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Reimagining Social Life in Karamoja: Lessons for Decolonizing Epistemologies

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ABSTRACT

Early anthropological research on Karamoja categorized the people as alien to social life. Terms such as 'tribe', 'warrior', 'backward', 'criminal', and 'heathen' circulated within the colonial vocabulary. Alongside the bifurcation of the state (Mamdani, 1996), the customary native authority that governed the natives also transformed socio-economic relations in ways previously unknown to Karamoja society. The challenges faced by the British in establishing customary law as the foundation of life and order highlighted their intentions to sedentarize the Karamojong. However, the policies of the colonial era did not emerge from a vacuum; disciplines of knowledge, especially early social anthropology, contributed to embedding social definitions of native life within a regime of compulsions that governed native society. While it is true that colonizing epistemologies received critical scrutiny towards and after independence, the categories did not vanish but persisted under the new impetus of the post-colonial state. Why have descriptions such as 'warriors', 'backward', 'criminals', and 'heathen' remained in the public discourse about particular social groups like the Karamojong? My objective is to question the relevance of specific epistemological frameworks in the social sciences by examining the validity of abstract categories. Assessing the real conditions of social life in Karamoja and how the people understand and organize their lives is the most effective way to scrutinize the categories that represent that life. This approach enables a deeper understanding of the processes by which epistemologies can either refine, replace, or deconstruct colonial perspectives. I aim to evaluate how discourses related to knowledge production in cultural and political economy disciplines, especially in key texts about Karamoja, either reproduce or challenge colonial categories. By undertaking empirical research through ethnography, life histories, biographies, the interpretation of material culture, and ideologies of social life in Karamoja, we can gain a clearer

understanding of how real social life is constructed, and thus begin to consider Karamoja as grounded in concrete science rather than abstract principles divorced from social realities.

Keywords: Violence; Social Life; Law**;** Order; Decolonization; Karamoja.

Introduction

Early historical accounts of anthropologists, ethnographers, missionaries, and British colonial administrators writing on the Karamoja District in Uganda beginning in the 19th century have described the people of Karamoja as being alien to social life. These accounts recognized the people of Karamoja as 'war-like,' 'wild,' 'hostile,' 'primitive,' and/or barbaric. The categories of *warrior, wildness, hostility, primitiveness, and barbarism* became a basis through which historiography made sense of the socio-cultural, economic, and political organization of the people of Karamoja. Karamoja, unlike the rest of the Districts of Uganda, presented a peculiar yet hard penetration to the early accounts. The people of Karamoja pursued resistance against invasion from newcomers to protect their values and culture through a myriad of mechanisms.

These included mobility of their cattle, cattle raids and rustling, armament, and/or homicide of invaders. Upon being challenged to penetrate the structures of the people of Karamoja, who were mainly pastoralists and crop cultivators, early newcomers devised ingredients to understand the people of Karamoja. The people of Karamoja became understood as *lawless, warriors, raiders, and criminality.* The paper is an attempt to deconstruct colonial epistemologies that have shaped the history and historiography of the Karamoja pastoralist community in Uganda. My objective is to question the relevance of specific epistemological frames in the social sciences by questioning the validity of abstract categories. This paper explores how narratives of *lawlessness, warrior-hood, raiding,* and *criminality* have been constructed and how these can be challenged by looking at how social life in Karamoja is understood and organized by the society itself.

The 'Karamoja Problem' in Uganda: A Challenge of Law and Order.

The problem facing Karamoja is a virtual breakdown of law and order, also referred to as *lawlessnes* (Bataringaya 1961). The British colonial state, which constructed its mission as a civilizing one, defined the problem of Karamoja as one of 'law and order,' with both internal and external contradictions (Bell 1949; Mario Cisternini 1978; Novelli Bruno 1988). The external aspects of the problem were associated with the presence of armed Abyssinians, Arabs, and Somali ivory hunters, and Swahili long-distance traders whose activities remained undeterred even after the British made claims over Karamoja in 1898, after having established authority over Uganda when it became a British Protectorate in 1894. The British

understood these activities as a direct challenge to their civilizing mission and political authority. The internal aspects of the problem were associated with the mobility of pastoralists, raiding activities, and tensions with traditional activity. To deal with the external problem, the first task for the British was to pacify Karamoja by neutralizing all external threats from ivory hunters, arms traffickers, and traders. In 1910, Karamoja was placed under full military jurisdiction of the Kings African Rifles, and it was declared a 'closed district'—to not interact with non-indigenous natives (Welch 1969, 51-52). A notice at the entrance to Karamoja read:

You are now entering Karamoja, a closed district. No visitor may enter without an outlying district's permit (Mario Cisternino, 1979: i).

While in closure, Karamoja land was placed under reserves for wild animals and forests only. And Cisternino (1979) contends that Karamoja "was meant to a human zoo; or better an integral zoo of animals and people alike." To deal with internal contradictions of the Karamoja problem, a permanent military garrison of Kings African Rifles was set up in 1912 to disarm the Karimojong and to tax men to get revenue to develop social infrastructures and services. Part of the Kings African Rifles' mandate was to shoot the men on sight, burn huts, and seizure cattle unless the Karimojong surrendered firearms and paid taxes (Barber 1968, 128-130; Welch 1969, 53-54). Despite all these efforts, Karamoja remained a problem to the British colonial state; neither external nor internal contradictions were resolved.

To further deal with the 'law and order' problem, the British colonial state incorporated in Karamoja a system of indirect rule anchored in the traditional authority structures that had succeeded in other districts of Uganda. As pointed out by Mamdani (2017, 16), the indirect rule administrative system distinguished between two categories through which colonial bureaucratic powers were exercised and to which different systems of laws and rights were applicable. First were European officials, who, because they were white, were subjected to a system of 'civilized laws of Europe' and enjoyed European social and political rights. Whereas social rights applied to areas of residence or entertainment, political rights applied to the right to participate in decision-making and the privilege of citizenship (Mamdani 2017, 17). Second, were non- European colonial officials who included non-native aliens (such as Indians, Swahilis, and Somalis); non- Karamojong natives (Ugandans from other parts of the protectorate); and native Karamojong appointed into the service of the colonial state as colonial chiefs or members of the Police and Kings African Rifle (Mamdani 2017, 16). These categories did not enjoy European social and political rights but enjoyed higher privileges compared to the ordinary natives who were "subject to an all-round tutelage" (Mamdani 2017, 17).

On the political organization of pastoralists, Barber has argued that "the importance of livestock and the lack of centralized authority" characterized Karimojong pastoralists (Barber 1968, 67). He rightly points out that the pastoralist political organization is based upon groups within it, but he argues that the lack of centralized authority is responsible for the lawlessness and frequency of violence.

There is no centralized political institution, no single leader, no central council, no predominant law-making or law-enforcing body, and no tradition of tribute or tax payment (Barber 1968, 75).

Similarly, Gulliver has argued that,

There is no formal process to be followed in order to obtain redress for an inquiry. There are no courts, no judges, no arbitrators, and often no conveners of public gatherings. There is no structure of political offices through which action can be taken (Gulliver 1963, 36).

Both Barber and Gulliver describe pastoral people as lacking in political organization. Their claim implies non-existence or deviance of a pastoral people from already established and accepted processual norms for power and disputes. These narratives suggest that pastoral people were merely "loosely defined political systems." Whereas Barber is right in stating that "elders within the age-set structure provide the main reservoir for leadership," his characterization of a pastoral people as *politically lacking* is problematic. That it was a loose society where individuals could migrate at will and raid at will. That the lack of political organization is responsible for the law and order challenges in Karamoja. Barber and Gulliver, like their predecessors, were preoccupied with political administration as vested in the hands of kings/queens and/or chiefs as in Britain, and later in Buganda of Uganda. If the pastoralist's society were viewed as lacking in political organization, the colonial state imported a state-like model characterized by centralized administration by imposition of a different kind of political organization. This was to ensure that a pastoral society is transformed into a political organization that was legitimate and, therefore, acceptable. This led to the consolidation of indirect rule in Karamoja as a binary: the 'tribal' model,' and the 'Ganda model' (Gartell 1983,3). The 'tribal model' is one imported and conceptualized by the British in their earlier assumptions that Africans were organized or divided into tribes. In this case, hereditary tribal leaders who claimed not only obedience but also allegiance assumed political leadership. The 'Ganda model' is one learned from experience in Buganda, and it involved appointed transferable administrators. While in Karamoja, the British colonial state imported this remodeled mixed approach, the tribal model first considered a convenient means of administering newly conquered peoples. During this process, certain clan leaders took great initiative in manipulating the British to win appointments as client chiefs. The British officials, however, were soon disillusioned with the inability of their new appointees to enforce their law and orders and to mobilize labor.

The British in 1909 appointed some Ganda agents in the belief that what they described as 'intelligent agents' would have no difficulty in managing these 'new savages'. However, it was worse for the Ganda agents because the peculiarity of administration in Karamoja was under the leadership of elders. According to Barber, an officer posted to Karamoja found that a great deal of the experience he had gained elsewhere was of no value. He was faced with a new situation, and inevitably, it took time to discover what the problems were even before he could hope to solve them (Barber 1968, 114-5). Citing Vincent, Gartell states that colonial officials did not recognize the nature of indigenous political developments, misinterpreted local institutions, and found in them a generalized uniformity (Gartell 1983, 6). This is hardly surprising. By taking over the Ganda apparatus, they were freed from the need to study the local political scene to search for appointees.

Men who happened to be prominent at the moment of contact were picked out of the invading Ganda and invested with a wholly new type of authority backed with guns (Gartell 1983, 4). This exacerbated resistance among the Karamojong pastoralists, who bestowed their honor to the clan leaders. Resistance laid a foundation for further marginalization of the Karimojong by the colonial state. The challenge of *law and order* became a basis through which the people of Karamoja were administered and integrated into the wider agenda of neoliberal and political control (Bataringaya, 1961). All attempts to impose the authority of the state over the Karamojong, including using the military to support the administration, were futile.

Postcolonial Attempts to Understand the 'Karamoja Problem.'

What has historically been framed as the "the Karamoja problem" forms part of the political and scholarly discussions in Uganda (Museveni 2010, Barber 1962). Pastoralism and cattle keeping in Karamoja particularly present a 'law and order' challenge in Uganda. First, the mobility of pastoralists in search of non-negotiable needs—pastures and water—have been identified with *lawlessness*. Secondly, pastoral traditions and territory have fostered a *warlord* mindset and nurtured the violent behavior of pastoralists. Third, the proliferation of firearms in Karamoja is to blame for the Karamoja problem. The solution by the postcolonial nation-state has been that pastoralists must be brought into line with "progressive" and "modern" development through the privatization of rangelands, the sedentarization of pastoralists, and disarmament. Political discussions define pastoralism as 'primitive,' backward,' 'outdated,' inefficient, and incapable of enhancing development. Only the transition to a more settled life and a sedentary economy is considered to be a meaningful alternative. Therefore, to achieve law and order, pastoralists must settle; they must be confined in state-demarcated enclosures and territories. This is because pastoralism is considered a danger that must be fought like all other social ills. Within the Uganda state

narrative, for example, 'pastoralism has no future', and as a matter of time, it is doomed to die or perish on its own. In its place, settled crop farming is preferred and supported.[1] The state position has, therefore, meant that all policy frameworks designed for Karamoja have been the first to identify the people as lawless and how to curb this lawlessness through the eradication of pastoralism and promotion of sedentarization.

Scholarly debates in Karamoja have tended to understand the 'Karamoja problem' by evoking culture and tradition as a point of departure. A subsequent set of scholars locate the 'Karamoja problem' in the *long duree* or the *deeper past*. These scholars stress that to explain the existence of lawlessness and violence, we need to go back to the pre-colonial era. They lay emphasis on continuity of the pre-colonial through the colonial to the post-colonial. Mburu (2001) traces the lawlessness and ethno-militarism of pastoralists' societies to the pre-colonial. He argues that, even before the colonial period, pastoralists were armed and engaged in violent confrontations with natives and newcomers. These arguments locate the law-and-order challenge in the pre-colonial period by evoking culture and tradition as a point of departure. This view is advanced by Mirzeler and Crawford (2000), who claim that pastoralists are culturally violent and that violence is a consequence of pastoral traditions. This claim presupposes that the British colonial state was weak and ineffectual; it was distant and largely impotent. However much these scholars consider history as a point of departure by pointing to the precolonial, they do not historicize the colonial history and the politics therein. This is not to deny that tradition actually existed before colonialism, but the challenge is for these scholars to self-interestedly single out one out of the many pre-colonial traditions and institutionalize it as tradition without regard to the multiple, contradictory and changing traditions during Karimojong interactions with anthropologists, ethnographers, missionaries, traders and colonial administrators.

Another perspective is one that blames lawlessness on the ownership of firearms by the Karimojong. Sandra Gray (2000) argues that it is not culture but the proliferation of modern weaponry that supported the transformation of already fluid relations and is to blame for the law-and-order challenge in Karamoja. This view is supported by Mkutu (2008), who argues that the presence of arms amplified the existing raiding tradition and exposed underlying lawlessness and weak governance. Both perspectives locate violence in society without regard to the role played by the colonial state and the postcolonial nation-state in dealing with the problem. Mirzeler and Crawford (2000), and their interlocutors do not pay attention to the history on how the colonial state transformed lawlessness into violence by demarcating fertile land as game reserves and forests, by confinement of pastoralists and their herd in demarcated territories, and

[1] See Hon. Janet K. Museveni. *Keynote address at the opening of the meeting of the ICGLR Zone 3 REDICOM*, *op.cit.*

seizure of cattle, and by undermining their political organization (Barber 1968; Dyson-Hudson 1966). They do not engage the question of how culture came to translate into lawlessness for people to reach an extent of forging evidence of violence from other categories, such as cattle raids in the case of Karamoja. What history is behind people organizing themselves into categories of warriors, raiders, and criminals in pastoral contexts?

In a recent study, *the transformation of Karamoja: Sedentarization of pastoralists 2018,* Muhereza has argued that the 'Karamoja problem' was "correctly" defined by the colonial state and later the postcolonial state as a challenge of 'law and order.' This problem, sometimes referred to as *lawlessness,* is associated with the mode of pastoral mobility—which was considered a setback for political control-cattle raids and counterraids, and the possession and use of illicit firearms.

According to Muhereza, the 'Karamoja problem' defined as one of 'law and order' was 'correctly diagnosed as a political question' by both the colonial and postcolonial states. However, the different interventions undertaken by different governments to address the problem undermined the realization of 'law and order.' This is because both the colonial state and the postcolonial state pursued interventions that were either legislative, administrative, or military (Muhereza 2018:367). These threefold interventions pursued by the colonial state and successive governments, Muhereza argues, failed to target the power base of the traditional authority structures whose solution necessitated the neutralization of the tribal war machine over which the traditional elders controlled. Of all governments, he claims, only the NRM of 2006 [despite being in power since 1986] pursued the right political solution to the 'right' political question. If NRM understood the 'Karamoja problem' as a political question, its political solution has therefore been to 'neutralize the tribal war machine'—through disarmament, if necessary by force (Muhereza 2018:17). In other words, the 'Karamoja problem' since the British colonial period has never been one of definition/understanding of the problem, but one of wrong prescription of solutions, and the right prescription only came to be in 2006 with Museveni's 'successful' disarmament.

Muhereza's argument is inadequate in explaining the state and the Karamoja problem. Muhereza buys into the colonial state's definition of the 'Karamoja problem' as one of 'law and order.' He believes that the problem was "correctly" defined by both the colonial and postcolonial states (Muhereza 2018:47). In this way, he theorizes the 'Karamoja problem' from the vantage point of the state, pitying the Karamojong against the state. This colonial definition of the problem aims at justifying the need to establish mechanisms to extend colonial dominance in the sub-region.

Similarly, the reason why the postcolonial state has failed to tame the violent clashes, especially the violence from below, is that it has reproduced the same colonial logic of defining the problem from the

vantage point of the state. How should we think of the 'Karamoja problem' from the vantage point of society? This paper is an attempt to deal with this puzzle! To deconstruct colonial epistemologies that have shaped the history and historiography of the Karamoja pastoralist's society by looking at how social life in Karamoja is understood and organized by the society itself.

Society's Narrative: An Alternative to Understanding the 'Karamoja Problem.

Dr. Kasule has talked about it...the question of mobility...What does mobility mean and how should we rethink it? This is better because it can give an analysis

In this section, I draw how real social life is constructed in Karamoja from the life histories and ideologies of social life. I argue that lawlessness characterized by mobility, raiders and cattle raiding, and homicide are iconic of the colonial frontier in the Karamoja's history and historiography. Writings show that as early as the 9th century, the Karamojong had meet Abyssinian, Arab, Somali and Swahili traders from the horn of Africa countries as well as coasts of the Mediterranean, Red Sea, and Indian Ocean (Pazzaglia 1982, 142-143; Lewis 1960, 217-219; Gulliver and Gulliver 1953, 29; Bell 1949). It is believed that the people of Karamoja did not originally have cattle. Folkloric and ethnographic evidence suggests that Arab locally known as *Ngichumpa* and Swahili traders brought in cattle and exchanged them for Turks in the 19th century (*Interviews*, May 2024). Bell (1949), a colonial ethnographer, contends that he would barter cattle, firearms, and ornaments with ivory, donkey, and grain from Karamoja. Before the introduction of cattle, the people of Karamoja are believed to have lived and survived on cereals, wild fruits, and bush meat. Upon the introduction of cattle, the Karimojong realized the ease in domesticating cattle, but also for its products such as milk, ghee, meat, and skin/hides. The introduction of domestic animals meant that the Karimojong had to attach a lot of value to cattle. Cattle then became treasured and a source for sealing marriages, reconciliation, prayer, celebrations, and thanks giving.

What is meant as value is not what the state thinks to be considered value

At the turn of the 20th century, Karamoja was beaming with livestock, and colonial ethnographers acknowledged that by the time the Karimojong encountered British colonialism, cattle ownership was widespread, having commenced hundreds of years before contact with them (Cunningham 1905, 153). It is believed that before '*Arenge angikakwang'* —forceful white administrators arrived in Karamoja, there was the abundance of wealth: cattle multiplied, crops flourished, grass was in plenty, and water was sufficient, during '*ekaru ngolo a Longeu'* —the year of abundance. This period is described as a time before foreigners, when no other country, European, African, or African/Ugandan exercised any form of hegemony over Karamoja and its people (Novelli 1994, 17). The Karamojong dealt with all outsiders as

equals and often staked their claims without fear of the consequences. **Interesting point on the notion of wealth**

a) Raiders, Cattle Raiding and Homicide.

History and historiography have described the people of Karamoja as cattle 'raiders' or 'rustlers' and killers (Gulliver 1955; Barber 1962; Dyson-Hudson 1966). The assumption is that a pastoral society is engraved in a series of raids and counter-raids and that the most outstanding crime is cattle raiding and homicide connected with it. The assumption is that a pastoral society is as obsessed with cattle as the definition and soul of wealth and status. This, it is suggested, is what encourages cattle raids, which feeds lawlessness and violence in the pastoralists' society.

Scholarship on Karamoja has long struggled to understand the redistribution of cattle within the Karamoja region, and any attempt to steal cattle, recover of cattle, revenge after loss of cattle, and defiance have led to the characterization of a pastoralist society as raiders or rustlers and, therefore, criminals. A report by the Karamoja security report 1961 describes a Karamojong raider as,

not a sneaking thief who will run away at first challenge, or even a violent robber with an ethical sense of guilt albeit blurred; he is a determined warrior on a noble expedition with the full blessing of his tribal spirits and full backing of his society. This presents a formidable, almost impossible task, to a criminal investigator. (Bataringaya 1961, 4).

Published before Uganda's independence (1962), the report by the Karamoja security committee defined a raider both by what it is not and what it is. The report contends that, first, a raider does not fancy cowardice; he is one who is straightforward, brave, and courageous. A raider is a firm fighter on a mission to defend his society and has blessings from his/her people. Secondly, that it is difficult to penalize this raider because of its attributes and the backing of his society. In my view, this is a very ignorant statement that has pathologized individuals and pastoralists for the purpose of justifying a violent intervention policy. Couched in the spirit of criminality, the state is justifying its violent crackdown as the only way to achieve order by looking for criminality in every social aspect of society. I argue that the criminalization narrative is inadequate to explain the category 'raider' as it focuses on individual acts while ignoring the political sources of violence.

Ethnography and folkloric evidence on Karamoja contend that the Karimojong accumulated their cattle through barter with long-distance traders who desired grain, and not through raiding. It implies that raiders and raiding did not exist /or rare. Cattle became abundant, and although not everyone had cattle, sharing of cattle happened through marriages, when a child was born, and when cattle were exchanged for

gardens, spears, obedience, etc. In a slow in-depth interview narrated by an elder said that, during our times;

Raids were not heard. There were very few people without cattle. People without cattle were integrated into the community and were thought of and cooperated with those who had cattle. They were accepted and respected and they also took care of this cattle as they partake in the cattle products such as milk, ghee, and meat. Additionally, the caretaker of cattle was given his own bull to motivate him as he took care of the herd. (Interviews May, 2024).

There was no sharp divide between people who had cattle and those who didn't. This is because cattle were communally redistributed to the community members, and their products were equally shared. I.e. when a bull is slaughtered, meat is distributed to every household in that particular community. This communality meant that cattle were protected and defended by the community at all odds. It is a common responsibility to search for greener pastures and water for animals, to spy and report the occurrence of thieves and wild animals because cattle benefitted the entire society. The reason raids were not there or unheard of is because even those who did not own cattle were accepted and integrated into the community, and they partook and shared in cattle and its products. This integration meant that at some point in time, those who did not have cattle before got to own cattle. These position challenges the epistemologies of raiders and raiding as cultural and, therefore, biological to the Karimojong society.

The other assumption is the understanding of the Karimojong as homicidal. The Karimojong 'warrior' seeks and celebrates the death of his interceptors, invaders, or tribesmen. The report by the Karamoja security committee states that,

If the raider kills any of his interceptors and/or pursuers he becomes a hero! Special ceremony is made for him, and special marks are made on his upper arms and chest—marks as highly esteemed by the Karamojong as a V.C. by an English soldier! Needless to say, such men are not only greatly respected by their fellow tribesmen but are also considered the most eligible suitors by the young ladies of the tribe (Bataringaya 1961, 4).

This statement suggests that the Karimojong fantasize murder; that they take pleasure in killing and in seeking violence. The aim of such statements is to ridicule the Karimojong and to portray him as dangerous and has to be assisted to come into terms with acceptable behavior. However, I argue that statements such as these are ill-informed and ignorant about the understanding of social relations within the Karamoja society. Karamoja society respect and believes in the sacredness of life. Whereas it is Easier to succumb to the political narratives that the Karimojong warriors aim is to kill— killing for its own

sake—research and folkloric evidence contend that the Karimojong respect the sacredness of life, and life is celebrated. This is not to suggest that death or killing never happened, but to acknowledge that even when murder happened, the perpetrator took responsibility for this forbidding act and showed remorse for his guilt. A respondent in an stated that,

We respect life, life as a whole. We celebrate life and wish every person well. If I know that at some point I shall die, why do I kill another person? Am I the other who gave him/her life? Even when I go to raid, the aim is to run away with cattle, not to kill. But, the challenge comes when I am trying to run away with cattle and you block me. There, I have to rescue my way out by teasing if you are unarmed, or getting rid of you if you are armed. Because if you are armed, you can as well kill me. (Interviews, March 2024)

My research found out that to kill a human person in Karamoja is taboo. There are two scenarios. First, if killing happened outside the home, say in the bush or in a raid and involved unfamiliar persons, the perpetrator returned home but stayed outside the home because he is guilty and therefore unclean. He sent a message home to let his family know of the forbidding act he had committed. The perpetrator slept out of the home for 31 days with one leg bent to acknowledge the mistake committed and as a sign of remorse. The perpetrators' household slaughtered a white ram for him to signify cleansing, and it is served by throwing pieces to the perpetrator. This ram symbolizes cleansing as the perpetrator is barred from contaminating the community. Second, if killing happens within the community or amongst the community members, a renown elder shall call a huge community meeting to investigate the killing. Within these meetings are mediators who are usually senior elders. The suspect is asked whether he took part in the killing and what their intentions were. If he acknowledges his mistake/sin, the family of the deceased is informed that the suspect had willed his sin. Negotiation then of fine begins. The final person to decide was the mother of the deceased. She would not allow the killer to be killed because the community would have lost two people. Traditionally, a fine of 60 cows would be paid by the suspected killer to the family of the deceased. Even this payment was not usual. So, the markings, as mentioned by the report by the Karamoja Security committee, are a symbol of remorse and to acknowledge that a forbidding act was committed. It is a marker of remorse, not pride, by an apologetic fighter. If a wild, dangerous animal was killed, there are different markers to show this bravery.

b) The 'Warrior' and the Mystique of Violence.

Within Uganda's state narrative and social sciences today is the understanding of the people of Karamoja as 'Warriors.' A warrior is understood as a person who fights senseless war: a cattle-raider and, therefore, a criminal (Bataringaya 1961; State House 2021). Early colonial epistemologies described the people of Karamoja as warriors who were suspected of "fighting simply for fighting's sake" (Barber 1968, 86).

James Barber argues that there was truth in this description, in that the pastoralists were, by their nature of existence, an aggressive people. The nature of the Karamoja district offered such a marginal existence that to survive is to compete.

James Barber states that there is "justification and logic" for what appears to be endless fighting. The argument is two-fold: one, environmental, that the harsh environment generates endless competition over scarce resources; and two, that the absence of an institutionalized fighting force (i.e. an army) means that the whole society must organize as a fighting machine and indeed functions as such. Similarly, Dyson-Hudson states that "When they compete with each other, they compete for most part peacefully; and their relations with outsiders are marked by distinctive, generally uniform, and frequently hostile behavior" (Dyson-Hudson 1966, 1).

First, James Barber, unlike Dyson-Hudson, thinks that pastoralists are in constant fights and competition for scarce resources, and this results in the warrior character and the fights of resource 'senseless' wars. On the other hand, Dyson-Hudson contends that competition for resources is peaceful and, therefore, negotiated. There is truth in Dyson-Hudson's argument; sharing of resources is very critical for pastoralist groups of people within the Karamoja, and resource sharing has never been a Karamoja problem. There is information sharing on the availability and scarcity of resources amongst pastoralists, and negotiation is key to sharing pastures and water.

The pastoralists system is composed of a class of *ngikarachuma* named *Ngirototin*. They are the scouts and messengers between communities, giving information to the clan leaders on security and resource availability. Second, the assumption of absence of an institutionalized and recognized fighting force, i.e., implies that the society must organize as a fighting machine. Barbers' preconception of an army clothed in uniform with a commander is to disregard the social organization of pastoralists to self-defend and provide security to their society in the face of uncertainty.

African societies differ in their modes of self-defense and security and their conception of the rights and duties of a warrior. While in Uganda, the British colonial state encountered severe protests and manifold resistance in establishing their economic and political control; local populations struggled against foreign domination, albeit with differing degrees of success. In western Uganda, for example, resistance is most pronounced in the Kingdom of Bunyoro, and Omukama Kabelega of Bunyoro is given full recognition as the single most significant leader in Uganda who put fierce resistance against the British colonial expansion from 1872 to 1899 (Dunbar 1965). In Northern Uganda, Rwot Ibrahim Awich of Payira is celebrated for mobilizing his fighters who resorted to guerilla tactics and made several surprise attacks against the British (Anywar 1948; Crazzolara 1955). In Karamoja (North Eastern Uganda), pastoralists

have been known for their fierceness, rebellious moves, and non-cooperation with the British colonial state.

Their tactics and strategy were so powerful that they defeated the British army even with crude weaponry. Their greatest feats include resistance and defeat of invaders from Europe, the Middle East, the Caliphate of the Arabs, the Ganda chiefs of Uganda, and the colonial native chiefs of Karamoja. Despite the resistance and rebellions exerted to the British colonial administration by people from Western Uganda and Northern Uganda, none of such resistance is defined as senseless, but liberating and fought by heroes, chiefs and/or kings. It is the resistance of pastoralists in Karamoja that is regarded as senseless and fought by warriors. To describe them as warriors is to give a demeaning attitude that to be a warrior is to be a killer and, therefore, a criminal. The aim is to belittle warriors as nonsensical category fighting senseless wars.

I argue that the warrior tradition, much as misunderstood, was not born on the day the foreigners first entered Karamoja. It was not a technique invented on the spur of the moment to meet a foreign challenge. On the contrary, it was deeply interlinked with the totality of the cultures of a pastoral society before colonialism. The challenge is not to read the people of Karamoja as famous resisters against European intrusion but warriors who did not as yet have to fight foreigners as such.

Colonialism demilitarized Africa such that much of Africa retreated from the hard virtues of warrior tradition. Africa, therefore, embraced instead a set of imported values for the time being, such that those who continued to oppose and resist colonialism became defined as warriors and understood as fighting senseless wars.

Conclusion.

The challenge with the early history and historiography written by anthropologists, ethnographers, missionaries, and the British colonial administrators on the Karamoja District in Uganda is their inability to transcend cultural talk and criminality. Cultural talk considers lawlessness as natural by evoking culture as a point of departure. It actualizes culture and gives it an irresistible power to condition the political actions of a society. Cultural talk arguments suggest that culture is static and eternal; it does not consider history, internal contradictions, and connection to the culture of another society of the circumstances of time. Cultural talk ignores the colonial institutions that have continued to reproduce lawlessness, warrior-hood, and criminality within the postcolonial state. On the other hand, criminalization focuses on individual acts while ignoring the political sources of such actions. It doesn't

ask why societies mobilize as raiders, as violent? At what point should the category, lawlessness, cattle raiding, wildness, and senseless wars become political?

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