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Clashes of well-being: A paper on the strangeness of a poverty reduction programme

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Clashes of well-being

A paper on the strangeness of a poverty reduction programme

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I want to thank all my colleagues at the Peace, Risk and Violence Unit for comments on an earlier version. A particular expression of gratitude goes to my PhD supervisor, senior researcher Finn Stepputat, for revisions and comments on this later draft]

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Abstract

The paper makes an ethnographic contribution to the discussion of what constitutes *well-being* through the exploration of a government poverty reduction programme in Moroto Town, Uganda, and how the programme came to be perceived as strange and even damaging to the people who benefitted from it. The programme sought to live up to standards of participation, conflict sensitivity and sustainability, but in practice it failed to provide change in people's lives that they had reason to value. The paper follows a line of thought, which regards values as those actions one is most willing to invest energy in. It illuminates how the actions that the programme generated were actions that the beneficiaries contributed little value or no value, while it impeded the actions that were highly valued. The programme endangered people's safety and challenged the social worth of the beneficiaries in the social lifeworld they valued being part of.

Gabriel and I sit down in the porch of the health centre, because his 2 year old daughter is running a fever. Gabriel opens the notebook in his lap and finds some passport pictures tucked inside. He hands me one and says that they had to bring photos for NAADS when they signed up as beneficiaries.

Me: "I hear people come for the goats in Nakapelimen [to steal them]".

Gabriel: "Even at my place, they [thieves] knocked on my door last night. I shouted: Police! Police! They are here! They are here! Then Apuun also started shouting, and this man who is lame in the hand shouted: 'Let them come. We're ready!'" He laughs.

I ask what happened then and he says that the thieves left, when they thought that they were many.

After a pause he continues to tell me that he had to leave the goats at home unprotected. He had asked his wife to take the girl to the health centre, but she got angry with him and told him that since he had no work (she did have a job), he should take the daughter to the health centre and leave the goats behind. Clearly, she did not think him herding the goats was important enough work to exempt him from child care duty.

The above conversation between Gabriel and I concerned some of the effects of a poverty reduction programme carried out by a semi-autonomous government agency, the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS), in the largest urban area of the remote Karamoja region of Uganda, Moroto town. The NAADS mission was to target poverty in order to fulfil "the presidential [mission of] poverty eradication at household level".¹ The programme gave four goats to each beneficiary accepted onto the scheme. The conversation points to two effects of the programme: thieves came to steal the goats, and the livestock brought on family conflicts concerning issues of work. Due to such effects, the programme was ultimately regarded as rather strange by the beneficiaries and came in for a lot of criticism from them, verifying Tania Li's claim that: "[s]ome of the more incisive critiques (...) are generated by people who directly experience the effects of programs launched in the name of their well-being" (Li 2007: 2).

In her work, Li looks at what she calls the "strangeness of improvement schemes", to explore their peculiarities and effects. Here I, in a way, turn this around; by exploring the strangeness of the programme I seek to tease out ideas about what constitutes *well-being* for Gabriel and some of the other beneficiaries, and how this clashed with the programmes' efforts to improve their well-being. This paper is meant as an ethnographic contribution to an ongoing discussion of what well-being actually is (see for example Jackson 2011; Jiménez 2008a; Sen 1985). Despite a lack of theorising of well-being within anthropology, which within recent decades has focused much more on violence, poverty, suffering, victimhood etc. (Jiménez 2008b; Thin 2008), it is, nevertheless, a science well-suited for making such a contribution. Lambek writes that anthropology, "explore[s] the art of living" (Lambek 2008: 128), which is similar to saying it explores what makes for quality of life for various people in different social settings through time. Anthropology investigates people's agency with regard to values, motivations, desires, aspirations, obligations and so on – the aspects of life that make it meaningful – in connection with

¹ Interview with representative from NAADS, 23.07.12.

the wider social world that people see themselves as part of (see also Højlund et al. 2011). Also, this working paper discusses how improvement schemes sometimes go awry because they are based on ideas of well-being which are too simplistic. The poverty reduction programme described here only seemed concerned with well-being in the sense of improvement of material wealth. However, as we shall see, merely improving people's material wealth does not make for well-being if it works against other aspects of well-being in their lives.

Well-being as a valued life – and actions as values

Well-being is more than material wealth. Jiménez quotes Sen's conceptualisation of well-being where well-being is found in the correlation between *functionings* and *capabilities*:

"[Functionings] reflects the various things a person may value doing or being... [which] may vary from elementary ones, such as being adequately nourished [...] to very complex activities or personal states, such as being able to take part in the life of the community and having self-respect" (Sen 1999: 75). A person's capabilities, on the other hand, reflect the substantive freedoms that she enjoys or has access to in making realizable the functioning of her choice. (Jiménez 2008a: 8; Sen 1999).

I argue that programmes to improve people's well-being should build on and support the conditions people need to achieve a life they value, hence what Sen refers to as their 'substantive freedoms' (see also Jiménez 2008b). In the case presented here, I will show that NAADS did not succeed in this, as they adhered to a 'default setting' in many humanitarian programmes, which assumes that removal of the 'pathologies' in people's lives will provide for their well-being (Hirsch 2008). In this case, the pathology was poverty in the sense of lack of material goods. I will therefore first show how the programme, to paraphrase Sen, treated the beneficiaries as patients whose diseases need to be cured, rather than as agents with the freedom to decide what to value and how to pursue it (2004). In the second part of the paper, I will show how – despite its intentions – the programme did not provide changes to people's lives that they had reason to value, but actually changed things for the worse in regard to the situation of violence, insecurity, poverty and uncertainty.

In the third part of the paper I identify what it is that the beneficiaries value, based on an approach which sees *actions as value*, because this approach embraces the interplay between goods, acts and people in processes towards states of well-being. In the words of Graeber:

Rather than having to choose between the desirability of objects and the importance of human relations, one can now see both as refractions of the same thing. Commodities have to be produced (and yes, they also have to be moved around, exchanged, consumed...), and social relations have to be created and maintained; all of this requires an investment of human time and energy, intelligence, concern. If one sees value as a matter of relative distribution of that, then one has a common denominator. One invests one's energies in those things one considers most important, or most meaningful (2001).

My argument is that those actions that one invests one's energies in need to be of value in the present time of 'the doing' of them, and to be moving towards the future of one's dreams of well-being. The actions that the programme initiated or indeed forced people to engage in were not valued actions in the social world of Moroto town, and not only did this endanger the safety of the beneficiaries but it also challenged their social worth. Michael Jackson, writing about the Kuranko of Sierra Leone, notes how the emic idea of well-being "emphasizes *social* over physical or psychological health – an emphasis that contrasts strikingly with the priority well-intentioned Europeans give to dealing with (...) economic underdevelopment in Africa" (2011: 24). I contend that the same contrast was vitally at play in the way the NAADS project went awry in their effort to alleviate the economic underdevelopment of Karamoja. The project challenged the beneficiaries' place in the social world they had worked hard to become a part of and had come to see as their valued way of life. To get an insight into this particular social world and the beneficiaries' place in it, I shall first provide a bit of background about the place and the people.

Empirical background

The NAADS programme, which serves as a case study for this working paper, took place in Moroto town, the regional headquarters of Karamoja region in Uganda. Moroto town is the largest urban area in this traditionally pastoral region. The Karimojong are socially, linguistically and culturally distinct from most other Ugandan tribes. Their persistence in practicing pastoralism and their cattle-rustling practices have earned them labels such as "conservative", "backwards", "primitive", and also "brutal" and "savage". Since colonial times governments have tried to regulate the numbers of livestock and guns in Karamoja (guns are needed to protect the herds and to raid cattle) (Barber 1968). The colonial administration pursued a policy of disarmament, destocking of livestock, coercive containment and forced settlement (Gray 2000; Gray et al. 2003; Mirzeler and Young 2000; Mkutu 2008a; Närman 2003; Quam 1978; Quam 1996). The Karimojong livestock herds decreased considerably due to these enforcements. Development schemes such as irrigated agriculture, ranching projects, and the exhaustion of water and forage resources exacerbated the problem (Mamdani 1982). After Ugandan independence in 1962, policies on Karamoja still followed the line of thought that the "dangers of pastoralism outweigh its benefits", as the current Minister of Karamoja Affairs put it (quoted in Stites and Akabwai 2010: 36). The current president, Museveni, took over power in 1986 and launched an intensive disarmament campaign to which the Karimojong responded with armed looting of various facilities and convoys (Office of the Prime Minister 2007). Disarmament campaigns of varying degrees of force, and development schemes have been carried out since, seeing confiscations of cattle, forced disarmament, limitations on freedom of movement and waves of fighting between warriors and government soldiers (Mkutu 2008a; Mkutu 2008b). Cattle raiding, road ambushes and looting continued and only since around 2007 has the area been declared safe for travel without armed escorts. The general security situation in Karamoja has improved, although acts of violence – the theft of cattle or other valuables – still occur (Kingma et al. 2012). It is only recently that the official discourse has started to change from a focus on military intervention towards a focus on development (Mosebo 2015).

Moroto town was established by the colonial administration in 1914 and grew to later become district headquarters and then regional headquarters. Today it is inhabited by approximately 14,000 people (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2014). The young men who participated in my research are urban Karimojong – a minority in a region where an estimated 95% of the population still live in rural areas (Närman 2003). The urban Karimojong are people who have left behind or who have never lived a life of pastoralism (Mosebo 2008; Mosebo 2015). Their ideas of well-being and the values that pervade their lives are characterised by the urbanity of Moroto town and despite the empirical blurriness of rural-urban borders, there is a marked rural-urban divide in Karamoja. This urbanity, and the rural-urban divide have a huge part to play in explaining why the NAADS programme was such a failure at providing well-being for its beneficiaries.

From agents to patients

It was the second round of the NAADS programme in Moroto town that Gabriel and several of the other people in my research benefitted from. It was said that the beneficiaries of the first round were “big people”, i.e. people of high socio-economic status. The first I heard of the NAADS programme’s second round was when a youth who participated in my research told me that they had been called to a meeting by NAADS “to get goats, maize or pigs”. I was told that it was all the youths of Moroto town who, at a previous stage, had signed up with NAADS that were invited to the meeting. I asked Gabriel about the programmes several weeks after the meeting. He said: “*Now it was good, ‘cause it was the public to choose (...). In the meeting they said that it was for us to decide, so we requested first for money and those people said that we could not get that. Then we requested for cows. Then after some time the NAADS people said that the money was little and that’s why we got goats in the end*”.

Gabriel’s first statement is indicative of the initial excitement about the programme on two accounts: Firstly, the agency called them to a meeting and addressed them directly, which ensured their participation. When Gabriel refers to “the public”, it is in the sense of “ordinary people”, hence those without economic or political power. He thus appreciated being a beneficiary as an ordinary man. Secondly, they were asked what they wanted to benefit from the agency, which was an appreciation of their knowledge. Decision-making and participation are vital components of a state of well-being and providing vehicles for such engagement is a provision for quality of life:

(...) vehicles for reflection, communication, deliberation and decision-making... provide people with the practical means to engage ethically with the present and to anticipate the future by means of practices established and dispositions cultivated in the past (Lambek 2008: 125).

The potential beneficiaries of the programme deliberated on the basis of knowledge about the past, the present and anticipation of the future, and asked for money because this would support the livelihood strategies that they saw as befitting an urban lifestyle in Karamoja. When this proved not to be an option, they chose the item which had most monetary value, cows, because they

believed at this point that they would be allowed to sell the items.

Partaking in the decision-making process induced a sense of ownership and responsibility. However, in the weeks following the meeting, the excitement dwindled. The beneficiaries did not hear anything for weeks. When they finally went to inquire they were told that there was not enough money in the programme to give them the promised five cows and instead they would receive two to four goats, which had much less monetary value. The reduction in monetary value was a disappointment. More devastating, however, was that it revealed the participatory approach to have been nothing more than hot air. When I asked Gabriel whether he knew why they changed the programme he answered: "I did not even ask. I just got paralysed, when I heard. They promised we would get this month, but I want to see before I believe". The change in item and exclusion from the decision-making instigated a "language of unkept promises" and mistrust in the future (Li 2007: 2). The youths had been excluded from the process and assigned to a role of receiving whatever was on offer, and this was a shift from being agents who could deliberate on the basis of their own values to being patients and passive recipients of the 'treatment' on offer. Moreover, as I will show, what was on offer made their situation worse rather than helping them.

Violence and insecurity

In the decade leading up to 2011 and 2012 when I was carrying out fieldwork in Moroto, the town became safe (Mosebo 2008; Mosebo 2015). It became free of the dominant forms of violence that still occurred in the rural areas, particularly cattle raiding and road ambushes. Government army soldiers patrolled the borders of the town after dark to keep potentially dangerous people out, and police officers carried out cordon-and-search operations of the town homes to ensure that no weapons were kept. The absence of violence was greatly appreciated and helped in providing conditions conducive for enhancing the well-being of the inhabitants of the town. Not only were people safer from violence, it also improved their livelihood opportunities. They could move around for more hours of the day, and more outsiders came in to start businesses, hotels, or to set up NGOs and other humanitarian agencies that provided jobs and a customer base for small businesses.

The NAADS programme sought to be conflict-sensitive by only giving goats to people within town rather than to people living pastoral lives in the rural areas. The reason why this was regarded as conflict-sensitive was found in Moroto town's position in Karamoja since colonial times. In the civilising missions of the various governments of Karamoja there are systematic patterns of discrimination between populations and subpopulations, based on ideas of their existing level of civilisation or "improvement" (Hindess 2005). The urban Karimojong have been regarded as more civilised than their rural kinsmen, who participated and still to some extent participate, in cattle raiding. In the interest of conflict sensitivity, the government agency did not want to place livestock amongst people who had spent years fighting over livestock, and thus potentially incite conflict. It was thought that placing them in the ordered, governed and legible location (Scott 1998) of the town would not create perpetrators. The townspeople were seen as "improved subjects" or "more improvable subjects" than the "hopeless cases" of the villagers –

paraphrasing Li (2007). Politically, also, it was probably quite impossible to be government agency, even if it was semi-autonomous, and give out livestock in rural Karimojong, when central government was engaged in anti-pastoral discourse and policies.

Giving goats to townspeople and not to village people seemed strange and illogical to just about everybody I encountered in and around Moroto. Gabriel told me one day: “The villagers abuse us saying we get goats and a lot of money. They think we get money. They [NAADS] should have given money in town and then goats in the village. The goats are giving us a problem”. The problem that Gabriel refers to here is that thieves came in the night to steal the goats. Within the town people had nowhere to put the goats at night other than inside their own homes. A neighbour of mine in Camp Swahili said: “They don’t allow corrals in town so people keep them in their houses. The bad thing is that those ones who didn’t get will come and take” – referring to ruralites. A *corral* is an enclosure for animals traditionally used in Karamoja (See Dyson-Hudson 1966 for more). It is normally placed in the middle of the village so the men of the homes around can protect the animals, and the temporary corrals used during the dry season when animals are brought closer to water resources far away from the villages are only populated by young men for protection and shepherds for caretaking. I never heard of an actual law against corrals in town, but a corral is only effective if it is protected by young men with weapons to match those of the thieves, and holding weapons is against the law in town. In fact, it is against the law everywhere in Karamoja, but with Moroto town being the most governed, ordered and compliant place in Karamoja, this was enforceable.

Within town the only option for many of the youths was to keep the goats in their homes, and this was risky, as exemplified by case of the thieves that came at night and tried to break into Gabriel’s home narrated above. Gabriel’s home, like the majority of homes in Moroto, was semi-permanent built from clay and cow-dung and easily breakable. The risk was severe, because a home is where you stay with your loved ones; as one of the youth in the research, Apuun, said: “Your children are inside. Your woman is inside. Erono! [It’s bad]”. By giving goats to people in town the programme actually ended up bringing violence to the one place in Karamoja which had for some time and up until then been considered safe. For the beneficiaries, the material benefit from the goats did not make up for the increased insecurity of their homes and families. Following the attacks on their homes Apuun talked about building a shelter for the goats outside his home in order to keep his family safe inside the home at night. He said: “Take the goats and leave us alone in our homes. It’s ok. Only money”. Poverty reduction in the form of material wealth which risked their safety was not regarded as an improvement of their well-being.

Poverty and uncertainty

Karamoja subregion is said to be the most underdeveloped part of Uganda. It does indeed have the highest poverty rates in Uganda today, with an estimated 82% living in poverty (Powell 2010). The region scores highest in the nation’s acute malnutrition rates and infant mortality rates and by

far the lowest in literacy rates (which range from 21% to 68% in Uganda as a whole). The young men who participated in my research generally talked about “chasing life” rather than living it. The possibilities for livelihood strategies were limited, which meant that much time was spent in survival work and waiting for or pursuing livelihoods rather than engaging in them (Utas 2012). This embroiled their lives in uncertainty, and I was often told how they spent whole nights worrying about how to find money for food the next day, rent for the month, clothes for their children’s bodies, and so on. Planning and making people aware that you are planning is a vital part of social life, because it means that you are continuously working towards the well-being of yourself and your family. Uncertainty can, as Whyte writes: “call forth considerate action to change both the situation and the self” (Whyte 2009: 213 - 214).

Acknowledging the problems of poverty in Karamoja, the NAADS agency promoted a poverty reduction programme. It ended up, however, impeding the very poverty reduction strategies of the beneficiaries themselves. As Gabriel explained:

Here in town, you need money, so one part of the mind is on [fining necessities for] the home and the other part is on the goats. That’s why Apuun and I have now divided the work: Two days for the goats and two days for finding something [money/food].

This refers to the second conflict-producing effect of the programme mentioned at the beginning of this paper, where Gabriel describes how his wife became angry with him when he told her he could not leave their home because he was taking care of the goats. She had told him: “What work are you doing? You leave the goats [at home]”. The goats were an impediment to finding casual labour. Goat herding could be combined with doing business at a market stall or along the side of the road, but that rarely paid for more than daily necessities. Goats did not fit with the urban lifestyle of pursuing alternative livelihoods to pastoralism. Money would have, however.

Initially, my interlocutors tried to mould the project to fit their urban way of life, by selling the livestock and buying something with the money which could provide a more sustainable livelihood in town. Gabriel suggested buying a small motorcycle and taxiing people for money. But selling the goats, as it turned out, was not allowed by the project. Gabriel informed me that the NAADS representatives had told him when he registered: “One leg at home, one leg in prison”, which meant that if they did anything besides herding and breeding, they would go to prison. According to the project design, the intended goal of the project was that the animals would reproduce and the beneficiaries were meant to pass on the original animals to other beneficiaries.² In this way the animals never actually became the property of the beneficiaries, and resale became a crime. The beneficiaries ended up being stuck with the goats, which was why Gabriel and Apuun sought to overcome the issue by dividing the herding and the search for work between them.

² The representative from NAADS told me this. I then later discussed it with senior researcher Esbern Friis-Hansen at the Danish Institute for International Studies, who has carried out research on NAADS in Uganda in general. He said that they are actually supposed to pass on four of the offspring. This does not make a difference to my analysis however, because you could neither sell the goats nor relocate them in my area.

The programme sought to reduce poverty by giving the young men something that would last and reproduce itself in the future. They tried to be conflict sensitive by providing goats to urban youth and not rural youth, and thus reduce the risk of inciting violent livestock raiding. This was a very typical government approach towards well-being for the Karimojong, one that sought to remove the negative aspects of life there, namely violence and poverty. However, this focus solely on negative aspects of life is a major part of the reason why the programme neither managed to free the beneficiaries from violence nor helped reduce poverty. Despite initial efforts, the agency failed to take into account the positive aspects of life in Karamoja, informed knowledge and deliberation about the future and the locals' ideas of what a valued life is.

The value of values

Well-intended interventions aimed at improving people's lives have been shaped by ideas of the 'good life' since the time of the missionaries to today's democratically elected governments and development workers (Lambek 2008). Whether or not the beneficiaries value such interventions is however dependent on whether the changes the interventions produce are regarded as beneficial changes. Following a conceptualisation of value which sees actions as value, I will illustrate why the NAADS programme did not create changes that people had reason to value. In order for me to do this, we need to discuss what *value* actually means. "Value", "values", "valued" are terms often used, but what actually makes for value is rarely defined: Is it concepts about what is good, desirable and proper in life? Is it a measurement of objects based on how much people are willing to give up to get them? Or is it 'simply' the meaningful difference between elements (Graeber 2001). The theoretical work on values is marked by discussions of dichotomies: gifts versus commodities; moral exchanges versus commercial exchanges; objects as value versus human relations as value; and money versus morality. The case of the goats in Moroto town shows how value cuts across these dichotomies when value is seen as the actions that are worthwhile investing energy in according to the social world that one imagines one belongs to. In Graeber's words, value is the way "in which actions become meaningful to the actor by being incorporated in some larger, social totality – even if in many cases the totality in question exists primarily in the actor's imagination" (*ibid*: xii). Value relates to actions that are considered good by other people. The NgaKarimojong word for well-being is *Nyajokon*. At one point it became 'a thing' amongst one group of friends who participated in my research to say: "nyaaaaaaaaaajokon" and then everybody would laugh. When I inquired about the meaning, one of them explained to me by using his arms to draw a horizontal circle in the air, as if embracing a whole or a unity, and said: "*Nyajokon* is when everything is just very good. It is when people stay together in a good way". The word is a noun made from an adjective, *ejok* meaning good or well, so it becomes well-ness or goodness: well-being. It is about people doing and relating in a good way; value is doing and relating in a good way. It is about the people, items and processes that people will invest their energy in.

In the case presented here, it is clear that money has more value than goats. Money even has more value than cows – the historically, traditionally, and still claimed to be, most valued asset amongst the pastoral Karimojong. On the surface this seems odd. Not only is the desire for money often portrayed as a rather immoral or superficial idea of value but it also seems to directly counter the claim at the beginning of the paper that a valued life – a life of well-being – is more than material wealth. To understand this conundrum I take two steps: firstly, to examine money as a medium for the owner's capacities for action, and secondly to follow the argument that value is the importance of actions (Graeber 2001). I will show how the actions that money makes possible, and the motivation that money can provide, are more meaningful in the social world of Moroto town than the actions made possible by and motivated by livestock. In Western thought money is often opposed to morality. However this is not necessarily so if money is converted “into a form that sustains the ‘good ways’ of living together” (Hirsch 2008: 63).

The value of money

It is in its capacities, and not as a valuable in and of itself, that money has value for the people of Moroto town. The distinction is between well-being and being well off (Sen 1985), because being rich in coin does not necessarily mean well-being. Among the Karimojong the normative moral system amongst kin and friends is one of *sharing* (Mosebo 2015; Woodburn 1998). If someone has some wealth he is obliged to share it with friends and family in order to maintain a principle of equality. As in many other places where people are poor, an investment in social relationships is often considered far more valuable than having money, because it is friends and family you can turn to in hard times, and that will ensure survival (Narotzky and Besnier 2014). Due to this normative system, if a rich person – often be referred to as ‘big people’ – showed off his or her wealth by building huge houses, driving big cars, or had a reputation for not sharing, they were often termed corrupt. Corruption is by definition “using public means for private gain” (Haller and Shore 2005), which is the exact opposite of sharing, because it is impoverishing someone else for your own gain. There is no value in containing wealth or showing one's wealth off. In this case money gains its value because of its capacity to be transformative and invisible (Graeber 2001), because obviously despite the normative ideal of sharing, everyone nevertheless had accumulate money in practice. When Gabriel wanted to start a market stall, he needed to accumulate money for the rent and for the items he wanted to sell. When Apuun wanted to re-open a small clothes shop, he had in the street he needed to accumulate money to buy stock. In order to succeed with this accumulation, however, the wealth had to be invisible to the social world around them.

Money can be buried in the ground, put into Mobile Money accounts or bank accounts and thus gain a kind of invisibility. One of my research assistants chose to get all of his pay at the end of my stay, so that his money remained ‘hidden’ in my account. It was therefore never openly discussed that our relationship was one of employer and employee, but only portrayed as friendship.³ The

³ That we were also friends was on the other hand also enabled by the fact that there was no money-for-work exchange between us, because that would have altered our relationship status, but that is another issue.

issue here is that the hidden capacity of his money enabled him to build a house he could rent to people, which accumulated more money for him in the future. He shared money as was appropriate, but no one knew how much he actually earned from his work for me, and that gave him leverage to fulfil his dream and improve the life situation for himself and his friends, kin and family. He was renowned for being a moral person, who lived up to his obligations, and this way of accumulating money did not alter that. The invisibility of the money ensured that. The invisible capacity of money also created security that the goats did not. Potential thieves could not be sure who had received money or if and when it had been used. Neither could they know whether the money had been shared around or whether it had entered into hidden storage waiting to be transformed into something else which was more sustainable. The goats were visible. They could not be stored away and hidden. This was more of a risk for the beneficiaries than if they had received money. Their material wealth was exposed and known about.

Money also had transformative capacity, which the goats did not. One young man told me one day that he had given a friend the task of driving some goods to a trading centre nearby. The promise was that if the guy did this well, he could get employment at the NGO the youth was employed at. The guy however chose to extract the gasoline from the car and sell it, and spent the money on a good night out for him and his friends. Despite the fact that he shared it, his actions were deemed immoral. It was theft and illegal in the name of the law, but his crime was not only that. His actions also made him miss an opportunity for a more sustainable income, which would have benefitted him, his friends and his family a lot more in future. The youth employed at the NGO said: "It's so stupid to give up a chance of 200,000 a month just for 50,000". The youth failed to actualise the capacity for transformative action that the money had in potential, and this was his big crime. Initially, the beneficiaries of the NAADS programme thought livestock would have transformative capacity, when they thought they could sell it. That's why they asked for cows, because they were worth more, and were disappointed on receiving goats. The technical restraints of the poverty reduction programme, which inhibited the beneficiaries from selling the goats, took this capacity away.

Actions and social worth

The motivation for the restraints on selling the goats sprang from the programme's aim of creating sustainability. The programme wanted to ensure that the goats were not sold off and the money spent carelessly. The design was a sort of 'livestock microcredit' where beneficiaries kept the goats until they reproduced and then the goats were to be passed on to new beneficiaries. In the logic of the programme, this provided for long-term, sustainable poverty reduction, which would also benefit more people than just the original beneficiaries. In ideal this coincided with the beneficiaries values – the wealth should not just be spent but should enable transformation. In practice however the programme went against the beneficiaries' notion of well-being, because the actions that the programme generated were not actions that "stood to reason to value" – and the actions did not hold transformative potential for development and improvement of life. Actually,

it was the exact opposite. Despite the fact that the goats provided transformative potential in the future, if they provided off-spring – the here-and-now was about the actions of rearing, herding and taking care of goats. It was shepherding. Shepherding was not a valued set of actions in the lifeworlds of Gabriel, Apuun and others people in Moroto Town in similar circumstances.

Most of the youths had migrated in their childhood or early youth to Moroto town to get away from a life of exactly shepherding. A life of shepherding had either become impossible for them, because the livestock had been stolen, or too tough or risky, or they had ambitions around education or alternative livelihood strategies. Shepherding for them was going back to a life they had left behind in order to live an urban life where their ambitions lay in alternative livelihoods such as casual labour, small business, education and perhaps a better, contracted, job in an NGO or government department. They saw life in town as more modern, more enlightened and more developed, and it was this life which they had reason to value. One night I was sitting with a group of youths, when I overheard Loru describe someone else's behaviour with the words: "rural-urban excitement". I inquired about it, and one of the guys explained it as the behaviour of "someone who comes from the village to town and sees that life, then they also want that. They become so excited that they spend all the money and have nothing". One of the others elaborated: "You see Marianne, it's like someone who comes and realises that 'I have been behind'. Then they live this life, but they still have a mind of the village". The emic concept of "rural-urban excitement" entailed the ideas of modernity and tradition, of being behind and being developed. It referred to the difficulties of making the transition from villager to townsperson, because it involved learning what was appropriate behaviour according to the town. Those who suffered from rural-urban excitement were transgressing the normative laws of the urban space (Cresswell 1996). They thought they had an idea about how to behave in town, but those who already mastered the norms of town saw through this. Money is explicitly mentioned in connection to rural-urban excitement and serves as a case in point. Mastery of money is not about spending all the money and then having nothing. It is not about having money to show off. The mastering of money meant being able to manage the transformative potential of money. This was what was valued in the social totality of Moroto town.

Graeber's definition of value as the way in which action becomes meaningful to the actor by the way it is incorporated into the larger social totality adds an extra layer to how the programme clashed with people's ideas of well-being or a valued life. If an action is to be considered meaningful and valued, then it must have public recognition (Graeber 2001; Jackson 2011). The goats interfered with the beneficiaries' ideas of social worth, and of which social world of values they belonged to.

How people delimit the world for themselves and for others – how that is, they re-proportion their sociological imagination – thus becomes a central question for understanding the making of collective and personal life-projects, including the delineation of projects of well-being (Jiménez 2008b: 26).

The beneficiaries of the programme were a wide range of people, from young men like Gabriel and Apuun who spent every day *chasing life* to those who had contracts with NGOs and even to those whom one could term 'well-off'. The goats exposed differences amongst these urbanites in regard to socio-economic standards, educational level and degree of urbanity. Such differences were always known and tacitly acknowledged, but were not made explicit on account of the principle of equality and the obligation to share. Those beneficiaries who had to herd the goats themselves because they did not have the money to employ a shepherd were very visibly exposed as less well-off. A difference arose between those who were able to continue with the actions that connoted town life and those who found themselves carrying out activities that connoted rural life. Furthermore, it also exposed those who had the skills to shepherd and those who did not. Those who had the skills were typically those who also could not afford a shepherd, so this seemed on a surface to be a good fit. However, in this case, ironically, their skills rebounded to expose them as those who had less urban quality than others. It exposed the fact that they had come to town after having been ruralites and it revealed them as someone who may not master a life of money as well as others. The programme ended up challenging the social worth, hence the value, of people where some are considered more worthy than others (Narotzky and Besnier 2014), of men like Gabriel and Apuun in the social totality of Moroto town.

The pathology of NAADS

NAADS in a sense followed all the proper 'how-tos' of a poverty reduction programme. They sought to provide for sustainability and they tried to make it fit what they thought was the local reality. As a representative for NAADS told me: "Here is pastoral, which is why you most often concentrate on livestock". They even used participatory methods. But the beneficiaries saw the programme differently, as one of them told me: "They just force people to take goats". My claim is that this kind of problem arises in the technical design of many improvement schemes, originating in oversimplified notions such as, "here is pastoral", as the NAADS representative put it (Ferguson 1990; Li 2007). I agree with Sørensen when he argues that the problem arises because the pathology that is seen to be aided against "must be framed within modern management tools, and fit with the overall objectives of the donor" rather than be framed by the needs of the recipient (2009: 63). Li (2007) writes that it takes two key practices to translate "the will to improve" into explicit programmes: 1) identifying deficiencies that need to be rectified, and 2) rendering it technical. Thus, the deficiency – or pathology – identified in Moroto town was that people live in poverty. Poverty was an urban as well as rural issue so in terms of the deficiency identified there was no problem. The misfit between project design and realities on the ground arose in relation to the practice Li calls "rendering it technical", where an "intelligible field" was created by translating messy conjunctures into "linear narratives of problems, interventions, and beneficial results" (*ibid* 4; cf. Ferguson 1990). This *simplification* process which rendered a complex of place and people translatable to a project design was what created the misfit between intervention and realities on the ground (Scott 1998; Stepputat 2013). In this case it was the mismatch between what beneficiaries deemed appropriate for the project and the interventions that the agriculturally-focused government agency had to offer (Ferguson 1990; Li 2007). Stepputat explains:

Thus, for example, the 'simplification' (Scott, 1998), which is necessary for rendering territory and population legible, as well as the efforts to make categories stick to a recalcitrant reality, always produces a residual or a surplus that does not 'fit' the categories and threatens to return with a vengeance to subvert the categories and the system. (2013: 30)

In this project, the urban youth were categorised as pastoralists, and therefore they received goats. They were, moreover, “improved pastoralists”, and therefore they received goats and not the villagers. These two categorisations returned with a vengeance and subverted the expected outcome when the process created shepherds in the effort to support urbanites. Li argues with Foucault that this is due to the fact that governing is rarely done to reach one dogmatic goal but is a process of a series of *finalities* (cf. Foucault 1991 [1975]; Li 2007). Such finalities may be incompatible or even contradictory: the NAADS programme had a finality to get livestock to people, whereas another government scheme was about putting an end to raiding, and a third to promote alternative livelihoods. On their own, each project was “politically intelligible” and viable, and could be portrayed as a success (Ferguson 1990; Li 2007; Swidler and Watkins 2009). In my interlocutors’ perception of the situation, these diverse finalities came to collide with each other and the NAADS project became yet another strange government project that was supposed to benefit people but did not.

Conclusion

“Before we had nothing. Now we have something. Only... the goats are now giving us a problem”. Gabriel told me this after they had had the goats for a while. Returning to the conceptualisation of well-being offered at the beginning of this paper, the problem that the goats presented was that they impeded the *functionings* of the beneficiaries. The project kept them from engaging in activities of their choosing and that they valued. It also decreased their *capabilities* because they had to constantly watch over the goats, and because of the risk that the goats created for them and their families. The programme did not provide a vehicle for the feeling of quality of life that comes from participation and decision-making.

And yet, Gabriel said that they were something rather than nothing. This statement is interesting. The “something” that the goats were, was a small beacon of hope. Apuun was fortunate in this regard because he had received a goat which was already pregnant. This meant that he owned a goat which would soon have transformative capacity. Gabriel however was more challenged, because in order to impregnate his goats, he would have to pay an owner for the services of a buck. He thus needed to engage in work that gave him money – work that the goats impeded him from getting – in order to be able to afford to get something from the goats. The temporal aspect of Gabriel’s goats was lengthier than Apuun’s, which meant an increased danger for him. As Jackson writes, “our sense of what is possible is always tempered by a sense of impossibility and danger (...), we tell ourselves to be careful what we wish for, since experience teaches us that the fulfillment of a dream often leads to disappointment” (2011: xii). Jackson writes that this

pessimism about the future arises from our relationships with others and with the world (ibid.) For the beneficiaries of the NAADS programme, the relationship with NAADS provided a small beacon of hope and a potential avenue for an improvement in life, but in practice the relationship proved to be ambiguous at best and dangerous at worst: dangerous for the safety of their families and for their social worth. When they received goats as material wealth, it provided a change in their lives which did not stand to reason to value and this impeded their efforts towards well-being.

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