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LIVESTOCK PROPERTY MARKS IN AFRICA

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Why should we be interested in livestock property marks, in Africa or elsewhere? One reason is that marking is a social signal, a form of message –in a way, a form of language. It usually does not indicate who is the precise owner of the marked animal, but it provides some clues as to the owner's identity and social relationships. Marks are signs of identity, and as such they are often not only used on livestock but on other items as well, such as trees, house poles, wells, bags of dates after harvesting, etc. To understand the meaning of marks, one has to know how they are chosen, combined and used by individuals or groups. This may shed some light on these people's social relationships, and also illustrate their community's ties with other neighbouring ones. The study of property marks may, therefore, be a valuable key for research on the logics and history of a social group, although such a method also has its limits that we shall discuss.

There are two main ways to mark one's livestock in Africa, branding and ear cutting. Herders most often either brand a design on the animal's skin with a hot iron, or they cut its ears in specific shapes. Sometimes however, both types of marking are used simultaneously. Whatever the technique, the aim is the same, i.e. to convey information as to the owner's identity. This is the reason why both brands and earcuts are taken into account in this paper, although from a technical point of view these two ways of marking animals are totally different.

This paper will first evoke the scant historical evidence of livestock marking in Africa, before it proceeds to a short review of the existing literature. Then the different components of a proper mark description will be presented and discussed, which is a necessary step as most studies unfortunately are lacking one way or the other in this respect. After that we shall describe the marking of livestock in some of the main African ethnic communities before discussing the logics and the social purposes which underlie property marking in most pastoral societies.

Marking in history

Historical evidence about livestock property marking in Africa is very scarse. Yet it may be guessed, as far as earcuts are concerned, that it has a long lasting history. In the 1920's it was reported in Madagascar (Birkeli 1926), where it was an already long lasting practice. It still is

in use there today. On the African continent itself, the same technique (but not the same marks) is mainly documented among the Fulani. These well known cattle herders spread all across the Sahelian zone, South of the Sahara, from Senegal to Sudan. Their historical traditions mention that they originate from the Nile valley, but evidence from the last centuries demonstrates the opposite, i. e. a migration in the reverse direction, from Senegal eastwards. This migration took place from the XIIIth century onwards up to now. However, it does not imply that Fulani traditions are mistaken: these herders may indeed have previously migrated from the Nile Valley westwards till Senegal, before migrating back to the East. Anthropological genetics hint to this Eastern origin, as they show that Cameroonian Fulani share up to 27 % of their ancestry with Middle-Eastern people (Tishkoff *et al.* 2009). But whatever the migrations of these herders over the centuries, we lack evidence as to the time when they started marking their cattle the way they do now, i.e. with ear-cuts.

As for livestock branding, it seems more widespread in Africa than ear-cuts. It is documented as a very ancient practice, dating at least as far back as Ancient Egypt. Most african pastoral peoples, both cattle and camel[1] herders, brand their livestock today. Branding is common practice not only in Africa but outside this continent as well. It is to be found among many herders, such as cow-boys in the United States of America, Mexico, Spain or Australia. Horses may also be branded. Such is the case in Southern France, in the Camargue region, where branding is called *ferrade* (from the French word *fer* which means iron). In former times, branding was not limited to livestock. It was also used for slaves who were, in a way, considered somewhat similar to livestock, being just another type of living property.

Historical evidence about livestock property marking in Africa, on the long run, is indeed scarce. But for a more recent period, let's say over the last century, available information is also very limited. It is, moreover, scattered and difficult to piece together. It consists mainly in marginal remarks given in articles or books which focus on other subjects. Such studies most often lack an index pointing to this topic. We are therefore bound to consider the following review of the existing literature as most likely far from complete. It is nonetheless useful to mention some best known works, before attempting to draw a general outlook of the situation as regards the marking of livestock in Africa today.

Review of existing literature

The French anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep was the first scholar to draw attention to the interest of collecting and studying property marks. He launched a questionnaire on this topic in 1901, and published a short article on Arab brands in 1902, calling for more data to be collected. These brands being some sort of armorial bearings, he observed, they may provide some clues as to the history of Arab migrations.

A much more significant work is H. A. MacMichael's in 1913. It is a detailed description of 133 brands used by the main camel-herding tribes of Kordofan in Northern Sudan, most of them Arabs. For each brand, MacMichael provides the name, drawing, size and position on the animal's body, and the name of users. His short introduction (2 pages) stresses the difficulties of such a research: « a study of the brands used by camel-owners is very confusing owing to the innumerable varieties and exceptions that occur to almost any rule that may be formulated » (p. vi). Yet MacMichael does indicate that some few brands are specific of one

[1] Camels in Africa have only one hump and should actually be called dromedaries. Yet we keep the word « camel » here to comply with a long lasting usage.

tribe or tribal section, and he notes that a common ancestry may be reflected by the use of a common brand, although in some cases the original brand falls into disuse. In spite of the difficulties he faced, MacMichael's very precise study remains a milestone that, for many years, will have no following.

The next worthwhile study is not on camel brands but on cattle ear-marks, on the Western coast of Madagascar. It is a long article published in 1926 by a Norwegian missionary, Emil Birkeli. This author uses ear-marks as evidence to piece together the history of local migrations. His pioneering work was continued in the late 1960's by a French anthropologist, Suzanne Chazan-Gillig. She studies the evolution of the same ear-marks and draws on Birkeli's work to check the changes that took place during the 40 years time gap between his and her stay in this region. Chazan-Gillig's book deals with the history of the Menabe kingdom in Western Madagascar. It only came out in 1991. It entails many descriptions of cattle ear-cuts and their social use by local herders. She observes that cattle ear-marks are associated to a lineage tomb (p. 144), and that these marks are a sign of the king's spacial influence (p. 222). Marks on the right ear refer to the owner's patrilineal affiliation, and marks on the left ear to his matrilineal ties. Marks on the right ear demonstrate the patrilineage unity. When the exogamous patrineal lineage splits –a fact which goes together with the transgression of the exogamy rule– the splitting group creates a new ear-mark for its cattle (p. 222). However, the use of a lineage mark does not necessarily point to a kinship link. It may also translate a political one, since in case of allegiance between two groups, the dominated group will borrow the marks of the dominant one (p. 255).

After Birkeli's work in 1926, which is the first detailed study on African cattle ear-cuts, no other significant work is published on livestock marks for nearly three decades. The next important publication is by Marguerite Dupire (1954). It deals with cattle ear-cuts among the above mentionned Fulani. Up to this date, this 20 pages article is the only precise study ever published about cattle ear-marks on the African continent. These cattle ear-marks are cut out during a ritual which the author describes (p. 125 sq.). Their aim is not only to indicate the owner's identity, but also to protect the animal against bad luck, illness or death (p. 130). In case of bad luck indeed, the Fulani herder will switch to a new ear-mark (p. 136). As the above mentionned scholars indicated, Dupire also stresses that a mark is not an individual's, but a primary patrilineage's property. The segmentation of a patrilineage, therefore, automatically leads to the creation of a new mark (p. 132-133). Cattle ear-marks thus demonstrate a tribe's cohesion or diversity (p. 135). As for the individual, his personal situation will be read through his use of patrineal marks on the left ear, and matrineal ones on the right ear (i.e. the opposite from Madagascar). Dupire also observes that marks do not only refer to kinship ties. Another type of ear-cut, known by a different name, marks an animal as part of a borrowing contract, in a type of social exchange that is widespread among, and specific of Fulani herders (p. 131).

Anthropological research among African pastoral people intensifies in the 1960's and brings more material on livestock marking forth. No specific publication, however, is devoted to this topic. In his famous book on Somali camel-herders, *A pastoral democracy*, published in 1961, Ioan M. Lewis very briefly indicates that camel brands do not belong to individuals, but to lineage-groups. These usually are dia-paying groups (i.e. kinsmen who jointly pay compensation for murder), who are also responsible when camels are stolen by raiders (p. 83). Although Lewis's description is very short, he stresses a particularly important point, namely the relationship between brands and camel theft. This is far from negligible in a society where livestock raiding is so common place.

One year later the French administrative officer Albert Le Rouvreur publishes a book about the Sahelian and Saharan tribes of Chad (1962). It provides much data about the numerous tribes of Northern Chad, and includes 15 tables on camel and cattle brands. Each table indicates the names of the brand users, their main habitat, the design of the brand, its name (sometimes with the translated meaning) and the location of the brand on the body of the animal. The author clearly considers these brands as a type of group signature, but he does not venture into any sociological discussion about their use.

In 1966, Ian Cunnison publishes his anthropological study of an Arab cattle herding tribe, the Humr of Southern Kordofan (Sudan). Right in MacMichael's steps, he provides a list of their brands (p. 205-208), and briefly discusses their social use (p. 99-100). Each of the two Humr tribal sections has its own brand, and « it is quite common for major or minor lineages to have exclusive brands » as well. They are « a help in the search of stray animals », and « a means of protection, in a mystical sense, for their cattle, and they change them when they appear to be no longer effective » (p. 100). This mystical use of brands as a form of protection, which may lead herders to change their marks in case of bad luck, is exactly the same as noted by Dupire (1954) regarding Fulani cattle ear-cuts (see above). Cunnison also interestingly mentions in a note (p. 100) that besides livestock brands, « earclips also are used on animals for identification », but that he made no comprehensive collection of them. It is quite unfortunate indeed that he did not go any deeper into the study of these ear-marks, since these *Baggara Arabs* are an interesting case of herders using both brands and ear-cuts on their animals. Thus the opportunity to study a case of how and why these two types of marking articulate together was missed.

Further South in Uganda, the cattle-herding Karimojong were studied by Neville Dyson-Hudson. His book (1966) provides some information about the Karimojong clan cattle-brands, and precise drawings of 18 brands (fig. 15) as they show on the animal's robe (1966, p. 88-89 & 192-193). Karimojong social structures differ widely from those of the previously mentionned pastoralists, in so far as they belong to this broad cluster of East-African herders who are organised along generation- and age-sets. Such « age societies » spread in Africa from Southern Sudan and Ethiopia through Uganda and Kenya, down to Northern Tanzania. Their age-systems mould political and ritual activities, involving men according to their age- or generation group. Situations vary greatly from one tribe to the other, and wide spans of anthropological literature are devoted to the study of these complex systems. Let us here briefly mention that in such societies a « succession ceremony » usually takes place every fifteen years or so, where the ruling « fathers » hand their responsibilities over to a younger group of « sons ». Because of this ritual succession of age-groups, rituals play a bigger part than they actually do in other societies. As a matter of fact, Dyson-Hudson does mention that « a formal branding of cattle representing the tribal herds » is performed during such succession ceremonies, and that in the following days « all unbranded stock are given appropriate clan brands » (p. 192-193). He does not say, however, if and how cattle is branded during the long time gap between two succession ceremonies.

My book on Tubu brands (Baroin 1972) comes next in this review. The Tubu, called Teda to the North, Daza to the South, herd their livestock over one fourth of the Sahara, from Lake Chad to Southern Libya and from Eastern Niger to Western Sudan. This book provides detailed information on 92 camel brands, collected among the Daza in Niger. Each brand is described through 1) its drawing and position on the animal, 2) its name and signification, 3) its users who are Tubu clans or lineages. These users are either Tubu proper, or endogamous

specialists called Azza, which means « smiths » in the Tubu language. Their specific activities and lower social status are similar in many African societies. The Azza of Niger, who were formerly smiths, hunters or musicians, are now mainly herders like dominant Tubu groups who used to « protect » them. They are now reluctant to mention these former allegiance relationships, but they still can be traced through the use of common brands. After this descriptive book, another one published in 1985 entails a fuller analysis of the social use and meaning of brands among the Tubu (Baroin 1985, pp. 87-90).

The sociological interest of studying brands is further discussed in an article by L. G. Hill (1972) à propos the Hababin Arabs of Northern Kordofan (Sudan). This area of Sudan, first illustrated by MacMichael (1913), then by Cunnison (1966), thus appears to be a hot spot for the study of property marks in Africa. This author concentrates a number of interesting sociological remarks which actually apply not only to the Hababin, but to other herding tribes as well. Most of them were already mentionned by previous scholars. Hill also focusses on the methodological limits to the conclusions that can be drawn from the study of marks. He judiciously observes, for example, that the sharing of brands is often, but not necessarily a sign of common descent, since marking is mainly political. It may demonstrate allegiance relationships, or result from an alliance through marriage (p. 10-12). He concludes that « these Hababin brands illustrate some of the dangers that arise from taking the agnatic segmentary model at its face value *even though* it is commonly used by the people themselves to explain their own brand system » and that the collection of brands « gives the fieldworker some convenient and concrete hooks on which to hang his questions about genealogy, as well as social and political boundaries » (p. 14).

No thorough study of livestock marking in Africa, whether brands or ear-cuts, seems to follow Hill's methodological warnings about the dangers and limits of using these « convenient hooks » to study African herders. In 1972 took place an international symposium on « Pastoralism in Tropical Africa » in Niamey (Niger), which brought together the best specialists. Livestock marks were briefly discussed there, and the papers edited by Théodore Monod in 1975. His lengthy introduction, published both in French and English, devotes only one page to property marks, summing up short comments that were made by the participants during the symposium, mainly about Fulani and Maasai marks (p. 128).

A later contribution to the study of property marks in Africa is F. H. Stewart's article in the *Encyclopédie de l'islam*, 2003. *Wasm* is the Arabic term for brands, and Stewart shortly mentions a few studies and sums up some basic remarks about the way brands are used by Arab bedouins, in Africa and in the Middle-East.

This review of the existing literature on African livestock marking is probably very incomplete. It should be considered as a first step towards a synthesis on this topic, and unmentionned scholars are kindly asked to point out to their studies, so that a better survey may be achieved in the future. For the time being, let us conclude with the following remark: notwithstanding the few contributions mentionned above, it may seem surprising that, given the wide range of African pastoral societies, so limited interest ever was shown for the study of marks on this continent.

Two methodological reasons might explain this situation. The first is the unescapable complexity of such a study. It was stated by many scholars, first and maybe best by MacMichael in 1913. He insisted that the study of marks is very difficult and confusing, because of the extensive number of marks and users within one tribe -many marks being used

by one or several groups of people together. It is also confusing, he observed, because of the many exceptions to any general rule that may be put forward as to the way marks are used. The second reason to the general lack of studies on property marks is the unreliability of the conclusions that one may hope to derive from it. This reason was best stated by Hill (1972). He stresses the fact that the use of common brands indeed may result from many different reasons, whether kinship, alliance, allegiance or other political ties, and the study of brands alone cannot determine which type of relationship is involved. Therefore, the study of brands (or other marks such as ear-cuts) can only be a help (a « hook », in Hill's words) in sorting out the logics of the interplay between groups. It never is enough *per se* to draw such conclusions. It has to be supported by other data. The question then is the following: is the study of marks really worth the trouble, considering the difficulty of such a study, and the unreliability of its possible results? Obviously a negative answer most often prevailed, and this is why we should be especially thankful to the few scholars who, nevertheless, took the trouble to provide data on this topic. The available information, limited as it is, still enables us to picture out a broad view of livestock marking in Africa. Before doing so however, it is deemed necessary to detail all the main characteristics that a precise description of a brand (or an ear-cut) should entail, in view of future research, because the many loopholes in most collected data make comparisons difficult.

The characteristics of a property mark

Let us first consider the generic word for « mark ». It is interesting to note it down, since a similar word may point to a borrowing of the marks themselves from one community to the other. In Arabic, brands are called *wasm*, as mentionned above. But this word is unknown to most African herders, who are not Arabs and do not speak Arabic. They speak many different languages, belonging to different linguistic phylae, and each language seems to have its own specific word to designate a property mark. Among the Somali camel herders for example, a brand is called *sumad*, whereas it is called *arbi* in the Teda language spoken by the Teda of Tibesti (i.e. the Northern Tubu). A brand is called *are* among the Daza of Chad and Niger (i.e. the Southern Tubu). As for the Fulani, who cut their cattle's ears, their generic word for an « ear mark » is *dyelgol*. These few examples suffice to show that, although the custom of marking livestock is widespread across Africa, the generic word for « property mark » often remains specific to each linguistic community. There seem to be little borrowing in this matter, if any. This coincides with another fact: the comparison of marks, when data is available and except for a few exceptions, seems to demonstrate that the borrowing of the marks themselves, from one linguistic community to the other, is also very limited. Each group basically seems to have its own range of specific marks, with their specific characteristics (shape, size, name, location, etc.). Comparing their designs does not seem to point to any close artistic similarity of style either, as opposed to C. Lévi-Strauss and N. Belmont's conclusion regarding two South-American Indian tribes[2] (1963, p. 106). The comparison of African property marks would however, undoubtedly, need further research.

In order to enable such comparisons, full data has first to be collected as regards all the specific characteristics of any mark (whether brand or ear-cut). This is all the more important as it has to be stressed, quite unfortunately, that most available descriptions of African marks are lacking in this respect, one way or the other, thus making comparisons difficult. Many

[2] These authors, comparing clan marks of two Indian tribes, the Guajiro of Colombia and the Caduveo who live across the Brasil-Paraguay border, concluded that in spite of the great distance between them their marks demonstrate the same artistic style.

scholars, for example, do not indicate the size of the mark and its precise position on the animal's robe. How can we then compare such data with other? Sometimes the design of two marks is exactly the same, but their names are different, and the size and position on the animal's robe may be different or similar as well. What conclusion can be drawn from such material? Reliable comparison is only possible with reliable and complete data, and this is why it is worthwhile here to list all the characteristics of any mark that should be recorded during fieldwork, in the hope that researchers in the future may take the trouble to collect comparable information.

A livestock property mark (whether brand or ear-cut) is fully defined through the following characteristics: 1) design, 2) size, 3) name, 4) meaning of this name, 5) location on the robe of the animal (or on its ears in case of ear-cuts), 6) orientation, 7) owner or group of owners (most often clans or lineages). All of these elements need be collected, because any difference on any item implies that one is dealing with a different mark. For example a short straight line on the left cheek cannot be considered the same mark as the same straight line branded on the right cheek, and moreover a long line (same design, different size) on the hind leg (different location) is bound to be a different mark. Such three marks, although they share the same design, are different. They are probably called with different names and used by different groups.

Marking the animal

The branding of an animal is most often done with a simple ironstick with a handle, the other extremity being put to glow in a fire and then applied on the animal's skin. The animal, of course, has to be made still beforehand. It is usually forced to lie on one side and tied up with ropes. Most animals are branded when still young, and if they are later given or sold, the new owner will add his own marks on the animal'skin. This is the reason why some camel wear many different marks, which is a sign of the many owners they had.

Marking an animal most often takes place any time. There is no specific occasion for it, and no ritual is performed. Some herders however choose a propitious day, as defined by the muslim calendar for example if they are muslims. As for rituals, some pastoralists do perform (or used to perform) specific ones when marking their livestock. Dupire describes such a ritual among the Wodaabe Fulani of Niger (1954 p. 124). When his calves reach one year old, as they are tied to the calves' rope near his camp, the Fulani herder cuts his marks in each one's ears with a knife. Then he collects the bits of ears he just cut away, and cuts them further into smaller bits which he throws on the kraal. This ritual is meant to ensure the herd's fertility. Dupire also refers to an older and more elaborate rite reported by I. N. Reed (1932) among the Wodaabe Fulani of Borno (North-Eastern Nigeria). After cutting his calves's ears, the herder there throws the bits of ears in a calabash filled with milk and water, before pouring the mixture on the calves' rope to insure fertility.

In pastoral East Africa, rituals are generally more developped than among West African nomads. The Karimojong of Uganda, for example, do have elaborate rituals when they brand their young cattle. Dyson-Hudson (1966) mentions their collective marking of cattle which takes place during a succession ceremony. At the final stage of this important social event, « in the evening occurs a formal branding of cattle representing the tribal herds. Four calves are selected, each from a particular clan, and from different sections and subsections, and branded with the appropriate clan mark » (p. 192). The rest of the unbranded stock is branded

on the following days. But such a succession ceremony only takes place once in many years. Is cattle branded only then, or is it branded meanwhile? Dyson-Hudson does not answer this question, nor does he describes the branding itself.

The physical spot where the mark is branded on the animal's robe varies widely from one tribe to the other, or within one tribe from one mark to the next. Any part of the body may be involved: the flanks, the legs, the neck, the head, etc. Among the Arabs for instance, camels are mainly branded on the thighs but also on the forelegs, neck, cheeks, knees, etc. (Van Gennep 1902). The Humr Baggara of Sudan brand their cattle mainly on their legs, but elsewhere as well (Cunnison 1966, appendix 4). The Tubu of Chad and Eastern Niger, who rarely brand their cattle, brand their camels on any part of the body, depending on the brand itself which is always characterised by its specific location. As for the Karimojong, they brand their cattle on different parts of the body (Dyson-Hudson 1966, fig. 15 p. 88).

The side where the animal is branded also makes sense. Thus in Sudan almost all Kababish camel brands are imprinted on the right side (MacMichael 1913), whereas almost all Humr Baggara cattle brands are on the left side (Hill 1972, p. 5). These details provide the traveller quick information as to what tribe's livestock he is facing. As for the Tubu and Karimojong, they mark their livestock on the right or left, depending on the brand. The side and place of a property mark is also meaningful for cattle ear-cuts. In Madagascar, one distinguishes three main locations, on each ear, where cuts may be seen: they are either at the base of the ear, or in the middle, or at the top. Each one of these three spots may be shaped differently, and each special brand is defined by the combination of cuts on the three of them. These designs are cut out either on the left ear to indicate the owner's matrilineal affiliation, or on the right ear if they refer to his patrilineal ties (see above, and Chazan-Gillig 1991, p. 249). Fulani cattle ear-cuts are less elaborate, but the cuts on the left or right ear similarly refer to lineage affiliation, although the opposite ones from Madagascar (Dupire 1954).

Let us now turn to the pattern and size of brands or ear-cuts. Most brands have a simple geometrical pattern, usually made of straight lines or wide curves. These simple designs merely derive from the use of a straight iron-stick for branding, which does not allow elaborate shapes. Some few brands however are made of smaller curves, and then a specifically shaped iron-stick is needed to brand the animal. Such brands are commonly used by chiefs (see for example Baroin 1972, pp. 65-66 and photograph n° 1 p. 237), and their standard size is determined by the iron-tool itself. Not only these, but other marks as well have a specific size, as noted above, and a specific orientation on the animal's skin (horizontal, vertical, oblique, etc.). Indeed, marks that share the same pattern but have a different size or orientation should be considered different.

The general tendency is for camel herders to brand their camels, while ear-marks are specifically developped among some cattle herders. Thus it seems that all desert people brand their camels. Such is the case of the Arabs, the Moors, the Twareg and the Tubu in the Sahara, the Beja in Erythrea (Paul 1954, plate II), and the Somali. The available information provides no evidence of the marking of camels with ear-cuts.

As for cattle, the situation is quite different. Some herders do not mark their cattle at all, or they only do so on a limited number of animals. Such is the case of the Tubu. These herders explain that cows do not need to be marked as much as camels do, because the risk of theft is far less for cattle than for camels. Indeed, cattle cannot travel long distances as fast as camels do, and they have a gregarious instinct that camels lack. Thus cows graze together in the

daytime, and come back to camp every evening in need of watering. They are therefore much easier to herd than camels, which graze separately and may go far away from human dwellings or wells for many days before they return for watering. It may thus take several days before a camel's owner finds out that his animal was stolen, when a cow's theft would be discovered at once, giving the thief much less time to flee away with his prey.

Cattle however are indeed most often marked, especially when their owners raise no other type of livestock. These marks are either brands or ear-cuts, or both, depending on tribal habits. Thus the Fulani only mark their cattle by ear-cuts, as do cattle herders in Madagascar. The Karimojong in Uganda only brand their cattle. The Beja in Erythrea brand their camels, but they mark their cattle with ear-cuts. The Tubu brand their camels as well as a limited number of cattle, but do not use ear-cuts. One interesting case is reported of cattle herders who both brand their livestock and cut their ears: the Humr Baggara of Southern Kordofan (Sudan). But their anthropologist, Ian Cunnison, focuses on brands as previous scholars in Kordofan did. He only mentions ear-cuts in passing, and unfortunately does not study the agency of both types of marking. The Maasai, a wide group of East African cattle herders spreading accross Kenya and Tanzania, have elaborate ways to mark their livestock. According to A. H. Jacobs, they use « three types of marking: « *(a)* ear marks refer to clan and sale-clan identity of original owner ; *(b)* over-all hide brands, often extensive and elaborate, are generally used for pure decoration or aesthetic purposes ; *(c)* private family marks are often, but not always, placed on front forelegs of the cattle to reinforce private ownership identity » (Monod (1975, p. 128) who notes down information stemming from A. H. Jacobs). Another anthropologist, Paul Spencer, in his study of the Maasai Matapato, also mentions propitious markings of oxen but he does not give any further detail about it (1988, p. 262).

These few examples hint to the wide range of different situations that may be found in Africa as regards livestock marking. Not only do ways of marking differ widely from one tribe to the other, but they also vary, within one tribe, depending on the type of livestock. Other animals should be considered besides camel and cattle, i. e. small stock (sheep and goats), donkeys and horses. Some herders mark all types of animals, others mark only one or two species. Horses are prestige animals in Africa and they tend not to be branded. Some scholars argue that branding is more commonly used for thick skinned animals such as camel, and ear marking for thinner skinned animals, i.e. mainly cattle. A concern to avoid damaging the animal skin may also be the reason why cattle brands, if any, are often positionned on the legs rather than on other parts of the body. But there are exceptions to this rule, such as the big marks branded on the flanks of some Tubu cattle (Baroin 1972 photographs n° 5 , 7 and 11), and the huge brands of Karimojong cattle sketched by Dyson-Hudson (1966 fig. 15 p. 88). In any case, if marks and ways of marking are specific to each pastoral community, it seems that the social purposes which underlie the marking of livestock are most often similar.

The social purposes of marking of livestock

Herders in general, and not only African ones, have such an intimate knowledge of their animals that they do not need marks to recognize them. Marking therefore does not answer such a personal purpose, it has a social one. Marks usually belong to groups, such as lineages or clans.

Some marks however belong to chiefs, as mentionned above, and a herder who marks his livestock with a chief's mark thus demonstrates that he belongs to this chief's following, or that he puts himself under this chief's protection. Among the Tubu, a newcomer lacking local support from his own kinsmen or clan members can ask a local chief for protection: he asks the chief permission to brand the chief's mark on his livestock. The chief's agreement implies that, in case one of these animals is stolen, he will help the owner find his animal back or take revenge, in the herder's name, against the offender. There is prestige for the chief in helping such a wronged pastoralist, but he will not do it for free. In order to be allowed to brand the chief's mark on his livestock in the first place, the herder does not come to him with bare hands. He has first to give the chief a seemly gift, i.e. an animal.

Not only chiefs, but other herders sometimes create their own brand. Some do it from scratch, when they move to a new place. One such case was mentionned among the Tubu. When he migrated from Bahr-el-Ghazal (North of lake Chad) to Eastern Niger in the late 1800's or early 1900's, a Tubu herder who had no local kinsmen created his own new personal brand which he called *keeso*, « hard ». Thereby he meant: « beware, I am a tough guy! » in order to scare away potential thieves. From then on, other men from his clan who later came to the area adopted this brand for their own livestock (Baroin 1985, p. 88).

Most often however, people do not create new brands. They merely add a small line to the brand of their group, thus adding a personal touch to it. Such cases have been recorded among the Arabs (Van Gennep 1902, p. 87) or the Tubu. According to W. C. Young, every man does so among the Rasha'ida Arabs of Sudan (Young cited by Stewart 2003, p. 189). The main message conveyed by such marks remains which group the owner belongs to, the small addition being only extra information.

The clear aim of these marks is to show under which person's or group's protection the animal stands. It is a help in proving one's property on stolen or lost animals. But even before any animal is lost or stolen, marks are a warning to potential thieves, as they show them to which group's retaliation they will be confronted if indeed they choose to steal the animal.

These are important signs, because animal theft is extremely widespread in pastoral societies. As L. G. Hill puts it, « animal theft is, and probably always has been, an exciting sport and profitable business in the Sudan » (Hill 1972, p. 2). And not only in the Sudan, one may add. It is an exciting sport because it demonstrates one's audacity, as it exposes the thief to great risk of revenge from the animal's owner and his group. It has indeed to be stressed that, in pastoral societies, revenge against animal theft or any other personal offense never is a mere personal affair, it is always a group concern. The reason for this collective response is that exposition to risk is particularly high for pastoral nomads, and would leave a lone herder defenceless. As a matter of fact, livestock is usually herded in small groups, the more so as pasture is scarce. Herds spread away from each other, with lone individuals to keep an eye on them. Quite often, watching livestock is left to children. One or two children will be left alone all day to keep an eye on cattle or small stock, and will only bring them home to the family camp in the evening. In case of camels, herding is the more arduous as these animals do not pasture in flocks ; each one goes its own way independently, covering long distances in a single day. This situation naturally makes animal theft, especially camel theft, rather easy. And it is the more tempting for young men as it is a risky sport which enables them to demonstrate their shrewdness and fearlessness.

A herder alone would have very little chance of recovering his lost animal. Group solidarity therefore is indispensable in such a case, as it provides a better chance to fall upon the stolen animal and/or upon the thief for retaliation. Group solidarity against theft is also what makes it a risky sport, because such affairs as a rule do not end up peacefully.

It is a tacit rule that members of the same group (whether family, lineage or clan), those very members who should help one another if one of them is stolen, conversely should not steal each other's livestock. Property marks are also meant to avoid doing so. But it does happen sometimes that a young man, by mistake, steals an animal belonging to one of his kinsmen or member of his clan[3]. I personally witnessed such a case among the Tubu in Eastern Niger in 1972. Retaliation then cannot take place, since kin solidarity is an indisputable social principle. Retaliation can only be directed towards outsiders. In that case, as the thief had already sold the animal, his close kinsmen had to compensate the lost animal to its owner. They decided merely to pay him back the animal's value, and bade him to forgive this unfortunate mistake.

When there is no kinship or other bound of solidarity between the thief and the animal's owner, which is the usual case, there is no such easy way out. It is a matter of honour that the wronged herder should avenge himself through violent retaliation. This means that he will do all he can, with his group's help, to trace the thief and take revenge by wounding or murdering him. It may take years before such revenge takes place. The Tubu, for example, are known for never giving it up, and for retaliating sometimes decades later. When revenge is taken, and the thief maybe wounded or murdered, his own kin will retaliate in their turn and more wounds or murders on both sides may follow. Such vendettas will only be stopped, sometimes many years later, through the muslim custom of paying compensation for murder, called *diya* in Arabic. The Tubu, who only became muslims towards the end of the XIXth century, have long been reluctant to adopt this custom, as they deemed it more honourable to avenge a wronged kin through violent reprisal rather than accept a payment in compensation.

Quite clearly, the marking of livestock is related to this logic of violence, which unfolds in the following manner:

1) Property marks are means to direct livestock theft on the proper animals, i.e. on those belonging to people who stand outside one's solidarity network
2) When such a theft occurs, violent revenge is indispensable, because a lack of response would automatically induce potential thieves to steal more of this man's livestock
3) For this revenge to be more effective, the wronged herder needs the help of his kin, or clan-members, or in-laws, or chief, whatever his solidarity network may be.

One may therefore conclude that animal theft, because of the revenge it automatically induces, is an indirect stimulus to kinship solidarity. In this respect, livestock property marking is a center piece in the organisation of violence which, indeed, is an endemic characteristic of these pastoral societies.

[3] The stolen animal may be a recent acquisition, that the owner had no time yet to brand with his own marks.

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