

Pursuing Pastoralists: the Stigma of *Shifita* during the ‘*Shifita War*’ in Kenya, 1963-68.

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Abstract: *This paper will address the ways in which cultural, economic and political appellations of shifita (bandits or rebels) were used to force social change amongst Somali Kenyans in Kenya’s Northern Frontier District (NFD) during the 1963-1968 ‘Shifita War’. Presenting a work-in-progress the paper reveals how the notion of shifita veiled various forms of violence in the NFD. Consequently, and in common with other investigations of banditry I argue that the Kenyan government ‘discovered’ a powerful political weapon in shifita that provided a pretext for forcing social and political change. In order to meet the challenges of independence, the shifita ‘threat’ enabled comprehensive government action against a group of people who were seen to defy the territorial and political constitution of the nation state. This resulted in the misrepresentation of violence in the region and the criminalisation of a community. When looking at state initiatives to contain the ‘Shifita War’, it is clear that counter-insurgency measures were directed not only at the secessionist fighters but also at the Somali pastoral community more broadly. Forced villagisation, movement restrictions and livestock confiscations criminalised a whole community, and shifita was the justification. In its broader significance this paper challenges the legitimacy of the post-colonial state as an agent of change amongst a group of people who have traditionally existed without regard to state authority.*

In January 1964, only a month after independence, Kenya found itself in civil war. On the one side was the Kenyatta Government, struggling to impose its authority over a divided nation. On the other side were the people of the former Northern Frontier District (NFD), united behind the Northern Province Progressive Peoples Party (NPPPP) calling for recognition of their right to self-determination and unity with the Somali Republic.

Politically and economically marginalised by the colonial state, pan-Somali aspirations in the former NFD were fermenting from 1946, when Ernest Bevin, the British Foreign Secretary recommended ‘Greater Somalia’ as a solution to Somali transhumance over colonial frontiers after the Second World War.¹

However, by 1963 British political expediency demanded that the process of decolonisation in Kenya be negotiated through the Kenya African National Union (KANU), for whom the Somali ideal was an embarrassment. Not only did it undermine the territorial integrity of the Kenyan state but also strengthened arguments for *majimboism* (regionalism) that their political rivals the Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU) were advocating. In March 1963, Duncan Sandys, the Colonial Secretary announced that the NFD was to remain part of Kenya's regional constitution. This was despite the findings of a commission of enquiry, which reported that the Somali and other Muslim minorities in the NFD 'almost unanimously' favoured secession.² Frustrated and antagonised, a number of Somali became engaged in guerrilla insurgency in an attempt to force the issue.

Informally aided by the Somali government in Mogadishu, the *shifita*, the commonly used term to describe the rebels, conducted systematic guerrilla operations targeting police posts, security and administrative personnel, and known collaborators with the Kenyan government. They combined the use of sophisticated weaponry with hit-and-run tactics. The official response was all encompassing. The NFD was declared a prohibited zone, security personnel were empowered to shoot and confiscate livestock or property on suspicion of subversion, whilst detention camps were erected to accommodate those persons considered politically dangerous.³ The '*Shifita* War' continued until January 1968 when diplomatic relations between Kenya and Somalia were re-established bringing the technical and logistical support of the Somali government for the rebels to a close. This enabled the Kenyan military to 'mop-up' the remaining guerrilla insurgents.⁴ Nonetheless, sporadic *shifita* activity has continued in the former NFD and the term *shifita* remains a sensitive political appellation in Kenya used as a pejorative term to dismiss potential internal and external security threats.

Presenting a work-in-progress and the results of some initial research findings, this article will offer a discussion of the concept *shifita* in relation to its uses during the ‘*Shifita War*’. Taking precedent from previous discussions of the ideology of banditry, I argue that *shifita* brigandage was re-invented and used as a tool by the newly independent Kenyan government as a means for state building during the 1960s.⁵ At a time of state consolidation, the *shifita* threat, which came from a group of secessionist activists’ legitimised comprehensive government action against a group of people who defied the territorial and political constitution of the nation state.⁶ Instances of violence during the ‘*Shifita War*’ were misrepresented resulting in the criminalisation of a community based upon social, economic, and cultural values that were deemed un-Kenyan.

The Somali of the Horn Of Africa

In order to fully appreciate the connections made by the Kenyan government between *shifita* banditry and the Somali, an examination of traditional Somali social and political organization is required. This is important to show how bandit activity in the form of livestock stealing was transformed into a nationalist challenge by the state.

The Somali form one of the largest single ethnic blocks in Africa covering a territory of nearly 400,000 square miles, intersecting Djibouti, the Somali Republic, Kenya and Ethiopia. For the most part this region comprises semi-desert and the Somali practice nomadic pastoralism. Strong cultural and economic attachment to the nomadic lifestyle is evident in the often contemptuous relationship between purely nomadic sections of the Somali such as the Dulbahante and partly agricultural clans such as the Habar Awal. Occupying higher and greener pastures in north-western Somaliland the Habar Awal are able to engage in some cultivation and form small settled groups.⁷ However, those who till the land are considered poor in spirit and I.M. Lewis has established that animal husbandry forms the main basis of the Somali pastoral economy where wealth and status is dependent upon livestock.⁸

Despite the predominance of nomadism small towns and villages do exist throughout the Somali inhabited region of the Horn of Africa but have historical significance as trade centres where pastoral goods such as skins, hides and milk are exchanged for imported goods such as rice, sugar and sorghum.⁹ Permanent settlement was restricted to shopkeepers, livestock merchants, and importers and exporters while the majority of the pastoralists came and went as transient members of the population.¹⁰

The Somali have no fixed territorial rights to land and seasonal migrations take place in common with pastoral norms as a means to maintain herds. The right to utilise pasture and water is dependent upon the establishment of effective occupation of an area from competing groups. As such, the fighting-unit forms one of the main features of the tribal group.¹¹ Due to the scarcity of resources and where there is constant conflict over access to pasture and water this unit is mobilized as a means to maintain both inter-tribal and intra-communal relationships by cattle stealing.¹² Violence and raiding are therefore part of Somali social organisation in which there is no separation between institutions of war and the political, social and economic spheres of life.

The Somali are also classified as following a segmentary lineage system, and mobilisation in war and feud can be made via clan or ethnic group.¹³ Peter Dalleo identifies five levels of lineage association, clan-family, clan, sub-clan, primary lineage, and dia-paying group, but suggests that the dia-paying group is the most fundamental.¹⁴ During the *Shifita* War, as will be revealed more fully, violence and raiding was both the consequence of ethnic mobilization as a means to pursue the nationalist agenda of unity with the Somali Republic, and inter-communal dispute, the playing out of clan and kinship antagonisms in the face of restricted mobility.

Colonial rule, the ‘Greater Somali’ debate and the Somali of the NFD

At the turn of the twentieth-century as Britain, Ethiopia and Italy sought to define and protect areas of colonial administration in the Horn of Africa attempts were made to proscribe pastoral transhumance that opposed formal boundary delimitation. However, this was not easy and British administration of the NFD was problematic. Widespread inter-clan warfare, which was supported by kinsmen across borders, and inadequate resources left the area largely ungoverned. In 1946 British officials admitted that they had hardly even begun to administer the Somali.¹⁵

Nonetheless, policies were adopted that have had a lasting effect on the NFD. Firstly, the Outlying District Ordinance was evoked in 1926 to prohibit persons entering or leaving the NFD without the permission of the Provincial Commissioner (PC). Further, in 1934 the PC was given special powers under the Special Districts (Administration) Ordinance to define grazing boundaries in an effort to reduce conflict over resources.¹⁶ What this meant in practice was economic and political marginalization. Under international law the NFD was part and parcel of the East Africa Protectorate but it was a ‘separately administered area of Kenya.’¹⁷ According to E.R. Turton, this fact undermined any opposition to irredentist claims made by the Somali that were to develop following the Second World War.¹⁸

Between 1941 and 1946 all Somali inhabited territories were joined together under a single British Military Administration following the defeat of Italy by the Allied powers.¹⁹ Lewis argues that this, and the placing of Italian and British Somalilands under UN trusteeship for 10 years in 1950: ‘should be considered as the most potent factor in the stimulation of new [Somali] political aspirations’.²⁰

New Somali political aspirations for unity had also been provided with a powerful symbol in 1946 when Ernest Bevin proposed the idea of a ‘Greater Somalia’.²¹ In recognition of the need for a long-term answer to the problem of administering

the defeated Italian colonies after the Second World War and as a solution to Somali transhumance over colonial frontiers, Bevin argued that 'British Somaliland, Italian Somaliland, and the adjacent part of Ethiopia...should be lumped together as a trust territory, so that the nomads should lead their fugal existence with the least possible hindrance'.²² In many respects this idea spoke to the determination of the Somali people to continue pastoral practices regardless of official state policies and boundaries, and has been the focal point of Somali nationalism since. In the NFD it was forcefully expressed in the '*Shifita* War', which began during Kenya's negotiation of its own independence.

The Somali of the NFD: *shifita* and implications for the independent Kenyan state

As Kenya neared independence in the early 1960s and as the issue of Somali unification became a potent and sensitive political consideration for the emerging Kenyan state, President Jomo Kenyatta sought to downplay the significance of the secessionists in the NFD by describing them as 'hooligans or armed guards or youths called "*shifita*". Those people who go raiding here and there'.²³ In this respect, the secessionists were regarded simply as bandit rebels at odds with state authority.

The term *shifita* can be used to describe various types of behaviour, including highway robbery, extortion, kidnapping, and political and personal conflict. *Shifita* is derived from the Amharic expression for banditry, *sheftenat*, which stems from the root verb *shaffata* (to rebel).²⁴ From *shaffata* the term *shefta* (bandit or rebel) is also derived and is used to describe someone who 'stirs up trouble, while taking to the forest or to the bush, departing from the king, the government, rule, instituted order, and the law'.²⁵ The prevalence of *shefta* in the Ethiopian highlands and Eritrea contributed to the emergence of the equivalent term *shifita* to the English spoken in Northeast Africa, and this is used in reference to any armed band that is at odds with the state.²⁶

Eric Hobsbawm also argues that banditry encompasses a challenge to an economic, social and political order and is a resistance to the encroaching power of an outside authority.²⁷ As such, bandits are ‘potential rebels’.²⁸ This definition is important because it infers that banditry is a form of criminality that can apply to any group considered subversive. Terrence Ranger concurs, arguing that the identifying criterion of banditry is ‘illegitimacy’ and ‘criminality’.²⁹

The idea that banditry represents illegitimacy and criminality is particularly pertinent for the Kenyan case. Documented in the borderlands of northern Kenya during British administration, use of the term *shifita* corresponded with the activity of criminal bandit gangs. Early District Commissioners (DC) in the northern regions referred to groups of raiders who looted and killed, targeting *manyattas* (Somali homesteads), police posts and army units. During the 1950s the term was similarly applied to describe the frequent raiding and poaching of livestock across the Kenya-Ethiopian border that resulted in the loss of life.³⁰ The term is used pejoratively and is associated with violence that combines partisan warfare with organized livestock stealing.³¹

Shifita has also acquired nationalist overtones and emerges from a tendency to connect banditry with subversive interstate and anti-state activity in the Horn of Africa. The use of *shifita* to describe political brigandage in this context was first made with reference to Eritrea during the 1940s. The emergence of Eritrean political parties during British Military Administration and their resort to ‘unorthodox methods, such as terrorism’ assigned *shifita* the position of political campaigners.³² Using violence directed at foreigners and funded by Addis Ababa, organised bandit gangs that traditionally engaged in livestock stealing and clan feuding were mobilized in an attempt to influence the decision-making process that was to determine the fate of the ex-Italian colony after 1945. In Kenya this is mirrored by the strong causal link between the ‘*Shifita War*’ and Somali irredentism, and in this sense *shifita* can be considered to be nationalist guerrillas.³³

For Kenyatta the secessionist movement that developed in the NFD had the potential to subvert domestic and regional political authority. Despite being the leading political force in the negotiation of Kenyan independence in December 1963, the authority of KANU rule was by no means certain. It was challenged specifically on two fronts. Regionally, the Somali Republic was laying claim to the Somali inhabited areas of the NFD on the basis of the right of all people to national self-determination.³⁴ This claim had been given some legitimacy following the conclusions of a 1962 commission of enquiry, which reported that over 87% of the population of the NFD favoured unification with the Somali Republic.³⁵ Furthermore domestically KANU's authority was challenged by the idea of *majimbo*, a form of federal government advocated by the official opposition KADU that would decentralise political power in Kenya to its constituent parts.³⁶ Not only did Somali political aspirations challenge Kenyan territorial integrity, it lent weight to the federal argument as a possible political compromise. The Somali were therefore anathema to Kenyatta and regarded as illegitimate and criminal: the embodiment of *shifita*.

Defining *shifita* violence: the movement for secession

The remainder of this paper offers a presentation of some initial research findings that show how *shifita* was used as a means to counter the secessionist movement but also Somali pastoralism that was deemed un-Kenyan. For this discussion of the *shifita* insurgency movement, *shifita* is referred to as the military wing of the NPPPP, the Northern Frontier District Liberation Army (NFDLA).

Shifita insurgents were organised into battalions of 1,000 and were deployed throughout the former NFD in bands of as few as 25 to 30. They carried old Italian and British arms that included rifles, Brens (Second World War light machine guns), bazookas and grenade launchers.³⁷ From 1965 the *shifita* insurgents also employed mine warfare to strategically limit the mobility of the Kenyan security forces, and extended their activity outside of the three major

Somali districts of the former NFD – Garissa, Mandera and Wajir – to areas around Isiolo and Marsabit.

The year 1967 can be identified as a time of intense security action against *shifita* which targeted not only those involved in identifiably politicised *shifita* violence. On 19 July, an army patrol found a group of suspects watering stock in Marsabit. One suspect was shot dead while 110 cattle found in the area were destroyed. Similarly on 22 July in Wajir, a gang of ten ‘spearmen’ were contacted and five of them killed.³⁸ On 24 July, a patrol of Kings Rifles sighted ten *shifita* who fled on their approach leaving behind landmines. During follow-up action when a ‘gang’ of five was sighted but not clearly identified as the same ten *shifita*, two were killed and a boy of eleven captured. All of the huts in the immediate area were destroyed, and in two further meetings with ‘gangs’, five more people were killed.³⁹ It followed that on 28 July a patrol spotted a man, woman and child out walking who refused to stop. The man was shot and the woman and child arrested.⁴⁰ Corresponding incidents were also reported from Garissa, where on 15 July a patrol of Kings Rifles confiscated 500 head of cattle without making a single contact with *shifita*. Again on 16 July, the discovery of an ‘illegal’ *manyatta* resulted in two deaths and a further 200 head of cattle being confiscated.⁴¹

Nonetheless the actions of the security forces should not be read out of context. More detailed analysis of events suggests that the nature of military action was the result of confusion between potential and genuine *shifita*. For instance, the events outlined in Garissa on 15 July that resulted in 500 head of cattle being confiscated without a *shifita* contact was sandwiched between spates of insurgency activity in the area. On 30 June, a *shifita* gang attacked a police post, and on 1 July a gang of 100 *shifita* abducted the mother of a known gang leader, Salad Kumo, along with four children, and attacked Ijara village.⁴² Then, on 28 July an engagement with a gang of fifty *shifita* resulted in the death of two known *shifita* leaders, Yakul Duale and Mohamed Karome.⁴³

What often appeared to happen was that contact with genuine *shifita* insurgents led to subsequent military attempts to pacify an area. Indeed, in Mandera on 17 August 1967, contact was made with a *shifita* gang of strength estimated at 800. During the engagement forty *shifita* were killed, as were three Kenyan army personnel. This incident was of particular note for the security forces as it was the first time that *shifita* stood to give direct battle. Orders were consequently given for the security forces to concentrate in this location. In the days following twenty-four more *shifita* were killed in six separate incidents. Yet, during these six incidents no arms were recovered, only spears and poison arrows, with one incident resulting in the death of four suspects who failed to stop on request.⁴⁴ Placed in context, security action was a matter of perceived military necessity.

Defining *shifita* violence: inter-communal violence

In common with Somali pastoral mores, throughout the '*Shifita* War' other types of violence were also being played out in the NFD that compounded the difficulty of identifying *shifita* insurgents. On 28 November 1967 at Koromi, Mandera District, twenty armed *shifita* raided a *manyatta* stealing goats from the village. This followed an incident a day earlier where in Kubi Arana, also in Mandera, thirty armed *shifita* entered a *manyatta* and in the process of stealing six camels from the village wounded a woman and child.⁴⁵ Although it is not absolutely clear from the record whose livestock was raided, the pattern of violence at the village level suggests that these incidents related less to politically inspired attacks and more to some form of inter-communal dispute. This argument gains credibility when placed in context with similar examples.

In the first week of December three cattle raiding incidents were reported in Meru district. On 29 November in the Maua area, an armed gang stole 425 cattle. On 2 December an armed gang stole 100 cattle from Latuane, which was then followed on 4 December by a gang of ten armed *shifita* stealing 500 cattle from Mburieni.⁴⁶ This pattern of raid and counter raid continued, with reports from Maua of *shifita* thefts on 8 December, and then again at Muurienne on 18

December.⁴⁷ Combined these three incidents resulted in 1,099 cattle thefts, and the death of at least nineteen *shifita*.

Inter-communal violence is readily identifiable once the intensity of the *shifita* insurgency began to reduce during 1967. In July 1967 the DC of Wajir began his monthly report with an assessment of the 'usual tribal animosity and blood feuds'. Raiding between the Degodia and Ogaden was particularly serious and had resulted in shifts in populations to areas where their respective tribes were strong in number.⁴⁸ Military reports from this time confirm the situation. On 5 July three armed *shifita* entered Sheikh Sasa's house and fired shots, while on 9 July another *shifita* gang attacked Wajir *manyatta*. The Army suspected that this was the consequence of 'normal vendettas'.⁴⁹ In August, a series of inter-tribal raids and incidents of violence involved the Boran in Marsabit district. On 4 August 1967 a gang of 300 *shifita* raided an Ethiopian Boma stealing 900 cattle and seven rifles. Later the following week on 11 August, an armed gang of ten *shifita* attacked some Boran boys who were herding camel. One boy was killed while three others were abducted and thirty-four head of cattle stolen.⁵⁰ Even in Nairobi there was reflection that events in Meru district during November and December were 'unconnected with politically inspired *shifita*'.⁵¹

However, inter-communal violence was not restricted to the later stages of the conflict. Analysis of Kenyan Special Branch Weekly Intelligence Reports reveals various strands of violence in the former NFD throughout the war.⁵² With regard to '*Shifita* Incidents', three patterns were identified. The first represents the organised activities of the *shifita* guerrillas against elements of the security forces. Attacks were mounted against patrols of the Kenya Rifles; ambushes were laid on Police and Army convoys whilst Police Posts were subjected to frequent rifle attacks at night.⁵³ The second variety can be said to be associated with the political situation but was also connected with communal rivalry. Throughout the period 1963-66 *shifita* targeted individual residents of the former NFD who were considered loyal to the Kenyan government. These individuals were often located

in Marsabit or Isiolo in Eastern Region, the centre of organised political opposition to secessionism. These people were mainly Christian Boran or individuals from the minority Burji community. They formed a distinct political block and had expressed opposition to secession during the 1962 Commission of Enquiry. They were led by the Northern Province United Association (NPUA) and were affiliated to KANU. The majority of these people were traders and farmers, forming a small settled group primarily in Marsabit Town but also in areas of Isiolo and Moyale. The Kenya Government sought to protect individuals from this group by the formation of Home Guard units as they were considered soft targets by the *shifita* in their attempt to undermine the appearance of government control in the region.⁵⁴

The third variety of *shifita* activity represents what Nene Mburu has described as the descent of the *shifita* into 'roving banditry'.⁵⁵ From mid-1965 it is clearly evident that *shifita* instigated incidents were represented less by ambushes and attacks on strategic targets, but documented as cattle stealing from *manyattas*.⁵⁶ However, rather than view this as mere 'roving banditry' it should be considered in light of traditional competition over access to scarce resources that became politicised. Raids of Christian Boran *manyattas* in Marsabit and Isiolo was a prominent feature of this type of violence, but so too was feuding between Ajuran, Degodia and Gurreh *manyattas* in Wajir and Mandera districts. By the later stages of 1965 these three groups were engaged in heated competition for resources. As a means of protecting themselves against rival groups and to perpetrate cattle stealing expeditions they employed *shifita* gangs from their respective sections as a form of protective mercenary force.⁵⁷

Shifita activity was thus a political act against the Kenya government but also a reflection of traditional animosity between groups residing in the NFD. At the same time this illustrates the potency of communal disputes at a time of perceived national mobilization, it also questions why this type of activity was not considered in Kenyan assessments of the security situation and its integration

within developmental planning for the former NFD. A conflation between potential and genuine *shifita* enabled the Kenyan authorities to create a crisis of legitimacy that suited their own agenda at independence.

Creating Kenyans: the Government's response to *shifita*

John G. Galaty argues that the dominant image of pastoralism is one of unviability. Herding societies are seen to have an irrational motivation for livestock accumulation, little respect for their environment, and are marginal rather than central to the African experience.⁵⁸ More than this however, pastoralists are neither numerically significant nor part of the dominant culture. Pastoralists remain outside of the political context, and ruling groups are little concerned with their fate except when considered engaged in subversive activities.⁵⁹ This has had numerous implications in Kenya and is closely allied with the image of criminality that is central to *shifita*.

It has also been argued that the period of the '*Shifita War*' was part of the so-called Resettlement Paradigm of the 1960s and 1970s, whereby development planning was concerned with the permanent settlement of destitute pastoralists.⁶⁰ Certainly, Kenyan attitudes to pastoral development during the *shifita* emergency reflect a commitment to resettlement. In 1966-67 a system of government loans was announced in an attempt to re-activate the livestock trade. However, these were only accessible to businessmen, the majority of whom were located and settled in the major towns and villages. Moreover, water facilities were located in designated government villages, membership of which was dependent upon compliance with movement restrictions that hampered herding activity and cattle accumulation (this process was dubbed villagisation).⁶¹

The founding concept behind villagisation was not new or unique. Throughout the twentieth-century we can identify cyclical programmes for development that focused on attempts to move pastoral groups away from herding. During the colonial period the British administration promoted *Duka* (small shop) ownership,

and encouraged settlement near contrived water areas.⁶² Moreover, grazing control schemes were implemented in response to the problem of constant conflict over water and pasture and to reverse the effects of ecological degradation.⁶³

During the ‘*Shifita* War’ governmental villagisation was designed and legitimated as a counter-insurgency measure to separate Somali from *shifita*. Yet, it also served as a convenient mechanism for implementing wholesale social reform. As one post-emergency development plan noted: ‘without villagization the Somali nomads will disappear into their former...hidings...it will be impossible to [improve things] for a constantly moving race.’⁶⁴ Negative official attitudes to pastoral activity in the NFD were aided by a government propagated image of the herder as ‘un-Kenyan’. A dichotomy emerged between *shifita* pastoralism and the nation state. Agricultural and settled pursuits were presented as more modern and more Kenyan, whereas pastoral raiding was *shifita* activity. Mburu argues that Kenyan attempts to court the Somali in the North-eastern Region focused on ways that they could be persuaded to fully accept Kenyan authority.⁶⁵ One example serves as apt illustration. In May 1968, during a period of acute food shortages in Wajir the Agricultural DC, J.M. Tiampati, held a *baraza* (public meeting) during which he reminded the Somali to forget their past attitudes of ‘despising’ labour. Tiampati underscored the value of agriculture using a pertinent cultural reference, ‘the *mirra* (Somali stimulant) you chew, the tea you drink and the rice you eat come from the *shambas* (farms) and [there] the people use their hands and sweat to plant.’⁶⁶ Rather than acknowledge that tribal clashes and stock thefts could have been the attempt of people to adapt to the ecological and demographic changes wrought by the *shifita* conflict, officials viewed it simply as a detriment to development and a psychological impediment to civilisation.⁶⁷

New ways of life had to be introduced to the people of the former NFD and the *shifita* conflict provided a solid basis for this. The intention of villagisation was to

get all people 'living in the jungle to villages.'⁶⁸ Here the general inference was that growing millet, maize and sorghum was the activity of civilised Kenyans while raiding was regressive, the activity of nomadic tribesmen and *shifita*.⁶⁹ When a police patrol found 100 head of cattle being grazed by Borana tribesmen in a prohibited zone, they were all arrested and the cattle seized. The officer in charge reassured that 'all of the bandits would be charged.'⁷⁰ Similarly in Garissa, the First and Third Class Magistrates court prosecuted 113 cases between January and June of 1967. Amongst these only one was for the possession of firearms. The remainder were the result of movement restrictions, and grazing allocations, incidents that under normal circumstances could be explained by pastoral norms.⁷¹

In Isiolo district, which was regarded as a 'hot-spot' for *shifita*, indiscrimination by the security forces under the pretext of *shifita* is illustrated further. Somali resident Yussuf Adam Mohamud lost 100 head of cattle, 400 sheep and goats, eight donkeys and one property 'during an inspection for *shifita* in early 1967.'⁷² Similarly, Jaldesa Molu, a county council tax collector; Mohamud Ismail, a police force member; Mohamud Mohamed, a provincial administrator, Ibrahim Haji Abdi, a council member; and Abdillahi Barre Ahamed, a National Reserve soldier; all lost significant properties during security operations.⁷³ Employed by the Kenyan authorities these men were unlikely to be the hardcore of the *shifita* insurgency. In fact, from 170 claims for compensation filed by residents of Isiolo district for properties lost during the '*Shifita War*', it has been calculated that 15,847 head of cattle; 76 camel; 3,352 sheep or goats; and 214 donkeys were either killed or confiscated; and fifty-seven houses or shops destroyed. The majority of the claimants state that this was the consequence of government action during either February or March 1967, and nearly all profess innocence regarding *shifita* activity.⁷⁴ Yet, as Ibrahim Ismail Khalif observed 'we were punished just because we were Somali'.⁷⁵ That this reflects an institutionalised discrimination of pastoralism can be revealed further.

In March 1965, a special inquiry was heard at the First Class Magistrates Court at Garissa in response to the seizure of 474 head of cattle from the Aulihan section of the Somali. This seizure had been ordered by the DC of Garissa in response to an allegation that the Aulihan from Muddo Gashe had acted in a hostile manner towards the Kenyan government. The inquiry was held to establish the legitimacy of the seizure following numerous complaints from local residents including some Aulihan but also Boran pastoralists that their cattle had been taken by mistake.⁷⁶ The findings of the enquiry are interesting. Although the seizure of cattle was ruled as unlawful this was not because the cattle had been seized from innocent residents. Rather, it had been unlawful because the cattle taken were seized from a location outside of the formal jurisdiction of the DC of Garissa. The Inquiry stated that it was 'immaterial whether the cattle seized belong[ed] to a person who supports the government or not'.⁷⁷ What was of concern for the Kenyan authorities was the organization of effective administration. There was no admission of wrongdoing towards the pastoralists.

Without further investigation it is difficult to put the destruction of Somali livestock in proper perspective. While Government confiscations and movement restrictions were unprecedented at the time, figures are not yet available to make meaningful comparisons of annual livestock losses. However, other research of the pastoral economy in Northern Kenya has identified the '*Shifita War*' as a period of heightened destitution within the course of general decline. Richard Hogg cites livestock figures from Isiolo and Garissa districts to illustrate the overall consequences of the *shifita* conflict for the pastoral economy. Hogg estimated that in Isiolo between 1963 and 1970 the camel population decreased by 95%, small stock by 90% and cattle by 7%. Similarly, Garissa saw an overall drop of 30% in its livestock population.⁷⁸ The concerted effort of the Kenyan government against the Somali pastoralists played a significant role in this.

Creating Kenyans: A success for the Kenyan government?

Attempting to assess the success of the Kenyan government's attempts to create Kenyans out of the Somali of the NFD is difficult. There is no doubt that as the Kenyan government has established its authority in the region irredentist claims have weakened. A negotiated *détente* between the Kenyan and Somali authorities and the gradual lifting of emergency regulations in the NFD has certainly dampened Somali aspirations. As Gunter Schlee argues it is doubtful whether the results of a referendum held today on Somali secession would be the same as in 1962.⁷⁹ Moreover, since the formal cession of hostilities in 1968, vast population resettlement has occurred with people moving away from pastoral areas towards towns and relief camps. Settled pursuits such as trade in charcoal, skins, and hides and shop-keeping have increased concurrently in popularity.⁸⁰

Nonetheless, whilst this conforms to the aims of the Kenyan government it does not necessarily mean that the Somali fully identify with Kenya. The NFD region remains a 'stagnant backwater', and in 1970 just 0.3% of the population attended primary school compared to 24.9% in Central Province.⁸¹ Since the 1980s there have also been numerous instances of state sponsored violence and intimidation against the Somali. Most notable was the implementation of a shoot-to-kill policy in the North East Region, two massacres in Garissa and Wajir, in November 1980 and February 1984 respectively, and a nationwide 'screening' of all ethnic Somali's residing in Kenya during late 1989 and early 1990. According to Africa Watch these measures led to instances of rape, beatings, stock seizures, detentions, arrests and potentially many thousands of deaths that remain officially unrecognized.⁸² In each case the spectre of a *shifita* threat was evoked as a means to legitimize the measures.

Lacklustre Somali nationalism in the NFD since the '*Shifita* War' must therefore be read in the context of state collapse in the Somali Republic, and as a consequence of persistent ethno-national conflict in the Somali region of

Ethiopia. This has made unification not only undesirable but also unworkable. Moreover, while Hogg suggests that pastoralism in general is in decline, in Northern Kenya it remains prevalent.⁸³ Here, despite some reorientation towards settled pursuits, oscillation between pastoral and other economic activities has enabled pastoral resilience.⁸⁴ Semi-permanent settlement has become a survival strategy for pastoral groups so as to retain their pastoral connections.

Conclusion

When looking at state initiatives to contain the ‘*Shifita War*’ it is clear that counter-insurgency measures were directed not only at the secessionist fighters, the *shifita* guerrillas, but also at the Somali community more broadly. Forced villagisation, movement restrictions and livestock confiscations criminalised a whole community, and *shifita* was the justification. *Shifita* was used as an all-encompassing term to victimise in the widest sense, any armed band at odds with the state. This included Somali nomads engaging in traditional pastoral practices that were considered economically and culturally damaging.

When post-colonial Kenya needed to assert its authority over a ‘dissident’ frontier community, and as a means of dealing with potentially subversive violence that combined acts of vengeance, random opportunism, as well as organised political action, *shifita* conveniently became anyone at anytime. *Shifita* was a metaphor for criminality and otherness, and an excuse to force social and cultural change. More broadly the ‘*Shifita War*’ symbolises an instance of social breakdown that results from the attempt of a shallow state to assimilate a peripheral group within the ruling ideology, and represents a point in time when small-scale lawlessness becomes criminal political activity.

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²¹ Michael W. Reisman, 'Somali Self-Determination', p. 153.

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