

Once Patriarchs and Warriors: Masculinity and Modernity in Karamoja, Uganda

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Abstract

This paper discusses the changing nature of masculinity in Karamoja, northeastern Uganda. The region is characterized by its dynamic and chronically unstable environment, as well as persistent low-intensity conflict. The ways in which Karamojong males achieve, consolidate, and maintain masculinity are similarly dynamic. Traditional mechanisms for men to garner social status, such as acquiring cattle wealth and getting married, are increasingly difficult due to changing circumstances on the ground. Coping strategies within this context of chronic instability create new opportunities for achieving manhood, which may have significant implications for Karamojong society in the future. Some of these strategies, including migration and the pursuit of new livelihoods, are variations of traditional short-term responses to scarcity, insecurity, and social pressure among pastoralist communities in the region. However, the new roles and behaviors men are adopting may signal a more permanent shift away from tradition and toward new conceptions of what it means to be a modern pastoralist man. These changing dynamics have profound implications for the viability of traditional Karamojong ways of life in the long term. The information included herein is informed by current and historical literature, as well as the author's field research conducted in northern Karamoja in August 2010.

The Karamojong Context

Karamoja is a semi-arid region in northeastern Uganda home to over one million people engaged in a daily struggle for survival.¹ The region is chronically unstable due to a variety of internal and external pressures, including insecurity, climate change, environmental degradation, restrictive government policies, and economic pressure.

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Each of these dynamics has intensified in recent years and challenged the resilience of the region's land, resources, and people. Stresses and shocks are among the few constants in Karamoja, and define this context of vulnerability.

All aspects of Karamojong life, including livelihoods, social structures, and cultural traditions, are tailored to this challenging environment. Agro-pastoralism—the blending of agriculture and animal husbandry—is a complex and highly adaptive way of life and has been the dominant land-use system across the broader region for centuries.² The core characteristics that underlie these practices are mobility, flexibility, and opportunism. These principles allow for traditional agro-pastoralist lifestyles to remain viable despite persistent adverse conditions. The result is a set of social, economic, and political institutions that are typically resilient in the face of the challenges so often faced by the Karamojong.

Masculinity as a social institution is no different. While the processes that allow for men to achieve, reinforce, and demonstrate masculinity are infused with generations of tradition, this too is a dynamic and adaptive concept. Masculinity is mobile because men acquire new roles and responsibilities as they age and complete certain rites of passage. It is also flexible in that there are a variety of ways for men to consolidate and express manhood. Finally, masculinity is opportunistic as men often engage in certain activities in order to achieve immediate gains in status and authority, including the raiding of cattle. These definitions and demonstrations of masculinity impact how communities are structured, how families support and protect themselves, and how the Karamojong engage with the modern Ugandan state.

There are new forces at play that are fundamentally changing concepts of masculinity in the region and undermining traditional ways of life. Challenges

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such as drought, famine, and violence are common features in Karamoja. They are, however, intensifying and are overwhelming the traditional coping strategies that have long allowed for the Karamojong to manage short-term stresses. As a result, critical assets, livelihoods, and social structures are eroding, and profoundly impacting the vulnerability of men and the population as a whole. Further, previously effective coping mechanisms are becoming more permanent adaptations rather than temporary means for survival. This shift toward permanency may threaten the traditional ways of life that have defined Karamoja for centuries.

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These changes have significant implications for how men see themselves, the roles they play in society, and how they relate to others within and outside of their communities. Today, Karamojong men are renegotiating what it means to be a pastoralist in this context, the result of which will have far-reaching ramifications for the broader society. The key question is whether new masculinities and their effects will make the Karamojong more vulnerable or more resilient in the face of continuing changes.

The following pages provide a brief background on the role masculinity plays in pastoral cultures in East Africa, and the economic, social, and security pressures inherent in the lives of men in Karamoja. The analysis continues with a discussion of protection issues that make men vulnerable to conflict, both as victims and perpetrators, and addresses the coping mechanisms that their communities are adopting as a response to persistent instability. These strategies will be examined to understand their impact on traditional and modern notions of masculinity in Karamoja, as well as on the viability of agro-pastoralist livelihoods in the region in the future.

Methodology

The information cited is gleaned from contemporary and historical literature as well as from interviews conducted by the author in northern Karamoja in August 2010. The secondary resources consist of academic and grey literature, including journal articles, academic theses, policy briefs, and strategy papers. These provide a broad cross-section of perspectives, observations, and analyses. Most are focused on Karamoja, although a number of key resources discuss how similar dynamics affect other pastoral groups in East Africa, such as the Maasai and Turkana. The insights remain relevant because these populations share similar lifestyles, histories, cultures, environments, and methods of production.

Primary data was collected by the author and a local research team from the Feinstein International Center at Tufts University in August 2010, under the tutelage of Senior Researcher for Conflict and Livelihoods, Elizabeth Stites.³ The purpose of the research was to understand factors impacting the livelihoods, food security, and nature of conflict in northern Karamoja, Uganda. The team visited ten sites in Kotido and Kaabong districts, primarily made up of semi-permanent homesteads in remote areas. In addition, the perspectives of urban and migratory populations were sought when access was possible. Respondents were from the Dodoth, Jie, Ik, and Nyangia population groups. In-depth, semi-structured small group interviews were conducted with approximately 275 participants, divided when feasible by both gender and age group. In addition, the researchers conducted key informant interviews with individuals at five international agencies, four community-based organizations, and several local district offices in Kotido, Kaabong, and Kampala. Recognizing the sensitive nature of some of the respondents' comments, efforts are made here to maintain anonymity for anyone not interviewed in an official capacity. The findings refer specifically to the study sample and should not be considered representative of the wider population of Karamoja, as they reflect the experiences of certain individuals and communities.

Masculinity in Pastoralist Cultures

Masculinities in pastoralist societies in East Africa are complex and dynamic identities firmly rooted in traditional livelihoods.⁴ Men and boys are responsible for the family's most valuable assets: the livestock that sustain and provide for them. In Karamoja, as elsewhere in the region, cattle and small ruminants such as sheep and goats provide the meat, milk, and blood around which the pastoralist's diet is based. Livestock are also an important economic asset in that they can be exchanged for staple commodities, utilized for labor in agricultural belts, and transferred between families to build relationships or resolve disputes. It is this central reliance on livestock that incentivizes cattle raiding, a practice that allows for the redistribution of wealth and re-stocking of herds lost to famine, drought, disease, or violence.

Male pastoralists are resolutely defined by their relationship to their animals, and derive from them not only food, but wealth, status, identity, and authority.⁵ There is a clear division of labor between males of different ages. Young boys herd livestock, while older boys guard the animals and wider community from raids, attacks, and other threats. Elder men are the primary decision-makers, and control the movement, usage, and reproduction of herds. Pastoralist societies are generally viewed as deeply male-centered because for men, status is a highly public affair and requires outward expression, in contrast with women, for whom it is largely domestic.⁶ As they gain greater wealth and prominence, men garner further responsibilities within the community.⁷ Conventional notions of masculinity are thus firmly ingrained in the perpetuation of pastoralist traditions.

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Contemporary masculinities have been heavily shaped by external political influences; earlier, by the region's colonial powers and today, by the nation-state. While traditional social and economic structures established defined gender roles, the colonial era led to new conceptions of gender identity that were largely imposed, rather than forged. Colonial actors in East Africa defined the Karamojong, Maasai, and Turkana, among others, as primitive, backward, defiant, and aggressive.⁸ These attributes referred almost exclusively to men, and were foisted upon the pastoralist, limiting him to the brands of nomad and warrior. This redefinition placed pastoralists in direct opposition to images of the modern, civilized man, and provided justification for outsiders to hold positions of dominance across the region.

The new concept of "statehood" came to supersede traditional authority, effectively undermining the control of men over their own communities. Pastoralist men were relegated to the margins, and were forced to cede decision-making authority to foreign actors who did not understand or support traditional lifestyles and livelihoods. For

instance, in order to cement control over the territories, new administrators restricted the mobility of people and livestock, a critical strategy for accessing scarce resources in the region. These actions eroded the authority to govern resources, which had always been under the purview of Karamojong elders. The masculinities defined by local customs and those defined by the state fell into direct conflict with one another. Colonial powers were eager to combat traditionalism and communalism in the name of progress, and thus, according to cultural anthropologist Dorothy Hodgson, “they exhorted...leaders to rapidly change their attitudes and practices, or else be left behind.”⁹ The colonial period fundamentally challenged traditional masculinities by undermining the means through which men consolidated and expressed authority over their communities.

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East African governments in the post-independence period largely pursued a similar approach in their relations with pastoralists. Those communities that stood in contrast to the emerging image of modern Africa were deliberately underdeveloped and marginalized.¹⁰ This was because pastoralist men were seen as inextricably linked to violence and instability for their near-constant cycles of raids and retaliatory attacks within and across the region’s porous borders. However, local experts Darlington Akabwai and Priscillar Ateyo argue that successive regimes “failed to understand the root causes of cattle raiding and arms trafficking in the region or to seek any non-violent responses to endemic violence and anarchy.”¹¹ Instead, governments maintained a distrust of these populations, and in many cases sought to restrict their traditional ways of life through domestic and regional policy-making. For instance, in Uganda, the government established that the Karamojong’s semi-nomadic lifestyle did not confer rights over the land and its resources. The establishment of wildlife preserves, nationalization of mining rights, and more rigid enforcement of international borders made pastoralist livelihoods less viable by restricting access to critical grazing and watering sites utilized for generations.¹² Additionally, disarmament campaigns dating back nearly one hundred years were the primary mechanism through which the state sought to control the region, and occurred without respect for their impact on lifestyles and livelihoods.¹³ At a meta-level, these sorts of anti-pastoralist actions set a precedent whereby the state could directly undermine local lifestyles with impunity. In a region where masculine identity in particular is so deeply entwined with one’s livelihood, active government restrictions on pastoralism subjugated Karamoja under the patriarchy of the state.

Similar challenges hinder healthy and functional state-society relationships within pastoralist communities across East Africa today. There is currently a greater variety

in how the region's governments perceive and relate to their pastoralist populations, with certain countries adopting more pro-pastoral policies. However, it remains true in Uganda that fewer resources are invested in the development of physical, political, and economic infrastructure across Karamoja than elsewhere in the country.¹⁴ This has had dramatic implications on how pastoralist communities engage with trends towards modernization. The region lacks access to the institutions and opportunities that have made Uganda such a favorite on the international scene. A feeling of mutual distrust is palpable between communities and the central government, and as a result, significant disparities exist between national and local perspectives and priorities. For instance, a series of government-sponsored development programs seek to promote sedentarized agriculture as an alternative to pastoralism in Karamoja.¹⁵ However, due to the variable nature of the region's ecology and the steadfast connection the Karamojong have to traditional livelihoods, it is unlikely that agriculture will supplant animal husbandry as the dominant way of life in the long term. As one woman in Panyangara sub-county, Kotido District declared, "we are going to die, so let [President Museveni] rule the trees."¹⁶

Pastoralist masculinities throughout East Africa have clearly become a key site for the "experience and negotiation of modernity."¹⁷ Pastoralists continue to face threats to their traditional ways of life due to climate change, economic pressures, persistent insecurity, and the policies of their own governments. As traditional stewards of this way of life, men are navigating a tenuous border between tradition and modernity.

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Status and Masculinity in Karamoja

Masculinity is achieved, cultivated, expressed, and reinforced in a variety of different ways in Karamoja. It serves as a way to distinguish between men and women, as well as between different men on the basis of relative power within the community. Men generally attain masculinity by engaging in specific rites, possessing livestock, and building a family. These achievements allow men to gain access to political and decision-making power and ritual authority. Elder men maintain both symbolic and real power through formal generation- and age-set systems that identify senior and junior leaders within the community. Males participate in the *akiriket* (formal political, social, and religious assemblies) in a manner that is strictly defined and ranked. All initiated men have an equal right to participate, though they possess varying degrees of influence depending upon their individual status. Boys and male youth have no formal place within these structures, and those who are awaiting initiation are known collectively as *karacuna*. While often mistranslated as "warrior," this term means "those of the apron," and is a way to indicate that male youth have the same relative influence as

women.¹⁸ The prestige associated with being an initiated male is transferred to the family, community, and wider tribal grouping.¹⁹ Thus, women, elders, and peers also have an interest in defining and encouraging masculine ideals.

Marriage is one of the most important rites of passage in a Karamojong male's life and signals the transition from boyhood to manhood. Procuring the assets needed to get married is a critical process by which men cultivate masculinity. In Karamoja, the bridewealth—traditionally paid in the form of livestock—is a way to solidify relationships with the bride's family, garner social status, and obtain the rights and protections awarded to formal customary marriages. For instance, only a man who is “married with cattle” has official claim to his children or any future bridewealth obtained by his daughters.²⁰ Men who are unable to acquire the necessary cattle are often ridiculed, especially by young women.²¹

Cattle raiding has long been a way to procure assets necessary for marriage and the passage into adulthood, and is customarily regulated by the whole community. This was traditionally used as a method for redistributing wealth and food, restocking herds, and hedging against ecological uncertainty.²² Raiding can thus be viewed as both an economic and a social institution. However, some argue that it is a flawed custom, in that it fosters instability and the wealth gained is fluid, brief, and unpredictable.²³ For instance, during an interview in Panyangara sub-county, a group of women explained that their community had recently been raided by the Matheniko. The men from the village went for revenge, but most were killed or wounded. The Ugandan military punished them for the counter-raid by taking away all of their livestock. One woman said that her daughter had just been married, and now the entire bridewealth was gone.²⁴

There are significant implications associated with how Karamojong men achieve and express masculinity, and what happens when young men are unable to realize adulthood. Over the course of the last generation, Karamoja witnessed a significant decrease in the population of livestock.²⁵ This is due to high rates of animal deaths associated with drought, famine, and disease, as well as an increase in commercialized raiding. The inability of men to obtain livestock assets renders them unable to undergo customary marriage rites. In the short term, both young men and women remain on the periphery of traditional authority and decision-making structures. In the long term, these social and political institutions may slowly erode, as there will be fewer formally-recognized elders to maintain them.

Karamoja has not witnessed an official transfer of power from one generation

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to the next since the late 1950s.²⁶ The delay in holding succession ceremonies is in part due to the reluctance of the current generation of leaders to hand over control, as well as the lack of appropriate conditions. According to tradition, major ceremonies and initiations are only to occur in years of peace and successful harvest. Decades of recurrent instability, conflict, drought, and famine have rendered the empowerment of Karamoja's junior generation-set impossible. Researcher Ben Knighton argues that the current leaders are increasingly old and infirm; members of the junior age-set are also approaching advanced years. Furthermore, inter-generational power struggles are leading younger men, both initiated and not, to lose faith in the leadership abilities of their elders.²⁷ Nonetheless, some researchers believe that today's power struggles are of a different nature. For instance, Charles Emunyu Ocan argued in 1994 that power structures were fundamentally changing: "[t]here is a total disrespect of the will and power of elders in favor of the will and power of weapons. Possession of weapons and a retainer army is now the major determinant of authority. Age is a virtually insignificant factor."²⁸ This situation has critical implications for the region's social and cultural future.

Without reliable structures in place to regulate and moderate behavior at the community level, violent conflict is likely to persist. In particular, men may continue to seek new ways of obtaining social status and wealth by manipulating the traditional custom of cattle raiding into a method for obtaining modern assets. An elder woman in Sidok sub-county decried the current generation of youth and their proclivity towards violent raiding, saying: "We are dying because of this disobedience."²⁹

Insecurity and Emasculation

The pastoral region of the Horn of Africa is widely considered one of the most conflict-prone parts of the world.³⁰ Of particular concern is the existence of approximately five million unregulated guns in the region, which are blamed for increasing the scope and intensity of conflict in recent decades.³¹ The demand for small arms in Karamoja—like the conflict in general—is rooted in the complex interplay between the ecological, cultural, economic, and historical factors that have rendered the region underdeveloped, marginalized, and insecure.³² It is clear that for some Karamojong males, escalating militarism is a new source of social definition and provides a mechanism for negotiating pastoralist livelihoods in a changing environment. For others, the proliferation of weapons poses a threat to their basic survival. This dichotomy is particularly applicable to young men, as their relationship to a community's livestock makes them the most likely perpetrators of raiding, as well as the most common targets when enemies attack. Thus, guns are considered both offensive and defensive tools for Karamojong communities. Their presence—or absence—has profound implications for issues of protection and vulnerability.

Access to small arms creates opportunities for young men to fulfill both traditional and modern gender roles. In line with generations past, young men acquire AK-47s in order to protect their families, communities, and assets. Indeed, according to

Akabwai and Ateyo, small arms have “replaced the traditional spear and shield as the hallmark of a warrior.”³³ Possessing small arms also allows men to provide for their families through raiding. This sort of violence has long served as a mechanism for securing the assets and status to attain manhood. Evidence has shown that since the arrival of modern weapons, raiding has become more arbitrary and more deadly.³⁴ However, while the dominant discourse states that incidents of violent raids have increased over the last thirty years; Knighton argues that firearms, sporadic conflict, and entrepreneurial raiding date back to at least the 19th century.³⁵

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While the use of violence may not be new to Karamoja, the nature of today’s violence does demonstrate different characteristics. Raiding appears to be increasingly undertaken for the purpose of individual economic benefit.³⁶ Additionally, other forms of violence and delinquent behavior are on the rise, including banditry, petty theft, rape, and alcohol abuse.³⁷ In the past, social norms and decision-making structures mitigated violent behavior and ensured that raids included only minimal loss of life.³⁸ In contrast, these sorts of attacks are increasingly targeted not at men, who traditionally control the family’s assets, but at vulnerable populations, particularly settled homesteads that are inhabited by women, children, and the elderly. Traditionally, attacks of this nature would have been deemed unacceptable breaches of custom. Communities in each of our study sites recounted stories of rape, physical assaults, and theft. Elderly women in Moruitit camp asked, “Why are the youth killing us [women]? Do *we* go to raid?... They are killing us just for trying to survive.”³⁹ This is not to suggest that all young Karamojong males are violent by nature. Rather, the existence of male youth engaging in violent or destructive activities suggests that social norms around violence and masculinity are changing.

The Government of Uganda cares little whether communities desire weapons for the purposes of conducting raids or for self-security.⁴⁰ Rather than attempting to eliminate the causes underlying weapons proliferation, including the absence of the rule of law and lack of development, the government has sought to rid Karamoja of guns entirely. The more recent set of disarmament campaigns began in 2001⁴¹ and have undergone a number of incarnations, ranging from voluntary and incentivized processes, to more aggressive cordon-and-search operations. The success of these efforts has been limited at best. Kennedy Mkutu argues that there is “no evidence available to indicate that disarmament (either forced or voluntary) brought about any period of peace,” and continues to say that forceful disarmament in fact exacerbated insecurity.⁴² The primary critique the current phase of disarmament is that it has been conducted unevenly. The result is that some communities are left without weapons, while others maintain them, creating a cycle of vulnerability. The demand for weapons

has actually increased in some communities as a response. As a group of elder men in Sidok sub-county argued, “[e]verybody these days is insecure because there is no gun.”⁴³ Indeed, the disarmament campaign has created a sort of prisoner’s dilemma for the Karamojong, wherein cooperation renders them more vulnerable, and refusal, while also risky, at least provides a semblance of security.

Further, there is an important regional dimension that encumbers any benefits gleaned from disarmament in Uganda. For example, the Matheniko, Bokora, and Pian ethnic groups in south and west Karamoja have largely been disarmed; however, the Turkana and Pokot communities across the border in Western Kenya have maintained their weapons, and continue to raid.⁴⁴ While most communities are not opposed to disarmament as a concept, they are angry with how it is being implemented. Stites and Akabwai found that communities in Kotido, Moroto, and Nakapiripirit districts overwhelmingly supported disarmament, so long as it was uniform, balanced, and complete.⁴⁵

Most critically, disarmament has not been complemented with a qualitative improvement in the provision of security by the military, the Uganda People’s Defense Forces (UPDF). Instead, the Ugandan government’s approach essentially emasculates those who would traditionally protect their communities by removing their weapons, and does so without stepping in to fill the vacuum. The most tangible effort on the part of the military to provide protection was centered around livestock, and involved a controversial initiative. Across Karamoja, the UPDF undertook a strategy whereby they accepted or impounded cattle across the region into “protected *kraals*”⁴⁶ near military barracks, each of which may contain tens of thousands of cattle.⁴⁷ However, both the health of the animals and the carrying capacity of the land is stressed through this practice due to the high concentration of livestock and the soldiers’ lack of knowledge around caring for livestock. While this practice was due to cease in 2009, many cattle remain under the management of military personnel, rather than their proper owners.

The dearth of state-provided protection for communities and the ineffectual manner in which security is provided for livestock both serve to challenge and undermine the position of Karamoja’s men. The government’s efforts to remove the region’s weapons have failed to treat the underlying causes of insecurity. Forced disarmament campaigns leave communities incredibly vulnerable to attack and men without the means to protect themselves and their families. This is due to the unequal manner in which disarmament

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has occurred, which only encourages those who maintain their weapons to go out and raid. Finally, the military seeks to protect critical assets, without the proper knowledge and resources to do so, and in turn threatens the livelihoods of men and boys across Karamoja.

The disarmament process in Karamoja significantly increases the vulnerability of men in a more direct way as well. By and large, the government has treated Karamojong males as potential threats, and the UPDF has gained notoriety in the region for abusing civilians. Cordon-and-search operations are reported to regularly involve abuses such as unlawful killings, arbitrary detention, torture, rape, theft, and the destruction of property.⁴⁹ In Panyangara sub-county, a number of women recounted what happened to their husbands and sons who had been detained by the UPDF:

The men were very mistreated. Those who were detained were tied around their testicles and linked together in a chain. Their heads were covered with black plastic bags. They walked from morning until evening to the barracks. Some of the men died along the way and others after they arrived at the detention site. Those men who have returned home are often impotent or otherwise injured.⁵⁰

This and the countless other similar incidents reported across the region demonstrate the government's deliberate attempts to undermine, intimidate, and emasculate men in Karamoja, both literally and figuratively. While there have been efforts on the part of the military to institute enhanced guidelines for conduct and human rights training, abuses largely remain. The UPDF's mistrust and mistreatment of communities they are charged with protecting means that they in turn are greeted with violence and hostility. As another woman in the same community remarked, "We have two types of enemies—raiders and the UPDF."⁵¹

The lack of protection in Karamoja as a result of the government's disarmament campaign has significant implications for all segments of society, including specific consequences for men. While the overall rates of violence have decreased in Karamoja in recent years, rural communities are actually experiencing greater insecurity.⁵² This has resulted in ever-greater pressures on men due to their traditional role as leaders and protectors of the community. Men are targeted as threats, both to would-be raiders as well as the UPDF. Not only are they at great physical risk, but attacks on communities can be perceived as deliberate challenges to their masculinity, as this demonstrates that they are unable to protect their families.

Even activities that previously stood as symbols of masculinity are being corrupted. Cattle raiding as traditionally performed was sanctioned, even celebrated, by elders, religious leaders, and women. However, the practice today stands in stark opposition to its traditional roots, and is more about individual financial gain. In addition, behaviors that were earlier seen as deeply shameful, such as attacking women and children, no longer bring stigma upon men. With complete disregard for custom, other forms of violence, such as rape and banditry are increasing. These actions may indicate attempts to regain a sense of power by warriors frustrated by a loss of livestock, unsuccessful

raids, or damaged pride.⁵³ The changing nature of conflict in Karamoja clearly demonstrates the challenges facing traditional mechanisms for achieving masculinity, and the new and dangerous opportunities now being pursued by Karamojong men.

New Lifestyles and Livelihoods

Pastoralism is by nature an adaptive and responsive livelihood strategy. Across Karamoja, it takes many forms, ranging from nomadic and purely animal-centered, to more settled and agriculturally-based. However, whatever the combination of strategies pursued, *Pastoralism is by nature an adaptive and responsive livelihood strategy.* pastoralists in Uganda are increasingly unable to maintain their traditional livelihoods. Few people are pursuing purely pastoralist ways of life,⁵⁴ instead complementing traditional livelihoods with activities such as agriculture and casual work. While the institution is vulnerable today, pastoralism has been the dominant land-use system across the region for centuries for a reason; it is uniquely adapted to the environment. Alternative livelihoods, such as fully sedentarized agriculture, are unlikely to be sustainable.⁵⁵ It is important to consider dynamics impacting livelihoods in a discussion about masculinity because it affects the ways in which men—and increasingly, women—provide for their families.

There are two particularly striking trends transforming Karamojong livelihoods, and both signal a potential move away from pastoralism. In both cases, these changes may be short-term coping strategies for managing difficult circumstances. However, they may also become longer-term and more permanent adaptations, should changing priorities or conditions not allow people to return to traditional pastoralist ways of life.

The first is shifting patterns in migration. Mobility and dispersal are key attributes of pastoralism because they help moderate access to sparse and highly variable resources. Karamojong social and physical structures are flexible because there is a near-constant need to move according to changes in vegetation density, water availability, soil quality, presence of disease, and proximity to enemies.⁵⁶ According to Rada Dyson-Hudson and Dominique Meekers, short-term migration in Karamoja is normally an individual-level response to changes in the environment, such as food shortage or the death of a family member.⁵⁷ It generally involves movement to areas inhabited by allies, including different ethnic groups with whom reciprocal relationships are established. For instance, in times of scarcity, the Jie of Kotido District traditionally move to greenbelt areas in northwest Karamoja due to their long-standing alliance with the Nyangia, a more agriculture-oriented minority group. Here the Jie engage in temporary opportunistic cultivation, and in return, help protect the Nyangia from their traditional Dodoth enemies.⁵⁸ Inter-ethnic social networks throughout the region have long been built around this sort of periodic migration.

Modern migration, however, is a distress adaptation of this traditional coping mechanism, and indicates a more dramatic shift in the balance between people and resources.⁵⁹ Long-term pressures, including population growth and climate change, are generating more permanent out-migration. Recent research also demonstrates that the Karamojong are migrating to new places. Young people in particular are moving to areas where they lack traditional social networks, specifically urban and peri-urban areas elsewhere in Karamoja, neighboring districts in Uganda, or even across the borders into Sudan and Kenya.⁶⁰ Life in towns means access to improved food security, material goods, and opportunities for employment.⁶¹ Youth interviewed in Kotido Town Council agreed, “Instead of wasting time in the village where there is nothing, you can come to town and look for your survival.”⁶² Also in contrast with earlier practices, these migrants are staying away for longer periods and are often failing to send remittances back to their families.⁶³ This indicates that individualism among Karamojong youth may be taking greater precedence over communalism due to the severe nature of their poverty, or perhaps out of an interest in the tangible benefits of more “modern” lifestyles. If present conditions continue, these indicators of longer-term change may dramatically impact the demographic landscape of the region.

Changing trends in mobility and migration have a variety of impacts on Karamojong masculinity. The breakdown of family structures and traditional social networks is one visible consequence. Nearly all respondents in Kotido and Kaabong districts said that the youth who are migrating today are doing so without the approval of their families. Many of those who leave fail to return home, and few send back remittances to help their families survive. This new dynamic may create a younger generation of men who are resilient, independent, and self-sufficient. However, it may also lead to a significant cohort who are unable to pursue traditional methods for realizing manhood and will need to create new mechanisms for achieving identity and status. Little research exists on the short-term consequences of these new trends in migration. However, some argue that the increasing numbers of young men who are experiencing new lifestyles away from the confines of traditional social norms directly correspond with the increasing rates of rape, domestic abuse, and delinquency that are currently being reported in urban areas.⁶⁴ According to some local experts, the cash earned by new urban male youth is often spent immediately on goods for personal consumption, particularly alcohol and prostitution.⁶⁵ The long-term impacts of youth migration remain to be seen, and will require concentrated study, but the impact on how men relate to their families and their communities is likely to be significant.

Changing trends in mobility and migration have a variety of impacts on Karamojong masculinity. The breakdown of family structures and traditional social networks is one visible consequence.

The second major trend affecting Karamojong livelihoods is greater participation in and reliance on the cash economy. This is often the case for people who have lost their livestock due to raiding, disease, or famine. Young men and women are moving to towns to engage in casual work, such as brick-making, transporting water, and washing clothing, often for very low pay.⁶⁶ UPDF military barracks are also a common source of these sorts of work opportunities.⁶⁷ It is interesting to note that men are increasingly adopting livelihood strategies previously reserved for women, such as the sale of natural resources (including as firewood or charcoal), or manufactured items (such as locally-brewed sorghum beer). For instance, men in Panyangara sub-county said that they now go to town to sell charcoal with the women without shame.⁶⁸ Divisions of labor that used to keep male and female livelihoods separate are now becoming blurred, which may change social dynamics and hierarchies. Further, the inability to access markets, when coupled with the loss of livestock, leaves many men without a means of supporting their families, and thus without access to higher status. Young men in Karenga sub-county reported feeling “redundant,” largely because they are unable to contribute financially to their families.⁶⁹

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Two other indications of greater Karamojong male participation in the cash economy are the rise of so-called “commercialized” raiding⁷⁰ and the distress sales of livestock. Today, rather than seeking to build up or maintain assets “on the hoof,” more individuals prefer to have cash, which can more readily be traded for food, beer, other commodities. These changes impact three areas of the local economy. First, the price of cattle has risen dramatically. One young man at Kaabong’s main livestock market said that the price had nearly tripled for larger cattle in recent years.⁷¹ Second, these higher prices attract traders and middlemen to Karamoja from further afield to buy cattle. As a result, profits from cattle are more likely to be transferred outside the local economy, meaning these assets are lost to the local pastoralist system entirely. Finally, distress sales by families facing hunger are increasingly common, particularly of smaller animals and those in poor condition. However, this trade generates only temporary relief, as the few thousand shillings earned are quickly spent.⁷² One young woman at the livestock market told us she was selling her last goat so that she could buy enough sorghum to feed her family for just three or four days.⁷³

These three changes have contributed to the widening disparity in wealth between those families and communities who have maintained herds and those whose have been largely depleted through both raiding and trade. With a decreasing cattle population in Karamoja, communities will find it increasingly difficult to obtain more livestock through purchase, trade, marriage, or even counter-raiding. Thus, the customary

methods that allowed for men to provide for their families, consolidate wealth, and garner social status are diminishing. The commercialization of cattle raiding and the increase in distress sales of livestock poses a profound threat to the maintenance of traditional pastoralist ways of life in Karamoja.

The two changes in livelihoods strategies described here, out-migration and participation in the cash economy, may indicate fundamental changes to pastoralist traditions in this dynamic environment. These changes may have dramatic implications for the demographic, ecological, and cultural landscape of Karamoja in the near future, and particularly for conceptions of masculinity. Men and boys may continue to migrate away from their communities either due to limited opportunities in pastoralism, or increased opportunities in alternative livelihoods.⁷⁴ While there is currently no definitive evidence in the literature to this effect, one result of this increased social distance may be the fragmentation of social and cultural institutions, as well as family structures over time. Further, the monetization of Karamojong economics may engender a shift in preference away from traditional assets, such as cattle, in favor of cash and non-traditional commodities. Both of these factors challenge traditional norms around masculinity and signal dramatically new ways of life developing in Karamoja. The pursuit of new, more modern livelihood strategies may signal a temporary shift. It could also herald a more permanent disruption in the region's fundamental social and economic structures and the role of men in them.

Conclusion

The Karamojong are fundamentally defined by their unique ability to cope with and adapt to the difficult and changing environment they inhabit. Mirzeler and Young call the result "a stable form of disorder."⁷⁵ The Karamojong are able to achieve a semblance of stability in an intensely unstable context through a reliance on mobility, flexibility, and opportunism. However, these critical capacities for change are being reinterpreted in ways that profoundly change the roles and responsibilities of men in society and threaten the viability of traditional pastoralist ways of life in Karamoja moving forward.

Men bear much of the burden of exemplifying what it means to be a pastoralist in the region. However, Karamojong males are faced with fewer opportunities to achieve, consolidate, and maintain masculinity because of the myriad threats to their livelihoods and culture. Persistent insecurity, climate change, and government policies restrict pastoralist ways of life and create incentives for participation in the cash economy. Each of these factors has tangible repercussions, particularly for men. Increasing environmental and economic pressures undermine their ability to provide for their families through the pursuit of traditional livelihoods. The significant decrease in the region's cattle population also means fewer men can marry or take on positions of authority and status. The dramatic lack of state-provided protection and limited defensive capacity at the individual level also limit men's ability ensure the safety of their communities. It is clear that traditional roles and responsibilities for men in Karamoja are deeply threatened by these changing dynamics.

Karamojong men are navigating new definitions and means of identity that span traditional and modern ways of life. Customary methods for managing temporary instability are increasingly adopted as longer-term adaptations, and with dramatic implications for the region's social, economic, and cultural institutions. Mobility, once a method for gaining access to scarce resources, is now facilitating increasing rates of urban migration among young men and the formation of social networks outside of their families and communities. Families formerly moved easily between cultivation and animal-based livelihoods, but today men are abandoning pastoralism outright in exchange for less sustainable activities. Finally, opportunistic raiding, which previously allowed for families to redistribute wealth, is now incentivizing criminality and raiding for individual economic benefit.

The question that remains is whether changing conceptions of masculinity, and the strategies associated with them, will make the Karamojong more vulnerable or more resilient in this dramatic and difficult context. This analysis appears to suggest that while these changes may make individuals and communities more resilient in the short term, they pose a significant threat to the survival of the Karamojong in the long term. The cultural traditions, livelihoods, and social networks that characterize the region developed for a reason and are uniquely adapted to the context. If the strategies described above persist, they risk eroding the very practices and institutions that have allowed them to survive. Other modes of production or social structures are less likely to prove beneficial in the long run, and risk destroying Karamojong ways of life.

The region is going to change, as it no longer lives in isolation from the world around it. With increased exposure to the benefits of "modernization," such as greater access to education and improved infrastructure, the Karamojong will likely choose to embrace some of the new opportunities available to them. This will result in different interpretations of mobility, flexibility, and opportunism, and may fundamentally change the nature of Karamojong vulnerability and resilience.

As Karamoja navigates its path into the future, so too will men have to reexamine their role within this dynamic society. The external pressures facing the region are only likely to intensify in the coming years. If the essential character of Karamoja is to be maintained, men and their communities will need to pursue appropriate and effective strategies for coping with and adapting to challenges in a way that balances the traditional and the modern.

The question that remains is whether changing conceptions of masculinity, and the strategies associated with them, will make the Karamojong more vulnerable or more resilient in this dramatic and difficult context.

Endnotes

- 1 The region is home to approximately 1.2 million inhabitants known collectively as the Karamojong. However, the inhabitants of Karamoja do not make up a single unified political entity or ethnic identity. The primary ethnic groups include the Dodoth, Ik, and Nyan-gia (north), Jie and Tobur or Acholi Labwor (central), Pokot (east), Bokora, Matheniko, Pian, and Tepeth (south), as well as a number of other smaller populations. These various sub-groups possess somewhat distinct production systems, cultural traditions, histories, and in some cases, languages. The terms “Karamojong” and “Karimojong” are often used interchangeably in the literature, although the latter refers to a particular sub-set of people in the region, made up of the Bokora, Matheniko, and Pian ethnic groups. For the purposes of consistency, the broader definition of “Karamojong” is used here, and refers to all populations listed above.
- 2 Traditional livelihoods in the region involve a variable mix of animal husbandry and agriculture, and make up the dominant land use system across the more arid parts of Ethiopia, Sudan, Kenya, and Uganda (also known as the “Karamoja Cluster”).
- 3 The research was conducted as part of a project entitled Livelihoods, Insecurity, and Value Chain Examination (LIVE), a joint collaboration between FIC and Save the Children in Uganda (SCiUG), and funded by US Agency for International Development – Food for Peace. The FIC research team included one international researcher (the author), one local researcher, one Kenyan (Turkana) research assistant, and one local translator. The Ugandan researcher, Darlington Akabwai, is an expert on pastoralist and agro-pastoralist livelihoods, and has written extensively on dynamics affecting pastoralism across the broader region, serving as a Senior Researcher and Team Leader with FIC since 1996. Elizabeth Stites is a Senior Researcher on Conflict and Livelihoods at FIC, and provided a great deal of guidance in the preparation and conduct of the research. All entities above approve the use of this data and the analysis is the author’s own.
- 4 Dorothy Hodgson, “Once Intrepid Warriors: Modernity and the Production of Maasai Masculinities,” *Ethnology* 38, no. 2 (1999): 121-150.
- 5 Note that all of the communities sampled in the primary research were agro-pastoralist, rather than purely pastoralist societies. Thus, the construction of masculinity is at times less linear, and may involve more than the consolidation of animal wealth.
- 6 Jon Holtzman, “Politics and Gastropolitics: Gender and the Power of Food in Two African Pastoralist Societies,” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 8, no. 2 (2002): 259-278.
- 7 It is important to recognize that the reverse is not always true, and that men who lose their cattle do not necessarily regress in terms of authority. This is particularly critical today, as the population of livestock is decreasing in Karamoja, and fewer men can boast of large holdings of cattle.
- 8 See Hodgson, “Once Intrepid Warriors,” and Holtzman, “Politics and Gastropolitics.”
- 9 Hodgson, “Once Intrepid Warriors,” 132.
- 10 Mustafa Mirzeler and Crawford Young, “Pastoral Politics in the Northeast Periphery in Uganda,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 38, no. 3 (2000): 407-429.
- 11 Darlington Akabwai and Priscillar E. Ateyo, *The Scramble for Cattle, Power, and Guns in Karamoja* (Medford, MA: Feinstein International Center, 2007), 3.
- 12 Mirzeler and Young, “Pastoral Politics.”
- 13 James Bevan, “Crisis in Karamoja: Armed Violence and the Failure of Disarmament in

- Uganda's Most Deprived Region," Occasional Paper 21, Small Arms Survey, June 2008.
- 14 Robert Walker, "Anti-Pastoralism and the Growth of Poverty and Insecurity in Karamoja: Disarmament and Development Dilemmas: A Report for DFID East Africa (Uganda)," March 2002.
 - 15 See Office of the Prime Minister, *Karamoja Integrated Disarmament and Development Programme: Creating Conditions for Promoting Human Security and Recovery in Karamoja, 2007-2010* (Kampala: Government of Uganda, January 2007).
 - 16 Jie elderly women, interview with the author, Panyangara Sub-County, Kotido District, August 9, 2010.
 - 17 Hodgson, "Once Intrepid Warriors," 144.
 - 18 Elizabeth Stites et al., *Angering Akujũ: Survival and Suffering in Karamoja: A Report on Livelihoods and Human Security in the Karamoja Region of Uganda* (Medford, MA: Feinstein International Center, 2007), 15.
 - 19 Karamojong social organization is generally structured along the lines of the tribe, section, home area, neighborhood, and camp, from broadest to smallest. Social organization it is highly flexible and subject to change due to historical relationships or political expediency. (See, for example: Hodgson, "Once Intrepid Warriors," and Dyson-Hudson & Dyson-Hudson, "The Social Organization.")
 - 20 Stites et al., "Angering Akujũ," 53.
 - 21 This was noted as one of the primary reasons why men go to raid in an interview with Jie elderly and young women conducted by the author in Panyangara Sub-County, Kotido District on August 9, 2010.
 - 22 See Sandra Gray, "A Memory of Loss: Ecological Politics, Local History, and the Evolution of Karamojong Violence," *Human Organization* 59, no. 4 (2000): 401-418; and Elizabeth Stites and Darlington Akabwai, *Changing Roles, Shifting Risks: Livelihood Impacts of Disarmament in Karamoja, Uganda* (Medford, MA: Feinstein International Center, 2009).
 - 23 Charles E. Ocan, "Pastoral Crisis in North-Eastern Uganda: The Changing Significance of Cattle Raids," Working Paper 21, Centre for Basic Research-Uganda, 1992.
 - 24 Dodoth elderly and young women, interview with the author, Panyangara Sub-County, Kotido District, August 9, 2010.
 - 25 According to Charles E. Ocan, in the year 1920 there was a ratio of 5.5 cattle per person (Ocan, 1992, p. 11), compared to just 0.6 cattle per person today. Further, an interview with a key informant indicated that the population of cattle in Karamoja may have been depleted by as much as *half* since the 2008 census. Dr. Pascal Pavuga, District Veterinary Officer, interview with the author, Kotido Town Council, Kotido District, August 12, 2010.
 - 26 Initiated adult males are recruited into groups of coevals. These age-sets comprise all men who have participated in the necessary rituals within an approximate five year period. An amalgamation of five age-sets together comprise a wider group, the generation-set. There is always only one senior and one junior set at any given time. For more information on Karamojong authority structures, see Walker, "Anti-Pastoralism and the Growth of Poverty," and Stites et al., "Angering Akujũ."
 - 27 Stites et al., "Angering Akujũ," 17-18.
 - 28 Charles E. Ocan, as qtd. in Mirzeler & Young, "Pastoral Politics," 419-420.
 - 29 Jie and Dodoth elderly women, interview with the author, Sidok Sub-County, Kaabong District, August 18, 2010.

- 30 Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN), *Strategy 2007-2011*, (Addis Ababa: CEWARN, Intergovernmental Authority on Development, 2006).
- 31 Ben Knighton, "The State as Raider Among the Karamojong: Where There are no Guns, They Use the Threat of Guns," *Africa* 73, no. 3 (2003): 427-455.
- 32 Kennedy Mkutu, "Small Arms and Light Weapons Among Pastoral Groups in the Kenya-Uganda Border Area," *African Affairs* 106, no. 422 (2006): 47-70.
- 33 Akabwai and Ateyo, "The Scramble for Cattle."
- 34 Sandra Gray, "A Memory of Loss: Ecological Politics, Local History, and the Evolution of Karamojong Violence.," *Human Organization* 59, no. 4 (2000): 401-418.
- 35 Knighton, "The State as Raider," 430.
- 36 Gray, "A Memory of Loss," 402.
- 37 Knighton, "The State as Raider."
- 38 Akabwai and Ateyo, "The Scramble for Cattle."
- 39 Jie and Dodoth elderly women, interview with the author, Moruitit Resettlement Camp, Border between Sidok and Rengen Sub-Counties, Kotido and Kaabong Districts, August 12, 2010.
- 40 Kennedy Mkutu, "Disarmament in Karamoja, Northern Uganda: Is This a Solution for Localized Violent Inter-and Intra-Communal Conflict," *The Round Table* 97, no. 394 (2008): 99-120.
- 41 The first phase of modern disarmament took place from 2001-2002, and was followed by a subsequent campaign initiated in 2004 and expanded in 2006, which continues today.
- 42 Mkutu, "Disarmament in Karamoja," 110.
- 43 Jie and Dodoth young and elder men, interview with the author, Sidok Sub-County, Kaabong District, August 18, 2010.
- 44 Akabwai and Ateyo, "The Scramble for Cattle," 13.
- 45 Stites and Akabwai, "Changing Roles, Shifting Risks," 13-14.
- 46 The word kraal, from Afrikaans, refers to mobile or semi-mobile livestock camps found throughout the region.
- 47 As of June 2009, UNOCHA estimated that 38 such protected kraals were in existence across Karamoja. These included 8 in Kaabong, 7 in Kotido, 9 in Moroto, and 14 in Nakapiripirit districts. See UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Uganda, *Focus on Karamoja, Special Report no. 4 (January-June 2009)*.
- 48 The research team saw evidence of a number of protected kraals in existence across Kotido and Kaabong districts in August 2010.
- 49 Human Rights Watch, *Get the Gun! Human Rights Violations by Uganda's National Army in Law Enforcement Operations in Karamoja Region* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2007).
- 50 Interview with Dodoth elderly and young women, interview with the author, Panyangara Sub-County, Kotido District August 9, 2010.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 Stites and Akabwai, "Changing Roles and Shifting Risks."
- 53 Akabwai and Ateyo, "The Scramble for Cattle," 29.

- 54 Stites and Akabwai, "Changing Roles and Shifting Risks."
- 55 Mirzeler and Young, "Pastoral Politics."
- 56 Rada Dyson-Hudson, "Pastoralism: Self Image and Behavior Reality," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 7 (1972): 30-47.
- 57 Rada Dyson-Hudson and Dominique Meekers, "Migration Across Ecosystem Boundaries," in *Turkana Herders of the Dry Savanna: Ecology and Biobehavioral Response of Nomads to an Uncertain Environment*, eds. Michael Little and Paul Leslie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 303-313.
- 58 Stites and Akabwai, "Changing Roles and Shifting Risks," 23-24.
- 59 Stites et al., "Angering Akujũ."
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 Ibid.
- 62 Jie male and female youth, interview with the author, Kotido Town Council, Kotido District, August 11, 2010.
- 63 Elizabeth Stites and Carrie S. Huisman, "Adaptation and Resilience: Responses to Changing Dynamics in Northern Karamoja, Uganda," Briefing Note, Feinstein International Center, 2010.
- 64 One interviewee said that there have been 19 cases of rape in Kotido Town Council this year, including one victim as young as 9 years old. Interview with Frewengel Michael, Program Director and Loruk Peter, Program Manager at Mercy Corps, interview with the author, Kotido Town Council, Kotido District, August 11, 2010.
- 65 Laban Rutare, Program Manager with ADRA, interview with the author, Kotido Town Council, Kotido District, August 11, 2010.
- 66 According to the youth interviewed in Kotido Town Council, men offload lorries, push wheelbarrows in the markets, make bricks, or transport water. They make about 500 Shillings (\$0.22) per task, and earn on average around 2,000 Shs per day. Women often fetch, wash clothes, and clean houses. They can earn 1,000 Shs for washing clothes, and 500 Shs for fetching water, cleaning plates, or cleaning houses.
- 67 Women at Kaabong Town Council livestock market, interview with the author, Kaabong District, August 16, 2010.
- 68 Jie elder men, interview with the author, Panyangara Sub-County, Kotido District, August 9, 2011.
- 69 Nyangia young men, interview with the author, Karenga Sub-County, Kaabong District, August 14, 2011.
- 70 A great deal of recent literature has been devoted to the concept of "commercialized" raiding in pastoralist East Africa. There is too little space to enter this extensive debate here; however, for more information, see: Michael Fleisher, "War is Good for Thieving! The Symbiosis of Crime and Warfare among the Kuria of Tanzania," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 72, no. 1 (2002): 131-149. See also: Bevan, "Crisis in Karamoja," and Stites et al., "Angering Akuju."
- 71 Young man at Kaabong Town Council livestock market, interview with the author, Kaabong district, August 16, 2010.
- 72 This highlights a potential discrepancy in the cost of livestock in markets today. Some respondents argued that prices had increased in recent years (perhaps due to the overall reduction in Karamoja's cattle population). Others stated that prices had decreased

(generally as a result of the animal's poor conditions after years of drought and famine). This difference may have to do with the location of markets, the types and quality of animals for sale, and the degree of desperation of the sellers. A more thorough market analysis is needed to identify in more detail how prices are shifting in the region.

- 73 Young woman at Kaabong Town Council livestock market, interview with the author, Kaabong district, August 16, 2010.
- 74 Dyson-Hudson and Meekers, "Migration Across Ecosystem Boundaries."
- 75 Mirzeler and Young, "Pastoral Politics," 426.