

## **An Ethnographic Introduction to the Garri in Southern Frontiers of Ethiopia**

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### **Abstract**

This study focuses on the Garri, an ethnic group residing in the borderlands between Ethiopia and Kenya, with smaller numbers in southern Somalia. Despite their historical significance as one of the earliest indigenous communities in the Horn of Africa, the Garri have received limited attention in scholarly works. This study aims to unravel the unique socio-cultural context of the Garri and their historical connections with neighbouring communities. This study employed a qualitative approach, utilizing key informant interviews and focus group discussions as the primary data sources. In addition to primary data collection, a review of existing literature was conducted to gather secondary data and enhance the understanding of Garri's socio-cultural history and related topics. The major finding highlights the importance of the Garri community's geographical location, particularly their settlements along the tripartite borders, in shaping the history of the southern frontiers. Therefore, by shedding light on the overlooked aspects of Garri's history and culture, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the region's socio-cultural dynamics.

**Keywords:** Garri, history, group relations, frontiers, ethnicity, and identity

## Introduction

The Garri, an ethnic group whose language falls within the Eastern lowland Cushitic linguistic branch, are predominantly Muslim pastoralists residing in the borderlands between Ethiopia and Kenya, with smaller numbers in southern Somalia. Widely recognized as the *Pre-Hawiye* (Schlee, 1989), they trace their historical roots as one of the earliest indigenous communities inhabiting the Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASALs) within the Horn of Africa. This particular region, as widely studied by scholars, has exhibited a remarkable degree of dynamism and perpetual transformation in terms of social and political engagements, patterns of mobility, interethnic relationships, political rivalries, religious expansions, and overlapping nationalism projects (Fekadu, 2009; Getachew, 1983; Schlee, 1989; Tesfaye, 2018). Despite the historical significance of Garri as one of the earliest social groups, they have received relatively limited attention in scholarly works conducted in the area. Thus, our current understanding of the Garri remains incomplete, with available information predominantly centered around functionalism, often conveyed through implicit references leading to the emergence of incommensurability.

The Garri people, occupying a prominent position within the Horn region, can be considered the most extensive and widely distributed social group. Their presence spans across territories encompassing Ethiopia, Somalia, and Kenya, reflecting their significant demographic and geographic influence. This unique socio-cultural complexity is further enhanced by their distinctive status as inhabitants along the triangular international borders, creating a complex spatial arrangement that shapes their interactions with diverse communities throughout the region. As a result, the Garri has cultured a rich and multifaceted history characterized by dynamic cultural exchanges and interconnections. Scholarly works have also substantiated that the Garri's ancestors or descendants have been involved in migratory patterns, leading to their dispersal across various countries, including Chad (Getachew, 1983). This dispersion pattern highlights the historical and geographical significance of the Garri, underscoring their enduring presence and cultural interconnections across the Horn of Africa and beyond.

When examining the Garri settlement patterns across different countries, it becomes evident that there is a need for additional, comprehensive research to unravel the historical challenges that the Garri society has encountered, potentially influenced by natural or human factors. While initially perceived as a seemingly 'homogeneous,' the Garri split into numerous mutually incomprehensible splinters that spread across North-Eastern Kenya, Southern and Central Somalia, South Eastern Ethiopia, and even extending to Chad. Nevertheless, contemporary demographic data highlights that most of the Garri primarily reside within the borders of Ethiopia. They maintained deep social, economic, linguistic, and historical connections with their neighboring communities, particularly the Gabra-Mijjo of Southern Ethiopia and the Somaloid people in Northern Kenya. Scholars

have classified these interconnected groups, with whom the Garri share strong affiliations, as either part of the Proto-Rendille-Somali (PRS) complex or as constituents of the Pre-Hawiye group. Notably, scholars such as Lewis (1969, 1983, 2002), Schlee (1989, 2013), and Turton (1975) have extensively analyzed these relationships. Despite the evident significance of these connections, a comprehensive ethnohistorical investigation focusing on Garri's homogeneity or diversity of its contemporary splinter groups is noticeably elusive. Existing studies paradoxically depict the Garri, despite their historical presence in the region, as newcomers and settlers within the broader interaction framework.

This article focuses on the Garri, in its specificity, a group of significant importance that has received very little or no attention in the existing studies compared to other splinter groups like Gabra and Rendile. The scholarly works on the Garri community have been notably limited, with few dedicated research efforts to understand their unique socio-cultural context. Among the existing works, Getachew (1983, 1996, 2002) emerges as the earliest significant contributor, conducting comprehensive academic studies into Garri's relationships with neighboring conflicts and the ethnographic and ethnic-historical dimensions of the society. Sato's (1996) investigation into the commercial herding systems of the Garri provides a valuable overview, shedding light on various aspects of Garri trade networks within the region. Staro (2013) also offers an opening analysis of Garri water ownership practices and their adaptive strategies.

Despite these efforts, a substantial amount of research has focused on the issues of conflict and identity concerning inter-ethnic relations. Numerous scholars, including Fekadu (2009), Asebe (2016), Tigist (2014), Kefale (2013), Schlee & Shongolo (2012), and Tesfaye (2018), have conducted research into various aspects of ethnic identities, resource politics, federalism, and inter-ethnic conflict, mainly focusing on the Garri, Gabra, and Borana communities. The studies have predominantly emphasized the topics of ethnolinguistic identity-based territorial federalism and ethnic conflict, particularly within the resource-rich areas such as Moyle town, where illicit activities like contraband trade are prevalent. These studies delve into the complexities surrounding the Oromo-Somali dynamics in these regions. Additionally, studies by Bassi (1997), Schlee (2008, 2013), and Belete (2008) have explored the complex dynamics of inter-ethnic relationships within the context of Southern Ethiopia and Northern Kenya. However, it is essential to note that while these studies provide valuable insights, they have primarily focused on the Borana community's distinctive features and relationships with other ethnic groups. This scholarship, emerging from methodological nationalism, often adopts a narrow perspective characterized by a rigid focus on ethnic territoriality. This narrow focus leads to the ethnicization of resources, which can be seen as *ipso facto*. Knowledge production often relies on the uncritical adoption of foreign ideas and concepts, sometimes excluding local knowledge. This tendency towards an ethnocentric lens within Oromo scholarship has led to a notable gap in understanding the complex socio-political history of the Garri

community. The failure to critically engage with these concepts leads to an unconscious endorsement. It cultivates an environment where Eurocentric perspectives thrive, ultimately trading indigenous values and the social cosmology they encompass.

### **Rationale and Scope**

The study, therefore, emphasizes the unique nature of the Garri experience, employing the concept of epistemic intermediaries against whom Mamdani (2018) critiqued for potentially de-historicizing phenomena by abstracting them from their contextual foundations in favor of interpretation through analogy. This study argues that adopting a detached constructivist approach rooted in Cartesian epistemology risks excessive dichotomization of the reality under examination. The rationale is that an object's role in the community can transcend beyond the subject's immediate physical interaction with the mechanical puzzle. Otherwise, it leads to misinterpreting humans as dislocated and disassociated by nullifying our perception of identity by making it excessively fluid and abstract.

This article, therefore, provides an ethnographic introduction to the Garri pastoralist group with an Islamic background, delving into their lineages, origin myths, geographical distribution, and historical and cultural dimensions. The Garri community maintains a strong tradition of remembering and passing down historical contacts from one generation to another. However, it is essential to note that this discussion does not aim to provide a complete representation of all aspects of the group or engage with an explicit theoretical framework. Instead, it serves as an introductory exploration of key issues. It highlights the need for further research to examine the particularity of the Garri, both as a distinct community and within the broader ethnic context.

Drawing on Getachew's (1983) and Sato's (1996) claims that recommend thoroughly examining pastoralists' mobility history and social networks, the study used migration/mobility histories as epistemic intermediaries. The contemporary distribution of the Garri results from historical movements and the establishment of flexible territorial boundaries. Therefore, historical narratives provide invaluable insights into understanding present-day practices and the complex network of social, economic, political, and cultural relationships within and between communities across the region. The explanation of these historical relationships in this discussion has enduring consequences, often displayed in current political dynamics and discussions of identity within the Garri-Borana context.

The empirical foundation of this article rests on ethnographic fieldwork undertaken during two separate periods: June to September 2020 and August to October 2021, forming an integral component of a doctoral thesis focused on the Garri community in Southern Ethiopia and Northern Kenya. The nature of the fieldwork process proved instrumental in refining the gathered data, ensuring an

inclusive and reliable portrayal of the subject population. This study used a qualitative research approach, relying on key informant interviews (KII), focus group discussions (FGD), and observation to get detailed insights into Garri's social and cultural practices. A detailed procedure was employed to collect data, which involved 15 interviews with key informants (KII) and seven discussions with focus groups (FGD). The participants in the study consisted of elders, Ugaz, and kebele representatives. While the main participants were from the Ethiopian side, Kenyan informants were also included. These methodological choices align with established practices within the domains of history and anthropology, contributing to the expanding literature on these themes. In presenting this data, I aim to contribute to the broader scholarly discourse and, from a regional perspective, reconstruct the historical significance embedded in these narratives.

### **“Ethnogenesis” and Historical anecdotes**

Many scholarly accounts of mobility are widely discussed in the literature, directly or indirectly, describing the pre-colonial history of ASALs of the Horn and East Africa. Similarly, as it occurred in other parts of the continent, this history was characterized by migration/mobility, interactions of fusion and fission of groups, and later cultural and religious exchanges (Baxter, 1954; Belete, 2008; Getachew, 1983; Haberland, 1963; Schlee, 1994; Turton, 1975). Nevertheless, “mobility” encompasses diverse interpretations and multiple layers of complexity. In Africa, historical accounts of people's movements are often linked to the creation or demise of significant social and political settings [ontological] on various scales. Before colonization, African border regions had long been recognized for their significant historical mobility, often dating back to pre-colonial eras and beyond (Bruijn et al., 2001; Lentz, 2013). Many factors instigated this movement, including unfavorable environmental, societal, or political conditions concerning the search for a better place.

The oral traditions of the Garri hold a history that goes back to an emergently controversial notion. This notion pertains to the diffusion of Kushitic people and their mobility from South Arabia into regions including present-day Sudan, Southern Ethiopia, Northern Kenya, and other unknown routes. The historical trade route that linked the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, Bab el Mandeb, the Horn/East African region, and the Indian Ocean coast played a vital role as a connection within the Indian Ocean trade routes (Pankhurst, 1965). Notably, Getachew (1983) points out that the Garri community strongly believes in their origin in South Arabia. Based on his analysis of their migration patterns, he claimed they reached Africa by crossing the waters of Bab-el Mandeb and continuing their way in a southwestern route. Equally, certain Garri elders assert that the origins of the Garri people can be traced to the area presently recognized as Saudi Arabia. They claimed that the Garri community first settled in the Zeila port along the coast of the Horn of Africa/Somali peninsula before 500 BC (Le Hey, KII: 2020).

Subsequently, they migrated inland towards the southern outskirts of Ethiopia and eventually fragmented into smaller groups, settling in various locations. While the Garri community claims their genealogy from Araba immigrants, scholars like Messay (2003) have criticized the Semitization claim as Eurocentric and in need of revision. Kusow (1995), in his influential works on Somali Studies, supported this claim and challenged the constructed knowledge of the Somali people. He argued that groups like the Garri were among the earliest inhabitants of southern Somalia, citing their migration patterns as evidence to support his claim.

The oral history of the Garri community, which recounts their migration towards the south, is substantiated by informants within the community. This narrative has also been documented by explorers, colonial government representatives, and scholars like Barile (1935), Cerulli (1957), Colucci (1924), and Haberland (1963). These sources attempted to map Garri's migration route from the east to the south. However, they could not definitively identify and confirm the ancient homeland of the Garri in the Horn of Africa during their pre-colonial era. They left their claim to become somewhat blurred. The existence of indefiniteness within the archives permits the coexistence of multiple interpretations and accentuates the complexity involved in retracing the origins of the Garri community. Given the complex nature, explorer sources have given insight into the presence of the Garri in their existing places, which extend over the Horn of Africa region. Based on Smith's (1896) historical account, he described the group he encountered during travel, documenting their social divisions, settlement patterns, and livelihoods. According to his claim, the Garri people residing south of the Dawa river have a reputation for maintaining peaceful relations with their neighboring groups, including the Borana and Digodi.

### **Garri's Stories About Their Origin and Lineage**

#### ***Myth of Origin and their earliest contact***

Like the oral traditions observed among various Somali clans, the Garri people claim ancestral ties to the Arabian Peninsula, specifically focusing on Southern Arabia. Within the prevailing narratives of origin, mainly upheld by specific Muslim communities in the Horn of Africa, there exists a widely embraced belief that the Garri people can trace their lineage to Arab migrants. The Garri people identify themselves as the earliest inhabitants, with a lineage tracing back to the Prophet Mohammed (KII, Moyale: 2020). They assert that their migration originated in response to the turmoil during the rule of the third Caliph. This turbulent historical incident provoked the movement of numerous individuals to Africa and other regions across the globe.

The Garri community has a unique origin myth that differs from the ancestral narrative of Somali groups. This alternative and lesser-known narrative sets them apart. According to this account, the Garri people were forced to abandon their ancestral homeland because of the implementation of *zakat*, a religious tax



implemented by the Islamic administration. The Garri community resisted this demand, ultimately leading to their departure from their original territory (FGD, Ardaolla: 2021). Following their dissent, the leader took decisive action to suppress their disobedience by implementing harsh measures. Faced with crushing encounters, they ultimately decided to leave their homeland and embarked on a sea journey to the Horn of Africa. Upon reaching the coastal region, they continued their migration southward, seeking temporary shelter in the area now recognized as the Ogaden area. According to one of the informants regarding their settlement,

*Once they arrived in the Ogaden area, the Garri people set up a temporary settlement. However, they had conflicts with other Somali groups, such as grazing land and water and cultural differences. Because of these issues, they moved southwest to find a better place to live. (KII, Local historian, Moyale: 2020)*

Supporting these narratives, the research conducted by Getachew (1983) provides evidence that a substantial number of Garri people migrated from the Ogaden region toward the southwest. Over time, they reached the present-day regions of Arssi and Bale in the southeastern part of Ethiopia. Through meticulous examination of historical evidence and corroboration of various sources, Getachew's research provides compelling support for the validity and accuracy of Garri migration narratives. After their migration, the Garri eventually formed settlements, with one specific area, *Garra Garri*, located west of Arero. They dispersed throughout the region, and their descendants can presently be found in the Borona zone, Dawa zone, and even as far as Northern Kenya, with some individuals claiming Garri ancestry in Chad (*see* Figure-2). Although there is a dearth of written records, the Garri informants assuredly stated that a portion of their community chose to settle in various locations along their migration routes. The assertion of Garri informants regarding the settlement along the migration routes reinforces the significant movement and cultural dispersion of the Garri community.

Upon settling in the Dirre area, the Garri community's oral tradition underscores their active engagement with neighboring social groups. The Garri people cooperated with various communities in their new surroundings, as attested by their oral accounts. According to Garri sources, the Maddanle and Warday people are mentioned as communities with a reputation for being powerful and warrior-like. However, despite this observation, the Garri community attempted to establish peaceful relationships with the Maddanle and Warday communities. According to Garri's informants, the Mandanle people collaborated with the Warday in digging sophisticated water wells and resisted Borona's hegemony. However, due to continued pressure and aggression from the Borana and increasing insecurity, the Mandanle and Warday communities eventually left and sought refuge elsewhere. The early history of Garri and their neighbors can be seen as the

result of encounters and contacts between various socio-economic groups. Consequently, the Mandanle and Warday communities, originally inhabitants of their homelands, are currently found in Northern Kenya, specifically in the Wajir and Tana River districts (the two groups restructured the society using the Oromo model of Luba generation classes). Despite the disappearance and debate surrounding their status, some scholars claim that these groups are Orma, regarded as a sub-group of the Borana (Oba, 2014).

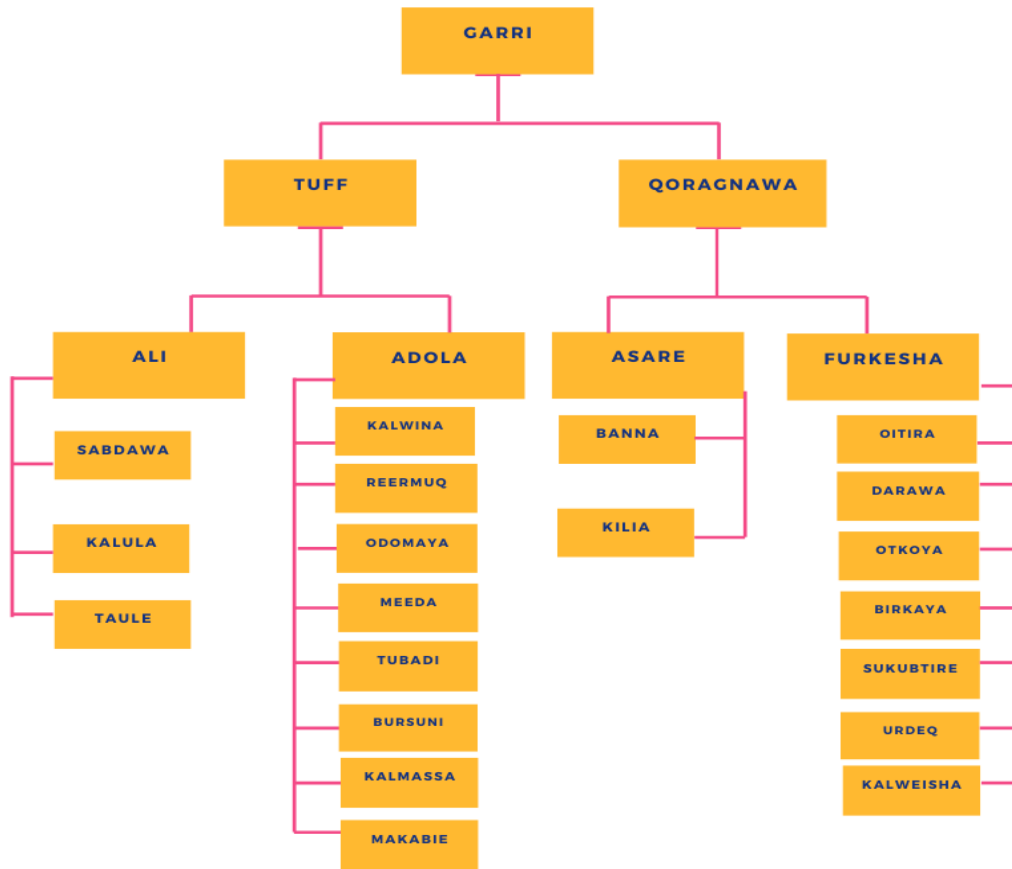
Contrarily, according to Garri's oral tradition, they underlined that they had maintained a distinct identity throughout history in contrast with their neighbors. The Garri community strongly emphasizes collective continuity, highlighting their belief in the enduring nature of their shared heritage and traditions. This belief contributes to their self-perception as a distinctive and resilient community. Accordingly, they emphasize that their identity is separate from all other communities their ancestors engaged with in ancient times. Through my extensive engagement in the subject domain, I have noticed a strong sense of integrity, which can be described as "epistemic solidarity," particularly regarding Garri's identity. The prevailing insecurity caused by neighboring communities has fostered a collective purpose among the Garri that transcends international boundaries. This unity is built upon shared beliefs, experiences, and memories, which promote cohesion through the appreciation and manifestation of communal values, kinship, cooperation, mutual assistance, and security. This dynamic harmony among the Garri lies in the commitment to shared beliefs, leading to mechanical solidarity, as Durkheim (1993) described. According to the informant, this dedication enabled them to preserve their identity and maintain a sense of ontological security by collectively recognizing and cultivating a sense of collective self.

### ***The Genealogical System***

The social organization within the Garri community is centered around groups of patrilineal descent, which gives rise to a structured clan lineage system. This system includes different sub-divisions, such as the clan moiety (*goss*), sub-clan (*maana*), and lineage/sub-lineage, forming the extended family unit. The patrilineal extended family, functioning as the smallest unit within this framework, comprises numerous nuclear families. This structure shapes social relationships, responsibilities, and interactions within the Garri community. The Garri genealogical line is presented as follows:



Figure 1: Genealogy of Garri Society



**Note:** This figure was created from filed data to visualize the clan structure of the Garri communities.

The Garri social structure, as presented in Figure 1, is categorized by a foundational segmentation, with the community organized into two moieties: Garri *Tuf* and Garri *Quragnowa* (also known as the *Quran*). Within the larger genealogical structure, scholars categorize the Garri community as descendants of Gardheere Samaale, explicitly belonging to the southern Hawiye. These moieties (Figure 1) hold symbolic significance, representing the core of the Garri identity. Further subdivision occurs within these moieties, resulting in four *maana*, each identified as a ‘house’. Within the four *maana*, the Garri social structure encompasses twenty sub-clans known as *balbala*, which can be translated as a ‘doorway’ in English. This hierarchical organization (Figure 1) serves as the foundation of the Garri social framework, delineating relationships and affiliations within the community. According to the Garri myth of origin, the Tuf and Quran trace their lineage back to the legendary ancestors Samaal-Irir. In other terms,

within the larger genealogical structure, scholars (Cassanelli, 2016, p. 18) categorize the Garri community as descendants of Gardheere Samaale, explicitly belonging to the southern Hawiye. As a result, each moiety consists of clans and lineages believed to be descendants of these mythical ancestors. This genealogical continuity is the fundamental narrative that shapes the composition and structure of the Tuff and Quran moieties within the Garri community.

Based on the Garri oral tradition, the Tuff sub-division holds great importance, as it is believed to have originated from Arabia and is linked to the renowned religious figure Mohammed. According to an informant, the union between Tuff's daughter, Maka, and Mohammed gives rise to Quragnawa, recognized as the founding ancestor of all clans within the Garri Quragnwa (KII, Moyale: 2021). This genealogical connection allows individuals to trace their patrilineal descent over ten to fifteen generations, revealing a shared and fictitious common ancestor within the community. This complex genealogical network enables individuals to establish their ancestral connections and acknowledge a common ancestor within their clans and sub-clans. Lewis's (1969, 1994) study on the genealogical system of Northern Somali pastoralists emphasizes the significant role played by ancestors, particularly those with many sons, in the segmentation process. This system led to the formation of lineages and sub-lineages with corporate agnatic political organizations. These agnatic political organizations served as the foundation for patrilineal groupings, encompassing individuals from the Garri territories and neighbouring communities. The Garri community has upheld a tradition of patrilineal kinship and descent from their earliest ancestor.

The contemporary Garri communities, as members of either the Tuff or Quran lineage (Figure 1), trace the line back to these origins. Sometimes, they also trace their lineage to Irrir, which connects them to the *proper Somali* and Arab lines, specifically to the lineages of Prophet Mohammed. These claims of genealogical ties have played a substantial role in legitimizing their distinct identity, particularly in identifying themselves from non-Muslim and even Muslim Somali neighbors. Many Islamic communities in the Horn and West Africa, including the Somali, share similarities in terms of claiming descent to a prominent family figure. According to Lewis (1961), this commonality contributes to these communities' shared elements of group identity. These shared narratives' origins often lie in historical connections, cultural influences, or religious beliefs. The assertion of ancestry and group identity holds a profound metaphysical power within communities, shaping perceptions and beliefs and providing a sense of continuity and rootedness that transcends generations. This shared knowledge of history and legacy establishes common ground beyond geographical and cultural differences. It plays a significant part in collective consciousness, serving as a cultural and historical anchor.

The etymology of the term “Garri” has garnered relatively limited scholarly attention within the existing literature. Only a handful of authors have briefly mentioned this term across different genres of literature (Ahmed, 1995;

Barile, 1935; Colucci, 1924; Getachew, 1983; Smith, 1896). Throughout various written sources, the name “Garri” appears in slightly differing forms, with variations such as ‘garre,’ ‘gari,’ ‘gerri,’ ‘gherra,’ ‘gahrri,’ ‘garee,’ ‘ger,’ and ‘gerra’ being documented. However, the most commonly recognized name is “Garri/Garre.” Kusow (1995), in his influential work, questioned the existing Somali studies and highlighted the Garre as the earliest communities, emphasizing their migration patterns. This particular designation is commonly employed to refer to the group. Despite the variations in spelling and transliteration, the usage of “Garri/Garre” by virtue prevails in the scholarly discourse and serves as the primary label for this specific ethnic entity. According to informants' accounts, the term “Garri” lacks a specific inherent meaning and appears linked to a particular individual's name. They assert that similar to the names “Tuff” and “Quran” (Figure 1), the group has been referred to as “Garri” for a considerable period, although the timeframe remains uncertain. Notably, it was observed that they do not possess an alternative name to identify themselves from neighbouring communities.

The mythology and historical narratives concerning the Garri indicate a shared ancestry, tracing back to a common progenitor. Whether regarded as myth or reality, this belief is reinforced by their shared cultural practices, religious affiliations, language, livelihood, and a shared worldview. Despite being dispersed across different states, their settlement in different countries has not weakened the belief in a common ancestor and the unified identity of the Garri people. According to Tajfel (2010), forming a consolidated collective involves self-identification and the identification of “others” as potential threats. Accordingly, the name they identify as Garri from others amplified their consciousness and territorial unity beyond political boundaries. Moreover, it assisted them in countering external threats posed by competing groups, thus enhancing a sense of collective identity. These factors reinforced their solidarity and resilience against perceived external dangers.

### ***Intra-clan relationship***

In the Garri community, all clans and lineages are considered equal entities collectively. They operate within a well-defined framework where each clan adheres to established social norms and religious virtues. These norms and values regulate interactions, relationships, and behaviors within and between clans. Religious virtues hold significant importance, shaping the ethical dimensions of clan relationships.

In the clan structure of the Garri community, each clan has a representative spokesman, a leader or head, and a council of elders responsible for the community. According to informants, these representatives resolve disputes between clans and manage resources (FGD, Udet: 2021). The Garri community is led by a principal chief, the Sultan or gob, who holds authority over significant matters. Collaborating with clan leaders and religious figures, they conduct group rituals based on Islamic principles derived from Sharia law. These rituals serve as mechanisms for resolving

significant disputes with solid adherence to Islamic principles in the communal governance of the Garri.

Each Garri clan plays a vital role as a social and political entity, significantly contributing to broader politics, settlement management, resource allocation, and territorial affairs. Unlike neighbouring groups such as the Gabra and Rendile, the Garri settlement pattern (Figure 2), characterized by heterogeneity of clans (Getachew, 1983; Sato, 1996). The unique settlement pattern observed among the Garri community indicates the diverse composition of clans. It presents the complex interplay of various clans and their adhere to a collective ownership model. The Garri community considers all land and natural resources to be communal property that belongs to them.

Consequently, clans and sub-clans do not have distinct territorial settlements exclusively for themselves. Instead, they share territory, including grazing areas and water sources. Due to this settlement pattern, according to an informant, the Garri clan and lineage cannot be distinguished based on territorial ties to specific areas within the designated tribal territory (KII, Gobe I, Kededuma: 2022). The lineage system runs with a notable absence of significant factionalism. The social structure, known as the lineage system, combines different social units into a unified and corporate social entity. The cohesion is achieved through the principle of patrilineal descent, which forms the foundation of kinship and affinal ties within the community. These associations within a settlement are perpetually solid among the Garri.

Each *olla*, which translates to ‘village,’ consists of several clan lineages interconnected primarily through patrilineal descent and affinal ties. Clan membership and belongingness are determined by agnatic descent. In Garri's ethos, belonging to one's father's clan or lineage is essential as it is used to categorize membership. Lineage serves as a visible identity marker for social categorization. It starts with the individual's immediate father, extends to their paternal ancestry, and ultimately includes the founder of the Garri clan, encompassing all sub-groups (Getachew, 1983). Clan membership is the foundation of each person's social identity and obligations. Then, individuals must demonstrate a shared commitment to practicing or displaying Garri's social symbols. These symbols are essential for shared identity, cultural environment, and interconnected networks in Garri's social cosmology. According to the informant, members of a particular clan or lineage are expected to provide hospitality to their fellow members in times of need or upon request (KII, Gobe II, Moyale: 2021). It is viewed as a moral duty and obligation in their social relationship. Other informants further strengthened this claim as follows:

*In times of famine or hardship, the solidarity within our extended family unit, known as the lineage, becomes crucial. We show strong communal support by sharing resources and assisting, especially when a family member faces hardship. This collective support system is a social safety net, ensuring protection and security. When confronted with uncertainty or*

*danger, the unity and cohesion within our lineage are vital for our survival and well-being. (KII, Gobe I, Moyale: 2021)*

*The clan members gather together if an individual loses family assets due to natural or human-made causes. We collect livestock such as cattle, camels, or small stock from all members and use it to restore the recipient, whether a man or a woman, to their previous wealth and assets. (FGD, Dokisu, 2021)*

The practice described within the Garri social cosmology functions as a mechanism to reinforce the cohesion of clans, promote a sense of brotherhood, and enhance overall solidarity. This deep-rooted tradition plays an indispensable and pivotal role in shaping and defining the very essence and fabric of the Garri community. It is the quintessential and indispensable cornerstone that establishes and cements Garri's collective identity.

Furthermore, within the Garri community, some collective responsibilities and alliances are specifically designed to ensure clan members' physical security and protection. As one of the informant stated that:

*When conflicts arise, the combatant is brought before the clan leader and elders for negotiation and resolution. This process of resolving the conflict often involves the payment and receiving of blood compensation. We use this tradition as the main way to peacefully address personal grievances, ranging from livestock theft to murders, by reaching a settlement instead of seeking revenge. (FGD, Halhuluko: 2021)*

A complex process in resolving conflicts involves extensive negotiations facilitated by esteemed elders with wisdom and experience in conflict resolution. Resolving conflicts requires careful negotiations and in-depth discussions among parties to find a mutually acceptable solution. The elders and clan leaders guide these discussions, ensuring all perspectives are heard and considered. This collaborative approach addresses conflicts inclusively, promoting harmony and maintaining social order within the community.

Apart from conflict resolution, the Garri community has various corporate responsibilities that stem from shared socio-cultural values. These responsibilities include herd management, pasture and water management, seasonal migrations, and defense against external violent raids (Sato, 1996; Staro, 2013). Pasture and water management are crucial for the sustainability of the community's resources. Clan members actively engage in discussions and decision-making to address these concerns. Notably, these arrangements can extend to include non-Garri neighbors. It is imperative to highlight that as corporate bodies, clans have legal identities, and land ownership is attributed to these collective entities rather than individual ownership.

Furthermore, the Garri community takes responsibility for defending their territory against violent raids from other groups. They organize and mobilize collective defense mechanisms to protect their clans, livestock, and resources from external threats. The shared responsibility within the corporate body reflects the intra-clan duty and alliance as a whole. According to one of my informants, inter-clan feuds are rarely documented in Garri history, with only a few minor conflicts occurring. This highlights the strong unity and peacefulness of the Garri clans compared to their neighboring communities. The essence of responsibility, rooted in kinship, creates an unbreakable bond among members across borders, fostering a sense of spiritual brotherhood and confraternity within the Garri community.

### **The Socio-Political Structure and Customary law**

The socio-political structure of the Garri community is defined by specific structures and practices that govern their communality. At its heart is the clan, which serves as a fundamental unit of social and political identity (Getachew, 1983). The Garri community comprises several sub-clans with unique lineage groups and extended families. The social structure of Garri culture is deeply rooted in tradition. The socio-political organization of the community adheres to a patriarchal system, tracing descent through the paternal line (Figure 1). This patriarchal principle significantly influences all aspects of Garri's life, defining their social dynamics, roles, and relationships within the community. Accordingly, the patriarchal structure dominates various aspects, such as property ownership, inheritance, and political and religious leadership.

Within the Garri community, the clan holds great significance in decision-making processes and the administration of communal affairs. Each clan within the Garri community has a designated leader or head who holds a position of authority and represents the clan's interests. This leader acts as a spokesperson and plays a crucial role in mediating disputes, upholding order, and ensuring the well-being of clan members. The traditional system of government is decentralized, with each clan having its own leader. The villages function as politically and geographically independent units, connected by their shared culture, religion, and social structure. In other words, while each independent clan unit within the Garri community may possess a certain level of autonomy, a shared understanding and solidarity exists among them, leading to the formation of coalitions. In this decentralized governance structure, the coalition's leadership does not exert direct control over the internal affairs of individual clan units. Instead, the coalition serves as a platform for collaboration on broader issues requiring collective action, thus showcasing the Garri community's adeptness at balancing decentralized and centralized approaches. As one of my informants stated, the concept of decentralization within the Garri community can be further strengthened by the following statement:



*We do not have a highly centralized administrative structure. Instead, we live in dispersed villages, which leads to the establishment of local political institutions within each village. Each locality exercises its matter independently. However, when we face external threats, we demonstrate remarkable solidarity by forming coalitions and rallying under centralized leadership to confront the challenges. This enduring sense of unity reflects the deep-rooted Garri nationalist sentiment that has endured for centuries. (KII, Government representative, Moyale, 2022)*

Regarding administration, the Garri community's political structure begins at the village level, known as *olla*. Each *olla* is headed by the *abbaolla*, the most senior male in the community. While the *abbaolla* possesses authority, he does not operate as an independent political entity. Instead, he collaborates with the village elders in all actions, including conflict resolution. Disputes within the *olla* are resolved by the council of elders under the leadership of the *abbaolla*. As Getachew stated, village leadership in the Garri community is entrusted to a selected head who collaborates with elders (Getachew, 1983). According to his claim, the elders hold tremendous respect, and their esteemed role involves providing guidance and resolution in various community matters. As one of my informants further shed light on this setting:

*The abbaolla and the elders hold a vital position as mediators when it comes to resolving conflicts within families, particularly between men and women. In case of any issues, they work together to seek out solutions. For example, if there is damage to a water point, they unite their efforts to repair it. However, if the problem exceeds their capabilities, they refer it to the twenty clan representatives for further resolution. (FGD, Dokisu: 2021)*

Based on the above narrative, the village holds immense significance in shaping personal identity and providing social security within the community. The village is a fundamental unit where individuals are born, raised, and nurtured in their sense of belonging. It is within the village that one's roots are grounded, and a solid bond for the community is fostered. Accordingly, the *abbaolla* is responsible for instructing individuals on social and economic ethics and ensuring that clan members fulfill their duties. It is a significant platform for discussing daily issues affecting the clan members. In more severe cases, a group of representatives is sent to the sultan to express the community's concerns.

At a broader level, the Garri community is guided by a respected leader known as *Sultan*, or *gobe*. This chief holds a position of great honor and is entrusted with overseeing matters of utmost importance to the entire community (Sato, 1996). Under the governance system, the Sultan serves as the principal chief. Alongside the Sultaan, representatives from each clan and an esteemed council of elders assist

in decision-making and governance. According to the informant, the socio-political structure of the Garri community mirrored that of contemporary state systems. The Sultan, acting as the principal leader, established an advisory council. This advisory council comprises representatives from lineage clans associated with the four main Garri sub-clans: Ali, Adola, Asere, and Furkesha. This council played a crucial role as a consultative body, providing valuable guidance and advice to the Sultan.

The Sultan's power, in specific contexts, is hereditary, and he also serves as a representative for the Garri community. The position of the Sultan is often inherited, with succession typically following a lineage or kinship pattern. As the hereditary leader, the Sultan plays a significant role in representing the Garri community both within and outside of their community. Internally, the Sultan symbolizes unity and continuity for the Garri people. According to informants, within the clan council are twenty leaders known as gobes, with one representing each sub-clan. The Sultan holds a position of authority above them all. It is a common practice in Kenya, Ethiopia, and Somalia (Figure 2), Garri, for each sub-clan to have its representative head.

Inter-clan and inter-lineage matters are managed by committees containing clan elders, overseen by the clan chief, the Sultan. The Sultan's position not only holds a sense of legitimacy but also represents the historical lineage that connects the present Sultan to the revered ancestral leaders of the past. Externally, the Sultan assumes the role of a representative for the Garri community in dealings and interactions with neighbouring groups and higher authorities. This tradition is vital in maintaining stability and continuity and fostering a strong sense of identity among the Garri people. As the embodiment of the Garri community's rich historical and cultural heritage, the Sultan ensures that these values are preserved and passed down through generations. This cultural heritage contributes to the overall cohesion and sense of belonging within the Garri community.

### **Customary law-*Xeer Kerri***

The Garri community has cultivated unique cultural values, standards, and a clearly defined set of rules that govern the hierarchical political institution and social relationships. These customary laws guide and shape the community, ensuring a harmonious coexistence and a sense of order. *As a customary law, Xeer Kerri/Garri creates* a structure that guarantees order and fairness and promotes harmonious coexistence among community members. As informants explained, these rules were traditionally transmitted through oral tradition and were not initially recorded in written form. This unwritten legal framework was deeply ingrained in the cultural heritage and collective wisdom of the Garri community, serving as a reflection of their values, traditions, and social norms. While the tradition of *xeer Kerri* was initially unwritten, according to the informant, efforts have been made over time to document and codify it. These written versions of *xeer kerri* have played a crucial role in preserving and protecting the legal heritage of the Garri community. They have made *Xeer Kerri* more accessible, consistent, and

applicable in modern legal contexts while still upholding the essence of original customary norms. According to one informant, the nature of the customary rule can be described as follows:

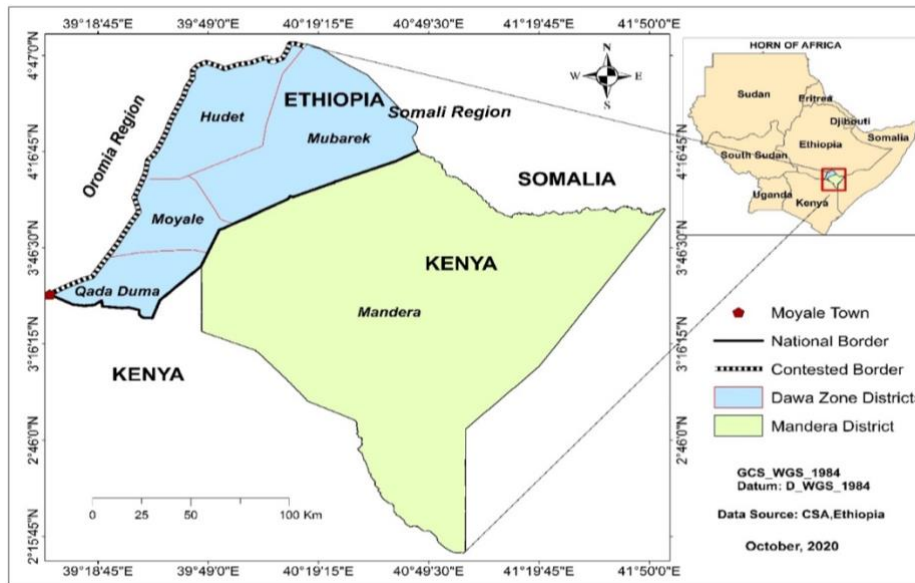
*Our society's culture was not solely based on oral traditions when a Sultan governed the Garri land. We also had our own social rules established through customary law, which we call "xeer kerri." This customary law encompasses various aspects of our community life. The Garri elder council recently took the initiative to compile and publish this oral law in written form. The written version, published in 2021, incorporates both the principles of Islamic Sharia-diin and the laws of the Ethiopian Federal government. (KII, Garri Sultan, Moyale: 2021)*

The above discussion highlights that the Garri community defies the assertions made by certain scholars characterizing the peripheries as ungoverned or ungovernable areas. The community's strong adherence to the principles of *xeer kerri* and the authoritative role of the elders demonstrate their ability to govern and maintain peaceful relationships effectively within the peripheries. This practice challenges the notion that these areas lack governance or control. The Garri community is a testament to their capacity to govern and uphold a harmonious way of life in these regions. With their deep understanding and application of *xeer Kerri*, the elders possess the knowledge and wisdom to address issues and conflicts within the peripheries. Their authority stems from the respect and trust they have earned within the community, which is founded upon their experience, fairness, and adherence to the values embedded in *xeer kerri*.

### **Location and Settlement Pattern**

The Garri community is primarily located in southeastern Ethiopia, specifically in the Dawa Administrative Zone (SNRS) of the Somali National Regional State. They can also be found in significant numbers in Northern Kenya and smaller numbers in Southern Somalia. In Ethiopia, the Garri spread across various localities within the Dawa zones (Figure 2), including Moyale, Hudet, Mubarak, Qadaduma, and Lehey Woreda. These areas serve as important hubs where the Garri people have built their settlements and formed their communities.

Figure 2: Settlement area of Garri



**Note:** Garri land and the tripartite border of Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia. The map is adopted from (Sato, 1996). *The Commercial Herding System among the Garri*. doi.org/10.15021/00002971.

Figure 2 shows that the Garri community predominantly resides in Ethiopia and Kenya. According to Alio, Kenya resides in counties like Mandera County, Wajir County, North Moyale County, and Isiolo County (Alio, 2012). The Garri people have also established a presence in southern Somalia, specifically in the *Kofur* district near Mogadishu. They have built settlements in different districts of Lower Shabelle, such as Afgooye, Waanlaweyn, Qoronyoley, Merca, and Awdhagle. The Garri community can also be found in the El Wak district in Gedo, Jubaland.

Based on projections by the Ethiopian Statistical Service (ESS, 2023), the estimated population of the Garri community in Ethiopia is around 440,535. The Garri community's territory is surrounded by various other pastoral peoples, creating a unique geographical setting. To the northeast, they share borders with the Guji people. To the north and northwest, they are bordered by the Borana community. Moving south and southwest, the Garri people are surrounded by the Gabera, Borana, and Sakuye communities. To the west, their territory is adjacent to the Rendile and Merhan peoples. This proximity and interaction between the Garri community and their neighboring pastoral groups shape the surrounding landscape. According to Garri's oral tradition, the Gabbra and Rendile, who live nearby, are considered their long-lost brothers. These communities, often seen as sub-groups of the Borana sub-group, live in and around the Mandera and Marsabit

districts. However, the oral tradition passed down through generations emphasizes the historical ties and shared ancestry. It reflects a sense of kinship and shared heritage that unites these communities despite their geographical separation. The geographical boundaries where these communities meet serve as essential hubs for cultural exchange, trade, and mutual influence.

Furthermore, Garri informants claim that the Toubou clan in Chad were a Garri splinter extending beyond Ethiopia and Kenya's current borders. According to Garri's elders, they were lived as a unified group before the arrival of the British and Ethiopians. However, the new geopolitical boundaries of the British and Ethiopians led to the diffusion of the Garri community across different regions. Accordingly, the Garri settlement (Figure 2), extending into Northern Kenya, was established through a colonial agreement between the British protectorate and Ethiopian authorities in the late nineteenth century. This agreement, known as the 1907 agreement (Getachew, 1983; Turton, 1970b), divided the Garri community and other groups like Gabra and Borana into two distinct countries. Therefore, the settlement pattern of the Garri and their splinters in this area indicates the possibility of continuous inhabitation as a cohesive unit and accompanying social transformation. However, their dispersal and assimilation occurred due to complex societal dynamics, state interactions, and interethnic relations.

## **Livelihood Strategies and Seasonality**

### ***Livestock***

Historically, the Garri community has relied on pastoralism and agro-pastoralism for their livelihood. Livestock, such as camels, goats, sheep, and cattle, have played a vital role in sustaining their means of subsistence. Camels, in particular, hold great importance in Garri society, providing security, milk, and meat, serving as valuable assets. In addition to symbolizing wealth and economic stability, according to informants, the camel holds a special significance within their community (FGD, Udet: 2021). This is attributed to its role in lending or giving to needy people. Lending practice reflects the core values of compassion, solidarity, and reciprocity deeply embedded in Garri culture. By offering assistance through the lending or giving of a camel, the community strengthens its social bonds, ensuring that no member is left unsupported during difficult times.

Beyond sustenance, camels also play a vital role in transporting goods and water, facilitating trade and connectivity for the Garri people in their surrounding areas. The Garri community is prominent for its business ethos, as it actively commercializes its livelihood and establishes strong business networks (Sato, 1996). In addition, they took advantage of their transboundary settlement and bilingualism by participating in regional livestock markets and other businesses.

### *Access to water*

The Garri community heavily relies on a network of strategically located wells, known as “*Ella*,” to meet the water needs of their livestock. These wells play a crucial role as vital sources of water. *Ella* concentration is observed in specific areas, including Udet, Lehye, Qadaduma, Wallena, and Jarra. The Wardai and Madanle are credited with the historical diggings of several water sources within the Garri community. These areas have been identified as critical locations where the Garri community historically established wells to ensure water access for their livestock. This *Ella* network serves as an important social and economic hub. These wells act as gathering places for herders and community members, fostering social interactions, exchanging information, and strengthening the bonds among individuals.

There are also permanent and non-permanent water points owned individually and as a community, and they are dug using sophisticated technologies. Alongside the communal water wells, the Garri community also relies on other water sources, such as local run-off water reservoirs called “*birkeds*” and dry season water wells known as “*tulla*.” These additional sources provide the community with alternative means of accessing water, especially during the dry season when water scarcity becomes more challenging. The property regime practiced by the Garri community is a unique combination of both public and private elements and communal and individual elements (Staro, 2013). It cannot be strictly categorized as “private” or “communal.” Instead, it incorporates different aspects from both realms, creating a distinct and complex system. Through field observations in Ardaolla and Qededuma, it is evident that the Garri community employs a complex property regime to manage and govern its resources. This approach combines both public and private, communal and individual elements, providing a flexible and adaptive framework for property rights. By recognizing the significance of both individual autonomy and collective responsibility, the Garri community demonstrates the socio-cultural complexity of their society.

Among the Garri, all groups have equal access to wells and grazing land. However, the decision to access wells and grazing routes would be decided by the village elder and *abba-olla*, a village compound head, and the person who manages the water (*Aba herrega*). Besides the water wells, ranges for grazing are also divided into wet and dry season grazing. However, it is essential to note that within the Garri community, the establishment of private enclosures, known as “*kallo*,” is strictly forbidden (Staro, 2013). This prohibition is based on the belief that *kallo* creates unequal access to land and leads to conflicts among settled camps regarding grazing rights. As expressed by a Garri informant during the fieldwork, “we oppose the establishment of *kallo* because it brings division among clans and intensifies conflict.” The Garri community recognizes the potential negative consequences of private enclosures and aims to maintain unity and harmony among its members.



### ***Seasonal calendar and livestock mobility***

Livestock mobility within the Garri community is closely tied to the seasons, pasture, and water availability. The dry season, comprising *Jilal* and *Haga*, and the wet season, encompassing *Gu* and *Dyer*, determine the movement patterns. The first season, known as *Jilal* or *Bira*, spans from January to March. This season signifies the long dry period of the year. According to informants, water and pasture became scarce during this time, leading to livestock migration in search of more abundant resources in other locations. Pasture and water resources scarcity often led to heightened tensions and conflicts during this period. During this season, conflicts with neighbouring communities often emerge due to the scarcity of resources.

The second season, known as *Gu* or *Gen*, spans from April to June. This season signifies the long rainy period when pasture and water become abundant. It brings relief as the abundant rainfall rejuvenates the grazing lands, providing ample resources for livestock. According to informants, during the *Gu* season, the community actively engages in agricultural activities and establishes communal enclosures. This period of abundant rainfall and fertile soil provides favourable conditions for farming. The community takes advantage of this opportunity to cultivate crops and ensure food security for the future.

The third season, *Hagga* or *Adolese*, spans from July to September. This period is characterized by dryness and coldness, presenting unique challenges for the community. The scarcity of rainfall during *Hagga* poses difficulties in terms of water availability and the growth of pasture. The temperature drops, adding a layer of coldness to the environment. In response to these conditions, the informant stated that they implement various strategies to adapt and ensure the well-being of their livestock and the sustainability of their livelihoods. One such practice is the enclosure of land during this season. According to an informant, this involves demarcating and enclosing specific areas of land in preparation for the upcoming *Dyer* rains.

The fourth and final season is *Dyer*, which commences in October and continues through December. This season is characterized by a relatively short yet crucial rainy period. The season holds tremendous significance as it is vital to pasture regeneration. Additionally, the rains refill water sources, ensuring availability for the subsequent dry season, *Jilal*. Water availability during *Jilal* becomes increasingly challenging, making preserving water resources during *Dyer* all the more essential. Accordingly, they closely monitor the weather patterns and eagerly anticipate the arrival of rainfall during this short rainy period. Recently, the Garri community has been experiencing the disruptive effects of climate change on their seasonal patterns. The traditional rhythm of the seasons has been disturbed, leading to recurrent droughts that have taken a toll on the community and livestock.

Regarding livestock mobility, the Garri community follows a well-planned and organized migration approach known as *godanna* or *godanntu*. However, before embarking on the migration, the community addresses several important

concerns. According to the response from my focus group discussion (FGD) informants, the discussion often revolved around the following key issues:

*We first discuss the challenges of finding water and suitable pasture for our livestock. We assign a young boy who can scout for potential water sources and grazing areas to address this. These boys are selected either through a general village meeting or based on voluntary participation. Once we are selected, these boys are responsible for exploring different locations and identifying suitable sites. Upon their return, they report their findings to the village elders and the head of the village, known as abba olla. These reports serve as the basis for decision-making regarding the upcoming migration, goddana. We discuss this matter during the night, due to our workload without disrupting their daily pastoral activities. (FGD, Ardaolla, 2022)*

The above description entails that the Garri community ensures a well-informed decision-making process for their migration. This consensus is achieved by involving the participation of the community and employing the knowledge of esteemed elders. This collaborative approach enables them to overcome the challenges of finding water and suitable pasture while maintaining their livelihood. However, migration is not solely driven by pasture constraints, water scarcity, and disease incidence. In times of ethnic conflict, people may be compelled to flee their homes, resulting in a different form of migration. Interestingly, the trend of human migration often aligns with livestock mobility.

### **Cultural Elements: Language and Religion**

#### ***Language***

Unlike many neighbouring communities, the Garri exhibit a unique linguistic diversity and complexity within their communication practices. While other social groups in the area predominantly use a single language, the Garri employs three distinct languages for communication (Getachew, 1983; Sato, 1996). The first language commonly used among the Garri clans is a variant of Somali derived from the Southern Somali dialect of Rahanwein. The second language employed by the Garri community is an aff-Borana dialect that has undergone a process of Somaliization. The result is a transformation of the dialect, reflecting the complex interplay between territorial dynamics and cultural identity. However, this linguistic fusion represents the dynamic nature of language development, influenced by historical and cultural interactions with other aff-Borana-speaking groups. However, amidst this linguistic complexity, Garri elders have expressed growing concern regarding the potential extinction of the 'authentic' Garri language, locally known as *Garri Kofar*. According to an informant, this language, which holds deep cultural and historical significance for the Garri people, is at risk of

fading away. The number of individuals who can speak the *Garri Kofar* dialect or language has significantly declined, reaching a critically low level. An informant from Mubarak, who is well-versed in this unique language, has confirmed that there are only a few remaining records in the form of poems and songs to commemorate its existence. Amidst this dynamic environment, the Garri community's multilingualism has played a crucial role in actively facilitating their engagement in regional trade. It has also helped them establish positive relations with their neighbours, even in recurring conflicts.

### ***Religion practices***

The Garri community's identity is profoundly shaped by their unwavering commitment to orthodox Islam, with a strong self-identification as Muslims and a dedicated integration of Islamic principles. The Garri follows the Sunni Islam branch and adheres to the *Shafii* school of thought. The practice of Islam plays a crucial role in shaping their routines and is deeply intertwined with their cultural and religious identity. According to one informant, the influence of Islam expanded significantly through their participation as caravan traders. The caravan trade acted as a conduit for transmitting Islamic teachings, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of the religion within the Garri community. Through their active involvement in trade networks, the Garri community expanded their economic horizons and experienced a profound transformation in their religious and cultural landscape.

The Garri deeply reveres Islamic tradition, embracing its principles and teachings with utmost respect. In some contexts, the Garri community refers to themselves as liberal Muslims. This signifies their commitment to upholding Islam's values while embracing a progressive approach to certain aspects of their lives. The Garri community's self-identification as liberal Muslims reflects their effort to balance religious beliefs with the evolving modern world. According to informants, the Garri community's liberal nature stems from their livelihood practices, which encourage marriage alliances to enhance their business networks. As confirmed by Sato (1996), this business network extends beyond religious and ethnic identities.

The Garri customary law, *Xeer Kerri*, is primarily rooted in their customs and cultural norms. However, it has also been influenced and adapted to incorporate Islamic Sharia principles. As an Islamic community, the Garris have a sharia court within the modern government structure, specifically in the judicial section. Therefore, individuals seeking justice have the option to either utilize the sharia court or the modern judicial system. The choice between the two can be determined by the person involved. This integration allows for the accommodation of Islamic norms within the framework of their traditional legal system. The members express and practice their faith in their daily routines. This faith is evident through their adherence to dress codes, observance of dietary restrictions, regular engagement in prayer, and frequent references to Allah's will and blessings. Their religious

devotion permeates various aspects of their daily routines, reflecting their deep connection to and reliance on their Islamic beliefs. The Garri community has adjusted various aspects of its culture to align with Islamic principles. This includes naming practices for children, customs surrounding funerals, and procedures for divorce and marriage. These adaptations reflect the community's commitment to integrating Islamic values into traditional practices.

Islamic education holds a central and inseparable place within the fabric of Garri culture. One of my informants elaborated on the centrality of Islamic education in the following way:

*Every eligible child in the village receives teaching in the principles of Islam from dedicated Muallims and Sheiks who are knowledgeable in reading, writing, and speaking Arabic. These teachings are conducted in a selected area, often beneath a tree, within an enclosure or temporary shelter constructed by volunteers or community members. (KII, Moyale; 2021)*

This communal effort highlights the importance placed on the education of the younger generation and demonstrates the collective commitment to preserving and passing on Islamic knowledge.

Moreover, the Garri organizes an annual prayer or *duaa*, dedicated to commemorating their revered hero for their contributions to the Garri people and the spread of Islam. According to the informant, although it has recently faded, there used to be a unique *duaa* (supplication) practiced by the Garri that differed from their daily Islamic practices. This *duaa* was aimed at remembering their heroes, such as Robow Hassen, who made significant contributions to the history of the Garri community. This event is a testament to the community's deep respect and gratitude for the recognized person. The prayer or *duaa* is significant for the Garri community, akin to a local pilgrimage. It is a time when community members come together to offer prayers, recite supplications, and seek blessings at a designated sacred site or mosque. During this event, traditional Islamic practices are observed, reflecting the cultural customs and rituals of the Garri community. These practices include recitations from the Quran, engaging in communal prayers, and participating in spiritual activities such as remembrance of Allah and seeking divine guidance.

Before the widespread adoption of Islam among the Garri community, they adhered to traditional practices such as *Bunaa-qella* (Getachew, 1983). *Bunaa-qella* is a traditional coffee slaughtering ritual where people mix and consume coffee beans with butter. However, with the increasing influence of Islam and the dissemination of Islamic knowledge, these traditional practices have been prohibited. As one of the informants stated, the spread of Islam has brought a shift in religious beliefs and cultural norms, leading to the abandonment of practices that are considered incompatible with Islamic teachings. Despite being characterized as

practicing a liberal form of Islam, the Garri community acknowledges that certain practices with traditional rituals contradict Islamic principles. As a result, these practices are prohibited in specific contexts. Due to this, the Garri community now primarily follows the principles and customs of Islam, embracing its teachings and relegating traditional practices to the past.

The Garri's significant commitment to their faith in Islam is evident in each village having a mosque. Even when they relocate or move for grazing purposes, according to informants, they ensure the continuity of their religious practices by erecting mobile mosques. In essence, Islam is connected with the social institutions and identity of the Garri community at multiple levels. On the one hand, Islam has played a crucial role in fostering strong connections between the Garri community and other Muslim groups, transcending mere ethnic identity. They established relationships and bonds with fellow Muslims through shared religious beliefs, creating unity and brotherhood beyond cultural boundaries.

On the other hand, Islam has also served as a means for the Garri community to maintain their distinct identity as Garri. While embracing Islamic teachings and practices, the Garri people have found ways to preserve their unique cultural heritage. This ability to simultaneously embrace Islam and uphold their Garri identity is evidence of the community's resilience and adaptability.

### **Intergroup Relations: Garri With Their Neighbours**

When examining the relationships of the Garri community with other ethnic groups, it is essential to acknowledge the coexistence, cooperation, and conflicts that characterize these interactions. While the specific dynamics of these relationships may vary, it is essential to consider the unique context in which the Garri people define their relations. These relationships have evolved into diverse, multifaceted influences marked by cooperation, cultural exchange, and conflict. In particular, the Garri-Borana relationship holds special significance and will be highlighted in the following discussion. The special significance arises from their extensive history of both cooperation and conflict.

#### ***Garri and Borana***

The relations between the Garri and Borana ethnic groups have been shaped by a complex history, characterized by a mix of cooperation and occasional hostility. Factors such as geography and historical events have significantly influenced the dynamics between these two communities. The Garri informants emphasized their longstanding presence in southern Ethiopia and their encounters with the Borana. Based on informant sources, the Garri historical contact in southern Ethiopia involved interactions with tribes known as Madanle and Wardayi. These tribes were regarded by the Garri as the area's oldest inhabitants, credited with the construction of numerous water wells in Dirre. Also, the Madanle and Wardayi tribes were known for their strong resistance against the Borana expansion

in the area. However, with the Borana military advantage, the Wardayi and Madanle tribes faced defeat in the conflict.

Following Borana's victory, they established their rule and subjected the people of Dirre to their authority. The Garri and other conquered tribes of Dirre were forced to live as clients under the Borana, paying tribute to the Borana Sabbo. Numerous scholars have described these relationships as a form of vassalage, commonly called the "trisso" system (Fekadu, 2009; Getachew, 1983; Schlee, 1989). The Borana strictly imposed their traditional laws, administration, and culture on those who resisted them. In response, the Wardyi tribe openly resisted. As a result, the Borana, with the alliance of the Garri, forcibly displaced the Wardyi from Dirre to the southern regions of what is now Northern Kenya (Kassam, 2006). Despite the Garri's alliance with the Borana against the Wardai, the Borana started treating the Garri similarly. They subjected the Garri to their control through the Sabbo section/moiety. They continued to act in an antagonistic manner towards the Garri community. This hostile act had a detrimental impact on the relationship between the Garri and Borana. The dynamics between the two communities were significantly affected, as the Garri felt betrayed by the Borana's actions.

The once cooperative relationship gave way to tensions and animosity, further straining the fragile bond between the Garri and Borana. It resulted in a shift from a joint patron-client trusteeship to mutual suspicion, affecting the overall dynamic between the two communities. The Garri community deeply resented the actions of the Borana, mainly their infamous trek known as the *keed-guray* or Bul Hussein trek. One of the informants claims that this event holds immense significance in the collective memory of the Garri people, symbolizing a defining moment in their history. The Garri oral tradition also affirms that the *keed-guray* is the ultimate embodiment of their resistance against the oppressive rule of the Borana. It is revered as a courageous act that symbolizes resilience and ethnic identification.

The rivalry between the Garri and Borana persisted even during the incorporation of their territories into the modern state structure of Ethiopia and the British protectorate. Surviving on the margins of the Ethiopian empire and the British protectorate, both groups found themselves at the center of attention due to their strategic location. The imperial regime began to grant special privileges to the Borana. The Garri and other marginalized groups who were predominantly Muslim, like Gabra, Guji, and Arssi voiced their strong opposition and dissatisfaction. In response to their marginalization, these groups formed alliances with the colonialists during Italy's invasion of Ethiopia (1936-41) (Tigist, 2014). They recognized their alliance as an opportunity to express their grievances against the state.

During the Derg regime, the relationship between the Garri and Borana worsened even more. Implementing a new administrative system by the Derg resulted in the Garri falling under the Borana administrative district. The ruling class of the Borana community was perceived to favor and dominate this new



structure (Helland, 1997). According to Garri's informants, they voiced their grievances about being systematically marginalized by the state. They also expressed their resistance against the oppressive rule imposed by the state and the Borana ruling class. The Garri as a core and Gabra, alongside others, joined forces to establish a military movement. This collective effort emerged as a direct opposition to the oppressive rule of the Derg regime (Abdulahi, 2005). They rallied behind Somali nationalism, which waged war against Ethiopia. However, with the decline of Somali nationalism and the Derg regime regaining control in early 1978, many individuals, including the Garri, sought refuge in neighboring countries.

Following the collapse of the Derg regime in the 1990s, the Garri and other refugees were returned to their original settlements. However, this sparked objections from the Borana, who had government backing. Tensions escalated as the Garri and other Somali groups reclaimed their territory. During the implementation of the federal state structure, the Garri settlement areas and water points came under the control of the Somali regional state. This resulted in resistance from the Borana (Tesfaye, 2018). Since then, between the 1990s and 2019, a significant number of conflicts, totaling more than 12, have arisen between the Borana and Garri communities. The conflicts primarily emerged due to resource competition, territorial demarcation, and historical grievances (Fekadu, 2009; Abdulahi, 2005; Tigest, 2014). These conflicts, initially localized and specific, escalated into ethnic and regional state conflicts.

#### ***Garri's Relations with Murulle, Digodia, and Marehan***

Garri, Digodia, and Marehan have a shared history as nomadic communities with common religious and cultural characteristics. Islamic faith and lifestyle greatly influence their cultural practices. They share a material culture, including common house types, clothes, and camel pastoral values. Despite these parallels, the Garri, Marehan, and Digodia relationship is marked by dispute. This rivalry did not begin in the post-colonial period but has roots in their historical relations. Historically, these groups were involved in conflicts over resource-rich territories, notably the Mandera district (Alio, 2012). This has led to a relationship characterized by mutual suspicion. The Murule frequently formed alliances with Marehan, Borana, and Digodia to overpower the Garri and seize control of these valuable resource areas. When confrontational options were not feasible, they requested to become *shegat* (liege) of the Garri, to gain access to grazing lands and water sources for their livestock. Initially, they were denied entry by Ugaz Gababa, the Sultan of the Garri, when asked for *shegat* (Alio, 2012). However, following consultations with the elders, the Garri granted permission to the Murule to settle and graze their animals in Mandera in the late 1890s.

During this period, the British established their presence in Kenya's interior, and Mandera fell within their sphere of influence. In 1895, when the British declared Kenya a protectorate, the Murule started challenging the Garri's authority in Mandera. They joined forces with the Digodia clans and rebelled against the

Garri, leading to a full-fledged uprising that ultimately resulted in the expulsion of the Murule and Digodia from Garri territory. As informant sources recounted, Ali Buke, the Garri's leader, played a pivotal role during this war. Under the leadership of Aw-Gababa Mohammed in 1916, the Murule and Digodia also engaged in two devastating wars. The Garri of Mandera and their Ethiopian counterparts emerged victorious in multiple encounters against the Murule and Digodia. According to informant sources, the Garri formed alliances with the Tigre (known as Kitire locally) to exploit the conflict and strategically confront the Murule and Digodia. The Garri and Murule clans have continued their conflict even after Kenya gained independence. Scholarly studies have extensively documented the continued conflicts and the devastating toll of this ongoing conflict, resulting in a significant loss of lives from both sides (Abdi, 2017; Alio, 2012; Schlee, 2013).

Concerning Garri and Digodia, long-standing and enduring feuds marked their relations for generations. The Digodia, known for their expertise in camel breeding, migrated to Ethiopia in the early 1900s. They established an arrangement with the Garri, trading camels in exchange for access to grazing lands. However, tensions between the Garri and Digodia have persisted for many years. According to oral sources, the Digodia have been engaging in frequent raids on Garri settlements in Dirre and the surrounding area of Qaddaduma, fueling the ongoing conflict between the two groups. Their main objective is to gain control over crucial locations in the area. The dispute revolves around the desire to dominate valuable pasture and water resources.

The conflict to dominate the area ignited a significant tribal conflict, with the Garri fighting to preserve their ancestral lands and resources. According to one of my informants, the Digodia were initially subordinate to the Garri as their shegat. They paid tribute in exchange for access to Garri resources. However, it led to a significant and intense conflict when they refused to pay tribute, denying the clientship (Interview, Kedaduma:2022). In their historical accounts, Turner (1970a) and Hodson (1927) described the area's complex and conflicting relationships between the Garri and Digodia clans. Tesfaye (2018) examined the deeply rooted animosity between the Garri and Digodia in a recent study. He described the dispute regarding the placement of the administrative center in the Liban zone, considering Moyale, Filtu, or Dollo town as potential locations. The controversy arose during the establishment of the federal structure and the subsequent decision for decentralization. The argument revolved around the socio-economic and political benefits that each side believed they would gain. However, the Garri felt economically and politically marginalized during the decentralization process.

Consequently, the Digodia formed alliances with minority clans such as Gurra, Karanle, Ajujan, and Marehan to advocate for Filtu as the chosen administrative center. Driven by the need to affirm their unique identity and improve their socio-economic conditions, the Garri initiated a movement. They aimed to establish an independent administrative zone, striving for parity with neighboring communities. Despite persistent and unsuccessful attempts to resolve

inter-clan conflicts, the Garri's struggle culminated in 2019. This culmination marked the establishment of the autonomous Garri administrative zone, Dawa. In contrast, the Digodia group, in alliance with other Somali clans, designated Filtu as their political center.

In addition to their relations with the Boran and Digodi, the Garri had a southern neighbor, the Marehan. Geographically divided between Somalia and Kenya, the Marehans share several similarities with the Garri. However, the relationship between the Garri and the Marehan remains antagonistic. According to one informant, the Marehan are considered formidable enemies within the Garri community. The Garris distrusted the Marehan and accused them of frequently supporting the Murulle clan in their conflicts against the Garri. The contentious relationship between Marehan and Garri has been documented by Lewis (1959) and a colonial document reported by Zaphiro in 1907.

### ***Garri's relationship with Gabra and Rendile***

The Garri, Gabra, and Rendile share a lengthy history. The Gabra, specifically the Migo faction, and the Rendile claim descent from the Garri. The Rendile, who reside in northern Kenya, have close ties with their Boran-speaking neighbors, the Gabra. The Garri and Gabra consider their Islamic religion a crucial part of their ethnic symbol and a binding force with other Somali clans. In history, when Somalia established the Somali Abo Liberation Front (SALF) in 1976, the Garri, the Gabra, and other Islamic Oromo clans were part of it (Tareke, 1996). They were the nuclei of the formed front. Unlike their neighboring group, Garri's relationship with Gabra is based on equal partnership. Despite undergoing several generations of Boranization, the Gabra still maintain unique cultural traits that trace back to their Garri ancestry. The distinct characteristics of their Garri lineage can be seen in various aspects of their culture. These include their clan names, property marks in camel and cattle brands, housing styles, and pastoral values, particularly those associated with camels (Getachew, 1983; Schlee, 1989). According to the Garri's oral tradition, the emergence of the splinter group can be attributed to events that occurred before the Garri employed their migration trick. An informant further elaborated, providing the following explanation:

*Approximately 400 years ago, a conflict arose between the Garri and the Borena or Kore tribes, forming the Gabra clans. The Borana captured the Garri and gave them the name "Gabera." Regarding the Rendille...there were young men known as Jilli who traveled far from their families with cattle for grazing. Due to the war, these young men were cut off in the middle and unable to return. This conflict resulted in the fragmentation of the Garri into different tribal groups. Notably, this occurred before Bul-Hussein initiated the keed gurayi. (Interview, Moyale: 2020)*

When examining their clan histories, it becomes evident that they identify as Odola or Adola, originating from the Garri, Gabra, and Rendile communities (Getachew, 1983; Schlee, 2008). Within the Gabra and Rendile, two Odola lineages, Mailan and Tubadi, came together to form the Sakuye clan. Based on their traditional synchronicity, it is believed that the Odola of the Gabra and Rendile clans separated from the Odola who remained among the Garri in the east. However, the Rendile rejects the claim of Garri descent and disregards the narrative vis-à-vis the lost group. Despite their denial, Schlee's (1985) conjectural history confirmed that the Rendile have lineage relations with the Garri. He described the Odola clan of Garri origin joining the Rendile after they had established themselves as a distinct group.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The Garri community, with its rich cultural heritage and extensive geographic presence, remains understudied compared to other regional splinter groups. Existing research on the Garri has been limited, focusing primarily on conflict, identity, and resource politics within inter-ethnic relations. The narrow focus of the scholarship, influenced by methodological nationalism, has further contributed to a lack of comprehensive understanding of Garri's socio-political history. The uncritical acceptance of Eurocentric ideas and concepts, combined with an ethnocentric view, has contributed to a disregard for indigenous values and social cosmology. This has created an environment where the rich cultural heritage and traditional knowledge of the Garri community are not given the recognition they deserve.

During the early demographic and political history, it was evident that one group had power over another, regardless of whether they were indigenous or non-indigenous. Historians of the ancient and medieval periods, such as Getachew (1983), Turton (1970a), and Lewis (1969), have highlighted the effectiveness of pastoralists in establishing social and political networks. Their livelihood has been characterized by a significant emphasis on mobility, deeply rooted in their metaphysical views. They did not even have the concept of borders in their social cosmology, reflecting their fluid relationship with their inhabited lands.

The ethno-cultural characteristics of the Garri, as discussed in this article, need further study. The existing sources do not entirely describe the Garri's historical and cultural features. However, previous studies exploring the Garri concerning their neighbouring groups provide conflicting views, committing methodological incommensurability. The fragmented sources about Garri's historical development have obscured our understanding of this proto-ethnic group and its sub-ethnic divisions. The fact that Garri is undergoing rapid changes makes the research more critical. There is a need to delve deeper into this subject to shed light on the Garri's history and cultural dynamics that have been obscured and have been lost in the shadows of history. As described in the article, many of the Garri's customs are currently undergoing substantial transformations. For instance, the

“unique” language is on the brink of extinction, highlighting the concept of language death. The origins and dispersal of the various subgroups within the Garri have not received adequate attention. Additionally, there is a lack of research on the modern cultural dynamics within each subgroup, their interrelation as members of the initial proto-group, and their subsequent division into distinct dialectical and cultural sub-groups. These areas deserve more comprehensive exploration to enhance our understanding of the Garri history and the evolving fabric of their cultural traditions.\*\*\*

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