

Historical ethnography and the collapse of Karamojong culture:

Premature reports of trends

by

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New world orders have implications. The post-11.9.01 campaign against terrorism has identified ‘failed’ and ‘failing’ states as its source, thus at once highlighting North-East African countries such as Sudan, of which Clare Short said on behalf of the British government:

We should not forget that Osama Bin Laden had his headquarters there up to 1998. As we saw in Afghanistan collapsing States, where people live in poverty and misery, provide opportunities for international terrorists to organise and hide themselves. (DfID 2002)

USAID has sought proposals addressing violent conflicts having a cross-border dimension ‘to reinforce the objectives of the USAID/Mission’, having a

Conflict Quick Response Fund to support innovative, catalytic, and facilitative activities in conflict prevention, mitigation and response (CPMR) in cross border areas in the Greater Horn and Great Lakes regions. Applications addressing violent conflicts having a cross-border dimension are encouraged from the Northern Arc region ... [which] is defined as the cross border zone along the

¹ This paper was presented with illustrations as ‘Historical Ethnography and the Collapse of Karamojong Culture: Premature Reports of Trends’ in the African Studies Seminar, St. Antony’s College, University of Oxford, 13 June 2002

Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, and Sudan borders (the Karamojong Cluster), and the Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia borders.² (USAID 2002)

Oxfam GB, whose Karamoja director is from the bitter enemies of Katakwi, issued a report comparing the Karamojong to Joseph Kony's insurgents, recommending that, 'Disarmament of the Karimojongs [*sic*] should be treated as part of a wider plan for regional disarmament under the auspices of Inter-Governmental Authority on Development'.³ (Oxfam 2001) So it was that Clare Short attended the next summit meeting 10-11.1.02 in Khartoum where the terrorist acts of 11.9.02 were top of the agenda. She chaired bilateral talks between Uganda and Sudan to ensure co-operation to eliminate the Lord's Resistance Army and the cross-border arms trade to Karamoja. The primary factors in violent conflicts involving pastoralists in the region are seen to be intensified cattle rustling and a local arms race, small arms proliferation facilitated by 'transnational criminal networks', and inadequate policing and state security (Mkuta 2001:ii,vii)

The Karamoja region is awash with guns that originate from the war in Sudan, northern Uganda and even far afield in Somalia and Ethiopia. Prof Omwony Ojok, until recently the Minister for Karamoja Affairs, says lack of governmental control in parts of Sudan that border Uganda have made it impossible to destroy the gun markets flourishing in the region. (Wairagala 2002)

IGAD is now focusing on the 5,000,000 guns on the loose among the 189,000,000 in the most conflict-prone part of the world: the pastoral parts of the Horn of Africa. It

² Management Services International, a Washington-based NGO, sought anthropological expertise on the Karamojong for such a purpose, but when the experts on Somali border insecurity were grounded by US embassy warnings of insecurity, they were reallocated to be the consultants on the Karamoja borders.

³ Oxfam's Policy Adviser in the Conflict and Arms Policy Department in Oxford refused to comment on the progress of the Disarmament Programme in April.

has launched a new body CEWARN, The Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism, which has the Karamojong cluster at the top of its agenda (*New Vision* 7 & 10.6.02).

The Disarmament Programme in Karamoja is funded by inter-governmental donors, including a small grant from the UK (Carrington 7.5.02 E-mail), who are strangely reluctant to take any credit for the application of their taxpayers' money. Museveni called EU envoys to his tented camp at Kangole among the Bokora in Karamoja last month to show them that the programme was 'going on well despite some drawbacks'. He appealed to their sense of 'enormous investment opportunities', such as gold mining, 'now that security is being restored to the region', in asking 'for their assistance to help Karamojong settle into peaceful and productive lives'.

Studies of the region in the last decade, which have not been voluminous due to chronic insecurity, whether anthropological, sociological, political, environmental, or developmental, have tended to focus on guns and warlords, keying in to wider theories of international relations in Africa. (Belshaw & Malinga 1999; Galaty 1998). The centre for Basic Research in Kampala is responsible for applying the term 'warlord' to Karamoja (Oloka-Onyango *et al.*, 1992:17), 'Over the past two decades, control over local armed groups has shifted from clan⁴ elders to warlords.'. Charles Ocan (1992:140) 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 (1992:16) uses the more appropriate 'kraal leader' at the same Centre for Basic Research conference. Mirzeler and Young

⁴ The reference should be to age-classes instead of clan elders, an old and common mistake in reports.

do not attempt a theoretical justification of their sixfold use of the term 'warlord', which would be difficult in the case of Karamoja. They may just be adopting uncritically the usage of 'the new leaders, the war-lords' from Ocan who was also the source for Peter Otim, (2002:112,116). Mirzeler and Young (2000:407-30, 409, 419f., 422, 424, 426) associate it with an arms trade and with state politics in full knowledge of the use of the term in African Studies. Concentrating on the effects of guns, the main one they identify is the social change of warlords replacing elders in leadership, which gives them the ground to predict the disintegration of the culture, which Sandra Gray (2000) claims began in the 1950s. Policy papers are influenced accordingly, '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.' (Walker 2002). It is seriously advanced that the firing of guns at celebrations demonstrates the death of traditional culture. 'Today, the bride feels devalued whose removal to her husband's home is not also accompanied by the repeated firing of the guns that provided the cattle.' (Gray 2000:408). At the Bokora dances in 1909, 'Each gunner would outrival the other to see who could produce the greatest noise, smoke, and fire, each discharge being greeted with a yell of consternation and applause from the girls and children.' (Bell 1949:136).

There is thus harmony between international agencies, governments, NGOs, and research centres on the 'Karamoja problem'. Since 1979 when Amin's fleeing troops left Moroto barracks with a full armoury of AK-47s, the Karamojong have been suffering from a proliferation of small arms, that has broken down security in their area, eroded the culture, and fostered the emergence of dangerous armed criminals who trade in arms internationally, thus posing a threat to global peace and prosperity.

In carrying guns, the Karamojong have forfeited respect for their traditional culture, which is in a painful transition anyway, so that the sooner socio-economic development can take root so much the better, especially for their neighbours and their livestock enterprises. The solution is obviously simple: remove the gun, if necessary by force, this corner of Uganda will return to normal, and world leaders will sleep in their beds more soundly for one more state to be saved from failing.

1. A HISTORY OF GUN-LAW

However there is a lack of historical understanding here, for the ‘Karamoja problem’ was labelled as such on the eve of independence at the latest by the *Report of the Karamoja Security Committee*.

The problem facing Karamoja is a virtual breakdown of law and order. The Karamojong seem to raid their neighbours if and when they please and the country is in a state of constant warfare which seems to become increasingly serious and more widespread all the time ...

If Karamoja is to cease to be the problem that it is now, the pace of development must be forced and forced hard, and if this is to be done, it should be *NOW* or *NEVER!* (Bataringaya⁵ 1961:4,15)

The *Pax britannica* did not go so far as to prevent cattle-raiding. Sandy Field (Letter 24.3.89), the former District Commissioner, reminisced of when he left Karamoja in 1958, ‘that the best efforts to develop Karamoja were likely to founder on our failure to solve the law-and-order problem and that the race to get the District into a better stance to confront national independence would not be won.’⁶ Nevertheless belief in

⁵ BK Bataringaya, the youthful chairman of the Committee, went on to be Minister for Internal Affairs under Obote.

⁶ This acknowledged failure contrasts with an American perspective that ‘the implementation of colonial policy in Karamoja brought the Karamojong to the brink of cultural extinction’ (Gray 2000:409). The British Empire never had that power over the Karamojong, nor sought it.

modernity did not fade. ‘The assumption in a scientific age is that it must be possible to find a solution to all social problems. Is this so in Karamoja?’ (*Africa Digest* 1958:95f.) Yet so far we have not strayed outside the developmental perspective.

Ever since they became neighbours, raiding has gone on intermittently not only between Karimojong and Pokot, but also them and Jie, Dodoso, Turkana, Samburu, Marakwet, Sapiny or Sabawoot, and Bakusu (Knighton 1990:85-99, 143; *The East African* 31.1.00). For the first half of the 19th century Jie, Turkana, and Karimojong were attacking neighbouring peoples and indigenous peoples such as Poet, Kuliak, Mogos, and Oropom, assimilating them or driving them off (Knighton 1990:96-100). Across the region, ‘Large scale raids in which hundreds of warriors were engaged became the most successful strategy to “harvest” other peoples’ livestock’ (Bollig 2000:360). In the second half there were repeated battles between the Jie on the one hand and the Karimojong and Dodoso on the other that could escalate into an attempt to break up the Jie polity (Lamphear 1976:169ff.). The rationale for their failure, which was sealed by the battles won by Loriang the great Jie warleader, was that they needed a constant supply of enemy cattle to raid!

Mount Elgon was the scene of intensive inter-tribal warfare during the whole of the 19th and early decades of the 20th century, when the Sebei-speaking semi-pastoral tribes living on the mountain were involved in conflict with cattle-raiders from the surrounding tribes. (Weatherby 1962:200)

Safaris to Karamoja could have the effect of provoking escalations. ‘The Arabs were the first foreigners. They came from the north through Torit and the Nile. They were business people after ivory and hides, and they killed with guns. They would force people on the way to carry the tusks.’ (D4) There were 300 Sudanese mutineers skirting the region (Austin 1903:142f.). In 1902 the British were impressed with the

‘ever recurring petty quarrels and blood feuds’⁷ Swahili and Abyssinian were happily joining in the local raiding (Knighton 1990:122-148), as is still remembered by Karamojong. ‘The Arabs were chased by Cumpa [Swahilis], who came through Toposa. They did not want their religion, for they feared to be circumcized... They also bought tusks, not gold. They took slaves and fought the Arabs. They had more than 500 in their *safaris* and many guns.⁸ They could join with the Turkana.’ (D4) The Abac [Abyssinians] fought the Arabs, they had horses and were heavily armed. (D4) ‘The time of Abac was a time of fighting’ (D3) ‘They were very fierce.’ (D4) The Abac wanted to take over the land. They killed elephants and took the tusks ... some Dodoso killed Abac to get guns. (D10) ‘The Cumpa [Swahilis] used Dodoso as *askaris*, and would give a gun if you killed elephant with it’ (D3). ‘Lokijukwa⁹ chased them ... (D3)

In 1910, there was ‘constant’ tribal fighting with the Pokot (Barber 1965:34). In 1920, the British pushed the Pokot, Sebei, Karamojong, and Turkana into conducting a peace ceremony, but hostilities only subsided for six months, as the Pokot, growing in numbers, sought to expand into Karamoja, which they did for the next seventy years (Weatherby 1962:210, Brasnett 1958:118f., Knighton 1990:348n.12). ‘Peace with the Upe is always like that, it never lasts long’ (women in Alwyn 1998). There is only

⁷ Harry Johnston quoted by Barber 1968:57

⁸ The Bokora c.1908 completely annihilated a safari of 300 guns and 800 men and women (Bell 1949:111)

⁹ ‘The one that pushes’ referring to a British column or platoon that covered only 10-12 miles a day, only half of what Karamojong would do walking in daylight. It was a common name for the British in the first two decades of encounter.

one year in the recorded history of the Karamojong,¹⁰ 1925, when no homicidal attempts were made by one group on another.

Incomplete district records show that 6 different ethnic groups between 1929 and 1983 killed some 3,000 Turkana, the hardest and fiercest of all nomadic pastoralists in the region, and took about 100,000 cattle (Oba 1992:9). Between 1958 and 31.10.61, a total of 727 raids were recorded, all involving the newly reunited and fast-growing Karimojong, and a third involved the expanding Pokot (Dyson-Hudson 1966:247-9). On average, only two men were prosecuted for every three raids, yet 201 people were killed (Bataringaya 1961:37).¹¹ Only a quarter of the 81,934 cattle stolen were recovered. The Ugandan official who observed in 1911, 'Until these remote parts of the country are far more closely administered, I fear we can do very little to stop these Ancient Native Customs. (EA 19/1911:1.5.11 PC, EP to Chief Sec.) proved mistaken as to what administration could achieve with Karamojong culture. Two years after civil administration began in 1921 the first chief was killed. The higher the chiefs tried to rise, and most did not try, the more they were hated, even being ridiculed in children's songs as enemies (Gourlay 1971:94). The current system is considered to be no different from that the British first instituted, as 'they used *nyampara* [spirit-eaters, headmen] and *mkungui* [subchiefs], just like now.' (D4). More systematic

¹⁰ Karamojong is used as a generic term for the dominant plains tribes of Karamoja: Dodos, Jie, and Karimojong, who all have a significant degree of original and ritual, if not continuing, political unity. Fighting does break out between Karimojong territorial sections. It is a moot point, whether Bokora, Pian, and Maseniko sections are not becoming self-standing political units, with the others classified as enemies.

¹¹ Patrick Morgan (personal communication 18.5.02), District officer in Teso, still remembers picking up the dead bodies.

government provoked fiercer trouble than when the administration was concentrating solely on protecting its monopoly of violence to invent the rule of the state in Africa.

The end of empire and the beginning of independence was a time of great military activity by the state to stop cattle-raiding once and for all. The skeleton in Uganda's nation-building cupboard was to be laid to rest by building roads across the remote passes, by manning police posts, and by laying down airstrips for spotter-planes to report every assembly and movement of men and cattle, in order to make their control more complete. Spears and guns were subject to strict regulations, and men felt their faith faltering when under pressure from suspicious eyes in the sky (Marshall Thomas 1965:61f.). Spotter planes would look for sacrifices at an *akiriket* as a sign of an impending raid. However the colonial administration had failed to meet its top priority throughout its occupation of Karamoja: law and order, even when they had forced a preponderance of spears over guns, and ruled that one of those should be carried. Without the energetic actions of a super-tribal umpire, mortality would have been worse, even if the long run effects of colonial rule in raising population, while limiting dry season grazing were not sustainable.¹² British colonial rule was successful in subduing Karamojong cattle-raiding after occupying the region, but

¹² The census figure of 171,945 in 1959 had grown by 200,000 in 32 years according to the unreliable census of 1991, but it probably demonstrates that the ecological limits were greater than those feared by officialdom. Casualty totals can be expected to be 7 times greater than those seen in before 1919 in order that proportions remain constant. 0.4 raiding casualties per thousand of the population is small compared with infant mortality and less than what happened either side of the colonial period, but the important point is that British rule only suppressed this violence towards the enemy without lessening the motivation sufficiently.

never eliminated the casualties.¹³ Though deferring to superior force on the spot, the Karamojong have never ceded their right to violence, or corporately acknowledged that they constitute part of any state.

Observers are prone to jumping to the conclusion that cattle-raiding is continuously escalating. It is true that fighting and casualties periodically escalate, but there are also pauses and lulls and even a few years together of relative peace. As Almagor (1977:143) wrote of the Dasanec, 'there is no telling whether escalation will turn into all-out war or revert to "normal" raiding'. It is still important to maintain a distinction between armed fights or sporadic battles, and all-out wars or full-scale campaigns that are much rarer (Fukui & Turton 1977:6).

2. DISARMAMENT OLD AND NEW

Just as it was reported to the Macdonald expedition in 1898 that the Jie were 'very hostile and treacherous' (Austin 1903:144), so it was rumoured to the Political Officer, PSH Tanner. He found that the Bokora would not counter-attack them, because the gunmen were now making up the enemy rearguard, so they offered Tanner a half-share in any cattle recovered if he would use his guns (Barber 1964b:17). He refused to interfere but was impressed by the opportunity for gain armed traders had in such a situation, an impression confirmed by his belief that

¹³ Colonial officers, though they felt personally safe, which was due to the prestige built up at the beginning of administration constructed by displays of brute force, acknowledge that they never mastered recurrent raiding and homicide (Brasnett 1996:29; Cleave 1996:34f.; Fleay 1996:23;). Garth ap Rees (1996:322), who was located to Karamoja as late as 1958, acknowledged 'trying to keep the Suk and the Karamojong within a mile or two of the law in which we did not really succeed.'

Loriang's army also included Swahilis and was a danger to the peace. A Gras rifle in 1908 could be traded in Karamoja for 3-10 cattle (EA 145/09 30.8.18 PC, EP-Turpin). Lt. EGM Thorneycroft (EA 19/1911: Report on the Situation in Karamoja 11.2.1911:1,3) was falsely informed by the Karimojong that the Jie were 'the aggressors in every raid' and 'that 9 out of every 10 of them are said to possess Guns'. What they needed was half a Battalion to 'teach them a good lesson'.

The Jie were rightly divining British thinking. The *emuron* who divinely assisted in the 1902 battle against the Acoli also predicted that the British were coming after the 'death' of the Dodoso at the Battle of Tiira and the 'death of the Acoli' at Caicaon. The prophecy evidently helped in staving off a Jie riposte to the following atrocity.

The Karimojong took animals from Losilang and Dengel's bull, Akolireng [red spots on a white hide]. A counter-raid brought it back. The Karimojong told the British, 'These are the Ngijie.' The British arrested Jie leaders and nailed them to trees. They used firing squads and burned people in their huts, especially in Nakapelimoru. Others followed the confiscated cattle to Kapeta, and found them with long nails hammered through the forehead after they had been tied or chained to the tree. The nails are still there on the tree. (J2)

When Lokijukwa [the British forces] came, they crucified and tortured people at the Kapeta drinking places. Arms were coming from Abyssinia ... (J20)

The story is lent credibility by the disappearance of Tanner's report (EA 71/1910) from the Entebbe Archives.¹⁴ That Tanner went from 'Panianhara'¹⁵ to his next camp

¹⁴ Lamphear 1976:256n. Departing colonial officers were sensitive that nationalists would use records to demean the imperial reputation. Thus the Moroto Archives were burned.

¹⁵ This was the selfsame subsection where a prophecy had been given a century before about the advent of a pale-skinned people. The Karimojong likewise 'had a tradition that white men would ultimately come to rule the country. As we were the first white men to enter Karamoja, the natives said the tradition had been fulfilled, and that the country was ours.' (Macdonald 1899b:236).

at Kapeta is marked on the map tracing his route (EA 13.3.11 Acting Governor, SC Tomkins to Sec. of State for the Colonies).

So many people were killed because of guns. The British came from the north. People were tied to trees, and shot or nailed through the head ... The British had guns, so we did not confront them. Their rolling volleys were too much for us. We dug our guns into the ground and hid them in caves. (J25)

The police patrols were not satisfied that the Jie were disarmed until they had collected 22 more rifles in September 1912 by rounding up cattle and burning deserted villages (EA 2957 20.10.12 Diary by Capt. W d'E Williams).

The Dodoso said it would be an excellent thing if the British would not permit indiscriminate killings, but they had heard it all before and thought Tanner simply a large-scale raider who would enrich himself with the Abyssinian ivory (Barber 1964b:21). After all, Major Darley (1935:21), a hunter who had recently left an empty whisky bottle hanging up in Chudi Chudi dedicated to all government officers 'and other unfortunates', had passed himself off as 'the authorized Agent of the British Government!' Having realized they were looked upon as just another raider, the British made it their aim to stay with the people and tackle raiding by every group, and this had the desired effect.

Lokijukwa asked the Dodoso to hand in guns which they did, but they buried many for when Lokijukwa would go away and the owners died with the guns spoiling in the ground. They feared Lokijukwa's powerful guns, the .404 breech-loader and the large Cuka-Cuka bullets.' (D3)

Lokijukwa fought foreigners to establish government. They were good, for they stayed with the people. They made the people to surrender. People hid guns on the mountains and they remained there without even their sons knowing. They used headmen and chiefs, just like now. The British government got everything except those that rusted. (D4)

A Nimule to Lake Turkana patrol of 40-50 police was instituted to cover 37,000 square miles (EA 19/1911 13.3.1911 Ag. Governor-Sec. of State for Colonies).

For the current Disarmament Programme, there are 15,000 troops stationed in Karamoja.¹⁶ A long NGO-driven sensitization campaign using chiefs before December 2001 led to Karamojong voluntarily handing in 7,780 guns before the final amnesty deadline on 15.2.02 out of a total ridiculously estimated between 40,000 and 150,000. Then began the forcible campaign using troops. Whenever information could be elicited as to gunholdings, they were to act.

The Jie armies are immobilized, because of the Disarmament Programme. If suspected of having a gun, then one has to produce it and receive a certificate, but that leads to further harassment and the certificate being taken. Failure to produce a gun on demand means a beating with batons, sticks, or whips. Information is sought of others. Jie have been killed like that. If someone runs with a gun, he is shot. (J22)

Members of the Local Defence Unit are allowed access to registered guns, but not to take to the dry-season cattle-camps to defend against raids.

Though given little publicity in Britain, an Irish missionary working for the Mill Hill Fathers was shot dead on the road past Mount Toror in Karamoja, Uganda, together with his driver and cook on 21.3.02. This atrocity would have been laid at the door of the Karamojong warriors had it not been for witnesses who escaped in a vehicle which drew up behind. The one in charge of the makeshift road-block beckoned the occupants to reverse and get out of their vehicle, but the driver noticed he had removed the safety-catch from his AK-47, so told the health-worker with him that if he obeyed, he would go without him. So saying, he drove on. The two armed men were adept at their task for they shot repeatedly from behind through the metal of the back door hitting the driver three times in the back. Two bullets made superficial

¹⁶ A similar figure is on or over the Acoli-Sudan border in the operation against the LRA.

wounds; the third entered near the spine going up into his collar-bone, missing the lungs. With hazard-lights flashing, he drove at speed to Kotido to tell the tale of the two men in full army kit. Their bootmarks were then tracked to the UPDF camp nearby. Within four days Corporal Omedio and Private Muhammad were court-martialled and publicly shot by firing-squad in Kotido before they could speak to anyone outside the army. A rumour was spread that robbery was the motive, but nothing had been stolen.

Six bullocks were sacrificed at Pananyang Dam one for each subsection of the Orwakol section of the Jie tribe in the Karamojong cluster. This was an annual ceremony to pray for rain and against any problems being encountered, this year set in advance by the elders for the fourth full-moon of the year. Since it was the third (27.3.02) by the Gregorian calendar, this shows that their calendar, both solar and lunar, is still independent of Western influence.¹⁷ Each subsection brings the ox prescribed for the ceremony and a deputation of at least two senior elders. The Losilang party had not turned up, so they would have to decide on the next occasion, when the Losilang people kill their ox to make up the seven bulls for the seven Orwakol subsections. (J20) So there would have to be a sacrifice at their sacred grove at Lomus for the whole of Orwakol, which elders from the other subsections and the Oding (Rengen) section would attend to ensure that the whole section was together in policy and in communication with the rest of the tribe. News reported by the elders, dreams, and divination by haruspication provide means for reaching a new consensus every time. 'At the Kotiang *akiriket* we prayed for the year to Akujũ, for

¹⁷ The Karamojong year begins with the moon of Lokwang, that of whiteness when the sun has bleached the grass in December or January, and normally had 13 moons.

wealth in cattle, for the health of the Itunga and animals, for rain, water, peace (*ekisil*), and for victory over enemies. Whenever there is *akiriket*, let them pray for rain and victory! “What can we do about UPDF?” We prayed for them to go.’ (J20)¹⁸

I was beaten when producing my card [for handing in a gun], and my wife was tied down. What can we do? What can we tell these people? Women are raped. Two women aborted this morning after a beating. One was from Rengen. The wife of Lokori was raped leading to the abortion of a three-four month pregnancy. One of the LDUs [Local Defence Unit militia] witnessed the UPDF. The woman was raped at home, and it may be a diseased soldier. It is the desire of the Jie and the desire of the Dodoso to be killed at Kalosoric [the army barracks on Mount Toror].

Father Apalopus brought the Dodoso and the Jie into peace but they killed him. What did he do? What does this leader [Museveni] want? He is already in power. Whom now does he lead? Will the government compensate?¹⁹

We are now in problems, because of government raiding. People are now crying but earlier people had loved Museveni, but he has become a killer, an enemy of the Karamojong. Some two soldiers entered an LDU’s homestead, where the guns had been surrendered. They can go for girls even at night around 11:00 pm; where there are no guns, they use the threat of guns. Girls were raped inside where food is stored. Girls and men were all tortured including children. Property was looted, chickens, and goats. We now desire another government, even Kenya. We can emigrate even tomorrow. We shall write a letter to Kucal, chief of the Turkana, so that they can protect us. (LDU Commander from Rengen at Kotiang)

Father I am standing here shocked when I am raped when men are present. We had returned our guns. I was threatened to return the gun, when I have a certificate [for handing it in]. When my husband is in the cattle-camp and I run to the bush and something attacks me and my children, what can I do, when I have already returned my gun? If I am affected with HIV/AIDS when my husband is in the cattle-camp, I end here. The soldiers have raped me and my four co-wives, so we shall die, and the head of the household be killed. How could the government troops do these things? I shall go out of my family, and let them remain with my family. All of us created in Jie may die of HIV/AIDS, which I have already contracted. How shall I survive at hospital? (Woman at Kotiang)

The Uganda Human Rights Commission turned up in Kotido on Maundy Thursday, interviewed officials and passers-by in the town before returning south for Easter. Among the Jie of Nakapelimoru was where any investigation should have started, for

¹⁸ This is how they prayed in the *akigat* a few days later:

L. Sugar-ants [UPDF] which have just come and disturbed our peace,

Go away!

R. Go away! ...

¹⁹ This reflects not a modern human rights agenda, but the continuing customs of bloodwealth (60 cattle) and other compensation, also usually in cattle, ordered in cases heard by the elders.

it was there in his parish that Revd. Fr. Declan O'Toole began his paschal ministry. At dawn on 9.3.02 an army contingent went into all the homes to flush out the whole population with batons, including a woman whose umbilical cord had not yet been cut from childbirth. Children were beaten; small girls, a harmless, mentally-ill girl, the old, the blind, the lame, and infirm bore the scars 19 days later. Bones and skulls were broken. Twelve women were raped. A 6-year-old boy was killed, but hidden with grass on the hill. A young man was bayoneted and hidden under a rock at the top of the hill (but by 28.3.02, hyenas had dragged out the remains too decomposed even for them). A youth was stabbed in the groin. The army stopped the LC5 Chairman, the senior locally elected representative, from going there. All were made to lie in the dry-season sun from 6am to 4pm. Women were kicked in the stomach and pregnant women hit on the side. Then the priest called Apalopus arrived, 'Why this treatment ... even for a man who had just shaved his head in mourning for his wife?'. They hit him on the head. He went to report the matter to the commanding officer and then to the Irish embassy who made representations to the government. 'That is why that *musungu* (white) was killed ... They shot him.'

Witnesses were prepared to testify formally before me in public, and I had not the slightest trouble in gaining their acceptance to take notes and record them on cassette-tape. Indeed they saw it as a mark of good administration, never exercised, that someone was interested enough in them to write down what they were saying. Yet none of this could have happened before the army commander or in the district centre at Kotido, since they would have been in the presence of *ngimoe*, (strangers, enemies).

On Maunday Thursday I went to the very spot under a tree at Nakapelimoru on the extreme east of Najie settlement, where I used to preach in the years 1984 to 1986 and on my return in 1998. Again they wanted to proclaim their grievances to me in public, and wanted me to photograph and record them as evidence. Ordinarily they can be very wary of being photographed, feeling that some part of their shade or selves is being taken away by the photographer. They do not besport themselves for the sake of any kind of professional tourism. Apart from the national game park in the Kidepo Valley there are no tourist services in Karamoja.

Some time ago things became bad, when our animals were getting finished, when grazing and water was short. When we reported that our animals were raided, no action was taken. Again we heard that a raid was taking place at the homesteads. Our people are now rotten and nobody is happy. An enemy can even come and take from here.²⁰ People are now scattered and thirsty in the bush. Others have been killed by enemies from the bush.²¹ Some women have been cut off from Nakapelimoru. If this is the behaviour of this government, which has killed people, we are quiet. Our cows have gone, some to Bokora, some to Dodoso. We are left like that with problems. They had promised us that animals shall be returned, even some children who were taken to Bokora. Even people have been killed by the government troops. Are not some Nakapelimoru women scattered by hunger in the bush? Somebody has been killed at the rock called Mogos. He was stabbed with a gun bayonet and died there.²² All our properties are lost in Nakapelimoru. Even women were put under the sun and kicked in their stomachs. If you complain why they rape the women, they point the gun at you so that you fail to have words to say. The women raped by soldiers are twelve. One woman close by was raped, and there were some others who have gone to the bush to collect brushwood for fencing.

Testimony was corroborated by other witnesses and by the visible evidence in human flesh left by the army's incursion.

How many people were beaten here? All the people. My child has a fracture and has been taken to the health unit (DDO Clinic). These soldiers do not know the difference between old men, small children, blind people, and the lame. When the *Musungu* [O'Toole] came to rescue us, the soldiers beat even that one when he complained of the torture of making everyone lie facing the sun. That is the very day they killed somebody on that hill. Even a certain boy from this home was stabbed and he is at the health unit. They kept on asking, 'Whereabouts is the gun?' Yet all the guns have already been sold, even for the three years we have had famine. Guns were sold to the Turkana and the Maseniko. Then they still continue beating me. Even those who are mentally disturbed are there in jail.

²⁰ The veracity of what they were saying was demonstrated by a cattle raid of their domestic animals nearby while I was around Nakapelimoru again on Easter Sunday afternoon.

²¹ Two were shot under a tree, whom I saw three days later.

²² This is the corpse that I afterwards photographed there.

That day when the soldiers were beating people from here one of the children disappeared on the very day the soldiers killed that person from the east side of the hill. The father looked for this boy and somebody told him, 'Let's go to the hill and they got this person who was covered with grass. This child was the same size [about 6 years old] as the dead person covered with grass. The father reported to me and the health personnel that this child has been killed, but after that night the mother came the next day and reported that the child has been found. So Lino can lead you to the the corpse of that dead person.

In fact the boy who led us was too afraid of further disturbing the spirits provoked by violent death to take us all the way to his peer's corpse.

Without guns any Karamojong is at the mercy of brutal soldiers who have, as two more witnesses testified.

Even those who try to follow the cattle after they are raided and maybe try to take the message to the army, are also arrested, even if the cattle have been taken by the Bokora. That is what I know.

I will only mention one thing. These soldiers who go into homesteads, they even kill people who go to graze their animals. Some children recently were killed by soldiers from Kaadacani. They shot and killed the herdboys, when seizing the livestock. There is one survivor here, who was running for four days, and two were killed. They were just driving the animals and were shot at. Sometimes the soldiers are not even interested in the livestock; they just shoot.

As with the *akiriket* at Kotiang, though the elders had not yet returned from there to Nakapelimoru, a fundamental threat was made to any sovereignty for the Ugandan government.

This operation came in a really very bad way unlike what Museveni said. Soldiers came and began spoiling this area, since livestock have disappeared, people have died, even cultivation has been neglected. People have disappeared. They are being sought, for of course, you may not know whether a certain person has died already and cannot be identified. The soldiers do not even know their President. People have now said they do not have any such president as Museveni. They are just looking for a place to go. They will migrate where there is no government rule. People do not trust Museveni right now. If the rainy season comes and we get enough food, we shall migrate. There is no ruler, because we used to love our President, and we thought he was only looking for guns. The Father went to the Brigadier; that is why he was killed. A boy saw the Brigadier; he only wants guns. Why should they really beat people who are even lame and blind. Take this message!

The old agenda of the Karamojong is clearly articulated here in the prediction that they will migrate where there is no government rule. The nomadic pastoralist is

neither exclusively a nomad nor dependent only on livestock, but the freedom to graze is non-negotiable with any government.

It is not only the Jie who are brutalized by the army. The army was beating people in Lotim in Dodoso. 'Everyone was beaten in Kalapata Sub-County. "Every Karamojong has a gun", the soldiers said, "Bring a gun!"' (D1). They were beaten with sticks as they ordered out of their homesteads. There was killing in Kapedo, but that led to a cessation of the beating.

The soldiers have been beating people. An old LC2 man was beaten badly and had to go to the Church of Uganda dispensary. Women were beaten including old ladies (*ngakimak*), as were the lame, the deaf, the mad, schoolboys, and children of that age. All were beaten to tell of guns. Some talked and others said, 'No'. In some places they got guns (18.3.02). The army took them to the barracks, where they were beaten much before being released. No bones were broken. The Turkana have taken all my animals in herd of 111 recently (23.3.02). The Toposa raided 167 cows at Kawabakol (25.3.02).

The President has been promising a plough and chain, a 100 kg. sack of *posho*²³, and protection for people, if they gave in their guns. Eight people have received ploughs and chains in Kalapata Sub-County, seven in Kasile, but no *posho* has been received. The promise of protection has failed, because the cows are going. They will give guns on appeal (general laughter). They volunteered 114 in Kalapata Sub-county of which 60 were returned to the LDU. There has also been a recovery of 36, but certificates have not been received by early April. The government will bring more trouble and get more guns. There are committees to sensitize. A group of four monitors will move with the soldiers and will identify any raping and beating. Only if people fear will they be victimized. (D3)

A return to the military despotism of Amin was signalled by the demand to wear trousers and shirt for the sake of decency and security (*New Vision* 15.5.02). In Moroto and Kotido the army is obliging to the populace to forsake the loose cloth *suka* and *kanga* in favour of trousers, shirts, and dresses for the sake of decency and security, reminding of Amin's army shooting tens of thousands of Karamojong for protesting against his clothes edict. Rashly soldiers chose the mother of a former MP,

²³ Maize meal.

David Pulkol, to force her beads down her throat, but there they found a voice in the capital (*Monitor* 22.5.02).

3. LEGITIMATION OF A NEW GUN LAW

Following the public execution by firing squad of the murderers of Declan O'Toole in Kotido, Museveni struck a presential tented camp by Kangole, and received a large deputation on 2.4.02.

'the priority is to bring guns. We shall catch Kony and kill him.' There was nothing they could talk. The Disarmament Programme was going very well in Chekwi County. A county that gives any difficulty, they can send soldiers. They have arrested five soldiers in Kapedo. There will be a court-martial there and they will hang. Raping and killing would lead to execution, so long as the right person is identified. He has told the army and the police, 'No torture or surrounding of cows.' Any suspect of having a gun, he can be put to work on the prison farm. If he is violent, he [Museveni] will sort it out, and it will be his own problem. The army should not beat anybody.

Arabic gum had been identified and sent to America. With peace gold will be open to prospectors and locals, but there would be nothing while guns are here, because they stop development. The beating must stop. The LC3 chairman of Panyangara reported raping and beating in Nakapelimoru and looting of shops in Panyangara. The Divisional Commander had no report. The President kept quiet. The Divisional Commander had two questions to answer, about Kapedo and Nakapelimoru. Some soldiers were arrested, who took cows in Labwor near Abim, including a Captain. (J29)

An *emuron* practising healing by herbs, and once attributed by medics with healing a patient from AIDS, found that the army had raided his cattle, so sought an audience with the President.

I went to Kampala, because the army stole cows near the border of Najie and Lango at Mount Lotukei. I went to see the President, because it was his *askaris*. The Permanent Secretary said the President had gone abroad. He came back and heard the President was at Kangole. You pray also, so that the government gives me my cows back. 400 were taken from the whole camp. No-one was hurt, for they took them silently. I had very big bulls there. You know these army guys. If they see anything belonging to you, they just take without saying, 'Hello'. Therefore I must see the President or remain without any cow. The President said at Kangole, 'Just wait! I am doing it.' (J21)

On Easter Sunday the former Maoist guerrilla leader went to the Anglican Pro-Cathedral for morning service with his Pentecostalist wife, Janet. 'What I saw in the

Bishop, I saw in the church. It is an interceding church for peace', he was heard to say.

Don't worry about problems in the army; I am dealing with those. Let there be no question about the army. Just bring the arms. 'Love your neighbour' is the greatest of all commandments. You Karamojong ... are violating the law of God. So God has put some people, inspired people by the spirit to vote for them to handle the lawbreakers accordingly and force them to understand the law. So when you say, 'What are they doing?', they are doing what God says in the Bible. And everyone said, 'Amen! Praise the Lord! Amen!'

However army elements have seen an opportunity to exact revenge on the feared and despised pastoralists, taking their cattle, persecuting, and killing. The violence is never even-handed. Since the Bokora section of the Karimojong has succeeded in obtaining the sympathy of the government, it is the Jie tribe, long enemies of the surrounding and more populous Karimojong and Dodoso, which is being scapegoated for the cattle-raiding of all. The government has not kept its promises. When it went to the Jie to recapture raided Bokora cattle, it just raided those it could. The Bokora refused them, as they were not the same cattle they had lost. Regard for the government has been forfeited, so herdowners still need guns to protect their livestock, even more now that raiding has increased as warrior spies test out the new military balances of power caused by local disarmament operations. 'The Turkana and the Jie recently came through Lopedo, and the Toposa came from the north.' (D5) The Dodoso and the Jie have raided each other frequently in 2002, the Bokora and the Jie, the Maseniko and the Jie, and the UPDF and the Jie. Pokot from Kenya have killed some Pian (*Monitor* 13.6.02). 'The Turkana are also taking advantage of the

weakened position of the Karimojong to attack them.’ (*New Vision* 4.6.02). The Army Chief of Staff has declared that raids ‘have become rampant’ (*New Vision* 13.6.02).²⁴

People said that exactly what they feared was that if they handed in their guns, then their cattle would be raided. Museveni should leave the chair and whites be allowed to take it over. He [the author] has come here and done the right thing by writing down what has happened. (J26)

It is most unlikely that the total number of guns taken by the government will rise from the 9,329 reported on 16.5.02 (*New Vision* 4.6.02) to the 10,000 mark, just one quarter of the programme’s original objective. ‘it is now said that the Karimojong are now secretly rearming themselves as they continue handing in the old guns.’

Army revenge is not merely an expression of Ugandan hatred, for Uganda has long been pressed internationally to ensure security. Yet it is not only the USA and the UK that take strategic decisions. Provoked by the army programme from their ‘love’ for Museveni, various Jie groups were saying that they would completely throw off the rule of his government and would if necessary pay taxes to Kenya. The UPDF has stepped up its campaign against the Jie, burning and shelling the homesteads of the Panyangara Jie after they raided the Bokora for the bloodwealth of their late parish priest

[A Jiot in Mbale] said on May 6, Jie from Panyangara raided 50 animals from Bokora; and on May 7, UPDF stormed Panyangara in company of Bokora LDUs. A meeting was held and the warriors gave three conditions before UPDF take animals.

The warriors said any animals recovered should never be taken to Kotido town. They also said that they would not hand over the raided animals to UPDF because the army had not compensated the Jie for the murder of the Irish priest and two Jie sons.

The UPDF reportedly accepted the two conditions but refused to compensate the warriors for the murder of Irish priest.

"We told them that in Karamoja if you kill a person, you pay 60 cows. If not, you or your relative is also killed," he said.

²⁴ Thus military action is having the opposite effect to Tanzanian forces on the Kuria, ‘Cattle thieving has stopped now, but it will start again when the *sungusungu* [militia] cools down.’ (Fleisher 2002:138).

After the UPDF refused to compensate the Jie for the murder of the priest, the meeting collapsed and a battle ensued in which the warriors gunned down several soldiers. (*Monitor* 13.5.02)

Now 5,000 have emigrated with their livestock to Kenya, where they will launch retaliatory action from across the border. This indicates the contingency of the Ugandan state on supra-national and sub-national forces. That world powers should back the state against those whom it would seek to oppress does not guarantee its legitimation; indeed it could expose the latent fact that Karamojong have never identified themselves as Ugandans nor trusted the government of strangers, *ngimoe*. The state is just another raider. The Karamojong thought the British were just another raider, but in the end proved not to be. In 2002 with elements of the UPDF²⁵ enriching themselves by taking cattle seized by force for their own herds or by selling them for meat, the government has proved to them it is a cattle raider.

4. CONCLUSION

The census figure of 171,945 in 1959 had grown by 200,000 in the next 32 years, but it probably demonstrates that the ecological limits were greater than those feared by officialdom. Casualty totals can be expected to be seven times greater than those seen in before 1919 in order that proportions remain constant. 0.4 raiding casualties per thousand of the population then is small compared with the present under-5 mortality rate of 246 or a maternal mortality rate of 6.5 per thousand live births (Oxfam 2001:36), and less than what happened either side of the colonial period, but the important point is that British rule only suppressed this violence towards the enemy without lessening the motivation sufficiently. Only seven a year die from gunshot-wounds in both the largest hospitals in Karamoja 1999-2000; obviously most such

²⁵ A Captain was found guilty of this near Abim.

deaths will go unrecorded in the bush, often outside Karamoja, but it is still less than the 17 soldiers a year who died of gunshot-wounds in Kitgum Hospital (Oxfam 2001:16). With 130 gunshot-wounds being treated a year in both the main hospitals (0.35 per thousand), it is small beer compared with 22,000 murders in South Africa in 2000 (0.51 per thousand). This analysis is directly counter to alarmist international aid views, 'the source of modern violence in Karamoja is automatic weaponry' (Gray 2000:407).

In these disarmament programmes 90 years apart, it is clear that there is little difference in the bellicose approach of Karamojong to anyone who would remove their freedoms or threaten their cattle-holdings, and in the willingness of the state forces to use brutality as a quite effective means of imposing their presence. However there are important religio-political differences. By the second decade of the 20th century the Karamojong were ready for peace, The formerly squeezed Jie had been able to restore their borders, and were content for the British to freeze them, while the Dodoso and Karamojong were happy to take the offer of protection from raiding. Initially it was thought they would not stay, so that it was a matter of biding time until they left. Yet why did they uncharacteristically put up with so much humiliation? There was a foreboding that this new power was not to be tempted, even when they could have overwhelmed the small patrols. The Oding spokesman was impressed by British forces as busy and numerous as black ants on the Nile. The prophets and the assemblies advised against confrontation with the new force, and after a decade peace and prosperity did come.

This time, despite the aggressiveness of the UPDF equipped with unprecedented hardware, there is a sense that they are facing an old enemy unworthy of respect. It may have sufficient determination and resources for a while, but its motives are for revenge and personal gain. It does not concentrate on elders and warriors, but is eager to injure and molest the most vulnerable, and to raid cattle for personal advantage. They know that at heart the officers and men fear them, as was demonstrated when the top military and civil leadership of an operation against the Jie in 1999 cried off sick after the sacrifice of a dog (*Monitor* 24.10.02).²⁶ ‘Government fears local custom’ (J8). If the object of global pressure was to secure international borders, then with 5,000 moving to Kenya with the aim of retaliating from there and eventually returning on their own terms, the Disarmament Programme could hardly have failed more. Yet new world orders tolerate no divergence.

The Karamojong have used guns as instruments to maintain their autonomy through their traditional politico-religious institutions (Knighton forthcoming). First among these is *akiriket*, the assembly of the initiated men to sacrifice cattle before *Akujũ*. This is what Major Macdonald (1899b:235) saw in 1898 as ‘the council of chiefs’ which adjudicated the strict rules regarding internal disputes, and electing ‘two fighting leaders’ for war. Captain Persse (1934:114f.), District Officer in 1929, noted the function of *akiriket* for rainmaking, despite suspecting ‘a veil of concealment and evasion’. Little has changed from his account, except that less centrality and privilege is accorded to the *emuron*, or the medicine man as he called him, allowing the elders yet more participation, and the prayers use the imperative mood and not the

²⁶ Lt. Col. Fearless Oboya and Brig. Geoffrey Kakama were diagnosed with unexplained illnesses in Mbale and Mulago Hospitals., while the Kotido RDC was sick at home.

interrogative. 'Akiriket continues as normal: praying, and cursing evil ... There has been no change after 30 years because they follow exactly what the elders have done' ... They can still disarm the rebels if they do not go far away. (D4).

Despite interruptions the culture has returned to normal. Initiations are going on in good years. You have to initiate even if you have education ... For us we are Karimojong ... It is not everyone who does this, but the educated and businessmen who failed and went to raid²⁷ ... Akiriket sorts out problems. (D6)

It was at the *akiriket* that the Jie raised the contingency plan of emigrating to Kenya. It was there that they prayed for the prayed for victory over the UPDF and for them to go away. Taking the long view *akiriket* determines, and the persistence of culture held dear will endure much longer. The ex-jiot Army Chief of Staff, James Lakara has ordered the UPDF to 'use all the weapons available to smash these bastards'. As Karimojong looked at him in disbelief, he continued 'Under the conventional war training, you fire a bullet at me, you get 100 bullets on your head.' (*New Vision* 5.6.02) If it succeeds it will accomplish the ethnocide of the nomadic pastoralist culture of his forefathers, if not their genocide.

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Abbreviations

D	Dodoso informant
DC	District Commissioner
EA	Entebbe Archives
EP	Eastern Province
J	Jie informant
PC	Provincial commissioner

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²⁷ This is clear dissembling, as so often has to happen in security matters. However it is men of that kind of status who promote or engage in banditry on the roads.

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