

Hi Martina,

It is long since I last communicated with you. How are you doing? I am trying to get this year's festival sorted out - we usually go through difficulties getting funds but we get there.

I have attached for Photos for you to look at, a majority of them, I took from the North Eastern Uganda where the Karamajong people live. These are nomadic pastoralists who are thought to be less civilized than the rest of the Ugandan ethnic societies. They are warlike people who are famous cattle rustlers.

I went to a district called Kotido and indeed I was scared that any time the men could shoot me if they became suspicious. I went to their home, where I took a picture with one of the wives who was busy collecting millet which she was going to grind and make bread for the family.

They live in homesteads called "Manyata" and their livelihood is tagged to the cow. They believe that all cows on earth belong to them and that they have a duty to collect their property where ever it is by force - cattle rustling.

I found a group of singers and managed to take only one photograph as they could not allow me to take any other pictures. One of my contacts - Mr. Okello Calvin a Music Teacher from Kotido Sec. School told me that originally, each homestead had guns which they bought from Sudan for purposes of fighting those who had their cattle. He told me that though the Karamajongs can attack and kill as they please, they fear dead bodies to the extent that if a relative died in hospital, they would abandon the body there. If one died in the "Manyata" they abandon the homestead and construct another one.

The homestead has a thick enclosure of small hard pieces of wood - typical of semi desert vegetation. To the home completed must be a very tiresome job given that fact that most of the land is bare and I suppose they gather the wood from distant thickets. They foot to most of their destinations within Karamoja region and use donkeys to carry luggage. There are two buses that go to Kotido each day and if one missed those, the risk of not reaching when using other means of transport is high; Karamajongs hit any vehicle at will as long as it is not the bus. They believe that to hit the bus means killing their own blood, since many of them use it.

The bus carries all sorts of things and can be uncomfortable as all sorts of smells reign.

The main dances of the Karamajongs are Naleyo which is both a war dance as well as courtship. The men go to war and return with cattle which they captured. The girls receive the boys and in the process select the best suitors according to who can jump very high. Karamoja region is flat and men are trained to jump in order to see the enemy at a distance. The dance is generally characterized by stumping of feet to manifest strength by both girls and boys. Every boy who gets a girl leaves the crowd until all or most of them have paired up.

It is also believed that before a girl accepts to marry a boy, the boy has to fight and over power the girl before she accepts. This practice could have ended by now, since government has put in place measures to educate and civilize them.

More later,

James

