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Lost in transition? Modernization, formal education and violence in Karamoja

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ABSTRACT

There is a shift from pastoralism towards agro-pastoralism and systematized agricultural production in Karamoja, a sub-region of Uganda. At the same time, aid agencies and the government want to formally educate the Karamojong, in line with global education norms and policies. This creates a lot of ambiguities and in-betweens for the Karamojong as formal education impels sedentarization and socio-economic division. The Karamojong have a long history of using resistance to formal education as a tool to protect their pastoralist lifestyle and cultural values. This paper sheds light on the complex and often violent intersections of modernization, development and formal education. It argues that while formal education has delivered some benefits to the Karamojong, it has also led to multiple forms of violence, aid paradoxes and dead ends. The Karamojong's relationship with formal education is shaped by *resistance*, *cultural repression*, *irrelevance* and *structural violence*. If pastoralism ought to be invigorated in Karamoja, there is an urgency to rethink the purpose and potential of formal education in the region. This includes to build on, expand and re-invest in locally developed, flexible and alternative learning programmes that are more suited to fit the everyday lives and realities of the Karamojong.

1. Introduction

Karamoja is in transition. Its culturally rich and ethnically diverse society is moving from pastoralism towards sedentarization. While the Karamojong have a strong and longstanding tradition of pastoralism, many settle unwillingly against the backdrop of economic, political and social pressures. In this process, the Karamojong had and still have to negotiate and navigate through multiple dichotomies such as (c.f. Krätli, 2006, p.126): nature vs civilization, rural vs urban, nomadic vs sedentary, traditional medicine vs conventional healthcare, informal vs formal education, women's subjugation vs gender sensitivity, communal life vs individual freedom, poverty vs prosperity, chaos vs order, collective vs individual rights, traditional belief systems vs Christian values; political and economic marginalization vs mounting developing aid; – and so forth. So-called 'development' and 'modernization' under the banner of human rights and liberalism, have led to profound contrasts, ambiguities and in-betweens in their everyday lives. These many in-betweens have, for the most part, not benefitted the Karamojong. Instead they were caused by and led to multiple forms of violence, human rights violations, extreme poverty, high child death rates and famine. Karamoja perfectly illustrates how some of the remaining and endangered indigenous and pastoralist societies are consistently challenged by attempts to exploit, develop and modernize a remote region.

Today, pastoralism in its various forms and as a main source of income is in steady decline (Randall, 2015; Caravani, 2019; Lind et al., 2020), – with mostly transhumant pastoralism and small-scale agro-pastoralism prevailing (Lind et al., 2020). The Government of Uganda (GoU) is sending very mixed messages regarding pastoralism in Karamoja. On paper, policies create an enabling environment and appear to support pastoralists (Byakagaba et al., 2018; MAAIF, 2018). In practice, the GoU clearly communicates strategies to abolish pastoralism and promote sedentary agriculture as a source of sustainable livelihood in Karamoja (Daily Monitor, 2019). In addition various non-governmental actors (including religious, humanitarian or development organizations) have encouraged sedentarization of the Karamojong. Recently this trend has changed among some (but not all) development actors (e.g.: Waiswa et al., 2019),[1] in view of the many ecological, economic, social and cultural losses caused by *de-pastoralization*

[1] See also https://www.kdfug.org/about-kdf/ or https://www.iwgia.org/images/documents/Statements-support/Pastoralism_is_our_Future_Statement.pdf, accessed, May 9, 2022.

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(Caravani, 2019). Representatives of pastoralist groups[2] and experts in the field (Oxfam International, 2008; FAO, 2018; Krätli, 2019) see pastoralism (not just in Karamoja), as the most sustainable, if not realistic, strategy for survival for societies in the East African region struggling with the consequences of climate change.

Paradoxically, despite recognizing the significance of pastoralism, efforts to 'stabilize and modernize' the Karamojong continue. One of these areas is formal education – for obvious reasons. It is estimated that 88% of Karamoja's entire population (1.37 million) is illiterate (UNFPA, 2018) and that about half of all children and youth (51%) aged 6–24 years never attended school (UBOS, 2017). The Karamojong have been consistently described as having a negative attitude towards formal education (Save the Children Norway, 2006; UNICEF, 2009; Namukwaya & Kibirige, 2014). Many parents refuse to send their children to school and have prejudices against the free scholastic material that is provided for them. How can someone possibly be *against* education? Especially at a time when schooling is heavily promoted (often in a very simplistic manner) as a remedy for almost any developmental dilemma, including poverty, conflict, gender inequality or climate change?

For the Karamojong, resistance to foreign education was first and foremost a strategic tool to reject colonial administration and all the violence that came with it. In the decades after independence, the Karamojong continued to be rather reluctant to *formally* educate their children. A non-formal education initiative called ABEK (Alternative Basic Education Karamoja) was designed in the early 1990s to respond to their prejudices against formal education – with quite some success. Co-developed together with the Karamojong, ABEK offered a culturally relevant curriculum, flexible learning hours and lessons taught by local teachers in the Karamojong language. After more than twenty years of operation it was significantly downsized due to prioritization of other programmes. Today, the focus of aid agencies and the GoU has shifted to sending Karamojong children back to formal schools. Formal education, it is assumed, will reduce poverty, nurture peacebuilding and increase sedentary agriculture among the Karamojong (OPM and Ministry for Karamoja Affairs 2016). That most of Karamoja's environment is in fact not suitable for sedentary agriculture (Nakalembe, Dempewolf, & Justice, 2017) is neither thought of, nor discussed. Again, one of the many aid paradoxes the Karamojong are confronted with, begging the question: *What role does formal education play in modernizing and developing Karamoja?*

In the first section, I briefly elaborate how I conceptually approach the intersections of modernization, formal education and violence, with a particular focus on Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). I continue with a short reflection on my positionality as a white western researcher in writing about the Karamojong, followed by an outline of my research methods. The ensuing section elaborates on the current situation of the Karamojong since colonialism; setting the scene for the final part of the paper, which discusses and analyses why formal education nurtured and led to *resistance*, *cultural repression*, *questioning irrelevance* and *structural violence*. I present and draw on insights, experiences and opinions of the Karamojong.

2. How modernization, formal education, and violence intersect

Modernization and development, as theories, concepts and historical processes, have been critiqued by many for being Eurocentric, ahistorical, not addressing the root causes of poverty, and labelling *other* (i.e. non-western) societies as backward (e.g.: Chatterjee, 2004; Comaroff & Comaroff, 1999; Easterly, 2007; Mbembe, 2001; or *Frankfurter Schule* to name but a few). Western modernities, it is argued, are not the only 'authentic' modernity, though the term modernity enjoys historical precedence and continues to be a basic reference point for others (Eisenstadt, 2000, pp 3-4). From a sheer Eurocentric perspective, modernization implies that there is only a single (universal) process of the evolution of civilization. It usually refers to the promotion and assimilation of social, political and economic structures, norms and ideas around modernity, as they emerged and expanded in European societies during the Age of Enlightenment in the 17th and 18th centuries. Modernization as a process (thus not just a condition and intellectual construct but a revolution in production methods), followed in the 18th to 19th centuries with the Industrial Revolution, which began in Britain and spread to Europe and the US. This was followed by attempts and ambitions to modernize the *other* (mainly colonies) to enable European domination of the world in the nineteenth century, resulting in a "first Europe then elsewhere structure" (Chakrabarty, 2007, p. 6). In this process, *formal education*, also referred to as modern schooling (e.g.: Anderson-Levitt, 2005) has become an ally of many Eurocentric modernization attempts in and outside Europe over the past centuries.

In fact, formal education, as it is globally promoted and implemented today,[3] still shows many similarities to how it was initially introduced during the Industrial Revolution. The so-called "Prussian Model" of formal education (die preussische Elementarschule),[4] was adopted in most European countries (and beyond, such as the U.S.) from the late eighteenth century on. It meant compulsory state schooling for all children for a minimum of eight years, according to their age, at a particular place and time to learn specific skills (reading, writing, arithmetic and possibly others). In colonial SSA, formal education soon became equated with modernization, with the aim to sustain and strengthen the colonial administration. European schooling literally "conquered the African mind" (Ngu~gi~ wa Thiong'o, 1992) through the use of colonial languages as the main medium of instruction and the introduction of western (hegemonic) epistemologies (c.f. Breidlid, 2012) and pedagogies (c.f. Tabulawa, 2003).

Later, after World War II, and in the wake of decolonisation and independence movements, modernization became most fashionable as a development theory, promoted, among others, by the American sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset and the economist Walt Whitman Rostow. During this time, modernization "set out to isolate, define, and measure the variables according to which human populations might be placed along an imagined continuum from the pre- to the modern, the past to the present" (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012, p.10). Schools once again played an important role in this process. At first, after independence, many African liberation leaders (predominantly western-educated, privileged males) aspired to a new role for formal education with the aim to deconstruct former colonial structures, identities and institutions in order to decolonize and reconstruct them anew (Bereketeab, 2020). Julius Nyerere's envisioned education reforms for self-reliance in Tanzania serve as a prime example (Nyerere, 1967). In reality, however, many of the colonial structures and educational institutions were left intact after the end of colonialism. African states (and their inherited formal schooling systems) grappled with the need to build multi-ethnic nations, challenged by the diversity within their borders encompassing different languages,

[2] COPASCO (Coalition of Pastoralist Civil Society Organisations) https://copacso.org/, accessed March 31, 2021.

[3] See for instance: The Dakar Framework for Action: Education for All: meeting our collective commitments (including six regional frameworks for action) (UNESCO, 2000); or the OECD PISA (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Programme for International Student Assessment), https://www.oecd.org/pisa/, accessed 7 September 2021.

[4] For an extensive account (in German) on the emergence and development of the Prussian Model of education see Wittmütz (2007).

ethnicities, religions, cultures and so forth, brought about by artificially drawn borders inherited from former colonizers (Bereketeab, 2020). National and international strategies to 'develop' former colonies anticipated that formal education would bring about national unity and modernize SSA societies against the backdrop of socio-economic pressures. The key assumption was that formal education (as appeared to be the case in the West) will strengthen human capital, increase economic development, improve health and support democratization processes (c.f. Lipset, 1959); a strategy that has not changed significantly to this day.

This is not to disregard the widespread academic criticism of modernization theories by non-western (e.g.: Frantz Fanon, Edward Said or Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak) and western (e.g.: *Frankfurter Schule,* Immanuel Wallerstein) scholarship. There is also significant scholarly and activist work to decolonize and de-westernize formal education, expressed among others in anti-colonial scholarship on schooling (e.g.: Assié-Lumumba, 2016, 2012; Sefa Dei, 2004); the "Rhodes must Fall" movements; or in the work of intellectuals and activists like Gustavo Esteva, Vandana Shiva, Helena Norberg-Hodge or Manish Jain, to give only very few examples. However, apart from a few piecemeal projects, this critique has not been seriously taken into account by decision makers in mainstream practices and policies in education and so-called international development.[5] On the contrary, formal education continues to be, by and large, grounded in Eurocentric and capitalistic notions of modernization, promoted by aid agencies, donors[6] and recipient governments, including Goal number 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals,[7] as the magic bullet to reduce poverty, conflict, bad governance and to nourish sustainable development.

I therefore join Chakrabarty (2007, p. 17) in arguing that the problem of contemporary, western, capitalist modernity cannot any longer be seen simply as a sociological problem of historical transition, but as a problem of translation as well. There is a striking void in acknowledging and working with 'multiple modernities' (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012; Eisenstadt, 2000), including how multiple versions of education unfolded the world over in different spaces, at different times, and not just in Europe during the period of enlightenment and later industrialization. This void has caused a lot of harm, as the case of the Karamojong shows. It is exactly here that *violence* plays a central part. I am not arguing that western and formal education per se is ultimately violent. It is far more complicated than that. Rather, the aim is to unravel the multiple impacts formal western education, as a tool of modernization and development, *can* have in non-western contexts. Similar to what Bush and Saltarelli (2000) have convincingly done in their work on the "two faces of education" in ethnic conflict, I shed light on the harm formal education has caused for the Karamojong. At the same time I also explore the potential education can have, when grounded in different or local (non-western) notions of modernity, such as African pastoralism.

As the following sections will show, my conceptualisation of violence in regard to formal education is deliberately broad. Drawing, among others on the work of Parkes et al. (2013) and my previous work (Datzberger & Le Mat, 2018), I approach violence as multidimensional. Violence is not just seen as a direct act of physical, sexual or emotional force, but also as having its roots in norms and discourses, and in inequitable and unjust socio-economic and political systems and institutions. For the purpose of this paper, I widen my analysis to structural forms of violence (e.g. Galtung 1969) and repressive violence (e.g. Salmi, 2000). Structural violence involves several forms of horizontal and vertical inequalities (c.f. Stewart, 2002), this includes for instance unequal access to formal education due to one's socio-economic background, lack of infrastructure, or responsibilities at home. Repressive violence signifies different forms of oppression which restrict a person's liberties or self-determination. In education this can take the form of imposed curricula, or the conveying of knowledge and skills that are culturally not relevant to the chosen lifestyle and worldviews of a society in question. I perceive repressive violence as closely interlinked with Bourdieu's (2001) work on symbolic forms of violence, which occurs when someone internalises and normalises imposed societal norms that cause harm based on hegemonic power relations. This could be for instance an internalised belief of being less worthy if one has had no formal education, perhaps because there is no access to it.

Against this backdrop, I want to showcase why the introduction of formal education, with the aim to modernize and develop Karamoja, has not just delivered some benefits to the Karamojong, but also nurtured multiple forms of violence over the past decades.

3. Methods and positionality

> *The word 'research', is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary. (. . .) It galls us that Western researchers and intellectuals can assume to know all that it is possible to know of us, on the basis of their brief encounters with some of us. It appals us that the West can desire, extract and claim ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce, and then simultaneously reject the people who created and developed those ideas and seek to deny them further opportunities to be creators of their own culture and own nations* (Smith, 1999, p. 1).

Researching foreign lands and societies continues to give the western researcher the power to define. As such, research is not an innocent pursuit of knowledge (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017) – on the contrary. In social sciences in particular, the researcher far too often benefits more from the research than the researched (Kincheloe & Mclaren, 2011). This will most likely also be the case for this paper. As a white, western female, I enjoyed a lot of privileges while conducting research in Karamoja. Something the Karamojong, who voluntarily opted to participate in my study, would not take advantage of, but rather embrace with curiosity and self-confidence. There is a growing body of much needed literature on the importance, purpose and pitfalls of decolonizing research (e.g.: Bhambra 2007; Barnes 2018; Keikelame & Swartz 2019). I am neither Ugandan nor Karamojong. I am also not a practitioner, policymaker, or so-called changemaker. So, what is my mission? I want to understand, learn from the Karamojong and let *them* explain. I join Aveling (2013) in hopefully "contributing in some small way to the project of decolonizing methodologies by 'speaking to my own mob'." In this attempt, the paper engages in a reflection on external interventionism in the region, examining why development assistance has failed the Karamojong for decades. I share and analyse the viewpoints and often different opinions of the Karamojong themselves who participated in my research. Doing so, I am aware that I will only shed light on a fragment of their experiences, which leads me to the problematic nature of interpretation. As researchers, no matter whether we are insiders or outsiders, we bring our own perspectives when examining the data. I am not alone in arguing that there is no such thing as 'objective' or 'neutral' research (Barnes, 2018). But we can at least make the effort to constantly self-reflect and be aware of how our own background and thinking shapes what we select from our data and the conclusions we draw from it.

[5] For an important and noteworthy discussions on the need (and how) to decolonize international development studies read: Rutazibwa (2018).

[6] Such as for instance the World Bank (https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education, accessed September 9, 2021), the Global Education Fund, or the Global Partnership for Education (https://www.globalpartnership.org/, accessed September 9, 2021).

[7] See: https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/education/, accessed September 9, 2021.

I draw on qualitative data, which was collected during research stays in 2015 and 2017 in and outside Karamoja. Data collection involved 23 interviews with a variety of actors from the government, civil society organizations (CSOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), school officials, education planners and teaching professionals (see Annex 1). Most of them were Karamojong. A few were not born in the region but had lived and worked there for significant periods. In addition I conducted one community interview (25 members), and two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), with Karamojong youth (see Annex 1). Each FGD consisted of 10 participants, female and male. I will not reveal the identity of interviewees and only refer to their professional background or institutional affiliation when permission was granted. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded in *Atlas.ti*. Sometimes I synthesize general findings from various interviews and sometimes I selectively cite respondents.

In addition I provide quotes from a questionnaire which was conducted with 497 youth in four different regions in Uganda. In total 189 respondents (female and male) were upper-secondary school students from Karamoja between 15 and 29 years old (see Annex 1).[8] All participating schools were public (government-led) institutions, enrolling youth with a low socio-economic status. I am not going to provide a quantitative analysis of their responses apart from one short reference to descriptive quantitative data. A thorough quantitative analysis of survey data has already been published elsewhere (Datzberger & Le Mat, 2019). Rather, I will make use of data obtained from an additional comments section in the survey. These sections were made available under 5-point Likert scale questions and aimed at learning from participants' everyday experiences and viewpoints.

4. Karamoja: Lost in transition?

Karamoja is located in north-eastern Uganda. The majority of the Karamojong[9] belong to the 268 million pastoralists (in all their variations) who call Africa's drylands their home (FAO, 2018). They depend on livestock production as their most important source of livelihood, food security, nutrition, income and well-being (FAO, 2018, p. 1). Although pastoralist lifestyles are under constant threat and in decline (Randall, 2015; Caravani, 2019; Lind et al., 2020), different types of pastoralism practiced in Karamoja still provide 89% of the total gross value of the regional livestock's physical output (Behnke & Arasio, 2019, p. 6). Official figures on the exact number of (agro-)pastoralists in Karamoja are hard to find, though some estimate that out of 1.37 million people who reside in Karamoja, around 70% live in rural areas as transhumant or agro-pastoralists.[10]

Before British occupation, all the land in north-eastern Uganda, what became Karamoja later on, used to be communally owned (Rugadya & Kamusiime, 2013). The British held many prejudices against the customary communal land system, and individualization of land became one of their priorities (Byakagaba et al., 2018, p. 4). Shortly after the end of colonial rule, in 1965, most of Karamoja's pastoral land (94.6%) was converted into national parks and game reserves, designated for wildlife conservation (Rugadya & Kamusiime, 2013). Many of the Karamojong's main grazing regions were also left outside Uganda (in neighbouring Kenya and South Sudan), due to the redrawing of borders, causing several cross-border conflicts among different ethnic groups. Conflicts amplified from the 1970s onward through the acquisition of modern firearms, increasing the momentum for cattle raiding among pastoralists. Attempts by the government to forcibly disarm and settle the Karamojong led to even more violence, human rights abuses, widespread poverty and famine (see Agade, 2010). Most pastoralists have now put down their guns but issues of land rights and illegal or exploitative mining activities threaten processes of sustainable development and peace.

In 2002, more than half of Karamoja's land area (54%), reserved for wildlife conservation, was opened up again for community use, crop farming and commercial mining (Nakalembe et al., 2017). However, the de-gazetting of land brought hardly any benefits for the Karamojong as many local communities are neither aware of this change in land rights, nor have the means, skills and needed infrastructure to claim back their land (Rugadya & Kamusiime 2013). The many difficulties of obtaining land rights and ownerships (Human Rights Watch, 2014; Rugadya, Kamusiime, & Nsamba-Gayiiya, 2010) have led to accusations of land grabbing, especially against the GoU. Approximately 25% of Karamoja's land area has been licenced by the GoU for mineral exploration and extraction activities, including the offering of concessions to private mining companies (Rugadya, Kamusiime and Nsamba-Gayiiya, 2010). This has coincided with a dramatic cropland expansion, promoted by the GoU and other development actors since the mid-1950 s. It is estimated that between 2000 and 2012 alone, cropland expanded from 3.24% to 12.92%, representing a 300% increase (Nakalembe, Dempewolf, & Justice, 2017). However, cultivated fields remain very small in size, are usually not very profitable, and over 55% of once cultivated land is left fallow (ibid.). All of these developments were achieved with increased development aid and aid dependency. Karamoja has been dependent on food aid from the WFP (World Food Programme) since the 1960s. While often described as marginalized in the context of Uganda, there has been and still is a fairly large, and also contested (e.g.: Jones, 2011), aid industry in the region. Despite several development initiatives by the GoU, donors and aid agencies, poverty in Karamoja has remained pervasive (UNFPA, 2018). It is estimated that currently around 61% of Karamoja's 1.37 million people live in absolute poverty (ibid.). Besides, the Karamojong have been at the sharp end of climate change and droughts, which frequently increase the risk of food shortages (Chaplin et al., 2017). A recent rapid assessment of Covid-19 impacts in Karamoja found that the pandemic had immediate and serious effects on livelihood and that child malnutrition is increasing (Arasio, Catley, & Ayele, 2020).

Today, the majority of aid and development projects continue to build on or promote a more settled lifestyle for the Karamojong. For instance the KIDP 2 – Karamoja Integrated Development Plan 2 (2015–2020) – promotes growth of permanent human settlement as a peacebuilding strategy (OPM and Ministry for Karamoja Affairs 2016). In addition, many of my interviewees – government officials, development workers and local CSOs – believed that the time has come to settle, modernize and develop the Karamojong. Researchers have, however, shown that land in Karamoja is not suitable for sedentary agriculture as the climate is too erratic to support sustainable rainfed crop production, which in part explains why past cropland expansion has not been profitable. This has caused a 'no-win' situation for the Karamojong,

[8] The survey has an unequal number of female and male respondents (see Annex 1), with 44% female and 56% male. This gender imbalance reflects secondary school gross enrolment rates, which were 20.09% male and 14.28% female across all secondary school levels (UBOS, 2017, p. 30) before Covid-19 led to school closures. This challenged an equal gender balance during data collection.

[9] There are different classifications of who belongs to the Karamojong. Most researchers understand the Karamojong as consisting of three principal ethnic populations: Dodoth in the north, Jie in the central region and the Karimojong (note with an 'i', subdivided into the Bokora, Metheniko and Pian groups) in the south (Sundal, 2009p.11; Waiswa et al., 2019, p. 34). However, the region is also home to several other minority ethnic groups: the Labwor, the Tepeth, Nyakwe, Ik (Teuso), Nigipore/Napore, and Ethur. The Pokot, an unrelated tribe from a separate linguistic group, are located near the border of Kenya in the southeast of the region (Waiswa et al., 2019, p 34). I use the term *Karamojong* to refer to all these societies – even though it is not fully correct, as not all groups are of Nilotic origin or share the same language family. Within official documents by the GoU, all of the above mentioned groups are referred to as the Karamojong (OPM and Ministry for Karamoja Affairs, 2016, p. 4).

[10] See: https://ella.practicalaction.org/programmenews/ella-community-blog-series-pastoralism-and-culture-in-karamoja-region/, accessed September 9, 2021.

who steadily lose land for pasture, and at the same time continue to rely on food aid as the increasing number of agro-based households cannot produce enough food (Nakalembe, Dempewolf, & Justice, 2017). A senior staff member from the Coalition of Pastoralist Civil Society Organizations (COPASCO) argues that supporting, maintaining or even reintroducing transhumant or agro-pastoralism would be one solution to fight poverty and starvation due to unprecedented long periods of drought.[11] For pastoralists variability is the norm, as they adapt to a changing climate and environment by literally moving their cattle to places with the most nutritious pasture (Krätli, 2019). Variability, however, has been perceived for far too long as a barrier to development, if not modernization (ibid.). Stability on the other hand, has thus far meant sedentarization, instead of supporting how the Karamojong harness climate variability to their advantage to ensure a stable source of income and food supply. It is precisely here that formal education plays a significant role in the sedentarization of the Karamojong. Formal education is generally portrayed and promoted by development actors and the GoU to bring about stability and modernization through poverty reduction, economic growth and human capital development (e.g.: Datzberger, 2018; Government of Uganda, 2010, 2015; UNESCO Institute for Statistics & UNICEF, 2015). Why this equation has thus far neither benefited the Karamojong nor reduced levels of multidimensional violence will be analysed and discussed below.

5. Karamoja's thorny relationship with formal education

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic,[12] it was estimated that 51% of all Karamojong children and youth aged 6–24 never attended school, 13% received some education and only 37% were currently enrolled (UBOS, 2016, p 26). The literacy rate for persons aged 10 or older in Karamoja stood at 26.8% (33.6% for males and 21.3% for females) compared to 92.8% in Kampala (UBOS, 2016, p. 34). When I asked my interviewees why the educational attainment in Karamoja is so low, a local project officer from a civil society organisation explained this as follows:[13]

> *Generally for us in Karamoja the biggest challenge is the attitude of the parents. Not all but some who have not yet seen the benefits of education take their children to school and then they withdraw them back at home to take care of the cows, animals, carry firewood come and sell in town. (. . .) And I think another challenge are poverty levels. It [poverty] is also making it hard for the parents to provide a book or a pen whatever little money they get out of scratching it is basically for food at home. The parent cannot continue paying for his or her child up to primary seven senior one or complete university. Such children who complete are the ones that get support from organizations.*

A Karamojong government official from Moroto additionally noted:[14]

> *Well in the first place, the Karamojong people look at formal education as something strange, new, something that they feel is a very long investment to archive as compared to have their children at home whom they bring up in their culture. For example, a young girl grows up and harvests dowry in form of cattle, so in context they look at formal education as something taking them away from their culture. And this was to a greater extent in early 60 s, 70 s to about late 80 s but now because of environmental changes, climate changes there is a small window of seeing the value of education.*

The above statements point to a number of issues in regard to the relationship with formal education among the Karamojong including: *resistance*, *cultural repression*, *irrelevance* as well as *structural violence*. All of these factors, as the subsequent sections will show, were and still are entangled with multiple forms of violence in the process of transitioning to a more settled lifestyle.

5.1. Resistance to formal education

In most pre-colonial SSA, including the region that is today Karamoja, education originally entailed the learning of skills, as well as social and cultural values that are not separated from everyday life. Education was thus highly utilitarian, accessible to every age group, flexible in regard to learning hours and usually involved every member of the community (Ssebbunga-Masembe et al., 2015). Knowledge was conveyed through group or individual instruction including observation and imitation as well as oral transmission, also known as 'storytelling' (Mosweunyane, 2013). The Karamojong's resistance to formal (western introduced) education has passed through different stages. Primary education was first introduced by the British in 1926, but met with great reluctance as formal schooling implied first and foremost spending significant time away from their cattle, thereby compromising their way of life and cultural identity (Oyet, 2014). British colonizers also used a pen ('*kallumu*') and paper to impose taxes and later to write down the names of young men to be conscripted for World War II. The newly imposed tax system caused widespread poverty and as a result, the '*kallumu*' was cursed and symbolically buried in 1930 by Karamojong elders. Local folklore had it that children who went to a white man's school were destined to die an untimely death. In the words of a Karamojong government official:[15]

> *The Karamojong are a tough people, you don't play around with them. So they [British] came in and whatever effort they were making they were forcing it on the Karamojong. The Karamojong were being forced to, to pay graduated tax and they were being forced to put on modern clothes, they were being forced to treat their livestock in the event of an outbreak of disease of livestock, they were just being coerced [. . .] in fact in word from Karamojong language to describe you who is being brought up in this Western culture is 'ariang' [. . .] This 'ariang' comes from 'arienyeo', it means forceful, coercive, fear, you know, aggressive, so anything to do with the westernization are ariang (. . .) something which must be forced on people, and that also made it, made them [the Karamojong] to develop a negative attitude towards any positive attempts including education.*

Reportedly, by 1946 only five children were attending primary education (Obanya & Ezewu, 2004 cited in Oyet, 2014, p. 7). Shortly after independence, initial development efforts included the building of another primary school in Moroto, which did not dramatically increase school enrolment either (Oyet, 2014). When Idi Amin came to power in 1971, he wanted to "push Karamoja into the 20th century", and launched a brutal campaign to modernize the Karamojong (Sundal, 2009, pp. 28–29)[16] – with little success,

[11] Interview 13.04.2017, Kampala.

[12] Uganda imposed the longest closure of schools worldwide because of the pandemic. Schools were closed from March 2020 and only re-opened for candidate classes (P7, S4 and S7) in mid-October 2021. A gradual reopening of schools was planned as of March 2021 but schools were then entirely closed again in June 2021 due to a surge in Covid-19 cases. When schools finally reopened in January 2022, they had been either fully or partially closed for 83 weeks. Most children and youth have lost at least one year of education, if they return to school (Datzberger et al., 2022).

[13] Interview 07.03.2017, Moroto.

[14] Interview 06.03.2017, Moroto.

[15] Interview 16.03.2015, Kampala.

[16] Sundal (2009) further alludes to Amin's order to replace animal-hide attire with cloth and maintain "unelaborated hair styles". In response, the Karamojong donned their finest garments and jewellery, which was perceived as an act of resistance. Amin's soldiers' brutal reaction included stripping the Karamojong, forcing women to remove their metal wedding necklaces, breaking their jewellery (glass beads), killing them and burying them in a mass grave.

however. Once his regime collapsed in 1979, the Karamojong revolted against years of repression and used any means at their disposal to replenish lost livestock herds, which included looting of thousands of weapons and quantities of ammunition left by Amin's solders in the barracks (Gray, 2000; Sundal, 2009). More than a decade of instability and conflict followed, which put the expansion of formal education more or less on hold. As observed by Human Rights Watch (2007, p. 9), "successive governments have marginalized the area, leaving it with the lowest development and humanitarian indicators in Uganda, weak governmental institutions, and little support for alternative livelihoods."

It was not until the early 1990s, under President Museveni, that the GoU started to invest again in the formal education sector. Formal education, it was hoped, would finally settle and modernize the Karamojong. In 1995, in a cleansing ceremony, Karamojong elders also lifted the curse their grandfathers had put on the '*kallumu*' during British occupation (Focas Licht, 2000). Three years later, in 1998, elders co-developed together with the GoU and Save the Children a non-formal education programme called ABEK, designed to meet the needs of a pastoralist society and to respond to local aspects of Karamojong culture (Save the Children Norway, 2006; UNICEF, 2009). The hope was to overcome the Karamojong's resistance to formal education via an alternative education programme. In the words of a local government official:[17]

> *What is special about ABEK is that the communities themselves participate in the formation of its curriculum. They wanted their children to learn about the cow which is the heart of their livelihood, they wanted their children to learn about the crops which in formal schools is agriculture, they wanted their children to learn about security. Then it incorporates other skills like HIV/AIDS prevention, rights, peace, security and obligations.*

ABEK sessions were also scheduled to suit the daily routines of children in their pastoralist environment. For instance, boys were permitted to take books along for studying while driving animals to the grazing fields. This was accompanied by the establishment of mobile learning centers to include children in marginalized communities (Datzberger, 2017b). A Karamojong government official based in Kotido further explained:[18]

> *ABEK has played a very fundamental role, it has even brought changes that have helped the local communities to appreciate the value of education. In the first place it was received with a lot of scepticism. People were saying "what are they going to teach?". The parents were suspicious that you know when our children learn how to read and write first of all they will be detached from our culture, and that they will not be able to look after animals, they will no longer obey elders, respect us. They will just have this foreign culture and they will speak the language that we do not speak which is English. So it was received with a lot of scepticism. (. . .) They would say "If you take our children to school you lock them inside a building with a gate and with a night watchman. Our children stay there the whole day we do not know what is happening. So bring the classrooms to our local settings!" So they did that and they could listen to teachers teach in their local language and in so doing it attracted more children to the [ABEK] centers. By bringing these local centers to the community, locals started to understand the purpose of ABEK. They also learned that children who attend an ABEK school and finish they are not detached from their cultural norms they just remain the same children, but now they know how to read and write, they are able to interpret which card is this, is it medical, is this a receipt and they can tell differences. So in a way generally speaking, ABEK tried and indeed it attracted more children to schools. By so doing the local people see it as complementing their cultural norms.*

ABEK, which showed quite some success, still faces many structural challenges and barriers. During an interview with Save the Children it was pointed out that it has been difficult to find, train and retain qualified Karamojong teachers.[19] Moreover, ABEK, which was also meant to act as an 'appetizer' to enrol children eventually into formal schools, did not lead to the desired transition rates after Primary 7.[20] Within my survey, only four out of 189 respondents reported that they transitioned from ABEK to secondary school; all of them were male. When I asked interviewees about the reasons for low transition rates, reference was made to the incompatibility of formal schooling with pastoralist lifestyles, a prevailing suspicion of formal (western) schooling, and the costs of schooling. After more than 20 years of operation, ABEK was significantly downsized from 209 to 52 centers. This was due to a decline in funding from its main donor (Save the Children) who after two decades of support had to prioritize other programmes. The remaining ABEK centers were turned over to communities and local governments to run and manage (Brown, Kelly, & Mabugu, 2017, p. 43). Neither the communities nor the local government have the resources to pay teachers and provide teaching and learning materials, as the majority of them are not supported by government budgets. The GoU provides some funding for teacher salaries, but there is a lack of monitoring and quality assurance.[21] The few remaining ABEK centers are predominantly sustained through community and parent contributions, which are very limited. Consequently, many of the centers have either closed down or fallen into disrepair. I got very mixed responses from interviewees as to whether or not ABEK should continue. While some felt that the initiative will soon peter out as more Karamojong are settling, others still saw a great need of ABEK for pastoralist children, and children in remote areas, who will otherwise have no access to education. One interviewee noted that ABEK would be particularly useful for illiterate youth and adults who are no longer of school going age. It is worth stressing, that to this day ABEK remains the only programme that managed to counter the Karamojong's resistance to formal education via co-creation, ownership and valuing their specific cultural traits and needs – vital features that are hitherto absent in formal schools.

5.2. Cultural repression through formal education

In a recent study on why educational attainment in Karamoja remains so low, 63.8% of respondents (n = 177) from Kotido[22] indicated cultural factors as the main reasons for resisting formal education (Namukwaya & Kibirige, 2014). Economic aspects (e.g.: hidden costs of education) appeared to be rather secondary, compared to the general fear of losing cultural values and ways of life as transhumant and agro-pastoralists (Namukwaya & Kibirige, 2014). A few written comments by school-going youth in the scope of my own survey echoed this finding. For instance, a female secondary school student wrote:[23]

> *Because it [education] is more of neo-colonialism, and it is not promoting our culture, like making back cloth.*

My survey further asked what kind of subjects young people miss in their formal education. Fine arts and crafts were mentioned, alongside the wish that education should be less theoretical (see next section on '*irrelevance*'). Others noted they miss being taught

[17] Interview 06.03.2017, Moroto.
[18] Interview 10.03.2017, Kotido.
[19] Interview 02.04.2015, Kampala.
[20] Interview with Karamojong government official, 16.03.2015, Kampala.
[21] Interview with local government official 06.03.2017, Moroto.
[22] One of Karamoja's seven districts.
[23] Written statement from survey participant, female, aged 15–29, Kotido.

in their local language, which is supposed to be used in Primary 1–3. In practice, most Karamojong children never benefit from this policy. In the words of a local government official:[24]

> *(. . .) if there are NGOs who come to ask us what we would wish them to do for us, we would wish them to do for us the first thing would be to help the native Karamojong teachers to train in the colleges so that they come and manage these classes given the government policy that the teaching of the lower primary classes must be done in the local language and the dominant language in this region is Karamojong so there are books that have been written but unfortunately the native teachers who can translate that language to the teachers are not there in required numbers. 95% of the teachers are from other districts from other parts of the country but our own from here it is very difficult to find.*

District education officers I interviewed stressed that schools are nevertheless trying to bring in some cultural and traditional elements in the form of music and dance classes, though all of this is usually facilitated by non-Karamojong teachers as well. Reference was also made to the Karamoja Cultural Festival (a five-day event taking place once a year), which aims at preserving Karamojong culture. The extent to which this will maintain (and not just temporarily revive) Karamojong culture in the longer term, is questionable. For instance, in everyday life traditions are not only celebrated; conversely, they can also become a stigma, or symbol of being uneducated:

> *If you see those ones who are wearing sheets these are guys who did not go to school. If indeed they went to school they just went to some level and dropped out of school and did not see the benefit of education, or their responsibilities of taking care of cattle out there was so paramount compared to education.*[25]

5.3. Irrelevance

That the Karamojong 'don't see the benefit of education' was not only a recurring theme in my interviews but also mentioned in other studies (e.g. Namukwaya & Kibirige 2014). The perception of the Karamojong as not valuing formal education was in part contradicted by my survey results. I asked participants in a 5-Likert question whether they agree or disagree with the statement: *The education I received made me feel better about myself, my life and future.* In total 84% of all respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement (63 females and 95 males); one male respondent somewhat agreed, and 3% (4 males and 2 males) disagreed. About 13% (16 females and 8 males) either did not understand the question or opted not to respond. Written comments underneath this question implied that for many, being formally educated nurtured feelings of self-esteem or improved their outlook on life (most comments here referred to literacy or numeracy skills). Strikingly, young Karamojong nevertheless questioned whether they will later benefit from their education *economically*. When I asked participants to write down what they would like to change in the formal education they receive, the majority highlighted that their education is not practical enough, too theoretical and/or does not help them to find employment later on. Below a small selection of their comments:

There should be more of vocational education than the type of education in Uganda. Uganda's education has more of theoretical part than vocational training.[26]

> *The education should be inclusive not selective. It should mould on all citizens not only minding of academic excellence and professionalism. It should be skill based incorporating the creative arts, performing arts, sciences and arts.*[27]

> *It should change from being theoretical to practical; this is because practical work makes someone a job creator rather than a job seeker.*[28]

> *I would like to change by being a job maker than a job seeker because most of education in Uganda are theoretical not practical like European history which is irrelevant in our future generation of Uganda today.*[29]

Statements from Karamojong youth generally suggested that they miss utilitarian aspects of education in schools, that are connected to their everyday lives. In a wider sense, they allude to a much bigger dilemma at hand: namely, in its current implementation and design, formal education is not addressing the difficult economic and political conditions the Karamojong are facing. Instead, formal education is detached from young people's needs and realities – no matter whether their families are pastoralists or settled. The issue is thus not whether the Karamojong value formal education, but rather if and how it can actually help them to improve their lives? At the moment, persisting inequities, structural and systemic barriers hamper the Karamojong in fully harnessing the benefits of their education, as discussed in the ensuing section.

5.4. Structural violence, poverty and education in Karamoja

> *After education, there is always unemployment in Uganda even in this community there is unemployment.*[30]

That it is difficult to find employment after formal education, was also stressed during two FGDs with Karamojong youth. One male participant for example stated[31]:

> *Most elders here in Moroto say the education is useless. Most people who graduate are jobless.*

Taking Uganda as a whole, it is estimated that 72% of the working population were engaged in the agriculture sector in 2012/13 (UBOS (2020, p. xi). According to the World Bank (2016), much of Uganda's poverty reduction from 2006 to 2013 was built on agricultural income growth, and not in other sectors or industries. Most types of income generation in Karamoja (see: UBOS, 2020, p. 188) do not require secondary or tertiary education. Concretely, 45.6% of all persons in employment (aged 14–65 years), work in agriculture, forestry and fishing, followed by manufacturing (15.5%) and trade (11.8%) (UBOS, 2020, p. 187). Besides, 57.4 % of people (aged 14–65 years) who are employed have no formal education and 21.6% have only some primary education (UBOS, 2020, p. 189). With these circumstances in mind, FGD participants were asked to engage in a mapping exercise to list barriers that prevent them from making an income outside pastoralism or agriculture after they completed their education. The three main challenges mentioned by Karamojong youth referred to structural forms of violence, specifically: a general lack of opportunities, no resources to start a business and corruption. Those who wanted to engage in settled agriculture noted lack of land titles and bad weather conditions as the biggest obstacles. A recent analysis on future livelihoods in Karamoja (Action Against Hunger and IRIS, 2017)

[24] Interview 10.03.2017, Kotido.
[25] Interview with programme officer of CSO, 07.03.2017, Moroto.
[26] Written statement from survey participant, male, aged 15–29, Moroto.
[27] Written statement from survey participant, female, aged 15–29, Kotido.
[28] Written statement from survey participant, male, aged 15–29, Kotido.
[29] Written statement from survey participant, female, aged 15–29, Kotido.
[30] Interview with pastoralist and founder of local CSO, 09.03.2017, Kotido.
[31] FGD with 7 male, 3 female youth (aged 22–34),08.03.2015, Moroto.

further stressed that pastoralism and farming will continue to play a predominant role in Karamoja's foreseeable future. Other sectors, such as mining and tourism, are on the rise and may improve state revenues and personal income, but neither sector is robust enough to generate sufficient new jobs or livelihood opportunities in and of itself (Action Against Hunger and IRIS, 2017). In short, pastoralism, in all its variations, remains the most realistic source of income – a reality the formal education sector is far from addressing.

Above all, education provision in Karamoja, be it formal or non-formal, is very uncoordinated, scattered and not uniform (see: Brown, Kelly, & Mabugu, 2017). It faces many challenges in terms of[32]:

> *(. . .) management, paying wages of teachers, recruitments, provisions of scholastic materials, or feeding programmes for children.*

Despite UPE (Universal Primary Education) and USE (Universal Secondary Education) policies, formal education is still not entirely fee free in Uganda, and many additional costs occur (Datzberger, 2018; Kakuba, Nzabona, Asiimwe, Tuyiragize, & Mushomi, 2021; Omoeva & Gale, 2016). A young Karamojong described his experience as follows:[33]

> *If we are not given a scholarship, often the environment and our communities will suffer because we are doing as much as possible to cut down trees for charcoal in order to raise our fees; please everyone who reads this may you give support to us because we are the future of Uganda. (. . .) Please members of this team, help with some fees to complete our studies because the environment is getting degraded through it and us burning charcoal.*

The same respondent further noted that he '*learned how to burn charcoal in school to pay for fees*'. That schools become sites where children learn how to harm their own environment in order to receive education, is not only counterintuitive, but also one of the many unintended consequences development actors and education sector planners should show greater awareness of. But the bigger question is: What kind of sacrifices and tough decisions do Karamojong have to make in order to send their children to school? In several respects, how formal education is currently organized and provided in Karamoja deepens rather than mitigates existing inequities and grievances. Many parents struggle financially, which has led to expressions of 'elite' and 'non-elite' pastoralists – the latter being those who cannot afford costs associated with schooling.[34] In its present structure, education can cause a vicious circle for families and their communities, who (as illustrated in the quote above) have to make tough decisions in order to make ends meet, thereby intensifying social, economic and environmental pressures.

Finally, remoteness is another major obstacle to education as well. Many of Karamoja's communities are located in areas with extremely long distances to schools and no access to high quality boarding facilities they could ever afford for their children.[35] Sedentarization has had an effect on families' income and consequently access to education overall:[36]

> *Moroto is prone to drought, for the last three years people have never got any harvest and you find that there is high poverty so maybe where a school is charging five thousand shillings for boarding you find that parents are unable to pay because of the poverty levels.*

Not only financial relief but also massive investments in educational infrastructure would be needed to overcome multiple structural barriers and inequities within and outside education.

6. On the potential of formal education in Karamoja

Notwithstanding the many violent aspects inherent in the process of formally educating the Karamojong, none of my study participants argued against formal education per se. To the contrary, respondents did see a lot of potential in education and had a clear normative vision of what it *should* or *could* do for their communities. Three main core themes emerged from my interviews. These included the role of formal education in: preserving and renegotiating local culture; provision of skills relevant for communities; and counteracting human rights abuses and environmental deprivation.

Many interviewees referred to 'good' and 'bad' cultural traits and practices in Karamoja. Examples of the former were dancing, traditional clothing or local village structures such as councils of elders. Bad customs were usually related to human rights abuses in the form of forced marriages or violence against women. In this context one interviewee stated:[37]

> *There are some bad cultural practices but the school finds opportunity to fight against it (. . .) Like FGM [Female Genital Mutilation], the school tries to fight it in form of changing the mindset that you are able to abandon it, like forced marriage you know. In our culture we just got into the bush and fought for marriage so there is a little bit of change and teaching the change of mindset of those things. Those days there used to be traditional dances in the schools and competitions and some of those things were reflected they were trained how a man goes to [forcefully] get a lady not until they realized that this is a bad practice we should not promote it, not even in our traditional dances so, they removed it to bring a better one [dance].*

The above statement is a reminder that it matters not just whether but also how certain norms and practices are re-negotiated and discussed in schools. Are these processes of norm re-negotiation an imposition or an all-inclusive discourse and debate taking place in a safe space? At the same time, interviewees also felt that formal education could help to find the 'right balance' between western modernization, development and culture – including identity formation:

> *I can say education has a big role to help the young people out there to appreciate our culture. It does not mean that when we go into development at different stages that you should lose your culture, because it is part of your identity. I think that is where people lose out thinking development will give them that identity. It is this culture that especially the positive aspect that give the person that identity and people should not get ashamed of it. I think that is something that should be encouraged even in schools.*[38]

> *It [education] is necessary it adds more value and when they continue with books they compare with other tribes and the countries.*[39]

Others saw the potential in formal education to provide the conditions for the Karamojong, and not outsiders, to take a lead in what development means for them. In this regard, skills training

[32] Interview with co-director of local CSO, 06.03.3017, Moroto.
[33] Written statement from survey participant, male, aged 15–29, Moroto.
[34] Interview with pastoralist and founder of local CSO, 09.03.2017, Kotido.
[35] Interview with Chief Field Office, UNICEF, 11.03.2015, Moroto.
[36] Interview with local government official 06.03.2017, Moroto.
[37] Interview with project officer and communication officer, 10.03.2017, Kotido.
[38] Interview with Karamojong Education Programme Officer, UNICEF 08.03.2017, Moroto.
[39] Interview with local government official 10.03.2017, Kotido.

was a frequent theme, not just among my interviewees but also in the survey with Karamojong youth. One older interviewee added:[40]

> *When I was in school in my primary it [skills training] used to happen but currently it is no longer there. They used to teach us how to dig, sew clothes, they gave a head teacher a plot of land you are given maybe seeds for cabbage and they tell you that is your garden and water it and later the school buys from you and you are able to pay school fees. That is how they used to do but these days it's just about capacity building through clubs like peace club, child abuse club, women violence, just forming those [clubs] and the child comes up knowing some of these things but my concern is, are they able to move on and survive?*

The wish to make formal education more utilitarian again (as was the case in pre-colonial times, and continues to be practiced in some villages) was expressed by many. Although respondents had mixed opinions whether or not ABEK is still relevant, all of them did agree that it taught children and youth the skills needed to provide for themselves, their families and communities. Until now, ABEK is the only initiative in Karamoja that has married the Karamojong's values and practices with global education norms, thereby creating a space for societal renegotiation of the old and the new. Through education, the aim was not to assimilate the Karamojong to a western-induced way of living or modernity but to move towards a more locally suited yet transformative approach. Its success, however, largely depends on the surrounding economic and political context (see also: Datzberger, 2017b).

Finally, interviewees associated formal education with a community's and individual's ability to advocate for their rights in the face of mineral resource exploitation, land grabbing and other human rights abuses. A director of a local CSO told me:[41]

> *In Karamoja we have had some instances where a few elites come and say "we are having this meeting in our community" and they set a different agenda. They make people to sign attendance but what is attached to the attendance is different from what was set as an agenda. So many times people have even sold their land unknowingly. (. . .) They just signed claiming that they were having a peace meeting and the following day you will get someone with a land title. (. . .) The list is then given to a particular mining company or an investor. Due to ignorance people are exploited that is why education is very necessary in active citizenship.*

Experiences like this have led to some independent programmes run by CSOs or CBOs to teach the Karamojong about various acts of corruption, land rights or other rights. While these initiatives are important, they were described by interviewees as being too small in scale, piecemeal and lacking scope and impact. When I discussed the issue with a local government official, he did see a potential role in formal school curricula:[42]

> Official: *Yes, we acknowledge the contribution of these partners in teaching people about these rights; land rights, of women and children but also in schools a teacher does that but not very prominently because it does not feature prominently in the curriculum.*
> Interviewer: *It does not?*
> Official: *It does not feature much, we may say; a child has a right to do this on a superficial level.*
> Interviewer: *Is this something you would think that it is important to include in the curriculum?*
> Official: *Yes, it is very important.*

While schools would in theory appear to be a potential platform to equip the Karamojong with the skills to advocate for their rights, thus far, formal education has not been able to successfully counter or even shed light on the many root causes of human rights violations. This can be, in part, explained by Uganda's rather restrictive political environment and the recent decision to remove citizenship education from the school curricula (Datzberger and Le Mat, 2019).

7. Conclusion

Far too often, formal education is portrayed and perceived in a very simplistic manner as the magic bullet for so-called development.[43] In this process, more reflection, thought and imagination is needed to also consider the harm western education can cause (and has already caused) for marginalized and non-western societies – not just in Karamoja, but the world over. In this paper, I have argued that the way in which formal education is designed, delivered, governed and imposed led to multiple forms of violence in the Karamojong's struggle to embrace different modernities grounded in their own and western culture. This is truly unfortunate, as formal education in itself would have the potential to re-negotiate how such different modernities could co-exist and are mutually reinforcing, rather than opposing one another. In its past and current form, formal education not only led to violent repression, but is also surrounded by structural violence, which explains in part why the Karamojong remain so resistant to it. Cultural repression is expressed in a curriculum that is perceived by the Karamojong as irrelevant (i.e. too theoretical and not responsive to their everyday realities, struggles and needs), including the absence of Karamojong teachers. All of this is joined by persisting inequities as well as structural and systemic barriers that prevent the Karamojong from fully harnessing the benefits of their education. The apparent irrelevance of education has its roots in structural forms of violence, such as: a general lack of opportunities, lack of resources and infrastructure, or no legal framework (i.e. land rights) to revive pastoralism, engage in income generating activities or generate employment. Moreover, the many difficulties the Karamojong face to access education in the first place, given the absence of truly fee free education and infrastructure, requires systemic change at large.

Above all, the role education ought to play in modernizing the Karamojong begs the question: Whose modernity and on whose terms? In its current design and mission, formal education justifies and increases processes of stability (e.g. in the form of sedentarization) in an environment where variability is actually the norm and not the exception. For thousands of years, Karamoja's pastoral systems did not cope with environmental variability but rather *took advantage* of it (c.f. Krätli 2019). There is an urgency to rethink the purpose and potential of formal education in Karamoja. Over twenty years ago ABEK represented an extraordinary example of the powerful role education can play in negotiating how pastoralism and western notions of modernity can co-exist. Its unique approach embraces local traditions of education as a utilitarian and communal endeavour that is neither time nor location bound. This is in stark contrast to failed colonial traditions of schooling as rather abstract, individualistic and time- and location-specific institutions. However, as an alternative to formal education, ABEK's success largely depends on political will, given resources, infrastructure, quality and type of teaching. Numerous studies convincingly show that pastoralism remains the most realistic livelihood for the Karamojong in the foreseeable future due to harsh

[40] Interview with project officer and communication officer, 10.03.2017, Kotido.
[41] Interview, 07.03.2017, Moroto.
[42] Interview 10.03.2017, Kotido.
[43] See for instance GPEs (Global Partnership for Education) "Case for Investment": https://www.globalpartnership.org/financing-2025/case-for-investment, last accessed May 9, 2022.

climatic conditions and in the absence of other sectors and opportunities. If not ABEK, there is still a need to build on, expand, reinvest in and learn from locally developed, flexible and alternative modes of education that are more suited to fit the everyday lives and realities of the Karamojong.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Simone Datzberger: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Writing – original draft, Investigation, Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The author declares that she has no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

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