Pastoralism: Self Image and Behavioral Reality

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Data gathered while we were living for a 3-year period among the Karimojong indicate an important difference between the image the Karimojong have of their activities; and what those activities in fact turn out to be. This difference between self-image and behavioral reality was found both with respect to herd management, and to sexual division of labor.

The Karimojong occupy a semi-arid area in north-east Uganda, where they practice both pastoralism and agriculture. In doing so, they exploit three ecologically distinct zones: the eastern highlands, the central riverine area, and the western plains. In the central area, which has relatively abundant permanent water and land suitable for cultivation, the Karimojong build permanent settlements. The peripheral areas to the east and west differ ecologically and are unsuitable for permanent occupation; these are exploited by grazing livestock from temporary camps which are quickly built and readily abandoned.

Being only 1° to 3° north of the equator, there is no winter and summer. The Karimojong year is however divided into a rainy and a dry season. The period of higher rainfall runs from about April through mid-September, but the distribution and amount of rainfall varies greatly from year to year. The period from mid-September through March is much drier, often with hot, dessicating winds. Rain storms do occur during the "dry season" – but are more frequent in the highlands and the far west of Karamoja than in the central area.

The self-image Karimojong have of their herding activities might be summarized as follows:

A herd of cattle is owned by the head of a family, and its movements are

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under his control. Throughout the rainy season, that herd is kept in a corral which forms part of the permanent settlement occupied by his family. The family is supported by the produce of the herd, as well as by agricultural produce which comes from the women's work in the nearby fields.

When the dry season begins, the cattle and their herdsmen move out from the central settled zone to the peripheral areas in a decisive, abrupt fashion for which the Karimojong have a specific verb, *aWosit* – to move away. In the peripheral areas the herds are moved frequently in relation to available grass and water and corralled in temporary thorn stockades watched over by herdsmen. Old men, women and young children are left behind in the permanent settlements, there to subsist on agricultural produce until, with the beginning of the next rainy season, the herd and its herdsmen move back once more to the permanent settlement in the central zone. In other words, the description of activity given to the observer is that of movement-with-a-permanent-base, commonly called “semi-nomadic”.

We recorded specific information about the moves made by the herds from seven settlements in the southern part of Karimojong tribal land, all of which were located within a mile of each other and formed a single neighborhood. This study was done in two ways.

In August 1957, the herdsmen from each settlement were questioned about where their herds grazed and drank during each month of the previous two years (going back to July 1955). We also mapped on a 1:50,000 scale all the water sources in southern Karamoja (Dyson-Hudson, 1958), and recorded all the place names. On our return from the field, by combining all these data, we were able to map with reasonable accuracy the locations of the camps of the seven settlements over the twenty-six-month period July 1955 through August 1957.

In addition, the cattle from one settlement (that of Loput) were followed on the ground for thirteen months. The milk yields, sex and age composition, and other details of this herd were recorded each month.

Great differences in herding practices were found. Some herd owners and their families looked after their own livestock; others pooled their labor and cattle resources with friends and relatives, and herded jointly. Some men kept their cattle in a single herd; others divided their cattle into a herd which stayed in the settlement for most of the year, and a herd which remained in stock camps throughout the year. The differences in herding practices revealed by these two studies cast doubt on the value of the simple notion “semi-nomadic” as adequate description of Karimojong behavior.

At the one extreme was the herd of Apalokosem. He and his sons herded alone, and his livestock remained together as a single unit for the entire twenty-six months. For fifteen consecutive months, July 1955 through September 1956, the herd remained in Apalokosem’s settlement. This was a year with an unusual amount of rain during the dry season period, hence grazing was available. The cattle were corralled away from the permanent settlement from October 1956 through May 1957; and then returned to the settlement in June 1957. The