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(Art and Education)**

Textile Design and Fine Arts

**DOCUMENTATION
HISTORICAL TRANSITION OF DRESSING BY
THE KARAMOJONG PEOPLE OF NORTH
EASTERN UGANDA**

Author: Agnes Achola

Matrikelnr.: 09949625

Supervisor: ao. Univ.-Prof. Mag. art. Dr. phil. Marion Elias

Location: Wien

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I. ABSTRACT

Despite the increased interest in the study of history of African textiles since the last quarter of the past century, less attention has been paid to the study of *Karamojong* people's way of dressing that is more connected with their socio-cultural background as pastoralists-nomads, in which cattle plays a big role in their tradition. The *Karamojong* historical way of dressing was all interwoven with their tradition of initiation practices and as nomads, their social-cultural system was based on self-organisation whereby the elders of these society played a big role.

This study examines the notion of continuity and change in the role and meaning of *Karamojong* way of dressing in north-eastern Uganda, in East Africa pre-eighteenth century to the twenty first century. The skin got from the animals was used in various forms, and it has continued to serve as a connecting thread between the past and present generations of the *Karamojong* society.

However, the study also reveals that the role and meaning of historical *Karamojong* way of dressing is no longer confined within the cultural boundaries; other factors have come into play since the mid nineteenth-century when the external (non-African) communities first arrived in the interior of East Africa. It has been argued that the role and meaning of *Karamojong* way of life is in continuous transformation on the dynamics of the social, economic, cultural and political structures at a given historical movement in *Karamoja*. Hence, the study analyses the extent of external influence; western christianity, colonialism and education, intra-regional and regional trade and local politics to redefinition of *Karamojong* way of dressing and being in the past. The study makes an important and necessary contribution to the history of East African textiles and material culture.

1. Objective

This research work was undertaken with general aim to establish how to reflect on the things we take for granted in our daily lives by forgetting the historical background and try to see the things from several different perspectives by the method of research. In that point, my topics of interest, the history and transition of *Karamojong* dressing and material culture from pre-eighteenth century until twenty first century are suitable themes. In this thesis I attempt to carry out a comparative study of the unpacked modes of consumption and production fashion discourse.

The study was designed to meet the following objectives:

- To examine the historical-cultural relevancy of dress among the *Karamojong*.
- To examine how the role and meaning of dress has been transformed since the late eighteenth century until present.

-To analyse how the shift in the social, political, economic and cultural structures in Uganda, and specifically *Karamojong* that contribute to the mediation and redefinition of the role and meaning of dress in modern times.

2. Research questions

-Who are the *Karamojong*?

-How has *Karamojong* way of dress changed over time, in terms of fashion, modernism, production, application and distribution?

-How has dress been appropriated among artists and designers in Uganda in recent times, and in what ways has the meaning of dress among the *Karamojong* been redefined?

-What are the indicators of continuity in the historical traditions of dress in *Karamoja*?

In order to address the above questions, I principally employed a qualitative method of enquiry based on grounded fieldwork research and comprehensive review of historical documentation, interviews and some of my own artefacts collections.

Though I acknowledge that we are in midst of rapid fashion transformation that will continue to progress. My intention is to expose the speed of modernity between the civilised communities and the poor minority like *Karamojong* as a fertile topic worthy of critical examination within the field of dress and fashion and beyond.

II. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Grateful acknowledgements are made to all my lecturers at the University of Applied Arts, Angewandte Universität Wien, especially to Professor Barbara Putz Plecko and to my mentor during this rough journey Professor Marion Elias and the team, for their continuous advice, corrections and inputs.

I am also grateful, to my people in Uganda, without you this research work would not be possible! And although quite an amount of money from private pocket had to be spent in order to make this research and field work possible. Most of the materials have been got from Uganda because when I started my research in Vienna, I did not get any books or information related to this particular topic. I am therefore grateful to the *Karamojong* people in *Moroto* district, library of Makerere University for allowing me to access the library with the help of Mr. Abel Rwendeire (RIP).

I am also grateful to my sister in law, Awilli Betty who made me get in contact with the *Karamojong* people living in Kampala and made interviews and also the parish priest Mr. Raphael Lobeerei of *Moroto* district. My acknowledgements are further extended to the various people who in one way or another have made my research work a success.

III. INTRODUCTION

The history of dressing and art crafts among the *Karamojong* is one of the developments that has been mostly ignored. For a long time, a lot of artistic work has been done in the field of craft-work in the medium of hides and skin. Definitely, several articles have been written on this subject, and I have been fortunate to cite some of the materials. But there has not been a unified collection of written material surveying the aesthetic values of dressing as a field on its own among the *Karamojong*.

This study is another attempt to analyse and relate the different methods and uses to which the craft of hide and skins has been carried until its transition today in *Karamoja*. However, it has been interesting to discover certain memories during the process of my research work, my tribe group, which is the *Langi*, were once *Karamojong* people but due to migration, they later then settled in the neighbouring districts of *Karamoja* for example; *Lira*, *Apac* etc. in northern Uganda. And above all my brother in law is originally from one of the *Karamoja* districts called *Abim*. It has been interesting for me during my research work to awaken this relationship between *Langi* and *Karamojong* peoples. And having a brother in law who is from this origin, this particular society, where people seem to be unwilling of talking to strangers about their culture. But from the fragmental information which I managed to get from some few educated people and elites, has made writing my thesis possible.

The *Nilo-Hamitic* people who live in what is now *Karamoja* province, formerly a district bordering *Teso*, *Sebei*, *Lango* and *Acholi* districts, and sharing the north eastern frontiers with Sudan, Ethiopia and Kenya. Their mode of life and the cultural values attached to it are similar to those of the neighbouring societies, such as the *Turkana*, the *Iteso*, and many other smaller tribes belonging to the same group of people.

Karamojong are predominantly pastoral, and in this case, cattle herding is their main occupation. Therefore, their most immediate material to be exploited is hides and skin. The value is of prime-importance to every *Karamojong*, but in this case, I will concentrate more on the dress code, and since in the *Karamojong* culture and tradition, most of their dress code is inter-woven with their initiation and ceremonies, in this case cattle is the centre of their life and this means leather must be mentioned as well in their craftsmanship.

Leather work was one of the most important craft in *Karamoja*. A variety of crafts in all fields were made in varying shapes, sizes, and methods of approach, with the help of simple tools. First of all, the craft developed as utilitarian, then into costumes, decorative objects and finally into commercial objects. Luckily enough, I have managed to acquire a few collections of my own, which I have had them for the last twenty years or longer.

The craft work of leather was practised almost in every home in *Karamoja*. The crafts were always

beautifully decorated with local beads, seeds, roots, fruits and metal (brass).

Today, the craft work is undergoing a lot of challenges due to the interventions of western modernisation, and most of the artefacts no longer exist. Nevertheless, the *Karamoja* is one of the oldest African societies with rich culture.

In connection with craft, the *Karamojong* being pastoralists were also hunters, meaning they obtained other materials for leather craft killing other animals such as baboons, giraffes, elephants, zebras and rhinoceros. In addition, they also made use of goat and sheep skins.

IV. HISTORY OF KARAMOJONG

The *Karamojong* live in the southern part of the region in the north-east of Uganda, occupying an area equivalent to one tenth of the country. According to anthropologists, the *Karamojong* are part of a group that migrated from present day Ethiopia around 1600 A.D. and split into two branches, with one branch moving to present day Kenya to form the *Kalenji* group and *Masai* cluster. The other branch called *Ateker* migrated westwards.

Ateker further split into several groups, including *Turkana* in present- day Kenya, *Iteso*, *Dodoth*, *Jie*, *Karamojong*, and *Kumam* in present- day Uganda, also *Jie* and *Toposa* in southern Sudan all of them together now known as “*Teso* cluster” or “*Karamojong* cluster.”

It is said that the *Karamojong* were originally known as *Jie*. The name *Karamojong* derived from phrase “*ekar ngimojong*” meaning “the old men can walk no farther.”

According to tradition, the people now known as the *Karamojong* Cluster or *Teso* Cluster are said to have migrated from Abyssinia between the 1600 and 1700 A.D. as a single group. When they reached the area around the modern Kenya-Ethiopia border, they are said to have fragmented into several groups including those that became *Turkana*, *Toposa*, and the *Dodoth*.

The group that became known as the *Toposa* continued to the present-day Southern Sudan; the *Dodoth*, settled in *Apule* in the Northern part of the present- day *Karamoja*.

The *Turkana* settled in Kenya where they are now and today`s *Jie* of Uganda are thought to have split from, moving up the escarpment into today`s *Kotido* district.

The main body continued southwards, reportedly consisting of seven groups or clans who settled in today`s Southern *Karamoja*, eventually merging to become the three clans now existing: the *Matheniko* in the east around *Moroto* mountains, the *Pian* in the south and *Bokora* in the west.

However, a significant sized group went west and formed the *Iteso*, the *Kumam*, and the *Langi*, it was this group who were said to have used the phrase “the old men can walk no farther.”

V. *KARAMOJONG* CULTURE

The main livelihood activity of the *Karamojong* is herding livestock, which has social and cultural importance. Crop cultivation is secondary activity, undertaken only in areas where it is practical.

Due to arid climate of the region, the *Karamojong* have always practiced a sort of pastoral transhumance, where for 3-4 months in a year, they move their livestock to the neighbouring districts in search of water and pasture for their animals.

The availability of food and water is always a concern and affects the interaction with other ethnic groups. The external migrations at the intra-district level were to the districts including my district where I was born and brought up as a young girl, and I do remember in the middle of the night people in the neighbourhood screaming “*Olok*” in my language *Lango*, meaning nomads! They usually came to collect the cows and maybe also the grains and since the people in my home *Lira* district were also cattle keepers and had similar kind of livelihood, the only difference is the *Lango* people did not intrude and take things from the neighbouring district and claim it belonged to them like the *Karamojong* people did, however the migrations level included the districts of *Lira*, *Kitgum*, *Soroti*, *Mbale*, *Tororo* and *Iganga*. The above-mentioned districts, especially those near *Karamoja* region, are the areas that the *Karamojong* usually move in times of severe famine and since their food consisted of milk and blood, it is usually supplemented with meat, millet, sorghum and beans and in my home *Lira* district, the people cultivate and feed on these grains. This kind of migration were mainly by the young people who were between the age of 14 and 25 years, since they were not married and not having family responsibilities and besides they were strong enough to cover long walking distances.

1. Social Organization



Manyatta, homestead

Visiting the *Karamojong* people in *Karamoja*, north eastern Uganda

www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/682576887245142400/?1p=true

02 June, 2017.

The dominant feature of *Karamojong* society is their age system, which is strictly based on generation. As successive generations have an increasing overlap in age, this leads logically to a breakdown of the system, which appears to have occurred after rules were relaxed in the 19th century among their close neighbours, the *Jie*. However, the breakdown in order leads to a switch in power from generation to their successors and a new status quo¹.

As both a rite of passage into manhood, as well as a requirement for engagement, a young *Karamojong* man is required to wrestle the woman he desires to marry. If he is successful in winning the wrestling match against the woman, he is then now considered to be a man and is permitted to marry the woman. This ensures that the man will be strong enough to care for and protect his wife. After a successful match, the dowry negotiations can commence. In an instance where the young man is unable to defeat the woman in wrestling match, he will often leave to marry a woman from a different people group where a test of strength is not required. If a non – *Karamojong* man desires to marry woman, he is also required to go through this ceremony.

¹ Dyson Hudson, Neville (1966), *Karamojong* politics, Clarendon Press Oxford

However, like I already mentioned above that I originally come from a district neighbouring *Karamoja*. The *Langi* belong to the *Lango* family which also comprised the *Iteso* and *Kumam*, the *Labwor*, the *Jie (Lango-Olok)* and the *Karimojong or Karamojong (Lango-Dyang)*. Tradition asserts that the *Langi* originated from *Otukei* mountain and also called *Awil* mountain. It is claimed that *Langi* came from mountains which had abundant rain. This land could be *Kaffa* and this presupposed indeed that the *Langi* originated from Abyssinia (Ethiopia). The original homeland was north of Lake *Turkana* where they used to live along with the *Jie* and the *Karamojong*. This means that the *Langi* my tribe group are also related to *Dodoth*, *Lotuko*, *Toposa* and the *Turkana* of Kenya. The *Langi*, *Iteso*, *Kumam* and *Karamojong*, comprise the *Ateker* clan family in Uganda.

The *Lango* Society was a segmentary, meaning that leadership was centred around the clan which would be both a kinship unit and the basic constituency of politics within the *Rwotdom*. The *Rwot* (chief) had the duty of controlling the entire clan and helped by a council of elders, the structure of leadership and also the architecture of construction, have similarities with the *Karamojong* social lives. The senior members besides the *Rwot* (chief) were the leading elders of the clan. The council of elders was responsible for general administration and maintenance of law and order within the clans.²

² In my opinion age system reflects on the organisation of people's lives and while they share a common origin, and they develop differently in various groups according to emerging needs.

2. *Karamoja* Map



www.researchgate.net/figure/236666827fig-map-of-the-karamoja-Region-and-District-Uganda

03 March, 2018.

`*Karamoja*` is used to refer to the five districts of *Abim*, *Kabong*, *Kotido*, *Moroto* and *Nakapiripirit*, which cover approximately 27,200Km² of North Eastern Uganda. The term `*Karamoja* cluster` is used to describe a larger, cross- border area of land which covers the *Karamoja* area of north eastern Uganda plus parts of south eastern Sudan, south western Ethiopia and north western Kenya. The term `*Karamojong*` is used to refer to the inhabitants of the districts of Uganda listed above. It includes the ethnic groups (or sub-tribes) of the *Dodoth* (south); *Jie* (central); *Pokot* (Kenyan border) and *Bokora*, *Matheniko* and *Pian* (south).

Smaller ethnic groupings that also come under the generic term `*Karamojong*` include the *Tepeth*, *Nyakwe*, *Lik*, *Ngipore* and *Ethur*.

3. Focus on the Historical Background

We cannot talk about the *Karamoja* map without understanding the roots of the *Karamoja* syndrome, it is necessary to take into account the colonial origins of the mismanagement of the region. In general, it is the colonial (British) rulers who started the vicious cycle of mismatches between semi-pastoral communities and ill-advised policies and reforms ignoring the specificities of the region and of its semi-pastoral land management.

Across the twentieth century, the vegetation of *Karamoja* deteriorated, with savannas turning into thickets, as a result of disruption of the ecological balance of *Karamojong* land management, brought about by colonial interventions: In the 1920`s the drawing of boundaries of `counties` (carried out by the occupying forces during the wet season) completely ignored the realities of trans-humane, resulted in a dramatic loss of pastoral mobility and overgrazing, initiating the vicious cycle of natural resources degradation. However, in 1910, the north of Uganda was largely unadministered and undefined. J.P. Barber explains that the boundary with Sudan both to the north and in the *Lado* enclave, which was handed over by Congo authorities was still unsettled and that to the north east the responsibility of the protectorate government stretched to the shores of Lake Rudolf, embracing most of the present-day *Turkana* district of Kenya. The only direct administration was confined to a strip of territory along the banks of the Nile and that in the centre of the vast unadministered area lay *Karamoja*.³ And at that time very little was known about the district, the only information there came from traders and hunters. Barber mentions that the first British contact with *Karamoja* had been made in 1898 when Major J.R.L. Macdonald led an expedition through the district in a vain attempt to reach

³ BARBER, J.P., The moving Frontiers of British Imperialism in North Uganda, 1898-1919, in "Uganda Journal," 29,1 (1965), pp. 15-43

06 April, 2016

In Memorium: Professor James Barber by Professor J E Spencer, OBE, FKC.

Department of War Studies, King`s College, London.

James Barber was born in Liverpool in 1931 and died 2015, he received his MA and PhD degrees from University of Cambridge and after national service as a Pilot Officer in the Royal Airforce he joined the Colonial Service serving in Uganda (1956-63) as a District Officer and subsequently acted as Assistant Secretary to the Prime Minister and Clerk to the Cabinet (1956-63).

to reach the Nile.⁴ And since McDonald who was most impressed by the tribesmen and the country as a whole, suggested that Britain should control the area by means of a standing military patrol, this was not approved by foreign office. His biggest fear was that if *Karamoja* was not controlled, the area would become the prey of unscrupulous traders and adventurers and later *Karamoja* was declared was then declared “closed” district, but then again, an attempt was made to develop a restricted trade by opening station in one of the neighbouring districts called *Mbale*, where licences could be obtained. In theory only, the licensed traders could operate in *Karamoja* and they were not permitted, on any terms, to sell firearms to the tribesmen. Elephant hunting was also, in theory, controlled by licence on which only a restricted number of bull elephants could be shot. And all ivory collected by traders and hunters was to be brought to the administered areas of the protectorate for payment of the government ivory tax.

The colonial authorities responded in adequately, prohibiting bush burning, resulting in loss of soil fertility and in a proliferation of animal diseases.

⁴ McDonalds, J.R.L, Journey to the North of Uganda, in “Geography Journal” August 1899.

Library, Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda 2017.

04 July, 2018.

Sir James Ronald Leslie Macdonald was born February 8, 1862 in India and died June 27, 1927. He was a Scottish engineer, explorer and cartographer, he also served as a British Army engineer and then rose to the rank of Brigadier.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/james_macdonald_\(engineer\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/james_macdonald_(engineer))

VI. FOREIGN INFLUENCE

1. Karl Peters⁵ and the Germans

Excerpt from Peter`s 1885 correspondence gives an idea of his personality and attitude towards Africa,

As the (Society) wanted to found independent German colonies under the German flag, it`s activity naturally was limited to those areas which at that time had not yet been taken.

In fact, only Africa was suitable....Already in November 1884 this task basically had been fulfilled by the expedition sent via Zanzibar: December 14th 1884 I found myself, as representative of the society for German colonization, as the rightful owner of 2500 square miles of very lush tropical land, located to the west of Zanzibar: Now the task was to gain the German government`s recognition for the acquisitions. This was achieved in short negotiations, and already on February 27th, 1885 our society had been granted the imperial charter by his Imperial Majesty.”⁶

⁵ “Carl Peters was born 27th September, 1856-10th September, 1918. He was a German colonial ruler, explorer, politician and author and also the prime mover behind the foundation of the German colony of East Africa.

“Otto Eduard Leopold, the Prince of Bismarck, Duke of Lauenburg who was born 1st April, 1815-30th July, 1898, was known as a conservative Prussian statesman who dominated German and European affairs from the 1860`s until 1890 and was the first chancellor of the German Empire.

Otto von Bismarck; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otto_von_Bismarck

01 July, 2018.

⁶ www.zum.de/imperialismus1e.php

1st year, Berlin, 16th Mai 1885, available at courses.wcupa.edu/jones/his312/lectures/eastafr.htm

Source: Kolonial-Politische Korrespondenz (Colonial-Political Correspondence).

2. **Missionaries in *Karamoja*, Uganda**

The first visitors that visited Uganda, were the missionaries who called themselves the “the Apostolic Prefect of Equatorial Nile” (actual north Uganda and part of southern Sudan), who were sent as missionaries to *Karamoja* in April 1933, originally from Italy and England. The missionaries settled in *Kangole*, in central *Karamoja*, where the protestants from the Bible Church Missionary Society (B.C.M.S) had established their base, since 1929.

In the first period, a lot of challenges were faced by the missionaries due to lack of cooperation from the local people. Lack of communication, the attitude of the people and their mentality were among the difficulties that were faced by the Missionaries.

The most serious difficulty was the mistrust with which the people received the missionaries and since the *Karamojong* have been confronted with foreign visitors in their region, they could still make a distinction between the priests and the British administration through their life styles or in difference in what they said and did. The missionaries were kept in a distance by the *Karamojong* due to the negative experience they had and were having with the white foreigners. However, the missionaries did not give up, they tried to react to these difficulties by making themselves better known through creating small centres of instruction outside of the mission, by placing in charge of them catechists. Missionaries tried to interact with the locals, hoping to be accepted through local intermediary and were unsuccessful. However, it is not clear, if the missionaries informed themselves before coming to *Karamoja* on their mission, if the *Karamojong* had spiritual belief or not.

According to my experience during my visitation in 2010, in *Karamoja*, I interacted with the local people and I attended the events that was taking place in *Moroto* district. The *Karamojong* are not that easy to get in contact with, one needs to get in contact with one of them, and then the communication and trust can begin. And of course, the language is also one of the challenges that one is confronted with, more especially if you are a foreigner. But in this case, I got help. One of the moments of my interaction with one young man who spoke fluent English, I asked him about religion belief among the *Karamojong* people, and if at all they do believe in christianity? His response was that “yes they do go to church but to meet and celebrate and interact with each other but not to pray” they do carry their food stuffs whatsoever they need to the church and then celebrate. However, he mentioned that the people have their own religion that they do believe in, and that is the “moon”.

Although the missionaries had high hopes of achieving their mission, their intentions were not welcome by the people due to lack of knowledge about christianity, nor the usefulness of embracing this religion. The missionaries insisted on forwarding their message to the people by inviting them to the church, and the few that turned up were then tactically rewarded with medicines, tobacco, salt and

sugar to the children to further seal the friendship and have more contact with the people. Although the missionaries insisted and gradually managed to convince a few people, the *Karamojong* people analyse that the god that was being presented to them was not that different from the one they believed in. The approach of presenting this new god to the people, was not convincing enough to be accepted. The *Karamojong* had their own belief “diviners” for example; the “dreamers” or “the sandal-interpreters”, in the case of sandal interpreters, only men become diviners, by communicating with the spirits through two very small sandals made from animal skin, I have further explained the process of this sandal divinity below. In a society such as *Karamoja*, where family and lifestyle remain intact, it is not possible to recruit adults before having the allowance from the *Karamojong* elders. The objection of the new developments that is happening today in *Karamoja*, some are still being resisted due to their lifestyles that they do keep intact, however, the western religion is still pushing their mission forward, there are some *Karamojong* people who have become priests but also do face challenges in convincing the people to accept god and since the formal teaching is basically foreign to the *Karamojong*, the priests have to include cultural activities in the church that will attract the people to attend the church ceremonies. Unlike in other parts of Uganda, Sunday church ceremonies are popular and visited in big numbers, but for the *Karamojong*, they remain different until now, since the most important thing for them is their livestock (animals) in which they continue to take care of and achieve not only daily nourishment, but also the fulfilment of all their psychological, and to a certain extent, spiritual needs. The missionaries tried all possible means to make the people participate in their mission by building up schools in which they taught writing, reading etc. in which was very successful in other parts of Uganda but still the missionaries were still confronted with resistance in *Karamoja*. Some of these schools still exist today, there are a few *Karamojong* who have graduated from universities in Uganda and are working with non-governmental organisations or in government offices, and as well participating in social media. But still the life of every individual among the *Karamojong* is punctuated with precise duties which each must fulfil according to age and gender to cope with the daily needs.

The idea of christianity as a block of truth and practices certainly did not facilitate understanding, which had no roots or background in local culture, and neither did it facilitate acceptance on the part of the people that are forced with and by hardships of daily living.



Missionary man and *Karamojong* men in Conversation.
(Photo: The *Karimojong* Some Aspects)
Augusto Pazzaglia⁷, Bologna – Italy 1982.
Makerere University Library, 2017.

⁷ Augusto Pallazaglia was born in Appoggio, Pesaro, Italy in 1906.

In 1932, he was ordained a priest and four years later he set off for Sudan where he labored for a period of almost 30 years as a missionary among the *Lutoho* and *Topossa* tribes. After his expulsion by the Sudanese government, he came back to Italy for a period of rest, and in 1966 he returned to Africa to start a new fascinating experience in the land of the *Karamojong* in Uganda.



Missionary woman⁸ and *Karamojong* women
(Photo: The *Karimojong* Some Aspects)
Augusto Pazzaglia, Bologna – Italy 1982.
Makerere University, 2017.

⁸ The Verona fathers are helped by the Verona sisters particularly in elevating the status of women.
During the last decade, many *Karimojong* have joined the Catholic church.
The *Karimojong* Some Aspects
Augusto Pazzaglia, Bologna – Italy 1982.
Makerere University, 2017.



Karamojong man at his homestead

(Photo: *The Karimojong Some Aspects*)

Augusto Pazzaglia, Bologna – Italy 1982

Makerere University Library, 2017.

Show at Katabok in the Labwor hills in Karamoja bul dance



V11 17 Agriculture, show at *Katabok* in the *Labwor Hills* in *Karamoja*, *bul* dance.

Photo: Mr. VAN VELSEN⁹ 35mm. Negative. May 1959.

Library, Makerere University Uganda, 2017.

⁹ Van Velsen was born 28 September, 1921-6 May, 1990. He was a Dutch born in Soerabaja and a British anthropologist, a son to Wilhelmina Louisa Metzelsa and Abraham Van Velsen who was a businessman and later a politician with a focus on culture. Van Velsen studied law at Utrecht University, before studying anthropology at Oxford and Manchester Universities. He did fieldwork among the “Tonga people” in Nyasaland by developing a method of “Situational analysis” in his PhD which was eventually published as “The Politics of Kinship”, and later fieldwork among the *Karamojong* in Uganda.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jaap_van_Velsen

01 July, 2018.

VII. LEATHER CRAFT IN KARAMOJA

Leather-Craft among the *Karamojong* people is one of the developed crafts, for a long time, a lot of artistic work has been done in the field of craft-work in the medium of hides and skin. A variety of crafts in all fields are made in different shapes, sizes and methods of approach with simple tools.

The crafts are then developed into costumes, decorative objects and finally into a commercial object, the craft work of leather is practised out all over *Karamoja*. The crafts are always beautifully decorated with local beads, seeds, roots, ringlets, fruits and metal.

The craft work originated from the need of utilitarian objects, the skins needed in this craft were graded into three groups:

- skins for making costumes
- skins for making musical instruments
- skins for making sandals and shields.

All types of skins were processed differently, some were exposed to the sunshine, others were pounded with a wooden mallet until it became soft for wearing as a costume. Different qualities of skins were used for different purposes. Skins used for male and young female costumes were from gazelle animals, and particularly the Uganda Kob, sometimes the chief's costume was made from leopard skin due to the texture of the skin that was not difficult to process. Skins and hides for making drums were obtained from large animals such as the eland and cow. Giraffe and buffalo skins were particularly used for making shields and sandals. The crocodile and elephant skins, especially the skin from the ears was useful in making sandals. As we know that the *Karamojong* people are nomads, their way of dressing is minimal and therefore textiles was not existing. Since the animals were the centre of their lives, they made use of all the materials that could be obtained from this animal.

The practice of killing enemies is approved, encouraged and in the event celebrated by bodily markings on the shoulders and upper arms (*ngageran*) in the *Karimojong* tribe, but it has no direct connection with either initiation or marriage explains N. Dyson-Hudson. He however continues narrating that the *Karimojong* philosophy of killing, originates from notions of general needs and general security rather than from notions of individual prestige or prowess, he also states that, it's not to deny that an individual may gain prestige for killing. It might also be remembered that enemies are killed by *Karimojong* usually with little regard for age or sex, and often in circumstances which the *Karimojong* recognize as reflecting little, a man will decorate himself in the same way, though on a different shoulder for killing a small girl as he will for killing a determined warrior, explains N. Dyson-Hudson.

N. Dyson-Hudson got into conversation and raised the point-being deliberately disparaging and

contemptuous with *Karimojong* elders, and he explains that their response was:

“You do not understand. If she (in this stance, a seven-year old Turkana girl) were not killed now, someone else would have produced more enemies.”²

As already mentioned that the *Karimojong* are herdsmen, and all their lives rotate around their animals, all the particles in these animals are being used differently depending on the ceremony.

Here Dyson-Hudson¹⁰ explains that after slaughtering a particular animal, the intestines are then removed entirely, the dismembering continues, and when little but the carcass is left, the initiated men are called to stoop and drink the blood which has been collected in the carcass cavity. At this point blessing usually occurs, consisting of smearing the contents of the stomach sack (not the intestines) on chest and forehead, and plattering some against the tree in sacrificial place. In blessing, adult initiated men usually smear themselves: younger men may be smeared by elders who mutter a brief invocation like “May you become important! May you become old! May you become rich in cattle! (*Topolor! Tomojong! Tobarra!*)”.

¹⁰ N. Dyson-Hudson, *Karimojong and the Suk*, Uganda Journal vol. 22, 1958 p.176.

Karimojong Politics, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1966.

Library, Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda 2017.

Neville Dyson-Hudson was born in October 1929, he is a Professor of Social Relations at Johns Hopkins University. He earned his Ph.D. from Oxford University in anthropology. His research interests centre on the place of ecological factor in social organization. He has done research among the *Karimojong*, *Beja* and *Turkana* and a consultant to numerous international organizations and taught at the University of Khartoum in Sudan.

www.library.cshl.edu/oralhistory/speaker/rada-neville-dyson-hudson/

01 July, 2018.

1. Female

a. Girl`s Skirt (Elou)

Traditionally, making of women`s and girl`s costumes in *Karamoja* was mainly a female work. Every woman in the village (*Manyatta*) had to be involved in the dress-making. The elderly women came together and co-operatively produced a respectful piece of work, while the girls were under apprenticeship, improving their skills in the techniques and styles of making female costume.

The same fashion of skirt was made all over *Karamoja* with just small difference among some tribes. The girl`s skirt was made differently from that of a woman with more detailed designed costume due to decency.

The “*Elou*” was mainly made from sheep and goat skin, the preparation did not involve as many processes as those found in the making of the “*abwo*” women`s skirt.

An animal is slaughtered, then the skin flayed off the sheep and the remaining flesh is removed, and wool is shaved off. While the skin is still soft and flexible for use, the leather is fermented underground for some days to make it stronger and later some residue from sorghum beer is folded inside the skin for more few days.

When the skin is removed, again some sour milk is poured on it to ease the process of softening it and then it is rubbed between hands by a group of women, after which the upper part of the skirt is ready.

After the goat and sheep skin has gone through these processes of treatment, the two pieces are joined together in an interesting pattern. The sheep skin is treated as the upper part and the goat skin as lower part of the skirt due to its difference in strength and texture.

Goat skin was mostly preferred for making dancing skirt, while still wet and fresh, the skin was soaked in fat for almost a week in order to remove the hair, and later soaked in water to regain its softness and then spread on the ground to dry in the sunshine.

After the process of drying the skin, it is then cut into desired shapes in a semi-circular geometrical shape using an awl and leather thread.

The surface covered with beautifully arranged geometrical patterns of beads and metal are then carefully hand sewn.

b. Women`s Skirt (Abwo)

The women`s skirt was made from skins of the antelope, goat and calf due to their softness, texture and availability. The upper part of the skirt was made of a single coloured skin mainly black goat skin, while the lower part was composed of several colours of goat skin pieces.

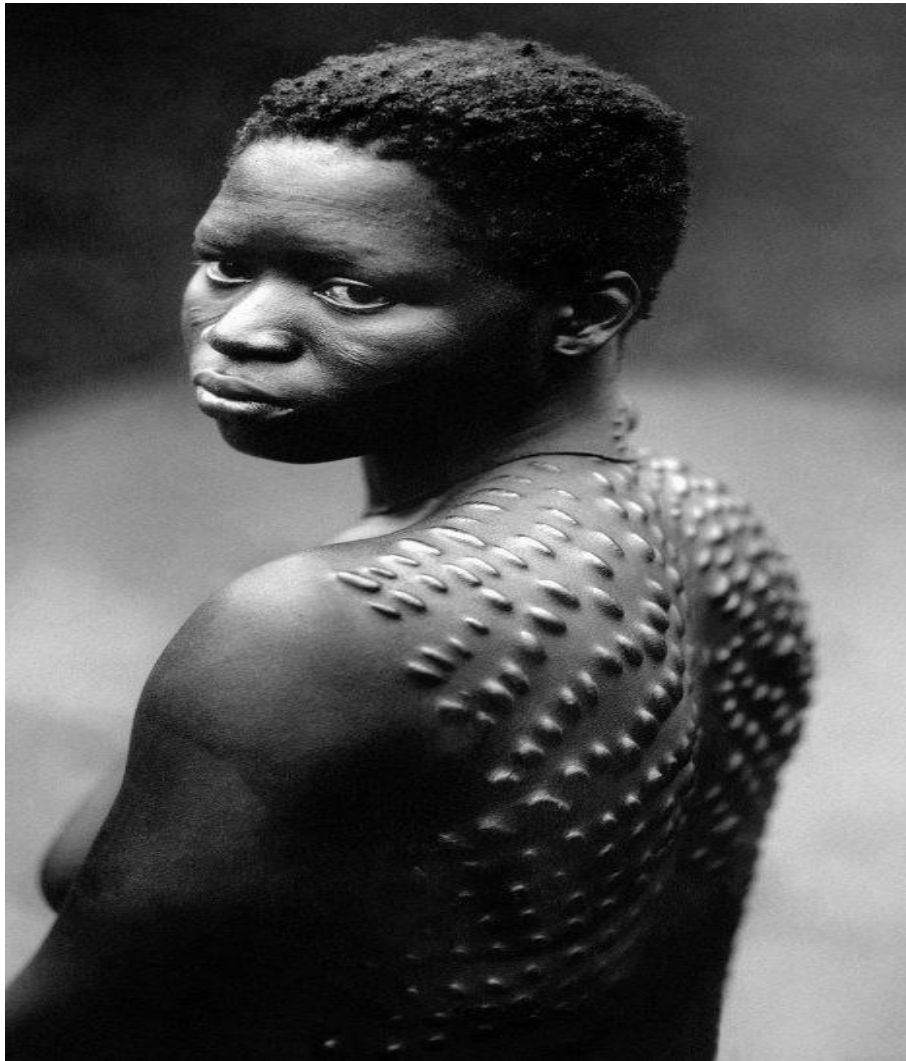
The process or method of tanning was applied in preparing a piece of skin to be used for making a skirt. The remaining flesh was scraped off the skin with a sharp tool, a locally made knife, then spread out the ground to dry in the sun. After few hours, it is cleaned again by removing all the flesh remnants. It is then stretched on the ground and goat dung was spread on the fleshy side and soaked with water until soft and then folded into a bundle. After the above process, the skin is then pounded by using a mallet and during this action of softening, smoothing and making it flexible was then speeded up with the use of some churned sour milk while pounding the skin.

When the skin is ready, it is then selected and arranged into colours that will be designed by joining all the pieces using tendon thread and awls (needle). A large piece of goat skin was cut for the upper part, and it was joined to the lower part and then for decoration and decency purposes, two pairs of un softened skin pieces were cut from the part of a cow`s leg in a rectangular shape with a slightly a widening at the bottom. However, in Dr. Treutle`s¹¹ documentary film, he enlightens us about the *Karamojong* traditional wedding that the skirt which is made from the new killed goat, is the only new garment that the bride will ever own in her life, but occasionally having a new front piece sewn with shell beads. He continues explaining the process of the wedding that it is also important that before their wedding, the bride must be tattooed beneath the heart. Tattooing is considered the mark of beauty for both men and women, the bride`s brother is the one responsible for this duty before the wedding ceremony, therefore he pinches her skin between four fingers and thumb and slices up with handmade knife to ensure scar, and then dirt is rubbed onto the wound.

¹¹ Dr. William B. Treutle, a practicing dentist/Director, in Tacoma, Washington. He was taught three short lessons on Cinematography by a famed Hollywood Cinematographer called James Wong.

https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0872337/bio?ref =nmbio_ql_1

01 July, 2018



*Karamojong Woman with body tattoo*¹²

www.pinterest.at/pin/337558934550899130/?1p=true

¹² In the process wedding ceremony preparation, Dr. Treutle, explains the bride`s role of making her own ring with different materials that she desires, that is depending on the husband`s clan.

Dr. William B. Treutle, *Karamoja* (1955). Documentary Film. Video: (40:20-42:12).

www.youtube.com/watch?v=3uLa4Cz3F48

01 July, 2018.

Tattoo, permanent mark or design made on the body by the introduction of pigment through the ruptures in the skin. Sometimes the term is also loosely applied to the inducement of scars (cicatrisation). Tattooing proper has been practiced in most parts of the World, though it is rare among populations with the darkest skin colour and absent from most of china (at least in recent centuries). Tattooed designs are thought by various peoples to provide magical protection against sickness or misfortune, or they serve to identify the wearer`s rank, status, or membership in a group. Decoration is perhaps the most common.¹³

According to the tradition, tattooing and sacrifice goes hand in hand, this is depending on what kind of ceremony is being practised at that moment. For example, the departure of a young woman from her group to enter into that of her husband brings the disruption of certain disconnection in the economic, social and civil context of the interested parties, and this demands adjustment. And therefore, tattoo is not just a mere cutting of the body but the procedure that must be followed by all the partners that are involved. In this case, the bride`s father plays a big role during the process of giving away her daughter, he as well is tattooed¹⁴, however his tattoo differs from that of women. The step that is done in the process of tattooing is that lines are scratched with a twig and the skin raised with a nail, then it is sliced with a crude knife. This tattoo mark is an evidence that this is his first daughter to be married. The marriage ceremonies among the life of the *Karamojong* in which livestock assumes a role to its status, attributes to sacrifice, during the ceremonial occasions, the *Karamojong* kill an ox that is chosen in advance for this purpose. The ox that is chosen becomes the connection between man and God, and this is believed by the people and recognized as a gift given to them through the ox. In this particular status that cattle have and the role which it fulfils in the social and religious life of the *Karamojong*, explains also the psychological basis which each herder has with his livestock. With this kind of lifestyle, it is difficult for a foreigner to understand this culture, why the *Karamojong* lives rotate around their cattle. Usually in *Karamoja* district and

¹³ Written by: The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica

www.britannica.com/art/tattoo

Encyclopaedia Britannica

¹⁴ “The groom is as well dressed in his best garments, with dancing bells under his knees and most unusual lip plugs made from testicles of a wild animal”

Dr. William B. Treutle, Karamoja (1955). Documentary Film (42:24-43:10).

www.youtube.com/watch?v=3uLa4Cz3F48

Northern Uganda, daughters are seen as valuable part of the family compared to the sons, the reason being that, when a girl grows up and is ready for marriage, the family gets wealthy in terms of getting cows from the boy`s family who will be marrying this girl upon wedding. However, it is important to note that *Karamojong* cattle is something more important, which fulfils their lives to such a point that they are extremely reluctant to make any kind of new change.



Karamojong girls, skirt made from animal skin 1968.

Photo: Ron McBride.

www.flickr.com/photos/26605560@N08/2938618282/

In the photo above, one observes the *Karamojong* style of dressing with many jewelleries, a bag across their shoulders, animal skin skirt and *gouard* bowls that are usually used as plates or bowls for scooping water for home utility. It is not clear since when the *Karamojong* started dressing up in skin attires, but I assume the skin attires must have been worn even before colonial powers and missionaries came to their region in 1884. And according to my research, none of the authors seemed to have picked interest in finding out when and why this people started using skin as an attire, this can be another field of making research. Today, this kind of organic dressing has been replaced with “Suka” skirts that came into use around 1970s, I believe more research needs to be done on this transition. And there have been changes with home utensils as well, more plastics have come in use

in the name of “modernity” although the *gouard* bowls in their hands still in usage, not only in *Karamoja* district but also in Northern parts of Uganda, still plastic utensils are very dominant. With this rapid change that is happening in *Karamoja*, the importance or speed for change is normally determined either by specific facts of history or mostly by contact with other peoples, by the confrontations of different life styles, mentalities and values. The outcome of these changes are sometimes unpredictable, if it is for a better or a worse society, according to the changes that occur, and how they are valued according what a person considers best.



Karamojong Girl and Plastic Cup, 2010, *Moroto* District.

Photo: Agnes Achola.



Karamojong woman, 2010, centre of *Moroto* district.

Photo: Agnes Achola.

c. Apron

The *Karamojong* aprons in contrast with the skirts, were small objects with loose edges which were decorated with different colours of beads, seeds and ringlets.

The aprons were named according to their shapes and type of decoration, the most popular leather aprons were *Agitha*, *Apetha* and *Rek*.

Agitha was a soft apron whereby the preparation of the skin was the same as in the case of that used to make skirts, the tanned leather was cut into a semi-circular shape, but quite short and thin aluminium cylinders were cut into pieces and sewn on the edges of the apron.

Apetha was a small apron mainly for elderly women and appeared in a variety of designs but with similar basic structure. During the preparation of the skin, some flesh is left on to allow the material to retain its hardness. Black goat skin was very popular for the upper part of the design.

This was a rectangular piece of skin, which held another three strips of hard leather from cow's leg or the zebra's leg. They were then joined together on the upper part vertically with the use of columns of different coloured beads.

Rek was an apron mainly for girls, it is quite small in size, smaller than that for women. It was made from softened goat skin; the preparation of the skin is quite similar to that of "*Agitha*".

It was cut into an open U-shape and attached on two string, the final part of the work was then done with the decoration of ostrich-egg shell ringlets and aluminium cylinders.

d. Baby Carrier

The carriers or hammocks were made with many superstitious rites and under strict observation of tribal customs. To protect the baby whose life was so delicate, prevention of bad spirits was necessary. When making the hammock, the choices of the skin also varied from clan to clan, goat and gazelle skins were mainly used for the baby carrier and sometimes the hair of the animals were removed depending on which clan.

When the flesh is removed from the skin, it is smeared with oil and softened by pounding it with a mallet and it became slippery and water-proofed. The upper and bottom parts were folded into moderately thick pillows to control the neck and legs of the baby and four thongs, that is two on the upper part and two on the lower part were sewn on.

It is then decorated with cowrie shells which contained powers to keep off the evil spirits.

2. Male

a. The Men Leather Jewellery

The men leather objects had few decorations, the leather craft as far as costumes were concerned, included skin capes, arm ornaments and hide sandals.

Leather sandals are one of the precious crafts works that were made by the *Karamojong*, since a considerable amount of resistance to the thorns and stones was needed, they therefore used tough skins from the giraffe, elephant and buffalo. There were three types of sandal fashions among the *Karamojong*, the sandals had a square sole which was in one piece and this were mainly designed for the boys and girls. While the women and elderly men wore the cowhide, sandals derived particularly from the neck and back part of the cow.

Process

The skin from the side of the belly area of the giraffe was more preferred since it was more practical. Fresh skin was spread out in the sunshine until it was half-dried, then some of the flesh was removed and the skin was cut out in the desired shape. The skin is then flapped into two, which is bent slowly in the process of making it firm and upright. A hole is then pierced in each of the sandals and two soft leather thongs are passed through and sometimes woven into criss-cross pattern and then an oval or round notch is made at the joint between the big toe and the smaller ones.

The dancing sandal was bent outwards slightly so that it had gently sloping edges, this allowed the young man during the dance to raise a lot of dust and thus win admiration. The other style of dancing sandal was decorated with very long straps which were tied around the leg in a criss-cross pattern and similar to some of the modern shoe styles. Some skins such as that of the crocodile had natural designs and patterns of the scale which served as decorations on the sandal.

The Interpretation of the Sandal

These are the third type of diviners, it is only the men who became sandal interpreters. They communicate with the spirits through two very small sandals made from animal skin, and they are only to be used for this purpose by the owner. When somebody or a group of people suspect something to happen, for instance an enemy coming to raid cattle or disease likely to come upon a family or a whole community, it is this diviner who is consulted for confirmation and as usual with diviners, precautionary measures were proposed. It is believed that what he says is final. The diviner himself consults his ancestral spirits using the sandals at his own time and he regularly keeps informed

about many things in the same way. If he discovers something of public concern, he immediately announces it and necessary steps are taken.

These sandals ritual is performed as follows: The man sits on the ground cross-legged and in front of him is spread an animal skin on which to play the sandals. These sandals are of the ordinary shape but have straps and are abnormally small. The owner holds them together, back to back and spits saliva gently on the sandals while pleading for help from the spirits.

Finally he flings them into the air to a reasonable height so as all fall on the skin sheet, knowing what or who is represented by the right foot sandal and the same applies to the left foot, and also by being aware of the meanings of the various positions the sandals may assume, he is able to find out much about many subject matters and accurately, so it is believed. In N. Dyson-Hudson's text, he reveals that by tossing sandals is not confined to a small area (p.34) but is a general form of minor divination throughout the *Karimojong* cluster. He however says that most commonly, the fall of the sandals is to pre-select one of several directions for the searcher of lost objects or for the undecided traveller.¹⁵ This is also an inherited ability from the dead ancestors like the dreamer diviners.

The dreamers are type of diviners (*Ajuogni*), the prophets who forecast calamities by dreams. This is believed the ancestral spirit informs the diviner by showing him the misfortunes in dream and suggests also remedies. In the morning following a dream, the diviner reveals what he has dreamt to the public. Examples of such catastrophes foreseen in sleep are serious draughts, cattle raids full of bloodshed, epidemic diseases causing great losses of lives death spells on individuals etc. Precautionary measures put forward must be carried out by the people affected to prevent harmful effects.

In case of any dream, the animal should be then be killed by ripping open the belly and chime from the bowel and then smeared on the front parts of a few people's bodies that is from the shoulders to the abdomen. A portion of the chime should also be scattered westwards so that the raid perishes in that direction.¹⁶

¹⁵ Okenga Okuda, Material Collected December, 1971-January, 1972.

Home Address: Nnyakwai Sub-county, Abim, Kotido, North Karamoja District, Uganda.

¹⁶ Ocassional papers in African Traditional Religion and Philosophy,

Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy Vol. 5, Makerere University, Kampala Uganda. June 1972, p.5 c- p6.



Karamojong sandal

Material: car tyre

Own collection 1996 by Agnes Achola

Photo: Agnes Achola

Men also had a special type of skirt which was made from a complete skin of a goat including its tail, particularly from a black goat skin. It was important that this type of skin had to be very soft to allow the flexibility of its rhythmic movements during the dance.

The hair of the animal played an important role, it was retained in order to add to its beauty and attractiveness, beads were part of the decoration especially orange and yellow colours.

During the dance, the tail is particularly useful by knocking it on the girl whom a young man wanted to marry.

b. Snuff containers (Abui)

It is very popular even today to see *Karamojong* men with snuffs hanging round their necks and the upper arm in which tobacco mixed with ashes is stored. The snuff containers were made from a combination of several materials, including small horns of animals, metal, wood and leather.

There were three types of containers with the same name “*Bui*”. It was only differentiated from their appearance and structure. One of the snuff containers was made as a small round bag, made from the skin of the testicles of a cow. To retain its interesting round shape, the contents in the testicles was removed while the skin was still raw, and then filled with either sand or soil, to maintain its shape. When it dried the sand or soil is then emptied and the strap or string was sewn as a handle.

The next type of container was a small goat`s horn, which was covered with a piece of a tail-skin, and after cleaning it, the tail was then fixed on the horn while still raw so that it dries hardens and clanged on it, which then took a shape of the horn with its peculiar gentle curves.



Karamojong tobacco, wrapped in plastics for sale

Own collection 2010, Photo: Agnes Achola.



Karamojong elderly woman sniffing tobacco,
Kakajo, Kisenyi slum, Kampala, Uganda
Photo: 2017, Agnes Achola.

c. Weapons

Since the *Karamojong* are known to be warriors, they designed their own weapons out of leather or hide shields when hunting, and even for safeguarding himself. It is clear that a traditional *Karamojong* is a real warrior. It is not a surprise even today to meet a young boy carrying a small hide-shield known as “*Aupal*” and spears while watching over their cattle. It is also regarded that apart from the shields and spears being useful in protecting themselves and their animals, they are also used in the decoration in houses or used by men as a sign of manhood and statesmanship.

The craft work of hide and skins was always supported with use of curved wood, they shaped a thin round stick, relatively longer than the shield itself, then sewn to the shield with leather thongs which formed lines of stitches on the either side of the mid-rib of the shield. At the centre of the shield, the wooden stick was forced away from the hide by two small triangular wedges which are driven parallel to it, this formed a grip and the hand was further protected by leather-guard attached to the back of the shield. The lines of the stitching fastening the stick to the shield were the only decoration, although the strips of brass or tin could be fixed on, the corners were often bounded with wire. The shield was also decorated with a tuft of ostrich black feathers, soft and woolly in texture, which contrasted against the dark brown surface of the giraffe hide. Ropes were made from a piece of raw skin, this either cow-hide or eland skin. The cow-hide skin was better type due to its durability and strength; a piece of skin well stretched was then cut in a spiral shape, after obtaining a long a long strap, it is then stretched between trees to dry and turned out straight. This was the type of rope which was made for ordinary purposes. In special cases, whereby stronger ropes were needed, they had to be woven, these types of ropes were in many cases intended for either decoration, prestige and pride and therefore the strength was put into consideration.

The predecessors of the *Karamojong* invented a unique style of weaving ropes which could be applied on special articles like cow-bells, straps, *Karamojong* stools (*Ngikocolong*), and some men`s decorations like arm and leg ornaments.

d. Beauty Decorations

The various objects that men and women decorate, may either be daily wear costumes or ceremonial. The daily costumes are simply decorated with few variously coloured beads which are arranged in different numbers. They can be sewn along the edges or in the middle part of the skin skirts, other local materials like the ostrich-egg-shell ringlets, metal beads and seeds are also popular in their work. Sometimes, the decoration is made more beautiful by mixing two or more of these colours. Most of the decorations are linear, either in vertical or horizontal form, depending on the shape of the outfit (dress). Aprons being small and narrow in size are decorated with compact geometrically arranged coloured beads, leaving well defined spaces in between to reveal the black goat-skin bottom design. Ceremonial garments are more colourful than the daily wear, the arrangement of the beads is the major aim to the attractiveness of a particular piece of work, the alternative design of beads and skin is one of the methods whereby the *Karamojong* chooses outstanding coloured skins, mostly black, which contrasts so well with any of the beads. To maintain the beauty, it is smeared with oil so that it remains smooth and shiny. Other decorations are intended for prestige and pride, these are worn to depict a person's strength, wealth and fame, the objects made for these purposes are the ornaments like the *Elado* and *Asayat*. *Elado* is sometimes covered with coloured beads and the strap instead of being a mere thong, is woven into a very complex rope. Many woven straps are also assembled into an interesting arm or leg band as a sign of prestige; the more straps a person has worn means the famous that person is.

However, the *Karamojong* culture of hair style depends on the clan that one belongs. And right from childhood, the children already participate in the head-dressing that associate them with their clans. There are kind of head-dress which are reserved to initiated men. One is a pad of clay, which the initiand receives during the *asapan*, the term *asapan* is used for male initiation. And the other is called "helmets" both are made of human hair, one is considered ordinary, the other more festive, worked into the shape of a shield and decorated with ostrich feathers.

N. Dyson-Hudson believes and think that *Karimojong* and *Suk* people, head-dresses are coloured not with vegetable dye but pounded rock and mud. This is found locally in certain river beds (grey) or on mountains (red); or comes from *Turkanaland* (green).

The uninitiated does not wear these articles, neither are they permitted to skin any sacrificed ox or eat the meat of the ox leg during ritual celebrations.

Drinking the blood of such sacrificed animals is also forbidden, the uninitiated do not also take an active part in formal gatherings but remain on the fringe of the group behind the rows of initiated.

Their duty is the role of spectators; obedience and respect are expected from them.

The solidarity among the people belonging to the same territorial section is greater than among persons of the same clan. It should not be a surprise that in a place where a clan does not occupy a well-defined territory, but rather lives mingled with other clans throughout the territory of the tribe. Out of necessity, one's solidarity is with whom one shares daily preoccupations: water, firewood to be gathered, illness present in the village, enemies who might attack, drought which menaces the harvest etc. this does not mean there is no solidarity among the members of the clan.



Karamojong Arm-Let, Material: Metal and Animal Skin. Own Collection 1996,
Photo: Agnes Achola

The hair dressing is one of the most important part of the *Karamojong* decorations, usually men spend a lot of time or even days working on a head piece which is part of their beauty. And since the only materials or resources that are available to them are the cows, birds and the organic materials, the ideas and materials that are being implemented into these objects must be given a deep thought in the process of implementation regarding the availability of the limited resources.

Some Scholars say that the clay was being used then in the making of the hair dress was got from the

neighbouring countries, this narrative is not clear why the *Karamojong* made a choice of the foreign clay rather than the Ugandan clay.

For the *Karamojong* people, clan is also one of the most important system of social organisation just like with other tribes in Uganda that also have clan systems, The *Karamojong* hair dress indicates the clan or age group of the men, this means from 10-15 years age, male hair dress takes the form of a tiny press on the back of his head, as he becomes older gradually the head dress is enlarged until certain age and later then the whole head will be covered. According to Dr. Treutle's¹⁷ observation regarding this process, he says that the finished head dress is then beautified with a scratcher that resembles a long piece of plyer of wire which is at the end decorated with shells, beans and ostrich feathers that are becoming extremely rare.

Regarding the women hair style, like we all know until today, African women like working on their hair that have traditionally geometrical plaiting like the nots, lines or sometimes called corn-rows etc. according to each woman`s desire. But the *Karamojong*, hair is shaved according to their clan that is for both women and children. Some clans leave a strip in the centre, and others one or two on the side, others a circle on the right, others little tufts etc. but usually their heads are shaved, leaving only a circle up.

However, this tradition is changing very fast, the organic and natural materials that the *Karamojong* people have been using in creating their own jewellery and decorations have become mostly unavailable due to the pressure of modernity from the outside world. The head dress sculpture below is made of clay and painted with black paint reflecting the *Karamojong* traditional hair style, this one is from my own collection from *Karamoja* district, which is a rare piece that I doubt if the *Karamojong* people still make this piece of art work today.

¹⁷ "Hair Dress lasts from 3-6 months" Also see; "Cutting the body" (39:35-40:20), "Wedding Skirt" (37:38-38:16).

Dr. William B. Treutle, *Karamoja* (1955). Documentary Film (23:14-27:18).

www.youtube.com/watch?v=3uLa4Cz3F48

01 July, 2018.



Karamojong head sculpture, made by *Karamojong* people, material: clay and black paint.

Own collection 1996, Agnes Achola.

Photo: Agnes Achola.



Karamojong neck rest, Material: wood and sisal rope (handle)

Own collection 1996, Agnes Achola.

Photo: Agnes Achola.

VIII. WHAT IS A CLAN?

A clan¹⁸ (*Ateker*) is one of the large groups into which people are divided. This division is based on paternal or maternal descent, so that all those who share, or claim to share, a common ancestor through father or mother, call themselves members of the same clan.

Among the *Karamojong* descent is reckoned on the father`s side. Those who belong to the same clan are not necessarily related by blood, given the fact that groups of different origin may once have entered and became a part of it during the history of the clan.

The same holds for the clans made up by one people: they do not necessarily have a common origin. According to tribal traditions, only three of the nineteen clans were among the original ones. Others joined along the way, because they were conquered by force, or because they were gradually absorbed after a period of living in close contact, because they were attracted by better prospects or many other reasons.

¹⁸ Bruno Novelli- Aspects of Karimojong Ethnology, Printed in Italy by Novastampa di Verona 1988, Comboni Missionaries, Makerere University Library Kampala Uganda. p.53-54. Chapter 111.



Karamoja Movie Poster, 1954. By Kroger Babb.

www.pinterest.at/pin/390968811385674107/

01 July, 2018.

A documentary film was made by a practical dentist called Treutle, it is said that Treutle was given a fatal diagnosis with a probability of having only six months to live, he then closed his practice, dispensed with most of his possessions and with his wife travelled to *Karamoja*, a remote region of Northern Uganda. In his documentary film *Karamoja*¹⁹ that was released in 1955 Treutle explains that since *Karamoja* was a British protectorate, the borders of the region were all sealed, on their arrival the only means of communication with the *Karamojong* people was *Swahili* language that is spoken in the East African countries. Later on, he then sold the film to a movie producer called Kroger Babb.

He was well known for his exploitative film titles, he did not only produce this film above but also went further and produced another film about the *Karamojong* called “Land of the Naked People” in 1965. He was then known as the American exploitation king who also produced films like “Mom and Dad”²⁰ in 1945 and “She Shoulda said No!” in 1949. However, it is said that Kroger Babb was one of the two legendary producers / distributors in the field of classic “roadshows” exploitation films.

According to my observations, there was and still is a lot of interest in *Karamoja* district, regarding to my interview with the parish priest, Mr. Rapheal Lobeerei, a *Karamojong* himself, explains that *Karamoja* region was being termed as a “zoo” by the early visitors then, because they wanted

¹⁹ www.youtube.com/watch?v=3uLa4Cz3F48

www.imdb.com/name/nm0872337/

²⁰ www.imdb.com/name/nm0044784/

01 July, 2018.

Karamoja to remain intact due to the natural resources that they wanted to retain for themselves by scaring away other foreigners, as a result by making fun of the *Karamojong* people and creating posters written on like “Uncivilized, Shocking, Reality” or “They wear only Wind”, “They live on Blood and Beer”! The kind of information that the Western people were then being fed on was exploitative. However, this also reveals how the white people view Africans as “primitive”, thus with their aim of showing direction that should be followed by the black people. To feel engaged in this mission certainly did not help the whites to consider the Africans as their equals, able to enter into dialogue with them, as a result, they turned into objects of their own work. One should not be astonished that the values of which the white men were bearers took the most difficult road to arrive to their destination that is the confrontation rather than dialogue. The *Karamojong* express the best of themselves exactly in dialogue, in debate, in the confrontation of ideas and values. And through dialogue, which brings a deeper maturity of knowledge of the people, who in their turn would through their questions and objections help their administrators or missionaries to find the right approach in order to present new structures, messages, mentalities that are necessary in order to live in our times, even for pastoral people. Dr. Treutle’s observation that is different to that of Kroger Babb²¹ in his postures is that the *Karamojong* people should not be seen as sadists, but cattle is their wealth, they do not believe that the animals are being hurt since they themselves do bear the same pain.

²¹ Howard W. “Kroger” Babb, born December 30, 1906 in Lees Creek, Ohio in the United States and died January 28, 1980. He was a former carnival owner and as a kid, worked at a Kroger grocery store. His friends began calling him “Kroger,” he attended Willmington College and later became a film producer and was known for his work on “Mom and Dad.”

01 July, 2018.



Karamoja Land of the Naked People, 1965. Kroger Babb.

International Film in British Cinemas, 1960-1975.

www.fromtheorientwithfury.blogspot.co.at/2015/05/

30 May, 2018.

In the documentary film by Dr. Treutle, he describes the scenes authentically and the viewer can associate himself or herself emotionally with the film. He explains in one of the scenes about nose pieces or ornaments how it is done by the *Karamojong* people, whereby a metal is pounded by a rock upon a rock, so that it gets its shape that is desired.

He however confirms with my research work that a spear is not just a weapon that is just for protection that is for him and his family but also for decoration and prestige. Spears and stools are inseparable companion for a *Karamojong* man, the objects that in daily use by the *Karamojong* people always have a multi-functional purpose, it may appear to be simple for example; a stick is not only used as a

walking stick, but quite practical in use against snakes and small animals. The stool above, which is called the neck rest, is sometimes used as a pillow and this protects and raises his head up, in case of small animals and insects crawling in the ground. It can also be used for seating on, and it is very light in weight and easy for transportation.

The stools have different curves, this depends on the rules of different clans, the number of legs on the stool can indicate age groups. Dr. Treutle also observes that protocol is serious matter among the *Karamojong* people, he says that only elders were entitled to a three leg stools, in this case the one leg stool was meant for the young men that is depending on his age group.

From one of the scenes in the film shows how the stools are finished with intense love, care and pride that reveals its longevity. It is then later sanded with a leaf that has the abrasive quality of a sand paper and then oiled down with a butter fat of a goat.

In the *Karamojong* tradition, regarding dressing, showing most of the body naked is not a problem to their society. Children are naked all the time and adults have minimal way of dressing, jewellery and decorations²² are the main part of dressing.

²² Dr. Treutle reveals in one of the scenes that every man and woman wears earrings, the ears are pierced at an early age by using large sharp forms that are passed through the ear logs and then later broken off, the thorns are twisted daily so that the flesh comes out, this continues to enlarge and by inserting a bigger stick, the hole eventually becomes the size that is desired.

Dr. William B. Treutle, *Karamoja* (1955). Documentary film (21:43-23:19).

www.youtube.com/watch?v=3uLa4Cz3F48

Dr. William Treutle was a dentist, born on June 8, 1924. He had been residing in Tacoma, Washington. He died in February 1975 at the age 50.

https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0872337/bio?ref_=nmbio_q1_1

01 July, 2018

IX. MODERN KARAMOJA

1. Interviews



Parish priest Mr. Rapheal Lobeerei²³

Photo 2017, Agnes Achola.

I had an interview with Mr. Rapheal Lobeerei who is a parish priest of Jubilee 2000, SS Karenga. He is a *Karamojong* and originally from Moroto district. The people call him father instead of priest. I asked him about his work in *Karamoja* and how the people respond to him. Mr. Lobeerei said that

²³ Rapheal Lobeerei, born 15 October, 1969 Moroto district.

He is a parish priest of Jubilee 2000 in Karenga, Moroto district. Uganda

working as a priest in *Karamoja* was challenging because of guns and insecurity making things tense. He however said that one must be part of the culture to get the audience and he emphasizes that since culture is changing, one still has to speak to *Karamojong* elders, that is when one gets the people's audience. He also mentioned that since he has been working as a priest, his observation is that the trend is people are turning to Christianity. There are some changes, one has to be patient, change is gradual and there is a transformation which brings modern light to *Karamoja* said Rapheal Lobeerei. He insists that patience is needed while working in *Karamoja*.

Mr. Lobeerei also talked about a brief history of christianity in *Karamoja*. He said that christianity has been in *Karamoja* for a long time, about 80 years, working as a priest was very hard since people were not willing to cooperate. However, he said that local people have joined priesthood as natives, there is an aspect of holding faith. The missionaries acted as the voice of the voiceless. They built schools, that is Anglican Catholic, health centres and parishes and that is apart from practicing their faith. In response the people saw some benefits since the church was providing these social services said Mr. Lobeerei.

I then asked him, what he thinks about christianity, whether it is affecting *Karamojong* way of life or the *Karamojong* way of life is affecting christianity. Mr. Lobeerei responded that the two are interacting, there is a dialogue between the two. The church would like to integrate, in order to bring good aspects to church. The church uses local language and therefore the books have been written in *Karamojong* language. He also explained to me why *Karamoja* was termed as a zoo by the early visitors then. They wanted *Karamoja* to remain intact, because of the natural resources that they wanted to retain for themselves by scaring other foreigners away. Apart from talking to Mr. Lobeerei about his duty as working as a priest in *Karamoja*, I could not wait for him to start with the topic of dressing. I asked him what the challenges are the people of *Karamoja* are confronted with regarding dressing. There have been challenges not in a negative sense but to come out from enclosure, due to christianity and modernity. The impact and aspects of changes are very attractive regarding the way of dressing.

However, during our conversation, he also remembered Idi Amin dada that time in the early 1970`s when he forced *Karamojong* people to dress in clothes other than animal skin. As a result, a lot of people lost lives because they were resistant to his command and since the cow was everything, their lives rotated around the animal said Mr. Lobeerei. The people knew how to treat skin and they were quite independent.

I also asked him about the second-hand clothes in *Karamoja* district, he responded that then the missionaries were bringing second-hand clothes and giving it to the people. This is how the people

were challenged to change from traditional way of dressing to western way of dressing Mr. Lobeerei answered. He mentioned that the old cultural customs are now left for the traditional rites for example marriage and dance. The costumes are designed with a touch of modernity but still relate to the *Karamojong* culture. The beads and metallic bangles are still the main part of dressing, a woman wearing one bangle around her neck means she is a widow. He emphasizes that the people still want to maintain their tradition despite modernity.

Skirts are a common way of dressing, bedsheets are used by males and stools are still available, but he still insisted that the life of the *Karamojong* people is dedicated to the cows. He thinks that what is contradictive about modernity is for example wearing miniskirts and trousers is allowed but discouraged for girls. Since the children are being sent to schools, they do embrace a different way of life. Therefore, it is very difficult for the elders to maintain their traditional way of bringing up their children. And then I asked Mr. Lobeerei about his dressing regarding the above picture and why he did not wear the priest garment. His response was that there is a particular way of dressing when he is going for celebration of a mass. After that he is free to dress in any attire he wants which is casual, just as in traditional way. However, he also mentioned that when there are rites, there are specific clothing that should be used to the fest that is celebrated. Priests garments are very expensive and not sponsored by the church. When I asked him about the bracelet on his arm, whether he still wears it together with the priest garment during his duty in church service, he said that he is promoting his culture. Then he continued explaining that the bangle on his wrist is made from a tail of a giraffe, the beads symbolize age sets that are named after particular animals like giraffes, elephants during initiation settings. He also stated that he is not identifying himself with the giraffe but that there are other people who do that. Mr. Lobeerei identifies himself with the antelope and suddenly showed his pride by saying that he is an African, he loves being African and that is why he is wearing an African attire. He described the bracelet on his hand: the colours are the Ugandan flag that brings out the features of black, yellow and red. He emphasized that the symbol of the Ugandan flag constitutes his sense of identity and he carries it wherever he goes.

And he continued saying that many other tribes in Uganda use beads as well, culture is portrayed in beads by bringing in different aspects of Uganda in colours.

Then I wanted to know his view of the transformation of the *Karamojong* from the past until now? His response was that he sees a lot of changes, *Karamoja* is getting transformed. The only facet where culture is still intact are the marriage rites, even those have been modernised.



Awilli Betty²⁴

Photo 2017, Agnes Achola.

I interviewed Awilli Betty who is also a sister in law to me, her brother married to my sister. Her family is originally from *Abim* which is in *Karamoja* district. Awilli went to school in *Kangole* girls Senior Secondary School in Moroto in 1994-1997 which was a missionary school.

I wanted to know from Awilli how it was in school with other *Karamojong* girls, since going to school was not their priority. She responded that since it was something that they were not interested in and a completely different surrounding, some of the girls got pregnant, others finished school and became

²⁴ Awilli Betty, born 04 September, 1980 in *Abim* district, she works with Mamas Club Uganda which provides psycho-social support to HIV positive mothers, partners and caretakers. She is also a project officer in Northern Uganda, providing support to mothers and their partners towards an AIDS free generation and supports vulnerable orphaned children in *Oyam* district and is also supporting *Karamojong* Children in Kampala slums.

nurses, teachers, got involved in projects and some even completed university. I asked her about the dress code at school. She said that the students were wearing uniforms that were sponsored by school, which was a blue skirt and a white shirt, some students did not wear shoes. Awilli admitted that the people of *Karamoja* are transforming, skin dressing is now mainly used at ceremonial dances and rituals. The making of skirts now involves pieces of colourful fabrics. She said that for a *Karamojong* girl or woman designing her own skirt, it is important that it can swing left and right because it is the movement that makes it beautiful. Awilli described that the top or blouses are short sleeved and bright in colours. The vests for example are factory made with bright colours. She confirmed that there is external interest in *Karamoja* fashion, it is getting commercial and modern. This Facebook page reveals it: *Karamoja* development forum (KDF) Facebook.

Awilli also observed that the *Karamojong* people's artefacts, for example the ear rings that are made by themselves out of animal bones, do not exist anymore, people now rather buy readymade beads out of plastics. I picked interest in the second-hand clothes market in *Karamoja* and asked her where these clothes come from. Her response was that the clothes are being sold in *Karamoja* by non-*Karamojong* and since there are many second-hand cloth markets all over Uganda, it is possible that the neighbouring districts make business of second-hand clothing in *Karamoja*. She also explained that even though second-hand clothing is available on the markets it is not offered in big quantities due to the little interest of the people because they still value their style of dressing in *Karamoja*. The people wear and appreciate more what they make or design by themselves giving emphasis on the colour of their dressing, for example men wear sheets (sukas) with vests and women are dressed in their hand sewn skirts, beads, vests and head gear.

Since Awilli Betty also works with *Karamojong* children in Kampala slums, I asked her if she still had contact with these people. She replied that she does visit them from time to time. So I did pick interest and asked her if we could meet them. My focus was meeting them and observing them to see if they were still in touch with their tradition. Since language was a problem my sister in law who still speaks her mother tongue translated to me. We went to *Kakajo* slum, it is messy, chaotic, loud and lively, men, women and children are all over the place and alcohol is being sold everywhere. Awilli is well appreciated in this place and remembered for her work since her visits from time to time keep her in the memory of the children who are now already grown-ups. We managed to get hold of Achuka Peter²⁵ who seemed to be also quite popular around there, I do not know why. But anyway, we sat down and Awilli asked him questions that I was interested in and later translated his

²⁵ Achuka Peter, born 05 July, 1978 in Moroto District. Lives in Kakajo slum Kisenyi, Kampala Uganda.

answers to me. Achuka Peter explained how he came to *Kakajo* slum, he said he was involved in a project in *Mbale* district, in eastern Uganda called CRO- Child Restoration Outreach and he said that is where he learned some English.

He described the bracelet he was wearing, is not original or traditional, the original one would have been more expensive. He then explained that the green beads (*Alibamun*) are a symbol of a snake, the yellow (*Thulela*) and orange (*Thainyang*) ones are a symbol of wild fruits.

Achuka also talked about body cuttings that they are a sign of beauty, preventing diseases whereby a grounded tobacco is put on to the cuttings to prevent infections. Cutting the body using local herbs. was also for healing special body parts depending on where the pain is for example, head, legs or back etc. He continued describing the big bangle “*Apokot*” (bracelet) made from elephant tusk, he said that to obtain this kind of bangle, a person has to pay more than 10 cows which symbolizes wealth. The metallic silver bangle necklace is worn by married women irrespective of age. Then he also explained about the *Karamojong* stools, these vary in size, the smaller stools are for the young men and the bigger stools are for the elders, the cutting of children hair and leaving hair in the middle symbolizes the clan one associates oneself with.



Achuka Peter

Kakajo slum *Kisenyi*, Kampala Uganda

Photo 2017, by Agnes Achola

2. Modern Dressing

Today, most of the leather crafts are being replaced by modern materials for example the wrappers, commonly known as bed sheets or “*Sukas*” that came into existence around 1970s, due to the enforced wearing of clothes. This has resulted into the disappearance of skin-made objects with most of their leather-crafts such as aprons, skirts, shields, and other smaller objects. “*Suka*” is a piece of colourful cloth designed in geometrical lines, which is usually about two meters long. The women cut the piece of cloth and sew it into pleated skirts by hand and while the men use them as wrappers by wrapping them around their shoulders or waist. Its origin is not well defined, but since the Masai people of Kenya use the same cloth, it’s possible that the *Karamojong* borrowed this way of dressing from the Masai since they are also nomads.

The indigenous *Karamojong* was content with what he made and therefore also got suspicious about any other thing that was foreign because they believed that it could be carrying diseases. Thus, for a long time, *Karamojong* craft work of hide and skin took a strong position in the society. It took a considerable amount of time to evolve and develop these crafts, until suddenly most of them were brought to an end by the introduction of clothes, shoes, belts and other imported goods.

Today, much of the laborious work is being avoided since it is very difficult to obtain wild animals’ skins, the people have now limited themselves using cows’ tails as whiskers. And sometimes, instead of using a tail of an animal, the people use wood on which interesting patterns are curved.

Although there is transformation taking place among the *Karamojong* people, they have managed to maintain the making of leather bands for arms and legs. These consist of several leather strings that are woven individually, by using only two stripes, since the strings should be thin, later then it is sewn on a leather band on one spot and varying heights, so that they overlap when they hang down.

In *Karamoja*, just like in any other part of African society, art has become a daily occupation of some people. This is why most of the art and crafts have been found in every society. In this respect, specialization is not absent, but relatively a large number of people in the society are competent in all the arts and crafts, thus the aesthetic activities are closely related to the whole function of life. The craft work of making decorative objects in *Karamoja* is one of the unlimited fields. Even today, despite of the new developments, the people still deal with quite a number of indigenous crafts only for decorations and sale but not mainly for any functional purpose. The crafts that are still mostly in daily use include costumes, such as aprons of all types, skin skirts, ornaments that is both for legs and arms, spears, shields, house-hold objects like clay pots, *gouards* and containers etc. The *Karamojong* attire has maintained its traditional look, especially the colourful nature and length of the skirt, the coloured bed sheets have been in long use by the *Karamojong*, and the only change is that currently

they are sewed to fit any design.

Originally the *Karamojong* women were not interested in the skirt, because they were wearing hides and skins until when the cows reduced due to cattle rustling, this is when they started wearing the modern dress. However, the hides are still being kept for traditional events.

I remember attending one of the dancing ceremonies in 2010, in Moroto district, this is the most memorial dance performance that I cannot forget, the ceremonial garments are usually more beautiful and colourful than the daily ones and this is the time when a young girl or boy wins admiration from the opposite sex. The arrangement of the beads is a major key to the attractiveness of a particular piece of work. The alternative design of the beads and skin is one of the methods whereby the people choose outstanding coloured skins, mostly black, which contrasts so well with any of the beads. In order to maintain this beauty, the object is smeared with oil from time and again, so that it remains smooth and shiny. A social gathering is always like a centre for fashion show, where a multi-collection of designs is displayed since every person has a choice of his own. The audience can easily be struck by the varied imagination and creativity. The *Karamojong* people today face a lot of challenges just like their fellow crafts artists in Uganda, this is also due to the pressure of demand and supply in response to modern facilities, however, among the adapted crafts by the people is that of drum-making. Traditionally, drum making was not regarded as part of the *Karamojong* activities, this are new developments that have come up in *Karamoja* due to the pressure of surviving. The drums are being made usually for musical purposes or as for decorations and for sale.

The *Karamojong* as we have seen above, appreciates regularity and perfection. The craft man seems to have had a prior planning for the work, however simple it may be. Most important of all the *Karamojong* people had to put in consideration the purpose of the object and secondly, to whom the object would be beneficial and therefore the attractiveness and beauty range from the intensively decorated garments.



Karamojong women, dance performance in *Moroto* district, 2010

Photos: Agnes Achola.

The women above were matching while clapping their hands and singing approaching the stage to meet their dance partners. This kind of gathering is often organized in *Karamoja* districts by non-governmental organisations to sensitize the people in this region of new developments. And since most of them do not have connections with the outer world, for example like having telephones, radios, not to mention even televisions, the elders then take responsibility of informing the local people by using a cow horn as a whistle through blowing it and then the people get information about what is happening in their area. The women are dressed in the famous colourful vest and skirts, beads around their waist and neck, of course the head gears and arm-lets, have to be part of the fashion. The vests, beads and “*suka*” (bed sheet) that these women are wearing, their origin is not known. Since the Masai of Kenya wear similar attire, the bed sheets or wrappers are being imported from Kenya, and regarding the beads and vests, there are local markets that are in the region and some Ugandans travel to *Karamoja* to sell their items and they bring these things along with them, of course knowing

the interest of the people.

At the background, one is confronted with a different view housing, a modern way of building houses in Uganda, the materials include; iron sheets, cement, bricks, paints etc. which contradicts with *Karamojong* architecture, this can be offices or hotels for visitors that come to Moroto town. Besides the women approaching the stage to meet their dance partners, there are a number of people also arriving to attend the occasion.



Karamojong women and men dancing, Moroto district, 2010.

Photo: Agnes Achola.



Karamojong audience watching performance, Moroto district, 2010.

Photo: Agnes Achola

In the above dancing performance, one observes the women dressed in different colours of skirts, T-shirts, waist beads, arm-let and some women are wearing head gears and others not. There is only one woman wearing a modern sandal and others are bare feet, but all are holding a stick. And with the men, their famous car tyre sandals never miss on their feet, with their colourful bed sheets (wrappers) wrapped around their waist in different colours and on top is the vest commonly called “*eplan*.” And wearing the colourful beads as necklaces, both men and women wear jewellery in *Karamojong* tradition but this time, the men are not wearing their famous traditional head gears. The man standing behind women dancing dressed in a modern attire, is blowing a whistle by guiding the dancers as his duty during the performance. This is extremely an intimate dance performance, it is a way of introducing young women and men to find their future partners for marriage, however, there is still resistance towards modernity, and the people still appreciate and maintain some of their tradition versus modernity.

Today, the *Karamojong* people have combined their craft work with their traditional skills with the foreign influence, and as such, they have accomplished what one may call a new form of leather-craft, the people are still very consistent with their indigenous tradition. New adaptations are being made in the fields of leather-craft, for example; modern handbags, pocket money and drums.

The method of trade is also mixed whereby some objects are obtained through exchanging goods like in the old days, while other products are being bought using money. Therefore, the present *Karamojong* is being pulled by two forces, the traditional and the modern forces. In this case, some crafts have at least continued to survive despite the external pressure, for example, it may take some before the *Karamojong* stool (neck rest) disappears. Some of these articles have begun prolonging their existence by being worked on with a thought to sell them to the tourist. However, the work which has been surrounded to the present moment by concentrated artistic values, is now becoming weak and cheap.

Karamojong people have been facing a lot of pressure from the government of Uganda regarding their tradition and culture and by using force on them to accept developments in their region. The parents have been forced to take their children to schools, in this case children must wear school uniforms, this conflicts with the *Karamojong* state of mind, since they have their own system of bringing up their children and they view these act in way of taking away their cultural expression. However, most Ugandans also look at *Karamojong* people and even say it out loud that the culture is backward, the *Karamojong* way of life is not appreciated. Literacy is too often associated with western education ideology, which has imposed discipline and social control on the nomadic pastoralists. The current education programmes in *Karamoja* have been unsuccessfully adapted to

meet the educational needs of the young *Karamojong*, who are instead mocked by their elders for their lack of knowledge of pastoralist techniques. They have also criticised the formal education that has separated their children from their communities, there are quite a number of organisations working together with Ugandan government in *Karamoja* district to find a solution to the resistance of education in *Karamoja*. There are ideas of alternative basic education for *Karamoja* (ABEK²⁶), which seeks to adapt the curriculum to the needs of *Karamojong* children who have dropped out of school. The school seeks to provide a more relevant education that is including lessons in livestock management, crop production and peace and security.

²⁶ ABEK (Alternative Basic Education for Karamoja), Strategic Review

Saverio Krätli

www.researchgate.net/publication/294088836_ABEK_Alternative_Basic_Education_for_Karamoja_Strategic_Review_2009

05 May, 2018.

a. Men Dress

The young *Karamojong* men wrap a sheet around their waist, pairing it a vest called called eplan in any colour. The older men, however, tie the sheet across their bodies and over the shoulders. The bed sheets originate from Kenya among the Masai, The *Karamojong* and Masai peoples have some similarities in their traditions. The *Karamojong* dress code is usually not complete without a stick known as “*Ebela*” and a stool called “*Ekicholong*”. Sticks are carried along by *Karamojong* people due to their kind of work as pastoralists, stool is used for resting when one gets tired while the cattle is grazing on the fields. The shoes or sandals are made from car tyres commonly known as “*Ngatangai*”.

The men can decide to wear beads locally known as “*Ngachilo*” around their waist just to enhance the appeal of the dress code, the beaded arm-let can also be worn on the arms or across the chest depending on its design, or on any part of the body that one desires. Men also wear a hat with feathers, the most preferred is the ostrich feather.

b. Women dressing

The women dress is usually made from bed sheets that is then hand sewn into skirts, it is sewn with folded pleats or hides, and it is then decorated with beads to make it attractive. The skirt is referred to as “*Abwo*”.

The skirt that is made from hides is however, the most commonly worn by the *Karamojong* women as a traditional attire. The skirt is also paired with a vest that is similar to that worn by men, except that there is a variation in colour. The women wear their attire that is also accompanied with beads, made as ear-rings, necklaces waist belts and head gears and this are all called “*Ngachillo*”.

The style of the skirts that many women now wear started as an abuse to general Andrew Guti, it has been said that he used to beat the *Karamojong* people during the abolishment of guns in *Karamoja* district. It was said that “*Guti*” was too tough on his own people when he was 3rd division commander, he applied force while searching for guns. People then decided to find a way of abusing him without him realizing.

A *Karamojong* woman then designed a skirt and when she wore it, she danced alone while chanting insults at “*Guti*” and since then, every *Karamojong* woman copied and designed this skirt for themselves.

During my visit in 2010 in Moroto District, I managed to interact with the local people in *Karamoja*, whereby I met one educated *Karamojong* man called *Nangiro Simon Achuka*, who then provided me with more details about *Karamojong* tradition.

Nangiro Simon Achuka who spoke very fluent English was then working with a non-governmental organization, this organization was formed in 2003 to provide a common forum or platform through which the people could articulate issues of concern and advocate for improved conditions for *Karamoja* in relation to peace, human rights and development. However, the organization's main interest is that they do emphasize that development actors need to act in harmony, and that disjointed efforts cannot bring about the desired impact that is needing to be seen in *Karamoja*. *Riamiriam*²⁷ stands for revitalizing indigenous or traditional mechanisms for peace building to make the indigenous people own and feel part of the process.

Nangiro Simon Achuka, worked with a non-governmental organization called *Riamiriam Civil Society Network* as a mobilizer assistant in *Karamoja* between 2006-2010. And later, was jobless.

During my interaction with *Nangiro Simon Achuka*, I saw a lot of women and girls wearing the “*suka*” skirts in different colours. This skirts that are made out of “*suka*” (wrappers) usually have stripes or lines that are already printed in them, but what the *Karamojong* women and girls do is, they do buy these “*sukas*” themselves in the local market in their area, which comes in different colours, and then it is upon the owner to decide on which colours she would combine together to give multiple colours in their piece of skirt. It is important for the *Karamojong* females that these skirts are able to swing left and right when worn by the owner.

However, I did get interest of owning one of this “*suka*” skirts, and since the *Karamojong* people do not interact that easily with strangers, I had to ask *Nangiro Simon Achuka* if he would ask one of the women to design for me a skirt which he did. He introduced me to the lady below in the pictures, we got her doing her household duties, and she sacrificed her time to design my “*suka*” skirt, she asked me then to go to the market and buy materials that was needed. This included; “*suka*”, elastic textile material, razor blade, needle and thread. The “*suka*” is usually is sold in two and half meter pieces, when I brought the materials to her, I was extremely curious how she would start the process of the work. She observed the textiles by looking at the length and width that needs to cut by the razor blade and how to two different fabrics would be combined together to make the final piece of my “*suka*” skirt, she then took a piece and wrapped around my waist, to find out the size of my waist line, and that seemed to me that was the only important measurement to her. Since she had limited resources that can speed up her work, she was at same time happy to utilize what is available. The razor blade was used for cutting the fabric instead of a pair scissors. I wondered how much time she would take to finish the “*suka*” skirt, so I decided to walk around the village for about four hours and by the time

²⁷ www.riamiriam-csn-karamoja.pirengo.org/about-organisation

15 August, 2010

I came back, the “*suka*” had already taken its form into a skirt. She asked me to fit in, in order to see if there is need for correction more especially around the waist line. The “*suka*” skirts are usually hand sewn in pleats, which involves a lot work by folding the textile around the waist line of the skirt during the process of sewing, the choice of the wrappers is usually important since their flexibility and durability are as well considered. The texture of the textile that is both soft and slightly hard are much easily formed, these can be easily folded and sewn together. The whole process and finishing of the work took about six hours, I am amazed with these process of work with very few resources available that has made me own my “*suka*” skirt, the simplicity and creativity that has been applied in this piece of work makes one reflect on our world today, that is if it is really necessary to keep up with mass production of materials that we do not need in the name of consumption.

The *Karamojong* women have not yet taken a lot of interest in exploring textiles, since this is still new to their culture. Although there is a lot of tailoring being practised as a source of income for most Ugandans, the people of *Karamoja* has not picked up interest in things like sewing machines, scissors etc. that has been in use now for many years. By observing the photos below, the surrounding where *Karamojong* woman was sewing my “*suka*” skirt, there are things like the plastic “*jerricans*” for collecting water, saucepans, some plastic utensils, bottles of beers for sale next to her etc. but no single table that she could use for laying the bed sheet (wrapper) to do this kind of work. However, one sees the spontaneity and flexibility being approached towards this work, it could be due to the lifestyle that people have gone through, since they have semi-arid climate and being nomads could be the reason for this flexibility and spontaneity. Whereas in other parts of Uganda where tailoring is the main source of income for most people, the approach to these work is different, the first steps involves; sketching the original idea on a paper but most tailors also prefer writing down by taking notes of the customers’ needs, taking measurements of the customer, cutting shapes into patterns which makes the pieces of this attire, and this pieces are usually cut on table in contrary to the *Karamojong* woman who is using her lap or body as a table. The tailors in Uganda usually have small space that they work from, in Kampala, which is found in central part of Uganda, tailors share space in one small room whereby they are only able to put in their sewing machines and use the side space on top of the machine as a table in order to cut the textiles and the rented space is paid monthly by each individual to the owner of the room. The tailors in different parts of Uganda use different textiles that are modern compared to that of the *Karamojong* people, since people from these areas prefer modern textiles that are usually imported from china or other western countries are more in demand. The colours of these textiles are all not that colourful like the preferred colours by the *Karamojong* people, which makes them unique with their choices.



Karamojong woman in the process of hand-sewing my *suka-skirt*.

Medium: bed sheet (*suka*), razor blade, needle and thread.

Photo: Agnes Achola. 2010.



Karamojong preparation of designing suka skirt, Moroto district 2010.

Photo: Agnes Achola. 2010.

I remember when I was growing up, my mother had a sewing machine at home that she used for repairing our torn dresses or even make adjustments whenever it was needed, the reason why am bringing this memory is that where I come from which is Lira District not far from *Karamoja* Districts, we have similarities in culture and tradition, makes me wonder how *Karamojong* people can be so consistent in maintaining and protecting their tradition despite the external influence. They have managed to keep the authenticity in their tradition, however the tailors both in *Karamoja* districts and other parts of Uganda face different challenges, for example; some customers are reluctant to pay for the services and the materials which are very expensive, nevertheless *Karamojong* creative imagination have remained consistent compared to other Ugandan tailors and whereas the modern Ugandans that are stressed up with consumption of new fashion, the *Karamojong* seemed to be still satisfied with their garments “*Suka*”.



Karamojong Woman sewing my Skirt, Moroto District, 2010.

Medium: needle, thread, *suka* and razor blade.

Photo: Agnes Achola.



Fitting in my *Karamojong* skirt, Moroto district, 2010.

Photo: Agnes Achola.

c. Dress or Clothing

What is dress or clothing? The authors of Encyclopaedia Britannica²⁸ define dress, which is also sometimes called apparel or attire, clothing and accessories for the human body. However, the variety of dress is immense, that is depending on the style that particular individual selects, that is often linked to that person`s sex, age, socio-economic status, culture, geographical area, and historical era, explain the authors. Regarding the *Karamojong* historical background, the dressing code was mainly skins and hides that they obtained from the animals, and things like ornaments that were used, was connected to their initiation practices which was also connected to their tradition and culture since they were pastoralists. Many scholars believe, however, that the first crude garments and ornaments that were worn by humans were designed not for utilitarian but for religious or ritual purposes. Especially in the western world, whereby dressing and clothing began long before than in African or Asian countries, the basic functions of dress include identifying the wearer, that is by providing information about sex, age, occupation, or other characteristics and by making the wearer more attractive.

Since the dress, itself also determines which kind of climate is conducive for what type of attire, here the *Karamojong* peoples of north eastern Uganda, preferred having minimum clothing or accessories on their bodies, they like being naked both female and male, this is due to semi-arid climate that they experience. The authors also mention that although it is clear why such uses of dress developed and remain significant to determine how they are achieved, some garments thought of as beautiful and offers protection whatsoever and may in fact even injure the wearer. The authors also point out that the items that identify one wearer can lose their meaning in another time and place, in contrary regarding the *Karamojong* people who have been consistent in their way of dressing, they have maintained and protected their interest in their culture and tradition despite the pressure that come from external influence of modernity. However, the authors also point out that due to high consumption, clothes that are deemed handsome in one period are declared downright ugly in the next and even uniforms- the simplest and most easily identified costumes- are subject to change.

Here the authors pose questions, that each of us need to reflect about!

²⁸ ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA; Written by: Pauline Simmons, Anne Wood Murray, James Laver, Doreen Yarwood, Diana Julia Alexandra de Marly.

www.britannica.com/topic/dress-clothing/The-nature-and-purpose-of-dress#ref294821

05 May, 2018.

- What are the reasons for such changes?
- Why do people replace garments before they are worn out?
- Why does fashion, as opposed to mere dress, exist?

Authors admit that there are no simple answers to such questions, of course one reason is influenced by a multitude of others, but certainly one of the most prevalent theories is that fashion evolved in conjunction with capitalism and the development of modern socio-economic classes. Thus, in relatively static societies with limited movement between classes, as in many parts of Asia until modern times or in Europe before the Middle Ages, styles did not undergo a pattern of change. In contrast, when lower classes can copy upper classes, the upper classes quickly instigate changes that demonstrate their authority and high position.

X. HISTORY OF COTTON IN UGANDA



By Garstaff, January 25, 2018. Gulf Africa Review.

www.gulfaficareview.com/25/01/2018/business/ssa-investments-signs-mou-uganda-trade-minister-cotton-rivival/

16 May, 2018, 11:50 am.

Cotton growing in Uganda is said to have been introduced in the country by the British Colonialist in 1903, to be specific, they were the British Cotton Growers Association²⁹, under then the British colonial government as the first cash crop. The British Cotton Growing Association was an organisation that was formed of various bodies connected with the Lancashire cotton industry that was formed in 1902 in order to reduce the industry's dependency on supplies of raw cotton from the United States by promoting the development of cotton growing in the British Empire. However, it has been said that and described as a combination of non-governmental organization and a development agency. And since it provided development funds without requiring any direct repayment but in long term, they did expect the Lancashire cotton industry to benefit indirectly from more secure cotton supplies. And since the association had their own interests in the cotton growing,

²⁹ www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_British_Cotton_Growing_Association#Foundation

15 May, 2018. 12:00.

they were involved in the distribution of cotton seed which would produce the types of cotton its members required and by providing expertise, both at no costs. It has been said that, while production was carried out in Uganda by small scale farmers, ginning was done in Kenya and the lint was then exported to Liverpool to service the British textile mills. The growing of cotton in Uganda started in the central part of the country-*Buganda*, and eventually spread to the rest of the country. Between 1903 and 1930, it was grown purely as a governmental crop whereby it was a mandatory to all the peoples of Uganda to take it as a serious activity. This kind of mandatory activity, reminds me as a young girl growing up, working in the cotton field with my family although we did not have a big piece of land, these was another way of generating household income and since the spinning mill factory was a 20 minutes' walk from our home, it was very easy to deliver our cotton to the factory. Cotton was always among the crops we were planting. The production of cotton as a cash crop also overshadowed the indigenous crops. However, during the same period, private sector, mainly of Indian origin, established ginneries across the country and took over processing and marketing while the British government retained the research, seed breeding, extension services, input supply and quality control functions. It is said that in addition to these functions, the British government in Uganda established three textile mills and one spinning mill in the late 1950s to add value to lint and absorb the increasing production. There was high production of cotton during this time, which increased to 371,000 bales by 1960/ 61. And since it was a mandatory activity whereby every family had to grow cotton in Uganda, the population revolted against the private sector due to exploitation and as a result, farmers cooperatives emerged around 1962 when Uganda became independent. The government compensated the private sector and took over ownership of the ginneries totalling to about fifty and handed them over to the cooperative unions. Cooperatives still performed very well in the beginning, because there was transparency and accountability, and inputs and crop finance were delivered through the union. The new Ugandan independent government set up a Lint Marketing Board (LMB) with monopoly to trade in all the lint and cotton seed and as a result, the production of cotton was high up to 470,000 bales of lint in 1969/70. During the early 1970s to 1980s, civil war strike Uganda which led to economic turmoil and poor governance and all the activities of the cotton sector were severely affected. As cotton was a mandatory activity to the people of Uganda and since at this time there was insecurity in the country, cotton growing was abandoned and cotton being an annual crop could not survive. And due to insecurity in the country, production fell drastically reaching the lowest level of 11,000 bales in 1987/88. During this time, the new government came to power, and still in leadership until today, Ugandan cotton has still ceased to be traded by grade on the international market and was instead traded by source of ginnery of the lint.

XI. COTTON PRODUCTION IN UGANDA TODAY

Cotton production in Uganda is dominated by small-scale farmers, whose productivity is often depended on by lack of resources necessary for cotton production including quality seeds, spray pumps, pesticides and fertilizers. The farmers are not able to irrigate their cotton fields during the time of droughts, other factors which have affected the cotton production include low prices, collapse of cooperative unions and alternative uses of cotton seeds. Besides the informal production, cotton processing including colouring, weaving and tailoring etc. has never been successful industrially in Uganda compared to other countries in Asia or Latin America. The main problem has been due to lack of infrastructure, transport-roads and costs, as well as lack of machines to finish the products are extremely expensive and due to lack of capital, there has been no investment in this area. The civil wars in Uganda also contributed to the collapse of cotton production, for example; formerly Lira Spinning Mill, stopped functioning in 1984 following the collapse of the cotton sector. The collapse also contributed to the downfall of other sectors for example; the African Mills Limited in *Mbale*, *Nyanza* Textiles Industries Limited in *Jinja* and the Uganda Garment Industry Limited. Cotton production once being the biggest foreign income earner, was hit hard by the setbacks such as fluctuating world prices and therefore ginners closed up in the cotton growing areas of eastern, northern and western Uganda.

Today small scale-farmers are beginning to start growing cotton again³⁰, the production is not as big yet like in the 1960s/70s but is picking up at a slow pace. The cotton growing now is being introduced and encouraged by the foundation that was introduced by Dr. Michael Otto which is called Cotton made in Africa (CmiA)³¹, is an initiative of the Aid by Trade foundation, this was established in 2005, based on the conviction that only by sustainable development the livelihoods of the future generations and vital resources can be protected. However, the foundation main aim is also to promote environmental protection and to improve the living conditions in the developing Countries. Some of the cotton ginneries that have managed to rise up in Uganda today are *Kasese Nyakatonzi* growers, Global Cotton Limited *Tororo*, *Arapi Teso* Co-operation Union-*Soroti*, *Aboke Rafiki* cotton Industries-*Apac*.

³⁰ www.ardmediathek.de/tv/W-wie-Wissen/Baumwolle=ausAfrika/Das-Erste/Video?bcastId=427262&documentId=38897412

Video available: 12 November, 2016 until 11 November, 2021. 6 May, 2018.

³¹ www.cottonmadeinafrica.org/en

21 May, 2018

There are other organisations in Europe that have also high interests in cotton growing in Uganda³², this is because of its fertile soil and tropical land, with a lot of rainfall that is favourable for cotton growing that needs much water for its growth. Some of these organisations are fair trade cotton from Uganda that is investing in cotton which opens markets for Ugandan farmers, Cotonea is a foundation of cotton mill Elmer and Zweifel, which is owned by cousins Friedrich and Heinrich Elmer, this was founded in 1885 in Germany. And still in family ownership, the company produces common textiles like clothing, beddings and later started specialising in textiles for medical and technical purposes and baby care textiles. Cotonea describes their philosophy as need to be of value for all. Cotonea also mentions that the farmers' benefits are financial security, strengthening the farmers' confidence and in return Cotonea itself has control over the quality and purity of its cotton. However, Cotonea is in cooperation with other companies in Europe that supplies them with organic cotton from Uganda, for example; Hefel-Bed³³ and Sleep in Austria that uses the organic cotton from Uganda to produce mattresses, pillows, bed sheets etc. A big percentage or if not all, the raw cotton that is being produced by small-scale farmers are being exported to Europe for its consumption in the textiles industry and now the question arises;

- Are the small-scales farmers and Uganda as country benefiting fairly in the partnership?³⁴
- And what percentage of raw cotton are left for the Ugandan factories and industries?

With all these interests in cotton being grown in Uganda, from different organisations from Europe, more especially German, are all the partners involved equally and inclusive? When I observed and reflected on the profile of Cotton Made in Africa (CmiA), their Board of Trustees Foundation that is based on decision making, are all male dominated with only one African man who is originally from Kenya. And the management of Board Guided of the Foundation's Work, includes two women and one man which are all based in Hamburg. The gender and racial aspects of this foundation is questionable, if at all, it respects and values inclusion. The cotton production that is being grown and produced for consumption for this foreign companies, has no single representation in their company profile from Uganda. And although a good percentage of women work in the cotton fields as well,

³² www.cotton.com/toxid-curl/manufacturing/countries-of-origin/

³³ Hefel-Bed And Sleep- Made in Austria

www.hefel.com/de/unternehmen#Made_in_Austria

21 May, 2018

³⁴ www.innovatedevelopment.org/2014/04/28/investing-in-fair-trade-cotton-opens-markets-for-ugandan-farmers

22 May, 2018. 12:00.

not to mention a Ugandan woman in the management position, there is also only two German women on top position who are based in Hamburg from whole company profile.

Should this kind of partnership remind us of colonial times in Africa? Modern Colonialism? The company makes all the decisions, meaning it has powers all over the production and the selling of the products. However, cotton made in Africa, also reveals that they work especially with textile companies or stakeholders based in Europe, for example; Otto (GmbH & Co KG), Rewe Group, Tchibo GmbH.

The Ugandan factories and textiles industries are still low in their production and exportation of textiles to other countries although there are also other raw materials like the bark cloth that is still used for ceremonial purposes could be modernised and refined for modern consumption.



Investing in fair trade cotton opens markets for Ugandan farmers³⁵

³⁵ www.innovatedevelopment.org/2014/04/28/investing-in-fair-trade-cotton-opens-markets-for-ugandan-farmers



Beddings shop, Gumpendorferstraße, Vienna, Austria. 2018.

Photo: Agnes Achola.

Cotton being grown in Uganda, there are also other possibilities of using other fabrics, like I mentioned above bark cloth which is got from a special tree locally known as “*Mutuba*” (*Fiscus Natalensis*) in Uganda, it can be obtain in its original or steamed colour that is locally produced by small-scale farmers. Another solution besides bark as an organic raw materials is *Kanga* clothes.

“*Kanga*” is a rectangle, which is made of pure cotton cloth with a border all around it, printed in bold designs and bright colours. It is as long as the span of out stretched arms and wide enough to cover one from neck to knee, or from chest to toe. *Kangas* are usually bought and worn as a pair.

Kanga cloth originated on the coast of East Africa in the mid-19th century, it is said that some ladies in Zanzibar got an idea of buying printed kerchiefs in lengths of six meters, from bolt cotton cloth, from which kerchiefs were usually cut off and sold single. They then cut the six meters into two lengths of three and sewed these together along one side to make 3- by- 2 sheet; or bought different kinds of kerchiefs and sewed them back together to form very individual designs.

The new design was then called “*leso*” that is still commonly used today by East African people. However, it is not clear if the early designs had a border and pattern of white spots on a dark background. The buyers quickly came to call these cloths “*kanga*” after a noisy, social guinea-fowl (bird) with its elegant spotty plumage. *Kanga* designs have evolved over the years, from simple spots and borders to huge variety of elaborate patterns of every conceivable motif and colour. For century, *Kangas* were mostly designed and printed in India and Europe. And since the 1950s, more kangas have been designed and printed in Tanzania, Kenya, and other African countries.



Kanga piece of cloth Kampala market, 2010. Own collection.

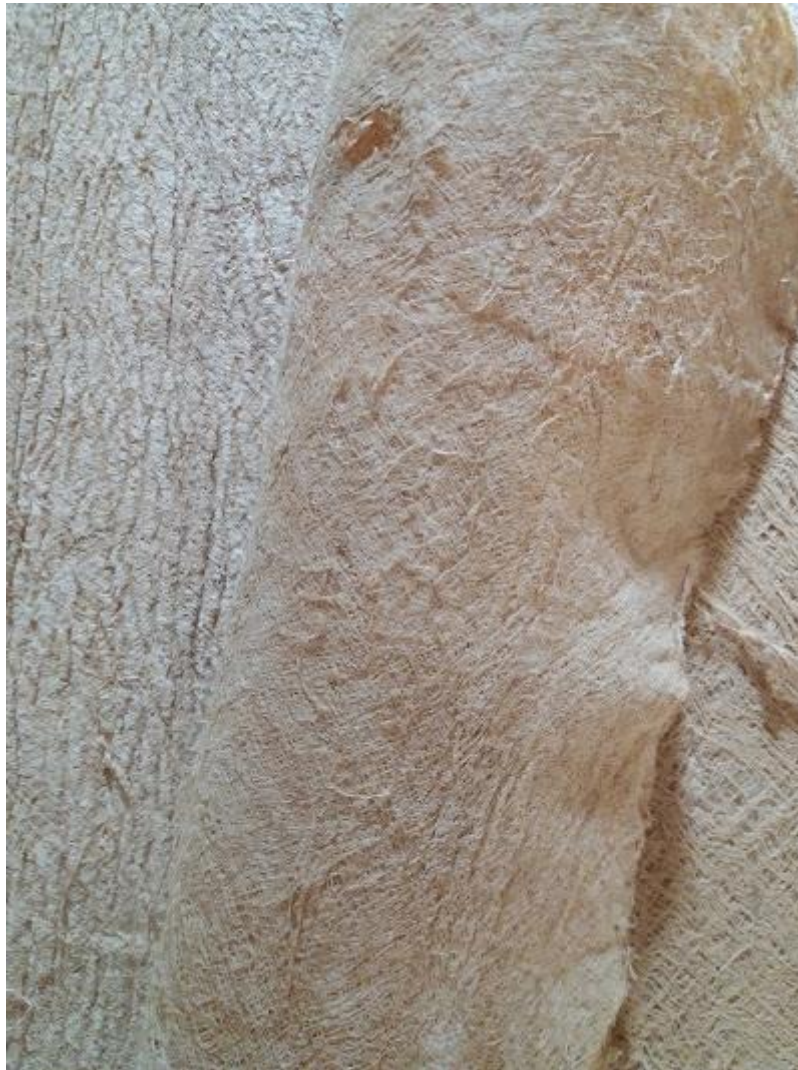
Photo: Agnes Achola.

The writings on the *kanga* piece of cloth is in “Swahili” language, this is a language that is being spoken by East African people besides the colonial language English. The printed words on the *kanga* cloth usually are either social or political messages that are conveyed by the society to make their voices heard that is depending on the circumstances. The piece of cloth is one and half meters long, that can be wrapped around the body, just like the *Karamojong* use their colourful piece of cloth which their origin is not clearly known. In this case, the people of *Karamoja* could use *kanga* cloth instead of second-hand clothes that is if the modern world is insisting that pastoralist must dress up just like any other person. But how about the *Karamojong* designing their own *Kanga* clothes in their favourite colours that are suitable for them? And since they are creative people and when given a chance to explore their own expertise, I believe they would excel. Why not give it a chance?



Kanga piece of cloth³⁶, Kampala market, 2010. Own collection.
Photo: Agnes Achola.

³⁶ “Swahili” is a language being spoken in East African countries, “Swahili” was also used during the time of slave trade as means of communication between the Arabs and East African people. I do understand and speak a few sentences but not fluent. For instance, the writings on the above Kanga clothes; “TANU MIAKA” means Five Years and “NDIYO MUNGU” means Yes God.



Original bark cloth from Uganda, 2010. Own collection.

Photo: Agnes Achola.

Bark cloth is not a material that is only found in Uganda, but also in other countries like China and Fiji. The process of making bark cloth is simple, the bark of the trees is peeled off, and outer layer separated from the inner light-coloured layer. This is soaked in water and then beaten on an anvil with a mallet-anvils and mallets may be made of either wood or stone. The purpose of beating is to spread the fibres of the bast and make it into a thinner, wider and suppler fabric. Sometimes several layers of bark are felted together with further beating, sometimes a single layer only is used. Certainly, the prolonged heavy beating causes a degree fibrillation which aids felting. The art of making this bark cloth is environmentally friendly, the tree is not cut down in order to process the bark, when the bark of the tree is removed, and it is then covered with leaves to maintain its humidity for further

growth. It performs all the cultural functions of cloth, functions that are both sacred and secular. However, the “*Baganda*” people of Central Uganda use bark cloth in their cultural activities until today, it is mainly used for interior designs, art and crafts that are meant for daily use or ceremonial purposes.



Steamed bark cloth on sale, Workshop in Kampala, 2010. Own collection.

Photo: Agnes Achola.

These are just a few possibilities that we have in Uganda and East Africa, not to mention Africa as a continent with diverse cultural background of techniques of different textiles, makes me wonder about the big second-hand cloth markets that has spread all over African countries and by not even singling out the *Karamojong* people. And today this natural organic material has not yet been exposed to the world as an alternative raw material that could be used besides cotton or other synthetic fibres that is being used to produce most if textiles, this makes it remain an indigenous material.

XII. SECOND-HAND CLOTHES MARKET IN UGANDA



Second-hand cloth, *Owino* market, Kampala, 2006.

Photo: Agnes Achola.



Second-hand cloth, *Owino* market, Kampala 2006.

Photo: Agnes Achola.

Like we all know that, there is high consumption of textile in Europe and United States, and since clothes are being sold cheaply in the shops, most of the people like dressing up in new fashion that is every season; summer, autumn, winter and spring. There are new collections of fashion in every season and therefore the people are under pressure to keep up with the styles that come in the market and this results into disposing or giving away clothes that are still in good conditions. This has an effect on our environment and other people who end up receiving these clothes. For Uganda`s case, the liberalisation and opening of Ugandan markets to the West in the 1980s, promoted by World Bank, allowed used clothing to pour in and finish off the industry by substituting a new one depending on the Western countries.

Most of the second-hand clothes come from Europe and United States of America through dealers that buy the clothes in bales (package), it is not clear exactly which countries but what people know is that they are from these two continents mentioned above. For Uganda`s case, 15 kilogram which is the smallest, costs 300,000 Ugandan shillings and upwards, the prices are not clear, since there is a chance to bargain the prices, and while growing up in Uganda, I know very well that the first price is not the final price, so there are chances of reducing the costs. The clothes are then sorted out and then sold out to other dealers or direct. Second-hand clothes are sold in every market, everywhere in Uganda.

However, it is said that most of these clothes has been donated by people wanting to help others, for example; small organisations like Caritas, Humana etc. and some are cheap imports from China, although their quality is lower than Western Second-hand clothes. Most of the Ugandans make good money selling used clothes, this is also due to high unemployment, 80% of the youth are jobless, it is a big business and these clothes are very cheap. It is estimated that 80% of the clothes worn in Uganda are second-hand clothes and imported.

Recently, there have been discussions about Second-hand clothing by East African Governments regarding abolishing second-hand clothes import from the Western world. This has aroused some tension from United States by sending a warning to Uganda, Rwanda and Tanzania on notification by the United States threatening suspension of duty-free status for Rwandan apparel products under African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), this came after the decision that was made by East African countries to raise tariffs on second-hand clothing imports, in order to promote local manufacturing capacity in garment and other industries.

Although the East African countries would like to promote the manufacturing of their own textiles, the wax or batik textiles that are widely worn by African people is said, was invented originally by the Dutch, who intended to sell it in Indonesia in 1800s, as a result the colonialists rejected it, leading

the Dutch to transport it to for sale in their African Colonies instead. Until today, the wax or batik textiles that the African people wear now, are still being manufactured in the Netherlands and then later exported to the African countries.

In a group project that I participated, and a book was released in 2010, with a title called *Sketches of Migration, Post-colonial Enmeshments and Anti-racist Construction Work*. Among other works of mine in the book, I also tackled the topic of second-hand clothes in Uganda. I termed the second-hand clothes “leftovers”, the use of second-hand clothes in my work reminded me of one of the biggest markets locally called “*Owino*” in Kampala that is dealing in this business, and the local name given to this “leftover” is known as “*Mivumba*”. One can find everything that one needs at the market, from socks and underwear to night-dresses etc.

However, I did use second-hand clothes to reflect on my life and on that of other African people living in Austria; here the questions arise;

-What are second-hand clothes?

-Why are they called second-hand?

-Why do they exist?

In my own understanding, second-hand clothes or leftovers are items that a person does not need any more, is worn out or considered not useful. In relation to my work, they represent the life of Africans in Austria: In the form, the frame of the body is designed in wire mesh, symbolising limited movement or freedom! This means being without a work permit or having a work permit but not being able to get a job even with the right qualification due to discrimination, as a result the mind becomes redundant. Poverty makes one creative...one must find a way out...in which direction? Which road does one choose? The answer is open. The paths and possibilities remain open. Poverty forces action.



Second-hand clothes collected and cut into pieces in Vienna.

Collective Art Project, Agnes Achola, Sketches of Migration, Post-colonial Enmeshment and Anti-racist Construction Work. 2010.



Media: wire mesh, Second-hand clothes and red pepper.

Collective Art Project, Agnes Achola. Sketches of Migration, Post-colonial Enmeshments and Anti-racist Construction Work. 2010.

When we look at other African countries that are having the technical knowledge of designing and printing their own textiles; The “*Bambara*” people of Central Mali practise the craft of “*Bogolanfini*” which is a textile printing method using mud. These local productions suffer due to the import of second hand clothes from the West. Uganda is not alone. *Neil Kearny*, General Secretary of the International Textile Garment and Leather Workers Federation, points out that in Zimbabwe some 20 000 textile and clothing jobs have disappeared directly or indirectly due to imported used clothing from the West.

South Africa has lost 20 000 and Senegal 7 000 jobs, while Kenya, Mozambique, Tanzania, Togo, Cote d’Ivoire and Ghana have been hit hard too. In fact, hardly a nation in Africa has escaped the attention of the importers.

Traders in Uganda complain about being cheated, when they open packages and find clothes that cannot be sold.



Second-hand cloth bales package, 2006 *Owino* market, Kampala.

Photo: Agnes Achola

Why do I bring in availability of different examples or options of producing textiles for instance the growing of cotton in Uganda and availability of other textiles in the continent of Africa? By observing the *Karamojong* people who are still new to this industry of dressing up in clothes, have not been given a chance of exploring the textiles produced in Uganda. This is due to the pressure that comes through globalisation, and design textile companies that are under pressure due to competition of producing modern fashion worldwide. In this case, the big design companies work on contract basis which provides licence contracts worldwide to diverse sub-contractors and it's not very clear how everything functions, but the main aim is to have cheap production. However, one notices that probably the most important criterion for the companies involved in the manufacture of this products are: cheap salaries, quantity, short contracts and delivery of their goods in short notice. The reactions or responses towards fashion and production time has drastically become less, for example the new collections of fashions that are being presented in Europe, two weeks later can be obtained as cheap

duplicate in H&M or C&A. The consumption of fashion articles has become a problem in the past and present time. At the moment, the concurrence pressure on the companies producing textiles is high, which also gives pressure on the employers working in the textile industries and a big percentage of them are women. The salaries paid are minimal, which does not even cover the minimum security of basic needs. The Work Agreements/Laws are usually not respected or followed, whereby the employees are not protected by wearing the right clothes, as a result, they get sick or are confronted with accidents due to negligence.

These seems to be the conditions under which today our textiles are being produced and offered worldwide, not only the cheap price of clothes that are on sales, but also expensive design articles. Companies like GAP, Adidas, Nike and other design companies produce their textiles and shoes in the free-business regions, what can bring them high profits.

There are some organisations that have come up to follow the working conditions in the international textile industries, in order to improve the lives of people working in this countries, in this case the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and non-governmental organisations like Süd Wind, that are involved in the campaigns for *Saubere Kleidung* (CCC – Clean Clothes Campaign), have started different initiatives and actions to create awareness.

Although there has been a huge protest by the textile companies against the International Labour Organisation for criticising their conditions of work, the campaign of *Saubere Kleidung* is creating awareness in the public and it is succeeding. The organisation insists on following the conditions and agreement in the contract by each single textile company and by also having attention to the lobbyists that they do follow the rules of the organisation. Through creating awareness with the consumers, some of the companies got afraid not to lose their image, therefore had to agree to the conditions of this organisations. However one cannot be fully sure if this conditions set by International Labour Organisation is respected by all the stakeholders, and since the production of textiles and its raw materials are being produced in other countries that have completely different conditions and ways of approaching work, some rules and conditions written in the agreement may not be conducive and followed up by the stakeholders, which makes it challenging for the textile companies since these rules are not effectively controlled by the production's original place. The International Labour Organisation and the Campaign for Clean Clothing have come up with one of the first and most important issues that through a strong inclusion of the consumers in different activities, can bring a huge impact worldwide.

However, when we see a country such as Bangladesh which is an agricultural state, and partially with the biggest moslem population of about 80% living in its land. The export economy is practically

textile oriented, most of the foreign companies use this chance to produce their textiles due to cheap salaries, for example; Karstadt-Quelle, Otto-Versand, Tchibo, Hennes and Mauritz. However there has been a trend in changes between the industrial and import countries since 2005, World Trade Organisation (WTO)³⁷ started a dialogue regarding textiles and clothing rules, this means that the import quotations which the industrial countries usually produced their cheap imported articles and protected it for their own benefits, have been reduced and eventually abolished. And therefore, the industrial countries have stopped the mechanism of protectionism and have opened their markets for importation. This means that for the textile industries like Bangladesh must be aware of the international markets in future regarding competition with many different developing countries, above all China in particular. Although the East African countries like Rwanda, Uganda and Tanzania have seen the negative impact of second-hand clothing and are restricting the import of this articles, but there is also still a close threat to the growth of textiles economy in East Africa. China has taken the whole of Africa by storm! The Chinese textile industry that produces their articles cheaply can supply their textiles worldwide which brings high competition for the developing countries. Countries like Uganda that have hardly any technology to boost the economy growth in textiles compared to China high and quantity production technologically, have less chance to be at the same level. This means that although Uganda aims at improving its textiles industries which has the potential since it has the advantage that the basic need that is important for producing textiles is cotton, is being grown and harvested in Uganda but needs to be well strategized for the economy to benefit from cotton, since technologically Uganda is weak. China has managed for the last ten years to sell its textiles products in Africa, most of these articles are cheap in price and quality. Most of the consumers complain about their quality in Uganda, but since there is not much choice between second-hand clothes and Chinese products, the people have no other alternative since there is no single industry or factory that produces massive articles for consumers, coffee is the only crop that is exported but not being consumed by the people because Ugandan people are tea drinkers.

³⁷ www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/whatis_e.htm

5 May, 2018.

Although countries like Rwanda, Uganda and Tanzania are demonstrating against the import of second-hand clothes, trade is a dominant feature of the clothing market in many sub-Saharan African countries, though it is gradually declining as a share of total African imports as cheap new imports are on the rise. However, the consumers still benefit a lot from this business, this is true in countries with low purchasing power, and for poorer consumers that choose to buy second-hand clothes. And consumption patterns generally have shifted away from locally tailored goods to imported goods. Since most of the people are unemployed, this is seen as the only source to support their livelihoods, whereby hundreds of thousands of people in developing countries who work in trading, distribution, repairing, restyling, washing etc. The second-hand clothing is deeply rooted in the African countries, whereby several countries feel insecure, if the absence of this trade would boost the local textile/garment production and would recover. As new imports from East Asia are flowing cheaply than locally produced goods in African countries, there are serious supply-side constraints.

Potential second-hand clothes impact on informal tailoring-is one of the informal employment sectors in Uganda, which appear to be limited or neutral. But given the importance of this sector, trends need to be closely monitored in each specific context in order to assess whether second-hand cloth trade is contributing over time to significant long-term displacement of employment.

There have been many researches about second-hand cloth that is being exported and sold in Africa, questions that have asked about these articles are; who are the consumers of the Second-hand cloth? And how significant is second-hand in clothing consumption?

The results of this research work reveal that over one-third of all people in sub-Saharan Africa are potential consumers of this articles, in Ghana 95 per cent of the people, that is both in urban and rural areas are consumers^{38,39}. The second-hand cloth represents approximately 70 per cent of all clothing purchases in Uganda, which is being purchased by the poor people due to low income, this could be a total clothing expenditure of about 45 per cent. However, countries like Zimbabwe purchase a combination of new clothing from retail outlets and Second-hand clothes from street markets, this depends also on one's income and choice⁴⁰ (Field, 2000, p.232).

³⁸ Hansen, K. (1995) `Transnational Biographies and Local Meanings: Used Clothing Practices in Lusaka`, Journal of Southern African Studies 21(1): 131-45

³⁹ Swiss Academy for Development (1997), `Second-hand clothing: Export, social compatibility and social acceptance. A Study on the trade in donated clothes in Switzerland, Ghana and Tunisia`, Solothurn, Switzerland: SA

⁴⁰ Field, S. (2000) `The Internationalisation of the Second-Hand Clothing Trade: The case of Zimbabwe`, African Studies Centre, Coventry University: unpublished PhD thesis

Most of the people in Uganda that buy second-hand clothes, are usually faced with harsh economic challenges, it is employment which generates income for their families and since 80 per cent of the youth are unemployed, most of them then seek to be self-employed through the second-hand cloth business that can bring them some money to survive the tough environment that surrounds them. These articles are also cheap for the people, it is affordable and makes it conducive and important during harsh economic period.

XIII. CONCLUSION

The *Karamojong* Leather-craft is one of the fields which traditionally has reached its maturity, which is disappearing gradually today. However, a collection of some of the *Karamojong* artefacts have been collected by Cultural Museum in *Moroto* district and Ministry of Culture and Community Development. Here varied forms of folk arts and crafts which include leather-craft, wood-carvings, black smithing, head-gears, pottery and some stone sculptures can be found. The disappearing of this artefacts and tradition is caused by several factors such as education, modernisation and lack of materials.

The young *Karamojong* are mostly not any more practising the art-craft that their forefathers practised before, this can be due to the pressure of modernisation that is being imposed on them and therefore the hindrance to the succession of the craft. Traditional craftsmanship has as well problems of obtaining materials and facilities, this is due to the laws that have been imposed by the government against game poaching. Most of the articles have come to its end, the traditional elegant articles like the sandals have been replaced with plastic sandals, and thus the old skills have been partly lost. The craft which was once carried out on family scale, with each artefact executed in the best way, is now turning into a more commercial asset.

Preservation of leather-craft in the museum now remains a challenge to Uganda, let alone *Karamoja* itself. A lot of traditional, pre-traditional man`s artefacts are missing, the present collection, for example at the museum, represents just a cross-section of our cultural background.

It is clear that *Karamojong* contacts with other people(s) have become more frequent, mainly through visits by villagers to trading centres or towns. There has been the adoption of trading as a means of livelihood for some, this means gradual turn from pastoral values. There has also been a full incorporation of *Karamojong* into various levels of local administration, of the police force and of the army, with the degree of mobility outside the home area which follows on such corporation. An increasing number of *Karamojong*, more especially men, have joined the teaching profession after training in *Moroto* or elsewhere in Uganda. And there has been persistence of outreach of christianity. These might have been the major influence which have led a sizeable minority of the *Karamojong* to seek for themselves a place in post-colonial Ugandan society.

The consequences of both types of influence, external and internal, range all the way from the matter of dress, the government`s requirement that *Karamojong* people, at least, must wear modern clothing, and this interruption contributes in its own way to confusion within the tribe.

Young men, too, are no longer so ambitious of initiation, not so respectful towards the elders and so attentive to the tradition of the past. Some of them do claim that *Karamojong* society is undergoing a

more thorough transformation than is presently observable. There have also been changes in the marriage rituals, marriage dowry has forced them to migrate in recent years due to few cattle that they have now. Many have left *Karamoja* districts for either the neighbouring districts or going to Kampala city which is more than 300 kilometres away.

We must admit that, there was no sufficient dialogue with the *Karamojong*, and only through dialogue, positive encounter can be possible, but this demands awareness and respect for one`s culture and tradition and the adequate capacities to carry on. Western mentality which is too full of itself, much too interested in its own projects and schemes of operation, had no time to waste in order to put itself on the same level as the *Karamojong*. And the consequences of this lack of dialogue maybe summarized on one hand in failure, or more less open, of all process of degeneration of structures of tribal values. The carelessness and self-interest of exploitation of the only real goods that the *Karamojong* had, their culture and their dignity, is coming to an end.

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He is a Parish Priest of Jubilee 2000, Karenga, Moroto District, Uganda.

Awilli Betty, born 04 September, 1980 Abim District, Uganda.

She is a Social Worker, works with Mamas Club Uganda, an organization that works to provide Psycho-Social support to HIV positive mothers and their partners towards an AIDS free generation. She also supports Vulnerable Orphaned Children in Oyam District in Northern Uganda and as well supporting Karamojong Children in Kampala, Uganda Slums.

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Thank you all who participated in this Research Work.

Agnes Achola

Mr. Rapheal Lobeerei (Parish Priest)



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