

Cattle Commodification and Pastoral Identity in the Horn of Africa

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Abstract : The past half-century has revealed massive structural, geographic, and technological changes in livestock production. The move, for instance, toward expanding export markets, massive feedlots for the fattening of cattle and improved veterinary standards is a global trend in food animal agribusiness and is apparent in both developed and developing regions. In the Horn of Africa, various breeds of cattle that previously were not considered in economic terms are now treated as commodities and branded for numerous export markets. Formerly a culturally significant exchange good within the subsistence pastoral livelihoods, cattle are now identified as a key economic resource and fully connected to global markets. This study incorporates an ethnographic-commodity chain approach to examine critical issues surrounding regional trade, harmonization of standards, import & export legislation, the role of the private sector, and infrastructure development relative to the Boran cattle breed and Borana pastoralists. The specific sites assessed include the cattle production region of Moyale in southern Ethiopia, feedlots and export abattoirs in Adama, Ethiopia, and quarantines and ports in Djibouti and Somaliland. The goal is to evaluate innovation and modernization outcomes and narratives around Boran cattle production and development and the associated livelihood changes for cattle producers in southern Ethiopia and how the smallholder pastoralists are coping with the multitude of global changes. Inevitably, the inherent pressures related to such changes alter, and may even promote the reconfiguration of identity, while inadvertently contribute to the capacity of smallholder cattle producers to act independently and make their own free choices in sustainability. It is through these processes that local Borana groups may appropriate, bypass, or put to new use available and innovative material resources.

Keywords : globalization, global change, commodification, pastoralism, vulnerability, adaptive capacity

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