Borana families were working on a smaller irrigation scheme at Gafarsa. Here again it seemed that many of the older people on the shambas were those who had lost everything during the Shifta wars. It could be that the extent of those losses were so great and traumatic that some of the poorest people realised there was no future for them in herding animals. The magnitude of the devastation of the herds was obviously so great that the traditional practice of sharing and redistribution of animals to restore self sufficiency and self respect to those in need was no longer possible.

 6. Several Borana elders said that the usual system for recovery through redistribution broke down because the losses were so enormous - far greater than usually occurs from drought. One particularly perceptive man who had lost everything told us that it was not just the practice of sharing animals with those in need that was lost but the traditional manner of gaining honour and leadership which broke down. This confirms what the acknowledged expert anthropologist, Gudrun Dahl, observed amongst the Ewaso Borana - that the more animals a man gives away, or loans out the more respect he acquires. She notes that there were stories of old men who used to have large herds but gave them all away. Presumably they would be provided for by their sons but these highly honoured men were assured of hospitality and great esteem wherever they went through the network of good will and social obligations built up. When asked if there were any examples of this still existing, nobody could think of any remaining but names were given of those who were remembered with such honour - but that of course was before the Shifta Wars.

C. Development Interventions

1. Pastoralists' Priorities

 Range management is clearly the most important component of any development effort in Isiolo District. This is officially classified as 30% arid and 65% very arid, suitable only for low density grazing. The remaining 5% is described as semi-arid but some cultivation is possible. The area north of the Ewaso Nyiro river where this study was done is all found within the 65% very arid area - classified as eco-climatic zone 7. This means that some rain can be expected to fall during the rainy seasons but only in limited and uncertain quantities and locations. This is the eco-system which is economically viable only for nomadic pastoralists who are ready to take their animals to the places where the rain happens to fall. In times of drought when reports are heard of rain falling in significant quantities in any particular area the herdsmen will move their animals towards that area trusting by the time they arrive the grass will have sprouted. This is the value of what is known as using the resource of spatial mobility - having `your harvest on the hoof'. It is also the reason why nomadic pastoralism is more successful than ranching on the same arid or semi-arid land. Apart from avoiding the high cost of constructing and maintaining range fences the primary advantage of nomadic herdsmen is that they can decide to take their animals over the long distances to reach the new grazing. Domestic animals without the intervention of pastoral herdsmen do not know how to find the best grazing.

 If rainfall is unusually low there is a danger of overgrazing when the number of animals exceeds the limits of the carrying capacity of the land. In parts of Africa like northern Kenya where government established administrative authorities try to exercise some sort of control of the available resources various attempts have been made to establish grazing blocks to prevent stock movements. These may be effective if grazing is reasonably good but in times of drought, when most needed, these measures do not work for obvious reasons. It is unrealistic and in practice impossible to stop herdsmen from taking their animals anywhere that grazing is to be found - if no rain happens to fall within their delineated block. We saw how herdsmen are prepared to face great danger from human and wild predators such as lions if it will mean the survival of their animals.

 During the first half of 1992 considerably more rains fell in the southern and more elevated Garba Tula division of Isiolo District. The grazing was consequently relatively much better than in the Merti division, north of the Ewaso Nyiro river. When the drought in the north became more severe at the beginning of the year many families began to move south into Garba Tula division, particularly towards the more fertile location around Kinna. This was inspite of the much greater danger from shifta attacks in Garba Tula district. It was obvious that since the last observation 5 years ago there had been a major shift of population from Garba Tula town to Kinna about 40 kilometers to the south. The population of Kinna may have more than doubled during that period, whilst the former administrative center of Garba Tula has correspondingly declined. It was said that this was due mainly to the shifta attacks on the town in the first quarter of 1992.

 The families who did not move south towards Kinna had more security but took a serious risk of losing their cattle through lack of rain. This provides a good example of the risk taking choices which are an inevitable part of nomadic pastoralism. For those in Eastern Isiolo who chose not to go south there were 2 options. One was to stay near the limited amount of riverine vegetation left in the Lorian Swamp which rapidly diminished as the Ewaso Nyiro river dried up. This could only support a small proportion of the milk cows and the small stock. The majority of the cattle, particularly the non-milking fora herd has to be taken northwards, at least 50 kilometers to find the nearest alternative grazing. There is no surface water available north of the river in the extensive grazing lands of Merti division so the essential development resources are the water boreholes.

2. Borana Pastoralists and the Ministry of Water Development

 There are four boreholes operating intermittently in Merti division. These are all that materialized of the original range management plan for twelve intended to give access to the full potential of the Merti grazing plains. Approximately 1/2 of the total land area of Isiolo District is included within this area north of the Ewaso Nyiro river and all classified as very arid. The Borana pastoralists consider it to be prime grazing as long as there is some rainfall to replenish the grasses. It is used as their primary grazing during the dry season when the boreholes are operating. In a very dry year as 1991 and 1992 have been, the herdsmen claim they are only able to use less than half of the possible grazing lands because the remainder is too far away from a functioning borehole to be usable. This usually means more than 15 or at the most 20 kilometers away. Once the cattle have to walk more than 15 kilometers to get to water they are declining in strength. The rate of decline depending on the quality and the quantity of the grazing. They will also probably only be going for water every 3rd day which is also injurious to the prolonged good health of the cattle. The maximum output of the most productive borehole at Yamicha can support about 20,000 head of cattle, drinking every third day and keeping the pumps going 24 hours per day. The least prolific at Uruma can only give sufficient water for 1,200 cattle per day.

 The Borana herdsmen all gave the provision of more boreholes as the greatest obvious need they have. They say that there is still adequate grazing in the Merti plains for many more animals, even in the worst drought times as at present. The limiting factor is the lack of strategically placed boreholes - meaning that the few existing ones are over used and the surrounding areas over grazed. The herdsmen are willing and able to supply the diesel fuel to operate the generators - providing for both the cost of purchase and transportation to the borehole where their animals are drinking. This is paid for by requiring the provision of 1 to 2 1/2 litres of diesel fuel per 100 head of cattle - depending on the output and efficiency of the different boreholes. The pumps operate 4 to 6 months per year on an average of 18 hours per day. The generator at Yamicha has run like that since 1986 without any major service.

 The government Ministry of Water Development provides the training and wages for an operator at each of the boreholes. He works with a committee of 12 men chosen from the herdsmen using the borehole to decide when each herd shall come for water. There are always 6 men from this committee at the borehole to control the animals, ensuring that the herds adhere to the watering schedule. When large herds have not drunk for 3 days this is not an easy task.

 When the rains begin the generators are removed to secure places before the roads across the plains become impassable. There did not seem to be any preventative maintenance undertaken during these non-operating times. It was said, "The engines are only opened when they break down."

Maintenance of the boreholes.

 Keeping the generators functioning reliably is obviously of critical importance. If they break down all the cattle dependent on that borehole have to be moved away almost immediately. As the nearest alternative water source may be 60 kilometers away, the cattle have to begin the journey as soon as the generator fails if they are to have any chance of survival. The Ministry of Water Development has the responsibility for constructing and maintaining the boreholes. Isiolo District Headquarters is located at the extreme western corner of the district about 4 hours drive from the start of the main grazing areas in Garba Tula and Merti division. The Ministry of Water Development, like all the other government ministries have their offices in Isiolo town, with more than 3/4 quarters of the staff on the payroll for the whole district located in Isiolo.

 The water department has a large workshop there which is primarily meant to service and repair the generators and submersible pumps of the boreholes. In practice it is engaged much more in the repair of the vehicles belonging to the Ministry of Water Development which, like the staff, appear to spend more than 75% of their time in Isiolo town. In 1992 some of the technical staff of this ministry did move out into Merti division to undertake the construction of a new pumping and watering site called Duma. The borehole had been dug several years previously by one of the oil exploration companies working in north east Kenya, but abandoned when the exploration work was terminated. The cost of equipment and materials for the construction of the generator house and water storage tanks and troughs was provided by a donor agency called, Action Aid. At the time of my visit at the end of July 1992 the work was almost completed but had come to a halt, very unfortunately.

 The construction crew under the direction of the Deputy District Water Engineer had been arrested for trying to sell a truck load of cement in Marsabit town. This was cement paid for and delivered to the site by Action Aid. The ministry workers had loaded the cement onto a ministry lorry and hauled it across the rarely used desert road to Marsabit, about 6 hours drive away. The Action Aid supervisor had rightly suspected that this had happened once before and alerted the police in Marsabit to be on the lookout for a Ministry of Water Development vehicle from Isiolo district. This is just another example of the realities of implementing development projects in remote areas where the people employed to do the job are not from the area where they are working and have no interest in the problems of the society whom they are meant to be serving. It is not surprising that the only members of the Ministry of Water Development who could be found serving on the job as borehole pump operators were all Borana men - most of them having worked for 8 or more years in these isolated locations. This commitment to the needs of the local Borana herdsmen points out the value of training local men to do all the work needed in such areas.

 Another example of the need for involving local people was illustrated by the empty workshop in Merti town. The British government had constructed and equipped this at a cost of more than 2 million shillings. The High Commissioner flew up to Merti in May 1991 to open the splendid facility, complete with all the essential machinery and tools needed for borehole maintenance. The next day all the movable equipment was loaded on the Ministry of Water Development vehicles and hauled back to Isiolo, leaving the magnificent new building at Merti empty and unused since that day. When questions were asked at the headquarters in Isiolo as to what was happening to the workshop the answer was given that there were no mechanics or technical staff at Merti so the tools and equipment would be more useful in the Isiolo workshop. It was pointed out that in the event of a breakdown at any of the boreholes in the grazing areas this meant at least 8 hours journey to get even the simplest repair. The Isiolo based staff replied that their primary responsibility is to the people of Isiolo town, "anyway there is no suitable housing in Merti and very little means of transportation to get there". At a subsequent meeting at the British High Commission I suggested that this might be a good place to use the Merti workshop as a training facility for a new generation of technicians from the Borana people. They have enough young men who have been through the secondary schools at Isiolo and Garba Tula and have proven their ability and willingness to come back to teach or do whatever work needs to be done in their home areas.

3. Borana views on Education

 This leads naturally to the next subject for consideration - the place of schools in Borana development. The value given to education by the pastoralists of Isiolo district was one of the most surprising results to come out of the field study. In every situation and amongst every age group questioned the same high appreciation was expressed for the schools in their district. Many examples were noted of great sacrifice being made to enable some if not all the children in Borana families to go to school. The reasons given for this sacrifice may have been different but the high level of motivation was quite uniform.

 The period of this initial residence amongst the Ewaso Borana happened to coincide with the Kenyan government exercise on registering voters for the emerging democratic process. This required many clerks and supervisors to do the registration work in every community - usually in the local school or chiefs office. In Isiolo district this employed nearly every young man who had finished secondary school or teachers college and was waiting for a posting. This gave the opportunity to meet at length with many of the young men who have been acquiring their education over the last 12 - 15 years. It was clear that these individuals maintain a very close relationship with their respective communities. It seemed that most if not all Borana families are highly motivated to get at least one of the children through secondary schools. There are a few who are deliberately giving up pastoralism as all the children are sent off to school whilst the parents look after the few remaining animals. This is presumably only possible in the relatively settled communities where there are sponsors such as the Roman Catholic mission at Merti, Garba Tula and Isiolo town who are willing to help with the costs of higher education. Once a family has a few older children into salaried employment they will of course be expected to assist their younger siblings.

 Even though most of the primary schools in Isiolo District are run by the government the influence of the Catholic Church is very evident as most of the teachers have been sponsored by the Fathers at Merti, Garba Tula and Isiolo. It is probably no coincidence that those are the three places where secondary schools are operating. The one at Garba Tula was built on a very sophisticated scale by German Church donations about 15 years ago. It suffers the inevitable problems of a high technology facility inadequately maintained. Dependence on electric generator, electric pumps and flush toilets demands a level of technical support considerably above the resources of the present administration. Inspite of this the school is still considered to be one of the 16 top National schools. It manages to keep operating with a full staff of well qualified teachers although constantly under threat of shifta attack. The fact that it serves both Somali and Borana students may account for the fact that the school bus is one of the only vehicles that has not been ambushed on its many journeys in and out of Garba Tula.

[Historical note re Borana Education. There is one renowned individual who seems to have set the precedent for Borana education advancement. Even before independence in 1963 there was one man called Dabaso Wabera who had been appointed the first Borana District Commissioner. He had been sponsored through his education by a Roman Catholic priest in Marsabit. The priest adopted the young man when he found a poor Borana woman cutting meat from a dead elephant to feed her young son. The advances this first educated Borana made introducing development most appreciated by pastoralists are still remembered. He was the first D.C. who really understood the needs of the Borana, being one of them. Tragically he was killed in 1963 at the start of the Shifta Wars together with the Garba Tula chief, Haji Garba Dida, who at that time was another very influential leader encouraging appropriate development. They were killed near to Mado Gashe in the nearest place to Somalia to which the killers fled. The killers were never found but this was given as the primary reason why the extremely harsh policy was adopted of putting all the Borana into the three concentration camps. Chief Dida who gave most of this information was one of the strongest opponents to the alliance between the Somalis and Borana which led to the Shifta Wars. He and 7 others at the Sericho meeting who refused to support the alliance with the Somalis were detained with their hands tied. After about one month he escaped and went to join the Government forces resisting the break away movement. He was a fearless guide and warrior for the British CID officers who led the Kenyan military forces after independence for which he later received a commendation from President Kenyatta. This probably accounts for the high regard he still maintains for the British.]

4. Cultivation and Irrigation

 Another aspect of development amongst the Ewaso Borana which is probably unique to their situation are the attempts to use the seasonal waters of the Ewaso Nyiro river. The District Development plan for the period 1989-1993 proposes that one of the primary resources of Isiolo District is the potential of the 4 perennial rivers. The fact is that 3 of these are just small spring fed streams, which rapidly disappear into the lowlands. The only large river is the Ewaso Nyiro which is very unpredictable. It seems to cause almost as much damage in flood as it does in drought.

 The Development Plan suggests that "the potential of these rivers could be tapped for economic development by constructing dams and pans to store excess surface water when the rivers flood." Anyone who has seen the effects of this river in flood would not be likely to make such a proposal without mentioning economic impracticalities. It could be technically possible but the prohibitive costs of construction and maintenance would no doubt preclude any serious consideration. Most of the attempts made in the last 15 years to harness or even just to bridge the Ewaso river at its eastern end have proved to be monumental examples of misguided development.

[Historical note on the Malka Daka Irrigation scheme. The current District Development Plan 1989-1993 states that the agricultural "strategy over the plan period will be towards increasing agricultural output....To achieve this,...funds will be mobilised to provide irrigation facilities along the few rivers." It states that to date "minor irrigation schemes on the whole have not been very successful. Hence the low crop production within the District". This statement needs to be seriously examined. In reality what is manifestly obvious is that the minor and unofficial schemes are still functioning whilst the large government administered project have collapsed spectacularly. In particular the Malka Daka scheme has demonstrated all the potential weaknesses of a centrally controlled and financed project with management by an educated elite who have no relationship or commitment to the local community.

 The review states that the schemes collapsed for two reasons. First the lack of funds for buying diesel and the failure to replace old machinery. Secondly, the general apathy by the local community toward crop production and lack of an efficiently organised marketing system. These statements were discussed at length with Borana leaders and the few outsiders who have shown their commitment to the community. Their responses suggest the following answers to the questions raised by the stated reasons for the collapse of the Malka Daka scheme. The first reason relating to inadequate funds to buy diesel fuel can be dealt with quite simply by pointing out that any scheme which must depend on pumped water for irrigation is doomed from the start. There was clearly a basic flaw in the design which did not allow for gravity flow. It seems that the original intake was so poorly sited and constructed that even before the canal was completed with the necessary control sluice gates, the river changed course and dropped from its former level to a point where the water could no longer flow into the canal and so to the prepared fields. Much money had been used to clear and level the land for cultivation so rather than relocate this it was decided to provide diesel pumps at the river side to lift water into the feeder canals. Three of these were reported to have been bought. They were so poorly installed that the next major floods not only inundated them but buried at least two of them so deep in the sand they have never been recovered.

 As to the suggestion that funds had not been adequate to replace old machinery. I witnessed for myself on a previous visit about 6 years ago that the machinery had never had a chance to become old. Almost new tractors and implements were lying around the project headquarters with some minor defect or missing part which put them out of service for months. Regular maintenance was apparently unheard of and lack of interest on the part of the mechanics and administration meant that repairs were rarely if ever completed. It was no secret in the closest commercial centres at Isiolo and Meru that if you needed parts for your tractor or vehicle of the same make being used at Malka Daka they could be bought very cheaply from the project administration. Hence the number of machines immobilised for lack of a key component. Eventually the Project Director was arrested and imprisoned when it was proven that he had misappropriated funds totalling several millions of shillings. It is significant that he was able to get away with this corruption for several year presumably as he had arranged that all the officials in the project administration who had sufficient responsibility to know what was going on were from his own ethnic group in southern Kenya, mostly from his own relations or acquaintances. This points again to the need to have trusted people from the local community involved in responsible positions in every development project - especially those entailing external capital input.

 The second reason given for the failure of the Malka Daka scheme refers to the general apathy of the community towards crop production. The inaccuracy of this criticism is demonstrated most effectively by observing the various schemes operated by the Borana themselves. The problem with the Malka Daka scheme seems to have been one of incentive or motivation. On that scheme the people were expected to work for wages to produce a crop for the government. The wages were very low, allegedly below the minimum established at that time by the Ministry of Labour. The complaint we heard most often was that the workers had to plant whatever crop the project managers thought most profitable. The difference between this "State Farm system" and the freedom of choice on the shambas run by the Borana themselves is another striking example of the value of private enterprise. I have to admit to my own surprise at the willingness of at least some Borana to take to shamba life. As mentioned earlier this may be partly due to the particular disasters the present Borana elders have experienced in their lifetime, not just from recurring drought but more seriously through political upheaval and repeated shifta attacks. At least some from that generation seem to have given up pastoralism altogether. Most prefer to mix shamba life for part of the family with pastoralism for others.]

The Gafarsa Irrigation Scheme

 There is one credit-worthy example of a successful irrigated cultivation project at the next community down stream from Malka Daka. The lessons to be learned from the differences in concept, implementation and operation between the two geographically close examples are worth noting.

 After the disaster of the Malka Daka project it must have been even more difficult to convince the Borana community of the viability of another scheme at Gafarsa. The people said that its success was due almost entirely to the efforts of one man whom they called Mr. Bomba - uncertain whether he was French or Belgium.

 I recall meeting him about 7 years ago in Gafarsa when he was beginning the Herculean task of reconstructing the whole canal and intake system as the level of the river in its sand bed had dropped about 5 feet. This required that a second intake tunnel and sluice gate be built 5 feet lower - underneath the original entry. The canal of course had to be similarly re-dug that much deeper making it now about 14 feet below ground level at its lowest point. Fortunately this has been effective up to date even though the low concrete "barrage" built across the sand river at the intake has been largely broken down. The local people using the scheme are able to build temporary dams of trees, branches and rocks to guide the water into the intake when the level of the water is not high enough to enter freely. The users of the scheme also have to keep the canal clear of silt which is clearly going to be a problem anywhere on the sand river. The problem of debris and general filth in the canals is particularly bad after a dry spell. Vast amounts of floating tree fruits and vegetation get washed down along with the inevitable animal droppings that accumulate in the river bed when the animals are watered from the shallow wells dug in the sand during the times when no water is flowing on the surface.

 At the time of our visit to Gafarsa in early July the water had just started running again after a dry spell of about 2 weeks. There was naturally great relief at the return of the river as the maize crops of about 400 people using the scheme were in jeopardy until the water returned. They have a well organised system allowing water to reach each 1/2 hectare plot approximately every 20 days. If the water keeps flowing. this will be enough for a maize crop which requires three "floodings" to give a good harvest. The scheme is run by a committee who strictly regulate the control of the sluice gates into the side ditches branching off the main central canal. Water is supplied to each side branch for up to 24 hours until all the farmers on both sides of the central canal - about 25 on the left and the same number to the right, have received enough water to flood their shamba. At the time of our visit the water was flowing strongly enough in the river and the central canal to allow three side branches to be supplied at the same time showing that there is plenty of flexibility in the distribution system. Each plot owner is required to open and close the gap in the side ditches which control the water flowing into their respective shambas. This means being present both night and day when water is flowing.

 In lengthy discussions in a tea shop in Gafarsa village we learned that each individual who is willing to live in Gafarsa is allowed an 1/2 hectare plot - meaning that some families have 5, 6 or 8 plots, depending on the size of the family. We were told that the committee gives the plots to those who are most in need. This may account for the presence of an unusually high proportion of Sakuye and Gabbra amongst the Borana willing to engage in shamba work. They came as economic migrants to the area to work for wages on the former Malka Daka scheme, having lost all their animals. We met a man in the tea shop who said that he had been waiting 4 years to be allocated a plot but he had low priority as he already owned a shamba at Kinna as well as a few animals. He conceded that he was able to find land to cultivate "borrowed" from other people. Whether this was freely given by a friend or the result of payment to absentee land owners was not made clear. It did seem obvious that most families were not wholly dependent on the harvest of their shambas. Most seem to have animals also who are herded by some members of the family whilst others work in the shambas as needed. This is probably quite little for most of the year as there is only one planting per year requiring weeding and watering three times.

Unofficial Irrigation and Cultivation

 At the other end of the scale in irrigated cultivation are the small scale informal shambas down stream before the waters disappear into the Lorian Swamp. We lived for several days at one such community called Malka Galla about 30 kilometers north east of Merti. They were planting maize in their shambas depending entirely on crude irrigation ditches from the flood plain where the Ewaso Nyiro had silted up or left its former course, spreading over the ground to the Lorian Swamp. Much of their maize crop was already lost but a few people who had planted early enough and got two "waterings" were still hoping for a small harvest. During the time of our stay amongst them the river had been dry for nearly 4 weeks so the situation was looking rather bleak. Some people were saying that water was very unlikely to come again into the river that year.

 Even our host who had one of the largest and most advanced shambas was beginning to accept the inevitability of no more water for his maize. It was all the more surprising when he killed a goat on the last evening of our stay in his manyatta to hear the result of his examination of the intestines. He showed us the signs which he said indicated that much water was coming. When I cynically asked when - he showed us another configuration of the entrails which he maintained indicated that it would be coming within the next 2 or 3 days. I still did not take the predictions seriously until we saw the water flowing strongly at Gafarsa - about 50 kilometers upstream.

 One adverse effect of the informal riverine cultivation are the problems arising from the primitive intakes used to take water into the irrigation channels. When the flood waters come down the river they have an obvious tendency to follow the small hand dug canals and due to the sandy consistency of the earth they quickly become the new course of the river. This had happened several times in the cultivated areas near to where we were staying and in each case it had meant moving the small towns which had begun to be established. The school and clinic buildings had been undermined by the flood waters - even though built of permanent materials such as cement block or treated lumber. A splendid clinic complex provided by the British Government only 2 years before had been abandoned and not replaced. School buildings in two places had been moved 3 times in 5 years. This is particularly discouraging for the people who had to construct those buildings with community labour and resources.

 It is a measure of the value given by those communities to primary education that they were willing to make that much effort. In one place the women were having to bring water more than 5 kilometers by donkey to make mud to form the walls of the classroom. The Catholic Father Pius was providing food for work for those building the school. The teachers said that the present site was now safe from the danger of any further flooding as it was sufficiently elevated. Unfortunately they were now 17 kilometers from the place preferred by the people where water was always available.

The Bridge

 Due to the bizarre geography of Isiolo District more than 90% of the land area lies at this eastern end with Merti division having 49.4% of it north of the river and Garba Tula and Sericho divisions having a combined total of 41.4% south of it. Attempts have been made to build a permanent bridge to cross the river as this would be most advantageous for reliable communications - particularly for the transportation of goods and livetock by lorry. At present all movements from Merti of vehicles heavier than a Land Rover have to use the much longer and rougher secondary road westwards into Samburu district. This follows the north side of the Ewaso river over some very rough and hilly country until it reaches the Marsabit road. Vehicles must then head south to Archers Post which has the only permanent bridge over the Ewaso Nyiro river. This route takes between 4 - 8 hours to get between Merti and Isiolo, depending on the vehicle and its load. The more direct road through Garba Tula, Kinna and Meru allows a vehicle to reach Nairobi in that same time. There is the danger of shifta attack on this road at present but this will hopefully only be temporary.

 The major and abiding problem is the failure of the bridge at Malka Daka. A multiple span Bailey bridge was erected on 4 very tall reinforced concrete pillars about 8 years ago. It lasted for 4 years before the river washed the sand from behind the concrete foundations on the southern bank. This was inevitable and foreseeable as the bridge crossing was sited on a bend of the river with no stone or rock on either bank. There is nothing but the alluvial sand of the flood plains on which to build. The steel Bailey bridge still spans the 4 concrete support pillars. Unfortunately the erosion of the south bank on the outside of the bend has continued even accelerated. The ministry of Public Works who are trying to repair the damage cannot work fast enough to keep ahead of the river to connect the bridge to the receding far bank.

 Each year a concrete pillar is erected, intended one day to carry another span of the Bailey Bridge, but by the time it is completed the river has again flooded and the far bank retreated another 20 to 30 meters. So during the last four years 4 more pillars have been built which stand as a sad indictment of ill planned technical assistance. The local people could not say why the bridge was sited on the particularly unfortunate place on the bend of the river. They are more concerned that at the rate the erosion is progressing their market town of Malka Galla will soon be gone. Some of the community leaders did point out that there was one place where the river never changed its course. It was less than 2 kilometers from the present bridge where the river approached a low rocky hill on the northern bank which formed the outside of a slow bend at that point.

 There was every evidence of a good rock base in the river bed with a well established high bank on the southern side. As this was on the inside of the bend of the river this would be safe from erosion even though it was only alluvial deposit. The young Borana chief at Malka Daka, Hussein Gufa Jila, seemed to understand the situation better than the expert engineers. He proposed that the rocky place which they referred to as Malka Andrea would have been a much better location for the bridge. He took me to visit this place and to my surprise I found the reason why it was called Malka Andrea - meaning the `crossing of Andrea'. The remains of a large concrete block built house were there on the high banks of the river, almost lost in the dense vegetation. This is where Andrea lived - a German Aid worker who had been referred to several times as someone who really tried to help the Borana. He was tragically killed in a motor cycle accident on the path between his house and Malka Daka town, about 1 1/2 kilometers away. His demise was deeply regretted by the local Borana as it led to the collapse of the Malka Daka irrigation scheme which he had come to assist. There were two other abandoned and ruined houses near to Andrea's which he had built for 2 other German aid workers. The chief reported that they never really knew these other two men as they left after Andrea's death. The riverside forest vegetation is now reclaiming all that remains of their efforts.

 The chief seemed very anxious to activate again the irrigation scheme. He assured me that the local people had seen the benefits of the neighbouring scheme at Gafarsa and they would be willing to do all that was necessary to get the water from the river to the fertile areas down stream which they knew would be the most productive. He readily grasped the possibilities of combining the construction essential for a permanent intake with the retaining walls and emplacements needed for a bridge at the rocky site of Malka Andrea. We tried the best we could through the dense thorn bush to walk the route along the river bank which a gravity feed canal would have to follow. It appeared to be technically feasible even though it would obviously entail some deep digging in certain places. He assured me again that if somebody would show them the line where to dig that he and his people would dig any depth necessary to get the water to the places best suited for cultivation. It was obviously a great encouragement to him that on my last visit to Malka Daka I was able to tell him that the Italian technicians and civil engineer working on the Merti irrigation project had agreed to come to Malka Daka with their Laser level to prepare the best alignment.

 It has no doubt helped his case that the young chief at Malka Daka had previously had favourable contact with the Italian technicians when they came to request the use of a large piece of specialised equipment called a land plane needed for levelling the freshly cleared land at Merti. This was one of the pieces left over from the earlier Malka Daka scheme. This is the sort of cooperation between local community leaders and foreign development experts which bodes well for the viability of the next attempt at an irrigation scheme at Malka Daka. It was obvious that all concerned had learned some salutary lessons from past mistakes and were working together to make positive progress in appropriate development.

 The lesson to be learned from these failed irrigation projects, whether large scale foreign funded or private informal efforts seems to be consistent with a lot of development work - inadequate planning and incompetent implementation can create more problems than they were intended to solve.

 Whether the river Ewaso Nyiro can be relied upon to provide sufficient water to supply all the different irrigation schemes being introduced along its banks without creating further problems downstream is a question which should have been asked a long time ago. If the dimunition of the Lorian Swamp is accelerated and the grazing it provides for the Borana herds further reduced there will be greater difficulties. Even the water supply for the human population at the eastern end of Isiolo District - at major community centres like Sericho, Malka Daka and Dadacha Bossa is being affected by the reduced volume of water coming down the river in recent years.

 There is one other example of development intervention which the Borana spoke about very appreciatively although it is not operating during 1992. This was the animal restocking programmes attempted during the last decade by two well-financed donor agencies. The first one was a small scale effort run by an Englishman whom the people refer to as Alakey. It seems he was doing field research amongst the Ewaso Borana about 12 years ago when he saw the poverty of some of the people who had lost all their animals. He was able to present a plausible case for trying a small scale restocking programme to a funding agency in Nairobi, believed to be Oxfam. The Borana along the Ewaso Nyiro spoke very highly of the way he consulted fully with their elders in the selection of individuals who should receive animals and in the number and type to be given. This was reported to be about 60 shoats as well as a few cattle and donkeys.

 This programme seems to have been perceived as an excellent model even though Alakey only stayed for a year or so. As this is such a top priority project in the estimation of Borana it would be valuable to find out more details of how it operated.

 The other restocking programme which was tried on a larger scale about 3 years ago was that introduced by the Catholic Mission in Garba Tula. There again every effort was made to begin with the poorest people in the community selected by a committee as being most in need. These turned out to be mostly destitute widows or rejected wives who were trying to support several children. It is difficult to understand why there were so many women with children to support as in normal Borana society widows are automatically remarried to the brother or closest male relative of her late husband. Unmarried women or those refusing to live with a husband stay in her father's house. Even in the families influenced by Islam where wives are divorced, the children stay with their father. More than a hundred needy women were identified and about half as many men. A rather smaller number of animals was determined as adequate to allow a return to pastoral life, 30 shoats were designated as sufficient with no cattle or donkeys.

 The shoats were bought by traders who were allowed an average local market figure to buy and bring them to Garba Tula. Some of the traders chose to buy the animals from distant areas where the price would be considerably lower. They then had to pay the costs of bringing the animals to Garba Tula. If they elected to drive them long distances by foot they would arrive in weaker condition. Animals that came from distant places were more likely to be affected by different diseases and changes in browsing vegetation. Before the animals were given out to the selected recipient every effort was made to ensure that the animals were vaccinated against all the common diseases affecting small stock in Isiolo District.

 The Catholic Missionaries at Garba Tula reported that they had spent more than a million shillings on this restocking programme by the end of 1991. Then came the outbreak of a devastating sickness affecting small ruminant stock called Nairobi Sheep Disease carried by ticks. These had proliferated in the unusually high humidity prevailing in Garba Tula during 1991

 Brother Andre who was responsible for the restocking programme was able to identify the cause of the outbreak of the disease and rushed to get the medicine to kill the ticks. It required dipping all the animals in the area, if they were not to be immediately reinfected. There was only one dip in the whole of Garba Tula/Merti area which was usable. The Borana would not use it he said, as they claim it was only suitable for cattle. Even more discouraging to Father Andre was the fact that a few individuals who did seem willing to try the dipping treatment were not willing to pay the smallest amount of 1 shilling per head to save their animals. This lack of interest in even a token contribution towards the heavily subsidized costs may have been part of the reason why the Catholic Mission has given up the restocking programme.

 It would seem to indicate more likely the attitude of the Borana living around Garba Tula who have become largely dependent on Catholic welfare. Borana in other areas do not speak very highly of those "pitiful miraa chewers" around Garba Tula. This seems to be confirmed by the experience of the local trucker in Garba Tula who reported that he was bringing in about one million shillings worth of miraa to this area each month until last year when he gave up the business as he realised that shifta were attacking the miraa carrying vehicles. Much more study needs to be done on the effects of this miraa drug on the Borana society and economy. It is a difficult subject on which to find objective opinions as most of the people who now profess to be Muslim insist that chewing miraa is part of their new Islamic culture. The few professing Christians in Merti seem to strongly oppose the drug so it has acquired a religious division. The growing addiction in all the small towns where there are mosques is having a serious deleterious effect on many individuals and families. Some supporters of the habit point to the money being made by the women who buy and sell the miraa. Many of them were addicts of the drug, spending their time and money waiting for the next delivery.

 One final impression remains of the struggle for survival going on amongst the southern Borana. It comes from a visit made to the furthest semi- permanent settlement at Dadacha Bassa. This provided a striking example of the efforts being made by pastoralists in transition to hang on to their semi nomadic traditional life style whilst accepting the need for adaptation to modern Kenyan developments. There are about 600 adults in that community, most of whom seem to recognise the value of education for their children. They are living at the farthest limits of the Lorian Swamp where the last vestiges of the Ewaso Nyiro river occasionally extend. When there is rain there is no doubt that the grazing around them would be excellent. Unfortunately, the lack of rain during the last year plus the diminution of the river water has resulted in the women having to walk up to 17 kilometers for water fit for drinking. As noted earlier they were able to get some water for making the mud walls of the school from a nearer water hole but this was very polluted. We were most impressed with the performance of the eight Borana primary school teachers who are struggling to keep teaching through almost daily dust storms which made it almost impossible to see across the mud walled classrooms.

 The nearest medical help was to be found at Merti, more than 60 kilometers away. A small clinic building had been started by a contractor from Meru but he had given up when water became so difficult to obtain at Dadacha Bassa. The commitment of those school teachers representing the educated new generation of Borana society and the tenacity of the chief and his people to retain their pastoral nomadic roots seemed to epitomize the strength of all nomads - mobility, diversity, flexibility and determination.

D. Religious Issues

1. The Arrival of Roman Catholic Christianity

 It has already been noted that one of the major agents for change and introducer of development in Merti is the Catholic Father Pius. He began his work in Merti at the end of the 1960's when the Ewaso Borana were just being released from the concentration camps in which they had been confined during the Shifta wars.

 It was Father Pius who told us that he came to Merti largely as a result of hearing of the suffering at that time when 842 people died in the worst month. Unlike Garba Tula which had been an administrative centre since Colonial times, Merti was nothing more than an artificial gathering of people forced together into the concentration camp. During the time of the Shifta wars there were no permanent buildings or infrastructure so when Father Pius made his first visit to Merti travelling from Isiolo he was offered the freedom to choose where to build his mission station. It would have been much quicker and cheaper to have built down on the alluvial plain but being the sort of man he is, he decided to choose a place part way up the escarpment of the volcanic rock plateau which forms such a conspicuous feature of Merti. This has meant that the Catholic mission stands out in a most impressive manner, elevated dramatically above the rest of the sprawling town which has developed on the plain below. Some indications of Father Pius's style can be gathered from the architecture of the buildings he has erected. Everything is painted pure white with his own house boldly labelled `Castel Gandolpho' (The name of the Pope's summer palace).

 Below that are located his church, deliberately planned to look like a Muslim mosque, and a large community centre containing a giant TV screen. There are also dining rooms to feed all the primary school children in his end of town two meals a day seven days a week.

 He has provided financial help to hundreds of young men and women, not only through primary school but thereafter through secondary school and on to higher education. For this reason nearly every Borana school teacher in Isiolo district as well as many of the other educated salary earners are beholden to Father Pius. Unfortunately, as happens all too often in situations of large scale charitable assistance, not all the recipients feel grateful to the donor. The most commonly heard complaint was that Father Pius tried to force people to go his way - do whatever training he felt best.

 There is no doubt that he and the Catholic mission exercise a commanding influence over all that happens in Merti. He has been responsible for virtually all the development that has come to the rapidly growing town of Merti and nearby smaller towns. Twenty kilometers away at Bulesa there is a large primary school and church building with a similarly impressive bell tower. Father Pius regards the ringing of the massive bronze bells he hangs as a direct challenge to the calls to prayer coming from the Muslim mosques.

 He tells of a very real confrontation which arose about 5 years ago when a recently installed Muslim preacher, Sheikh Abdullahi tried to build a mosque directly across the street from the Catholic church. The land he wanted to claim was already occupied by several private dwellings - all belonging to Catholic church members. When they asked Father Pius what they should do about the boundary marker pegs planted by Sheikh Abdullahi he did not hesitate in advising them to pull them out. Sheikh Abdullahi persisted with his efforts to plant his marker pegs, even trying to arouse his Muslim followers to take aggressive action against the Catholics.

 Eventually the government had to intervene with a bevy of officials from the district level who ordered Sheikh Abdullahi to withdraw his challenge and avoid further unnecessary confrontation. He did give up the struggle for his mosque to be built as close as possible to the Catholic church but he chose the next nearest piece of empty land he could find, building not only a mosque but a large well constructed primary school. This is only a couple of hundred metres from the even larger Catholic primary school and health centre. This means that both primary schools are in the heart of the Western end of Merti town usually known as the Catholic end. In between that and the larger Muslim eastern end are strategically located the sprawling government offices and police compound. These are built very close to the main flood drainage gully which forms what is sometimes referred to as "the green line" between Christian and Muslim sections of Merti.

 This is more than just a symbolic or imaginary line; it represents a very real attitude divide within the Borana community. In terms of numbers the Muslims are definitely the largest force, but in terms of money, education and all other development activities the Catholics are the most powerful. How long the Christian community would survive without the commanding presence of Father Pius is uncertain.

 This points out as clearly as anywhere else seen in Africa, the problems of trying to introduce a form of Christianity that is totally alien and unsupportable in a nomadic pastoral society. Father Pius has shown incredible courage and tenacity in pouring so much of his life and the resources of his wealthy Italian Catholic supporters into Merti. The buildings are superb and impressive - even in his attempts to make them resemble Arab/Muslim architecture. Father Pius has also tried for years to incorporate some of the traditional Boran religious practices into his celebration of the mass. He still has some time in the service for old men to recite Borana style prayers in which the congregation all make a repetitive response. He was rather sad that recently some of the young educated Catholics had forced him to drop the ceremonies which he was trying to include involving Borana blood sacrifices. The young men, mostly school teachers told him that if they were going to be Christians it was unnecessary to continue following the old Borana religion: the two were incompatible and attempts to combine them were only adding confusion. That seemed to show a surprising degree of insight and courage on the part of the educated generation of Borana to oppose the Catholic fathers good intentions at synchretisation of worship form.

 On the other hand we found other school teachers working in remote areas who complained that they could not have any Christian services as Father Pius never came around on a Sunday. They obviously had no idea of the possibility of having a Christian gathering which did not involve the presence of a Catholic father to celebrate the mass.

 The other Merti priest, Father Luciano, is a close relative who is clearly more interested in the musical advancement of Merti Borana than in any other sort of development. His brass band is a surprise to hear in the northern deserts of East Africa but that would presumably last as long as Father Pius's giant T.V. screen if the white fathers were to leave.

 Even the educated Borana who can read the Bible in 3 different languages including their own mother tongue seemed to have no practical experience in reading the scriptures or any other Christian literature. When asked why they had little apparent interest in such reading they replied that the father did not encourage them to read the bible and had few Christian books.

 It may be a particular problem with the Italian form of Roman Catholicism that seems to require extensive use of robes, rituals and religious chanting. There is no doubt that it would be almost impossible to transplant it to a nomad camp or even a settled community that did not have a sophisticated style of church building. The masses we observed required extensive use of music with electric organ and/or brass band, burning of incense and sacred elements moving out of and into elaborate highly ornamented mystical boxes. It would be hard to imagine an expression of religious worship less likely to be replicated in rural areas amongst people for whom permanent buildings of any size are low priority.

2. Protestant/Methodist Christianity

There is one other Christian church in Merti - a Methodist one which

seems to serve all the non-Catholic Christians. It has a building physically very close to the government offices and police lines and it is from them come the government workers from the southern Bantu tribes who comprise most of that congregation. The only Borana who attends when he is in Merti is a Methodist pastor called, Rev. Golicha, who is the official responsible for all the Methodist churches in north east Kenya. He is one of the few individual Borana who have professed to be Protestant Christians - the convert of an evangelistic Methodist missionary who visited the concentration camps during the traumatic Shifta wars 1963-68. This British missionary who finally left Kenya in mid 1992 is remembered as the white man who brought the plight of the impounded and dying Borana to the attention of the outside world. Through his ministry of preaching the gospel and showing practical concern there were hundreds of Borana who professed to become Christians. Also as a result of his concern for the plight of the Borana in eastern Isiolo the National Christian Council of Kenya began a range of large scale relief and development projects to help rehabilitate the Borana after they were released from the concentration camps. Methodist congregations were started in each of the places where the camps had operated. Unfortunately there were no suitable pastors to be found so evangelists were appointed from anyone who was interested in the job. A small salary was offered and basic training courses provided for young men who had received enough education to be able to read. There seems to have been some questions about the spiritual qualification of the young `evangelists'. There was no doubt that the life style of most of the staff employed by the NCCK was definitely not useful as a Christian witness.

 From various comments made by people who watched the growing movement of Methodist/NCCK style Christianity competing with Islam for the hearts of Borana abandoning their traditional religions, we learned that Christianity lost largely because of its association with the professing Christians from the southern Bantu people.

 There are still a few Methodist congregations to be found in the major urban centres of N.E. Kenya where there are government workers sent from the South. Some of them have paid pastors from these same southern ethnic groups but the relationship between them and the Borana are virtually non-existent. Even some of the few Borana who have been given the title of Pastor have done little to show a positive Christian lifestyle. The Land Rover given by the Methodist Church in Kenya was used to transport the drug Miraa to the markets of Eastern Isiolo until it was shot up by Somali Shiftas and the driver killed early in 1992.

3. Hypotheses to be examined as a result of the observations made in Isiolo District.

 a. For a Christian witness to be appropriate and acceptable amongst nomadics it should be independent on structures or rituals which cannot easily be adopted and followed by local people. This is particularly important amongst pastoral nomads for whom attachment to any particular piece of real estate is impossible, relationships are the all important "glue" in their society.

 Questions.

1. Would it be possible for a Christian service to be held without the presence of the Priest - in an unconsecrated place?

2. Who would object to the informality of such a meeting?

3. What do the professing Borana believers think should happen during a Christian service?

4. What do they believe is essential to be a Christian?

5. Who do they think Jesus is? Why did he die? For whom?

6. What do the professing Christians feel is their responsibility and relationship towards other Borana?

 b. An appropriate Christian witness should start with a clear understanding of what the ultimate end is going to be - a church totally relevant, attractive and reproducible amongst that society. If it is true that the church is not only adaptable to any society but also the most liberating, elevating and transforming agent for change in that society then that must be the ultimate objective of any Christian intervention. Development which does not include the planting of such a church is not just deficient it is defective. It will be lacking the most powerful liberating force from within, enabling that society to be able to live the fullest and most effective lives.

 Questions

1. What do the Borana think "Church" means?

2. What examples do they have to consider?

3. What have different Christian missionaries aimed to convey?

4. Why did some of the educated Borana Christians in Merti reject Father Pius's attempts at syncretism - including traditional practices?

5. What are the differences in the effects of the Catholics in Garba Tula to include traditional Borana religion?

6. What other examples of the Christian church adapted to pastoral nomads can be found in Kenya, or anywhere in the world?

7. How would a church amongst the herdsmen on the northern grazing lands operate?

 c. Over emphasis of projects, institutions and structure appears to confuse the message that missionaries want to bring. It may well be necessary to address physical needs but concentration on these is liable to give the impression that Christianity is primarily concerned with food, medicine, education and employment.

 Questions.

1. Why do Borana largely reject the religion presented by the Christian agencies, (Catholic, Methodists and NCCK) who bring all the development projects?

2. Why do they choose to follow Islam which offers a relatively insignificant amount of material relief and development?

3. Has there ever been a presentation of Christianity, amongst the Borana that did not major on development projects?

4. What would an integrated Christian witness to Borana look like comprising proclamation of the gospel and practical concerns?

5. Is it possible to keep a balance of physical and spiritual ministry?

6. What models of integrated Christian witness in other pastoral groups can be found?

 d. Christians from any outside culture going to witness amongst nomadic people will inevitably need a home base for their living purposes. For their ministry they should be deliberately moving out for extended periods of time. This will serve to minimise the usual misconception that Christianity is only for settled people.

 Questions

1. Why does Islam appear more relevant to Nomadic peoples than Christianity? Even though it is brought by hostile neighbours.

2. Why is it said by some that to be a Borana is to be Muslim?

3. What is the general Borana opinion of the Catholic and Methodist ways of living and sharing their faith?

4. What is their attitude towards the sort of Christianity demonstrated by the Bantu nominal Christians who work in Isiolo district?

5. How do these compare with the Muslim traders and teachers who are not ethnic Borana?

6. What are the major differences in behaviour and relationship to the Borana people?

4. Summary of Principles Derived from Field Experience.

 For effective Christian ministry amongst Nomadic Pastoralists there seems to be some general principles of action that are transferable to other similar societies.

1. If missionaries have to have a fixed base for their residence it may be advisable to locate it in a town or settled community where their presence is not so conspicuous.

2. It is advantageous for missionaries to Nomadic Pastoralists to move out from their base not only to be able to minister to the scattered pastoralists but also to reduce the tendency to create dependency.

3. Those people who are struggling to survive because of drought, disease, raiding or plain laziness will inevitably gather at the mission station if they can be sure to find him there.

4. These people will not be the best community in which to begin an indigenous church, attractive and appropriate to pastoral nomads. There may be genuine converts but there will inevitably be those who profess to believe because they think this will get them some benefit. Even those who are genuine converts will have more difficulty in gaining the respect of the pastoralists who are still out in the bush with the cattle.

5. It may even be advisable not to try to start a church at the place where the missionary lives to avoid giving the impression that it is dependent on and controlled by him/her.

6. A better model may be to deliberately avoid meeting in any one location but to meet at any place where the people are living at a particular time. This need not necessarily be on a Sunday, it could be on a market day if the people have a local market.

7. Once there are a few genuine converts then these need to be taught and encouraged to meet together at any convenient place, especially where this will give opportunities for witness to their extended families.

8. The missionary would try to keep out of these gatherings as much as possible to allow the indigenous Christian community to develop - this will require a high view of the ability of the Holy Spirit to nurture that embryonic church.

9. The teaching of the new believers will probably be best done on an ad hoc basis by the missionary whenever it is convenient for them to gather - either seasonal or intermittent, not in western-style Bible Schools.

10. This may mean that the missionary will leave his home and the believers their animals to minimise distractions and give maximum opportunity for concentrated teaching.