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"LOPAE: GEOGRAPHICAL DISPERSAL OF FRIENDSHIP IN TURKANA"

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"LOPAE: GEOGRAPHIC DISPERSAL OF
FRIENDSHIP IN TURKANA"

ABSTRACT

Lopae are special friendships among the nomadic Turkana pastoralists based on the exchange of stock animals and other gifts. This study of lopae among semi-sedentary southern Turkana has shown that: 1) lopae serve as an investment, insurance, and risk dispersal over a wide geographical area, and 2) settlement itself does not hinder exchanges or diminish the friendships. Indeed, many Turkana in the settlements gained new lopae because of grain from their agricultural plots and their access to purchased food and goods.

This study is part of larger research on sedentarization and social changes among the Turkana. The paper outlines the methods and testing of the following hypothesis: "If the Turkana nomadic pastoralists become sedentary, then their stock-associate (lopae) networks will deteriorate." This hypothesis was proved false, and results are given about their number of friends, gifts exchanged, and reasons why friends break off and remain. The geographical dispersal of lopae friends is illustrated with maps.

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In the harsh, unpredictable arid ecosystems of northwestern Kenya, the Turkana pastoralists have carved out a niche by nomadically herding goats and sheep, camels, cattle and donkeys. Rainfall and vegetation conditions can vary within the large district every year. Mobility is the primary adaptation to this variability, but the Turkana have also practiced an intra-regional livestock exchange through their special "stock-associate" relationships called lopae. Lopae friendships are a means of risk dispersal over a wider geographical area than any one herder could graze his animals.

All over the world, inter-regional exchanges were established in early times to supply areas with goods not produced locally, and link various tribes and peoples. Livestock-grain connections are found on every continent. Traders may act as middlemen, or the people may barter directly, thus personalizing the exchange. Gift exchanges are also part of the glue of social networking in many cultures. When money becomes the medium of exchange, the impersonal relations of a market economy can supersede or replace barter.

In Turkana, intra-regional exchange of livestock flourished for two reasons: environmental conditions vary within the district, and when local conditions are poor, the people are not totally free to roam outside because of surrounding "enemy" tribes. The Turkana traditionally have not had regular trade with agricultural groups in Kenya, except some Somali traders who set up shops near waterholes during the colonial era.

The first major anthropological works on the (northern) Turkana described Lopae as "stock-associates" relationships based on the exchange of stock animals (Gulliver 1951, 1955). Lopae served as each individual herder's network of insurance, as they were dispersed around the district, especially adjacent to his dry-season pastures. During a time of local drought, disease, or raids, a herdsman could go to his Lopae to beg for animals or to share pastures. Although it has been said that "all Turkana can graze anywhere," in practice each family moves within one of 19 territorial sections (ngitela), with much flexibility and variation (Dyson-Hudson and McCabe 1981, McCabe 1983).

This study examines the Lopae of 110 settled and semi-sedentary men and women in the communities of Lokori and Morulemin southern Turkana. It is part of a larger research project on sedentarization and social changes in Turkana. My hypothesis on the outset was,

"If Turkana nomadic pastoralists become sedentary, then their stock-associate (lopae) networks will deteriorate."

Instead, I found that settled Turkana continue to have lopae, and indeed some have gained new exchange friendships with herdsmen who are interested in grain and purchased goods from the shops.

From my study, it appears that a better translation of lopae is "special friendship" rather than "stock-associate." Turkana people beg or ask for things from each other continually, and asking for a present is a way to initiate a friendship. They have other looser friendships and neighbour relationships with whom they may share food, but not make the same expectations or demands as they would of lopae.

Exchanges between lopae can be classified as dyadic, with balanced reciprocity rather than direct barter. The general pattern traditionally has been for one friend to travel (by foot) to the other's home with the express purpose of "begging for an animal," most commonly a goat. He may visit for some time and then lead the animal to his home. Usually it is not for a few months or a year that the friend will repay a visit to beg for a return gift. This waiting time strengthens the trust between friends (cf. Mauss 1925, Foster 1961, Johnson and Earle 1987).

Women tend to develop friendships by exchanging beads, food, traditional containers for milk and fat, or other items from the household. Married couples usually share the same lopae, although some adults retain friends of their own from childhood or teen-age days.

Methods

The communities of Morulem and Lokori were selected for the larger research on sedentarization, and households were selected by mapping and using a random numbers table to choose a statistically representative sample. Morulem is a village of about 2000, and almost all of the sample families have one or more small plots (shambas) on an irrigation scheme off the Kerio River. The town of Lokori is a divisional center (est. pop. 1500-2000), and has government offices, a police post, a mission, and about ten shops (see figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1 The Lokori Area in Southern Turkana

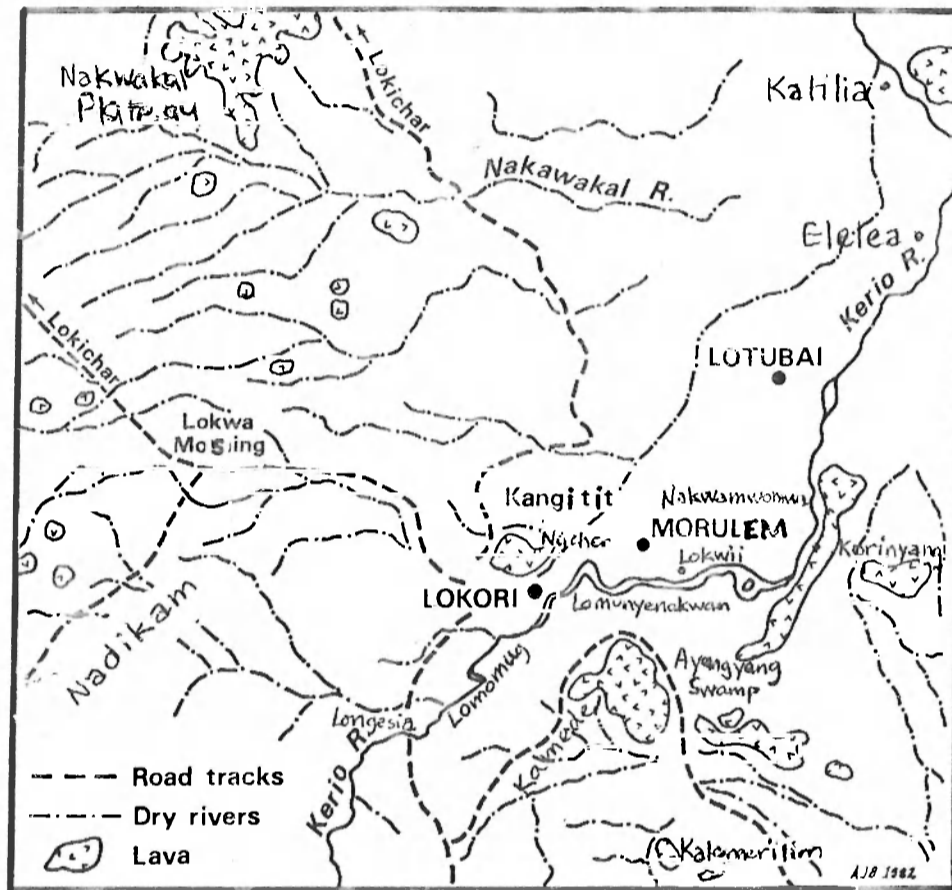
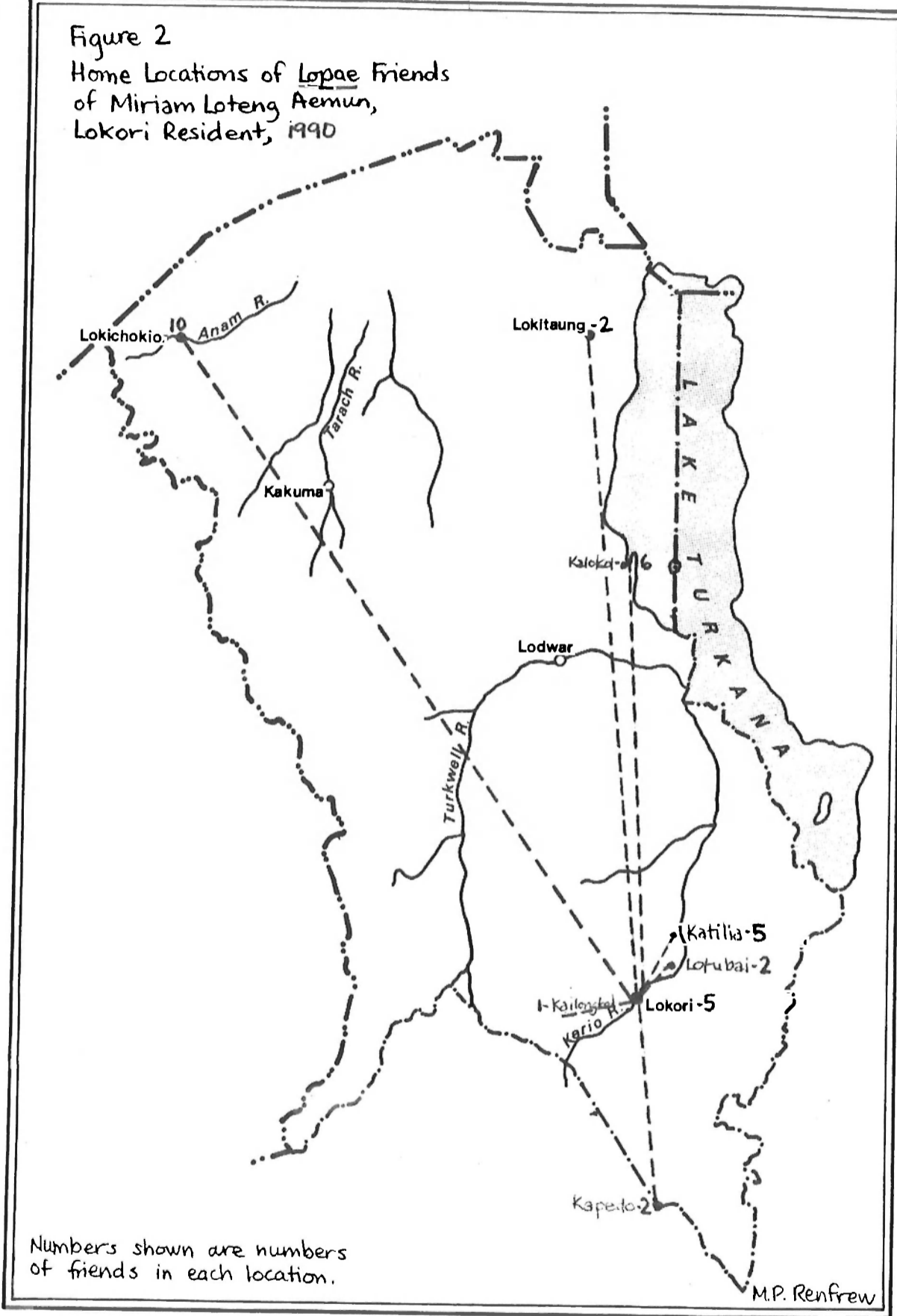


Figure 2
Home Locations of Lopae Friends
of Miriam Loteng Aemun,
Lokori Resident, 1990



Numbers shown are numbers
of friends in each location.

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Interviews were conducted among settled Turkana, but in many households, someone leaves during the dry season to herd animals elsewhere. About half of the people express a desire to return to nomadic herding; these are considered semi-sedentary. The major reason why almost all the people came to settle was the loss of animal herds during Pokot and bandit raids, and droughts in 1960-61, 1970-71, 1979-81, and 1984. Most of the families now have only small herds (e.g. 20-40 goats and sheep), but some keep larger herds in the remote pastures, and some have no animals at all.

The following interview questions were asked to 110 male and female respondents:

1. How many lopae do you have? Male or Female?
2. Where do they live?
3. What did you exchange with them?
4. Have you exchanged anything with them in the last year?
5. Have you ever 'lost' a lopae? When, and how?
6. Of the lopae you have, are any new since you came to (Morulem or Lokori)? (Did you get any new ones because of your shamba?)

Results and Discussion

Morulem and Lokori responses were similar with two exceptions: Morulem residents have more lopae (averaged of 4.7 each vs. 3.2 for Lokori residents), and sorghum and maize from their shambas were more common gifts to their friends (70% mentioned these as some of the gifts exchanged). Participation in the irrigation scheme could thus be considered an advantage in gaining exchange friendships. The other results will be considered for both communities together.

Numbers of Friends

Equal numbers of men and women were interviewed, yet men appear to be favoured for lopae friendships, because they have authority over the animals. In Morulem the average numbers of friends were 3.5 males and 1.2 females, while in Lokori, each person had an average of two male and one female lopae.

The range of special friendships for one individual was from 0 to 33. Only four of the 110 respondents replied that they had no lopae; three of these were old men who said that their animals had already been given out, some friends had died, and they were too old to walk long distances to visit others.

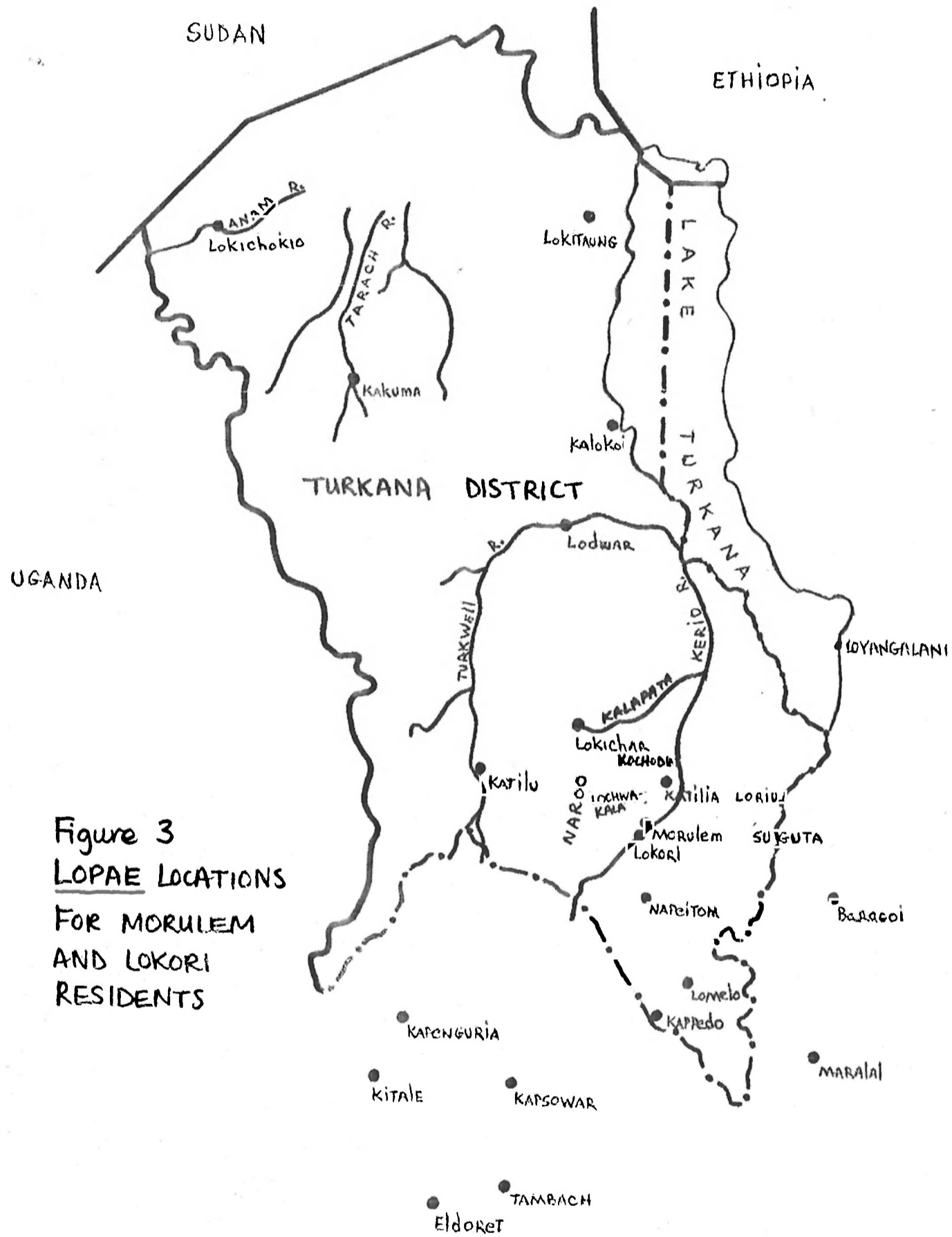


Figure 3
LOPAE LOCATIONS
 FOR MORULEM
 AND LOKORI
 RESIDENTS

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One young married woman in Lokori reported that her 33 lopae friends lived in 8 locations in Turkana District (see Figure 2). Her childhood home was Lokichoggio, and she explained that the northwestern Turkana generally have large numbers of lopae. Her parents had "at least 20". This is close to Gulliver's (1951) estimate that each herder had "30 close associates"; his research focused on the northern Turkana.

Future research could examine regional variation of these exchange friendships, and try to determine whether high numbers are correlated with greater history of risks. A comparison of settled and nomadic southern Turkana may also show significant variation in numbers of lopae.

Gifts Exchanged

By far the most common gift exchanged between friends is goats, even among settled Turkana (Mentioned by 78% of respondents). For those with a shamba, many friends and relatives come at harvest time to beg for a share of the sorghum and maize. Sixty percent of Morulem respondents reported that they gained new friends because of their shambas.

The Turkana are generally opportunistic, which again is an adaptation to the risks of their environment. In this area, they have recognized that a shamba is a valuable supplement to livestock herding. If their family or relatives do not have a shamba, then many try to make an exchange friendship with someone who does. In this part of Turkana, they do not demonstrate "a typical pastoralist conservatism which shuns farming," which is a common stereotype.

Table 1 shows the lists of gifts exchanged by my respondents, with animals, food, blankets and sheets, clothes, money, and jewellery forming the major categories. The percentages shown are the number of respondents who mentioned these gifts out of the total sample of 110, not of the total numbers of exchanges. Many respondents exchanged many types of items with friends.

Table 1: Gifts Exchanged with Lopae by Morulem and Lokori Residents

Animals:		Clothes	22.7%
Goats	78%	Shoes	21.8%
Sheep	3%	Money	30.9%
Camels	14.5%	Sheets	22%
Cattle	18.2%	Blankets	15.5%
Donkeys	16.4%	Traditional containers	16.4%
Chickens	2.7%	Modern containers or utensils	9.1%
Food(non-specific)	25.5%	Jewellery	20%
Sorghum	50%	Tobacco	11.8%
Slaughtered animal to eat together	23.6%	Tools	7.2%
Maize	15.5%	Child named after Lopae	2.7%
Maizemeal	10%	Miscellaneous items	9.1%
Sugar	12.7%	"Nothing" exchanged	4.5%
Fat/ghee	10%	"Still waiting"	8.2%
other foods mentioned	5.4%		

Turkana herders have traditionally operated with a minimal involvement in the monetary economy. When milk dries up and grain foods are needed during the dry season, a goat is sold and maizemeal ("posho") is purchased at the shop ("dukā"). Other commonly bought products have been tobacco, sugar, tea, sheets (for clothing), and rubber tire sandals. For many pastoralists, the preferred methods of acquiring these things have been trade or begging rather than direct purchase, thus avoiding the use of shillings. However, 30.9% of my settled respondents indicated that money was one of the gifts to their lopae. This is a high indicator of increasing incorporation into the Kenyan national economy. If this trend continues, as in other parts of the world, exchanges may become more and more impersonal.

"Losing" a Friend

The hypothesis for this study was, "If Turkana nomadic pastoralists become sedentary, then their stock-associate networks will deteriorate". The rationale behind this hypothesis was that the major reason for settling was the loss of livestock. Without animals to give, I postulated that the Lopae relationships would diminish.

One reason why this question is important is that recent development recommendations for rehabilitating drought - destitute pastoralists are in favour of re-stocking. When droughts are detected by an early warning system, then de-stocking is encouraged through market sales. OXFAM, the United Nations World Food Program, and many other relief organizations have recognized that many pastoralist development projects have failed (see Goldschmidt 1980), and that re-stocking families may be a better strategy than giving grain (e.g. as food-for-work), which can sedentarize them and make them dependent. In view of re-stocking, the basic question is, "Once a herder has become destitute of livestock, are the social networks of exchange still there?" If not, i.e. if he has lost his Lopae, then how will that affect his success in returning to pastoralism?

To examine this hypothesis, I first determined the length of residence and purpose of coming to stay in the settlements. The average length of stay is 12.1 years in Morulem and 16 years in Lokori. The major push factor from the remote areas was loss of livestock and subsequent "hunger" and the major pull factors toward the settlements were the availability of various (sometimes menial) jobs in Lokori (e.g. carrying firewood and water for somali shop-owners), and food for work by digging the canal in Morulem.

I also asked the question, "Have you ever 'lost' a Lopae?" The results were that 62% said "no", and of the 38% who had lost friends, the major reasons given were that they had moved away (24%), they had died (20%), they refused to give them anything (20%), or that they were friends from childhood days, before marriage (12%). Five people from Morulem (4.5% of total sample) did report that after they lost their animals to Pokot raids and bandits, their Lopae abandoned them a few others also reported that they had heard of this happening, but not to them personally. Some had their Lopae give them animals after the raid to help and return the exchange.

Because almost all of the Turkana in Morulem and Lokori have undergone severe livestock losses during 1979-84, the fact that not more had lost their friends demonstrates the strong resilience of Lopae networks as a social institution. Lopae indeed serve as an investment against future local calamity, or a type of insurance for the Turkana, who seek to manage their risks by dispersing their debts and gifts.³ My hypothesis was therefore proved false.

Geographical Dispersal of Friendship

The Turkana possess an intimate knowledge of their physical environment, as their survival has depended on skillful management and movement of five animal species. They also have very detailed mental maps of geographical areas through which they have travelled on foot all topographical features (hills, rocky outcrops, stream beds, plains, etc) and areas have place names. Settled and semi-sedentary Turkana adults still possess this knowledge, as they have spent most of their lives herding nomadically.

Each of the respondents was quite specific when I asked, "Where do your lopae live?" A total of 76 places were named, and these are listed on Table 2. Because many of these places are rural and remote, we can assume that many of these friends are still mobile pastoralists. Figure 3 illustrates many of the major lopae locations while Figure 1 shows an enlargement of the Lokori - Morulem area, with lopae locations added.

The respondents commonly had lopae in alternate directions, for example, in Lokori, a Turkana may have 3 lopae, from Kalapata to the north, Loriu to the east, and Lomelo to the south.

Although the majority of lopae are in a cluster surrounding the region, they still show a wide geographical dispersal.

Table 2: Locations of Exchange Friends (Lopae) of 110 Sample Residents of Morulem and Lokori, 1990

	#Friends		#Friends
Anyangyand	6	Lokori	27
Baragoi	3	Lokorikor	1
Eldoret	1	Lokosimekori	2
Elelea	12	Lokwa Mosing	15
Golgol	1	Lokwawa	1
Kaaleng	1	Lokwii	23
Kailongkol	3	Loling	6
Kakitoe	1	Lomelo	12
Kakulit	4	Lomomug	1
Kakuna/Tarach	2	Lomunyenatwan	3
Kakurio	1	Lomorutae	5
Kakwachuna	1	Longesia	3
Kalokol	7	Lorlu	22
Kalapata	20	Lotien	1
Kalinyenyang	2	Lotubai	19
Kalomerilim	2	Loyangalani	2
Kalezo	1	Maralal	1
Kamede	1	Molo	1
Kamuge	1	Morulem	52
Kanaudo	1	Nachor	2
Kangitit	7	Nadikam	10
Kapedo	10	Nakorinya	1
Kapenguria	2	Nakosawan	1
Kapsowar	1	Nakuru	5
Karasagol	6	Nakwakal	9
Karinyang	1	Nakwamwomwa	1
Kaimanang	3	Napeitom	11
Katilia	13	Naramam	2
Katilu	3	Narop	5
Kenya (country)	6	Natir	1
Kitale	14	Nawiakipur	4
Kochodin	6	Ngichwae	3
Kolong	1	Riet	11
Lochebu	1	Suguta	25
Lochwakala	1	Sweden	1
Lodwar	3	Tambach	2
Lokichar	16		
Lokichoggio	11		
Lokitaung	3		
Lokone	2		

CONCLUSION

This study of exchange friendships among settled and semi-sedentary Turkana has shown that 1) Lopae are chosen as a type of investment and risk dispersal over a wide geographical area, and 2) settlement itself does not hinder exchanges or diminish the friendships. Indeed, many Turkana in Morulem and Lokori gained new Lopae because of grain from their shambas and their access to purchased food and goods.

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