

FROM UNCERTAINTY TO PRECARITY: MORAL ECONOMY PRACTICES AMONG THE SOMALI COMMUNITY IN KAKUMA REFUGEE CAMP

Bashir Mohamed and Samuel F. Derbyshire



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper explores how precarity shapes life for Somali refugees in Kakuma refugee camp, north-western Kenya. Contrasting contemporary precarity with the uncertainty that previously shaped livelihoods and social structures in Somali pastoralist communities back home, the study asks not only how things have changed but also how past experiences might be shaping novel challenges. Precarity in Kakuma refugee camp stems from multiple factors, including a lack of employment opportunities and a dependence on humanitarian aid. Nevertheless, despite this precarity, Somalis in Kakuma still demonstrate a kind of resilience through practices that elsewhere have been described as essential to pastoralists who are navigating uncertainty. These include solidarity, the redistribution of resources and strong cultural norms. Meanwhile, economic volatility is navigated, both via support and remittances from an international diaspora and through networks that function through reciprocity and obligation. Exploring these issues, the paper highlights how Somali refugees deploy culturally rooted practices to manage the harsh environment of the camp, demonstrating a kind of resilience that emerges from reimagining and reconfiguring past orientations in order to negotiate new challenges and possibilities.

INTRODUCTION

Precarity refers to a state of chronic instability affecting livelihoods, resources and social structures. It is a state that shapes life for all occupants of Kakuma refugee camp in north-western Kenya. In dealing with this precarity, Somali refugees have developed coping mechanisms to withstand the unpredictable life of the camp. Through shared cultural norms—forms of obligation and solidarity—they create ways to guarantee resilience. Like other communities in Kakuma, Somalis face the camp’s drastic limitations on employment opportunities and a broad sense of economic volatility, leading to a prevailing reliance on humanitarian aid. This study analyzes how, despite this, and drawing on their past practices and experiences, this community sustains its identity, social cohesion and underlying cultural norms in the context of displacement.

Of critical importance to doing so is the concept of the ‘moral economy’, which was explored by Edward P. Thomson in his essay ‘The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century’,¹ and by James Scott in his work, ‘The Moral Economy of the Peasant’.² Both scholars highlighted how vulnerable populations mobilize to resist exploitation and unjust practices in times of crisis. Their theories provide a useful framework for exploring the dynamics of life among the Somali refugee community in Kakuma, whose past livelihoods as pastoralists and traders have given way to new forms of precarity. Life in Kakuma is filled with challenges because most of the refugees there are living with poverty and minimal job opportunities.³

This paper explores how the displaced Somali pastoralist community navigates economic and environmental challenges—a situation of profound hardship. Generally, the Somali community is guided by religious and cultural values that embrace reciprocal practices, such as loans, gift-giving and the sharing of resources. Their navigation of this situation is shaped by social norms and cultural values which engender mutual support and care. The community builds trust by sharing resources through reciprocity. The relationships that emerge from this constitute a moral economy that strengthens the community, allowing them to continue giving support to each other in times of need and to navigate the volatile situation of the camp.

1 Edward P. Thompson, ‘The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century,’ *Past & Present* 50/1 (1971): 76–136.

2 James Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in South Asia*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976.

3 Mohamed Tahira Sharrif, ‘The Role of the Moral Economy in Response to Uncertainty Among Borana Pastoralists of Northern Kenya, Isiolo County’, PhD dissertation, University of Sussex, Brighton, 2022.

Understanding this moral economy is vital to developing a more comprehensive idea of resilience in Kakuma. To achieve this, this paper focuses on the following areas:

- Remittances, and the redistribution of resources
- Forms of solidarity that create a mutual support system
- Social networks providing grounds for mutual reliance
- Obligation and trust

The fieldwork behind this paper included 16 interviews, 4 group discussions and extensive participant observation. It was conducted between August and September 2024. This qualitative approach enabled the researcher to access new information on the complex relationships and values shaping Somali livelihood practices in Kakuma in the contemporary era. A diverse array of respondents was consulted, including formal workers, businesspeople, informal workers, women, elderly people and livestock keepers.

Overall engagement with these multiple categories of respondents aimed to understand how a history of pastoralism—a livelihood described in multiple studies as uniquely geared towards making a success of prevailing forms of uncertainty through flexibility and dynamic adaptation—might have shaped approaches to contemporary camp life, where there are little or no livestock and where a much more rigid set of restrictions inhibit all forms of flexibility. The study focused on three main areas within Kakuma occupied by Somali communities, namely Kakuma 1, 2 and 3. Interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in-person and in the language that respondents were most comfortable with.

Examining how moral economy practices take shape in precarious circumstances in Kakuma, this study provides a picture of how Somali refugees have adapted amid radical processes of change, building on past experiences to navigate new contexts.

This introduction is followed by an overview of the life of the Somali community in Kakuma, which provides the context in which they operate. Subsequent parts of the paper focus on how the Somali community navigates economic and environmental challenges in the camp, drawing on its long-term traditions of reciprocity and resource-sharing. The paper then concludes with reflections on the broader implications of these findings

LEAVING PASTORALISM BEHIND: THE SOMALI COMMUNITY IN KAKUMA REFUGEE CAMP

After the fall of the Siad Barre regime in 1991 and the ensuing political instability in Somalia, thousands of Somalis fled the country, with some eventually finding refuge in Kakuma in north-western Kenya.⁴ The impact of this shift from their original homeland to Kakuma, and their concomitant loss of pastoral livelihoods, cannot be overstated: For most Somalis, displacement meant a radical lifestyle change. Migration to Kakuma led to the loss of the livelihood practices and forms of mobility associated with this mode of production. While, on one level, Kakuma camp comprises an escape from conflict and political instability, their livelihoods—oriented towards livestock, flexible migration and various forms of communal tenure—have all disintegrated, despite their pastoralist skills once allowing communities to navigate the famously volatile environment of the Horn of Africa.

Many Somali refugees in Kakuma have since shifted their means of livelihood to running small businesses, which help them to survive. This new form of survival is, in many respects, engendered by various forms of social capital, which facilitate the pooling of resources and provide mutual support in the face of the restrictions presented by encampment. Though perhaps a cliché, many observers argue that Somalis have an entrepreneurial spirit that enables them to carve out a comfortable life in the camp's economy. Overall, the Somali community has resided in Kakuma for over 25 years.

At the end of May 2024, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), a total of about 288,000 refugees were registered as belonging to Kakuma in different areas—Kakuma's four camps, the integrated settlement of Kalobeyei, and in the Kenyan town of Eldoret. Roughly 37,000 of these were Somalis.⁵

4 Colin Robinson, 'Revisiting the Rise and Fall of the Somali Armed Forces, 1960–2012', *Defence & Security Analysis* 32/3 (2016): 237–252.

5 'Kenya-Situation Horn of Africa', United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Accessed 25 October 2024, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/horn/location/9922>.

PASTORALISM, UNCERTAINTY AND PRECARIETY

Pastoralism has historically been a central livelihood activity within Somali society across multiple contexts, with economic practices often oriented around livestock and around regular movement in search of both water and pasture.⁶ Such livelihoods create a unique relationship with uncertainty, one that allows for the most efficient exploitation of unpredictable and variable resources, not through new forms of engineered stability but through dynamic, open-ended improvisation. Pastoralists do not just live with uncertainty, but they live off it.⁷ Following the crisis of conflict in 1991 and the years after it, Somali communities found themselves leaving behind these lives and practical features of this orientation toward uncertainty, migrating away from their homelands without their possessions and various components of their cultural and economic practices. The lives they have come to know in Kakuma entail a radical curtailment of freedom of movement. Importantly, the ways in which Somali communities previously managed uncertainty including physical movement, herd growth and reduction are no longer possible.

Adaptation is a temporally situated process in which humans and non-humans interact amid different contexts and environments.⁸ In this sense, it is important to recognize uncertain circumstances and their correspondingly flexible strategies and social structures as characteristics that are not inherently negative; and yet it is perhaps equally important, by reverse implication, to underline the fundamental challenges that stem from monolithic views of pastoral life and linear views observers might hold of progress, modernity, and development (complete with restrictive policies) that underpin these.

It is worth emphasizing here that uncertainty is a characteristic experienced by multiple pastoralist groups across Africa in the twenty-first century, whose practices entail the general embracing of uncertainty rather than attempts to control it or buffer against it. The central thesis of this paper is that the historical experiences of managing uncertainty among the Somali community in Kakuma have shaped particular ways of dealing with precarity—a characteristic that is altogether more negative than uncertainty, and conceptualized here as associated with new forms of restriction.

In Kakuma, precarity is engendered by a set of negative factors that impact not only individuals but entire communities. Both individual and collective capacities have, on a fundamental level, been greatly diminished by displacement, a lack of sufficient resources and trauma. Importantly, mobility itself is restricted in Kakuma, within and outside the camp, drastically reducing access to opportunities and forming a barrier to sustainable economic development.

Despite this, members of the Somali community are resilient, as by means of the experiences that derive from their pastoral heritage, they draw on tacit knowledge and collective expertise,

6 Ian Scoones, ed., *Pastoralism, Uncertainty and Development*, Rugby: Practical Action Publishing, 2023.

7 Ian Scoones, ed., *Living with Uncertainty: New Directions in Pastoral Development in Africa*, Rugby: Intermediate Technology Publications, 1995.

8 Erin Fitz-Henry, 'Multiple Temporalities and the Nonhuman Other', *Environmental Humanities* 9/1 (2017): 1–17.

established amid the management of uncertainty in the past, to negotiate new conditions. The subject of how Somali communities deploy mutual support mechanisms, resource sharing and solidarity, has been explored extensively.⁹ This paper explores how such strategies, which go back to a nomadic past, allow them to remain resilient even in the face of displacement and instability.

Solidarity has been explored as one of the defining characteristics of Somali social life, and is a term used to describe multiple practices deployed by contemporary communities.¹⁰ In a general sense, it is something that both emerges from and serves to enshrine expansive and the dynamic networks that are vital for accessing resources, information and opportunities. Such networks are also the bedrock on which moral economy practices are established, themselves entailing various forms of locally led social assistance, sharing and the handling of collective responsibilities.¹¹ In Kakuma, moral economy practices often involve various forms of resource sharing,¹² but also involve the sharing of responsibilities and support. They lead to a kind of strength that is not robust, per se, but rather dynamic and regenerative. In the same way that pastoralists have found ways of adapting to various long-term processes of economic and environmental change elsewhere, Somalis in Kakuma have drawn on old strategies to meet new challenges.¹³

NEGOTIATING PRECARITY

How then are such conditions negotiated? One idea, developed in the context of studying critical infrastructures, such as water or energy supply systems, considers the role of 'high reliability' professionals and of networks in generating reliability.¹⁴ Envisioning pastoralism itself as critical infrastructure allows the identification of those who engender reliability amid uncertainty, dynamically adapting to shifting conditions to render essential services within the wider system.

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- 9 See for example Elia Vitturini, 'Solidarities on the Move between the Horn of Africa and Italy: Somali Migrants' Disconnection and Networking Practices in the 2010s', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 18/1 (2024): 97-116; Anja Simonsen and Mohamed Tarabi, 'Images of Torture: 'Affective Solidarity' and the Search for Ransom in the Global Somali Community', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 18/1 (2024): 117-134.
- 10 Joakim Gundel, 'The Migration-Development Nexus: Somalia Case Study', *International Migration* 40/5 (2002): 255-281.
- 11 Anna Lindley, *The Early Morning Phonecall: Somali Refugees' Remittances*, New York: Berghahn Books, 2010.
- 12 Laura Hammond. 'Diaspora Returnees to Somaliland: Heroes of Development or Job-stealing Scoundrels?'. In *Africa's Return Migrants: The New Developers?* edited by Lisa Akesson and Maria Eriksson-Baaz, London: Zed Books, 2015.
- 13 Peter D. Little, *Somalia: Economy Without State*, Bloomington: Indian University Press, 2003.
- 14 Emery Roe, *Making the Most of Mess: Reliability and Policy in Today's Management Challenges*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2013.

In Kakuma, while the Somali community no longer practises pastoralism, wider system dynamics have transformed on a fundamental level and some decidedly pastoralist approaches to achieving reliability via dynamic improvisation can be identified. For example, one woman interviewed for this study explored the difficulties encountered by people with low incomes:

She emphasised how, while some individuals who have money run different types of businesses and own huge wholesale stores, others have almost nothing.¹⁵ The difference between success and failure is often an individual's capacity for reconfiguring and reimagining past economic activities, or their ability to determine new niches and to re-establish relationships and connections amid new economic and political dynamics.

It is important to clarify that the economy of Kakuma refugee camp is mostly dependent on external support, either from friends or from family members. It is also important to note how diverse the population in the camp is, with refugees from Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda. Each community has different ideas, influencing its ambitions and community cohesion. In a focus group discussion held on 18 August 2024 among community elders, a Somali male respondent explained the impact that poverty in the camp had on some refugees:

Some households are completely broke, with zero income. There are refugees who could have only sorghum for a daily meal and eat cowpeas every single day. They depend on the Bamba Chakula [an e-voucher, sent by mobile phone, that enables refugees to buy foodstuffs]. They completely rely on food rations distributed by the UNHCR because they don't have any other means of income. Therefore, they can't afford to change their diet, as the only food they consume is food rations provided by the UN. Since they have [a] poor diet, they are exposed to many different types of diseases and malnutrition.¹⁶

It is in this context that Somali refugees in the camp have come to rely on informal trade and small businesses that sell food, clothes and other goods. Although there are limited job opportunities in the camp, these businesses help them build prosperity beyond the food rations given by the UN, thus enabling some families to significantly improve their living conditions. The Somali women play a vital role in all this. However, as individual businesses are situated within much wider social contexts, not only do they function by means of expansive networks and relationships, often formed at the level of the Somali clan, they also recursively feed back into these networks, often serving as sources of informal social assistance in the form of interest free loans. The relational, networked nature of economic practices among the Somali community in Kakuma is comparable to subsistence procurement in multiple contemporary pastoralist contexts.

15 Participant in a focus group discussion with women, Kakuma, Kenya, 17 August 2024.

16 Focus group discussion with Somali elders, Kakuma 3, 18 August 2024.

SOLIDARITY

The fieldwork undertaken for this study emphasised that solidarity is critical to many small-scale Somali businesses in Kakuma, including shops, enterprise services and restaurants. The community managing these diverse businesses gives support to each other in order to strengthen their individual successes, particularly in times of need. The sharp limitations of employment opportunities force this community to rely on each other for support and, in some sense, for regulation of competition.¹⁷ Historically, Somali society has been divided into five main clans, and elsewhere a strong sense of solidarity has been linked to this social geography. Clan-based solidarity was once critical in pastoralist contexts, and in the present day, it still is in areas where Somalis practice transhumance. Networks, including those shaping business in Kakuma, are clan based.

In this regard, past experiences of clan-based mutual support have come to be reflected in daily economic practices in Kakuma in the present era, playing an enabling role in circumstances of extreme precarity. This point was articulated by a respondent who described the relations between culture and business in her life. She explained:

During my time at the camp, I was engaged in different kinds of small businesses. Additionally, when I first came to this camp, I sold cooking charcoal, and I was a tea vendor too. As I mentioned above, since I moved to this camp, I have been doing several types of small business, which make me earn a small amount of money and live hand-in-hand. These small businesses helped me manage my daily wage of living. Lastly, I started to sell khat or miraa [a freshly grown leaf, chewed by some for its stimulant effect]; whenever I have money, I sell the miraa, and when I don't get any money, I just sleep. Thank God I don't starve any more. In general, Somali women help each other; we borrow money from merchants and we also lend to those that are in need. Therefore, in the Somali community, we do have charity programs, where they help each other so that the jobs do not stop.¹⁸

These kinds of informal social assistance networks are critical in Kakuma. However, they are also critical in other contexts where Somalis still practice pastoralism, and in Somali networks that nowadays span diverse geographies and contexts. Many in Kakuma maintain close connections not only to international diaspora networks but also to pastoral communities in Somalia and Ethiopia. Tesfamichael Teshale recently examined the role of locally led social assistance among the Somali community in the Somali Region of Southern Ethiopia, noting how, in the absence of assistance from the state, pastoralists deploy various resource redistribution mechanisms to

17 Günther Schlee, 'Policies and Boundaries: Perceptions of Space and Control of Markets in a Mobile Livestock Economy', Program Working Paper, 1991. Accessed 15 October 2024, <https://www.cabidigitallibrary.org/doi/full/10.5555/19911886713>.

18 In-depth interview with business respondent in Kakuma 1, 20 August 2024.

support vulnerable society members.¹⁹

REDISTRIBUTION OF RESOURCES AND REMITTANCES

The redistribution of resources is a fundamental process through which solidarity comes to take shape.²⁰ In pastoralist contexts, access to resources is communal and sharing is a critical component of day-to-day life. Modern technology has, in multiple pastoralist contexts, radically transformed these redistributive practices, particularly as a result of advances in connectivity and telecommunications. In Kakuma, such technologies have paved the way for past forms of collectivity, previously enacted via the exchange of goods with livestock, to resurface. New diaspora networks and mobile phone technology provide the means for remittances to reach the camp from locations across the globe, often responding to specific local needs and improving the living standards of many.²¹ Where, back home, social networks were—and indeed are—oriented to wider pastoral economies, in Kakuma they come to be more centrally oriented towards businesses and non-pastoralist livelihoods.

OBLIGATION

Obligation is, in short, a sense of duty or responsibility that shapes social interactions. Relations among the Somali community in Kakuma comprise strong cultural values that often manifest themselves in various forms of clan-based obligation. Such practices allow collaboration and encourage resource mobilization throughout the community. They also engender forms of reciprocity that entail ever-closer entanglements between families, neighbours and other kin. Kin-oriented gifting was, historically, something primarily undertaken with livestock, and yet in contemporary Kakuma, where it is not possible to keep large herds of livestock, similar dynamics shape the gifting of other commodities and cash. These gendered relations of access are governed through family and wider kin networks, acting both to constrain and enhance accumulation.²² Furthermore, studies have shown that gender relations intersect with inheritance patterns, where opportunities for the inter-generational transfer of wealth may be limited.²³ These practices enshrine trust and cooperation and are often closely associated with Islam, which embraces economic behaviour that praises communal work, such as charity. Importantly, these practices reach across the gender divide, shaping relations between women

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- 19 Tesfamichael Teshale, 'Human Cruelty to the Environment: Indigenous Knowledge for Climate Change Prediction and Adaptation Among Pastoralists in Dhagaxbuur District of the Somali Region, Ethiopia', Research Paper, Rift Valley Institute, 2024. Accessed 18 September 2024, <https://bit.ly/4cVcL8E>.
 - 20 Joachim Von Braun, 'Social Security in Sub-Saharan Africa: Reflection on Policy Challenges,' in *Social Security in Developing Countries*, eds. Etisham Ahamed, Amartya Kumar Sen, Jean Drèze and John R. Hills, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991.
 - 21 Emery Roe, 'A New Policy Narrative for Pastoralism? Pastoralists as Reliability Professionals and Pastoralist Systems as Infrastructure', Working Paper, STEPS Center, 2020. Accessed 16 October 2024, <https://www.ids.ac.uk/download.php?file=wp-content/uploads/2020/01/STEPS-working-paper-113-Roe-FINAL-for-opendocs.pdf>.
 - 22 Dorothy Louise Hodgson, *Rethinking Pastoralism in Africa*, Oxford: James Currey, 2001.
 - 23 Diana Davis, 'Gender, Indigenous Knowledge, and Pastoral Resource use in Morocco,' *Geographical Review* 76/2 (1986): 284–288.

as much as between men, and between men and women. One interviewee described how, when she was unable to support herself, she was helped by another Somali businesswoman.²⁴

Beyond providing a foundation for a sense of identity, the Somali clan structure is a fundamental avenue through which food, shelter, or protection are rendered in times of need. Somali refugees from the same clan often feel obliged to provide assistance during scarcity, even when they themselves are struggling. Beyond this, a large portion of the Somali community in Kakuma is guided by religious beliefs, with *zakat*,²⁵ ‘giving’, one of the five pillars of Islam. *Zakat* encourages Muslims to give a portion of their wealth to those with none. Although Somali refugees may have little, those with more often share with those who have less.²⁶ This kind of sharing is, of course, often compromised by resource constraints.²⁷ *Zakat* is integrated into formal social assistance systems in Islamic communities, yet in Kakuma external policy actors pay limited attention to it.²⁸

Connections between businesses, saving groups and other forms of social protection based on obligation that help protect vulnerable community members against precarity, were outlined during an interview with a woman who explained:

When there is a funeral ceremony or the community members face a starvation situation, they seriously help each other. Also, Somali women play a huge role in helping, supporting, contributing, and collecting money for the vulnerable ones. Some of these women voluntarily take part in collecting money from the merchants and shop owners to help the people in need.²⁹

This kind of generosity extends beyond immediate community members and emerges in hospitality shown to guests, whether they are fellow refugees or visitors. Often, it can take the form of offering assistance, even in a situation of personal scarcity. For example, many Somali refugees in Kakuma welcome and accommodate new arrivals from Somalia and give them food, even though their own family lives in overcrowded conditions.

24 In-depth interview with Somali women in Kakuma 2, 21 August 2024.

25 Manoranjan Mohanty, ‘Informal Social Protection and Social Development in Pacific Island Countries: Role of NGOs and Civil Society’, *Asia-Pacific Development Journal* 18/2 (2011): 25–56.

26 Gebremichael Kibreab Habtom and Pieter Ruys, ‘Traditional Risk-Sharing Arrangements and Informal Social Insurance in Eritrea’, *Health Policy* 80/1 (2007): 218–235.

27 Ruchira Bhattamishra and Christopher B. Barrett, ‘Community-based Risk Management Arrangements: A Review’, *World Development* 38/7 (2010): 923–932.

28 Rebecca Holmes and Charles Lwanga-Ntale, ‘Social Protection in Africa: A Review of Social Protection Issues in Research: Policy and Programming Trends and Key Governance Issues in Social Protection’, Scoping Study, Partnership for African Social and Governance Research (PASGR), 2012. Accessed 15 October 2024, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08a9d40f0b649740006ac/Social-protection-in-Africa_A-review-of-social-protection-issues-in-research.pdf.

29 In-depth interview with Somali man in Kakuma 1, 27 August 2024.

In this regard, despite the harsh living conditions of Kakuma refugee camp, the Somali community continues to uphold important cultural, social and religious obligations. These practices strengthen the community's resilience and ensure mutual support in the face of adversity.

SOCIAL NETWORKS

Networks provide a fundamental framework, through which various forms of locally-led social assistance function in Kakuma. Such networks usually manifest themselves physically in public gatherings, social amenities and business centres. These forms of mutual connection are very important in bonding friends, relatives, families or people outside in other locations. Emerging amid these vast social networks, this idea of mutual connection helps people solve problems and access the resources or services they require during periods of hardship.³⁰ Such a sense of connection is very important in creating relationships, building trust and sharing values, and often helps people expand their businesses. By means of these networks, Somali refugees manage to create viable livelihoods in a newly challenging environment. By reinforcing social cohesion and cultural identity, they ensure not only the preservation of heritage but also the preservation of a particular orientation towards unpredictable and difficult circumstances.³¹

A new narrative for development, based on pastoralists' experiences, means thinking about how people—individuals but also, most importantly, collectives connected in networks—can transform high variability (the increasing norm) to ensure a reliable flow of goods and services. These networks are not only crucial for material survival but also for maintaining cultural continuity.³²

The most important coping mechanism that the Somali community has is the extended family network, through which remittances are sent from friends and families in the diaspora to help other family members during times of difficulty. This kind of assistance is often critical in dealing with issues such as medical expenses, education and food. Connections with relatives abroad help people in Kakuma mitigate the harsh environment of the refugee camp.

This situation is comparable to the kinds of 'vernacular humanitarianism' identified as key to disaster management in contemporary Somalia, where pastoralist communities gather funds from international sources to deal with a fast-moving terrain of challenges and crises, many of which are not only protracted but also extraordinarily complex. In these contexts, the aid that is given by the diaspora community is often far more nimble, efficient and impactful than formal assistance, which is founded on prediction-based early warning systems and shaped by complex bureaucracies and upward accountability.

30 Matteo Caravani et al., 'Providing Social Assistance and Humanitarian Relief: The Case for Embracing Uncertainty', *Development Policy Review* 40/5 (2022): 1-16.

31 Philip McMichael, *Food Regimes and Agrarian Questions*, Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2013.

32 Roe, 'A New Policy Narrative for Pastoralism?'

CONCLUSION

It is worth emphasizing that the actions and orientations described in this paper are best understood as components of a moral economy that shapes life and prosperity by means of deeply rooted values that go far beyond the existence of Kakuma in both time and space. Despite a prevailing environment of precarity, the Somali community in Kakuma refugee camp is resilient because of a longstanding set of approaches, institutions and cultural norms. This paper has laid out evidence to show how fundamental these features of Somali life are in the present day, arguing that they can be traced back, to a large extent, to a history of pastoralism prior to displacement. In many respects, the practices deployed by Somalis in Kakuma allow them to exert a significant degree of agency in otherwise extraordinarily difficult conditions.

This moral economy also plays an important role in maintaining social cohesion and identity. Somalis embrace it as the grounds for and means of improvement in their lives, and as a framework through which to make sense of both contemporary circumstances and of history. Understanding it is not only valuable in terms of gaining a richer appreciation of contemporary life for Somalis in Kakuma, but also in terms of thinking about much wider concepts, such as ‘resilience’, a concept used often nowadays in academia and the development sector. The particular ways in which the Somali community of Kakuma has achieved what we will call resilience emphasize the importance of focusing on relations and networks. This lends support to arguments that a more ‘relational’ approach to assistance and development should be adopted, particularly in contexts where communities are faced with multiple forms of restriction, all the way from climate to conflict.

Solidarity should be a key focus of support going forward. Humanitarian assistance would be greatly improved if it oriented itself towards existing networks and values that already shape economic life for Somalis in Kakuma. Importantly, the kinds of practices described in this paper, which relate to the Somali community, can be identified in multiple other refugee communities, both in Kakuma and beyond. Thinking more carefully about moral economies may improve countless forms of intervention in refugee contexts, where lives and livelihoods have never been best understood in relation to individuals and have always been fundamentally collective and relational in nature.

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