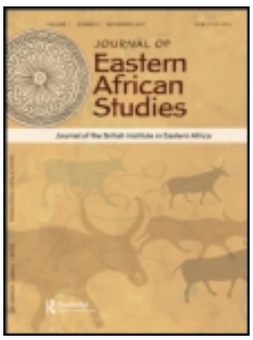

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Globalizing Trends or Identities through Time? The *longue durée* in Karamojong[1] Ethnography

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ABSTRACT *Using a range of oral and documentary sources, this article presents a detailed account of how Karamojong traditions have varied over time according to historical contingencies, while retaining a strong commitment to communal will even when this runs counter to perceived global trends. The very dominance of the global discourses surrounding issues of development in the Karamojong country may sometimes drown out local voices and can seem to relegate African agency to a matter of little importance. Despite this appearance of globalizing trends, African agency in Karamojong does in fact remain robustly active in a variety of important social contracts. In marriage, for instance, while the girl's freedom of choice has in some senses reduced, in others it can recently be shown to have increased; similarly, the quantity of bridewealth paid or pledged upon marriage has undergone fluctuations in the recent past, with implications for social relations. In warriorhood, too, new weapons have been acquired in recent times but the gun has long been part of the pastoralist arsenal for Karamojong. It is shown here that the aim and rôle of raiding have changed little over time, and the associated rituals have not atrophied with any secularisation due to the possession of Western technology. The power of Karamojong elders has been challenged by that of government administration and by the cyclical disequilibria of the age-class system, but traditional politics remain more sovereign than the state. African institutions have their history, too, and while it is a history of change it is not necessarily a history of decline.*

President Moi, speaking as a pastoralist, once pronounced at an academic forum: 'Traditionally, cattle rustling did not involve killing people'.[2] Cultural anthropology frequently encounters and deals with traditions,[3] for culture is the accumulation of human response to situation. Remove the connection with time and there can be no patterned connection. Yet the distinguishing, and distinguished, feature of intensive fieldwork is not often best suited to examine changes in tradition due to its inevitably synchronic tendency. Even fieldwork spread over a decade or two can be too short to spot the fallacies in the reconstruction and invention of tradition,[4] not by outsiders, but by the shared or social memory.[5] The bracketing of the reliability of an alleged tradition has a place in any analysis involving causation and prediction. If Moi's quaint belief is allowed to sneak in as an academic presupposition,[6] then certain filters for data are thereby constructed out of this romantic reconstruction of the past.

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If cattle raiding involved no human bloodshed traditionally, then causative factors for violent conflict are sought in the present, even when some traditions such as this one, are the products of modernity. The trend is assumed to be one-way over time: from an ideal feature of society to present degeneration. Since change can be expected to accelerate further away from past African traditions in a globalising 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,[7] but they are also renegades according to their own lights, defying their own traditions,[8] so losing their dignity as representatives of a lost African heritage.

Such reasoning is dangerous for the people who are the subjects of the study. It confers a moral mandate on the interventionist policies of the state, of NGOs, and religious mission emphasising a complete break with the past.[9] The people have forfeited their ethnic legitimacy by betraying their own traditions. Yet might it not be the case that Moi's tradition was a product of the most peaceful periods in the colonial era, a passing myth associated with an incidental *Pax Britannica*, rather than an idyll of the pre-colonial past? It is urgent then to test tradition in order to expose all assumptions of the causation and direction of cultural trends that we detect. Yet to do so is difficult, for it means going to data beyond our own fieldwork. Oral tradition is least reliable here for the common tendency to collapse memory of past tradition into the service of present institutions cannot be entirely eliminated. Yet we are not alone, for there is the cloud of witnesses of the venerable ancestral ethnographers who have gone before. Then again there are those suspect testimonies of once contemporary colonial official, missionary, and hunter all documenting ethnography. How much easier is it to avoid all these partial views and just pick up the voices of individual subjects now, to be immersed in inchoate plurality rather than to invite charges of hegemony and homogeneity! Yet for Hastrup it is the nature of social anthropology to deal with whole cultures.[10]

Sharon Hutchinson no doubt depicts a Western Nilotic people radically reconstructing traditions in her *Nuer Dilemmas*.[11] Divorce rates are rising.[12] The sacred status of cattle is being banished by Christian conversion to the margin, thus secularising society. Bloodletting rites are being replaced by a desacralizing discourse of homicide. The politics, tactics, and weaponry of local warfare are changing.[13] The problem is that anthropologists tend to transfer the findings of other anthropologists more easily synchronically than diachronically.[14] Thus in the most recent work on the Eastern Nilotic Karamojong, it is Hutchinson's trends that predominate over the excellent work of predecessors in Karamoja – Gulliver, Dyson-Hudson and Lamphear[15] – despite the inadequacy of their theoretical approaches as judged by later postmodern and feminist perspectives.[16] Of course all such combings must be scrutinised for internal consistency and weighed in the scales of an intimate historical acquaintance with the whole range of sources on the Karamojong. Any source can have wrongly recorded or misunderstood data, so vigilance must be maintained for any sign that the wrong end of the stick has been grasped.

This paper is based on work undertaken among all three Karamojong tribes from January 1984 to April 1986 and return visits in 1998 and 2002. Little sustained research has been undertaken inside Karamoja for 30 years because of chronic insecurity. That which has been done assumes theory from African studies that the region fits into conceptions of fast-changing society,[17] and that the Karamojong have been disrupted as many other Nilotic peoples. The view from Makerere is that from 1979, the possession of the gun is eroding Karamojong culture from within, with the desires of young men taking

precedence over the elders.[18] In this way traditional politics has been rendered obsolete. This paper will test the hypothesis that the Karamojong appropriation of modernity is 'eating away at the soul of Karamoja culture',[19] though the notion that cultures have souls is immediately dismissed. In-depth interviews were carried out to collect current understandings. Historical information is introduced from a variety of sources were compared critically in order to trace the history of particular cultural traits, greater weight being given to the incidental data in original contemporary accounts of observers. Six traits in Karamojong culture are briefly examined to see how they have changed over the very long term. Then it will be seen whether it is possible to gauge the direction and extent of the transition in Karamojong society.

Marriage

The Karamojong have a custom throughout Karamoja whereby when an unmarried girl bears a child, which is common, the genitor creates an obligation to compensate with what is most aptly described as birthwealth. His parents must go to her parents to apologise and 'beg for unity'. Whatever the future arrangements, the boy's parents are obliged to pay *ecula* compensation of three oxen including at least one cow (or 30 smallstock)[20] on the birth of the baby, not as a down-payment on either the child or the bridewealth, but as a provision for the welfare of the mother and child, whom the father may never see again. This gives a considerable incentive to pay bridewealth before many children are born, so that woman and children may move into his home, before another man marries her and takes the children. The significant point is that the incidence and level of this fine has kept constant for at least 70 years,[21] as much a pronounced feature of memory as of diverse written record.

When education has the effect of changing the mores of youth concerning marriage and cohabitation, the elders are always sensitive to any possible diminution of their power to maintain the customs.[22] Lokol's 'parents told him not to play about with different people, but to follow the custom (*etal*) of the people'.[23] 'When educated boys and girls do not listen to their parents, or they defy the elders, they are cursed.'[24] Some parents take the initiative in selecting partners. Yet it would be a mistake to suppose there is one trend from absolute parental control to the autonomy of youth. It used to be emphasised that the young people exercised their choice. As Macdonald noted in 1899, 'If the girl objects to marry her suitor, her refusal is absolute and settles the matter.'[25] Moreover, '[n]ormally . . . no compulsion is brought to bear upon either party to a marriage',[26] and if a pregnant girl had more than one suitor, she could prefer the one she loved most over the genitor of her child: basically, '[t]he woman's consent is essential'.[27] Thus there appears to be a shift over 20 years of civil administration to the time when the suicide of girls denied the suit of their lover,[28] but with even less government intervention now, girls' choices of suitors are down to the girl with advice from her friends and sisters.[29] Girls have more opportunity to use the threat of elopement, which risks her family losing all possible bridewealth, but taking such an option permanently reduces the girl's social status.

Bridewealth continues to be paid. Only 4.5 per cent of girls achieve literacy[30] and they still want to be fully married if at all possible: 'even educated girls want to go through the stages to *aberu* [= the status of a full wife]'.[31] In the terrible times of the 1890s, memory had it that bridewealth went down to only one or two cattle, but in the 1950s the mean

was 63, ranging from 5 to 200, more typically 50–100, cattle or equivalent.[32] It dropped in the great famine of 1979–82, but was raised to about 100 in 1989[33] when raiding had multiplied cattle riches. The norm is 80 now, a traditional valuation of compensation for a life,[34] but can range from 75 to 120, the point in the range being defined as usual by familial and personal differentials.[35] Of course those with little access to cattle can arrange for their lover to cohabit without giving more than a token bridewealth, especially if the parents belong to another political community,[36] but then some ceremonies are omitted, so that she can never achieve full womanly status. Significantly the standard level of bridewealth has returned to a level of bloodwealth held in memory. It is higher now than it has been for more than half a century, and is relatively very high for East Africa. The evidence presents tradition then not as eternal and immutable, but as adaptable to exigencies, yet strangely persistent and apt to return to old levels. Analysis of social structure can incorporate 'also the structures of the *longue durée*'.[37]

Warriorhood

Warriors (*ngijokan*) comprise all pastoralist men of fighting age, and raiding is so popular now that educated people join them.[38] There are two religious ceremonies, which encourage them to overcome the spiritual challenges of fighting. Some find the prospect daunting; others are addicted to the adrenaline produced or the prospect of a short-cut to social and economic status.

Eve of a Raid

In time of war, the leaders and the warriors gather their clan-based cattle-camps into an *alomar*, which becomes a fighting unit on full alert for the defence of their cattle and people. If you have cattle there you are obliged to participate in attack as much as defence. Dr Arthur Banks[39] was present, in the bush, when the Jie were under very real threat of attack, and watched the whole group of several hundred warriors at a 'prayer-meeting', called to put a terrifying curse on the enemy in amazing unison of the curses, 'the rolled "R's" and exhaled hisses – no, more deep and sonorous than hisses more like the power of the bottom note on a cathedral organ, or a vicious rumble of thunder close by'. The timing and place of a particular attack is settled at such a raiding feast (*epeyos ngolo jie*). This is held on the eve of the planned raid and so often at night for the warriors which each have an *emuron* (a divine with wider powers than divination) attached to advise the war-leader (*ekapolon ka ajore*). Central is the sacrifice of an ox, whose stomach sac is slit open for haruspication, so that the movements of the enemies may be divined.[40] The *emuron* then advises on who to take, the route there and back, or the tactics. A younger man is chosen to lead the raiding party into action, a spy or the bravest and most skilful warrior.[41]

Recent practice chimes with the old recorded aim of a ceremony '"to make their hearts fierce"' by drinking ox's blood.[42] Even the emphasis on blood finds corroboration today in that sacrificial blood spilt on the ground is eaten by the sky-god, Akujů.[43] 'When the life goes out of the animal, it releases power. Through the animal, Akujů acts there. Akujů will have power on earth to tell enemies to return. That is why it is the best time to pray.'[44] So cattle-hungry youth must also return to those with religious authority. Even if elders are not present for the sacrifice, and it is their prayers who count being closer to

Akujů, the warriors must at least have an appointed *emuron*, as his medicine (*ekitoi*, tree) has always been significant in the hunt and the raid to 'confuse' the victims. Sacred clay will prevent harm from bullets, spears, and arrows.

Ceremony for Homicide

Though there are incentives to kill the enemy, as there are for every culture in its military aspect, the spiritual harmony of the killer's world is radically jeopardised by the seizing of life.[45] During the battle, if he has blooded his spear, which is much rarer with the increased use of firearms, he licks the blood 'to prevent him feeling faint',[46] as an internalisation of the enemy's life-force or heart (*etau*).[47] Otherwise, he may stick the spear into the ground to return it to creation. Its taint must be dealt with, at least by burning off the blood (*akicun*),[48] for it could cause him to die. Not only may the dead person's family seek vengeance but his spirit (*aparait*) may become an embittered one (*ecenit*) dogging his killer with problems (*ngican*). Therefore one who has killed from a distance with a bullet must still purify himself before Akujů who is unhappy with bloodshed, and free himself from the stain of death first through the sacrifice of a goat. He eats the goat and cuts the goatskin into strips, which he wears to show that he has undergone the cleansing symbolised by the white goat-skin thongs (*ngarukanes*) above his elbows and below his knees. Should he not, it is believed he will fall sick,[49] overcome by the life-force of the other, because it cannot be said that '"the enemy blood has been washed away"'.[50] He may also don a necklace of white (if possible, ostrich shell) beads, also as a charm against avenging spirits whose symbolic colour, being that of the shades, is black.[51]

The killer may also be honoured by the assumption of an enemy-name. He sacrifices an ox in the presence of elders and may then cut notches in the ears of his beloved ox,[52] that is the ox whose name he has already taken and whose praises he will sing in the dance. If satisfied as to the details of the event, the elders permit him to use a name which relates to the enemy, whom he killed, such as Lokwarasmoi (he of the enemy who bore spears). The cicatrice (*ngaloka* or *ngageran*) are cut on the shoulders. 'Only warriors who have raided cows and killed enemies can decorate their bodies with scars and show them off at the dances. Women only choose men with good scars. So a real man's body must be decorated with scars.'[53] This demonstrates complete continuity with customs as far back as records and memory go.[54] I have seen newly cut *ngageran*. They become a lifelong tell-tale sign of his capacity to overcome the other.

Raiding

To advance the hypothesis that the AK-47 has brought unprecedented, radical change by fuelling violence and disorder, it is necessary to deal with the history of Karamoja to assess trends. This has seldom been done in any continuous fashion.[55] Raiding with guns is now considered by observers as evidence of the dissolution of society.[56] There is only one year in the colonial history of the Karamojong, 1925, when no homicidal attempts by one group on another were noted by the authorities in the annual reports. Ever since they became neighbours, raiding has gone on intermittently not only between Karimojong and Pokot, but also with the Jie, Dodosů, Turkana, Samburu, Marakwet, Sapiny or Sabawot, and Bakusu.[57] In the first half of the nineteenth century, '[l]arge scale raids in which

hundreds of warriors were engaged became the most successful strategy to "harvest" other peoples' livestock'.[58] Weatherby's oral sources showed that:

> Mount Elgon was the scene of intensive inter-tribal warfare during the whole of the 19th and early decades of the 20th century, when the Sebei-speaking semi-pastoral tribes living on the mountain were involved in conflict with cattle-raiders from the surrounding tribes.[59]

The first British impression of the Karamojong, apart from their warlike reputation, was that they were 'excellent raiders, as there was a suspicious dearth of livestock amongst the weaker tribes on the borders of their country'.[60] In 1902 the Special Commissioner was taken with the 'ever recurring petty quarrels and blood feuds'.[61] Abyssinian and Swahili were energetically joining in the local raiding.[62] Only one trader escaped three Karamojong massacres of Swahili caravans, one of 300 guns and 800 men and women.[63] In 1910, there was 'constant' tribal fighting with the Pokot.[64] Incomplete district records show that six different ethnic groups between 1929 and 1983 killed some 3,000 Turkana, the hardest and fiercest of all nomadic pastoralists in the region, and took some 100,000 cattle.[65] For the first seven months of 1956, even during the rains, Karimojong were involved in almost daily raids on average.[66] Between 1958 and the end of October 1961, a total of 727 raids were recorded, all involving the newly reunited and fast-growing Karimojong, and a third involved the expanding Pokot.[67] On average, only two men were prosecuted for every three raids, yet 201 people were killed. Only a quarter of the 81,934 cattle stolen were recovered. Large well-organised traditional armies were revived by the Jie with as many firearms as they could muster for huge raids on the Karimojong.[68] British colonial rule was successful in subduing homicide, after occupying the region, but could not repress Karamojong cattle-raiding.

So it has continued to the present. The Dodosô suffered the worst from the 1979–81 famine, since their enemies had better firepower from the munitions of a Moroto barracks deserted by Amin's troops to raid all the cattle. There could have been no greater devastation and many Dodosô were resettled by Oxfam. Yet when the author stayed with his Jie friend Longoli in 1998, all his cattle had just been raided by the Dodosô,[69] and one man had been killed the previous week.[70] Dodosô raided the Jie, and then 10,000 cattle from Turkana grazing the National Game Park, right on the deadline the Uganda government gave them to leave.[71] Staying with a Pian friend, two years later, the Pokot had just tried to raid his brother's cattle and the Pian had counter-raided. Up to 100 Pokot were killed in one raid.[72] The counter-raiding continued. Later Karimojong raided Teso and camped at the MP's home.[73] The next week 1000 Karimojong warriors attacked the UPDF army at Moroto and killed 11 people.[74]

Gray argues that 'modern weaponry supported the transformation of fluid structural relations within Karimojong society into increasingly inflexible internal divisions'.[75] Yet guns were easily available from hunters, traders, allies, and enemies, including Abyssinians, from 1880 to 1910 and there was no 'intra-tribal raiding' before the 1960s as the population of the Karimojong sections grew.[76] 'The Dodosô killed the Habac [Abyssinians] to get their guns'.[77] Assessing the numbers of guns held by the Karamojong before and the British tried to collect them from 1910 onwards is very difficult, because they used to bury 'many for when Lokijukwa [he who pushes, that is the British patrols] would go away and the owners died with the guns spoiling in the ground'.[78] The

Karamojong have always desired effective weapons, so they have hidden them when necessary and their knowledge of them. The warrior tradition is an invention neither of colonial romance,[79] the Karamojong being regarded as unsuitable for the army, nor of nationalist policy. Warriors (*ngikajok*) are a very long-standing feature of the Karamojong. Conflict is not the strange, dangerous new phenomenon that some current analysts seem to want policy-makers to believe 'many researchers agree that violence has long been one form of interaction among these groups.'[80]

It is commonly said, perhaps also by elders, that there was a golden age of Karamojong spearheaded chivalry, when women and children were unharmed.[81] Greater chivalry in the past is a romantic notion, even if espoused by both contemporary Karamojong and observer, which coincides with the dogma that all disruption can be blamed on the insertion of the Westerner and his, primarily military, technology. It has been asserted that 'the Karamoja problem' is the side-effect of the breakdown of the African state in the neo-colonial age with big men, that is national political players, raising private armies, and of the firearm overturning the essentially chivalrous, harmony of traditional culture.[82] 'Traditional cattle-raiding, while often involving some violence, tended to be small-scale and involve the theft only of a number of the best livestock.'[83]

The restraint on killing women was, in fact, a colonially induced imagination of Victorian morality, for women were and are seen in Karamoja as part of the war effort, blessing their men when they go out to fight and giving military strength by procreation. The cicatrice on the killer's shoulder still denote the victim's gender. Over seventy years ago 15 per cent of observed men were decorated on the right shoulder having killed a man, and 5 per cent of observed men on the left having killed a woman,[84] despite the colonial proscription of homicide. The ratio of three men slaughtered to one woman is easily explained by men and boys being exclusively responsible for herding the cattle and guarding the cattle-camps. They are the ones usually in the way of any military action, so the killing of women is, and was, much more the expression of total war or the escalation of revenge, but it is by no means a novel phenomenon.[85] Bell claimed arrogantly:

> that for years I roamed among these truculent tribes, flogged them when they were too naughty, fined them, made them return their raided cattle sometimes, and prohibited the killing of women in their raids, this being considered the most unreasonable prohibition of them all.[86]

The hunter may have exaggerated his own significance with the passing of the years, but it is clear that there was no taboo on the killing of women, for his contemporary report runs thus:

> I have been told by one who was on the raid that a great many women and children were speared by the Karamoja who went with the Swahilis. This I give for what it may be worth; personally I quite believe it.[87]

Paget Wilkes, the first person to write in Ngakaramojong, retells the story of Aleper Apothia who fought in a raid of Nato, in 1909, remembered also by Lamphear's Bokora and Jie informants as one of many: [88]

> Every spearpoint blooded, whether on a man, woman, or child, means marriage is more certain, more secure, for the girls laugh at the men who are not warriors. . . . So the children first out and slowest to get away, are butchered first. A woman runs, she is too feeble to go far, and the spear finds yet another home as she sinks to the ground.[89]

Those closer to the times were not so caught up with romantic notions of the chivalry of old Africa, even if the nomadic pastoralists generated not a little sentiment in their British observers.[90] Cattle-raiding is not evidence of dissolution: quite the reverse, for as Dyson-Hudson noted in another period when the senior generation-set was waning, the Karamojong are so committed to their pastoralist policies as to take and lose lives.[91] 'When all significant interpersonal relationship rest upon connections through livestock',[92] it may be considered worthwhile to expand relationships by throwing yourself against the enemies who threaten livestock maximisation.

Elderhood

The elder is the owner (*elope*) of the family herd. His sons cannot marry without his cattle and his blessings. Meanwhile any girlfriend or children he may have, can be suddenly forfeit to another who can pay the bridewealth. That raided cattle have not shifted privilege to young warriors is evidenced by the continued practice of polygyny suggesting greater command by elders over women and livestock. The bridewealth received by a Jie father for the first marriage of a daughter of his is his privilege to use as bridewealth for a further marriage of his own, even if he should already have five wives.[93] Through their own diligence as herdsmen, as raiders in the past,[94] and as fathers, they are likely to have accumulated more cattle than the youth, who only have raiding and what their fathers and friends give them. If elders want guns, no-one can stop them, but they have no need when they instruct junior age-sets as their armed police. An elder entrusts his herd to sons, agnatic nephews, or affines to tend. It is their duty to look after the cattle, to find grazing and water, often far from the home, and to live in cattle-camps (*nawi*). The primary responsibility is to protect them from wild animals and enemies, so they must be armed in order to accomplish this.

Mirzeler and Young go beyond finding mere change, asserting 'a new dynamic' consequent on AK-47s. They even hypostatise this 'power that came out of their barrels', while at the same time, trying to socialise it in the young men.[95] This supposedly autonomous power, without further explanation, becomes that of young men, and then, with another mysterious shift, it becomes the power of warlords. All are taking away power from the elders. 'Locally, the balance of power has clearly shifted away from the elders who were once the lynchpin of authority.'[96] They project their theory retrospectively, making the Jie military saviour at the beginning of the last century, Loriang, a 'warlord'.[97] It is the first time he has called thus, being styled by Lamphear as 'war-leader', for the Karamojong know no lords. Loriang and his successors possess the functional appellation of *ekapolon ka ajore* (the big man of the fight, raid, or battle).

In the mid-1980s, when heavily armed Turkana were grazing in Najie, there were three Jie *ngalomarin*. The cattle-camp during dry season grazing is known as *awi*, and is based on family herds sometimes joined with the herds of friends and age-mates. When large numbers coalesce, it becomes known as *alomar*, meaning coming in and going out. Every

herder has the freedom to join the camp or leave it. It is not a conscripted army, unless the elders require it for tribal defence in the direst crisis, so it would not be true to say that any one man can put 10,000 in the field.[98] However, if a number of warriors do come together, then they are bound by a very strict communal discipline. Leadership, as in any military organisation, is very well defined. The general of the warrior host, *ekapolon ka ajore*, may frequently be a divine, *emuron*,[99] because of the need for medicine in warfare, or at least an *ekesiemon*, because of the need to be an haruspex to read the entrails of the sacrificial ox. He may also need a younger man to lead the troops into battle, who will be the most skilful and courageous warrior, *ekadedengan* (*dedeng*, fierce). If his leadership is based on military strategy alone, then he will need to work in tandem with an *emuron*, entirely in continuity with the 'two fighting leaders' elected by the elders over a century ago.[100] Typically the non-divine war-leaders have been aged around the thirties, so that they have been of that age recently proves nothing concerning the rôle of the elders.

The military aim is not related much to national politics, in fact it has little to do with politics as academics now know it, for cattle-camps 'were primarily a religious organisation on the move',[101] highly instrumental for unity and morale, but useless for warlords seeking to exploit weakness in a national regime, unless it has cattle to raid. In short, Karamojong have nothing in common with others named as warlords around the world seeking commercial gain and state power. When it suits them, or in order to mollify an outraged government, tacit compliance can be adopted, but not for long. The Karamojong rely far more on traditional politics and military than on the unfavourable mercy of an alien power. The Karamojong are for the Karamojong, so the rule of elders and the policing of warriors are quite enough for them.

That elders control over choice of marriage-partners increased in mid-century, perhaps due to government seeking their support against raiding,[102] and is hardly less than what it was 70 years ago, despite current sensitivities. They may lament that their power is not that of a previous generation in the good old days, but across the Karamojong the traditional jural system (*ameto*) works effectively in regulating society.[103] A customary punishment for adultery, rape, and murder used to be 80 head of cattle.[104] President Amin, in his drive to outlaw Karamojong customs, had it reduced by civil law to eight, but the rise in crime provoked the elders to raise it again to 60,[105] and the Assistant District Commissioners, in conjunction with the Sub-County Chiefs,[106] now accept this as summary justice that has no need of the magistrate's court.[107] Since these trespasses are crimes against a life, one would expect the fine to return eventually to 80 in equivalence to the basic level of bridewealth. Marriage adds a life to a family; adultery, divorce, or death takes it away. Karamojong sometimes punish miscreants with death and government does nothing. 'Adultery was traditionally regarded as grave a crime as homicide, involving the death of a man concerned or a compensation payment equal to that for murder'.[108] There could hardly be a clearer demonstration of the way in which, Karamojong culture, even when shifted out of its cultural groove by external forces, gravitates back, change notwithstanding. 'People do not stand out for long, as a solution needs to be sought. The authority, the strength of the elders is till there'.[109]

Philip Gulliver, who undertook thorough fieldwork around Kotido in the 1950s reminisced to me:

> I remember that I picked up a few stories about the pre-colonial days when the young men were raiding under 'war leaders' and, allegedly, disregarding the elders

> of that era. After all, the authority of elders must always have been rather fragile (control of livestock, of marriageable girls, of ritual and access to Akuj,[110] etc.) and probably the elders themselves remembered how, as young men, they too had not altogether heeded their elders. . . . So I would be very cautious concerning complaints of contemporary Jie elders, that their authority has been weakened in recent times.[111]

Others have not been so cautious, yet Karamojong *ngisorok* (initiates but not elders) bear him out. 'Akujů wants for an elder to have more spiritual power than others in the family to lead them';[112] 'Akujů is with the elders'.[113] Thus elders' complaints that their powers have gone, represent either empty nostalgia, family poverty, or the avoidance of blame by government for cattle-raiding.

Generation-Sets

Karamojong define elders not according to age, but according to the age-class system and the order of begetting. 'You cannot be initiated in the same generation-set as your father or your son.'[114] The sun 'mixes up' herdsmen in the dry season, so that clan loyalties are an inferior means for structuring social relationships to age-classes that can stratify a whole tribe. The system fits their nomadic pastoralism, where land under cultivation is not the main geographical factor in male livelihoods. Where men and their interests are dispersed, large centres and monarchical leadership are quite inappropriate. A cabal of elders in the senior-most age-section or two make such decisions as are necessary for the political community.

> What can we do this year or next if society goes wild (*ngitunga adedengata*), how can we bring it back to peace, obedience, respect? Custom is failing because these are not people keen to keep traditions and there seem to be few living beyond 80 compared with when they entered responsibility.' They realise the trends and consult one another and decide to say, 'We need to go back to where they began to name them.[115]

By this reasoning a promotion ceremony is fixed in order to affect generation-set succession, but the same informant, an elder, did not foresee it happening for another decade or two, so clearly elders cannot think that society has forsaken tradition and is out of control. However, members of the senior generation-set are becoming thin on the ground in some localities, and the uninitiated are taking some liberties by prematurely wearing the decorations of their generation-set yet to be opened.

As Dyson-Hudson noted in the 1950s, when the senior generation-set becomes few in number and incapacitated, due to the natural death of their peers, the culture regularly enters a period of crisis.[116] Older uninitiated men drift into raiding, as the only means whereby they can increase their standing in the community. The junior generation-set of initiated men, which itself contains men older than the junior-most age-set of the senior generation-set, is itching for power. They will show, short of revolution, various displays indicating that power should now be handed over to them, while some rituals fall into abeyance for lack of elders, and men move their herds totally independently. Yet Dyson-Hudson observed for himself that when the junior generation-set was promoted and a

new generation was opened into which their sons could be initiated, the former rebels now conformed.[117] There was a quick, visible return to the pattern of allocated roles and the corporate emphasis on the age-class system. Cattle-raiding is a generational affair,[118] when it is in the herd-owners' interest to maintain the status quo, while warriors desire to acquire cattle fast, yet they are stuck herding their fathers' livestock.

Generation-sets remain essential to the constitution of the political community. It is the elders who are closest to Akujů, so can bring rain. There are dynamics in the prolonged matter of succession, which can mean that warriors are under governed for a considerable while, but this should not be taken as evidence that social order has been irreparably damaged. '*Akiriket* [the assembly of the initiated generation-sets] sorts out problems';[119] '*Asapanu* [the age-class system] is the divine ordering of society'.[120]

The Role of Cattle

'A Man is a Man in Cattle' is as true a saying as when Marshall Thomas recorded it.[121] For without any, women will be ashamed of a man. In the Karamojong world-view, all significant inter-personal relationships continue to rest upon connections through livestock, even the bond-friend.[122] Without cattle, he can have no wives or children to call his own, for someone else can always come along, pay bridewealth and take all. Cattle must be transferred to acknowledge and compensate new relationships. Otherwise, human life and social relationships are not valued. The status cattle confer is symbolised on the body, for those who own more than 20 may wear the ivory armlet.[123] They are regarded still as the supreme mediation of the divine blessing upon them.

Raiding is for wealth in cattle (*ngibaren*),[124] and this is socially enjoined.[125] Not only can they be used for bridewealth, and many wives are desirable, but they and their acquisition are the means for perpetuating a man's ox-name, for replacing his beloved ox, for making the sign of his ox in a fight or a dance, and for composing his own ox-songs. Cattle are not usually slaughtered except in the sacrifice, a justifiable term if only that the victim of a religious ceremony is considered to be intensely sacred through the power released by its loss of life. 'Then there is prayer, because God is there. Whenever they kill the sacrifice, they have first to pray.'[126]

The second main reason for slaughtering or selling cattle is the prospect that they are going to lose beasts anyway through sickness they have, looming epidemics, or attempts to reclaim stolen cattle. So many have these been that cattle markets, with drunkenness on the proceeds, have flourished freely over the last decade for the first time ever.[127] They will sell the branded cattle as quickly as they can at the new cattle markets for slaughter in Kampala to avoid detection.[128] Yet cattle remain wealth, while cash is for spending. Cattle sales of about 7,000 a year have coincided with extreme cattle wealth for successful raiders, who have been able to raid 99.9 per cent of cattle from districts to south and west over the last 15 years. Only 3,276 cattle are estimated for the whole of Kitgum District compared with 430,000 for Kotido.[129] Given less of other people's livestock, traditional values can be expected to apply more strictly and the market trade to dry up.

Religion for Defence of the People

The '*juju*' of the Karamojong is greatly feared even by army commanders whom they regard merely as enemies. After the sacrifice of a dog for the Jie to curse the soldiers

following the burning of two Buffalo armoured vehicles, the Ankole and Acholi officers in charge were admitted to hospital with mystery illnesses.[130] Karamojong are not unchanging, stone-wall conservatives, but it is their faith in Akujů who intervenes in the world that helps carry them through exigency. 'It is bad to abandon sacred tradition. Akujů is beseeched in sacred tradition. The whole clan is venerated by what is done according to sacred tradition. There will only be peace by means of sacred tradition.'[131] Sacred tradition goes back as many generations as the sun is old. Yet how is the spiritual protection that is afforded by homicide ceremonies transferred from spear to gun?

A spear is blooded, so there is an object that has to be, or at least can be, consecrated, and a victim whose features are known at once. With a shooting, the enemy may die at a distance, and since warriors of either side are always left where they fall, the enemy may be more likely to remain *incognito*. Without the blooded spear, the ceremony is robbed of its most potent symbol. The avenging spirit (*ecenit*) is seen as sent to the unknown places whence the bullet came, and not the bush where it can cause problems (*ngican*) for the killer.[132] Thus, there is no need in this case to be so closely associated with the victim, or to disengage from him, or to cease to use the gun as had been the case with the spear.

Mirzeler and Young conclude that 'the escalated armament has intensified local conflict within Karamoja':

> The culture of the gun, and the cultural changes triggered by the omnipresence of the AK-47 portend far-reaching changes in social relationships, which are only beginning to work themselves out. The equilibria, which have sustained Karamojong survival in a taxing environment, and their normative embodiment, seem at risk. The soulless AK-47 is eating away at the soul of Karamojong culture.[133]

However, the Karamojong do not believe in souls, certainly not in Greek philosophical terms as immortal substances, nor even as the disembodied part of a person, regarded as a separate entity, and as invested with some amount of form and personality. *Etau* should not be translated as soul or spirit, if either refer to existence after death. For it is precisely death which marks humanity's loss of life-force (*etau*). The heart (*etau*) stops beating in the dead. All that remains is fading, vestigial spirit, whether *eparait* or *ecenit*. The Karamojong world is all connected by shadowy spirit, whether man, beast, seed, soil, or metal. In this sense, the gun is not soulless. It is made by outsiders (*ngimoe*) as are spears, and all other metal. It may be acquired by exchange with outsiders, just like spears. Thus gun superseding spear is still encompassed by religious belief and practice.

Karamojong religion is assailable, not eternal. One great push was made at the end of empire to quell Karamojong raiding. The skeleton in Uganda's nation-building cupboard was to be buried by civilisation. That meant building roads across the remote passes, manning police posts, and laying down airstrips for spotter-planes to report every assembly and movement of men and cattle. Spears and guns were subject to strict regulations, and even the elders at sacrifice felt under pressure from suspicious eyes in the sky, which led to their arrest for plotting a raid. 'Our religion is dying, and government wants it to'.[134] Faith, depending on the limited capacity of humans to trust in what is beyond themselves, became fragile at this point, and sensitive to the challenges of alteriority. Yet far from disintegrating with the instrumentality of guns, Karamojong freedom is expanding at the expense of the less invigorated. Guns are allowing a

reinvigoration of the culture despite, the recent series of droughts, because they used and not believed in as the West looks to its military technology for superiority. In fact the Karamojong giving up their guns would be more significant for cultural change than retaining them. For by them they carry their autonomy forward in a state where to cede it can be catastrophic. Karamojong identity is reaffirmed, however anathema that may be to progressivist Ugandans.

However the guns are firmly the means and not the end, a dependent and not an independent variable in Karamojong culture. What moves and energises it is the spiritual and religious aspect, however odd it appears to the literate world, as it infuses the embodiment of life in all its aspects. Their social memory in the ritual forms of sacrifice, prayer, blessings and curses is in rude health at present, even if its place at the heart of their culture is inadequately recognised.[135] The contingent dilation of spirit and practice moves between Karamojong people and through time. The study of the *longue durée* shows that these fluctuations in a living tradition, whether in implicit belief or behaviour, follow no unilinear project and are far from being determined by outsiders (*ngimoe*) and their various agenda and traits. For a concrete if negative achievement, it is enough to disprove the dictum of Radcliffe-Brown, 'We cannot have a history of African institutions.'[136]

Notes

[1] Karamojong is used as a generic term for the dominant plains tribes of Karamoja: Dodoshô, Jie, and Karimojong, who all share a significant degree of original and cultural, if not political, unity. Raiding repeatedly breaks out these and between Karimojong territorial sections.

[2] Mkutu, 'Pastoralism and Conflict', 7.

[3] A series of essays presented at a session of the Association of Social Anthropologists' conference on 'New Directions in Social Anthropology', Oxford, July 1973, was subtitled 'The Social Anthropology of Tradition': see Jain ed., *Text and Context*. The problem comes when traditions are presumed to be fixed.

[4] Ranger, 'The Invention of Tradition Revisited'.

[5] See Connerton, *How Societies Remember*; James, *The Ceremonial Animal*, 102–118.

[6] Educated commentators may easily succumb to the nostalgia of older informants, taking their memory as established history. Gray, having cited other developmentalists, claims that '[a]utomatic weapons assuredly are responsible for the lethality of modern Karimojong violence': Gray, 'A Memory of Loss', 407. Raiding with automatic weapons is a 'capricious driver' and has a 'negative impact' on 'human welfare': Gray *et al.* eds, 'Cattle Raiding, Cultural Survival', 22.

[7] Knighton, 'Karamojong: Criminals or Warriors?'

[8] Gray, 'A Memory of Loss', 402.

[9] As it was put to me by a development worker in Moroto in 1985, the Karamojong have in the adoption of modern weapons forfeited the right to be respected for their traditions. Modernity can do with them what it wills.

[10] Hastrup, *Other Histories*, 4.

[11] Hutchinson, *Nuer Dilemmas*.

[12] Hutchinson, 'Rising Divorce among the Nuer'.

[13] Hutchinson, *Nuer Dilemmas*, 27, 107f., 123, 157, 345.

[14] Even Hastrup still held 'that contemporary event registration is always the baseline': Hastrup, *Other Histories*, 10.

[15] Gulliver, *The Family Herds*; Dyson-Hudson, *Karimojong Politics*; Lamphear, *Traditional History of the Jie*.

[16] For instance Broch-Due shows that Gulliver undervalued women in his account of the Turkana, but this does not render all his data useless: Broch-Due, 'The Fertility of Houses and Herds'.

[17] Mirzeler and Young, 'Pastoral Politics'; Gray, 'A Memory of Loss'.

[18] Okudi, 'Pastoral Crisis'.

[19] Mirzeler and Young, 'Pastoral Politics', 424.

[20] Locap, 'Marriage and Bride Price', MS (c.1989), printed in Knighton, 'Christian Enculturation', 79; Novelli, *Karimojong Traditional Religion,* .235; also interviews P5 and J23.
[21] Persse, 'Ethnological Notes', 114; Dyson-Hudson, *Karimojong Politics*, 134. The Mogos are noted here as having a birthwealth of only 20 smallstock, which again indicates their distinct origin.
[22] Interview P5.
[23] Interview D7.
[24] Interview D11.
[25] Macdonald, 'Journeys to the North', 137.
[26] Persse, 'Ethnological Notes', 111.
[27] Wayland, 'Preliminary Studies', 224.
[28] Clark, 'Death and Burial Ceremonies', 75; Dyson-Hudson, 'Marriage Economy', 48.
[29] Interview J7.
[30] UNDP, 'Uganda Census', 2001.
[31] Interview P5.
[32] Clark, 'A Karamojong Wedding', 177; Gulliver, *Family Herds*, 229; Docherty, 'The Karamojong and the Suk', 31; Bataringaya, *Report of the Karamoja Security Committee*, 11; Dyson-Hudson, 'Marriage Economy', 46f.; Brasnett, 'Basic Administration', 25.
[33] Locap, 'Marriage and Bride Price', in Knighton, 'Christian Enculturation'.
[34] Interview J22.
[35] Interviews D1 and J20.
[36] Interview J7.
[37] Hastrup, *Other Histories*, 3.
[38] Interview J7.
[39] Interview M2.
[40] Interview P5.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Paget Wilkes ed., *Lokong,* 8; Docherty, 'The Karamojong and the Suk', 33. See also Dyson-Hudson, 'The Karamojong and the Suk', 177; Gourlay, 'Studies in Karimojong Musical Culture', 144.
[43] Interviews J13 and P11.
[44] Interview P11.
[45] Tornay, 'Un Système Générationnel', 866ff.
[46] J. R. J. Rowland, 'Jie Ritual', mimeo (1983), Rhodes House Library, Oxford (hereafter RHO), 9.
[47] e- is the masculine gender marker, -ta- is a strong causative infix in the Karamojong verb, while −u denotes an abstract noun. Thus e-ta-u is the quality that causes a person to be, so is that which is lost at death. As with animals, this life-force is not annihilated at death, but released with cosmic potential.
[48] Interview P5.
[49] Rowland, 'Jie Ritual', 9.
[50] Marshall Thomas, *Warrior Herdsmen*, 119.
[51] Knighton, 'Christian Enculturation', I, 133f.
[52] Novelli, *Karimojong Traditional Religion*, 279, gives details of Karimojong cuts. *Ngamunyen* on oxen are there to be seen today.
[53] Alwyn, 'Gun for Sale', BBC television programme broadcast 22 January 1998, as part of the series 'Under the Sun'.
[54] Novelli, *Karimojong Traditional Religion*, 279; Macdonald, 'Notes on the Ethnology', 236. Bell's first journey was in 1902, related in *Wanderings of an Elephant Hunter,* 37; also Entebbe Archives (hereafter EA) 19/1911 Jackson to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 4 July 1911. P. H. G. Powell-Cotton's first journey was in 1903: see his *In Unknown Africa*, 365. The Karamojong's neighbours to the south, the Southern Nilotic Sabawot cut a 2.5−3 inch scar on one side of the chest or other.
[55] Yet see Knighton, 'Christian Enculturation',I, 54−226.
[56] Gray, 'A Memory of Loss'; Gray *et al.*, 'Cattle Raiding'; Mkutu, *Pastoral Conflict.*
[57] Knighton, 'Christian Enculturation',I, 85−99, 143.
[58] Bollig, 'Staging Social Structures', 360.
[59] Weatherby, 'Intertribal Warfare on Mount Elgon', 200.
[60] Macdonald, 'Journeys to the North', 136f.
[61] Harry Johnston quoted in Barber, *Imperial Frontier*, 57.
[62] Knighton, 'Christian Enculturation',I, 122−148.

[63] Bell, *Wanderings*, 36; also by Bell, *Karamojo Safari*, 111. Bell was a rare eye-witness writer in Karamoja l-break/>1902–09, and Lamphear, *Traditional History*, 243, 248, makes use of him, although he appears to confuse his books, safaris, and dates, ibid., 49, 236n, 252, 254f. A letter of Bell's gives detailed information of Swahili activities to government; RHO MSS.Afr.s.1018 Bell to Ormsby 28.2.06. Frederick Jackson, the East African veteran and Governor of Uganda, found him more credible than his own police report, and there is no need to doubt Bell's testimony here. In fact Jackson corroborates the massacre of Chambi bin Musa's caravan; EA 19/1911 Jackson to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 4 November 1911. The caravans, at least of Coutlis and Simba, undertook punitive expeditions for personal grievances; others combined with a tribe to raided ivory and cattle, or slaves and traded guns. Caravans went north regularly from the base, where Shundi alone kept a harem of over 80 women, bearing 120 rifles and 3–4,000 rounds of ammunition: see Barber, *Imperial Frontier*, 91–102.

[64] Barber, 'The Moving Frontier', 34.

[65] Oba, *Ecological Factors*, 9.

[66] Dyson-Hudson, *Karimojong Politics*, 247–249.

[67] Bataringaya, *Report*, 37.

[68] Lamphear, 'The Evolution of Ateker', 80.

[69] Interview J23.

[70] Interview J20.

[71] *New Vision* (Kampala), 22 June 2000.

[72] *The East African* (Kampala), 16 February 2000. I was living among the Pian at the time, and have no reason to doubt the unusually high mortality.

[73] *The Monitor* (Kampala), 30 March 2000.

[74] *The Monitor* (Kampala), 5 April 2000. The number of dead will have been given by the army to the press, and is not likely to be an overestimate, because of the embarrassment caused.

[75] Gray, 'A Memory of Loss', 401.

[76] Knighton, 'Christian Enculturation',I, 121–174; Garretson, 'Vicious Cycles'.

[77] Interview D10.

[78] Interview D3.

[79] 'The tribe has a great reputation as warriors ... as this is a warlike tribe and the women are allowed a voice in matrimonial arrangements, it is more or less a custom that a young man must distinguish himself in war before marrying': Macdonald, 'Notes', 234f.

[80] Hussein *et al.*, 'Increasing Violent Conflict', 413.

[81] Gray, 'A Memory of Loss', 402; Oxfam, 'Conflict's Children', 25. Disembowelling pregnant women seems no more likely in the past than now. It happens rarely, being motivated by a rage to reduce the production of more enemies to raid one's own herds. At this point, violence is decidedly ethnic.

[82] Okudi, 'Pastoral Crisis'; Belshaw and Malinga, 'The Kalashnikov Economies'; Galaty, 'Pastoralists and Forced Migration'.

[83] Mkutu, *Pastoral Conflict*, 9.

[84] The proportions are derived from the figures in Wayland, 'Preliminary Studies', 222–227. Paget Wilkes also attests that the practice was long established at the time: *Lokong*, 11.

[85] Karamojong women are hardly shy and can express themselves forcibly, even in a raid by the Sabawot in 1909: 'Four Karamojong were called and then the women came after them crying, and two of them were killed': Weatherby, 'Intertribal Warfare', 211. Sabawot women had to defend themselves when raiders came to their homes with bow and arrows.

[86] Bell, *Karamojo Safari*, 38.

[87] RHO MSS.Afr.s.1018 Bell to Ormsby, 28 February 1906.

[88] Lamphear, *Traditional History*, 244.

[89] Paget Wilkes, *Lokong*, 9.

[90] Both missionaries and District Commissioners were known to join in traditional dancing there: interview M1.

[91] Dyson-Hudson, *Karimojong Politics*, 247.

[92] Gulliver, 'Jie Marriage', 155.

[93] Interview J23.

[94] 'Raider' is a much more accurate popular term than rustler, which infers that cattle are quietly stolen with no-one really noticing. The good herder is always aware of loss, and is frequently in the way of the raiders, hence the immediate danger to his person.

[95] Mirzeler and Young, 'Pastoral Politics', 419.
[96] Ibid., 426.
[97] Ibid., 419.
[98] Interview P5.
[99] Exemplifying what became a strong feature of Turkana politics, the Turkana-born *alomar* leader in Najie, Apaloris (master of the leopard), was an *emuron*, who made decisions on moving camp and finding grazing based on his reading of the intestines of sacrificial oxen; Banks, 3 April 1990, p.1f., letter.
[100] Macdonald, 'Journeys to the North', 137.
[101] Banks, 3 April 1990, 2, letter.
[102] Docherty, 'The Karamojong and the Suk', 40.
[103] Knighton, 'Karamojong'; Gray, 'A Memory of Loss', 408.
[104] Interview J22.
[105] Interviews D1, J13 and J22.
[106] One diligent Sub-County Chief said, 'Government fears local custom. Court is rare': interview J8.
[107] Interview J31.
[108] Gulliver, 'Jie Marriage', 155.
[109] Interview P5.
[110] Akujů is best translated as the word God as popularly used. The final vowel is breathed, not voiced. See Knighton, 'Christian Enculturation', I, pp. 247–256; also Knighton, 'The Meaning of God'.
[111] 19 June 1990, letter.
[112] Interview J31.
[113] Interview P5.
[114] Interview P3.
[115] Interview P5.
[116] Dyson-Hudson, *Karimojong Politics*, 188, 198f.
[117] Ibid., 199.
[118] Docherty, 'The Karamojong and the Suk', 40.
[119] Interview D6.
[120] Interview J31.
[121] Marshall Thomas, *Warrior Herdsmen*, 146.
[122] Gulliver, *Family Herds*, 155.
[123] Interview P3. The qualification may vary among the Karamojong, but it does signify a pastoralist identity.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Novelli, *Karimojong Traditional Religion*, 328.
[126] Interview P5.
[127] Interviews N1 and P7; Docherty, 'The Karamojong and the Suk', 33f.; Knighton, 'How Far Does the Western Rationality of Economics'.
[128] The raiders would prefer to be able to keep the cattle, and would do so without government interference. It is not the same business as much cattle-raiding in the southern half of Kenya. 'The Kuria have been in it for the money for 80 years': Fleisher, 'Cattle Raiding', 241.
[129] Oxfam, 'Conflict's Children', 35.
[130] *The Monitor* (Kampala), 24 October 1999.
[131] This is my translation of Pellerino's informant: Novelli, *Karimojong Traditional Religion*, 311 n.13.
[132] Mirzeler and Young, 'Pastoral Politics', 423.
[133] Mirzeler and Young, 'Pastoral Polotics', 424.
[134] Marshall Thomas, *Warrior Herdsmen*, 61.
[135] Knighton, 'The State as Raider' and *The Vitality of Karamojong Religion.*
[136] Radcliffe-Brown and Forde, *African Systems of Kinship*, 2. Radcliffe-Brown (1881–1955) was the first President of the Association of Anthropologists. In 1972, lectures after his name were established by the Association of Social Anthropologists. Neville Dyson-Hudson was a recipient of his legacy at Oxford.

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