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Editors:

Lioba Lenhart, Editor-in-Chief
Institute of Peace and Strategic Studies (IPSS), Gulu University
l.lenhart@gu.ac.ug

Susan Reynolds Whyte, Co-editor
Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen
susan.reynolds.whyte@anthro.ku.dk

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About the Journal

The Journal of Peace and Security Studies (JPSS) is a peer-reviewed electronic and print journal, published by the Institute of Peace and Strategic Studies (IPSS), a multi-disciplinary academic institution at Gulu University in Uganda.

The Journal reflects the multi-disciplinary focus of the Institute and publishes articles in the social sciences and humanities, broadly defined to include anthropology, sociology, political science, history, psychology, law, conflict and peace studies, religious studies and environmental studies. Articles that cut across disciplinary boundaries are particularly welcome.

Uganda is a key regional focus for the Journal, but contributions from the whole East African region and beyond are encouraged as well. The Journal actively seeks to publish studies that can help to develop a broader comparative perspective on issues related to conflict, peace building, post-war reconstruction and human security in Eastern Africa and beyond.

JPSS is published periodically. Volumes/numbers devoted to specific topics and edited by invited guests alternate with miscellaneous volumes/numbers.

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Journal of Peace and Security Studies

Volume 2, Number 1, June 2016 (Miscellaneous)

Edited by
Lioba Lenhart & Susan Reynolds Whyte

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Editorial Note

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This number contains articles on peace and security issues in a broader sense, with a regional focus on northern, northeastern and central Uganda. Julia Vorhölder looks at youth discourses and intergenerational debates on the future of post-war Acholi society in northern Uganda with reference to ‘culture’, ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ and contesting the social order. Sam Dubal describes the development of love relationships and kinship-like ties among formerly abducted and forcibly married Lord’s Resistance Army combatants that have endured after their return from the bush and he challenges popular imaginaries of the fighters as beyond the pale of humanity. Ina Rehema Jahn discusses cosmological implications of exhumations and reburials of those who were laid to rest in the ‘wrong soil’ of the Internally Displaced Persons camps during the civil war in the Acholi Sub-region. Anne Werbter examines mass graves in the Teso Sub-region in north-eastern Uganda, which became memorial sites established by NGOs, local government and the Uganda state; she stresses the politics of memorialisation that contradict people’s concepts and customary practices of burial, mourning and commemoration. Clara Himmelheber writes about the strategies of different stakeholders involved in the reconstruction of the world heritage site of Kasubi Tombs in Buganda: monarchists, UNESCO, the Ugandan government, Baganda in the diaspora, the tourism industry, the Ugandan Asian Community and Born Again Christians. She discusses these against the background of contested concepts such as authenticity and heritage. Martha Lagace provides a research note on anthropologist Paula Hirsch Foster who conducted fieldwork in Acholiland in the 1950s and described Acholi concerns about land alienation at that time.

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JPSS Volume 2, Number 1 is edited by Lioba Lenhart from the Institute of Peace and Strategic Studies/IPSS, Gulu University and Susan Reynolds Whyte from the Institute of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen, who have collaborated in the context of the ongoing research project ‘Governing Transition in Northern Uganda: Trust and Land’ (aka ‘TrustLand’) jointly implemented by IPSS, the Department of Culture and Society of Aarhus University and the Department of Anthropology of the University of Copenhagen.

IPSS and the editors of JPSS would like to thank the contributors as well as the peer reviewers, who have to remain anonymous, for their great commitment and excellent work. We are grateful to Martha Lagace and Boston University’s Paula Hirsch Foster Collection for allowing

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Lioba Lenhart, JPSS Editor-in-Chief
*Institute of Peace and Strategic Studies,
Gulu University, Uganda*

Beyond Dichotomies: Complexifying Intergenerational Debates and Discourses on Post-War Society in Northern Uganda

Julia Vorhölter

Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Göttingen University, Germany

Abstract

This article analyses intergenerational debates on the future of Acholi society following the war between the Lord's Resistance Army and the Ugandan Government (1986-2006). Specifically, it focuses on the generation that was born and grew up during the 20-year war. I present selected examples of the complex ways members of this 'war generation' position themselves in the ongoing debates and make use of the various discourses on culture, tradition and modernity in order to establish, maintain and contest the social order. I argue that while it is important to acknowledge the way generational location shapes social actors' perspectives and positions in the post-conflict phase, overemphasising generational differences risks missing the many shared concerns and cross-cutting issues. By drawing on Foucauldian discourse analysis and Ferguson's concept of cultural styles, I show how taking discourses rather than distinct groups as a starting point of analysis can help to overcome such a deadlock.

Introduction

Since 2006, northern Uganda has been recovering from the 20-year war between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the Ugandan government. The post-war period saw the emergence of intense discourses and debates on the socio-cultural changes that had occurred throughout the war years and their implications for both the present and the future. At the centre of these debates were various visions for post-war Acholi society which contained a range of often conflicting notions of social order, norms and values. A central point of debate was whether peace building activities should be directed towards re-establishing former cultural practices and conventions and 'retraditionalising' Acholi society, or towards establishing 'new' social structures, values and norms and 'modernising' Acholi society according to what was commonly seen as Western ideals.

Both local perceptions and academic analyses, including my own work, have tended to associate these position with distinct societal 'groups', the most commonly identified being elders vs. youth and men vs. women. Older men, for instance, are generally taken to be stern supporters of retraditionalising Acholi society and its inherent patriarchal power structures, while youth are mostly portrayed as agitating for modernisation. More nuanced analyses have emphasised diversity within these 'groups' based on class and educational background, age, gender, family situation, political alliance or location. However, the general focus has remained on identifying groups of actors and attributing certain characteristics and positions to them. While such a

perspective is beneficial in many ways, it also lacks complexity. By focusing on similarities within groups it risks overemphasising differences between them, thereby potentially overlooking points of overlap or convergence.

In this article I explore an approach that shifts the focus from groups to the discourses adopted by particular actors in specific contexts. Such an approach is able to capture the complexity of a social actor's positioning by focusing on the interplay of individual characteristics and positions, situational context and societal discourses. It emphasises that positions are always shaped by speech contexts and are thus, to some extent, relative and contingent.

My material is based on 11 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Gulu Municipality in 2010-11. My research focused on the complex ways members of the war generation¹ positioned themselves in discourses on Acholi culture and how they evaluated the changes they perceived in Acholi society². Most of the research consisted of participant observation among youth in their late teens and early twenties, along with their families and friends³. While my original aim was to explore the war generation's perspective on the socio-cultural changes they had experienced and their imaginations of and hopes for future Acholi society, I soon realised the inherent difficulties of such an approach. The more time I spent with different interlocutors in different settings, the more I became aware not only of the diversity of their perspectives, but also how their positions shifted according to whom they were talking to and the social setting of the conversation. Even though people had strong convictions on matters of debate, whether and how they expressed them was always shaped by the speech context.

This is not to suggest, however, that their positions were arbitrary, or that their specific generational location did not matter. On the contrary, their 'similarity of location' (Mannheim 1928)⁴ strongly influenced not only their outlook on life and the way they experienced the instability caused by the war and the post-war situation, but also how they were seen by society. In societal discourses the war generation was often portrayed as the link between past and future, tradition and modernity, Acholi culture and Western culture, and this liminal status placed its members in a particular situation of uncertainty and ambivalence which was reflected in the ways they strategically positioned themselves in debates about Acholi society.

Understanding how different social actors conceive of the future and their respective roles in bringing about this future is a crucial concern for researchers and practitioners involved in post-war peace building. First, because a (shared) future vision is the prerequisite for any peace building activity, and second, because negotiations of the future in societies that are recovering from war almost unavoidably entail (new) struggles and conflicts. A key debate familiar from other African post-war contexts is whether to return to or to break with the pre-war past, often referred to as 'traditional culture'. The former usually involves re-establishing pre-war social hierarchies and

¹ With reference to the concept of 'historical generation' (Mannheim 1928), I use the term 'war generation' to refer to the generation that was born and grew up during the years of the war. I sometimes use it interchangeably with 'youth'. I take both, generation and youth, to be relational rather than absolute concepts. For a detailed discussion of the problems of defining such terms, see Vorhölter 2014: 36ff.

² The article summarises some of the findings from my research, which has been published as a book (Vorhölter 2014). Parts of the text have been taken and adapted from the book, especially from chapter 5.

³ Using participant observation rather than interviewing as my main tool of research gave me the opportunity to witness how my interlocutors spoke, acted and shifted their positions in different contexts which, unlike the interview situation, were not or only to a small extent shaped by my presence. Although this article mainly presents statements taken from interviews, the analysis of these statements heavily relies on the insights that I gained from following and observing my interlocutors in different situations.

⁴ For a more detailed characterisation of the war generation, see Vorhölter 2014: 193ff.

power structures (frequently characterised by [older] men having power over youth and women), while the latter entails introducing new social orders and norms, often shaped by external discourses.

In northern Uganda, peace building discourses (at least in key fields like reconciliation, justice, political representation) have been dominated by a focus on retraditionalisation. Starting with the *Kacoke Madit* conference and the subsequently commissioned report ‘The Bending of Spears’ (Pain 1997), international organisations started to engage in reviving Acholi cultural practices, for instance by rebuilding the cultural institution *Ker Kwaro* or supporting the performance of rituals like *mato oput* (Vorhölter 2014: 165ff.). Widespread enthusiasm for these initiatives based on the belief that using Acholi traditional culture would be the best way to (re)create social stability meant that voices that did not wholly embrace this approach (coming, for instance, from those who had held largely subordinate socio-political roles in pre-war Acholi society, especially women, youth and the economically weak) were largely ignored. And even when these voices *were* represented, often by NGOs who were carrying out youth or women’s projects, they were often presented in monolithic terms, thus concealing the complexity and diversity of actual positions.

This article takes the perspective that any peace building measure must start by identifying, understanding and taking seriously the various and often incoherent positionalities of different social actors in a post-war society. This cannot be achieved by surveys alone but requires long-term ethnographic fieldwork and a frame of analysis which embraces rather than ignores complexity. As I will argue in the next section, discourses and cultural styles are two theoretical concepts which can be productively used for such an endeavour as they shift the focus of analysis to the *context* in which positions are established and presented rather than seeing a particular position as an inherent feature of an individual. Such an approach may help to discover cross-cutting issues and commonalities between groups of actors, which should be a central aim of any peace building attempt.

Discourses and Styles: Analytical Tools for Understanding Complex Positionalities

The analysis presented in this article is based on a methodological approach which combines Foucauldian discourse analysis with Ferguson’s (1999) concept of cultural styles. I will briefly introduce both.

Discourse Analysis

My understanding of discourse draws heavily on the work of Foucault and those who have appropriated his approach for anthropological analysis. Following Foucault (1994), I understand discourse as a highly regulated arrangement of statements or opinions which is internally structured and follows certain rules of formation. These rules guide what can be said, how, by whom, and under which effects of power. Discourse analysis, then, is an instrument for studying power relations as reflected in societal practices and speech and, vice versa, for studying how speech acts are shaped by broader power structures. Discourse analysis allows for the interpretation of text material (field notes, interview transcripts, documents etc.) with regard to the societal context in which they were produced. Through a combination of participant observation and linguistic procedures it is possible to analyse how discourses develop and how they operate and become

manifest in concrete situations. As Dracklé states:

Through participant observation over a longer period in one place (...) sufficient situations arise in which discourse, its process of coming into being, and its effects can be pursued.(...) Against the background of empirical work and the participant observation of non-discursive practices, discourse theory offers the pivotal point for an anthropology of 'truth production.' (Dracklé 1996: 33, 36)

Dracklé goes on to point out that discourses are never singular but multiple. Thus, one must also pay attention to contradictions within discourses as well as to interdiscursive effects (Dracklé 1996: 38).

In my research, I chose a discourse-analytical approach to study the ways various social actors perceived and talked about socio-cultural change in post-war Acholi society and to reveal how their (shifting) positions were affected by generational, gender and local-global power relations and dynamics. For the material presented in this article, discourse analysis is relevant in three ways. First, it takes the context of a speech act into account. Second, its key premise is that power is an inherent feature of every speech act. And third, it provides guidelines for a structured analysis of text material. While there are quite a number of elements one can seek out to dissect discourses⁵, in this article I place particular emphasis on implicit rules that define who is allowed or not allowed to say what in a given situation, and on binary oppositions.

Binary oppositions are a consistent feature of discourses on socio-cultural change in northern Uganda. The most common examples revolved around distinctions between Africa and the West, modern and traditional as well as local and global. The high prevalence of such binary oppositions or 'cultural dualisms' (Ferguson 1999) in speaking about and positioning oneself in contexts of social change is not specific to northern Uganda but has been observed in other studies of perception of socio-cultural change. James Ferguson's seminal study of adult miners on the Zambian Copperbelt, who were forced to reconsider their 'expectations of modernity' in the face of rapid economic decline, is a particularly illustrative example. Like Ferguson, I treat binary oppositions in local discourses as ethnographic facts which shape people's experiences and interpretations of their lives, and thus have real effects not only on everyday thinking but on social life more generally. I also draw on his concept of 'cultural styles'.

Cultural Styles

Ferguson uses the term cultural style 'to refer to practices that signify differences between social categories. Cultural styles in this usage do not pick out total modes of behaviour but rather poles of social signification, cross-cutting and cross-cut by other such poles' (Ferguson 1999: 95). Ferguson emphasises that cultural style is 'first of all a performative competence', does not necessarily reflect 'questions of identities or commonalities' and thus 'means moving away from the quest to locate underlying "real" identities and orientation' (Ferguson 1999: 96, 97). Nevertheless, Ferguson argues that 'cultural style tends to stick with a person' because 'a style requires not simply a situational motive but an internalized capacity that can only be acquired over time' (Ferguson 1999: 96).

I adapted Ferguson's concept to the context of northern Uganda and differentiated between what I called modern and traditional styles. People in Gulu who were labelled and perceived

⁵ For an overview see Hall 2001: 73f., Dracklé 1996: 37f. and Vorhölter 2014: 53f.

themselves as ‘modern’ often talked derogatively of Acholi culture, claimed that Uganda as a whole was still ‘backward’ and needed to be ‘modernised’, tried to avoid going to the village, spoke English even in contexts where everyone present knew Acholi, and tried to copy fashions and technologies and imitate behavioural traits they regarded as Western (and thus modern) and which they usually derived from films. People who were labelled and perceived themselves as ‘traditional’, on the other hand, were often nostalgic about Acholi culture and ‘the good old days’, had stronger ties to the village, spoke Acholi even in contexts where non-Acholi were present, and talked derogatively of those Acholi who were trying to copy the West. At the extreme ends, some members of the war generation framed their styles in very exclusive terms as either ‘fully modern’ or ‘fully traditional’, but these were by far the minority. Most young people rather seemed to be floating between these two styles, which may be explained not only by their age and life situation – youth generally being a time of uncertainty and change – but also due to rapidly changing living circumstances they had experienced while growing up.

This floating between styles seems to relativise Ferguson’s argument that ‘situational switching of style is possible only to a limited degree’ (Ferguson 1999: 95-96), because people have to invest in their style in order to acquire an ‘internalised capacity’ to be able to perform it convincingly. During my research, I found that many of the young people I worked with in Gulu were still in the process of finding their style and thus were still more flexible in combining different stylistic practices (for instance engaging in traditional dance *and* hip hop) or switching between styles depending on the situation⁶.

As I observed the behaviour of my interlocutors in different settings and got a more complete picture of their lives, I often had the impression that they strategically conjured different styles depending on the setting. I noted stark differences between how youth presented themselves among fellow youth in town as opposed to at home or when visiting relatives in the village. One young man, Martin, described to me very bluntly how he switched between different styles according to context: ‘There is a saying that says “when you are in Rome, behave like Romans.” So maybe when you go to the village, you portray those kinds of characters there. But when you come back to town, you drop the village stuff in the village, and you cope up with lifestyle in town’ (Interview, 21 April 2010). Martin acknowledged that different social expectations are at work in the different settings – village and town. Although he considered himself a town person and regarded the lifestyle in the village as ‘backward’, he nevertheless adapted to village life because he feared that people, and especially his family, would not accept him otherwise. In the village, elders are seen to have more power to define social conventions and to sanction those who deviate from them. Thus Martin’s willingness to adapt his behaviour to the village setting was also an accommodation to local power relations that define behavioural guidelines and set the rules of the discourse which govern who can say what, how and to whom in a given situation.

Ferguson’s concept of style is able to accommodate the influences of discourses on social practices. Although Ferguson clearly uses cultural style to refer to *social practices*, he also draws on the work of Judith Butler to stress that differences in style are continually (and discursively) produced in the context of power relations (Ferguson 1999: 94). Both actions and ways of speaking are heavily affected by the situational context in which they occur, that is both by other social actors and supra-individual discourses. As stated, my primary aim in this article is to demonstrate the complexity of youth positioning by analysing selected statements and speech acts and placing them in a larger context. I do not focus on non-verbal practices and can only incorporate ‘thick

⁶ The non-verbal aspects of ‘stylistic positioning’ cannot be adequately addressed in the scope of this article. For a more comprehensive analysis, see Vorhölter 2014.

description' of particular situations and events to a very limited extent (for a fuller ethnographic picture of youth positioning, see Vorhölter 2014: 118ff., 188ff.).

Youth Perspectives in Discourses on Socio-cultural Change

In the following, I look at the different ways members of the war generation reflected on socio-cultural changes in Acholiland. I discern four discourses, two of which stand for different projections (retraditionalisation, modernisation) and two that encompass different sentiments (ambivalence, creativity) towards the future of Acholi society. I analyse selected statements by my interlocutors that I see as representative of the particular discourses and present some background information on each of the 'speakers' in order to clarify the subject position they are speaking from⁷. I analyse how they perceived their present situation and their opportunities in shaping the future. I do not imply that speaker-discourse positions are fixed. Although certain individuals have more affinities to one discourse than to others, speakers do switch between discourses depending on the context and its attendant power constellations.

The Retraditionalisation Discourse: Idealisation of Tradition and the Past

Although the retraditionalisation discourse was mainly attributed to (conservative) elders, it was not uncommon among members of the war generation. The basic underlying sentiment of the retraditionalisation discourse was a strong idealisation of an imagined past and a fear of future developments in Acholi society. Supporters of retraditionalisation often maintained that everything had been better when Acholi culture was still 'intact', guided by clear moral principles, and when men and women, elders and youth still had their clearly defined roles in society. Nowadays, they argued, Acholi culture had been lost and many feared that it could not be revived and reinstalled.

Tradition and modernity, in this discourse, appeared to be irreconcilable binary oppositions. Youth who supported retraditionalisation often blamed their fellow youths for becoming too modern and westernised, for no longer respecting Acholi traditions and values, and thus for destabilising Acholi society. In many ways their arguments sounded similar to the expressions commonly heard among Acholi elders, as the following statement by Denis (born 1986) reveals. When I asked him about the biggest challenges for his generation and how these differed from those of former generations, he replied:

This generation, I can see many young people floating. They are not going to school, [even] when they find good things they just turn their life to the worst, they don't see that they should reach some point. Mostly they turn out drinking, even you find some who come from a very good family, you find them floating on the street drinking (...). For theirs [parent's and grandparent's generation] it was good, it was better, in those times. Our parents always listened a lot to our grandparents, and when they [the grandparents] are teaching a lesson you find them sitting together (...) Storytelling could also be there, there are a lot of things those grandparents were doing to

⁷ Due to the nature of my interview date, the examples I use in this section are all from male speakers. For a detailed discussion of female perspective, see Vorhölter *forthcoming*.

our parents, so that generation was good. (Interview, Gulu, 16 April 2010)

The quote expresses very well the young man's yearning for the past, which he imagines to have been a time of family solidarity and stability. Like other young people who participated in the retraditionalisation discourse, he felt overwhelmed by the rapid changes Acholi society was undergoing. This also becomes evident through his description of his generation as 'floating'. Throughout the interview and in personal conversations afterwards, I learned that although Denis came from an economically stable family, he had faced many struggles throughout his life. After his father's death in 2000 he had grown up with relatives in town and struggled through school. He never finished his A-level and instead started different job-trainings and courses, not all of which he completed. At the time of my research, he was working in a badly paid job at a local internet café. He was deeply frustrated with the job and his future prospects. Although he sometimes talked of his dreams – to become a successful musician, to have a secure job and a family – he did not really seem to believe that they would ever come true. In an email (30 May 2010), he told me that his future plans had all failed because the people he relied on had disappointed him.

Denis' visions for the future of Acholi society seemed equally bleak. When he talked about urban youth he repeatedly mentioned alcoholism, suicide and prostitution as major problems which incapacitated many members of his generation. He lamented how young urbanites were losing all the 'beautiful things' of the past. One time, he told me that if he was to find a future wife it would have to be in the village, because girls in town were all 'spoiled'.

Denis' way of speaking about the past and the village is typical of the retraditionalisation discourse. Like him, many of those who were in favour of retraditionalisation had experienced difficult times throughout their youth in town and currently felt stuck in life. Frustrated, with no educational or job perspectives and no prospects of getting married and starting a family, they perceived their situation as hopeless and feared for their future. They were sceptical of the promises of modernisation, which had remained largely unfulfilled for them, as their daily realities contrasted starkly with images of a modern life presented in the media – of wealth, prosperity, consumer culture and individual freedom. Instead of talking about their future plans, they idealised the past and claimed to see the only solution to contemporary problems in going back to an imagined traditional culture.

However, despite this rhetoric, not all youth who claimed to support retraditionalisation were 'traditionalists' in practice. Denis, for instance, was a great fan and performer of hip hop and worked in an internet café, which for many Acholi signified a modern lifestyle. Thus, although their opinions on tradition and socio-cultural change were by no means arbitrary, what youth said and how they acted in practice did not always neatly correspond. Youth were more prone to adopt the retraditionalisation discourse in some situations, for instance, when they were specifically asked to reflect on their lives and their future prospects, like in my interviews, when they were looking for support from older people, or in specific settings, for instance the family home. In these socio-political contexts, specific power relations and ideologies were at work, which were favourable to the retraditionalisation discourse and excluded or impeded other ways of speaking about past and future.

The Modernisation Discourse: Idealisation of Life in the West

On the surface, the modernisation discourse represented the complete opposite of the retraditionalisation discourse. It was commonly supported among members of the war generation, but also among some members of the adult generation. The basic argument of the modernisation discourse was that life today should be ‘civilised’ and ‘developed’ and that African states needed to ‘catch up’ with the western industrialised countries. Proponents of this discourse argued that traditional Acholi culture could not accommodate the changes which were necessary to become modernised and that Western ideas were replacing it. Just like in the retraditionalisation discourse, tradition and modernity were perceived as irreconcilable binary oppositions. In this sense, the following statement by Martin (born 1984) is typical for the modernisation discourse. When asked to comment on the biggest differences between the young generation and the parent’s or grandparent’s generation, he responded:

If I compare the now and the then generation, I can see there is some change we are getting, when I [compare it] to old stone age there (...) At least you can see some modern roads here, some machinery; you know those kind of things. In those days you couldn't see these things, they were backward, they didn't even know what education is. Right now an African child can do something cool, (...) in some few generations to come we are at the same level with those white people. Though some of us, we have coped up, but there are some people still living in those mountain areas, still having those kinds of mentalities. (...) What I can say in Africa, more especially in cities, town and centres, the Westerners, they are taking over, they are bringing their culture. (...) The culture of Africa, the way I am seeing it – I can't force something – it is going to get lost. (...) Nowadays they say the world is just growing, and for you – you are still backward. Nobody wants to be called local, so people move away from their culture. And even when you know how to do something in this culture, you don't do it, you just run away to the Western life, so that is it... (Interview, Gulu, 21 April 2010)

The quotation reveals the ambiguity of change and the feeling of being ‘seduced’ into giving up one’s own culture in order to participate in ‘modernity’. Interestingly, the respondent does not blame the West for enforcing its culture. Rather, he describes the decision to move away from the local culture as a conscious and strategic choice, which occurs, however, within a well-established (global) system of power. He seems to have internalised the widespread narrative of Africa as a place that is ‘backward’ – economically, culturally and socially. He does not believe that ‘the culture of Africa’ can coexist with elements of a modern, Western society, but rather that all spheres of life need to be modernised and westernised in order to catch up and ‘grow’ with the rest of the world. But, importantly, he sees himself and (some) members of his generation – those who have ‘coped up’ – as drivers of this (necessary) change.

Like Denis, Martin had faced many struggles in life. He had lost his father in the war and was currently staying with his uncle. Although he was originally from an economically stable family and had attended part of his schooling in Kampala, he was currently in a situation of economic uncertainty and not very optimistic about his future perspectives. However, unlike

Denis, he did not idealise the past, but in fact blamed the past for the current state of Ugandan affairs. Although he also often expressed discouragement and despair at his current situation, he seemed less resigned and always tried to initiate new projects.

When I asked Martin how he imagined his future society to be, he talked about the political situation in Uganda. He was very critical of the current government and doubtful that its policies would bring about major improvements for his generation. He stated that Ugandan politics needed substantial reforming in order to initiate a development process from which the whole country would profit. Instead of imagining a local solution to contemporary problems and a return to traditional life (like supporters of retraditionalisation), he referred to the national and even global level and saw the key to a successful future of his society in political reforms and development initiatives.

In some ways the analysis of the current state of Acholi culture found within the modernisation discourse is similar to the discourse on retraditionalisation. Both claim that Acholi traditions are getting lost because they are not reconcilable with modern life. But the conclusions drawn from these lines of argument greatly differ. While the retraditionalisation discourse attributes the current, negative state of affairs (poverty, social conflicts, future insecurity etc.) to the *loss of Acholi culture*, the modernisation discourse in fact blames the current problems on the *continuing interference of local culture* with modern life. It sees the solutions to contemporary (individual and national) problems not in tradition, but in copying the West. Thus, instead of a glorification of the past, we find an idealisation of life in the West and a deep-seated belief that the adoption of Western models can help Uganda to become modern and progressive.

The Ambivalent Discourse: Uncertainty in the Face of Change

The ambivalent discourse combined the two discourses outlined above and reflected the most widespread position among members of the war generation in Gulu. Proponents of this discourse were unclear on whether modern life in town today was better or worse than traditional village-life in the past. While they appreciated many aspects of contemporary urban life and could not imagine going back to a rural lifestyle, many still valued Acholi culture and expressed sadness that they had not practiced and learned more about traditions and cultural practices during their childhood. The ambivalent discourse, like the former two, relied on a number of binary opposition (tradition – modernity, past – future, urban – rural), but it supported a more dynamic view of culture. It acknowledged that certain elements of culture could change over time, but not Acholi culture as a whole. Therefore, while most believed that life in the past had been good and that traditional Acholi culture was something to be proud of and that should be preserved, they also acknowledged that times had changed and it was not possible to revive the past – which in some ways was good and in some ways was bad. The following statement by Odong (born 1991) typically reflects this position. When comparing his generation to former generations, he stated:

This modernity and this technology have changed everything, most of the things. (...) The biggest difference nowadays is respect and morals. Those days, our parents, old people those days, they were so respectful, they were uprightly brought up, they were so disciplined, but nowadays (...). These children, they are used to these video things, they are used to what they see from screens, they will start imitating (...) so that is the biggest challenge, that is the biggest difference which I see between the people of those days –

our parents – and the people nowadays of this generation.
(Interview, Gulu, 04 May 2010)

When I asked him whether he thought that ‘modernity’ had brought only negative things, he replied:

You see, everything has a bad part and a good part. But the way I see it, the bad part of it [modernity] is bigger, (...) there is so much indiscipline and no respect. You know in Africa those days, I mean in our culture, in Acholi culture, ladies were not allowed to put on miniskirts. If you put on something like that, oh – they will cane, they will chase you from home, they will call you prostitute, that you are trying to ruin and disgrace the name of the family, so those things were not allowed. (...) Anyway, modernity and civilisation have brought also good things, because it [modernity] has opened our eyes to the world. Like I told you, it has brought so many things we used not to know, but somehow somewhere it has also ruined our future and our culture – it has affected our lifestyle badly.
(Interview, Gulu, 04 May 2010)

The quotation well captures the ambivalence and uncertainty regarding the contemporary role of tradition I encountered among many youth. They had heard about formerly established norms and rules in Acholi society, for instance regarding gendered forms of behaviour. On the one hand, they seemed proud of such traditions and regarded them as desirable and well-suited to establish social order. On the other hand, they also found many traditional practices strange and outdated and very much in conflict with their modern values.

Odong had grown up and gone to school in town. He has recently finished his A-level. Throughout his youth he had participated in diverse youth activities ranging from breakdance and football to traditional dance. He was an avid supporter of English Premier League Football and a very active member of a cultural group⁸. Although he dreamt of attending Gulu University, he had been compelled to start a course at a teacher’s college because he could not afford the university fees. When he spoke about his future, he always seemed torn between his dream of a modern life – with a house, a car and other luxury objects – and a more realistic vision of a life as a teacher, who might be sent to work in a rural area, who would have to struggle to provide for a family, but whose lifestyle would be closer to the ‘original life’ of the Acholi people. He, like many other young people, felt that it was not so much his own choice how his personal future and the collective future of the Acholi people developed, but that it was determined by external circumstances.

Unlike the former two discourses, which were adopted in situations in which the speakers had a clear opinion on whether Acholi society should be retraditionalised or modernised with regard to the matter discussed, the ambivalent discourse was adopted in situations in which the speakers were truly torn between the advantages and disadvantages of either, retraditionalisation or modernization. In this sense, the ambivalent discourse implied not just a switching between retraditionalisation in one situation, and modernisation in another, but pertained to situations, in

⁸ So-called cultural groups usually consisted of children and youth and sometimes also adults. It seems that in their current form, cultural groups had only been started in northern Uganda in the late 1990s. Often supported by international donors as ‘youth projects’, they were seen as a way to support the revival of ‘traditional culture’ by providing a setting for learning and performing traditional dances and music (Vorhölter 2014: 171ff.).

which the young people I encountered were really undecided about one specific matter (for instance gender norms and roles) with regard to which they felt that they could not really combine traditional and modern elements or decide which was more desirable. This ambivalence and indecisiveness posed a major difference to the position represented in the creative discourse.

The Creative Discourse: Translating Acholi Culture

The attitude underlying the creative discourse is best captured by a statement from one of my interviewees. When I asked him whether he could imagine a future life in the rural areas, Elima (born 1990) answered: 'If I go back to the village, I will go with a new style' (Interview, Gulu, 09 April 2010). Like him, supporters of the creative discourse believed that Acholi culture was currently undergoing many changes, but that this was a natural and desirable process. Rather than blaming certain groups within Acholi society for contributing to the erosion of traditional culture, they encouraged everyone to contribute to transforming and actively shaping Acholi culture.

The creative discourse did not primarily assume a binary opposition between tradition and modernity, Africa and the West, and did not see globalization processes as a threat to 'local cultures'. Thus, rather than being in favour of retraditionalisation or modernisation, or being torn between the two, proponents of the creative discourse contended that different facets of identity could coexist and be combined. Accordingly, changes in Acholi culture were acknowledged, but they were not interpreted as a sign of cultural loss but rather as necessary adaption to changed living circumstances and as a result of cultural transitions and transformations. The following statement by Laurence (born 1990) is a typical example. When I asked him why he thought Acholi culture was changing, he replied:

When you are stuck to your tradition, sometimes you don't achieve much. Though I believe culture is wealth, that is true, but sometimes culture when you stick to it, it will not bring you the world. Sometimes you go and also try to copy up some other people's culture, then you come back to yours. That is when you can lift up your culture and go ahead, when you know all or maybe both cultures (...) You have to change, in order also to cope up with others – as the world grows you grow together with the world. Because if you are to remain behind, you remain for good. (...) There is much improvement because of the culture changing (...) even the system of education has changed, that is why we are also able to speak English, we are able to communicate to other people (...) you have to change your culture at times, and you know, adjust to other cultures also. (Interview, Gulu, 28 April 2010)

Laurence stresses that people of different cultural backgrounds should learn from one another and integrate the new insights they gain into their existing cultural repertoire – without interpreting the ensuing changes of their culture as a sign of loss. Stagnation, the belief in cultural purity and the desperate latching onto one's own traditions are interpreted as hindrances to a country's or a people's development. Laurence gives the pertinent example of language and communication, which only work if people are willing to engage with and adapt to one another.

Laurence came from an economically stable family background. His mother had died when he was still young and he had grown up with his grandmother in the village and later with his father and his new wife in town. He told me that he had always been a successful student and that

his father was planning to send him to a good school in Kampala for his A-level, or even abroad. Laurence was a supporter and performer of hip hop, who felt greatly inspired by US-American rappers. But he also loved Acholi music and traditional dance. He had many different plans for his future: he told me that his father was planning to open a big farm in the village and he would probably be involved in the management of the farm, but that he could also imagine becoming a musician because he really loved music.

In some ways, Laurence was a typical representative of the creative discourse. He had a good level of education, his family was planning to set up a large-scale farming business in the rural areas and he was generally very optimistic about his future. From an emic perspective, his lifestyle (in terms of dressing, free-time activities etc.) made him appear quite westernised. But unlike the proponents of the modernisation discourse, he often proudly emphasised his Acholi identity and, unlike the representatives of the ambivalent discourse, he did not perceive his Acholi identity to contradict his modern style.

Like Laurence, most proponents of the creative discourse had economically stable backgrounds and thus had to worry less about their future than youths from more precarious backgrounds. Due to their relative economic security and higher social and spacial mobility, they could actually *choose* how and where they wanted their future to be and, even if they decided on a rural life as farmers, this usually did not mean a complete break with their urban lives⁹. This meant that they could envision themselves as self-conscious agents of change, not only regarding their individual lives but with regard to the future of Acholi society as a whole. As Hannerz (1996: 73ff.) has pointed out, although people are free to choose and can adopt various discourses, they are influenced not only by the state and the market, but also by their capacities as cultural consumers.

In sum, the examples presented here reveal that individual members of the war generation engaged quite differently with the subject of socio-cultural change. Some tended to dream of a return to the imagined stability of the past. Others were more prone to believe that they could overcome the conservativeness they saw as inherent in Acholi traditions by orienting their styles and behaviour towards what they labelled Western modernity. These different positionalities depended on individual characteristics (age, gender, social status, and life experience), situational context and societal discourses. Few of the young people I met exclusively adopted only one cultural style or supported only one of the four discourses. Rather, they switched between discourses and styles depending on the people they were interacting with (e.g. parents, elders or peers), the setting (e.g. town or village) and the power relations involved and thereby exposed different facets of their identity as Acholi youth.

In the last part of the article I situate the discourses I identified above in the broader context of intergenerational debates on the post-war future in northern Uganda. This should make clear that, although youth are not locked into a particular discourse by virtue of their generational positioning, it is also important not to lose sight of the way their generational positioning continues to structure societal discourses.

⁹ However, I also met youths from more precarious backgrounds who quite successfully managed to combine urban and rural, modern and traditional lifestyles and perceived their extensive cultural repertoire primarily as a resource and not as a source of conflict.

Intergenerational Debates on Peace Building in Gulu: Grappling with the Crisis

Intergenerational relations in the post-war phase were often described as being highly conflictive. Youth and elders mutually blamed each other for the perceived crisis of contemporary Acholi society. This crisis was related to the processes of disarray and change Acholi society had undergone since the beginning of the war.

Members of the pre-war generation, i.e. those who had experienced the war as adults and elders, often blamed the crisis on Acholi youth. They claimed that today's youth were lazy, disrespectful, no longer valued Acholi cultural and moral principles, and that they had thus contributed to the breakdown and 'moral degeneration' of Acholi society. In conversations and interviews I conducted, young people's lifestyle was often described as westernized and portrayed as revolving mainly around leisure activities (hanging out in video halls and clubs, drinking and being involved in inappropriate sexual relations) and material wealth (especially phones and clothes, often inappropriate ones like miniskirts). This individualistic lifestyle was seen to threaten established societal institutions like traditional marriage, kinship systems, property laws and family-based labour arrangements like farming. In short, elders accused youth of lacking dedication to the communal values which they regarded as necessary to overcome the perceived crisis of Acholi society.

Members of the war generation, in turn, accused elders and adults of neglecting and disregarding youth and not properly fulfilling their roles as advisors, caregivers and guardians. Young people often recited a discourse according to which parents during the war-years, especially in the camps, had left their children to fend for themselves, while they drank or otherwise surrendered to the desperate situation. In the contemporary post-war situation, members of the older generations were often described by youth as being unwilling or unable to adapt to the changed circumstances and of still living in the past. Common expressions I encountered were that elders were 'backward', lacked modern education and knowledge and did not understand the changed requirements and complex challenges of life in a capitalist, globalised world. Young people felt that their parents did not respect global rights discourses, for instance regarding children's and youth's right to education, leisure time, and freedom of expression. Furthermore, they claimed that traditional family models, based on polygyny and a large number of children, were no longer viable today and, on the contrary, were the cause of many intra-family conflicts, in which especially the children and their mothers had to suffer.

However, as the above analysis has shown, despite young people's scepticism with regard to some traditional practices and beliefs, which they saw as outdated or incompatible with modern life, most of them still valued Acholi culture and wanted to integrate some of its elements and principles into their everyday lives. In fact, many of my younger interlocutors complained that they did not really know enough about Acholi culture and accused their parents and grandparents of not passing on their cultural knowledge to the young generation. For them, the essence of the crisis was the situation of uncertainty in which they currently found themselves. They had grown up in a situation of great social upheavals in which collective norms, rules and conceptions of life were in flux. They were confronted with an equally unstable future in which they had to reconcile local and global demands in addition to the overall challenges of living in a society recovering from war. These disordered experiences that many of my young interlocutors underwent during their childhood and youth are a key factor in understanding their current sense of uncertainty and their feeling of being 'stuck in between' past, present and future, tradition and modernity.

Sociological studies of biographical uncertainty have pointed out that:

*[e]xperience and its status in biographical projecting is the key category for an assessment of the quality of the linkage of past, present and future. Experiences are characterized by a dual temporal horizon: through experience we conserve and reinterpret the past in order to orient our (biographical) action towards the future (...). [A] **sociological notion of biographical uncertainty** is generally identified as the weakening of this linkage of experience, expectation and projecting due to an erosion of intersubjectively shared certainty in a special social situation. (Reiter 2010: 8, emphasis in original)*

The difficulty of establishing a coherent link between past experiences and future actions, which Reiter identifies as a major cause of uncertainty, seemed to be at the core of the ‘cultural crisis’ in Acholiland. This became evident from the commonly voiced assertion that the 20-year war had undermined the very foundations of Acholi society. Expectations and projections related to the future of Acholi society greatly differed among various social actors. The relevance of the past as a guide for the future was disparately assessed, especially between members of the older and the younger generation. Consequently, one can assume that this lack of a coherent past-future ‘horizon’ led to an overall ‘erosion of intersubjectively shared certainty’ among all members of Acholi society. This, in turn, caused feelings of uncertainty not only on the individual, biographical level, but also evoked feelings of ‘cultural uncertainty’ at the societal level, indicated by a perceived lack of a shared value system and the disagreement about which lifestyles were to be regarded as desirable, morally acceptable and sustainable. As argued above, members of different generations experienced the manifestations of this cultural uncertainty differently and subsequently drew different conclusions and options for action from it.

Youth’s reaction to the situation of cultural uncertainty involved very complex considerations. On the one hand, they resisted (in diverse and sometimes subtle ways) elders’ attempts to re-establish gerontocratic principles and instead lobbied for the ‘modernisation’ of Acholi society based on the ideas of individual freedoms (including notions of citizen rights, children’s rights, women’s rights etc.). They rebelled against the roles and expectations – in terms of lifestyle, occupation, marriage and family structures – which would have been required of them in ‘traditional’ Acholi society and which were still envisioned by some of their parents and community elders. On the other hand, however, many were also drawn to the idea of reviving Acholi culture. They seemed to be strongly influenced by the highly emotive societal discourse (promoted especially by elders *and* international actors), which burdened the young generation with the task of ‘saving’ Acholi culture and suggested that only the revival and maintenance of Acholi traditions would lead to a restoration of social stability.

This then relativises the extent to which one can speak of clearly separable generational perspectives on Acholi culture and socio-cultural change. Although there are many aspects which are debated along generational lines, there are also crosscutting positions as well as intra-generational disparities. More important (and problematic) than the actual similarities or differences, however, is the general perception, (re-)produced in local discourses, that generational relations in Acholi society have become strained and conflictual. In some ways, this discursive creation of clearly distinguishable ‘conflict groups’, which are associated with dichotomous notions of tradition and modernity and which mutually blame each other for the crisis, might reflect

an attempt to make sense of and explain the current state of affairs. At the same time, however, it may also be detrimental to fostering inter-generational dialogue and thus should be unravelled through more differentiated analyses.

Conclusion

In this article I have argued that despite generational differences in reactions to and interpretations of socio-cultural change in northern Uganda, one should also pay attention to cross-cutting issues and concerns. This may be done by taking discourses rather than distinct groups as a starting point of analysis. By providing a detailed and complex understanding of how competing visions for the future of Acholi society are negotiated among members of the war generation, I gave an example of how to make 'intra-group' differences visible. This helped to reveal that the position of the young generation vis-à-vis older generations is much less clear cut than often assumed in peace building debates.

In order to draw attention to those segments of society like women or youth, which are commonly neglected in peace building negotiations, it may sometimes be unavoidable to think in terms of 'groups'. However, a necessary second step should always entail taking these 'groups' seriously by paying attention to the various positions they represent instead of subsuming them all under one unifying group identity. It is when we acknowledge that social actors' positions are shaped by *but also* cross-cut distinct groups that a more constructive dialogue becomes possible.

In northern Uganda, members of the war generation are crucial actors for bringing about and maintaining peace and stability, which is why their various perspectives should be taken (more) seriously in any peace building measure. In local discourses, they may often be blamed for 'losing' Acholi culture, for disrespecting long-established norms and orders and for westernizing Acholiland. Implicit in these accusations, however, is also the realisation that the fate of Acholi society is left in the hands of the young generation – which in itself is a powerful incentive to engage with young people's concerns. Thus, peace building initiatives, rather than taking for granted and reinforcing conflict lines between generations, should make more attempts to instigate and strengthen intergenerational dialogue.

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Rebel Kinship and Love within the Lord's Resistance Army

Sam Dubal

Harvard Medical School, Harvard University, USA

Abstract

The forced conscription of soldiers and forced marriages within rebel ranks are among the crimes against humanity that the International Criminal Court (ICC) and others have charged against the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Based on thirteen months of ethnographic fieldwork with former LRA rebels, this article examines rebel kinship, or the forms of meaningful social life that were formed through forced conscription and forced marriage. Focusing on a forced marriage between two rebels and a sense of militant kinship fostered within the LRA, I show how rebels live and lived beyond the moral boundaries of the static social-philosophical construct known as 'humanity'. I argue that reading violence and its consequences through the moral paradigm of humanity – in which violence necessarily dissolves rather than forges social life – precludes a genuine understanding of profound forms of life that emerge in its aftermath.

In the eyes of most of the humanitarian West – including the International Criminal Court (ICC) – many LRA practices constituted crimes against humanity. Among the charges of crimes against humanity that the ICC levelled at LRA commanders are forced conscription of soldiers and forced marriages within the rebel ranks. Characterised as absolutely inhuman, these acts are thought to constitute a seriously violent evil beyond the pale of humanity.

Although many of these acts were indeed violent, this did not imply that meaningful and valued relationships did not form in the aftermath of these so-called crimes. Simply understanding (and dismissing) these crimes as 'against humanity' fails to appreciate the dynamic breadth of rebel kinship that flourished in and through the violence of the war – forms of meaningful and often non-violent social life that were lived beyond the moral limits prescribed by the social-philosophical construct known as 'humanity'. This article explores the forms of social connection forged rather than dissolved through violence, shifting who related to each other and how in unexpected ways. In doing so, it attempts to open new moral spaces beyond the boundaries of the good that the amorphous concept of 'humanity' delimits.

It begins with the story of Amito, a woman forcibly abducted and married into the LRA who unpredictably develops close ties to her husband and his family, creating love out of violence. It then examines the forms of militant kinship that formed out of forced conscription, a kinship that sometimes coalesced into a sense that the LRA had itself become a clan.

The material upon which this work draws stems primarily from thirteen uninterrupted months of ethnographic research undertaken in and around Acholiland in northern Uganda, from

July 2012 to August 2013, following a shorter spell of research from June to August 2009. I spent most of this time learning from networks of former LRA rebels through a variety of research methods, including participant observation and semi-structured interviews. These networks included men and women who had spent varying amounts of time as or with the rebels, ranging from a few days to over two decades, and with varying ranks, ranging from no rank up to high-ranking commanders. Taken together as a group, these rebels had participated in almost all phases of the war, from the beginning and up until the present. Rather than refer to them as ‘respondents’ or ‘informants’ or ‘interlocutors’ throughout this piece, I name them as ‘friends’, because this more accurately describes how I see them. All names appearing here are pseudonyms.

Violent Love: The Problem of Inheriting Amito

‘Who shall fight for love?’

A pregnant woman, cradling her distended tummy, asks her unborn baby, in a line from Acholi playwright Judith Adong’s production ‘Silent Voices’ (performed at the National Theatre, Kampala, in July 2012). The play reproduced a humanitarian narrative about civilians caught between the violence of the UPDF and the LRA. It ended with a song imploring the audience: ‘*Don’t let innocence die!*’; ‘*Save love, save the future!*’

As she told me, Amito was forcefully abducted by the LRA from her village home in northern Acholiland in the late 1990s, near the border with what is now South Sudan. She was about 11 or 12 years old. She became a babysitter (*ting ting*) for Onen, an LRA officer who was keeping five wives, the most senior of whom was Gunya. At first, Amito looked after Gunya’s children. Within a short time, she became Onen’s sixth wife. She gave birth to Ojara, her first child with Onen, at the age of fourteen. She wanted to escape and did not want to stay with Onen, who took her as his wife by force.

When Amito first narrated this story to me, she was emotional and tearful. Her narrative followed the arc of the story often told about women in the LRA, according to which young girls were kidnapped and made sexual slaves of male rebels. By legal definition, she was abducted, defiled, and raped – entering a ‘forced marriage.’ As two human rights scholars of marriages between LRA men and women adamantly declare, ‘Forced marriage as it was practiced by the LRA is a crime against humanity’ (Carlson & Mazurana 2008: 64). Even scholarly accounts that attempt to disrupt this narrative by questioning the image of the passive female victim of war or by contextualising abduction of women within Acholi marriage customs emphasise that such marriages were forced, always referring to women in these arrangements as ‘wives,’ in ersatz quotes (see e.g. McKay & Mazurana 2004, Allen & Schomerus 2006, and Annan *et al.* 2009; Baines 2014 is a rare exception in dropping, as I do, ersatz quotes).

These morally charged labels offer very little understanding of the complexity of what followed in Amito’s experience as Onen’s wife (a term that in her case cannot justifiably be qualified with ersatz quotes). As she continued her story, she began to remember her co-wives – who they were, where they came from, and what their relationships were like with each other and with Onen. Amito’s facial expressions and storyline changed dramatically. She was Onen’s most beloved wife. Everyone told her that Onen loved her the most. Her co-wives (*nyeggi*) became filled with jealousy (*nyeko*) of her, performing a language in which the word used to signify ‘jealousy’

is also used to signify 'co-wife.' Amito worried that they were plotting to kill her while Onen was away, planning to throw her body into the bush (*lum*) and to blame her death on the Lotuko people, a tribe in South Sudan. Amito told Onen about these plans, and he began to protect her from his other co-wives. He also called together his co-wives and asked them to explain what had happened, warning them that jealousy was illegal among LRA co-wives. Indeed, many of my friends reflected that jealousy was well-regulated and that co-wives lived together more harmoniously as rebels in the LRA than as civilians. Fights between jealous co-wives in the *lum* were dangerous because they could bring injury or death to the husband in battle. Onen's own finger was injured because of a fight between Gunya and another of her co-wives.

Once, she recalled wistfully, she suffered a bad injury. Government troops had tossed bombs at the rebels, and one of them landed near her, felling her on the battlefield and rendering her unable to move due to the severity of her wounds. The rebels ran away, and she was abandoned. But Onen had not forgotten her. He searched for her for three days before finding her and carrying her back to the LRA defence, where he put warm water on her wounds. He struggled for a month to procure medicine for her and cared for her wounds until they healed. Amito saw others killed or dying in the *lum*, but found that Onen took excellent care of her. After she delivered Ojara, she saw Onen's love for her grow. He sought to find a way to return Ojara to Amito's mother, Min Amito, to keep him safe.

On closer inspection, the relationship that developed between Amito and Onen was hardly the 'crime against humanity' that its inception is often characterised to be. He was, as the quote opening this section asks, precisely the one fighting for love. Yet just as his forced marriage to Amito was seen as a 'crime against humanity,' his love for Amito was considered incompatible with and antithetical to the violence he committed as a rebel.

After about six years with Onen, Amito left the LRA. She was separated in the course of a battle and captured by the UPDF before being sent to the World Vision reception centre. Though she was happy with Onen, she found life in the *lum* hard and was secretly longing to leave the frontlines. She did not know how to ask Onen to send her home, though, as he wanted her to stay with him there. While staying at the reception centre, she was delighted to reunite with her mother. She was bitter and angry to learn, however, that while she was with the LRA, the rebels had killed her father, ambushing a vehicle he was travelling in and shooting him dead.

Members of Onen's family also came to see her in the reception centre – an act of social recognition that might be unexpected for a 'crime against humanity.' Hearing that one of Onen's wives had returned, Mohammed, Onen's first cousin and a former LRA military policeman, was there. So too were two of Onen's brothers. When Amito finished her required time at the centre and prepared to leave, Mohammed helped her carry her things to her mother's place in town.

At first, she decided to spend some time with her mother. She was unsure of what the future held for her and Onen, but she planned to wait for him to return too, without a desire to get another man. She noticed that so many of her friends she had left behind when she went to the *lum* had died of HIV/AIDS, and she was grateful that she had been abducted so as to have escaped their fate. In time, people around her began to ask why she was waiting for this man who was still in the *lum*. They questioned how long she would wait for him to come back. Some advised her to continue to wait for him. Others, including staff at the World Vision reception centre, advised her to forget him. In fact, they insisted that Onen had abducted her forcefully and told her that she should pray that he would die. Amito told me that she found this 'rather stupid talk' (*lok ming ming*). Her mother Min Amito called this 'really bad' (*rac tutwal*). Instead, Amito prayed daily that he – the father of her son, the husband who took care of her and someone whom she could not

let go of – would come home safely. Onen was also abducted against his will, she retorted to the staff. She angrily asked them if praying for someone's death was consistent with the evangelical teachings of World Vision. Though others found her relationship with Onen morally unacceptable given the violence in which it was forged, Amito deeply valued it and longed for him.

Kinship in Question: The Conflict over Inheriting Amito

Soon enough, Amito decided she wanted to go visit Onen's family in their rural home in Palik (a pseudonym). So she, Min Amito, and Ojara journeyed from town to visit them. They were happy to see her and welcomed her and their son, Ojara, who bore a striking resemblance to his father. Amito wanted to stay with them there, and so did Onen's family. They respected her and told her that if Onen were to come back, they would be married. This would be her home, and there would be land for Ojara to dig on, they assured her. Though entitled to ask for a fine for keeping Ojara (*latin luk*), Min Amito and Amito had not yet done so, a claim respectfully reserved. This was hardly a typical relationship between the family of someone who was 'raped' and 'forcibly married' and the family of the 'rapist.'

Amito wanted to stay in Palik, but she wondered who would take care of her there as she waited for Onen. She did not have to wait long to find an answer. She soon perceived that Mohammed was indirectly courting her, starting by being very supportive of her and Ojara. Mohammed bought Ojara clothes, books, and shoes, and began paying for his school fees. Mohammed and Amito had only known each other as acquaintances in the *lum*. Onen had introduced Mohammed to Amito as his cousin-brother, the son of his father's brother. But Amito and Mohammed were in different battalions and did not get to know each other well until they both returned from the frontlines. Mohammed, Amito recalls, started courting her from afar, like a cat trying to get food sitting on a table, sneaking steadily closer and closer. He was a bit shy and fearful, and not at all direct in his courtship, she remembered.

Once, he took Amito on a motorcycle taxi (*boda boda*) from town to Palik to harvest some crops. On that trip, Amito witnessed a growing conflict between Onen's family and Mohammed's family. She wanted to stay in Palik with Mohammed's family, but Onen's family was furious about this. Sensing that an intra-clan dispute was about to erupt with her at the centre, Amito broke off her nascent relationship with Mohammed. At the heart of this conflict between the families was a contestation over kinship, wealth, and social death manifesting in a dispute over widow inheritance. By conventional kinship rules, Mohammed had little right to inherit Amito. It was only through the militant kinship that he had forged with Onen in the *lum* that he staked his claim against those of Onen's brothers.

Widow Inheritance in Acholiland

Widow inheritance (*lako dako*) was until more recently a common feature of customary Acholi social life. As a respected elder, Ogweno Lakor, and others described it, *lako* occurred when a woman's husband died and the late husband's brother took over as the woman's new husband. The woman was allowed to choose which of the brothers she wanted to marry, with whom she would begin staying following a cleansing ceremony involving the ritual use of a chicken (*buku gweno*). The chosen brother could not refuse to take care of her and her children. Often, the chosen brother was close to her family and helpful to them while her husband was still alive. A brother produced from the same mother was considered most eligible, though brothers from the same father but different mothers were also considered. Cousin brothers (sons of brothers) or clan brothers (men of the same clan) could be chosen, Ogweno Lakor said, on the condition that there was precedence

in the family for such a practice. If there was not, the clan brother would be treated as an outsider and obligated to marry the woman with cash, paid not to the widow's family, but to the deceased husband's family. By contrast, inheritance by brothers from the same mother or father paid nothing, assuming the wife had been formally married to her first husband. Inheritance by the closest male friend of the deceased was almost unheard of; such an inheritance would also require payment to the deceased husband's family, and would, Ogweno Lakor warned, cause great enmity between the friend and the deceased's brothers. Given how integral the wife and her children were considered to the family, to whom they customarily belonged after marriage and part of whose wealth they constituted, the brothers might even seek to kill the friend for inheriting their wife. By taking their wife, such a man would be mocking and insulting the clan, as though it had no remaining men to care for a wife.

Conflict also arose if the process of inheriting a wife took place while the first husband was still alive. According to some, including Ogweno Lakor, inheriting the wife of a man still alive but perhaps working abroad or living far away was a serious offense. The only way for a husband's brother to help the wife in this situation, he insisted, was to keep the children, dig her garden, buy clothes for them, and the like – but by no means should the brother have sexual intercourse with the wife, as it was presumed that the husband would someday return. There were, however, situations in which a husband was presumed to have died when in fact he had not. In these cases – not uncommon during World War II and the LRA war – a soldier or rebel returning home might find that his wife had been inherited by his brother, with whom she may have produced more clan-children. In this case, elders returned the wife to the original husband after a cleansing ceremony, and the brother was told to never go back to the inherited wife ever again. If he did not heed this advice, conflict would arise between him and his brother, the original husband.

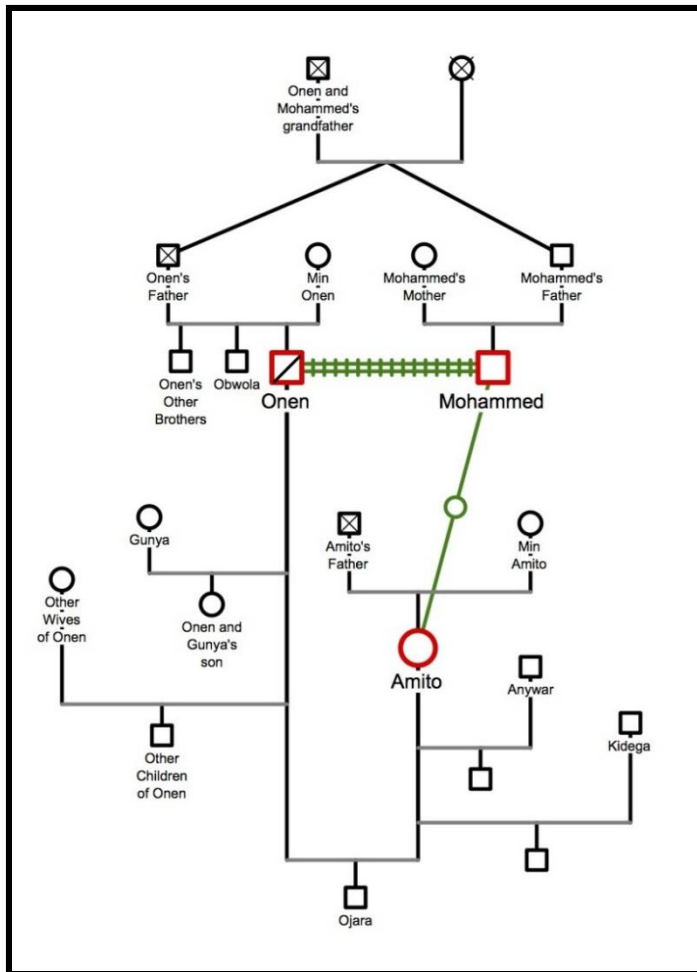
Mohammed's Attempt to Inherit Amito

Mohammed's suspected attempt to inherit Amito was contested precisely over many of these customs. As Amito and Min Amito saw it, Onen's immediate brothers wanted to inherit Amito, and together with their mother Min Onen, were unhappy that Mohammed – a cousin brother – was trying to court her. Min Amito told me that she heard rumours that Min Onen had tried to curse Mohammed for attempting to inherit Amito.

At first, Min Onen denied these rumours to me. She claimed that she would be happy if Mohammed inherited Amito. She lamented that her own sons (Onen's brothers) were not responsible enough to take care of Amito, nor were they capable of dealing with the jealousy (*nyeko*) that their own wives would have towards Amito if she were to become a co-wife to them. Min Onen, together with her son Obwola (Onen's brother), suggested that Mohammed was helping Amito and Ojara because of how caring Onen was to him in the *lum*. Onen helped to facilitate Mohammed's return from the frontlines, after all, she recalled. But later, she adamantly proclaimed that her own sons should be the ones to inherit Amito. Only if all her sons had died, she insisted, would the more distantly-related cousin-brother Mohammed be allowed to inherit Amito. A prominent chief of the official organisation of Acholi chiefdoms, *Ker Kwaro Acholi*, confirmed Min Onen's assessment when I presented this case to him in hypothetical, anonymized terms – the brothers, not the cousin-brother (Mohammed), should inherit the wife.

On the surface, it appeared that customary kinship rules clearly excluded Mohammed from inheriting Amito ahead of Onen's brothers. But these rules were fundamentally challenged by new forms of rebel kinship, particularly brotherhood, developed in the *lum* with the LRA and under conditions of intense violence. Gunya, for whom – together with her and Onen's child –

Mohammed also cared, told me that she agreed that Onen and Mohammed were not immediate brothers, but said that they were close friends who were like brothers. She argued that because they had stayed closely together in the *lum*, and Mohammed had cared for Onen's wives there as though he were Onen's real brother, he himself is the *true* brother (*omin Onen ki kome*). She remembered that like a true brother, he welcomed Onen's new wives into their home in the *lum*, joking, talking, and playing with them as they adjusted to their new family. He helped develop Gunya and Onen's relationship, facilitating their courtship and earning her respect as a responsible brother to Onen. He took better care of Onen's children than Onen's biological brothers did, she reflected to me. She suggested that if Onen were to come out of the *lum*, he would be angered by the way in which his brothers had neglected his wives and children. Both because of the time he spent with Onen in the *lum* and the way in which he took responsibility for Onen's wives and children, Mohammed had effectively confronted existing rules of kinship and staked his claim as more than a mere cousin-brother to Onen – and therefore the first-choice to inherit Amito, as illustrated in the figure below.



Family genealogy with focus on relationships of Onen, Mohammed, and Amito (all outlined in red). Note the transgressive relationships between Onen and Mohammed as 'true' brothers (marked by green railroad track) and between Mohammed and Amito as potential husband and wife (marked by circle on green line). Figures marked with 'x' are deceased. Onen is marked with a slash, representing the precarity of his social life living in the lum.

Mohammed told me that he felt similarly, feeling that he had a special bond with and special directions from Onen, based on their time together in the LRA. Before Amito had become Onen's wife, Mohammed narrated, Onen had suggested to him that he court Amito. Mohammed

refused, saying he did not want to keep a wife in the *lum* because of the control the LRA asserted over married couples (see also Dolan 2009: 296; Baines 2014). But he and Onen grew close fighting together in the *lum*. Their brotherhood remained strong and was melodically commemorated in the form of Mohammed's ringtone. Whenever his phone rang, it blasted out the sound of a sequence of rapid machine gunfire. He explained how he chose his ringtone:

There was a time when [Onen and I] came for operations here [in Uganda]. When we reached a field which was well-cleared, a gunship reached and found us there on the bare field. I was with Onen and he was shouting, 'This gunship is going to kill me and my brother today. God help us.' The gunship came and started firing at us. We all went down but Onen still got up and ran to check whether I was alive. So, when [the phone rings] I start thinking about how the gunship came and shot at us but we didn't die, and again remember how Onen and I used to make fun of this, because we would laugh at each other about how we panicked and the way he was shouting. So, [the ringtone is] for remembering what happened to us.

Yet while he may have made a new claim of rebel brotherhood to Onen, Mohammed also posed a threat to Onen's existence with his suspected courtship of Amito. As Min Amito stressed, Onen was still alive in the *lum*, and so any talk of *lako* was premature. Indeed, Onen's family received updates every now and again about his status, often from those rebels recently returned from the frontlines. Min Onen insisted to me that inheriting a wife whose husband was still alive would curse the husband to an untimely death, inflicted wherever he was. This is why, she suggested, some women were particularly keen to avoid having sex with other men while their husbands were away at e.g. war – it was thought that such illicit sex (*lukiro*) would lead to the husband's death. Mohammed's courting of Amito touched on the difficult subject of Onen's very life. There was an enduring uncertainty as to whether he would ever return alive from the *lum*, having spent over two decades with the LRA. The question of who would inherit Amito had not only begun to push Onen into a zone of social death, but physically threatened his very life. Onen's family suggested that Mohammed, in surreptitiously aiding Amito so that he could inherit her when Onen died, was wishing death upon Onen.

As a relatively successful man making money in town, Mohammed also attracted the jealousy of his cousin-brothers with his pursuit of Amito. While some of Onen's brothers also worked in town, they had their own families to care for and were struggling for money. Mohammed was seen to be both unattached and comparatively richer, in addition to being among the more responsible men in his clan.

Mohammed was not the only one imagined to have wealth and status in this situation. Were Onen to come back from the *lum*, Gunya pointed out, he would become a moneyed big man, most likely converted to work for the government or UPDF in some capacity. (Of course, were the LRA to win the war, his status would be even higher). Gunya suggested that were Onen to return to see how poorly his immediate brothers had treated his wives and children, he would angrily refuse them patronage.

Mohammed himself acknowledged that Onen's family began to suspect him of trying to inherit Amito. He continually denied these claims, insisting that he only helped Amito and Ojara because no one else was doing so. He also agreed that no one should inherit Amito as long as Onen

was still alive. Indeed, he recalled that he and Onen lived well together in the *lum*, and he believed that Onen wanted him to continue to help Amito while Onen remained in the *lum*. He felt that Onen's immediate family was unable to help Amito, and that they erroneously thought that this meant that he should not help her either. But, having incurred their wrath, he began to pull back and became more reserved when it came to helping Amito, Gunya, and another of Onen's wives who had returned from the *lum*.

Before Mohammed had returned from the frontlines, he recalled, Onen instructed him that his clan should take care of his children who had returned from the LRA, even if he died. Mohammed refused to renege on the responsibility he felt Onen had given him. After Mohammed returned from the LRA, and from time-to-time, he and Onen communicated on the phone. When Amito returned home, Onen called Mohammed and asked him to go see her. He wanted Mohammed to let his other wives know that he did not expect them to wait for him to return, that they should feel free to find other men if they liked. But he had different plans with Amito, whom he promised he would marry when he returned. Indeed, Mohammed recalled, when Onen occasionally called into the radio show *Dwog Cen Paco*, he always greeted Amito first, sometimes even asking the host Lacambel to go to Amito and Min Amito's home so that he could directly talk to them – but not Gunya nor his other wife.

Amito's Nostalgia for Onen Grows

As Mohammed remembered, when Amito came back from the *lum*, she often sought him out for life advice, including wisdom on what she should do about her husband. Mohammed told Amito that she was free to find another man if she wanted. But he told her that once she got another man, he would inform the new husband that this woman [Amito] with whom he would be staying was 'our wife' (*dako-wa*), and that when her husband [Onen] returned, he might take her away.

Both Amito and Min Amito knew of Onen's plans to marry Amito. So when Amito got another man in town, Anywar, Min Amito was both shocked and unhappy. As she remembered, she called Mohammed to let him know what was going on and to share her displeasure. She did not like Anywar. He did not respect her; he refused to take care of Ojara, who he made clear was not his child and therefore not his responsibility; and he was not earning money to support the family, leaving Amito to pay for both food and rent by herself. As their relationship deteriorated, Min Amito and her family grew worried about her and brought her back to Min Amito's home together with her second child, ending their relationship.

Min Amito wanted Amito to wait for Onen. But after a year or two, she found another husband, a *boda boda* rider named Kidega, with whom she was staying at the time I met her. Kidega was, as far as Min Amito could tell, an equally poor husband to Amito. He too refused to have any of Amito's other children stay with him, and so Ojara and his half-brother remained at Min Amito's home. When Amito's family sent Kidega a letter assessing the fine that he owed for unsanctioned elopement (*luk*) with their daughter, and came to see him to claim it, he did not give them a single coin – not even to help pay for transportation from their rural village to town. Min Amito felt he was very disrespectful, wanting only Amito and not her children or family. Unlike Onen's family, his family did not seem serious about caring for Amito as their own daughter.

Min Amito had become frustrated. She never wanted Amito to take another husband in the first place. Now, Amito had been through one difficult marriage and was unhappy in her second. Moreover, Amito was pregnant again, with her third child. Min Amito wanted her daughter to wait for Onen, to come home and stay with her, or to go to Palik and stay with Onen's family. She would have been happy if Mohammed inherited her daughter, but she too knew of the internal

family conflict that prevented that from happening. Instead, she waited for Onen – a better, more mature man than either Anywar or Kidega, someone who would provide for her daughter and love her. During my last visit with her in 2013, she shared with me pictures of Onen and Amito together in the *lum*. She recounted a time during the war when Onen saved Amito from drowning in a strong river current, nearly drowning himself in the process. She reiterated her desire for Amito to return to Onen. Even though he took Amito as his wife without courting her, he was a responsible man, she reflected. She knew that people would stigmatise her, saying that her son-in-law was a rebel (*lakwena*), but she did not care. She had already given Ojara to Mohammed for him to see his father's land, even though *luk* had not yet been paid – a sign of her tremendous respect for Onen.

Amito herself was torn over what to do. She told me that she wanted to accept Mohammed's courtship and stay with him, but could not. She also wanted to wait for Onen, but was becoming more and more impatient. How long should she wait, she wondered? She knew that she wanted to produce a total of four children, but with Onen still in the *lum* eight years after she had returned, she had grown anxious. She also found staying alone difficult, feeling as though she needed a husband to help care for her and her family. She wanted him to come back alive, and she still dearly loved (*maro*) him, she said. If he returned, she would go to him, leaving behind her current husband, Kidega. Indeed, she prayed that Onen would come back so that she could be together again with him.

At the time of writing, Onen remained in the *lum* with the LRA, almost a decade after Amito's return. Whether Onen would leave the *lum* remained as uncertain as ever. Min Amito longed for him to return from the frontlines, inferring from her daughter that he was a good, respectful, and mature man who was and would be a much better husband than either of the two men Amito had found at home (*gang*). He cared for Amito and their son Ojara and loved them both very much. She was not sure what Anywar or Kidega would do if Onen were to return, but she was sure that she wanted her daughter to reunite with Onen.

Forged in violence, Amito and Onen's relationship endured, held together by strings of love and networks of kinship stewed in rebellion, and holding strong in the face of competing civilian loves and kinships. Amito and Onen were one of many couples I found that had developed a lasting relationship out of forced conscription and marriage. There were, to be sure, many relationships that also dissolved when taken out of the *lum*, for a variety of reasons. Sometimes the husband failed to take responsibility for his wife and chased after other women. Other times, conflict or jealousy arose among co-wives at home that made a lasting relationship impossible.

In Amito and Onen's case, it was through violence that they had proved their love for each other. Because of the caring way in which Onen protected Amito from violence, Amito and her mother grew nostalgic for him in his absence. It was also through the rebel brotherhood that Mohammed had staked his claim as Onen's true brother and thus challenged existing kinship rules about Amito's inheritance. If Amito and Onen's marriage had indeed been a 'crime against humanity,' it was not a crime that Amito or either of their families cared to recognise given how it had developed over time.

Militant Kinships: Brotherhood and Sisterhood in the LRA ‘Clan’

I feel as if I’ve left my clan (kaka) and am staying far away in a foreign land (rok), not in my clan (...) I still find life hard. If I were to decide again, I would choose to stay with my clan [the LRA].

Makamoi, a former LRA fighter and collaborator, reflecting on the kinship he had within the LRA and had lost since leaving the rebels

Just as some like Amito longed for their ‘forced marriage’ partners from the *lum*, others who had come back from the frontlines spoke glowingly of the forms of mutual being they shared with fellow rebels with whom they had been forcibly conscripted. Musa, who had returned in the early 2010s, was particularly nostalgic about the sense of brotherhood and sisterhood that rebels cherished in the *lum*. ‘Since I’ve returned, there has been nothing good with people at home (...) People don’t help each other. If, for example, a fire destroys all the sorghum, even your real brothers won’t help give you food to eat,’ he lamented. By contrast, Musa and many others noted, people in the *lum* were united. ‘In the *lum*, people helped each other a lot, there was a lot of sharing – of food, sugar – it was all shared to the last bit, even if it was scarce,’ he recalled. ‘This doesn’t happen at home – people only care for their own kids (...) There’s a lot of jealousy among people, people aren’t united, and they work on their own.’ He was not afraid to air his feelings on the outside of his hut.



‘My brother, change your mind. Let’s unite.’ (Omera lok tami. Waripe.)

Inscription on the outside of Musa’s hut, directed toward his biological clan brothers. He explained that in writing it, he wanted to ‘repair people’s heads’ (roco wii dano), reversing the discourse of rehabilitation centres designed to ‘reintegrate’ former LRA rebels by, as one of these organisations put it, ‘repairing’ the heads of rebels.

(Photo: Sam Dubal)

Musa articulated a sense of mutuality that is not uncommon within military groups (see e.g. Thiranagama 2011, from which the title, ‘militant kinship’, of this section is drawn). He spoke of his fellow rebels as his *real* brothers and sisters:

The LRA are more than my family at home (...) the relation was really strong, stronger than my real [biological] brothers. I might have helped some person in battle who was on the verge of death, protecting them from death – something that my real [clan] brother won't do. Even at home, if I was on the verge of death, he wouldn't do it, but [instead] run away and leave his own brother. But in the lum, people helped each other to the final moment. So today, so many [who knew me from the lum] come to see me, and want me to visit them in their homes. But you're not invited in the same way from your family who live elsewhere. So the bond in the family relations in the lum is stronger than it is here.

Musa's anger at his clan kin, and nostalgia for his LRA kin, was in part fuelled by their denial of his claims to land. But such nostalgia was not unmeasured. Musa had deserted the LRA after suspecting other rebels of concocting a plot to have him killed. His attachment to LRA kin was made all the more remarkable by the mistrust this plot stirred in him.

Musa claimed new kinship ties with his former LRA comrades, as though they were a clan of their own (as Makamoi alludes to, in the epigraph to this section). But he insisted that he gained more than just concrete social relations while a rebel – he gained the capacity of sociality itself. '[With the LRA, I learned how to] stay with people. Socialising together with people of different areas – we stayed with people there from different areas and walks of life, as brothers (...) I also learned to live together with [different] tribes, making me know how to socialise with people.'

Like Musa, others maintained relations with fellow rebels who had returned from the frontlines, even as physical distances often kept them apart. 'The relationships (*wat*) in the *lum* are stronger than the ones here [biological kinship],' Gunya declared. Within town, whenever another rebel friend of mine, Aliya, met with or ran into another former rebel woman, she greeted her as sister (*lamego*), a practice she explained as a result of the LRA spirit of togetherness (*cwiny me bedo karacel*). She, too, recalled how people in the *lum* supported each other as though they were blood family, and that many of these networks of support were maintained after their return from the frontlines. In her own family in the *lum*, when her husband was not around, his brothers would help their family with what they needed, providing them with cooking oil and other supplies. At *gang*, she lamented, a husband's brother refused to help. People had lost their sense of helping each other, she mourned, working only as individuals. She saw this as an effect of the war – people had become poor and kept what little they had within their families, unable to maintain larger patronage networks.

This unity among former LRA rebels was partly an effect of rules and regulations that, many friends noted, controlled problems that were frequently troublesome at *gang*, including adultery and jealousy (*nyeko*) among co-wives. It was also a transformation of belonging that included a break from one's clan kin as part of the process of becoming rebels. While they were in the *lum*, Gunya explained, they 'didn't know' their relatives at *gang*. 'People at *gang* know that even if you are a relative to a rebel (*adwii*), you shouldn't get close to him,' she said, meaning that rebels did not always hesitate to injure or kill their clan kin if they had to. One friend, Labwor, spoke of his gun as his mother and his father, the weapon often trumping the ties to his clan kin. Labwor's friend Otto, also a former rebel, similarly referred to his gun as his mother, his wife, his everything – because with it, he was able to provide for himself and others through its force, robbing food and supplies, among other bad behaviours (*bwami*).

As these new relations of rebel kinship were established among men and women who had been conscripted against their will, blood itself came to embody these ties and mark them off as different kinds of biological kinship. Gunya once complained to me that her son would often run into the *lum* near their home on the outskirts of Gulu town whenever he was criticised or disciplined. She joked that dealing with children who were born in the *lum* was very hard. She said that her son had bush blood (*remo me lum*) or rebel blood (*remo pa adwii*). At first, I thought she was speaking metaphorically, but she explained, ‘people in the *lum* have a different blood from people at home.’ She recalled that when their son was young, she took him to the hospital to have an operation on his left knee, from which, she claimed, they removed ‘bullet acid.’ She wondered if the bullet wounds that she and her son’s father suffered in the *lum* had been transmitted to their child. ‘The blood of the parents is the one that makes the blood of the child. Both of his parents were *adwii*, and now he is too. He has *adwii* blood – that is why he runs to the *lum*,’ she concluded. Indeed, she suggested that he might one day become a fighter himself, either as a rebel or an army soldier. ‘The child takes to the idea of fighting as the parent did,’ she explained of the inheritance of a martial character. Not only had rebel kinship come to challenge clan kinship, establishing new patterns of mutual care, but it had slowly taken on the very form of shared blood. Importantly, this was not a kinship of brothers and sisters who had signed up to fight together with a shared vision and common goal. Rather, it was a kinship that emerged from a so-called crime against humanity – the forced and often random conscription of soldiers who, by and large, had no intention to fight.

Rebel Kinship beyond Humanity

In and through so-called crimes against humanity such as forced marriage and forced conscription, the LRA redrew relational boundaries to create what we could broadly categorise as rebel kinship. Rebels became husbands, wives, brothers, sisters, and children, cared by and caring for each other. As a form of mutual belonging, rebel kinship challenged and often overtook conventional relations – as exemplified in Mohammed becoming Onen’s brother at the expense of his birth brothers.

These relationships show that violence is not exclusively something destructive that must be coped with or survived, as Carolyn Nordstrom (1997) claims, but can also be creative, producing new forms of mutual belonging. Here, I follow Lubkemann (2008), Thiranagama (2011), and Ferme (2013) in questioning Nordstrom’s argument. Like the violence of heroin addiction described by Angela Garcia (2010) in the Española Valley in New Mexico, the violence of the LRA war destroyed certain relationships but also constituted others. When the causative violence is characterised as ‘against humanity,’ however, it becomes very difficult to understand the meaning within or produced in the aftermath of the violence. This is not to say that the violence itself was moral, nor that forced conscription and marriage was something positive to be accepted or lauded. Rather, it is to recognise that understanding the violence and its consequences through the static moral framework of humanity limits an understanding of life itself, and in particular, the perhaps unexpected turns it often takes over time after violent events.

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Post-war Development and Camp-site Graves: The Politics of Reburials in Former Pabbo IDP Camp, Acholiland

Ina Rehema Jahn

African Centre for Migration and Society, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

Abstract

Since the end of the conflict in Acholiland, northern Uganda, development actors increasingly embark on economic reconstruction and rehabilitation projects in former IDP camp sites. Yet, all these sites contain multitudes of graves as a burial back at home was greatly obstructed during the period of forced encampment. For many Acholi, a burial away from home is however widely believed to aggrieve the spirits of the dead, whose bones are said to lie in the ‘wrong soil’. Former camp residents have attributed misfortunes and illness to these bones left behind in the camps. Since the first closures of IDP camps in northern Uganda, the need to move graves from former camp sites back home has thus occupied the imagination of many returnees, and reburials have become a common practice. At the same time bones and graves left behind literally come to the surface in the context of reconstruction projects in former camp sites. Drawing from the example of a donor-funded infrastructure project in former Pabbo IDP camp, this article highlights both the material and cosmological implications of dealing with bones and graves that have been left behind in these sites. It argues that while reburials are intimately linked to questions of local cosmology and efforts to reconstitute a sense of belonging in the post-conflict phase, the practice also becomes subject to political stakes of development and government actors with potentially unsettling cosmological consequences. Without understanding both material and cosmological concerns of former displaced populations regarding graves in the ‘wrong soil’ and their appropriate treatment, development initiatives in former camps in Northern Uganda hence run the risk of causing renewed social and cosmological disorder.

Since the 2006 Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, which marked an inconclusive end to war between the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) and the Ugandan government, the majority of the forcibly displaced have returned to their former homes. However, the violent disruptions of social, political and economic life which marked the two decade long conflict remain etched in collective memory and linger on as returnees attempt to remake homes and reorder lives. Among the remnants of war are also the physical remains of those who died in the displacement camps and were buried away from ancestral or marital land, a situation commonly described by former camp inhabitants as ‘bones in the wrong soil’ (*congo i ngom ma pe tye kakare*). Death was a daily

occurrence throughout the period of forced encampment, conditions of which have been described as amounting to ‘social torture’ evidenced in ‘widespread violation, dread, disorientation, dependency, debilitation and humiliations (...) perpetrated on a mass rather than individual scale’ (Dolan 2009: 2). The harrowing camp conditions caused excess mortality levels classified as highest humanitarian emergency (Branch 2012: 89, WHO & MOH 2005) while the camps themselves also ‘soon became magnets of fighting’ (Finnström 2008: 136). Destitution and death were so omnipresent that a strong local narrative emerged which framed the camps as the implicit means to control, dominate and even ‘exterminate’ the Acholi population (Finnström 2008: 144).

In the context of such intense structural violence perpetrated against the majority of the Acholi population, cultural and social agency became severely diminished while cosmological orders were also subject to new negotiations. In Acholiland, where the dead are customarily given a burial at home and graves are sacred places intimately lived with on one’s homestead, culturally appropriate recognition of the many occurring deaths often became impossible. Official restrictions on movement and the lack of income both heavily inhibited the transport of the remains back home as well as the customary institution of funeral rites. In Acholiland, improper burials are however thought to greatly aggrieve the spirits of the dead who as a result can cause misfortune, illness and even death among their surviving relatives and the wider clan (Baines 2010), spreading cosmological disorder and upheaval. Since the end of the conflict, many bereaved families have therefore organised reburials from camp sites to their former homesteads in order to appease the spirit of their dead relatives and to reconstitute a sense of belonging with their land. Reburials in post-conflict Acholiland thus acquire their meaning in the relation to prevalent cosmologies tied to notions of place and belonging and the shared experience of structural, decade-long violence.

The emergence of reburials in post-conflict Acholiland also coincides with rapidly increasing business opportunities and land commercialisation in the former camp sites, which are purposefully developed into larger urban centres (Whyte *et al.* 2014). Since the end of the conflict, the Ugandan government has exerted ‘highly public pressure (...) for the opening up of Northern Uganda for “development”’ (Atkinson 2009: 2) by incentivising large scale infrastructure and economic rehabilitation projects in the area. As highlighted by Whyte and colleagues (Whyte *et al.* 2014), this drive for development is underpinned by the logic of subtraction: to clear the way for concerted development intervention and economic reconstruction, former camps need be cleared from both the remaining displaced populations as well as the dead bodies they left in the ground.

Local cosmological idioms circumscribing the engagement with the spirit world – of significant importance to many Acholi – therefore become entangled with development approaches which are often grounded in materialist concerns that fundamentally exclude the cosmological domain. As a consequence, family-level negotiations over the reburial of their dead have become part and parcel of post-war reconstruction efforts. The potential consequences of these processes are highlighted by the construction of a sub-county hall in former Pabbo IDP camp funded by the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in 2009, following the request for support by the sub-county leadership. The construction of the hall provoked widespread anxiety and concern among Pabbo’s residents, and led the agency to funding both exhumations from the construction site as well as reburials in returnee villages. Many of the affected families experienced these reburials as a forceful violation of their cosmological imaginations with unsettling consequences, long outlasting the presence of JICA.

This article aims to situate reburials in the context of post-conflict development and reconstruction initiatives and their politics in former Pabbo camp. Based on six weeks of fieldwork

in early 2013, the case of JICA's involvement is used as a lens to understand how bodies and bones 'in the wrong soil' are not only part and parcel of local negotiations of the meaning of home and belonging in the wake of return, but also and simultaneously the substance of post-conflict politics in the former camp sites such as Pabbo. It is hence important to return the debate on post-war belonging and reconstruction to a discussion of local cosmological idioms and concerns and shift away from analyses grounded in predominantly materialistic worldviews and concerns.

Dying and Burying in Northern Uganda's IDP Camps

All over the world, 'burials reflect upon the complicated relationships between humans, land and belonging' (Núñez & Wheeler 2012: 215). In Acholiland, the connection between the living, the dead, and family land is particularly strong. For most Acholi, death indicates not a separation but a transformation of relations between the realm of the dead and the living (Mbiti 1969, Odoki 1997, p'Bitek 1971), and the ancestors play a significant role in the affairs of the living. It is through a properly performed burial, which prominently includes being buried at home, that 'the deceased person is initiated into the divine lives of the ancestors, who are believed to be the founders and the guardians of society' (Odoki 1997: 2). If someone dies a 'good death', the spirit of the deceased will become *tipu maleng* – a 'pure ancestor' (Behrend 1999: 23) or a 'holy spirit' blessing or protecting the descendants. But when proper funeral rites have not been conducted, or a burial has taken place in an unfamiliar location or not at all, the spirit of the deceased can become a *tipu marac* ('evil/bad spirit' or 'aggrieved ancestor') or even *cen* ('vengeful ghost') that haunts the relatives responsible for the improper burial, and also the wider clan.

The impact of forced encampment, obstructing a proper ritualised burial at home, greatly disrupted the transformative and regenerative process normally brought about by an honourable burial. Due to this failure to create order vis-à-vis death, 'bad death spread throughout the landscape and social order' (Jahn & Wilhelm-Solomon 2015: 188) and daily surroundings became imbued with *tipu marac*. Dead bodies interred in 'foreign' IDP camp soil demanded active management and containment from their families and clans.

It is in this context that Acholiland has seen the widespread emergence of reburials from former camp sites to pre-displacement areas of residence in the wake of return. These reburials in the post-encampment phase are indicative of a cosmological idiom which circumscribes home as the place where the ancestral collective is anchored. As Finnström has observed in his study of healing ceremonies during the war in Acholiland, the emergence of reburial similarly presents the 'process of socialization in which the victim is incorporated and reconciled with the community of the living and the dead... The traumatic experience is socially deconstructed' (Finnström 2008: 161). With a reburial in the place of residence prior to encampment, and a return of the spirit to where it belongs, the deceased can finally join the ancestral collective (Hertz 1960: 54) and is incorporated and reconciled with the community of the living and the dead.

For the surviving relatives, the reburial itself is not only emotionally charged but also very costly. The whole process, often spread over several days, demands the sacrifice of a goat or sheep, men to do the work of exhuming and reburying, the transport of the remains, payment of a traditional healer or spirit medium (*ajwaka*) who will call home the spirit of the dead, as well as food and drink for the larger family and clan to gather and celebrate.

Development Projects in Former Camp Sites: Encountering ‘Bones in the Wrong Soil’

Usually a solely community-regulated affair, reburials and graves remaining in former camp sites have also become of increasing concern to international development agencies. The resulting entanglement of material concerns and cosmological imaginations is exemplified by a recent development project implemented in Pabbo, formerly the largest IDP camp in northern Uganda with a population of 65,000 people at the height of displacement in 2004 (Dolan 2009: 108). Since the official camp closure in 2010, Pabbo has developed into a thriving urban centre on the strategically important route connecting Kampala and South Sudan. Mergelsberg (2012: 67) describes the effects of Pabbo’s post war economic boom: ‘...the IDP camp was turning into a permanent semi-urban space... Previously one of the remotest areas in Uganda, Pabbo suddenly found itself in the middle of a border region of growing importance.’

Today, traces of the camp structure are difficult to spot by an untrained eye and economic interest in the area is continuously increasing. Pabbo trading centre now boasts a primary and secondary school, a Health Centre IV, a very active market place, modern government infrastructure, and many video halls and bars. The existing road connecting Pabbo and Gulu has recently been tarmaced with funding from World Bank, which has further facilitated the regional and cross-border flow of people and goods. Having been bestowed the status of Town Board by the Ministries of Local Government and of Finance and the district government, Pabbo is now officially recognized as an emerging urban centre and receives financial support for the systematic planning of urban development (Whyte *et al.* 2014).

The upgrading of the former camp to the status of Town Board and the prospect of further elevation to Town Council have resulted in the division of government and family land into plots to be privately sold and developed, thereby acquiring new value and commercial significance. In due course, bones and graves which had so far remained in the former camp site have become a hindrance to the wider development and post-war reconstruction agenda actively pursued by private landowners, local leadership, NGOs and government officials in the area. Among Pabbo’s political leadership the remaining graves are widely framed as inhibiting economic commodification and obstructing the ‘dreams of development and proper urbanization [which have taken hold] in the former camp sites’ (Whyte *et al.* 2013). As one of Pabbo’s parish chiefs stated evocatively, ‘business and unknown graves do not go together’ (Pabbo Trading Centre, 14 January 2013). Building on a grave is widely perceived as severely disrespectful towards the dead, and is likely to cause great spiritual harm to those who attempt doing so. In the words of a private landowner in Pabbo, ‘it is problematic to build on graves as the spirit of the dead will complain that you are stepping on him, suffocating him. It will invite trouble to your family’ (Pabbo Trading Centre, 01 February 2013).

In discussing the presence of graves in post-conflict Pabbo and the issues they raise, a member of the newly formed Pabbo Trading Centre Landowner Association explained that ‘we advise people to hurry up in exhuming bones in order to free up opportunities for development’ (Pabbo Trading Centre, 01 February 2013). On frequent occasions, the Association has facilitated the bringing together of families and landowners to avoid open conflict and smoothly arrange for exhumations:

We, as landowners, are very interested in removing the graves but families are delaying us. It is a very common problem among us landowners in the trading centre, and at the meetings with the

Association it is a very frequent issue that we discuss...If you want to do development, you must seriously pressurise the families into reburying quickly. In some cases, members have even subsidised reburials in order to hurry up the process. (Member of Pabbo Trading Centre Landowner Association, Pabbo Trading Centre, 01 February 2013)

These dynamics underline the argument that development agendas in former IDP sites are underpinned by the logic of subtraction; that is the removal of both the last remaining displaced persons as well as the dead who were interred in the camp during the conflict. In the words of Whyte *et al.* (2014: 605): ‘The transformation of the IDP camps back to trading centres was a matter of subtraction. The displaced people had to be re-placed in their rural homes; thousands of their huts had to be demolished...and the multitude of graves had to be removed and put where they belonged.’

In this context of emerging urbanism and increasing land commercialisation, Pabbo’s sub-county leadership was approached by the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), a valued development cooperation partner, with the offer to construct a new sub-county multi-purpose hall as outlined in the sub-county’s latest development plan.

In an enthusiastic response, the sub-county officials allocated a large plot of centrally located land to JICA for construction purposes. However, the construction planners soon encountered numerous bones and graves in the allocated land, which delayed the execution of the project and ultimately led the agency to fund both exhumations from the construction site as well as reburials in returnee villages.

It is important to note that reburials did not fall under JICA’s mandate of supporting the rehabilitation and reconstruction of physical infrastructure. As such, JICA found itself under pressure to justify to its stakeholders why they had proven to be flexible and funded reburial ceremonies. In the May 2010 newsletter of JICA’s Gulu Office, the intervention was framed as an act of respect for Acholi culture but also as a decision firmly based on an economic cost-benefit analysis:

Since the sub-county had also insufficient budget, JICA was requested to provide assistance by providing the funds for sheep and goats to facilitate the rituals. However, it should be noted that such assistance by JICA is not part of JICA’s major assistance program, and that this was a way of speeding up the constructing process. Partly, the activity was funded by JICA because of the respect it holds for the culture of the Acholi community. (JICA 2010: 2)

In this sense, the cosmological dimension was largely bypassed: in an apparent commodification of ritual action, JICA presented its decision to fund the reburials as the most effective method to swiftly get the bones out of the land. Not only were the remaining graves in the area framed as an obstacle to development, but JICA actually took an active role to ‘get rid’ of the obstacle by paying for the reburial ceremonies to take place.

Affected families were given one week from the 19th to the 26th of February 2010 to exhume their dead from the construction site. During this period 249 bodies were claimed by 92 different families, and taken home for reburial. On each day, a sheep was slaughtered in the presence of a cultural leader, who then ensured the sprinkling of its chyme (*wee*) into each

exhumed grave to bless the spirit of the deceased, before the bodies were transported to their reburial sites. As some families lived very far away and transport costs were not covered by the JICA budget, several graves remained unclaimed. In a few cases, relatives living closer to Pabbo took on the task to exhume the bodies, but eight families were unable to find an alternative arrangement. These remaining graves were in due course levelled by the construction workers.



*The completed Sub-county Hall in Pabbo Trading Centre, February 2013
(Photos: Ina Rehema Jahn)*

The Politics of Donor-funded Reburials in Pabbo

The government-initiated exhumations and reburials funded by JICA were widely experienced as a disruptive experience among inhabitants of Pabbo. Many residents perceived them to be a factory-like process focused on little else than an efficient and speedy subtraction of graves from the construction site. While some of the affected families referred to the JICA's funding of the exercise as an example of compassionate development assistance, many others experienced the speedy, large-scale exhumations and reburials as a forceful violation of cosmological imaginations. A closer examination of the multiple and often astoundingly contrasting narratives circulating in Pabbo regarding the JICA-funded exhumations and reburials helps to understand how graves and bones became potent agents in local politics through the trope of reconstruction and development.

The local leadership in charge of managing the reburial exercise on the ground was largely adamant that only a few elderly people had initially resisted the exhumation and reburial plans. The government stance disseminated throughout was that the sub-county needed to develop, and that development cannot be delayed by resistance to the construction plans. As one of Pabbo's civil servants put it, 'the law says that development comes first (...) when development is taking place, everything must make way' (former Sub-county Chief, Gulu, 10 February 2013). According to the sub-county employee tasked with the direct oversight of the reburials, most affected families ultimately agreed to the reburials as long as assistance in the form of goats, sheep, food and drinks would be provided (Parish Chief, Pabbo Trading Centre, 14 January 2013). It is unclear exactly how many animals JICA agreed to provide, but many families seem to have assumed that there would be one for each home.

Before the reburials, JICA had also invested heavily in sensitisation exercises for the local population. The main channel to disseminate information was JICA's weekly radio talk show

named *Dongo Lobo Acholi* ('Development of Acholi Land') on MEGA FM, the major radio station in nearby Gulu Town. Among local government officials, JICA also paid Pabbo's *Rwot Moo*, the most senior cultural leader on community level, to come on air and disseminate information regarding the exhumations and reburials to his constituency. The JICA Gulu Office May 2010 Newsletter summarises his radio visit as follows:

On Feb 24, His Highness Zaccheus Acaye was invited as the chief guest on the radio show. He was to give his view on the exhuming of bodies in Pabbo in his capacity as the cultural leader of the area (...) [H]e emphasized the following:

Now that people are returning to their villages, it is important not only as a human thing to do but also in accordance with the dictates of the Acholi culture that the relatives do not leave the bodies of their loved ones in a foreign land. He said that since the people are now going back to their ancestral homes, it is also cultural enough to take with them the remains of their loved ones to their ancestral resting places (...) [H]e requested all the people who had relatives buried in Pabbo Sub-County land to take advantage of the assistance rendered by JICA and the sub-county to relocate the remains of their loved ones within the stipulated time period (...) in his conclusion, His Highness appreciated those who responded positively for the function earlier and encouraged others to do the same. He further on behalf of the people thanked and appreciated JICA for respecting the culture of Acholi by funding the requirements for ritual activities that was not in their budget line.

(JICA 2010: 2)

Significantly, JICA officials feared that families could take material advantage of the exhumation and reburial exercise. This was not entirely unfounded, as earlier USAID budget allocations for cleansing ceremonies in areas across northern Uganda, where bones were found, had previously gone missing. As one of JICA's field officers explained, 'we were worried that people would take the material benefits offered by JICA and then not dispose of the body correctly. So we were checking thoroughly whether any body was dumped elsewhere than home' (JICA Field Officer, Gulu, 04 February 2013). Seeing the importance of an appropriate treatment of dead bodies, the preoccupation with the potential misuse of funds nonetheless points to a potential disconnect from prevailing cosmological concerns in Pabbo. Instead, the institutional focus squarely remained on creating measurable, added infrastructural value to boost local government capacity in as short a time frame as possible. As such, as Jones has stated in his examination of the durability of Pentecostal churches vis-à-vis the brief after-lives of local development interventions in Teso, eastern Uganda, the language and objective of technocratic development actors 'remained distant from people's landscape of interpretations that made up the place' (Jones 2013: 88).

In contrast to the fear of JICA officials, and maybe as testament to their misunderstanding of the cosmological significance of reburials, all exhumed bodies were in fact reburied. Nonetheless, many of the affected families described the exercise as highly unsettling and in some cases even as re-traumatising. Apart from widespread cynicism marked by a perception that the JICA intervention had primarily benefited the sub-county leadership and a generalised sense of

discontent with perceived politics of patronage, many stressed the lack of time and adequate resources as main causes of the cosmological upheaval caused by the JICA-funded exhumations and reburials.

Many of those who were pressured into the reburials claimed to have received only a half, a quarter or no sacrifice animal at all, which, in the absence of further financial resources, prevented the proper ritualisation of reburial. In the words of a family caught up in the reburial exercise, ‘these weren’t decent reburials - but an incomplete process instead because important items were missing. Such a rushed reburial can really come to haunt families and cause great misfortune’ (former Camp Leader, Pabbo Trading Centre, 15 January 2013). Even the local Parish Chief and focal person for JICA explained that ‘some families were not happy with exhumations. Goats that we gave to parishes were not enough to cater for all families, and the families had to cover transport costs themselves, which meant that it became a financial challenge for some’ (Parish Chief, Pabbo Sub-county, 07 February 2013). The head of local government in turn rationalised the lack of fully catering to transport needs by stating that ‘it is crucial that the families also contribute something, because if everything is funded by Japanese it damages our rituals and makes us lose our traditions’ (LC3, Pabbo Trading Centre, 14 January 2013).

The Reburial Process as a Source of Cosmological Upheaval

The experiences of the families who had to rebury under the JICA initiative highlight the complex contestations entangled with the JICA-funded exhumations and reburial exercise. Okot’s family reburied seven children (including twins, who are imbued with *jok*, or particularly strong spirits warranting special treatment after death) in due course of the JICA-funded construction project. The family’s biggest concern pertained to the fact that contrary to public promises, they had not received a single goat to use as a sacrifice. Instead, one goat had been given to the whole parish in which more than forty families had to rebury relatives that day. This one goat was slaughtered and consumed by those who exhumed the bodies and carried them home, and therefore could not be utilised for ritual purposes.

At the time, Okot and his family were also embroiled in conflict over access to their ancestral land. Without time to come to an interim agreement for the reburials of their deceased family members, they were unable to bury the exhumed bodies, as Okot expressed it, ‘in the soil where our ancestors are resting’ (Pabbo Sub-county, 06 February 2013). As he continued to explain, this has caused great consternation and worry in the family: ‘That is our land. We wanted to re-bury our loved ones there (...) I don’t know yet if the spirits will complain about not being brought to their proper home – they may complain because they are supposed to rest on our ancestral land, where the grandparents are.’

In drawing attention to the missing resources needed for a proper reburial, Okot emphasised the widespread rumours that the JICA-funded development intervention had primarily benefited the sub-county leadership. After all, he maintained, none of the material supposedly purchased by the additional JICA budget earmarked for the exhumations and reburials ultimately reached those it had been intended for. Okot’s wife evocatively recounted what she perceived to be the direct consequences of the hurried and improper reburials the family had been pressured into:

The sub-county leadership told us that because of construction of the new sub-county hall by JICA, we need to exhume our loved ones from the area. They promised us that a sheep will be slaughtered to

use its wee in exhuming. I didn't see any of the sheep's wee, and neither were there any goats that had been promised by the political leadership. My twins were supposed to be reburied with wee from a sheep, but there was nothing there, and this has caused us big problems. (Pabbo Sub-county, 09 February 2013)

As a result of the rushed reburials conducted with very limited resources, she continued wearily, the spirits of the reburied twins are now disturbing her remaining children. While 'before the forced exhumation, we didn't feel anything with their spirits, it has started since we exhumed because the Acholi traditional rituals were not done (...) My remaining children frequently fall sick, and sometimes even become temporarily blind' (Pabbo Sub-county, 09 February 2013). Six months after reburial, she resolved to visit an *ajwaka* who advised her that the twins' spirits were feeling mistreated and neglected by their family due to their improper reburial, and demanded two goats as a sacrifice from their family. Still trying to gather the financial resources necessary to do so, Okot's wife strongly condemned the JICA-funded exercise as a whole as 'they neither gave us any time to prepare for the reburials nor provided the necessary things to make the reburial proper' (Pabbo Sub-county, 09 February 2013).

Okello's family was among the many who still lived on sub-county land when JICA's development initiative was announced in September 2009. They were given a time span of three months to leave the envisaged construction site, and 'us people had to agree because the land does belong to the sub-county...there was no chance to protest' (Kal Parish, Pabbo Sub-county, 05 February 2013). In January 2010, Pabbo's leadership ordered Okello's family to exhume their left behind graves. The small portion of goat meat provided by government officials on behalf of JICA did not suffice as food for even the immediate family, which forced him to also slaughter some of his chickens to cater for the family's guests. In his assessment of the JICA exhumations and reburial as experienced by his family, Okello stated that:

*We were promised a goat for each grave by the local authorities. But as we came to experience, later on, it came down to a quarter goat (...) I didn't feel happy because I had to provide chicken to feed the reburial guests, which I had not anticipated at all. It has caused us financial trouble. Everything was so abrupt but an *ajwaka* and the organisation need money, which I could not organise in the little time given. (Kal Parish, Pabbo Sub-county, 05 February 2013)*

The family intends to hold another reburial celebration once they can afford to purchase a goat. Yet he counts himself lucky as his clan brother, who was also called to exhume and rebury bones from the sub-county grounds, failed to locate his two graves before the end of the deadline. The construction did commence regardless, causing the family further grief and concern for the deceased's spirit.

Reburials and Post-war Development: A Site of Politics

Rupture and dislocation are defining and encompassing experiences inscribed in northern Uganda's history and the life worlds of its inhabitants, who have lived through more than two decades of war between the LRA and the Ugandan government. In the wake of return from forced displacement, efforts to remake homes and reorder lives have taken centre stage across the region.

The return period is also marked by continual anxiety over the unsettled dead who have died and were buried away from home in the displacement camps. Reburials from former camp sites to returnee villages are thus highly expressive of the notion of home and belonging in the aftermath of ‘seriously bad surroundings’ (Finnström 2008: 193). At the same time, ‘dreams of development’ pursued by the Ugandan government and international development actors have changed the landscape of post-conflict northern Uganda and are leading to continued urbanisation and increased commodification of land.

In the context of these post-conflict rehabilitation processes, graves left behind in former camp sites have also become a public concern involving development actors, national and local leadership and private land owners. As illustrated by the JICA-funded exhumation and reburial exercise in Pabbo, reburials are instrumentalised through political stakes of other actors who interact with local cosmologies as material and cosmological concerns become intimately entangled. The case thus highlights the complex and potentially unsettling interstices between local cosmologies, the impacts of conflict and displacement, and the developmental and reconstructive agendas of state and international agencies.

In outlining the contestations surrounding the reburial exercise, this article has aimed to show how different actors have perceived and understood JICA’s development assistance in Pabbo in contrasting ways. JICA employees took a very technocratic stance vis-à-vis the exhumations and reburials; even checking on whether bodies are disposed of correctly and ensuring that no funds were claimed without an actual reburial. The political leadership was primarily concerned with bringing development to sub-county level, sharing the same rationalistic development idiom as JICA. Yet, the JICA-funded exhumations and reburials have been a severely disruptive experience for the individual families affected. The severe consequences are maybe most evocatively reflected in the experience of Okot’s family, who had to hurriedly rebury their *jok* twins without the promised animal to sacrifice and is now haunted by their aggrieved and restless spirits. This succinctly shows that cosmology is not separate from politics; on the contrary, these contestations over land and bodies become the actual site of politics.

The JICA intervention in post-conflict Pabbo therefore provides a lens into how cosmological idioms produce meaning and value that intersect with and problematise the global rationale of development and its focus on rationalised economic objectives and materialist concerns. Primarily preoccupied with creating measurable, material output and little concern for local interpretation frames, the government-coordinated and JICA-funded exhumations and reburials were thus widely experienced as alienating and potentially harmful by many of those subjected to the intervention. JICA and the local leadership thus remained at a distance from the particular, evolving ways in which life is made sense of in post-conflict Acholiland.

In the meantime, Pabbo and other former camp sites in Northern Uganda continue to develop into emerging urban centres and attract increasing commercial interest. More infrastructure projects are implemented and planned, and the sub-region has become a focus of reconstruction efforts predominantly funded by international donors. As more ‘bones in the wrong soil’ will be encountered and uncovered in due course, it is critical to come to an understanding of what it means to ‘reconstruct’ or ‘develop’ in a context in which reburials are often for most intimately linked to questions of an ever evolving cosmology and belonging.

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Ambivalent Places of Memory: Mass Graves in Teso

Anne Werbter

Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Freie Universität Berlin, Germany

Abstract

This article is concerned with mass graves that have been constructed in the aftermath of different violent conflicts in the Teso region in eastern Uganda. These are not hidden graves, but rather graves that have been established by different actors – the Ugandan state, local government, and community-based organisations in cooperation with NGOs. By investigating customary practices of burial, mourning and commemoration I explore the ways in which people in Teso perceive the mass graves to deviate from conventional notions of memory, burials and graves. I draw on material from interviews with respondents from all four gravesites in Teso and from villages in Amuria and Katakwi to analyse the divergences that the mass graves represent and how they seem to challenge and contradict people’s concepts and practices of how to come to terms with the violent past. By describing these differences that revolve primarily around notions of how to achieve a sense of closure with the past, I explain how prolonged mourning and memories of loss and suffering are related to local concepts of sickness. Furthermore, it can be argued that controversies evoked by the mass graves can reveal something about the current relationship between the government and communities in Teso. Taking the example of the mass grave in Obalanga,, I examine matters of commemoration, compensation and reparation.

For more than thirty years, Teso region in eastern Uganda has experienced a series of conflicts, stemming from recurring cattle raids, the Uganda People’s Army (UPA) insurgency (1986-1992) and the incursion of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) in 2003. These violent conflicts caused loss of life, internal displacement and economic and social destruction in the region. In the aftermath of the violence, four mass graves were constructed by different actors: the Ugandan government, the local government and community-based organisations (CBOs) in cooperation with national and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Although these four gravesites are all located in different areas in Teso and represent three different conflicts, which all had their own dynamics and parties, they share certain similarities. All four mass graves were built with the intention to preserve the evidence of the particular incident, to collectively mourn the dead and to be used as sites of public remembrance and commemoration, thus giving them the status of ‘intentional monuments’ (Riegl 1988).

Mourning and commemoration rituals are practices that produce meaning (Jewsiewicki & White 2005: 2) and aim to restore social and moral norms after a period of disorder caused by death and disaster (see Oliver-Smith & Hoffmann 1999). Following this perspective, the mass

graves provide valuable insights into how the dead are mourned and remembered and what kind of meanings people in Teso assign to them. Furthermore, responses to the mass graves reflect how the past and the future are mediated and envisaged (Jewsiewicki & White 2005: 2), particularly how communities in Teso perceive and relate to former parties of conflict.

This article investigates certain practices of memory in Teso: how the dead are mourned, buried and commemorated and how the mass burials are perceived to deviate from customary burials. It also discusses the notion of memory in relation to the violent conflicts in Teso and how it correlates with concepts of suffering and sickness. Furthermore the mass graves/memorials are intertwined with local, national and international politics of memory and are therefore contested places in the ongoing debate about reconciliation and reparation for victims of conflict in Uganda.

‘Landscapes of Violence’¹⁰: A Topography of Pain

Within the region of Teso there are four mass graves/memorials that serve as physical reminders of the diverse conflicts of the past.

In Mukura, located along the Soroti-Mbale road, a mausoleum comprised of a mass grave commemorates a massacre of approximately 69 people¹¹ during the UPA insurgency that ravaged Teso from 1986 until 1992. On 11 July 1989, soldiers of the National Resistance Army (NRA) rounded up about 300 civilians from Mukura and other surrounding areas on the suspicion of being rebels or collaborators. The soldiers incarcerated some of the villagers in a railway wagon, where approximately 69 of them died of suffocation (Justice and Reconciliation Project 2011: 5). The mausoleum, which was constructed by the Ugandan government, has the shape of a small house with the mass grave inside and a plate that lists 55 names of victims. Next to the mausoleum is another building, to be used as a public library according to respondents, but it was empty at the time I visited the site in 2011. The area around the two houses is fenced.



*Mukura mausoleum with mass grave, September 2011
(Photos: Anne Werbter)*

In Ngariam Sub-county, close to the border to Karamoja Sub-region, two gravesites have

¹⁰ Schramm 2011

¹¹ This number is disputed and has varied between 47 and more than 70 in reports by journalists and researchers (see e.g. Buckley-Zistel 2008: 111, Justice and Reconciliation Project 2011: 6).

been constructed in the aftermath of violent cattle raids that culminated in massacres of people then living in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in 2001 and 2003. In Ngariam camp, cattle rustlers from Karamoja killed 17 people in an attack that took place around 2 pm on 13 September 2001. Around two years later, on 20 September 2003, 21 people were killed in Apeuro Aodot¹² camp during a cattle raid. In both places, the victims of the massacres were buried in arrangements that resemble a small graveyard. People referred to them as mass graves, although the remains were buried in individual graves. The term was used because usually people are not buried close to each other if they are not from the same family. According to former camp residents, the burial materials and coffins for the graves were provided by the district of Katakwi (interview 5 January 2013).



Grave site in Ngariam, January 2013



Grave site in Apeuro Aodot, January 2013

(Photos: Anne Werbter)

The largest mass grave in Teso region is in Obalanga, situated in the north of Amuria District. In this grave, a total of approximately 365 remains of victims of the LRA rebels, who

¹² Other spellings are Operu Odot or Opeuru Aodot.

attacked Teso in 2003, were laid to rest (Justice and Reconciliation Project 2012a: 5). After the first attack on 15th of June 2003, Obalanga Sub-county was used as an entry point by the LRA rebels into Teso. Obalanga was heavily affected throughout the LRA incursion and its trading centre became the largest IDP camp in Teso at that time, sheltering more than 40,000 internally displaced persons (interview with sub-county officials, 29 September 2011).

After the LRA was driven out of Teso by the national Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) and the local militia named 'Arrow Boys', which was mobilized by Teso leaders, many villages in Obalanga sub-county as elsewhere in the region, were littered with dead bodies and bones, causing fear among the people who wanted to return to their homes. With the help of the community, scattered bodies and human remains were collected and also exhumed from makeshift temporary graves that were dug during the war and buried in the gravesite in Obalanga (Justice and Reconciliation Project 2012a: 22). The majority of the remains buried in this mass grave could not be identified because most of the corpses had already decomposed. Therefore, only a few of the concrete slabs that cover the graves display the names of those who are buried in them, while most remain blank. The construction of the mass grave in Obalanga was initiated by the community-based organisation (CBO) called Obalanga Human Rights and Healthcare Association (OHRHCA) who lobbied for support from local and international organisations, individuals and the local community to build it. The mass grave is fenced and located in sight of the main road.



*Mass graves in Obalanga, September 2011
(Photos: Anne Wermbter)*

Besides these four mass graves, there are many other places in Teso region where massacres took place and people have been buried in the past. For example, a swamp north of Soroti town was said to be called *apal itunga* ('forgotten people') because many people were killed and buried here during the UPA war. Another such place is in Katine, located along the Soroti-Lira road, where LRA rebels ambushed a bus and killed 22 of the occupants in 2003. These places are not marked with any signs that indicate their history (to a stranger), but they are very well known to the local communities. Both, the marked and unmarked mass graves and 'spaces of death' (Luig 2012) make up a 'geography of pain' (Mueggler 2001, cited in Argenti & Schramm 2012: 25) that is embedded in the landscape of Teso and part of people's collective memory. While the memory of the unmarked places of death is produced and reproduced by telling and retelling

the histories and stories of those places, the mass graves/memorials are turned into sites of official and institutionalised commemoration.

However, the mass graves/memorials generate a lot of controversy among people in Teso for two reasons. First of all, it is contested if those mass graves represent the victims of the violent incidents appropriately, because they constitute a sharp contrast to customary graves and burial rites. And secondly, they reflect the power relationship between the government and the local communities in Teso, which is perceived as one of dominance and exclusion, not least because questions of responsibility and reparation remain unresolved.

Graves and Burials in Teso

In Iteso culture there is no tradition of building memorials or any other physical sites to remember the past. 'Physical memorials are not there. We would remember things and events through names', I was told, when I asked for places of remembrance (conversation with Robert, 9 October 2011)¹³. However, during burial rites, the dead are mourned at graves. In Teso, as elsewhere in Uganda the dead are buried at home in the homestead of the family. 'The clearest evidence that the dead belong in the family is that their graves lie in or on the edge of the courtyard', writes Whyte (1997: 90) about Bunyole in eastern Uganda. Most recent graves in Teso are cemented – depending on financial resources of the family – while older graves and those of poorer families are marked with piled stones. During get-togethers of family and neighbours or wedding ceremonies in the village, people sometimes used to sit on the edges of the cemented graves, eat and drink, or even dance on the graves, if there is little space in the compound. This reflects the integration of the dead into the everyday life of the living. Furthermore, as in many African societies, the living are considered to be in a profound spiritual relationship with the dead, which is expressed in the notion that the latter influence the well-being of the living. Sickness and other misfortunes within the family are often attributed to an improper or disrespectful burial; the disgruntled spirits of ancestors are believed to take revenge for the negligence by causing problems to their offspring. A proper burial is therefore important to pay respect to the deceased and to prevent their spirits from troubling the living (see de Berry 2000, Jones 2009).

Even when people were living in IDP camps due to the various conflicts, they were trying to bury their relatives at home in the village. If this was not possible because of ongoing attacks by the rebels or cattle rustlers, the dead were often buried temporarily in a separate place next to the camp and exhumed and brought home, when the situation was more secure. A former member of the Arrow Boy militia told me that he had buried many dead bodies of people who were killed by the LRA in makeshift graves during patrols in his home area. He said:

It was mostly Arrow Boys who buried them. When the people came back to the village, they were asking us: 'Where is the place where you buried our people?' Because we were the ones who buried the dead. We directed them. (...) Then they were taking them and buried them home. (Interview 17 August 2012)

¹³ All names have been altered for confidentiality.

This shows the great importance people attach to burials and graves¹⁴, and their strong linkage to home in Teso even in times of war and conflict.¹⁵

Contrary to cultural custom, the dead in the mass graves were not laid to rest in their family homes, but in a marked-off place, disconnecting them from the everyday lives of their relatives. Respondents expressed grief and sadness over the spatial alteration that the mass graves/memorials represent and said that they wished the dead could have been buried in their ancestral homesteads (group interviews: Orungo, 17 August 2012; Soroti, 2 April 2013).

The mass grave of Obalanga, where victims of the LRA attacks are buried, differs from customary graves, but also from the other mass graves in Teso in another aspect. As already mentioned, the majority of the approximately 365 remains laid to rest in this grave could not be identified and are therefore buried unnamed. There are only a few individual graves in this gravesite which are named, but most graves contain up to 20 unidentified bodies, according to sub-county officials (interview 15 November 2011). In Mukura, Ngariam and Apeuro Aodot, the victims of the massacre in the railway wagon and the cattle raids could be identified by the community or family members and their names are written on their graves. But the surviving relatives of those whose unidentified bodies were buried in the mass graves in Obalanga were not able to pay personal respect and to mourn their deceased family members, although communal prayers were held at the burial and at commemoration ceremonies for the dead buried in the mass graves. One condition for mourning, as Jewsiewicki and White (2005: 2) write in their introduction to a special issue of *African Studies Review* on 'mourning' in contemporary Central Africa, is the physical presence of the body of the deceased. They go on to explain that in order to achieve a sense of closure with the past, the (identified) body of the deceased is necessary, so that relatives can witness and perform rituals that transform the deceased into an ancestor. Without these prerequisites, as they put it, 'the ghost of the deceased remains obsessively in the present' (Jewsiewicki & White 2005: 2). In the case of Obalanga, there were several indications, that the spirits of the dead buried in the mass grave were perceived to be inadequately put to rest and therefore potentially harmful. One indication for this was, for example that the residents of Obalanga refused to maintain the mass grave because they were afraid to attract misfortune from the spirits of the dead, as the sub-county officials told me in September 2011, during one of my visits.

Burial Rites

To put an end to mourning after some time in order to achieve a sense of closure with the past is a central part of the burial rites in Teso. The funeral ideally consists of two parts, referred to as *aipuduno* and *asuban* (Lawrance 1957: 99). *Aipuduno* is the ceremony where the relatives and neighbours come together to bury the deceased. Usually, prayers are said, elders address the mourners to speak about the deceased and food and local beer is served.

The second part of the burial, *asuban*, is called last funeral rites. It is supposed to be a

¹⁴ Another example that underlines the importance of burials in Teso is certainly the institution of burial groups that emerged in the aftermath of the UPA insurgency. Jones (2007, 2009) shows how burial groups developed as a collective insurance scheme to help its members meet the cost of burials and to organise them on a minimum level of order and respect after chaos and war.

¹⁵ Furthermore, graves indicate the home and land ownership of a family and gained increasingly importance in the light of the intensification of land conflicts during the ongoing resettlement process after a period of war and conflict in Teso.

joyous ceremony, where the whole clan gathers and celebrates with a lot of food and beer. This burial rite is meant to mark the end of mourning (Lawrance 1957: 100, Nagashima 1976: 59) and used to be held in the month of November. According to the Iteso calendar, the month of November is called *Osuban* – after *asuban* meaning ceremonies. As Akello writes: ‘This is a leisure month with plenty of food. (...) But since those living are part of those dead, Iteso usually reserve this month for all kinds of ceremonies related to their departed relatives. Then nobody may be laughed at for having given a poor memorial ceremony for a departed relative for everybody has food enough to feed the people who come to the ceremony’ (Akello 1981: 123).

The ritual of *asuban* is still well known in Teso, but rarely carried out. For example, in Palam Sub-county in Katakwi District, a region that was strongly affected by cattle raids, the last funeral rites were celebrated only in a few homes, after postponing them for ten years or longer due to lack of financial resources.¹⁶

Even though there is a decline of the ceremony of *asuban*, its central meaning to mark the end of mourning is still important. The LC3 chairperson for Palam Sub-county told me that many people would nowadays combine both ceremonies, ‘the *alomun* and even the *apunya*¹⁷, the last burial rites, just there and then (...) in order to save resources’ (interview 15 November 2012).

Another indication of the continued concern with marking the end of mourning can be found in the way the first burial rite was explained to me. While Lawrance, who served as a district commissioner in Teso in the 1950s refers to the first burial rite as ‘the ceremony of taking out the corpse from the house’ (Lawrance 1957: 99), it was interpreted to me as: ‘coming out of the problem you had. (...) resuming with usual duties’ (conversation with John, 15 November 2012). Contrary to Lawrance, the respondent here refers to the living who are coming out of mourning rather than the corpse being brought out of the house. That could indicate that the meaning of the first burial rite has changed over time to include the purpose of the second rite, which is not carried out regularly any longer. In other words, the fact that the meaning of *asuban* — to bring an end to mourning — seems to have persisted even though the ceremony itself has not, is a clear indication that it is of great importance for people in Teso. It also emphasizes the flexibility of ritual structure, a point that has already been made in many other studies on burial rites (cf. Luig 2009, Jones 2009) and rituals in general. If social circumstances require, people often change or replace certain elements of rituals while holding on to its central aspects (Luig 2009: 118). Lack of resources and the experiences of violence, war and camp life has influenced and altered the way burial rites are performed in Teso today.

The Memory of Loss: *too much thinking*

The importance of putting an end to mourning – and in a broader sense to dwelling on death – was also emphasised in the notion that prolonged mourning and painful memories can have a negative effect on the individual’s health in the form of a disease called *aomisio*, translated as *too much thinking*. This correlation was clearly articulated by Lydia, as I sat with her one day at the house where she grew up, near to her father’s grave:

¹⁶ Both, Henriques (2002) and Jones (2009) make similar observations for southern Teso (Ngora District) after the UPA insurgency.

¹⁷ In Katakwi District the burial rites were also referred to as *alomun* and *apunya*, meaning the same as *aipud* (‘to come or bring outside’, Kiggen 1953: 233, 338) and *asuban* (‘the annual feast for the departed’, Kiggen 1953: 341). These differences may be due to variations of dialect of Ateso. Nagashima, who conducted fieldwork in Katakwi district in the late 1960s also refers to *apunya* as the ritual for marking the end of mourning (Nagashima 1976: 59).

Lydia: *When I think of my father, I think of the assistance he could give me if he were still alive. (...) But I can come to this house, dance and drink and be happy with my family. If someone dies, your mother, your sister, you stay with the ones who are still alive. You cannot mourn all the time. It is not good. You mourn and then you forget.*

If your heart thinks too much, it will drop down. I don't want to remember too much, I don't want to get ulcers.

A.W.: *What happens if you 'mourn all the time'?*

Lydia: *Ulcers are growing in the heart. This is very bad.*

(Interview 11 December 2012)

As depicted in Lydia's account, to mourn and remember 'too much' of the deceased and of the loss associated with him, is believed to have a physical impact, namely developing 'ulcers' or 'wounds' (*edola*) in the heart. This is not meant in a metaphorical sense. Painful experiences and memories of loss and suffering are said to trigger thoughts and worries that can in turn cause a locally defined disease, called *adeka na aomisio*, literally the disease of thoughts. This condition is referred to by respondents and in the literature as *aomisio* and translated as *too much thinking* or *overthinking* (de Berry 2000: 292). As indicated above, *too much thinking* is associated with the growth of ulcers or wounds in the heart. In the context of the concept of this local disease, the ritual of *asuban* that marks the end of mourning can be also understood as a precautionary measure to protect people after the loss of loved ones from the disease of *too much thinking*.

Similarly to Lydia's remarks when she pointed out the need to 'forget' or rather to avoid the memory of her father's death, respondents emphasized that the mass grave/memorial in Obalanga kept them from forgetting the deaths caused by the LRA attacks. They said it would continuously evoke painful memories. Thomas, a peasant and former member of the Arrow Boy militia and his nephew Peter remarked:

Thomas: *We are not happy with it. Because that thing reminds us of the people we have lost.*

Peter: *It reminds us a lot. Actually by now, by this time we would be forgetting it. But if you again reach Obalanga and you see that thing, actually, you break into tears. It brings back the memory.*

Thomas: *If you reach Obalanga, you will see (...) it hurts. Then you remember and it hurts. (...) That thing, it can hurt you. Really.*

(Interview 17 August 2012)

For Thomas and Peter, the sight of the mass grave in Obalanga triggers painful memories and thoughts of the suffering and loss they encountered during the LRA attacks, particularly the violent loss of relatives and friends. Peter suggests that without the mass grave they would have 'forgotten' about it by now, but it 'brings back the memory' every time they see it. As depicted in Thomas's and Peter's account, the mass grave represents not only an alteration of the spatial, but

also of the temporal dimensions of mourning and commemorating the dead compared to the customary graves. As a result of these alterations, they feel distressed by the recurring memories.

The mass graves/memorials provoke resentment because they continuously represent the violence and the loss of the past and thus keep the memory of it alive, while people try to come to terms with the past by avoiding the memory of it. That people have not ‘forgotten’ the violent past in the sense that it has fallen into oblivion, became evident during many conversations, as most people in Teso do remember the past very well.

Whereas in Western cultures it is often thought important to keep alive the memory of a violent past in order to ‘never forget’ and ‘to learn from the past in order for history not to be repeated’, in Teso painful memory is ‘believed to hold back’ I was told, as it hinders one in continuing with life (conversation with Opio, 17 December 2012). What was prevailing in the conversations with people concerning the violence of the past was not an ‘imperative to remember’, but rather an ‘imperative to avoid’ the memory of a violent past in order to come to terms with it.

Relations between the Government and Communities in Teso

Since the mass graves/memorials in Teso are public places of official and institutionalised remembrance of the conflicts, they are inextricably linked to local, national and international memory politics. One can argue their construction is a political act itself, as they intervene in the relationship between the government and the communities in Teso (cf. Luig 2012: 179). As mentioned above, the mass graves/memorials in Teso represent different conflicts and have been built by different actors, under different circumstances. For the sake of clarity, in the following I will concentrate on the mass grave of Obalanga, where the victims of the LRA invasion have been buried.

In Obalanga, the mass grave was initiated by a community-based organisation called Obalanga Human Rights and Healthcare Association (OHRHCA), which, under the leadership of local politicians, lobbied for support from local and international organisations and individuals to construct the mass grave.¹⁸ The mass grave was built to promote healing, to remember those who lost their lives during the LRA attacks, and to bury the remains and bones that were scattered in the area in a decent way. Yet, it was also constructed with the aim to preserve the evidence of the violence inflicted by the LRA on the community and to counter claims by the government that the LRA invasions had not affected Teso. Representatives of the local government in Obalanga said during an interview that the government had attempted to downplay the impacts that the LRA incursion had on the Teso region. As one respondent put it: ‘All that time the rebels were here full time. Night and day. But sometimes you wondered when government said the rebels are no longer in Teso region, when we had them here. When our people were tied in the camp, they could not even move 100 metres away from the camp’ (interview 29 September 2011). This comment illustrates the tension between the government and the communities in Teso. It also indicates that

¹⁸ Concern Worldwide donated burial materials of 400 bags of cement, iron sheets, wire-mesh, timber and fuel to facilitate the transport of human remains from the countryside. Action Aid donated 1000 metres of burial linen. Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation (TPO) donated 50,000 Uganda Shillings and Teso Islamic Development Organisation (TIDO) 10,000 shillings. War on Want donated 200,000 shillings, Teso Diocese Development Organisation (TEDO) donated 130,000 shillings, and Julius Ochen donated 575,000 shillings. Archbishop Henry Luke Orombi donated one million shillings to fence the burial site. (interview 29 September 2011, Justice and Reconciliation Project 2012a: 22-23).

unresolved questions of responsibility and interpretation of the past are raised by the presence of the mass grave/memorial. Many people in Teso placed responsibility on the government for not having reacted in time to the LRA incursion and for its failure to protect them and their property sufficiently.

Furthermore, it should be noted that many people working for local NGOs and local government in Teso are often acutely aware that their counterparts in northern Uganda (mainly in Acholi and Lango regions) received much more attention and aid from international NGOs and donors in recent years. They are also aware that mass graves and memorials correspond with a certain symbolism of an international culture of remembrance and commemoration that is recognized by international NGOs. Recently, a number of national and international NGOs have begun to document the various civil conflicts, counter insurgencies and mass displacements in the northern region of Uganda by means of memorial sites and mass graves with the aim to promote dialogue, memory work and reconciliation processes on a national level.¹⁹

In this regard the construction of the mass grave/memorial in Obalanga has to be understood as a strategy to unveil and verify the violence and deaths caused by the LRA in Teso region, in order to put pressure on the government to acknowledge its role in the conflict and to attract the attention and support of international NGOs.

Commemoration and Compensation

On June 15 – the day Teso was attacked by LRA rebels in 2003 for the first time – annual commemoration prayers were introduced at the mass grave in Obalanga beginning in 2005. The memorial prayers prompted controversy among government and opposition politicians from Teso right from the start in 2005, when opposition members of parliament blamed the government for negligence, saying it has led to the massacres in Teso (Omoding 2005). Grace Akello, a politician from Teso, then Minister of State for Northern Uganda Rehabilitation, criticized the opposition MPs for using the memorial prayers for politicking (Omoding 2005). The tension between opposition and government politicians in Teso continued in this regard and culminated during the tenth anniversary of the LRA attacks in 2013 when personalities from Teso were pressured to shun the memorial prayers in Obalanga altogether.

One reason for the ongoing political disputes concerning the mass grave/memorial is that reparation and compensation claims by the communities have not been satisfactorily responded to. There is no coherent government policy of providing reparations to victims of war and conflict in Uganda. Pledges made by President Museveni seem to take long to materialise and thus leave residents frustrated. For example, the President is said to have promised residents of Obalanga a memorial secondary school in 2005, but first instalments allegedly did not reach the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) of Amuria until 2011 and it took another three years until the school was under construction (interview with sub-county officials, 29 September 2011 and residents of Obalanga, 19 March 2014). In addition, the Museveni government is said to have paid compensation to selected individuals, which causes resentment and mistrust among those who were also affected by the conflicts and did not receive any compensation. For example in December 2012, during a tour in Kaberamaido District, President Museveni personally pledged compensation to the widow of Charles Opio-Ocwa, who was part of the Arrow Boy militia and killed the LRA commander Tabuley in 2003, according to media reports (Odeke 2012). Since there

¹⁹ For example, Justice and Reconciliation Project, Refugee Law Project, Kitgum Peace Documentation Centre.

is no standardized government policy to provide reparations and compensation to victims of conflict, a number of individuals and groups from different regions, including Teso, Lango and Acholi, have sued the government for compensation over losses sustained by war and conflict (cf. Justice and Reconciliation Project 2012b). Currently, there are several cases from Teso pending in court.²⁰

To apologise genuinely, acknowledge responsibility and pay compensation are important steps in reconciliation processes in Teso and elsewhere in Uganda. The compensation payments promised by the government are of potentially strong symbolic value as they recognise individual and collective suffering (Buckley-Zistel 2008: 113). But if these promises are not kept and compensation payments do not materialise, commemoration prayers lose their meaning and instead of strengthening a process of healing and reconciliation, they reinforce anger and resentment against the government. Commemorating the dead without a genuine apology and substantial material compensation by the government only reminds people once more of the loss they have encountered and intensifies their feelings of marginalisation and exclusion from economic and political participation.

Conclusion

The mass graves/memorials represent a certain sort of politics of memorialisation. While emphasising what people in Teso have lost and what has been done to them, they seem to remove agency and authority regarding (re)interpretation of the past from people. They silence the memories and experiences of those who survived and other forms of collective memory and means through which people come to terms with violence in Teso.

For many people in Teso, the mass graves represent a spatial and temporal divergence from the customary graves in the homestead, thus generating a permanent presence and visibility of the deaths and violence of the past conflicts. This permanent visibility was often perceived to keep alive the memory of the past, mainly the memory of the painful loss of loved ones, who had died a bad death (Bloch & Parry 1982) – a death which did not happen at the right time or in the right place. Therefore, the mass graves seem to challenge and contradict people's concepts and practices of how to come to terms with the violent past by not thinking too much about it.

At the same time, local politicians and NGOs make use of this very presence and visibility of the mass graves to document and discuss the loss and suffering people endured during the conflicts and wars, thus recognising their plight. They also utilise these graves to put pressure on the government to acknowledge its role in the conflicts and to pay reparations to people in Teso.

The ambivalent meaning of the mass graves/memorials outlined above was well expressed in Sarah's account, when she spoke about the mass grave in Obalanga:

It is good to have those graves here to a certain extent. But it keeps on giving you memories (...) because whenever you cross, you see. I wish the community had thought it wise (...) It could have been [better for] people to be buried in their own ancestral burial grounds, but unfortunately some people could not be identified. (...) But at the same time, it can build on the history of Teso. Our

²⁰ For example, Teso Cattle Rustling and War Victims Association represents over one million claimants in the whole of Teso region and has filed four separate cases to claim compensation from the Ugandan government (Justice and Reconciliation Project 2012b: 8).

suffering. How Iteso suffered. And those ones could be used as a reference. (Interview 2 April 2013)

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Kasubi Tombs: Reconstruction of a World Heritage Site in Uganda²¹

Clara Himmelheber
Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum Cologne, Germany

Abstract

The theme of this article is the negotiations between different actors which took place during the course of the reconstruction of the world heritage site of Kasubi Tombs after the tombs had been destroyed by fire in 2010. It shows the overlapping as well as competing interests of the stakeholders and touches on currently much debated and highly contested concepts such as authenticity and heritage.

Introduction

In 2001, Kasubi Tombs in Buganda²² were declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. According to the homepage of the UNESCO, the tombs are both ‘the major spiritual centre’, and ‘the most active religious place’ in the Buganda kingdom (UNESCO 2015a).

On 16 March 2010 Kasubi was destroyed by fire. The fire and the subsequent reconstruction of the tombs led to new dynamics between the following actors, who are – in one way or another – involved in the reconstruction of Kasubi:

- The monarchists under Kabaka Mutebi are split into two parties: the ‘custodians of tradition’ who stay and/or work in the royal tombs and the ‘modern monarchists’ who are entrusted with the organisation of the reconstruction of Kasubi.
- The UNESCO administers the international World Heritage Programme through the UNESCO World Heritage Committee. It not only follows the reconstruction through expert delegations, but also finances major parts of the project.
- The Ugandan Government under President Museveni has a difficult relationship to the monarchists, but as a state party it is the official negotiating partner of the UNESCO for the reconstruction.

²¹ The field research in January 2013 for this article was kindly supported by the Museumsgesellschaft RJM. I would also like to thank the Director of the Institute for Peace and Strategic Studies at Gulu University for accepting me as an affiliate researcher.

²² Nomenclature: The region is called Buganda, the people are called Baganda (singular Muganda), the language is Luganda and in English texts the form for adjectives and adverbs is Bugandan, even if this is grammatically incorrect.

- Further donors such as the Baganda in the diaspora, the tourism industry and the Asian Community of Uganda each have different motives for supporting the kingdom.
- Born Again Christians (*Balokole*) are betwixt and between condemning and supporting the kingdom.

The following pages give an insight into the different motives and strategies of these various actors in the process of negotiating the reconstruction of Kasubi and the different problems occurring in the course of the reconstruction.

Monarchists: Social Capital versus Political Influence

The Baganda in Uganda supported the reconstruction of Kasubi by donating money and material such as cement for the building and grass for the roofing. Furthermore, they helped clean up after the fire and some of them are involved in the reconstruction itself. However, the monarchists themselves are not a homogenous group, but split into the so-called ‘custodians of tradition’ and the representatives of the Royal Parliament (*lukiiko*) who call themselves ‘modern monarchists’.²³ Between these two monarchist groups there is repeated potential for conflict.

The custodians of tradition inherit their duties from their ancestors. They comprise the leaders of the Bugandan clans and the people in charge of producing and looking after the traditional items of regalia. In the surroundings of the royal tombs these are mainly women – the wives and sisters of the deceased Kabaka. These are hereditary offices, so there are wives of a Kabaka who passed away 200 years ago. Other hereditary offices such as clan heads or producers of royal objects are usually held by men.

Many of the custodians of tradition have only very little Western education. They gain status and self-confidence through the secret knowledge connected to their royal duties. One might call this self-promotion or a ‘reciprocal construction of value’ (Appadurai 1986: 20): the custodian defines the importance of his duty for the kingdom amongst other things through the secret knowledge attached to it and the importance of the duty defines the ‘value’ (i.e. status) of the custodian. Claiming that one is responsible for an important duty requiring lots of secret knowledge raises one’s own status (Mayer-Himmelheber 2004: 26).

The custodians of tradition look down contemptuously on the representatives of the second monarchist group: the members of the Royal Parliament. Officially, the Kabaka only has cultural functions, but he appoints his own government. His ministers and the members of his parliament form the ‘modern monarchists’. They gain unofficial power by broadcasting their resolutions on the royal radio station CBS or, during the first phase of my research (1998-99), by publishing them in the royal newspaper Njuba Times – two important instruments for the kingdom to promote itself. The interest of the modern monarchists is often directed less at monarchical traditions than at politics. In terms of Kasubi they are mainly interested in the preservation of the tombs for the public – Baganda, Ugandans and international tourists.

While many modern monarchists hold the views of the traditional custodians as antiquated and superstitious, the traditional custodians in turn repeatedly state that they are the real rulers in the royal tombs, whereas the rights of the modern monarchists are limited. For example, the modern monarchists, in contrast to the traditional custodians, are not allowed in the secret part of

²³ Reluctantly, I use the terms ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ since they are a self-designation by the actors and this dichotomy was crucial in my informants’ discourse.

the tomb – the forest – as mentioned in the following dialogue between a custodian of tradition and a modern monarchist who is employed as a guard by the Royal Government to work in the royal tombs:

- L.: *You have to be born to work for the king, otherwise you can't force it.*
- R.: *Do you mean that I have been born to work in the royal tombs?*
- L.: *Ha no, you work for external duties. I told you that no one is allowed to enter the forest. You only serve to welcome tourists who come to see the tombs. I have no boundaries, I go anywhere in the tombs.*

(B.L. and P.R., 11 March 1999)²⁴

In the 1990s, though, before the declaration of Kasubi as World Heritage Site, the power of the custodians of tradition appeared to dwindle. The guard employed by the Royal Parliament, for example, said a problem with the traditional custodians was that they went to the Royal Parliament to ask for cows, goats, chicken, bark cloth and building materials to make a royal twin object (*mulongo*). However, when the accountant of the Royal Parliament asked what they really needed all these things for, they replied that they could not say, because it was secret. If as a result they did not get anything, because one cannot book 'secret' in the account books, they felt they were not being taken seriously. (P.R., 9 September 1999).

After the fire at Kasubi, the status of the custodians of tradition was upgraded by the UNESCO.

UNESCO: Authenticity, the Intangible and the Problem of Secrecy

The Rise of the Intangible

The royal tombs of Kasubi were built in 1881, originally as a palace for Kabaka Mutesa I.²⁵ They are situated on a terrain of around 270,000m². In close vicinity to the actual burial site, there are additional buildings in which the carers of the royal tombs live and royal objects are stored.²⁶ In another area there is a whole settlement which includes agricultural land and a larger cemetery for distant royal family members. The actual burial site of the last four Kabaka²⁷ 'Muzibu Azaala Mpanga' is (or was) a large circular building, 7.5 metres high and 31 metres in diameter. Like all royal tombs, Kasubi consists of two parts, one that is open to the public and a second which is separated by a curtain of bark cloth (*lubugo*) and a barrier of spears. This part of the tomb, called

²⁴ I anonymised my informants' statements as long as they were not official statements made by public figures.

²⁵ According to Ray, today there are 23 royal tombs in Buganda (Ray 1972: 35) but they are not as spectacular as Kasubi.

²⁶ For a detailed description of the royal tombs, see Oliver 1959, Ray 1991, Kigongo 1991.

²⁷ The correct term for a deceased Kabaka is Ssekabaka. However, to improve readability, I will call a deceased Kabaka also Kabaka.

‘the forest’ (*kibira*), is not accessible to the public. It is the place where the spirits of the royal ancestors reside.²⁸

After the destruction of Kasubi in 2010 much of the money for the reconstruction of the royal tombs came from the UNESCO, mainly from Japan. An important question for the UNESCO after the fire was whether Kasubi still fulfilled the criteria of a World Heritage Site. Was it still ‘authentic’ in its unique features?

In the late 1990s – during the process of enlisting Kasubi as a world cultural heritage site – the UNESCO was especially interested in the preservation of the architectural elements of Kasubi. From 2010 onwards, in discussions about the reconstruction of the ‘intangible aspects’ of Kasubi, the rituals increasingly came to the fore.

What was the background for this change in strategy? On the one hand the politics of the UNESCO had changed. In Europe, with its ‘built for eternity’ architecture, many more World Heritage Sites have been appointed than in Africa, where a lot of buildings do not have such a long history. In the last few decades there has been a growing interest in intangible cultural heritage in order to reduce this bias in favour of European heritage sites (Duvelle 2013: 8). In 2003, therefore, the ‘Convention for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage’ was adopted. It comprises dance, theatre, music, oral traditions, festivals and other cultural manifestations and expressions (UNESCO 2003). As a result, in 2008, for example, the making of bark cloth in Uganda was listed as an Intangible Cultural Heritage. In the years 2006-2009, the UNESCO implemented a safeguarding project in order to ‘popularize the making and use of bark cloth’. This led to an increasing interest in bark cloth in Uganda (UNESCO 2015b).

On the other hand, in the case of Kasubi, one is under pressure to justify why Kasubi should remain on the list of World Heritage Sites, as the tombs – the *material* cultural heritage – burned down.²⁹ The intangible is the only thing that is still ‘authentic’. The reports on the reconstruction focus therefore on the intangible strengths of Kasubi.

The Committee noted that the site combines the historical and spiritual values of a nation. It was a specific achievement of the November 2010 Joint Monitoring Mission to elevate recognition of the intangible dimension of the Kasubi heritage site, and to indicate that this dimension influences every decision made regarding the reconstruction of the material remains, and that deliberations on the property must bear witness to this reality. (Lisitzin & Bakker 2012: 7)

This focus on ‘intangibles’ strengthened the status of the custodians of tradition who in recent decades had been increasingly marginalised. Now they are the ones who are knowledgeable about the ‘intangible aspects’ of Kasubi, about the reconstruction and the associated rituals. The UNESCO sees enhancing the status of the custodians of tradition as central for Kasubi to be taken off the list of ‘World Heritage Sites in Danger’:

²⁸ The term ‘forest’ derives from a legend according to which Kabaka Kintu, the legendary founder of the kingdom of Buganda, did not die but disappeared in a forest (Kigongo 1991: 3, Ray 1991: 7).

²⁹ The delegation came to the following conclusion: ‘Although the authenticity of the site has been weakened by the loss to the fire of the main tomb structure, the traditional architectural craftsmanship and the required skills are still available to allow it to be recreated. This factor, (...) coupled with the extensive documentation of the building, will allow an authentic renewal of attributes’ (Lisitzin & Bakker 2012: 7-9).

The increase in status of the custodians and the steady progress on the Reconstruction Project, augers [sic] well for the site to be taken off the List of World Heritage Sites in Danger in the future when all the adopted corrective measures and recommendations presented in this report are adhered to. (Lisitzin & Bakker 2012: 7)

Moreover, two traditional monarchists were chosen to assist the architect with their knowledge.³⁰ And finally in 2012 spirit mediums decided that the royal tomb of Kabaka Ssuna³¹ in Wamala had to be renovated before one could start reconstructing Kasubi:

The spirit mediums informed the National Technical Committee that, not only is the beginning of reconstruction at Wamala a prerequisite for the start of work at Kasubi, but that [the] two projects belong together as one. (Lisitzin & Bakker 2012: 32)

This means a huge change in status of the traditional monarchists. In the late 1990s they were almost powerless against the modern monarchists, and now spirit mediums – traditional monarchists – dictate when and how the reconstruction of Kasubi has to take place and the Technical Committee bows to their orders! The growing power of the traditional monarchists harbours considerable potential for conflict with the modern monarchists and the UNESCO itself, for example concerning issues such as ‘authenticity’ and ‘secrecy’.

Conflicting Concepts of Authenticity

‘Authenticity’ is one of the key concepts for the UNESCO in the legitimisation of a site as World Heritage Site. But there are ‘culturally different ideas about the nature of authenticity’ not only in connection with souvenirs from Africa as Phillips and Steiner asserted (1999: 4), but also in the context of the royal tombs in Buganda.

The twin object (*mulongo*)³² of Kabaka Ssuna from the royal tomb in Wamala is one example. Around the year 1900, a group of royal objects from this tomb – including a royal twin object – found its way into British museums.³³ In the royal tomb in Wamala they were replaced by new objects. The traditional custodians of Wamala see the twin object of Kabaka Ssuna as a living being which is not accessible to the public. For them, the twin object in England – from a

³⁰ ‘The use of mediums and the appointment of two ‘bearers’ [of indigenous/traditional knowledge] from the kingdom to assist the architect in recording and understanding traditional facets of the reconstruction is vital to integrate pragmatic and spiritual aspects of the project. In this project the 1st King has the last word.’ (Lisitzin & Bakker 2012: 30)

³¹ Kabaka Ssuna is the father of Kabaka Mutesa I, who was the first to be buried in Kasubi.

³² In Uganda twins are considered blessed with special powers. They receive special names, twin ceremonies are held in their honour and special twin objects (singular: *mulongo* / plural: *balongo*) are made. Members of the royal family are considered per se to be born with a twin, and thus as equipped with special powers. Their umbilical cord is kept in a twin object that accompanies its living counterpart throughout life. When a Kabaka passes away, it is believed that his soul merges with his twin object – the twin objects are considered living, acting beings (Mayer-Himmelheber 2004: 151ff).

³³ The objects were presumably brought in 1900 by Rev. John Roscoe to the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology and the British Museum in London. Roscoe seems to have received them as gifts from the Bugandan Royal Prime Minister Apolo Kagga, according to a letter from A.K. Mayanja, Minister of Education at the Royal Parliament at that time, to the Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University in 1961 (Archives of the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology). For the biographies of Roscoe and Kagga and their relationship, see Ray 1991: 23ff.

Western perspective the original, the authentic object – is uninteresting, because the spirit of the Kabaka has left this shell and has entered into the new *mulongo* stored in Wamala. The latter, therefore, is for them the original / authentic object.

In contrast to the traditional monarchists, modern monarchists regard the twin object from Ssuna's tomb currently in England as the original, authentic object, whereas they see the twin object, which is today stored in Ssuna's tomb at Wamala, as only an inferior copy. In general, they do not consider the royal twin objects as living beings, but as cultural assets worth protecting. They propagate that the royal twin objects in general should be accommodated at a scheduled-to-be-built Buganda Museum in a display case according to conservation requirements. And they should not be sacrificed to as the women in the royal tombs do (Mayer-Himmelheber 2004: 165ff).

Another example of conflicting views of authenticity is the roof pitch of Muzibu Azaala Mpanga at Kasubi. After the fire, a Japanese UNESCO Commission of experts for grass roofs visited Kasubi. They noted that the roof slope at Kasubi was lower than in all other parts of the world:

The roof pitch in Japan is generally 47 to 60 degrees, 50 to 60 degrees in Europe, and in Southeast Asia it can be steeper close to 70 degrees. The pitch of the roof surface is normally less steep than the roof foundation, in Japan being 45 to 50 degrees.

The roof pitch of the Kasubi Tombs is around 45 degrees, which is lesser [sic] than in other regions of the world. The roof pitch directly affects the durability period of the roof, so if the roof pitch is transformed towards 50 degrees, the durability may improve.

(Nitto, Furukawa & Hasegawa 2011: 24)³⁴

A flat pitch leads to a faster decay of the roof as rainwater cannot run off properly. A reconstruction on the basis of old photographs shows that the roof of Kasubi was originally much more inclined (Eloundou *et al.* 2010: 53-58). The plan is to rebuild the roof more inclined than it was in recent years in order to heighten its conservational standard (Eloundou *et al.* 2010: 23). In this way it will come closer to the original state of the roof at around 1900. But one of the Bugandan experts involved in cultural heritage posed the question:

They were suggesting that they should go back to the 1913 design which was a bit sharper compared to the roof that slumped. So how about the people who are used to see Kasubi as it was before the roof slumped, who never used to see the 1913 design. Because sometimes authenticity and originality is in people's imaginations. So do you think those people will look at Kasubi as original? [For them] it will be a replica or something. (K.S., 17 January 2013)

The Power of Secrecy

Another problem touches on the question of secrecy. A good example is again the royal twin objects (*balongo*): There were probably over a hundred twin objects of royal family members in the secret rear area of Kasubi. After the fire, the UNESCO wanted to catalogue all the twin objects,

³⁴According to other sources, in 2006 the roof pitch of Kasubi was only 32-39% (Eloundou *et al.* 2010: 58).

to restore the damaged ones and to renew the ones destroyed by the fire. However, when asked about the objects and their documentation by external experts, the traditional custodians acted as if they were totally unaware of the documentation project. They refused to answer questions about the number of objects, their condition or whereabouts as shown in one of the UNESCO reports:

The twin's [sic] objects were not documented because of misunderstandings from the members of the royal family and wives at Kasubi Tombs. The custodians were not aware of the purpose to document the artefacts. This created tension amongst the custodians at Kasubi Tombs.

Therefore, there is a need to sensitize the custodians and the stakeholder on the current best conservation principles and disaster risk management.

(Kayima, Kalanzi & Kigongo 2012: 10)

What is the background for this refusal by the traditional monarchists? It is the fear of abandoning their secret knowledge. The traditional custodians cannot divulge their secret knowledge to the UNESCO and the modern monarchists, because it constitutes their status, their social capital. Peter Probst has pointedly formulated a similar problem in the sacred grove of Osogbo, Nigeria, with the following question: 'How does the demand for visibility and publicity go together with interests in secrecy and concerns about loss of control?' (Probst 2011: 11).

In the case of Kasubi, the question of secrecy culminated in the demand of the traditional monarchists to build everything by themselves: The argument of 'secrecy' initially served as an argument against an international tender for the reconstruction. This argument was accepted and a Bugandan construction company was awarded the contract. Later, the argument of 'secrecy' was also directed against Bugandan companies as contractors since they were also not traditional custodians, but were assigned by the modern monarchists. And the rejection by the traditional monarchists goes even further. It is also directed against the UNESCO in general. The fear of getting expropriated even goes as far as to label the whole 'reconstruction according to UNESCO standards a "dictatorship"' (Maseruka 2010), as was done by the monarchist group 'Abazukulu Ba Buganda'.

For some members of both monarchist groups the intention to declare Kasubi a World Heritage Site in the late 1990s had already been accompanied by the fear of a second expropriation. The first expropriation had taken place after the abolition of the kingdoms in 1966/67, when the royal tombs were placed under the Ugandan National Museum until 1993. On the one hand, the Ugandan government provided for the maintenance of the royal tombs and employed an official guardian to take care of the tombs (Moriset 1998: 11-12, Okee 1997: 24, Tumwine 1995: 9). On the other hand, the Ugandan government was restrictive against meetings of Baganda in the royal tombs, as it feared the tombs could be used as a place for a counter-movement by Bugandan monarchists as one of the traditional custodians recounts: 'Army troops came to this place. They [the traditional custodians] couldn't play drums. Obote was afraid that the Baganda could organise and meet here' (P.R.: 30 April 1998). After the reintroduction of the kingdoms in 1993, Kasubi was returned to the Kabaka and the former state custodians are now subordinated to the kingdom.

In 1998 some traditional custodians of the royal tombs raised the concern that the Ugandan State, with which the relationship had been tense ever since the restoration of the kingdom, could regain greater influence in Kasubi, as the UNESCO cooperates with states and not directly with the monarchy. Another concern was that Kasubi as a World Heritage Site would be theoretically

subject to the UNESCO and the Kabaka would not be allowed to make any changes without the consent of the UNESCO. So Kasubi would in some sense be ‘expropriated’ again: ‘There are rumours that the ICOM people are going to take away the [Kasubi] building and change our culture. People in Kasubi tombs are afraid’ (P.R., 14 October 1998).

These fears of the monarchists from the 1990s were reinforced after the fire in 2010 by statements such as that of Uganda UNESCO Commission Secretary General, Mr. Augustine Omare Okurut, whose position was reported in a newspaper article: ‘The assistance, he said, was to the government because UNESCO works with the states through the national commissions for UNESCO. Buganda, he explained was just custodians of the site’ (Mulondo 2010). This statement is factually correct but with regard to the conflicts between monarchists and Ugandan government and assumptions regarding the cause of the fire, it is a sensitive issue. This point opens up a much wider discussion on the top-down approach of the world heritage project in general and on the unequal power relations on the different levels.

Ugandan Government: Negotiating Political Power

In the 1990s, it was the central government which had set the institutional framework of the current kingdom of Buganda. Upon restoring the Ugandan kingdoms³⁵ in 1993, President Yoweri Museveni defined them as purely cultural institutions.³⁶ The restoration of the Buganda kingdom was part of a strategy of Museveni and his central government to win the Bugandan lower- and middle-classes to vote for the new Ugandan constitution. Ever since its restoration, the relations between the Buganda kingdom and the central government have become ever tenser, as the monarchists have been demanding more political rights, such as the collecting of taxes. The fire at Kasubi in March 2010 led to an intensification of the conflict between the monarchists of the kingdom of Buganda and the Ugandan government.

In their article ‘The clash of institutions: traditional authority, conflict and the failure of ‘hybridity’ in Buganda’, Goodfellow and Lindemann (2013) convincingly explain why the relationship between the kingdom of Buganda and the Ugandan government has been strained ever since the restitution of the kingdom. They discuss in general the phenomenon of why in some African countries the cooperation between the nation state and so-called traditional authorities – which in the 1990s and 2000s were gaining importance again in many African states – works and why it fails in other countries.

In short, their thesis is that the cooperation is fruitful when the so-called traditional authorities are either integrated into the state structure (Goodfellow & Lindemann 2013: 6) or when they limit themselves to their cultural role and do not compete with the state’s functions (Goodfellow & Lindemann 2013: 7). However, the Buganda kingdom takes on certain roles and tasks that the Ugandan state considers its exclusive right, so that in the past it has repeatedly come to conflicts and clashes between the two parties (Goodfellow & Lindemann 2013: 7-8). A point of contention between the kingdom of Buganda and the Ugandan government is decentralisation in Uganda. Like the Bugandan monarchists, Museveni’s government strives to decentralise the state. But contrary to the monarchists the Ugandan government does so not along ethnic lines and it does

³⁵ The traditional leaders of Buganda, Toro, Bunyoro and Busoga were reinstated (Kayunga 1995: 244).

³⁶ This limitation re-appeared in the Ugandan constitution of 1995: ‘Traditional leaders may exist / are to / shall act in accordance with the culture and wishes of the people (concerned). [...] 3 (v) a traditional leader shall not participate in partisan politics (vi) a traditional leader shall not have administrative, legislative or executive powers of central or local government’ (quoted after Mukholi 1995: 77-78).

not want to put Buganda under the control of the Kabaka as the Bugandan monarchists demand in their claim for *federo* – the Luganda word for federalism (Goodfellow & Lindemann 2013: 12-15). Between 1989 and the year 2000, the number of districts in Uganda rose from 33 to 45. By 2011 there were already 112 districts (von Weichs 2013: 20) – a process Goodfellow and Lindemann call ‘an “epidemic” of district creation’ (Goodfellow & Lindemann 2013: 12). Many monarchists see Museveni’s decentralisation policy as an attempt to weaken their power by fragmenting the kingdom. As one representative of the Royal Parliament stated: ‘Central Government tries to weaken Buganda by creating new chiefdoms’ (J.E., 11 January 2013).

To summarise: According to Goodfellow and Lindemann the cooperation between the Uganda state and the Bugandan monarchists failed ‘because of the tenacity with which the traditional authority clung to institutions based on its powerful past, while the government – threatened by the Kingdom’s popularity and influence – refused to allow those institutions a role in formal government’ (Goodfellow & Lindemann 2013: 21).

In 2009 the situation between the Ugandan government and the monarchists escalated. In September of that year, protests by the monarchists in Kampala turned violent. The royal radio station was closed, so that the Royal Parliament lost its mouthpiece. In this still tense situation, Kasubi burned down in March 2010. The question was and still is: Who was responsible for the fire? Ugandan officials say the fire could have been sparked by the traditional custodians of Kasubi, who while keeping watch in the secret part of the tomb had cooked on an open fire (Khisu 2010). Many monarchists, on the contrary, think that Museveni’s people set the fire as a further measure to weaken the monarchy. The result of the inquiry commission established by the government to investigate the cause of the fire has been available to the Ugandan government since March 2011, but it has not yet been published to date. The publication would certainly be tricky, no matter what the result is.

The day after the fire, President Museveni visited Kasubi before Kabaka Mutebi came to visit the royal tombs. This led to clashes between Museveni’s security forces and the angry crowd that had gathered at Kasubi. In the shootout, three civilians were killed. Each side accused the other of having caused the fatal injuries. The question discussed in the newspapers was whether President Museveni as head of state should have visited Kasubi before Kabaka Mutebi? Some commentators said it was Museveni’s right as head of state to visit Kasubi first as it is a national heritage – but it might not have been very diplomatic of him to do so (Kalinaki 2010). Others draw a comparison to the storming of the royal palace in 1966, which led to the abolition of kingdoms (Littlefield Kasfir 2012: 68).

The trauma of the abolition of the kingdom is shared by members of another group that also donated to the reconstruction of Kasubi: the Baganda in the diaspora.

Baganda in the Diaspora: Heritage for Social Identity, Sense of Belonging and Political Opposition

An important group of Bugandan supporters of the kingdom does not live in Uganda itself but is scattered around the world – the Baganda in the diaspora. Many Baganda were forced to leave the country during the times of Milton Obote and Idi Amin – they mainly migrated to Britain, the US and Sweden. By the end of the 20th century about 250,000 Baganda lived in the diaspora (Anonymus 1998). They are potent donors and supporters of the Buganda kingdom. Like other communities in the diaspora, they tend to be more conservative, i.e. more conscious of their traditions and in this case stronger monarchists than many of their fellow countrymen at home. As

Peter Probst puts it: ‘Under conditions of colonial experience and forced migration, heritage can become a powerful signifier of social identity and a people’s desire to shape their own future’ (Probst 2011: 7). For many members of the Bugandan diaspora, the kingdom is a means of self-definition. A Muganda in Britain commented on his situation as follows: ‘You must have your culture and your nation and then other people will respect you; and otherwise you are a third class person’ (P.B., 01 September 1998). Many Baganda in the diaspora are also long-standing critics of Museveni, as sources from the Royal Parliament noted: ‘The Diaspora can speak freely and criticise the Central Government and the way they treat Kabaka’ (J.E., 11 January 2013). Some of them administer extremely aggressive websites, which denounce Museveni’s behaviour towards the monarchy.

In March 2010 the diaspora announced that it would donate one million U.S. dollars to the reconstruction of Kasubi (Ssenkabirwa & Mwanje 2010).³⁷

Tourism Industry: Kasubi as Unique Selling Point

Funds for the reconstruction of Kasubi also came, among others, from tourism companies, which denote Kasubi as a ‘unique selling point’ (Muhumuza 2010). The tourism industry lost one of its main attractions in Kampala in the fire, which also means a great financial loss:

The destruction of Kasubi tombs, a world heritage site, left many sharing the grief of our lost heritage. From the tourism industry, it was a similar story. Fresh from marketing (B)uganda at international tourism fairs, through press trips and promotions, tour operators who had packaged Kasubi tombs on the Kampala City tour circuit, are now grappling over how to repack the city tour without Kasubi tombs. (Ofungi 2010)

The importance of Kasubi for tourism is also shown in the fact that it is subordinated to the ‘Royal Ministry for Royal Tombs, Heritage and Tourism’ (Lisitzin & Bakker 2012: 48).

Heritage: a Booming Concept

Heritage is an important factor not only for tourism but in general there is a real commercial boom in heritage. According to Zoë Strother

This is the moment when ‘tradition’ is metamorphosing into ‘heritage’ in the literature on Africa. Through the model of ‘world heritage,’ the UNESCO is forging the universalism demanded by international institutions by providing a template to negotiate local differences within a global matrix. In the process, ‘heritage’ is transformed from a tool articulating national identities to one assuring global interconnectivity.’ (Strother 2012: 1)

Peter Probst defines heritage as ‘a contemporary form of cultural production, i.e. a form that is directed towards the past but is produced in the present’ (Probst 2012: 11). There are heritage

³⁷ A group of non-Baganda in the diaspora also donated to the reconstruction (Monitor Reporter 2010).

trails for tourists in Uganda and heritage clubs for pupils in schools as well as heritage camps. These various heritage products are offered by different distributors.

Since 2007 the Nabagereka, wife of the Kabaka, has been organising an annual *Ekisaakaate*, a two-week holiday programme for children, where she teaches Bugandan customs and traditions – in 2013 e.g. according to the motto ‘Re-awakening African Values for Posterity’ (Wanyenze 2013). The programme faced similar objections by the Ugandan government, traditional monarchists and Born Again Christians as the reconstruction of Kasubi. This is indicated in a passage of the publication ‘*Ekisaakaate: Reconciling Traditional and Modern Gender Values*’:

Negative attitude towards the programme – In its initial stages, some government officials were opposed to a traditional institution grooming children, suspecting indoctrination and fostering rebellion through the children. The Ekisaakaate became the object of subtle security surveillance but, with time, fears were dispelled. Secondly, some traditionalists within the kingdom and the community stated a preference to have this programme exclusively for Baganda children. A negative perception of culture as ‘satanic’ has also surfaced: some religions [sic] groups (mainly ABalokole – ‘saved’ Christians) have linked learning about traditional values to learning about traditional worship and witchcraft, an accusation that the Ekisaakaate Executive Committee has deliberately not responded to, allowing parents’ and students’ testimonies to speak for themselves. (The Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda 2009: 10)

In another kind of heritage camp, the Catholic Church focuses on Christian moral values.

The Ugandan NGO Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda (CCFU) works on heritage clubs in schools providing ‘Heritage passports for young people—for them to be able to record their identities’ (K.S., 17 January 2013). In 2013, CCFU organised the 15th International Conference of National Trusts: ‘Our heritage, Our Future: Cultural diversity for Responsible Development’ (Entebbe, Uganda, 30 September – 04 October 2013). The Uganda Voluntary Development Association (UVDA), as a member organisation of the Coordinating Committee for International Voluntary Service (CCIVS), holds international work camps for ‘World Heritage Volunteers’ at Kasubi. The campaign is coordinated by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre in cooperation with the CCIVS. There are plans to also involve members of Ugandan heritage clubs in the work camps (B.S: 17.1.2013).

Unlike heritage clubs which target the Ugandan youth and work camps which try to bring together local and international youth, a third form of heritage projects – heritage trails – targets international tourists: The Uganda Museum plans different heritage trails, e.g. on rock art sites, slave trade, the Bacwezi and the Ugandan Martyrs (Rose Mbowe, Commissioner, Department of Museums and Monuments, 18 January 2013). A ‘Kabaka’s Trail’ has been set up by the Kabaka Foundation (Kabaka Foundation 2015).

To quote Peter Probst: ‘[T]he celebration of heritage has become a major factor in the cultural economies of many African states today. A heritage fever has set in. With the help of supranational agencies like the UNESCO, heritage has become a new technology, preserving and

safeguarding the present past' (Probst 2012: 10).³⁸ The booming interest in heritage was the reason for the tourism industry to support the reconstruction of Kasubi. But there are other stakeholders who in turn donate to the reconstruction of the royal tombs for other reasons.

Asian Community of Uganda: Aiming for Security

Since colonial times, the Asian community of Uganda has been an important factor in the Ugandan economy (Mickleburgh 1999).³⁹ In the 1990s, the Asian community in Uganda was one of the major donors to the Buganda kingdom. For example, Kasubi was restored at the expense of a Ugandan member of the Asian community prior to it being listed as a world cultural heritage site (Kibugwe 1999: 4). Asked for his motivation in sponsoring the kingdom in general, the Asian sponsor stated his close relation to the kingdom: 'My financial donation (...) is due to the love for Kabakaship and the kingdom at large. The Asian community and I enjoy close cooperation with the people in the kingdom and the country at large' (Ruparelia in Kakande 1999). The Baganda on the other hand tend to believe that financial gain and not love for the kingdom is the Asians' strongest motive. For example, another Asian businessman was the main donor to the coronation. He sponsored the Kabaka's outfit including the regalia as well as the royal wedding outfit some years later. He was also the official royal photographer at the coronation and was suspected to have earned a lot of money in that position (D.W., 23 November 1998). But there is also an ulterior motive, rarely mentioned by anyone: the fear of the Asian community of being expelled from the country, as in 1972 under the regime of Idi Amin. One informant characterised the Asian sponsor of Kabaka Mutebi's regalia as follows: 'This guy is lucky. No one will ever touch him. It was a clever idea [to sponsor the regalia], because anybody who touches him now touches the kingship' (N.R., 26 November 1998). This shows the power of the kingdom within the Ugandan national state: the Baganda are seen as influential enough to expel the Asians and the Kabaka is perceived as powerful enough to protect them in case of danger, whereas officially he does not have any political power.

According to a statement from sources within the Royal Parliament, members of the Asian community also donated to the reconstruction of Kasubi. But they were not as open in appearance as they had been at the coronation and wedding of the Kabaka in the 1990s. One reason might be that supporting the monarchy today would be seen as an overly open positioning against the Ugandan government. And the members of the Asian community wish to forfeit neither side, as one informant put it: 'They [the members of the Asian community] used to sponsor the kingdom and they still do, but not so open, because that is not opportune because of Central Government' (J.E., 11 January 2013).

Born Again Christians (*Balokole*): Religion Versus Culture

One of the most influential movements in Uganda is the *Balokole*,⁴⁰ a number of different fundamental Christian-oriented groupings, who describe themselves as Born Again Christians

³⁸ For a discussion on the metamorphosis of tradition into heritage see Probst 2012, Strother 2012 and Duvelle 2013.

³⁹ The term 'Asian Community of Uganda' comprises mainly Ugandans originating from the Indian subcontinent, not people of Chinese origin, whose number in Uganda has been increasing in recent years. In 1998 the Asian community comprised an estimated 10,000 people (Mickleburgh 1999).

⁴⁰ Singular: *Mulokole*

(Mugeere 1999). In 1990, more than 100 groups in Kampala ascribed themselves to the *Balokole* (Kalebbo 1998) – and numbers have grown within the last decades. In the beginning, the attitude of these fundamentalist Christians towards the restitution of the Buganda kingdom was restrained. They regarded the kingdom as a traditional institution with unchristian if not satanic implications. And even today they are still split on whether they should support the monarchy or not.

This demonstrates another potential conflict provoked by the new focus of the UNESCO on the ‘intangible’ – by calling Kasubi ‘the major spiritual centre’ and ‘the most active religious place’ in the Buganda kingdom (UNESCO 2015a). On the one hand the *Balokole* oppose this statement as they are against any traditional beliefs, and on the other hand they – as many other Christians – question it because they hold huge church services in Kampala which they would much rather define as the ‘most active religious places’.

In their problematic relationship with the kingdom, the *Balokole* are in the tradition of the other Christian denominations, as a glance at the relationship of the Christian denominations to the royal tombs in the past shows. Previously it was the missionaries who were agitating against the royal tombs. At the beginning of the 20th century, converts such as the Royal Prime Minister Apolo Kagga gave away objects from the royal tombs (like the twin object from Wamala mentioned above). While a British official at the beginning of the 20th century still pleaded to demolish the royal tombs (Cunningham 1969: 230), nowadays both the Church of Uganda (part of the Anglican Communion) and the Catholic Church (after the 2nd Vatican Council) have largely come to terms with the royal traditions. As a student of Ggaba National Seminary stated: ‘Always let good elements in the tradition which do not oppose Christianity be adopted and be transformed. In other words be christianized’ (Kiwauka 1980: without page numbers). In the 1970s, Kasubi was even called a model for customised sacral architecture (Lugira 1970: 40). In 1993 official representatives of the Catholic Church and the Church of Uganda attended the traditional part of the coronation of Kabaka Mutebi II. A Catholic priest was even among the traditional dignitaries performing the traditional part of the coronation (Mayer-Himmelheber 2004: 53).

In contrast to the Church of Uganda and the Catholic Church, most *Balokole* shun Kasubi and the other royal tombs even today. A *Mulokole* compares the relationship between the *Balokole* and local faith practices with a wrestling match between good and evil (Magumba 1998). However, Kabaka Mutebi, by realising the *Balokole*’s influential position in Uganda and the fact that they were not represented at the coronation, has attempted to assign a higher value to them. In doing so, he is torn between the custodians of tradition and the *Balokole* who demand an end to all ‘satanic royal rites’. For example, for the fifth coronation anniversary, the Kabaka sent only his cultural minister to a traditional ceremony rather than going himself and instead received hundreds of *Balokole* at the royal parliament for public prayers. The royal wedding service was led by Archbishop Mpalanyi Nkoyoyoa – a self-confessed *Mulokole* – whereas most traditional ceremonies were cancelled (Mayer-Himmelheber 2004: 138f, 192f).

Before the fire at Kasubi, the *Balokole* visited the Royal Tombs only to preach to the hereditary office holders, as a custodian explained: ‘*Balokole* came several times to preach to the women in the tombs to become born again’ (P.R., 09 September 1999). After the fire, however, Kasubi was described as a central place of religion in Buganda not only by the UNESCO, but also in the Ugandan news coverage; and religious leaders of all the large religious groups, including the *Balokole*, gathered for a service at Kasubi (Mukasa & Muwanika 2010).

But there are also critical voices amongst the *Balokole*, as this quote from a letter to the editor of the New Vision, a Ugandan daily paper, shows: ‘The prayers that were held at Kasubi tombs on Friday March 26 proved to us that our spiritual fathers are actually spiritual politicians.’

I was shocked to learn that even Apostle Alex Mitala, the chairman of the National Fellowship of Born-again Pentecostal churches was also in attendance. (...) The burning of the Kasubi tombs is carnal and, therefore, unacceptable. However, there is no way a true Christian can pray to God to rebuild a stronghold where satanic rituals such as devil invocation, pipe smoking, ancestral possession, fire altars, ritual cleansing, worship of the dead, are practised' (Kizito 2010).

The inner conflict can probably best be understood if one considers that some members of the Royal Parliament are also *Balokole*.

Conclusion

This article aimed at showing how, by the example of a single building, conflicts and debates at local, national and international/global level can be visualised.

The UNESCO has expanded its policy in the last decades from an originally purely preservational approach to the protection of intangible cultural heritage. It constantly encounters issues relating to authenticity and secrecy.

For the traditional monarchists, the fire at Kasubi on the one hand meant a great loss, but on the other hand it led to an up-valuation of their position. The modern monarchists who are entrusted with the organisation of the reconstruction face lots of problems due to lack of funds, according to a statement by the Royal Prime Minister Katikiro Peter Charles Mayiga, but also due to the numerous rituals used by the traditional monarchists to delay the reconstruction (Lule 2013). For the Baganda in the diaspora, Kasubi is an important part of their identity, providing a feeling of belonging. The fire has provided them with another opportunity to criticise the Ugandan government.

The Ugandan government under President Museveni is in a delicate situation, as it is not only being blamed by some of the monarchists for having caused the fire, but it is also the official negotiating partner of the UNESCO in the reconstruction of Kasubi. This might look like a very special conflict, but the general problem of power negotiating with traditional authorities has become quite virulent for many African heads of states since the 1990s (Goodfellow & Lindemann 2013: 3).

For the tourism industry, Kasubi is a place of financial interest and its destruction has been a huge loss of a 'unique selling point'. In this case, Kasubi is an example for the current boom of 'heritage' in Africa (see Strother 2012).

The members of the Asian community form one of the most significant donor groups among those acting in favour of the Buganda kingdom. They market themselves as friends of the Buganda kingdom. They wish to enhance their prestige through donations to the kingdom as a way of protecting themselves against future persecution, as one Muganda informant stated, 'They are trying to do as much as they can do to attract our attention. For example give money to rebuild⁴¹ Kasubi. They want to get favour, so that we don't have the same feelings as Amin' (F.B., 19 March 1999). For them, the reconstruction of Kasubi is another opportunity to invest through donations in their security in Uganda. But they have to perform a balancing act between supporting the monarchy on the one hand and the Ugandan government on the other hand in order not to alienate any of these two influential players.

The Born Again Christians (*Balokole*) are torn between two sides: rejecting 'satanic' rituals – as Christians; and supporting their king as Baganda.

⁴¹ In 1999 'rebuilding' meant 'restoring'.

Depending on the perspective of the different actors, Kasubi is therefore a place of royal legitimacy and political power, a place of cultural heritage or ‘satanic rites’, a family cemetery, tourist attraction, world heritage site and place of residence—a place to generate social as well as financial capital.

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Research Note

Paula Hirsch Foster: Anthropology and Land Tensions in Acholiland, 1954-1958

By Martha Lagace

Department of Anthropology, Boston University, USA

Abstract

Paula Hirsch Foster, a Hungarian-born student from Chicago's Northwestern University, conducted doctoral research in Acholiland between 1954 and 1958. Despite her fascination with Acholi life, her fluency in the language, and her promise as a scholar, Foster (1930-1997) never published her research or completed her PhD. Drawing upon the Paula Hirsch Foster Collection of field notes at Boston University's African Studies Library, this research note introduces Foster and the collection. Its main contribution is to provide evidence that Acholi concerns about land alienation go back at least to the 1950s. Her field notes demonstrate that Acholi fears for their land are not new and not simply the result of the war between the government and the Lord's Resistance Army.

'In late 1954, a Ford Foundation Research Fellowship was granted to me to study the changing status and role of women in Acholi society ...'

So began the thesis outline of Paula Hirsch Foster, an anthropologist in the making. During four years of field research—nowadays an inconceivable luxury of time—Foster moved between West and East Acholi living in homesteads, mastering fluency in the language, and writing copious notes about everything she saw, heard, and experienced. For a while—how long is not clear—she also put her Acholi language skills to use as a court interpreter.

Foster traversed the physical distances in her rugged Opel van, usually giving a lift to locals. She attended funerals, dances, *ajwaka* divinations; interviewed male elders about Acholi principles, and schoolgirls about their own life stories. Even 60 years on, one can sometimes meet older men and women around Gulu town who remember her fondly or at least recall her Opel van rumbling past; and babies were named Paula after her. In that sense she made her mark.

Unfortunately, Foster never published the thesis or any other work about her time in Acholiland. This may be why her deeply researched, pioneering study has continued to slip under the radar of many contemporary scholars of Acholi. Nor did she attain her PhD degree—despite her absorbing interest in Acholi, her many personal and professional relationships there, and her promise as a scholar.



*'Paula Hirsch Foster (centre) and friends in Acholiland', 1950s
(Photo courtesy of Boston University Paula Hirsch Foster Collection)*

This research note introduces readers to a remarkable woman and to the archive she left behind. Her notes, which fill 15 boxes at Boston University's African Studies Library, may be accessed by scholars who visit in person; in the meantime a detailed finding guide is available on OpenBU or by email to [asl\[at\]bu.edu](mailto:asl[at]bu.edu). (The collection is currently being digitized.) Below, I include extracts of her notes to give a sense of the challenges she faced and to offer glimpses of Acholi culture and tensions in an era that was far less documented by anthropologists than the current post-civil war period. These extracts provide evidence that Acholi concern about the alienation of their land is by no means a new phenomenon.

Perhaps Foster's refusal to complete her PhD thesis was due to factors that especially affected female students in the 1950s. First, as a woman she may have been expected to study women; but upon arrival she found other topics more compelling. It appears she aimed for a head-on comparison with the Nuer studies of E. E. Evans-Pritchard. Observations about women are there in her notes but are relatively few compared to other aspects of Acholi life: kinship, law, religion, suicide, *jok* rituals, witchcraft; discourses and struggles over land; and Uganda's coming independence.

Second, according to different accounts, her thesis supervisor, the great Melville Herskovits, was a demanding personality and much older besides. Given that Foster was self-confident and strong-willed, it is possible they clashed in the final analysis. According to friends, despite her sureness in her own findings and her husband's unwavering support, her professor's critique was terribly painful. She chose to abandon her thesis at the writing stage, having drafted all but the first and last chapters, and she moved on with her life.

From Budapest via Chicago

Hungarian-born Paula Foster (née Hirsch) and her sister were the only members of their family to survive the holocaust. The girls felt compelled to lie about their ages so as to seem older and escape the arbitrary fate of Jewish children too young to be useful to Nazi tyranny. Following World War II, Hirsch and her sister emigrated together to the United States. While her sister aimed for a career as a pianist, Hirsch pursued academic studies, enrolling by the early 1950s as a doctoral student at Chicago's Northwestern University. A fortuitous meeting with a Ugandan student led to her first welcome in Acholiland. (The student was Martin Alier, later one of Uganda's most prominent dental surgeons and businessmen and the first Chancellor of Gulu University, 2004-2014.) Four days after arriving in Gulu in December 1954, she could hardly believe her luck that she was already living in a homestead with the student's family outside of town. And so commenced her field study.

While in Uganda she met and married Philip Foster, a British education officer who was one of the first teachers at Sir Samuel Baker School. Philip became a professor of comparative education and the couple raised two sons in the United States and Australia. It was a happy marriage that lasted for the rest of their lives. She died in 1997 at the age of 67; her husband died in 2008.

An Undercurrent of Worries

In the field, Foster was readily included in Acholi community activities. She moved with ease socially and was by all accounts popular. Until her departure in 1958 she lived with the extended families of chiefs and controlled her own transport. Her method thus allowed for a kind of dependency that was socially acceptable, even necessary, and an important element of practical independence.

However, she did encounter two particular challenges. First, how could she reconcile an Acholi discourse of abundant land, while hearing on multiple occasions and in different places Acholis' real fears about land being overtaken by outsiders, possibly with the connivance of Acholi leaders? Second, how could she as a light-skinned person presumed to be British—a 'European'—grapple with recurring suspicions about her own nature and purpose?

I do not think these challenges were ever resolved in her work nor could they be, especially at that time under colonialism and also under the then-prevailing constraints of anthropology as a discipline. The land issues she encountered, cryptically noted but without follow-up in her papers, suggest painful inequalities in society and with the researcher as a foreigner in a position of relative privilege. Bringing her experiences and evidence to light, however, makes clear that Acholi fears for their land are not new and not simply the result of the LRA war.

The discourse of plentiful land was one she apparently heard from elder men, her main expert sources. The discourse also seems to have been compelling to her as a scholar because it fit with anthropological theories popular in that era, theories of structural functionalism that tended to overlook frictions as well as the presence and power of the colonial state. An example of the land discourse occurred early in Foster's stay in Acholiland. According to her interview notes, a longtime *rwot* [chief] told her, 'You know, land here is not important. No trouble about that. Here money isn't important. Here we count in cattle' (Box VI, folder Ae).

Similar ideas are then echoed in her thesis drafts about Acholi marriage. She wrote, for example, 'The independence of a new house is assured by the gift of land to the new couple. All

Acholi women have a claim to the land that lies directly behind their houses' (Box II, Ka). And: 'Women have complete charge of their homes and fields' (Box XII, J11). Noting an Acholi population of 250,000—the precise year of the figure is not given—Foster further drafted, 'There is a relatively good supply of land limited only by the capacity to use it. [There are] no land disputes except on an interchiefdom basis. Since land rights are defined on a communal basis, land disputes occurs [sic] only on these levels. Very infrequent, due to availability of land' (Box IX, A.J./Kb).

After such assurances of plentiful land and its orderly allocation, it is therefore surprising for a reader of her field notes to come upon frequent examples of worries, even dread about land. These concerns and anxieties, which took many forms, exposed fissures within Acholi society under pax Britannia. They also suggest people's awareness of their place in the wider world and the potentially harmful effects of geopolitical trends.

A brief conversation at a funeral, for example, offers a glimpse of these concerns as part of historical memory and of potential future violence in some uncertain, possibly distant, locale. A man whom Foster met discussed his life as a soldier for three years in the King's African Rifles. The 'young queen' [Elizabeth], he said, 'will want to have some more land and she will get everybody to fight for her.' While the money he had earned as a soldier was not worth it, he would probably have to go to war again, he said (Box X, Bc).

Another time, her assistant worriedly told her that people wanted to know why she was mapping the fields. 'Ojat and Ojul are asking why I made a map and saying there will be war if I tried to take their land,' she wrote, wondering why the pair did not ask her directly what she was doing: Were they afraid of her? Their concern grew out of tensions surrounding the upcoming elections as well as the civil war in nearby Sudan, she supposed (Box VI, De).

People also wondered what anthropologist F. K. Girling, her predecessor in the region, might be writing about Acholi society: whether it could leave them somehow vulnerable. His book *The Acholi of Uganda* was not yet published; that would happen in 1960. It seems individuals missed him and also wanted Foster to explain his whereabouts as well as the status of his book about them (Box X, Bc, Bd, and Hc). She apparently did not know Girling personally and had no answers. She wrote, 'They say Girling has gotten lost and will probably never come back to Acholi' (Box X, Bc). Another time, a teacher grilled her: Had the government sent her, has Girling written his book yet? Girling should have done it by now. If it was a bad book that must be why Foster was sent here to write another one (Box X, Bd). She also had a tense interrogation from Acholi political leaders who questioned her business and were suspicious of the truth of her claims when other white people had exploited them. When Foster asked them to trust her, they said Girling came to do what she did and nearly got killed—why or by whom is not noted (Box VI, De). Foster thought they were lying about Girling. She further reasoned that they did not understand the difference between a protectorate and a colony and this was why they feared their land being taken (Box VI, De).

Further contradicting the discourse of abundant land, Foster also met people living near Gulu town who still suffered from their displacement four decades earlier from the sleeping sickness-prone region that subsequently became Murchison Falls National Park. A son of a *rwot* told her, 'It is very bad luck not to have enough land. It gives great sorrow to the people. Just look at the children, see how weak they are. There is no milk to feed them....' His clansmen were no longer allowed to hunt or fish even though there were plenty of fish in the Nile, he said. People explained to Foster that they could not even move away from here because other areas were already too crowded: 'The people have little land there, too' owing to a government rule that those with cattle should only graze cattle on their own land and not exceed the boundaries.

Then the *rwot*'s son asked, 'Do the British govern America? Why can the Americans govern themselves and the Africans can't? Why should the Africans have a government over them?' Foster wrote, 'Then they asked whether there were many people [in America] and did they have enough land' (Box X, Bd). Her answer is not documented.

A Generational Divide

Sometimes young and older men confronted her with their belief that she was a government spy sent to Acholi to take away their land (Box VI, De; Box XI, D n2; Box X, Bd). Once, probably in 1956—she rarely wrote the year in notes—people in one community refused to speak with her, accusing her of being a spy who came to steal their land. To break the tension, Foster agreed: Yes, she came around every night with a big sack and hauled away their land. The joke seems to have calmed them. She nonetheless felt angry about the scrutiny and at answering the same questions again and again about who she was and what she was doing (Box XI, D n2).

In the same encounter, in what suggests a painful division between young and older male generations over issues of land, masculinity, and history, a young man publicly interrogated her and the elders with whom she was chatting. He bitterly recounted a period of disarmament in which the *munu* (Europeans) tricked Acholi into giving up their weapons that were subsequently burned. (If he meant the wake of the 1911-12 Lamogi rebellion, it is not clear.) 'This'—her presence—the young man insisted, was the same problem: She must be working on behalf of the District Commissioner. Turning to the elders present, the young man said they 'always thought they were so smart. But look what happened to them' after disarmament. Now the land is being taken away from them. Their children will be poor, homeless men, he predicted. 'If the *ludito* [elders] were so smart, then why isn't Lasto Obol still the chief, why did they put in a commoner to be *Rwot*, why are there national parks? Have you asked [Foster] about those things?' (Box XI, D n2).

Surprisingly perhaps for readers, but as testament to Foster's positive attitude, the encounter ended on a high note and she was invited back (Box XI, Dg11).

The 'War of God' and Acholi Suspicions

When a Langi religious group of striking peculiarity tried to set up their homestead a few miles from Gulu town in the mid-1950s, neighbours speculated that the members' true motive was less religious than land-based. As one neighbour claimed, since the government planned to give land to every Acholi, he hoped this group—which called itself *Mony pa Lubanga* (War of God)—was not there to take land; he added his hope that Europeans and Asians would not get land either (Box VI, Bd).

Most of the few dozen young converts—none Acholi—were under 25 years old. Their round compound had 14 houses as well as a simple church, sitting room, and bicycle shed (Box VI, Bd). Detective-style, Foster tried to fathom *Mony pa Lubanga*. The clues were maddeningly difficult to parse. Aside from their strange martial-like tendencies—marching, group calisthenics—their religious service was identical to Protestant ones. Neighbours had once seen a flag, but the group's leader insisted that it was nothing special, bearing only the words *Mony pa Lubanga* (Box VI, Ad).

After interviewing the leader, Foster's assistant and his friend opined that the group was crazy but harmless. Still, she could not understand why they left behind fields and cattle in Lango

to settle more than a hundred miles away (Box VI, Bd). Others agreed among themselves that religion was but a pretext (Box XI, ac). Although Foster was not able to answer the question of why they came—or why and when they left—the community dealt with *Mony pa Lubanga* by effectively freezing them out. The group was treated as ‘guests’ rather than kin, Foster wrote, meaning that they were not allowed to disperse, their homestead was but temporary, and they were not given any opportunities in the community (Box VIII, Jd). One can presume they departed before long.

Defending ‘with bare hands’

Finally, Foster’s research suggests a foreshadowing of the Apaa crisis of 2015 in which Acholi women tried desperately to defend against land appropriation by figures including government. Describing a controversy in the mid-1950s over what sounds like the establishment of two coffee farms, Foster learned that plans were announced to the Acholi community without their consultation or input. According to one man she spoke with, the District Commissioner and the Agricultural Officer had already conferred with the Acholi Standing Committee and the *rwodi* [chiefs] and the resolution was passed; therefore, it was a done deal. According to this man, women ‘were the most militant against the farm,’ saying they would rather work the land with their bare hands from morning till night than use supposedly labour-saving machines and lose ‘the land of their fathers’ (Box VI, Ae).

The farm managers or operators—whether British, Acholi, or Indian is not specified—tried to persuade the women that they would not have to work so hard at farming because machines (perhaps tractors) would help them. Still the women refused. As Foster wrote, no one wanted to accept the planting of coffee despite the potential increase in money, if it meant losing their land.

‘It is a cruel way of introducing these things,’ her interlocutor told her. ‘People should have been consulted first. Even though the government can only lease the land, it would be as if they owned it’ (Box XI, B g14). Alas, no further details are available.

Conclusion

Acholi concerns about land alienation go back to at least the 1950s. Acholi fears for their land are therefore not new and not simply the result of the LRA war. F.K. Girling, in whose shadow Foster worked, had written that Acholiland was underpopulated—there was plenty of land—perhaps because he focused on population density rather than the politics of land. Indeed, in Foster’s own written drafts for her thesis she adhered to this line of reasoning. Therefore, it is all the more striking to find that people were so sensitive about foreigners wanting to take land. Acholis were also vulnerable to fellow Acholis who did not consult them on decisions about land that affected their lives, their future, and their ancestors.

Photos by Paula Hirsch Foster



'Woman walking in homestead' --- 'Hut under construction'



'Woman bathes baby' --- 'Women dancing'



'Older men drinking' --- 'Four boys smiling'

(Photos, undated: Paula Hirsch Foster; courtesy of Boston University Paula Hirsch Foster Collection)



'People and woman with pot' --- 'Crowd at dance'



'Abila' (shrine) --- 'Smear'd grave'

(Photos, undated: Paula Hirsch Foster; courtesy of Boston University Paula Hirsch Foster Collection)



*'Foster standing and Cindy', Gulu, September 1955
(Photo courtesy of Boston University Paula Hirsch Foster Collection)*

Notes on Contributors

Julia Vorhölder studied social anthropology and political science at Hamburg University and holds a PhD in anthropology from Göttingen University. She is currently employed as a lecturer and post-doc researcher at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology in Göttingen. Her ethnographic research experiences include field studies in Uganda, South Africa and Niger. Much of her work has concentrated on dynamics and perceptions of socio-cultural change in Sub-Saharan Africa, including changes in gender and generational relations and changes in the political landscape due to armed conflicts, foreign induced reforms and development interventions. Her most recent project focuses on contemporary discourses on mental health and emerging forms of (psycho)therapy in East Africa, especially Uganda.

Contact: jvorhoe@gwdg.de

Sam Dubal received his Ph.D. in medical anthropology from the University of California-Berkeley and the University of California-San Francisco in 2015. He is the author of a forthcoming book, entitled *Against Humanity*, based on his doctoral dissertation research with former Lord's Resistance Army rebels. He is concurrently earning his M.D. at Harvard Medical School and plans to train as a trauma surgeon.

Contact: sambdubal@gmail.com

Ina Rehema Jahn completed a BA in Social Anthropology and Development Studies at SOAS, University of London, and is a graduate of the Erasmus Mundus Master in Migration and Intercultural Relations taught by University of Oldenburg, University of Stavanger, Makerere University Kampala and the University of the Witwatersrand. An anthropologist at heart, her research interests pertain to the study of forced migration, borderlands, cosmologies and concepts of belonging with a particular focus on East Africa. She is currently with the Land, Property and Reparations Division of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in Geneva, engaging with land restitution and reparations programmes in a range of post-conflict contexts.

Contact: Ina.R.Jahn@gmail.com; ijahn@iom.int

Anne Wermbter is a PhD candidate at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Freie Universität Berlin, Germany. She currently teaches at the Institute of Anthropology, Universität Leipzig. She worked as a lecturer at the Institute of Cultural and Social Anthropology, University of Cologne and at the Freie Universität Berlin. She carried out long-term ethnographic fieldwork in Uganda, Austria and Benin. Her main research interests are in the field of anthropology of violence and conflict, natural disasters, refugees and migration. Her current research is concerned with matters of memory, coping strategies, gender relations and mental health in post-conflict and post-disaster situations.

Contact: annewermbter@yahoo.de

Clara Himmelheber is the head of African Collections at the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum – Cultures of the World, Cologne (Germany). She is also a lecturer for Museum Anthropology at the University of Cologne. She studied African Studies, Anthropology and Art History at the University of Cologne. For her MA in Anthropology she carried out ethnographic field research in Namibia, for her PhD. in African Studies she conducted fieldwork in Uganda. She has been author of several publications and curator or co-curator of numerous exhibitions, e.g. ‘Namibia – Germany: A Shared/ Divided History. Resistance, Violence, Memory’ at the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum and the German Historical Museum Berlin and the permanent exhibition ‘People in their Worlds’ at the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum. Currently she is project manager of the special exhibition ‘Pilgrimage – Longing for Bliss?’ at the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum.

Contact: clara.himmelheber@stadt-koeln.de

Martha Lagace is a doctoral student in the Anthropology programme of Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts, USA. She earned her Master of Liberal Arts degree at Harvard University and her Bachelor's degree at Simmons College, Boston. She has recently completed two years of dissertation fieldwork in post-war Gulu, Uganda, studying the history and social life of transportation during and after the 1986-2008 civil war, focusing on the rise of *boda-boda* motorcycle taxis. Martha has also conducted ethnographic research in Rwanda on memorialising the 1994 genocide. She and Dr. Jens Meierhenrich published a photo essay on this topic in the journal *Humanity*.

Contact: mlagace@bu.edu

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Notes on Contributors



Institute of Peace and Strategic Studies
Gulu University - Uganda