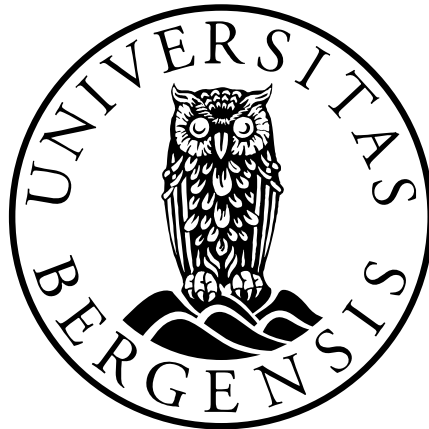


# **PASTORALISTS IN VIOLENT DEFIANCE OF THE STATE**

*The case of the Karimojong in Northeastern Uganda*

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this work to my family; my dear wife Olive and son's; Claude,  
Calvin and Clovis.

## *Abstract*

This thesis explores the issue of persistent violence between pastoralists and the state in north eastern Uganda, probing why after many years of trying to settle the problems of cattle raiding, armed violence and disorder still pervade the area. The study argues that while resource conflicts and violence between different groups are not strange in this region, the new dimensions and intensity brought in new actors and more innovative processes. A situation that has been created leaves the bulk of the population vulnerable to rampant armed violence and has become the order of everyday life. A number of factors are held responsible for this upsurge of violence and continued vulnerability of the largely agro-pastoral communities, they include: cattle raiding, decades of political marginalization, pastoralists' cultural and economic focus on cattle, environmental change, different development processes, and the ongoing forced disarmament process by the State military forces.

The populations have survived for a long time through these combination of both natural and human-induced disasters competing for the scarce resources, but their resolve to keep up their pastoral lifestyle while taking advantage of the historical and dramatic events like the political turbulence in the region as well as the sudden rise in arms smuggling opens up numerous processes that run parallel to each other. Though the situation is not “normal”, the local people continue to eke out a living amidst extremes of gun related violence and a horrific humanitarian environment. Due to their continued involvement with modern weapons, the attention of the state and other global forces like the UN has been drawn into the area to intervene, particularly in disarming the warriors and allay the security threats they pose to the region. But instead of ridding the region of violence, such interventions have intensified the rivalries, introduced new actors and new forms of violence. In reality, while the most visible actors are the state security apparatus and the armed warriors, an array of less visible actors are continuously coming into the context including; politicians, businessmen, warlords, the media, humanitarian agencies, and NGOs. Their participation and indeed contribution towards sustaining the violence is embedded in the many wide-ranging processes that furnish aspects of violence.

In the type of situation presented here, different notions of violence begin to emerge depending on the cultural, historical, and political moments regarding pastoral ways of life, acquisition of arms and use of armed violence. Thus, in as much as conflict and violence between different groups were not strange in this region, the new dimensions and character require deep exploration. This study focused on the critical junction at which the different historical, cultural and, both local and large-scale processes converge in understanding why and how violence has characterized the relations between the state and the society.



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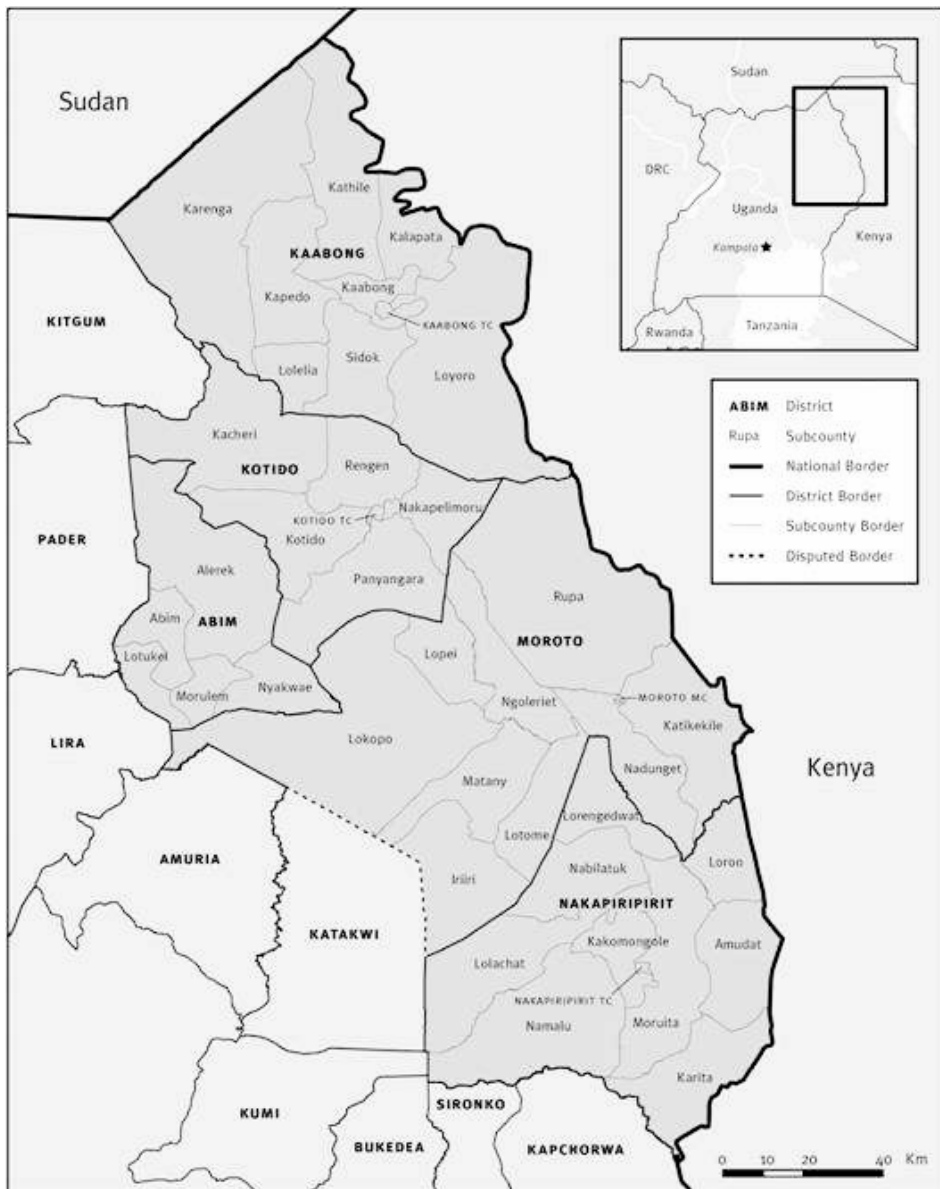
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Figure 1 Map of Africa showing location of pastoralists



Karamoja Region

Figure 2 Map of Karamoja Region





**Figure 3** A Karimojong warrior with his recovered cattle



**Figure 4** Burning of the collected guns in Kaabong



**Figure 5** The process of identifying raided cattle in Kaabong



**Figure 6** Protected Kraal in Kaabong

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CHAPTER ONE

# 1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 East African pastoralism: increasingly marginal, increasingly violent

Pastoralism as a mode of life in the drylands of East Africa has for a long time been labelled as primitive, backward and untenable in the modern age. Despite living under the most difficult ecological conditions and making life possible in these areas that are otherwise unsuitable for agriculture, pastoral communities in the drylands, just as others elsewhere around the world, have been in a persistent state of crisis. The twentieth century particularly saw the world's pastoralists experience widespread violence as a response to pressures from various circles and yet the period also saw them demonstrate incredible resilience on preservation of their values.

In East Africa, and indeed in many parts of the world, pastoral groups still depend on livestock and rudimentary forms of production for their livelihood. An essential part of their survival strategy involves taking advantage of the mixed social environment that many pastoralists live in through trading, exchanging, or allying with neighbouring groups such as foragers, farmers, urban dwellers and sometimes other pastoral people (Fratkin 2007). Often such relations end up becoming competitive and lead to conflict over the resources, a situation worsened by the population explosion, loss of land, civil strife and weapons proliferation currently prevalent in many pastoral zones. For that matter, areas under pastoralism are riddled with crises that are sometimes compounded by devastating famines and constant conflicts, often spiralling into lawlessness and social breakdown.

The last three decades in the drylands of East Africa have been particularly problematic as pastoral populations experienced unique forms of conflict often bordering on blatant warfare. An abnormal and huge escalation in conflict among the remote borderland communities and their neighbours in what looked much like cattle raiding was worsened by the addition of automatic weapons, and intermittent episodes of civil strife became almost synonymous with pastoralism. The conflicts

are aggravated by persistent conflicts among pastoralists themselves, resulting in continuous insecurity and colossal loss of life and property. Small arms and ammunition are easily accessible to the youths in the region. Many of these youths have taken to dealing in guns, and the governments of Uganda, Kenya, Sudan and Ethiopia have been blamed for marginalizing pastoralists and abandoning the state's responsibility for ensuring security and development of the area. In addition, these areas are too barren to support vegetation given the recurrent droughts that force the people there to continuously migrate in search of pasture and water, exposing their cattle to more risks such as drought and rampant diseases.

Thus, with the too many problems, cattle herders in this region began to seek recompense for recurrent shortages and losses of livestock due to drought and other disturbances through cattle rustling as a strategy in coping with an uncertain and hazardous environment (Bollig 1992; Dyson-Hudson & Dyson-Hudson 1980; 1999; Gray 2000; Lamphear 1998). They were drawn into finding alternative methods of survival and of guaranteeing their security amidst counter attacks. For that reason, they took to searching for all possible means of obtaining weapons and the proliferation of arms effectively began raising the levels, scale and nature of violence in the region. With emerging global forces and rampant civil wars, the use of force in raiding changed drastically since pastoralists were exposed to and adopted the use of modern weapons for use in their tribal warfare. Given that change, in a few years the drylands area of East Africa soon became known as bandit land, where cattle raiding, bloody feuds, fighting between neighbouring ethnic groups and heavily armed warriors ruled the day.

The situation has recently become more complex and has probably pushed these people into the most complex set of challenges. This happened when the governments in the region moved to disarm them and rid the region of small arms. Along with the disarmament, there has been a consistent drive to force the pastoralists to settle and practice agriculture rather than nomadic pastoralism. In response, the pastoralists resisted, they also began to view state hegemony with apprehension, and developed the view that the world outside their own was unreceptive to them and was

bent on eliminating their way of life, especially through disarming them and exposing them to the whims of their enemies. They were drawn into finding alternative methods of guaranteeing their existence without reference to the state. Instead different groups resorted to increasing their levels of armament, suspicions grew high, and attacks and counter attacks became more frequent as they were confronted by state security. As a result recurrent cases of violent armed raiding increased, failing food security worsened, social differentiation and the collapse of gerontocratic power followed, and comprehensive social and cultural changes in pastoral societies were triggered.

The persistent conflicts continued to undermine the effective exercise of both traditional and civil administration. The respective governments have since failed to manage the conflicts, and acquisition of small arms by different ethnic groups has in turn intensified rivalries and animosity in the vast dry lands. Previous notions that competition over access and control of scarce natural resources was the cause of the conflicts are no longer acceptable since societies all over the world compete for exploitation of natural resources but do not persistently engage in deadly violence. Due to such pressures coupled with socio-economic dynamics, pastoralism, which is the major form of livelihood in the region, has been forced to undergo a series of transformations. The conflicts have transformed the cultural and social institutions among these groups. Their customary normative order is experiencing enormous changes and the warrior culture of the pastoralists has consequently shifted since the values and strategies of the traditional form of raiding and warfare as well as the social construction of meaning attached to it have all changed.

A number of studies have employed numerous perspectives including human ecology and political economy to understand the different forms of engagements between pastoralists themselves, and also with their neighbours. The human ecology approach was used to attempt an examination of the ways a human population utilizes physical resources to survive, and how they interact with other human groups, including cooperation, trade, and intermarriage on one hand, or competition, subjugation, and warfare on the other. Inclusive of all the different forms of resource

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interactions, these relationships are also contextualized in a political economy framework, particularly considering the relationship to state structures and interventions (IKeya and Fratkin 2005; 6).

The early ethnographies by Gulliver (1955), Dyson-Hudson (1966), Barber (1962; 1968), Lamphear (1976) on the history, politics and social organization of cattle herding peoples of East Africa tended to locate violence among these communities in its normalcy. Cattle raiding was first viewed as a form of tribal conflict that the colonial administration decisively dealt with and contained using the arms embargo imposed on pastoral districts (Dyson-Hudson 1966; Barber 1962). These studies often describe pastoral conflicts as tribal warfare (Lamphear 1976), and particularly point out the forms of political organization and how they facilitate cattle raiding and provide cultural functions such as rites of passage for the young boys.

More recent studies that build on the work of Barber (1962), (1968), Dyson-Hudson (1966), Lamphear (1976) explore notions of how pastoralists' livelihood in non-equilibrium ecosystems and the abiotic processes influenced their survival (Dyson-Hudson and McCabe 1985; Ellis et al 1988; Galaty (1991); Little et al 1999; McCabe 2004). They examine raiding practices in respect of the ways through which pastoralists have successfully exploited East African drylands by showing how these practices maintain symbiotic relationships between the people and their livestock (Hodgson 1999; Broch-Due 1999; McCabe 2004). While Broch-Due (1999; 2000), McCabe (2004) and others have tried to locate poverty within the violence – social or cultural and ecological nexus – they argue that currently images of poverty and pastoralism have become inextricably bound up in apocalyptic scenes of drought, famine and warfare. Such studies have tended to concentrate on the discrepancy between the perceptions of the state machinery and the perceptions of the pastoralists themselves regarding violence and poverty. In addition to this, there are well-documented cases of conflicting interests and competing power bases that have been part and parcel of the development discourse.

Some studies since then even predicted doom for pastoralism. They perceived pastoralism as having no potential for development with some studies like Campbell and Axinn (1980) went to the extent of suggesting that pastoralists could steadily be 'en route to extinction'. The basis for that analysis lay in the persistent crisis that was and is still characteristic of pastoral regions (Dietz 1987; de Koning 2003). Reference is always made to the fluctuating circumstances such as drought, population pressure, ecological deterioration, lack of institutions of state and undesirable political and economic interventions. Meanwhile other studies have rallied on the pastoral cultures, citing either the practice of cattle raiding, backwardness or resilience (Knighton 2005) to explain the crisis associated with pastoralism in East Africa.

Ironically, over the years, pastoralists have proved to be not only progressive but also disagree with the notion of lack of development potential and being resistant to change. The work of Broch-Due and Sanders (1999) and Anderson and Broch-due (2000) for instance argue that taking a pastoralist's perspective would render claims of lack of development potential a nullity. The studies point to delving into the self-perceptions and community consciousness to understand the pastoral modes of production and also be able to know how pastoralists want to be seen and how they perceive of their situation. So, what some onlookers may observe as retrogressive may actually be strategies for surviving drought, violence, development initiatives, and other crises like cattle raiding which is very common in pastoral areas.

Whereas some of the early ethnographies do point to cattle raiding as accompanied by enormous violence, they describe it as largely symbolic violence that was central to raiding as a means for a warrior to fully enter manhood (Gulliver 1955). For instance Gulliver's (1955) description of how Turkana or Karimojong captives would be immediately integrated into the raiders' group resonates with the notion that violence was legitimate and part of the social values. Furthermore, the recent descriptions of cattle raiding by pastoral people often emphasize the escalating violence as it was in the past compared with the present, for the most part pointing to the acquisition of automatic weapons leading to the indiscriminate killing of innocent



people especially women and children, referring to it as either homicide or more recently, genocide.

But curiously little attention has been paid to the specific processes that drive both the non-state and state actors into these unending acts of violence or genocide. These include processes that surround the state and its claims over monopoly of violence. And whereas there is a general consensus that the states in the region are experiencing a tenuous monopoly of violence which leaves their legitimacy or effectiveness in crisis, little thought is generally paid to the processes that suck in other actors in their relationship with the state as a centre of this crisis.

## 1.2 The case of the Karimojong as seen through the literature

Moving from the regional picture to the case that forms the focus of this study, the Karimojong, the existing studies show a similar picture. The Karimojong have consistently been presented as being primarily cattle herders (Dyson-Hudson 1966; Barber 1968; Lamphear 1976; Quam 1996; Broch-Due and Anderson 1999; Gray 2000; Mkutu 2001; 2003; 2006; Knighton 2005), even when some unreliable rainfall in northern parts of Kaabong allows the Karimojong some space to engage in cultivation of cereals like sorghum to complement herding. However, since the 1970s, when the Karimojong experienced recurring shocks in the form of droughts, famines, epidemics, and violent armed cattle raiding, their presentation in many publications changed. A great deal of the publications on Karamoja in the period preceding the 1970's had concentrated on descriptions of the cultural forms of the pastoral people and how they manage the ecological distress in the drylands.

The works Gulliver (1953), (1955), Dyson-Hudson (1966), (1985), Barber (1968), and Lamphear (1976) particularly give an enriching exploration of Karimojong ecology and culture. They describe how the pastoral people were able to practice a resilient and ecologically sound mode of production in the hardships of the drylands. The studies demonstrate how the bulk of Karimojong were able to employ

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their social networks, dispersion by constantly moving with their herds and other forms of redistribution and reciprocity to manage their environmental challenges. Dyson-Hudson (1966) explores the age-set system and shows how the confirmation of manhood status establishes a structure of groups organized according to seniority which serves as a mechanism for according authority to make decisions to men in the elder bracket. Although to reach these conclusions, these studies trace the historical processes from the onset of colonialism, they do so with regard to specific actors they are investigating. For instance, Dyson-Hudson in his analysis of political behaviour as an outcome of the interplay of multifaceted values spanning around the values of cattle ownership, the territorial and the age organization, traces the historical processes from the onset of colonialism. However, Dyson-Hudson does not put this history in context of other significant actors in the region and beyond. He does not show how the different relationships of varying scales unfolded in between the localized actors and the culturally related and historically linked pastoral people in the region.

It is also crucial to understand that at the time these early ethnographies were carried out, the context in which power and authority were expressed was basically in the setting of public ritual, but the contexts and dynamics of power has since changed, they have since become matters of contestations between the youthful warriors and elders on one hand, and with the state on the other. A scenario that Lamphear (1976) tries to circumvent by situating his discussion of the historical relations between the Jie and other Karimojong groups, particularly their hostile relations with the Dodos in the north and the Karimojong in the south by doing a historical analysis. The analysis takes a historical reconstruction of the oral accounts of Jie military build up under the leadership of Loriang which brings in the relations of exchange between the Ethiopians, the Swahili on one hand, and the British imperialism on the other; all with different consequences. In whichever way, they had to negotiate their way out of the contradictions they got into. Nevertheless, Lamphear's work again dwelt too much on the history and description of the migration and settlement patterns and without paying much attention to the social and how other actors influence their local world and its transformations. It is important to

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understand how such experiences laid out by Lamphear's work changes under the interactions between cultural representations and emerging realities, and how the interactions which are in turn shaped by large-scale changes in political economy, politics, and culture influence violence.

The work of Spencer (1997) expands on Gulliver's (1955) and Lamphear's (1976) description of the pastoral systems of social organization, looking at the family which in many respects runs like an economic enterprise. The social systems like in marriage are shown to be understandable in a more rational context. The Karimojong social system began to be put in context of the ecological situation and in this way, the importance of their age systems and marriage patterns were finally appreciated. However, new situations given the unpredictable environment they live in constantly leads to the restructuring of the either the social organization or the responses to shocks with the intention of creating a manageable environment. The adjustments that the Karimojong make in response to the new situations constitute the bulk of the studies by Ocan (1992) Oloka-Onyango, Gariyo and Muhereza (1999), Mirzeler and Young (2000) and Mkutu (2001) on pastoralism and crisis in Karamoja. Their argument is that, being in an area not environmentally suitable for settlement, the Karimojong have adapted to violent conflict as a coping mechanism and because they got introduced to guns, violence has increased. That due to the Karimojong's lifestyle which is highly militarized, it has led to their being marginalized and in response, the Karimojong have transformed and now believe they can only fight to have their livelihood ascertained.

My own study presented here specifically focuses on the transformative processes by looking at the configuration of specific sets of social relationships; from the connections in their engagements with traditional neighbours on one hand, and with the "new" actors which include the state, as well as interactions with international agencies on the other hand. All these interactions lead to configuration of new relations, new knowledge and new politics regarding how to survive amidst emerging uncertainties. These new formations in their pastoral ways of life are made in reference to, but not necessarily with regard to historical processes. Thus, to

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understand the ways in which historical events generate such dynamics this study looks at the moment where these different processes reach a confluence, a form of what Kalb and Tak refer to as ‘critical junction’ (Kalb and Tak 2005). Through a historical analysis of those processes and the social configuration of the complex dimensions of emerging forms of power, this study saves us from getting enslaved into the cultural templates that have previously been used to explain violence and Karimojong behaviour. It moves beyond environmentalism and the cultural deterministic models so as to understand the persistent Karimojong – state violence in a more historical and dynamic framework.

In the contemporary period after the 1970s, a number of studies seem to have transcended the earlier approaches that were vested in functionalist approach. But they are still caught up in looking at cattle raiding as a reflection of cultural idioms in the Geertzian sense of the society (Geertz 1973). Whereas they acknowledge the early anthropological work, recent scholarships like Dietz (1987), Oloka-Onyango et al (1993), Ocan (1992; 1994), Muhereza (1999; 2001), Mirzeler and Young (2000), Gray (2000; 2003), Knighton (2003; 2005), Jabs (2007) and Mkutu (2001; 2002; 2006; 2007) all tend to examine the history, economy, and most especially the contemporary issues of conflicts as processes of adaptation. They generally point to the fact that Karamoja is a semi-arid area used mainly for transhumant cattle pastoralism and modest drylands agriculture, and cattle raids by neighboring groups within the region was historically limited to ‘acceptable’ violence by the youthful warriors under the control of elders. Notably that this was the case until the coming of modern weapons, border problems, wars and insurgencies in the vicinity, disarmament, the international assistance and food security problems began creating shifts in adaptive processes. Whereas they try to avoid the problem of reductionism by adopting multi-perspective theoretical approaches, these studies are still held back by continued focus on culture and adaptation. They view pastoral violence as products of competition over meager resources; and that struggle for power among different ethnic groups are reflections of desires to maximize economic privileges (Mkutu 2001).

But the Karimojong livelihood is not about rationality or rational economic action; it is about their social values. To the Karimojong, what is of value is their memberships in their particular groups and the interconnected powerful networks. My argument revolves around the social system on which they invest the lives of the people, and it is about their basic values which sustain that system. Thus, the significance of their values to the social system is paramount over the ideals of the modern state and the rationality in the economic system that the state propagates. Even Knighton (2005) who tries to break off from the economic and ecological perspective, ends up getting subsumed into the ‘thick description’ of Geertz (1973) presenting the Karimojong as having enduring cultural forms that cannot succumb to ‘foreign’ intrusion, and that their culture has been maintained and strengthened. He attributes this Karimojong resilience to the power of the traditional religion. While acknowledging the work of the mid and late twentieth century anthropologists such as Gulliver (1953), Dyson-Hudson (1966) and Lamphear (1976), Knighton (2005) advances a functionalist perspective in highlighting the multifarious functions of different Karimojong social actors in local warfare. In this regard, he argues that their participation in resisting any form of intervention and the vitality of their traditional pastoral life continues to re-energize their culture rather than weaken it. Hence the Karimojong culture is presented as relatively autonomous; that even with the entry of guns, the state and other contemporary challenges the culture is maintained.

Another, perhaps more troubling notion he suggests is that the culture is intact; the view that the culture is preserved, that practices like cattle raiding isn’t changing, warlords do not exist and warriors have always remained loyal to the gerontocratic order. The view that despite having multiple contacts with other actors, the “Karimojong maintenance of a surprisingly autonomous culture and identity is not just due to geographical and economic factors; it has been greatly assisted by their not seeing any great need to appropriate a foreign faith, when they had long cultivated a much more satisfying means of appreciating the presence of a vital religion and a saving god in their pastoralist life” (Knighton 2005; 76).

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Although he acknowledges that the Karimojong have been in contact with numerous macro as well as micro forces, he regards such interactions as largely passive and not dynamic. But peoples way of life evolve and recreate themselves through dynamic processes, responding to changing exterior conditions, as well as their own internal contradictions. Given that the different historical processes engender different forms and scales of violence, it is no longer plausible to look at the violence merely as part of the cultural practice or as resilience of traditional religion.

Rather, we need a broad perspective as the one argued for here that allows us to connect various processes and link them to our specific focus on violence. The perspective opens for an understanding of violence as a product of dramatic encounters between historical processes such as colonialism, markets, transnationalism, and the emergence of the nation-state vis-à-vis Karimojong autonomy. They entail exploring relations developed through time, relations in space, relations of power, and dependency (internal as well as external), and the interstitial relations between nominally distinct domains such as economics, politics, law and the family (Kalb and Tak 2005; 2). These relations do not only entail large-scale processes acting upon the local but involves global processes acting together with the “local histories, political experiences, divisions of assets, and divisive relations of gender, race and class, which make starting points, diverge. And such divergence becomes magnified in its spiraling consequences for local sites in an environment of stepped-up rivalry and competition, which is scripted in the very rules of the global game. Local outcomes are therefore never merely locally produced, as Appadurai (1996) rightly implies. They are willy-nilly composites of global-local interactions, critical junctions” (ibid; 23).

Returning to the issue of emphasizing cultural analysis; the use of culture involves dealing with meaning, and consequently with representation, and cultural analysis will therefore inevitably involve formulating meanings about meanings, representations about representations. For instance Christopher Taylor (1999) in his book *Sacrifice as Terror* attempts to demonstrate that while both political and historical analyses of the Rwandan genocide is necessary in understanding the

violence, they fail to explain the forms that the violence took and the degree of passion that motivated it. Taylor presents a case where different versions of a country's history are offered by the warring extremist groups to justify violence. Accordingly, he argues that the Rwandan genocide cannot be understood through a politico-historical analysis alone without a close scrutiny of the culture. Taylor also points out that culture is particularly important in understanding the forms that the violence took. He cites the notions of *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977) and ontology (Kapferer 1988) to argue that a cultural dimension is very important in extending the previously employed political and historical analysis. While this extension gives a broader perspective, Taylor's preoccupation with cultural symbols in attempting to attribute all actions to make sense in every violence experience brings problems of reflexivity and standpoint (Hall 2000). Indicating that leaning so much on cultural analysis is counter-productive and a more processual, actor oriented perspective should be appended to it.

Rather this study acknowledges the diverse views about violence by incorporating discourses of history, culture, the state, the international community and other witnesses like the media into the discussion of armed violence in Karamoja. Whereas previous accounts of violence have largely focused on environmental, cultural and economic dynamics, this study focuses on the critical junction at which these different forces and many other emerging ones confluence. By focusing on the 'critical junction' of various processes of varying scales where the use of violence is always under contestation we obtain a more realistic understanding of the interaction between the historical actors, their agency and the resources involved.

Indeed the local outcomes of such processes generally exhibit properties with important implications for our understanding of global processes as well. With the general improvement in communication that occurred in the last century, there has been a tremendous increase in the modes of connectivity between people and places, even in some respects having reached planar scale after the 1980s. No matter what we call it, whether we like to call that process globalization, cosmopolitanism, imperialism, stepped-up financial capitalism, or what not, it is clear that such

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processes fragment as they unite and localize while they globalize (Kalb and Tak 2005; 22).

However, this is not to say that culture plays no role, thus seen from Taylor's (1999) perspective discussed earlier, it also applies to the dynamics of social relationships where particular techniques of violence are used on the enemy on the basis of cultural stores of meanings and metaphors. The violent actions are not only meant to accomplish specific goals like killing the enemy, but they are carried out in specific ways so that the action can be 'understandable' to both the perpetrators and victims. As in the case with Taylor in the Rwandan case, it is important what the context is under which persons are killed – who has killed and who is killed in a battle - because it conveys meaning beyond the overt actions that we see. Beyond the act, the social person is under construction and if we look at the mere function of the act alone, we miss the point. In fact, the ways people are killed or violence meted out to them is in itself a way of communicating messages that are only understood within the bigger picture of the conflict. Thus Taylor's perspective becomes relevant in serving our case to explore the significance of violence for the Karimojong, and particularly its expression in culture or social relations. Because cattle raiding integrate violence as a cultural function in the making of social order, we need to reflect on the meanings of this violence in the context of sociality as well as in the other parallel and emerging processes.

### **1.2.1 Modern guns, modern states**

In recent years, the presence of small arms among pastoral groups like the Karimojong has led some scholars, and particularly the media to describe them as being militarized. Much of the literature with this militarization label highlights the role of the modern weapon as an adaptation tool but do not adequately describe the complex situations in which the guns are put to use. These studies generally underline the militarization of pastoralist societies as being accountable for the sudden increase in the brutality of what was otherwise resource conflicts, and contributing to the



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indiscriminate nature of the killings (Quam 1996; Gray 2000; Mirzeler and Young 2000; Markakis 2004; Knighton 2005; Mkutu 2001; 2003; 2006; 2007; 2008).

The general situation attributed to the militarization concerns the acquisition of the AK47 rifles which is argued to have driven the violence to new perspectives, expressed in the customary cattle raiding but with modern automatic guns. They argue that this 'militarization' has caused concern in a variety of ways: first as a security concern for the their neighbours and then for the state, secondly, it has increased the scale of cattle rustling, and thirdly made it difficult for the modern state to run its affairs in the region. That the modern gun has been the most potent ingredient fueling pastoral conflict in recent years, and with its continuous influx from other conflicts in neighbouring Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Uganda itself through the leakage from the army, the society now revolves around guns (Mkutu 2009). To survive the vagaries of drought and insecurity, the gun has been turned into a household item, trafficked across international borders and used to fuel cattle raiding and other armed crimes (SNV/Pax Christi 2004; Mkutu, 2008). The gun culture got so deeply rooted that it has become part of the everyday social and economic order (Gray 2000).

Recent studies (Muhereza 1999; Gray 2000; Mirzeler and Young 2000; Knighton 2005; Mkutu 2001; 2003; 2006; 2007; 2008) all point to the entrenchment of the modern gun into the socio-cultural dynamics of the Karimojong. This has disfigured the traditional normative order; breaking not only the critical customary restraints against unacceptable violence but also disentangled the social webs of livelihoods. Although low-intensity violence, above all revolving around cattle-raiding has been an enduring value among the Karimojong, the influx of automatic weaponry and its use in facing off the state and other enemies in the last two decades has transformed its nature, intensified its human cost, and transformed a range of social relationships (Mirzeler and Young 2000). The gun also took on social roles, it began to influence and shape all cattle associated cultural practices. Gray (2000) describes this association between guns and cattle using the transformation that occurred in the marriage ceremony. In marriage for instance, full bride price can be

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acquired as a result of a single successful raid (conversely, the formal transfer of bride wealth heightens the risk of being raided). Gray illustrates how upon completion of payment, members of the groom's family travel to the bride's home to "capture" her and bring her to her husband's home. However, customarily, this ceremonial 'kidnap' was accompanied by much noise making, dancing, and singing. She points out how today; the bride whose removal to her husband's home is not also accompanied by the repeated firing of the modern guns that provided the cattle "feels devalued."(Gray 2000: 408).

These studies also show that in the past decade a number of large-scale clashes have occurred among the Karimojong pastoralists, resulting in major losses of life and displacement. A number of authors have argued that the state is also a raider in the region (Knighton 2003; Markakis 2004; Mkutu 2009; Storaas 2009) and cattle raiding are now a threat to regional security. The state is actually the centre of the crisis pitting the pastoralists on one hand and the state machinery on the other. In today's situation, the state presence in pastoral areas is very nominal and given that pastoral communities carry little political clout at the state level, there is no political incentive for greater state involvement. But normally automatic weapons are seen as a monopoly of the state and they reserve the right to collect and control its ownership and use. But the pastoralists also look on to the same weapons as their new means of security and capital accumulation in the face of a weak and aberrant state, all of which enable different types of actors to engage the state.

However, whenever state interventions take place, it focuses on the symptoms and usually in a very high handed militarist manner (Storaas 2009). Thus, state intervention brings in new perspectives; the concerns that cattle raiding has transformed into a threat to regional and world peace which must be dealt with by international action. We begin to extend the explanations beyond the dynamics of inter or intra-group conflicts which are thought to be the product of primordial antagonisms and resource wars.

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We also need to include the perspective of the state. Looking at the pastoralists through armed conflict first started with the British colonialists even after they had previously ignored the region – later it attracted the attention of the post-colonial state as well as the UN and other international bodies especially when cattle raiding was linked to the proliferation of small arms and regional security. So whereas the Karimojong persistently fight to survive according to their beliefs and values, many of the contemporary interventions bear marks of prejudice against their traditional ways. Their engagements with the state or any form of humanitarian assistance have all rigorously attempted to replace or weaken their values. The government insists it has to rebuild state institutions (it earlier ignored) to be able to control the Karimojong. But the prevailing conditions also call for addressing the humanitarian emergency; and to facilitate economic recovery. Such attempts are done without due regard to the fact that these pastoralists livelihood is essentially guided by their values, principles and beliefs that have for long been stereo-typed as backward or primitive. According to Knighton (2005) such values are embedded in the religious aspect of Karimojong culture which enables them to sustain their autonomy in a postmodern world.

It worthy noting that state interventions target reforming (in many guises through total annihilation) of the pastoralists forms of social organization and interaction, particularly dismantling their fundamental values, institutions and relationships, social rules, laws and norms of behaviour, feelings and beliefs connected to identity and belongingness. The ensuing tension arises because the pastoralists feel their identity comes under threat. There is a close relationship between the nature and intensity of local conflicts and the ways through which peoples socially approved status shifted with the power of modern weaponry. In sum the transformation in the character and nature of cattle raiding leads to a reconsideration of local forms of power and sociality (Knighton 2006). The stability which has sustained their survival in a difficult environment, and their normative embodiment, all seem to be at risk. This is explained in their reference to the transformation from the traditionally and spiritually loaded local weapons of spears and arrows to the soulless AK-47 which is eating away at the soul of Karimojong

culture (Knighton 2007). When the power of the guns began to reign, violence began to rule the day, influencing all aspects of life not only limited to cattle raiding.

That transformation has resulted into massive shifts in adaptive patterns that seem to favor commercialization, criminal deviance and the will and power of weapons at the expense of tradition. To this end, there is need to understand this violence from a variety of perspectives in relation to different forms of historical, social and cultural representations, and taking into consideration the wider context of socio-cultural, economic and political systems in the region. Rather, pastoral conflicts must be understood within the context of a historical analysis of configuration of the state, its expansion and its central role in other crises in the region. It is important to locate pastoral conflicts within both the historical and ongoing processes of pacifying otherwise peripheral pastoralist groups into state sovereignty and firmly bringing them under state apparatus of control. We need to appreciate this escalation of violence across time and space to understand how the processes facilitating it endure and at the same time keep changing character over the years.

### 1.3 Navigating the Theoretical Terrain of Violence

Anthropological analysis of violence in terms of processes, the actors, the motives and its forms of manifestation has been a continuous debate that not only presents us with formidable methodological problems of fragmented perspective, but also requires navigation of “conceptual terrain that is heavily laden with moral presupposition, bursting with emotional investment, and rife with politically contested representations” (Lubkemann 2008; 35). In fact some theorists have argued that the very act of describing and theorizing violence runs the risk of, in some sense, re-perpetrating violence by giving it an order or “reason” that inevitably does not do justice to the suffering of those who have experienced it, and fails to adequately convey those “aspects of human existence that are not so easily captured by the text” (Nordstrom 1997; 24; Lubkemann 2008).

However, the multiple meanings attached to the concept of violence, and the way it seems to inform all social fields in various ways suggest that violence is not a single condition but rather a set of processes involving different actions unevenly enacted over time. In so doing, violence becomes deeply permeated with cultural meanings and we cannot really say we now “know” exactly what violence is, and “it” “cannot be readily objectified and quantified so that a “check list” can be drawn up with positive criteria for defining any particular act as violent or not” (Scheper-Hughes 2004; 2). Following the multiplicity in meaning, several emergent theoretical frameworks have come forward to explain violence. We can look at several of these theoretical perspectives:

There are those frameworks that have focused on the claims that violence or war is rational. In his “A Rational Kind of Madness” (1997) and (1998) *The Economic Functions of Violence in Civil Wars*, David Keen argues that wars are not irrational or simply “imposed” on societies but should be understood as emerging from political and economic processes taking place within such societies. Keen’s frame of analysis points to the fact that understanding the sources of violence requires a deep exploration of the economic dynamics that buttress it. He demonstrates that the various forms of violence that we witness, such as atrocities in war, brutality, and even genocide, can be strategic and meant to serve an economic function for those who employ them, and so even apparent “madness” may in fact be a meaningful economic strategy by rational individuals seeking personal gain (Branch 2008). In line with the literature on new wars, Keen argues that since the end of the Cold War, certain factors have emerged that have made economic violence more prevalent than ever before. These include; the end of super power support, economic crises, imposed austerity measures, and the breakdown of elite patrimonialism. When it comes to Africa, as Keen suggests, we come face-to-face with the privileged terrain for economic wars, the exemplar of the dictum that “war has increasingly become the continuation of economics by other means.” As David Keen noted;

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Conflict can create war economies, often in the regions controlled by rebels or warlords and linked to international trading networks; members of armed gangs can benefit from looting; and regimes can use violence to deflect opposition, reward supporters or maintain their access to resources. Under these circumstances, ending civil wars becomes difficult. Winning may not be desirable: the point of war may be precisely the legitimacy which it confers on actions that in peacetime would be punishable as crimes (Keen 1997)

For Keen, violence is not merely a result of “irrational,” “chaotic,” “mindless,” actions, neither can it be reasoned out as the result of “ancient tribal hatreds”, but the focus should be on the relevance of violence and the functions it assumes in the society. In some cases, violence is better understood as “an instrument of enterprise and violence as a mode of accumulation.” In Karamoja such circumstances signal the performance of the state, the continuation of violence to echo the presence of the state. As Keen would have put it, war represents not so much the collapse of one system as the emergence of a new one; one that benefits certain groups—government officials, traders, combatants, and international actors who stand to gain from dealing with local actors—while further impoverishing other sections of the community. Evidence of this can be found in a number of the wars that have raged in the different countries in the region: Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Uganda itself where much of the 1980s and 1990s provide some of the most striking examples of the “benefits of war”.

But this economic motive is not only limited to the state and its related actors, it leaves out the Karimojong. Indeed my argument is that much of the violence is driven by considerations of the social. The Karimojong are driven by collective interests and the power of their social relations. This view resonates with the work of Pierre Bourdieu. Violence as symbolic is a view which represents an extension of the term “violence” to encompass a variety of social/cultural domination. Symbolic violence usually passes unnoticed (partly unconscious) or is taken for granted as a form of everyday social habit. According to Bourdieu, symbolic violence is the imposition of systems of symbolism and meaning (culture) upon groups or classes in such a way that they are experienced as legitimate. In his *theory of practice*, Bourdieu views all

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aspects of social life as being infused with power relations, so the central question is not about the existence of violence in those aspects, but about the degree to which they participate in, or foster, “violence” (Bourdieu 1977).

Following Bourdieu’s argument means that our analyses of violence should go beyond the mere description of social agents’ self-understanding of their institution and how society is displayed in their interaction, and should strive to critique current practice so that the social agents can liberate themselves from the grip of the legitimated symbolic domination (Kim 2004). Michael Taussig’s analysis of the culture and society in which terror is the order of the day is one which uses this premise to provide an illuminating framework for understanding violence. He shows how the state has persistently used violence as the machinery for state brutality against its own citizens. This is evident right from colonial times running through to the present. For Taussig, violent suppression and brutal force were part and parcel of the “culture of terror” that British colonists and plantation workers instituted in the Amazon to control their indigenous labour force, which did not always take to the “wage-labour” system with much enthusiasm<sup>1</sup> (Taussig 1984). Indeed if we take a broad cultural historical perspective, it would allow us to connect many developments under the British colonial administration in Karamoja, how cattle raids had been controlled (Pazzaglia 1982) and what the violence associated with the construction of the colonial reality meant to victims then and what followed.

Tausig’s argument is that no matter how much we try to understand the psychology of terror or victimization, we can never satisfactorily reach its core because we have never really experienced it with our own eyes or flesh. This means that since stories of terror usually reach us through the words of others, we are simply unable to understand why someone would go to such extreme lengths to destroy other human beings. In other words, the anthropologist is unable to live and express the physical or psychological pain that victims undergo. He elaborately shows how “the

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<sup>1</sup> The violence that was meant to serve economic and recreational purposes turned out to be so extreme that it lost its original intent

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individual becomes the violent agent of the unconscious, which is the repository of the symbolically constituted worlds the individual finds himself within. The “culture of terror, space of death” belongs to the Europeans. In this, violence is the medium for the symbolic expression of the unconscious. The culture of terror is, in this sense, what results when the symbolic world of the Europeans – one of savages, of evil, and of divinely-sanctioned violence – erupts into the real world” (Branch 2008; 69). Violence becomes part and parcel of ordinary people’s lives, so only their own reconstruction of history would open us to the larger picture.

Scholars have also explored violence not just from the pain of it, but by looking at “identity, self, and personhood, as well as physical bodies”, all as strategic targets of war (Nordstrom 1998; 105). They show that violence attempts to take from people ways in which they recognize themselves as human. Following the perspective of Carolyn Nordstrom, violence and even war generally “unmake worlds, both real and conceptual.” For Nordstrom, war and its associated violence affect all within their reach, and “the crisis of representation is not limited to the immediate victims of violence. War’s violence unmakes the world at large both for those who experience it and for those who witness it.” Thus, in her words, “violence deconstructs reason,” and she expands the meaning-destroying effect of violence to encompass not only violence in practice, but the representation of violence by the anthropologist (Branch 2008). According to Nordstrom, violence destroys meaning for both victim and perpetrator. She does not look at violence as a way of life or of solving societal problems. She argues: “Our assertion that violence is a dimension of living does not imply that we regard it as functional... we do not argue that violence serves as a safety valve for intra-societal tensions. Violence is not functional...We prefer to regard violence as a socially and culturally constructed manifestation of a deconstitutive dimension of human existence.” In Nordstrom’s account, pain, violence, war, terror, and fear all only amount to collections of stories, and the anthropologist can only pass these stories along (Nordstrom 1998).

Michel Foucault is another theorist who confronts violence from its social perspective. In his book *Discipline and Punish: The birth of the prison* he seeks to



analyze forms of violence in their social context, and to explore how changing power relations affect punishment. According to Foucault, violence that comes in the form of punishment is loaded “with symbolism referring to the crime; religious beliefs impregnate the proceedings at every level; an important function of the execution is to underline authority (although too much emphasis is placed on the person of the king); in particular, the execution serves to restore the sovereignty, shaken for a moment by the crime; finally, Foucault rightly stresses the constitutive role of the spectators watching an execution (providing little evidence on this aspect from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, though)” (Spierenburg 2004; 611). He points out that “the term ‘penal torture’ does not cover any corporal punishment: it is a differentiated production of pain, an organized ritual for the marking of victims and the expression of the power that punishes; not the expression of a legal system driven to exasperation and, forgetting its principles, losing all restraint. In the ‘excesses’ of torture, a whole economy of power is invested” (Foucault; 1995; 35).

Thus when it comes to violence that is institutionalized as in “discipline and punishment,” Foucault says it also acquires some positive social value. This is in conformity with Bourdieu’s idea of “soft” violence that has generally been taken for granted and overlooked in social theories, and is subject to “misrecognition” in everyday life. This misrecognition of violence allows symbolic violence to conceal itself within dominant discourses as these are spoken, and within other forms of violence as these are applied to bodies.

Liisa Malkki’s treatment of violence shows how experiences of violence and one’s ethnic identity are considered meaningful in the process of constructing identities such as “Hutu” and “Tutsi.” Violence in Malkki’s perspective is the means for creating entire moral, social, and political worlds that are understood through myths and links with the body. According to Malkki, violence is meted out to specific parts of Hutus’ bodies; the anus, the genitals and the head were the particular focus of mutilation and destruction by Tutsi. This is the kind of analysis that moves closer to unveiling the social conditioning and the symbolically meaningful ways of violence. As we saw also in Taylor’s analysis, symbolic violence rooted in cattle raiding,

historically as well as contemporary ones brought by modern guns can also be understood in this context. So when violence becomes part of the livelihood, it does not only shape social life and masculine identity but also emerges from a certain symbolic world and assumes its meaning in the elaboration of or creation within that symbolic world by the perpetrators of violence – in effect, instead of violence shattering meaning or the capacity for representation by the victims, it became part of their culture, their symbolic political world.

As Malkki explains, people use violence not to efficiently realize objectives, but to define and redefine themselves as members of a community, and others as members of other communities (Branch 2008; 74). Furthermore, Malkki highlights the agency of the various actors showing how they creatively reconstitute their social identities in relation to displacement (Lubkemann 2008; Malkki 1995b). The Hutu refugees that she studies did “not simply lose their culture or social identity but creatively drew on cultural referents to reinterpret their history in ways that incorporated the experience of displacement into their group identity and gave that experience new value and meaning” (Lubkemann 2008; 17).

In some analyses of wartime violence, emphasis is put on the everyday, mundane structural violence as a significant factor in constituting the social condition for conflicts or war. Nancy Scheper-Hughes (2004) adapts this perspective and argues that violence can never be understood solely in terms of its physicality, that is, as force, assault, or the infliction of pain alone. She argues that violence itself “defies easy categorization. It can be everything and nothing; legitimate or illegitimate; visible or invisible, necessary or useless; senseless and gratuitous or utterly rational and strategic.” Violence is not only physical; it encompasses other aspects such as assaults on personhood, dignity, sense of worth or value of the victim. This means that our analysis of violence needs to go beyond the conventional focus on ‘physical hurt’ and involve the agency and social conditions that generate violence.

This enables us to focus on the social and cultural dimensions of violence – as the elements that give violence its power and meaning, therefore, focusing “exclusively

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on the physical aspects of torture/terror/violence misses the point and transforms the project into a clinical, literary, or artistic exercise, which runs the risk of degenerating into a theatre or pornography of violence in which the voyeuristic impulse subverts the large project of witnessing, critiquing, and writing against violence, injustice and suffering” (Scheper-Hughes 2004; 1). A case such that of the Karimojong can be understood in this context, looking at cattle raiding as ‘practices of everyday violence’ where suffering is routinized and normalized as part of their social life.

The same can be said of Veena Das, who in her analysis offers us an alternative way of exploring the pain victims of violence go through. In her book, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (1997) Das suggests we take a keen interest in the language of the actors in relation to the experiences of violence. In this perspective, by way of interaction between body and language, a person can be seen as a victim of language – as if words could reveal more about us than we are aware of ourselves”. She demonstrates that violence could be the outcome of the relationship between agency and the everyday, while violence disrupts or ruptures lives, life itself is “recovered ... through a descent into the ordinary”. Indeed if we situate her analysis in the kind of violence that occurs among pastoral groups like the Karimojong, where social actors lived in the same local worlds and knew or thought they knew each other, we are compelled to re-examine the manner in which everyday life is transformed in the engagement with violence (Veenas Das 1997; 2). We not only see the performance of violence but also capture the language of the actors in their everyday life and how the violence unfolds itself into the ordinary. My attention is also captured by both the voices of the ordinary actors and how it interfaces with large scale phenomena like the state.

Thus, as most of the anthropological contributions have shown, violence is an increasingly common aspect of the social life of the communities the researchers worked in and often defies easy explanation. By and large, this demonstrates that violence is an aspect of livelihood that may be manifested socially or culturally as learned behaviour, and can also be transferred and exchanged between groups and across boundaries (Nordstrom and Giraldo 2002). It constitutes the social and cultural

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imaginaries of order and disorder. It is not simply an interruption of the everyday but is experienced in everyday life (Das 2008). Also, within certain frameworks of violence, men, women and children can assume fluctuating positions, either as perpetrators, victims, witnesses or even all three. A perpetrator can also be a victim and often perceives himself/herself to be so. This feature is particularly observable in the ‘social production and circulation of hate’ whereby the ‘images of the perpetrator and victim are frequently reversed, depending upon the perspective from which the memories of traumatic events and of everyday violence are seen and re-lived’ (Das 1998; 109).

At this point my analysis may also make use of David Riches (1986) definition where the meaning of violence is based on a triangular relationship between ‘perpetrator’ (performer), ‘victim’, and ‘witness’ (observer). Riches defines violence as “an act of physical hurt deemed legitimate by the performer and illegitimate by (some) witnesses” (Riches 1986; 8). Riches employs the concept of the “triangle of violence” involving performers, victims and witnesses to show that violence is manifested by contests regarding its legitimacy as a social act. That is, the performer may see a violent act as justified, and therefore legitimate, while the victim is likely to see the same act as unjustified and illegitimate. Whatever its conceptual limitations are, the merit of Riches’ triangle in our present case is that it can only assist us handle the question of ambiguity by pointing out that the lack of agreement in what constitutes violence arises out of people’s conflicting perceptions, and that these result from their differing relationships to the action itself. But the issue then is to understand the variations in the experiences of each segment from both the cultural and historical perspectives and not just the performance of violence per se. Thus, rather than trying to conclusively define the concept of violence, what is important is to consider the analytical utility of looking at all the three: perpetrator, victim and observer at the same time both in space and time.

## 1.4 My own perspective

In my analysis, while acknowledging the above multifaceted perspectives, I employ a perspective which not only looks at violence as an indispensable part of society but also locates the actors within a cultural historical perspective. In this thesis I extend the discussion on pastoralism and conflict by thinking through a cultural and historical context while employing an actor-oriented perspective to generate a deeper understanding of the persistence of nomadic pastoralists' – state violence in Karamoja. Of significance to the argument is the view that in order to understand the individual, one must also understand the cultural–historical context in which the individual resides. Cultural-historical theory underpins those contexts which shape social relations and community values, and past practices which have laid the foundations of what actors currently focus on in their communities.

First, I attempt to recast the problem of pastoral violence in a historical inquiry so as to tease out the meanings that inform important courses of action in historically unfolding circumstances; and then look at violence as institutionalized patterns of social life that may be elaborated in more than one concrete construction of meaning. Secondly, while I agree with much anthropology scholarship that many of the recent wars or violence have not been between states and organized armies, but fought between states and their own people, I argue that the state is a distinct actor implicated in the violence multifarious ways; violence is intrinsic to forms of state capture and formulations that relate to the state apparatus – my argument is that, even when the state is not the direct actor in the violence, its invincible presence just as its inabilities to control or even surrender to other actors appears to be overwhelmingly responsible for violence. Additionally, I argue that violence not only physically 'hurts' or takes life or destroys, but reconfigures social relations and the various ways through which people redefine relations of power with the state.

Thus, for instance where analysis is focused on decisions made by an individual warrior to raid, this does not imply that such an action will be enough to explain the resultant violence but we will have to take into account a variety of

relationships in which that warrior is embedded, both within and outside the known group as well as all those connections considered influential for the enhancement of the action and its outcome. Thus defying the argument by Kratli (2001) that the Karimojong are locked into own traditions, and obstinately opposed to change or innovation. To the Karimojong new social values gain significance when engaged in social interaction. Values are created, reinterpreted, reinforced, used and challenged during the processes of interaction; meaning that they are grounded in their everyday lives. Historically, cattle raiding were socially accepted but then, there were no guns used in the raiding. Over the years, however, the traditions and rules have changed due to various dynamics in their everyday lives. They incorporated the gun, widened the horizons of enemies and the resultant violence also began to interact in a negative, mutually reinforcing cycle. The violence has set a kind of legacy influencing repeated forms of gains and losses; spurring gains for some while losses for others. It can be discerned from it that the social system that generates conflict and instability, and the system that generates wealth and destitution are inextricably bound (Escobar 1995). Thus cattle raiding and violence have become part and parcel of their livelihoods, becoming endemic, part of the cycle of poverty (Broch-Due 2000) because it impoverishes many others.

It is also important to note that the above perspective allows us to note that whereas actors can effectively mobilize available resources to construct, maintain and enhance social worlds in conformity with what they perceive as their own interests, actors can inadvertently contribute to the problems afflicting them. So their capacity to act in a world has to be in conformity with other social actors. Agency is considered as belonging to the actor who also acts within social or cultural contexts. From such a perspective, one may undertake to explain the socio-cultural processes that facilitate violence among actors whose intentions are always varied but who act within certain norms. Similarly, each of the key actors defines their identity in relation to the roles they play in terms of the values each adheres to. For instance, the warrior groups are primarily guided by the age-set system, the values of masculinity which entail bravery and proving one's manhood. They are also guided by values that promote security of cattle and the general well being of the clan. Hence, the notion of

values as a resilient aspect of the Karimojong social system is one which is central to our analysis. Knighton (2005) solely attributes this resilience to the vitality of the traditional religion that ingrained core values for survival among the people. In which case, the agency of religion remained at the heart of the Karimojong culture in spite of numerous external influences, and it often formed the basis for mobilization of various actors to think and act in certain ways considered concomitant with societal values.

In my analysis the Ugandan state becomes a central focus of analysis. The failure of the modern state to grasp the Karimojong values marked the genesis of the 'Karamoja problem' which puzzled both colonial and the post-independent governments alike. They particularly picked on cattle raiding as a debilitating practice for which the Karimojong are most known. Yet historically, the traditional form of cattle raiding was basically carried out for three main reasons; first it had a social and economic purpose, the move to construct an enhanced economic base which in turn raises one's social status in the society. Secondly, raiding carried with it the motive of gaining territorial control of grazing areas; this would consequently empower the raiders. Thirdly, it was meant to increase the herds after a disaster or loss, or just as an insurance against the unexpected misfortunes like drought, famine, and cattle epidemics. But many times cattle raiding were used only when extremes of drought or disease decimated herds and people badly needed to recoup. They would otherwise have tried through other mechanisms like exchanging or loaning stock and could only resort to raiding in the worst of circumstances.

It is particularly important for us to get a clear understanding of the ways in which the Karimojong themselves subjectively interpret their experiences and their perceptions. For instance, whereas we may perceive of cattle rustling as theft, the Karimojong think otherwise, thus the violence is equally perceived differently among the different actors. Additionally, agency (and power) significantly depends upon the emergence of a network of actors who become partially, though hardly ever completely, enrolled in the 'project' of some other person or persons' (Long, 1992: 23). It includes the emergence of social networks that enroll others in their own

‘projects’ and become enrolled in others’ ‘projects’. The enrolment is partially done and never complete, as they must leave some space for manipulation. The manipulation occurs in that process of interaction where actors endeavor to pursue their projects.

The use of successful agency then involves calculated manipulation of a network of social relations, cultural roles and control of cultural institutions. For instance, whereas women do not directly participate in controlling raiding activities, they only use their cultural roles as mothers and their tongue to influence their husbands and sons, for instance through praise songs and food as agency for cattle raiding. The notion of agency is also very significant in enabling a clear understanding of identity construction and social relationships. Agency enables a more vivid understanding of how individuals participate in social identification processes that trigger violence. The agency, while also reflecting the importance of the unconscious, affects the relationship between individuals. During the process of orchestrating violence in its various forms, the prevailing social relationships and identities are challenged and may perhaps become distorted as a result.

Turning to one of the emerging processes in the history of armed violence in Karamoja, I focus on the increasing involvement of humanitarian agencies in the conflicts. I start with the interventions by the international community such as the United Nations (UN) agencies and the international NGOs that have not only stretched out in size and scope but also taken up the state’s mandate. This stems from the fact that the international community looks at the Karimojong as a clear threat to international peace and security, so the UN and its associated agencies have had to seriously take on their responsibilities of protecting ‘other people’ from the Karimojong. I particularly look at the processes of humanitarian activity usually perceived as generous assistance targeting the hungry, malnourished and suffering population in need. Secondly, I also follow the ways through which humanitarian action interfaces with the cattle raiding which is largely viewed in the context of ‘new wars’ – with the UN agencies and NGOs severally accused of complicity in generating violence. Here, I focus on how the roles of these international actors get



rooted in patterns of the social that foster violence. I build up an understanding of how these global humanitarian aid networks draw together various processes that were previously isolated from each other in time or space; and also show how they provide the political agency for the state actors within which aspects of the social are contained.

In which case, it means that the process of organizing violence is characterized by a fluid social system of interconnected relationships, and the actions themselves signify the junction at which many sets of agencies converge, all of them taking part in the building up contacts, organizing the raids, smuggling of the arms, and sustaining the confrontations. It sometimes entails dynamic trade offs between the state and the various actors. Thus I undertake a wider perspective using the notion of Critical Junctions which allows us to summarize “the core analytical value of four closely related sets of social relations for understanding any human collectivity, sets that have been relatively neglected in a social science that took its modernist subdivisions and differentiations of time, space, and institutions - markets, states, civil societies etc. - as truths rather than just claims and programs. These are relations through time, relations in space, relations of power and dependency (internal as well as external), and the interstitial relations between nominally distinct domains such as economics, politics, law, the family” (Kalb and Tak 2005; 2).

#### **1.4.1 Violence linked with the social**

In this perspective, we open for a strong emphasis on the social as a way out for understanding the various forms of violence among the Karimojong themselves, and in relation to the state. We also look at the various relations or processes through which the social life is constructed and effectively violence is enacted. For that matter the study is focused on the “critical junctions” which shapes the different actors: largely, the modern state as well as its transformed and now armed Karimojong subjects. These interconnected junctures at which the processes meet expose the social relations that they see as fundamental to collective social life.

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In his books *The Society Against the State* and *The Archaeology of Violence* Pierre Clastres depicts how the ‘primitive’ political organization of the Yanomami and Guayaki people, who are largely egalitarian, resists hierarchy and the rise of any one individual over the rest of the tribe through complex political structures (Bowman 2001). His intention is to point out how violence pertains to socio-political as well as the economic structure of society, how it becomes the life-blood of the social system. A perspective that also allows us in this case, to see violence among the Karimojong as being so entrenched in the social system that it continues to constantly recreate itself. And as Clastres puts it in his situation, “If war ended, the heart of primitive society would stop beating, war or violence among such groups becomes the foundation, the essence of the society’s being, its purpose: primitive society is society for war, it is essentially a warrior society” (Clastres 1999; 82). He makes a distinction between primitive societies “with warriors” and the others that he refers to as “warrior societies”. In primitive societies, all the men are warriors who go to war when the community is in danger, while in warrior societies, a minority of the men continually goes to war, and prestige is their ultimate objective. “Society has mechanisms for neutralizing the centrifugal tendencies that are inherent in these situations: the warrior is constantly competing with himself and others, which necessarily leads to his death. In fact, in many cases the warrior mentality may even destroy the unity of the society” (Sastre 2008; 1025). Bowman (2001, 33) in a study of the relationship between violence and identity, says in reference to Clastres’ theories,

“If violence against others is a structural principle of community, how could community exist before others were encountered? Yet, how could there be others to encounter if there wasn’t already a community existing in terms of which to think otherness? Clastres shows, synchronically as it were, that violence and identity are profoundly interwoven in Amerindian society. His opposition of primitive non-statist societies to proto-statist and state societies enables us to think of a genealogy of violence within which two sorts of violence emerge within the space of the social – one normative and defensive, the other deviant and violative” (Bowman 2001; 33)

Thus, by going to war or engaging in certain forms of violent acts, various actors are able to persistently establish and uphold prestigious positions in their societies. They are also able to support the social system through violence and guaranteed redistribution of wealth. Consequently, violence becomes one of the society's mechanisms for counteracting the divergent forces that are inherent within its social order; "the warrior is constantly competing with himself and others, which necessarily leads to his death" (Sastre 2008). In addition, sometimes shifts occur that affect power differences between various actors to the extent of rendering some of the perceived aggressors as powerless as their assumed victims. Also, within certain frameworks of violence, men, women and children begin to assume fluctuating positions, either as perpetrators, victims, witnesses or even all three.

Taking us back to Riches triangle of violence, we have said that a perpetrator can also be a victim and often perceives himself/herself to be so. Thus depending on the social condition, Karimojong social relations may perceive violence in a form that convey a certain element of legitimacy to those that perpetuate violence. This feature is particularly observable in the 'social production and circulation of hate' whereby the 'images of the perpetrator and victim are frequently reversed, depending upon the perspective from which the memories of traumatic events and of everyday violence are seen and re-lived' (Das 1998; 109). The traditional enmity between the various ethnic groups that do not form alliances is rooted in such social conditioning. From their historical recollections and myths, they are able to justify the social production of hate for certain groups.

In this context, violence pertains to the socio-political as well as the economic structure of society; it becomes the life-blood of the social system. And just as Clastres puts it, "If war ended, the heart of primitive society would stop beating. War is its foundation, the essence of its being, its purpose: primitive society is society for war, it is essentially a warrior society" (Clastres 1999; 82). All support systems begin to relate to the war situation; the state apparatus, the humanitarian assistance, non-

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governmental work, the business of peace<sup>2</sup>, all function because violence persists. Accordingly, Clastres' view is based on the idea that warfare serves the purpose of guaranteeing the atomization of groups and is vital because primitive communities are characterized by their self-sufficiency and independence; "The logic of primitive society is the logic of the centrifugal, of the multiple" (Clastres 1999, 84), because primitive society is anti-division (internally) and anti-unification (externally) (Sastre 2008; 1025).

Clastres will insist that power is not the exclusive basis of every society, and indeed it is the social that forms the organization of the so-called stateless societies. Indeed for the contemporary Karimojong groups that still live at the periphery of the nation state, grasping the state as imagined, that is, with imaginary boundaries of social interaction vis-à-vis the physical or cultural and political boundaries of a state that directly affects their adaptation games is the point of contestation. The sovereignty of the state for people like the Karimojong is under question and the very Hobbesian notion of the state as a panacea to human problems and violence is being rejected.

### **1.4.2 Gender and the construction of persons**

One way of approaching the field of the social is through the lens of gender. Gender analysis takes the 'social definition' of women and men as the primary focus. This definition fluctuates among different societies and cultures, classes, ages and during different periods in history. Thus gender relations refer to the ways in which a given society defines the rights, responsibilities, and the identities of men and women in relation to one another (Bravo-Baumann, 2000). Hence, the gender analysis takes into account the different interests and responsibilities of men and women, which

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<sup>2</sup>This stems from the argument by Dave Eaton that peace-building NGOs scattered all over the Kenya-Uganda border have never understood the dynamics of the conflict, but are simply doing business, and in so doing perpetuating the conflict

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permits conceptualization of their specific contribution to the persistent violence. In a situation such as Karamoja's cattle raiding fields, an analysis of power relations goes beyond merely looking at the social hierarchies and patterns of dominance. It requires looking at the outcome of complex struggles and negotiations over influence, status, and resources, which necessitates an engagement with the networks of actors and community.

The Karimojong society is hierarchical and the division of labour and responsibilities is structured along their traditional notions of gender roles. Women for instance are not part of the age-set system that grades men. Upon marriage, women in principle belong to the generation and clan of their husband. Although the female initiation ritual of *akiwor* may confer a respectable senior status for the elderly women, it does not empower them to take part in the influential decision-making organs such as the council of initiated (male) elders, or *akiriket*. Thus they do not directly deliberate nor influence decisions relating to issues such as cattle raids, grazing grounds, revenge, bride wealth and political alliances which are all reserved for the *akiriket*. However, although the Karimojong women do not have formal access to traditional decision-making institutions, through their other culturally sanctioned social roles they engage in activities that put them in an indirect but very influential position in generating violence. Their influence as prized brides, as wives, as mothers and as elderly women particularly in relationship to cattle raiding and more recently peace campaigns demonstrates the rather concealed ways in which they are key actors in the persistent violence.

### **1.4.3 The state as a focus of persistent crisis**

Turning to the analysis of the state, I draw insights from Bruce Kapferer, that the appropriation of the means of violence by the state does not overcome violence; rather it ensures its continuing destructiveness towards humanity (Kapferer 2004; 7). Thus the state is at the centre of this incessant crisis; the state is "virtually the spectre" in such circumstances even where the state is assumed to be non-existent; its rabid influence over violence is evident across time and space (Kapferer and

Bertelsen 2009). This is a shift from the notion of the state as doing things in the interest of the people to the state running an almost corporate system with new forms of war situation facing it. As a result, the modern nation-states have ordered as well as regulated social production through their bureaucratic institutions. The modern state has embraced reforms that steered bureaucratic processes that began redrawing social realities in such a way that they may generate a relatively original habitus, or what we have referred to as the society of the state (ibid; 8) – a process that started with colonial rule where the foreigners struggled to control the situation, apparently taking on a corporate state dimension. The post colonial state simply perpetuated this notion by incorporating international policies and actors, which in effect, marked the development of corporate state structures that sought to transform the social.

Kapferer and Bertelsen (2009) emphasize two critical points; the first is the view that “the modern state, its agents, and its institutions, became consciously oriented to the creation or production of the very society in which its sovereignty was defined, and furthermore, engaged the citizenry in this task in a variety of discursive practices. Power and control became an effect of social production in line with state interest. This occurs in democracies as much as it happens in dictatorships. In other words, this echoes Nietzsche’s analysis where the subject becomes an effect of the cause; the activities of the agents and agencies of the state in social production and the creation of its moral order, and in varying degrees the involvement of the citizenry, can be seen as a major strategy for addressing forces that may challenge or resist the state (Kapferer and Bertelsen 2009; 7). The state becomes dependant on rhizomes in the Deleuze and Guattari sense to gain its sovereign status.

When it comes to Karamoja, it is part of a country in which the rule of law is more often than not displaced by Agamben’s (2005) state of exception, and people are increasingly subject to extra-judicial state violence. Institutions of the state whose central function would be both ‘ordering and protection’ of the social is virtually absent. For instance, there are no functioning police, prisons and courts of law to serve state interests and assure control. Thus the state makes use of its apparatus to enforce clampdowns on all forms of illegal armed individuals or groups to allow it

uphold its monopoly of power. The state thus refers to its apparatus and its monopoly of violence to suppress the population. In essence the state purposely works towards the destruction of the social; obliterating the very values which work to build resilience to different forms of shocks. Whereas the violence in its traditional form is integral to the social and is used to attend to the local livelihood problems, the incessant attack on society's values accelerates the impoverishment of people.

Kapferer and Bertelsen use a typical Deleuze and Guattarian sense to draw the links between the state and violence, and inspired by their analysis, I find the violence in the state – Karimojong dynamics similarly apparent in social processes although they will manifest in particular ways relative to the manifold historical, cultural and other contingencies of context (Kapferer and Bertelsen 2009; 3). But we need to emphasize the social processes to get the right context that is highlighted above. By applying the perspective that focuses on the social we are, first, able to see the changes in the forms and trends of violence after state interventions. Second, this enables us to look into the inner dynamics of cattle raiding and the violence, particularly exploring the basic values of the industry. Third, it also demonstrates how pastoralist's practices can put in order social relations of power that can violently defy the state.

In that way, we are able to see how the interactions and relationships between people, their environment and the processes of transformation associated with state interventions are all inextricably linked to violence – in either disarmament or provision of security or just as provision of human welfare. All the evolving interactions point toward the relationship between the state apparatus and society; the state and the security of the people; the state and the general human welfare of the people. Thus we see that understanding the notion of “the social” in many ways are connected to the state, connected to the economic rationality that Keene suggests, just as it is connected to the local space as well as wider spheres of society.

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#### 1.4.4 The East African state and sovereignty revisited

Whereas most existing research has tended to address the paradox of state sovereignty as challenges that come from outside the nation state boundaries, this thesis largely focuses on the internal threats that confront state sovereignty. Sovereignty is here conceptualized as a much more fluid and flexible concept than its standard characterization as fixed and immutable in international affairs (Bertelson 2006). In this thesis I argue that the whole notion of sovereignty has been revisited (Hansen and Stepputat 2006), and is no longer a thing monopolized by the state, but is constantly being contested and shared between the state and non-state actors.

In violence-prone areas like the East African drylands, the states have never been in its sovereign place, its sovereignty has persistently been contested, and to capture the reality therein we ought to focus on the interactions of “sovereign bodies”. Under colonialism, peripheral peoples like the Karimojong were militarily forced to operate within a nation-state system which clearly did not have a place for them. With the coming of postcolonial governments after the Second World War, the meanings and practices of sovereignty have experienced constant negotiation, as Kapferer et al states;

Although the nation-state remains the dominant political form, there have been a growing number of external as well as internal attacks on the nature of state sovereignty and autonomy, especially among those countries that have achieved independence from colonial control after World War II. Broadly, the social-economic orders of states as these were politically constituted in the idea of the nation-state have weakened. What might be referred to as the ‘society of the state’ (the order established through the relative totalizing power of the nation-state) has been disrupted by post-colonial processes of international dependency and the postmodern forces of globalization. This is expressed in the rise in civil wars, the emergence of contested or “wild sovereignties” (Kapferer 2004), and the scaling back of state intervention in what is widely referred to as civil society, which is increasingly viewed as being opposed and denied by the assertion of state authority (Kapferer, Eriksen, and Telle 2009; 5)



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While the Karimojong are certainly territorially located within the boundaries of a large nation-state structure, their experiences with the state only open ways for multiple control of the ‘sovereign’ territory and also point to loss of monopoly over the use of coercion by the state. Again, with the emergence of global network power of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international humanitarian aid agencies, the state was confronted by new realities, including forces of globalization and international policies that collectively undermine its sovereignty (Hansen and Stepputat 2006; 296).

The aftermath of 9/11 made it clear that national sovereignty, war, and security regimes still remained the hard kernel of modern states. It was also clear, however, that the new threat to the established world order would come from forces that were difficult to conceptualize—highly mobile, evanescent, and resolutely global networks, akin to what Deleuze & Guattari (1987 [1980]) call “nomadic war machines,” rhizomes of force (puissance) that leave institutionalized power (pouvoir) highly vulnerable (Hansen and Stepputat 2006; 296)

Nevertheless, when the state fails to perform its cardinal functions of securing territory, multiple sovereignties may begin to develop as rebels or groups take control of a subdivision of its territory. Multiple control of state territory means loss of monopoly over the use of coercion by the state. Such a situation in turn increases individual, group, and national insecurity. In state failure, the elements of statehood (people, territory, government, sovereignty) become more contested. I want to draw specific attention to the precarious nature of state authority in much of the drylands of East Africa where absence of state authority is often superseded or supplemented by alternative forms of social organization such as criminal networks (Hansen and Stepputat 2006). If the exercise of the rule of law, enforced solely by a central authority, is the mark of a state in the Weberian sense, parts of otherwise stable states such as Uganda would then pass for weak states. Theoretically, however, forms of state order do not operate on a continuum from a monopoly of violence to dispersion thereof between several actors. The principle of indivisible sovereignty, in the modern era, demands rule

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by one over a given territory (Chowdhury 2007). Hence my argument here is that the state in volatile areas like Karamoja has never been in its sovereign place; its sovereignty has persistently been contested, and to capture the reality therein we ought to focus on the interactions of “sovereign bodies” as suggested by Hansen and Stepputat (2001).

#### **1.4.5 Linking violence to weak states**

The phenomenon of ‘weak states’ is associated with states that for various reasons have failed to significantly exercise a monopoly of violence within their sovereign borders. Whereas the definition could broadly include many polities in the world, the term is appropriate for most conflict-ridden African states that fall within the taxonomies of ‘primitive societies’ that Pierre Clastres’ (1974) experiences in South America demonstrate. The expression ‘weak state’ is rather ambiguous, but some specific characteristics have been attributed to weak states: (1) lack of societal cohesion and consensus on what organizing principles should determine the contest for state power and how that power should be executed, (2) low capacity and/or low political will of state institutions to provide all citizens with minimum levels of security and well-being, (3) high vulnerability to external economic and political forces, and (4) a low degree of popular legitimacy accorded to the holders of state power by portions of the citizenry (Ohlson and Söderberg 2002).

The notion of weak state or state failure is associated with the transformation of the state as an oligarchic structure (Kapferer 2004) where it serves as the provider of social services (education, health, subsidies) to failure to provide and prop up warfare. The consequence may be individual, group, and societal increase in misery, and a simultaneous loss of authority, legitimacy, and cohesion within the state. Furthermore, it may result in fragmentation of the state into social bands or cleavages (Conteh-Morgan 2006). The critical point here is that as the state fails, its key institutions (civil service, police, judiciary, military) become increasingly corrupted and unprofessional (Conteh-Morgan 2006; Rotberg 2002; King and Zeng 2001) if not totally absent from some peripheral territories. Either gradually or speedily, loss of

vigour in the state gets to a point where its machinery becomes incapable of guaranteeing even a modicum of social welfare services. State failure can escalate into state collapse if the situation develops into open challenge by forces that either directly rebel or simply resist the state (Conteh-Morgan 2006).

Generally, when it comes to East Africa, colonialism ushered in the nation state as the basic modern organizational condition for society's existence, and it must follow that the state influences all the actions and inactions within its jurisdictional competence (Olaitan 2005). It is through this kind of notion that the post-colonial African state has been blamed for much of the development failure in Africa, suggesting that the problems of the state have to be addressed as part of the solution to the problems of underdevelopment (Yahaya, 1989; Gibbon, et al, 1992; Olaitan 2005). The nation state therefore must be seen as being able to provide social services such as health care and education, and other forms of infrastructure such as roads and railways which facilitate trade and economic development. In addition the state is expected to provide political goods/platforms which enable the citizenry to participate freely, openly and fully in the political processes and decision-making structures that define their nation (Rotberg 2004). When the post-colonial states started failing to deliver these goods to their inhabitants, their governments also began losing their legitimacy, and the continuing nature of the particular nation-state itself became questionable and illegitimate in the hearts and minds of its citizens (Abubakar 2007; Rotberg 2004).

Hence what begins to distinguish "strong" from "weak" states is the capacity of the state to ensure human security. The primary function of the state has been perceived as the duty to "provide that political good of security to prevent cross-border invasions and infiltrations, and any loss of territory; to eliminate domestic threats to or attacks upon the national order and social structure; to prevent crime and any related dangers to domestic human security; and to enable citizens to resolve their differences with the state and their fellow inhabitants without recourse to arms and other forms of physical coercion." This means that a state must as a matter of fact limit and control practices of society by constructing boundaries for all sorts of

behaviour. The state in Uganda for example manages a military and police force whose major duty is to regulate, protect, and coerce citizens into being law abiding members of the society. As Kapferer and Bertelsen (2009) describe, most states now claim a monopoly in the ordering and protection of society. The state has become associated with the ordinary, the everyday life of the people. It is in effect a system of components assembled together for the purpose of ensuring order.

This also reminds us of Max Weber's definition of the state as 'a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory' (Weber et al., 1991; 78), indicating that within a specific territorial space, the state has the ultimate authority to make and put into effect ways of ensuring social order, even if this may involve use of violence. The primary justification for the existence of the state is that of protection or security, wellbeing, and generally ensuring peace for its citizens. This Weberian concept of the state refers to three attributes that a modern state should have: a legislatively regulated, administrative, legal and binding authority over citizens, and a defined territory and a monopoly over the legitimate use of force. The state possesses the ultimate power with which it exercises its functions. It acts independently and free of control by other states. A state therefore implies the means through which a defined 'sovereign' territory is ruled. A state is more than a government because whereas governments change quite often, states are supposed to endure.

## 1.5 The Fieldwork

The fieldwork for this study was carried out in two visits; first, from July 2007 to July 2008, and then from December 2008 to January 2009. During this period, I visited all the five districts of Karamoja (Nakapiripirit, Moroto, Abim, Kotido and Kaabong) before finally settling in Kaabong district. I primarily used participant observation given its potential in unearthing the matrix of multiple relations which are otherwise difficult to get to. This was so because some of the behaviours and actions being studied were perceived as unlawful. Furthermore, with participant observation, I was able to uncover what lies beneath the overt violence and observe

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what people do in their ‘real life situations’ and not simply what they say that they do. Since observational research does not interfere with the activities of the people being studied, participant observation was particularly fit for investigating sensitive issues because such work provides rich, detailed descriptions about the unknown or the little known (Li 2008) but conditions on the ground constantly demanded a change of methods.

I did voluntary work with Dodoth Agro Pastoral Development Organization (DADO) facilitating peace meetings and involved holding meetings with elders, youth and women groups. During this time I made contacts and friends with a number of key persons who were knowledgeable and were at ease discussing sensitive issues related to the violence and small arms smuggling. I conducted several key informant interviews with specific people who I purposively selected because of their knowledge or position in the society. These ranged from warriors, elders, women, local government officials, local council leaders, NGO officials, soldiers to government bureaucrats including the Minister for Karamoja Affairs. Generally, these interviews took place within the fieldwork area in Kaabong district. Some interviews came spontaneously as we interacted in various activities and Peter who was always with me would translate when it was in *Ngikarimojong*. For the beginning, some of our interviews were not very successful when we started by asking on too many sensitive issues especially regarding cattle and guns. But as time went on, as I held many group meetings with different groups, attended nearly every peace meeting that was organized, and together with Peter who happened to come from Kaabong, we became familiar with almost everyone.

I also conducted a print media monitoring, collecting local newspaper articles on the violence in Karamoja. I followed up stories in three newspapers in Uganda; two of them were dailies; *The New Vision* and *The Monitor*, and then one weekly paper *The Observer*. I followed their stories about the disarmament process, government programmes and also reports about some of the atrocities committed by both the warriors and soldiers in the ‘Karamoja zone’. The papers would give general views of what other people outside the region feel but also serialize specific events as

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they occur in different parts of Karamoja. I would always build on these stories by visiting the actual sites and independently listen to the local versions of the particular story.

My fieldwork was for the most part a constantly changing process; the violence was constantly changing in both character and intensity. For that matter I also had to persistently negotiate and adjust the methods of my research to the ever-changing realities of the given situation and security in my locality. I joined in the evening parties which was part of the Karimojong daily routine in Kaabong. My assistant Peter was a renowned social person who attended many ceremonies, and as an educated young University graduate who had been a research assistant to other ethnographers before, he had no problem where we could go. When three weeks elapsed, I began to take part in the conversations even when Peter was not available; and interestingly, the security situation was always part and parcel of our daily conversations. Before you settle down in a particular place, shortly after exchanging greetings, you ask “how is it here” as if to know whether you can stay on or move to a safer place. A self-reflexive awareness of the security situation in the region, my personal position at any given time and/or the context became critical factors in mitigating self-risks. Kaabong district, which was my original field site, for instance, was unfortunately home to one of the most heavily armed groups in the region. It is also the gateway to weapons trafficking routes running across international boundaries to both Sudan and Kenya.

My first location was in Moroto, some 840 kilometres away from Uganda’s capital city Kampala. In a remote village near Moroto town called Nadunget, I spent close to three months in relative safety. I was not only facing the risks that any ‘foreigner’ would face in Karamoja but I was also being considered as a ‘security threat’ as both the state agents and the local Karimojong couldn’t come to terms with my intentions. The state apparatus kept following my movements and interactions with people to gain some information on the dealings of my research subjects. But with the unpredictable and deteriorating security situation as the forceful disarmament continued coupled with the rumours of impending raids from the Pokot

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of Kenya, I had to re-evaluate my own situation and move to a 'safer' area. I decided to join a local friend and informant and moved further north to Kaabong where I had the intention of studying the dynamics of the cross-border conflicts as well as weapons trafficking.

Although I remained loyal to the basic goals of my study, my work became more the ethnography of an unfolding process rather than that of a particular locality. For instance I began by joining a local football team of youths (my assistant was already a member) who played in the evenings to pass the time. Through the use of participant observations, I was able to observe the interactions that were generally common knowledge. But at the same time got the opportunity to closely interact with the young men on my own and I was also able to specifically experience their interactions at the various social gatherings we would end up in at the end of each day. Although I had to use an interpreter, I also had the advantage of being a native *Luo* speaker with a good command of Kiswahili, both of which were widely spoken. Because of this I was able to freely throw myself into any conversation and the people would be eager to talk with me since there were no prying ears of an interpreter. At the time, since forceful disarmament was ongoing I often did not even have to bring up the topic of violence as security concerns were part and parcel of daily conversations. This also made it simple for me to join conversations which were relevant to my study since I could easily bring up an issue for discussion without attracting suspicion, and observing the people's reactions helped me to gather much more detailed information.

Towards the end of September 2007, I moved to Kotido and then settled in Kaabong district where much of the resistance to the forceful disarmament operation was still strong. My move was mainly prompted by two reasons; first was the spirited resistance that the people here put up against the operation as a result of being in possession of more guns, and secondly, my discussions with the officials had revealed that the cross-border trade especially along the Sudan and Kenya borders, was possibly a major source of firearms. I decided to pitch camp in the farthest district of Kaabong so I could observe the different relationships that various groups

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across the borders have with various sections of the Karimojong. I was able to alternately stay in Loyoro, Lolelia, Kathile, Karenga, Kapedo, Kalapata, and Kaabong depending on the security situation. Being near the border, I was able to cross over to Sudan to Lotukei and interact with the residents of neighbouring Didinga communities across the border with the neighbouring southern Sudan. While there, my interactions enabled me to further delve into the ways in which such cross-border relationships influence access to weapons, trade networks, physical threats, customary and commercial cross-border raiding patterns, peace making and access to services such as education and health facilities which are lacking on one side of the border. This brought into focus the regional patterns of adaptation strategies that condition unrelenting violence.

In December 2007, there was an outbreak of deadly meningitis that the Ministry of Health in Uganda characterized as subtypes X, Y and Z, and which was believed to be resistant to drugs. This was most severe in Kotido district with a rise in the number of affected cases also recorded in the districts of Moroto and Nakapiripirit. During this time, movement was restricted and I had to move to the 'safe areas' and stayed in the neighbouring districts of Pader, Abim and later also moved to Kampala. In Kampala, I held in-depth interviews with officials in the Ministry of State for Karamoja Affairs (MSKA) and even had the chance to speak to the minister himself. However, the minister was always unavailable, and every day I visited the offices, I was told he would be around tomorrow. I only managed to get his cell phone, briefly talked to him and made appointments that were never kept. I finally caught up with him at a peace ceremony he came to preside over in Kaabong where we discussed government policies especially on security, disarmament and development in Karamoja. I followed up these discussions when I went to Kampala at the Ministry headquarters, and they centred on the implementation of the then lately released revised Karamoja Integrated Disarmament and Development Programme (KIDDP).

My sojourn with the community in Abim and Pader in December 2007 and January 2008 was made much easier in that I did not need an interpreter to work



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among the *Luo* that inhabit these areas. Being a native *Luo* speaker myself, and at the same time being from ‘outside’ the group, I was able to observe events first hand as a participant, as well as reflect on them as an ‘outsider’. Of particular interest were the different relationships between the Karimojong who flooded into these areas in search of pasture in the dry months of December, January and February, and the largely Acholi agricultural groups. I was able to look into the ways in which the heavily armed cattle-dependent groups relate with unarmed groups that are less dependent upon cattle.

When I returned to Kaabong in February 2008, I investigated the problem of the gender and generational dimensions of the conflict. I participated in various activities and social events that related to the traditional decision-making institutions, specifically observing the not so obvious decision-making roles played by women and young men (*Karachuna*) in spinning the violence. I was concerned with the cultural notions of masculinity and femininity. I held personal interviews with male youths (*Karachuna*) on their life experiences and how they were involved with women (both unmarried and the elderly) in processes that generate violence and the demand for weapons. I paid particular attention to the construction of gender identities and gender relations and in turn probed how they configure violent behaviour and the use of firearms.

In the course of the fieldwork, I had the opportunity to participate in a number of local peace meetings and specifically the historic cementing of ties with the Didinga that took place at Kanangoro hot springs at the border areas with south Sudan. This also included attending the celebrations marking the sacrifice and contribution of women (particularly the late Laura Aya) towards the Dodoth – Didinga peace and reconciliation. Towards the end of February 2008, I attended a similar high level peace and reconciliation meeting in Kaabong hospital with the elders from Turkana. A similar meeting was held in March 2008 with the Jie in Kotido but this ended in violence when the two parties could not agree over compensation for the Jie goats that the Turkana warriors had rustled weeks earlier. I held several in-depth interviews and group discussions with the delegates. In the

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remaining months from April to July 2008, I carried out in-depth interviews, drew life histories of specific people in the manyattas and held group discussions with kraal leaders, elders (*ngikasikou*), male youths or *Karachuna* (*ngikaracuna*), women (*ngaberu*), female youths (*ngapesur*), district political leaders, public servants, soldiers from the UPDF, members of civil society organizations (CSOs), community and political leaders from the Didinga community in south Sudan and Turkana in northern Kenya. The in-depth interviews were also extended to the community and political leaders among the Jie, Matheniko and Bokora ethnic groups in Karamoja. Community and political leaders among the neighbouring Acholi communities in Pader district were also interviewed.

I made another short visit to Kaabong in December 2008 and January 2009. During this visit, I particularly checked the information I had earlier gathered on how problems between different groups on the borders become nation state problems, and how commercialization and general modernization shape the adaptive responses of such groups. I followed the herders and traders on their commercial trips to the border areas, finding out about their negotiations and processes of making amends.

Though I sometimes had difficulty accessing security restricted and extremely dangerous areas, employing the field method of participant observation, allowed me penetrate into the life-world of my research subjects, enabling me access to sensitive information. I found this risky and it could have led to the possibility of victimization in the field of me and my companions. Thus, for the purposes of protecting my sources, and for my personal safety, I allowed my informers themselves to implement the safety measures. For the time I was there, I used a warrior as my guide and as an interpreter (where I needed one) and it was they (the participants) who always suggested the patterns of behavior that they thought were important for us to follow for their (and my) safety and security. In this way, we managed to negotiate spaces for confidentiality that reduced the risks of the government security forces or state agents arresting us.

## 1.6 Overview of the thesis

The rest of this thesis is structured as follows; Chapter Two highlights the socio-cultural and political organization of the Karimojong; describing the nature and forms of cattle raiding and its associated violence. It points out the symbolic links drawn between people and cattle, and their associations to those cultural processes sustaining ideologies which underpin cattle raiding. All of such processes involved in the social construction of personhood like the rites of passage as witnessed in the structure of generation-sets or enactment of masculinity are loaded with potent metaphors for the enactment of 'controlled' violence. Building on these points, the chapter argues that the current forms and levels of violence are outcomes of historical and dramatic developments of which being a Karimojong and other practices within each group have radically been transformed. The chapter suggests that rather than looking at the practice in isolation, it should be located within the wide range of other parallel processes to understand its influence.

Chapter Three continues with a deep exploration of the social construction of personhood, reviewing how violence has impacted on the construction of social persons. The chapter defines how gender identities and relations are shaped and impacted by cattle raiding and increasingly by acquisition and the use of modern weapons. Particular attention is paid to the processes that lead to cracks in the patriarchal values and marital social order. A close scrutiny of various experiences of youths in the warrior grades and both the married and unmarried women is carried out to trace their intersection with evolving forms of violence. The young men are presented as that segment of the society which is often at the frontlines of any armed violence associated with pastoral groups. The chapter discusses how new forms of violence influenced the demand factors for increased armament, citing specifically the local gendered notions of masculinity and femininity, and how changes in the social structure might have affected the gendered socio-economic deprivation in the region. It shows that the socio-cultural transformations resulting from armed violence can be highly gendered and essentially intensify power imbalances between women,

men and children in several ways that make the lives of the most vulnerable even less secure.

Chapter Four gives a historical reconstruction of the processes leading to establishment of the colonial state and the post-colonial state and their relations with other processes in Karamoja. It begins to pay particular attention to external actors focusing on the fact that cattle raiding and conflicts are not recent developments in the history of violence in the pastoral region. The historical contexts show that violence assumes various forms and dimensions as Karimojong engagements with various local and external forces continue to reproduce more complex varieties. Out of such engagements, the Karimojong in many ways get connected to a much wider economic and political system of interrelationships between various groups and processes. It points to the historical accounts of colonialism, demonstrating how redrawing of territorial boundaries and setting up of colonial state apparatus all incorporated new dynamics for group interactions. This was also heightened by the subsequent establishment of the state accompanied by introduction of the extremely structured central administration in a society predominantly autonomous with its own traditional forms of political systems. Thus, the chapter argues that the rising tensions that develop between the Karimojong and emerging power bases in the region can only be fully understood when seen against different and parallel processes in time. These include; colonialism, the processes of reorganization after the Second World War and the politics of statehood that followed in the second half of the twentieth century. This history is then weighed against all the corresponding processes of the time and the subjective recollections of the people to shed more light on how the violence builds up.

Chapter Five interrogates in greater depth the hostile relationship between the state and the Karimojong, and shows how state interventions and the flow of comprehensive political and economic forces influence the transformation of pastoralism. The political and economic environments that are set by the state in the form of policies, laws and ‘quarantine’ on their nomadic character are highlighted as competing processes stimulating violence. The chapter demonstrates that among

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nomadic pastoralists, power is held by the social group itself and interventions by the state only created new disruptive forces external to the pastoral society. Even where the state imposed its chiefs, they lack power, the institutions don't function and essentially there is an apparent discontinuity between the state and the society. The state is in crisis and sometimes its 'shadow' presence only legitimizes the use of violence and entrenches the local moral perceptions that contribute to continuous violence. It also puts to question other recent studies with the widely held view that attribute the persistent violence to the 'failed state'.

From a historical point of departure, Chapter Six moves the discussion into an exploration of the intersection between the contemporary processes of globalization and potential for changing social and economic processes at the state level on one hand, and the its impacts on the local dynamics generated by changing situations. It explores the systematic rise of both international and local non-state actors in the conflict, performing various roles and lighting up wide ranging transformation in different aspects. It highlights the junctions between social practice and the transnational processes pointing to the fact that "social practice necessarily glides, slips, or trips retrospectively into microhistory; microhistory emerges prospectively from the temporal practices of social life. Practice – the doing, and therefore the creation of social life – produces microhistories of living, just as these micro-histories shape the living of lives" (Handelman 2005; 30). A close examination of the agency in these macro and micro processes allows for them to be retrospectively reconstructed looking at both the pastness, and how it moves toward or into the present.

The concluding chapter also demonstrates how the various processes operating at different levels and periods in time all converge at critical points to illustrate production and reproduction of violence. It reemphasizes the necessity of combining discourses of history, culture, the state, and other international actors to reach a more realistic understanding of the armed violence in the Karimojong cluster. Based on the discussions in the previous chapters, it concludes with the position that while conflict and violence is not new in this region, the current trends, intensity and dimensions

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has brought with it innovative processes which need to be studied in comprehensive ways.

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## CHAPTER TWO

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## **2. BEING KARIMOJONG IN WAR AND PEACE: values, institutions and social organization**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The Karimojong in Uganda are one of several ethnic groups that inhabit the dryland region of north-eastern Uganda. They are part of the Plains Nilotes ethnic group which is also part of a wider linguistic community of the Ateker. These Nilotes originated from the Ethiopian highlands from where they split into different groups to migrate around the sixteenth century (Pazzaglia, 1982). They migrated from the Lake Turkana area in different directions: one group moving into Kenya and Tanzania, and another into Uganda, including the Karimojong, Jie, Dodoth, Toposa and the Turkana; making up the Karimojong Cluster, whose members shared the same features of social organization (Gulliver 1955). The Karimojong are linguistically intelligible with their southern neighbours; the Iteso of Kenya and Uganda, and their history and culture closely interlocks with that of the Turkana (Turton, 1994).

They occupy the Karamoja region that lies in the northeastern corner of Uganda bordering the Sudan to the North, the republic of Kenya to the East, the Ugandan districts of Sironko and Kapchorwa to the South; and Kumi, Katakwi, Lira, Pader and Kitgum to the West. Karamoja covers a semi-arid area of 27,200 km<sup>2</sup> (Mkutu 2008). It is divided into five politico-administrative districts namely; Nakapiripirit, Moroto, Kotido, Abim and Kaabong. The districts are divided on the basis of the major ethnic groups of the Karimojong. These include; the Dodoth, Jie, Labwor, Bokora, Matheniko, Pian, Chekwii and Pokot. According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics the Karimojong population totals 954,000 (UBOS 2003) people comprising all the various Karimojong ethnic groups which are typically identified as the “Karimojong Cluster” living in the arid and semi-arid sub-region.

The region encompasses eleven different ethnic sub-groups of the Karimojong people. Among these different groups the notion of the ‘Karimojong’ as a unified



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group does not really exist. It is viewed as a superficial and foreign creation of different ethnicities classed as a tribe. The various groups are homogeneously spread in the region, covering specific geographical regions. The Jie for instance occupy the central parts of the region in present day Kotido district, the Dodoth live in the north, covering Kaabong district with the minority Nyangia, Napore and Ik (Teuso). And the other groups who consider themselves the proper Karimojong live in the southern areas. These include; the Matheniko, the Tepeth and the Bokora who are inhabitants of Moroto district. The Pian and the Pokot share Nakapiripirit district, while the Labwor inhabit Abim district. While these groups are not homogeneous, they all share the same language, *Ngakarimojong*, except the Labwor who speak a Luo dialect.

In their everyday interactions, group relationships are always fluid and there are no permanent enemies or friends. These clusters of Ugandan Karimojong have a series of complex alliances and traditional enmities within their own groups and across the neighbouring groups including the pastoral peoples of southern Sudan, northern Kenya, and as far away as the Ethiopian borders. They involve loose links dictated and measured by strategic or opportunistic alliances built around cattle and rivalry for water, pasture and security.

In terms of natural features, Karamoja has a semi-arid climate with semi-arid vegetation composed of mainly thorny scrub and short savannah. The area is part of the African peneplain forming a plateau stretching from the top of the Turkana escarpment of the east African Rift Valley to the Nile (Knighton 2005). It has bi-modal variable rainfall pattern ranging from about 600 mm per annum to 900 mm, and for this reason, it is almost impossible to practice crop farming except in Abim district, hence the high reliance on rearing livestock for their subsistence. There are a few streams and rivers that flow from the hills and mountains to the east of Karamoja and pour towards the south and west. These rivers flow in deep wide channels usually filled with water after heavy storms during the wet seasons, but are dry for the greater part of the year. But the river drainage banks remain visible as deep sandy beds of the watercourses. For instance the river courses cutting through the plains include the

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Nangolapalon and the Dopeth with their tributaries the Longiro, Lokwakel and Lokibuwo flowing southwards towards Lake Bisinia. There is also the Kapeta and the Kotidani flowing westwards to join the Moroto and then the Nile (Lamphear 1976). However, these rivers are all seasonal, flooding during the rainy seasons and becoming completely dry for the greater part of the dry seasons. Sometimes they dig up the dry river beds to try to find some water still seeping up from the bottom of the river banks. When all is dried up, they are left with no option but to migrate in search of water.

Thus their nomadic way of life is dictated by ecological conditions that compel them to wander the entire drylands in search of water and pastures for their animals in the drier months of the year. Most parts of the community have at least one planting season annually which is used to grow mainly sorghum to augment their diet of mainly meat, blood and milk (Dyson-Hudson 1966; Lamphear 1976). The planting season, which is also referred to as the wet season, ranges from late March to the middle of September, while the dry season begins in September and goes on until March. Although the Karimojong are largely dependent upon cattle for their food, they cultivate some sorghum, maize and beans near the rivers. Most cultivation occurs around Karenga, Kapedo and Kathile in the district of Kaabong, Kangole in the district of Moroto, and around Kotido in Kotido district north of the Toror Hills. Much of the sorghum and maize grain they cultivate is used to make the local sorghum or maize beer, and the rest of it is eaten.

The ways in which the Karimojong manage their ecology have important ramifications for social organization. Natural resource management is based on communal land tenancy systems. When they migrate, a particular area is cleared for settlement, worked and secured to ensure protection from intrusion by wild animals and wandering armed groups. Settlement is dictated by the availability of water and pastures in the wet and dry seasons, which are essential for their own survival and that of their cattle. The smallest unit of human geography is the yard known as an *ekal*, where a thorny wood fence is used to encircle approximately fifty square meters to form a homestead. Depending on the season, cattle are usually divided up between

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the more permanent homesteads known as *ere* and the actual kraals *awi* which may be located several kilometres away from the permanent homestead in the dry season. The cattle left within the permanent homesteads are usually heifers, bullocks and lactating cattle that provide milk and blood for sustenance of the children, women and the elderly (Dyson-Hudson 1966; Lamphear 1976). Like other pastoralists in the region, land and most grasslands are communally owned and administered by de jure or de facto control (Sanford 1983; McCabe 1990; Fratkin et al. 1994). The movement of cattle herds during the dry season in search of water and pasture is an essential element of land management. As pastoralists, they gain rights of entry to pastures and water across space and time through reciprocal rights to common pool resources sometimes belonging to other groups in a different territory. These rights to exploit another group's land and water resources are the basis for the non-exclusive tenure and land use systems associated with pastoralism.

## 2.2 Forms of social organization

The Karimojong are organized in clusters of patrilineal groups, coming together in lineages and clans with relationships constructed around livestock, particularly cattle, which is used for both subsistence and payment of brideprice. For a Karimojong man, if social organization is to be regarded as a network of interpersonal relationships, then the significant sectors of it can be demarcated in terms of those persons with whom he has mutual or common interests in cattle (Dyson-Hudson 1966; 87). The society consists of clusters of agnatic descent groups that are normally dispersed, but can also be condensed and structurally separated through the constant limitation of descent reckoning to three generations, inclusive of living adults, and they regard themselves as interconnected less by descent than by affinity. These agnatic descent groups are taken to be sub-clans deriving from one or another of nineteen clans from which they take their names, stock brands, children's hair markings, domestic ritual observances, and food prohibitions. The sub-clan is usually considered more significant than the clan because it marks the limits of descent reckoning, exogamy, and widow inheritance, and may exhibit its own modification of

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clan name, brand, and ritual, all of which is constructed in relation to their cattle stocks, as Dyson-Hudson explains;

For the most part, the Karimojong see groups of kin in pragmatic rather than formal terms, that is, as a totality of significant and specific relationships with individuals. Such a view explicitly involves a mutual stock interest between the persons concerned. A kin relationship which does not centre on common interest in a single herd, or involve reciprocal stock transfer, is a relationship without content, for it lacks both the means and the occasion for effective expression. Relatives are accordingly distinguished as "cattle kin" and "water kin." Cattle kin may include close affines as well as immediate agnates; water kin is a residual category comprising all members of the descent group with whom no relationship of stock transfer is maintained. Rights and obligations of cattle kin are expressed in terms of stock sharing, those of water kin simply in terms of expected hospitality. Cattle kin form the liability, compensation, and redress group for the Karimojong, for stock figure in virtually every clash of interests, and it is the group of cattle kin that is most closely touched by the stock affairs of any of its members (Dyson-Hudson 1963; 356).

A given neighbourhood will consist of about ten or more homesteads with people who are personally known to each other and who are linked by complex ties of kinship, affinity, and contractual friendship. People in the same neighbourhood mutually support one another and share the communal resources, for example water, which is drawn from one nearby source. They till gardens within the same area and take common action in matters of human and cattle security, ritual, and the settlement of disputes. In a typical homestead there is a man at the heart of a field of direct, interpersonal and enduring relationships. The field is constructed on a network of social relations specific to the man. These relations exhibit a variety of practical, moral and emotional contents, but they also contain the basic common principle by which they are brought together into a significant social system (Gulliver 1955; 3). In each homestead or household, interpersonal relationships as well as modes of expression are bound around reciprocal rights over cattle, and social order is maintained by the many ties and obligations inherent in the kinship system. A man controls these relations and has the right to claim gifts of animals for certain socially defined roles.

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Gulliver (1955) in his book *The Family Herds* describes this from the Jie setting where a house, *ekal*, forms a unit of organization in an enclosed fence – under the supervision of a particular wife. She is responsible for the upkeep of members in that house, which is her husband's homestead. It contains her huts, her granary-baskets and all her other possessions. A 'house' is founded by a set of full-brothers who upon the death of their father gain independence from other parallel sets of men like half-brothers and paternal cousins. Such a house owns its own livestock over which it exercises sole rights of use and disposal, through the authority of the eldest brother. Inside a typical Karimojong *manyattas* (homesteads), there are several huts constructed in a large enclosed space with only one entrance. A strong fence of thorns is built around it to protect the family from cattle raids. The *manyattas* also come together to form a socio-economic unit called a *kraal*. They encompass all the elders, women, children and the warrior groups who collectively herd the cattle, donkeys, goats and sheep as one grazing unit to provide a stronger force that can shelter the livestock and counter enemy attacks in case of a raid. The kraal has a leader who is chosen by consensus; but on the basis of being a courageous man, a sharpshooter, a prolific seer, or a wealthy and generous person who is popular in the neighbourhood. The kraal leader uses his privileged position to form alliances among the herders, not only to protect the cattle but also to reach consensus on general matters concerning livestock management.

Among the members of a given kraal or *manyattas* there is usually constant co-operation in livestock management, and residential as well as everyday goings-on. Most of all, there is recognition of reciprocal obligations to support each other in dealings involving exchange of cattle such as bride wealth, compensations and gifts. Usually the unmarried girls are part of a homestead but when they get married they leave the group and become members of their husband's family. But as mothers, women occupy high positions of prestige with authority over their daughters-in-law and are highly respected as experts in family ritual and taboos. However, women do not own stock since this is an area reserved for only men. A woman vests her economic interests in her sons to gain control here.

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Being an exogamous group, members of the same clan cannot get married and generally men avoid marriage with women from their mother's lineage or clan. In terms of adolescent social life, parents often leave relationships between boys and girls to be arranged by the young people themselves. They pretend to take no interest in what the young people are doing until sexual intercourse takes place. According to an elderly woman in Kaabong town, girls venerate their virginity and they always move in groups to form a sizeable force that can counter any intruding male. However, young men waylay them on water point routes and when a virgin has been forcefully lured into sexual intercourse (literally raped), then marriage must take place. It is at that point that the parents intervene to follow up the due process of marriage.

Marriage only takes place after a series of negotiations are carried out by a delegation of the suitor's close agnates with the girl's parents, and bride wealth is agreed upon. If a girl gets pregnant out of wedlock, it becomes a concern of the entire community, because children are considered as valuable community assets but the mother must be 'married with cattle' (Dyson-Hudson 1966). Whenever conception outside marriage occurs, then the boy's parents must go to the girl's parents and offer an apology (*edyekir*) as well as look for harmony (*akidyek*). They must pay compensation (*ecula*) of a certain agreed number of cows after the birth of the baby. Upon marriage, a daughter leaves her father's home and becomes a full wife who migrates to live with her husband. She is ritually incorporated into his clan and thus into his family and clan (Gulliver 1955). While women are always eager and looking out to marry a successful man who has wealth in cattle, men are always reluctant to embark on the laborious task of marriage, which presupposes a certain personal wealth in cattle (Knighton 2005; 81). Even the men who live in urban areas or the educated working in Kampala and other towns in Uganda maintain herds of cattle in the protected kraals to show how 'successful' they are.

Payment of bride price is the basis for establishing marriage and related bond partnerships. It is also one of the most valued ways to acquire livestock and it occurs when two families establish ties through marriage (Gulliver, 1955; Johnson, 1999).

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Bride wealth (also called stock of marriage) is transferred from the family of the groom to the relatives of the bride. The transfers usually do not occur all at once but over an extensive period of time and, for first marriages, symbolize the initial stage of a man's independence as a herd owner. Often, the bride wealth for the first marriage is from animals inherited from one's father, especially after his death. For the subsequent marriages, the potential bridegroom goes to each of his stock associates and begs from them contributions of all kinds of stock for about half of the bride wealth (Gulliver 1955).

## 2.3 Forms of political organization

Despite so many years of continuous engagement and pressures from 'outsiders', the Karimojong have persistently kept any non-tribe mates "outside" their socio-political formations; that is, the pastoralist societies of Karamoja have remained closed and independent. When it comes to dealing with groups considered external such as those sections of Karimojong that are foreign to a particular territory, strict rules are set for safeguarding their independence, usually derived from their social equality. Political relations occur within the Karimojong scheme of values, in which cattle are counted as the greatest good and their possession is considered a significant prerequisite for establishing a family, realizing economic security, gaining social value as well as for gaining personal contentment. Men have to raid and work towards acquiring more and more herds as a way of maximizing and safeguarding their groups and strengthening the resource base necessary for their welfare, but also to weaken alien groups by depleting their herds. Any form of raiding taken in pursuit of the wellbeing of the group is considered action which benefits the Karimojong as a political community, and which will receive the support of any members of other sections who happen to be near the scene of activity (Dyson-Hudson 1963).

Within specific neighbourhoods, groups are incorporated into corporate political units through customary group gatherings for ritual and sometimes these rituals actually bring several groups together for a common good. These public rituals are loci of political activity and a significant aspect of the internal political relations

of Karimojong society. Within the clans there are age and generation sets structured to perform specialized roles; a form of political organization that must also be understood as part of the general adaptive process. The herdsmen for example, leave their permanent settlements during dry seasons (*ere/ngirerias*) and move their cattle to the temporary grazing camps (*nawii/ngawuiyoi*) near pasture and watering places, often crossing over into the territory of neighbouring groups, for pasture as well as security and markets. The warrior sets (young men, 15 – 30 years old) play a significant role in both the economic wellbeing of the society and in the acquisition of identity, wealth and status through courageous deeds such as raiding that make them heroes. But at the same time they are marginal in the various decision-making processes in the society.

### 2.3.1 The age set system

The political system structures adolescent boys into a corporate group that confers upon them adult responsibilities, and it requires that they begin to perform much more political roles outside the *manyattas* as soon as they reach puberty. As a mechanism for appropriating power all Karimojong males go through a series of age and generation-sets. These age sets function as bonding mechanisms between the different Karimojong territorial groups. There are five age sets - the interval being about five to six years - that comprise one of the two generation sets; the elders, and the juniors. A man's first initiation is called *asapan*, whereby a young man is admitted to the organization and earns a voice in assemblies, (*akiriket*) hence becoming an adult man as explained below:

Adult male Karimojong are recruited into named corporate groups of coevals, termed *ngasapaneta* or *ngasapanisia*, and are here spoken of as age-sets. Each age-set comprises all those men who have performed the initiation ceremonies within (ideally) a single five-to-six-year period throughout the entire tribe. Five age-sets amalgamate into a named corporate group of wider time span and larger membership, termed an *anyamet*, to which I give the name generation-set. Each generation-set thus comprises all men of the tribe who have performed initiation within the period of 25 to 30 years ideally covered by its constituent age-sets. Every generation-set is considered as begetting the generation-set following it, so that adjacent generation-sets are considered related as fathers to sons



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and alternate generation-sets as grandfathers to grandsons. At any one time, two generation-sets have corporate existence: one is senior and closed to further recruitment; the other is junior and still in the process of acquiring its full complement of five serially recruited age-sets. The two generation-sets extant at any one time are part of a total series of four distinctively named generation-sets which succeed each other cyclically and continually. Since recruitment to age-sets is continuous and serial, the time span of a single complete cycle of the total series of generation-sets is ideally 100 to 120 years (Dyson-Hudson 1963; 359).

Power is transmitted to the junior generation set through a ritual in a ceremony called *akidung amuro* (Koning 2003; 42). It is the senior elders who take the responsibility of organizing and leading all forms of ritual activities. The seniority of an individual elder is determined by the age-set system, which directly controls the rites of passage for the men. Only initiated men may take part in most ceremonies, and the fact that they are initiated is believed to make their participation in the ritual especially efficacious (Gulliver 1955). Women do not go through the age-set system but share the age-set status of their first husband, whereby they also deserve the prestige and the honour of their husbands. However a special ritual ceremony is also in place for women to sanctify their entrance into a group of elderly women with its own name, which is added to their husband's status. The woman's initiation rite is known as *akiwor*, and it celebrates their entrance into one of six age sets. When the sixth group has celebrated its *akiwor* the cycle starts again from the first name (Novelli 1997; 223).

But today there are no *akidung amuro* organized to transfer power to the younger generation, and the current traditional elders in Karamoja have grown very old. They all fall into the category of the retired elders' generation called *ngikathikou*. Although they can still be consulted on critical issues, in the current situation, they cannot influence the trend of things given the socio-economic transformation of the region and its people. For instance, they cannot make decisions regarding the protected kraals or the role soldiers play in grazing of cattle. The *ngikathikou* largely stay in the permanent homesteads, helpless while the last two age groups of the junior generation set take up the operational authority and are referred to as the kraal-

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leaders. These kraal leaders derive their power and status from the size or number of herds they own. In truth, these are also the most powerful people who own and command weapons that can provide security for the clan; in other words, they are respected for their personal ingenuity, wealth and access to the ancestral spirits. During the local assemblies known as *ekokwa* it is these wealthy men who lead in decision-making, for instance regarding when and where to move to next and in what formations.

The Karimojong are largely agro-pastoralists, with most of them relying on livestock rearing as their major source of survival. To supplement the subsistence from livestock, they cultivate millet and sorghum, and during periods of extreme food shortages, they gather wild fruits and vegetables to survive on. Thus, the frequent and devastating droughts and limited annual rainfall has encouraged transhumance to flourish as a way of coping with the periodic scarcity of natural resources such as water and pasture. The entire region receives very little rainfall. It is in such a harsh ecological locale that the Karimojong have to struggle to eke out a living. For the most part, the focus of their economic, social and spiritual wellbeing is centred on cattle. The social significance of the livestock among the Karamojong cluster includes but is not limited to the following: making sacrifices as per the community's cultural beliefs; as a source of life, without which life has no meaning; as a measure of wealth; for enhancing social links in marriage/bride wealth; and use in other life cycle ceremonies such as births, naming and funeral feasts. The Karamojong cluster uses livestock for other rituals such as: rainmaking, cleansing of families, communities or livestock, protection against curses or disease outbreaks, treating sick persons and in initiation ceremonies.

A Karimojong child is not born just into a nuclear family but into a long series of communities occupying progressively wider territory, which he soon learns from the activities of the rest of his family (Knighton 2005; 26). They are still largely cattle herders (Dyson-Hudson 1966; Lamphear 1976), although the Dodoth who live in the rainier and hillier northern parts of Karamoja carry out some cultivation of cereals such as maize, sorghum and beans to complement cattle herding. However, since the

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great famine of 1980, the Karimojong have experienced persistent droughts, famines, epidemics, and violent armed cattle raiding, which many scholars have linked to factors such as environmental hazards, resource scarcity, small arms proliferation, and the political insecurity in the region (Quam 1996; Ocan 2000; Mirzeler and Young 2000; Gray 2000).

They are mainly known in the Ugandan media and academic circles as the most heavily armed tribal group, whose lethal violence is driving them to extinction. At least going by media reports in Uganda, about thirty percent of Uganda's tribes could be extinct by 2015. Six tribes among them, including the Karimojong clusters, have been noted as having declined by more than 95% in five years<sup>3</sup>. These are said to be the Ik (also called Teuso), Dodoth, Ethur, Jie, Nyangia and Napore. According to *The state of Uganda population report 2008*, 19 tribes out of the 61 registered a decline in population since the last population census in 2002. The decline is attributed to factors associated with the deadly gun violence, diseases and poor living conditions in the region. However the entire cultural group comprises nine different sub-tribes which together total about 12% of Uganda's population according to the 2002 census. Amongst the nine are the Dodoth who separated from the main Karimojong group during the migrations in the mid-nineteenth century and moved into the mountainous territory north of the present day Karamoja; an area which provides better physical security and is suitable for dry season cattle grazing (Gulliver 1953; Dyson-Hudson 1966; Pazzaglia 1982; Lamphear 1976; Quam 1999; Mburu 2000; 4).

Since 2006, the Karimojong have repeatedly suffered successive shocks including a severe drought in 2006, a combination of prolonged drought, late rains and flooding in 2007, and another extended dry spell with late arriving rains that came only to parts of the region in 2008. Unlike the rest of Uganda, the region has only one annual harvest and relies on timely rainfall to enable planting. The delays affect their planting and effectively lead to recurring crop failure and famines. The

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<sup>3</sup> See The New Vision, November 14, 2008 "Ugandan tribes face extinction"

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extensive droughts have placed enormous pressure on the scarce water resources in parts of the region. In addition, since 2007, the region's livestock, which forms an essential component of food security in a largely pastoralist region, has been decimated by diseases such as the *peste de petits ruminants* (PPR), or goat plague, and contagious *bovine pleuropneumonia* (CBPP), while the usual staple crops such as sorghum have been hard hit by crop fungus. Moreover on top of these environmental shocks, the Karimojong have one of the fastest growing populations in the country (Uganda's is the third fastest growing population in the world, nationally averaged at 3.2 per cent compared to the sub-Saharan average of 2.4 per cent (UNOCHA 2008).

Due to this difficult environment in which they have lived in recent years, whenever drought and famine strikes life becomes unbearable for the Karimojong and pressures are built up in the relations between and within the different ethnic groups. The competition for water and pasture also begins to take a different dimension as each group tries to exercise their rights to exclude non-members (Karimojong or non-Karimojong), they make forceful spontaneous entry into a territory belonging to another group and may end up fighting. The Karimojong are heavily armed and the warriors of every ethnic group provide protection for the cattle as well as their homesteads. Over the years, the majority of these warriors have acquired modern automatic and semi-automatic rifles as spoils from the civil wars that have engulfed the region for several decades (Quam 1996; Muhereza 1998).

These guns have been used to bolster their traditional practice of cattle raiding. As a tradition, cattle raiding arose as a culturally driven economic response to the environmental stress caused by localized famine, disease, and drought. Raiding "was at one time adaptive, an integral component of a profoundly contingent, flexible, and successful subsistence strategy" (Gray 2003; 4). Cattle raiding of this sort was not considered theft but was treated as "taking by force" (Halderman et al., 2002; 2). But the present level of hardship and other compounding factors have altered the use of these guns. Today, anywhere one moves in the whole of Karamoja, there are stories of these guns being turned against the unarmed people everywhere they go to graze or simply to earn a living. With the guns come numerous cases of highway robbery,

cattle rustling in neighbouring districts, raping women, and sometimes wanton killing of innocent people by armed cattle herders. The Karimojong have been blamed for creating food shortages. They steal food and other property and raid cattle from communities (Muhereza 1998). Today, cattle raiding and guns in Karamoja are the source of much violence, grief, and trauma. The influx and proliferation of automatic weapons have been said to greatly increase both the frequency and the consequences of raiding. Some scholars have argued that violence from raiding alone in the 1930s and 1940s, accounted for 12% of all male deaths in the region while since the introduction of AK-47s, violence has accounted for around 35% of all male deaths (Sundal 2002; Jabs 2007; 1502).

### **2.3.2 The Value Attached to Cattle**

The Karimojong consider cattle to be of great value and vital for survival in the harsh environment in which they live. Cattle are so central in their economy, culture and society that their entire livelihood is constructed around them. As noted earlier, the economic, sociological, and ritual significance of cattle is attested to in spheres which are dominated by men. Just as stock management is generally a reserve of men while women take control of agriculture (Dyson-Hudson 1966). The cow is considered sacred and is rated above all other animals and just slightly below the Karimojong – not all humans, but the Karimojong. They compose many praise songs and poetry on the value of cattle, and men take the names of their most prized bulls as monikers (O’Kasick, Pluth and Onyang 2007).

A man’s wealth is counted in terms of cattle (Comaroff and Comaroff 1990) and the difference between the rich and poor, like power, all depends on the size of one’s herds. Cattle are also a means towards some social ends (Hutchinson 1996). They constitute items of great social and economic interest to everyone because the value attached to cattle provide motives for most of the decisions and actions they take, and their social and political behaviour is largely influenced by the value attached to cattle. To a Karimojong, cattle are not just a kind of capital commodity from which they can obtain a living, but something far more important and sacred. In

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fact, it is said that ‘outsiders’ find it difficult to understand why a Karamojong could commit suicide over the death of his favourite ox (Mamdani, Kasoma and Katende 1992).

There are various ways through which cattle serve an important economic purpose. Neville Dyson-Hudson, in his book *Karimojong Politics* (1966), points out that for the Karimojong, subsistence is derived from cattle as “the milk and blood of cattle are drunk; their meat is eaten; their fat used as food and cosmetic; their urine as cleanser; their hides make sleeping-skins, shoulder capes, skirts, bell collars, sandals, armbands, and anklets; their horns and hooves provide snuff-holders, feather boxes, and food containers; bags are made from their scrota; their intestines are used for prophecy, and their chime for anointing; their droppings provide fertilizer” (p. 83).

Yet economically cattle are considered real wealth which can be put to a wide range of uses, especially in the establishment of marriages, development of the family, garnering political support and achievement of status. Although wealth is not equally distributed in traditional Karimojong society, subsistence is manageable for every family, and the size of family herds fluctuates depending on the skills of the herdsmen and the winds of fortune (Quam 1996). The point of convergence for all members of a group is ownership of cattle; it is the mediating link between production and exchange; as well as a means of forging sociopolitical ties (Comaroff and Comaroff 1990).

For the Karimojong, marriage is only possible through exchange of cattle in the form of bride wealth paid to the girl’s family. Marriage cannot be sanctioned unless this exchange of cattle has taken place. Cattle for marriage, paid in full, become the binding factor that makes the marriage official. While some marriages may be sanctioned in situations where the bride price has not been paid in full, a recognized debt over the man can be agreed upon and payment is then spread over several years to enable him to accumulate enough cattle. Indeed, payment of cattle in marriage fetches large profits in the society that the man and his family enjoy later. It is marriage with cattle that allows a man the privileges associated with decision

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making within the *manyatta* and the kraal. Such liberties are only gained when a man has undergone the rituals of initiation and marriage with cattle to enable him to be recognized as an adult member of the clan. Therefore, a man who has not married with cattle can never be allowed to enjoy those benefits, and above all, does not hold any position of significance among members of his age-class.

It is equally a significant marker for a woman to have cattle when she is married; it is only then that she becomes a sanctioned member of the man's clan, and only then is she considered a complete member with rights to partake in clan activities. Such rights, which are extended to the woman and also to her children, include enjoying protection and according of legitimacy to her children. The issue of children is distinctively significant in a woman's marriage because it is only children born after the payment of marriage cattle that are considered legitimate in the clan and in the case of the husband's death, the woman can only possess the rights to her late husband's property, the most important of which is his cattle, if she has been married with full marriage cattle paid. Payment of the marriage cattle also has implications for the man's clan upon the man's death; they are compelled to help the widow, take care of the orphans and offer another man for remarriage with the woman. Such remarriage is considered a continuation of the dead man's family and children born out of it are part of the man's clan. Certainly, the clan takes control of the children and this continues even when the children grow up. For instance, when a girl matures, it is the clan member who receives the marriage cattle when she marries. There are some situations where the parents of the girl may have failed to exchange the marriage cattle. In such a scenario, the marriage cattle go to the clan of the mother and not to the father's clan. Hence the capacity of a man to fully contribute marriage cattle is a vital aspect that girls of marriageable age consider when choosing a partner to marry; and thus the man who possesses the most ability is definitely most likely to take a girl in marriage.

Cattle wealth may also be dispersed on behalf of the community during public rituals. A man wealthy in cattle may spear an ox for the elders and the community to earn respect and prestige. To spear an ox in sacrifice is considered a privilege which

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carries very high social esteem and ritual benefits. Not many men can afford to offer an ox or a heifer in exchange for the one to be speared, so to offer cattle in such a public sacrificial spearing ritual brings a valued return in prestige (Dyson-Hudson 1966). It is through cattle as a medium of communication that the Karimojong contact their spiritual powers or the deity (*Akuju*) who is regarded as the source of all value. The Karimojong consider their sacrifice as a gift to *Akuju* who partakes of the blood or the smoke from burnt offerings. Animal sacrifice is expiatory and whenever a man kills another man, be it an enemy or a clansman, an animal must die in the place of the offender to prevent problems, and sacrifice may be performed to seek reconciliation with him or may be performed to placate *Akuju*. Thus sacrifice is considered to be propitiatory (Knighton 2005). The sacrifice also marks the major rites of passage for individuals in life. To pass from boyhood to manhood requires the sacrifice of an ox at initiation. A woman also needs to celebrate the successful conclusion of the first pregnancy and an ox has to be speared by the suitor. Just as when a man dies, his favourite bull with whom he shares a name must be speared (so as not to remind the bereaved family of the dead man since it is an intimate symbol of his life) and, before the dead person's family may resume their normal dress and activities, an ox has to be sacrificed to end the period of mourning (Dyson-Hudson 1966; 95).

Thus to the Karimojong, cattle are objects of great value. The people's subordination to cattle is considered absolute; cattle take precedence over everything and everybody. Development practitioners have even argued that until "you get these people away from cattle, they will continue to be independent in their minds and will not accept development" giving credence to the view that cattle and the Karimojong are inseparable. Dyson-Hudson (1966) sums up this attachment as, "cattle are objects of manifold interest for the Karimojong. They are a source of food, of furniture, of ornaments. They can be exchanged for other forms of property, for the acquisition of desired rights, for the compensation of wrongs." Thus cattle stand at the core of common interest which holds the Karimojong together. It is this centrality of the role played by cattle in Karimojong culture that makes the Karimojong happy but which is also held responsible for the contemporary violence.



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## 2.4 Traditional Practice of Cattle Raiding

The Karimojong have historically survived in a very harsh and unpredictable environment, which is the reason they adopted a pastoral lifestyle. As already highlighted, they keep livestock from which they derive a significant part of their social welfare, economic benefits, and nutritional needs from the milk, meat and blood. However, although pastoralism has proved more dependable than agriculture in this hostile climate, it is still prone to disasters. Successive seasons of drought or extensive flooding can decimate their herds, and an epidemic can wipe out an entire cattle population (Ellis and Swift 1988). Because weather systems and disease patterns tend to be local, pastoralist tribes in neighbouring regions are usually not as severely affected by the environmental stress. During these times, they resort to raiding cattle specifically to mitigate the shocks. In fact, cattle raiding started as a cultural institution amongst pastoral groups in response to the environmental stress caused by localized famine, disease, and drought (Gray 2003).

Cattle raiding is a very old cultural practice that has been in existence for generations among pastoral groups throughout the Karimojong cluster. The practice has been literally defined as a group incursion or forceful attack by an ‘outside group’ whose main objective is stealing cattle rather than seeking territorial expansion. The ‘theft’ is culturally accepted and is carried out by groups of young male warriors who engage in the practice as part of the societal requirement for achieving manhood as well as in response to symbolic, pecuniary, and economic motives. Raiding also occurs in retaliation to prior attacks in order to (re)acquire stolen stock and to replenish decimated herds or simply to intimidate enemy groups (Mulugeta and Hagman 2008). Customarily, raiding was done under very strict traditional control and raided cattle were to serve three key motives. Firstly, the raiding had a social and economic purpose of creating a better economic base and enhancing one’s social status in the society. Secondly, it served the motive of territorial control of grazing areas, which subsequently led to an entrenched position of the stronger group and, thirdly, it had a motive of increasing one’s herd as insurance against unexpected misfortunes such as drought, famine, and cattle epidemics.

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### 2.4.1 How cattle raiding started

Every Karimojong group has its own version of how cattle raiding started, gained momentum, and what exactly led to the violence. The local discourses also vary from one elder to another but what is common among them is that all raiding relates to cattle, and in each story the blame is pinned on the “other” group. The elders telling the stories talk about it as the beginning of bloodshed and starting point for desecration of their traditional values as described here:

What I remember from the stories being told by the elders when I was still a young boy is that the Karimojong used to move long distances far to the Dodoth plains and cross those mountains as they hunted for wild animals. The Dodoth areas up northwards were particularly rich in game as rhinos and elephants roamed those areas. The rhinos and elephants were most wanted because of their valuable horns (ivory). They would say that the most famous of all Karimojong hunters then came from the Matheniko and these were Lokoris and Lomodangabu. But these two men one day misbehaved by killing a very beautiful Turkana young girl called Nangole while in the Dodoth territory. This incident annoyed the Turkana and they decided to avenge the death of Nangole by directly attacking the kraal of Lotaumoe at Kidepo – Nacholong north of Morungole mountain ranges. Since then vengeance has characterized the relations between the Turkana and the Dodoth.

The elder also adds that these two hunters caused the conflict between the Matheniko and the Dodoth. It is believed that the two hunters, Lokoris and Lomodangabu, used to steal cows from the Matheniko and under the guise of their hunting expeditions brought them to the Dodoth. This went on until the Matheniko one day decided to track the thieves. They followed the tracks (*Ngakejen-angaatu*) of the cattle only to discover that they had been driven into the Dodoth rangelands. Since no one could explain the whereabouts of the stolen animals, the Matheniko concluded that this was an “assault” on their group which necessitated revenge. However, according to another myth regarding the conflict between the Jie and the Dodoth the origin of raiding was the death of a man called Lokong Apakapeyo at Nayache (Moru Anyayeche). In this myth the Jie killed him accidentally and that

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infuriated the Dodoth who felt they had to avenge Lokong's death, and this was the origin of the bitter conflict between the Dodoth and the Jie.

John Lamphear (1976) in his book *The traditional history of the Jie of Uganda* points out that in the 18<sup>th</sup> century the most powerful age set of the Jie called *Ngikok*, which were the contemporaries of the Dodoth *Ngiruwa* and *Ngikwarua* (of the termite, of the bee and burger respectively) issued severe social sanctions against the disobedient junior age set of *Ngikok II*. The juniors ran into the bush in fear of beatings and other social humiliation to be administered by elders. While wandering in the bush, they came across the herds of their rangeland neighbours called the *Kapwor*. They raided all the cattle and went back with big herds. When they reached home, they were welcomed and praised by the elders as an age-set which had exhibited heroism in the field of providence. The exploit, which was more of a coincidental occurrence, became a landmark in the early history of raids by Jie (Lamphear 1976).

The different Karimojong groups have numerous and diverging stories and myths regarding the genesis of the violence. A Bokora legend that they use to explain the Karimojong rivalry is called "*Inakinai Karecha emoit lo*" (give me an enemy to attack). It goes that, long ago, the Karimojong used to live peacefully as one group at Nakadanya (which is still recognized as the most revered ritual ground in Karamoja). They lived under the tutelage of one chief called Lokolimoe. One day the warriors implored Lokolimoe to grant them permission to raid the Turkana so that they could replenish their herds. Lokolimoe refused to grant them permission for the raid, but the elders continued to implore him, and the warriors also persistently begged to be allowed to save their people. Lokolimoe refused but to silence them he 'washed his hands of' the matter and let them go. However, he refused to bless the raid, but the warriors did the unmentionable. They went ahead and carried out the raid without his blessing.

When they returned from Turkana land, they had conflicting stories of victory and the casualties the enemy had suffered. Unfortunately the warriors did not know

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that one of the kraals they had attacked was Lokolimoe's own kraal and during the raid one of the victims was Lokolimoe's own son called Arion. Indeed when they arrived with the raided cattle, the elders managed to recognize Lokolimoe's own cattle and confirmed that Arion had been killed during the raid. When the report was delivered to Lokolimoe, he listened carefully, and reacted by preventing his family from mourning. He then cursed the Karimojong saying that in view of what had happened, they would from then on kill each other and kill their own. They argue that the present escalation of cattle raiding is a result of this curse.

These stories echo the discourse on resource competition as the storytellers 'heard it from their senior elders'. They also point out that years of extensive drought were the reason they experienced shortage of pastures and especially water for livestock. Therefore, as people or whole communities started struggling for the scarce water sources, the struggle culminated in constant fights using sticks, stumps (*Ngikomiok*) and other similar weapons. The communities that were badly affected would get organized to provide water for the livestock at all costs – which would often involve fighting off other parties so that one gained the advantage of watering the animals first. In the circumstances, the well armed groups would always be better positioned to beat their rivals in order to water their livestock. That is when it dawned on them that being better armed in itself was a good strategy for survival.

The Teuso, who are largely agrarian, say the origins of the conflicts are linked to competition for water by the pastoral groups. One elder Teuso at Kalapata trading centre was of the view that raiding started following the death of a Turkana man called Lotapeng at Naporoto water point. The man was killed by the Dodoth, and the Turkana reacted to the incident by organizing a very high handed revenge which involved the killing of a *Muzungu* (white man) at Pire – Naurat (Mountain Napak). The incident opened the way for the white men (colonialists) to establish their chiefs in the region, just as it also marked the start of cyclic raids between the Dodoth and the Turkana. Although the scale of such reprisals may be questionable, killing in revenge remains one of the driving forces in cattle rustling. The communities apply "an eye for an eye" retributive philosophy in the nature of vengeance. And according

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to the District Chairman, Kaabong, it explains why up to this day throughout the entire *Tunga* region of cattle keepers modern law does not have a grip. Stories of terrible massacres are narrated to justify revenge. The Dodoth attribute the necessity for revenge to the scale of Turkana atrocities, as an elder narrates:

It was long ago as our elders have told us, that at one time in a place called Kaloboki the Turkana came in the middle of the night and surrounded the hill which was densely inhabited by the Dodoth. They launched a surprise attack at dawn and massacred very many of the Dodoth people. When they left, there was a huge stream of blood flowing in Dodoth territory and after a few days a heavy stench engulfed the environment for a period of about one month. The Dodoth could not just leave their people to die in vain, so after some few days, they organized a massive counter raid. The counter raid was carried out by the Dodoth at a place known as Loreng where big Turkana kraals were located. We are told that when the Dodoth warriors reached there, all living things including children, old men, women, warriors and even dogs, were killed in large numbers. It was only cattle that were spared, and to date bones and beads from that massacre in the counter raids still litter the land at Loreng.

But some of the youthful and elite Karimojong view it differently; they blame the violence on colonialism. For instance, according to Simon Lomoe, a program Manager with DADO, the current scale and intensity of violence resulting from cattle raids are largely the outcome of the repressive hand of colonial administration. He estimates that raiding could have started before the advent of colonialism in the 1890s. He argues that in all probability raiding was then not very pronounced. Simon argues that it was the advent of colonialism that unsettled the Karimojong system. Before colonialism, these communities used to raid but it was more like a game, the raiding was well organized and no one would dare kill women, children or the old men who could not fight. At that time, if you killed a woman then you had to go through a cleansing ritual and you would automatically be given a cleansing name like *Loberumoe* (that is, the one who killed a woman). Such irresponsible actions would always remain a permanent disgrace to the killer and for that reason, no one

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would wantonly kill. But Simon maintains the roots or principles of raiding still lay in the cultural practices as he notes:

I think the problem begins with cattle, for us the *Tunga* (people of the same dialects referring to each other as *Itunganan/itwuan, Ngitunga*). These include the Dodoth, the Jie, the Toposa, the Bari and Didinga of the Sudan and the Turkana of Kenya who all have a very high affinity for cattle. The desire to own a cow among our people is so high because the culture rotates around livestock and a threat to the cow is a threat to life. Take for instance, marriage in the *Tunga* setting, young men in society cannot aspire to marry without seeing any animal (cattle) available before them. The desire to marry leaves them with no option but to band together to acquire animals through raiding, and that is not to say the rich are excluded from raiding; they too are key players in the raids because they are the ones who can afford the services of the soothsayers, elders and diviners to have a successful raid. So they hire the young men who cannot afford to pay for the services of those significant players. In the process, the young warriors are employed in the raiding “business” in order to realize their place in society. We have had cases where a rich man admires and actually grabs another man’s woman with all her children irrespective of age or years of marriage as long as the man she was married to did not pay or complete bride price. Therefore to guard against such embarrassment of losing a wife to a rich man, many young men or even elder men struggle to carry out several raids in order to replenish their family herds for the purpose of maintaining a high social standing in the society.

From the stories, it is evident that cattle rustling in the region cannot be traced with exactness but some scholars believe it probably started around the 1870s (Novelli 1988). Many of these stories or myths tend to cite the immediate cause of the violence. They do not go into the underlying causes of these clashes. There is a tendency to assume that the immediate human causes of symptoms of ecological degradation constitute the significant causes. The elders themselves admit that there are many versions of how the violence started and every ethnic group blames another for starting the violence. They also attribute the real pressures for raiding to the excessive social and cultural demands for cattle within their social system and argue that, in the face of each of these demands, the provision of cattle (goats, cows, donkeys, and sheep) is obligatory.

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The main focus is on the young men, whose achievement in society is largely measured in terms of cattle, placing them within the mainstream of society. Many of the cultural undertakings for the collective good, including rituals such as rain making (*ekidere*), initiation rites (*asapan*), collective punishment of groups of undisciplined junior age sets (*ameto*), feasting (*epoka*) naming ceremonies and sacrifices for rain (*ajulot/Ngajul Aakiru*) all require cattle to be sacrificed. Hence there is a need for adequate numbers of livestock, and it is incumbent upon the young warriors to increase the herds. The elder's further point out that it is a requirement that young men (*Karachunas*) kill a bull during those rituals. If they do not have one, they are compelled to 'borrow' a bull from another successful warrior and then pay with a cow at a later date. Many young men try to guard against embarrassment in such ceremonies and the fear of losing respect or status. Against all odds, they therefore stock their own herds in order to be ready to meet any of the society's demands. However, at present such herds are mainly obtained through raiding and to a lesser extent from the bride price a raider gives to his bride's family.

#### **2.4.2 Dynamics of cattle raiding**

Historically, cattle raiding involved the entire society. It would begin with a consultation of seers, elders, renowned warriors and women to establish whether or not it was possible for a raid to be carried out. There was communal responsibility and reverence for the different roles played by different groups in the *manyattas* and *kraals* for the wellbeing of the society. For instance, before a raid, seers would be consulted for information on issues of rituals, timing, and routes to be followed. Elders would perform all the required rituals (Stites et al 2007). The women also played a very important role of blessing the warriors and preparing the special meat that they took with them. Spies and guides would also be raised from the *manyattas* and *kraals*, and the entire community would offer their support, thus having a direct influence on the planning and implementation of all cattle raids.

Likewise, the returns would be shared by all members of the community as raided animals were amalgamated into the joint herds and everyone benefited from

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the proceeds. The warriors were particularly supposed to reciprocate by killing a bull for the elders as some form of pay back (taxes) to the elders for blessing the raid. The bulls were killed for the elders to feast on under the ‘tree of men’ (*ekokwo*). Younger people say that sometimes the elders could withhold their blessings at the onset of a raid but readily share in the spoils of the raid once it was successful. In *Ngakarimojong* these spoils are known as *lookwa*, which literally means “*taste the sweat of the boys*”.

The raids are also integral to the cultural requirements for boys to demonstrate courage as they pass through the rites of passage to be declared men. Elders talk about the kind of special body tattoos that a boy who kills several people in battle with enemies is decorated with and as such is considered a great warrior. The more tattoo marks a warrior obtains, the more popular and respected he becomes in the community, and more girls will try to dance with him and want to marry that warrior. On the other hand, the men who grow to maturity without such body tattoos are ridiculed in the community, prompting them to go on raiding expeditions so as to kill the enemy, earn respect, and prove that they are not useless men in the society. Girls and women normally sing war songs to praise successful warriors and ridicule those who have not raided a single cow or goat. Girls only choose to dance with brave warriors during the evening beer party or at the traditional festive dancing parties; the undecorated men are shunned and verbally abused as cowards.

Although cattle raiding is known to have been socially accepted in the past, no guns were used. Over the years, the traditions and rules have changed due to various dynamics. The change particularly came with the introduction of the modern gun, which completely distorted the traditional normative order; breaking the critical customary restraints against unacceptable violence. The cultural values connected with cattle raiding began to embrace the gun and by extension influenced anything to do with acquisition of cattle. As a result, cattle raiding as previously known changed from an adaptive (largely redistributive practice) into a maladaptive (predatory) and violent strategy, and in so doing it increased male mortality, famines and epidemics among the Karimojong (Gray et al 2003). Some scholars have further argued that it is



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the entry of modern weaponry that became the 'change agent' (Mirzeler and Young 2000) in the pastoral livelihood of the Karimojong and a major cause of destitution among pastoralists (Kratli and Swift 2001; 13).

Such changes have given young men powerful incentives to arm themselves at whatever cost. Many of them rushed into cattle rustling to get wealthy. In the end, what used to be an organized cultural activity turned into an individual quest for wealth. It now assumes the character of many forms of armed violence manifested in the form of banditry, looting, aggravated burglary and wanton murder. It also recasts the Karimojong identity in a more exclusive and militant form; emphasizing militancy as the mechanism by which they define their livelihood. The shift from the power of the customary weapon (spears) and as a cultural practice to the new force of guns/modern weaponry as an instrument for securing a livelihood and affluence, has totally changed the raiding culture of the pastoralists, consequently shifting the traditions and values of the traditional form of raiding and wealth acquisition (Hutchinson 1996). It is a shift that often breaks the conventional bounds of customs and legality, turning criminal activities into modes of production open to those who lack other resources. To this end, some studies have argued that the violence resulting from guns has become an instrument of income redistribution, a ubiquitous feature of the postcolonial economy (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999).

Thus, there exists a link between shifts in power and the changes in the adaptive processes. For instance, the ways in which the society dealt with economic hardships such as drought, famine and disease epidemics has changed from migrations to profit-making movements (moving to urban centres for trade), redistributive cattle raids have changed to banditry, theft, looting etc. All these are changes that are attributed to the incorporation of the modern weapons into the society's economy, culture and politics. Such changes allow us to see how changes in both the local politics and adaptive processes influence the configuration of group identity. We are also able to see that such groups have been actively part and parcel of a regional, national and indeed international network of criminal profiteering. They

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are not 'backward' stagnant societies but part of the interdependent historical processes of change in the region.

### **2.4.3 Military discipline and the control of the age-class system**

Whereas cattle raiding involved considerable use of force, the organization of the age-sets that nurtured warrior groups functioned like contemporary military formations that train disciplined military personnel. Military discipline here refers to a special form of principles that govern relations in the armed forces. Usually the conduct of the members of the forces is regulated by special rules delineating required standards of behaviour as stipulated in the regulations and orders of commanders (superiors) and reflecting the specific features of the state. The warrior groups in the Karimojong socio-political organization reflect these features that have organized the military personnel into a disciplined force in the service of the state.

In the Karimojong system for example, all adult males are culturally required to be organized into a series of groups on the basis of degrees of common age. Under this system each age-set comprises all those men within the ethnic group who get initiated within (ideally) a single five- to six-year period. These generation-sets are linked not to location but to date of initiation, i.e. the men who graduate in the same year, the interval being about five or six years or more. Inclusion in age-set is not necessarily a question of chronological age; younger men can sometimes be initiated ahead of older ones because of greater physical maturity or for some other approved reason. Nor do members of the same age-set have to be initiated together in the same year. The ceremonies are held for small groups, in their own neighbourhood, at an appropriate time, and when the required sacrificial beasts can be offered. When an age-set is initiated, it may not adopt a name already in use by a superior generation set while any member of that set is still living. This is out of respect for those still living, or it might be out of fear that some hurt or harm (violence) might follow, that is, out of superstition (Pazzaglia 1982; 95).

The exercise and expression of authority are demonstrated at the ritual assemblies or public meetings where an initiated male has a voice to speak and take

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decisions affecting the entire group. Before initiation, such a male is only a spectator, like the women and children (Pazzaglia 1982). The age-set system, just like military service, provides a clear notion of status and rank which can also facilitate the exercise of political authority albeit in a gerontocratic form (Lamphear 1998). It operates within a certain level of unwritten formality in accordance with a set of general principles. Entrance to the system is through the male initiation rite known as *asapan* with a clear set of guidelines on how to join. Although every male Karimojong is ideally entitled to membership in an appropriate age-set at some time or other, the point at which he is initiated is determined by two principles of recruitment, viz.: the appropriate generation set for any person is that immediately following (adjacent and junior to) that of his father, and only two generation-sets may exist at any one time. Thus, if his fathers' generation-set is the senior present generation-set of the society, a man may be initiated and join an age-set of the junior generation-set. If it is not, he may not (Dyson-Hudson 1966; 163).

The initiation itself is a process comprising three distinct ceremonies held over a period of several weeks. In seeking initiation, a person first approaches his father, who must confirm that he is qualified on the basis of family ranking (by chronological order of birth) and sanction the sacrifice of an ox for the ceremony. The father then takes his son around the neighbourhoods to declare the son's intentions and also to establish if there are other initiands to include in the rite. When the arrangements are finally made, the first stage of the initiation begins with spearing an ox in the neighbourhood ceremonial ground. Each initiand spears his selected ox, and with the help of initiated friends dismembers it and prepares it for the elders to come and bless them. The actual blessing involves anointing by a senior elder accompanied by the senior generation-set who bless them to "be well, grow old, become wealthy in stock and become an elder". The second ceremony known as the 'eating of the tongue' takes place at each initiand's locality days later. In this ceremony, the initiand's mother or a woman in the household prepares the tongue, throat, windpipe and lungs taken from the ox that the initiand speared in the first ceremony. In this ceremony, all men of the senior generation-set in the neighbourhood gather in the initiand's homestead, eat the meat, and bless him and his

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family. The final initiation ceremony known as ‘cooking the stomach’ takes place in the cattle corral of each initiand’s homestead at least two or three weeks later. In this ceremony, the initiand’s mother, assisted by other kinswomen and neighbours, collect vegetables and grains of specified kinds and prepare a grand feast. All the initiated men in the neighbourhood, especially the senior generation-sets, gather and they are served in order of their seniority. When the eating is finished, the initiand is blessed by his mother as the senior generation-sets witness, and the initiand thereafter becomes *ekasapanan* (he of initiation), leaves with his initiated friends as an adult man, and can join in the dancing at the grounds (Dyson-Hudson 1966; 168).

From the initiation ceremony, which is more like recruitment into military service, the principle is thus set; political authority is embedded in the corporate office of elderhood. The channels of political authority are the relationships created between groups and persons by age ranking. First, there is a clear affirmation of the superior status, and thereby of the authority of the senior generation-set. This is evident in the necessity for permission from the senior generation-set to hold a ceremony; the requirement that they must pronounce on the suitability of the initiand; and the role of the senior generation-set in doing the introductions. Only the senior generation-set has authority to open a new generation-set or its component age-sets, and since only two generation sets may co-exist, the power to keep the age-sets of the juniors open for recruitment lies with the senior generation set. Initiation is training by affirmation and reaffirmation, and acceptance of the values of society.

Secondly, there is the public expression of subordination of the junior age-set, particularly the age-set which is being recruited through the ceremony. They are introduced to offering service which they must uphold until they become seniors. Thirdly, there is the restatement of the father-son relationship in a public gathering. Not only are the next generation-sets considered related as fathers to sons, they usually are actually fathers and sons. As fathers the senior generation-set give the permission to hold the ceremony and their word is final, unquestionable by sons; it is ranking that facilitates the superiority and subordination relationships. Fourthly, the initiands work together to fulfil certain ritual obligations. It is the first time they work

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together, but also an introduction to their corporate responsibilities that prepares them for future leadership as elders (Dyson-Hudson 1966; 171).

Thus the society, especially through elders, has proper means of controlling cattle raiding and limiting any excesses young men would be tempted to engage in. The elders do this in two ways; first is the religious way – which involves the elders taking control over the significant rituals linked to raiding itself and those that attend to the age-class system that defined the young men’s rites of passage. Since the spiritual wellbeing of the society rests in their age old wisdom and links to the supernatural, they can make threats of a curse, which is greatly most feared. Secondly, given the fact that cattle are collectively owned by families, the management of wealth falls directly on the authority of the elders who control the flow of wealth in the community and their sons desire to get married (Lamphear 1998; 81; Knighton 2005). The age-set organization provides the groups with the principles for political or military behaviour. They are able to take corporate action, sanctioning a specific class to wield authority and exact obedience in public matters (Dyson-Hudson 1966).

Traditionally, control of the military behaviour of warriors is exercised within the age-set system. And the society is able to control these young men whom they organize to move together through social roles as well as arming them to defend the society and its resources. In addition, it inculcates in them “the ‘queue discipline’ which encourages young men to wait their turn, entailing group solidarity, communal brotherhood, and obedient deference until such time as they enter a new role where individual acquisitiveness and differentiation are the norm” (Lamphear 1998; 81). Pastoral societies are always confronted with the problem of safeguarding internal peace and harmony, including persistently fighting enemies and raiders from other groups, for this reason a disciplined standing force is always required. Hence a sense of group consciousness and an almost constant condition of physical and emotional readiness to fight in defence of the society must be imparted in the warriors. And since they are armed, high military discipline is necessary to keep them in check lest they go on the rampage and spread disorder in the society. In addition, as is the case

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in military service, the constant reminder of subordination to a senior authority is used to bring them under control so that they do not use their military might to ‘overthrow’ the power of the elders.

#### **2.4.4 Evolving Trends in Cattle Raiding**

Armed groups are really not new in this region, and cattle raiding has been going on for as long as the people's own history. The difference however is that the warriors are now better armed, probably more discrete, and increasingly sophisticated in their actions compared to the past. Thus the nature, character and intent of cattle raiding have also been transformed over time. In recent times, cattle raiding has increasingly taken a predatory form, often implicating actors previously not known in the pastoralist space such as businessmen, warlords, security personnel, politicians or government officials. Gradually, more sophisticated weaponry and military tactics are being employed by raiders, including widespread looting and indiscriminate killings during cattle rustling and attempts to restrain them. As a result, cattle raids have been transformed from an adaptive into a maladaptive and violent strategy, thereby increasing their negative impact on the society (Gray et al. 2003).

##### *Redistributive cattle raiding*

Historically, survival was the primary motive for cattle raiding, closely followed by factors such as maintaining group solidarity or accumulating prestige. Other socio-political reasons such as providing an opportunity for young men to prove their manhood were more motivational factors. Redistributive raiding, also referred to as *areom* (large scale collective raids), served to rebuild herds of cattle depleted by drought, diseases, and raids or serve the needs of marriage and rituals (Mkutu 2008). Cattle raiding assumed a redistributive function as a traditionally recognized way of reallocating pastoral resources between rich and poor herders, and has been an equally common feature of both intra- and inter-tribal relations (Dyson-Hudson 1966; Lamphear 1976). As noted earlier, through the diverse forms of engagements, cattle raiding serves to rebuild herds after livestock have been devastated by drought or decimated by disease or seized in raids, and both the

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frequency and intensity of these happenings is often closely tied to climatic conditions and the prevailing state of the 'tribal peace'.

Under the circumstances above, raiding was traditionally managed within the context of the indigenous Karimojong notion of cattle as collective property. The raiding operations by young warriors were sanctioned by elders and evolved 'according to strict rules governing preparation, engagement, disengagement and conflict resolution' (Hendrickson et al 1996; 21). For the Karimojong, cattle raiding was not perceived as stealing; instead it was a social, economic as well as a heroic endeavour. This cultural practice was very important and was loaded with livelihood-enhancing functions; a warrior enhances his status in society by acquiring wealth; the wealth in cattle which earns him a wife and reverence; and above all changes his social status. That is why a Karimojong would never admit any fault as far as raiding is concerned (Knighton 2005). The use of excessive violence, especially against the elderly, women and children, was taboo and socially intolerable. Raiding was more of a cultural prerequisite for the advancement of social, political and economic matters.

Rather than spark violence, there are various ways in which redistributive forms of raiding contribute to the stability of the pastoral system as a whole. In the absence of any over-arching authority in pastoral society, raiding and other forms of warfare serve to maintain separate identities and rule-governed relations between different groups as well as acting as a balance (Hendrickson et al 1999; 191). However, there is also the negative aspect of redistributive raiding. Over the years, the traditions and rules have changed due to various dynamics. Although low-intensity violence, above all revolving around cattle-raiding, has been an enduring aspect in the region, the huge influx of automatic weaponry in the last two decades has transformed its nature, intensified its human cost, and transformed a range of societal relationships (Mirzeler and Young 2000). Nevertheless, redistributive raiding could be seen to occur within a social framework able to accommodate its excesses (Hendrickson et al 1999).

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### *Predatory raiding*

Unlike redistributive raiding, the predatory type of cattle raiding is not regulated by cultural rules, and entails excessive use of force as the animals are violently looted from members of other clans or ethnic groups. The main distinction between redistributive and predatory raiding is not in terms of the sophistication of weaponry used but concerns the increasing participation of other actors from outside the pastoral system which has significantly undermined pastoral livelihoods and the socio-economic integrity of the pastoral system as a whole. It involves the new and exaggerated dimensions that raiding has assumed, bringing in some desperate actors whose struggle for survival is now a threat to the existence of some groups (Markakis 1993). And with the entry of sophisticated firearms, and actors who do not follow any guidelines, its violence verges on ethnocide where neither women nor children are spared (Osamba 2000).

Predatory raiding is influenced by a criminal logic that sharply contrasts with the Karimojong traditional values of raiding. The influence of other actors including soldiers, state-armed auxiliary forces, politicians, businessmen and market forces introduced new forms of violence characterized by commercialization of cattle rustling. It transformed raiding into the “crudest form of primitive accumulation” (Markakis 1993; 13); the motives for raiding moved from social to commercial; largely to procure cattle or other items of value for the market to make profit. The trend particularly changed when the raiders acquired guns in the 1970s. Since then, raiding became intensive, and it involves breaking the traditions and undermining the essence of the pastoral system.

The constant use of the gun sparked off a local arms race among the different Karimojong groups and also smuggling of weapons and cattle emerged, often in connivance with prominent local businessmen and politicians at the fore (Osamba 2000; Mirzeler and Young 2000; Mkutu 2008abc 2003, 2006c). The new trend in raiding could no longer be controlled by the elders and only the people with guns controlled cattle. In so doing, the bases of power have since shifted, becoming concentrated in a few hands. With the easy availability of markets, raided cattle are



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often quickly sold out of the region, thus impoverishing the communities and making them dependent upon the gun for their livelihood (Mkutu 2007; Mkutu 2009).

The presence of arms has also led to increasing incidences of road banditry, child abduction, rapes, theft, and crime. The situation has left the armed Karimojong warriors as a force to reckon with and they are feared and held in suspicion by their neighbours throughout the region. In the unfolding circumstances, groups of Karimojong warriors began to operate freely without control from the elders or the state, engaging in their own activities, and this has given birth to a violent network of armed groups referred to as “cattle warlords” (Ocan 2000; Osamba 2000; Mirzeler and Young 2000). With the governments’ continued neglect of the region, the Karimojong warriors have turned to the gun as a source of security, livelihood and a status symbol. This trend has not only escalated armed insurgencies but also exacerbated trans-border/boundary livestock rustling, road banditry and indiscriminate killings. Hence, the introduction of guns on an increasing scale in the region has caused violence against neighbouring groups, and increasingly amongst the pastoral communities themselves, to soar.

## 2.5 Forms of Armed Violence in Karamoja

Generally, pastoralist violence among the Karimojong groups as well as with their neighbours in the region is very complex and takes place at different levels of interaction. Not only is violence caused by a lack of resources, it also creates a situation in which resources become more scarce as large tracts of land are blocked from grazing due to insurgency. Specifically, the unanticipated acquisition of automatic guns has provided the pastoralists with a new stratagem at a time when a shift in the local, tribal and regional politics was already under way. These changes have tremendously altered relationships among the Karimojong, neighbouring groups, and the state in Uganda, transforming the fluid structural relations within their society into rigid internal divisions. In the circumstances, inter-clan rivalries have escalated, revenge raids have become common, mutual suspicion is higher than

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ever before, and it is the power of the gun that reigns. The violence takes the following forms.

### **2.5.1 Intra-group violence**

This is the most common type of violence, which is driven by the long tradition of enmity where one group is in opposition to another. This began as part of the redistributive cattle raiding to replenish stocks during periods of drought and scarcity. But with the division of the region into ethnically bounded districts, it is now taking the form of one district or county community raiding one another. The Jie for instance and the Dodoth have been enemies for a very long time and whereas the Dodoth and the minority Ik (Teuso) sometimes ally, they also fight when the Dodoth are raided by the Turkana with the help of the Ik who spy and give protection to the Turkana. These intra-group conflicts increased in scale after the 1979 looting of the Moroto army barracks by the Matheniko.

The sudden shift in balance of power enabled the Matheniko to maintain intermittent large-scale cattle raiding of their traditional enemies, sometimes even going beyond their boundaries to raid their would-be allies. It increased the tension within and beyond the region, forcing their traditional enemies like the Jie and Dodoth to look for possible options of arming. The Dodoth allied with the Didinga and secured arms from the troubled south Sudan while the Jie secured access to the LRA operation zones in northern Uganda to get arms from other sources. This sparked off a clear arms race between the traditional enemies. In fact many scholars now argue that there is a strong relationship between the proliferation of small arms and armed conflict among the Karimojong and neighbouring Turkana and Pokot groups from Kenya (Mkutu, 2003; 2007b; Mirzeler and Young, 2000).

This impacted on intra-group relations, and shared access to common grazing areas and watering holes lessened as violence escalated, making it hard for groups to move with their animals. This prompted the dominant traditional enemies such as the Matheniko and the Bokora, and the Jie and the Dodoth, whose level of armament from then on considerably increased, to be separated by expanses of no-man's land.

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This has continued to the present day. Areas around border neighbourhoods between various warring groups became very insecure for grazing or collection of natural resources and were declared ‘no go’ zones – these have for a long time included areas such as Kodonyo (Katiquekile sub-county), Moru Ariwon (Rupa sub-county), Nomuriangalepan (Iriiri sub-county) and Kochulut (Lokopo sub-county) (Stites 2007).

### **2.5.2 Inter-ethnic violence**

Since the Karimojong groups have been confined within their respective districts<sup>4</sup>, they have had very little interaction with the neighbouring non-Karimojong groups. These particularly include the Sabiny in Kapchorwa and Bukwo districts, the Bagisu in Sironko district, the Iteso in Katakwi district, the Langi in Lira district and the Acholi in Pader and Kitgum districts. The cattle raiding on the communities in these neighbouring districts also escalated after the general increase in levels of armament of Karimojong groups.

To stamp out this animosity, the government decided to take measures that would reduce contact between the people of Karamoja and the neighbouring communities. They introduced a buffer zone along the Karamoja - Teso border, and much later along Karamoja’s border with their agricultural neighbours to the west among the Acholi (Muhereza 1999). These buffer zones also meant that they could no longer cross over to search for water and pasture beyond Karamoja’s border with Kapchorwa, Teso, Acholi, and Sudan.

The local politicians in neighbouring areas have advocated the introduction of national policies that completely restrict the Karimojong seasonal migrations. In 2006, when the violence threatened to surpass the state security capacity to protect these districts, the army ordered the Karimojong to live within their respective district

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<sup>4</sup> The process of creating new districts in Uganda which started with the presidential campaigns of 2001 has seen almost every group in Karamoja being confined within its own territory as a district. Some elite Karimojong say that this districtisation in the name of decentralisation is partly responsible for the increasing division and conflicts among the different groups in Karamoja

borders, and those that attempted to cross borders faced the firepower of the Ugandan army. This policy has particularly controlled the movements of the Jie, whose efforts to enter Pader district in December 2006 met stiff resistance in the form of aerial bombardments from the UPDF.

The army has since then continued to block the pastoralists from crossing over to the neighbouring districts. In February 2009, during the terrible drought, they again stopped about 2,000 Karimojong pastoralists who tried to cross into Amuria and Katakwi districts. The pastoralists were searching for water and grass for their animals. The 403 Brigade Commanders said the army was doing this to prevent the insecurity that could have arisen if the pastoralists entered the districts. The army blocked over 10,000 head of cattle, 20,000 goats and sheep, and over 300 donkeys even though there was a risk the animals would die<sup>5</sup>. The situation has now made the Karimojong hesitant to cross to the Teso or Acholi regions without their guns for fear of losing their cattle in revenge for past raids.

### **2.5.3 Cross-border clashes**

These involve skirmishes across the international borders where the Karimojong in Uganda border other pastoral groups in the neighbouring countries of Kenya and Sudan. They are usually conflicts between the Karimojong of Uganda with either the Turkana and Pokot of Kenya or the Toposa of Sudan. The scale and intensity of the violence continuously gives great concern to the various governments and to the pastoralists themselves. The intensity of conflict in the region has had severe and far-reaching consequences in society. All the pastoral areas of the region, from the Sudan across the horn of Africa, including Somalia and Ethiopia, down to the Northern frontier regions of Uganda and Kenya are in turmoil. The areas that are not outright war zones are marked by growing insecurity resulting from the possession of arms by all the different pastoral people. This has turned traditional cattle raiding in these areas into a nomadic battle (Muhereza 1999).

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<sup>5</sup> The New Vision March 31 2009

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Cross-border conflicts are mainly between the Kenyan Pokot and Turkana on the Kenyan side, and the Toposa, Buya, Didinga, Jie, Murle and Kachipo from Southern Sudan, then the Karimojong from Uganda. They are very complex as they do not involve an entire group from one country, but it is usually one specific group of the Karimojong that raids or is raided by one group of the Turkana or Pokot of Kenya. The trend varies, for instance, whereas at one time it may be the Jie against other groups like the Kwatela, at another time it is the Dodoth against the Lukmong, or the Matheniko against the Woyakwara, or the Ngisonyoka against the Pokot since each of these paired groups share borders (Stites 2007).

Usually when drought descends on this region, food, water and pasture for the animals become extremely scarce and scattered and the pastoralists are forced to migrate to places where they can be found. This means that alliances become vital and enemy territory must either be avoided or attacked to benefit from the spoils of the war; hence how and where they move is essential in mitigating the risk. Thus what becomes significant to a group's survival is to take advantage of the military weakness of the enemy group.

As a result, disputes over access, control, and use of the increasingly scarce resources begin by isolated confrontations usually starting when one group raids another, and this often triggers rounds of violent retaliation and revenge killings. Yet perhaps the greatest problem also relates to the absence of a clear and consistent hand of the state in the region. There is a prominent absence of state institutions and their power in the confluence border areas of Uganda, Kenya and Sudan that these pastoral groups occupy.

In Uganda, the state has often conceded its obligations to provide security by allowing the warriors to take charge of their region. Hence, given the widespread availability of automatic weapons and the general absence of state security in all the three countries in the region, the potential for escalation of the violence is real. According to the local population in Kaabong, every dry season the Turkana pastoralists for instance move into parts of Kaabong through the sub-county of

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Kalapata on the escarpments in search of pasture and water for their livestock. These border pastoralist communities are constantly migrating, crossing the borders between Uganda, Kenya and Southern Sudan, sometimes clashing with other groups in the process.

In recent years, the scales of livestock, people, and property being lost or destroyed has raised concern amongst them and they have started organizing peace crusades demanding a ceasefire. One such initiative is the peace and sports programme for the youthful warriors from Southern Sudan, Uganda and Kenya which brings together groups that are usually hostile<sup>6</sup>. By using sports, some of the civil society organizations are creating relationships between warriors from the warring communities, namely Turkana from Kenya, Jie and Dodoth from Uganda and Toposa, Buya, Didinga, Jie, Murle and Kachipo from Southern Sudan. The warriors from these groups and their leaders hold regular peace meetings alongside sports activities. But this process has not stamped out or reduced the conflicts; it has only brought in other dimensions of alliances.

#### **2.5.4 Clashes between the State Organs and the Karimojong**

The Karimojong have had a hostile relationship with all the governments in Uganda since colonial Times. There has always been a conflict between their desire to live autonomously by themselves and follow their own way of life, including being

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<sup>6</sup> The purpose of the program is to use sports as a means of encouraging interaction for peace building, reconciliation and social transformation. It is hoped that such efforts can help reduce the violence from cattle raiding perpetuated mainly by youth warriors. This is the initiative of a Dutch peace movement IKV Pax Christi Netherlands, and they are implementing it with their local partners in the three countries. These include, the Catholic Dioceses of Torit (CDOT), Kuron Peace Village (HTPVK) of emeritus Bishop Taban and Pibor Development Access (PDA) in Boma, all from Sudan. The Ugandan partners include; Kotido Peace Initiative (KOPEIN) and Dodoth Agropastoralist Development Organization (DADO), while Lokichoggio Oropoi Kakuma Development Organization (LOKADO) and the Diocese of Lodwar are implementing it in Kenya, and a Kenyan CBO called Seeds of Peace Africa which is the coordinating unit of the program. The program has so far organized two peace and sports rallies in 2007 and May 2008 at Kapoeta.

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armed, and the obligation of the state to guarantee its sovereignty. However, when the NRM came to power in Uganda in 1986, the government first, in calculating fashion, let some of the pastoral groups in Karamoja hold on to their weapons. At that time the intention was to exploit the Karimojong 'fearlessness' and military skills in fighting a proxy war against the numerous insurgencies that erupted against the government of Yoweri Museveni.

But as they amassed more and more guns, the Karimojong became more of a threat to the security of their neighbours in the region. The government was forced to act. They ordered the disarming of the Karimojong and set up some state institutions which were lacking in the region. The army moved in and started arresting gun-holders and removing their weapons. This sparked a wave of relentless resistance and things went awry. Whereas, the soldiers successfully confiscated many guns in some places, the soldiers became unruly, bullying people, torturing them and looting their animals.

These actions convinced the Karimojong more than ever that their only protection from men with guns lay in keeping guns themselves. The resistance might have become quite violent, but before that could happen, the NRA army was withdrawn and sent westward to fight another serious rebellion that had broken out among the Acholi in northern Uganda. They left behind only a token force and a still heavily armed Karamoja (Quam 1996).

However, the employment of military force to disarm the Karimojong warriors was interpreted by the community as a declaration of war against them. Disarmament just could not work as removing guns from the Karimojong warriors did not take away the skills they had acquired in using and trading in guns or making homemade guns. Besides, weapons trafficking had taken root and was flourishing in the region. The sprawling insecurity resulting from the wars in northern Uganda and southern Sudan, coupled with the cattle rustling insecurity in northern Kenya all provided the required atmosphere for the Karimojong to resist state influence in the region.

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### 2.5.5 Banditry

In the past, large-scale cattle-raiding groups of about fifty or more armed warriors would launch fierce attacks on rival ethnic groups, stealing thousands of their cattle and killing anyone who tried to stop them. While this type of approach to raiding has greatly declined in recent years, petty theft has been on the rise in Karamoja, an area where there are very few employment opportunities and where a severe drought since 2006 has left the majority of the population short of food. Recent attempts by the government of Uganda to disarm the warriors have frustrated disparate groups from mobilizing into big ‘armies’ to launch attacks, so many of them resort to staging roadside ambushes to rob innocent civilian passengers and humanitarian workers across the region.

Humanitarian aid workers as well as most local business men and people of Karamoja also told me various stories of how they had frequently run into these ambushes by the bandits, especially along the highways and the major livestock marketing routes. People are very apprehensive travelling between Kaabong and Kotido, especially on market days or days prior to the cattle market days. Usually the bandits stage their roadblocks along major routes as they target the businessmen and women heading to the livestock markets.

In the Karamoja region, banditry activities are common on all highways linking Moroto town with other urban centres in the region. It is a security requirement that security personnel escort all vehicles going to Karamoja. The following roads linking Karamoja to the stated livestock markets are prone to banditry activities: Moroto – Soroti (Naitakwa, Kangole, Iriri and Matany Livestock markets), Moroto – Kotido (Kotido and Kaabong markets), Moroto – Nakapiripirit (Namalu, Amudat, Lotome and Nakapiripirit markets).

Road banditry is also common along Moroto – Nakiloru – Lokiriama road, a major cross-border route between Karamoja (Uganda) and Turkana (Kenya). This banditry has killed cross-border trade between the two countries. The Karimojong have been unable to sell their farm produce, mainly cereals, to the Turkana, who have



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also been unable to sell their livestock (goats) to the Karimojong. For one to travel along the linking roads, he/she must be escorted by armed security personnel. Tales of roadside ambushes of business people abound in news reports from Karamoja. The most noted ambushes are among the Jie and the Dodoth, as The New Vision paper reports:

A group of Karimojong warriors of Jie ethnicity on October 11 ambushed a vehicle in which an Indian businessman was travelling, injuring him seriously. The Regional Police Commander, Mr Okot Obwana identified the victim as Mr Matal Patel who was returning to Kaabong after shopping in Lira, about 200kms north of Moroto town. The attack comes barely two months since Karimojong warriors ambushed two buses and a UN vehicle, killing two passengers instantly. The road ambushes, particularly in Jie and Dodoth counties, have persisted in the region for the last three months, invoking memories of when it was only safe to travel to the region by air. Relative peace has been reported on roads in Moroto and Nakapiripirit districts but that has not been the case with Kotido and Kaabong in north Karamoja. "Peace was returning to Karamoja but the road insecurity in north Karamoja is crippling business in the region," Mr Simon Nangiro, chairperson of Karamoja miners' association says. The recent incidents, however, are some of a thousand others that have mainly been blamed on the menace of the illegal guns in the region. "What is happening there (in Karamoja) right now is a trick by the stubborn Jie warriors to divert us from reaching their hideouts in Morungole and Kailong," the UPDF 3rd Division, Captain Henry Obbo said (**The New Vision Monday, 13th October, 2008**)

In July 2007, when the forceful 'cordon and search' disarmament operation reached its peak, a group of defiant Jie warriors fled to the mountainous areas of Morungole and Kailong. They live in the mountains and frequently return to stage ambushes to get food or revenge whenever they are attacked by the army. They have created much fear in the region but the army spokesman Captain Obbo insists there is no cause for alarm: "We have enough forces on the ground to handle the situation". He said the attacks were reactions by the warriors against the army that has continued to carry out forceful disarmament operations in the region. "The UPDF has dominated key hideouts of the warriors. They now attack soft targets like the UN and

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passenger buses to divert our attention to road patrols but we have responded to the situation and the culprits have often been caught,” he said.

Numerous scholars have discussed how the gun has changed the nature, scale and intensity of the inter-communal conflicts in Karamoja (Quam 1996; Osamba 2000; Mirzeler and Young 2000; Mkutu 2003; 2006c). They further suggest that the local arms races, smuggling of weapons, and cattle thefts are all results of easy accessibility to modern weapons. The new forms of raiding that often involve well-known local businessmen and politicians (Osamba 2000; Mirzeler and Young 2000; Mkutu 2008abc; 2003 2006c) are responsible for these emerging trends. For instance the current disarmament operations have created many of these bandits because young boys in possession of guns have resorted to living in the bush to hide away from the army.

In July 2007 a group of warriors retreated to the top of the Morungole Mountains where they occasionally planned attacks on their targets including army units. Throughout the remaining part of the year, the Karimojong warriors fought fiercely with the Ugandan army at the foot of the Morungole Hills in Kaabong. Once in August, a fight broke out when the army confiscated Dodoth cattle, demanding that they surrender their guns to get back the animals. The population was furious and warriors mobilized themselves to face off with the army. The warriors decided to lay an ambush in which some soldiers were shot and killed and several others were injured. In retaliation, the army reinforced its rank and file, and was buttressed by a helicopter gunship that was used to ‘neutralize’ the Karimojong warriors. My friend told me “many people have died, and many animals were killed and the gunship continues to pound our people up in Morungole”.

A ‘war’ for cattle in Karamoja seemed to have begun as the months that followed were full of battles between the army and Karimojong on one hand, and between the various ethnic enemy groups on the other. Cattle represent a matter of life and death which affects the daily lives of thousands of the Jie, Dodoth, Turkana, Bokora, Pokot and other communities in northeastern Uganda and neighbouring

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Kenya. Villagers afraid of the spiralling violence and insecurity that comes with nightly raids and gunfire are displaced from arable land and squeezed into infertile town centres. Armed cattle raids also result in the loss of innocent life and strain relations between tribes. These security problems have plagued Karamoja for many years and continue to the present day. At the centre of the conflict in the Karamoja region are the cattle, which are at the heart of their culture of pastoralism, providing the most important source of food through milk, blood, and meat.

## We keep our guns, you keep your freedom

On an ordinary day in Kaabong in the month of October 2007, together with my guide we had set off for Kalapata on our journey to cross over to Turkana land, but we were stopped by the army on the way arguing that “the roads were not fine” and an attack was looming that week. Although there was a heavy military deployment in the area, movement from one sub-county to another was minimal and the army roadblocks had been set up to stop the kind of journey we were set to make. One of the soldiers at the roadblock where we were stopped asked me if I had to make the trip since I looked bent on going to Kalapata. He advised me to wait for another week as the situation was bound to get back to normal. But curiously, he asked me why I was ‘risking’ my life by moving without an armed escort in such a ‘war zone’. Given the choice, he told me, he would not be working in such an area. We then settled down for a chat as I waited for my guide who by then had gone to the nearby kraal to check on a friend.

Martin, my new soldier friend, told me Karamoja was his first military deployment since joining the army two years ago. He first worked in the area around Kotido before moving to Kaabong where he had lived for just over one year now. He had been charged mainly with guard duty, guarding the communal cattle kraals against attacks by the armed cattle rustlers. These protected kraals were set up all over Karamoja when the raiding became intolerable to those that the army had lured to disarm in the voluntary disarmament that started in 2001. Their deployment around these kraals was meant to check the cattle raids as one of the strategies in the

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Karamoja disarmament programme. Under this collective protection of cattle, as many as 5000 - 10000 cattle are brought into one big kraal every evening for the army to guard, and their owners only come for them in the morning to go and look for pasture.

The army has been deployed in Karamoja since 2001 with the main task of disarming the warriors who raid each other for cattle and sometimes for food and other personal belongings. According to Martin, who hails from western Uganda, Karamoja's lack of security is probably as old as the region's history. "When you talk to these Karimojong, they tell you we have lived with this cattle rustling since we were born. Our grandfathers also found it here." He believes the problem is actually more than just guns: "They do not seem to be interested in peace. The other day I was drinking with some local councillors in Kaabong town and they openly told me what they want is to be responsible for their own security and not have soldiers all around them." The region "has always been a problem for even the past regimes and the NRM government simply found an escalating problem which it inherited." However, when the previous governments failed to forcibly disarm the Karimojong, they left them to do what they liked. That is why Martin believes the problem will take even longer to resolve. The Karimojong now look at the state as the problem and the soldiers who are present in their territory as the oppressors, as another set of raiders (Knighton 2003).

In the face of increasing raids and attacks, the Karimojong are determined to hang on to their guns. Economic liberalization influences the local discourses on insecurity as guns are now linked to private property that is owned by the economically well-to-do. When my guide returned we began walking back to Kaabong sub-county where we joined people waiting for food distribution from WFP. Under the trees where we sat, the conversations centred mainly on the hunger situation and the insecurity in the region. The sub-county LC3 councillor also joined us as we reviewed the violence that accompanied the disarmament operations in the last few weeks. Contrary to what my soldier friend told me, an elder here argued that the problem was the militarization of disarmament, with no regard for society values.

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“We are not opposed to disarmament; we all want to be happy with our families and have cattle living in peace. However, what we do not want is the manner in which disarmament is being carried out...especially the behaviour of the UPDF,” said Lotule, an elder.

He argued further that, “How do you expect an old man of my status to feel when we are being humiliated before women and children? Some of the soldiers arrest us and when we tell them old men like me have no guns, they begin to flog you, abuse you, pierce your testicles and you cry like a child openly for everyone to see. It is that inhumane conduct that we find unacceptable. They say they want everyone to have freedom and by the way...who told them that we want their freedom? Is it freedom to humiliate us? Before disarmament came we didn’t have this type of violence, let them leave us to keep our guns and they keep their freedom...we shall know how to manage our young men.”

There are many forces at play; the state wants to take control, the warriors are determined to challenge the state and the elders want a return to the active role of customary institutions. A report issued by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in September said the UPDF had made significant advances between the months of April and August in reducing the number of guns and ammunition. Earlier in April, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights had accused the UPDF of using indiscriminate and excessive force when fighting the warriors, leading to uncalled for civilian deaths. The new report said the UPDF had recovered more than 1,500 weapons in “cordon and search” operations since the beginning of 2007, and handed back 5,344 raided cattle to the owners. The report also noted that increased military deployment of foot patrols along major roads had contributed to an increased sense of safety, as well as faster responses when attacks and cattle raids occurred. But it added that some soldiers have continued to violate human rights with killings, torture, and the use of excessive force that had caused the destruction of property and livelihoods.

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## 2.5.6 Treat Karimojong warriors as criminals

In March 2008, the UPDF announced that there would be no more amnesty for Karimojong warriors found in possession of illegal firearms. The army's third division commander Brigadier Patrick Kankiriho, said any Karimojong warrior who was arrested with an illegal gun would be brought before a military court martial, tried immediately and sentenced to imprisonment. He announced that the warriors were nothing but criminals who must be dealt with severely, adding that the amnesty under which they have been hiding is no more.

Under the Ugandan laws, the Amnesty Act 2000 offers immunity from prosecution to rebels. The act was designed at the height of the war in northern Uganda to encourage the return of both abductees and LRA rebel commanders, and aimed at ending the armed conflict in the region. The same immunity was extended to any Karimojong warrior who voluntarily handed over a gun or was arrested with a gun during the 'cordon and search operation'. The army's decision to remove the amnesty came as a reaction to an earlier request by the Regional Council of Speakers of Karamoja Local Governments that was chaired by the Kaabong district speaker. They urged the army to stop the amnesty and have armed warriors executed by firing squad.

The Karamoja Regional Council is a huge assembly that brings together all the district local government councils in Karamoja region, the ministers, Members of Parliament, under- secretaries from or working in the sub-region, donors and religious organizations. They had studied the situation "and cattle raiding was getting out of hand. It is no longer the raiding we know, and something more serious had to be done" the district speaker for Kaabong said. "After studying the situation in Karamoja for almost three months, we have now taken a decision to scrap the amnesty that we have been granting to the Karimojong warriors. And from now onwards, any warrior who is arrested with a gun, whether he/she is a child or an elderly person shall be court-martialled immediately and sentenced in accordance with the laws governing Uganda," the division commander said. He said that many of

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the warriors have been very uncooperative with the disarmament operations and refused to surrender the guns voluntarily; instead they have decided to abandon their homes for the bush and caves in order to retain the guns.

After rescinding the amnesty, the UPDF embarked on a massive military campaign against the armed warriors, searching homesteads and ‘cordoning’ off whole villages, arresting all men for screening to net those who had guns. They also started carrying out air attacks against the warriors who had migrated to the Morungole Mountains in Kaabong district. On Monday 10<sup>th</sup> March 2008, in one of the air operations in Abim district, a helicopter gunship which was flying very low in hot pursuit of some warriors hit the nearby trees with its propeller. The helicopter crash landed as a result and the pilot was killed in the accident. After the incident, rumours ran round Kaabong that the warriors had succeeded in shooting down the much dreaded chopper. The warriors who were drinking local beer at Kaabong Township burst into jubilant singing when the news started trickling in about the chopper mishap. A source told us that eight soldiers were aboard the Mi24 helicopter and that it was on a mission chasing after Bokora warriors trying to recover over 100 cows that they had just raided from the Jie in Kotido.

On June 2<sup>nd</sup>, soon after the scrapping of the amnesty, the Bokora again launched a huge cattle raid against the Jie of Kotido in which 13 people were killed in Kailong and a total of 780 cows were taken from them. When the army initiated a counter-attack in pursuit of the Bokora, they killed two Bokora warriors and recovered some of the cattle. It was in this counter attack that the UPDF soldiers alleged that some Karamoja politicians were actively involved in organizing and commanding the raids. “We have proof of communication between the leaders and the armed Bokora warriors during the attack after the Bokora lost their mobile cell phones to Jie. We have seized the phones and are going to print out the communication,” the army spokesman said. He said that the culpable leaders coordinated the attack using mobile phones. But during the exchange of fire, the Bokora warriors lost their phones to the Jie. However, the two leaders (politicians) did not know and continued commanding the raiders by phone not knowing that they

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were talking to the army commanders. The Third Division Commander, Brig. Patrick Kankiriho, confirmed the incident and he named the LC5 councillor representing Matany Sub-county, Moroto District council and the LC III chairman for Lokopo Sub-county also in Moroto as the commanders of the raiders in the June 2<sup>nd</sup> Bokora raid on the Jie at Kailong. The Division Commander argued, “Why this is true is that although we had already got the phones from the Jie during the ethnic tribal clash, the LC5 councillor representing Matany sub-county still rang us to find out how far the raid had gone, but when he discovered a different voice, he switched off.” The UPDF in Karamoja described their finding as an eye-opener to the government and members of Parliament from the Karamoja region who had been saying that the local leaders were not involved in the persistent armed cattle raids that have plagued the region for the last 20 years<sup>7</sup>.

But the decision to scrap the amnesty just as there was an intensive militarist approach towards disarming the warriors did not reduce incidences of cattle raiding. On the contrary, raiding escalated. Since the army became very high-handed in dealing with the raiders, they too changed tactics. Many of them broke into small groups of five to ten and began raiding without any ‘official’ sanctioning from the elders or the community. Cattle rustling also changed from the raiding of domestic animals from ‘other’ ethnic groups to outright theft or robberies for commercial reasons, and the warriors were ready to kill anyone for money.

In August 2008, the warriors attacked a World Food Programme (WFP) convoy that was transporting relief food to Kaabong. Although no one was killed, several people in the convoy were seriously wounded. From that moment, the warriors seem to have gone on the rampage as the Monitor newspaper reported:

On August 19, 2008, three armed Karimojong warriors sneaked into Wipolo village of Orom sub-county, Kitgum district, and stole 14 head of cattle. The Uganda Peoples Defence Forces (UPDF) pursued and killed two of them. The army also captured two guns and six rounds of

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<sup>7</sup> See The Monitor, June 17, 2008



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ammunition from the warriors. All the stolen animals were recovered. Part of the group attempted to raid Patika village of Agoro sub-county in the same district but was quickly intercepted. One warrior was killed in the process and a rifle with 15 rounds of ammunition was recovered. Earlier in the month, the warriors had attacked a World Food Programme (WFP) convoy, injuring a soldier who was driving one of the escort vehicles. Later during pursuit, the army arrested Lotee Locham, who masterminded the ambush, and his three accomplices. Three guns were recovered from them. The warriors also attacked a bus belonging to the Gateway company on August 14 and 15, killing a woman called Sarah Chekwemoi, a teacher at Kabong Primary School, and injured six other people. The tan boy of the bus later died from severe injuries in Moroto Hospital. There have been many such attacks in the region for some time. Therefore, security forces, especially the army and the Police are confronted with a type of banditry that borders on criminality. The warriors are not mere rustlers but criminals. Cattle rustling in Karamoja has changed from the raiding of domestic animals among ethnic groups to theft for commercial reasons, and the warriors are ready to kill for money. This is why President Yoweri Museveni instructed the army to try those involved in committing these crimes in court martials. Since the year began, the army has recovered 1,697 guns. Of these, only 4% were handed over voluntarily. Efforts to recover guns from those unwilling to hand them over voluntarily have yielded good results. The warriors are unwilling to hand over the guns and have turned to criminal behaviour. In July, 61 warriors were convicted and 21 others remanded. A total of 84 have been convicted this year. It is encouraging that on average, over 100 guns are recovered every month (**The New Vision, Tuesday September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2008**).

Originally cattle raiding was used as a form of redistributive mechanism for wealth and food during times of scarcity, and to form alliances with other families or *manyattas* (Stites et al 2007). Historically this practice has been the major source of tension between pastoral groups. Over the years, for several reasons, cattle rustling has significantly metamorphosed from a cultural relic that used to be carried out as a show of warrior zeal amongst warrior age groups into a form of primitive accumulation where warrior gangs are mobilized, trained and armed with modern warfare equipment Muhereza (1999).

Some scholars attribute this transformation of cattle raiding to the integration of the pastoral economies in the market economy (Fleisher 1998; 2002; Muhereza 1999; Mkutu 2003; 2006). They understand the other role of cattle raiding as an income-generating activity rather than a cultural practice serving some livelihood functions. Internally, cattle-related conflicts in Karamoja are ubiquitous; virtually all

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of the different ethnic Karimojong groups steal cattle from each other. For instance, the Dodoth are in conflict with the Jie, the Matheniko are in conflict with the Tepeth, Bokora and the Jie, just as the Pian raid one another with the Bokora. According to a Dodoth elder, the Jie are the most chaotic because “they consider every other Karimojong group as an enemy, and even the word “Jie” itself means “war”, which is why they are at war with almost every other group.”

One of the most important outcomes of colonization and the subsequent intrusion of the independent state in Karamoja was the creation and development of a commodity sector that opened up Karamoja to begin supplying cheap meat to the burgeoning urban centres in the south of Uganda. This sparked off commercial activities involving the buying of cattle and retailing of other consumer goods which eventually became a significant part of economic life (Barber 1962). In this process, trade links were developed and cattle in the pastoral economy acquired significant value due to the great demand for meat in urban areas and also because of their export value. This is was particularly the case in the Karamoja region and in the entire cluster in general.

As the markets expanded, raiding also started taking on another dimension. The business of raiding cattle as a cultural obligation faced transformation to suit the new circumstances. A network for the cattle rustling industry emerged that would offer ready markets for raided cattle beyond the borders of the victims. The raided animals began to easily find their way across borders and would be sold in markets beyond the reach of the pastoralists who had lost them. To date the impact is so diverse that it is felt even when incidents of raids are low – sometimes just the fear of attack creates a climate of danger and fear that impacts upon people’s lives and livelihoods in complex ways (Stites et al 2007).

Cattle raiding is now characterized by violent armed clashes that outwardly, might appear to be an extension of the previously known traditional practices, but in reality, today’s raids take place within a failing system. Communities speak of the need to maintain a ‘balance of terror’ to dissuade rival groups from attacking them.

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Where violence might have formerly been moderated by virtue of the communities having to occupy the same resource space for decades or centuries, it is now uncontrolled and highly unpredictable, leading to elevated levels of insecurity in the region (Bevan 2008; 27).

### **2.5.7 UN report on rising crime and lawlessness**

The months of August and September were very unsettled as the Jie intensified raiding the Dodoth. In September, three people were killed in Kaabong when the Jie warriors attacked. A school girl of Lokonayon Primary School and two other people were killed in the attack in which the raiders took about 200 herds of cattle. The Kaabong LC5 chairman, Mr. Sam Lokeris said they had heard about the impending raid but still could not stop it. The army was made aware of the threats and they deployed to block and track the warriors. The escalation of these armed cattle raids and clashes came at a time when the *United Nations Department of Safety and Security* report, authored by Godfrey Kasenge described the situation in Karamoja as being at the peak of insecurity and recommended that travel to the Karamoja region only be carried out with the use of armed escorts.

Whereas the UPDF dismissed the UN report as unrealistic and not a true reflection of the security situation on the ground, the army spokesman readily admitted that of late there had been increasing inter-ethnic cattle raids in Karamoja which had spread to the neighbouring districts. The Monitor reported the paradox surrounding the security situation:

#### **UPDF dismisses UN report on Karamoja**

The UPDF has dismissed the recent UN report on Karamoja and described it as unrealistic and not a reflection of the security situation in the region. The UPDF said declaring certain regions 'no go zone' areas in Karamoja indicated that the UN lacks the facts necessary to present a true security situation of the region. "This report is unrealistic and not a true reflection of what is on the ground. Given the security improvement in Karamoja by about 300 per cent, the report would therefore apply in 2006 but even so, not wholesome because there has never been a 'no go' area due to insecurity in Karamoja," said the UPDF 3rd Division spokesman, Capt. Henry Obbo. Capt. Obbo

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told the Daily Monitor on Sunday that all roads in Karamoja are relatively safe and that vehicles move without escorts at any time of the day and night unlike in 2006 when there were deliberate road ambushes and robberies. The report released by the United Nations Department of Safety and Security, dated September 11, says the security situation in Karamoja has deteriorated, and advised anyone travelling to the region to ensure they have armed escorts wearing ballistic jackets and ballistic helmets. The report declared the areas of Loyoro in Kaabong as 'no-go-zones' and recommended that all travel to the area be "suspended due to insecurity". Third Division commander Patrick Kankiriho said security has improved and that the region has not witnessed any major ethnic clashes since last year due to the disarmament exercise (**The Monitor, September 30, 2008**)

Raids continued to escalate as the Karimojong were experiencing one of the worst economic declines in recent years. First, the year 2007 was marked by a devastating drought that was followed by heavy rains, flooding and an outbreak of livestock disease which resulted in widespread crop failure and loss of herds. So the population's main survival pillars were broken and recourse to raiding was therefore inevitable. Coming at the time of 'cordon-and-search' disarmament operations, this only helped to raise the frequency of clashes with the army and consequently raise the human cost of the violence. The army continues to vigorously pursue the government's disarmament programme and getting rid of illegal guns from warriors as one way of stabilizing the region. But as the operations continue, another form of lawlessness has set in. Lokwang says this is perpetrated by "the young men who have acquired jobs wandering in the bush to keep armed. From the camouflage of being herdsmen in the bush, these armed gangs periodically initiate raids, loot, and wreak havoc on neighbouring communities to survive. Now the frustrating thing is when people cry to the government for support, the government says, you people have guns, bring them first."

When a peace meeting was called to bring the Jie and Dodoth to settle their age long enmity, each group blamed the army for not doing enough to protect them and their cows. "When the army asked us to return our guns, they promised to protect us but when the Jie come, they raid our cattle without any resistance from the army. Why do they leave the Jie to hold on to their guns and ask us to return ours, yet they

do not protect us?” asked one Dodoth elder. They argue that whereas the government is looking for guns, it is the unarmed and innocent who are being victimized, tortured and who are suffering because they handed in their guns. The warriors with guns are hiding in the bush and are never beaten or raped and never go hungry like those in the villages. Hiding and clinging to one's gun seems to offer some security and livelihood to those boys living in the bush. Given the prevailing circumstances, raiding has turned out to be a highly destructive activity, even when operating within traditional structures of community authority (Mkutu 2001; Bevan 2008; Mkutu 2009).

People live in constant fear of attacks - from the warriors hiding in the bush or the army rounding up people in search of guns or an enemy attack from the neighbouring groups or due to a clash between the army and the warriors. “We fear to move anywhere away from our homesteads. Our people who have dared to go out looking for food have remained there, they never came back, they got killed by the Jie or our enemies,” said one Dodoth elder. The Dodoth whom I interacted with believe most of their security problems are caused by the Jie warriors. They also blame the army for taking sides with the Jie because of the many Jie in the army ranks. For that matter each group tries as much as possible to keep the other on tenterhooks through intermittent raiding. Thus even with the heavy deployment of the army on disarmament operations, raiding has not stopped but has been translated into various armed criminal thefts.

The robberies and thefts have been particularly taken up by small warrior groups who are on the look out for money or food to survive on. With cattle markets sprawling all over the neighbouring regions, the desire to steal livestock or rob travellers on the highways has grown even stronger leading to the integration of raiding activities into the free market economy (Mkutu 2007a; 49; Bevan 2008). It has also signalled the rise of ‘commercial raiding’, a term used in Karamoja to describe cattle theft undertaken for immediate profit. In contrast to traditional raiding practices, which augment ‘working’ livestock and contribute to the productive output of entire communities, commercial raiding removes livestock from the pastoral system. Cattle are either sold for cash or taken directly to meat-processing plants,

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which represents a net loss to pastoral communities that cannot be recouped by counter-raids. Bevan (2008) has explained the transformation of raiding into 'other' criminal practices through which it is made manifest.

In addition to commercial raiding, there has been a rise in other activities that people label 'materialistic' criminality. Currency and material goods, which had little relevance in traditional pastoral barter economies, are now essential for subsistence. But with few employment prospects, groups of Karimojong have found a niche in armed attacks on vehicles, urban robberies, and elimination killings. As with commercial raiding, urban-based entrepreneurs have exploited the poverty of warriors by paying them to carry out roadside ambushes of political or social rivals. Focus group research in Nakapiripirit, for example, suggests that this type of violence is quite widespread. For instance, in 2006 alone, four deaths in the town were attributed to 'elimination' killings, including a dispute over finances, a social dispute, a political killing, and the targeted killing of the district director of health services (Bevan 2008)

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CHAPTER THREE

### **3. GENDER, VIOLENCE AND PERSONHOOD**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

Although it is very rare for people to use the abstract term ‘gender’ in daily speech, traditional perceptions of women and men and of the relation between them is everywhere inevitably a type of ‘gendered’ perceptions. In all cultures, even if with diverse variations from one culture to another, a difference between men and women is normally emphasized, often represented as natural, rooted in biology and confirmed in history. Sex roles and responsibilities are accepted, even idealized, as contrasted and complementary (Cockburn 2001). The contemporary discourses on gender goes beyond the overt physical differences entailed in being biologically male/female, it actually emphasizes the social constructions of maleness and femaleness which translates into power relations between men and women. Culturally determined patterns of behaviour like rights, duties, status and obligations assigned to women and men in society (gender roles) vary, sometimes even within the same social group (Kameri-Mbote 2004). Much as their different roles are said to be determined by cultural norms, beliefs and the society’s values, they are also changing. Thus, gender is a relational concept that refers to the differential social roles that define women and men in a specific social or cultural context – and to the power relationships that perpetuate those roles.

However, when specific focus is put on gender, it does not only divulge information about women’s and men’s experiences, which otherwise can be hidden, it also sheds light on the deep-seated assumptions and stereotypes about men and women, the values and qualities associated with each and the ways power relationships can change (Heyzer 2003). Violent conflict regardless of the way in which it is described, whether as ethnocide or genocide or ethnic cleansing or just as civil war, will have an enormous impact on what are considered ‘normal’ relationships in the affected society. This is particularly evident in relations pertaining to gender. Violence and its associated effects will play significant roles in constituting the changes as well as sustaining certain elements of hierarchy and power



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in gendered relations. In fact, war or armed violence in itself needs to be conceptualized as a gendering process that affects everyone in the society, whether that person is active or not in the violence. The various entanglements that armed violence creates between women and men are usually linked in symbolic as well as social and economic systems. At the time of fighting or violence, the discourse of militarism with its stress on ‘masculine’ qualities permeates the whole fabric of society, touching both women and men; in doing so, it draws upon pre-existing distinctions connected to gender, at the same time restructuring gender relations (Martin 2008; Higonnet et al 1987; 4).

Hence, when situated in a Karimojong context, it reflects on the types of implications armed violence has for the Karimojong society, which is firstly, a patriarchal polygamous society (Gulliver 1955; Pazzaglia 1982), and secondly, until recent decades a forgotten society continuously suffering extremes of neglect; marginalization and generally closed to outside influences. The society has strictly defined roles for both men and women, with an age-set and generation system that structures forms of gendered behaviour. For instance, while men are expected to take charge of providing for the family in terms of subsistence, security and formal decision making, women are mainly confined to the home and to the domain of reproduction and production. While gender is also used to assign social relations in all the other aspects of life such as agriculture, community activities, and decision-making within the household, armed violence introduces mechanisms that begin to challenge the construction of gender identity.

This chapter analyzes the gendered perspective of cattle raiding and armed violence in general. The chapter traces the links between the cattle raiding economy, security and livelihood strategies among the Karimojong. It demonstrates that what is considered pastoral violence is rooted in the social and enacted in the ways through which masculinity and femininity are constructed. I argue that according to the evidence available in the social relations between men and women, the incessant violence in Karamoja is not exclusively a male practice. It is socially constructed and it has significant implications for understanding the context in which violence is

experienced. For instance, while fighting and the handling of weapons are traditionally known to be the preserve of men for the purposes of raiding cattle, exacting revenge and providing security, this chapter shows how women are persistently brought into the larger picture. Although they do not publicly handle guns, they are very instrumental in their acquisition and determining how men and particularly young men behave in the circumstances.

## 3.2 Gender analyses in conflict zones

In many societies the traditional perceptions of gender roles and identities particularly in armed conflicts still take the simplistic view of looking at women as victims and men as aggressors. They tend to view women as playing a much more passive role in war. They are usually associated with responsibilities as peacemakers and holders of familial and cultural values. Women are treated as nurses and more importantly as mothers of warriors who for the most part, are wronged by violence. Men on the other hand, are traditionally perceived in more active roles. Whereas some scholars have ably applied gender analyses to the study of conflict (Cockburn 2001; Jacobs, Jacobson and Marchbank 2000), relations embedded in the conflict itself, which sometimes shape gender identity and behaviours, are rarely built into the analysis. Gender relations in some of the persistent conflicts demonstrate that social relations actually shape the conflict and this sheds new light onto the roles of both men and women in perpetuating violence.

In some of the studies so far carried on conflict, women have been proved to not simply play the role of victims, but have been found to be powerful agents who are actively involved in violent, military actions, as was the case in Rwanda (Lentin 1997), in Sri Lanka (de Mal, 2003), as well as in promoting peace, such as in Afghanistan (Collette 1998). In addition, the status of both men and women is continuously being reconfigured as their previously normative roles takes on a new perspective in the destabilizing nature of war. This new perspective has forced women to take on new roles for their survival and that of the family, including

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influencing as well as making decisions about acquiring weapons and ammunition, as well as taking on alternative livelihoods.

Some studies on pastoral conflicts have found that contrary to the popular belief that it is cattle that cause war, conflicts over other social issues (such as over women) have been the principal cause of violence. A good example comes from among the Nuer of Sudan who believe that “it is girls (or women) who bring war”. The men among the Nuer prefer to refer to themselves as “women thieves” rather than “cattle thieves” (Hutchinson 1996; 160). But Hutchinson succinctly demonstrated that cattle and women were so closely associated in their daily lives where for instance, all disputes over women were in principle resolvable through cattle. Gender relations in such situations are intertwined, configured and also altered through relationships with cattle. Unlike the Nuer, the Karimojong will not overtly agree that war or violence is basically about women. On the contrary, it is about cattle after which a warrior will say “the cattle can marry for me a woman” (to mean he can use the cattle to pay bride price to marry a woman). With the interaction and simultaneous integration of the money economy, many young men now want money to acquire modern goods such as mobile phones and radios, to drink bottled beer, and best of all, to own a gun. Whereas these items and others in the same category are now considered markers of “doing well” among the youths, marrying a woman still stands out as a significant breakthrough to manhood.

When it comes to armed conflict such as the raiding and counter raiding practices of the Karimojong groups, women and men are affected differently. Usually men are openly shown to be more active in organizing the raids, carrying weapons, and carrying out the actual fighting, while women are shown running away from fighting and being subjected to different forms of violence. In other words, whereas the men are considered as ‘benefiting’, the women are ‘suffering’. Women are portrayed as taking over the non-normative roles and largely known responsibilities of the men. This entails taking over responsibilities of providing the family with food, shelter and security – giving the impression that they are being overburdened, and thus offering a skewed analysis which does not reveal the gendered dynamics of

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violence (Cockburn 2001; El-Bushra 2003; Jacobson 1999). Women in war zones are often understood from a rather narrow perspective with the emphasis being put on their potential to make peace “as an organic by-product of their ability to mother and nurture” (Mkutu 2008; 238), meaning that there is need for a deeper examination of women as participants in, and contributors to, armed conflict (Jacobs et al. 2000; Moser and Clark, 2001, Enloe, 1993). In particular there is a need to understand how the manipulation of gender roles fuels the violence machine in very critical yet concealed ways (De Pauw, 1998; Enloe, 1998).

Thus a gender analysis of conflict and violence such as that in Karamoja is essential for deconstructing essentialist notions of women as victims, ‘natural born nurturers’ and that which casts men as warriors and ‘natural born rapists and killers’ (Korac 2006). We need to focus on both women and men, as gender actors in specific historical and social contexts who react to violence in different ways. While some may become actively involved in fighting, enacting violence or waging war, others seek out alliances across conflict imposed divisions and differentiation lines, organizing themselves against violence. For instance, evidence from Karamoja suggests that the women’s role in the ongoing violence is not just that of mothers, daughters, brides, sisters and victims but of ordinary members of the society experiencing the violence just like the men around them. Thus, whereas men are still considered influential because of the weapons in their possession, the persistent violence has also created space for women to gain independence and status (Mkutu 2008).

### **3.2.1 Perceptions about men**

Although men as a group have been perceived to exercise power over women, at the individual level many men feel powerless. In reality there are many ways in which men experience powerlessness irrespective of their socio-economic standing or identity. This suggests that men are not always dominant (Esples 2006). Societies sometimes set up rigid systems not only for regulating men’s behaviour but also for denoting what makes them men, and there are many risks for men who conform to, or

try to conform to those rigid social expectations. For instance, most cultures expect men to be physically strong, robust and brave, to be risk-takers and decision-makers, to be providers for their wives and children. These are culturally accepted ideas about being a man in a particular society.

Conventional gender norms for men and boys, such as those listed above, are often described as ‘dominant’ (or ‘hegemonic’) masculinities. Internalizing these ideals is not enough, however; rather they must be repeatedly acted out by men (Harris 2004) to demonstrate and prove that they are the men their society acknowledges. Like race, class, and sexual orientation, gender is a socially constructed concept (Weber 2001). The notion of hegemonic masculinity treats the subordination of women as the fundamental organizing principle and it is achieved in part by placing some men above others (Connell 2000). The notion foments a patriarchal social system where the construction of the male identity perpetuates, and underpins patriarchy. In these ways, hegemonic forms of masculinity serve to oppress women, marginalize some men, and limit all men.

But men are usually known to act in very explicit ways, sometimes violently when they feel that their sense of “manhood” is being challenged, and this is more pronounced when someone tries to undermine their ‘strength’ to be able to be a man. When challenged, a man will always find ways for the expression of power, and violence may be an easy outlet. At such times, women usually provide the impetus that boosts this male ego and the social construction of manhood. They will try to demonstrate to the women that they are daring, courageous and strong. Violence provides them with a chance to prove the socially constructed male attributes. Thus, although traditional systems of attaining manhood exist, environmental influences seem to play significant roles in determining manhood. Men as a group exploit some spaces of interactions that provide them with a structure for behaviour considered manly. This space is socially constructed, culturally complex, networked and

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reflexive<sup>8</sup>. In the face of war, the social space has been reconfigured and this has altered the manner in which men and society at large look at men's position and roles.

### **3.2.2 The social construction of manliness**

Both masculinity and femininity are social constructs that are neither natural nor given. For the Karimojong, there are strict rules governing how one becomes a man or a woman and it has more to do with what Peteet (1994) referred to as "performative excellence". Citing Gilmore (1990; 11) she points to the "critical threshold" which an individual has to pass through in terms of the various tests and ordeals to attain manhood or womanhood. For the Karimojong, the whole idea of masculinity as Peteet puts it, "is acquired, verified, and played out" in the forms of courageous accomplishments a young man undertakes in the local community. This particularly involves daring exploits in acquiring wealth and in expressions of fearlessness and boldness. In fact, manhood is arrived at through exemplary performance in the acquisition and defence of cattle wealth and in protecting the community from external aggression.

Manliness is generally defined as the state of being an adult male, usually made in fulfilment of certain traits such as courage, energy and strength, which are often considered manly. Manhood therefore, is achieved and not merely ascribed when one is born male. It pertains to one's assumed behavior and feats accomplished that in specific ways conform to the social group's characterization of manhood (Connell 2003; Gilmore 1990; Pollack 1998). Attaining manhood is judged by the society at large and does not necessarily come through one's own convictions. Among the Karimojong, the society has explicit expectations of a man and the roles that men perform are continuously evaluated to determine whether they meet those expectations. Manhood is a relational construct, a man is only a man through the lived experiences that makes others (other men and women) agree if one is a man or not. It also points to power relations as an important step in the social process that

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<sup>8</sup> Social space is employed as the system of relationships that men construct among themselves, the people within their environment and the community within which they exercise their power

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men have to go through to be able not only to express a given role but also demonstrate the power embedded in manhood. That is to say, there exists some clout among men which makes them feel they are ‘men’.

The notion of manhood brings up what society expects of male adulthood, usually structured along some societal standard form of behavior that Dolan (2002) calls the normative model. Dolan argues that the model is normative in the sense that it is what men are taught they should aspire to and judge themselves by, and in the sense that it is against this representation that men are evaluated, and then either validated, or belittled and punished (Dolan 2002:1). According to Baker and Ricardo (2005) the main social requirement for achieving manhood in Africa involves achieving some level of financial independence, employment or income, and subsequently starting a family. Dolan argues that the entire socialization of young men into masculinity begins at a very early age and is based on constructing the differences between men and women. Thus the net product of this process is the adult married man who is a fully constituted “married provider.” In fact, a man only becomes a man when he has married and fathered children (Finnstrom 2003); marriage then becomes a significant marker of manhood.

Men and women have their different ways of “becoming a man or a woman” and likewise express their masculinity or femininity in ways that suit the society’s expectations. It is important to note that in the social construction of male and female roles, issues related to valuation of one’s masculinity or femininity are for the most part associated to the way the other gender will rate the individual in question. The Karimojong male youth has to go through the *asapan* rite first to be properly inducted into manhood. According to Pazzaglia (1982) when a father feels that his son has reached the stage to attain manhood, he may suggest this to him and provide the necessities for initiation.

Today, many young men have not been initiated “properly” as the old men of age say they were. *Asapan* is no longer common; the organization is not possible amidst worsening insecurity. Secondly, even initiation has now become an

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economical show of ‘strength’; now it is all about cows. A young man who amasses cows through raiding can spear a bull for the elders. In this ceremony the elders bless the young man. It is also important to note that it matters how many times you spear a bull for the elders. One can spear a bull three, four or even five different times even in one year to show power and wealth in cattle. Powerful raiders do this to garner support and raise a following among fellow warriors.

In the past, initiation was accompanied by fighting, wrestling and killing a bull (spearing the bull in the shrine) before the elders to prove that you are a man. But now cows are all kept far away in protected kraals, people are also confined in the camps and some elders who were previously very enthusiastic in following these rituals have been humiliated before boys. For example soldiers have publicly beaten elders, and some elders have been tortured and imprisoned together with boys; hence they have lost their authority in rituals of manhood. Thus, manhood is a relational construct, a man is only a man through the lived experiences that makes others (other men and women) agree one is a man or not. This also points to power relations as an important step in the social process that men have to go through to be able to not only express a given role but also demonstrate the power embedded in manhood. That is to say, there exists a quality among men which makes them feel, they are ‘men’.

### **3.2.3 Boys have a special relationship with their families**

As it is the case with other nomadic groups, boys are treated as assets. They are vital for the continuity of these largely patrilineal groups, but more than that, the Karimojong place value on the boys because they can raid and bring wealth to the home, they provide the much needed security, and they have to take over from the father. Although girls also bring wealth when they leave the home and get married, it is the boys who are the owners of wealth.

For the Karimojong, a home without a boy is considered a “black, darkness home”, and a man who has failed to produce a boy in his lifetime is not allowed to perform critical roles in public functions, such as those performed at the shrine. Such a man sits behind the others, and during initiation rituals he cannot even move near



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the initiands. For the women, it is only those who have produced boys who are accorded respect and this is manifested during the naming ceremony. Any woman who has not produced a boy cannot perform the naming ritual.

This gives the boys a special relationship with their families. They become a critical centre of focus in the construction of other relations. A woman therefore has a special bond with the son since her bearing and honour in the family rests on having a son. An elderly woman in Kapedo told me that “a son remains a son to his mother regardless of the age”. In other words, the bond between son and mother is very strong and sons prefer to consult their mothers over issues such as marriage, wealth and any other crucial matter in their lives. “Just as he is protecting the cattle now, as a mother it was my duty to protect him when he was young. I knew that one day he would grow into a brave man to protect that which belongs to us, cattle” she told me. Thus women remain a critical part of their son’s lives. Security of the person to the Karimojong is the decisive way of ensuring survival amidst persistent armed violence. Wealth without security is meaningless to the Karimojong. They know for certain that raiders will take all the cattle if they have no security, thus having sons is one sure way of guaranteeing that security. Thus their survival hinges very much on their ability to provide security for the person.

As the frequency of cattle raiding violence intensifies and given the increasing reliance on the use of guns to guarantee security, the most vulnerable (unarmed) social groups (women and children) have put their lives in the hands of the male youth, the *karachuna*. They have literally taken over control of the administration of Karamoja. This is also in effect an indictment of the state having failed in one of its cardinal obligations. Karamoja’s degeneration into an example of a ‘failed state’ needs to be looked at from this perspective. It falls very much within Foucault’s governmentality framework. The government seems to know that imposing laws on the Karimojong does not work so they employ tactics rather than laws. This entails re-conceptualizing the whole concept of security. King (2007) argues that; “security” referred to in this circumstance is not security such as could be the product of the state’s monopoly of violence (which is usually significant in the definition of state).

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This is also advanced by Bøås and Jennings (2005), indicating that security in the circumstance pertains to the entire human life and dignity. Human life is people-centred, taking on the wellbeing of the person first; security therefore applies to various dimensions of human existence.

Perhaps for that reason the Karimojong have realized that the young men provide them with the greatest opportunity of ensuring security. When I talked to Ochelum about his understanding of security, he clearly pointed out that it meant protection for cattle and the people. He equated it to the 'life of a man' in Karamoja. "The life of a man in Karamoja is that of fighting. Since I was a child and all my life I have been fighting to protect our lives. That herd is our survival and without fighting hard you cannot have it. I am lucky to be alive; my brothers died in the battles we have fought" he said as he showed me the scars he got from a bullet that grazed part of his left ear. "This one was with the soldiers when they came for our cattle. They said we had to surrender all our cows until they recovered the rustled cattle and I stopped them from taking our cows. Usually when they take them, few return. We fought them until they left us alone, but then some people died. As you see this village, every one here has had a son killed either because he went looking for wealth or through trying to survive or through protecting our cows. That is the life of a man in Karamoja" Ochelum says.

It is the duty of the male youth to care and provide security for both the settlements and more importantly the cattle. They move the livestock to the grazing and watering areas during the day, and at night they must be armed, take their positions and guard the cattle against thieves and raiders. The Karimojong male youth is always on the look out for raiders or thieves, even during the day while grazing the animals. They divide themselves into groups that carry out regular patrols in the areas where cattle are grazing. You have to look for the enemy; "if not the enemy will look for you" Lokeris would say to me. Everyday early in the morning, different patrol teams leave the kraals on a mission to find the footprints of the enemy who could have spied on them in the night. This is one way in which they detect that some surveillance is going on which might indicate an impending attack or thieves doing

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reconnaissance in their area. I remember once when we tracked the movements of the soldiers who had patrolled the areas around Sidok sub-county one warrior friend of mine was able to show me the footprints of my own shoes where we had passed two days earlier. The *karachuna* are so keen on any “foreign footprint” that they can accurately tell who the persons were by looking at the footprints.

Since most raids occur at night, and all *karachuna* are expected to take defence lines outside the manyatta or kraal, it is worthwhile noting that they literally sleep outside. They live as if on a battlefield at night. As soon as it gets dark, the *karachuna* take their positions in the trenches dug outside the kraals which are heavily guarded. All around the kraals are carefully dug trenches where these young men sleep. At times when they suspect that an enemy attack is imminent, they may withdraw the cattle to a distant area, and knowing that their lives depend upon the strength of their firepower, heavily armed groups of warriors are sent out to lay ambushes on known routes that the enemies usually follow.

Usually, susceptibility to raids is a key factor in determining the vulnerability of the population and the degree of risk may rise or fall depending on the number of armed males available or the nature of relations with neighbours, and the interaction with the security forces (Stites et al 2007). The anticipation of a raid or in the recent cases, of a surprise cordon and search operation by the army keeps the armed male youths always on the alert and greatly influences their daily mobility. In some areas they do not live in the *manyattas*, they have also abandoned participation in the evening beer and dancing parties. They dread coming to the urban centres for fear of clashing with the army.

For example in June 2007 in Kalapata, a group of warriors preferred to migrate with their cattle and weapons to the top of Morungole Mountains where they had an advantage in engaging the army if they had to exchange fire. The warriors were systematically separated from the social network of communal relations and familial guidance of the elders. Yet the family guidance had always ensured that a warrior had to be respectful to his social superiors and he had a responsibility to the community.

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In addition the overlapping friendship, kinship networks and participation in communal activities such as rituals and dancing, ensured that there was a continuous vetting of the warriors' behaviour.

This of course is a result of the continued neglect of these youthful warriors by the state amidst the declining cattle economy. This reality increases the desire of young men to get involved in violent rustling to secure livelihood security for themselves and their families. Formerly pastoralism offered a full-time engagement for all age groups, everybody was catered for<sup>9</sup>. The males were the most economically productive when they were still young, energetic and very active. Jobs were easily available for them as warriors or scouts or herders to enable them to mitigate some of their daily problems (Mkutu 2008; 26). But these young men have now found themselves in a very difficult situation. For most of them, there are no more cattle to herd; there are no jobs for them to earn money and yet the families look to them to fulfil those expectations of a man. The young men too, consider that their peers who are living in urban centres like Kaabong Township have broken the shackles of belief in cattle. They admire those who possess modern goods like cell phones and radios and who drink bottled beer<sup>10</sup>. The result is that many of these jobless young men will join the raiding ranks, some encouraged by their families while others are attracted by the 'goodies' they see their privileged employed peers enjoying.

Since the Karimojong have largely depended on cattle, when these are raided or confiscated by the state, they become completely powerless. They become insecure and insolvent<sup>11</sup>. Insecure as they are, these young men become ready labour for hire in the raiding market. They are usually hired and armed by the influential and affluent people living in the urban areas to raid cattle from other groups for payment that they are eager to get. This commercialization of cattle rustling, which is

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<sup>9</sup> Division of labour was such that everyone had something specific to do at a given age group.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with LC V chairman, Kaabong

<sup>11</sup> It points to security as being embedded in the protection of the people from the sudden and hurtful disruptions in the pattern of daily life – whether it is in their homes, jobs or in communities. It is the sort of security that comes about when people are helped to secure their social, economic and political livelihood

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increasingly linked to foreign markets and the proliferation of small arms, effectively becomes an added incentive to engage in raiding (Hendrickson et al 1996). This reality heightens the levels of scarcity and loss; and it is a principal factor driving pastoral conflicts (Markakis 1997; Mkutu 2002). It pushes the Karimojong youth close to the dilemmas confronting Nuer society as a consequence of the dislocations of war that Hutchinson describes. It relates to the ways in which social relationships get redefined and refined in order to articulate changes in forms of social capital, represented by 'blood', 'cattle', and 'food', with new things, represented by 'money', 'guns' and 'paper' or the cash economy. Similarly the weapons needed to provide for the family and to defend one's capital begin to set some men apart from their fellows (1999:12).

### **3.2.4 Weapons and Warrior Culture**

A warrior culture is profoundly associated with war and fighting. For the Karimojong it is a culture that is closely associated with the traditional practice of cattle raiding. Cattle raiding provides the space upon which the intrinsic worth of a warrior is tested and proved. The efficacy of a warrior largely depends on how well armed he is. For this reason warriors have to own guns. They are acquired to prove one's worth in raiding, to gain wealth, to get married, and to protect cattle. Therefore owning weapons and putting them to 'effective use' earns a warrior great admiration in society. Warrior-hood and weapons are intertwined. To be a good warrior one must have good weapons (probably the most sophisticated).

For the Karimojong, warrior-hood is constructed around a demonstration of courage, strength and strong personality in terms of military skill and leadership. Warrior-hood is a special class in the hierarchy. It is this special category of warriors that for instance holds the economy and security of the society. Achievement in this class is a matter of how much one can kill and provide protection for the animals. A warrior's courage and skill is measured by the number of successful raids he has taken part in. More often than not, this not only involves the killing of an enemy or enemies, but also entails bringing back big herds.

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It is at this age when a man must demonstrate all the masculine characteristics that are cherished in society, and as such warrior-hood embodies the exhibition of energy, bravery and personal charm. It is a young man's most challenging period where he must prove himself to be a man, and as Knighton sums it up "a man is a man in cattle. For, without any, women will be ashamed of you (Frank 2002:81), and women enculturate men from birth into this susceptibility to shame as a spur for them to show virility and bravery in battle: 'Male infants are named after successful raiders, and grow up being told they must fulfil their legacy by being an even fiercer, more powerful raider. All ages and genders go about in fear of the *ngimoe* (enemies), who will strike when you least expect'" (Knighton 2005; 124). The Karimojong boy or man is therefore not afraid of killing, especially an enemy – after all it is what will confer manly status upon him.

With the continued influx of guns into the region, armed raiding has made killing a lot easier and it occurs on a colossal scale. When a Karimojong warrior goes to raid, killing is one common factor that everyone looks up to. Any threat to raiding team must be killed; it is no longer taboo to kill women, children and even the elderly. These are practices that were never known before, and even pregnant women are being killed. The young men have lost touch with the elderly counsel and even take pride in killing women as can be discerned in the newspaper reports by *The New Vision*

Suspected Tepeth warriors shot at a group of Karimojong women, killing four of them, including two who were pregnant. Three others were injured. The incident took place on Sunday morning in Alikalet parish, Rupa sub-county in Moroto district along the road to Nakiloro on the Uganda-Kenya border. The dead were identified as Natalina Apeya, Loroto Napul Arichu Lolimoro and another not readily identified by press time. Apeya and Napul were in advanced stages of pregnancy. Those rushed to Moroto Hospital were Cecilia Lopuwa, Natalina Nate and Nakutu Lomere. The Moroto district Police commander, Thomas Obong, attributed the attack to the idleness of the warriors. Lomere, 13, in whose stomach a bullet lodged, said they had gone to collect firewood for sale on the slopes of Mt. Moroto early in the morning. "After about an hour's trek, we realized we were in the middle of an ambush and about 10 armed warriors had blocked the path," Lomere said. Speaking from her hospital bed, she added: "A warrior shouted at us in

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*Ng'akarimojong* that he had the chance of killing pregnant women who were simply producing to fill up Karamoja." The Rupa parish chief, Lowurien Kabila, said such lawlessness should be fought before it escalates in the region. "The poor women do not have milk to sell, which is why they had resorted to selling firewood to earn a living." "With such incidents in the bush, many families are going to starve due to poverty, poor crop harvest and reduced herds," he said (**The New Vision, February 10, 2009**).

They kill because anyone, regardless of the gender and age can have a gun. So they look at anyone as a threat to their security. Since elders can no longer access them with ease, effectively dispossessing them of power to restrain their actions, no one exercises control over these young men. The result is a risk of total breakdown of traditional law and order and a major transformation in the use of weaponry in the warrior culture (Quam 1996).

Another important transition that came with the use of guns is in the nature of raiding itself. Today, many young men raid and quickly sell off the proceeds of the raiding for cash or weapons. This type of raiding sometimes changes form and takes place as outright cattle theft, armed robbery or highway banditry. But the young warriors, knowing that what they are doing is not sanctioned by the elders or society, will kill their victims and try to destroy any 'evidence' that they have killed. They will neither get the social reward of piercing their chests nor will they seek penitence. A warrior defiantly argued; "I have to get rich like those people in Kaabong and Kotido town. Look at us, what do we have? Our cows have been stolen, we have nothing and yet we must get married. I will use my gun".<sup>12</sup> But however one looks at it, they must kill and accumulate wealth in the end to achieve status in their society. That status, which is badly needed, is what can enable them to get married and be recognized as men.

Given their love and possession of the gun, the warriors have over the years become almost synonymous with cattle rustling, destruction of property, looting,

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with a warrior in Sidok

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banditry and highway ambushes. But at the centre of all this is the fact that the Karimojong still hold the cow sacred. Cattle form their entire livelihood and a primary part of their daily lives. Cattle are perceived as the greatest good and their possession is believed necessary for economic security, family establishment, social esteem, and personal satisfaction. The maximization and safeguarding of these cattle assets has led to havoc in the region. It has instituted a culture which only leads to more violence and the only real power of value among the population today is that of the gun/modern weaponry (Hutchinson, 1996; Keen, 1994; Ocan 1994). There is a lack of security and the general situation has produced various types of violent conflicts.

Although the weapons are usually seen in the hands of young boys of 12 to 25 years of age from the local communities, gun ownership draws in a complex of relationships. In these communities, although clusters of armed youthful warrior groups and their gang leaders are seen as the perpetrators of the violence, other actors such as local businessmen, small arms and drugs dealers and the state security agents of the three neighbouring countries have all become involved in the melee<sup>13</sup>. Many of these actors are also known to be at the centre of regional criminal groups that also have links with other wider international networks (Mirzeler and Young 2000; Mkutu 2006; 2008; Stites et al 2007). The warriors would then be hired for a given fee. They are business people from Kotido and Moroto who supply these youths with guns and pay them money for the number of animals raided<sup>14</sup>. With the introduction of new notions and material linkages such as money, the value and power imbued in the social networks has changed. The most notable change involved the waning of the role of 'family guns' in the face of increased access to weapons and ammunition; changes in rules and practices of raiding; changes in the composition and timing of raiding parties; shifts in the role of elders in sanctioning raids; and the emergence of a crisis of authority with the lack of succession of power from the senior generation-set to the junior generation-set (Stites et al 2007).

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<sup>13</sup> These events occurred at the confluence of Uganda, Kenya and Sudan borders

<sup>14</sup> Discussions with local people in Kaabong



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The Karimojong have since continued to be exposed to the monetized economy as they interact with the world beyond their region. This has particularly seen the young warriors become more involved with their peers in the urban areas; many of them are now out to search for material possessions that grant them a more befitting individual identity. In the several conversations with the *karachuna* in Kaabong, they were quick to point to more modern material possessions they desire to acquire on top of simply owning cattle. Many of these include having things such as cell phones and radios, dressing well and being able to buy bottled beer and cigarettes. The young unmarried girls now look up to young men who have such material possessions which puts more pressure on them to have money. In addition, many of these young men are not yet recognized as adult males because they are not yet initiated and have not achieved honourable status through performing a heroic act. Yet such groups of youths can now access guns and know the power that the guns have to enable them to attain their dreams. This has generally become part of the commercialization of cattle rustling, which is increasingly being associated with foreign markets and the proliferation of small arms, and also provides more incentives to young men to engage in raiding (Hendrickson et al., 1996: 191). Commercial raiding has been particularly instrumental in enabling these young men to achieve economic independence and social recognition (Nori, Switzer, & Crawford, 2005: 16). These young men have also acquired more sophisticated weapons that enable them to face off with government security forces (Adano & Witsenburg, 2005: 720).

Whereas these warriors argue that they have a duty to perform and it is their obligation to protect the herds and the people's lives, the easy availability of guns has also produced new forms of violence such as banditry and robberies (Odhiambo, 2004: 28). According to Kratli and Swift (1999: 22), small-scale banditry and even fights between individuals, which in a town would fall under the category of small-scale criminality, can lead to clan raids and escalate into a full scale ethnic war (Meier, Bond and Bond 2007; 720). The gun has thus become a very significant aspect of life among the young Karimojong male youths. Many families that own cattle indeed possess guns. The most common guns are usually the Russian-made AK-47, which according to the councillor of Karenga in Kaabong is common because

it is cheap, handy and convenient, automated and easily obtainable, durable, and requires only minimal maintenance and modest training for one to be able to use it<sup>15</sup>. This is the reason why youths as young as twelve are able to take on the status of being a warrior and join the armed violence industry.

There are individuals whose survival now hinges on the cattle raiding. Some of them have to pass through very influential power brokers including agents of the state. There are also individuals within the state security systems who work closely with the armed youths, just as some highly connected people in criminal gangs across the borders are also involved. They operate closely knit networks that fuel violence from which they make vast profits (Nordstrom 1997). War in this case is intimately enmeshed in the struggles people engage in during their daily lives. The violence is therefore an invention of a human-built social order in which a group of people and institutions in the society control most of the resources and make the decisions that end up in violence (Pilisuk 2007).

### **3.2.5 Killing and the mark of manhood**

Generally, the practice of raiding is considered a very different and far more legitimate activity. As stated earlier, raiding is associated with the tradition that provides a right of passage for young men. But alongside raiding is facing off with the enemy, and killing the enemy. To the warrior, killing is the yardstick by which manhood and particularly bravery and heroism is confirmed and actualized. Killing is a motivation for one to ascend the social hierarchy. While the Karimojong cultures provide enormous incentives for those warriors who kill their enemies, anyone who has killed must ritually purify himself before God. He should seek penitence so that the spirits of the dead do not seek vengeance<sup>16</sup>.

If he killed an enemy with his spear, he must lick the blood from the blade, break the weapon and never use it again (Onyang and O’Kassick 2007). Customarily

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with LC V councilor for Karenga

<sup>16</sup> Discussion with elders in Kaabong

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when one has killed in a raid or battle he must not sleep in the hut when he returns home. A ritual of repentance must be performed at the sacred grove and a bull is speared to appease the spirits of those killed before he can enter his hut again. This ritual of atonement ends with the decoration of the warrior. The marking of rows of small dots on the valiant man's chest signifies that he has killed in raiding. It is a sign that he is a fearless and heroic warrior who has killed the enemy in a raid and defended the group.

In this rite, as the warrior is being pierced with sharpened sticks whose tips are on fire, to demonstrate his bravery he must not cry or show any sign of feeling pain. The piercing creates blisters which later heal to form shiny scars in neat rows on the man's chest. When the scars (tattoos) are marked on the left side, it means that he has killed a man (or men) in raiding, and when they appear on the right side, it is a sign that he killed a woman or a child in the raid. The overall essence of tattooing is meant to depict the warrior as a skilful raider. However it also exacerbates their persistent desire to kill their traditionally known enemies in the quest for heroism. It is also accompanied by assigning pet names to the victorious. Such names are highly prized and only associated with having big bulls in the kraal and killing enemies. By having a special warrior names (pet names) one is distinguished from the rest of the men in the society. However, the killing of a fellow tribesman in a fight outside a raid is completely prohibited and attracts the wrath of the elders, including paying a fine of not less than 60 cattle (Onyang and O'Kasick 2007; 168).

Usually when the wounds from the blisters pierced on the warrior's chest heal, the warriors leave them exposed for women to see. Warriors argue that the scars are rewarding and women treasure and respect men with those signs of heroism. Such a man is not only held in high esteem but also greatly admired by young women, especially those seeking marriage. For the Karimojong the killing of an enemy is one way which makes men and it is these special body marks that men make to show that someone has killed several people and as such is considered a great warrior. The more marks one has the more popular and respected he is in the community, and the more girls are likely to marry him (Oxfam 2004). Women sing disparaging songs

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about men without marks. They are ridiculed in the community, prompting them to join raiding cum killing expeditions in order to allay the fears that they are useless men in the society and to restore their glory. Killing has continued despite more involvement of various groups in creating human rights awareness in Karamoja. “Since change can be expected to accelerate further away from past African traditions in a globalizing world, then it follows that things continue to fall apart. Not only are the cattle-raiders criminals in the eyes of the law of the state, but they are also renegades according to their own lights, defying their own traditions, so losing their dignity as representatives of a lost African heritage” (Knighton 2006).

### 3.3 Security, Women and Guns

The Karimojong society is highly stratified and the division of labour and responsibilities still falls largely along traditional notions of gender roles. While men are responsible for herding, overall security issues and raiding, and decision-making, women are in charge of the homestead; usually tending the fields and managing the daily life in the family. When a woman gets married, she is allocated land and a cow to enable her to feed herself and her children. She also takes charge of calves that will be bred by that cow and as she gives birth to more children, more cows are also given to her (Mkutu 2008; 241).

Women are excluded from the age-set system of men. Although they have their own initiation into womanhood called *akiwor*, they technically belong to the generation and clan of their husband. Whilst the *akiwor* bestows upon the elder women a certain status, a right to meet with other women and perform ceremonies, it does not confer the same socio-economic powers of decision-making as the council of initiated (male) elders, or *akiriket*. Such meetings are usually called whenever there is a severe disaster. Women can ask for the meeting to be called and these days some senior women can attend and listen from a distance but do not take part in the discussions or decisions. Instead, women more often than not make use of their informal influences on decision-making through their husbands, sons, and prospective spouses (Mkutu 2008; SNV 2005:20; Mkutu 2005, 2007; Novelli 2001).

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They can also channel their issues through the *akiwor*. This is the ritual which confers status on women, cultivates solidarity among them which they can use in defence of their rights, and also provides them with the space to perform certain traditional ceremonies. Hence, although women do not have the same power in decision-making as men, they are not without power (Mkutu 2008; 242).

Traditionally, the *akiriket* is the sacred grove where ceremonies are performed; the trees in it are not supposed to be cut and it is the meeting place for the clan assemblies. It is here where they where initiated men assemble, though the uninitiated men can also attend. They consult, discuss and resolve the general or specific problems of the area. These may include but are not limited to; raids, epidemics, new grazing grounds, enemies, political alliances or how to demand back confiscated cattle. The elders conduct the discussions but usually have the last word. The main speakers are generally two among the oldest of the ruling generation set. In this forum the young men attending are encouraged to have children, be strong and courageous in protecting the clan and their cattle; and be worthy of their parents (Pazzaglia 1982; 98).

Thus membership of the *akiriket* is purely male and of all categories. However, men are ranked in order of their seniority and while the uninitiated men attend, they have no proper voice in the assembly. Their status is comparable to that of women, *karachuna* or boys (*ngidyain*) (Knighton 2005; 135). In addition, being initiated alone is not enough to give one a voice in the *akiriket*; a man must have fathered a child to have a voice in the assembly. This means that marriage and manhood is only attained after one has fulfilled all family values especially gaining the status of fatherhood. Having children brings women into a position of influence in many Karimojong men's lives, and while women do not have formal access to traditional decision-making institutions such as the *akiriket*, they are still socially well positioned to influence decisions, albeit remotely<sup>17</sup>. Through their social roles as unmarried girls,

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<sup>17</sup> Discussion with elders in Kaabong

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wives, mothers and elder women, they play an ambiguous, but often ignored part in the conflict dynamics of the region.

### 3.3.1 Women and cattle raiding

With the long period of endless conflict in Karamoja, the roles of both men and women have changed. Traditionally it was the duty of men to go hunting, raid cattle, graze cattle, and provide security for the home while the women stayed home and took care of household undertaking responsibilities such as building the huts, preparing meals, and looking after the children. With the persistent conflict some of these roles have changed; some men have either been forced out of productive roles or have even been killed in the raids. This leaves women with many challenges. Some women have adopted various ways of coping with the new challenges; for instance, taking to activities such as brewing local beer and selling it (Ocan 1994; Quam 1996). Due to the loss and reduction in cattle herds and the restrictions over movement across other territories, men have also started building houses, and doing some of the cultivation which was previously left for women.

The part played by women in the conflicts of Karamoja is somewhat ambiguous; besides encouraging raids in various ways, the women are also highly active in peace activities. Women, like uninitiated men, cannot sit at the council of initiated elders, *akiriket* but can influence decisions in other subtle ways. As wives and mothers, their roles are sometimes very influential in the kind of decisions men make in both instigating and mitigating conflict. During peace negotiations, two mothers from opposing communities exchange babies and breast-feed them as a symbolic alliance between the two communities (Mkutu 2008). Or women can be chosen as messengers between clans as they occasionally marry into different clans and are not directly perpetrating raids. They can also choose to go on peace crusades of their own, sharing milk and tobacco with enemy communities as peace offerings. These offerings are rarely refused, as it is believed that to reject a woman's peace initiative is to invite a curse. Older, well-respected women also have the power to curse younger generations. These days many *ngikaracuna* fear to ask for the

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blessings of women before going on raids because they fear that a raid which is not sanctioned will encounter major obstacles.

Like men who need to attain manhood, women are also rated according to marriage. Women who are not married with cattle are looked down upon and they do not have a strong voice in matters that pertain to women in the *manyattas*. For example, women who are not married with cattle are traditionally not buried when they die, and their surviving relatives do not perform ritual mourning or carry out other rituals for the dead (Akabwai and Ateyo 2007). Marriage is therefore a significant determinant for a woman's participation in issues that matter to society. This applies to their roles in issues associated with cattle raiding as well. The women could help initiate the raid through hinting that the children were without milk (indicating the need for cows), or in extreme cases wives could attempt to inspire their husbands to raid by beating their children to portray poor household welfare. More explicit and popular methods of encouraging cattle raiding amongst older generations of women include taunting and humiliating the men, insulting their manhood by accusing them of not providing for the family, and generally making the 'lazy' or 'weak' men feel out of place and wish to prove their manhood<sup>18</sup>.

Whereas women are not considered perpetrators of cattle raids, they can indirectly and in many ways play significant prompting and supporting roles. Women do not directly handle firearms nor do they fire the AK-47 rifles but they have an important cultural role in cattle raiding. "A woman's weapon is in her tongue" is what most Karimojong women say. Women have been found to actively take part in the smuggling or trade in small arms, women sell ammunition to the *ngikaracuna* disguising as payment for alcohol they have trade in. Women have actively performed innovative roles in the provision of security.

In the 1990s when Moroto district started the vigilante system that employed a community-based approach using local warriors to provide security, women were

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<sup>18</sup> Interview with LC V women's councilor from Loyoro

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used in the gathering of intelligence (Quam 1996; Mkutu 2006). They would go in the guise of performing their household chores of collecting firewood or fetching water or gathering vegetables while observing and collecting information about warrior locations, movements, and type of armament without raising any suspicion. Such changes in women's participation are perhaps beginning to lead to a more direct approach. Men know for sure that women will not be suspected of carrying weapons and the army will always turn a blind eye to women during search operations regardless of what they are carrying.

Traditionally, warriors must get a blessing from an elderly woman before embarking on a raid. This ritual which is commonly referred to as "passing between the legs of a woman" is the last ritual before the raiders set out to accomplish their mission. The warriors leave with the confidence and full support of the women in their lives. As they march away to battle the women sprinkle water on them as the journey to acquire wealth begins. Back in the *manyattas* they remain singing and dancing. Mothers or wives of the already married warriors continue in ritual even after the young men have left. Each of the warrior's stools must be kept in an upright position at the centre of the hut as a symbolic sign that the warrior stands strong in combat. These are events that go almost unnoticed as they occur inside the raider's hut and solely under the careful watch of his mother (if he is not married) or his wife.

When men return from a successful raid, the women sing war songs and dance in honour of the brave warriors. This used to be a formally organized ceremony where the warriors would be given pet names matching their bravery and everything would be done colourfully in dance and songs sung by women in the victory dance. Guns would be shot in the air to signify the military success. But with the disarmament and government interventions of gun ownership, the ceremony is now performed in much more concealed manner. What is clear to an outside observer is that celebrations and merry-making are going on but to other participants a powerful message of achievement is being conveyed. Whereas the gun may not be physically seen on the scene, the happiness and praises in the songs show that everyone has enjoyed the fruits of firepower. As the men jump in the air, they act as if they are



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firing a gun. And the women respond by singing in praise of courage and good marksmanship often in a veiled song. One such song ostensibly praises the man's sexual performance in bed.

The distinction in battle and subsequent exaltation of the *ngikaracuna* by elder women appears to have great significance for the young people, especially those who are unmarried, as bravery in battle is traditionally a desirable attribute for a husband. Perpetrators of botched raids return home under cover of darkness to avoid the shame of failure. In fact honourable conduct in battle is so highly valued, that security officers note that the most dangerous group of *karachuna* are the unpredictable youths between the ages of 15-24 (generally unmarried). These are typically the armed youths who ambush cars and buses on the roads in frustration after returning from an unsuccessful raid.

That singing and dancing is part of the Karimojong daily life, the context and content of the songs all convey powerful messages to the young men. The Karimojong spend their 'free time' in the evenings on drinking sprees accompanied by lots of singing and dancing. Here certain songs are specifically composed and sung because they are intended to convey a specific message. "Even when you sit with them, you cannot know that the song is meant to praise the bravery of a team of warriors already out on a mission. For they are always singing anyway, they are always dancing, jumping and merry making even when it is clear life is hard for these people" the Kaabong RDC told me. Much communication takes place amidst that merry-making and leisure as we would call it. But to the Karimojong, that is the time to reconcile the individual and the social, and the women take a critical part in this public appraisal of the men in their midst.

### **3.3.2 Women are for the Decorated Fighters**

Lokwang and his wife Agnes have been married for twelve years and have three children. He paid one hundred head of cattle plus some twenty goats and sheep for her bride price. "It is not easy getting that number of cows; you must be a man to raise them" he says. Indeed, it took him three different raiding expeditions to raise the

number on top of meeting other obligations. He proudly defends his decision to pay the bride price and is happy to have an expensive wife. It would take a very wealthy man in cattle to take away his wife. If a man gets interested in your wife, he can pay off the bride wealth and take the woman plus the children. Therefore an expensive wife makes this possibility remote given that gathering a herd is not easy nowadays. Lokwang says he had all that it required to win the heart of a beauty of Agnes' calibre. She was from a respected family. Her father was a highly respected elder and her brothers all wear tattoos of honour, meaning they have killed enemies. Whereas all these are sources of pride for Lokwang, his own position in the society puts him above all men of his grade. "I am a well decorated fighter and I had a new gun which convinced her that she would be safe under my care. She also knows that with a man like me she would not starve"<sup>19</sup>.

To the Karimojong, marriage is only acknowledged when the exchange of cattle in the form of bride wealth is fully paid by the man to the family and clan of the woman. Marriage does not occur simply as a single event but involves series of successive ceremonies and rituals leading to the social creation and establishment of marital union (Gulliver 1955; 227). The process may take up to five years as the family ensures among other things that the woman is fertile and able to bear children. The processes culminate in the ritual incorporation of the woman into the husband's family and clan.

Thus, being married brings particular benefits not only to the man but also to the clan in many ways. First the rituals that come with marriage confer the much longed for social acknowledgment of the man as an adult member of his clan and bestows on him the ability to participate in decision-making within the *manyatta* and kraal. A man who has not married with cattle does not enjoy these benefits, and will hold a place of less importance within his age-class (Stites 2007). Gulliver (1955; 234) lays out the moral claim upon which the Jie Karimojong are obligated to

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<sup>19</sup> Interview in Kapedo

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contribute cattle for bride wealth. Close agnates closely cooperate in each other's payments and they also share in all payments received.

My friend Lokwang tells of how his clan members were not wealthy enough to contribute cattle when he married Agnes. He had to find other ways of raising the number of cattle required and raiding was one such alternative. The young men will not openly admit that they raise the cattle through cattle raids. In many instances they actually say it was contributions from the clan members and donations from friends. The reason is that raiding means that one possesses a gun and this attracts the attention of soldiers. In particular, the young men say that raided cattle may be easily identified in some cases when they are branded. So one has to sell them quickly and buy cattle from the cattle market slowly to avoid suspicion. While some people still legitimately claim bride wealth from relatives as Gulliver (1955) points out, Lokwang's case demonstrates some shifts. He had to cut "his own wisdom" to raise the number of cattle required for bride price<sup>20</sup>. So the necessity to fulfil certain cultural roles makes their participation and contribution to the violence more likely. Talking to Lokwang's wife, she fully approves of her husband's participation in raiding.

"There is no woman who can feel secure with a coward. Women do not have guns, it is men to protect us, it is men who fight with guns and bring home cattle. I feel proud because I was married with cows, my family is proud and my sisters will get wealthy men too." Agnes jokes about Lokwang's strength in the way he handled her the first time she was ambushed on their way from Kapedo. "He is a strong man, he held me and I couldn't move. He had a gun, he had to have a gun. How would he protect us and the cows without a gun?" According to Mkutu senior women in Rupa, "Women would tell the men who did not go raiding: you are not a man. Women encourage raids because all their peers are married, and they would say to the man 'Why are you still sitting here? Go on raids and marry me.' 'The other women will

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<sup>20</sup> For the young men in Karamoja, 'cutting wisdom' means using one's own intelligence to find means of surviving; in this case as is often the case, it means raiding to meet the demands of bride price.

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start abusing their sons, (saying) ‘so and so has gone raiding and they now have cows and you do not want to go’ (Mkutu 2008; 242). Courtship among the Karimojong is usually crowned by a man literally ambushing the girl and forcefully taking her hostage or having sex in the bush. Although several women still agree they were waylaid by their current husbands, the trend seems to be changing. Some of the women, especially in the urban areas like Kaabong town, say they simply agreed to marry their men and no force was used.

The use of force to win over a woman might look like rape but is not rape in the Karimojong custom. Force is applied after the two parties in a relationship have literally consented. However the final test of whether a man is a real man is necessary for the woman to guarantee her safety in the hands of a daring and strong man. Stites et al (2007; 53) for instance shows how a woman may be able to reject a particular man whom she feels is not ‘man enough’ in terms of paying sufficient bride price. But on the other hand, the girl’s parents also may literally compel her to marry a man who is not of her choice if he is wealthy and can offer many cattle in marriage.

These facts point to the way that involvement of women, whether directly or in a roundabout way, regulates behaviour of the Karimojong men. Women have a very important cultural role in shaping the behaviour of men and their participation in cattle rustling in particular. Although they do not go on raids and they do not carry guns like men, their weapon is their tongue. Whenever their wives talk, men act, and raiding is the most important way in which they can express their manhood. In terms of cattle raiding, girls, wives and mothers play very crucial supporting roles for the raiders. These roles cannot be undervalued or downplayed as merely a support mechanism to their sons, brothers or husbands. Agnes’ desire is to have her sisters marry great warriors who can pay more cattle in bride price to enable her brothers to pay for their own wives.

I am a decorated woman because my brothers are great warriors and they have worked hard to earn our family this prestige. Every man needs a strong woman in marriage, men prefer women who are from great families to produce boys to protect cows (*ngikatukok*), the men who will plan and

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command cattle raids. A man should be brave, strong and must have a gun. Here in our life, things are very difficult so a man must be a good raider to bring back cattle and to protect cattle. He should be wealthy in cattle, well decorated and a good dancer (as *karachuna*); he must have good songs composed about him, the songs that are admired and liked by girls. He must be a good dancer who can jump highest in the dance. And men do all these things in order to win the hearts of girls. There is no girl who will want to marry a coward, a man without a gun, a man who sleeps at home and cannot protect the kraal. So as girls we have to show our brothers the way forward, we compose songs that encourage them to be active, to enable them to see the way and do what their fellow men are doing. If they don't kill the enemy, we shall all be wiped out, if they don't kill the enemy we shall not be decorated and men will shun us because we are from a family of cowards. And yet if we don't get men who can pay more cattle, our brothers will not be able to marry. They need to earn respect in society. A man who pays more cows in marriage is respected and a man who pays less is not a man and the wife can be taken away by a wealthy man who can pay more cows.

During the festive seasons and usually after successful raids, the *akidong'o* dance is performed. It is a period for jubilation as well as seducing girls for marriage. There is a lot of singing and dancing to mark heroic exploits of great fighters. At this time it matters if one's brother has been a successful raider; you get so many advances because "you are associated with daring and successful warriors. A man believes you will produce for him such courageous boys". All this happens because it is during this dance when men seek out and find potential wives. Therefore, the way a girl is decorated becomes a very important factor. A girl whose brothers have killed the enemy will have tattoos to show off. The girls and women normally sing songs praising heroic acts in battle and pay tribute to successful warriors while ridiculing those who have never taken part in a raid. The girls all crave to dance with the heroic warriors while the cowardly men who have not raided are rejected. An Oxfam (2004) study also points out that in a typical Turkana or Karamoja setting, it is difficult to get a girl to marry if you have not demonstrated your manhood through raiding and or defending the community from enemies.

### **3.3.3 Women, Marriage and Weapons**

The unmarried Karimjong girls agree that what makes a 'good man' has to do with being courageous, hard working and wealthy. In a discussion, they argue that a

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man must undertake to attest that he is able to fend for a family. How one is portrayed before girls or women is of the utmost importance to a Karimojong boy. There are specific features that show this success in their bodily display. This can always be seen in the way one adheres to the cultural values through body ornamentation, including beaded necklaces, earrings made of sticks, small rocks or beads, strings of beads worn around the waist, and beads or feathers woven into the hair (Stites et al 2007). But to round it off he must also have a gun because culturally, it is the duty of a man to raid other communities in order to replenish lost herds (after droughts, diseases) and in doing so, meet the community's needs. Almost 90% of the Karimojong population agrees that they have either raided or inherited or received (as bride price) their present herds (OCHA 2008).

Historically the Karimojong were known to be armed simply with spears that they used for hunting and raiding in the pre-colonial times. But upon being introduced to modern weapons in the second half of the nineteenth century, their perception of hunting, raiding and indeed warfare changed. Now even in marriage, guns have become a force that has surely substituted spears, and they are not just weapons for hunting and raiding expeditions but also status symbols. However, when they were first introduced guns were expensive and only wealthier families could afford them for use by their elder sons to protect the livestock while herding. The weapon was referred to as a 'family gun' and no action could be taken with that weapon without the approval of the father and mother. Elders and seers were involved in decisions regarding raids on other groups. Many Karimojong continued to use spears regularly until firearms became more widely available from the beginning of the 1970s. By the time of the first major disarmament exercise in 2000, Karamoja was estimated to have 40,000 to 100,000 firearms. In fact, almost every adult male possessed a weapon and would publicly move around with it. Karamoja was indeed gifted in firepower and prior to the disarmament campaigns, a single large raid could (and often did) result in the deaths of hundreds of people, many of whom would be unarmed women, children and the elderly (Stites et al 2007; 57).

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The government was forced into action and decided to disarm the Karimojong. At least in theory some forms of disarmament have been carried out. But the reality according to the warriors themselves is that the guns have gone into hiding<sup>21</sup>. Whereas the disarmament programme has forced all guns into oblivion, within the community, they know who owns a gun and who does not. Guns and ammunition are no longer openly sold in the market but negotiations about the price and actual buying take place in a much more concealed way. It now involves many people one would never suspect of being involved in gun trafficking. It also involves social relationships within which its significance is constructed by both men and women.

There is no doubt that marriage is still one very important ritual to the young men in Karamoja. While they cannot conduct the *asapan*, marriage is still possible and it is the final evaluation of their manhood. So they badly need this community assessment which must be done to ascertain the readiness of a young man in need of marriage. He needs to show power and strength, and must be a skilful marksman. He definitely needs a weapon to demonstrate this. The gun thus becomes such an important asset for determining the ability of men to get married. Stites (2007) says:

It is the belief of any pastoral woman who was properly married that her daughter should be married properly [through an exchange of cattle]... Usually the beautiful girl ends up being given in arranged marriage to a rich wretched old man but these days the young man will pick up his AK-47 and go to raid. If he is lucky he comes back with his loot and a quick marriage ceremony is organized and the bride is taken with ululation and a barrage of gun shots! Of course the girl's mother will be rightly happy but little does she know how much blood was spilt to bring such a dowry! This is how the poor youth responds and this is contributing to perpetual cattle rustling in the Karamoja cluster (Stites 2007; 62)

This introduces ambiguity about what makes a desirable husband. As in many other African pastoralist societies, the payment of bride wealth by the groom in heads

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with a warrior in Kathile

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of cattle is a critical feature in the institution of marriage in Karimojong culture. “Although these gifts are supposed to be tokens of appreciation to the women’s parents, often they have been regarded as a price or value for the woman.” Thus the customary norm is that women do not participate in formal decision-making. Because of the high bride price, the women are considered the property of men, who are generally richer, more educated and own other assets as well. This has the effect that women are under pressure to produce children, to increase the resources of the husband’s clan. These children belong to the husband’s clan and in case of divorce, must be left with the father’s family.

Cattle raiding has had a tremendous impact on many parents and their extended families. It is not possible for some relatives to contribute enough cattle to meet the marriage obligations of their sons. As a result, many young men find themselves in a fix regarding where to get bride wealth. Sometimes the ways out that exist involve taking a woman and paying later in a traditional bond called *ekicoli*. Under this arrangement, a man can enter a relationship with a girl and even have a child and pay the compensatory payment (*ekicoli*) on condition that he completes paying later (Knighton 2005; 84). The man may pay one to three cows depending on when the woman gives birth; for each child he has to give a cow to the wife’s family since the children will still belong to the clan of the father. But if a wealthy man becomes interested in the woman and he pays more cattle, the poor man can lose the woman plus all the children to the rich man. These restrictions all point to the importance of making prompt and full payment for marriage. Hence many *ngikaracuna*, especially those whose families are not wealthy in cattle, will find it impossible to avoid going raiding to acquire the necessary cattle and meet these obligations.

Those poor ones, those who do not already possess weapons, sometimes hire guns from their friends or relatives, or the rich gun owners and pay in cattle after a successful raid. In some situations, the poor warriors may look after the cattle of the wealthy and are given animals either annually or after a set term, or they may be employed by rich men to raid on their behalf with promises to pay their marriage obligations (Mkutu 2008; ADOL, 2002). Whatever the arrangement may be, the



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bottom line is that these youths take on a large debt with the obligation to pay back the cattle directly or in the form of participation in further raids to amass wealth for the creditor.

Since the young men are always anxious to acquire cattle for marriage and raise their status, their economic indisposition is exploited by some cattle traders who take advantage of their youth and engage them in cattle raids and, in return, pay them cash or give them part of the herd looted. Elders also agree that “as things stand now ownership of the gun is an important factor here in enabling one to garner wealth”<sup>22</sup>. In many of the peace meetings I attended, these matters of bride price were echoed as one of the principal causes of conflict both within families and between communities.

Young men are always under pressure to meet society’s expectation, and this pressure is also felt by their fathers who are traditionally obligated to provide bride wealth and yet on many occasions they also want to take on another wife. The priority of the father is to get additional wives before he agrees to dig deep into his herd and provide bride wealth for the first son of his first wife (Mkutu 2008; 243). Many of the fathers who have daughters of marriageable age would wish to have their daughters married away to raise bride wealth that would enable them to marry more wives. Such a man tries to delay his son’s marriage as long as possible because this will be a sign of the beginning of the end (Broch-Due 1999; 23). This creates some tension between fathers and the sons who want to assert their independence. Thus raiding provides the young men with a viable way of accumulating wealth and cattle of their own, in order to fulfil their own needs for marriage and economic self-sustenance.

The young men find themselves squeezed into a tight corner and some have taken to the life of a full time raider as explained by this warrior; “a gun is wealth, with a gun, I can get whatever I want ... I can use the gun to get cows, wealth of all kinds, to get a wife, to defend my community and also to carry out revenge when we

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with 8 elders in Kapedo

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are attacked”. They have taken to the gun to meet their daily needs. But most importantly, they do not necessarily need the approval of elders to possess weapons and subsequently access the nature of goods they need. This gun possession has detached the youth from the strong familial control. They seem to elude the control of the traditional decision-making institutions that previously decided on important matters of marriage, raiding, and conflict resolution.

As Akabwai and Ateyo (2007) put it; with the young men feeling that they have been freed from the traditional constraints on raiding, they are now more likely to raid in smaller groups of less than ten. They have a target and normally work towards attaining it. “Such groups are very dangerous when they fail to get the cattle they went to raid. With their frustrations they resort to laying road ambushes to rob travellers of money and other expensive goodies that can attract women. They look for things like mobile phones, watches, shoes and hard cash. They kill their victims to destroy evidence and that is why they cannot be decorated for such acts”<sup>23</sup>.

It becomes very difficult for the youth to directly accumulate cattle wealth to be used in paying bride wealth. For raiders, wealth can now be in the form of money which can be used to buy cattle and eventually marry a woman. Men prefer to pay bride price and marry several women than keep the herds that will eventually be taken away. The *ngikaracuna* now look on the gun as a better option to wealth because the gun can be used to marry a woman in strange ways as Ocan (1994) puts it, “because cattle have become so fluid and risky to possess, people turn cattle wealth to ‘women wealth’ by marrying several as a kind of cattle security”. It is not uncommon for a *ngikaracuna* to refer to his gun as ‘my wife’, not in the literal sense but as one of them described, “with the gun, you have a wife in waiting”.

This is corroborated by women, particularly the young unmarried girls, who look at being married with big herds of cattle not only as a sign of prestige but also as a way of providing for their families. The cattle of bride wealth are shared among the

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with district council speaker, Kaabong

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agnates of the bride as a way of expressing a special relationship between the bride's family and the clan (Gulliver 1955). Given the deepening effects of drought, famine and insecurity, many brides now feel their marriage should serve as a relief to the family when the bride price is paid. A girl now feels the young man taking her in marriage must be able to withstand the economic and security hardships in the region. These include being able to feed her and provide for her family, as well as provide modern goods that other women in towns enjoy. But all these are the benefits only the *ngikaracuna* who owns a gun can afford.

So when they get married, these women know the value attached to the gun. They know exactly where the men they are married to derive their power and enterprise from. We do not need to focus only on women or men as an isolated category but look at the social relations between them that are key to understanding how and why guns become an issue in the society. Customarily, it is the duty of the woman to keep the man's weapon. When a man returns home from herding or hunting, a woman is supposed to receive him and tend to his gun. Mkutu compares it to how a woman takes off a man's shoes when he returns from work; likewise she must receive the gun from him and put it in a secure place. But things have changed as the warrior group in Kapedo argued. If one leaves the gun for the woman to keep and soldiers come, she will be compelled to hand it over when she sees the husband being beaten. "Before the soldiers started asking for guns from us, it was okay for the women to store our guns, even spears. That is why some women would take guns to the detention centres to have their husbands released". Women knew where their husbands kept the guns and they were the definite caretakers of guns in the home. "Now we can no longer leave guns to women alone, every man knows where to hide his gun; women sometimes help in transporting it". But the relationship between men, their guns, women and cattle has always existed. Mkutu (2008) quotes a former Moroto MP who explained the relationship between the gun, the woman and the cow thus;

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*The first time you're buying the gun, you have to take the cows to pay for it from the mother. The gun is sought particularly for protection and livelihood ... At first it used to cost 20 cows. It came down to 15 then to 10 and it now costs about 1-3 cows depending on either it's the border area or the interior. The father owns the cattle but the woman has a say. Usually the father is more rigid than the mother and when a son comes to the mother she will respond quickly (Mkutu 2008; 244).*

At the height of the cordon and search operations in July 2007, the soldiers who were returning from a disarmament mission in Namalu sub-county encountered a group of Karimojong women who were carrying firewood. When the women saw them, they got panicky and started running away, abandoning their firewood. This act attracted the attention of the soldiers who decided to go and search the abandoned bundles of firewood. The search revealed four guns and 140 rounds of ammunition that were concealed in the bundles. This forced the army to change tactics in dealing with Karimojong women. The local commander of a detachment near Kaabong narrated how many times warriors adorn clothes of women and safely walked with their guns alongside a shield of women to avoid detection by the army. The Daily Monitor newspaper reported that the army had changed their perception of Karimojong women.

Lt. Obbo said women were now the biggest gun traffickers. He said the army was lenient to women assuming that they were innocent but would intensify the search for guns even among them. Since the army launched the disarmament exercise in Karamoja, the warriors have tried to ensure it fails. In February the army discovered that cattle and donkeys were being used to traffic small arms. While addressing residents at a security meeting, 3rd Division Commander Patrick Kankiriho said warriors were disguising themselves as women to spy on the UPDF and animals that they could steal at night. He said the UPDF recently intercepted a truck carrying waragi (local beer) with ten jerricans loaded with bullets (The Monitor, July 28<sup>th</sup> 2007).

According to the local elders, it is at this point that the army started demanding guns from the women. Whenever a cordon and search operation was carried out and all the men were rounded up and detained at the military facility, women would be

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asked to produce their husbands' or sons' guns to secure their release. Women would be told to bring the guns before the men could be released. Some women indeed brought guns and had their husbands released. The challenge was that men had learnt to hide their guns in the bush and did not keep them in the *manyattas* for fear of the UPDF operations. Their wives would never access these hidden treasures and yet the men's release was essential for the family survival. Many women were forced to use the gun market in southern Sudan and other parts of Karamoja and beyond. They bought guns which they took to the military detachment to have their tortured husbands and sons released.

The women agree that their husbands release was very important because they had "to run around and look for what to eat". So keeping the men in detention greatly affected the family's livelihood. What is more, they were not able to perform their roles after detention because they no longer possessed the guns. The weapons are part and parcel of being a man. One's ability to defend and fend for the family is all tied to the gun. Thus no woman would wish to see her husband disarmed of his badge of manhood. Indeed, whereas many women sought the release of their husbands by buying guns, they made sure the man had another gun to be able to "start off" anew after the detention and disarmament. Elukor, whose wife could not afford to buy a gun to secure his release spent long periods in detention and only managed to get out when he became very ill. He admits he is no longer man enough. "I handed in my gun the very first time, I was even given the certificate, but it could not help me when I was arrested again. They demanded I bring another gun". His life now depends on whatever the woman can gather from Kaabong town council. Sometimes Elukor eats the dregs of local beer (kwete) for a meal. He blames his deplorable condition entirely on the loss of his gun. Once known as a wealthy man with over 200 animals, he fell victim to attacks by the Turkana who rustled his entire herd. With his gun taken in the disarmament, his next fear is that a wealthy man in cattle will easily take away his wife and children. This is the concern of every Karimojong man – a wealthy man can marry off your wife and all the children. It is a sign that you are no longer man enough to manage a family.

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Women were not only trafficking arms and ammunition for their men's freedom but also to bolster their ability to withstand social and economic pressures in being a man among the Karimojong. For a man to carry out his role a gun is not only a necessity but also an identity marker. Women constantly implored their men or husbands to be (the *karachuna*) to seek revenge. But on the other hand, this direct participation of women in the gun-related violence increased social acceptance of violence as a resource and effectively as an appropriate means of survival. Such developments have brought women to the forefront of Karimojong politics. Women thus become the motivation not just for raiding but for any man's prestige. Many women talk about a difficult future without guns and they are now securing weapons for their sons, in order to guarantee their security, protect the herds and ensure economic survival.

When the raiding environment becomes rather difficult because of the heavy deployment of soldiers, women literally take over the management of the household economy. Karimojong women are known for their innovative ways of managing scarcity. Some women engage in petty trade, selling firewood or collecting water for cash as an alternative livelihood while others engage in the brewing and distilling of local beer. At the local trading centres women run a relatively brisk business in selling beer. In Kaabong, women are in charge of the beer business; they sell bottled beer as well as the popular local brews known as *kwete* and *waragi*. These beer drinking points are common meeting places for men in the evenings where discussions on the 'situation in Karamoja' are regular topics. Elite men working with NGOs and local administration in Kaabong Town meet here to "hear the situation on the roads and updates on insecurity".

But warriors and gun handlers also use these places as meeting points to arrange weapon deals as well as negotiate business. In such 'difficult times' money is hard to come by and warriors as well as some local people come with bullets to exchange for beer. In these economically hard times, a bullet costs between five hundred to two thousand Uganda shillings. Mkutu in 2006 found they cost 300 to 1,200 Ugandan shillings depending on the area (Mkutu 2008). This is exchanged for a 500 ml bottle

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of waragi or three litres of *kwete*. This same point is the purchasing point, or at least is known as a place for “connecting” someone who is in need of ammunition<sup>24</sup>.

### *Conclusion*

This chapter has revealed that the Karimojong women are active participants and beneficiaries of the tirade of violence in the region. There are various ways through which they can participate. For instance, they opt for selling beer first as an income generating activity to care for children, the elderly, and the orphans of the violence. But in the process, they are also making it possible for the warriors to survive and play their role in the society’s wellbeing. As a result, the socio-economic relations between the various sections of the Karimojong reinforces the cycle of violence. Most importantly, continuous attempts by the Karimojong to construct alternative ideals of masculinity and femininity have broader implications for social relations and violence in particular.

Everyone agrees that they have experienced the violence associated with cattle rustling in one way or another and it is extremely difficult to find a family that has not either lost cows or a member shot as a result of raiding. Under the excessive military force of the UPDF in the disarmament a number of men have lost both their guns and cattle, leaving them powerless and vulnerable to attacks. Their powerlessness is more pronounced given that the drought and famine have made it impossible for them to provide any food for their families. This inability to provide for the family has meant that men can no longer lay claims to manhood as has always been known. Such state interventions therefore seriously diminish the realms of practice that allow a man to engage in, demonstrate and confirm masculinity in ways that affirm honour on men.

Instead, everything in the social construction of relationships seems to be inextricably linked to guns. Guns and cattle are increasingly being fused as complementary symbols of wealth, power and physical strength (Hutchinson 1996).

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<sup>24</sup> Discussion with warriors in Kidepo

Through commercialized armed cattle rustling, the warriors were also introduced to Western goods like clothing, mobile phones, ornaments and bottled beer. A new form of status was conferred upon them. But the ultimate impact still remains with the disfiguring effect that the guns have on those who own them. The guns offer them a direct way to increase their self esteem and demonstrate their masculinity without necessarily meeting the customary requirements. They no longer need to seek the age-set initiation, perform marriage rites and own cattle as cultural markers of male prestige, only a gun is sufficient. In consequence, social institutions are becoming superfluous, power imbalances are becoming exacerbated and violence is continuously escalating.



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CHAPTER FOUR

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## 4. A HISTORY OF VIOLENT STATE ORDERS

### 4.1 Introduction

Karamoja is one region in Uganda that widely known but not for particularly good reasons. The region forms a battle ground for armed cattle rustlers engaging enemy groups or exchanging deadly fire with the state security apparatus or laying deadly roadside ambushes or pillaging whole villages, all under the guise of cattle raiding. When looked at from a broader perspective, we can begin to attach these developments to the historical formation of the state in Uganda and then link them to the issue of persistent violence in Karamoja. Equally important for understanding the insecurity among pastoralist groups is their distant and often oppositional relationship to the state. As with other peripheral groups in the region, pastoralists have suffered systematic marginalization from central authorities. At the same time, they have a history of rejecting the authority of the state, which they view as threatening their distinctive nomadic way of life. Pastoralist violence must therefore be situated in historical time and space to come to terms with the forces of mutual opposition and exclusion as well as the struggle for control that define their existence.

The violence associated with the Karimojong should therefore not be looked at in isolation. This is because violence has been very much part of historical processes in the entire region. It was part of the process of state formation, part of the unfolding global politics and even the economic transformation. Many scholars of violence in this region would agree with Knighton (2006) that for the Karimojong, an historical approach would best demonstrate the way they changed their circumstances to adapt to the conflicting demands of the state. This entailed skilfully exploiting new opportunities to promote their core values and way of life. According to Knighton, the persistent conflicts could simply have been a projection of colonial violence or the side-effects of a breakdown of the African state in the neo-colonial age. However, that does not give us the full picture. Little consideration has been paid to an exhaustive historical analysis of the patterns and diverse relationships within the wider socio-economic and political forces that gradually produced the violence. What

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we seem to miss is how the historical forces of colonialism, the postcolonial era, the cold war, the crisis of legitimacy in statehood in Uganda etc have all differently positioned the Karimojong in their struggle for survival and independence.

In this chapter, I suggest that the history of this region entails an analysis of the various processes that introduced the nation state and its assemblages in Karamoja; dating back into the colonial politics of cultural autonomy vis-à-vis state formation. But unlike, the view that the Karimojong were simply coming to terms with the demands of the state, the chapter explores the manner in which the various historical moments have provided opportunities for the Karimojong to reorganize and transform their social system to galvanize resistance against the new order. My argument is that armament and eventual militarization of the society was stimulated by dramatic historical circumstances such as the global and national crises and new political movements. These events made it possible for the prevalence of civil wars, mutinies, military coups, rebellions and ultimately crumbling states to accustom accessibility of weapons as a basis for violence. Each specific historical process created new avenues not only for armament but also for resistance and shaping their destiny. The chapter systematically explores how persistent violence should be understood as part of the comprehensive world order for which locally, the Karimojong were and are still avid adversaries.

## 4.2 The coming of colonial domination

The history of gun violence in this region can be traced back to the days of organized raids for slaves, livestock, ivory, rhinoceros horns, and other game trophies by Ethiopian interlopers and Arab merchants that predate European colonialism of the 19th century<sup>25</sup>. Acquisition of arms and the associated conflicts at that time were very much part of the ecological, spiritual, socio-economic as well as the political history of the drylands region. The Karimojong in particular had contact with arms even before the European scramble for and partition of Africa. From time

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<sup>25</sup> Nene Mburu 2001:153

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immemorial they had been engaged in cattle raiding as a cultural practice which required them to have some weapons, and then in the later years they came into contact with other groups such as the Arab gun traffickers and the Swahili slave traders coming from the East African coast with whom they bartered ivory and cattle for guns.

Before this region experienced colonial rule established by the British in 1900, much of the hinterland of East Africa had experienced decades of trade in slaves and arms from merchants and gunrunners of Ethiopia and Sudan. Gun markets in the south-western Ethiopian town of Maji existed well before the 1855 partition of Africa and this served as a supply point for arms in the East African region. During this time, the East African coast also served as the gateway for thousands of assorted firearms, mainly breech-loaders and Winchester Repeater rifles (Mburu 2001). Indeed the early explorers acknowledged coming into contact with emerging armies with large stockpiles of arms among the tribes in the interior of Eastern Africa. For instance, the first explorer in Uganda, Speke in 1862, was surprised that his present of guns was no novelty to Mutesa, the King of Buganda, who was only interested in the Colt six-shooter<sup>26</sup>. By that time the arms trade in East Africa was already linked with the development and use of new types of firearms in Europe. For example they had already been exposed to the breech-loader or needle-gun that was first used in the 1866 Prussian victory over Austria (Beachey 1962: 451). The vast country of East Africa by then was largely ungoverned territory with growing numbers of war lords who were very keen to acquire any type of firearm. Many of these were Arab and Abyssinian merchants who stormed Karamoja territory in pursuit of the lucrative ivory trade of the time.

For the Karimojong, the real first contact with foreign gun influence was in the 1880s during Menelik's Ethiopian imperial advance into the southern parts of the Karamoja cluster. The Karimojong described to Lamphear (1976) the brown-skinned strangers who appeared in Najie from the north. "They had come from the area to the

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<sup>26</sup> Mutesa had already been accustomed to different guns from the Arabs

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north of Lake Rudolf which was by the end of the decade, to be incorporated within Menelik's expanding Ethiopian empire, and in their baggy cloth garments, mounted on strange four-footed creatures, and carrying for weapons sticks which made a fearful noise and gave off a terrible odour, they presented an exceedingly weird spectacle to the astonished Jie" (Lamphear 1976: 221). They referred to them as the *Habaci* and interactions were minimal given the difficulties in communication<sup>27</sup>.

In this initial encounter with strangers, the Jie patched their relations with the Ethiopians and in the following years other strangers moved into Karamoja. This marked the coming of the *Acumpa*, as the Jie referred to the Swahili from the East African coast. It is worth noting however that these strangers were mainly interested in hunting, for their tusks, the elephants that were roaming the expanse of Karamoja's drylands but over the years, real connections and relationships developed. These relations extended into trading links, at first through exchanges of grain, milk and meat for beads, copper and brass wire. This broadened the trust and eventually the Jie were lent rifles to hunt the elephants themselves. This was the Karimojongs' first discernible contact with firearms; exchange relations with the *Habaci* and *Acumpa* culminating in utilization of guns to hunt elephants for ivory, fundamentally for trade. At this time, the main objectives were trade and survival, and the Karimojong contact with guns was purely for hunting purposes to cope with the increasing demand for elephant tusks. It is noteworthy that even the grand army of Loriang, the greatest war leader of the time did not use guns in warfare in all the victorious battles against the Dodoth, Bokora and other Karimojong ethnicities<sup>28</sup>.

But then came another lot of strangers who were not brown-skinned like the *Habaci* and *Acumpa*. They were pale-skinned and at first, like the others before, were for the most part concerned with shooting elephants<sup>29</sup>. The Karimojong easily established relations with this new group as well. Their relations with these

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<sup>27</sup> The Ethiopians could not speak Ajie and even when they had an interpreter, there was much mistrust between them since the motives of the Ethiopians were seemingly unclear. This led to clashes and the strangers eventually disappeared.

<sup>28</sup> see Lamphear (1976) Chapter 7

<sup>29</sup> This was the coming of the Europeans

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Europeans remained calm despite the flow of rifles from the Arab traders, and indeed in 1897 when Major Macdonald led the first British expedition in Karamoja, he met heavily armed groups of Karimojong who were already trading in ivory and guns (Achia 2007)<sup>30</sup>. The Macdonald expedition is said to have been at the complete mercy of the Karimojong who had amassed rifles, cattle and ammunition (Barber 1969:94).

It is also reported that although Macdonald made treaties with these otherwise 'hostile ethnic groups', and although he was much impressed by the Karimojong military skills, describing them as "the best fighters in Equatoria", Britain was unwilling to extend its commitments in East Africa, and so there was no immediate attempt to follow up the expedition by administering Karamoja (Barber 1962; 111). In fact, Macdonald's only concern was the enormous quantity of 'illegal ivory hunting' and the unclear boundary between Abyssinian and British spheres of influence<sup>31</sup>.

But this did not mean that there were no other interested parties in Karamoja. For the traders the major attraction in Karamoja was ivory. The other parties included the Swahili, Arabs, Persians, Greeks and Abyssinian traders who were all trekking the drylands looking for ivory. Ultimately, Karamoja became a meeting ground for the different shades of ivory traders. The trade became so famous and lucrative that competition soon developed. This forced the unscrupulous ones to ally with Karimojong warriors and begin raiding other groups (Welch 1969: 47; Barber 1964:18). The Toposa moving from southern Sudan soon joined the trade. This inclusion amplified the tension and could often spark quarrels resulting in fighting for the elephant tusks. Other groups like the Turkana also joined in the competitive trade and they occasionally joined forces with the *Habaci* to fight intruders. In the long run, it was the intense competition that brought in the strong temptation of exchanging ivory

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<sup>30</sup> Macdonald was leading the 'Juba Expedition' whose mission was to move northwards and make treaties with indigenous tribes in the scramble for Africa, so the British could lay claim to these territories as their sphere of influence and deny the French and Belgians access to the upper Nile

<sup>31</sup> Lamphear 1976:250 Macdonald followed by urging the protectorate government to establish direct control over Karamoja and levy taxes on ivory hunting

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for guns to be able to win over the enthusiastic Karimojong. Finally, what started as a trade to obtain ivory soon became a trade to obtain guns (Barber 1962: 112).

By this time many of the Dodoth had already been enlisted as *askari*<sup>32</sup> by the *Habaci* and they often received rewards in the form of guns. They started using their guns to ambush and kill the Arabs to take away their guns (Knighton 2002:7). This was a significant stride in the Karimojong's exposure to modern arms. This state of affairs went on uninterrupted by the British, although they had already established a protectorate government over Uganda. Their interest in Karamoja then was just to remove threats of French and Belgian imperialism, and they were not concerned with the livelihood of nomadic pastoralists. The colonial government completely neglected Karamoja and declared it as economically insignificant (Barber 1962; Lamphear 1976).

It was not until 1911 that the British showed interest, prompted by the continuous tribal fighting that beset the Karimojong and their enemies the Pokot. That is when they moved into the region and set up the colonial administrative apparatus to pacify the area. This was done by appointing one Captain Tufnell as a touring officer for the region. His main task was to specifically control the evolving arms trafficking that was beginning to gain momentum. The British had already detected the threat of arms trafficking in the region and in July 1911, they decided to act. They declared Karamoja a closed district and special permission was required for anyone who wanted to visit it. In addition, all the ivory hunters and the traders were compelled to leave and they revoked their trading permits (Pazzaglia 1982: 59).

It had dawned on the British that the spiralling ivory and gun trade was augmenting a sturdy military build up in Karamoja. Hence they moved fast to restrain the possible emergence of a strong Karimojong autonomy having neglected this at first. Even then, the intervention was not to rescue Karamoja from neglect but to impose a strict domination. It was to ensure that the people became submissive to colonial authority. The British had already considered administering Karamoja, but

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<sup>32</sup> This is a Kiswahili word for guards or watchmen

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this would have been a costly venture and they were not ready for it. But it became necessary for firm military control to be established over the Karimojong given the speed at which they were acquiring arms and wealth with the trade in ivory. In fact the words of the then Governor of the protectorate to Tufnell on being appointed to oversee Karamoja were very instructive;

There would be no attempt whatever to commence administration, nor in any way to interfere with the tribes, save in so far as necessary to prevent them obtaining ammunition or illicitly obtaining or exporting ivory (Barber 1962: 112)

Hence it was the ivory trade and contact with the gunrunners that posed a very serious risk to the British colonial interests in gaining effective control over this territory, its people and their resources. The declaration of Karamoja as a closed district in 1911 therefore marked the beginning of a deliberate strategy to isolate, marginalize and control the Karimojong. There would be no contact between these rebellious people and other groups already brought under colonial control. They even erected a signpost at Iriri on the Karamoja border to warn visitors against entering the region without permission. It read:

You are now entering Karamoja closed District. No visitors may enter without an outlying district's permit

The British knew that the Karimojong were a force to be reckoned with and isolating them required a powerful force. An army had to be stationed in the region to counter the tenacity of the warriors. To do that, a contingent of Kings African Rifles (K.A.R) was deployed to deal with the Karimojong. They were given strict orders to shoot anyone who showed any resistance, burn their huts, confiscate their livestock and cut down their crops. The purpose was to economically weaken and deny the



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Karimojong opportunities of investing their resources. This is because they knew the Karimojong had the potential of building a strong economy and an army that could resist colonialism. When Tufnell arrived in Karamoja, he was amazed by the huge flocks and herds the Karimojong had. He came across well equipped armies led by fierce and battle-hardened brave men who enjoyed fighting<sup>33</sup>.

But this campaign also caught the Karimojong on the wrong foot. They had just suffered from a cattle epidemic in the 1890s that wiped out most of their herds leaving many of the people dying of starvation<sup>34</sup>. So what they had was not reflective of the economic and military strength of the time. Much of the labour and fighting force had either migrated or died in the epidemic. They were attacked while at their weakest moment.

Thus when the British unleashed their guns on the Karimojong, it was obvious they could not sustain the war. Their economic and military strength had already been greatly undermined by the deaths and migration. The British used the well trained and equipped Acholi K.A.R to hit them. They shot and killed many of the warriors who had staged a formidable resistance. Many of their cattle were looted, leaving them in disarray. They proved to the Karimojong that there was a stronger force in charge. It was an opportunity for the British to bring them to submission. The deliberate raiding of Karimojong cattle also began as described below:

The European came here with many K.A.R *askaris*, as well as the chiefs of Kumama. He camped there at Matani and I saw all of what followed. The *askaris* were mostly Acoli. They wore caps with pieces of clothes hanging down in back and pieces of cloth wrapped around their legs. In the morning the *askaris* began going out and taking people's cattle by force. They did that for no reason, as we had no quarrel with them. No one understood why they did that. Afterwards, the people realized that the European just wanted to show he was the ruler here. When the *askaris* reached Kayopath, the Karimojong attacked them, but the *askaris* shot them with their guns and

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<sup>33</sup> See Lamphear 1976:248

<sup>34</sup> Most of the Karimojong had died or migrated to other places. The few still remaining had resorted to the ivory trade as the only means of replenishing their herds

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many of our warriors were killed. The Karimojong were defeated, and then the European went away with our cattle<sup>35</sup>.

They suffered a humiliating defeat, and a new era had arrived. The tide was turning towards foreign control and this was particularly unpalatable for the warriors. But to the British this show of force was necessary to subdue these armed people. However, it also set a reactionary precedent in dealing with the Karimojong. From then on the standard practice became keeping them marginal to subdue them rather than constructively reckon with their problems of violence and lawlessness. It also effectively proclaimed the commencement of the Karimojong mistrust of the state in Uganda. They were pushed on the defensive and after that they saw government as an adversary that had to be resisted.

By 1921 the British had firmly established a military administration in Karamoja. They established that it was necessary for the warriors to be disarmed and denied access to guns. The Karimojong military agility had to be checked. Warriors were prohibited from having guns. Chiefs were appointed and armed to be able to impose order in their communities. It did not matter to them that the Karimojong had no respect for this system or the chiefs. Tokens of resistance put up by renowned fighters were quashed by the orders of shoot to kill. They also used a scorched earth strategy of destroying Karimojong food stocks and looting all their cattle. The blockade also cut off weapons supply, weakening their military strength. But the Karimojong continued to rely on their traditional weaponry and their indigenous military tactics to raid neighbouring groups for survival (Quam 1996). With their cattle taken, their military prowess undermined, and gun supply cut, the Karimojong were left with few options, and arming themselves by whatever means became the only way they could survive and protect their herds (Muhereza 1999).

But the British had taken deliberate steps to ensure that pacification of the Karimojong took effect. Tufnell began his assignment by firmly establishing the role

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<sup>35</sup> *ibid*

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of chiefs in Karamoja. Chiefs had never existed there but he imposed them. He appointed men considered to be of some social standing in the community. The men who voluntarily handed in their guns were also appointed as chiefs. Speaking Kiswahili fluently also became another qualification for one to be appointed<sup>36</sup>. Their duty was to keep their people in order, and to provide porters and food to the administrators whenever there was a need. This was a very unpopular job and they were despised by the local population. For serving the colonialists they received irregular wages paid in the form of cattle. The chiefs were particularly instrumental in rounding up people for the compulsory community labour. This involved digging up roads for no tangible returns<sup>37</sup>. They could also be used to confiscate the cattle of uncooperative people who refused to do community work. In effect this was an arbitrary diversion from the model of social organization of the Karimojong where social control was rooted in the elders within each clan group (Barber 1962). The elders made all the important decisions. Therefore the Karimojong could not understand why people made decisions for them, most of all about their cattle. Cattle were very important and governed their entire lives. And they were not going to give over their entire lives to the British.

### 4.3 The World War Period

However, the outbreak of World War I in 1914 changed the trend of things in the British colonization of Karamoja and the subsequent security set up. As pointed out earlier, the British had already established a strong military presence in Karamoja. Using their superior military power they maintained a firm grip on the warriors. But when the war broke out, K.A.R had to be withdrawn and only a small military garrison was left in Karamoja. Control over these forces was handed over to the command of Turpin. Changes were made to try and ensure that peace between the Karimojong and their neighbours was realized. To do it, the strong militaristic

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<sup>36</sup> Kiswahili was the colonial language of administration

<sup>37</sup> The government officers knew that to be able to control and become familiar with the area, they had to have a good communications network, so Tufnell had started road construction work, employing mainly the forced labour that the new chiefs would mobilize

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approach was blended with dialogue. They organized peace rallies that brought different Karimojong ethnic groups together. In these rallies, they deliberated, settled and affirmed peace pacts that were sealed with sacrifices of bulls. The British perception was that the Karimojong, Pokot and Turkana shared much in common and could be brought together to some understanding.

When Turpin took over control, he decided to use mainly the Karimojong women to continue with the construction of the road network. He imposed heavy fines on those who did not take part in the compulsory road works. He demanded large numbers of cattle. Turpin also perfected the practice of setting villages that were uncooperative on fire. The court system he established started sentencing and ordering the execution of some people. The Karimojong named him *Lokijukwa* (the one who pushes) and they remember him as one of the most wicked and authoritarian men in the colonial history of Karamoja (Pazzaglia 1982). In addition he introduced and imposed taxes on all adults (*ocur*) which later led to a rebellion and the battle of *Kayepas*. He continued the policy of appointing chiefs, and established councils for every clan. The clan courts were given powers to try people and were given a maximum penalty of two months (Barber 1962). Karamoja remained under this military rule and never received a civil administration like all the other parts of Uganda until 1921. It was at this time that the first District Commissioner Ashton Warner was appointed to Karamoja. The colonial government also appointed Lamb as his Assistant District Commissioner (A.D.C)<sup>38</sup>. Thus, in terms of development of state institutions, the British set the foundation for Karamoja to lag behind the rest of Uganda whose governmental institutions were already functional and effective in mobilizing the people.

Although the British thought they had brought the Karimojong to their knees, the situation changed after the withdrawal of the K.A.R. The Karimojong were only waiting for the right moment to strike, and certainly they continued to resist what

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<sup>38</sup> The British continued with economic neglect of Karamoja, strengthening the military occupation and disempowering the Karimojong through proscription of pastoralism and trade in ivory and guns

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they perceived as an occupation of their territory. Ashton Warner conceded that the chiefs only existed in name because the Karimojong never gave up their respect for the elders. In reaction, a more authoritarian and vigorous disarmament exercise was imposed and sometimes an absolute scorched earth policy was employed to reduce the incidence of cattle raiding. What followed was years of tension as the British imposed a very stringent set of laws that made it difficult for the Karimojong to raid their neighbours.

The British attitude towards the Karimojong grew more and more apprehensive and they deliberately laid out schemes that secluded these ‘natives’ from other ethnic groups in eastern and northern Uganda. Certainly it was during this time that the colonialists created the interminable prejudice that the Karimojong are primitive; the epitome of which was the sign post they put just at the entrance to Moroto town. This billboard alerted visitors to gaze at the naked tribesmen of the pristine ‘real Africa’ as it read; “You have reached the heart of Africa” (Akabwai and Ateyo 2007). The prejudice that the Karimojong cannot adjust to modern life and the rest of Uganda should not wait for them to develop had its roots here.

In 1926 the colonial powers set out to align the boundary between Kenya and Uganda. When this was done, the Rudolf Province was transferred from Uganda to the present day Kenya, effectively creating the modern republics of Kenya and Uganda. This new border cut across the grazing lands of the pastoral groups affecting the Karimojong and their neighbours. But the British instead used these boundaries to confine and restrict the movements of the Karimojong and Turkana within their freshly formed borders (Nene Mburu 2001). This movement affected other groups as well. For the Pian, Matheniko, Upe and Bokora for instance, areas of Chemerongit and Kanyangreng River were transferred to Kenya in order to provide land to the Pokot in Karasuk after they were displaced from Kitale by the White settlers. In fact they ended losing up to 1500 - 2000 square miles of grazing land when Karamoja’s border with Kenya was drawn (Muhereza 1999). The rationale then was also to confine the Karimojong cattle keepers to very small areas to make it impossible for them to practise nomadic pastoralism.

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The British action that followed this partition divided these pastoral groups further. They divided according to their ethnic categories, creating boundaries among the major ethnic groups. These divisions however did not have any regard for their systems of resource use. Rather boundaries were drawn to form administrative units based on each ethnic group. For instance the Bokora were confined in what became Bokora county, Matheniko in Matheniko county, Jie in Jie county and Dodoth in Dodoth county. This was done to ensure that one ethnic group did not cross over to another area. This situation was aggravated when large chunks of dry season grazing land in Usuk County were also cut off and transferred to the Iteso in the South and some areas to Lango in the South-west (Welch 1969: 83).

However, it is important to note that prior to these colonial divisions and restrictions the Karimojong and their Turkana neighbours mutually exploited the existing common resources in the region. Hence, the newly created boundaries drew a wedge between these nomadic people whose livelihood depended very much on drifting across the vast plains in the region without any boundary obstructions. Besides, these armed groups had discerned how to establish their own relationships and networks necessary for them to exploit resources under their control and ensure access to arms without boundary restrictions<sup>39</sup>. Hence, the creation of the international border line that formed the limits of the new states, prohibiting unauthorized cross-border livestock movement simply added a cruel stress to their already debilitated nomadic livelihood.

Since pastoral groups are never entirely self-reliant, it follows that they must maintain some reciprocal and mutually supporting relations with the neighbouring pastoral as well as sedentary communities within reach. Thus the relationship between the various groups or tribes comprises a series of rights and duties to one another with respect to the exploitation of their resources. The Karimojong interpreted these restrictions as a denial of their fundamental right to relate with their neighbours. The impression given was that there were no amicable relations between

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<sup>39</sup> See Lunde, Taylor and Huser 2003

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the different groups. Conversely, to the pastoralists, raiding one another did not mean the whole region was in anarchy. It did not mean a permanent state of warfare reigned over their land and animals. Although conflict existed, there were symbiotic relations between those warring groups sustained by cultural ties, intermarriage, political and military alliances, and trade was not uncommon between them, including groups that were cultivators. For example, when one group was to move into another territory, negotiations were held and an agreement was reached on when and where the coming group would draw pasture and water their cattle (Dyson-Hudson 1966).

Therefore this insensitivity to the pastoralists' movement strategies challenged the core of their existence and only helped to reinforce enduring ethnic divisions and escalated the tensions. The large-scale free movement was brought to an abrupt halt. Every group then started claiming their demarcated territory and since they were not allowed to cross freely into the next, a stronger sense of ownership was built to fight any intruders. When they found themselves boxed into a corner, the guns offered an alternative way with which they could assert themselves. In doing so, the security situation was worsened since their actions led to loss not only of men and livestock, but also of a permanent peace (Novelli 1988). If anything, colonialism only served to widen the existing divisions between the Karimojong and their neighbours and the responses damaged the relations further<sup>40</sup>.

#### **4.3.1 Prolific and gifted fighters**

The British came to the realization that the Karimojong were prolific and talented fighters in the way they organized their resistance. For this extraordinary dexterity, they drafted hundreds of Karimojong men into colonial military service as Kings African Rifles (K.A.R) and they were used in various military campaigns conducted in the Horn of Africa. Indeed their performance in colonial policing while serving in the K.A.R overwhelmed the British. When World War II broke out, the British seized that opportunity to make use of these fighters.

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<sup>40</sup> Pluth, Onyang and O'Kasick 2007:28

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So the British massively recruited the Karimojong and the Turkana in the wake of the Second World War. They were armed and deployed in the war against Italy in Ethiopia. It was the Karimojong and the Turkana that formed the contingent of the 25 East African Brigades that was deployed to spearhead the invasion of Abyssinia. This served as an opportunity for the two pastoral communities to galvanize their military skills and strengthen their positions. The net effect was that they were able to rejuvenate their tradition of dynastic raids and predatory expansion<sup>41</sup>. This experience provided the Karimojong with the occasion to buttress their capability in resisting colonial repression.

But even then, the British still succeeded in disarming and subduing the Karimojong. They kept Karamoja under a powerful military occupation and a well laid groundwork for keeping them on the periphery was institutionalized. For instance, their movements from then on were restricted and were subjected to severe economic isolation. When they were struck by a devastating drought in 1943, the competition for pasture intensified and the Karimojong resumed raiding across northern Uganda and Kenya. The Karimojong persevered, and continued to organize large traditional armies to resist the interlopers taking over their livelihood.

The government became even more relentless in dealing with the Karimojong after the war. There was a renewed effort to construct roads in the remote areas, erect police posts and lay down airstrips for spotter planes to report every assembly and movement of men<sup>42</sup>. In addition, stiffer laws regulating the use of spears and guns were introduced to completely neutralize them<sup>43</sup>. As if to box them into a corner, the British moved again to set aside large areas of prime grazing land around Kidepo valley for wildlife conservation and water development projects.<sup>44</sup> This was after passing the National Parks Ordinance 1952 which created Kidepo Game Reserve in 1958, depriving the Karimojong of over 1200 square kilometres of arable land

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<sup>41</sup> Nene Mburu 2001: 6 The Karimojong provided troops for the British in the Second World War

<sup>42</sup> Knighton 2005:120

<sup>43</sup> The 1955 Firearms ordinance that restricted the use of firearms

<sup>44</sup> Other wildlife reserves were set up in Pian-Upe, Bokora-Matheniko corridor (1964), and two Controlled Hunting Areas in Kaabong (1963).



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(Mamdani, Kasoma and Katende 1992). It was also thought that denying them a large expanse of land would force them into sedentary lives.

But with much of their arable and grazing land taken away, competition for scarce resources intensified, leaving the Karimojong dejected. This not only exasperated them but also galvanized their resolve to fight back. Intense pressure from the demoralizing environment forced them to resort to the traditional spears and dare to confront their neighbours. Indeed as Novelli (1988) puts it, the British found the Karimojong organized but went away leaving chaos and anarchy in a place where only half a century before, they had found orderly people managing their own lives. Although the British defeated the Karimojong and subdued them, they never stamped out their passion for the practice of cattle raiding. The Karimojong continued using their traditional spears to raid the Iteso, Sebei, and even the Pokot up to the early 1950s. So whereas they succumbed to the supremacy of the war machine, the Karimojong continued to resist; they never ceded their right to violence, and never corporately acknowledged that they constituted part of any state (Knighton 2002).

#### 4.4 The cold war period

After World War II, many African countries went through a struggle to attain independence from colonial rule. It was these struggles that eventually gave birth to the new independent African states. Having gained independence, most of the new African states had all sorts of conflicting interests and competing power bases. Rather than focus on the remedies for these problems, they soon got caught up in the ideological conflict and the quest for hegemony between the United States and the Soviet Union; the cold war.

For instance, this was the period when the then Zairian strong man, President Mobutu received extensive military support from the West for his tough stand against communism. For its part, the Soviet Union also extended military support to her allies including Somalia's Siad Barre, Uganda's Milton Obote and Ethiopia under Mengistu Haile Mariam later in 1974. Other countries in the region also strategically aligned

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themselves either with the United States or the Soviet Union, cognizant with their leaders' aspirations. It was the era of strong dictatorship in Africa that saw some countries amassing stockpiles of weaponry to service the interests of the world power in control<sup>45</sup>.

Of interest here is that many of these countries that benefited from the huge stockpiles of arms in the later post-independence years became extremely weak, conflict-ridden, and eventually turned into completely failed states (Berman 2007). The two decades that followed were punctuated by changes of government all over the African continent and most commonly in eastern Africa. These changes were sometimes violent military coups that left the country deeply divided and continuously threw arms and ammunition into private hands. Typical examples can be drawn from the Sudan, Ethiopia, Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire), Somalia and Uganda itself which have all experienced violent civil wars for decades. In these countries, there has been a deep and continuous divide among ethnic groups resulting in civil wars that have remained unresolved. Sudan for instance, is divided between an Arab Muslim north and an African Christian south and has suffered destructive ethnic and religious strife since independence, often resulting in contested partitions of the country. The resultant large scale violence against civilians in the south has led to chronic forced displacement<sup>46</sup>. It turned out in Sudan that both the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and the Khartoum government started arming the pastoralists in their 19-year civil war over the mineral-rich areas of the south.

In Ethiopia for instance, there was the Ogaden War (1976 – 1978) resulting from the arbitrary demarcation of colonial boundaries. The outcome was violence in which Somalia went to war with Ethiopia to obtain Ogaden Province. The war weakened the Said Barre regime and sparked decades of chaos and anarchy in Somalia that has endured to date. In Zaire, after more than three decades of fighting

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<sup>45</sup> This included amassing both small arms and light weapons as well as heavy military hardware

<sup>46</sup> See de Waal (2007) Sudan: What kind of state? What kind of crisis? Occasional paper, crisis states' research centre, occasional paper no. 2, LSE

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dictatorship, the Congolese together with Rwandese who were retaliating against the Hutu extremists' presence in the northwestern region of Kivu triggered a wave of instability that has also persisted to the present day. Uganda itself suffered military coups in 1971, 1979, 1985 with long guerrilla wars first from 1981 to 1986, and in northern Uganda from 1986 also up to the present day. In all these wars, many warlords and guerrilla chiefs secured enormous supplies of small arms and light weapons from either the Soviet Union or United States<sup>47</sup>. Indeed these became years of civil unrest in the Great Lakes region of Africa.

Furthermore, during these years the frequency of civil wars, mutinies and military coups in Africa contributed to the growth of illegal trafficking of arms. In fact, within a period of 46 years, from January 1956 until December 2001, there were 80 successful coups d'état, 108 failed coup attempts and 139 reported coup plots among the then 48 independent sub-Saharan African states. And it is this military driven political turmoil that has adversely affected the region's socio-economic growth and is a major cause of the current 'African crisis' (McGowan 2002). This era of state crisis was accompanied by the appearance of endemic disorder over two large geographical regions; one stretching from the Horn of Africa to the Congo and Angola, and the other extending from Senegal to Liberia (Young 2002:533).

These crises, particularly that of the Great Lakes region in our case, not only provided attractive markets for small arms but also fertile grounds for the emerging warlords yearning for power by building private armies and accumulating huge stocks of weapons. For Uganda, with all these tribulations occurring within her neighbourhood, the spoils of the cold war arms cache that the numerous private armies were throwing around would soon find their way to the pastoralist zones. Incidentally, they are always badly needed among the pastoralists - of course for different reasons. Hence, to understand the history of post-independence armament

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<sup>47</sup> For instance, the United States heavily armed Mobutu's Zaire to fight communism whereas the Soviet Union armed Somalia before switching to Ethiopia in the wake of the Ogaden war.

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among East Africa's pastoralists it is important to understand the politico-military landscape of the region since the end of colonialism.

#### **4.4.1 Ugandan Nationalism and Karamoja's crisis**

In Uganda's case, the contemporary conflicts the country experienced in the post-independence period began as a crisis of legitimacy of the state, its institutions and the political incumbents<sup>48</sup>. It was a crisis for which British colonialism had already laid the grounds through their expansionist violence coupled with the manner in which they manipulated the pre-existing ethnic differences, and their divide and rule policies. These indeed aided them in implementing economic policies which fractured the fragile conglomeration of disparate groups of people in areas such as northeastern Uganda. Here the British policies not only undermined the faltering legitimacy of the state, but also impeded the emergence of Ugandan nationalism and generated ethnic, religious and regional divisions that were to contribute in later years to instability and political violence (Otunnu 2002).

For instance, the British colonial state in Uganda was fractured in terms of economic zones. The territory south of Lake Kyoga was reserved for cash crops and industrial zones. Then the area to the north of Lake Kyoga was a preserve for labour force supply, especially serving the security forces. The Karamoja zone was delineated as wastelands that were insignificant (Barber 1962: 122). This division, which apparently failed to take account of potential for development, led to the total neglect of the Karamoja region that the post-independence state inherited and has perpetuated. Indeed, it has always been this peripheral treatment that the Karimojong respond to in their aversion to state institutions.

It is astounding that with the call for independence in the 1960s, the then 'new breed' of Africa's nationalists had on the whole accepted the colonial boundaries drawn up in the 1880s. These were boundaries which arbitrarily cut across ethnic groups, and as already noted, caused the conflict between Ethiopia and Somalia,

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<sup>48</sup> See Otunnu 2002

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heightened ethnic and religious differences in Sudan, and led the Tutsi dominated Rwanda to invade the DRC to protect the national security of Rwanda and to defend the Tutsis in the DRC. In Uganda and for the Karimojong in particular, the colonial boundaries cut across the grazing grounds, taking away grazing land and watering points. Undoubtedly such actions intensified competition for pasture and water and prompted the regional/inter-state border clashes. In response, the governments always opted for the use of excessive military force to settle these problems<sup>49</sup>. Thus, like the Somalis in Ogaden province or the African/Christian people of South Sudan, the Karimojong also began to look to firearms as the only way they could guarantee their autonomy from an indifferent state.

In 1961 the government set up a commission under the chairmanship of Basil Bataringaya dubbed the Bataringaya commission to probe the 'Karamoja problem' and made recommendations that would eventually resolve the persistent crisis. Their findings and recommendations reflected the same colonial stereotype of the Karimojong as primitive in the extreme and the region as one "occupied by a people whose main occupation is cattle herding". The Commission observed that, "We are not dealing with mean and cowardly thieves who know that what they are doing is morally wrong and are not admired by the society they live in ; we are dealing with determined, brave warriors who will stop at nothing to achieve their aim." It added that "the only force they will respect is that superior to their own and the only authority, that which can fight and defeat them" (Mirzeler and Young 2000:415).

To be able to incorporate the Karimojong into the new independent state, the Obote I government in 1963 decided to create a battalion of the Ugandan army in Karamoja, ostensibly to protect and ensure State sovereignty by dealing a blow to the Karimojong war machine. Whereas the Obote I regime generated state-planned development initiatives specifically for Karamoja in areas of livestock disease control, cattle commercialization, food security, rural water supply, education and

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<sup>49</sup> For instance rather than address the real needs of the Karimojong, the British made it a policy that the problem was security and it could only be mitigated through disarmament and the use of military force. Succeeding governments have never appreciated the unique nature of Karamoja's problem.

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health facilities, the Karimojong themselves remained aloof and did not cooperate. The district government staff that was mostly from other areas of Uganda became discouraged, and fearing working among armed and fighting warriors, many quit the region. In fact, according to Mirzeler and Young (2000), the 1966 District Annual Report concluded on a note of surrender to circumstances; “All of us would like to see Karamoja developed as fast as possible so as to catch up with the rest of Uganda but the major problem is how to do it” (Wozei 1977; 218). The irreducible alterity of Karamoja remained embedded in state discourse, for which the Karimojong were “the natives” - unclothed, unschooled, indolent (Cisternino 1984; ii; Mirzeler and Young 2000).

Ultimately, the independent government became a mere resurgence of the British colonial hegemony. They continued to pursue the logic that the central region and parts of the eastern region were cash crop areas, and the north and northeastern regions were reservoirs of cheap labour providing conscripts for the army. These labels inevitably created inequalities which resulted in widespread conflicts between the different ethnic groups in the country. Stiff competition over access to opportunities gave way to the construction of complexes, with some developing feelings of superiority while others became inferior. So the impression they had of the Karimojong was of ‘lawless warriors and cattle rustlers’ wielding small arms, hastily wandering the countryside to wreak havoc on their neighbours and other law-abiding citizens of Uganda. It is against this backdrop of stereotype and distrust that the new independent state took over the ‘Karamoja problem’. And in consonance with the colonial cynicism of the Karimojong, they began by modifying the laws that would enable them to deal with Karamoja’s lawlessness. A good example is the 1964 Administration of Justice (Karamoja) Act, which was passed for the administration of Karamoja. This stated in part:

“the government jettisoned the normally strict rules on admissibility of evidence, placed sole discretion in the hands of a single judge, and overturned the time-honoured legal principle of the presumption of innocence in cases within the district. Indeed, any person who was accused of

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engaging in a cattle raid in which someone had been killed, was presumed guilty until they had proven their innocence<sup>50</sup>,”

Whereas the law in Uganda presumes any accused person innocent until proved guilty, this law literally placed the Karimojong in a unique legal position in which where they were presumed guilty even before trial. Such discrimination was a clear indication that they were languishing at the periphery of the state and society, and was the reason for their deepening restlessness. The Karimojong have had to live with this stigma of lawlessness. This is the reason they are persistently subjected to continual cruel treatment. It is also the reason that they will stay in conflict with the state. The Karimojongs’ revulsion of state borders, and their negative experience with the state for over a century does not help create a sense of national identity and citizenship among them<sup>51</sup>. Even the growing elite among the Karimojong echo this sense of indignation as a justification for resistance.

When you reach Karamoja it is like you are in another country, and this is how we have always been treated. How can we identify with other Ugandans when we are being openly discriminated against? People think all that is in Karamoja is insecurity and guns. This treatment started long ago, it is not new and all of us know it. We have always felt isolated and that is why these warriors sometimes also have no regard for other Ugandans<sup>52</sup>.

This feeling of betrayal is manifest in the way the Karimojong lament over the lack of physical and social infrastructural development in the region; ‘look at our roads, our schools, our hospitals and even the cattle which were all we were left with have been taken. What do you expect the Karimojong to do?’<sup>53</sup> Ultimately denying

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<sup>50</sup> Oloka-Onyango, Gariyo and Muhereza 1993, Pastoralism, Crisis and Transformation in Karamoja, IIED Drylands Network Programme, Issues Paper No. 43. June 1993 p.4.

<sup>51</sup> Markakis 2004:23 Pastoralism on the Margin, minority rights group international

<sup>52</sup> Interview with a Makerere University student from Kaabong

<sup>53</sup> Interview with a retired civil servant, Kapedo

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them a physical, social and economic infrastructure over the years has only helped to cultivate acrimony. This is how the antagonistic relations with the state and the rest of the country became a legacy that young Karimojong now grow up socialized to accept as a fact.

During this time, the Karamoja region remained a closed district and had no choice but to stay detached from the rest of Uganda. All reference to them was in relation to their backwardness and belligerence. Karamoja was treated as a war zone where martial law was in force. In 1970 the government repealed the 1955 Firearms Ordinance that restricted gun ownership and replaced it with the more stringent Firearms Act 1970. This new law put into effect compulsory registration of all firearms and imposed strict gun-ownership licensing regulations including acquiring a gun certificate:

Subject to this Act, no person shall purchase, acquire or have in his or her possession any firearm or ammunition unless, in respect of each such firearm, he or she holds a valid firearm certificate<sup>54</sup>.

This law particularly targeted the Karimojong by outlawing private citizens' possession of guns. What is noteworthy here is that there were no prior security arrangements in Karamoja to take care of their unique and fragile security. The security in the region was unique in the sense that the Karimojong themselves hold the responsibility of facing off any threat, and the government forcing them to disarm had failed to provide security.

Hence removing the Karimojong's possibility of defending themselves was a risk they were not prepared to take. As a consequence, resentment towards the state reached a peak and the Karimojong began undermining the authority of government in the region. To the Karimojong, having guns had become an inalienable right since it enabled them to defend themselves against aggression, including that of the state itself. Although this raised tension in Karamoja, the interesting thing about it was that

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<sup>54</sup> Laws of Uganda, Firearms act 1970 (Ch 299)



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the Obote government did not survive long enough to implement this law. In January 1971 the then army chief of staff Major General Idi Amin overthrew the government in a military coup and jeopardized all the plans made to disarm.

#### **4.4.2 The Karimojong and the era of Idi Amin**

When Amin took over power, the Karimojong did not expect things to be any better since he had already had a stint with them. Earlier in 1962, as a junior army officer, Amin had been sent by the British to quell cattle rustling between the Karimojong and the Pokot of Kenya. Amin sent his troops into northwest Kenya to disarm Turkana raiders where he tortured, brutalized and killed several of them. It is said Amin's use of excessive force beyond what he was asked to do prompted the British governor of Kenya to request that Amin be prosecuted, but his Ugandan counterpart, after consulting prospective Prime Minister Obote, objected to prosecuting Amin<sup>55</sup>.

Elders still tell the story of how Amin ruthlessly commanded his troops to shoot to kill the Pokot. Stories of how he ordered that the bodies should not be removed but left for the hyenas to eat are widespread. Amin used terror to inflict enduring psychological pain that would dissuade the Karimojong from cattle rustling. "That time just hearing that Amin was coming here could cause migration. He was a very ruthless man. Amin had killed people before and the Matheniko and Pokot were the first to face his cruelty. He arrested some warriors and ordered that they be shot one by one in a line as people were watching. And he did not stop there..." recalls an elder.

A story is told about Amin that once, when he arrested some warriors, he called a rally and publicly lined them up in Moroto town. He paraded them naked as they were, forcing each man to put his penis on a table. He threatened to cut their penises off unless they revealed where they had hidden their weapons. By that time most of the guns had been taken and it was mainly spears that were left. On one

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<sup>55</sup> Mirzeler and Young, p.416

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occasion, they refused to reveal the weapons and Amin personally cut off the organs of eight screaming men before the others revealed the hiding places of their weapons<sup>56</sup>

Hence Amin's ascendancy into power ushered in another dreadful moment in the history of Karimojong violence. In the years of Amin's rule (1971 – 79) the Karimojong were subject to stringent decrees, the most famous of which prohibited them from wearing their traditional sheets and clothing made from livestock hides. Amin would follow up and see to it that his decrees were implemented the way he wanted it<sup>57</sup>. The army at that time was very tough. Indeed they ruthlessly enforced Amin's decrees that aimed at turning the Karimojong into 'modern people' by forcing them to change to modern dress<sup>58</sup>. Karimojong men (including elders) and women would be stripped naked in broad daylight and flogged in the streets of Moroto town if found flouting the dress code.

In effect, the state was making every effort to get rid of some of the well entrenched Karimojong values in the wake of its modernizing crusades. Yet by insisting on their values the people were not resisting modernity but insisting on their social order. The values and beliefs provided them with the foci for shared action, shared identities and social cohesion among the various groups. Among the Karimojong, key elements of culture are contained in some of those "backward" practices associated with raiding. For instance, gender identity and social status are contained in processes linked to raiding. For their systems to yield positive returns, it appears that conflict is an inevitable and necessary part of the culture, and cultures which are resilient to violence are those which recognize, attest, articulate, and defuse this conflict. On the other hand, those cultures which deny difference and instead insist on some imaginary unity may well be the ones that disintegrate most quickly when under stress.

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<sup>56</sup> 'Dada' always rubbed Kenya the wrong way, Sunday Nation August 17, 2003

<sup>57</sup> Interview with a Dodoth elder

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Program Manager Dodoth Agro-pastoral Development Organization (DADO)

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It is important to note that in a society such as the Karimojong, values gain significance when in social interaction. The values are grounded in the everyday practices of the people and hence getting rid of them means touching the very core of their existence. For that matter the Karimojong did not take the 'modernization drive' lightly and considered it an ignominious attack on their identity and culture which they had to fight. They could no longer watch their women, kith and kin being humiliated publicly. In 1972 the Karimojong protested this ill-treatment at Nawaikorot. A massive demonstration was organized in which they denounced the conduct of the state in forcing them to adopt 'modern decency'. In response, Amin ordered his troops to crush the resistance. As a result, 300 Bokora were shot dead at Nawaikorot to serve as a lesson for the others.

Amin also issued orders that no Karimojong should be seen with a gun or a spear. Forceful disarmament was effected and guns were collected by the army. The seriousness with which Amin's decrees were enforced pushed the Karimojong into a defenceless position exposing them to lethal attacks from the Turkana. Without guns, they again found themselves vulnerable to their traditional enemies. Left with fewer options, they were forced to seek peace with the Turkana. They entered a dialogue and finally buried the hatchet in 1978 at Lokiriama.

But this stress only made them more obstinate and they had to use any method within their means to defend themselves. They resorted to fabricating their own homemade guns (*ngamatidai*) to provide alternative mechanisms of securing their livelihood and identity. To do that, they stole the metal frames of the school desks from the schools in Karamoja. They used these metal tubes to fabricate gun barrels for their guns. Then they used the homemade guns to attack the isolated police posts in the region. In many cases, they overran them, killing the policemen, and thus acquired better and more powerful guns. One such daring raid was on the police headquarters in Nabilatuk, a raid that netted them many modern firearms (Quam 1996). In addition, they stripped the schools of corrugated iron sheets which they converted into frying pans. These pans were used for burning the fermented sorghum used in the making of a potent local brew that sustains the warriors. Thus the

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Karimojong did not give up. They remained resilient, trusting that their god (*Akuju*) would one day reward them and open up opportunities for them to restock their herds again.

In 1978 Amin invaded Tanzania and in retaliation the Tanzanian army, backed by Ugandan exiles waged a war of liberation against Amin, taking power from him in April 1979. This was the opportunity of a lifetime for the Karimojong as Amin's troops fled the military garrisons in the region. In his brutal military campaign against the Karimojong, Amin had constructed a huge military garrison in Moroto. He also equipped it with sophisticated Russian-made weaponry. But when Kampala fell to the Tanzanian forces, Amin's soldiers abandoned the barracks and fled for their lives. The Karimojong stormed the army barracks and helped themselves to substantial numbers of modern guns and ammunition. The Matheniko, who live close to the Moroto garrison, seized the opportunity, moved in and looted the government armoury, controlling the area for several days until the new government sent military forces. Even today, stories are still told in Moroto of how people loaded lines of donkeys with guns and weapons to go and hide them in different places<sup>59</sup>. Automatic weapons thus became abundant and readily accessible throughout Karamoja. The raiders pillaged Moroto barracks stealing approximately 12,000 weapons (mostly automatic G3s) and large amounts of ammunition. The Jie in Kotido also raided a smaller armoury at roughly the same time<sup>60</sup>.

Guns became so plentiful that a gun was like a hoe in the house. Those Matheniko in Moroto were the most armed of all of us, and you see the Jie also took advantage and bought so many guns to raid us. It became obvious that almost everyone had to get a gun because you needed to guard your cattle; without it there were no cattle and no life<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Group discussion with elders in Lolelia, Kaabong

<sup>60</sup> Akabwai and Ateyo op. cit

<sup>61</sup> Ibid

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This new reality changed the face of cattle raiding in Karamoja. Indeed after this arms boost from looting the barracks, cross-border and internal raiding intensified and tensions within and beyond the Moroto district area worsened. Some scholars (Buchanan-Smith and Lind 2005) have argued that for that reason, from the 1970s cattle raiding became increasingly violent and deadly. Shared access to key grasslands and watering holes decreased as a safety measure to avoid the intense violence. It became extremely difficult for groups to rotate their animals to fresh pasture. Groups who had benefited from the arms cache such as the Bokora and the Matheniko had to draw boundaries. Due to deadly clashes, they are today separated by swathes of no-man's land. These border areas are apparent through their abundant vegetation and tree life, as they are too insecure for regular grazing or collection of natural resources. As late as 2005, grazing areas such as Kodonyo in Katikekile sub-county, Moru Ariwon in Rupa sub-county, Nomuriangalepan in Irii sub-county and Kochulut in Lokopo sub-county all became unreachable as 'no-go areas,' including the Locagar watering dam in Nabilatuk in Nakapiripirit district (Stites et al 2007).

Because the transition from Amin's military dictatorship, which had placed a heavy military presence in Karamoja, to another system took time as leaders in Kampala delayed while bickering over power, the Karimojong had time to establish their stocks of weapons. The new regime that came after Idi Amin disbanded his military structures. They therefore had to start building both the army and police afresh. This lull created a big policing vacuum for a place that was almost synonymous with military pressure. This lack of proper policing structures and the fragile political landscape in Uganda immediately after the fall of Amin gave the Karimojong enough time to revive the inter and intra-tribal raiding. It was also enough time to restore cross-border raiding from Kenya and Sudan, this time using the now prevalent AK-47s. This scenario apparently disturbed the balance of power between the various actors, leading to a new escalation in violence.

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### 4.4.3 The Great Lakes Revolutions

There is a close relationship between international cross-border weapon proliferation and the local conflicts, ethnic conflicts and the regional wars in the Horn of Africa. Recent increases in the problems of weapons proliferation have been linked to the end of the Cold War proxy wars that have seen long armed conflicts in, among others, southern Sudan, northern Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Chad and Somalia within the same region of sub-Saharan Africa. These 'wars' are fought at different levels involving nations, regions, ethnic groups, clans and lineages, and entail fighting between and within states, regions and ethnic groups (Markakis 1994).

Thus the 1979 revolution that overthrew Amin in Uganda was a war between the Tanzanian state and the state under Amin. It involved Ugandan exiles just as much as it involved the Karimojong when the war came to Karamoja. But most importantly, it also became a prelude to a significant fresh pattern of uprisings in Africa. It ushered in the era of destruction of dictatorial regimes by insurgents from the rural periphery or a neighbouring state. As noted earlier, the trend followed suit in Chad (1990), Liberia (1990), Ethiopia (1991), Somalia (1991), Rwanda (1994), and both Congos (1997). But this situation brought with it a phenomenon where the overthrow of government led to dismantling the existing national army, complete with all the security apparatus. The result was that the former soldiers disappeared to their respective birth places in the countryside with all the sophisticated weaponry that they could conceal or put up for sale on the black market.

The region started flourishing because of black markets where guns were easily and cheaply bought. As a consequence, this practice has led to the widespread creation of militias who are much better armed than those known in the past. This sudden and continuous growth of huge black markets in weaponry was essential to the expansion of armed conflict. The Ethiopian and Somali armies that were disbanded in 1991 were some of the largest and best equipped cold war armies of Africa. All the remnants of these huge armies disappeared into the countryside with

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weapons. During their heyday the despotic rulers of these countries purchased huge quantities of weapons from the mainly bankrupt states of the former Soviet Union such as Bulgaria, Ukraine, and Russia (Young 2002). All these weapons eventually found their way into the hands of insurgents who traded them for cash or cattle in the black market.

As noted earlier, it is evident that this region of Africa has best been known as the arc of violence in terms of internal rebellions and interstate conflicts. Africa's longest civil wars have occurred in this region (Assefa, 1999). This has been the case with the civil war in Sudan which is in the Karimojong neighbourhood. To a large extent it is also the perception, attitudes and actions of parties involved in these various conflicts that continue to shape the process of militarization in the region.

The affected states persistently refuse to acknowledge that there are real internal problems that require attention; instead they usually prefer to avoid confronting the issue. Meanwhile the victims of this injustice are left with no other option but to fight for their survival. Then the conflict escalates beyond the control of the initial actors and the emerging insurgent groups launch their recruitment campaigns among such disenchanted civilian groups (Wasara 2002). In this way, the civilian population either voluntarily or involuntarily gets sucked into the conflict; often by building clandestine militias and self-defence groups. This is exactly what has happened in the border areas of Sudan, Kenya and Uganda. The long years of state neglect have produced thousands of idle young people (Karachuna) in the Karamoja region. It is these youths who have found easy sanctuary and 'employment' in armed banditry and cattle rustling. They have taken advantage of the disruptive civil wars and interstate wars to acquire modern assault rifles for their private causes.

In addition, the dissolution of the big armies that dictatorial regimes in the region built provided such groups with reservoirs of rapidly redundant warriors who had no skills beyond soldiering. Such jobless but trained military persons fitted very quickly into rebel and cattle rustling ranks. In Uganda for instance, the post-Amin

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governments had recruited many Karimojong in the army as a way of regional balancing. Many of these Karimojong men were given training in one of East Africa's finest military academies in Munduli<sup>62</sup>. Thus when the army disintegrated, most of them took their skills to the drylands of Karamoja. When they deployed their talents, it is little wonder that the raids became more deadly.

Hence these years of militarization had a critical influence in the broader context of violent conflicts in the region and the drylands in particular. Thus, contrary to the common impression given that it was the 'fall of Amin' and the looting of Moroto barracks that heightened the levels of armament, an array of factors existed, and they need to be looked at in a broader historical and regional perspective. The reality is that most of these wars of 'liberation' in the Great Lakes region were superseded by organized violence associated with the breakdown of the states. As a result of the wars, the states influence in the region fragmented, with its key institutions of social control breaking down. With this prevailing failure, the state entered a crisis and it is only through the use of violence that it tries to suppress the local and sometimes ethnically-based challenges like that of the Karimojong, and this only encourages more of the same violence. Hence violence becomes part of the state 'culture' that is incorporated into the state identity.

#### **4.4.4 The revolutionary crisis and state legitimacy**

After the downfall of Idi Amin, the Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF) formed an interim government headed by Professor Yusuf Lule. The new government adopted a new system of administration replacing Amin's military junta, and established a type of legislative organ known as the National Consultative Commission (NCC). Immediately upon assuming office it became clear that this NCC and the President differed on many political reforms. One of the issues in dispute was the extent of presidential powers. After only 68 days, in June 1979, the NCC deposed Professor Lule from the presidency and replaced him with Mr. Godfrey

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<sup>62</sup> Munduli is a military academy found in Tanzania and has trained most of East Africa's army generals



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Binaisa. It did not take long before Mr. Binaisa was also deposed after he was accused of trying to neutralize the powers of the NCC to keep himself in power<sup>63</sup>. In May 1980, Binaisa was replaced by a military commission chaired by Paulo Muwanga. This commission then organized the 1980 elections which brought to power the Uganda People's Congress (UPC) party under Dr. Apollo Milton Obote.

All this time the Kampala establishment was preoccupied with the leadership transition, there was a very low level of gun control in the Karamoja region and the Karimojong strengthened their hold with the newly acquired weapons. In 1980, Karamoja was hit by a serious drought that resulted in massive famine *Akoro* (the great famine). For the Matheniko and the Jie who had just amassed weapons, it was an opportunity of a lifetime and they turned on the Bokora and the Dodoth who had never benefitted from pilfering Amin's weapons. They carried out massive raids on the Bokora and Dodoth, taking almost all their cattle. This raiding spread throughout the region, moving into the neighbouring districts.

It actually exaggerated the effects of the severe drought. The loss of livestock, out-migration of herds, inability to plant crops due to the drought and insecurity, and cessation of trade due to the threat of road ambushes resulted in acute food insecurity. By the end of 1980 people had run out of food leaving an estimated 50,000 Karimojong dead by the end of the famine<sup>64</sup>. Many of the families lost their cattle and wealth in the recurrent raids. International organizations such as the World Food Programme (WFP) had to step in to deal with this disaster.

After the controversial 1980 general elections, Dr. Apollo Milton Obote took over the presidency, and he turned to the 'Karamoja problem'. By this time the Karimojong had escalated their cattle raids on the Iteso. The Iteso, who had

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<sup>63</sup> Tindigarukayo, *Uganda, 1979-85: Leadership in Transition*, The Journal of Modern African Studies, Vol. 26, No. 4 (Dec., 1988), pp. 611 – 613

<sup>64</sup> Akabwai and Ateyo op. cit

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unanimously supported Dr. Obote during the campaigns, appealed for government help. A new strategy of dealing with the Karimojong was set up. This was the creation of militias in all the frontier districts. The militias served as a buffer against any raid. After deploying the militias, the army was deployed in Karamoja. Then a forceful disarmament of the Karimojong was launched in the period 1983 to 1984. This was a giant military operation that was jointly carried out with the government of Kenya. It aimed at simultaneously disarming all the armed warriors on both sides of the border. They employed heavy military hardware such as helicopter gunships. The helicopters provided aerial surveillance and attacked the marauding warriors who were running across the borders. The militias in the frontier districts also ensured that the Karimojong did not cross to find sanctuary in another region. As expected, the Karimojong were left with no option but to defend themselves. This was yet another state offensive. Not many of them were disarmed; the military only scared them into hiding the guns. In fact they turned to using bows and arrows to fight back<sup>65</sup>.

But just like the previous attempts that failed, this forceful disarmament did not yield the much anticipated peace. Part of the problem was that the army had to be withdrawn. A bloody rebellion had broken out in central Uganda. It was the insurgency that arose out of the contested 1980 elections which brought Dr. Obote to power. The 1980 electoral loss brought resentment and led to a rebellion under the leadership of Yoweri Museveni. He formed a guerrilla militia called the National Resistance Army (NRA). The resultant insurgency denied the army the concentration they needed to complete the work of halting cattle rustling. The army was withdrawn and disarmament was suspended. This in effect gave the Karimojong the space they needed to reorder. Having been left to themselves, by 1985 an internal and even international trade in light arms was already under way in Karamoja dominated by the Jie and the Matheniko (Wairama 2001:19). Again, this was when militarization of pastoral groups was taking place in the armed conflict in south Sudan, western Kenya and southern Ethiopia.

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<sup>65</sup> Group discussions in Sidok, Kaabong district

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Meanwhile due to the rebellion and ethnic squabbles in the leadership of the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA), divisions emerged within the rank and file of the army. During the critical time when they were fighting rebellions, the divisions greatly undermined the commitment and loyalty of the soldiers. Specifically, a row regarding promotions, appointments and opportunities for training abroad emerged between the two prominent ethnic groups in the army. These were the Acholi on one hand, and the Langi who were from the President's ethnic group. This conflict heightened when President Obote promoted and appointed one of his kin to the position of chief of staff, replacing another Langi who held the same post. The Acholi in the army and who actually constituted the majority group in the army mutinied. This resulted in a coup d'état that overthrew the government of Obote in July 1985. It brought into power the short-lived military junta of General Tito Okello, which reigned from July 1985 to January 1986. During the confusion of the takeover, soldiers who were loyal to Dr. Obote withdrew with their arms to the countryside. Those Karimojong who had been recruited in the UNLA also withdrew with their guns and joined their respective groups in the region.

During the transitional period as the military under General Tito Okello was busy setting up a government, the rebels in central Uganda took advantage of the confusion to gain ground in western and central Uganda. Most of the government troops in central Uganda had withdrawn after the coup, leaving the rebels to take control. General Tito Okello, upon assuming office, invited all the then anti-Obote rebel factions to come and join him in forming a government of national unity. He also instituted peace talks with the Museveni NRA. The peace talks were initiated in the Kenyan Capital of Nairobi under the stewardship of President Daniel Arap Moi.

But as these negotiations about state formation were being advanced, fighting between the NRA and the Okello junta was raging on. The defeated UNLA soldiers retreated to the north and eastern Uganda. While there, they recruited large numbers of Karimojong warriors to help them fight the NRA. They promised them large herds of cattle from southwestern Uganda after defeating the NRA (Mutengesa 2006). The warriors joined them in the hope of getting cattle but unfortunately they still lost the

war. However, the Karimojong again acquired some of the most sophisticated guns. This was a period when the numbers of automatic guns, especially the AK-47, strikingly increased in the entire drylands region.

The peace talks between the Okello military junta and the rebel NRA collapsed and six months later, in January 1986, the government of General Okello was overthrown by the NRA. The rebel National Resistance Movement/Army (NRM/A) of Yoweri Museveni then formed a government that set out to follow a ten-point program outlining Uganda's core problems and how they were going to tackle them. This program however, was built on assumptions that the post-independent Ugandan political leaders were the ones responsible for the economic distortions established by British colonial rule, and as way out of these problems there was need for a new political and economic strategy. These strategies are what the NRM opined in ten points dubbed the ten-point program. Among these points was the crucial issue of the 'Karamoja problem', which was point number eight:

The problems of victims of past governments should be resolved: land should be returned to thousands of people displaced by mistaken development projects and land seizures; the Karimojong should be settled by providing adequate water; and workers and public servants should receive salaries that would allow them to meet the cost of living<sup>66</sup>.

By Statute No 4 the NRM government established the Karamoja Development Agency (KDA) in 1987. This was primarily meant to oversee the transformation of Karamoja. Subsequently, the Ministry of Karamoja Affairs (MKA) was established under the Office of the Prime Minister. The ministry then set up the Karamoja Projects Implementation Unit (KPIU) to guide the implementation of development programmes largely funded by the European Union. These were done to bankroll

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<sup>66</sup> The NRM ten-point program

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investments in Karamoja as a way of settling the pastoralists into alternative livelihoods.

But the new government came with a group of very corrupt officials. The funds approved by Parliament for development programmes under the KDA were soon diverted by these officers. Before long, questions were being asked about the promised wells, the roads, and the benefits the pastoralists were promised in exchange for their weapons<sup>67</sup>. Even the weapons that were recovered from some warriors also disappeared. In that way, these organizations have existed only on paper and have never positively changed anything in Karamoja.

#### **4.4.5 The countenance of counter rebellions and new approaches**

In the aftermath of the fall of the military junta, the defeated Okello forces of the UNLA withdrew from Kampala and moved northwards. Meanwhile the NRA also embarked on disarming ex-combatants of the UNLA in the liberated areas. The procedure was that all ex-soldiers were required to report to the nearest military barracks, surrender their guns and get clearance to allow them revert to civilian life. This took effect in the central and southern parts of the country without any problem. It also started in the eastern and northern regions but by June 1986, it had changed character in these areas.

The exercise changed from disarmament to actual arrests and harassment of former UNLA soldiers who came from the eastern and northern regions. It is alleged that these areas were the stronghold of support for the previous regime of Dr. Obote. Thus the intention was to use harsh methods that would intimidate them into submission to the new regime. As a result, a number of former soldiers went to the Sudan to escape torture and arrest at the hands of the NRA. The NRA continued to harass the relatives of ex-soldiers who had fled to Sudan. This did not go well with

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<sup>67</sup> Kopel, Eisen and Gallant 2003, *Gun Ownership and Human Rights*, The Brown Journal of World Affairs, Winter/Spring 2003 – Volume IX, Issue 2 pp. 7-8

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the ex-combatants in their exile. While in southern Sudan, they mobilized themselves into a fighting group to counter the harassment. They took advantage of the tribal wars and insurgency in the south of Sudan which helped them to readily procure arms and train a strong militia to launch counter offensives against the NRA beginning in August 1986. It was this uprising which in the long run developed into the current LRA in northern Uganda. The first of these counter armed opposition groups came to be known as the Uganda People's Democratic Army (UPDA) whose struggle lasted till June 1988 when they signed a peace accord with the NRM/A government<sup>68</sup>.

In the early days of this counter rebellion in northern Uganda, (late 1986 and early 1987) the UPDA enjoyed good support from the local population. The people looked on them as a source of security and protection against the brutality of the NRA. In addition the population in northern Uganda looked on the NRA as an invading force that was harassing their sons, and they felt they had to protect them in some way. In some instances the local population was asked by the UPDA leadership to donate cattle to the fighters. This was on the understanding that once the government of the NRA was overthrown, they would be paid back in more cattle<sup>69</sup>. Left with no better alternative many gave cattle to the UPDA. They lent out their cattle anticipating that the war would not take long, and there were promises of higher returns. The NRA government on the other hand deployed its soldiers to fight the UPDA. They also lacked the cooperation of the local population but had to do something to win the war. They realized victory would not be possible without breaking the alliance the UPDA had with the people.

The people of Northern Uganda were largely agriculturalists. They also reared some cattle which they used for bride wealth payment, accumulating wealth as well

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<sup>68</sup> HURIFO's IDP Report; 'Between Two Fires' *THE PLIGHT OF IDPs IN NORTHERN UGANDA, The human rights situation in the "protected camps" in Gulu District, Northern Uganda*, Human Rights Focus, 2002, p.5

<sup>69</sup> Ibid p.6

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as investment of surplus realized from agriculture<sup>70</sup>. The NRA entered the war knowing that the strength of the UPDA was in its local support, which was anchored on the economic power of their local supporters. Thus they immediately aimed at economically disabling the support of the UPDA. Their first target was the cattle that constituted the region's resource base. To loot the cattle, the NRA entered an alliance with the Karimojong warriors. They were armed and alongside the NRA they raided almost all the cattle from the Iteso, Langi and Acholi regions<sup>71</sup>. The Langi and Acholi for instance, who were largely agro-pastoral, had a relatively strong economy with approximately 685,000 head of cattle according to 1980 statistics from the Ministry of Animal Industry. But the Karimojong raided almost all these cattle, causing a drop in the estimated herd sizes to 72,000 by 1989 (Ocan 1992).

The cattle raids were extensive and drew much suspicion. People started wondering why the NRA had not intercepted the warriors during all this time. The Karimojong moved as far as they wished. The Acholi, who share borders with the Karimojong, wondered why the cattle raids that had never extended deeply into their hinterland had happened this time<sup>72</sup>. As a result of the raids, the Acholi, Langi and Iteso lost nearly all their cattle, and this period became a critical turning point in the economies and livelihoods of these groups. For that reason, the Acholi, Langi and Iteso groups have continuously accused the NRA of helping the Karimojong warriors to plunder their economies. The facilitation included arming the Karimojong and providing safe routes for them to penetrate their territories. It was also unfortunate that many of their sons had fled to exile after the NRA persecution. Then, defenceless as they were, their wealth was looted.

In extreme cases, they even alleged that many officers in the NRA were seen transporting raided cattle to markets in Mbale and beyond. Just as Akabwai and

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<sup>70</sup> Mirzeler and Young pp.417

<sup>71</sup> Robert Gersony, 1997, The anguish of Northern Uganda, Results of a field-based assessment of the civil conflicts in northern Uganda United States Embassy, Kampala, pp.27

<sup>72</sup> Interview with elders in Pader district

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Ateyo (2007:63) also point out, many of the impoverished people in this region attributed the loss of their cattle directly to the NRA. They alleged that vehicles bearing government number plates owned by NRM ministers and government officials were seen loading and transporting raided cattle to the south of the country. However, the NRA accused the Karimojong instead.

After a series of cattle raids, the Karimojong defected to their sanctuary in the drylands with the weapons they had acquired from the NRA. This gave them an edge over their warring pastoral groups from Kenya. It also boosted their strength sufficiently to enable them to counter the NRA troops when the tide changed. The balance of power within the pastoral region had also been troubled. There was a sudden rush for weapons in the flourishing international arms racket that was developing from the conflict zones in south Sudan, western Kenya, and southern Ethiopia. The mounting tension in the Karamoja region created a lucrative market as the previously less well armed Dodoth in the north moved to procure weapons. Given their strategic location along the border with both Sudan and Kenya, the many Dodoth resorted to arms trafficking. As arms began to flow in, the NRA became apprehensive. They began to arrest gun-holders and when they attempted to disarm the Karimojong, things went awry (Quam 1996).

The NRA decided to deploy heavily in the region and demanded that the warriors surrender all the weapons they had amassed. They even started demanding the weapons raided from the Moroto barracks when Idi Amin was overthrown. To the Karimojong, this was unthinkable. But the NRA was determined and ruthlessly attacked the warriors. They were forcefully disarmed and many of them were tortured to disclose where the weapons were hidden. Where the resistance was strong, gun battles ensued and people were harassed and their cattle looted. They erected road blocks, searched homesteads suspected to have guns, and arrested many people. The



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arrested warriors were tied up with their hands behind them in a style then known as ‘three piece’ and they were severely beaten, some to death<sup>73</sup>.

The Karimojong interpreted this renewed brutality as another attempt to annihilate them. Those people were after their cattle. They wanted to finish them off, it was not about guns, these were the same people who were selling guns, so how could they be looking for the same guns? They still asked how the President, who knew the value of cattle, could send his soldiers to take their cattle. They put up a spirited resistance and the situation would have become extremely bloody but this was when the LRA launched its offensive in northern Uganda. With the new emergency, the NRA was withdrawn and sent westward to fight the more serious rebellion. What was left in Karamoja was just a small force that could not fight the still heavily armed Karimojong<sup>74</sup>. This forceful and brutal manner in which the NRA tried to disarm Karimojong was heavily criticized, and after serious scrutiny, in 1989 the approach was dropped.

#### **4.4.6 The birth of community-based systems**

Once the livestock in the regions of Teso, Lango and Acholiland had all been stolen, the inter-ethnic raiding within Karamoja escalated. In the 1990s cattle raiding tremendously increased, raising the violence level in Karamoja. This extended to the neighbouring districts and was soon completely out of control. The situation demanded serious attention because the use of force had failed. Some individuals from the affected districts and policy-makers called for a conference and debate on what could be done. The first started with Moroto district, where the council became involved. They resolved to generate a local solution to the security problem. The district council decided to appoint Sam Abura Piri (the Secretary for Security) as a local security chief. He was assigned the duty of forming a home-grown local police force to be recruited from among the warriors themselves (Quam 1996).

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<sup>73</sup> Three piece is a torture tactic by security agents in the Ugandan military also referred to as *Kandoya* where the victims’ arms above the elbow are tied behind tightly together with the feet.

<sup>74</sup> *ibid*

The idea was to find a way of covering the policing vacuum in the district. They realized that it was necessary to involve the people and not impose systems on them. For that reason they opted to use the Karimojong warriors themselves in providing security. So Abura Pirir was mandated to recruit a local police force. He started with 900 warriors whom he recruited and trained in the basics of keeping security. He then utilized these warriors in stopping cattle raids, guarding, and road patrols. He also recruited some women who were used in gathering intelligence, since many warriors never paid much attention to them. They could provide information about an impending raid, and Abura and his group would circumvent it. In the end, they managed to restore some order and even road ambushes were reduced; something the army had failed to do. This approach was to be replicated by other districts to cover for the total absence of police in the region.

However, according to (Muhereza 1999) in June 1993, the government decided to take up the Moroto approach. They planned to scale it up and have it in other regions as well. The government then set up the Karamoja Pacification Committee to serve as a security co-ordination and monitoring point. This committee was headed by the Divisional Army Commander and was constituted of the security personnel in the region. The committee was charged with the responsibility of drawing up strategies that could provide a workable alternative to solving the problem of armed violence in the region. When they met, the committee also agreed to use the armed warriors to provide security. They would also involve the Kraal leaders and local councils to officially set up the scheme as a government project. Under this official scheme, the warriors would be allowed to continue possessing guns but only as a measure for self-defence against both local and external aggression. In return for this goodwill on the part of the state, the scheme required them to offer security services needed for securing the volatile region.

This was the birth of a community-based system of managing cattle raiding. The system works by making use of the kraal leaders and local councils from within Karamoja to design security strategies. The result of this approach was the creation of warrior groups known as vigilantes; a sort of police force that was recruited into the

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service of the state. It was envisaged that they would bolster the army's role in tracking raiders and the raided cattle. This would be easy for them since they knew the routes and the tactics used. It was also hoped that they would conduct surveillance, patrol the highways, and give confidence to more warriors to have their guns registered. There was a laid down standard for selection. It was a rule that for one to be registered as a vigilante he:

1. Must own a gun (the guns were personal and not provided by the administrative authorities)
2. Must be recognized as a leader in the community. The characteristic Karimojong traditional measure for accepting a person as a leader were used, i.e., your opinions are listened to and carry great weight, you are a man, or the son of a man, wealthy in cattle, your bravery and marksmanship are well-known and admired (or feared), or your skills at divination are recognized and respected.

In addition, the vigilantes were expected to sensitize the local communities to peace and create good working relationships between the army and the local people. They were also expected to take a leading role in mending the relations with the neighbouring people among the Iteso, Langi, Acholi, Bagishu and the people of Kapchorwa who had suffered the most in cattle raiding.

The government committed itself to providing uniforms, basic military training, and the payment of a monthly salary. The salary was put at the rate of the equivalent of 10-20 US Dollars per month (Muhereza 1999). Under this arrangement, the vigilantes were incorporated into the army's military structure. In this 'deal' the vigilante as a rule was required to register his 'private' gun with the state, but remained the 'owner' of the same gun. The aim of this program was to recruit a vigilante from each homestead (manyatta) and by the end of 1996; approximately 8000 vigilantes had been enrolled. With every homestead represented, it was

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envisaged that the vigilantes would then offer a foundation for initiating reconciliation between the antagonistic groups that raided each other. As a unified force, they would counter any impending raid and since they were drawn from different groups, surveillance would be made easier. When the program was finally implemented, there was a noticeable reduction in cattle raids from 1993 – 1996, indicating that the program worked.

Having integrated the vigilantes into the army's command, the management of the scheme started suffering the same corruption scandals of the Ugandan army. The women vigilantes were for instance left out of the program. The army's command structure did not have space for the women. Yet in Abura Pirir's scheme they were very significant in gathering intelligence information, so leaving them out was already a big mistake. But even for the men who joined the scheme, the rewards that motivated them were not forthcoming. Payment of the monthly salary of 10 US Dollars was always delayed. Often this money was not paid at all as unit commanders and senior paymasters embezzled the money. Even the proper command in the management of the vigilante force was not clear as no one knew whether they were under police or army authority. The failure to pay vigilantes was partly caused by this lack of clear terms as to whether they belonged to the authority of police or the army. Some elders still insist this was a deliberate move by the security forces to sabotage the program since some of them reaped big gains from the chaos. The result was that many of the vigilantes deserted the force. However, they retained their weapons that might otherwise have been subject to collection during disarmament programs (Mkutu 2006).

Another problem apart from the poor management and financial impropriety was that some of the warriors resisted registration of their guns, and even the ones who registered brought only very old guns which often no longer worked. In reality, the majority of the warriors did not register their guns and they continued to rearm. By 1994, the number of guns in Karamoja had risen to approximately 150,000 (Muhereza 1999). While the source of these guns might have been the renegade government soldiers deployed in these areas in times of insurgency, it is also clear

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that lack of government control over the thriving weapons trade in the region played a part. It is also important to note that this was the period when large armies in the region had disintegrated in Ethiopia (1991), Somalia (1991), Rwanda (1994), and later in Congo (1997). With the Ugandan army in both the Rwanda and Congo wars, weapons flow in the country was just too tempting for poorly paid, undisciplined and corrupt armed forces. Hence the warriors enjoyed multiple sources of weapons including the Uganda government army, and it is no surprise that the number of guns increased tremendously.

#### **4.4.7 The creation of Anti-Stock Theft Unit (ASTU)**

In 1996 there was a presidential election that was followed by a cabinet reshuffle. The Ministry of Karamoja affairs got a new minister. By this time it was also apparent that the vigilante approach had failed and lawlessness had escalated in the region. The new minister made changes in the strategies. This came with a shift in approach from using the vigilantes to an auxiliary para-military police force. A new force created was called the Anti-Stock Theft Unit (ASTU). It was mobilized, formed and operated under the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The unit was created to specifically prevent the Karimojong warriors from raiding their neighbouring districts. When the ASTU was deployed, the number of soldiers in the region was greatly reduced. Instead they mobilized local defence units (LDUs)<sup>75</sup> to take the place of the army in the provision of security and to campaign against cattle theft.

This strategy left a very skinny army presence. The vacuum was covered by deployment of the more sophisticated armoured personnel carriers (APCs). This was meant to maintain superiority over the AK 47-wielding warriors but this force could not contain the cross-border raids which had become frequent. So the government instead facilitated dialogue with the Kenyan pastoralists. The first of these meetings was held at Kakuma in Kenya's Turkana District in June 1996. In this reconciliation meeting, the Dodoth were handed back their raided cattle just as the Turkana

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<sup>75</sup> These are local militias that came to force in 1987 composed of local volunteers trained to support the army in providing security in a given area.

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demanded the return of: 70 cows, 35 donkeys, and two children abducted by the Dodoth.

The second Moroto meeting was held from November 13-16, 1996. The second meeting looked at reconciliation on the southern common border with Kenya. It addressed the conflict between the Pokot from Uganda, the Pokot of Kenya, the Sabiny, and the Turkana. Uganda was represented by six ministers of state while Kenya had the North Rift Valley Provincial Commissioner and his two District Commissioners from Turkana and West Pokot, one assistant minister, and several heads of department and members of parliament. This high level meeting was intended to develop the basis for regular meetings and to coordinate regional planning in these areas. It recommended the establishment of a Regional Peace Secretariat to address peace and security in these areas<sup>76</sup>

That was the arrangement for regional security but at the local level in Uganda, the ASTU was faced with the same virus that killed the vigilante program. This was corruption in the Uganda Peoples Defence Forces (UPDF). This time, the numbers of the ASTU personnel in the operational zones were exaggerated and the money meant for their payment was again embezzled. The UPDF commanders started creating imaginary troops of ASTU on paper (also known as ghost soldiers in Uganda) just to receive their intended salaries. This practice misled the government into overstating the presence and role of the ASTU. In the end, it played into the hands of the warriors as they marshalled powerful raiding parties which they took wherever they wanted.

In 2007, the President set up a committee to investigate this phenomenon. The committee came out with many startling findings. For instance, they found out that the commanders would simply interchange first names of non-existent soldiers as a tactic for creating and maintaining 'ghosts' on the payroll. For example, in the 507 Brigade where ASTU in Karamoja operated, the investigators found out that Sierra Battalion of ASTU in Moroto listed 43 soldiers with the last names of Ongom, 28

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<sup>76</sup> Muhereza 1999, pp.17

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called Owilli, and 24 called Owiny. In the 507 Brigade Headquarters there were 20 instances of the name Kule and 29 of Baluku, all with only first name variations, as testified by Col. Fred Tolit, the then assistant chief of staff<sup>77</sup>. This meant that the ground presence of the military in Karamoja existed largely on paper only and in reality they were almost absent. This led to overstretching of the few personnel, resulting in operational fatigue, loss of morale and a high rate of desertion. Many of the vigilante deserters from the Karimojong groups rejoined their traditional raiding gangs. Once back in their gangs, they were no match for the thinly veiled and demoralized ASTU in the region. That is why the years that followed 1996 saw a marked increase in armed violence. This violence triggered seasonal migrations of close to 100,000 Karimojong into Teso and Acholiland (Mkutu 2008).

Apart from the 4<sup>th</sup> division, which was fighting the Karimojong, being riddled with more ‘ghosts’ than men, the salaries of the soldiers and ASTU were not being paid. For this reason, many of the victims had to devise alternative albeit counterproductive strategies to survive. They resorted to selling guns and ammunition to the warriors. This included selling some of the recovered guns. Often, even the records of recovered guns are not clear. According to the Soroti RDC Mr. Bwalatum, there is a very big problem looming. He concedes that the ASTU have gone without their salaries for a long time and are surviving on the goodwill of the communities they are protecting. “And others have now taken to selling bullets to the wrong people, which is very dangerous.”<sup>78</sup> This again puts into the spotlight the way the states in this region create so many para-military groups that, incredibly, get absorbed by the marauding armed insurgents. It can also be argued that in this way the government indirectly induces redundant and frustrated groups such as the ASTU to become accomplices in the unrelenting violence in the region.

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<sup>77</sup> *How Kazini’s 4<sup>th</sup> division became the home of ghosts*, The Sunday Monitor, March 30, 2008

<sup>78</sup> *ASTU personnel selling bullets for survival, says Soroti RDC*, The Daily Monitor, September 29, 2008

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## 4.5 Disarmament Phase I (December 2001- December 2003)

The failure of the ASTU to bring order led to an upsurge in violence. The frontier districts of Teso, Lango and Acholi regions were all affected. The local leaders and area MPs all expressed serious concerns about the escalating cattle raids. The MPs tabled a motion in parliament demanding government action against the warriors. In March 2000 the sixth Parliament passed a resolution banning free movement of armed Karimojong from the frontier districts that had suffered the most raiding. The resolution also called for an immediate disarmament of the Karimojong, to be completed within 12 months. This period of disarmament was separated into two: the voluntary and compulsory phases. A ministerial policy statement was also issued to the effect that the government was going to vigorously engage in:

- Increasing the quantity and quality of the police, intelligence and Local Defence Units (LDUs) to guarantee better protection to the people in the region
- Establishing permanent barracks along the Kenya and Sudan borders
- Constructing a security road along the border from Namalu moving northwards to cover the Kenya and Sudan borders
- Recruiting and training of 146 vigilantes per sub-county inside Karamoja and 292 vigilantes per sub-county bordering Kenya and Sudan. They were to be armed, and paid salaries by the government, and put under the command of the army. Their mission was to guard against inter clan raids.
- Providing incentives to all individuals who handed in their guns. The incentives included an ox-plough, a bag of maize flour and a certificate as a token of appreciation.



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- Giving priority in accessing funds from poverty eradication schemes (*entandikwa*) to those who handed in their guns. Each kraal leader who mobilized guns from the villages was to receive 40 pieces of iron sheet.
  - Instituting strict instructions for the army to use minimum force and ensure discipline.
  - Prosecuting and jailing all those involved in cattle rustling and highway robberies to end criminality.
  - Establishing special magistrates and prosecutors attached to military units to expeditiously dispose of all cases.
  - Constructing valley dams to provide water to support disarmament (KIDDP 2007 – 2010)

The ministerial statement emphasized the fact that the army would move in to stop inter-clan terrorism within Karamoja as well as against the neighbouring communities<sup>79</sup>. The Karamoja conflict was then fitted into the mainstream discourse of terrorism. The government statement began to refer to them as terrorists; as instruments of instability that must be uprooted. The language now changed to enlist support from the donors to ‘fight terrorism’ and parliament endorsed this legislation that dramatically cast the pastoral conflict into the terrorist realm.

In December 2001, the President officially inaugurated the disarmament program with voluntary disarmament first. This involved creating conditions for the warriors to voluntarily hand in their guns to the army. In return they were promised oxen, ploughs, and building materials. The President further promised to construct schools, provide water points, and supply building materials as well as provide capital for investment when the guns were surrendered. He also promised to deploy the army and trained armed militias (Local Defence Units, or LDUs) to guarantee the security of the Karimojong.

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<sup>79</sup> See supplemental report on the inaugural report of the Republic of Uganda to the African commission on human and people's rights submitted in May 2006

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Before implementation of the programme, the government consulted with several stakeholders within the region. These included: the civil society groups, Local and international NGOs, MPs from Karamoja, local government authorities and Karimojong University students. A local NGO, Action for Development of Local Communities (ADOL) even conducted a survey at grassroots level to gather people's views on disarmament. These views were shared with the international and local NGOs, including the churches, before presenting them to government. Among the key issues that arose was that firearms per se were not a major problem in the region. However, they emphasized that the major problems exacerbating insecurity were: lack of governance, absence of law and order, and the failure of government to provide development in the region (Stite et al 2007). In addition, they defended the practice of the Karimojong holding guns as a way of protecting themselves due to the absence of government policing mechanisms in the region. As a remedy to those problems, they recommended massive sensitization and provision of an effective law enforcement and security system before persuading them to voluntarily surrender their weapons. In as much as the government representatives appeared to embrace these proposals in the workshop, its implementation left much to be desired.

Instead when the disarmament program was launched in December 2001, the government gave a period of two months (up to February 15, 2002) to the Karimojong to voluntarily surrender their guns. This was not preceded by massive sensitization and establishing a police system as the stakeholders had recommended in the workshops. What actually happened was that some of the officials who were supposed to carry out the sensitization and reward the warriors who surrendered misappropriated the funds. There were people who held impromptu and poorly attended workshops. They did not sensitize warriors and many of them never even attended the meetings<sup>80</sup>. When disarmament started, the warriors who surrendered were supposed to be given ox ploughs, food and iron sheets<sup>81</sup>. But these items were

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<sup>80</sup> Interview with local government official in Moroto

<sup>81</sup> The warriors alleged that most of these items never reached them. The iron sheets in particular, were received by very few people

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not provided. They were disappointed and refused to surrender the large numbers of weapons expected. This approach realized only approximately 10,000 guns by the end of 2003<sup>82</sup>. This fell far short of the over 100,000 guns in the region. So the bulk of the guns remained in the community and the approach did not work out as successfully as had been anticipated.

However, the failure seemed to point to a more serious problem. The disarmament exercise was uncoordinated and irregularly carried out. There was no security provided for the disarmed communities. They became vulnerable to attacks from groups who were not disarmed and within a matter of days, the disarmed were raided, losing all their cattle. They faced the stark reality that the government could not provide protection at such a critical time. It emerged that the whole of Karamoja at the time had only 145 policemen. In Kaabong for instance, the Dodoth handed in their guns willingly but two days later the Jie came and raided all the cattle. The iron sheets being given were also problematic. The raiders were using them to identify the disarmed. Hence this policy only helped to identify those who should be raided<sup>83</sup>. Thus, when other communities saw what had happened to the Dodoth, they completely refused to disarm, fearing fatal consequences.

The failure of this program eroded the people's faith in government protection. The state failed in its fundamental role; protecting its citizens, and the Karimojong noted this, "people wanted to hand in their guns but there was lack of trust, there was no way that program would work without alternative security provided". The Karimojong did not trust the words of the government, even when the President himself went there to talk to them. Given their past experiences when they were told to hand in guns and some of them had then lost cattle, they were not ready to take the risk. The few who did take the risk paid dearly. They had learnt to take caution. It was true that: "the guns bring us problems with the soldiers but when you hand them over, then the Jie come for your cows and the army will not be there to protect your

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<sup>82</sup> KIDDP pp.9

<sup>83</sup> Stites et al 2007:65

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cows, so why hand them in and become poor?”<sup>84</sup> The Jie and the Dodoth have failed to trust the army, and the two ethnic groups remain in possession of the most sophisticated arms due to their proximity to Sudan (Mkutu 2007:106). Furthermore, as Mkutu points out, when the guns are bought cows are given in exchange, and the government only wants to get hold of the guns without giving anything. They only give promises in return. Worse still, it was on record that the government had consistently reneged on its own promises and the Karimojong were not ready to take any more of it. Cows are very important to the Karimojong and after paying cows for guns, they could only get cows in return.

Some literature has focused on the role of modern weapons in exacerbating this conflict. It argues that the entry of small arms amidst resource competition and scarcity has escalated the deadly violence (Mirzeler and Young 2000), changing the normative order. While this is accurate, more important is the fact that the nature of the policy adopted by different actors in pursuit of different goals was what actually complicated the situation. As noted before, the colonial policies deliberately marginalized and confined the Karimojong and it is now clear that the post-colonial governments have continued with the same approach. What is more, the government gives promises, reneges on them, and expects the Karimojong to comply.

When the voluntary disarmament exercise ended on February 15, 2002 as had been scheduled, the program had literally failed. Only a small number of guns, estimated at 7000, had been handed in to the army out of the anticipated 40, 000 guns. This failure led to action from the President. He issued a circular from the State House setting up the new terms for the nature and path the disarmament exercise would follow. The new approach was the beginning of a militarist and forceful disarmament approach that involved:

- Shooting on sight persons found with a gun on the roads

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<sup>84</sup> Interview with warriors in Sidok, Kaabong

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- Cordoning and searching suspected villages and kraals
  - Arresting and prosecuting suspected criminals
  - Curbing cattle raids and facilitating the recovery of livestock
  - Patrolling the international borders with Sudan and Kenya
  - Recruiting the remaining quota of vigilantes per sub-county
  - Providing an *entandikwa* scheme<sup>85</sup>

The forceful disarmament was started and the UPDF would arrest anyone found with a gun. They also had the power to search any homestead they suspected had guns. The Karimojong resisted this initiative. They hid the guns in the bush; many of them stopped keeping their guns in their homesteads. They particularly resisted the idea of non-Karimojong officers being used to command the operation. Some of the UPDF commanders were from the neighbouring ethnic groups like the Iteso, Lango and Acholi, and they or their relatives had suffered from the cattle rustling violence of the Karimojong. When the forceful disarmament started, such commanders were very ruthless in handling the warriors. To the Karimojong, this operation amounted to revenge by such officers and they were justified in resisting it<sup>86</sup>.

However, this was the period the LRA struck hard in northern Uganda and the security situation in northern Uganda deteriorated. The UPDF had to respond to the attack. The UPDF personnel in Karamoja were again withdrawn and redeployed in northern Uganda under the 'Operation Iron Fist' to fight the LRA. Only a skeleton force was left behind. As a result a large defence vacuum was once more created in Karamoja. The cattle raids increased tremendously. The less well-armed groups and those who had earlier surrendered, like the Dodoth, were forced to re-arm themselves. The Dodoth took advantage of their proximity to Sudan to make alliances with the

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<sup>85</sup> Entandikwa is a Lugandan word meaning 'initial capital'

<sup>86</sup> Interview with warriors in Kathile, Kaabong

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Didinga and the Toposa who supplied them with weapons. Indeed since then, the Dodoth have remained one of the most well armed groups in Karamoja.

The Pokot, who resisted disarmament and had even fled to Kenya during the exercise, returned. They took the opportunity to wreak havoc by raiding many of the Pian and Bokora herds. The Matheniko and Jie also turned their guns on the vulnerable Bokora and Pian. The Pian were forced to re-arm and organized retaliatory raids on the Pokot and Bokora. The Dodoth, who had just re-armed, raided the Jie and the Matheniko, and vice versa (KIDDP 2007). Across the border, the Turkana also moved in and raided the Matheniko. By the end of 2002, the entire region was once more in insurmountable disorder. All those who had disarmed had by then re-armed, and the cattle raids were extending as far as Katakwi and Pader in the neighbouring districts (SNV and Pax Christi, 2004:39; UHRC, 2004:77).

#### **4.5.1 The murder of Fr. Declan O'Toole**

As a result of the army's thin presence, the cattle raids became very intense. The UPDF also started arbitrarily torturing the Karimojong. It no longer mattered whether one was in possession of guns or not, they were all tortured to make them produce weapons. The situation became characterized by brutality and there was no difference between the warriors and the UPDF. They all tortured the population alike. The UPDF personnel operating in Karamoja at this time had been given sweeping powers. They could summarily execute anyone suspected of being a threat to their interests. The indiscriminately molested children, women and girls, and killed several civilians.

The excesses of the UPDF attracted much criticism from the civil rights groups, human rights organizations, and the Catholic Church. Notable in this regard was a priest from the Mill Hill Missionaries in Karamoja called Fr. Declan O'Toole. He was based at Panyangara Catholic mission. He had been trying to broker peace between several Karimojong groups in the area. He was also monitoring the army's drive to disarm the Karimojong. When he noticed the unwarranted torture of innocent civilians, he complained. He travelled to the Irish embassy in Kampala where he

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lodged a formal complaint with the ambassador. Because of his fierce criticism, while travelling back to his mission, he was murdered together with his driver and cook by soldiers on 21 March 2002.

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) reported that Father Declan O'Toole, his driver and a passenger were shot dead as they drove through Kotido district of the Karamoja region. "It is our soldiers who are suspected to have killed him. We have arrested two of them," Major Shaban Bantariza the army spokesman of the UPDF told the French news agency AFP. Bantariza said the two soldiers would be tried by a military court martial as soon as an investigation had been completed<sup>87</sup>. Earlier the local media had reported that the same priest had been beaten in the that month by government soldiers. He had been attacked for accusing the UPDF of using excessive force while searching the residents of his Panyangara parish for weapons.

This episode started with a UPDF early morning raid on March 9. This was when an army contingent went into local homes in the area to flush out the whole population using batons, including a woman whose umbilical cord had not yet been cut from childbirth. The villagers narrate detailed accounts indicating that children were beaten, including small girls, a harmless mentally-ill girl, old people, the blind, the lame and the infirm - all bore the scars 19 days later. Bones and skulls were broken. Twelve women were raped. A six-year-old boy was killed, but hidden under grass on the hill. A young man was bayoneted and hidden under a rock at the top of the hill (but by March 28, hyenas had dragged out the remains, which were too decomposed even for them to eat). A youth was stabbed in the groin. The army stopped the Local Council (LC5) chairperson who was the most senior locally elected representative, from going there. All the people were made to lie in the dry-season sun from 6am to 4pm. Women were kicked in the stomach and pregnant women were

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<sup>87</sup> *Soldiers arrested for Irish priest murder* BBC march 23, 2002

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/1890002.stm>

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hit on the side. It was then, according to local witnesses, that Father O'Toole arrived and demanded to know what was going on. The soldiers hit him on the head. He went to report the matter to the commanding officer and then to the Irish embassy, who made representations to the government. That is why, according to local people who witnessed the event, the Irish priest was killed.

When the UPDF arrested the soldiers named in the murder, they were hurriedly arraigned before a military court martial where their trial was also hastily carried out and they were sentenced to death. They were executed in a matter of days without being given the chance to appeal or reveal who gave them the orders to kill the priest. The hurried manner in which the "justice" was dispensed also attracted much condemnation regarding the army's conduct in Karamoja. Fr. O'Toole had been very vigorous in taking elders to meetings to make peace. That they believed the government deliberately killed him meant that its motive in disarmament could not be helping the Karimojong make peace (Knighton 2003: 440).

People in Karamoja believe someone killed Fr. O'Toole to prevent him from telling what he had seen in Karamoja<sup>88</sup>. Similar claims about harassment were echoed by Robert Achia, the Member of Parliament for Jie County in Kotido district, who claimed that "the brutality is meted by army officers who come with a negative attitude towards the Karimojong. Some of them are from tribes whom the Karimojong raid, so they come with anger and commit atrocities."<sup>89</sup>

In spite of all this brutality and the mayhem the UPDF unleashed on the Karimojong population, the disarmament program did not yield the expected guns from the warriors. On the contrary, they took their security into their own hands, fighting back against their protectors who had turned into attackers. Ironically the few who innocently gave up their guns did not receive the promised oxen, ploughs, and building materials; instead they lost their cattle, were beaten and became more susceptible to raiding. With this experience, the army became another enemy, just

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<sup>88</sup> *The Death penalty is Uganda's crazy aunt*, The East African, Monday April 1, 2002

<sup>89</sup> *Fr. O'Toole Murder Linked to Army Brutality Against the Jie*, The East African, Monday June 3, 2002



like the Pokot and Turkana from Kenya. At the end of this phase, the paradox was that the government had failed in its key responsibility of protecting its citizens, and was now responsible for brutalizing them.

	<b>Ethnic group</b>	<b>Number of guns</b>
1	Bokora	1,782
2	Matheniko	756
3	Dodoth	2,275
4	Jie	1,601
5	Labwor	408
6	Chekwii	735
7	Pian	1,001
8	Pokot	531
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9,089</b>

**Figure 7 Summary of recovered guns by end of Phase I disarmament**

Source: Mburu 2001

## 4.6 Disarmament Phase II (2004-2005)

The UPDF basically remained absent from the Karamoja region for much of the period 2002 – 2004 as they were fully engaged in fighting the LRA in the north. This left the region's security situation to deteriorate further, culminating in the absolute breakdown of law and order. The disadvantaged groups in the 2001 disarmament who had surrendered their guns had by now aggressively re-armed themselves and in some instances had formed new alliances to shore up their strength. The Karimojong were again in charge of their own destiny. This lasted until 2004

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when news of disarmament again started coming their way. Given the past experiences, tension engulfed the region as they waited for another battle with a brutal army.

To express their mistrust at the way the government had failed to protect them, the elders protested. Stites et al (2007) illustrate this with a case that occurred in May 2005. Prior to the launch of the disarmament campaign, the government saw the need to consult. The army leadership in particular needed to seek the views of the decision makers, so they decided to call a joint meeting of the UPDF, the elders and the kraal leaders. In the meeting, the commanders introduced the issue of another phase of disarmament. The elders and kraal leaders opposed it and cautioned against any form of forceful disarmament. They argued that it would automatically fuel insecurity. It was reminiscent of the failed disarmament of 2001 – 2002. When the UPDF commander insisted it would be used, one exasperated elder who had lost several of his children and all of his 400 head of cattle in a raid stood up. Angry as he was, he threw his disarmament certificate at the UPDF commander, spat and said “I am now reduced to a dog by those people who did not hand over their guns to you, and you again talk of disarmament!” He made his point; disarmament undermines the very core of survival - the ability to protect one’s herd.

But in the period 2003 – 2004 the government faced immense security challenges as the LRA launched massive attacks in the north extending into the Teso region of eastern Uganda. Thus the timing of this phase too was bad. Although stakeholder talks were conducted to mobilize public support prior to the exercise, the people were opposed to it. They became even more suspicious about the government’s intentions. Nearly all the people who spoke about this phase of disarmament in the discussion groups alleged that the Iteso commanders in the UPDF influenced the government to undertake this phase of disarmament. They wanted to unleash brutality on the Karimojong in retaliation for the raids they had incurred from the Jie. In fact, the way the process started was intimidating and sent the wrong signals to the Karimojong that war was coming. The operation began with deployment of heavily armed soldiers, armoured vehicles, armed tanks and two

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military gunships that were based at the army Division headquarters in Mbale. What heightened the tensions were the rumours that were being spread that the government was going to use the *Amuka* and Arrow boys' militia from Teso to disarm the Karimojong and put them into camps (Mkutu 2008: 108)<sup>90</sup>.

Although the UPDF took the leading role in the disarmament exercise, the involvement of the frustrated militias was a recipe for trouble<sup>91</sup>. The local leadership recount that this took place during the period leading to the 2006 presidential elections and the President was cagey about the votes only from the Teso region. He wanted to show them that he was concerned about the cattle raids that had displaced thousands of residents of Soroti and Katakwi districts. So this phase of disarmament was meant to please them and show that government was determined to deal with cattle rustling. In particular, informants mentioned President Museveni's ambition at the time which was to change the constitution to enable him to run for a third term. They felt this disarmament was more opportunistically and politically oriented towards satisfying other motives and not towards bringing peace and stability to the region (Akabwai and Ateyo 2008).

## 4.7 The Cordon and Search Disarmament Phase

This phase came as a response to the various stakeholder negotiations that were carried out after the launch of the 2004 – 2005 disarmament programs. It was spearheaded by the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) in which the Ministry of Karamojan Affairs is located. Together with the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), it sought to build on the lessons learned in the 2001 – 2002 phase. From the discussions, a draft development plan document known as the

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<sup>90</sup> With the army's role became overstretched, the government instead decided to support the formation of local militia groups in the affected areas to help fight the LRA offensive. The population in the affected areas then formed the Arrow Boys, the Rhino Brigade, and the Amuka Boys militias in Teso, Lango and Acholi sub-regions respectively

<sup>91</sup> When these militias fought the LRA, they were supposed to receive a salary from the government but some corrupt officers in the UPDF swindled them out of their money, leaving many of them despondent.

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Karamoja Integrated Disarmament and Development Program was made (KIDDP 2007).

This KIDDP program sought to combine the disarmament exercise with development interventions with effect from 2007 when cabinet approved it (Akabwai et al 2007). The program acknowledged that guns had become part of daily life among the Karimojong. It also recognized the need for government to undertake measures to assure the safety of the population in the context of a well co-coordinated Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) collection process. Hence, the overall goal of this KIDDP was meant to be to contribute to human security and promote conditions for recovery and development in Karamoja. The program proposed a comprehensive and coordinated disarmament that enhanced peace building and development in Karamoja. It suggested undertaking weapons recovery within the context of peace-building, where efforts to remove weapons from the society would be linked with initiatives that addressed the root causes of conflict, such as the incidence of poverty (KIDDP 2007).

One of the key components of this program was the cordon and search disarmament. This was a military-driven exercise in which the UPDF and the supporting militia surrounded the Karimojong homesteads (*manyattas*) in the night, usually in the early morning, sometimes as early as 2 am. Then they forced all the people outside their huts so that they could search for weapons. During my sojourn with the Dodoth in Kapedo a young herder described the operation: “They came late at night when we were sleeping. We did not know what was happening. They surrounded the *manyattas*. Before we could wake up, the soldiers were at every door chasing everyone out of the house, even children, and we assembled under the tree by the road. They searched hut-by-hut for guns and when they came to us, all men were asked to produce guns that we did not have, and that is why they took us to the detach (makeshift barracks)”.

With a full military character, the cordon and search was launched in May 2006 starting with the Jie in Kotido district. Several hundred homesteads were burnt

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down, and warriors, women and even children were rounded up and detained. Human Rights Watch in a report based on 50 eye-witness accounts described the operation as a gross abuse of human rights. Whenever people were rounded up, they were taken to a military facility where they were forced to reveal the whereabouts of guns. If they failed to produce the guns, they were tortured. They told how the interrogations took place. ‘Why are you here?’ they asked, and we would answer, ‘we don’t know why we are here.’ Then they said, ‘You are here because we want the gun.’ ... If you say, ‘I don’t know about the gun,’ the soldiers get the stick and begin beating you .... They say, ‘Get the gun! Get the gun!’”<sup>92</sup> The tales particularly point out the unlawful killings, torture and arbitrary detentions. The residents reported that the way this operation was carried out was very harsh and brutal, and it actually demonstrates how the Karimojong are provoked into reverting to armed violence.

This confrontation often ended up in innocent women, children and men getting shot, tortured and maimed. Individuals perceived to be escaping or alerting others about the presence of the UPDF in the area were particularly vulnerable. “People have been shot, others beaten to death. If the soldiers meet you running or resisting arrest you were shot. One boy was killed in that way. He was returning from Kaabong when he saw the soldiers and attempted to run, they shot him dead even though he didn’t have a gun”<sup>93</sup>. When the soldiers failed to get the guns they anticipated to find, people were taken for detention. Men were held in the military detention centres and their wives were asked to bring the guns as condition for their release. Sometimes, they were asked to pay in cattle if they failed to bring the guns. According to the villagers, the UPDF commanders allegedly sold the cattle brought in exchange for detainees at the local livestock markets<sup>94</sup>. In March 2008 the *New Vision* newspaper reported four senior UPDF officers including, a major and the Brigade Intelligence Officer had been arrested after they were caught selling such

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<sup>92</sup> *Get the Gun! Human Rights Violations by Uganda’s National Army in Law Enforcement Operations in Karamoja Region*, Human Rights Watch, 2007

<sup>93</sup> Discussion with residents of Kaabong sub-county

<sup>94</sup> See Akabwai et al 2007: pp.69

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cattle stolen from the “captives” in Kapedo, Karenga and Kathile during the cordon and search operations.

In addition, there were also complaints of looting during the searches. There were allegations of soldiers looting items such as livestock, weapons, cash, food, clothing and other household things. In October 2006, the UPDF command imposed strict controls over the soldiers in the operation zone to improve on the discipline. This reduced the human rights violations though impunity continued unabated. The elders argued that the army was not at all interested in peace; all they wanted were guns and nothing else, not peace. It was also clear that the UPDF had failed to secure the disarmament and the operation had taken the trend of war with the Karimojong. Fearing the dire consequences of surrendering their guns, the warriors preferred to fight to the death than accept to disarm.

The backlash to cordon and search is always brutal. The warriors ‘answer fire with fire’. For instance in the much publicized UPDF massacre in Kotido town in October 2006 where they killed dozens of people in a dance festival, the Jie warriors hit back, killing several soldiers. They also viciously attacked what they perceived as the government area of Kotido town itself. In another incident in Kakumongole sub-county, Nakapiripirit district, the UPDF surrounded villages at 4.00 am for a cordon and search, and then fierce fighting broke out leaving two civilians dead, while an unspecified number were injured. In the subsequent revenge attack, the warriors also overran and looted a Tokora UPDF military detachment. At the time they attacked, most of the soldiers had gone for another cordon and search operation. They also thoroughly beat the soldier’s wives in revenge for the ways in which the soldiers had beaten their own wives, sisters, and mothers<sup>95</sup>. Then the UPDF also retaliated by blocking the Tokora – Nakapiripirit road to all public transport. In return, the warriors also ambushed and shot up two vehicles that they connected with the government. From then on rumours spread that the warriors would shoot at any vehicle with red

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<sup>95</sup> Akabwai and Ateyo 2007:37

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number plates that crossed into Karamoja territory. And this fear constantly hangs around the roads in Karamoja.

The operation drew much criticism pertaining to the arbitrary use of excessive military force. The 2007 UN High Commissioner's report tells of human rights violations that include: unlawful killings, torture, arbitrary detentions, burning of homesteads and granaries, and theft of property, including cattle. The army's use of MI-24 attack helicopter gunships to carry out indiscriminate aerial bombing was particularly distinguished as disastrous. The bombing left thousands of Karimojong cattle dead and grossly affected the pastoralists' economic livelihood. Group discussions and personal interviews in Kaabong report all sorts of abuses around the Morungole Hills where the UPDF arrested, tortured, and beat up men and confiscated cattle. They also detained men and demanded guns from their wives as a precondition for discharging them. When there was no gun, the women had to find one from somewhere (Mkutu 2008). This has widened the market for guns, with the prices now soaring from 300,000 Uganda shillings before the cordon and search started to 800,000 – one million shillings.

In their September 2007 communication, the Human Rights Watch was however still daunted by the army's impunity and insisted the Ugandan government brings its soldiers who committed heinous crimes to justice. Human Rights Watch wrote to the Minister for Defence citing specific cases of gross abuse and giving eyewitness accounts of UPDF brutality. In the letter they particularly pointed out evidence of unlawful killings, torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, arbitrary detention in military facilities, and theft and destruction of property. The letter mentioned some of the cases where the UPDF soldiers shot and killed people such as the eight people killed in Kaabong, including one woman and three children during an operation in Lokolia in December, 2006. Two children who were also wounded during this operation were mentioned. During an incident in Nakot a man shot at UPDF soldiers and was killed by return fire, and soldiers also shot an unarmed man trying to flee the scene. One youth was shot and wounded as

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he ran away from an operation in Irosa village on January 1, 2007, and many other such incidents occurred<sup>96</sup>.

Tales of mass beatings during cordon and search operations are heard all over the region. The beatings were often aimed at uncovering the location of weapons. In Moroto district for example, witnesses of three different cordon and search operations described an almost identical pattern of mass beatings by the soldiers. They narrated how the men were first rounded up outside their homesteads, and then subjected to collective beatings with sticks, whips, guns, and tree branches accompanied by the soldiers' demands that they "get the gun."<sup>97</sup> The discussions also confirmed accounts of UPDF soldiers detaining men in military facilities in Kaabong and Matany barracks. They recounted how people who were being detained in these military centres were not allowed access to family members. The men narrated how on top of the military subjecting them to beatings and violent interrogations, they were deprived of food, water, and adequate shelter. In some situations soldiers conducting cordon and search operations are reported to have destroyed the property of some homesteads. During one such cordon and search operation in Lobongia parish in Kaabong Sub County the soldiers drove an armoured personnel carrier through a homestead, crushing six huts, and two granaries and narrowly missed a crowd of people. Ultimately the situation leaves Karimojong men between a rock and a hard place given that they are not allowed free movement, and can rounded up at any time. They shoot at anyone wearing the traditional blankets and the wounded are denied treatment.

Although the UPDF denies the scope of human rights abuse, stories from the people in Kaabong confirmed and corroborated the atrocious military operations. The warriors recollect the humiliation of people of status at the behest of some UPDF officers. "You can imagine an elder being flogged naked and made to lie in the hot sun for more than 6 hours when women and children are all watching. Can such a

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<sup>96</sup> Human Rights Watch

<sup>97</sup> *ibid*



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person command respect again? That is why all these *Karachuna*'s (warriors) no longer have respect for them." Such disgraceful treatment of the elders is responsible for their diminishing influence and the authority they used to wield in controlling cattle raids has greatly faded. With powerless elders, power continues to flow into the hands of gun handlers who are largely the young warriors. Since they (warriors) need to assert their power, they have to kill and raid to become wealthy in cattle to gain status in society. The *Karachuna* no longer have to wait for the transfer of power as one only has to raid to prove that he is a 'real man'.

#### **4.7.1 Guns come from the army**

With all these strategies between May 2006 and May 2007 the UPDF had collected 7,199 guns out of the estimated over 100,000 guns in Karamoja. One of the common types of gun they recovered was the AK 47 referred to as 'Nakasongola' because they were repaired and fitted with distinctive new red wood fittings by the UPDF factory at Nakasongola<sup>98</sup>. According to the army spokesman Captain Obbo, the army had unearthed a racket of soldiers selling guns to the warriors. In the month of June alone, the army arrested four soldiers in Kotido and Moroto districts selling guns to the warriors. This has made it difficult for the army to ascertain whether the amount of guns is really reducing. From this revelation, it is becoming increasingly clear that many modern weapons in the conflict are imported by the state. The state imports them for its own purposes, but they find their way to the Karimojong in the pastoral region, as the daily Monitor newspaper reports,

##### **Kaabong RDC Accuses Soldiers of Selling Guns**

Kaabong District, RDC Geoffrey Kiwanda yesterday alleged that some UPDF soldiers are selling guns and ammunition to the Karimojong. Flanked by the Dodoth County MP, Fr Simon Lodou, Mr Kiwanda told journalists at Parliament that the UPDF is not only selling impounded cattle but also guns and ammunition. "Whenever we track these guns from the Karimojong during the disarmament operations, we recover our very own guns which the UPDF soldiers sell to them but

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<sup>98</sup> *Prices for illegal guns up*, The Daily Monitor, June 4, 2007

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we shall try the suspects in field court martials," he claimed. He alleged that the Karimojong buy guns not only from neighbouring Sudan and Kenya but also from the UPDF soldiers to protect themselves against cattle raiders. The third division spokesperson, Lt Henry Obbo, said that recently they have not had any cases of government guns being recovered from the Karimojong except for a few cases late last year of soldiers who lost their guns to warriors. He admitted that some LDUs deserted with government guns. "We are very serious about our guns and we have spot-checks of all guns issued and an armoury committee," Lt Obbo said, adding that they have communicated to all army units that they are considering field court martials for those officers who fail to protect their guns. Over 10 army officers and intelligence officers were arrested on Saturday in connection with cattle thefts in Karamoja sub-region. The officers were conniving with local leaders to sell cattle recovered in disarmament operations in Karamoja. The officers in question are Maj. Alex Bakubanja, Capt George Byaruhanga, Lt Enock Musinguzi, and Lt Bosco Maliamungu among others. The officers are being held at the 3rd Division headquarters in Moroto after they connived with local council chairpersons in Kaabong and stole cattle that had been impounded (**The Monitor 28 March 2008**).

It cannot be ruled out that most of the recovered guns also find their way back to the warriors in the same way. The numbers of guns recovered are very instructive in this case. They seem to systematically reduce, for instance; in 2006 they recovered 3,936; 2007 they got 2,949 guns while 2008 have been recorded 1,733 by September. Besides, the situation is getting worse by the day. The cattle raids and roadside ambushes continue to escalate. The army spokesman says on average 13 warriors are killed every month in different areas of Karamoja while carrying out cattle raids and ambushes. According to the UPDF statistics as shown in the figure 2 summary, there are many casualties. The region is now a typical war zone and the UN has set travel restrictions for its staff and directed that all the activities in the region must be carried out with the use of armed escorts<sup>99</sup>.

Although the army tries to give the impression that they are present in Karamoja, the absence of the state in the entire region is manifest in the high levels of lawlessness. The cordon and search disarmament exercise is practically a power fueling violence. It influences the Karimojong to balance power in all ways. Violence

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<sup>99</sup> UN announces strict Karamoja travel time, The New Vision Wednesday October 1, 2008

becomes a normal choice. It is no longer mere cattle raids, but real bloodshed. It involves looting of property, burning of homesteads, wanton murder and total destruction. And amazingly all this takes place within the reach of the army units.

According to NGO workers in the region, the cordon and search exercise is just complicating the situation. Yet the army refuses to accept that it is failing and they prefer to blame it on the Karimojong. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Division commander says the problem is with the leadership in Karamoja. “The leaders follow their people by supporting them whenever there is an armed raid that leads to a clash with the army...until these leaders come out to condemn the armed cattle raids and desist from using the warriors, the disarmament exercise will take longer and delay the development of Karamoja.<sup>100</sup>” And true, the Karimojong are determined to keep their guns at all costs just as the UPDF want to recover the guns at all costs.

	<b>Item</b>	<b>Number</b>
1	Total of guns recovered from cordon and search	1,008
2	Ammunition of different calibres recovered	3,089
3	Warriors arrested or captured	31
4	Warriors charged in court	03
5	Warriors killed in battle	129
6	Civilians killed by warriors	86
7	Civilians injured by warriors	45
8	Soldiers killed in action	24
9	Soldiers injured in action	28

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<sup>100</sup> See The Daily Monitor, Friday July 20, 2007: 7

10	Rustled cattle which have been recovered	1,360
11	Livestock branded	16,488

**Figure 8 Summary of cordon and search results for the period November 2006 – March 2007**

Source: Ministry of Defence <http://www.defenceuganda.mil.ug>

#### **4.7.2 The army cancels amnesty for warriors**

Under the UPDF amnesty, any Karimojong who voluntarily handed in a gun or was arrested with a gun during the cordon and search operation was set free after surrendering the gun. In March 2008, as the situation became tense, the army decided to scrap this official pardon. According to the division commander Brigadier Kankiriho, effective March 2008, any Karimojong warrior arrested with an illegal gun would be immediately subjected to a military court martial and sentenced to imprisonment. These are some of the stern measures the army is trying to impose to save the situation.

That decision was arrived at in response to the prevailing deteriorating security that was slipping out of control. This had earlier prompted the Karamoja regional council, chaired by the five speakers of the districts in Karamoja, to sit on the 13 and 14 of December 2007 to examine the issue. In their recommendation, the council proposed the scrapping of the amnesty and the execution of arrested armed warriors by firing squad as a deterrent to armed cattle rustling. But the Karimojong are just not moved by strong laws, they know they do not work. At least their experience of government does not reflect adherence to laws; instead they have encountered either neglect or resistance.

In March 2008 the commander announced that “after studying the situation in Karamoja for almost three months, we have now taken a decision to scrap the amnesty that we have been granting to the Karimojong warriors. And from now onwards, any warrior who is arrested with a gun, whether he/she is a child or an

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elderly person shall be court-martialled immediately and sentenced in accordance with the laws governing Uganda,”<sup>101</sup> He said although the army has been giving amnesty to the warriors, many of them have been un-cooperative in surrendering the guns voluntarily. Many of them decided to abandon their homes and opt to live in the bush and caves in order to retain the guns. He disclosed that a new operation codenamed *storm operation* is going to start. This is aimed at modifying the cordon and search.

Given the level to which the army brutality had descended, the regional council again sat in July 2008 and resolved to urge government to change to a non-violent means of disarmament. They instead enacted punitive bylaws as one such non-violent approach. They agreed to touch the Karimojong where they would feel the pain without firing a single bullet. They acknowledged that the Karimojong place a very high value on cattle and they would do anything to protect their cattle. Cattle form the basis of Karimojong livelihood; they are extremely valuable and that is why they value the gun. The gun guarantees the wellbeing of the cattle, so there is a relationship between cattle and the gun. The state has for many years failed to guarantee that wellbeing. That is why the Karimojong need the gun. Without it, they cannot keep or get cattle. Thus the council agreed to use fines in cattle to curb the incessant violence. Thus they enacted a by-law that punished through compensation; for every cow stolen, one pays a fine of 50 head of cattle. This was envisaged to give disarmament a human face, but implementation is still a challenge.

### *Conclusion*

From the foregoing, it quite clear that whereas the physical violent power at the centre of the state is always concealed in complex ways, violence is an omnipresent aspect of state order, and is far from being a practice of last resort (Kapferer and Bertelsen 2009). The historical trajectory of cattle raiding in Karamoja provides an interesting analytical path through which the state – society interactions can be understood in peripheral areas that are neither fully controlled by the state nor

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<sup>101</sup> *Army cancels amnesty for Karimojong warriors*, The Daily Monitor, Tuesday March 25, 2008

by the powerful non-state actors. The persistent violent raiding points to these interactions where the state criminalizes cattle raiding, yet it is incapable of suppressing it. Historically, state efforts to control and ‘pacify’ the Karimojong pastoral communities by forcing them into a secularized, centralized model of social organization as well as inculcating ‘modern decency’ have been understood as undermining customary values which only escalates violence. On the other hand, the Karimojong notions of raiding draw attention to the symbolic and economic benefits and imperatives of a cultural practice.

In addition, it is now quite clear that cattle raiding is probably as old as the history of the Karimojong themselves. Their involvement in small arms proliferation and the associated violence draws heavily from this history. It has always involved engagement with different forces at specific moments in history. Theirs is a history of constant back and forth in which militarization more than anything else has been the motivating power behind human survival. In the circumstances, the gun has become the badge of manhood and dexterity. And in the context of increasing vulnerability at the household level both from gun violence and economic decline, guns have now become household or community assets. So communities acquire weapons as a means of protecting, replacing or accumulating assets. Armed violence in particular becomes a way of life, with the guns as a very important ingredient in the way people manage their lives.

## CHAPTER FIVE

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## 5. DEFYING THE STATE – PROTECTING THE KARIMOJONG SOCIAL ORDER

### 5.1 Introduction

In north-eastern Uganda, the pastoral frontiers remain a contested territory that have never been fully incorporated into the nation-state as the Karimojong non-state actors ceaselessly resist the centripetal drive of the state to subdue them. The overt violence which we see is largely intrinsic to the socio-political formulations of state formations. It is part of the responses to the continued drive towards secularizing the Karimojong into a form of centralized model of authority. Indeed a number of valuable studies demonstrate that violent, armed cattle rustling among neighbouring ethnic groups has occurred in the near if not total absence of the state in the whole of northeast Uganda and the entire Greater Horn of Africa (Muhereza 1999; Osamba 2000; Mirzeler and Young 2000; Mkutu 2003; 2006c). The region is largely governed by warfare and the local warlords and warriors are basically in charge (Osamba 2000; Mirzeler and Young 2000).

The idea that warfare is an important element of primitive or stateless society was best illustrated in Pierre Clastres (1974) work that demonstrate that in stateless societies power is held by the social group itself and the development of inequality and the division of society are vigorously prohibited; “There is a radical dichotomy separating primitive societies, in which the chiefs lack power, from societies in which power relationships develop: essential discontinuity between societies without a State and societies with a State” (Clastres 2001 147). Clastres offers an important starting point towards understanding the political behaviour of East African pastoralist groups and their distant and often oppositional relationship to the state.

As with other peripheral groups in the region, pastoralists have suffered systematic marginalization from the state. At the same time, they have a history of rejecting the central authority of the state, which they perceive as threatening to their distinct nomadic way of life. Similarly, according to Taylor (2009), Clastres' position



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on the socio-economic behaviour of primitive societies fits well in the model of Marshal Sahlins' earlier work on the domestic mode of production (2000) where "in contrast to all depictions of primitive economies as economies of deprivation, the people who actually live in such societies procure their subsistence with an average of less than three hours of work per day. These are economies rooted in and encompassed within the social, and it is this social factor that is their driving force rather than their by-product." He argues that if we are to understand the social and cultural specifics of how violence is enacted in such societies, there is a need to focus on the ontological underpinnings of moral personhood in these societies, as this is deployed in war.

This chapter investigates this hostile relationship between the state and the Karimojong, and shows how when violence is conducted by the state, it legitimizes and entrenches the local moral perceptions that contribute to continuous violence. I argue that contrary to numerous studies attributing the persistent violence to the 'failed state', the historical development of the nation state systematically conditioned the forms of defiance that the Karimojong pastoralists exhibit. I explore the fact that the defiance itself has not been static and self-contained but part of an evolving process of historical and cultural change, particularly influenced by the shifting relationships with the state.

Right from the colonial period, the Karimojong have always been treated with suspicion, marginalized, and relegated to being a peripheral constituency of the nation state in Uganda. Although the successive post-colonial regimes have made some attempts to integrate this region into the Ugandan national space, the state has never successfully established itself in Karamoja and the Karimojong have been left to largely operate outside of state sovereignty and outside state laws. They took to their traditional ways, particularly cattle raiding which brought them into contact with modern weapons. They amassed weapons both for protection against their equally well-armed neighbours as well as for executing raiding missions for their survival. I argue that since the colonial period, different regimes in Uganda adopted different anti-pastoralist policies which only lead the Karimojong to lose faith in matters of the

state. For instance attempts to forcefully disarm them, just as forcefully settling them have resulted in an unforeseen social crisis, setting the stage for an emerging armed confrontation with the state.

## 5.2 The notion of the failed state

The notion of failed states largely rests on the idea of ‘statehood’; juxtaposing ‘enduring states’ and ‘failed states’, contrasting the two to draw attention to the defining characteristics of the latter. While there is no single definition of failed states, they are states generally conceptualized as those mired in or at a risk of conflict and instability; where the persistence of violence causes state structures to become ineffectual (Huria 2008). Countries that are said to have degenerated into failed states are held back by poor governance, corruption, and inadequate provisions of fundamental public services to their citizens. Moreover they show lack of effective control of their territory, military, or law enforcement, which grants a golden opportunity for instability, and the countries are usually also among the poorest countries in the world like many in Sub-Saharan Africa (Ibid.).

The reality behind violence in Karamoja is that the government of Uganda is not in control of events. The government has itself conceded that there are serious doubts about the functionality of its institutions in the region. First, it has recognized that currently the UPDF does not have the overall monopoly over the means of coercion because of the widespread proliferation of small arms and ammunition. Secondly, it agrees that state institutions and structures used in governance such as the police, the judiciary and prisons, are hardly operational and this undermines the government’s capacity to ensure order. Thirdly, they also admit that the trend of armed violence in Karamoja and the impact it has on access to resources necessary for survival has, to a large extent, influenced the capacity of the institutions of government to provide services, especially the necessary security in a very troubled region (Republic of Uganda 2007).

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It is because of the above factors that the Karimojong have never had good relationships with any regime in Uganda's political history<sup>102</sup>. The basis of this bad relationship is historical. First, the colonial rulers and then all the succeeding regimes in Uganda have never accepted that the Karimojong deserve their way of life. Secondly, the managers of the state just as the rest of Uganda, have stereotyped the Karimojong as backward, obstinate and unruly people. The state generally prefers to understand them as people who are stuck to traditional pastoralism in an era of economic and social transformation.

So policies are designed to deal with 'stubborn' and 'unruly' people. There are laws made specifically for them and without any consultation the government tries to forcefully enclose and permanently settle them (Dyson-Hudson 1953; 1966; Gulliver 1955; 1965; Barber 1962; Lamphear 1976, 1994; Novelli 1988; Quam 1996; Muhereza 1999; Nabudere 2000; Mburu 2000; Mkutu 2003; Knighton 2005). For this and other reasons they have persistently fought hard to protect their own autonomy. The end result is war between the state and the Karimojong. This raises a number of serious questions; for instance, do the Karimojong consider themselves as part of the 'the nation-state' or as 'people' of Uganda? Why does the state persist in trying to uphold the principles of a 'state' even at the cost of destroying the Karimojong? Who is responsible for the violence in Karamoja? Does this violence shed light on the general socio-political situation in Uganda and the region?

### **5.2.1 The state enmity is historical**

The concept of the state reminds us of Max Weber's definition of the state as 'a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory' (Weber et al., 1991; 78). This indicates that within a specific territorial space, the state has the ultimate authority to make and put

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<sup>102</sup> This has been the case with all past national governments, including the colonial military administration from 1911 – 1921, the colonial civil administration 1921 – 1962, the first Obote (UPC) government of 1962 – 1971, Idi Amin's military rule 1971 – 1979, the UNLF Interim administration 1979 – 1980, second Obote (UPC) 1980 – 1985, the Okello military junta 1985 – January 1986, and Museveni's NRM from 1986 to date. The Karimojong have fought with them all and continue to fight

into effect ways of ensuring social order, even if this may involve the use of violence. The primary justification for the existence of the state is that it provides protection or security, wellbeing, and generally ensures peace for its citizens. But ironically the most essential arm of state machinery that enables it to meet those functions is the use of force against its people; that is, the monopoly of the state to coerce its own citizens. The state possesses the ultimate power with which it exercises its functions. It acts independently and free of control by other states. A state therefore implies the means through which a defined 'sovereign' territory is ruled. A state is more than a government because whereas governments change quite often, states are supposed to endure.

A state also seeks to limit and control the practices of society by constructing boundaries for all sorts of behaviour. The state in Uganda for example manages a military and police force whose major duty is to regulate, protect, and coerce citizens into being law abiding members of the society. But sometimes states also fail to perform their functions and they sometimes fail to meet the standards set for statehood. In this way they can also become 'failed states'. In such a situation, the state finds itself in a situation where the ability of its institutions to preside over order in the society is lost. In this case it may not only result in hostilities and internal strife, but it also means that the concerned state will have failed to gain full authority over some of the areas supposed to be under its jurisdiction. Whereas it is clear that all nation-states the world over historically develop out of the imagination of different communities, the historical circumstances in which they emerge to become states differ from place to place. In countries where the populations merged were multi-cultural and strikingly distinct, formation of the imagined communities in the concept of nation was usually based on a cultural definition of nationhood.

On its way to becoming a nation-state, first as a British protectorate in 1894, Uganda was a typical and highly multi-cultural society. The British on arrival established some form of administration all over the country except in the Karamoja region (Barber 1962). Karamoja was left un-administered by the British for a very long time because the hostile ecological conditions in the region could not support the

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production of cash crops like cotton and coffee to service the industries in England as well as finance its administration (Barber 1962; Welch 1969). The only activity for which Karamoja was then known was the lucrative ivory and slave trade with the Arabs, Abyssinians (Ethiopian) and the Swahili where exchanges including guns were made (Welch 1969). Among the exchanges they were engaged in that included guns, ivory and slaves, it was guns that gained most currency among the Karimojong. This of course quickly sparked off weapons proliferation in the region. These weapons were largely required for the purposes of acquiring cattle through their cultural practice of raiding. The weapons gave an upper hand to the groups that got them. They raised the stakes in cattle raiding and in that way increased the scale and intensity of the raids (Welch 1969; Lamphear 1976). It is that escalation in cattle rustling and most especially the weapons emanating from the raiding that attracted the Protectorate government to the region.

The decision of the Protectorate government then was to quickly stop this trade and find ways of subjugating the Karimojong because, in military terms, the British could no longer ignore Karamoja lest they lose it to traders (Barber, 1968). This was followed by the closing of Karamoja district to all traders in 1911. Contingents of KAR were dispatched to the region and a military occupation of Karamoja was put into effect (Barber 1962). This marked the beginning of the militarist approach to dealing with the Karimojong. The British instituted military patrols in Karamoja and by 1912, a permanent Northern Garrison had been created and tasked with the pacification of Karamoja. This campaign took a typical military character distinguished by brutality, shooting people, burning their huts and confiscating their livestock (Barber 1962; Welch, 1969; Republic of Uganda 2007).

In this way guns were introduced into the conflict and since then guns have become part of the inter-clan cattle raids and, particularly importantly, of the warrior's face-off with government troops. With more firepower in their hands, cross-border raiding also became regular. The Karimojong became a real military threat to the British supremacy in the region and this led to deployment of a special paramilitary police force. The British also instituted a disarmament program that

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aimed at collecting all instruments of violence in Karamoja. Even if guns had already been introduced into the violence, during this period many warriors were mainly armed with spears that the colonialists referred to as *mukuki* in Kiswahili<sup>103</sup>. Forceful disarmament began and was to define the state – Karimojong relations in the years to come. The elderly Karimojong actually refer to this period as *ekaru a'mukuki* (the year of the spear). The government took the view that disarmament was the only way of bringing the Karimojong under control (Republic of Uganda 2007). However, no attempts were made to try to integrate them into the thinking that they were citizens of Uganda as a nation. They were fought, disarmed and restricted to their district. A precedent was set and all the post-independence governments that succeeded the British simply followed suit. They all became more pre-occupied with the existence of guns and bringing the Karimojong to their knees rather than setting up state institutions to organize them. Although the Obote I government in the 1960s is credited for attempting to introduce some structures to ensure administrative control over Karamoja, before it took effect, Idi Amin's coup that ended the regime occurred in 1971.

The Karimojong under Idi Amin were subjected to extreme harassment by the military. Amin set up more military garrisons in Karamoja to check the flow of arms and fight cattle raiding. He moved a step further to re-write what he considered Karimojong backwardness. For instance he outlawed the wearing of traditional dress of sheets and forced the people to adopt the modern (western) formal dress code. In 1973 when the Karimojong protested by holding a demonstration against what they considered an insulting policy, the army unleashed its might on them and at least 300 Bokora were shot dead at Nawaikorot. Such historical experiences in their relationship with the state meant they could no longer trust it – and certainly not with their security. From this incident, they started devising ways of protecting themselves from the state which they considered a very lethal enemy. It is from this perception that the Karimojong concept of referring to the state as *ariang* (enemy) was coined.

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<sup>103</sup> Kiswahili, which was the language of the Swahili, became the official lingua of the British colonialists in communicating with the Karimojong.

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The state on the other hand totally failed to integrate the pastoralists in the nation state. Given their level of armament and their ways of life, the state remained wary of their intentions. The inclusion of modern weapons and their cross-border mobility intensified this suspicion in the context of national security. The recent war on terrorism that came in the aftermath of the September 11 US attack further raised the tensions between the two (Knighton 2006; Mkutu 2006). The bottom line is the relationship between the state and the Karimojong can best be described as one of isolation, antagonism, and warfare.

As the suspicions bred, the violence also grew and the government continuously failed to manage it. The acquisition of small arms by different ethnic groups intensified rivalries and animosity first between different groups (Mirzeler and Young 2000) and then with the government. The last four decades in particular have seen the state – Karimojong tensions grow on a worrying scale. The raiding grew to an alarming level, guns became common household items, and the Uganda army officials themselves also became complicit in this raiding and killing business (Knighton 2003; 2005; Mirzeler and Young 2000; Mkutu 2003; 2006). Yet the Karimojong, in as much as their internal political organization promotes bravery and the use of violence, showed no interest whatsoever in state power. They did not in any way pose a threat to directly overthrowing the regime in Kampala. However, for the state, its sovereignty was at stake as the Karimojong would not respect the power of the state but put all their allegiance in their tradition and the will to survive.

But the Karimojong should not be misunderstood as people who do not have any interest in matters of state politics. The Karimojong youths express their desire to be left to manage the affairs of their own region. Even the elite Karimojong involved in the national politics are already asking for Karamoja to be declared a political region that can run on its own. When the Kampala regime involves a few elite Karimojong in national politics as MPs or Ministers or army generals it does not in

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any way tilt the bulk of the Karimojong population towards national integration<sup>104</sup>. Their wish is always Karimojong autonomy. Undoubtedly therefore, we need a particular focus on the role of the state just as another actor in the Karamoja problem. It is important that we understand why the Karimojong always regard the state as an enemy, as another raider of their cattle (Knighton 2003), as a source of disorder and hence as responsible for the escalating crisis. It is a question of the legitimacy of the state with regard to its people.

We begin to see the notion of the state as simply a subjective actor in the violence. This has been the feeling right from the colonial period. If we look at what happened during the British colonialism, the problem was the state itself. The pastoralists' indigenous ways of adapting to the harsh and variable environment have always been disrupted; they have been displaced primarily in the guises of state intervention. Barber (1962) in his historical accounts clearly showed that right from the colonial times, military occupation was the most preferred method to provide protection to the Karimojong. Even then, when the security was provided, they had to pay the cost by losing their trading links in the form of expulsion of the traders and closing the district to any outside links.

From the foregoing, we can also discern that one of the central issues responsible for the escalating violence has been the combination of the lack of effective government and the absence of a clear, consistent and comprehensive government policy on Karamoja (Oxfam 2004). This is because the relationship between the state and the Karimojong over the years has simply been one of seclusion and resentment. The Karimojong do not recognize the institutions of the government that is supposed to exercise control amongst them. They still reserve their respect for their traditional institutions and perceive state institutions as working against their livelihood. Indeed when the Karimojong first acquired guns it was as much to protect themselves against the government as against their neighbours (Ibid). Thus, as the

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<sup>104</sup> The Dodoth had just got one of their MPs appointed minister of state for industry. Many of them were questioning what industry meant to them. They did not see such political appointments as having any tangible significance to them



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state wakes up to its role of ensuring the rule of law, enforcement is fast becoming anathema to the Karimojong. Indeed, attempts to establish the administration of justice in Karamoja by the government represent one source of conflict between the state apparatus and the local pastoralists due to the fact that the state is introducing a parallel system of administration of justice alongside theirs.

## 5.3 The state and its policies in Karamoja

### 5.3.1 Colonial state and development policy

The problem of gun ownership and its related violence in the region is nothing new. The establishment of the colonial state found the Karimojong armed. Cattle raiding and gunrunning were already lucrative businesses by the time colonial administration took control over the region. The Karimojong were already bartering ivory and cattle that they exchanged for weapons (Barber 1962; Lamphear 1976; Pazzaglia 1982).

As noted in the previous chapter, arms proliferation in this region started well before civil administration by the British was established. The gunrunners, who were operating a thriving gun market in Maji, southwestern Ethiopia, went all over the region exchanging weapons for ivory (Barber 1962; Pazzaglia 1982). By this time armed violence was already noticeable between and among the Karimojong and their neighbours and some people had started setting up private armies to out-compete rivals in the ivory trade. The potential for more violence was growing as competition between the Abyssinian merchants and the Swahili culminated in them competing to train and arm the Turkana, Dassenetch, and Karimojong, supposedly to protect their ivory caravans from rivals and local populations that might attack them (Akabwai and Ateyo 2007). These developments resulted into the creation of pockets of private armies that were quite a force to reckon with by the time the British moved in to set

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up their administration. These well armed groups posed a threat to the, British forcing them into action in 1911<sup>105</sup>.

Hence it was the presence of these private armies and the perception that they were dealing with people who were well-armed that drove the colonial administration to disarm and pacify the region. They met with stiff resistance, forcing the British to resort to a scorched earth policy to force compliance. As was the case with most of the pastoral groups in East Africa, the Karimojong did not easily succumb to colonial rule. They put up sporadic but formidable resistance towards colonial control. This was partly perceived as a refusal to give in to incorporation into state systems. According to Barber (1962), the British-backed King's African Rifles managed to pacify the Karimojong and set up the first government outpost at Koputh<sup>106</sup>.

When the British colonialists finally established indirect rule system of governance in Uganda, Karamoja was initially left out. For instance, in all parts of the country every district was run by a District Commissioner (DC) who administered through appointed local collaborators acting as traditional chiefs (Mamdani 1995). Karamoja was the only region administered by military officers and the KAR for a long time (Barber 1962; Lamphear 1976; Pazzaglia 1982). When they finally set up a centralized form of administration, they swept away the local institutions and practices and commanded conformity with the colonial administration orders. With such reforms, the British succeeded in breaking up the traditional sources of power that the local Karimojong used to preside over their state of affairs (Barber 1962:122; Dyson-Hudson 1966; Lamphear 1976; Pazzaglia 1982).

The colonial policy in this period was arbitrary; they did not build on any tradition on the ground. All attention was focused on how to reduce the military might of the Karimojong. They ignored the fact that the institution of elders played a

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<sup>105</sup> The military strength among the Karimojong groups was seen as a threat and only military response was considered, marking the beginning of the militant relations with the British

<sup>106</sup> In 1911 the British did not find much resistance among the tribes of northern Uganda except for the Karimojong that they had to fight hard to be able to bring them under colonial rule. The colonial officer in charge of the region was called Tufnell. Karamoja was then one district.

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key social control role that would be needed. So they neither consulted nor appointed the elders to take on the administration responsibility. Tufnell chose men whom he considered to be of social standing in the society and particularly those who were not so old as to be physically incapable of carrying out duties. Preference was also given to Swahili speakers (Barber 1962; 113). The chiefs' main role was to maintain order in their communities, and to provide free labour and food whenever the colonial authorities demanded them. Karamoja was then administered as a single district from 1911 until 1971<sup>107</sup> when it was divided into two administrative districts of Northern Karamoja and Southern Karamoja, later renamed Kotido District and Moroto District (Quam 1996). As the district got properly constituted, the colonial administration then moved to appointing chiefs on a clan (ethnic) basis with each clan given a council, which had the power to sit as a court, try offenders and sentence up to a maximum penalty of two months' imprisonment<sup>108</sup> (Barber 1962).

In this way the Karimojong were systematically left behind and consequently, misleading and pessimistic stereotypes began to be formed about the Karimojong. At the centre of public representation began the idea that the Karimojong and "modern life" were mutually exclusive. So the discourse about the Karimojong and pastoral development in general began to be constructed along strings of oppositions; positing them as nature versus civilization; as nomadic versus the progressive sedentary livelihood; as traditional versus modern; as engaging in irrational practices versus rationality; as subjugating women versus gender sensitivity; as favouring group (ethnic) domination versus individual freedom (Kratli 2001). Such stereotypes began to portray the Karimojong as people with no moral standards; as wild and unruly group of people. And certainly this was the thinking that informed the making of policy. With that in mind, the intention was always to keep them away from contact with other tribes so as to steer clear of their violent ways and try to avoid conflict with the other tribes (Barber 1962).

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<sup>107</sup> It was the government of Amin that divided up Karamoja into two districts

<sup>108</sup> All this was done against a background where there was no custom of chiefs upon which they could build. The Karimojong were a non-centralized social group whose political and social power to control society were vested in the elders within each clan group

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Oral accounts reveal that it was not until the 1950s that the colonial state moved in to establish development projects aimed at making Karamoja supply cheap meat to the already developing southern urban centres. Embarrassed by the growing gap between Karamoja and the rest of the country, this was when the Protectorate government constructed several dams and water holes and introduced ox-driven ploughs in the fairly fertile arable areas around the mountains in Kaabong. For instance, it took the colonial administration twenty-seven years after the establishment of the protectorate government to post a veterinary officer to Karamoja in 1948. It was also not until 1958 that they instituted the District Development Plan whose mission was to “persuade an extremely backward pastoral people who are many years behind the other tribes of Uganda to adopt a money economy and a settled way of life” (Gartrell 1988; 206). In line with that, the Karamoja Cattle Scheme was also set up, primarily to organize marketing and destocking of cattle. The scheme took the monopoly of buying cattle, usually offering very low prices, and became the instrument of exploitation of the pastoralists. By the time of Uganda’s independence in 1962, the scheme had succeeded in providing cheap meat to the south. However, it failed to integrate the Karimojong into the cash economy. They simply used cattle marketing only as a way of circumventing famine. As a result of the policy on movement restrictions coupled with the expanding population, declining grazing sources and increasingly limited food supply, the Karimojong turned to raiding and forceful entry into otherwise restricted grazing areas ” (Gartrell 1988). In this case, the Karimojong were simply responding to the crisis that the state on one hand and the environment on the other had led them to.

In response, the state had to continuously remind itself of its purpose; to reassert its control over the Karimojong in a more direct and military way. The state would directly confront the offending group without looking at the wider socio-economic implications. From that position, the Bataringaya report of 1961 also influenced the designs of the post independence state policies for Karamoja. The state persistently looked at Karamoja from a more militarist perspective. Whereas they acknowledged that the remedy required included a sterner administration, establishment of district council systems as elsewhere in Uganda, better road and

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communication networks, the report looked at the problem as a political-administrative one requiring beefing up security (Akabwai and Ateyo 2007).

## 5.4 Post colonial policies and fighting cattle raiding using legislation

The development policies that were formulated for this region largely drove the Karimojong to lose their most valuable resource - grazing land. For instance, the government moved in to demarcate part of the grazing territory of the Dodoth, turning it into Kidepo game park and subsequently denying the pastoralists access. Secondly, during the process of demarcating district boundaries, parts of the Karimojong dry season grazing reserve land were given to Teso district. Meanwhile on the eastern frontier, the Pokot from Kenya who had been pushed out of their grazing lands in the Trans-Nzoia plateau by the white settlers, moved into Karamoja and managed to take off about fifteen percent of Karimojong grazing land (Barber 1962; Dyson-Hudson 1966). In this way, the colonial state in Kenya succeeded in exporting the Pokot livelihood dilemmas to Uganda (Gartrell 1988).

Equally disturbing for the Karimojong were the colonial policies targeting confiscation of cattle as a punishment for committing acts of violence. Cattle are the most valuable resource for the Karimojong and when targeted, they respond viciously with all their energies. This started when the environmental and social pressures increased and raids into neighbouring Teso sub-region escalated. As a result, the Legislative Assembly sat in 1958 and passed the Special Regions (Karamoja) Ordinance Act, 19 which gave the Provincial Commissioner of Karamoja the power to declare any section of the region a 'prohibited area'. It legalized the movement restrictions for both cattle and humans, and it delineated Karamoja from the rest of Uganda. It was after this law that the colonial government 'littered' a few police stations over the region to provide machinery for subjugating the Karimojong (Barber 1962; Gartrell 1988). In addition, this was the legislation that promptly expelled all the traders from the district and in effect Karimojong became cut off from any form of outside contact or influence. The law also demanded groups swear 'peace bonds'

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that committed them as a group to ensure that no one amongst them would engage in acts of violence. Any breach of these pacts especially through cattle raiding would lead to the entire group (ethnic group) living in such an area being punished through confiscation of cattle as a ‘collective fine’ (Republic of Uganda 2007).

The above laws set the pace for Karimojong – state relationships in the years to come. By the time the ordinance was repealed in July 1961, the scale of cattle raiding had greatly increased. The enforcement of ‘collective fines’ triggered more conflicts<sup>109</sup>. Instead violence resulting from cattle raids became more frequent and the government had to act. To the Karimojong there was no longer suspicion that the state was at war with them; they had to fight for their cattle. Indeed in 1962, the 4th Battalion of the KAR was deployed in Karamoja to restore law and order. With this deployment, the principle that only the military could bring order in Karamoja continued to be observed. The state presence became increasingly militarized as more legislation was enacted to direct the situation. To augment the military action, the Administration (Karamoja) Act No. 17 of 1963 was enacted (Republic of Uganda 2007). This act gave the Karamoja Administrator wide administrative and judicial powers to facilitate quick military and administrative action against cattle raiding. In contrast, cattle raiding persisted and even increased, leading to an amendment of the act<sup>110</sup>.

The state responses to violence took the trend of amending and altering the laws to oscillate between extensive marginalization and outright military occupation. The (Karamoja) (Amendment) Act of 1964 was no exception. Having failed to have any effect, it was amended by Cap 314 Act 13 of 1970 (section 241) and subsequently repealed by the Special Regions Act (Cap. 306) in the revised Laws of Uganda. “To date, it stands out as a piece of legislation on the statute books intended to make provisions for the prevention of cattle raiding and stealing. The existing

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<sup>109</sup> The fines which were in the form of confiscation of cattle made the Karimojong feel they were justified in raiding to recover losses made. At this time the state began to be viewed as a raiding party in the conflicts

<sup>110</sup> The implementation of these laws remained wanting in several respects. First, the Karimojong never really got to accept them, and secondly, the personnel in the district could not enforce the laws as people never respected them – respect remained for the traditional structures that the colonial state authorities simply ignored

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Special Regions Act empowers the concerned Minister, through a statutory instrument, with powers to declare any area to be a ‘special region’ (section 2), where entry of any person into that area without the permission in writing of an administrative officer is prohibited (section 3[1])” (Republic of Uganda 2006; 10).

Furthermore, a number of laws were made to check the illegal possession of firearms. These measures were no different from those implemented in the past. The government continued to pursue legal options that were impossible to implement. For instance it repealed the 1955 British Firearms Ordinance that was used to restrict gun ownership and replaced it with the Firearms Act of 1970. This act made it an offence for anyone to possess a firearm without a licence. Section 3(1) of the Firearms Act (Cap. 299) states that; *‘No person shall purchase, acquire or have in his or her possession any firearm or ammunition unless, in respect of each such firearm, he or she holds a valid firearm certificate’*. This legislation continued to affix stringent sections that would deal a blow to Karimojong who held guns. The Act for instance made it an offence for anyone who dared possess a gun without a licence upon conviction to be liable for imprisonment for a term not exceeding 10 years or to a fine not exceeding twenty thousand Uganda shillings or both (Republic of Uganda 2007). Although these statutes are still in force to this date, no serious implementation of the Firearms Act, 1970 has been recorded. It therefore served no meaningful purpose in forestalling violence as intended.

The government is still determined to use military campaigns to disarm the Karimojong warriors. This use of military force against citizens of Uganda is derived from the laws of the UPDF Act (1995) (Cap. 307) by which the Karimojong warriors definitely find themselves subject to military law, *‘for being in unlawful possession of arms, ammunition, equipment and other prescribed stores ordinarily being the monopoly of the army’*. Following their illegal possession of firearms and ammunition, as well as engaging in armed confrontations in their cattle raiding activities, they commit offences under this law. The penalty for it is that they are *liable, upon conviction, to suffer death* (Section 33[1] [2]). This law is applied together with the Anti-Terrorism Act (2002) which came into force in 2002 in the

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aftermath of the September 11 attack in the United States of America. Section 10 of the Suppression of Terrorism Law states that; “Any person who aids or abets or finances or harbours, or in any other way renders support to any person, knowing or having reason to believe that the support will be applied or used for or in connection with the preparation or commission or instigation of acts of terrorism, commits an offence and shall on conviction, be sentenced to death.” This law was meant to reinforce the Firearms Act 1970 which aimed at preventing people like the Karimojong from obtaining weapons (particularly small arms or light weapons) within or outside Ugandan territory. The Anti-Terrorism Act 2002 also addressed this in sections 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12. The sentence prescribed for supply of weaponry or explosives is death on conviction. Likewise the sentence for recruiting, financing, and harbouring terrorists is death upon conviction.

Carrying guns by civilians is a violation of the Firearms Act (1970), the Uganda People’s Defence Forces (UPDF) Act (1995) and the anti-terrorism act (2002). Since these guns are illegally held, the owners are all taken to be criminals and in the new terminology they are terrorists who should be treated as such. One thing that is clear is that all these changes aim at showing that the state has the monopoly of using force, and indeed force is always the preferred means of enforcing compliance. Therefore, the state’s claim to the monopoly of the use of force and the Karimojong’s insistence on the use of force makes confrontation with the state unavoidable. What the state has failed to consider is that the Karimojong are not accustomed to being given instructions or orders. On the contrary, they have been, for a long time adapted to making individual decisions about things that matter most to their lives<sup>111</sup>. They are used to leading an independent life, freely moving to places of their choice and going about their different roles, either as an elder, a warrior, or a herdsman. Thus, the introduction of civil administration that among all things confines their movements, defines their behaviour and subjects them to hitherto unknown

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<sup>111</sup> The Karimojong make their own decisions about things such as movements to particular areas for water and grazing, when and where to raid cattle for food or marriage, who should be punished and for which crime. They do not see any justification in the state taking over those functions when it makes their lives much more strenuous



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impositions such as compulsory community work and porter jobs (Barber 1962; Lamphear 1976; Pazzaglia 1982) is anathema to them. That is why they detest all aspects of the new order, from the chiefs, the restrictions, the rules and the work to the administrator.

#### **5.4.1 Policy and vulnerability under Idi Amin**

Whereas special laws were being made for Karamoja, they all reflected one thing; that cattle raiding and weapons possession were the primary security concern. The laws were therefore not meant to provide effective governance but to fight cattle raiding and to suppress armament in Karamoja. With excessive use of force, the post-independent state managed to register some success in restraining cattle raids for the short term. They employed brutal methods to confiscate Karimojong livestock and to force them to disarm while their neighbours, the Turkana and Pokot of Kenya, remained heavily armed. In the period 1962 to 1970, the Karimojong felt unprotected and extremely vulnerable. When Idi Amin Dada came to power in 1971 the Karimojong were dealt a further blow by the heavy deployment of the military in the region. The army disarmed most of the warriors and confiscated their cattle upon the slightest provocation and did not give them a chance to re-arm and fight the Turkana and Pokot.

According to Quam (1996) Idi Amin's army took over the job of stopping the raiders, and with excessive brutality they pursued the raiders with a vengeance. Whenever they recovered the raided livestock, they would not return the cattle to their rightful owners. The soldiers confiscated the animals and sold them to local cattle traders. It was an era when the people of Karamoja were faced with both armed raiders and a thieving army. This also brought in an unofficial policy of harassing and brutalizing the Karimojong. Amin's army and the subsequent armies have all been noted for brutal treatment of the Karimojong because of their association with

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instruments of violence<sup>112</sup>. Whereas there has never been an official state policy that directs the army to torture the Karimojong, since that time, the Karimojong have persistently suffered extremes of torture, humiliation and all manner of human rights abuses. It is to this manner of treatment that they respond with violence, especially in matters concerning the state<sup>113</sup>.

In 1975, the military government of Idi Amin passed a decree that changed the land tenure systems. The decree was underpinned by the assumption that many people who occupied prime land were standing in the way of progress and they should be displaced. Hence it was decreed that all land in Uganda be vested in the state in trust for the people to use for economic and social development. This literally meant that all land in Uganda became public land and was administered by the state. This had implications for Karamoja. A vast expanse of land which was crucial for seasonal transhumance was taken by the state. The fertile land north of Kaabong was converted into Kidepo Game Park to facilitate tourism development. Large chunks of land in different places were also set aside for forest reserves, mission stations and administrative centres (Bazaara 2002). In effect, the state had facilitated an automatic reduction in grazing lands amidst the rising population. Consequently this led to severe food shortages, famine and serious conflicts amongst the Karimojong groups. Knighton (2006) emphasizes that while all human activities other than those connected with the management or utilization of wildlife resources were strictly prohibited in the parks, the pastoralists range management system was in an expansionist mode with more livestock and more herders than ever before.

In Karamoja, access to land is largely a function of the community, lineage and family members. Usually, land is used for communal grazing as well as a corridor for other groups migrating in search of water and pasture. Thus the loss of these areas to the game parks and reserves has had severe consequences for the

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<sup>112</sup> The Human Rights Watch was very critical of human rights abuses by the UPDF in their 2008 HRW special report of violations in Karamoja. The army was accused of torture, rape, pillaging, detention and arbitrary killings

<sup>113</sup> Group discussion in Kaabong town council, February 2008

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sustainability of pastoral livelihoods in the remaining common rangelands. With grazing areas reduced and the corridors closed, the state had assisted enemy groups to draw nearer to one another, leading to more clashes, which heightened the need for more security in terms of guns. This perpetuated the vicious cycle of the region's chronic livelihood difficulties by forcing warriors into the alternative option - raiding. Because the Karimojong feel no one can order them around, whenever they are hard-pressed they turn more to dependence on their weapons for security, livelihood, and status (Mkutu 2006). To many Karimojong pastoralists, it is the gun which enables them to maintain or regain the pastoralist identity which was threatened by their "condemnation to closed districts".

However, it was the fall of Idi Amin which perhaps had the greatest impact on the state – Karimojong relations. The fall of the Idi Amin regime in 1979 marked a major turning point in the Karamoja conflict when the military garrison in Moroto was abandoned by the fleeing Government troops. The Matheniko took the chance to loot the weapons left behind and it was at this point that the severity and scale of the violence escalated. Armed with modern weapons the raids became more frequent, more serious and more daring. The well-armed Matheniko raided other groups who were less well-armed, and were capable of countering government troops. Faced with the task of guaranteeing their own security and survival, the less well-armed groups exploited the lapse in state security and joined the illicit and informal gun running business at the border areas to acquire weapons. All this was possible because of state failure to provide security and the much needed livelihood options. So the guns the Karimojong rushed to acquire were primarily obtained to ease the imbalance of power between the different groups and to offer protection to the communities and their cattle, and then make retaliatory attacks.

Although tough legislation and tough military action continue to exist in the post colonial state, they do not work to stop violence in Karamoja. The problem for the Karimojong is survival, but state responses to it are often politically motivated and usually take the form of coercive measures that merely focus on weapons rather than definite settlement of the problem. Over time, even the various state agents

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(mainly the military) positioned in Karamoja have also become involved in the web of political and money-making ventures cropping up out of the disorder. With an apparent absence of an effective government at the local level, the state authorities at the district headquarters all over Karamoja have continued to rely on the heavy deployment of the army to solve any problem, even if it is not cattle rustling.

#### **5.4.2 Feelings of marginalization and the absence of the state**

Because of the historical circumstances surrounding the state presence in the region, the social services and general infrastructure that exist in modern states such as roads, housing, health and education facilities, local administration offices, courts, police and prisons are almost non-existent in Karamoja. This situation easily draws anyone's attention to Karamoja's remoteness and its failure to become integrated into a nation-state. Since government services are typically absent in these areas, the stark reality is that the state hardly ever plays a role in the security of the Karimojong.

Since the colonial period, the state has alienated Karamoja. This was evident in the isolationist policies of the British, the absence of state institutions from the time of independence, and a total absence of government and judicial systems in some areas to date. To a certain extent this marginalization arose out of the non-acceptance of Karamoja as an essential part of Uganda, but most importantly due to lack of comprehensible understanding of their way of life, particularly the recognition of pastoralism as a viable mode of production suitable for arid lands. It is from this lack of clear understanding that the common saying in most parts of Uganda that "We shall not wait for Karamoja to develop" was coined – based on the opinion that the Karimojong are still primitive despite the many years of 'development' there has been in Uganda. This thinking has dominated state policies on Karamoja, effectively obstructing focus on the region's peculiar problems. In doing so, it has seriously diminished hopes of state investments in the region and likewise reinforced the Karimojong's belief in cattle raiding as an alternative livelihood, and increasingly, armed cattle raiding for commercial purposes (Mkutu 2007).

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According to most Karimojong youth and especially the warriors, the government is only concerned with the violence emanating from cattle raids when these raids involve the non-Karimojong ethnic groups neighbouring Karamoja. If the cattle raids are within and among the Karimojong, the government shows little interest (Oxfam 2004). What they want from the region are the guns which they think are plentiful<sup>114</sup>. Thus the only time the state seems to come into contact with the Karimojong is when it is either subjecting them to forceful permanent settlement or other authoritarian and heavy-handed efforts to make them conform to sedentary life, or most important, forcefully disarming them. Such perceived indifference, rather than being a deterrent to their association with violence, has actually strengthened their resolve to reject the authority of the state and opt to remain apart.

### **5.4.3 Absence of state institutions**

Generally, there is neither political leadership nor local administration even at the local level in many areas of Karamoja. Conversations with many Karimojong men and women show that their perception of the situation is that the government is not bothered about cattle raiding and violence in Karamoja. Where there are no guns, there are no soldiers and no sign of state presence. According to the Local councillor for Loyoro sub-county, Kaabong district is only administered from the district headquarters. His sub-county of Loyoro with an estimated population of 34,000 has no police personnel, no courts, and there was no presence of local government despite the structures of government existing on paper<sup>115</sup>.

Apart from structures set up by the NGOs, CBOs and UN agencies, the infrastructure in Karamoja does not depict any presence of the state. Even the few government infrastructures that were set up by the colonialists and past regimes have been totally run down. For example there are no police posts, no local administration offices, no prisons, and no court premises. Where some structures had been

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<sup>114</sup> Interview with kraal leaders in Sidok, Kaabong, December 2007

<sup>115</sup> Interview with councilors for Loyoro who reside in Kaabong Town council due to the insecurity, December 2007

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introduced in the past, they have been completely destroyed or merely left derelict. In Loyoro, heavy deployment of the army has not helped matters as there was neither any district local government nor a sub-county official during the period of fieldwork. Loyoro is an empty village, and at times the entire population runs to Kaabong for fear of both the raiders and the army. The councillor laments, “we can no longer live there. When the raiders come, it is terrible, there is no security ... even the soldiers, before the raid it is okay, but after a raid, they beat everyone, they say we are all raiders, even women sometimes.” Indeed the sub-county was one of the regions declared as a “no-go” area for UN humanitarian workers from October 2007 to September 2008. There are no government services of any kind in the area except a few non-governmental organizations that occasionally carry out mobile operations in the region. The UN special report on Karamoja for the month of October 2008 describes this problem of lack of government in Loyoro;

Local authorities, including the sub-county chief, local councils, some sub-county technical officers and parish chiefs, had not been regularly present throughout Loyoro due to insecurity, as well as lack of transport, housing and markets. The district is currently constructing sub-county offices, expected to be completed in March 2009. Increased patrols by the Uganda People’s Defence Forces (UPDF) have led to a reduction in raids and fewer cordon-and-search disarmament operations, helping to improve the relationship between security forces and the civilian population in some instances.

However, there is no police post in the sub-county, nor are child protection or gender-based violence committees operative. The two primary schools located in the parishes assessed report significant gaps between enrolled and retained students: Lokananyona parish primary school retains only one quarter of enrolled students, while Toroi retains 70% of its 567 enrolled students, but an estimated 400 additional school-aged children have never been enrolled. Both schools reported insufficient access to latrines and safe water, school supplies and security. Most communities reported eating only one meal per day. Despite available land, the number of acres cultivated has fallen due to insecurity inhibiting the population’s movements, loss of tools and seeds, and lack of water. For household water, families in Toroi parish must walk between one and five hours per day to water sources some 2.5 to 4.5 km distant and are often reliant on gourds for collection, while storage containers are shared within manyattas since they are unaffordable by a single family.

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Hygiene practices are greatly lacking due to lack of water and soap and open defecation is practiced in the absence of community latrines (OCHA 2009).

This near absence of civil institutions that is supposed to maintain law and order exacerbates the insecurity as local people resort to the gun to protect themselves. The state is supposed to provide those services but as officials in the minister of state for Karamoja's office also agree, they have not provided what Karamoja needs. They reason that many civil servants posted to work in Karamoja are not willing to go and work there because of the constant insecurity. As a result, many officials (including the ministry for Karamoja affairs) operate from the capital city in Kampala. Some officials have never set foot in Karamoja and may not even know where the local offices they should be occupying are located.

#### **5.4.4 A crumbling police system**

By 2008 in the whole of Karamoja region with its five districts, there was only one operational court, which sat at the regional headquarters in Moroto. The entire region had a total of approximately 100 police personnel, an average of 20 police officers per district, and even this paltry number were only located at the district headquarters or sub-county posts. After the many complaints and petitions against the activities of the UPDF operations in Karamoja, there has been a move to deploy a police force that is entrusted with the role of containing cattle raiding and lawlessness in the region.

The Netherlands government donated about 7.7 billion Uganda shillings to enable the police to begin its activities in Karamoja. The money was channelled through a newly-created police unit named Re-establishing Law and Order in Karamoja (RELOKA) launched by the prime minister recently. According to the police unit's coordinator in charge of Karamoja, assistant commissioner of Police Grace Turyagumanawe, the money has facilitated heavy deployment of professional police troops in most sub-counties of Karamoja. Part of the money is to be used for establishing a basic infrastructure for the force's operation, such as constructing four

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police headquarters and barracks in the districts of Moroto, Kotido, Abim and Kaabong. The minister even conceded that Karamoja runs its own justice system;

State minister for Karamoja affairs Aston Kajara has called on the Judiciary to re-establish itself in Karamoja to bolster the region's traditional justice system. Kajara said although several practices within the traditional justice system were positive, the underlying principles, such as that of being assumed guilty until proved innocent conflicted with the constitutionally recognized judicial system. "The ability of the Judiciary to deliver services in Karamoja has been undermined by structural, staffing and logistical constraints, as well as rustling," he said. The minister was addressing a workshop on enhancing justice in the region, held at Imperial Royale Hotel, Kampala. Kajara commended the Government's efforts to establish law and order in the region, saying in the last three months, Police officers in Karamoja have increased from 100 to over 1,200. "Karamoja was faced with a breakdown in law and order due to intra-ethnic rivalries, cattle-raiding and tension over natural resources, especially water and grazing land," Kajara said (**The New Vision, November 23, 2008**)

The state and its laws exist only in theory. In case of an offence, retributive justice that is typical of the Karimojong society is quickly applied. Many local people in the villages agree that the most problematic groups are the warriors who have been the target of the UPDF disarmament exercise. Since the army is hunting for them, they have been on the move with their herds and most of the time they migrate to more inaccessible parts of Karamoja. In Kaabong, for a long time the Dodoth warriors migrated to the top of the Morungole mountains where the UPDF commanders say most criminals are in hiding. This exodus of the warrior groups to distant places upsets the social system in a number of ways. Firstly it contributes to the decline in the welfare of whole communities since the warriors are the ones who raid for food, cattle and earn money to take care of the families. Also, there is an enormous fall in nutritional levels because the warriors move away with the cattle and blood and milk become increasingly rare. Secondly, by keeping away from the kraals and *manyattas*, they lose contact with the elders; a consequence of which is that social cohesion and mediation are impaired, and disputes become much more difficult to solve. Thirdly, criminals who have committed serious offences run away



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to join the warriors in their hideouts from where they occasionally resurface to seek revenge against those considered to be enemies. This has particularly raised the scale of violence since retributive justice is a long entrenched custom among the Karimojong. Because of the high levels of violence and harsh environmental conditions, even the few police officers posted to Karamoja are deserting the force, as reported here:

Sixty-six of 1,200 police officers who were deployed in Karamoja region under the Re-Establishing Law and Order in Karamoja (RELOKA) programme have deserted, a police commissioner has said. The coordinator of RELOKA, Mr Grace Turyagumanawe said police officers who are deployed in Karamoja see it as a demotion and find different means to get out. "Since Karamoja is a hard-to-reach region, the attitude of police personnel towards the region is negative. They feel it is a punishment to work in Karamoja. Sixty-six officers have been declared as deserters," Mr Turyagumanawe said on Friday at Moroto Municipality. He said he has arrested some of the deserters in Kabale and Kasese districts but the Director of Public Prosecution (DDP) has failed to prosecute them. "When we take their files to the DPP, he says that since they came back, they didn't have an intention to desert and he dismisses the case," he said. Mr Turyagumanawe said some of the officers have personally talked to him, asking him to help them leave Karamoja, while others connive with officers in the police's human resource department to redeploy them elsewhere. Police officers operating in the region face enormous challenges ranging from logistics, housing, transport and basic necessities (**The Daily Monitor, February 18, 2009**).

So whenever the state tries to exhibit its presence, it is the UPDF that is deployed to show the government's existence. Due to the deficiencies in civil government, the Karimojong are generally governed by martial law. A curfew has existed in Karamoja for a long time and the army has set up a military court martial to try people arrested with guns. According to the Division army commander, the army is not at war with the Karimojong but these measures were put in place to restore order in the region where armed violence had become the order of the day<sup>116</sup>. Whereas the court martial

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<sup>116</sup> The Third Division army commander speaking during a peace meeting with the Didinga at Kanangoro in Kaabong

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can only charge a few of the warriors arrested, the HRW report says the majority are simply locked up without trial, and released after torture.

Conversations with the warriors reveal that they are not afraid of the court martial. In fact they would rather restrain themselves from committing a crime for fear of being cursed by the elders than because of fear of facing the court martial or prison for illegally possessing a gun<sup>117</sup>. The government owned New Vision newspapers reported that eleven warriors were sentenced to imprisonment by the court martial. This however, does not deter them from committing the same crime, “I will definitely get a gun, it is for my good, my life and my animals”, a warrior who had just returned from the military detention assured me.

#### **Army court jails six Karimojong warriors**

The 3rd Division court martial has sentenced 11 Karimojong warriors to imprisonment for illegal possession of firearms. The sentences read out in Moroto, range from six to 10 years. The acting division commander, Col. Paul Loketch, said on Thursday that the court chairman, Col. John Mulindwa, found the warriors guilty of possessing guns illegally. Some of the warriors, Mulindwa said, were arrested during ambushes by the army and others were captured in action during the forceful disarmament exercise. “This serves as a lesson to those who are still holding weapons. They should know that they will be prosecuted if arrested,” Loketch said. He said the convicts would serve their sentences in various prisons across the country. Some warriors were acquitted because they had stayed in prison for a long period without being tried. They are Pader Apanalipol and Lomij Chilla, both from Panyangara sub-county in Kotido district. Paul Lokut of Ngoleriat sub-county in Moroto district was released on bail. Two juveniles aged 15 and 16 were also acquitted and cautioned. John Namuya (Kotido) and Gideon Omara (Moroto) were remanded till the next court session due late this month. Loketch said the ruling was a manifestation of the army’s zero tolerance to crime. He appealed to residents with illegal guns to hand them over voluntarily, saying if they did not, the law would catch up with them (**The New Vision 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 2009**).

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<sup>117</sup> Interview with an elder in Loyoro

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This army intervention in restoring state presence only raises suspicion about their intentions in Karamoja. The local Dodoth warriors feel the army is taking sides with the Jie to have them impoverished. “They want us to slaughter ourselves and finish each other off so that they can finally come and take our cattle. Last week the Jie raided our animals here and yet the army is just camped hardly one mile away. Why are they (the army) here if they cannot prevent our cattle from being taken?” asks Lomanio. In fact warriors speak of the soldiers as ‘raiders’ who simply grab their cattle as Knighton (2003) puts it. Every time they raid or exchange fire with the soldiers, the army usually impounds their cattle to compel them to surrender the guns they used. They take the cattle away to the military establishments. After driving the cattle to the army barracks, the soldiers demand that the concerned warriors produce a gun for every 10 animals released. Some of the warriors allege this is the method used to take their cattle. In March 2008 several high ranking army officers including the Brigade Intelligence Officer were arrested for stealing recovered animals, as reported here:

Ten UPDF soldiers, including a commanding officer, have been arrested over theft of cattle recovered during disarmament operations in Karamoja. A UPDF investigation report of March 21, said: “Some army officers have been conniving with some local leaders to sell recovered cattle from disarmament operations in Karamoja.” The probe was ordered by the UPDF 3rd Division commander following several complaints from the population. Col. Paul L’Okech chaired the board of inquiry. Most incidents happened in Kapedo, Kathile and Karenga in Kotido district, where the UPDF’s 65th and 45th battalions have been operating. Those arrested last week and now in detention include Maj. Bakubanjja Byaruhanga, the commander of the 49th Battalion, and Capt. George Byaruhanga, the operations and training officer of the 65th Battalion. Also detained are intelligence officer Lt. Edgar Mwesigiwa and Pte. Walter Bweka, both of the 405th Battalion, Lt. Bosco Maliamungu and Lt. Yusuf Kabu, both of the 49th Battalion, Lt. Tom Otim, the officer in charge of ‘C’ company, and intelligence officer Lt. Enock Masinguzi. Battalion commander Maj. Byaruhanga admitted to slaughtering and ordering the eating of six recovered head of cattle according to the report. Lt. Tom Otim was involved in selling off eight bulls together with Kathile kraal leader John Omuliria. The 49th battalion intelligence officer is named in the loading of a truck full of cattle at Nattaba detachment, which was driven away by a man only identified as Ochanga. Capt. George Byaruhanga confessed to having slaughtered and eaten 19 recovered animals in a period of two weeks, while Pte. Walter Bweka of the Special Investigation Branch was caught with

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shIm suspected to be proceeds from the sale of animals or a bribe to release warriors. In another incident in Lotome sub-county in Moroto district, the probe found that operation commander Capt. Yufu Buga and Pte. Peter Ndyanabo, an intelligence officer, both of 29th Battalion, connived with local councillors to obtain and sell recovered cattle. The two officers exchanged the bulls for calves with Emmy Lokiru, the LC1 chairman of Naitakotowan village, and James Leeyam, the LC1 chief of Nariwit village. They later sold off the bulls. "The four were all arrested and have confessed to having committed the offence. The LCs were taken to the police cells and the soldiers are in our own cells in Moroto," said the UPDF spokesperson, Maj. Paddy Ankunda (**The New Vision 25 March 2008**).

The local people argue that whenever the animals are returned from the army barracks, they are fewer. An elder pointed this out as one of the bones of contention between the local people and the army. This disappearance of cows into the hands of the army infuriates the Karimojong and they always swear to have revenge. In fact as long as this policy continues, raids will continue. The heavy deployment of the army within Karamoja has not stopped the raids, it has only made them more lethal. For instance in Kalapata, a group of warriors who had taken to living in the mountain and the escarpments were persuaded to come down with their cattle and surrender their guns to get government protection<sup>118</sup>. They only accepted when the elders convinced them it was possible for them to live with government protection. They surrendered in a colourful ceremony witnessed by the army commanders in the region. Two days after, the Jie warriors attacked and raided all their cattle. "When we put them to task, demanding our cattle, they said they will investigate, but that is what they have always said in the past. We need to protect our cows ourselves. They don't care because the cattle are ours not theirs" a youthful warrior argued.

Whenever the warriors learn about an impending cattle raid and they report the matter to the military, no pre-emptive action is taken. In March 2008 Jie warriors raided Kaabong Town Council, several herds of cattle were lost, and a teacher, one woman and all her three children were killed. The LC V district chairperson for

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<sup>118</sup> Group discussion with *karachuma* in Kaabong, July 2008

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Kaabong was furious about it. He said several people died daily in his district as a result of raiding despite the heavy deployment of soldiers. The on-going disarmament exercise is just an escalation of the violence, “it added yet another outstanding actor – the army”. The whole place is in a mess, “it is no longer mere raiding for animals but real looting of everything that is available, even saucepans, hoes, ox-ploughs and worst of all, they burn up the manyattas”. Since all these things happen within easy reach of the army units but they take time to respond, local leaders reason that their people are justified in clinging to their guns so that they can guarantee their own security. Furthermore, they now associate the army with cattle raiding, torture, looting, detention, destruction of their property and arbitrary killings. The Karimojong do not believe in protection from the army<sup>119</sup>.

The irony of it all is that an indispensable foundation of state legitimacy is that it is supposed to protect its citizens, yet the Karimojong firmly believe the state does not protect them. In this way, state legitimacy in the region is tainted, to the extent that any government-associated policy is viewed with hostility. This animosity can be far-reaching and extends to government-related activities that are wholly unconnected with the activities of the military. In November 2006, the warriors threatened to attack students sitting national examinations. They set up highway ambushes and the army had to escort the national examination papers from Kampala to various areas in Karamoja and also had to guard the students sitting the exam<sup>120</sup>. This bitterness with the army has remained intense and it reinforces violence from different points. The feeling that they have to avenge the harm inflicted on them during disarmament, the feeling that the army is an occupational force reminiscent of the colonial military occupation and a counter force must be set up to challenge them, the feeling that the army is there to disarm them and leave them vulnerable to raids from their traditional enemies and the feeling that the army comprises the non-Karimojong groups whose motive is revenge. What is more, of course there is the feeling of pride that their local

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<sup>119</sup> Interview with elders in Kaabong sub-county in May 2008

<sup>120</sup> Interview with Kaabong district council speaker in July 2007

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group have acquired military prowess capable of sustaining a viable armed confrontation with anyone.

#### **5.4.5 The complacency of local leadership**

Yet the army officers also allege the local leaders tend to protect the raiders for political reasons. According to the sector commander at the local army detachment in Kaabong, the Karimojong are a very suspicious and enigmatic people. “They do not trust anyone who is not a Karimojong like them. Even their leaders do not trust the entire institution of the army and they hide vital information about the cattle rustlers to protect their people from arrest. That is why they make all sorts of allegations of torture to get favours from the people. These people do not want cattle raiding to stop; they do not want to be disarmed because they benefit from it<sup>121</sup>.”

When a warrior is arrested and the population is requested to provide information, the Karimojong go on the defensive and exhibit a strong sense of solidarity with their ‘son’. It is almost impossible for a fellow Karimojong, including the leaders, to come forward and give evidence against a fellow Karimojong, under a justice system that they do not respect and consider as an “alien” court in their territory. What they usually do is a practice known as *kimuk ekile* which literary means, “cover the man” and as a duty every Karimojong is expected to provide security for a fellow Karimojong against any ‘outsider’. This practice is so strong that whenever cattle raids occur the army cannot get any information volunteered to them, even by the victims of the raid. The army leadership argues that this enigmatic nature of the Karimojong in effect limits their effectiveness in tackling the problem of cattle raiding. According to a number of field commanders of the UPDF operating in Karamoja there are several reported cases where victims of cattle raids have inflated the numbers of raided animals and the rest of the community have supported such claims fully, knowing them to be false (UHRC 2004).

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<sup>121</sup> Interview with UPDF sector commander at Kaabong in February 2008

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The UPDF commanders complain that the local politicians are often unwilling to take a firm position against arms proliferation and cattle raiding. They protect the interests of the local Karimojong to get local support at election time. In 2006, a local councillor from one of the sub-counties was voted into office because he publicly ‘renounced’ cattle raiding but the villagers know he secretly remained a leader of one of the ‘toughest’ raiding warrior groups. He was “re-settled” with a good package after ‘renouncing’ cattle raiding. But he actually used his “package” from the government to buy two SMG guns and a mobile phone which he handed to his brother to continue with the business of raiding<sup>122</sup>. He also mobilizes other *Karachuna* for training into strong warrior squads. So whereas he is now part of the government in the district, he is still a prominent member of the raider groups. This is the nature of local leadership and when one talks to such officials, they will downplay the scale and levels of violence when in reality they are granting the perpetrators impunity. It is a case where political interests become enmeshed in the local; where views about security; protection of cattle, gun possession, cattle raiding and provision of basic necessities like food become key in determining political support. As they jostle for power in the region, politicians always try to manoeuvre the situation to their advantage.

The reality is that the Karimojong are armed, and it is the guns in their possession that ensure their much valued cattle are not only secure but also acquired through their long tradition of cattle raiding. Cattle mean everything to them; food, wealth, financial system, welfare system, prestige and power. The state in Uganda does not provide any of these, but with the gun a Karimojong can get all of them. Importantly, with the guns they can maintain the balance of power between the various ethnic groups which pose security and economic threats in cattle raiding. This realization has tremendously modified the value of cattle; the gun; their relationship with the state; and the perception of violence. Thus, while the state legitimately

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<sup>122</sup> Interview with councillor Kaabong district council January 2008

moves to rid them of the arms as a measure for peace and stability, they question the significance of a deficient state; the result of which is the invariable violence.

Thus, while the state is not about to withdraw from the region, it no longer has a free hand in dealing with the Karimojong and is not fully in control of the violence. The submission of warriors and their ethnic groups as a whole to the authority of the state is still being challenged. Whereas the state capacity to be moved by the violence seems to be ever-increasing, the Karimojong are also getting more and more complex. A world of contradiction exists between the Karimojong and the state; whereas the former is still being driven by traditional incentives to make use of violence and safeguard their autonomy, the latter is primarily making use of violence to pursue its sovereignty, which is embedded in the principles of the modern state.

#### **5.4.6 Dangerous roads and state of war**

Karamoja as it looks today is like a war zone where 'outsiders' are afraid of travelling. For a long time now travellers to Karamoja report that the roads are famous for their daily ambushes and for being in a very poor state. The ambushes have killed many people both by the warriors and other criminal elements taking advantage of the violence. Many reasons have been advanced for these ambushes, but mostly they are blamed on frustrated warriors returning from unsuccessful cattle raids. It has also been alleged that some Karimojong business people hire the warriors to ambush unsuspecting travellers and rob them of money and valuables. The loot is then reinvested in their shops in the urban centres of Karamoja or elsewhere in Uganda. Other reasons given include; some warriors wanting to settle personal scores, the numerous militia groups that waylay vehicles in order to raise money to survive because they are not being paid, and some drunken warriors are said to simply want to prove their manhood by killing (Mkutu 2008).

In one such tragic case, on October 28, 2007 George, a driver of a pick-up truck drove a group of business men and their merchandise from Moroto to Kaabong in the northern part of Karamoja region. His truck had a few other people on board including two armed military escorts. They had also been joined by three other



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vehicles to form a convoy that included one pick-up truck with UPDF armed escorts. Although it was getting late in the evening and under ‘normal’ circumstances the army check point at Kotido would not allow them continue travelling, they were allowed on the basis that they had ‘enough’ escorts.

However, before reaching Kaabong; a group of Jie warriors, armed with AK-47 guns ambushed them. George lost everything, all his money, shoes, and cell phone and he was even maimed. “I was lucky to run away and sought help in the nearby army barracks. I also reported the matter to the officers I met there and the soldiers nearby had also learnt of the fire exchange between our escorts and the warriors. But they did not respond immediately. I think they were cautious at first, but the harm was already done. The men who were in the vehicle were critically injured with many of them suffering multiple bullet wounds” he narrated. On several occasion George has been a victim of these numerous ambushes on this road. He talks of his narrow escape in such ambushes as part of the everyday experience for someone living in Karamoja. On this particular day, a group of about 30 warriors intercepted them a few kilometres after they left Nakapelimoru UPDF barracks. “They barricaded the road with logs and as soon as we stopped, the warriors started shooting at us. I narrowly escaped being killed although I got a bullet lodged on my arm.” He cited four other such deadly experiences within a period of one month while he was working as a driver on the bad roads of Karamoja. According to George, some of his colleagues have not been that lucky. Some of them have been maimed while others have actually lost their lives in these ambushes.

Earlier in May 2007, his close friend Peter who was a senior truck driver with the World Food Programme was shot dead by the warriors in such an ambush along Kotido – Kaabong road. He was driving a team going to distribute food to the starving population of Kaabong. Although they were moving in a UPDF military escorted convoy, there were not safe; the warriors ambushed them and he was shot dead. Immediately after that incident the following week, two buses belonging to Gateway Bus Company were ambushed and several people were killed including the district agricultural officer for Kotido. Road ambushes among other forms of violence

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have intensified and it is very risky travelling to Karamoja. George has now resigned from his job and is planning on moving out of Karamoja to get another job in Kampala. He plans to go and live with his brother who also left his job in Kaabong district local government because of the risky security situation.

This story of George is just one of the many numerous incidents of violence characterizing the daily lives of people in the region. Listening to George, he is convinced the state has failed to provide for the people, failed to defend the defenceless, and failed to show why they should support it. “How can we only be known for bad things like ambushes, killing, looting and suffering? What have they done apart from provoking the warriors into more chaos?” Indeed in Uganda today, media stories are replete with many such horrific tales of wanton killings in Karamoja. The newspaper headlines, radio and television commentaries about Karamoja being a region of lawlessness, insecurity and primitivity as a result of cattle rustling and its related criminality have become normal, at least in the Ugandan context. Terms such as insurgency, banditry and terrorism are all being used to describe the widespread violence that has engulfed the region.

When one travels to northeastern Uganda today, the impression one gets is that the Karimojong are at war with the state. As one travels in Karamoja, scenes of war-like situation is eminent with the presence of machines like armoured tanks, helicopter gunships roaring in the air and heavily armed troops patrolling the roads giving the actual image of war. Continuing inside the vast territory of Karamoja, sights of small groups of 12 – 15 year old boys herding cattle with the modern AK-47 slung on their backs only confirms the thought that this is a war zone. In the last few weeks of 2007, as we traversed the countryside, we were constantly reminded by our friends at the district offices in Kaabong to strictly rely on military escorts even where the army seemed to be in control. Indeed for the government officials to conduct their day-to-day business the use of military escorts to move from one place to another is the norm. Occasional outbursts of gunfire are commonplace and movements from Kaabong to Kotido district are strictly restricted to day time even when one has the armed escorts.

But the state authorities insist they are not at war with the Karimojong. The government blames the insecurity and violence on the illegally armed Karimojong warriors and they insist only forceful disarmament which started in May 2006 after voluntary disarmament failed can bring the violence to an end. Yet the Karimojong also argue that they are simply responding to the aggression by the state and its agents. The state seeks to bring to an end the use of firearms in the region but the means of doing this raises several other problems.

This situation subjects the role of the state in this violence to further scrutiny. The state is certainly a critical player in the development process of any developing country like Uganda, and it acts within the context of other players since it is not the only player. For instance the local populations, the private and civil society sectors all play very significant roles in development together with the state. This probably begins to bring to mind the traditional roles of the state. The idea that a state carries with it a definite set of responsibilities to its people and a variety of mechanisms it employ use to fulfil such responsibilities.

From the intervention of the military to restore public order, to the ability of the state to wage war, to the role of government in providing physical and social infrastructure and reconstructing areas affected by disasters and violence, it is an accepted fact that the state has a central role in society (Ghani and Lockhart 2008; 115). In doing so, the citizens have inherent rights to demand such services, just as the state has the obligation to provide them. And this is what George is saying; why has Karamoja never been fully integrated even administratively into the state structure? And yet the state possesses ultimate power (Foucault 1978) with which it can bring Karamoja to order. It runs on the rule of law, upholds the rights of citizenship, and takes care of wide-ranging economic and social responsibilities. Why then would the state 'be at war' with its own citizens?

Through their constant engagement with warring groups and with the competitive retaliation that made the fighting persistent, the Karimojong have become hardened to military confrontations. They have come to realize that it is only

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through militarization of their society that they can face the major instrument of state ‘intervention’, the army. That is why for a long time, the state has positioned the region as a war zone, where the principles of the modern state are virtually absent. Basically, that is how the state shows it is present in Karamoja. The state perceives the Karimojong as serious threats to national integration, and therefore a threat to the very existence of the nation-state. Throughout their historical relationship with the state, the Karimojong have borne militarist pressures that would normally have been only momentary. However, given the fact that the Karimojong modes of organization do not subscribe to the normative principles of the state, the success or failure of attempts at national integration must therefore be studied not only at the level of political strategies or systemic imperatives, but must equally be understood at the level of the everyday life-world (Eriksen 1991).

## 5.5 A general idea of policies that came with the NRM

When the NRM government came into power, the ‘Karamoja problem’ was on their 10-point programme for development of a ‘new’ Uganda. They tried to mainstream Karamoja into the nation-state. First by including Karamoja in the 10-point programme<sup>123</sup>, secondly, through the Resistance Council (RCs) system, efforts were made to fit the Karimojong into the national space as they chose their own leaders through local participation. It was envisaged that through these RCs, the presence of the state and its organs would finally be felt at the local level. As a mechanism of integrating the Karimojong into the modernization project of the nation, the NRM government created an institutional structure that would specifically address Karamoja’s problems. This was done through the creation of Karamoja Development Agency (KDA) by an act of parliament in 1987. Its role was to take charge of the transformation of Karamoja. In addition, a Ministry of State in charge of Karamoja Development was formed in the Office of the Prime Minister, and tasked with the supervision of the KDA. Under the ministry, a unit known as the

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<sup>123</sup> This was the blueprint for development when the NRA/M took over government in 1986

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Karamoja Projects Implementation Unit (KPIU) was established to coordinate various development projects in Karamoja funded by the European Union.

These institutions were meant to address the unique needs of Karamoja. However, they ended up merely existing on paper and their performance has been extremely deficient. Their operations were dogged by corruption and most of the funds never reached their intended targets. In fact, according to an Oxfam report, the KDA is largely known for being a general failure, famed more for loss of funds than for any serious contribution to the development of Karamoja (Oxfam 2004). KPIU which was created to salvage the failed KDA simply followed suit and did not perform any wonders. The Ministry of Karamoja Affairs on the other hand has had a very limited presence in Karamoja itself. Besides, the ministry is located far off in Kampala and not where it is supposed to touch the 'hearts' of the Karimojong. When I visited the ministry's office in Moroto town, only abandoned desks lay in an abandoned house partly being used by the RDC. Many local people are wondering how this office can fight cattle rustling let alone contribute to the transformation of the region from its location in Kampala. Even the President agreed that the ministry had failed to perform; its ministers are elitist and ended up appointing the first lady (his wife) to the same ministry (New Vision 16 February 2009). Whether that will work is still debatable. The President's wife too, operates from Kampala.

Despite all this bureaucracy and the formation of the above state organs whose influence never really reached the plains of Karamoja, the 1980s were marked by extensive violence. This was due to the biting 1980 famine coupled by the general instability in the region. By this time the Karimojong had already amassed firearms from the ruins of the 1979 liberation war. Some of the armament and violence was actually sponsored by the governments in the region. In the Ugandan case, during the political and military turmoil of the 1980s, the NRM government had supported the arming of certain militia groups among the Karimojong as a strategy to fight off an armed insurgency coming from the LRA in northern Uganda and as a way of 'policing' Karamoja itself. This drew in more actors to the crisis which led to the total breakdown of state security structures in the region. And when the drought-related

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disasters that developed during the 1980s started biting hard, the use of the gun in cattle raids intensified, escalating the violence.

The creation of specific institutions to address the needs of Karamoja has been useful in focusing national and even international attention on the problems of the region. However, the performance of these institutions has been wanting in many respects. Their operations have not made any substantial impact on the ground. The KDA is recognized as a general failure, famed more for loss of funds than for any serious contribution to the development of Karamoja. KPIU appears in many respects to duplicate the mandate of KDA, and it is indeed arguable that the need for the establishment of KPIU would never have been felt if KDA had been delivering efficiently on its mandate.

### **5.5.1 The decentralization policy**

In Karamoja, decentralization is one of the policies associated with the NRM government. This system of governance was modelled along the structures of the RC system as part of a broader strategy for restoring state credibility and democracy after many years of political turmoil. Although it was part of the larger World Bank projects, it started in 1987 when the government set up a commission of inquiry into the local government (LG) system. The commission collected views from all regions of Uganda and recommended that a decentralization policy should be adopted (Onyach-Olaa 2003).

The legislative framework for decentralization was provided for in the Local Government Statute of 1993, the 1995 Constitution and the Local Government Act 1997 (Uganda 1997a). These acts converted the then existing system of RCs, with their origins in the civil war period, to a pyramidal structure of Local Councils (LC) at village (LC1), parish (LC2), sub-county (LC3), county (LC4) and district (LC5) levels<sup>124</sup>. In October 1992, the decentralization programme was launched. The legal

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<sup>124</sup> Under this system, at the very local level, all adults in a given village would constitute the Resistance Council one (RC1) of that particular Village. At the RC1 or village council, a nine-member committee would be elected by the members of that village to constitute the Resistance Committee of the village (RC1

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instruments mentioned above changed the central government framework within which the various local governments functioned. The policy meant that districts under decentralization were to have more power, more resources, more responsibilities and more decision-making autonomy. In addition, their performance was to be increasingly significant for growth, poverty eradication and long-term rural development prospects.

One of the key changes that this policy brought was the local representation in local development planning. From then on, all districts were expected to assemble their District Development Plans which would clearly show the needs of the local people. The planning exercise under this policy was initiated by the local politicians who were supposed to organize meetings to listen to the views of lower administrative units as well as the local opinion leaders. Through this web of information flow, the local councillors then prioritized the specific activities that their people needed for rational planning. Unlike the centralized system where the sector plans were submitted to the central ministries, under the decentralization system, the local council plan was submitted to the area local council for approval and for all matters of implementation and accountability (Rondinelli and Cheema 1983).

Thus decentralization is supposed to be built on the strength of the ideas of local actors, particularly their capacity to act and influence their ways of life. It is a point of departure from having the huge political structures that the colonialists left behind to having the perceptions of local actors take precedence in the process of shaping the state – local relations. With decentralization it was envisaged that development would be possible by empowering the people and institutions at every level of society including public, private and civic institutions; improving access to

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committee) to take charge of the local village affairs. Then in every parish, the RC1 committee members from all the villages in that parish would constitute the Resistance Council of the parish (RC2), modeled on the same basis as RC1. Thus the nine member councilors of the RC2 councils in all the parishes in a given sub-county also constituted the Resistance Council of Sub-county (RC3) and elected a nine-member committee of the RC3. The same model was used to constitute the district council at the RC5. The structure of RCs was built like a pyramid. In these areas, the elected committees and the RCs were the local governments that ran the general administration, controlled crime, mobilized food, and sought alternative ways of life for their localities in case of disaster.

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basic services; increasing people's participation in decision-making; assisting in developing people's capacities; and enhancing government's responsiveness, transparency and accountability. Thus decentralization was hailed as the necessary framework from which the Poverty Eradication Action Plan could be effectively implemented.

### **5.5.2 What decentralization means for Karamoja**

The Karimojong are highly divided into opposing factions where different groups raid one another but a few also ally. Behind this division is widespread suspicion and mistrust between the groups. Cattle raids and counter raids regularly occur between neighbouring communities and they involve different forms of violence including killing hundreds of people and destruction of their property. Under this social system, the complex pattern of group and sectional loyalties and rivalry complicate the management of the conflict in Karamoja because a simple theft or an act of aggression between two people can be interpreted as a provocation to the entire group (UHRC 2004).

In Karamoja, there are various power centres among these groups that determine the trend and intensity of cattle raiding and violence. There are traditionally known enemies such as the Jie and the Dodoth who have always raided one another. Then there are the Tepeth and Matheniko who are said to have been arch-rivals to the extent that even social ties such as marriage between these two neighbouring communities are very rare. While on the other hand, the Tepeth and Pokot of Uganda are traditional allies of the Pokot of Kenya and jointly, they plan and raid the Matheniko or Bokora groups, who retaliate against them from time to time.

The overall goal of the decentralization was to take government nearer to the people. This move was expected to circumvent the long red tape that makes it difficult for state systems to function in distant places like Karamoja. But at the same time this meant granting some form of autonomy for the districts like Karamoja to manage their own affairs. Under this system, the district is the highest level of



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government and constitutes a link between the central government and the local governments. The sub-county local government with its Council, Executives and the administration/technical staff are imbued with the power to collect and distribute resources. Hence with the LC system, the necessary links to reach everyone in the village had been employed, meaning that with the decentralized system a formal system of political participation would bring everyone on board.

The Karimojong understood decentralization to mean autonomy of each group and within no time every ethnic group demanded district status. Prior to this, Karamoja had been a single district from 1911 up to 1971 when Idi Amin turned it into 2 districts<sup>125</sup>. Prompted by the policy, the big power brokers began to advocate a break away from the old districts and in that line of thinking in 2001 Nakapiripirit was carved out of Moroto to form a third district of Karamoja. Kaabong district was also established in July 2005 when the former Dodoth County was cut off from the original part of Kotido district. In July 2006, Abim district was also created when part of Kotido district and formerly Labwor County was carved off.

What is clear is that these are now homes of different prominent ethnic groups. Each of them in territorial control of a district; in other words, what started as decentralization became 'districtization'. The different groups are now identified by the different districts. Nakapiripirit is known as the territory of the Upe, the Pokot and the Pian. And at the time of the fieldwork each group was clamouring for autonomy, to have its own district. The district of Moroto is the territory for the Bokora and Matheniko, the district of Kaabong is predominantly a Dodoth territory, while Kotido district is for the Jie and Abim district is for the Labwor. Thus every group now wants a marked territory and a district status.

With decentralization, Karamoja now comprises five districts including; Nakapiripirit, Moroto, Abim, Kotido, and Kaabong. Each of these districts is separately inhabited by one of the major ethnic groups in Karamoja, and this reveals

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<sup>125</sup> These were Moroto and Kotido districts

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the ethnic distribution patterns in Karamoja. Whereas these different ethnic groups are not homogeneous, they all speak a similar language, *Ngikarimjong*, except the Labwor who speak a Luo dialect. The various groups forge links at different levels and while some are continuously at war, there are neither permanent enemies nor contacts. The ties between groups are usually driven by strategic or opportunistic alliances, which relates to the sharing or competition for water, pasture, cattle as well as security threats. For this reason, the groups co-exist through constant negotiations for the meagre resources and security of their cattle, and where cooperation fails, recourse to violence is considered an acceptable option. Thus they classify their relations with other ethnic groups within Karamoja and across the borders according to the historical circumstances of this type of cooperation:

- i. The *Ngikaitotoi*, meaning those born of the same father and mother, used in a general sense to refer to all who belong to the Karimjong cluster
- ii. The *Ngikaipapai*, meaning those born of the same father in a polygamous family, that is, they were of a different mother – this where they categorize the Dodoth, Didinga and the Toposa whom they believe came from the same predecessor as them.
- iii. The *Ngimoe*, referring to all those considered enemies – these are neither Karimjong nor *Ngikaipapai* and are considered adversaries who should be killed. When a Karimjong man kills *Ngikaipapai* it bestows honour and pride on him. That is why for every one such person killed, one earns a significant scar on the right shoulder (if it is male) or the left shoulder (if it is female).
- iv. The *Ngaryanya*, meaning strangers – during the colonial times, this was reserved to refer to government officials, their collaborators, chiefs and any state official over the years after colonialism (Pazzaglia 1982; 16).

Such divisions do not just draw the Karimjong in opposition to other groups externally relating with them; even the concept of classifying them as the

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‘Karimojong’ is an external construction as the people themselves still subscribe to their sub-ethnic groups. By referring to them as Karimojong, we are bringing together a bunch of different ethnicities and not one big ethnic group or a political unity. Their concept of decentralization which administratively draws boundaries for each group only helps to reinforce differences rather than cooperation. This has driven the dominant groups to clearly demarcate their regions with the Dodoth in the north, the Jie in the central area, and the south has a cluster of related ethnic groups including the Bokora, Matheniko, and Pian, all of whom occupy specific territorial areas (Dyson-Hudson 1966).

With the new lines of division, the long-established tradition of enmity is played out in the orchestration of violence, particularly cattle raiding. The traditional enmity has now grown into full-blown continuous rivalries with various groups in opposition to one another, like the following:

- the Pian in opposition to the Pokot
- the Matheniko in opposition to the Bokora
- the Tepeth in opposition to the Matheniko
- the Jie in opposition to the Bokora
- the Jie in opposition to the Matheniko
- the Jie in opposition to the Dodoth

These kinds of antagonistic relations are played out during the dry seasons when the scale and intensity of intra-group conflicts, especially cattle raiding, escalate. Quite often the clashes are perceived as districts conflicting. For instance clashes between Kaabong (Dodoth) and Kotido (the Jie) are mostly settled at district level with the various LC V chairpersons taking the lead. And the same happens when Kotido district (the Jie) fight Moroto district (Matheniko) to their south. This pattern of traditional ethnic rivalries and conflict cuts across all the other sub-groups of the Karimojong, with the Bokora, Dodoth, Jie, Matheniko, and Pian sub-groups of

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the Karimojong switching quickly between fragile alliances and outright war depending on whether the group in question is a traditional enemy or one where their interests can be met at that particular time (Bevan 2008).

With decentralization, the rivalry has been politicized and politicians have become key actors in spurning integration of Karimojong groups. This of course has invariably destroyed their mechanisms of human adaptation by destroying the socio-economic cooperation between the groups. All the neighbouring ethnic groups are suspicious of one another and some consider the Karimojong as enemies. A person from one district cannot be entertained in another – for instance, cannot be given a job in a district which does not belong to his or her group. The ethnic sentiments have begun to be played out in all circles of life as everyone is distrustful of another person from a different district.

Every district wants to own more territory and this has resulted in districts disagreeing over boundaries. For instance in the 1960s the Karimojong of Moroto had a boundary problem with their neighbours the Iteso of Katakwi district. They then claimed the Iteso altered the border line in their favour. At that time, a prominent Iteso politician Cuthbert Obwangor was the minister in charge of local government. According to the elderly Karimojong local politicians, Obwangor used his position to push the district border inside Karamoja. The government was always against the Karimojong, thinking that they were up to some war with the Iteso. So the Karimojong decided to write a petition to the President. The outcome was in the Karimojong's favour and Obwangor was relieved of his duties. The problem was cleared up. But when decentralization took effect, the disagreement burst out again in 2004<sup>126</sup>. The LC V Chairperson of Moroto Mr. Terence Achia decided to petition the neighbouring district of Katakwi demanding they surrender over parts of Napak, Kodike and Alekilek which he claimed belongs to the Karimojong. He demanded that the boundary should be drawn to what the colonial authorities set for Karamoja.

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<sup>126</sup> Districts under decentralization have more power and should have more resources, more responsibilities and more decision-making autonomy – that is why they began fighting for territory with Katakwi district

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As those political tensions build over district boundaries; relations between local people also get wrecked. This sets grounds for tension since these groups living across the created district and national boundaries have had to survive through operating networks within a number of regional economies; economic and social networks which cross ecological zones and help to link them together (Anderson and Johnson 1988; 6). Before the partitions were made these groups had very fluid relations and were heavily dependent on each other. They had an intricate web of relations that were crucial in the provision and sharing of the rather scarce resources. Such relationships were shaped by cooperation as well as conflicts in constructing adaptive strategies for survival by the different groups in this very harsh environment (Manger 2002). So when decentralization came, they understood differently – especially the political elite - that the different groups had to be completely split to form separate districts and survive on their own. And since politicians depend on the creation, maintenance and exploitation of some of these differences, they have become a source of persistent anxiety between groups.

Another problem is that this system does not take into account the traditional systems where elders in the community played a very important role. In effect, the decentralized system only attempted to create parallel authorities whose power the government assumed would emanate from the people. The omission of traditional elders in the political organization of the LCs structurally drew attention to the fact that the system undermined Karimojong socio-cultural structures. The Karimojong could never accept that and have refused to succumb to this ‘foreign’ power. The warriors do not respect the LCs because they are not part of the traditional justice system. Secondly, as agents of a deficient state, the LCs have reservations about pushing their own people hard lest they face vengeance. This reality ultimately leads to an increase in armed cattle raiding and the arms trade since the state checks and balances are wanting in all respects.

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### 5.5.3 Do elders maintain influence?

The reality is that the Karimojong have never known power to reside in the institutions of state. To them, there are three main power bases; the elders, the warriors/youth (*karachuna*), and the fortune-tellers. The elders make decisions on matters of the daily lives of the group, and sometimes in consultation with the fortune-tellers. In the traditional way, the elders make the decisions while the *karachuna* carry them out. But other forms of authority have emerged; the herd-owners who have accumulated huge assets in cattle are well-known as wealthy men. Wealthy men have power; they own guns and can organize a raid or defend the group in case of an outside attack. They possess considerable influence over other men of equal age ranking in the society. The *karachuna* have equally become formidable power centres. In the traditional society a warrior would first become initiated before engaging in active cattle raiding activities. But now it is physical fitness and one's ability to access guns rather than age which can propel one to a powerful position.

The Karimojong know all power rests with God. Everyone, whether elders, warriors or women and children, respect *Akuju* from whom all power originates. In Kaabong, Lokii explained that all power comes from *Akuju* from whom the elders draw their power. That is why they can curse someone and God will punish that person. For instance, when disaster falls, it is most likely that *Akuju* is punishing them for the wrong someone has done in the past. The Karimojong work towards pleasing God and must not do things that are known to offend God and the elders. Lokii recalls when he had to make a sacrifice. He had accidentally killed someone while fighting off the Jie during a cattle raid. The dead man was one of his group. He was forgiven but the decision was made for him to take one his best bulls and present a sacrifice. He called the elders and presented a bull for the sacrifice. When the bull was killed, its blood connected Lokii to the ancestors and to *Akuju*.

The blood spilt on the ground and the prayer begging (*akilip*) *Akuju* to look at them with mercy was repeated to seek clemency. At the time of such sacrifices, the presence of *Akuju* is exhibited in the elders who have His authority to command

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every activity in their lives (Knighton 2005). All manner of sacrifice and communication with God remain the reserve of the senior generation-set. It is a sacred duty of all senior members of the generation-set, a duty for which they are still respected. Dyson-Hudson describes the significant role of the elders in a sacrifice:

All members of the senior generation-set who live within convenient distance attend and take their places around the enclosure, while within it, seated cross-legged on the ground and facing the senior most elders, are the initiands. The senior elder and the local leader (*ekeseran*) slit the stomach sacs of the sacrificed beasts with spears and then smear each initiand on the head, shoulders, and belly with chime, calling blessings on him: "Be well. Grow old. Become wealthy in stock. Become an elder." The senior elder then holds the foreleg of the sacrificed ox, while the initiand who speared it nibbles the hoof and spits hoof-grains on himself in self-anointment. When this has been accomplished for each initiand, prayers are held. One prayer leader succeeds another, each leading a litany which invokes good fortune on the initiands, on the age-set and generation-set which they are about to join, on the territorial section of which the assembly is part, on the cattle which are their common livelihood, and on the tribal land in which they live. All the men present respond in unison to each phrase of the litany, repeating the operative part of the prayer leaders' invocation. On the conclusion of prayers, the joined hindquarters of each sacrificed beast are smashed with the animal's foreleg, and separated and reduced to chunks by spears. All the meat of the carcasses is then distributed by "dividers," who know relative precedence and individual claims to prestige, to those around the enclosure, who in turn hand it to the initiands to cook on the nearby fire. The initiands share the work of tending the fire and receiving and serving meat until all the elders have eaten. The inducting (senior) generation-set eats by right, but may offer pieces of meat to others, including the initiands, as a gesture of beneficence. Once all the meat has been eaten, people disperse to pass the heat of the day under the shade trees by their several settlements, and the first stage of initiation is at an end (Dyson-Hudson 1963; 365).

Thus, the power to command the society's dealings rests with the eldest members of society and that is the institution the Karimojong hold in awe. The elders derive this power from the fact that they have proven by their age and skills to be in close contact with the supernatural world as the latter decides on faith and fortune (Lamphear 1976; Koning 2005). Elders are imbued with the power and knowledge of the supernatural to influence the group's welfare. Their role in the decision-making is meant to please *Akuju* who rewards them through blessings. Also for individual well-

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being the elders' blessing and approval is essential. Novelli (1999; 90) notes that nothing among the Karimojong is feared more than being cursed by the elders. A curse amounts to being badly treated by the gods. This puts the elders right at the centre of the socio-political life of the society (Lamphear 1976; Pazzaglia 1978; Cisterino 1985; Knighton 2005).

Men can only achieve this seniority within the context of generation-set system (Lamphear 1976; 153). In fact the formal decision-making is largely the preserve of men, and elders are still in charge of this process (Dyson-Hudson 1966; Lamphear 1976; Koning 2005). Hence for these male members to attain power they must go through the mandatory rituals. The age and generation sets also function as bonding mechanisms between the different territorial groups of the same ethnicity as well as between the Karimojong and neighbouring peoples with similar age set structures. Since the system is linked within the entire region, wherever a member is situated, he or she will face the same justice system (Koning 2005). Dyson-Hudson (1963) describes this supremacy of the elders that is very evident at initiation;

The supremacy of the elders is emphasized in that only the senior generation-set has the power to open and recruit age-sets, and every initiation ceremony is a reminder of this power. Their beneficence is also emphasized in that adulthood comes to each initiand as a gift of the elders, which accords well with the general Karimojong view that the well-being of society derives from the elder's power and wisdom. Thus, although no formal teaching takes place at the ceremonies, initiation is nonetheless a process of political education of a kind (Dyson-Hudson 1963; 366).

Indeed as Lamphear (1976) observes, to this date, elders still wield great authority in the socio-political structure of Karimojong traditional systems. Their power lies in the gerontocratic structure of managing and controlling the society. The elders are at the fulcrum of society's socio-political structure, balancing the ecosystem as well as directing the critical decisions regarding livelihood (Cisterino 1985). The elders assemble according to the needs of the people. Matters that require



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ritual performances and directly invoke the powers of *Akuju* are settled in the *akiriket* assemblies.

On the other hand, issues regarding everyday social problems that the government would turn over to the LCs or to the judiciary are taken to *ekokwa* assemblies. In both assemblies, it is the elders who provide leadership. The *akiriket* are held in specific shrines in relation with *Akuju* and there are particular elders qualified to perform rituals related to the *akiriket*. The *akiriket* is not governmental like the *ekokwa* as Stites et al (2007) point out;

In contrast to the formal *akiriket*, *ekokwa* gatherings are informal and held daily by male elders at the manyattas and kraals. *Ekokwa* are much less reverent than *akiriket*, and deal with issues of daily management. News and information are shared, disputes are brought forward (and potentially settled), and day-to-day affairs of the group and conditions in the area are discussed. These gatherings are ideally held in the shade of a large acacia tree. Any respected elder can officiate at *ekokwa*, and this is the forum where most decisions are made. The *ekokwa* consist of male elders, but women may present their problems or requests at these fora as well (Stites et al 2007; 15)

Hence for the Karimojong, what would be issues of the state are embedded in their tradition and are set in motion through formal meetings whenever need arises. Elders are present in every community, even in their mobile lifestyle. They always assemble at the shortest notice in any area where a problem has occurred; they can convene under the shade of a tree, discuss and take decisions (Cisterino 1985). This traditional justice system is still preferred and elders still wield extensive powers when they preside over various cases. For instance there was a widely publicized case that took place in September 2008. It was the case of Apalalu's sons in Longorinyangai village of Namalu sub-county in Nakapiripirit District.

Two brothers raped their sister in Namalu sub-county. The girl shouted an alarm which attracted several people in the village. The perpetrators of the crime ran away but the villagers mobilized themselves and a hunt for them immediately started. The *karachuna* were very instrumental in

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hunting down these youths. It was a community problem, widely publicized as the *karachuna* made telephone calls all over the territory warning their friends not to provide sanctuary for the culprits. They were particularly concerned that the culprits should not cross over to another district and hide in an enemy territory. When the massive hunt finally caught up with them, they were arrested and brought back to the village. The parents together with other villagers who arrested them did not report the matter to the police or file a case with the courts of law. This was because justice in the Karimojong way had to take its course. And this meant taking the two wrongdoers to the *Ekokwa*. Fortunately, the boys' was also an elder in the community, and he chaired the *Ekokwa* (the traditional court) which sat and tried the two boys in the village on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2008. They were found guilty and subsequently sentenced to death. After the sentence was passed, the villagers started beating the two boys and one of them was beaten to death while the other hadn't died by the time police intervened. Among the Karimojong, once one is found guilty of heinous crimes such as incest, homosexuality and bestiality, one is immediately killed by passing a sharp long stick through the anus, forced upwards to the mouth and once dead, the body is not buried or accorded any ritual but just thrown in the bushes. Under the Karimojong traditional justice system, the punishment for murder of a clansman is also death. Such a murderer is made to dig two graves, one for the person he killed and the other for himself. The killer is first forced to bury the dead before being stoned to death and buried in the other grave next to his victim. The clansmen of the offender then abandon such a place to find another to settle<sup>127</sup>.

According to the UPDF spokesman for the 3<sup>rd</sup> division in 2007 the army received reports of five people who were tried under *ekokwa*, sentenced to death and hanged after going through the Karimojong traditional court sitting at Namalu in Nakapiripirit District. Under such circumstances, the role of the state must be drawn into question. The state runs a parallel system which is alien to the Karimojong. The power of administering justice to them lies with the elders whom they know have powers from the God everyone respects. As time lapses, when the elders decline in number and become few, they hand over this decision-making power to their sons, who then become the elders and the cycle continues (Lamphear 1976; Knighton 2005). On matters of governance, the state, according to the Karimojong is an external coercive force that they cannot bear. Their zeal in resisting this external intervention affects violence in the region, but the "state itself is both the arena and a

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<sup>127</sup> Group discussion with men in Kaabong, December 2008

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major contestant, when it is not the very object of violent conflict” (Fukui and Markakis 1994).

In addition, the state does not take into account the traditional systems where elders in the community play a very important role. For instance, the decentralized system only attempted to create parallel authorities whose power the government just assumed would emanate from the people. The omission of traditional elders in the political organization of the LCs structurally drew attention to the fact that the system undermined Karimojong socio-cultural structures. The Karimojong could never accept that and have refused to succumb to this ‘foreign’ power. The warriors do not respect the LCs because they are not part of the traditional justice system and have no power from God. Secondly, as agents of a deficient state, the LCs have reservations about pushing their own people hard lest they face vengeance. This reality ultimately leads to an increase in armed cattle raiding and the arms trade since the state checks and balances are wanting in all respects.

But there is more to this; the Karimojong have never been seriously governed by the state (Knighton 2005). Hence any state-run administrative structure will have a very serious problem of legitimacy with the people. The Karimojong still believe in their councils of elders sitting in the *manyattas* to preside over their complaints. They remain powerful in the face of a deficient state system, they are respected like gods and there is still room for them to operate. They carry with them the voice of the gods and the power to curse any recalcitrant member.

The LC system on which decentralization is built is run or managed by ‘non-entities’ in the society. They do not have wealth, they are not elders and the state does not allow them to possess guns. In short, they are powerless and remain agents of a ‘non-existent system’ in the face of the local Karimojong. The situation was aggravated with the entry of guns which empowered various groups to continue administering their own forms of justice. This has had serious implications for the legitimacy of not just the LC system, but the entire state in Karamoja.

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The end result is that the Karimojong communities have learned to function outside the state structures and in the process their way of life has become totally irreconcilable with the state. They view the state as yet another raider in the region (Knighton 2005). Such incompatibilities have resulted in the state failure to resolve conflicts among the Karimojong communities. The big problem now is about relations between the state and the increasing numbers of Karimojong actors. The events of the past two decades have given rise to a new balance of power between the state and the Karimojong, and a number of other independent actors that have emerged. Apparently, the circumstances have played in favour of increasing the power of the Karimojong and this has significantly transformed the violence landscape, challenging the monopoly the states are supposed to hold over violence.

## 5.6 The Novel Comprehensive Development Programme

The 1990s saw most parts of southern Uganda stabilize and they began a period of reconstruction and rehabilitation with multi-lateral and bi-lateral donors increasing their support, especially in the rehabilitation effort. The government created a multi-sectoral and multi-district reconstruction programme for the disadvantaged regions that came to be known as Northern Uganda Rehabilitation Programme (NURP). The programme was implemented in phases, and the second phase (NURP II) particularly included the districts of Karamoja so they would benefit from the component that targeted promoting and stimulating community-based conflict prevention measures<sup>128</sup>.

Then a forum specifically focusing on developing Karamoja known as the Karamoja Working Group (KWG) was created with the membership including: the Government of Uganda ministries, development partners such as the European Commission, the Italian Embassy, the Danish Embassy, the Irish Embassy, USAID,

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<sup>128</sup> Interview with Kaabong district LC V Chairperson, March 2008

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DFID, the NGO Forum and other participants who are called as and when the need arises. The goals of this development and discussion forum was to: coordinate and monitor government and development partners' strategies and responses towards disarmament, security and the overall development of the region; facilitate frequent exchange and dissemination of information to all stakeholders; promote the mainstreaming of Karamoja issues within National Development Policies and Strategies; define a long-term development approach as well as identify the most critical areas of focus; establish mechanisms of interventions for prospective donors to support development in the region; and support ways of realizing peace and security in the region<sup>129</sup>.

Discussions from the working group brought many misgivings about the disarmament operations and the heavy deployment of the army in Karamoja. They argued that given the level of violence, using the army alone could neither succeed in restoring law and order in the region nor decrease the demand for weapons. As an alternative, they put forward a proposal that aimed at restoring security through bringing Karamoja to the same economic and development levels as the rest of the Uganda (OCHA 2008). This marked the birth of the Karamoja Integrated Disarmament and Development Programme (KIDDP) that was launched in April 2008, and which, according to the government, laid the foundation for development action in Karamoja.

The KIDDP aims at improving human security and promoting conditions for recovery and development in Karamoja. The program proposes interventions for a comprehensive and coordinated disarmament programme that will enhance peace building and development in Karamoja. It suggests that disarmament activities should be undertaken within the context of peace-building programmes, where efforts to remove weapons from society are linked with initiatives to address the root causes of conflict, including targeted development interventions that will reduce the incidence of poverty. The planned programme involves, among others, the following:

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<sup>129</sup> Discussion with officials of Ministry of State for Karamoja May 2008

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- Measures to secure the international borders in order to contain the international trafficking in small arms and light weapons across the vast international borders. Once the international border is secured through effective strategic deployment of well-equipped armed forces, and coordinated cross-border peace building initiatives, a series of multi-level holistic interventions will be undertaken primarily to enhance internal security of the people of Karamoja and their property (especially livestock), which will make the continued possession of illegal guns completely irrelevant, hence laying a lasting foundation for sustainable voluntary and peaceful disarmament. This will also be achieved by undertaking several other interventions, including the following: (i) piloting the establishment of a community-based security system in a few communities to learn the most appropriate and cost-effective mechanisms of containing internal raids; (ii) strengthening the capacity of the state to establish its authority and ensure law and order in Karamoja in order to deal with criminal elements in Karamoja who use possession of illegal guns to terrorize unarmed populations in and outside Karamoja.
  - Undertaking weapons collection initiatives coupled with efforts to tackle the root causes of conflicts, through, among others, support for the development of viable alternative sources of livelihood, and physical social infrastructural development activities; promotion of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as building a foundation for peaceful conflict resolution and management;
  - Soliciting the support of the wider public for weapons collection together with measures to control access to small arms and light weapons on the part of civilians as important preconditions for sustainable disarmament and development in Karamoja;
  - Ensuring an appropriate balance between sanctions for non-compliance with voluntary disarmament and the provision of incentives to encourage voluntary surrender of illegal weapons;
  - Creating procedures for dealing with collected, seized or surrendered weapons to prevent their re-circulation into society.
  - Devising measures to control and stop the proliferation and inflow of small arms, light weapons and ammunition into Karamoja both from within the country and from neighbouring countries in the region;
  - Strengthening institutions for effective administration of justice and promoting good governance in the whole of Karamoja (Republic of Uganda 2007)

To date, this program has served as the blue print that the state is using to tackle the Karamoja problem. Through various activities, the KIDDP has planned to combine disarmament with interventions intended to create peace within Karamoja and at the same time systematically promote development. This means that the military option of dealing with the violence is still open but as a component of a much broader programme for the development of Karamoja. The overall goal of the

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Integrated Disarmament and Programme is: 'To contribute to human security and promote conditions for recovery and development in Karamoja', implying that there is a deliberate attempt to work towards sustainable peace/stability and development.

However, the approach has still been found wanting in two respects. First, while the government has stated its commitment to the development of Karamoja through formulating all the above policies or programs, it remained adamant in its resistance to the Karimojong way of life. Secondly, the government took to understanding the problem as a military one because it involved the use of guns, and more specifically focused all policies towards the gun or its removal from the region. In this way, the government of Uganda did not only narrow the problem to guns, but also lost focus on wider networks that the violence seems to be connected with. Thus, while there was considerable support from the Karamoja Working Group as well as various international humanitarian agencies for the approach adopted by the KIDDP, serious concerns arose about the persistence of government in continuing with the military-led disarmament operations, which have repeatedly led to extensive violence and human rights violations (OCHA 2008).

### *Conclusion*

The relationship between the state and the Karimojong brings up several points. The first is that the relationship continues to be characterized by serious armed confrontation. As the years go by the state policies seem to merely raise the scale of the violence. Just as many studies have pointed out, the state has persistently failed to consider pastoral production as a viable livelihood option for the region (Barber, 1962; Dyson-Hudson, 1966; Ocan 1992; Quam 1996; Muhereza 1998; Mkutu 2003; Gray et al 2003; Akabwai and Ateyo 2007). This letdown on the part of the state has created ripples in the society's social security system leaving the pastoralists vulnerable to intermittent violence (Gulliver, 1953; Thomas, 1965; Dyson-Hudson, 1966; Barber, 1969; Galaty and Pierre 1991).

Today the toll of violence in the region is manifested in many forms; as acute food insecurity, as a response to a declining economy (in terms of cattle herds), as

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cattle thefts, highway banditry, indiscriminate killings and other forms of unlawful acts. All these relate to matters of the state. And whereas the state acknowledges the severity of the problem in the region, its complacency, corruption and lack of political will has resulted in an unchecked escalation of violence. The state is only present as a shadow and that is why disorder reigns. The disorder in the region only leads to more violence and the only real power of value among the population today is that of the gun/modern weaponry (Hutchinson, 1996; Keen, 1994; Ocan 1994).

Over the years, state-driven programmes for modernization and policies for development have become synonymous with displacement, violence and relentless pressures on the meagre resources. The Karimojong say the state is not offering them better alternatives than what they are able to craft for themselves. Right from the colonial era, the policy on Karamoja was limited to maintenance of order, protecting the tribes against outside raids and leaving them to their customs as much as possible. In spite of maintaining this policy of nominal interference with their customs, the administrative measures taken, such as restricting their movements within the tribal territories, demarcation of rigid district and county boundaries, forceful relocation of some groups, reduction of grazing lands, and imposition of taxation (Gartrell 1988; 202; Barber 1962) are only recipes for violence. The state looks too much on the weapons held by the Karimojong. As they crack down on cattle rustling which is an essential part of Karimojong life, they either confiscate the cattle or simply 'loot' them. The state has never put value on cattle the way the Karimojong do. Yet cattle are more than just a way of life; they are part of their cultural identity. To be Karimojong is to own cattle by whatever means (Gray et al 2003).

Thus, as is the case with other nomadic pastoralists in the drylands of Africa, the Karimojong violence has a lot more to do with the collapse of the modern state in the neo-colonial era (Broch-Due 2004; Knighton 2002; 2006). Some scholars argue that it is the proliferation of modern guns that has raised the level of today's raiding which has in turn impacted on the scale of violence so that it is now much worse than it was in the past (Mirzeler and Young 2000; Gray 2000; Mkutu 2006). This is so because the state has been unable to provide basic public requirements such as



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territorial control, social services and legitimate institutions to the Karimojong. The core of the problem seems to centre on the inability of the state to perform the basic functions of state responsibility such as ensuring peace and stability, effective governance, territorial control, and economic sustainability (Huria 2008).

It is clear that the Karimojong have throughout the history of this violence, resisted integration to the nation-state due to the enduring discrimination against them. State laws discriminate against them; state policy initiatives only speak of them in terms of overturning their livelihoods and tough military action, yet offer nothing in return. Salzman (2004) for instance has demonstrated a perspective where pastoralists who succumb to the state and lose their autonomy by being incorporated into centralized states become ‘pastoral peasants’ and often lose their freedom to pursue a pastoral livelihood (Little 2006). The point of contention is that the motives of the state are usually geared towards full sedentarization of the Karimojong for the purposes of governmental control and so they can be disarmed. The Karimojong know of this; that is why they resist any program of the government. First of all they argue that they do not partake of the ‘fruits’ of the state in Uganda. That is to say, they are not considered in the distribution of the nation’s purported public goods and services as exhibited in the sheer absence of basic infrastructure.

Secondly, quite often they are left out of government development planning, or if included, government services are just “on paper but are usually absent on the ground”. Thirdly, the state seldom plays a role in guaranteeing their security. When they do become an object of state interest and intervention, it often involves brutal forceful disarmament and other coercive strategies aimed at making them conform to sedentary life which only strengthens their impulse to fight state agents. Therefore, although very significant, the violence is not just about the influx of guns, a troubled balance of power and fighting for limited resources, but involves a much more complex network of what seems to be the state's loss of public standing that has eroded its influence in the management of violence and the people of Karamoja.

## CHAPTER SIX

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## 6. HUMANITARIANISM AND VIOLENCE

### 6.1 Introduction

For the last three decades there have been places in Africa and particularly in the drylands region that have perpetually faced deepening crises which have been worsened by impacts of the global food, energy and financial crises. Moreover, even before the current global financial as well world food crises, these parts of Africa were already experiencing a dangerous economic crisis, particularly linked to deficiencies of food. The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) reported that at least one in three people and a third of all children in the African continent were undernourished and more than one half of all Africans (about 300 million people) were living on the World Bank definition of less than one dollar per day. The situation left Africa as the only continent that was increasingly dependent on relief aid from abroad and had the highest projected gap in meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) of halving hunger and poverty by 2015 (FAO 2009).

The global food problem has turned the perpetually severe food problems caused by environmental hazards, armed conflicts and poor state interventions into a catastrophe. The overall rise in commodity prices has exacerbated the situation with the World Bank projecting that it will result in an additional 100 million Africans being driven further into poverty. Already there is evidence of rising malnutrition in children as poor households cut back on food consumption. Moreover this situation occurs in the midst of endemic and increasing internal civil wars. Many of these wars are the types found in the drylands region; wars that are distinct from classical warfare but at the same time leave the state at the centre of the crisis. Within some literature dominated by Weberian thought the commonly held view about such states in Africa is that the state has failed because "... the basic functions of the state are no longer performed" in the way(s) expected. Some of these states have been characterized as the world's 'failed states' but alongside their state dysfunction exist entirely separate non-state entities that are always able and perhaps more than willing

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to take over the duty of fulfilling the functions that have long defined the meaning of a state.

These include the new forms of globally organized power; operating on skills situated within humanitarianism, as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or multi- and bilateral organizations. In their places of operation, they run parallel to local forms of power, constituting a form of mobile apparatus or migrant sovereignties. Since 1945, there has been a systematic increase of NGOs performing various roles, which has led to enormous transformations in the nature of global governance. This upsurge in NGOs has been fuelled by the connected development of the U.N. system, and specifically by the increasing global circulation and legitimization of discourse and politics of “human rights.” In many of the interventions and declarations of the U.N. Security Council and various international humanitarian agencies, there is evidence of new forms of sovereignty evolving in place of or running alongside the older territorialized ones. “These new forms legitimize the right of interference and intervention, identifying a deterritorialized sovereignty that migrates around the globe to sites of “crisis” and humanitarian disaster” (Pandolfi 2003; 369).

These sovereignties, constituted by the local and international NGOs, charities or aid agencies, have become powerful actors in crisis areas like the vast drylands of the Karimojong cluster. Such non-state actors frequently appear in the form of NGOs and private contractors and more often will take on roles that they lack both the capacity and legitimacy to perform (de Waal, 1997); an act which has gradually pushed their work into the social space that is beleaguered by political manipulation from powerful international forces. Given their wide-ranging connections, these agencies are steadily being used to capture the state by taking over key state functions, for instance; they have taken over provision of health care, welfare, and even that of security of the citizens. Lately, some studies have been critical of these actors for being at the forefront of what appears to be the “new imperialism” of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – largely because they operate on a model that facilitates systematic withdrawal of the social contract as it were, and accordingly hands over functions of

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the state to transnational networks (Macrae 1998). Hence many scholars have started questioning their effectiveness, citing the negative impacts in places where they are in control such as Darfur, Afghanistan, Serbia, Somalia and in others like Rwanda where they have been accused of exacerbating local insecurities (de Waal 1994; Fox 2001; Rieff 2002; Young et al 2005; Young 2007; Prendergast 1995).

That is the kind of problem which has been a long term dilemma in enhancing humanitarian assistance for Karamoja. Behind these actors are the global is both part of the global financial and food problems, just as being part of the escalating local problems gaining momentum. Indeed according to the World Food Program (WFP), Karamoja is “on the brink of a humanitarian catastrophe, following a drought that reduced agricultural output to as low as 30 percent in some areas in 2008”. The situation is so bad that even the critically rated Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) has soared to emergency levels. In Moroto District, for example, the average GAM rate was recorded at 12.7 percent in September while the regional average was 9.5 percent. The government and its donor partners have set the emergency threshold at 10 percent (*IRIN* February 03 2009). Karamoja is a region that has now become home to the massive inflow of aid that the entire population seems to survive on. Large amounts of international food aid are constantly being ferried into the region and the government is always appealing for aid to rescue the famine-stricken pastoralists.

The relief agencies operating in Karamoja has almost taken over all the roles of the state even when the government still claims sovereignty over the region. Issues pertaining to health, education, feeding and the entire human welfare have all become the ‘mandate’ of charitable relief agencies. Despite calls for a fully fledged government strategy, there have always been half-hearted attempts to solve the Karamoja question, many times militarily trying to subdue them and consequently ‘reducing them to a state of acute hunger and desperation, through corruption, ineptitude or brutal counterinsurgency warfare, and then the blame is put on the weather’ (de Waal 1994). Emergency relief assistance has been part and parcel of the Karimojong since the great famine of 1980 (Quam 1996; Mkutu 2006) and to varying degrees has extended to different sections of Karamoja at different times to assist the

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extremely vulnerable. Since then, repeated environmental hazards and insecurity has forced the Karimojong to live with humanitarian support from World Food Programme and their partners.

The situation has grown from bad to worse so that today many children in the region will turn their faces and look at you the moment you mention “world food” as the agency is fondly called. Many other such organizations involved in relief aid provision have become household names in the region. Much of the work that these organizations have addressed includes areas of; infrastructure, hygiene and sanitation, food security, provision of water and construction of dams, pans and boreholes. They also involve drought preparedness which includes; pastoral field schools, animal health, drought planning or early warning systems, and road construction. Today, almost ninety percent of the 1.1 million Karimojong survive basically on food assistance from the WFP (OCHA 2009). Indeed, when one enters Karamoja region, one cannot fail to recognize the strong presence of NGO activity by the mere sight of numerous signposts along the highway, but the presence of these, however well-intentioned, has failed to reverse the trend of violence in Karamoja.

This chapter considers the work of humanitarian actors in the region as a critical factor in cycles of violence in Karamoja. First, it looks at the way in which humanitarian aid actors framed their understanding of the crisis and at how they adapted their responses. It demonstrates that, because the aid community is influenced by the state, they have not fully appreciated the socio-cultural dynamics pertaining to crisis management among the Karimojong. Secondly, the chapter argues that under this influence, humanitarian agencies captured the state, taking over its roles and ended up perpetuating the very ills associated with the state as well as supporting state complacency towards the appalling humanitarian situation on one hand, and on the other, prolonging the conflicts through the direct and indirect impacts. Then I will demonstrate how, against their intended goals, humanitarian assistance serves to benefit those very armed groups who are being accused of being perpetrators of violence and the humanitarian crisis in the first place. Thus, I argue

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that even the most well-intentioned humanitarian interventions can end up encouraging violence.

## 6.2 Karamoja's unending food crisis

The history of contemporary humanitarian assistance in Karamoja is a long one that dates back to the 1980 famine. It was during this period that massive food relief efforts by international organizations were sought and used to halt the disaster, but not before “21 percent of the population died in the twelve months up to December 1980, mostly from starvation” (Okudi 1992; Quam 1996). This also marked the period when in the overthrow of the regime of Idi Amin, the Karimojong looted weapons from Moroto barracks and became heavily armed. The same period also saw the major political upheavals in Uganda as the new governments kept changing in the face of various fighting forces that were trying to balance power in Uganda. Thus the weak government then lacked the disaster preparedness that would cope with a disaster of such a magnitude as was occurring in Karamoja.

Furthermore, the government at that time was more bothered about projecting a good image before donors and foreign governments, and in fact first denied the crisis. Indeed it was the church-based organizations that first brought the humanitarian crisis in Karamoja to television screens and thus to the awareness of the international community. And that is how the international community came to know of the famine in Karamoja. In response, a host of UN agencies and NGOs began flowing into Uganda and into Karamoja in particular. These included OXFAM, the Lutheran World Foundation (LWF), International Christian Aid (ICA), the Uganda-Italian Cooperation and Development (CDU), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Food Program (WFP), and Action Internationale Contre La Faim (AICF) into Karamoja.

The assistance they gave managed to contain the famine by 1985. But even after containing the situation to a certain degree, these humanitarian agencies did not withdraw; instead they diversified into other activities, including monitoring the

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humanitarian conditions in Karamoja. Their presence spurred greater international attention to the problems of the region and there were more calls for greater state involvement in the development of Karamoja. They even warned the government then of the inadequacy of the *ad hoc* responses in dealing with the crisis, emphasizing the need for long term solutions for sustainability, and much greater involvement of the local population in planning and social transformation (Oloka-Onyango, Gariyo and Muhereza 1993). A significant area that they focused on and maintained was the distribution of food. Throughout the 1980s the distribution was kept in process as they holistically moved to perform some erstwhile functions of the state which they did independently of the other actors in the region, especially the state.

The end result was that was that duplication and wastage of some resources occurred due to lack of proper coordination. Although it was very clear that these agencies moved into Karamoja basically to offer emergency relief services, when they pitched camp, the state began to leave most of its responsibilities to them. Karamoja was from then on treated as a war zone under the care of the UN and humanitarian organizations (Ocan 1992).

But this also occurred in a historical period when the wars that attracted humanitarian aid were beginning to change. Humanitarian responses to the emerging situations also had to change. Sørensen for instance demonstrates that humanitarian interventions that were developed in the more complex years of the 1990s found it increasingly difficult to remain neutral because of the precarious situation into which the new wars cast them. She argues that the nature and dynamics of war were changing in the “new wars”. In these rather complex emergencies of the 1990s the difference between armed forces and civilians became blurred, and nearly 95% of casualties in war turned to be from among the civilian population. Such shifts were also ‘replicated’ in Karamoja. For instance, cattle raiding moved from a purely cultural activity to an organized armed insurgency with the characters of the new wars. The warring parties turned the local communities and private homes of people into an area for fighting, creating a much more complex humanitarian emergency. As



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a result, the humanitarian operations also became increasingly complex and the mandates of the agencies involved also expanded.

With the escalating insecurity situation, the crisis during the period of fieldwork seemed to reach a high level with more than one million people declared to be badly in need of emergency food aid<sup>130</sup>. Even the traditional sorghum-growing areas like Iriiri, Lolelia and Karenga in Kaabong that were known as the 'bread basket' of Karamoja suffered as a result of the devastating drought and famine. They could not support the less fortunate areas, let alone themselves<sup>131</sup>. In some places, the prevailing insecurity that got worse with the 2006 'cordon and search' operations contributed to the famine. As a result of the disarmament operations and the retaliatory cattle raids people ran away from their farms. In areas such as Kalapata, Panyangara, Karenga, Kathile, Kapedo and Lopei, people fled, leaving their sorghum in the fields.

These are places where at least crop cultivation takes place and they are well known for producing much of the sorghum, a staple food in Karamoja. When people left their fields unattended, the raiders harvested them leaving the owners with nothing to fall back on when they returned. In Kathile the raiders are said to have spent almost two days harvesting in the fields though some of them abandoned the sorghum as they fled UPDF firepower. Famine and the food crisis was no longer an issue of the drought alone, but a combination of factors. Especially in this period, there was persistent cattle raiding that kept people on the move. The forced migrations of people could not allow them to tend new fields to produce food. They kept moving, often to the urban centres where the army was usually camped. The army would also stop people from moving to far outside the urban areas to graze the

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<sup>130</sup> For three successive years there was extensive drought, followed by heavy flooding, which led to very poor harvests, high food prices, livestock diseases and poor livestock terms of trade, which were exacerbated by cattle raiding and insecurity caused by disarmament, all of which prevented households from replenishing their food stocks

<sup>131</sup> Discussion with elders in Lolelia February 2008

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animals. Generally there was an embargo on the Karimojong and they could not cross into other districts outside Karamoja. This made access to water and pasture even more difficult. “As people are dying from hunger and diseases, our animals are also dying due to lack of access to water and pasture” my friend Lochan said.

When the fighting between the warriors and the UPDF conducting the ‘cordon and search’ operation intensified, the situation deteriorated further. Within the last three months of 2007, food was becoming very scarce and the World Food Programme (WFP) warned that more than 700,000 Karimojong may require some degree of food aid to be able to push through to the next harvest which was expected in July 2008. The agency carried out an assessment to establish the magnitude of the impending crisis. By the end of March, 91,363 of the most vulnerable Karimojong assessed to have required immediate assistance had received food distributions: 65,000 in February and 26,363 in March. As of 3 May, 320,842 people had benefited from 5,272 metric tons (MT) of food since the beginning of the year (OCHA 2008).

Earlier in December 2007, the Permanent Secretary in the Office of the Prime Minister issued a warning that food shortages would increase in the northern and eastern regions as drought was expected to hit the country in the first three months of 2008. The experts from the Famine Early Warning Systems Network attributed the situation to the floods that had ravaged the region. They also blamed insecurity in the Gulu, Pader, Kitgum and Amuru districts which neighbour Karamoja for the famine, saying the people were unable to tend their fields. Furthermore, the food shortages were also blamed on the fact that the Government had privatized its silos, or food reserves, as well as on the collapse of the traditional practice of keeping millet, dry cassava and sorghum in granaries (*The New Vision* December 19, 2007).

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The food crisis in Karamoja kept on growing as the New Year 2008 brought with it more challenges<sup>132</sup>. The number of hungry people in the region who could not survive without emergency food aid grew to more than one million. When the Minister in charge of disaster preparedness and relief visited the region in the month of March, he found old men and women had been isolated from the young. He said later said that the Karimojong had told him that the old people were useless and therefore, food should not be wasted on them.” He said “The situation is bad; the population in the affected areas have adopted the theory of ‘survival of the fittest’ as the able-bodied took advantage of their physical strength to deprive others of access to food.

He also said the government of Uganda and WFP has unveiled plans to resume the humanitarian operations in Karamoja. He pledged that the government would provide the required security to escort the staff and property of WFP and all humanitarian partners in the region to enable them put the aid effort into effect. He particularly mentioned this because the week before his visit one WFP driver had been killed in an ambush by armed Karimojong gunmen along the highway in Kotido District. The ambush was part of the emerging trend of attacks that targeted WFP convoys ferrying relief items and delivering food. The most dangerous parts were the road from Kotido to Kaabong. This road has recorded the highest number of ambushes. In fact the local people say the frequent ambushes are part of the reason there is no public transport on the road. The Dodoth say it is the Jie warriors who lay these ambushes but the Jie deny this, saying it is the Dodoth from Kaabong who are responsible.

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<sup>132</sup> The violence resulting from cattle raiding and disarmament, including road attacks and cattle thefts exacerbated poor food availability in the region, pushing prices even higher and limiting household coping options and humanitarian access

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### 6.2.1 Eating wild leaves and rats

The international media began to report on the famine. On May 20, 2008 *Reuters* reported that the surge in global food prices and the previous years' floods had caused severe food shortages in northeast Uganda where nearly thirty people had died while some had been reduced to eating rats. The media in Uganda also wrote extensively on the looming famine but it did not elicit a response from the state until news of people dying in large numbers started to litter the newspapers and local FM radio stations. The Dodoth Member of Parliament Hon. Fr Simon Lokodo was quoted as saying "From data we have collected, 28 people have died in the region as a result of an acute hunger situation, and the government seems less than bothered." These were people who had died in just one six-week period. The Minister for Karamoja affairs did acknowledge that hunger had claimed lives and led to a hopeless situation. He said, "There are reports of people being seen with rats pierced on sticks. This shows that the hunger situation has worsened."

In Loyoro, just like many parts of Karamoja, people were dying from hunger related problems. "People are now eating leaves and wild fruits which are very dangerous, some of them are poisonous, but they wash them and try to eat them because they no other choice" a Kaabong district local council speaker said. This was causing a lot of health complications resulting into death. "Many of the people who eat the leaves for survival end up developing diarrhoea and this has led to the death of several children and elderly people," an old woman in Kaabong explained to us. This prompted the Moroto Diocese Social Services and Development (SSD) program to carry out a study *Famine in Karamoja* in May 2008. Their findings indicated that apart from people dying of diarrhoea, cases of mental illness and suicides were also on the increase. They attributed this to 'worries and helplessness over the famine situation'. The report also cited malnutrition in both children and adults as signs of helplessness. The SSD Director, Fr Thomas Achia, argues that lack of food in the region had caused price increases in the food markets and since people could no longer afford these prices, they resorted to eating wild vegetables.

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Although WFP tried to maintain the distribution of relief food in the villages, the scale of the violence resulting from the ‘cordon and search’ operations made the situation unbearable. Many of the villagers had to flee to the town for safety<sup>133</sup>. Yet most of them had already lost their cattle and few belongings, which is why the aid agencies remained their only hope. In Moroto, at Lwelotei and the surrounding areas, the local people reported that human beings were competing for wild fruits with the goats and cows. Reports of people dying in the region continued to flood media stories and on 2 August 2008, *The Monitor* daily newspaper quoting Mr. Lochap the LC 5 chairperson of Moroto district as saying that at least fifteen people had been reported dead from hunger in his district in the preceding three months alone. The village of Nawaikorot, Ngoleriet Sub-county in Bokora County was the worst hit since they had been the most affected by the poor harvest and subsequently the effects of the famine. While briefing officials from the World Food Programme on the food situation in the district he said, “We have begun receiving reports of deaths resulting from hunger and so far 15 have been brought to my attention. I have told my people in the district to use what (food) they have in the granaries sparingly but there is also need for relief support.”

Mr. Lochap said most victims of hunger were the women, children and the elderly who live in the *manyattas*. The youths who drive the cattle to look for pasture and water sometimes “raid food” on their way and are able to live better. The Moroto Chief Administrative Officer said the biting famine in the villages has forced many young girls to move to the urban areas and take on dangerous jobs that have adverse risks related to HIV/Aids. “Others have moved to neighbouring districts and the Turkana region where relief food is currently being distributed” (*The Monitor* August 2, 2008). In Kotido district, the situation was no better, with about thirty percent of

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<sup>133</sup> People started developing ways of coping with the sudden decline in access and availability of food; many of them began gathering wild fruits, hunting rodents, picking wild vegetables, and leaves. They also employed more drastic measures such as decreasing food intake by skipping meals while some women and children just migrated out of the region to urban areas like Kampala to do odd jobs or engage in begging on the streets

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the population in Kotido district moving to the neighbouring districts and others crossing the international borders to Kenya. The district chairman was reported by the *New Vision* as saying, "People have gone to Abim, Kitgum, Soroti and Kampala to look for what to eat. We fear that when the situation worsens, the whole population will migrate and also bring problems to their host areas" (The *New Vision* September 7, 2008).

Originally, when the newspapers reported two or three isolated cases of deaths the government would just wish it away, but the numbers gradually started becoming bigger. On the 12<sup>th</sup> October, the *New Vision* headlines screamed "*108 starve to death in Moroto district*" and this began to raise serious concern in Uganda as a whole. The paper was again quoting the District Chairman addressing the Karimojong people during the 46th Independence Day celebrations at Moroto Boma Grounds. He revealed that a total of 108 people had died of starvation in Moroto district since January. Of those reported; 41 people died in the suburbs of Moroto town in September alone while 67 died in the surrounding villages. The mayor of Moroto also announced that 17 people had died of hunger at Nakapeliane, 12 in Kamp Swahili, 7 in Katamitemo and 5 in Kakoliye suburbs. The most affected groups were the children and the elderly. This was largely because when violence and famine became intolerable, many of them began flocking into Moroto town expecting to get security and food, only to starve to death. The women who were selling firewood for money resorted to exchanging it for dregs of *butia* (a local sorghum brew) to survive.

The matter was immediately picked up by parliamentarians. The Dodoth Member of Parliament Hon. Fr Simon Lokodo told the Ugandan Parliament that the famine situation in the region had reached alarming proportions and from his Dodoth group, thirty Karimojong had died as a result of famine in only one month. However, he said the death toll record was a conservative estimate as it was restricted to those who could be reached, and the real number might be higher. Actually in Kaabong, where Lokodo came from, they say this number of thirty was not accurate - many elders were speaking of more than sixty people who died. The situation had reached an embarrassing level for the government and some councillors in Kaabong were

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saying the time has come for the Karimojong to also demand some of the ‘national cake.’ In Uganda, political goods are commonly referred to as ‘national cake’ and many Karimojong like the MPs then believed they had been denied their fair share of the cake.

Whereas Lokodo’s revelations were strongly dismissed by State Ministers Musa Ecweru, for Relief and Disaster Preparedness and Aston Kajara the minister for Karamoja, they still conceded that the deaths had occurred but argued that they were largely caused by poor hygiene and not famine. The Minister for Karamoja Affairs further defended the sloppy government response and the Karimojong eating rats and herbs by arguing that they are this way not because of famine but because the rodents ‘could be a delicacy’ in the region. This infuriated the Karimojong. Particularly the elite educated Karimojong who felt the minister had grossly insulted them. In the villages where newspapers and such news items are rare to come by, the ministers insensitivity was not much of an issue to the otherwise starving people. Many of the local Karimojong did not know him. The minister lived and worked in Kampala, so to the ordinary Karimojong, those were Kampala issues.

When I inquired about this with the district local council speaker, he said his council had passed a motion that the minister should not set foot in Karamoja again. But beyond that, local discourses were more engaged with the hunger and deaths itself than with what politicians in Kampala said. According to my friend Lokwang, who works at a local NGO in Kaabong, the minister has never ‘enjoyed’ the delicacy he is talking about otherwise he would be aware of the pain such stereotypes create. He recalled that whenever the Karimojong are faced with a food crisis, other ethnic groups simply make fun of them. “That is how they coined the infamous phrase ‘we shall never wait for Karamoja to develop’ and many still believe in that” he concluded<sup>134</sup>.

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<sup>134</sup> Interview with local NGO workers, Kaabong May 2008

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Meanwhile at the national level the Karamoja MPs held a press conference in parliament in Kampala on May 26<sup>th</sup>. Together with the district chairmen, the MPs asked the President to transfer the state minister for Karamoja, the Hon. Aston Kajara for saying that the Karimojong eat rats as a delicacy. At the press conference, the top Karamoja politicians said they were traumatized and saddened by the “malicious utterances” of Mr. Kajara and his disaster preparedness colleague, Musa Ecweru, on the situation in Karamoja. They pointed out that a minister for Karamoja who does not live or work in Karamoja cannot know the depth of the crisis in the region. They read out a statement calling for his resignation over the stereo-typical remarks. “We wish to inform the appointing authority that the Karamoja Affairs minister is ignorant of the situation in the region,” the legislators said in a statement read by Dodoth MP, Fr. Simon Lokodo<sup>135</sup>. “He should be relocated to where he has interest and knowledge or alternatively, he should resign.” Lokodo explained that the people were eating rats out of desperation and not because they were a delicacy. “Kajara does not love Karamoja. If the appointing authority has other reasons for keeping such a person in Karamoja, he should explain them to us.” Fr. Lokodo appealed to the Government to come up with an “affirmative action plan” that would tackle the problem of famine in Karamoja (*The New Vision* May 27, 2008). But one thing remained clear, the government was not sure of what was going on in Karamoja, and some other actor should know better. And that is how and where the humanitarian agencies come into the picture.

These humanitarian agencies have mainly focused on interventions and programs targeting the vulnerable (who form the bulk of the population) in terms of provision of: food, health care and improving sanitation, combating insecurity and developing communication links. From 2006 when forceful disarmament that triggered massive violence started, much of the humanitarian assistance centred on

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<sup>135</sup> Aston Kajara was later removed from being minister for Karamoja in a cabinet reshuffle in February 2009 which also saw Fr Lokodo appointed state minister for trade and industry. President Museveni appointed his own wife Hon. Janet Museveni as the new minister for Karamoja. He defended appointing his own wife when people raised ethical questions, saying other people had been elitist and could not manage Karamoja. In an interview with the BBC, he said he had made her minister of the troubled region because no other members of his government wanted to work there



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the distribution of food. This was largely because the insecurity did not allow those pastoralists who had turned to farming engage in crop husbandry after losing most of their cattle. But despite all the humanitarian assistance, the basic living conditions and welfare of the population continued to worsen. According to aid workers, apart from the security problems, the challenge remains how to make the Karimojong pastoral livelihoods become supportive amidst environmental degradation. The region is also in dire need of basic infrastructure such as roads to be able to improve on people's livelihoods.

### 6.3 The alarming health indicators

Despite long standing food aid programmes, it is highly likely that poor access to health care and clean water are significant contributory factors to the deaths in the region. Government statistics on Karamoja region indicates that over 90% of morbidity and disease in Karamoja occurs as a result of preventable diseases. These are mainly related to water, nutrition and personal hygiene. The top five causes of morbidity and mortality include: Malaria, Diarrhoeal diseases, respiratory tract infections, trauma, eye infections and skin diseases (Republic of Uganda 2003).

According to one of the aid workers, Karamoja is one of the most difficult places to survive in Uganda. Food distribution is directly linked to malnutrition and the health crisis in particular is worsened by the high levels of food insecurity. There are generally very low humanitarian and development indicators. Among the causes of these low indicators cited by the agencies are: the extremely low access to and utilization of basic health services for reasons such as poor health seeking behaviour, insecurity arising out of cattle raiding, long distances to health centres, and the highly mobile pastoralist lifestyle. But Mr. Simon Lomoe, the Program Manager of DADO takes a different view. He says marginalization of the region plays a significant role in exacerbating the already bad situation. He says the picture painted about the Karimojong is that of a chaotic, primitive, unproductive and destructive people who should not be bothered with. Accordingly, all governments since colonial times have

only looked at the armament of the Karimojong and nothing else in terms of their wellbeing and development<sup>136</sup>.

**Figure 9 Humanitarian and Development indicators for Karamoja**

<b>Comparative Humanitarian and Development Indicators</b>	<b>National</b>	<b>Karamoja</b>
Estimated Population [UBOS]	28.9 million	1.1 million
Life expectancy [UNDP 2007]	50.4 years	47.7 years
Population living below poverty line [World Bank 2006, OCHA/OPM 2008]	31%	82%
Maternal mortality rate (per 100,000 live births) [UDHS 2006, WHO 2008]	435	750
Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births) [UNICEF/WHO 2008]	76	105
Under five mortality rate (per 1,000 live births) [UNICEF/WHO 2008]	134	174
Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) rate [UNICEF/WHO 2008]	6%	11% and rising
Immunization (children 12 to 23 months, fully immunized) [UDHS 2006]	46%	48%
Access to sanitation units [MoH 2007, OCHA/OPM 2008]	59%	9%
Access to safe water [UDHS 2006]	67%	43%
Literacy rate [UNDP HDR 2006, UDHS 2006]	67%	11%
HIV/AIDS prevalence rate [HSBS 2005, WHO 2008]	6.4%	3.9%*
<b>Source: 2008 -2009 UGANDA HUMANITARIAN CLUSTERS</b>		

Since the first Obote government tried to establish some health centres in Karamoja, very little has been done in the health sector. Delivery of health services in the region has largely been left to the humanitarian work done by UN agencies in the region. According to UNICEF, inadequate healthcare delivery and malnutrition alone

<sup>136</sup> Interview with the program manager DADO, Kaabong June 2008

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contributed to about 16% deaths of Karimojong children in the last three years. Humanitarian workers insist that the government's will to provide health care is still lacking. Take for instance Abim District, which is considered the best equipped in terms of health services. Here there are only 14 health facilities including one hospital, three HC IIIs and 10 HC IIs. The district has only two doctors (the Medical Superintendent and the District Health Officer) currently on active duty and only 56 per cent of health posts in the district are filled (151 of 272 posts). Of the 42 midwives required in the district, only 11 posts are filled. Only 64 per cent of health facilities have functional latrines and only 14 per cent of health centres have functional hand washing facilities. There is only one vehicle allocated to the district health office and 24 health workers have not received their salaries since October 2007 and six since January 2007. In the other districts, Kaabong has only 45 per cent of its health posts filled; Kotido has only 51 per cent; while the regional referral hospital in Moroto currently has no physician at all.

Another worrying trend is the budding HIV situation in the region. Significantly, ten years ago, Karamoja had an HIV incidence of less than 0.1 per cent of the population. Currently that rate is at 3.4 per cent. This suggests that new HIV infection rates in Karamoja are among the highest in Uganda. Moreover, only about 8 per cent of HIV/AIDS patients requiring the treatment have access to anti-retroviral therapy (OCHA 2008).

It is also reported that its maternal mortality ratio (MMR) and crude mortality rate (CMR) for the region stand at 750 deaths per 100,000 live births and 3.9/10,000/day respectively. This is considered very high when compared with the international CMR emergency threshold of 1/10,000/day. Karamoja lacks even basic health facilities. According to a UNICEF report, only 30 per cent of the Karimojong have proper access to safe water compared to the national average of 66 per cent. While only two percent can access sanitation facilities (UNICEF 2009). The people of Karamoja have suffered famine for such a long time that they now live with it and

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have since resigned themselves to thinking even malnutrition is normal<sup>137</sup>. For instance a September 2008 food assessment report by the World Food Programme (WFP) in Karamoja showed that acute malnutrition in Moroto stood at 12.7% (*The New Vision*, June 21 2009). Records at Matany Hospital show that over the last three years, about 54% of the children admitted died. In 2008/2009, over 453 children were admitted to the hospital out of which 72 died, 358 recovered, six did not improve, while 17 escaped.

Health problems in Karamoja have always been sorted out by the humanitarian agencies. The ill who really feel they have to visit a hospital, have to endure the long journey to Matany missionary hospital. St Kizito Hospital Matany is a private non-profit organization run by the Catholic Diocese of Moroto. The Hospital was set up in the 1970s by the Italian Co-operation for Development (CUAMM) and gets expatriate help from the Comboni Missionary Societies. The hospital is run by funds obtained from donations and aid from mainly Catholic organizations, international aid, NGOs and private sponsors. Since 1998, the government of Uganda has been giving some contributions every financial year. It is this hospital that supports the health of the Karimojong.

In the villages far off from Matany, the Karimojong have maintained their strong tradition of using traditional healers, and some of them say they have never been to hospital and will probably continue to visit the local healers for their health needs. Many of the communities that live in the remotest parts of the border areas such as the Ik or the remote *manyattas* and kraals north of the region do not have access to health services. The medical officer at Kaabong said communicable diseases such as TB and meningitis spread very fast in these areas because many of the people sleep in the same room, without proper ventilation. He also attributed high

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<sup>137</sup> According to the doctors at Matany hospital, malnutrition is the main killer in Karamoja especially with regard to children below five years. Those admitted usually have from moderate to acute malnutrition; with moderate malnutrition, the victims suffer from starvation, while in acute, it is a combination of diseases and malnutrition

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levels of diarrhoea in the region to lack of water, poor sanitation and unhygienic practices.

Areas far away like Kaabong district have had special projects established by UNICEF and the WFP to reduce morbidity and mortality among children. They opened up stabilization and ambulatory therapeutic feeding centres run by Médecins Sans Frontiers (MSF-Spain). An official of MSF explains how they became involved in the crisis; “The situation in Karamoja had reached very alarming levels; nearly all the children were at risk of dying and we found out that the best way to help the most vulnerable in the population was to move out to those far villages and locate the malnourished children whom we provide with two-week rations to try to get them out of danger.” But this is not enough he explains, “There is a need for a complete package of screening, education, as well as treatment. Every child ought to be tested for malaria and screened for any other opportunistic infections especially diarrhoea. In some areas, the number of children with malaria is as high as 60 to 90 percent. This program needs the full intervention of the government if it is to be sustainable in future.” The MSF team working in the region is encouraging the government to recruit community health workers who should move out to the most feared areas of Karamoja to seek out the malnourished children from their *manyattas*.

## 6.4 Rolling out humanitarian responses

Over the years, the government has rolled out multi-million dollar programmes, but nothing on the ground indicates that this money has been spent. There has been the Northern Uganda Reconstruction Programme, the Karamoja Development Agency, Northern Uganda Social Action Fund, and the current Peace, Recovery and Development Plan and the Karamoja Integrated Development and Disarmament Programme, all of which have yielded nothing for the region. According to *The East African*, the government recently released over 1.7 million US dollars (3 billion Uganda shillings) to buy food supplies for the drought-hit region. This is in addition to over 8,000 tonnes of food rations that have been distributed under the WFP. However, the famine has not relented; in fact it is getting worse.

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According to an official from the Prime Minister's office, the problem starts from the meagre money that the government allocates the Ministry of Karamoja. “This has left the Ministry persistently cash strapped and unable to respond to even the smallest emergency in a region known better for crisis. Moreover for this particular case, even the food security agencies had earlier in December issued warnings regarding an impending food shortage in Karamoja as well as some other areas of the country” he said. Karamoja has never been a priority for this government<sup>138</sup>.

Humanitarian agencies have expressed concern over this poor attitude of the state. Many warnings have been issued by the agencies regarding the issue of food security in Karamoja. A rapid assessment carried out by the Uganda Red Cross Society revealed that the household food access situation has worsened, particularly in Agro-Pastoral and pastoral zones of Karamoja. It showed that there was a tremendous reduction in the number of meals consumed per day by both children and adults (85 percent have one meal per day). The assessment concludes that the reason for the serious food shortage at household level was a result of limited or no food stock, and limited availability of food in markets, leading to adaptation of several negative coping strategies that have serious consequences in terms of nutritional outcomes<sup>139</sup>.

Ever since the violence in Karamoja escalated, there has been a remarkable increase in the presence of humanitarian actors in the region. First of all, the major United Nations agencies working in Uganda have moved into the region. The UNDP has particularly established a notable presence by setting up a region-wide peace and recovery programme to address aspects of the Karamoja Integrated Disarmament and Development Plan (KIDDP); UNFPA has placed a gender-based violence (GBV) specialist in Moroto; FAO has taken to addressing the livelihood challenges by placing a livestock specialist in Kotido and OCHA has expanded its presence in the

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<sup>138</sup> Interview with officials at the Ministry for Karamoja, office of the Prime Minister, Kampala

<sup>139</sup> An assessment of food security situation in Karamoja done by the Uganda Red Cross Society (URCS) with the support of the International Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) 23 September 2008

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region by opening a sub-office for northern Karamoja in Kotido in March 2008. UNICEF has also increased the scale of its staffing and programmes in the region. Civil society expansion has also proceeded modestly with the recent arrival and/or expansion of activities by ACF, Malaria Consortium, Medair, CESVI, MSF-Holland, Uganda Red Cross Society and Save the Children (OCHA 2008).

Some of the humanitarian agencies have tried to cover up for the state inadequacies by scaling up their operations. Oxfam GB for instance raised its budget to include funding long-term development activities that would have been done by the state. Oxfam GB currently spends about 700,000 US dollars (2.45 billion Uganda shillings) annually in Karamoja to supply the community with essential services such as water, veterinary services, roads, health and, food. Its country director also argues that even if the government of Uganda lacks the resources needed for extending services into the vast drylands, it should endeavour to attract more development agencies to assist the region, rather than lay the burden on a few players. The state needs to be the driver of development within its national boundaries. “As a government, you cannot just sit and wait for other agencies to develop a part of the country because all we do as Oxfam is complement the work of the state” (*The East African* July 7, 2008). What Karamoja needs is long-term investment and not simply ensuring that they get bags of food, he argued.

In January 2008, ECHO approved the Regional Drought Decision programme (RDD), which is a regional support programme for the coordination and strengthening capacity for drought preparedness in the Horn of Africa. In Uganda, under this programme an emergency humanitarian assistance fund was set up to cater for the Karamoja region. Under this programme, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Uganda together with other partners such as the Danish Church Aid consortium, Oxfam GB, Medair and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) implemented projects that were geared towards strengthening the capacity of communities in the Karamoja region to be more resilient to droughts and their effects.

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UNICEF and the WFP also widened their support in the provision of food to include therapeutic feeding centres in various parts of Karamoja to counter the worsening cases of malnutrition. They opted to work through local service providers that operate in the region such as MSF, OXFAM, the local district health services and the Comboni Mission which runs one of the functioning hospitals at Matany. It is under this program that the project to reduce morbidity and mortality among children was started in Kaabong district in July 2008, and is being implemented by MSF-Spain.

## 6.5 Working through NGOs

In April 2008, the government launched the Karamoja Integrated Disarmament and Development Programme (KIDDP) in Moroto. This programme is supported by the UNDP aiming at promoting peace and development of Karamoja. Under the KIDDP, the UNDP launched a project called “Building Sustainable Peace and Development in Karamoja” with a particular focus on strengthening the role of the local government, traditional leadership and Karimojong communities in peace building and also in establishing sustainable livelihoods. As initial support for the three-year project, supported through the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), UNDP handed over to the OPM and the five districts of Karamoja (Abim, Kaabong, Kotido, Moroto and Nakapiripirit), six field vehicles and a total of USD 631,250 for labour-based community projects. Other activities that the UNDP programme supports include: strengthening traditional mediation, reconciliation and conflict resolution mechanisms; peace building dialogues in rival ethnic groups in Karamoja to promote longer-term reconciliation; and traditional forms of justice and reconciliation between warring ethnic groups. The UNDP will also support district local governments to undertake cross-border peace initiatives and development projects to promote peace building.

Working through local NGOs, the European Union (EU) is another major donor behind humanitarian work in Karamoja. Under the Instrument for Stability (Quick Action Fund) are facilitating three major projects to pacify the region and



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mitigate the socio-economic hardships facing the people of Karamoja. The projects the EU runs are in the areas of education, food security, peace and conflict resolution, Human Rights and Peace Building; Civil-Military Cooperation and it also funds the Ateker Cross Border Leadership Initiative for Peace, Security and Development. The EU programs are being implemented among others by Save the Children in Uganda (SCiUG), the Africa Leadership Institute (AFLI) and the UPDF in partnership with the EU. In August 2009 the UK again announced a donation of 20 billion Uganda shillings to the World Food Programme (WFP) specifically meant to support emergency operations in Karamoja. According to the *New Vision* (12.08.2009), the money is to support the provision of food to over one million people in the region. They said the donation was in response to predictions that Karamoja is likely to experience another failed harvest in the year 2009.

A host of other international humanitarian agencies are also part of the implementation of the UN emergency relief programme, for instance Action against Hunger (ACF) took off from MSF and began training the few existing staff of Kaabong hospital and the village health teams (VHTs) in different ways of managing the nutrition issues in the villages. A new programme which started in 2009 is the Capacity Building and Alternative Livelihoods for pastoral groups. This is jointly run by three NGOs including: the International Rescue Committee (IRC), Medair and Mercy Corps. With support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through its Horn Food Price Crisis Response, this program is being implemented in the three districts of Abim, Kaabong and Kotido. Their goal is to build the capacity of these districts to be able to produce and improve on food security and market systems. They argue that it is still possible to turn around the priorities of pastoral production and engage the people more in crop production by setting up interventions that restock crop seed supplies in the region (OCHA 2009).

Figure 10 Summary of the major Humanitarian agencies in Karamoja, what they do and where

District	Peace & Reconciliation	Education	Food Security	Health, Nutrition and HIV/AIDS	Protection	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
<b>Abim</b>	ADLoG, Caritas, UNDP	ADLoG, ADRA, KDDS, UNICEF, WFP	ADLoG, Caritas, CESVI, FAO, KDDS, URCS, WFP	ADLoG, Caritas, CUAMM, Malaria Consortium, KDDS, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP, WHO	ADLoG, OHCHR, UHRC, UNFPA, UNICEF	ADLoG, ADRA, Caritas, KDDS, UNICEF
<b>Kaabong</b>	Caritas, DADO, KaDLoG, KDDS, UNDP	ADRA, DADO, KaDLoG, SCiU, SIL Uganda, UNICEF, WFP	Baptist Mission, Caritas, DADO, FAO, KaDLoG, KDDS, NAADS, Oxfam, WFP	ACF, Caritas, CUAMM, KDDS, KaDLoG, MSF, UNICEF, UNFPA, WFP, WHO	DADO, KaDLoG, KDDS, OHCHR, UHRC, UNFPA, UNICEF	ADRA, Caritas, KaDLoG, Medair, Oxfam, UNICEF
<b>Kotido</b>	Caritas, KoDLoG, KOPEIN, UNDP	ADRA, JICAHWA, KDDS, KoDLoG, Oxfam, SCiU, UNICEF, WFP	Caritas, FAO, JICAHWA, KoDLoG, Oxfam, URCS, WFP	CUAMM, FAO, KDDS, KoDLoG, Malaria Consortium, Oxfam, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP, WHO	IRC, KoDLoG, OHCHR, UHRC, UNFPA, UNICEF	ADRA, Caritas, KDDS, KoDLoG, Oxfam, UNICEF, WFP
<b>Moroto</b>	C&D, IRC, KAAP, KACHEP, MWSL, TKL, TOBARI, UNDP, WECOP	C&D, FOC-REV, KACHEP, SCiU, TKL, UNICEF, WECOP, WFP	C&D, FAO, FOC-REV, MWSL, VSF, WECOP, URCS, WFP	ARELIMOK, CUAMM, FOC-REV, GL, IRC, KAAP, KATHES, KAWOSEP, MAHAS, Malaria Consortium, Matany Hospital, MDLoG, MMC, Moroto Hospital, MtoD, SCiU, TKL, UNFPA, UNICEF,	C&D, FOC-REV, KAAP, KACHEP, MWSL, OHCHR, TOBARI, UNFPA, UNICEF, WECOP	C&D, KAAP, MWSL, TKL

				UPDF, WECOP, WFP, WHO		
<b>Nakapiripirit</b>	CARDO, IRC, PIRDO,  TKL, UNDP	ACTED, CARDO,  FOC-REV, PIRDO,  TKL, UNICEF, WFP	ACTED, CARDO,  FAO, FOC- REV,  SVI, URCS, WFP	COU, CUAMM, FOCREV,  IRC, Malaria  Consortium, MOH,  MtoD, NDLoG,  Presbyterian Church,  UNICEF, UPHOLD,  WFP, WHO	FOC-REV, OHCHR,  UNFPA, UNICEF	ACTED, CARDO,  C&D, PAPD, PCID,  POZIDEP, WFP

Source: OCHA<sup>140</sup>

<sup>140</sup>They are; Action Contre la Faim (ACF), Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED), Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), Action for Poverty Reduction and Livestock Modernization (ARELIMOK), Cooperation and Development (C&D), Cooperazione e Sviluppo (CESVI), Church of Uganda (COU), Doctors with Africa (CUAMM), Dodoth Agropastoral Development Association (DADO), District Local Government (DLoG) – i.e. Abim DLoG (ADLoG); Food and Agriculture Organizations (FAO), Friends of Christ Revival Ministries (FOC-REV), International Rescue Committee (IRC), Jie Community Animal Health Workers' Association(JICAHWA), Karamoja Christian Ethno-veterinary Programme (KACHEP), Karamoja Women's Association for Peace (KAWOSEP), Karamoja Diocesan Development Services (KDDS), Kotido Peace Initiative (KOPEIN), Medical Environmental Development with Air Assistance (Medair), Médecins sans Frontières (MSF), Moroto Widows Save Life (MWSL), National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Pokot Zonal Development Programme (POZIDEP), Save the Children in Uganda (SCiU), Summer Institute of Linguistics-Uganda (SIL-Uganda), Servizio Volontario Internazionale (SVI), The Kids League (TKL), Tunga Rural Cross-Border Development Initiative (TOBARI), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Uganda Red Cross Society (URCS), Uganda Programme for Human and Holistic Development (UPHOLD), Veterinarians sans Frontières (VSF), Women's Environmental Conservation Project (WECOP), World Food Programme (WFP), World Health Organization (WHO).

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### 6.5.1 Food insecurity heightens competition

Over the years, the WFP and its supporting NGOs have become the symbol of life in Karamoja by making the relief food distribution a daily practice. They are the only hope to some of the people in the drylands. But wherever they supply food, the previously known armed cattle rustlers follow to raid the food or better still the hungry recipients. When the raiders fail to get food, they turn to the highways and make the roads too dangerous for the NGO vehicles to deliver relief. In the process the food continues to be scarce, more people get hungry and demand increases as the food also become more and more expensive. A trip to the local markets in trading centres is very revealing. There is hardly any food on sale, and where one finds dry cassava, sorghum, maize or rice, they are very expensive. The prices have more than doubled making them unaffordable for majority of the Karimojong households.

The food ratios provided by the relief agencies are generally not sufficient for all the households who are going hungry. Most of the families confess they go for some days without a meal and with only supper when the distribution is on their side. Since the distribution does not take place in all the sub-counties, people from neighbouring areas flock to centres outside their zones to get food at whatever cost. People have reached a dead end. Unlike in the past when in the event of hunger one would sell a cow to buy food, today the cows have been raided and there is nothing to sell. So the population can only look to the UN and WFP whenever there is a food crisis<sup>141</sup>. This situation has heightened the insecurity problem, bringing it to the local level right at the household. Disputes arise when young boys from one *manyatta* cross over to raid food in the next one. This was previously unheard of but is now common as people struggle to get food. It is now threatening to break down the traditional practices that bind the Karimojong together and ensure food security. A number of the vulnerable people are migrating out of Karamoja in search of other livelihood options as stated by an elder:

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<sup>141</sup> Discussion with elders in Kaabong July 2008

The reason you see many of our Karimojong women and orphaned children loitering and begging in the streets of Kampala or Mbale is because of the hunger. Many of them run away to search for casual jobs or food. When they fail to get them, they end up as beggars on the streets. They find that better than facing the risk of being either shot or starving and dying here (Elder in Kaabong, July 2008)

Food has now heightened the competition between families as well as between individuals. In one area of Kaabong district, food was delivered with the help of local government officials. When they handed over the consignment to the district councillors they did not immediately distribute the food. They took time claiming they were still looking for ways of measuring and distributing it. People waited until it got dark and they were told to return very early in the morning to collect food. But that very night, people came and stole the entire consignment of food. The warriors say the thieves were the same leaders who had postponed the distribution earlier in the day. Some of it found its way to the local shops in the trading centres. In spite of the ongoing deployment of the army in the region, a new trend of raiding has emerged where the target is the WFP food distributions<sup>142</sup>. The WFP beneficiaries have become the targets of raids, and they are being subjected to physical assault and their food is looted, sometimes right at food distribution centres. Those who succeed in taking the food home have their manyattas ransacked and looted by armed raiders every time they receive food aid. These are not raiders from other ethnic groups but just armed warriors within the same group.

This lack of food has brought with it negative violent coping mechanisms associated with raiding of food. These strategies not only destroy the traditional rural livelihoods but also weaken their ability to withstand the crisis. The effect of the

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<sup>142</sup> Discussion with warriors, Kaabong July 2008

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widespread famine is being felt right in the household. There is an enormous increase in petty thefts in villages that the elders now say goes beyond cattle rustling. People now steal within the household; individuals are looking for survival and steal anything they can lay their hands on. It is no longer just warriors known to look for cattle who will steal; anyone succumbing to the pressures of hunger will grab anything. They are very aggressive and ready to kill anyone who dares stand in their way. The threats to security are now localized and one is no longer safe even within one's own clan.

Out of frustration, many people have turned to excessive consumption of local beer and a strong gin known as *waragi*. Many people have died after drinking the strong local gin. Many of the men I chatted with in the evening drinking joints in Moroto and Kaabong say, “the *waragi* allows you to sleep and forget your troubles for a moment. I even forget my cattle after drinking it,” but many of them sleep to death after drinking on an empty stomach<sup>143</sup>. Since January 2008, the Local government authorities in the districts of Karamoja have tried to ban the selling and drinking of *waragi* in the region. The Resident District Commissioner of Nakapiripirit district mounted several road blocks along the highways, particularly from Mbale and started arresting business people trafficking *waragi* into Karamoja. He made a considerable effort to curb this business but met with persistent challenges. Many of the smugglers bribe their way through the roadblocks when they meet soldiers who have not been paid for a long time manning them. In January 2009 there was one instance when the RDC in Moroto impounded 60 jerry cans of twenty litres each and he had it publicly burnt at the Boma Ground in Moroto town. People gathered at the grounds watched in amazement when the *waragi* was being poured on the ground and the jerry cans exploded like bombs as they were being burnt<sup>144</sup>.

As a result of frequent deaths the government has now moved to prohibit the sale of this gin in the entire Karamoja region. Roadblocks have been put at the border

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<sup>143</sup> Informal conversations with men in Nadunget, Moroto January 2008

<sup>144</sup> Discussions with the LC V chairperson, Kaabong January 2009

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points on the neighbouring districts to Karamoja and all vehicles suspected of transporting alcohol are inspected before they are allowed entry into the region. Announcing the ban, the state minister for internal affairs, Hon. Matia Kasaija said the government has banned the sale of *waragi* in Karamoja to allow the locals to concentrate on development. “All supplies to the region must stop. People are spending plenty of time drinking instead of engaging in agriculture. All local leaders, politicians and businessmen involved in this trade consider this as a bad deal. If you have *waragi* for sale in Karamoja, just forget it because we will not allow you to sell it,” he said while meeting Kotido district leaders at the Town Council Hall (*The New Vision* May 3, 2009). The *waragi*, according to local Karimojong traders, comes from the neighbouring districts of Lira, Soroti, Katakwi and Mbale.

In fact, the drinking and trafficking of *waragi* is actually reported to be on the increase according to *The Daily Monitor*. The Mid-Eastern Regional Police Commander Juma Hassan Nyene was quoted as saying the increased trafficking is caused by the ready market available in Karamoja. Since the launch of the ban on *waragi*, Police in the neighbouring district of Soroti have so far impounded 589 twenty-litre Jerry cans of the drink destined for Karamoja region. “People in Karamoja region do not have work. They spend most of their time drinking,” Mr. Nyene said. The common type of *waragi* trafficked into Karamoja is known as *enguli*, which is the most crude potent gin brewed out of sugar molasses. The police say that this gin is highly toxic and can cause severe health complications or death if consumed in excess.

The end result of too much alcohol consumption is that there has been a sharp increase in insecurity due to attacks for food, particularly on WFP relief supplies. Many of the youths who had turned into *waragi* traffickers were again left jobless and they have now turned to their guns for survival. These young boys now drink out of frustration and since they move in very small groups of about 5 or 8, they cannot mount a raid of another group. So what they do is just stage roadside ambushes or go to steal from where food has been delivered in the course of the day.

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## 6.6 The paradox of humanitarian assistance

The humanitarian aid programs have provided the Ugandan government with a false humanitarian ‘clean bill’ of performance just as the UPDF soldiers have been busy stripping the population of their resources in their ‘cordon and search’ operations. Under this detested operation, some Karimojong families have lost their entire livelihoods or the key providers in the family, forcing them into destitution; but amidst these compounding factors, the state claims credit for allowing international humanitarian agencies to feed these impoverished people. That is why some scholars argue that humanitarian intervention, as it is generally conceived and practiced today, presents a dual paradox (Branch 2007); although justified as a redemption of human rights, it has a strong tendency to eradicate the conditions of possibility for the realization of those rights; although purporting to save lives, reduce suffering, and resolve conflict, it can prolong conflict and intensify the suffering of those in whose name its interventions take place.

With the enormous interventions that moved into Karamoja following the response from the international community, including the specialized UN agencies, international NGOs, national and local NGOs and CBOs humanitarian operations simultaneously expanded in size and scope. But contrary to the expectations, these operations have not ended human suffering; instead, since the 1980s to the present, the region has experienced a dramatic upsurge in violence, characterized by armed robberies, highway ambushes, wanton revenge murders, rape, torture, looting and destruction of property.

The humanitarian aid programs provide the government with an opportunity to present itself as present and committed to resolving the conflicts. The fact that the aid agencies can freely operate in these areas also gives the government the confidence to claim that it granted the agencies authorization to feed the Karimojong. In other words, it is an opportunity for the state to play the master at managing humanitarian propaganda. The state gives the international press the impression that the government is present in the conflict area and that there is some ‘joint’ intervention



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with humanitarian actors, the net effect of which is that people are becoming better off than they were before. It is a case of using the humanitarian interventions to rehabilitate the state image that there is a genuine humanitarian concern regarding the suffering population in Karamoja.

Until very recently, these relief agencies in troubled places all over the world were operating within well-defined limits imposed by the political order established in the aftermath of the Second World War. All humanitarian relief agencies or the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were required to conform to specific rules, which prohibited taking a political stand (de Waal 1994). They worked along the principles of impartiality, helping the suffering without discrimination according to ethnic or national criteria, religious beliefs, or political opinion. In principle, humanitarianism targeted mitigating the suffering of individuals on the basis of the victims' needs. By neutrality they meant "not taking sides in hostilities or engaging at any time in controversies linked to an armed conflict. Neutrality excludes advocacy in favour of a party to the conflict and public accusation. But neutrality does not mean keeping silent in defending the victims' rights, especially when those rights are grossly disregarded by the belligerents" (Weiss and Collins 1996; 2).

Thus, humanitarian aid the way it is presented is a novel enterprise, known for its political neutrality and provided for the purpose of saving human lives, regardless of what side people are on or the nature of their political inclinations. However, regardless of its intentions, humanitarian aid has other aspects which, whether they are political or not, impact and influence the dynamics of violence and peace in their zones of operation (Uvin 1999). The work of Anderson for example, has been very influential in pointing out that the dynamics behind humanitarianism can make or break conflicts and inter-group violence (Anderson 1999).

Indeed responding to war-related tragedies that humanitarian agencies work with is often challenging, especially reconciling the divergent interests of actors involved. For this reason, the humanitarian agencies have always had problems positioning themselves in the midst of crises since often the values of humanity and

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peace which they represent are juxtaposed with the values of inhumanity and violence ubiquitous among actors in the centres of conflict. In effect they are “swimming against the current” of whichever society they want to assist (Slim 1997; 343). In fact, some studies demonstrate that these global humanitarian interventions often present a two-sided process where the much anticipated “virtuous cycles of growth, prosperity, and stability” can also yield “new and durable forms of disparity, instability, and complexity” which is equated to persistent disorder (Duffield 2001; Branch 2008). Thus Mark Duffield's (2001) consistent argument that neo-liberal globo-optimism constructs positive outcomes in the North, while cultivating “durable disorder” in the South.

### **6.6.1 Survival hinged on dependence**

Whereas it is true that international aid organizations may be effective at spotting potential humanitarian disasters and making quick responses when victims cannot survive on their own, we also need to consider the harm they do to local initiatives and capacities. These are global forces whose impact on local capacities cannot be taken for granted. For instance, drawing from Duffield's argument on the impact of globalization, not only has the global economy effectively weakened state structures, but also instituted a process that disintegrates economic systems in the south rather than integrating them, and that economic liberalization has instead provided the new actors within the emerging political complexes with the opportunity to engage in a more direct, individualistic, and competitive fashion with the global economy (Duffield 2001; 72).

Many of these societies surviving on relief aid previously managed life on their own. But it is noteworthy that upon being visited by war or human generated impediments to their livelihood, they have lost track of the crisis. As has been noted in the previous section, these aid agencies usually make quantifiable assessments of the crisis before prescribing the nature and magnitude of rescue responses. However, in doing so, they tend to overlook the indigenous ways through which the local Karimojong responded to disasters as well as assured their self-sufficiency. They

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seem to be averse to acknowledging the fact that these people had ways of tackling their crises. All they do is to provide immediate responses through distribution of food and medical supplies to save lives and avert crises. Generally they are focusing on the day-to-day survival of the hungry and sick populations but their support does not help restore the local population's self-reliance; instead it perpetuates dependency.

Conflicts such as the one in Karamoja distort economies. They tear apart the local patterns of production, forms of employment, trading networks and service delivery, and all shifts to violence or cattle raiding-related activities and patterns. Some people actually benefit from the violence, and get enriched by the war, whereas the majority are actually impoverished. Some trade linkages are opened and supported while there are others that are disrupted. This is evident when the war atmosphere leads to the suspension of legality which in turn is often a necessary precondition of asset realization through parallel and cross-border smuggling and other means of income generation.

Thus a new generation of “post-modern conflicts” are created which are “not necessarily about winning or securing a comprehensive settlement,” but are about sustaining instability so as to maximize profitability (Duffield 2001; 81). Therefore, aid can underpin market distortions by feeding the war economy and undermining peacetime production and productivity. More of such distortions for instance occur when aid agencies import food that can be grown and locally produced; they can undermine peacetime economic incentives (Anderson 1999). The local capacity to produce may then be seriously weakened rendering the people requiring relief aid.

Aleper is one of the thousands of Karimojong women who have lived on food support from the WFP and World Vision. She receives food from the distributing agencies and on two different occasions has been given seeds to plant. But she could not do the planting because it was very dry. When she had nothing to feed the children, the seeds became easily available source of food. Without the food aid, she says life would be impossible and probable she would be out of Karamoja. “I usually get food from the sub-county, some kilograms of maize or sorghum or beans and

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sometimes some cooking oil. The food is not enough; I have small children to feed and no husband to help me. My husband died in the raids and I remained helpless. My big sons ran away because they wanted to take their guns, I have never seen them again. I have thought of going to look for work in Mbale or Kampala or elsewhere so that I can raise these children...but I don't even have transport out of this place"

A situation like that of Aleper is what the warring parties exploit as Leader (2000) puts it; that food is usually the commodity 'most sought after and most abused by belligerents' (2000: 55). They make the population vulnerable and when aid agencies come in, they begin to make them look indispensable. The RDC Moroto, Mr. Nahaman Ojwee, for instance urged NGOs to closely work with the army, one of the warring parties. He said, "Apart from Save the Children in Uganda that has come out to partner with the army, most NGOs here, many of which are 'briefcase' NGOs have been operating in isolation just to benefit themselves and not the Karimojong," Mr. Ojwee said. "This I think must change. All the money channelled through any NGO in Karamoja is meant for the Karimojong and therefore must be used to benefit them," he added. He said the greatest roadblock to the progress of disarmament has been failure by the over 2000 NGOs operating in Karamoja to partner with the army as the lead agency in the pacification of the area (The Monitor, December 31, 2008).

Observing the diverse impacts "throughout Africa, relief operations mounted under such politically-constrained circumstances were less than successful; the literature on the last decade of relief operations in Africa contains little true analysis and much hagiography. But, gradually, a shocking picture of ineptitude and massive diversion is emerging. There have been some successes, particularly in emergency care in refugee camps, but the sad truth is that the huge pouring of relief aid into Africa for over a decade has contributed to the institutionalization of violence (de Waal 2004; 1)". Thus politicians largely depend on the aid program, the government relies on it to advance their counterinsurgency schemes and yet the poor and hungry peasant like Aleper entirely depends on it for survival. Under such circumstances, we usually expect too much from the work of humanitarian aid; it is bound to fail.

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## 6.6.2 Reducing Karimojong endurance on cattle

Being pastoralists, cattle are so central in the Karimojong economy, culture and society that their entire livelihood is constructed around it. Cattle mean livelihood and a Karimojong lives his life only to get cattle. He works hard to amass herds or inherits wealth through patrilineal lineage or acquires it at the time of payment of bride wealth in marriage. But outside this, elders can sanction young men to go and raid cattle from one of their neighbouring groups, and young men can make their names as well as get cattle (Lamphear 1976; Pazzaglia 1982; Quam 1996).

In their lives associated with cattle, the Karimojong were able to ensure forms of self-sufficiency rooted in the rituals and practices that ensured survival. The management of cattle and livelihood for that matter is rooted in their tradition and culture, passed on mainly through the age-set and generational set system. The symbolic as well as real power and authority is embedded in these systems of initiation and is derived from being initiated (Pazzaglia 1982). The way in which this power and authority is attributed has very important ramifications for livelihood security. For instance, power is vested in the elders, and by virtue of their seniority in the society, they were considered wise and had to make and take important decisions that provided solutions to the problems faced by their people.

Recent developments have distorted their balance of power, for instance when the army started the 'cordon and search' operations, warriors moved away with their herds to more remote parts of Karamoja such as the Morungole Mountains in Kaabong. They moved to the mountains far away in the wilderness, away from their villages and distant from roads that the UPDF might use as a bridgehead to launch an attack. This dislocation has led to a number of factors that together contribute to a decline in the welfare of whole communities: there is usually no water where the warriors move with the herds and they die, they do not have access to the staple foods provided at home and their health is affected considerably. In addition since there is usually no supply of drugs for animals in the mountains, most of them die. These warriors spend much less time with their families, impairing the social structure, the

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elders also lose contact with warriors impairing any move towards mediation and dispute resolution, and families are affected by a reduction in protein, because the warriors and cows have moved further from the villages (Bevan 2008; 58).

Yet the pastoralist mode of production demands the labour of strong men to navigate through the drylands with their herds searching for water and pasture. It also demands that in periods of extreme scarcity and during disasters such as famine or cattle raids, elders make a serious decision on the course of action for the benefit of society. Formal traditional meetings called *akiriket* would be called and elders would provide leadership in finding solutions to the problem. The meetings are usually loaded with taboos and beliefs that regulate the behaviour of everybody including the most feared warriors so much that compliance is assured (Muhereza and Otim 2002). Here the general problems of the society will be discussed, whatever they may be, such as raids, sacrifices for rain or an outbreak of an epidemic. Some specific issues that could have arisen like migration to new areas or how to compel another group to return raided cattle may also be talked about (Pazzaglia 1982; 98). One elder in Kalapata explains that shrines were very important public spaces necessary for bringing order and prosperity to the people;

The shrines were revered places used as platforms for disciplining wayward youths (*Ameto*); also used as feasting grounds (*Epoka*); a place for invoking the spirits of the clan for the general welfare of the community. They also seek pardon from the ancestral spirits in case a misfortune has befallen the society. Here they not only appease the spirits but also pray for rain, peace, health, fertility, food, a good harvest, averting enemies and diseases, curse off drought and epidemics and do general meditation. The shrines were the spaces where authority was exercised and the young generations were brought into the fold of the clan through initiation. It was also a venue where information was passed. This occurs when the spiritually anointed pass on information regarding the welfare of the society. There are grades of shrines and their use varies according to the clan (*Ariyet*), for instance, the Dodoth have their shrine at Loyoro which is considered as their central reference or spiritual home (*Ekitela ngolo anyekeri*).

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So the issues of tackling disasters, famine and raiding are not new to the Karimojong socio-cultural system. Actually disasters among pastoralists usually help us to visualize the inner workings of their societies and illuminate “the basic values and assumptions which inform its actions and govern its relations with outsiders” (Waller 1988; 74). Cattle raiding in particular is just a part of the larger processes of the inner workings through which the Karimojong address scarcity and disasters. Cattle raiding and asset-stripping between rival groups of the Karimojong is not new and is well-chronicled among other groups in the region like the Turkana, Toposa, Nuer, Didinga and Dinka (Barber 1962; Dyson-Hudson 1966; Lamphear 1976; Pazzaglia 1982; Hutchinson 1996).

It is a long tradition that generally involves looting cattle, destroying crops, pillaging villages, and destroying other resources such as granaries. In the raids men are often killed, as are women and children although previously the latter were spared). But in all these disasters, the socio-cultural safety nets surface whenever the affected group is forced to abandon their subsistence practices (Rackley 2000). After the disasters, they invoke the power of rituals, supplications or prayers (*akigat*) or sanction the sale of livestock or migration, all of which would be democratically decided after lengthy discussions.

In addition, in the vast drylands of Karamoja, communication is largely done on a face to face level, so an increase in armed violence has prevented people from making their most essential contacts or carrying out important travel. People say they have abandoned visiting their relatives who live far from them for fear of being robbed, killed, or taken hostage by either the warriors or even the army. This has greatly impaired social networks which in turn has a negative impact on their survival strategies. As noted earlier, inter-group meetings have historically been instrumental in dispute resolution, and for sustaining resource-sharing agreements and access rights to pasture. Many elders are now disinclined to risk travel and are often dependent on transport provided by the few faith-based and other community-based mediation groups in the region (Bevan 2008). In other words, mediation and conflict resolution has become a matter for the humanitarian agencies to arrange and not the

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real home-grown initiatives under local leadership. With the warriors uninvolved and removed from the mainstream Karimojong community, the elders become ineffective because it is the warriors who implement their decisions. The warriors too now have to rely on the power of the gun to survive in the bush, through looting, raiding and stealing food for themselves. Before, they could only undertake raiding missions under the direct tutelage of the elders, but this is not so anymore.

The issue of leadership was crucial in reaching these decisions. The leadership was part of the processes constituting the mechanisms of arriving at particular courses of action and enhancing their potential to mitigate any disaster. The issue of leadership is linked to the socio-cultural framework of their traditional crisis response or survival strategies. Through the practices they engage in at the times of crisis and the institutions that inform, sustain, and express their survival strategies, they are able to pass on knowledge within the population and across generations. These socio-cultural components form the home-grown framework of crisis response that they have always used in periods of adversity.

### **6.6.3 Protected kraals and humanitarian action**

When the government came up with the idea of disarming the Karimojong warriors, they had to ensure that they devised measures through which the army could provide security for cattle. This among others involved the establishment of the “protected kraal” as a means of safeguarding livestock. The protected kraal is an encampment where all cattle in a given territory are collected for security purposes. Under the scheme, no one was allowed to have cattle around the homestead and people and cattle were separated. They could not access the milk or blood as they used to, and the youths who moved with the cattle also became separated from the mainstream *manyattas*. Furthermore, as the UPDF moved in to stop incidences of inter-group raids, the inter-district movement of livestock was banned. Again the cattle movement was restricted further; eliminating the migration of cattle and building alliances with neighbouring groups.



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Then came the cordon and search operations where the army began rounding up people in *manyattas*, marketplaces or whole villages and detaining all the adult men. The men talk about the unlawful killings and mistreatment of some individuals during the operations involving the use of excessive force by state actors that forced many youths to run away into the bush. Their disappearance created an imbalance in the household roles. The Karimojong in their traditional nomadic nature divided their time and the household between the *manyattas* and the *kraals*. Such movements allowed access to water and pasture in the dry season, and the kraals would be flexibly moved across both district and national borders. Through those movements, they would be able to create alliances with neighbouring groups and construct binding relations between individual families that enabled people to return seasonally to the same locations for generations. The hosting groups also gained from the manure in the form of dung, animal products, and demand for trade in grains, and brewed and non-food commodities (Stites and Akabwai 2009; 8).

Thus the embargo that the army put on their nomadic livelihood that was worsened by increased insecurity resulting from the disarmament exercise essentially eroded their traditional mechanisms of coping with vulnerability and food insecurity. The fact that the cattle were literally controlled by soldiers who had to give permission to move meant the real owners, who were the elders, had lost their decision-making power. And once the cattle were barricaded in the kraals and the youths were on their own out there raiding for survival, they are left with no space to exercise their authority. This loss of decision-making has been most apparent in regard to animal mobility. Mobility is a fundamental component of pastoral livelihoods and is particularly important in droughts and famine periods. The real cattle owners and shepherds normally consider multiple factors in animal migrations, including security, reports of disease, access to different types of pasture and the location of allies (ibid; 17). All these issues became very problematic with the protected kraal system but most importantly they were stripped of the most essential and productive assets in their system.

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Currently, the state is beginning to manipulate humanitarian assistance to its benefit and to the disadvantage of the Karimojong pastoral system. The state actors usually seek to make the best out of the work of the UN agencies or the NGOs in this area. Once their movement was restricted, access to cattle was literally blocked, and decision-making powers lost, the Karimojong turned to other actors for support. They could neither culturally manage their affairs nor make decisions to access other regions on their own terms. They had to depend on humanitarian aid being offered by international agencies and facilitated by the state. And as the humanitarian agencies and NGOs took over management of disasters, the dismantling of the power relations was worsened. What is more, the humanitarian assistance that was provided which was expected to only be temporary is increasingly gaining an enduring character. In some manyattas, people talk about having relied on relief food for over 10 years. The system is one in which humanitarian organizations are the only forms of 'state' structure responsible for protecting and providing them with basic services. Even the government's KIDDP programme for developing Karamoja is framed in a way that puts the international community in the form of development partners into the framework ostensibly to provide financial resources for the programme.

Given that the social structure has been distorted, the local decision-making authority has also been altered. There is a shift in decision making powers from the elders to the military apparatus who now decide when and where the manyattas or grazing can be moved. And likewise, it is only those with guns who can dare confront the army – it is this which gives the young warriors authority. The warriors from this stage began to acquire authority vested in the power of the gun – unfortunately, they lack the wisdom and agility of the elders to mobilize and to confront disasters. The army on the other hand continues to impose more and more restrictions on the movement of animals. All these factors have implications for their relations with the communities and relations within the communities themselves. For instance, it no longer matters who makes decisions because survival is hinged on the humanitarian actors. The vertical structures of accountability and authority are completely undermined. For instance, the Karimojong have two generation sets (*nganyameta*), centred on a male adult population. The generational based age set system is made up

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of either first, the *Ng'imoru* (mountains) age set, who are specifically elders who exercise and hold decisive power and authority in the community, or secondly the warriors (*Ng'igetei* or gazelles), the younger men who should follow the orders of the elders. So elders should dish out supplies to the young but when the humanitarian agencies took over management of the famine crisis, they ignored these power bases. In fact when the environment dictated that humanitarian agencies take over the provision of survival the elders automatically became immobilized. The agencies distributed food to women, children and the able-bodied that went to the distribution centres. The elderly were left without food and no one cared. The WFP or the NGOs do not pass the food through the hierarchy of elders and consequently abrogate their welfare responsibilities.

Such shifts in responsibilities and the transfer of animal management responsibilities have greatly impacted on the socio-cultural survival strategies. The humanitarian agencies took over provision of food to all the hungry and displaced. This in effect interfered with the people's traditional way of life making everyone dependent on the agencies. In the long run, it perpetuated a dependence syndrome where even the state started depending on the humanitarian agencies and the NGOs. The state could not make any alternative livelihood planning but relied entirely on the care of humanitarian agencies. The state frequently appeals to them to take care of immediate responses wherever necessary. And for the agencies doing so, they have effectively dwarfed the state's ability to develop capacity in sectors such as relief or disaster response. Under these circumstances the humanitarian organizations have slowly but surely begun having a new meaning and taking on more roles owing to the ever increasing demands posed by the persistent and escalating character of humanitarian crises in the region. In response, this also called for increases in the volume of humanitarian assistance consequently leading to an increase in donor funding. The end result is that as the state loses control and withdraws from engaging in the day-to-day function of the region, the humanitarian agencies take on more and more roles of the state but without the corresponding monopoly of the use of violence with which the state ensures control or compliance with state laws.

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In the main, the state has lost its capacity to run the affairs of the region, relapsing into a distinctly inferior or third rate actor position. In fact, for the most part, what the humanitarian agencies in Karamoja do would typically be the job of the state. As already highlighted, Karamoja is now an “NGO country where almost all of what the government was supposed to do has been left for us to manage” says one of the program managers based in Kaabong. The region being a chronic disaster zone it has never had structures of civil administration suitably established.

Although a local government structure exists, complete with a council and a skeleton technical staff run at the urban centres, the actual service delivery is done by the humanitarian agencies. In other words humanitarian aid lets national political actors off the hook - in particular, “it blocks the formation of social and political contracts between warring parties and the civilian population, and the humanitarian system is fundamentally unaccountable” (Macrae 1998; 25). So apart from acting as a wrapper to a negligent state, the humanitarian actors also work at their own pace and do not account to the population. This is because humanitarianism tends to work outside the usually known state structures, for instance through NGOs which put up parallel structures and services alongside the state structures and often at inflated prices, while national capacity to meet basic needs remains under funded (de Waal 1997). There have also been concerns that apart from controlling huge sums of money they receive in the form of aid, humanitarian NGOs are not accountable to their host governments. There are no forms of regulation of their activities, leaving them open to any form of abuse.

## 6.7 The mask of humanitarianism

Humanitarian aid is a novel enterprise commonly known for its political neutrality. It is provided for the purpose of saving human lives, regardless of what side people are on or the nature of their political inclinations. However, regardless of its intentions, humanitarian aid has its other sides which, whether they are political or not, impact and influence the dynamics of violence and peace in their zones of operations (Uvin 1999). The work of Anderson for example, has been very influential

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in pointing out that the dynamics behind humanitarianism can make or break conflicts and inter-group violence (Anderson 1999). Indeed, responding to war-related tragedies that humanitarian agencies work with is often challenging, especially reconciling the divergent interests of actors involved.

In the last twenty years, not only have humanitarian interventions in the form of peace keeping operations multiplied, but compared to the past they became more intrusive and multi-levelled, requiring the creation of new forms of interaction between the military and civilian actors, especially aid agencies (Duffield 2001). The 'new wars' such as the LRA in northern Uganda or the Karimojong conflicts in the north east tend to disregard conventional distinctions between the civilians, the army and the government, so requiring them to create a new environment for peacekeeping or humanitarian assistance operations. But that level of intervention is only possible within the grasp of a certain amount of power which is only present in state processes. But given that these agencies operate under the auspices of the donor governments who wield enormous financial resources in the form of aid to these troubled states, they apparently begin to assume the state character. They control the financial resources for service delivery in these areas; they reach out to the belligerents; and they deal directly with the all powerful donor state that funds Uganda's national budget.

Ideally, the work of the humanitarian agencies is not aiding and abetting the forces of conflict but it can indirectly create an enabling atmosphere for violence. There are various ways through which aid can sustain conflicts; it can be directly through feeding the combatants or indirectly integrated into the dynamics of the conflicts. Take for instance situations where the relief aid is stolen and directly feeds the various military groups. In northern Uganda where the people lived in internally displaced people's camps for twenty years, sometimes the IDPs had to surrender some of their relief supplies to the rebels or risk being killed. Likewise, the rebels would tell people in the camps that they had only managed to receive this aid because of them, and the conflict and the government would say the same (Finnstrom 2005). The warring parties all manipulate aid and the humanitarian organizations to their

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benefit. The humanitarian agencies in Karamoja are not always seen as part of the conflict but can facilitate either side of the actors involved in violence. It has become a routine that whenever food is distributed in Karamoja, rumours begin circulating about an impending raid on that particular area. Often, a raid actually occurs and the warriors collect the food given during the day. Distribution therefore attracts raids but also feeds the people.

This is also part of the reality of what Kaldor (2006) describes as “new wars” which link the new forms of violence to the notion of failed states. Since the Second World War, these have become a common phenomenon in Africa. A rather peculiar characteristic of these new wars in Africa is the fact that the state fails to control its borders and certain sections of the population. The situation is such that the non-state actors are fully in charge, and for the Karimojong, the state instead becomes vulnerable to its own population. The state's failure to ensure that its institutions are operational is exploited by the armed warriors who assume power over day-to-day happenings. In the midst of this state vacuum, the humanitarian agencies directly substitute for the state. While being supported by the locally available collaborating NGOs, they systematically pick up the role of providing services that were traditionally the responsibility of the state. As the structures and institutions of the state are left in abeyance, a precedent begins to be set. The humanitarian agencies and international NGOs gradually take over key state functions such as provision of health, welfare, and responding to disasters.

For instance, Karamoja has continued to rely on the NGO Missionary Hospital at Matany because the other health centres established by governments are largely non-functional or without staff and/or medicines. Even the state now prefers to send its war casualties to Matany. What remains however, is that they are able to sustain the various actors in active service of unleashing violence. Matany Hospital remains a major humanitarian facility and so far the only major facility treating both wounded warriors and soldiers. At the hospital both antagonists share the same ward immediately they are rushed for treatment after battle. According to medical workers

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at Matany Hospital, at the peak of ‘cordon and search’ disarmament from mid 2006 up to end of 2007, the hospital was receiving to the tune of 50 wounded per day.

According to *Foreign Policy Magazine*, the service provision roles were previously performed by the “colonial masters or superpower patrons”. A role that is currently being manned by a mixture of international charities, aid agencies, philanthropists, and foreign advisors spread in different parts of the world where violence, conflicts or disasters have built a near ‘permanent home’. In these places, they have become powerful actors, powerful global forces that have even taken over the functions of the state (*Foreign Policy* July/August 2008). The end result is that in many of these states, the capacity and the necessary skills for running the affairs of the country and managing violence in crisis areas in particular have failed to be developed. In places like Karamoja where the state is virtually absent, the humanitarian NGOs have vividly filled in the roles of the state but only to some degree.

The economy in such collapsed states as highlighted by Kaldor is run through plunder or criminal networks in a black-market or through external assistance (2006: 10). Since the state is not in charge of events, criminal gangs benefit at the expense of the society. Weiss points out that ‘with cash, arms, and power flowing in their hands’ these groups have no incentive to stop war; instead it is in their interest to prolong it. The operations of humanitarian agencies therefore are seen as an impetus for driving the conflicts. Humanitarian aid can be used by actors as an economic boost and a resource to support conflicts. As Anderson puts it, “aid is usually distorted by local politics and is misappropriated by warriors to support the war. War victims report that aid is enriching warlords or strengthening the “enemy.” Again, the systems of aid and the manner in which aid workers interact with conflict reinforce the modes and moods of those at war, undermining and weakening the non-war aspects of the society” (Anderson 1999; 37). So this makes aid ‘function as a tool of war; its distribution can exacerbate the causes of war’ and the humanitarian assistance can end up supporting the very crisis it is intended to ameliorate.

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Furthermore, Macrae says the orthodox developmentalists criticise humanitarianism on the basis of the dependency that relief aid creates and because it effectively diminishes the capacity of communities to survive on their own. The human resources involved in relief distribution are largely “seen to comprise largely white foreign aid workers issuing passive recipients with rations, a view echoed by the anti-imperialists” (Macrae 1998). Their presence is facilitated by the fact that local belligerents among the Karimojong for instance, look on these foreigners as ‘saviours’ whereas the local personnel are treated as ‘enemies’ who must be shot. The Catholic Church has specifically had a firm grounding in the region, and the white Catholic fathers and sisters are never attacked by the warriors. “They look to them for humanitarian support, they give food, medicines, clothing and other household items that we use every day” says a Karimojong elder. The presence of these missionaries therefore makes their everyday lives possible and that includes being able to defend their cattle. The case of father Declan O’Toole is very instrumental. Father Declan O’Toole was an Irish priest from the Mill Hill Missionaries who had become a member of the Karimojong community. He would provide them with food and basic items they needed for survival. But importantly to the Karimojong around Panyangara where he lived, he was instrumental in restraining the soldiers from torturing people<sup>145</sup>. The Karimojong warriors always spoke of him, and generally about the Catholic Church as ‘supportive’ to their cause.

### **Relief aid and institutionalization of violence**

It is very clear that the three fundamental principles of humanitarianism of duty - assistance, impartiality and neutrality - are the driving mantra of any relief agency working in trouble spots like Karamoja. Such relief agencies are known to not

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<sup>145</sup> Fr O’Toole for instance on March 21, 2002 had asked the army to stop being aggressive in the disarmament and a few days later he was shot, together with his driver Patrick Lochole and cook Fideli Longole in a highway murder by UPDF soldiers as they drove back to Kotido from Moroto town. The villagers say it was an ambush about 3km from Kalosarich army detachment on the Moroto-Kotido road. When the villagers and the army together mounted a manhunt to track the killers, the tracks they followed led them to the army barracks. Two soldiers were arrested in connection with the murder and a Field Court Martial headed by Colonel Sula Ssemakula hurriedly held a trial of doubtful integrity which found the two men guilty and sentenced them to death by firing squad in what many still say was a cover up



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only champion those principles but also operate within specific confines as dictated by the UN conventions. That is the reason all NGOs that partner with them in the distribution of relief aid subscribe to the same principles and are generally considered non-partisan, and are prohibited from taking any political stand. But, gradually, as wars also began to shape new characters, images of ineffectiveness and massive diversion began emerging (de Waal 1994). The humanitarian aid program in Karamoja for instance, has variously diverged from the core principles of impartiality and neutrality and veered off into taking sides with the warring parties. In some instances the aid program in Karamoja is actually seen as part of the state project to feed the hungry pastoralists. Aid flow is generally controlled by the government and sometimes the distribution is pegged to state institutions, ostensibly to portray them as functional even when they are known to be lame ducks.

For that and many other reasons, the state has been held accountable for the suffering of its citizens in the war zones or areas of armed conflicts. However, in creating the unfavourable conditions under which many protracted armed conflicts persist, humanitarian agencies have been noted to play a part. Often because of their presumed impartiality, neutrality and beneficence, they are always left outside the discussion of accountability (Branch 2008; 152). Yet according to Deleuze and Guattarian (2004), the humanitarian agencies and the NGOs are the nomadic state that operates as the new form of imperialism in Africa. Behind their altruistic contributions in war zones, relief aid has been used by some NGOs and their donors to support forces responsible for some of the world's most despicable abuses such as the deposed genocidal regime of Rwanda in the 1990s. This type of practice has lent credence to the argument that humanitarian aid that international agencies distribute has often become incorporated into processes of violence and oppression (Storey 1997; Branch 2008).

In Uganda, humanitarian aid has been cited as supporting the Ugandan government's policies that spurred its counterinsurgency programs in northern Uganda (Dolan 2005; Branch 2008) as well as pacification of the Karimojong. The government of Uganda was able to force the Acholi people into IDPS camps because

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the humanitarian agencies were handy in supplying them with relief aid to make life possible there (Branch 2008; 153; Finnstrom 2003). Similarly in Karamoja, state-driven programs such as ‘cordon and search’, where the local Karimojong were tortured to reveal guns, were possible with the complicity of these agencies.

In protracted emergencies of violence and chronic conflict, humanitarian assistance is usually intended as an instantaneous life-saving support. Other forms of aid given in accompaniment are simply to enable the livelihood support systems to function normally. But over time the affected communities are expected to learn to survive on their own. Increasingly, even some agencies are beginning to question the rationale of providing life-saving support endlessly (Longley and Maxwell 2003). The type of aid given to Karamoja where food distribution year after year goes on without supporting people's own initiatives to survive in the context of chronic conflict only perpetuates more violence. Once the UN and other humanitarian actors' agencies seize control over livelihood resources they begin to dish them out at the behest of state actors. This is because they enjoy the protection of the state – in Karamoja; the state provides military guards for charitable agencies to travel the dangerous roads. The outcome of this is that the military actors in the region take advantage of the relationship they construct with the agencies to redirect the distribution of resources to areas and mechanisms unintended by the funding. Their intention is to keep the pastoralists immobilized and depending on relief to warrant their continued resistance. In the end humanitarianism provides external support for individuals in the military benefiting from this chaos to cage the Karimojong in specific areas, wait for supplies and remain vulnerable to their machinations. A case in point is the army officers who are getting extremely wealthy through the violence. They connive with local leaders and businessmen to raid, and after the army has tracked the cattle, they sell them. An article in *The New Vision* revealed how ten UPDF soldiers including a commanding officer were arrested over thefts of cattle recovered during disarmament operations in Karamoja. Such incidents were common happenings in Kapedo, Kathile and Karenga in Kaabong district where the UPDF's 65th and 45th battalions were operating (*The New Vision* March 25, 2008).

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From this marriage with aid agencies, the local politicians are also beginning to use the NGOs and the humanitarian agencies to advance their interests. The politicians such as aspiring members of the Ugandan parliament first identify with the humanitarian agencies and appear as ‘providers’ of food and people's welfare. When the period for mobilizing support comes, they simply remind the locals that more ‘aid’ will flow if the people vote for them. The aid agencies have thus helped them advance their interests and the violence is necessary for this to continue. It is thus common to find international NGOs that operate in Karamoja, such as the World Vision, telling you that they are always under constant pressure from local politicians to locate their operations in more politically expedient areas, which speaks volumes about the increasing power of NGOs in relation to that of the state in Africa (*The Monitor* December 29, 2008).

Through their operations some of these humanitarian agencies actually end up providing a cover up for state inadequacies. For instance, they appear as being complicit with the government military campaign against the entire population. Many aid agencies, especially the WFP, insist on having armed escorts before they deliver supplies to different areas. Given that in Uganda the government is the sole legitimate armed force in the conflict, the aid agencies depend upon the UPDF for their protection. WFP food distribution convoys, for example, travel with UPDF armed personnel carriers, scores of troops, and an array of heavy weaponry (Branch 2008) Aid groups report having to pay UPDF officers to provide them with protection or to ensure that the aid delivery goes smoothly (HRW 2004; Branch 2008).

Hence the possibility of connivance or complicity under these circumstances remains high. The Human Rights Watch (HRW) for instance has several times warned of the reckless way in which the Ugandan armed forces have tortured and illegally killed Karimojong civilians during the disarmament operations in the region. In their report (containing allegations which the army denies) based on 50 selected eyewitness accounts of human rights abuses in the operations carried out by the army between September 2006 and January 2007, eyewitnesses described incidents in which soldiers tortured, raped, looted, destroyed property and detained the

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pastoralists (HRW 2007). Apart from the Catholic Church, which protested the manner in which the operations were being done, other relief agencies continued with their job seemingly unperturbed, moreover with the protection of the same soldiers. The UPDF were able to gather the Karimojong in one place, and quarantine, detain and torture them because the aid agencies fed and supported them. In fact in their report, HRW urged the UN to get more involved in the monitoring of the gun collection operations as well (HRW 2004).

With the end of the ‘Cold War’, the Western donor governments are, for the most part, not very keen on spending on developing countries like they did in the past. It is now development cooperation more for public relations rather than strategic interest. And, since NGOs have already cultivated a positive image among distraught populations such as the Karimojong, good public relations can often best be achieved by channelling resources through them. That explains why Western governments now prefer to ‘sub-contract’ development activities to NGOs, which also has the convenient effect of reducing direct state involvement (and often expenditure) on ‘Third World’ affairs, as well as linking NGOs to the neo-liberal shift in donors’ policy agendas. Hence where former colonial masters or donor countries would be blamed for fueling endless conflicts, international charities, aid agencies, philanthropists, and foreign advisors have spread in different parts of the world where violence, conflicts or disasters have built a near ‘permanent home’. In these places, they have become powerful actors, powerful global forces that have even taken over roles of the state (*Foreign Policy* July/August 2008).

The end result is that in many of these states, the capacity and the necessary skills for running the affairs of the country and managing violence in crisis areas in particular have failed to be developed.<sup>146</sup> What is more, with all these emergency

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<sup>146</sup> With cash flowing into these areas and power in the hands of beneficiaries of violence, these perpetrators have more incentives to continue the mayhem; it is in their interests to prolong it. The operations of humanitarian agencies therefore are seen as an impetus for driving the conflicts

responses, no proper solution has been reached to address the underlying causes of food insecurity. Food aid has been provided without regard for its appropriateness or whether its beneficiaries wanted it. In fact although the region is badly in need of food, and although food aid is currently the most dominant mode of intervention, it is not clear whether food is the top priority for these pastoralists. Thus, these global processes as evidenced in the work of international donors and humanitarian agencies, market deregulation and the eventual 'capture' of the state, have opened multiple avenues for the politics of violence and the creation of private profit to not only come together as a new powerful force, but also underpin the regional trend towards protracted instability, schism, and political assertiveness in the south (Duffield 2001).

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## 7. CONCLUSION

On the whole, the principal aim of this study was to investigate and provide a clearer understanding of the persistent armed violence in the drylands region of Africa. Being home to one of the world's largest expanse of drylands and with one of the longest standing conflicts that is growing to horrific levels by the day, the region offers a test case for studying interminable regional armed conflict. The region is occupied by a cluster of closely related ethnic pastoralist groups collectively referred to as the Karimojong cluster. For this study, the Karimojong of north eastern Uganda were selected as a specific case for deeper analysis of the constant violence among its ethnic groups. The study also concerns itself with the numerous interventions by the state and other local and international actors in pursuit of peace and development for the region.

The study focused on the critical junction of both local and large-scale processes as observed in history, in the social and in the course of negotiating sovereignty where the use of violence is always under contestation. This has been possible through tracing the historical roots of different actors and how they link to a range of unfolding processes during the affirmation of the state and secondly, through placing the Karamoja problem in a broader context where the Ugandan state becomes a central focus of analysis. In doing so, we clearly see how the processes that facilitate violence among different actors whose intentions are always varied but act within specific norms converge at some point in time. Thus, this point of convergence reveals the dynamics entailed in each actors role in the organization of violence.

### *Challenging the state*

The various processes that outline the violent defiance of the state by the Karimojong present a complex form of society's response to the conduct of the state. It offers us a fresh perspective particularly for understanding some of the mainstream discourses around 'new wars'. By employing a cultural-historical analysis of violence as a social fact which I described in Chapter One, I argue that violence not only redefines the social, but also reconfigures relations of power with the state.

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While violence between different groups in this region has not been strange, the new dimension it assumes brings in more innovative processes. It is those processes that generate new assumptions, new attitudes, and new expectations for different groups with regard to their relations with the state.

The study indicates that the traditional basis for nomadic pastoralism which has been the only viable livelihood option in the area has suffered serious blows in the last three decades. First, the droughts and other environmental effects have become more severe, secondly, the introduction of market economy has monetized previously socio-cultural goods and services, and thirdly various forms of interventions in the region has introduced new power bases and brought in new actors who are a force to reckon with.

Under the circumstances, both the pastoralists and the state have had to devise various ways of dealing with these new challenges. In the process, the pastoral communities today find themselves engrossed in a persistent state of crisis as both the large-scale and remote socio-economic forces plus their local dynamics modifying if not altering their life chances altogether. The state, as part of the lived reality that the Karimojong live with in their everyday lives is integral to the transformation of the social reality. Hence, since the Karimojong have to continuously contend with a war-like situation, the thesis argues for continued emphasis on the significance of the state in the persistently shifting social and political circumstances.

Uganda, like other similar modern states may appear weak in their governmental structures but the influence of some of the state processes is still very prominent in instigating violence and therefore mitigating it. This rests on the states traditional monopolies over power and the territorially bounded order by which it wrests control of the citizens. In Karamoja that monopoly appears weakened and the challenge put up by the Karimojong can only be understood by focusing our investigation on the critical junction where the historical, social/cultural and political processes converge. In doing so, we have to place the problem of Karamoja in a

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wider context necessary for debates regarding not only state sovereignty and the future of the state, but also its relevance amidst the surge of globalization.

### *Rethinking the social*

One of the processes that trigger violent defiance of the state is that which pertains to the social. Traditionally, practices like cattle raiding were used to disperse or redistribute wealth in times of crisis. Practices such as the customary payment of bride wealth and attaining social status rested on performance of certain kinds of violence. Indeed for the Karimojong, the move to construct an enhanced economic base which in turn raises one's social status in the society is one of the major factors driving young men to engage into various forms of violence. On top of that violence is further aggravated by the state interventions aimed at forcefully disarming the warring youths.

For a variety of reasons and most especially the forceful nature of state intervention, cattle raiding and generally the social have been transformed and refashioned to suit the current trends in both the local and broader world-view regarding armed violence. Similarly, stratification of Karimojong society moved from just cattle wealth differences to other more 'modern' ways of gaining social recognition like ownership of modern weapons and ability to guarantee local sovereignty. Hence the thesis shows that we need to extend our perspective on pastoral violence while at the same time demonstrate that such processes of challenging the state constantly occur in the light of history.

Applying the historical perspective has also shown that the Karimojong have not been static groups simply fighting to protect and maintain their traditions or religion but continuously reposition their social conditions within the context of other competing processes. Social differentiation of the wealthy and the poor Karimojong whom the society treats differently is also constantly changing, the successful people are those who can persist in the face of the authoritative state, the changing values, attitudes and practices occasioned by evolving processes. For instance, ownership of



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guns and the ability to use them to survive and gain social status thus became deeply embedded in the culture and social consciousness of the Karimojong.

We see that understanding their notion of violence and most especially when linked to state interventions can in no way be confined to religion, culture or economics processes alone. Instead, the study shows that whereas various processes are linked to the social, they can only be understood by integrating different discourses of history, culture, sovereignty, small arms and the international community into the discussion of challenging the state. It is the junction at which these processes meet that the social is profoundly reconfigured.

### *Sovereignty at stake*

Given the Karimojong's strong inclination to the military and their agility in aggressively defending their local sovereignty, they have historically been left out of the process of modernization, first by British colonialism, and then by the succeeding post-colonial regimes in Uganda. To counter this marginal position within the wider Ugandan socio-economic order and as part of their cultural heritage, livestock raiding became an important aspect in mitigating both the environmental and economic uncertainty. A major development closely associated with the escalation of the violence has been the role of the armed youthful warrior groups and the proliferation of small arms which started in the 1970s. A dramatic and historical moment occurred in their history in 1979 when an arms cache fell their way as they looted firearms from an abandoned army garrison and tremendously raised their level of armament. From that time, the previously known violence orchestrated by the traditional cattle raiders took on other forms linked to the new sophistication of armament as well as changing local and regional politics.

As a result there has been a heightened level of conflicts in the region which greatly constrained the production capacities of the people. Furthermore, constant migrations as well as loss of livestock in cattle related conflicts worsened the humanitarian conditions in the entire region. The ensuing situation has over the years attracted myriads of both international and local humanitarian groups. Such groups

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get involved in the process of bringing peace and development also end up exploiting the ‘generosity’ of donor countries in the guise of helping the Karimojong. While the donors pump in money to supply food and other humanitarian needs to mitigate the persistently deteriorating human welfare, the money disappears due to mismanagement and corruption, and rather than mitigate the violence, it facilitates processes fueling violence.

In the process, the state has proved itself incapable of carrying out the most basic everyday tasks of statehood and instead the fleets of non-state actors pouring into the region have become a powerful force, almost replacing the state’s influence in the volatile area. And as a measure of that influence, these new actors are increasingly taking over key state functions, for instance providing health, welfare, and protection services to the citizens. These private actors have become the “new imperialists” in Karamoja. In reaction the Karimojong have taught their children to believe that they have a fundamental right to self-determination – that their ‘local sovereignty’ is critical if they are to remain Karimojong pastoral people. The Karimojong only recognize themselves as Karimojong and do not subscribe to the nation state of Uganda which they believe seriously undermines their independence and puts their cattle and their own security at risk. And along side this reality, the Karimojong do not care about discourses of national sovereignty and national security, all they care about is security of their cattle and their own position in the new world (at any cost).

### *Fighting dependency*

Also deeply troubling for the Karimojong is the fact that they can no longer provide their own food and have to rely on humanitarian aid. But though these emerging processes of humanitarianism provide the bond holding society together in the face of humanitarian catastrophes and a weak state, their existence more often than not deepens the dependency of the Karimojong on humanitarian aid. Whereas they undeniably fill the absent roles of the state, as a consequence, the state as well as the Karimojong has failed to develop the necessary skills required to run their own affairs effectively. They have to continuously fall back on the global safety nets to

break away from their predicament. A process which embarks on a steady erosion of the 'social contract' – eroding the state's known responsibilities to its people and consequently empowering the 'new' actors including the warrior groups in the pastoral region.

Furthermore, the processes of internationalizing the Karamoja problem effectively turns what was possibly a localized armed violence into a national and even regional or global problem. Just as what seemed to be a global problem of small arms proliferation coupled by environmental and economic stresses turns out to be a complex crisis of the state as well as a social crisis of the society with links to armed violence. By looking at the critical junction at which both the local and global processes get embedded in the local, national and global spaces we are able to extend our conceptualization of both the transmission and performance of violence in Karamoja.

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**Errata for  
PASTORALISTS IN VIOLENT DEFIANCE OF THE  
STATE**

The case of the Karimojong in Northeastern Uganda

**Eria Olowo Onyango**



Thesis for the degree philosophiae doctor (PhD)  
at the University of Bergen

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(signature of candidate)

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(signature of faculty)

2010-04-15

## Errata

Cover Page “December 2009” – changed to “2010”

Page 5        Last sentence on dedication – transferred to Page 6

Page 61       Line 16 – deleted “together within”

Page 68       Line 29 – added “of” to read “in form of”

Page 74       Line – deleted “found”

Page 75       Line 17 – deleted “dowries” replaced with “bride price”

Page 76       Line 11 – deleted hyphen from “ex-pressed” to read “expressed”

