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From the border to the bedroom: changing conflict dynamics in Karamoja, Uganda*

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ABSTRACT

For the latter decades of the last century, the Karamoja region of north-eastern Uganda was infamous as a place of violent cattle raids and road ambushes, populated by fierce warriors. Using primary data, this article examines the shifts from large-scale raiding to opportunistic theft as well as the profound transformation in the security environment over the past 10 years. We argue that the combination of a top-down sustained disarmament campaign and grass-roots peace resolutions have created relative stability for the first time in decades. This stability has allowed for the expansion of markets, investments by national and international actors, and the rejuvenation of livelihoods for many residents. However, while large-scale violent cattle raids are largely a thing of the past, violence and insecurity have shifted to the domestic sphere in the form of small-scale but pervasive thefts and rampant domestic violence.

INTRODUCTION

Upheaval and perceived ungovernability led the British colonial authorities to declare the Karamoja region of Uganda a 'closed district' in the early 1920s (Mirzeler & Young 2000). The characterisation of the region as out of control and beyond the reach of the state continued throughout the colonial and into the post-independence era, and

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internal violence escalated in conjunction with political turmoil elsewhere in the country in the 1970s and 1980s. However, while stability was gradually returning to central and southern Uganda by the late 1980s, levels of insecurity in Karamoja continued to escalate.[1] Violent large-scale cattle raids within the region and into neighbouring districts decimated herds and uprooted communities. Insecurity spread beyond the realm of cattle theft, and deadly ambushes on vehicles became a regular event, severely reducing trade, transport, and access to the region. The state responded with sporadic, brutal and largely ineffective forced disarmament campaigns, but insecurity in Karamoja remained high overall. The reversal of this trend began in 2006 with the launch of a new disarmament campaign and sustained presence of a large number of military forces in the region.[2] By 2017, cattle raids had dwindled to the occasional theft and there was widespread freedom of movement allowing access to resources and to the burgeoning markets. AK-47s – which once adorned most young men – were no longer visible. Based on the failures of previous such campaigns, however, the improvements in security cannot be ascribed purely to the disarmament efforts. What factors within the political and social order in Karamoja may have led to an environment conducive for such change? What were the trends in internal violence, and how – and for whom – have these trends shifted since disarmament was introduced? This article examines such questions from the perspectives of male and female respondents collected over 10 years of fieldwork in the region.

Karamoja in context

The Karamoja region of north-eastern Uganda is home to approximately 1.2 million people and covers a land area of 10,550 square miles – about the size of Belgium. Karamoja is a semi-arid environment with average annual precipitation of 500–1000 millimetres. Livestock-based pastoral production systems evolved over generations as the most appropriate subsistence models based on the wide fluctuations and high variability in precipitation (Ellis & Swift 1988; Otim 2002; Markakis 2004). However, few people in Karamoja today practice a pure form of pastoralism; many engage in opportunistic cultivation and are better described as agro-pastoral (Gray *et al.* 2002). A high degree of climatic and livelihood variation exists within the region, and a growing number of people have turned almost entirely to agriculture, particularly in the more fertile western and southern sections of

Karamoja. Much of this shifting away from pastoralism has been the result of a decades-long combination of government, aid agency and missionary efforts to sedentarise the population (Caravani 2018). That said, cattle ownership continues to be an important determinant of both social and economic status (Broch-Due 1999; Markakis 2004), and livestock remain central to the identity of the inhabitants of Karamoja, even for those who have diversified their livelihood activities away from exclusive animal husbandry.

Cattle raids have long been a part of pastoral livelihoods systems in eastern Africa. Raids historically played an important redistributive aspect, and raiding allowed young men to achieve status (Hendrickson *et al.* 1998; Mkutu 2008). Raids in Karamoja became increasingly violent in the 1980s and 1990s and high levels of violence continued in the early 2000s. The heightened violence of raids was due to a variety of factors, including the ready availability of small arms (Mkutu 2007, 2008), the increased commercialisation of raiding (Fleisher 1998, 2000a; Eaton 2010), the collapse of internal alliances (Gray 2000), and the general absence of state control over or interest in the region. The erosion of authority by the male elders over young men (due to struggles over political power as well as the inability of the elders to control the violence) also contributed to the climate of violence (Stites 2013a, 2013b).

In accordance with a pattern of response to the regional upheaval that began in the early colonial era (Knighton 2003; Bevan 2008), the Ugandan government implemented a short-lived forced disarmament programme in 2001, followed by a more comprehensive campaign beginning in 2006. Insecurity initially increased following the start of the 2006 disarmament campaign and human rights violations were widespread; in addition, many communities reported experiencing increases in violence due to the loss of firearms for protection (Human Rights Watch 2007; Stites and Akabwai 2010). However, within five years of the start of the 2006 campaign, security had improved across the region. Associated positive impacts were visible on inter-group relations, herd mobility, markets and trade, and access by national and international actors (Burns *et al.* 2013, Howe *et al.* 2015, Stites *et al.* 2016). By 2015, large-scale cattle raids were rare, though other more localised forms of violence and insecurity continued.

This article examines several key trends in insecurity and violence from the height of cattle raiding in the 1980s and 1990s to today. We document the nature, impacts and internal causes of the improved security environment. We also examine the continuing forms of

insecurity in the region. The first of these forms is individual and small-group theft by young men. We posit that this form of conflict – which is often accompanied by violence (Stites and Marshak 2016) – has its origins in commercial cattle raiding which emerged in the 1980s and 1990s. To place this violence in context, we trace violence from traditional community-sanctioned raids, to the more individualised commercialised raiding, to the opportunistic but still ubiquitous theft that continues today. The second main form of violence in the region is the endemic domestic violence (primarily male-on-female intimate partner violence) that has profound and often overlooked impacts on individual and household well-being. We do not imply that the domestic violence is a direct outcome of disarmament, but rather emphasise the extent to which this form of insecurity has become the most pervasive in the region. Insecurity within homes – in the proverbial bedrooms – has taken the place of the violence associated with cattle raids as the most detrimental factor in lives and livelihoods of the region's residents.

This article relies on primary data collected from 2006 to 2016, a period of marked change in Karamoja. We find that in recent years the improvements in security are nearly uniform across locations in Karamoja, with widespread positive impacts on livelihoods and human security. We argue that while the top-down disarmament campaign is a major contributor to these improvements, it is the bottom-up processes that allowed for a coalescence of relative peace in the form of a reduction of large-scale and violent cattle raids. At the same time, however, violence and insecurity have shifted from cross-border (international and territorial) attacks to assaults that take place within homesteads and families. This article first examines shifts in violence over time and then looks at the factors of this change. Lastly, we detail the often-overlooked impacts of domestic violence on security and well-being.

Methods

This paper discusses trends apparent across Karamoja based on primary data collected from late 2006 to early 2016.[3] The majority of the research was qualitative and consisted of individual semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (separated by age and gender), participatory exercises (such as community mapping, timelines and seasonal calendars), and key informant interviews. Interviews were conducted with residents in rural (both settled villages, or *manyattas*, and mobile cattle camps, or *kraals*), urban and peri-urban locations, with a near equal balance of male and female respondents. Key informants included village, clan

and territorial group representatives; local, district and regional administrators and elected officials; staff of national and international agencies; members of the police and army; local and regional traders; and health-care providers. In total, this data set entails approximately 800 qualitative interviews.[4] The quantitative data consists of panel data from four sets of interviews with approximately 400 young men in southern Karamoja in 2013 (1556 surveys in total). This article also draws on secondary data and literature from Karamoja and the extended region.

Important limitations to this research include the sensitivity of subjects discussed, the nature of negotiated access to the communities and possible biases in information provided (whether directly or through translation) and in our analysis. We sought to minimise these constraints to the degree possible through a number of means, including working with a seasoned interlocutor who was known and respected in many areas due to his work as a veterinarian (this allowed us to avoid association with or introductions by NGOs or other actors whenever possible), relying on native speakers working without translation for approximately half of the interviews, and discussing possible biases of respondents and the team itself on a recurrent basis. These measures, however, cannot eradicate these limitations entirely, and we recognise that the narrative presented here is only one of the many that may exist. Furthermore, our sources of data for this study are limited to interviews with residents and key informants, as reliable external quantitative data about incidents of crime and violence has not been systematically collected in the region. In terms of presentation of findings, quotes are used to illustrate the emblematic perspectives of individuals interviewed, unless otherwise noted.

FINDINGS

Lethal violence and widespread asset stripping has greatly decreased in Karamoja over the past 10 years in comparison to the period from 1980 to 2006. Security has improved for most people in most aspects of their lives, but the nature of the insecurity that continues has transformed and takes place much closer to home. This section locates the data from our field research regarding violence and the transformation of violence within the broader literature on the region.

Violence and insecurity: 1980s to mid 2000s

Violence associated with cattle raiding became a pervasive threat in Karamoja starting in the 1980s.[5] The raids of the 1980s, 1990s and

early 2000s were normally large and well-organised events. They most often occurred in locations where the raiders could expect to find a large concentration of animals – such as *kraals* – and attackers were usually heavily armed. Dyson-Hudson (1966) describes individual Karimojong raids in the 1950s as involving up to 600 men and resulting in the losses of several thousand head of cattle. Young men were the most likely to experience casualties, as they were at the front lines of both raiding and defending cattle (Gray *et al.* 2003). Many authors argue that strict codes of cattle raiding enforced by male elders ensured that women and children were spared from the most egregious violence (Adan & Pkalya 2005; Simala & Amutabi 2005; Akabwai & Ateyo 2007; Carr 2008). However, such prohibitions were not always effective, and women and children were increasingly killed or injured in raids. In a 2009 group interview in Kotido District, female respondents explained that although men made up most of the residents at *kraals* – and hence were the most exposed when attacks took place – women and children could also be in great danger if found at *kraals* and could sometimes be subject to targeted attacks.

Somewhat counter-intuitively, women and children often had more protection during attacks on the settled *manyattas*, as most of the fighting took place outside. The same group of women in Kotido explained, 'fighting mostly affected men – they were the ones outside the home. The women were in danger only if we came outside to relieve ourselves and found that the enemy was hiding outside. Then you would be killed.'[6] Extreme violence and widespread casualties often occurred during revenge attacks (Eaton 2008).[7] A Voice of America report from September 1999 captures the scale of a particularly large attack:

> Bokora fighters swept into the Matheniko village of Apule at dawn Thursday, killing about 400 people and stealing more than two thousand head of cattle … Eyewitnesses say most of those killed in the attack were women, children, and the elderly. Many of the victims were wounded or killed and then dumped in the bushes around the village … In July, Matheniko fighters raided some Bokora settlements, slaughtering 140 people. (Wiens 1999)

A reported increase in sexual violence in the 1980s and 1990s may also have been the result of revenge mentality.[8] A group of Matheniko male elders interviewed in 2008 reported, 'In retaliation, the avengers go for women, children, the lame and elderly to pay for their lost wives or sisters! That is why even the raping came in. It was a tit-for-tat affair as raiders would rape any women they would find on their way in

revenge for what was done to their manyatta or kraal.'[9] However, raiders from Karamoja were also using sexual violence to terrorise the largely unarmed populations in the neighbouring Acholi and Lango regions during this time (Stites *et al.* 2006), and hence sexual violence cannot be explained solely by revenge.

These examples provide a window into the insecurity in the region during this time. Not all experiences of violence were so extreme, and those that were most extreme were more likely to make headlines or to remain in people's memories. However, the threat of violence was ubiquitous and limited residents' access to grazing areas, markets, natural resources and social networks.

The rise and role of commercial raiding

In Karamoja, commercialisation was an important factor in the rise of violent raiding in the 1980s and 1990s and a component of the gradual transformation of raids from large communal activities to small group or individual endeavours aimed in part at meeting needs for food, commodities and other expenses. Commercial raiding here refers to the exchange of stolen animals for cash or other commercial gain.

While commercial raiding is tied to the evolution of pastoral societies in East Africa, there is no clear date when this practice began. Variations exist based on location and historical interpretation. For instance, in examining the Kuria of Tanzania, Fleischer (1998, 2000b) argues that raiding evolved from a form of cultural expression to a capitalist strategy beginning in the colonial era. Anderson (1986) has similar findings about the colonial roots of commercial raiding among the Kalenjin in Kenya. Some scholars of Turkana (Kenya) and Karamoja locate the emergence of commercial raiding in the decades following national independence (Ocan 1992; Mirzeler & Young 2000; Markakis 2004). Mkutu (2003), on the other hand, believes that the commercial component did not become the main motivation in Karamoja until the mid-1990s. Regardless of the time period and region, the commercialisation of raiding is best understood as a gradual and irregular process: some raided cattle in some areas are sold for commercial gain at certain times, while on other occasions the same raiders may retain or exchange stolen animals for traditional purposes, such as marriage, tribute and increasing one's own herd size.[10]

Raiding parties decreased in size as raiding transformed in East African societies experiencing commercialisation. By and large, commercial raids in the Greater Horn did not have the approval and blessing

of the male elders and community members that had existed for traditional raids (Mirzeler & Young 2000; Akabwai & Ateyo 2007). Young men engaged in raids that took place outside of official sanction sought to avoid detection, and hence were more likely to operate in small groups. Anderson traces the transition of stock theft from a communal activity mediated by custom and collective justice to a form of 'sport' for groups of young Kalenjin men in Kenya (1986). The shift from the large group to the individual (or small group) undermined the authority and control of local elders who had previously been involved in planning raids. It also led to increased militarisation as more guns came into the region and were purchased at low prices by young men (Mirzeler & Young 2000). Importantly, Markakis points out that, even when it was a communal activity sanctioned by elders, raiding served as a means through which 'young men acquire their own herds and assert their manhood' (2004: 26). The role of raids in asserting manhood became even more important in Karamoja as traditional rites of passage for male youth (namely initiation and official marriage) became less common (Stites 2013b).

Shared benefits from raids decreased as raids shifted from the communal to the commercial and raiding parties became smaller. Animals from successful traditional raids had been incorporated into collective herds and paid as tributes to those who had planned and blessed the raids, including the elders. Commercial raiding, in contrast, largely benefitted the raiders alone, with fewer benefits (or blessings) passed vertically. Horizontal transfers that did continue were more circumscribed, with benefits going to the raider's friends, his immediate family, or to an in-law in the form of bridewealth.

Reflecting on periods of intense raiding in the 1980s to early 2000s, respondents in Karamoja often cite the involvement of businessmen, politicians, police and members of the military. While difficult to prove, these rumours of outside involvement are notable because they are so widely *believed* by the local population. Many sources on commercial raiding in East Africa explore the role of external actors.[11] This 'external collaboration and assistance' (Oloka-Onyango *et al.* 1993: 12) can reportedly take a variety of forms, such as an extended entrepreneurial chain originating with a specific order for cattle (Schilling *et al.* 2011), training in military tactics and use of modern weapons (Ocan 1994), the involvement of external 'armed military or bandit groups' seeking to 'procure cattle in vast quantities either to feed warring armies or to sell on the market' (Hendrickson *et al.* 1998:

191), logistics and transport support (Akabwai & Ateyo 2007), and the financing of cattle raids for commercial purposes (Mkutu 2003).

Our data show that networks of raiding and commercial exchange in Karamoja are broader than the immediate actors or nearest market. Overall, however, these data illustrate a broader and less nefarious view of the commercialisation of raiding in Karamoja from that depicted above. This is in line with Krätli & Swift who point out that

> [t]o a certain extent, all raids are 'commercial', not just those usually referred to by the term, in which the promoters and paymasters are businessmen, officers or administrators. The so called 'commercial raids', do not represent a separate category in which 'external' interests interfere with pastoral economy. They are probably better understood as an aspect of the wider integration of pastoralists within a market economy. (Krätli & Swift 2003: 8)

In other words, the transfer of stolen animals is commercial whenever such animals are exchanged for cash or items in kind, as opposed to being used to build herds, for a ritual or social event (sacrifice, marriage, etc.), or for a reciprocal social transfer (repayment of debt to a stock associate, lending to a relative, etc.). Our analysis shows that this more nuanced interpretation of commercial raiding allows for an analysis of individual motivations and smaller scale transactions, and helps explain the prevalence of individual and small-scale thefts seen today.

The role of poverty in commercial raids receives less attention than the shadow markets and the cross-border trade in small arms, but is central to understanding past and present patterns of violence. Writing on Tanzania, Fleisher and Holloway (2004) point to the greater likelihood of raiding by males from poorer households. This was especially the case for men who had no sisters and therefore lacked the promise of bridewealth animals from the sisters' marriages. More broadly, the lack of economic development in most pastoral areas means there are limited opportunities for income generation for young men outside of the pastoral economy (Catley & Aklilu 2012). Fleisher states: 'Kuria cattle raiding today is most productively viewed as one item in a desperately brief menu of cash-generating economic options available to the Kuria people of rural Tanzania' (Fleisher 1999: 240). Krätli & Swift (2003) make the distinction between men who engage regularly in raids as a way to make a living and those who undertake periodic raids to restock, feed their families or acquire money for school fees. The causal link between poverty and raids is highlighted by Gray *et al.* (2003) who argue that raiding is an adaptive cultural response (albeit negative and destructive) to environmental,

sociopolitical and economic pressures upon pastoralists' subsistence base. This economic motivation is strongly supported by our research on Karamoja and underpins the shift from raids to thefts in the region, to which we now turn.

Shifts from 'raids' to 'thefts'

Our research over the past decade in Karamoja illustrates a change in how attacks are described, with victims making a clear distinction between 'raids' and 'thefts'. In addition, a new type of thieves, considered 'thugs' and widely condemned, has emerged. Thefts have become increasingly opportunistic and spontaneous (as opposed to well-planned raids), and are carried out individually or by a handful of men. Perpetrators are either unarmed (although they may pretend to be), carrying knives or sticks, or sharing a weapon among a group. Raiders of the past were interested primarily in livestock, with an overriding preference for cattle. In contrast, the thieves of recent years are more likely to steal productive assets (such as tools), essential domestic items (clothing, bedding and cooking implements), and food. Livestock may be stolen if the opportunity arises, but various factors make this a risky venture, including the increased efficacy of tracking systems and punishments. Productive and household commodities, in contrast to livestock, can be quickly converted to cash on the second-hand market or incorporated into thieves' households.

The desire for cash that predominated in the commercial raids in the final decades of the 20th century is a central component of the thefts of today. When asked why men steal, the most common response in all locations and by both genders was 'hunger'. The lack of income-generating alternatives for young men without animal herds is seen as a driving force behind the thefts. Poverty is not the only factor, but understanding the connection between asset theft and basic needs explains at least some of the motives for such crimes. Unlike the raids of the past, when proceeds were widely shared, looted proceeds today are largely kept by the individual or his household.

In 2008, reports began to emerge of thieves or thugs who attacked homes and homesteads on a regular basis (Stites & Akabwai 2009). At the time these thieves were called *lonetia*, a reference to the widespread theft of household goods and grains that were stored in mosquito nets.[12] The *lonetia* attacks were notable for many reasons, including the shift to private residences, which brought an expansion in types of victims. A group of young men interviewed in Kotido in 2009 reported:

Insecurity has also invaded our homes. When the enemy comes there is an alarm but they find you anyway. They come to raid and loot – chickens, saucepans, relief food … They come inside over the fence. If a woman sounds an alarm she will become the target and will be killed. They are armed with guns and torches … These things did not happen in the past.[13]

Sexual violence appears to have increased in parallel to attackers entering domestic spaces (Stites & Akabwai 2009). Such violence also increasingly took place upon women collecting natural resources in the bush, as described by young female respondents in Moroto in 2009, 'When you are attacked in the bush they take your clothes, your beads, your sheets – anything of value. You might also be raped and even get 'slim' [HIV/AIDS]. Rape is not that common unless it is very bad person.'[14]

The strategy of opportunistic theft (with or without accompanying violence) was applied regularly if infrequently by young men who felt they had few options. A longitudinal quantitative study with approximately 400 young men in southern Karamoja in 2013 found that many who stole did so only once over the four time periods of study. These once-off actions followed a seasonal trend and increased during the hunger gap. A much smaller subset of young men engaged in such theft regularly and as a primary livelihood activity. Importantly and in marked contrast to the previous insecurity in which attacks were almost exclusively inter-group (or inter-sub-county, in the case of raiding among the Pian), *lonetia* at times steal from *within* their own communities, a previously unknown phenomenon (Stites & Marshak 2016).

Lonetia attacks were a consistent problem in most study sites and were a major security concern for respondents during fieldwork from 2008 to 2010. This corresponded to a time in which disarmament abuses by the military were widespread, animal deaths in protected *kraals*[15] were high, and skirmishes between groups remained rampant. However, perceptions on overall levels of security shifted markedly over a period of several years, even while *lonetia* activity continued. The thefts still brought condemnation from community members, but the exacerbating conditions had improved. By 2013, many respondents deemed the insecurity of these small-scale thefts to be minor in comparison to previous experiences of violence and upheaval. This sentiment is captured in the thoughts of male youth respondents in Nakapiripirit in April 2013, 'The people can walk to other villages without fear. Women can go to fetch firewood and water freely. They visit each other. People can now sleep at night peacefully. The only problem now is *lonetia*.'[16] By 2015–16, respondents in many areas only mentioned *lonetia* thefts when asked directly, and depicted the incidents as a common nuisance

to be dealt with as best as possible. We posit that while these improvements are part of an overall decrease in insecurity and violence, low-level theft remains pervasive and has the potential to once again escalate into a wider problem.

Impacts of improved security

Reductions in violent, large-scale and unpredictable attacks have brought a number of positive impacts as reported by both men and women in multiple locations. One of the most critical impacts is improved mobility for both humans and animals. For example, in 2009, women's fear of attack when collecting natural resources was so pronounced that some communities in southern Karamoja were dismantling their *manyatta* fences to use for firewood instead of gathering wood in the bush. In contrast, in 2015 and 2016, women in both northern and southern Karamoja reported that they move freely to collect resources, to markets, and even to neighbouring districts to buy sorghum or other commodities.[17]

Animal migration patterns, once severely constrained by insecurity, have recovered to an extent not seen in decades. Male herders interviewed in western Kotido District in 2016 explained that in previous years they would have kept animals of different types in one large herd for ease of protection, despite related disadvantages for animal nutrition and health. They reported, 'Now that it is peaceful we don't need to have them all in one big kraal like that. We are only able to do this dividing by type because of the relative peace.'[18] This disbursement allows for different types of animals to access the specific and most appropriate rangeland types.

Relations among groups have also improved, allowing for increased dry-season access to water and grazing points. Animal owners and traders move easily between districts within Karamoja, including on foot and accompanied by animals, to buy and sell at the main markets.[19] Dry-season grazing is now expansive and includes sharing of pasture among groups. As of early March 2016, Jie herds from Kotido were in Abim District, Pokot herds from Amudat were in Kween (formerly Kapchorwa) District, and Pian herds from Nakapiripirit were in Napak District. Matheniko and Jie herds were soon to join up with Turkana animals on the eastern edge of the region. Historical precedents allowed access to all of these areas, but insecurity had undermined usage rights for many years. While isolated problems continue (such as between Acholi and Jie populations on the Kotido–Agago border at the time of

our visit), these issues are minor compared to the insecurity that previously made these areas entirely off-limits.

Insecurity from livestock raids is still a concern in some locations, particularly cross-border raids from Turkana and Toposa in Kenya and South Sudan respectively. Security personnel remain actively involved with *kraals* in select areas, such as along the Uganda–Kenya border in Kaabong District. *Kraals* in this area remain under UPDF and LDU protection, but even these arrangements are continuously evolving as security improves. For example, although a large protected *kraal* (called Losera) still existed in March 2016 in Kalapata Sub-County in Kaabong, several smaller *kraals* had broken away from the main one with the permission of the UPDF. These *kraals* have more mobility and are less crowded than Losera, but are still guarded by LDUs. Similarly, a Pokot *kraal* in Kween District was fully mobile and yet had LDU protection. The willingness of the security forces to allow such innovations – and, in the case of the Pokot *kraal*, to move far distances with herds – is an example of the security forces' increased adaptability, improved community interaction, and better understanding of the needs of pastoral populations. These differences are particularly stark when compared with the early phase of the 2006 disarmament campaign and the establishment of the protected *kraals* (Stites & Akabwai 2010).

Factors of change

Many of the improvements to security detailed above have been gradual and non-linear, meaning that outbursts of violence or a spate of raids may have occurred even while the overall trend was in a positive direction. One of the clearest examples of this uneven trajectory came in the early years of the disarmament campaign that began in 2006. Many communities experienced an initial increase in insecurity due to uneven disarmament and abuses by the armed forces (Stites & Akabwai 2010). Overall, it is difficult to quantify shifts in violence or crime in Karamoja due to the unreliability of police reports, death certificates, and hospital records. This article does not claim that the changes in violence and security are absolute or immutable, but data from repeated research trips to multiple locations within the region provide strong and compelling evidence for overall improvements across broad swathes of Karamoja.

The overall and marked positive changes in security are the result of several inter-related factors. The first is the now 10-year-old disarmament campaign. Although beset with early problems (Human Rights

Watch 2007) and – like previous campaigns (Knighton 2003) – extremely unpopular, local perceptions began to change in approximately 2012 (with variations based on location). Today, male and female residents in both rural and urban areas express overall support for the outcomes of disarmament. This is the case even in some areas that had markedly negative experiences with the UPDF and the disarmament process. In one such example, a group of young Jie men interviewed in early 2016 reported that peace had been delivered by 'a good leader [President Museveni] who removed the gun'. We asked about the discrepancy between this view and that expressed in the same location in 2009, a time at which young men in particular considered the UPDF a mortal enemy and helicopter gunships had attacked herders who resisted disarmament in a nearby sub-county. The young men interviewed in 2016 responded, 'When [the UPDF] first came here it was very hard and there was a lot of attacking. But now we see the better way of living. It is like when you beat a small child who corrects himself and grows into a good adult.'[20] This could be interpreted to mean that – with hindsight – the respondents appreciated this 'corrective' external use of force, or, on the contrary, that they realised that fighting against the authority of the state was a lost cause.

As a corollary of the success of disarmament, the UPDF as an institution is today largely viewed in positive terms. Male respondents in Kotido and Kaabong in early 2015 reported positive cooperation between the UPDF and local peace committees in tracking stolen cattle. Female respondents in *manyattas* near UPDF barracks also had favourable views, and reported that the soldiers often share food and health resources.[21] Importantly, these impressions were in contrast to views regarding the police, who were seen as either absent or unwilling to assist residents without a bribe. These negative and suspicious impressions of the police existed in most locations we visited in 2015 and 2016.

A second factor contributing to improved security is the increased involvement of community-based and cross-sectoral mechanisms in combating crime. The most widely cited of these bottom-up processes is the 'two-for-one' policy, whereby an apprehended thief is required to hand over two times the number of animals he stole, plus one additional animal. This initiative arose out of a meeting at Nabilatuk, Nakapiripirit District in April 2013 attended by representatives from local communities, the police, UPDF, and national and international conflict mitigation actors. The Danish Refugee Council/Danish Demining Group (DRC/DDG) and other external actors facilitated the meeting, but the resolution was reached by participants over the course of three

days of discussions.[22] Often referred to as the Nabilatuk Resolution in southern Karamoja, communities in northern Karamoja agreed to a similar mechanism known as the Moruitit Resolution. In response to these initiatives, communities formed peace committees (consisting of male elders, male youth, and members of the UPDF and police) at the local, sub-county and district levels. These volunteer committees enforce the resolutions and coordinate the tracking and recovery of lost animals among the local volunteers and the security forces. Respondents in multiple sites in 2015 and 2016 cited the extent of local acceptance of and adherence to these resolutions, as well as the effectiveness of the 'two-for-one' policies and the peace committees in improving law and order.

These local mechanisms are not without their problems. Recent data reveal that the terms of Nabilatuk/Moruitit policies can be implemented with some discrepancy. For example, if the perpetrator is 'too poor' he can be excused from the requirement to hand over twice the number of stolen animals. The animals actually stolen must still be returned, and perpetrators unable to return the animals are taken to the police.[23] Local communities feel largely positively about these systems, but some point to potential injustice in the collective retribution that stipulates a return of double the looted animals. For instance, if an alleged thief does not own a sufficient quantity of animals to pay the two-for-one fine, then the animals are meant to be repaid from other sources. As explained by the UPDF Brigade Commander of Kaabong, 'When you have to pay back what you don't have, you need to go to your relatives. And if the relatives don't have, then it is the community that must pay.'[24] Those within the community who have few livestock stand to suffer disproportionately in the absence of local safeguards.[25] Another criticism has to do with the extent of involvement by external actors in 'imposing' these peace mechanisms as part of the 'imposed pacification' of the region (Caravani 2018). At this juncture it is difficult to distinguish between 'facilitation' of the initial Nabilatuk meeting and a more heavy-handed initial involvement. It should be noted, however, many local respondents spoke proudly about the local and grassroots nature of these resolutions.

A third and related factor promoting better security in the region is what many respondents described as the revitalised authority of the elders. In most locations visited between 2013–16, both male youth and male elders described improved inter-generational relations compared with 5–10 years earlier.[26] Youth felt that elders were approachable for both advice and support, and youth felt included in decision-

making.[27] Elders largely agreed with these depictions. This positive picture is in contrast to that of the decades prior to the 2006 disarmament in which violence had increased and elders viewed youth as disrespectful, stubborn and disobedient. Elders largely attributed this disharmony to 'the gun'; many elders had wanted male youth to cease raiding that was seen as individually driven and without communal benefit, but these efforts were largely to no avail (Akabwai & Ateyo 2007).[28] Female respondents also perceived and benefitted from the improvement in male intergenerational relations, as illustrated by a woman interviewed in 2016:

> Before disarmament, [the relationship between youth and elders] was not good. Most youth were in the bush raiding with their guns. The elders tried to tell them to stop, but they continued with their raids. Their gun was their power. They were hostile. But now, they listen to elders more than before.[29]

A lack of power-sharing underscored much of the tension between generations of men. Initiations, particularly in southern Karamoja (among the Bokora, Matheniko and Pian) had stalled due to a delay in the transfer of authority from one generation to the next as stipulated through the gerontocratic generation-set system common to pastoral groups in East Africa (Gulliver 1953; Spencer 1976; Knighton 2005).[30] Insecurity, poverty, drought and reluctance on the part of the senior elders to acquiesce all contributed to the failure to hand over power and to begin initiations of a new generation of men (Stites 2013b).[31] Young men were not able to initiate in the absence of this transfer, and hence lacked official adult status regardless of chronological age. (Many respondents were in their late 30s and even 40s and had still not initiated.) The lack of transfer of power and the stagnation of initiations further fuelled the discord between generations of men in the late 20th century, and many observers felt that this contributed to violence in the region (Gray 2000; Stites 2013b).

Succession began across much of southern Karamoja in approximately 2013, and initiations soon followed (Gray, personal communication, February 2014).[32] The renewal of initiations has directly improved the relationship between male youth and their elders: the youth are reportedly affording greater respect to elders who, in turn, are seen to be acting as the appropriate guardians of power.[33]

Arising in part from the improved relations, male elders in some areas report being able to revitalise customary justice mechanisms that the youth had previously either largely ignored or deemed irrelevant. One

such mechanism is *ameto*, through which male elders order the caning of a wrong-doer by his peers along with the payment of a fine (usually a bull). The threat of *ameto* reportedly helps to keep male youth in line (Muhereza *et al.* 2008; Gray 2010), and appears to have a direct impact on improved security (Howe *et al.* 2015; Stites & Marshak 2016).[34] However, there are limits to its effectiveness as a deterrent, including that it can reportedly only be applied to those of the same clan.[35]

Many respondents drew a connection between the revitalised power of the male elders and the two-for-one policies in response to animal theft. The possibility of losing animals from the community to compensate for the crimes of recalcitrant youth may have helped to galvanise the male elders. In addition, the coming to power of the next generation of elders as part of the recent succession has increased their legitimacy in the eyes of the youth and has helped to improve vertical relationships.

Respondents interviewed in all sites in 2015 and 2016 felt that security had greatly improved, but widely described the status quo as one of 'relative peace'. Those interviewed emphasised that peace is fragile given the continued presence of weapons in neighbouring Kenya and South Sudan. Additional factors of concern voiced by key informants include potential political upheaval at the national level or a too-rapid reduction of UPDF forces in the region.[36] A general lack of trust in the capabilities and competencies of the police compound these concerns. At the local level, respondents qualify their views on the current peace due to the continued patterns of theft discussed earlier and the pervasive domestic violence to which we now turn.

Domestic violence

Sexual and gender-based violence and, in particular, domestic violence against women by male partners,[37] is certainly not new in Karamoja. Efforts to measure or quantify the extent of the problem or changes over time are unreliable due to the sensitivity of the issue. Its long-standing existence does not, however, make its pervasiveness or impacts less of a problem, and the seriousness is increasingly being recognised in official circles. In 2015 and 2016, for instance, sequential District Police Commissioners (DPC) in Kotido reported to the research team that domestic abuse was one of the most pressing concerns facing the district.[38]

In interviews in Kotido and Kaabong districts in early 2015, more than half of the women interviewed in focus groups in 13 villages (across 11 sub-counties) reported being victims of domestic violence. Domestic abuse is seen as nearly constant, as indicated by the following quotation:

Researcher: How often are husbands violent towards their wives in this village?
Female respondent: It is daily – it is like taking breakfast.[39]

Many of the female respondents reporting abuse had suffered serious injuries, including blindness, broken bones, burns and deep cuts. Several had permanent disabilities resulting from the violence. These acts were at times torturous in nature, such as kicking a pregnant woman in the abdomen, burning of genitals, gouging of eyes and cutting of throats. Death was not uncommon: in one sub-county of Kaabong, five women had been killed by their husbands in January 2015 alone (Howe *et al.* 2015).

Male respondents interviewed in northern Karamoja in early 2015 were generally open about domestic abuse. Men considered violence to be justified if a woman had not prepared or had burned food, was 'lazy', came home late, 'did not take care of the children' (as evidenced by children crying or misbehaving), challenged authority or acted disrespectfully, drank to excess or committed adultery. In contrast, very few female respondents believed that violence perpetrated by a husband was ever justified.[40] Women reported that refusing to have sex was the most frequent 'cause' of domestic abuse. Without exception, women said that they had no right to refuse sex. Violence within the home most often occurs when the perpetrator is intoxicated (Howe *et al.* 2015).

Domestic abuse in Karamoja is both a security and an economic issue. Women in Karamoja provide for their households largely through the production or sale of natural resources, through cultivation, or through service-sector work in towns. The extent of women's economic contributions to their households is particularly pronounced due to the decrease in traditionally male-dominated animal husbandry. Due to the extent of injuries from domestic violence, women are at times unable to work to support their households for days, weeks or months at a time.

Perceptions on whether domestic abuse is increasing or decreasing differed by location, and potential explanations exist for both trends. A shift in gender roles within households is one possible cause of increased violence. The decline in animal-based livelihoods due to growing inequity of livestock ownership and the protected *kraals* as part of disarmament removed many men from their herds. Whereas previously these men spent long periods of time in the *kraals*, they are now more likely to be home and with few meaningful tasks to occupy themselves. Women, on the other hand, are increasingly the main providers for their households (Stites & Akabwai 2010), but often do not control the means of production or profits beyond what is needed to cover subsistence needs

(Caravani 2018). Simultaneously, inexpensive commercial grain alcohol has become more widely available, and many women report that domestic violence is most common when one or both parties are intoxicated. Evidence of the link between drunkenness and domestic violence comes from Karenga Sub-County in Kaabong. The Karenga Peace Committee banned the sale and consumption of grain alcohol, and rates of violence (both domestic and otherwise) reportedly plummeted.[41]

A smaller number of sites in 2015 described a decrease in domestic violence.[42] Women reported that their increased mobility as a result of improved security allows them to leave home when their partners were drunk or combative. The ability to avoid the threat, regardless of time of day, means that women are able to de-escalate situations that might otherwise have resulted in violence.

Overall, our data show that high rates of domestic violence are the result of attitudes around gender relations at multiple levels. Male and female respondents describe that women are largely understood to be a man's property and are expected to obey their husbands. A woman is often blamed for situations beyond her control, such as children crying from hunger. These attitudes are reinforced by the local custom of publicly caning both husband and wife when the husband has been violent. Local leaders in one village in Kotido rounded up all the women in the middle of the night and threatened them with severe punishment should they continue to 'refuse sex' or speak back to their husbands.[43]

CONCLUSION

Karamoja of 15 years ago was rife with everyday violence and was a no-go area for national officials, international agencies, academics and traders. Cattle raids across ethnic, district and international borders undermined livelihood systems, prevented access to services, and exacerbated political marginalisation and underinvestment. Karamoja remains a difficult place to live – rainfall is erratic and variable, services are few, governance is poor and malnutrition rates remain high. These considerable challenges make it easy to lose sight of the magnitude of the positive changes that have taken place regarding peace and security. Such progress has occurred largely because of the convergence of the top-down and bottom-up processes of the disarmament campaign and local resolutions. However, while the highly visible and far-reaching cattle raids have dissipated, insecurity has become more localised, less apparent, and, in the case of domestic violence, more ubiquitous. Violence has

shifted in locale from the border to the bedroom; this shift is indicative of the depth of challenges still facing the rapidly evolving region of Karamoja.

NOTES

1. The Acholi and Lango regions of the north were also experiencing sharp upticks of violence in this period due to the growth of different rebel factions, most notably the Lord's Resistance Army or LRA.

2. Both the national military – the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) – and local defence units (known as LDUs) have been involved in disarmament and associated activities in Karamoja.

3. Author 1 was the principal investigator on each of the studies contributing data to this report. Author 2 has been involved in research in Karamoja since 2012.

4. Interviews were transcribed, coded and analysed with the assistance of qualitative software (Nvivo and Dedoose).

5. The ebb and flow of raiding and associated violence in Karamoja is due to a number of factors that cannot be covered in detail in a short article. This article focuses specifically on the experience and perspectives of respondents, which comes at the expense of an analysis of the role of institutions, poor governance, broader security challenges, and the benefits to the central state of disorder on its periphery. All of these are also factors in the history of insecurity and violence in Karamoja.

6. Interview with Jie young women, Kacheri, Kotido, 7.4.2009.

7. Eaton (2008) argues that retaliation as a motive for attacks is central to the perpetuation of violence along the Uganda–Kenya border.

8. As reported by respondents and key informants.

9. Interview with Matheniko male elders, Rupa, Moroto District, 8.7.2008.

10. The gradual and varied aspects of raiding for commercial gain means that blanket references to 'commercial raiding' (as occasionally made by political leaders) should be viewed with suspicion.

11. Eaton (2008) is one of the few authors to directly challenge the reliability of the widespread allegations regarding the linkages between raiding for profit and external criminal linkages, saying that some scholars tend to rely on unverifiable assumptions to advance the more sensational aspects of commercial raiding.

12. Thieves are often named in reference to the types of items they steal or the ways in which they carry out attacks, such as *lopangae*, referring to those who attack with pangas/machetes. We appreciate the assistance of an anonymous reviewer in helping to add nuance to our understanding of these terms.

13. Interview with male youth, Panyangara Sub-County, Kotido District, 6.4.2009.

14. Interview with young women, Nadunget Sub-County, Moroto District, 2.4.2009.

15. In an unwritten but widely implemented policy, the military established what became known as protected *kraals* as part of the disarmament campaign that began in 2006. Animal owners were compelled to put their livestock into these protected enclosures (those who refused were assumed to still have weapons and were targeted for further disarmament) which were near or adjacent to military detaches. While this system did cut back on animal theft, livestock health suffered in the protected *kraals* due to over-crowding, rapid disease transmission, and limited mobility (Stites & Akabwai 2009, 2010).

16. Interview with male youth, Lorengedwat Sub-County, Nakapiripirit, 13.4.2013.

17. Interview with woman making sorghum brew in Rengen Sub-county, Kotido, 1.3.2016.

18. Interview with male herders, Loongor Dam, Kacheri Sub-County, Kotido, 3.3.2016.

19. Interviews at Kanawat (Kotido), Kaabong, Nandunget (Moroto), Amudat and Karita (Amudat) livestock markets, March 2016.

20. Interview with young men, Rengen Sub-County, Kotido District, 28.2.2016.

21. Data from focus group discussions with women and men of mixed ages across 13 villages, Kotido and Kaabong Districts, January and February 2015.

22. Interview with Poul Thisted, Danish Refugee Council/Danish Demining Group (DRC/DDG), Moroto, 16.3.2016.

23. Interview with young men, Rengen Sub-County, Kotido District, 28.2.2016.

24. Interview with UPDF Brigade Commander of Kaabong, Kaabong, 7.2.2015.

25. It is not known if such safeguards exist in select areas; it is entirely possible that they do.

26. There was one exception to this positive trend. In Kotido Town Council, one *kraal* leader described that youth were disobedient because they had become exposed to money and alcohol.

27. Interviews with a community animal health worker (CAHW) and youth leader in Rengen Sub-County, Kotido District, 1.3.2016.

28. Interviews with a CAHW and youth leader in Rengen Sub-County, Kotido District, 1.3.2016; interview with a female community leader, Kalapata Sub-County, Kaabong District, 7.3.2016; interview with *kraal* members Kalapata Sub-County, Kaabong District, 6.3.2016. As discussed earlier, elders had sanctioned and benefited from cattle raids when these had been communal activities; this changed when the raids became more opportunistic and individual in nature.

29. Interview with a female community leader, Kalapata Sub-County, Kaabong District, 7.3.2016.

30. As explained by Gulliver (1953), Spencer (1976) and Knighton (2005), among others, the gerontocratic system of authority in Karamoja, as with many pastoral regions in the Greater Horn, is based on a rotation of male generation-sets. In Karamoja, only two such sets exist: the seniors and the juniors. A man cannot be initiated into the same generation-set as his father. This means that in the absence of regular rotation (whereby the senior generation set 'retires'), there is no space for a new generation of men to be initiated (as they would be in the same set as their fathers). These uninitiated mean are called *karacuna*, meaning 'of the apron', which is meant to signify that they have a status akin to women.

31. There is disagreement in the literature as to the normal interval between succession ceremonies, with Dyson-Hudson claiming 25–30 years, Lamphear (1976) stating 35–40 years, and Knighton (2005) stating 50–60 years. Based on discussion with key informants in 2009 and with academics (Sandra Gray, personal correspondence, 10.6.2011), we posit that the Dyson-Hudson model is probably the most accurate. Until recently the last succession ceremony in southern Karamoja was in 1956–1958, meaning that there had been no handover of power for almost twice the normal interval by the start of the 2006 disarmament. There is debate over the precise date of the last succession – usually given as 1957 or 1958 – because the Pian appear to have carried out a separate ceremony, breaking from the rest of the Karimojong groups (Gray 2000). Dyson-Hudson (1966) posits that this split in timing had more to do with fierce fighting between the Pokot and the Pian and a simultaneous drought than with internal Karimojong relationships. These external aspects had undermined the age-set system of the Pian and new leadership was needed.

32. Initiations were infrequent but not stalled to the same extent in northern Karamoja as in the south. Jie initiations have reportedly increased in recent years to a greater extent than those of their Dodoth counterparts, but more research on the trends in the north is needed.

33. Interview with male youth and elders, Nabilatuk Sub-County, Nakapiripirit District, 12.3.2016.

34. Interview with male youth and elders, Nabilatuk Sub-County, Nakapiripirit District, 12.3.2016. We heard that *ameto* was being used with regularity among Pian, Matheniko and Jie communities, and less among Dodoth groups. We do not have data on this for Bokora communities.

35. We thank an anonymous reviewer for the distinction about intra-clan use. The same reviewer reports that *ameto* is not used on youth who have attended school, but we have heard reports to the contrary in this regard.

36. Interviews with local councillors (LCs) in Kotido and national and international civil society actors in Kotido and Moroto, March 2016.

37. Some men reported abuse by their wives. However, no physical injuries were reported and the abuse was most often described as women 'provoking' men or 'misbehaving'. Alcohol was reportedly frequently involved.

38. These comments were not part of a conversation on sexual or gender-based violence or in reference to issues concerning women. Interviews with DPCs in Kotido conducted 4.2.2015 and 2.3.2016.

39. Interview with women, Kacheri Sub-County, Kotido District, 2.2.2015.

40. A few older women were among the only participants who felt it was periodically justified.

41. Interview with the Vice Chairperson of the Karenga Peace Committee, Kaabong District, 10.2.2015.

42. Domestic violence was discussed with13 female focus groups during fieldwork in early 2016. Eight of the 13 groups said domestic violence against women was increasing, and five groups said it was decreasing. Respondents in these five groups reported that although overall levels of violence seemed to be lower, domestic violence was still common and frequent, particularly when men were intoxicated.

43. Interview with women, Kacheri Sub-County, Kotido District, 2.2.2015.

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