OF WAR-LEADERS AND FIRE-MAKERS: A REJOINDER

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If there is to be a "great Karamoja debate", then it is necessary to keep in focus the leading issues, with the constraints of historiographical and methodological concerns. Since 1990 publications on the Karamojong[1] have in general taken the line expressed in Mirzeler and Young's abstract: "The transformation of local modes of conflict by large-scale infusion of the AK-47 has had far-reaching effects …".[2] Against this trend I cite the French critic, Alphonse Karr (1808-1890), "*Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*". My perversity is sustained by studying the Karamojong over 23½ years, living there 1984-86, and returning for fieldwork across Karamoja in 1998, 2000, 2002, and 2005. Taking copies of my monograph[3] to deposit for Karamojong *literati* to read, the dominant impression was that mobile telephones notwithstanding, this was the same Karamoja. I will not have the last word, but history will.

The issue in Mirzeler's paper above is that "Pastoral Politics" has been misrepresented. Of course any part of an article cannot fully represent the whole, but my book cites Mirzeler no less than 49 times, often giving multiple page references. There is therefore no attempt at disguise or misappropriation: readers are invited and enabled to see for themselves. Where I have fallen down is in five sentences in one chapter, which Allen enjoys for its rare antipathy,[4] where I have inverted commas in manifestly the wrong

[1] Neither Karamoja, the mapped region of north-east Uganda, nor Karamojong, the Eastern Nilotic peoples of its plains, are indigenous words except inasmuch as they have begun to accept being so-called. Among themselves, the primary identities are Dodoshɔ, Jie, and Karimojong.

[2] Mustafa Mirzeler and Crawford Young, "Pastoral Politics in the Northeast Periphery in Uganda: AK-47 as change agent" *Journal of Modern African Studies* 38(2000), 407

[3] Ben Knighton, *TheVitality of Karamojong Religion: Dying tradition or living faith?* (Aldershot, 2005)

[4] Tim Allen, "Northern Uganda Revisited: A review article" Africa 76(2006), 427-436 "He is particularly interesting where he reveals the problems in perceptions of Karamoja

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places. Sadly this is merely where my incompetence got the better of my conscientiousness. These five sentences were my précis, which I knew contained phrases it would have been appropriate to quote, so I marked them with inverted commas with the full intention of checking with the original article. Since I did not have it in my study, my intention was never executed, so now Mirzeler has his reward and I a lifetime's chagrin.

It would be much worse if they formed a poor précis, but this case has not been made. His conclusion settles on the missing jots of punctuation,[5] which he does not establish for the book as a whole, rather than slight differences in representation. He claims that the worst intervention is in quoting Amuk, Lamphear's informant. I have dropped the top and the tail of a quotation enclosing a story which would otherwise amount to 109 words. Again this does not change the sense a tittle, for "the west" does not refer to the Western World. Among the 73 occasions on which I have used the term, he will see that I consistently use a capital letter when referring to the occidental "West", but much more often refer to the geographical "west". I am not referring to sorghum seed from the West where it is not grown, but from Serere in neighbouring Teso district to the south. As to the time difference, Seredo sorghum was being developed at just the same time that Lamphear was recording Amuk's story.

as a place of endemic disorder, where elders no longer have authority, and warriors armed with automatic rifles make off with the herds of cattle and join marauding bands under warlords. He argues that access to modern weapons has had no such effects, and provides plenty of evidence that what has become a received wisdom about the Karamoja is wrong, and that traditional order has adapted and even been strengthened."

[5] Mirzeler's Ngakaramojong spellings are not checked with existing literature, e.g. Mirzeler & Young "Pastoral Politics", 420 *ekaworan* instead of *ekeworon*, as Edward Wayland, "Preliminary Studies of the Tribes of Karamoja" *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 61(1931), 221; John Lamphear, *The Traditional History of the Jie* (Oxford, 1976), 121; Ben Knighton, "Christian Enculturation in Karamoja, Uganda" (Ph.D Thesis, University of Durham, 1990), I,301, II,55; *essegese* "Pastoral Politics", 420, instead of *ethegethege* as Lamphear, *Traditional History*, 176) though it should be *esegesege*; *ekisel* instead of *ekisil* as Nadiket Seminary, *Ngakarimojo-English and English Ngakarimojo Dictionary* (Verona, 1986), 161; and Knighton "Enculturation", I ,336; II, 56; Karamojang in Mustafa Mirzeler, "Veiled Histories and the Childhood Memories of a Storyteller" PhD Dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1999) *passim* or Karamojans "Pastoral Politics", *passim* instead of Karamojong as in Philip Gulliver, "The Karamojong Cluster" *Africa* 22(1952). Neither "Pastoral Politics" nor "Veiled" lists one of the many dissertations written on the Karamojong, see Knighton, "Enculturation", II, 164-284 and the only archival document noted in "Pastoral Politics" (428) is a letter by Harry Johnston in "BOCP", as in Mirzeler, "Veiled", 428f., presumably a Foreign Office Confidential Print.

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There is hardly space here[6] to give even three main points to their argument:

1. Before 1979 (a date which is given three times) Karamoja was pastoral and traditional, but that year ushered in a "new era", "new epoch", "the new dynamics", which is "the AK-47 era", "The age of the AK-47". The intensified human cost of automatic weaponry would threaten Karamojong survival by 2009, unless the violence were halted.[7]

2. The gun has facilitated the young, led by warlords, to triumph over the elders.

> The large-scale infusion of AK-47s after 1979 introduced a new dynamic, again favouring the emergence of warlords and the decline of the elders. The guns, and the power that came out of their barrels, were in the hands of younger men, grouped and led by warlords.[8]

3. National identity has taken precedence over ethnic identities, so that the Karamojong have become part of Uganda politically, militarily, and ethnically.

> In the words of Nakapor, they dismiss the spiritual consequences caused during national defence. Nakapor says that today, the overarching political context of the current warfare in Northern Uganda is defined as secular state war [*sic*], and that Uganda as a national entity takes precedence over traditionally defined ethnic identities and supersedes the spiritual ramifications of death from AK-47s during clashes for [*sic*] the government.[9]

I

Mirzeler now claims above, "In our turn we defined Loriang as a 'warlord' instead of a 'war-leader' because the Jie people redefined Loriang as such in the contemporary cultural and political context in 1996 and 1997." How did

[6] The editor, who gave me 2,000, then 4,000, words to reply, is librarian at Wisconsin-Madison, where Mirzeler was based for seven year's doctoral work, and is acknowledged for commenting on Mirzeler's work, "Veiled", v, vii.
[7] Mirzeler & Young, "Pastoral Politics", 408-10, 416, 419, 427
[8] *ibid*., 419, 422, 426
[9] *ibid*., 420. It is incredible that such academic-speak could appear on the lips of Nakapor, "who demonstrates his traditional power", in any language. I still await a response from Mirzeler on this: perhaps it has been channelled in other ways.

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the Jie people do this? There appears to be an elision between observer and observed in the redefinition of war-leader. Certainly "Pastoral Politics" cites no evidence from the Jie, only the emergence of warlords after 1979, rather than after 1997, and this is coincident with their citation of Ocan's use of the term from a version of the paper he presented at the Moroto conference,[10] dominated by non-Karamojong. This was not a Jie event, for they still commonly talk of "*ekapolon ka ajore*" (raid- or war-leader) or "*alomar*" (mass cattle corral) leader with no distinction from Loriang's rôle, except that he was the greatest.[11] Mirzeler and Young do not identify a single warlord currently in Karamoja. They cite no source.[12] Mirzeler now claims above that this was to protect his sources' identity, but did he ever interview one? Their socio-political rôle remains mysterious and, as I have argued, spurious.[13] It is certainly not necessary for big men to be buying armaments centrally, for it is the concern of each herding family. I heard of a woman who travelled twice the length of Karamoja, and came from Lobilangit to Namalu with a bagful of ammunition on the bus!

[10] Charles Ocan, "Pastoralism and Crisis in North-eastern Uganda: Factors that Have Determined Social Change in Karamoja" Paper presented in the Workshop on Pastoralism, Crisis and Transformation in Karamoja, 14–15 August 1992, Moroto, (Kampala, Centre for Basic Research Working Paper no. 20); Charles Ocan, "Pastoral Crisis in North-eastern Uganda: The Changing Significance of Cattle Raids" 14–15 August 1992, Moroto, (Kampala, Working Paper no. 21); Charles Ocan, "Pastoral Crisis and Social Change in Karamoja" in ed. Mahmood Mamdani and Joe Oloka-Onyango "Uganda: Studies in Living Conditions, Popular Movements and Constitutionalism" *Journal für Entwicklungspolitik* (1994), 140 uses the term "war-lords" suggesting that he had learned it from colleagues rather than the literature, "The accumulation by the new leaders, the war-lords, is largely through cattle raids." Ben Okudi, "Causes and Effects of the 1980 Famine in Karamoja" (Kampala, 1992), 16 uses the more appropriate "kraal leader" at the same conference. Mirzeler & Young, "Pastoral Politics", 419f., 422 do not attempt a theoretical justification of their sixfold use of the term "warlord", once juxtaposed with "kraal leader". They might just be adopting the usage of "the new leaders, the war-lords" from Ocan who was also the source for Peter Otim, "Scarcity and Conflict in Pastoral Areas: A look at the other side of the coin" in Babiker, Mustafa (ed.) *Resource Alienation, Militarisation, and Development: Case Studies from East African Drylands* (Addis Ababa, 2002), 112, 116. It affected policy papers: "A class or [*sic*] raiding entrepreneurs commonly [*sic*] referred to as warlords has emerged who engage in violent raiding on a frequent, well armed and organised basis." Robert Walker, "Anti-pastoralism and the growth of poverty and insecurity in Karamoja: Disarmament and development dilemmas" (Kampala, 2002)

[11] For an extended discussion of Karamojong military leaders, see Ben Knighton, "Belief in Guns and Warlords: Freeing Karamojong Identity from Africanist Theory" *African Identities* 4(2006), 269-86

[12] Mirzeler & Young, "Pastoral Politics", 422. There is no indication, who the "many Karamojan elders" (p. 423) might be, though eleven men and one woman, seven of them aged 50, the others 30, 40, and 65 are recorded in "Veiled".

[13] "Belief in Guns"

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The inclusion of warlords, which was not a concern of Mirzeler's dissertation, serves rather the need to find continental or global significance in one small part. Mirzeler and Young associate the term with an arms trade and with state politics in full knowledge of the use of the term in African Studies.[14] Concentrating on the effects of guns, the social shift of warlords replacing elders in leadership, gives them the ground to predict the disintegration of the culture. The notion of warlords began with 1920s China, and has been used to explain the weakness of the African state in the post-colonial period.[15] So the unauthorized presence of the gun permits the grim reality of Karamojong violence to be drawn together with studies of armed conflict in the states of Chad, Somalia, Sudan, Sierra Leone, and Liberia.[16] It is tempting to see in Uganda a similar scenario.[17]

II

When the voices of Karamojong are brought in, and there is some interesting material, yet we are not allowed to know their social rôle and place. Nakapor's name was given without qualification as "the current *ekeworan* (the politico-religious leader …)".[18] Now after it has been contested, Mirzeler is saying he knew from Joseph Lodungokol (one of his translators) in 1997 about the ambivalent position of Nakapor, though what is still not revealed. Nowhere, let alone three times, can I find I have written that Nakapor was "not a fire-maker". What I did write in a few rescensions was, "the writers are unaware that the succession to the rôle of firemaker has long been contested, so that none is recognized as consecrated, and an interregnum persists (J1, J2)". It is so, that Peter Lokiru did not tell me that Nakapor was not the fire-maker, but also neither he nor anyone else told me that Nakapor was the fire-maker. Rather he told me clearly that there was a "dispute of 'Who is the fire-maker's family?'".

Around 1996 the claimant to the office had been put to the test by putting sandals outside the homestead at night with "oil on top". The fraud's sandals would be eaten by hyena, which was apparently the case. If according to Mirzeler's Lodungokol, Nakapor was not respected in 1997, though

[14] Mirzeler & Young, "Pastoral Politics", 407-30, 409 ,419f., 422, 424, 426
[15] Roger Charlton & Roy May, 1989: "Warlords and Militarism in Chad" *Review of African Political Economy* 45(1989):12-25; Christopher Clapham, ed. *African Guerrillas* (Oxford, 1998), 212
[16] William Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States* (Boulder, CO, 1998)
[17] Pascal Ngoga, "Uganda: The National Resistance Army" in Clapham, *African Guerrillas*, 91-106; Stephen Chan, "The Warlord and Global Order" in Paul Rich, ed. *Warlords in International Relations* (Basingstoke, 1999), 164-72
[18] Mirzeler & Young, "Pastoral Politics", 420

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Lodoc[19] said he had been installed and had made New Fire, it could have been his sandals that were eaten. Anyway the scenario virtually repeats that of the succession of Lowatamoe long ago, whose fat-smeared sandals were the only pair not to be eaten by hyena.[20] Even this omen was not enough to persuade everybody, so there was a rupture in the clan and Lowatamoe had to leave Kotiang where the Toroi sub-clan remained with the hereditary generation-set leader. This ritual custom of the sandals has clearly retained its meaning for nearly 300 years according to my reckoning of the generation-sets,[21] which puts into perspective Dorothy Hodgson's troubles about possible changes in meaning over 50.[22]

In 1998 I was very interested to know from five different contributors in various parts of Kalokorwakol who was the current successor to Dengel and Lotum as fire-maker for Orwakol, but I was never given the name, but rather contestations and criteria. On April Fools' Day 2002 Apalopudukudoki told me that fire-making originated from Kanawat, thus giving unsolicited, if partial, confirmation to Lamphear's clear account that Orwakol's seat was not at Losilang, and to Lokiru's dispute over the real family of the fire-maker. The Ngelep clan and Toroi sub-clan had not forgotten that the pretender, Lomanio, had only taken the rôle for the Jimos clan by virtue of his mother, Lowatomoe's daughter,[23] Nasoryth.[24] This 250 year-old event has not been forgotten in Kanawat or Kotiang and informs contemporary politics. Then as now, one clan puts forward its claims while the other is divided, reminding us how little the nomadic pastoralists like hereditary monarchy.

On April Fools' Day 1998 I went to Losilang to interview members of the Jimos clan. Lodio was himself a relative of Lotum and another was the son of Lotyang Lonyangamoe, the step-brother of Lotum, and the grandson of Dengel. Both, he said, had fought the Acoli with Loriang at the Battle of

[19] On 14 October 2005 I interviewed in Losilang a Joshua Lodoc, born in 1932, son of Penek and grandson of Locam of the Toroi clan at Losilang. He was one of the very few Jie to be schooled at Lotome Mission and be confirmed by the Bishop of the Upper Nile. Mirzeler's "storyteller" ("Veiled", 1, 289) was Lodoc (if he was 65 in 1997, there is an exact tally), who was reported to be the son of "Penek" and grandson of "Lochiam", but there is no mention of school in Lotome. Sadly I did not ask Lodoc about fire-makers.
[20] Lamphear, *Traditional History*, 170
[21] Ben Knighton, *Vitality*, 150
[22] Dorothy Hodgson, "Religious Beliefs and Practices in Uganda" Journal of African History, 47(2006), 522
[23] Lamphear, *Traditional History*, 171. My book is not aimed at defending Lamphear, when it revises his age-classes for being influenced by Abwor and Turkana, changes the span of a generation-set, and diminishes their historical usefulness.
[24] Edward Wayland, "Preliminary Studies", 224

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Caicaion (in 1902[25]) and had beaten them badly. A divine (emuron) prophesied and foretold, that "if anyone killed this bullock of Dengel, they would be pulled to bits (acilun) and killed". After the death of Acoli and Dodoso enemies at the Battle of Tiira (in the late 1890s[26]), the British came (for the first time in September 1898[27]). Then the Karimojong raided cattle from Losilang, including Dengel's name-ox called Lokolireng (red markings on the hide), but a counter-raid brought it back. The enemy was defeated, so the prophecy was fulfilled.

The men of the Jimos clan showed me, the *ebur*, a hole in the flat rock that was used for pounding sacred clay for anointing, and the place where the old fire-maker used to lie to direct the affairs of the homestead. They even acted out the rituals for my benefit. Since there was no question of interfering with the dignity of the present incumbent, it appeared on the "mount of respect" that Lotum's office, though extant, had not been filled.

Mirzeler has interesting material on the fire-maker. Lodoc told him that Lumulen was considered too young at first, but now the Jimos clan are championing him, apparently because of no other reason than that Nakapor is left-handed. There is a neat connection with what Lodio told me before he died, that Lomulen Epuriapua was one of only two candidates for the remnant of the retired Tome generation-set to choose from according to their behaviour. The other was not Nakapor, but Dengel Kamare, most likely the grandson of Dengel, and the one designated as his heir to the Gullivers.[28]

This brings us to the identification of contributors about which there are several issues in research ethics.[29] Did Mirzeler obtain prior, formal permission from his in order to put down their words for posterity and public inspection among President Museveni's best allies? I made my position

[25] W.D.M. Bell, *The Wanderings of an Elephant Hunter* (London, 1958), 63
[26] Lamphear, *Traditional History*, 229
[27] H.H. Austin, *With Macdonald to Uganda* (London, 1903), 150-60
[28] Pamela Gulliver & Philip Gulliver, *The Central Nilo-Hamites* (London, 1953), 40, 50. The point of a footnote here in my *Vitality*, 183n4 was not to provide evidence for the text, which was given by oral sources who were sure that the last fire-maker was Lotum and that he died between 1950 and 1956, but to comment on the lack of fire-making, and point to the comparative material. It would be easy for the Gulliver who took this information to confuse Lotum and his father's name, when they had misspelt Dengel, Jimos, and Losilang in the space of nine words.
[29] "the interests and rights of those studied should come first…. Consent from subjects does not absolve anthropologists from their obligation to protect research participants as far as possible …" Association of Social Anthropologists "Ethical Guidelines for Good Research Practice" (1999) Available at: http://www.theasa.org/ethics/ethics_guidelines.htm Accessed 2000

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clear in the introduction. Though I had amassed a great amount of detail about the ancestry and social categorization of my contributors, amounting to 1,535 words, I finally omitted it, for it would mean that every single informant would be traceable by any reader. My qualms were not about other researchers, but about the sporadically active security forces. I used many seditious comments, such as "the government is an enemy" or it "eats cattle". It is my foremost ethical duty to protect my sources for life even if they were quite brazen when they spoke – in the absence of security forces. "Anthropologists should be sensitive to the possible consequences of their work and should endeavour to guard against predictably harmful effects."[30] The Ugandan army is as I write again at war with the Karamojong (New Vision 15.2.07). In such a situation just to reveal who are knowledgeable, or influential people is to lay them open to potentially brutal pressure.

If the army can shoot dead a RC Irish missionary on the road, it can, and does, much more damage to hated, despised Karamojong, typified as "terrorists". Imprisonment without trial, beating, and torture are commonplace, when the army stirs itself. Thus I only divulged a few names: those who had sadly died already like Lodio, and some friends who were not quoted as saying anything seditious and could look after themselves. I knew they would appreciate their names in print. So would others, but they often gave me their confidence, and it is not for me to betray it. Thus I will be sitting on hard-won notes and cassette-tapes for a lot longer yet. Sharing data should not breach privacy, confidentiality, or anonymity.[31] A sensitive approach which values all contributors and their knowledge is required.

The degree of credence of my reviewers is high enough.

> You are creating a very impressive body of work. We almost never see someone who can look at a society that is foreign to those who are not part of it, including you when you started, and seeing them exactly as who they are and what they are - not as others expect or want them to be. Your work is incredibly attractive to those of us who respect the truth.
>
> We are honored to have read your papers, and to have met you.
>
> Joanne says, in contrast to everything she has read, she doesn't feel any bias coming through of any kind with yours.[32]

[30] *ibid*.
[31] *ibid*.
[32] Paul Gallant, personal communication 10 January 2007

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> ...that's why I find your work so impressive and rare.[33]

> The book is ambitious, informative, profoundly sympathetic, well written … and the linguistic, historical, and anthropological expertise on show is staggeringly impressive. The author's bibliography is exhaustive: 908 items…[34]

The only West African reviewer has nothing derogatory to say at all:

> In a field often plagued by such problems as blatant stereotypes, sentimentalism, essentialism, and facile generalizations Knighton presents a balanced analysis of Karamojong religion.… This is an important book. I applaud the author's sympathetic, detailed and critical study of Karamojong religion. This monograph will be very useful for scholars in anthropology, religious studies, history, cultural studies, and mission studies.[35]

Despite the questions which Mirzeler highlights, Hodgson concludes, "As for his central thesis, Knighton has certainly demonstrated that Karamojong religion persists as a living faith …",[36] which contrasts markedly, with the claim that, "The soulless AK-47 is eating away at the soul of Karamojong culture."[37]

History is ever contingent. If Museveni chooses to throw all his military firepower at the Karamojong, Uganda's ethnocidal tendencies may at last be fulfilled and Karamoja will experience the African equivalent of the Highland clearances in Scotland. So will end a way of life; nomadic pastoralism and age-classes will become a romantic past for the twenty-first century. A ruthless military solution could conceivably eliminate cattle from Karamoja, and the government could live with the consequences of a starving, displaced population of a third of a million. The option then becomes starker, between genocide or giving way, as state governments have eventually done by letting pastoralist institutions predominate, secure in the assumption that they will have negligible impact on modern politics at the centre. Short of the final solution, then, Karamojong culture, however inconveniently non-

[33] Joanne D Eisen, personal communication 10 January 2007
[34] Paul Gifford, Review of "The Vitality of Karamojong Religion" *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 21(2006), 416
[35] Akintunde Akinade, Review of "The Vitality of Karamojong Religion" *International Bulletin of Mission Research* (2006).
[36] Dorothy Hodgson, "Religious Beliefs and Practices in Uganda" *Journal of African History* 47(2006), 523
[37] Mirzeler & Young, "Pastoral Politics", 424

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Western, however revoltingly barbarian to Ugandans, will continue for the foreseeable future. Its religion is intact, its economy is soundly based on the efficient use of local nutrients, and its politics effectively sustains local autonomy. Yet the Karamojong are free to change whenever they corporately make a fundamental choice to do so. Neither we, nor the government of Uganda, nor Western technology has, or indeed should have, that power to determine.

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