The Forming of Town in Pastoral Society and its Meaning
The case of Borana in South Ethiopia

Chikage Oba¹

Most of the people in Borana breed cattle, sheep and goats, and they move between their homesteads and camps in order to adapt to the seasonal changes in the savanna. However, at present, 17% of all Borana people have stopped moving, and have settled down. In this short thesis, I will focus on urban Borana. I will describe how the town has been formed and how urban Borana people have settled as permanent residents detaching themselves from rural life. Finally, I will dwell on the meaning of dividing into two societies for Borana.

Introduction
Borana is mainly located in the districts of Yabelo, Dirre and Areero in the southern part of Ethiopia. According to the official government statistics in 2005, the number of people living in this area is 248,582. The rural (baadiya) population accounts for 83% of this number while the urban (thira) population is 17%. Most of the people in Borana breed cattle, sheep and goats, and they move between their homesteads and camps in order to adapt to the seasonal changes in the savanna. This migration in search of water and pasture has been an important activity for the local stock breeders as a means of maintaining the lives of humans and livestock.

However, at present, 17% of all Borana people have stopped moving, and have settled down. They have formed a community which is different from the nomadic one and which has been gradually increasing in Borana-land since the 1940’s. Thus Borana society has been divided into urban settlement and rural pastoral people. It is impossible to ignore this urbanization for understanding Borana society and culture at the present time.

In this short thesis, I will focus on urban Borana. I will describe how the town has been formed and how urban Borana people have settled as permanent residents detaching themselves from rural life. Finally, I will dwell on the meaning of dividing into two societies for Borana.

The History of Town Formation
There is an international road passing through the center of Borana-land. It comes from Addis-Ababa and reaches Nairobi through Moyale. The prototype of this main road was built during the Italian Rule Period (1935—1941) and it was paved with concrete between 1963—1968 during Hyle Selasie Period (1941—1973). After its pavement, the flow of people, materials, information and cultures from highland and Kenya increased and became more intensive. There are some towns with big population, shops, restaurant, bar, mosque, church, school, governmental office and clinic by this main road. They function as a direct connection between the inside pastoral life and the

¹ The Graduate University for advanced studies, School of Cultural and Social studies, Department of Regional studies, Osaka, Japan
outside world. These towns have also weekly markets – in Yabelo on Tuesday and Saturday, in Dubuluk on Friday, in Mega on Tuesday and Saturday, and in Bokuruboma on Thursday.

There are also many non-paved roads in the savanna, a kind of network which spreads to connect the towns by the main road. These roads have been built since 1968. Almost all of them pass by traditional water wells (*eela*) which are very important places for all Borana. As Borana people try to make their homesteads not far from water wells, these roads pass through the center of each region. Once the roads are made, some petty shops and bars begin to appear nearby water wells. Freight trucks and buses run on these roads to bring goods, merchants and customers for the weekly town markets located by the main road. Small settlements near water wells which are far from main road also have small weekly markets. Towns and small settlements connected by such a road network became the centers of each rural area.

How were the settlements by the main road and non-paved roads formed? They were not made by the government or any other power. I can point out two types of formation by looking back into the history of these settlements. We can see the first type of town formed by immigration of other ethnic groups. They started to settle down in Borana-land since 1940’s. Their settlements gradually expanded as Borana people came here and governmental institution offices were established after that. In the second type of town formation, Borana people put the beginning of these settlements by settling down near water wells. We can observe this phenomenon especially since 1992 when capitalistic political power was established. Due to the economy policy of the new government, market economy has been activated and weekly markets have appeared even in small settlements. In addition, the government has built primary schools near water wells. The spread of market economy and education might lead to the settlement of many Borana people. In this thesis, we focus on the first type of settlements and follow their process of formation.

History shows that other ethnic groups (Konso, Burji, Garri, Arsi, Somali, and Shawa-Oromo) immigrated to Borana-land from the later half of 1940’s to the first half of 1950’s. This immigration was caused by big droughts in the period of 1941 –1945. Farmers had to immigrate and cultivate lands beyond their territory. Stock breeders lost many livestock and had to start agriculture. Mega, Yabelo and Hidi-lola town were chosen as immigration destinations proper for land cultivation by other ethnic groups. Burji, Somali, Garri, and Arsi have settled down and started to cultivate land in Mega. According to my informants, although there were some conflicts about the land between these people and Borana, they lived together and exchanged various goods. Borana sold butter, milk, *soodda* and *mogaado*¹ to get maze from them and iron and cloth from Konso. In Hidi-lola near Kenya and Ethiopia borderline, Showa-Oromo immigrated and started land cultivation after the Italian Rule Period. There was established a marketplace where people exchanged maze, cattle and goods produced in Kenya and flowing through the border since 1950’s. The Konso ethnic group immigrated in Yabelo. One of my informants went to sell goats for the first time in 1955. He sold his livestock for paying tax. He saw many things (grains, species, coffee, tobacco and so

¹ Salt (*soodda*) and *mogaado* had been exchanged in the trade between Borana and Somali at least from the middle of 19th to the 1930’s. It is also important goods on the market. In Borana-land, there are three salt lakes (*Soodda/Dillo/ Mogaado*). There are three kinds of salt, *dhawa*, *ilkoole*, *lokke*. *Dhawa* is white salt. *lokke* and, *ilkoole* are eaten by livestock. *Mogaado* is a salty spice. Borana chew tobacco with this.
on) and merchants came from Highland at that time. In the 1950’s, Yabelo formed as the main cattle market in Borana-land.

These settlements in the early days were established by immigrants. At the same time, they started functioning as marketplaces. Borana people have gradually come to live in these settlements. Now let’s move our point of view to smaller settlements. We will see in detail how settlements formed by immigrants and how Borana entered these societies. I will present the case of Soodda, a place far from the main road, 50km away from Mega.

At present, about 1000 people live in Soodda town. 74% of them are Borana. Soodda means salt in Borana language. It is also a place name. As the name shows, there is a salt lake nearby Soodda settlement. This salt lake (booge) exists on the bottom of a volcano crater. In Borana history, the salt lake was a place of vital importance for Borana people who did not have livestock. As there is no water place around the crater, Borana did not build any homesteads or even a camp. The road to salt lake was so dangerous that only Borana who were free of cattle could go and bring salt. Salt is a valuable thing for life. Not only Borana but also other ethnic groups are eager to get it. Borana who did not breed cattle could live by exchanging salt for milk and butter which other Borana brought. Then they exchanged salt with Somali and Konso to get cloth, ornament, iron and maze.

According to some of my informants living in Soodda, the Italian Army built the road leading to the salt lake in 1930’s. After its completion, the way to the lake became safer. In 1946, three Somali men immigrated to that area at first. The next immigrants are one Amuhala sent to collect salt tax and four Shawa-Oromo people sent as supervisor in cultivation by Hyle Selasie. According to the Borana salt tax collector, when he came here in 1955, the members of the settlement included Somali families, governmental officers and five families who had come from Konso. As Konso families have called some relatives from their country, the number of Konso people has gradually increased since 1955. Somali and Konso people collected and exchanged salt as a way of living. In 1950’s, Somali took salt by camel to Dila, exchanging it to grains and things produced in the highland. Then they sold these things in Soodda. They bought a truck and expanded their trading to Awasa in the 1960’s after the pavement of the main road was completed.

Before 1960, almost all immigrants were not Borana. However, many Borana people have gradually immigrated to Soodda since the 1960’s. An old Borana woman who is 76 years old and has been living here since 1960 said that they immigrated as her husband did not have any cattle. Her husband worked on the salt lake, and she sold firewood for living. A Borana man who is 40 years old has been living here since 1984. When he immigrated to Soodda, he was 16 years old. As his father lost all his livestock in the 1983-1984 droughts, his family had to immigrate. A young Borana who is 20 years old came to Soodda in 1994, when he was 8 years old. As his oldest brother has started salt collecting work, he and his mother were urged to settle near by him. His brother and he had to search for another way of living because their father had a lot of sons. They could not get enough cattle to live on. He also has started to manage a shop since 2003.

In the short rainy season of 2005, rainfall was very scarce and the Government granted food aids in Borana. I received the name list of all Soodda habitants. I made a research and collected data from all the household (119) about: a) ethnicity, b) ownership of livestock, c) life strategy, d) religion.
In 1979, Hojrt made a research about Isiolo town in Northern Kenya mainly formed by pastoralists. He explored the impact of stock breeders settling down in Town. He also pointed out the fact of decreasing livestock by droughts and conflict. Isioro was the place of refuge for stock breeders who had lost their livestock. This was a means to earn some income and maintain their lives by agriculture. They tried to return to their pastoral life using the opportunities of the town. [Hjort, 1979] Lack of cattle was one of the factors for Borana immigration to Soodd in the period of 1960’s – 1990’s. They also had to find another way of living, different from the pastoral. They started work in the salt lake following the example of other ethnic groups. In Soodd, 71% of men householders are salt takers and land cultivators. In case of divorce or death of the husband, the woman becomes a householder. 45% of them rely on their work as a merchant, selling salt, alcohol and firewood by themselves.

Life Strategy of Urban Borana

Urban Borana people make their living by agriculture and market trade in Towns; they are not occupied with stock breeding. In this capture, I will focus on Borana women traders. More specifically, I will describe how urban Borana make their life strategy in town.

There is no tax for business in weekly markets. Everyone can be a trader. There are two kinds of weekly markets in Borana-land. One is the livestock market which is occupied by men merchants. The other one is the merchandise market occupied by women. On this kind of market, there are A) miscellaneous industrial goods from Highland, Kenya and China, B) preferable goods for Borana, C) grains, D) clothes, E) ironware made by Konso, F) salt, G) milk, butter, chicken, eggs, H) medicine for livestock, I) chat, J) fruit and vegetables. The merchants on the market can be classified into two groups. The first one is made of people who have capital, stock transport and sell large amount of goods. It is a rather small group which consists mostly of people from other ethnic groups. Only a few Borana people are successful as cattle traders. The other group consists of people who do not have capital; they buy goods from big merchants or they buy goods on credit and pay back money after selling. So to speak, they are those who sell on a consignment basis. Most of them are Borana.

One Borana woman petty trader said she started her business from taasa (it is 1L of aluminum can, it is a unit for measuring) thus making her funds. Her words imply that it is so easy to start business on markets without capital. They save capital trough pity trading and change into trader who sell many kinds of goods. I will explain this system introducing one case of a Borana woman petty trader.

The case of a Borana woman petty trader.

Sake is 46 years old. She has been living in Dubuluk Town since 1999 with her 5 children. Dubuluk is situated by the main road and its market day is Friday. She has been engaged in petty trade in weekly market at Dubuluk and Qarsa-dambii settlement which is 30 km away from Dubuluk. Before that she had lived in the rural area of Goobsoo which is about 40 km far from Dubuluk. She moved to Dubuluk because of her marriage. But later she got divorced. When she was 31 years old, she started her petty trade. According to the Borana marriage practices, women who get divorced cannot marry again. After the divorce they are supported financially by own relatives or their relatives-in-law. But it is such an unstable life that Sake started this trade to make her living by herself. I observed her trading in Dubuluk market in March.
At 8 o’clock in the morning women traders line up their goods in front of them at the marketplace. In front of Sake, there is sugar, soup, tea, oil. She got the sugar from a sugar merchant and she has to pay its cost later. If she can manage to sell 120 kg of sugar, her benefit is 20 birr. But it is too much sugar to sell all by herself so she sells this quantity together with some other traders. In this way petty traders get 1birr per 6 kg sugar. As they do not have any capital, they do their business on a consignment basis and get a very small profit. However, if they have some small capital, they buy one set of goods. For example, Sake bought 24 packages of oil for 150 birr on the day of my observation. If she sells all, her profit will be 18birr.

Her daughter who is 14 years old continues with lining up qundhii (incense for women) and salt that Sake has bought before. Sake has also bought from some wholesale stores small plastic baskets, soups, electric batteries produced in Addis-ababa. She has also bought kulufidhii (a kind of herb) which Borana women put on their heads with butter, chewing tobacco and mogaado. She puts all her goods on the market. Not only she but also almost all the petty traders arrange their stock on the marketplace and sell the same kinds of goods at the same price.

At around 10 o’clock, people from rural area started coming to the market. A teenager from the rural area is the first customer to visit Sake’s shop. He came to buy qundhii. As I tended the store, a student in the town and his sister who were interested in me as a foreigner came to talk and bought 1kg of sugar and some tea. As soon as Sake finished arranging all goods and sat down on her seat, a woman from Goobsoo came and bought many goods from her. According to Sake, the woman raised the funds necessary for her trade from her fellow villagers. Later she gives a part of her profit to her investors. The woman bought from Sake 200kg of salt, 5kg of sugar, 60 pieces of soup, 14 packages of tea, 2 packages of oil, kulufidii, chewing tobacco and mogaado. She left these goods in Sake’s place while she went to buy some other things. Although the woman bought a lot of things from another trader, she brought all goods to Sake’s place. It is important for a petty trader to build a good relationship of trust between her customers and herself. Keeping the customer’s goods is a part of this. As I already mentioned, all trader at the market sell the same kinds of goods at the same price. That’s why it is very important for customers to choose not only the goods they need but also the trader from whom they will buy them. When customers make a purchase, they take into account the trader’s personality and his social relationships. This is valid especially in the case of petty traders who come from rural areas where social relationships are directly reflected in their business. During her working hours, from 8 o’clock in the morning until 4 o’clock in the afternoon, Sake was visited by 34 customers. 26 of them were relatives, relatives-in-law and friends from her rural area. While accidental customers just buy and soon leave, familiar people sit down and talk with Sake keeping their stuff in her shop. They sometimes use their social relationships to ask her for a service. It is an important activity for traders to give to their customers a little bit more than they paid for in order to keep good relationships and continue their petty trade. However, sometimes there happen to come quite troublesome customers as well. On the day of my visit, for example, one customer said he bought goods only from Sake’s shop at the Market and although he paid just for 1kg of sugar, he asked her to give him 1 piece of soup for free. She consented unwillingly. It is a kind of obligation because her business depends on her customers. She earned 70 birr on that day.
Most of the customers who come to the market are rural Borana. They are people like Sake, who are deeply related with the rural area and can establish their business on the grounds of their social relationship in the rural area.

As we could see, Borana petty traders gradually build their life strategy through trading. In Dubuluk merchandise market, 91% of the people who sell A) miscellaneous goods and B) preferable goods are women living in town. 58% of the people are Borana women. Borana petty traders have been increasing in recent years. Although they are still a small number of people, merchants living in villages near the town have appeared. Women traders at the market said, there was no other work for them except for trading in town. Their husbands’ work is not enough for raising the big number of children they have. Most of the women traders are wives of men with low incomes. Their husbands do not have livestock. Even if they have some, they entrust a part of their livestock to relatives living in the rural area. The possibility for men to get a stable job in the town in order to support their family is extremely limited. Shop management and other stable jobs for which one needs an academic background have already been occupied by people from other ethnic groups. Except for agriculture husbands of women traders are also engaged in trading. It is impossible to live in town only on land cultivation because of scarce and unstable rainfalls in Borana. There are also women who do not have husbands because of death or divorce as it is in the case of Sake. Market activities give Borana people the opportunity to live in the town even without academic background, capital and livestock.

The Islamization in Urban Borana

Life of urban Borana is based not on pastoral but on monetary economy which is connected with life in town and market economy. It’s not only their way of living which is different. They have been thoroughly separating from the traditional Borana pastoral culture. Rural Borana lead a social life based on clanship. They manage their water wells, meetings and ceremonies; they solve their problems, and help poor people in the clanship. They also talk about their problems and help each other in each village. In contrast, urban Borana do not have such social relationships and ties based on Borana culture (aada-Borana). What are the uniting bonds for urban Borana then?

Urban Borana currently started to practice other custom instead of Borana culture in town. It is Muslim culture (aada-isulaama). On the one hand, almost all Borana living in rural society practice their native religion, waqqa. On the other hand, Borana living in urban society have converted into Muslim. Once Borana people become Muslims, they obey Muslim cultural pattern. I will describe the Islamization among urban Borana by introducing the case of Sooddta town.

Today, 53% of Borana people who have immigrated in Sooddta have converted into Muslim. In the beginning of Sooddta Islamization, one Somali, his name is Ali Ilumi played a major role in this process. He came from Somalia to help Italy in 1935. After colonial time, he remained in Borana-land, settling down in Sooddta and starting salt business. He was married to three Borana women in succession and had a lot of

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3 In February at Dubuluk market, I made a study on petty traders selling common goods and luxury goods. I asked 158 persons and got answers from 118 of them about a) home area, b) ethnicity, c) the length of trading experience, and d) religion.
children. The Islamization in Soodda started from Ali family. He was the first immigrant and pioneer of salt business. It is certain that he had a great influence among immigrants.

In 1961, one Borana family immigrated to Soodda. Roba was 10 years old at that time. 5 years later, he became Muslim by his father's wish. Roba and his brothers were one of the first Borana immigrants who converted into Muslim. In 1966, his father said to him:

Islam is good. Now, there are many Muslims in the settlement. You should become a Muslim. Islam culture (aada-ilaama) is similar to Borana culture (aada-Borana). Muslims do not eat dead cattle, do not kill and hit people just like Borana culture, like aba-gada (a political leader of Borana), like qaallhu (a spiritual leader of Borana). Now, Islam is better than Borana. Become a Muslim.

His father pointed out the similarity between Borana culture and Islam to persuade him to be Muslim. Finally, his father tried to make him acknowledge that Islam is better than Borana. Moreover, in the 1960's Islamization had already permeated into Soodda. His father recognized Islam as the new social standard instead of Borana culture.

Almost all Borana who immigrated to Soodda had lost their livestock before. They had to enter monetary economy which is quite different from pastoral economy. In the case of Soodda, people in the core of the society belong to other ethnic groups. How do Borana incorporate with them? How do they live and adapt to different customs and a situation quite new for them? Islam gives the answers to all these questions. Islam was the means of adaptation which helped Borana adjust to the new conditions. Roba said, “I am Borana, Islam is just a religion.” But he also said that if his daughter gets married, her husband should be a Muslim. One Borana man converted into Muslim in 1980’s because all people around him were Muslims. He felt lonely so he chose Islam to overcome this feeling.

There are 100 householders who were born in rural society and immigrated to Soodda from the 1960’s to the 1990’s. They are the first generation of Borana immigrants. 39 householders of the first generation are Muslim. 5 of them had already converted into Muslim before immigrating to Soodda because they came from Mega where Islamization spread earlier than in any other place in Borana-land. Among the remaining 34 householders who became Muslims in Soodda, 25 persons chose Islam by their own will and 9 persons became Muslims because of marriage. In the second generation, 37 of the all 48 householders are Muslims. 12 persons inherited Islam from their parents. 17 persons became Muslims through marriage. 8 persons chose Islam by themselves. In the third generation, 1 of 7 persons chose Islam by their own will and 6 persons inherited Muslim from their family. People who decided to become Muslims by their own will are 41% through all generations. This phenomenon is remarkable since the 1980’s. On the other hand, 51% of all Borana Muslims became such by family succession or marriage. In case of marriage, this phenomenon is observed not only among women, but also among men.

Islamization among urban Borana has been spreading and has established a ruling-class clan to which belong people from various other clans. Borana people covert into Muslim in order to incorporate with the new society. Islamization among Borana people functions as a social strategy in the town. At the same time, it assures the cultural ties instead of Borana culture.
The Rise of Urban and Rural Identity in Borana

According to the research Hojrt made in Isiolo town of Kenya in 1979, there are many communities formed on the basis of different ethnic identity. He analyzed town society by focusing on socio-economical relationships based on each cultural rural tie. In Borana-land of South Ethiopia today, there are many towns in pastoral area. However, there are no communities based on ethnic identity. Similarly to the Borana people living in Isiolo, urban Borana in Ethiopia do not identify themselves by differentiating from other ethnic groups. They try to find their identity in differences between themselves and the rural Borana. Rural-Borana also do so.

Urban Borana tend to look down on rural Borana as poor and undeveloped people. On the other hand, rural Borana consider urban Borana as people who have lost their Borana culture. Although urban and rural Borana are economically interdependent on each other, they also tend to differentiate from each other. Each of them tries to establish their own identity through the “urban and rural” differentiation in their daily relationship. The Islamization among urban Borana has played a very important role for forming the urban society. At the same time, it has become a part of the urban Borana’s identity.

Rural Borana find their identity in the image of the “traditional Borana” and regard urban Borana as people who reject and loose their tradition. For rural and urban Borana, people who should be differentiated from them are not other ethnic groups or foreigners who are far distanced from them, but people who live nearby, inside of Borana. We need to observe both urban and rural Borana in terms of inter-relation and inter-differentiation in order to understand their society and culture today.

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