

Alienation in Acholiland:
War, Privatization, and Land Displacement in Northern Uganda

Researcher: Nicole Kligerman

Academic Directors: Dr. William Komakech and Stefanie Pollender
Academic Advisor: Daniel Komakech
SIT Post Conflict Transformation: Uganda and Rwanda
Spring 2009

They want to displace us as if we have no children.

*We need development;
this is democracy.*

-An executive officer of the Gulu Concerned Landowners Association

Acknowledgements

Many people helped me in the formation of this research project. Thank you to Dr. William Komakech, Stefanie Pollender, Stella Atto, and my colleagues in this program their support during the course of our studies in East Africa. Additional academic thanks are in order for my advisor Professor Daniel Komakech, my translator (of both language and most other things) Obunya Harry Dean, Professor Ron Atkinson, the Gulu Concerned Landowners Association, and all of my research participants for their willingness to share and discuss their opinions with me.

And most of all, thank you to Allan, Auma, Dean, Peace, and Rose for the support, love, and home-cooked meals that made my stay in Gulu so wonderful: apwoyo matek!

Abstract

This paper presents the various dynamics, causes, and consequences of land conflicts in Acholiland. In order to comprehensively address these complex issues, this paper analyzes land conflict in connection to the Northern Uganda war, explaining the military strategies that resulted in widespread displacement and alienation from the land. This paper further explores changing Acholi cosmology and customary land law in connection to land alienation. Additionally, I examine local land conflicts as well as three privatization and “development” plans in relationship to preexisting land displacement issues. This paper highlights the opinions of my fieldwork participants regarding the importance of land to Acholi people, customary land law, and the future for Acholis if widespread land alienation continues.

In order to explore these complex and intertwined conflicts, I carried out in-depth interviews with nine informants in the Laroo Division of Gulu District. Additionally, interviews were held with local experts in field related to my research, including a local politician, an NGO worker, a professor at Gulu University, and the executive committee of the Gulu Concerned Land Owners Association. To complement this fieldwork, I reviewed academic literature related to land issues, the armed conflict, and current privatization plans.

Through my research, I argue that the consequences of pending land privatization schemes will have the same result as the armed conflict on the Acholi people: alienation from the land, homelessness, poverty, malnutrition, and death. Acholis rely on their customary land as the privatization as the primary source for economic and cosmological survival; in the opinion of the majority of my interview participants, displacement from their land will result in the widespread inability to support current and future generations of Acholis and, ultimately, the potential decimation of the population.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	page 2
Abstract.....	page 3
Table of Contents.....	page 4
Introduction.....	page 5
Literature Review.....	page 7
Justification.....	page 9
Statement of Objectives.....	page 10
Methodology.....	page 11
Ethics.....	page 15
Background.....	page 16
Subsistence farming in Acholiland.....	page 16
Acholi customary land law.....	page 17
Patrilineal land inheritance.....	page 17
Displacement due to armed conflict.....	page 17
Local land conflicts.....	page 18
Acholi Land Alienation.....	page 20
Land Access and the Armed Conflict.....	page 20
Acholi cosmology in connection to land alienation.....	page 25
Pending Land Investment, Development, and Policy Issues.....	page 27
Fieldwork Findings and Analysis.....	page 33
Research Discussion.....	page 41
Conclusion.....	page 44
Recommendations.....	page 45
Works Cited.....	page 46
Appendices.....	page 47

Introduction

“If Acholi people didn't have land, there would be a very big problem. [Investors] would be chasing them all the time. Now that I have kids, how am I going to feed them? How am I going to send them to school?”

If Acholi people had no land, they would be sleeping in verandas, on the balconies of some rich people.”

-Grace, interview participant from the Laroo Division of Gulu District

Solina, an elderly Acholi woman, spends hours everyday digging cassava and millet in her garden in the Laroo Division of Gulu District in the Acholi sub region of Northern Uganda. Originally from the village of Unyama, about ten kilometers away from Laroo, Solina relocated to Gulu Town during the war to escape from violence in the village. During her time in Gulu Town, her grandson tells me, Solina fell sick often, complaining of frequent bouts of malaria. Now living in Laroo, Solina's health has been restored because of the access to a garden, digging, and open space.

Solina has not yet returned to her homestead in Unyama, however; disputes with neighbors there regarding her property have created potentially severe physical insecurity despite the cessation of armed conflict in 2007. She, like so many other in the Acholi sub region, has become part of the displacement and violence caused by land conflict in the post armed conflict era.

This paper explores the various levels of land conflict experienced in Acholiland both during the 23-year war and after, in an era labeled as post armed conflict. Through my research, however, I will demonstrate that conflict in Acholiland is not “post” conflict, but rather the violence has taken another form. With attempts at land privatization and foreign investment combined with local land wrangles and other disputes, land conflict in Acholiland has the potential to cause the same effects as war: homelessness, loss of culture, poverty, widespread malnutrition, and even death.

To address these issues, I outline the various dimensions of land conflict and their effects in Acholiland, using Laroo as my case study. First, I explore the effects of war strategies of both the Ugandan People's Defense Forces (UPDF) and the Lord's Resistance Army/Movement (LRA/M) on land access, arguing that they directly led to alienation from the land, particularly devastating as historically are largely subsistence farmers (Atkinson, R., 2008). As a result of the war, “the great majority of Acholi have lost immediate access to their land” (Finnstrom, S., 2008, pp.180). I define this loss of land access as both “land alienation” and “land displacement” throughout the course of my

paper.

Next, I highlight the importance of land in relationship to Acholi cosmology, as well as the cosmological significance of land alienation. I will then outline three investment and land privatization attempts in the Acholi sub region, highlighting the opinions of my local research informants on these ventures.

I will further discuss the beliefs on the importance of land, its connection to war, and the future of land access that I found through extensive field interviews in Laroo Division. I will conclude with my own analysis on the future of land security in connection to peace and stability in Acholiland and provide important areas of future research.

Through this research, I intend to connect the effects of war with current conflicts facing the Acholi sub region through the lens of land accessibility. I will also argue that, though the armed conflict and current land issues take very different forms, the consequences of the two on the Acholi people may prove to be very similar. Ultimately, I will establish that conflict is still very prevalent in the region and that safe access to land will provide the strong cornerstone for establishing lasting stability for the Acholi people.

Literature Review

There has been extensive research on the violence in Acholiland and its effects on the people in the region. Much of that literature focuses on displacement, gender based violence, abduction of children, and the changing cultural values of the Acholi people as a result of the war (UNFPA, 2008; Ochieng, 2002; Isis-WICCE, 2001). While land conflicts are prominent in local and national media sources as well as a concern for local government, few scholars have broadly studied the contemporary problems facing land accessibility in the region in connection to both the armed conflict and attempted policies of land privatization and investment.

The effect of LRA/M and UPDF military strategy on displacement as well as land alienation has been documented in literature about the war in Northern Uganda (Finnstrom, S., 2008). Humanitarian aid, in the form of forced IDP camps, must be seen in a larger context of governmental military strategy, and thus inaccessibility of the land should be seen as an important, and perhaps purposeful, result of the war (Finnstrom, S., 2008). As a result of these policies, according to Atkinson (2008), safe access to land is one of the most pressing needs currently facing the Acholi people.

Various privatization attempts have further threatened the Acholi people and made accessing land challenging (Atkinson, R., 2008). As Atkinson (2008) argues, the central government of Uganda has agreed to the incoming of private investors to Acholiland before all of the IDP camps have been evacuated; land considered “idle” does, in fact, belong to people, yet those people are still displaced and thus cannot access their land. Privatization practices therefore reinforce and further displacement in Northern Uganda.

Land access issues are also deeply embedded within other global conflicts both during and after armed conflict. The case of Sierra Leone is similar to that of Northern Uganda; refugees raised in IDP camps have not learned how to farm and thus moved to urban centers such as Freetown after the armed conflict in order to find employment alternative to agriculture production (Dale, R., 2008). As in Acholiland, in many rural areas of Sierra Leone, the land tenure system is customary, with chiefs acting as the primary distributor of land and land is inherited, rather than bought and sold rather than privately owned titles (Dale, R., 2008).

In Northern Mozambique, war has resulted in an abundance of unused (supposedly “idle”) land (Bruck, E., 2003). Bruck (2003) argues that in the post-war era in Northern Mozambique, both investment plans and options for creating enhanced security are largely determined by farm size and the relative land abundance. In the case of land security and access in post-genocide Rwanda, Rose (2004)

argues that women have more difficulty in accessing land because of a combination of factors, including patrilineal customary land law, the high rate of return of refugees, and the lack of both manual labor and infrastructure for tilling.

My study adds to the existing literature about land access in conflict zones in several ways. While existing literature reviews the importance of land and the difficulty in accessing it both within Uganda and in other African countries, I have not found any academic sources linking the effects of land alienation to both privatization and “development” schemes with the outcome of war. My research links the effects of land conflict and the consequences of war, ultimately arguing that the “on the ground” results are very similar. My paper expands the definition of “conflict” and “post-conflict;” while violent struggle by official armed bodies has ceased, violence and displacement continue via various forms of land conflict. As such, by linking armed conflict and land conflict, my research offers a new lens on the study of post-conflict transformation.

Justification

My research provides several important contributions to the study of post-armed conflict transformation in Acholiland. Issues of land are fundamental to establishing peace and economic stability in the Acholi subregion; Atkinson (2008) states that safe access to land is one of the biggest and most important obstacles to creating security in the post-armed conflict era. My research deeply explores these land conflicts by demonstrating the cultural, cosmological, and economic importance of land to the Acholi and the perceived potential consequences of inability in accessing that land. I analyze the effects of war and military strategy through the lens of land access; doing so provides a certain logic to the prolonged armed conflict, which is too often distilled into sheer brutality without purpose or strategy. Lastly, my study serves as a warning of future conflict and instability should land access continue to be denied through large-scale privatization and investment plans in their currently proposed form. Ultimately, I hope this research will provide a more complex understanding of the challenges facing the Acholi today within a broader context of land access throughout the armed and post-armed conflict eras.

Statement of Objectives

In implementing this month-long research project, I had several personal academic objectives based on my previous studies in Gulu. Designing my project, therefore, was a process of combining the areas of study I wished to further pursue with the desire to provide a new angle on the study of post-armed conflict Acholiland. My primary objectives were to:

- learn more about the importance of land for the Acholi, who had frequently described their land as “life” and “wealth” to me;
- analyze the events and effects of the war through the lens of land access and land grabbing;
- understand the different dimensions of land conflict both during and after the armed conflict era;
- examine how large-scale land privatization would affect the Acholis;
- capture the voices of Acholis as they describes the current difficulties they have and their hopes and fears for the future.

Subsequent to the achievement of these personal academic objectives, I had four key goals in writing this research paper. Through this paper, I hope to:

- form purposeful connections between conflict surrounding land privatization and the armed conflict, particularly regarding the consequences of these conflicts;
- demonstrate that although the LRA/M has moved to Southern Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, conflict in Acholiland persists, although now in a different dimension;
- analyze the importance of land to the Acholis in light of recent investment schemes;
- accomplish these goals through the voices of the oft-ignored Acholi people.

Methodology

In carrying out this research, I used three primary methods to gather information. I used secondary resources such as existing academic material on Acholi land issues, cosmology, and war, as well as used local and national newspapers to learn more about local land conflicts, particularly land wrangles. I underwent extensive fieldwork, holding in-depth interviews with nine residents of the Laroo Division of Gulu District. Lastly, I carried out investigative research regarding the land conflict with Gulu University; according to the Gulu Concerned Land Owners Association, the group leading the fight against the university, I am the first person to conduct research on the issue of the university expansion plan. In total, I conducted thirteen interviews as well as held a meeting with the six executive members of the Gulu Concerned Land Owners Association in order to conduct the primary source fieldwork necessary for this research.

I chose to do my field interviews in the Laroo Division of Gulu District. Laroo is a peri-urban division that, as of the 2002 census, is home to 20,971 inhabitants, including 10,193 men and 10,778 women, over an area of about 5 square kilometers (Abonga interview, 24 April 2009). Laroo is a fairly rural locale; many people in the division practice small-scale subsistence farming and/or work in a nearby quarry to provide additional economic means for their families. Almost none of the houses have running water or electricity and public health issues like ringworm, marasmus, and kwashiorkor are clearly evident. The Local Council (LC) Three Chairman of Laroo, Abonga Moses, states that more people are illiterate than literate, although the illiteracy rate is decreasing (Abonga interview, 24 April 2009). About half of the land is communally owned, while the other land is privately titled (Abonga interview, 24 April 2009). The mixture of communally and privately owned land, combined with the pressing issue of land take-over by Gulu University, made the Laroo Division a perfect case study for my research.

I also chose to conduct my research within Laroo because I lived there during my stay in Gulu, which presented several practical benefits. All of my interviews were carried out in homes within walking distance to my own home and I was able to gain the trust and confidence of my interviewees through the visibility of my presence in the neighborhood. This made finding informants quite easy and I was able to continue with the relationships created with these people after the interviews were carried out.

Of the nine informants I interviewed, four were men and five were women. Three of my informants (one man and two women) were young adults (two students of Public Administration in

Gulu University and one completing secondary school), while the others were middle-aged and elderly. I will analyze and account for the potential generation gap and differences in opinion with my paper. All of my interviews were held individually with the exception of one during which I interviewed an elderly mother and her son simultaneously.

I never experienced a problem in interviewing my informants. All seemed happy to speak with me and to appreciate that I sought their opinion on the important land issue and that I was not affiliated with the government (although there were some knowing glances towards me, as a student at Gulu University, when describing the on-going land conflicts with the University). I gained a nice rapport with my research participants; one man stated that, as my friend, he would have liked to give me a rooster if he had one, while another asked me to “uplift” him with words of wisdom from the Bible before I left (I mustered some words from the Our Father prayer—no easy task, as a Jew).

In addition to my informants in Laroo who shared their own life stories and connections to their land, I interviewed several experts on issues of land privatization, Acholi cosmology, government policy, and local land conflicts. These experts included an NGO worker, a professor at Gulu University, the Gulu Concerned Land Owners Association, and local government officials. After my meeting with the Gulu Concerned Land Owners Association, who, at the outset asked me if I was a land surveyor or investor, ended with them telling me that they like me and appreciated my transparency. This was a particularly meaningful experience for me, as I was the first researcher to speak with the Association and its members are (justifiably) suspicious of outsiders inquiring about their land holdings. In interviewing these informants, I hoped to provide put the opinions of my local participants in a wider scale as well as access different opinions, particularly of those in support of privatization and investment plans.

Most of my interviews took place in Acholi, although some were in either English or a mixture of the two languages. My translator was Obunya Harry Dean, a recent graduate in Development Studies from Kyambogo University who carried out his own research project on the difficulties of women in accessing land in Acholiland. In addition to sharing my academic interests and possessing a strong academic background, Dean is my Acholi host brother, which provided the honesty, respect, and openness necessary between translator and researcher. Previous to starting field interviews, and continually during the process, Dean and I discussed the information we gathered, analyzing and putting it into the larger context of conflict in Acholiland. Importantly, Dean was also able to provide the cultural cues and context of my interviews, granting me a deeper understanding of my interviews.

It is important to note that there were limitations to my research. Practically, the confined geographic scope of my study most probably produced research informants with similar histories and experiences during the war, perhaps giving me a limited perspective of Acholi opinion. I do not, however, claim to understand the full range of Acholi opinion. Rather, my research acknowledges and is based on the particular experiences of the people I interviewed. Another practical restraint facing this project is that, though some of my participants lived on or accessed cultural land (a concept I will explain later in this paper), some of my informant did not have their own land due to displacement, war, and/or the patrilineal inheritance of land that excludes women from directly accessing the land. While those who rented land instead of living on cultural land still provided valuable opinions and stories concerning my topic, it was those who were in real danger of losing their cultural land that provided the most valuable insight into the potential effects of privatization.

A more comprehensive research project would require more time and resources in order to carry out a wider ranging study to understand more fully the diversity of experiences of Acholis during the war in relationship both to varying degrees of internment as well as shifting experience with land access in the post-armed conflict era. Given more time, I would expand my study to include a more widespread geographical base. Similarly, I would search more to find Acholis who are proponents of the privatization and investment plans; because this view point is in the minority, I was only able to interview a few people who (somewhat) supported the privatized investment in Gulu.

I also encountered some difficulties due to the limitation of resources at my disposal. While many researchers have studied the conflict in Northern Uganda, few have studied land issues and even fewer have looked at the connection between land privatization and the war. Because of this, I primarily used Sverker Finnstrom's recently updated book "Living with Bad Surroundings" as well as various articles by Professor Ron Atkinson as my secondary sources. It was very difficult to find non-biased information about the Land Amendment Bill (2007) both because of the highly controversial nature of the Bill and because the contents of the legislation have not been made public. Ideally, I would have access to a broader range of academic opinion but because of the lack of this information, much of my research was informed by the studies previously carried out by these two researchers and online sources about the Land Amendment Bill.

I entered my research with my own bias regarding natural resource privatization and foreign investment in subsistence farming areas. My interest in this topic is based on my academic study of the effect of neoliberalism and privatization on agriculture practices and local economies globally, although

my focus has largely been the Latin American region. In pursuing this academic study, I wanted to connect my belief that natural resource privatization has a largely negative effect on local communities and does not result in real development for the people; rather, it results in exploitation of resources and people, as well as profit repatriation, environmental devastation, and loss of culture and economic stability. These beliefs stem both from academic study at Macalester College as well as a ten week research project that I, along with a Political Science professor from my university, undertook in Bolivia and Ecuador during the summer of 2008. That research project focused on the role of women in opposing natural resource privatization; many of my findings of our extensive research pointed to devastating social, cultural, economic, and environmental loss due to privatization. In designing this study, I aimed to find points of similarity and disjuncture in the opinions of Acholis I interviewed during my month-long project here and the people I spoke to in the Andes during my previous research project.

I should note that my personal opposition to natural resource privatization and investment is not an opposition to so-called “development;” rather, it is based on the belief that privatization and investment historically have not brought genuine development and that the ultimate goal of foreign investors is profit maximization rather than culturally and environmentally sensitive development. I do not wish to further the “Noble Savage” discourse of the “native” who does not seek any improvement or ease in her life. Instead, I advocate for home-grown, sustainable development without excessive exploitation of natural resource by foreign bodies that, most likely, will profit the most.

While I did find that many of my research participants shared my belief on what the effect of privatization would be in the Acholi region, I tried my best to ask open, unbiased questions and did not disregard the opinions that differed from my own. In this paper, I will explore the range of opinions, including those that were different from my own political beliefs, and try to objectively analyze the reasoning and experiences behind those opinions.

Ethics

It was of the utmost importance to me to carry out my field research in a respectful and ethical manner. In order to conduct ethical research, before each interview I explained (through my translator) my status as a student studying in Gulu for two months and the topic of my research project. I stressed that my research findings would only be used for my own academic purposes and were not to be shared with any governmental or NGO official. I also highlighted that the informant would be kept anonymous, that I would provide a pseudonym if I were to quote the informant, and that I would not share or discuss the contents of the interview with anybody. As such, all of the names of my informants used in this paper have been changed and identities have been masked to protect my research participants. Both before and after the interview, I asked my informants if they had any questions about the nature of my research, my involvement in Gulu, or any general queries. My involvement with my research participants, stated protection of privacy, and attitude of respect and confidentiality enabled me to carry out ethical research to the best of my ability.

Background

The 2002 Ugandan census states that the population of Acholiland is 1,45,437 people (5% of the Ugandan population and, with its composition of 27,871 square kilometers, its physical area encompasses 12% of Uganda (Finnstrom, S., 2008, pp. 34). This region has experienced severe violence over the past decades. In 1986, several armed rebel groups began a war against the recently instated government of Yoweri Museveni, with the Acholi civilian population most often caught in the cross fire of the armed conflict between the forces (Finnstrom, S., 2008, pp., 2008). Ultimately, the remaining “rebel” force was that of the Lord's Resistance Army/Movement (LRA/M), led by Acholi commander Joseph Kony.

In addition to the armed conflict, as alienation from the land due to the war, proposed government land policies, and local land conflict such as land wrangles have caused further destruction to Acholi livelihood and cultures. This background will outline a short overview of subsistence farming in Acholiland, displacement due to armed conflict, Acholi customary land law, government land policies, and local land conflicts in order to provide the necessary background for analyzing my fieldwork. These themes will be explored in more depth in my research analysis and findings based on the extensive secondary and primary source research I conducted. I also explain the patrilineal land inheritance system and the effect this has on women's access to land; while I do not go into further depth about this topic, I would be remiss to ignore the effect of customary land law on the female Acholi population.

Subsistence farming in Acholiland

It is frequently anecdotally noted in Acholiland that the northern region possesses the most fertile land in Uganda and, had it not been for the war, the area would be more economically competitive based on the fertility of the land. Historically, subsistence farming was the primary agricultural and economic means for most Acholi (Finnstrom, S., 2008, pp. 34). Millet and sorghum are staple crops, while sweet potatoes, cassava, peas, beans, maize, groundnuts, sesame, squash, and other vegetables are also grown (Finnstrom, S., 2008, pp. 35). Before the war, other products, such as mangoes, pineapples, avocados, cotton, sugarcane, tobacco, sunflowers, and rice, were grown for both consumption and trade, but the war made this production very difficult (Finnstrom, S., 2008, pp. 35).

Acholi customary land law

The physical result of the war in terms of agriculture production and land access is particularly harmful to the Acholis, as the majority depend heavily on “digging” (peasant/subsistence farming) as the key basis of economic stability as well as social, cultural, and cosmological structure.

Land rights in Acholiland are customary and communal (often described as “cultural” land) rather than privately owned. Through this customary system, land is unable to be bought or sold; rather, land is passed patrilineally through localized families and clans via male heirs (Atkinson, R., 2008). Clan chiefs, called *rwots*, distribute clan land based on whose ancestors have been digging in specific plots (Odur interview, 24 April 2009). Non-clan members can use cultural land, but are unable to claim ownership (Atkinson, R., 2008). Communal land is not titled—rather, it's ownership is agreed upon communally based on ancestral claims to the land—and therefore often is not recognized as “owned” by the government and investors.

Patrilineal land inheritance and its effects

In Acholi customary land law, land is inherited patrilineally; women have access to land only through their husbands and male heirs. In the context of the war, this system has greatly disenfranchised women, making land access extremely challenging (Obunya interview, 10 February 2009). The violence of war resulted in the deaths of so many men (as well as women); when men die, their land goes to a son or, if lacking a son, back to their clan. Left out of this patrilineal land system, women lose access to the land gained through their husbands (Obunya interview, 10 February 2009).

Unsupportive local governments seem unwilling and/or unable to help women regain access to the land (Obunya interview, 10 February 2009). There continues to be a high level of physical insecurity for women digging, particularly in rural areas. Former LRA and UPDF soldiers are known to attack and, in some cases, rape women while they are farming, even in the post-armed conflict era; women are more at risk of this physical insecurity than men (Obunya interview, 10 February 2009).

The lack of infrastructure and support for digging, such as equipment, tillable land, and manual labor, also effects womens' ability to return to their digging practices. Land is largely not demarcated and the cost is high for hiring the surveyors, buying the demarcation posts, and accessing the papers necessary to restart farming after war (Obunya interview, 10 February 2009). As a result of the combination of these factors, women in Acholiland continue to face many challenges in accessing land even after the end of the war.

Displacement due to armed conflict

Much of the culture and economic basis of subsistence farming has been severely disrupted due to the 23-year war between the LRA/M and the UPDF, the governmental army (Finnstrom, S., 2008, pp. 34). Statistics of the violence of the war vary, but it is known that by 2005, two million people, including 90% of the Acholi population, lived in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps, largely unable to cultivate land and highly dependent on food aid (Atkinson, R., 2008). A United Nations report released in October 2008 found that only one fourth of displaced Acholis had returned home (Atkinson, R., 2008). Despite of (or perhaps because of) the violence, the final peace agreement between the LRA /M and the government of Uganda failed on November 30, 2008, sinking hopes for a permanent peace in Acholiland (Atkinson, R., 2008). In their opening statement at these peace talks in Juba, Sudan, the LRA/M cited land access and natural resources as a key concern for the group.

Local land conflicts

In addition to the effect of war and governmental policy on disrupting customary land structure, more localized land conflicts present a constant threat to stability in Acholi land as neighbors, families, and clans dispute, sometimes violently, over land boundaries and ownership. The Gulu District NGO Forum carried out a study, released in September/October 2008, outlining the key land issues in Gulu and Amuru districts. Among the 35 land conflicts that informants identified, the following issues were identified as presenting the most pressing problems: limited knowledge on the processes of acquiring certificates and renewal of titles by the community; misinterpretation of the land laws by some organizations; role conflicts between the area land committees (ALC) (a position created by the central government under the 1998 Land Act); sub county boundary conflicts; legality of some land owners given land during Amin's regime; reclaiming of communally owned land by individuals; poor selection of the ALC; land grabbing from the disadvantaged people (orphans, widows); some politicians decampaigning the land registration; encroaching on public land; the dilemma of land owners who hosted IDPs; reclaiming formerly given land by ancestors to friends, relatives, in-laws, and institutions by the current generation; and land wrangles inspired by the rich and others (Gulu District NGO Forum, 2008). The majority of these conflicts were created, or at least compounded, by the violence and displacement caused by the armed-conflict.

One example of a local land wrangle was recounted to me by Otim William. He told me:

“There is a land dispute between us and somebody who came early. So they came here and they stay here for about 29 to 30 years. The acres that they've been plowing—they expanded the

boundaries on our land. With the dispute, we take it to the LC, but they've failed to solve. We talk to the paramount chief so there could be peace.” (Otim William interview, 19 April 2009)

The LC-Three of the Laroo Division, Abonga Moses, estimates that about 90% of the cases heard by the Division Court Committee concern land issues, the majority of which are for land wrangles (Abonga interview, 24 April 2009). Many of these conflicts stem from confusion caused by selling a single plot of land to multiple buyers, selling land at a low price and then reselling the same land to another person at a higher price and then returning the original buyers' money, and unclear delineation of land borders (Abonga interview, 24 April 2009). In order to solve these local land cases, citizens go to the LC 2 Chairman and then, if one party decides to appeal the case, to the Division Court Committee; it is ultimately the Gulu District Land Board that holds the power to decide land issues in Gulu (Abonga interview, 24 April 2009).

Acholi Land Alienation

Through both secondary and primary sources, my research holistically addresses land conflict both during and after the armed conflict while making purposeful connections to both eras. My research findings thus are an amalgamation of the analysis of the various dimensions of the conflict. In the following sections, I will outline in greater detail the effect of war on secure land access, particularly looking at the effect of the UPDF and the LRA/M's military strategy on land and Acholi cosmology to provide a clearer understanding of the potential long-term effects of both the war and government policy on the Acholi people. I will then provide an overview of the attempts at land privatization and investment in Acholiland, specifically analyzing three pending plans which, I argue, would further alienate Acholis from their land: the Land Amendment Bill (2007), the proposed Madhvani sugar plantation in Amuru, and the Gulu University plan to take 742 hectares of land in Laroo to expand its institution. After providing this background, largely based on secondary source material and interviews with local professors and government officials, I will discuss the findings of my fieldwork, which focuses on the opinions about land privatization, the war in connection to land, and the importance of land in Acholi culture that I discovered while conducting interviews in the Laroo Division of Gulu District. I will conclude with my own comprehensive analysis of the future of land access in Acholiland, informed largely by my research informants and what I understand to be the major obstacles to peace in Northern Uganda.

Comprehension of the various degrees of land conflict is crucial to understanding the necessary ingredients for sustainable peace in Acholiland as “regaining access to land will be one of the single most important factors determining peace, reintegration, and recovery in the region” (Atkinson, R., 2008, pp.2).

Land Access and the Armed Conflict

*“They [the LRA and the government] are like two big elephants fighting.
Who do you think suffers? The grasses.
We are like the grasses.”*

-Odokos, interview participant

Throughout the twenty-three year civil war in Northern Uganda, conflicts and discourse surrounding land rights and access presented both one of the biggest political battlefields as well as one of the most challenging practical obstacles to peace and stability for the people of Northern Uganda.

Continuing into the post-armed conflict era, land issues shape the nature, practically, politically, and philosophically, of instability in the north.

From the inception of the conflict, land discourse from both Uganda's central government and the LRA/M remained a key theme within the political debate surrounding the war. Further, policy regarding land (particularly in terms of internment and future land use) reinforced both the governmental and LRA/M narratives of war in Northern Uganda. The parallel and intersecting policies of both armed bodies towards the Acholi people reinforce the importance of land—both in its practical and political use—as a key theme of the war. The actions of these forces also highlight one of the most devastating overall effects of the war: the increasing difficulty of land access and land security for the agriculturally-dependent Acholi people.

The LRA/M and land

The gross human rights abuses inflicted upon the Acholi people by the LRA/M have been well documented and internationally vilified. In the process of outlining the rape, torture, murder, and displacement caused by the “rebel” group, the LRA/M is presented as a force with no political agenda, indiscriminately slaughtering Acholis in its northern self-genocide (Finnstrom, S., 2008). This process of depoliticization, however, does not present the entire reality of the Northern war. The group does have a stated and outlined political agenda, which is primarily to oust the Museveni regime, and releases political manifestos stating its policies for a new Uganda. In addition to critiquing Museveni's National Resistance Movement (NRM) political party, the LRA/M releases statements to include its policies on agriculture, health, education infrastructure, commerce and industry defense, and land and natural resources (Finnstrom, S., 2008, pp. 123). It further critiques the International Monetary Fund and World Bank's structural adjustment policies, arguing that they “achiev[e] low inflation and deregulat[ion] to the exclusion of other considerations” (as quoted in Finnstrom, S., 2008, pp. 125).

Government and NGO policy in relationship to land and natural resources has been a key theme in the LRA/M's political discourse. In one manifesto, the LRA/M writes:

“UNICEF, other human rights organization, and NGOs like World Vision are masquerading as relief workers during trouble and times of war. But these organizations operate on a set agenda *to deplete your natural resources* [emphasis added]. Those operating among you are actually the shield and spears for Museveni against you. You should know they are in Gulu, Lira, Kitgum, or Apac not as relief workers, but to fulfill the agenda of Museveni. Do not be deceived that we [the LRA/M] have no political agenda. Where were the UN, the human rights agencies, and

UNICEF at the time you were herded into the camps?”
(Finnstrom, S., 2008, pp. 142)

As such, the LRA/M reinforces the notion that they are actually protecting the Acholi people from natural resource grabbing. This claim was a frequent area of concern for the Acholi people I interviewed during my fieldwork. But while its verbal and written political goals aim to emancipate the Acholi people from the grip of the Museveni government and international monetary bodies, the practical and physical effect of LRA/M policy towards the Acholi people have devastated Acholi access to land and livelihood.

The extreme violence of the LRA/M resulted in the inability of most Acholis to live on and/or access their land in rural villages as their physical security was increasingly threatened. Acholis can be divided into three groups based on their geographical location during the war: 1) those who lived in the bush; 2) those who lived in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps; and 3) those who lived in urban locations, either within the Acholi subregion, other cities in Uganda, or internationally (Komakech interview, 15 April 2009). While it was highly physically dangerous for individuals to access land, particularly in rural areas and during the night time, LRA/M members also looted fields and food storage, destroying valuable property. The physical insecurity presented by the LRA/M combined with the destruction of livelihood via looting led to physical displacement of the Acholi people from their land, as they moved into internment areas; by some estimates nearly 90% of Acholis lived in camps (Atkinson, R., 2008). As I will discuss later in this paper, the violence and displacement caused by the LRA/M discounted the groups' claims of a political ideology in the minds of many Acholi. As such, the violence inflicted on the Acholi people by the LRA/M made land access extremely difficult.

The government, the UPDF, and land

Simultaneously, government policy denied Acholis access to their land, heightening suspicion that the central government hoped for the extermination of the Acholi people via the war despite governmental claims that the UPDF created security measures for displaced while fighting the rebel forces led by Joseph Kony. The widespread perception of the Acholis regarding this policy, however, is that military policy was put in place with the aim of controlling rural Acholi land through the displacement and extermination of the Acholi people (Finnstrom, S., 2008, pp. 142).

Similar to the LRA/M, the UPDF looted foodstuffs and general property, particularly cattle. Anecdotally, many Acholis I spoke to said that their cattle had been killed or taken by the UPDF.

Government soldiers even put cows onto army lorries and took them away (Finnstrom, S., 2008, pp. 71). Indeed, only 2% of the pre-war cattle remain today, significant because, while cows are not the main source of income, they are “very culturally important and the most prestigious form of wealth” (Finnstrom, S., 2008, pp. 34). In some cases, the UPDF has admitted to taking cattle during the war. In one case, it admitted to taking 871 head of cattle, but the “claimant wasn't compensated and was accused of being a rebel collaborator (Finnstrom, S., 2008, pp. 72). Considering the economic and cultural importance of cows in Acholi culture, “cattle looting is seen as a deliberate strategy to impoverish the Acholi so as to control them (Finnstrom, S., 2008, pp. 72).

Physical displacement of the Acholi is also seen as a military strategy to enable further control. Finnstrom (2008) argues that “the forced mass movement of people to the camps must be understood in terms of military strategy” (Finnstrom, S., 2008, pp. 142). It has been reported that high-ranking military officers, understanding all Acholis to be potential LRA/M collaborators, believed that the camps were an important strategy for winning the war (Finnstrom, S., 2008, pp. 142). The physical set-up of the camp placed security forces in the center, leaving the residents of the IDP camps to believe that they were actually protecting the army, a “living shield” between two dueling forces (Finnstrom, S., 2008, pp. 143).

It is also believed by some that the displacement of the Acholis from their land was a governmental attempt to “grab” the land itself to bring investment and industry, particularly of large-scale farming and mono-cropping (Finnstrom, S., 2008, pp. 175). The government supported plan of the Madhvani Group to build a sugarcane plantation in Amuru seems to be a fulfillment of this “conspiracy” theory. A *New Vision* article published on December 1, 1997 can also serve to fulfill this prophesy; it states that “Museveni told Acholi PMs that funds would come for tractors to help with large-scale farming that was part of the five-point program on the camps” (Finnstrom, S., 2008, pp. 175). Although these funds never arrived, it points to a potential reality that part of the IDP camp strategy eventually would lead to large-scale farming that necessitates the vacated land of former subsistence farmers.

Some Acholis I spoke to believed that the deaths resulting from the public health crisis in the camps were a deliberate strategy of the government to kill Acholis. In 2005, it was estimated that 1,000 people died each week in the IDP camps, but only 11% of these deaths were from physical violence; the vast majority of the deaths were from curable diseases and malnutrition (Finnstrom, S., 2008, pp. 133). Of those not in camps, 40,000 fled across the Nile to Masindi district, while others lived in urban

areas like Gulu Town, whose population grew from 40,000 before the war to 140,000 in present day (although some of that population boom can probably be attributed to high fertility rates) (Finnstrom, S., 2008, pp. 133). The combination of abandoned land and death in camps point, for many Acholis, to the policy of purposeful denial of land access by the government via the UPDF.

Culturally, many values, forms of knowledge, and social institutions are challenged in the camps. The inability to access land for digging, combined with food aid provided by the World Food Programme, decreases knowledge of farming practices and, according to elders I spoke to in an IDP camp in Kitgum, creates a culture of “laziness” and dependency amongst the population. Rituals such as installing new chiefs are rendered nearly impossible, with no place to create an ancestral shrine, plant an ancestral tree, or sacrifice a goat, all necessary practices for this tradition (Finnstrom, S., 2008, pp. 147).

Overview of effect on land access

The result of the twin policies of the central government and the LRA/M, which mutually reinforced each other in denying Acholis access to their ancestral lands, is several fold and depends to some extent on differing experiences during the war. As demonstrated, some of the problems resulting from these policies include widespread disease in camps, food dependency and loss of culture of digging, difficulty of access to land because of physical insecurity (because of the presence of one or both of the armed forces as well as land mines), and destruction of property. But regardless of variation in experience, some truths cut across lines drawn across the Acholi population; “war and displacement have limited or even deprived most Acholi from growing their own food” (Finnstrom, S., 2008, pp. 35), resulting in economic, social, and cultural difficulties and devastation.

Land wrangling has become one of the biggest internal challenges facing the Acholi and is directly related to the high levels of violence and the resulting policies of internment. The combined result of the destruction of land plot demarcations by the UPDF and the LRA/M, the death of many of the elders possessing the knowledge about land plot demarcations, and the inability, ineffectiveness, and/or unwillingness of local government to outline land plots results in competing claims for the same area. Many youth, who have spent the majority of their lives in camps, have returned back to their ancestral villages to claim familial property, only to find others claiming the same thing. As privatized land titles become more common in a society based on communally owned, not titled land, confusion and manipulation concerning the sale of land results further conflict. This results in land wrangles,

violent conflicts (sometimes ending even in death) over who is the rightful owner of the land (Abonga interview, 24 April 2009).

According to Finnstrom (2008), “to lose their land is perhaps what Acholi people fear the most, and in the judicial vacuum that has accompanied the war, displaced people can do little to legally protect their interests” (Finnstrom, S., 2008, pp. 179). In the following sections, I will outline why Acholis fear the loss of their land, connecting it to both economic and cosmological practices, and then detail pending land schemes by both the government and private parties that could lead to even further land alienation.

Acholi cosmology and land alienation

*“Land is not equal to money.
Money will just be scattered around, but land will always stay.”*

-Solina, interview participant

In addition to forming the primary economic foundation of Acholi society, land also serves as the connecting force between deceased ancestors and the living generation (Odur interview, 24 April 2009). Properly buried ancestors provide the continuity and link between generations of Acholis, vitally blessing the present generation and allowing for the flourishing of the Acholi people (Odur interview, 24 April 2009). Communal land, also known as ancestral or cultural land, is the fundamental source that allows for this generational continuity (Odur interview, 24 April 2009).

Burying the dead on communal land is an important mechanism through which ancestors are honored and thus promote the continuance and unification of the Acholi. Dug graves are considered sacred and people honor the graves as much as they honor the deceased person. Simultaneously, the grave site is feared, as the ancestors possess enormous power over the lives of the living. Stepping on graves is considered bad, and if a grave sinks into a depression, people fear the grave is opening and the spirit will arise (Odur interview, 24 April 2009).

Spirits are appeased through the sacrifice of animals such as goats and each homestead has an *abila* (shrine) that is connected to the spirits of the familial ancestors; meat is left on the *abila* to honor ancestors and children are blessed there to demonstrate the continuity of generations. If the *abila* is destroyed, ancestors will be greatly angered (Odur interview, 24 April 2009). Homestead land is thus “the source of life, source of blessing, and source of continuity” (Odur interview, 24 April 2009). Ficus trees are planted to represent both important people who have died as well as the plot of former

homesteads (Odur interview, 24 April 2009).

Marriage and birth, also symbols of the continuance of the Acholi, further reinforce the deep cosmological importance of linking land to life and the deceased to the living. During pregnancy, women must follow instructions uniquely specified by her clan; all of these rituals are tied to the land. Children are seen not as individual children but rather born “both to the clan and the land” (Odur interview, 24 April 2009). The patrilineal inheritance of communal land reinforces the connection between the land and future generations (Odur interview, 24 April 2009).

Displacement from the land and/or destruction of land poses not only a problem to economic survival, but to the spiritual survival necessary for the continuity of the Acholi people. According to Gulu University Professor John Olanya Odur, alienation from the land equates to “nonexistence. You are completely uprooted from your ancestors” (Odur interview, 24 April 2009). Acholis “would have no origin, as if they've been wiped from the earth” (Odur interview, 24 April 2009). Displacement from the land due to war or “development” plans through which Acholis sell their land angers Acholi ancestors, disconnecting the relationship between land and Acholis. The destruction of graves spiritually signifies alienation from the ancestors and thus the breakdown of the link between past and present that allows for the future (Odur interview, 24 April 2009).

Looking at the LRA/M armed conflict through the lens of Acholi cosmology also sheds important light on why they have so little support from the Acholi civilian population. It also helps explain why, despite political discourse on land rights, most Acholis believe that the LRA/M does not represent the Acholi people nor do they possess a political belief system (Odur interview, 24 April 2009).

The LRA/M claims to be guided by a spirit; originally, this spirit was Christian in origin, but has since shifted to being Chinese in origin (Odur interview, 24 April 2009). Professor Odur argues that had the spirit guiding the LRA/M been that of an Acholi ancestor, Acholi people would be more receptive to supporting the group.

In Acholi cosmology, there are five main divinities (spirits): *olalteng* (the divinity of war), *lapul* (divinity of fertility), *loka* (of rain), *baka* (a mixed divinity), and *lagoro* (another mixed divinity). Interestingly, Joseph Kony, the leader and founder of the LRA/M, is from the geographic headquarters of *olalteng*, the divinity of war.

Pending Land Investment, Development, and Policy Issues

*“They want to displace us as if we have no children.
We need development; this is democracy.”*

-Executive officer of the Gulu Concerned Landowners Association

One of the biggest controversies facing policy creation for the Acholi sub region is whether or not Acholi land should be available for purchase by large-scale farmers, investors, and other forms of “development,” considering that many Acholis have not yet returned to their land. It is precisely the land of Acholis still living in camps that is considered by some as “open” and “idle,” and thus available for purchase (Atkinson, R., 2008). Of further contention is how much Acholis themselves would benefit from these investment schemes (Atkinson, R., 2008). Many Acholi political leaders have been highly resistant to outside investment while the rightful owners of the land are still in camps and thus unable to claim the ancestral land that has existed via customary land law for generations. In this section, I will outline three different proposed projects that, in the opinions of the majority of my Acholi research informants, would, if implemented in their current form, further alienate the Acholi people from their land.

The Madhvani Sugar Plantation

One of the biggest and most controversial proposed investment plans is the Madhvani Group that aims to open a 40,000 hectares sugarcane plantation in the Acholi district of Amuru. In early 2007, the government of Uganda granted 40,000 hectares of land to the Madhvani group and later granted another 20,000 hectares to the sugar company (Atkinson, R., 2008). There is currently a court injunction against the plan, but many people believe that the acquisition of the area by the Madhvani Group is inevitable (Makamiko Claudia interview, 16 April 2009).

Many Acholis oppose the project not only because Acholi cultural land is not to be sold, but also because many of the owners of that land are still in camps and, because of displacement due to war and its consequences, have not yet been able to return to their ancestral birthplace (Finnstrom, S., 2008). If it were to go forward, the Madhvani plan would further displace residents of Amuru; the Daily Monitor states that “at least 10,000 people face eviction after Amuru Land Board officials applied for personal acquisition of an estimated 85,000 hectares of land” (Atkinson, R., 2008, pp.4).

Many of my interview participants, while from Gulu District, were very concerned about the Madhvani sugar plantation and frequently mentioned the plan when I inquired about non-Acholi

investors who were interested in acquiring Acholi land (Makamiko Claudia interview, 16 April 2009; Milana interview, 16 April 2009; Stella and Okelo interview, 21 April 2009; Otim William interview, 19 April 2009). I was told that it would cause “chaos” if Madhvani were to acquire the land and that people would violently protest (Makamiko Claudia interview, 16 April 2009). While some thought that perhaps the investment would bring investment to Amuru (Makamiko Claudia interview, 16 April 2009), that opinion was in the minority; the majority of my informants stated that “it’s a land grab” (Milana interview, 16 April 2009). Others mentioned the widespread belief that there is oil in Amuru and that while the Madhvani plan may be for sugarcane production in the short run, in the long run the investors are interested in owning the land rights for oil speculation (Stella and Okelo interview, 21 April 2009).

It’s not solely the Acholi residents who believe that further land alienation in the form of land investment would be harmful to the region. A World Bank report in July 2008 recommended a moratorium on land titles to investors in Acholiland until residents had returned home from camps and people had been “sensitized” to land issues (Atkinson, R., 2008). The report also recommended that the government demonstrate its commitment to protecting natural resource rights (Atkinson, R., 2008); this is remarkable support for the Acholi people, particularly considering that the World Bank is one of the major promoters of land privatization globally.

Many are also concerned that the installation of the sugar plantation would force Acholis to move away from subsistence agriculture production towards a system of land Acholi wage laborers who would be permanently displaced from their land (Finnstrom, S., 2008, pp. 178). The result of creating a population of day laborers would be devastating: no longer able to feed themselves and largely stripped of their cosmological ties, Acholis would be dependent upon investors for their survival and would most probably be permanently displaced.

The Land Amendment Bill (2007)

The controversial Land Amendment Bill (2007) is the latest phase of government land policies. Stalling in the Ugandan Congress due to fierce opposition primarily from Baganda and Acholi parliamentarians, the Land Bill, according to the government, intends to protect people from illegal eviction (Atubo, D., 2009). The government states that land tenants are not granted proper protection by the 1998 Land Act because this legislation does not provide penalties to punish landlords who illegally evict tenants (Atubo, D., 2009).

Critical voices of both parliamentarians and citizens have stated, however, that protecting the rights of poor land tenants is a guise for the true purpose of the Bill; the real aim of the legislation, they argue, is to allow for wider privatization of customary land so that land can be repossessed by the government and given to investors (Omara, J., 2008). Critics also state that parliamentarians have not been given access to the specific contents of the Bill and thus cannot appropriately and accurately determine its long term effects on land and land tenure systems in Uganda (Omara., J., 2008).

This 2007 initiative should be analyzed within the context of past Ugandan land laws. The 1995 Ugandan Constitution led to the creation of a new land land that promoted the conversion of customary land into titled—or privatized—land holding; this also established a privatized land market (Atkinson, R., 2008). The 1998 Land Act expanded upon the potential to disrupt customary Acholi land holdings by creating institutions to administer customary land that bypasses traditional leaders, therefore “stripping away locally specific and sociocultural land and resource allocation processes” (Atkinson, R., 2008, pp.3). It does, however, recognize communal land membership, provided it helps further community development (Atkinson, R., 2008).

When I raised questions about the Land Amendment Bill, none of my respondents—even those attending university—had a clear idea about the specific provisions of the Bill or how it would effect them. Others had not even heard of the legislation, indicating a startling, though perhaps unsurprising considering the alienation of Northern Uganda from the rest of the court, knowledge gap. While this legislation would effect the land tenure system in Acholiland (as well as the rest of Uganda), my informants seemed both unsure and uneasy discussing the Bill, perhaps due to the widespread lack of accurate information regarding government legislation.

The Expansion of Gulu University

Land conflict with Gulu University, a government institution opened in 2002 and located in Laroo Division, provides an important and pressing instance of conflict facing the citizens of Laroo. Gulu University was originally intended to be a farm institute and the people residing on the land were consulted and compensated for the land now occupied by the university (Abonga interview, 24 April 2009). Instead of being used as a farm institute, however, the buildings were used for other educational purposes, such as classrooms (Abonga interview, 24 April 2009). The university still wanted to build its farm institute, so the government decided to allocate the university 742 hectares of surrounding local land—almost all of which is inhabited by citizens of Laroo—to the university (Abonga interview, 24

April 2009). This was done without consulting the approximately 10,000 land owners who would be displaced; although the government states that it will compensate landowners, there is a presiding fear that only those with land titles will be compensated even though the majority of the land is cultural, and thus not titled (Abonga interview, 24 April 2009).

In opposition to the government and university plan of land takeover, local landowners organized themselves into the Gulu Concerned Land Owners Association on September 8, 2003 (Gulu Concerned Land Owners Association interview, 24 April 2009). The constitution of the Association states that it was formed because its members were “facing the threat of unlawful eviction and other injustices pertaining the land” (Gulu Concerned Land Owners Association, 2003). Although the group was formed with approximately 30 members, it now claims to represent the 10,000 people that would be displaced should the university plan move forward under its current design (Gulu Concerned Land Owners Association interview, 24 April 2009).

The Association has undergone a vigorous legal battle against the university, successfully suing the public institution in two different court cases. Represented by Ocen & Co. Advocates, Obwoya Robert and Others versus Gulu University in case No. HCT-02-CV-0019-2995 and Nicolas Ochora and 34 Others in case No. HCT-02-CV-0025-2004 successfully sued Gulu University, resulting in a court injunction against the university's expansion plan on October 31, 2006 (Gulu Concerned Land Owners Association interview, 24 April 2009).

Despite the court injunction, however, the plan moved forward. On July 31, 2007, however, the Gulu District Land Board appropriated land to the university against the court injunction, causing confusion regarding the future of the expansion (Gulu Concerned Land Owners Association interview, 24 April 2009). On June 14, 2008, the university sent a letter to residents stating that land surveyors would arrive to evaluate the monetary worth of the property so the land owners could be compensated when the university expanded into their land (Gulu Concerned Land Owners Association interview, 24 April 2009). On June 18, 2008, Anywar Paolo, the founder and Chairman of the Association, sent a letter of reply stating that as per the court injunction of 2006, land surveyors would be interpreted as illegal criminal trespassers (Gulu Concerned Land Owners Association interview, 24 April 2009). Regardless, surveyors came to Laroo, but local youth chased them away.

In April 2009, the Association forwarded their case to President Museveni via the presidential advisor to Northern Uganda. The members of the Association are certain that Museveni will protect their land and interests (Gulu Concerned Land Owners Association interview, 24 April 2009). An

executive member of the Association told me that “he is going to answer that. We are a very big population. He has helped us. Our argument is leaning on the Constitution of Uganda which says the land belongs to the people, not the government” (Gulu Concerned Land Owners Association interview, 24 April 2009).

A meeting with the six executive members of the Association revealed to me the grievances that the landowners feel in connection to the university plan and the potential alienation that would result from the plan. The main opposition to the plan is that the proposed area of takeover is too large; members frequently reiterated to me that it would be unprecedented in Uganda, and perhaps the world, to have a university occupying such a large area (Gulu Concerned Land Owners Association interview, 24 April 2009). Furthermore, landowners were not consulted nor compensated in the creation of the plan; even if landowners were to be compensated, there is not an appropriate location for the 10,000 occupants to move (Gulu Concerned Land Owners Association interview, 24 April 2009). LC Three Chairmain Abonga Moses suggested that the displaced could move to rural areas (Abonga interview, 24 April 2009). The Association members contend, however, that rural locales are in the midst of their own land conflicts, the majority of which are land wrangles, and that it would result in violence should they move to those areas (Gulu Concerned Land Owners Association interview, 24 April 2009). And Abonga Moses contended that there is very little infrastructure such as schools or health clinics in rural areas and there are no plans to create new centers for health or education; moving to rural areas would leave residents even more deprived of government services (Abonga interview, 24 April 2009).

Members also believe that “there's a hidden agenda [to the plan]. [Administrators and professors] want to bring investors to make factories to make students work during holidays” (Gulu Concerned Land Owners Association interview, 24 April 2009). They believe administrators will sell the land to investors for their own profit (Gulu Concerned Land Owners Association interview, 24 April 2009).

Another grievance of the Association is that local landholders feel disregarded by investors and university administrators. “They think they are superior [and] we are small,” one executive member told me. “We will fight to defend our land. This is our grandfather's land” (Gulu Concerned Land Owners Association interview, 24 April 2009).

A Gulu University professor explained to me that “the university has not come to fight them. They shouldn't be against it, because the university will benefit them. [The university and the Madhvani Sugar Plantation] are not the same institutions. This one is not income generation” (Odur

interview, 24 April 2009). He explains that the majority of the beneficiaries of the university are local citizens and that the education provided will lead to both individual and community development (Odur interview, 24 April 2009). He further believes that opposition to the plan is politically motivated; because Gulu University is a public institution and thus linked to the Museveni government, the university has gained a negative connotation, particularly in the context of war (Odur interview, 24 April 2009).

The executive committee of the Association states that they do want development and education. One member remarked that “the university should be there, but in a proper place. The university should not be concerned of industry, they're concerned about education. We want peace” (Gulu Concerned Land Owners Association interview, 24 April 2009).

They claim that if the plan goes forward, they “will fight [to] defend our land;” “if the police fail to control us,” one member continued, “it shall end up in war” (Gulu Concerned Land Owners Association interview, 24 April 2009).

Ultimately, the Association claims, “they want to displace us as if we have no children. We need development; this is democracy” (Gulu Concerned Land Owners Association interview, 24 April 2009).

Fieldwork Findings and Analysis

In addition to the academic research I carried out through this project, I conducted field work to discover the opinions of Acholis living in Laroo about the prevalent themes in land conflict. In undergoing this fieldwork, I held nine in-depth interviews with residents of Laroo to understand more fully the opinion of Acholis on the land alienation experienced due to war, displacement, local land conflicts, and investment and development plans [see Appendix A for questions asked]. These interviews were carried out over the course of two weeks and were all held in participants homes during the day hours. The majority of the interviews were conducting in Acholi, but some were held in either English or a combination of the two languages.

Although my participants all live in the same division in Gulu, there was diversity in their responses to some of my questions based on various identity factors. I found differences in responses was largely based on generational and/or educational differences; the three young adults I interviewed varied somewhat from the middle-aged and elderly people, particularly concerning questions of how development in Gulu in the context of land investment. Some of the other differences in opinion could also be based on whether or not the participant lived on communal or rented land and, if the participant did have communal land (either in Laroo or a more rural village), whether or not s/he had experienced conflict surrounding the ownership of that land. I will analyze these differences later within this section.

Overall, I found five broad themes in my field interviews: the importance of land to Acholis, buying and selling land, outsider interest in Acholi land, the war and Acholi land, and the result of land alienation. The themes that developed as a result of my interviews grant important understanding of the “on the ground” reality of the importance of land to the Acholi, and their perception of the result of potential land inaccessibility. In the following section, I will discuss each of my fieldwork findings, accounting for and analyzing similarities and differences within the responses I received.

The importance of land to Acholis

All of my interview participants firmly stated that access to land is of the utmost importance to the Acholi people, reinforcing secondary source material that stated that land was the key resource of survival for the Acholi (Finnstrom, S., 2008; Atkinson, R., 2008). Land was cited as the primary means of eating, generating an income, supporting ones children, and providing a sort of spiritual solace. All

of my participants who subsisted largely as a result of farming (a category that accounts for seven out of the nine people I interviewed) stated that land is very important because “we eat land,” (Solina interview, 16 April 2009) and it is the key source for “farming cash crops and food crops” (Otim William interview, 19 April 2009) such as “groundnuts, maize, rice, and boo” (Opio Richard interview, 18 April 2009).

Land also provides the income necessary for supporting children. Grace told me that “land feeds the Acholi people and can keep my kids” (Grace interview, 17 April 2009). Otim William describes land as “wealth” (Otim William interview, 19 April 2009), while Milana told me that “land means richness when you have land, you are rich” (Milana interview, 16 April 2009). Odokos elaborated, explaining that “land is very important to the Acholi people. Before whites came with education, land was useful to make them survive with digging, planting, your properties, harvesting to eat, to make life easy. Other people use land for hunting” (Odokos interview, 15 April 2009).

Participants also found a deep spiritual importance to being able to dig and access cultural land. This is particularly important “because all was take by the war—land is the only resource for [our] well-being” (Makamiko Claudia interview, 16 April 2009). Stella, an elderly woman, stated that “when [she] dig[s], that's where [she] finds it good” (Stella interview, 21 April 2009). The solace found within

These primary sources reinforce academic literature regarding the importance of land to the Acholis. From my discussions, it was quite clear that land was one of the most important resources in the lives of most of my informants and that they rely heavily on it for all aspects of their well-being. The importance of land is not static; as schooling becomes more available, the land becomes not only the source of food provision and cosmological aid, but a key mechanism for generating the income necessary to pay school fees and related education costs. The combination of the needs met by land makes the resource the key support system for life for many Acholis.

Buying and selling land

Informant responses varied slightly on whether or not Acholi land should be sold; most of these differences can be accounted for based on generation and level of education. All of my middle-aged and elderly informants (six out of the nine informants) stated that Acholi land should not be sold and that customary land is supposed to exist solely within clans. Opio Richard told me that he has lived on his customary land, both in Laroo and his village in Anaka, for years and he “[doesn't] even know what a land title is. Nobody knows what it is” (Opio Richard interview, 18 April 2009). Others believed that

land should not be sold because of its importance for income generation as well as food supply (Otim William interview, 19 April 2009; Opio Richard interview, 18 April 2009). Otim William explained that in the Acholi tradition, “we replace generation to generation. We don't sell [land]” (Otim William interview, 19 April 2009).

Some elderly people connect the sale of customary land to war. “Customary land is not supposed to be sold but because of the war it has begun to be sold,” Solina declared. “The people who sell it don't think because what are their siblings going to do if they sell the land? These stupid people want to sell land of their parents” (Solina interview, 16 April 2009). Others simply stated that “land is not for sale. It is not good to sell or buy. This is cultural land” (Stella and Okelo interview, 21 April 2009).

Some young adults, however, believe that if the sale of land will bring development to Gulu, it should be sold, but then returned to its original owner. “When the land is idle, it loses nutrients” (Milana interview, 16 April 2009), and therefore investors should be able to develop it, “put it into more productive use, to generate some good things” (Makamiko Claudia interview, 16 April 2009). At the same time though, these youth believed that investor acquisition should not be permanent, and instead land should be returned after a period of approximately five years (Makamiko Claudia interview, 16 April 2009). Based on the people I interviewed, I believe that these discrepancies can be accounted for largely based on the relative dependency on the land; those who use land as their primary source of support were very strongly opposed to land sale, while those who do not use the land to support themselves (largely a younger, more educated, and wealthier population) do not as strongly oppose land sale.

Outsider interest in Acholi land

It was widely acknowledged by my interview participants that numerous outside parties were interested in accessing Acholi land. It was suggested that the primary parties interested in purchasing land include the Madhvani Group, Gulu University, Indians, people from Western countries, the Dinkas from Southern Sudan, and the Alur, Ugandans who live on the border of Sudan (Milana interview, 16 April 2009; Otim William interview, 19 April 2009; Stella and Okelo interview, 21 April 2009; Solina interview, 16 April 2009). It was also suggested that “the government wants to get all the land. Their thoughts may be for development but I don't know” (Grace interview, 17 April 2009).

These outside investors are interested in Acholi land primarily because “it's big and fertile”

(Solina interview, 16 April 2009), its strategic location (Stella and Okelo interview, 21 April 2009), and because there may be oil located under the ground in Gulu, as has been speculated in Amuru (Stella and Okelo interview, 21 April 2009). It was also admitted that because of the war, the land has not been used because of the war, leading investors to believe that the area is idle and uninhabited (Odokos interview, 15 April 2009).

Only one of my respondents, a young woman attending Gulu University, believed that the land was “huge...with no use” (Makamiko Claudia interview, 16 April 2009). She believes that investment could bring development to the area, although those investors should return the land back to its original owner after a period of five years (Makamiko Claudia interview, 16 April 2009).

The majority of my participants disagreed with the claim that the land was idle; instead, they argue, people are still in camps or in Gulu Town and have yet to return to the land that is still rightfully theirs. Milana, another student at Gulu University, believes that “they want the land to put factories, claiming they'll bring development, but it's a land grab. Acholi people don't benefit because they take the money make to their countries [through] profit repatriation” (Milana interview, 16 April 2009). Another key problem cited was the difficulties of finding alternative places to live if land was bought. Odokos wondered, “Big companies and investors shouldn't be able to buy land because where would the people go? It's difficult and not good” (Odokos interview, 15 April 2009).

Several examples explain the negative effect of investment in the eyes of my interview participants. Solina recounted one episode of investors causing internal family strife:

“Some white men collided and bought land without consent of the other family members. The family sat down with the brother [that sold the land] and told him to take the money back to the white man. How could he sell cultural land? They got their land back, but some of money had already been spent” (Solina interview, 16 April 2009).

My interview participants were also clear that the central government has a strong interest in accessing Acholi land. While many people did not know the specific actions of the government to possess that land, some suggested that Museveni uses “leaders and the paramount chief” (Otim William interview, 19 April 2009) to create large-scale farming plantations and “encourages the landlords to sell land to those investors by telling them they'll be paid some money” (Milana interview, 16 April 2009). Others recounted scare tactics and high taxes for those with large land acreage; these taxes are impossible for the poor to pay. Okelo wonders “If you're a poor man, how will you pay all that? They take it. Even in town, it's happening. If you can't develop it, they take your land” (Stella and Okelo

interview, 21 April 2009).

Reactions to government interest were somewhat mixed; while the majority of respondents were adamantly opposed to government intervention, some do believe that perhaps the government could bring development to Acholiland. These respondents differentiate between land that is accessed through “land grabs” and land that will be used for development, which “would be different” (Odokos interview, 15 April 2009). This is because “when they are just grabbing the land, that is not good. What we need is development and employment” (Milana interview, 16 April 2009).

The respondents who stated that government land use would be appropriate if it were used for developmental purposes are all young adults or are early middle-aged; this indicates a generational divide between younger Acholis, raised in a global era of non-governmental organizations and “development” discourse, and the elder population who is highly mistrustful of any government intervention, even in the name of development projects.

The older generation fiercely opposed government intervention into Acholi land issues. Solina declared that “the government is really interested and wants to finish the Acholi people with all of their land. [Museveni cannot steal the land with all the people around” (Solina interview, 16 April 2009). They argue that Acholi parliamentarians such as Chairman Mao fight to protect Acholi land against the government which “just intimidates the local people” (Stella and Okelo interview, 21 April 2009).

Many respondents stated that they “feel pain. All Acholi people feel pain” (Solina interview, 16 April 2009) because of land takeovers. Shaking her head, Stella mourned that because of the land issues, “we are so sorrowful” (Stella and Okelo interview, 21 April 2009).

The war and Acholi land

Many of my informants reported on destruction of their land as a result of the war. Some of this was caused directly by one or both of the armed forces, while others reported on land wrangling conflict with neighbors that they attribute to the conflict. From these discussions, it is apparent that insecurity continues due to land issues even in the post-armed conflict era.

In my interview with Okelo, he succinctly outlined the effect of war on the customary land he shares with his mother, Stella, in Laroo. He states:

“[The war] has done many things. One, bullets that have not exploded. Once it rots or rusts, it becomes acidic to the soil. Two, some place in the village where many people were killed. People fear to go and till the land. They feel the demonic spirits, even the bones of dead or on the land. Three, it has scared the younger generation. Most boys have come to town instead of

tilling. They resorted to singing. Four, it has polluted the atmosphere. Rain used to fall in March but now it doesn't. That shows that the war has spoiled the atmosphere. Five, water has spoiled the most. It has led to numerous diseases like AIDS which is very hard now. All the soldiers are brought and just thrown here. Six, It has spoiled the family structure. The elders that were supposed to lead the people are the most stupid. They drink, not supportive, and don't give advice" (Stella and Okelo interview, 21 April 2009).

While perhaps not all of the negative realities that Okelo outlines should actually be attributed to war (such as climate change), this eloquent explanation of the connection between war and the societal and environmental problems facing Acholiland demonstrates the holistic devastation caused by the war. Environmental and culture destruction can be linked directly to the violence caused by both armed bodies; seen within the context of perhaps purposeful military strategies [See Land Alienation section], it is clear that Acholis directly link the war to the current conflicts they face.

Land wrangling conflict is also attributed to the war. Solina related the story of her communal land in Unyama. She says, the land "was destroyed but not by the LRA but by the people, the neighbors. One lady took my land, but she gave it back. I spoke with my mouth and said everybody should bring back my land. If you want to dig, you should come ask me then I can help them. It is in accordance with the law" (Solina interview, 16 April 2009). Because not all the land was given back, problems continue on her land.

Others outline poverty and physical destruction caused by the armed forces. "They burnt my house, carried everything out, even all the food I grew, all the properties," Opio Richard told me (Opio Richard interview, 18 April 2009). Some informants outlined the poverty caused by the war. "There is nothing wrong with [my] land," Otim William says, "but they kept people in a poverty way because they lived in protected camps" (Otim William interview, 19 April 2009).

But while it is widely believed that the war brought grave physical devastation to the Acholi, the effect on the government has not, in the opinion of many, been a negative one. "The war has not brought [Museveni] problems, only happiness because he knows he can do anything he wants. He insults the Acholi. Acholi people are like rotten mushrooms. [Museveni] can call for water, but they give him milk. If he wants the war to continue, he can continue" (Solina interview, 16 April 2009). Many blame the government for "causing the rebellion in Northern Uganda" (Otim William interview, 19 April 2009) and believe that "the government fears to go to the villages since they will be attacked. Some do believe, however, that the war "increased the government expenditure" while "[bringing] tension between the Acholi people and the government itself" (Makamiko Claudia interview, 16 April 2009). As Otim William told me, "the government has no close relationship with the Acholi people"

(Otim William interview, 19 April 2009). This negative relationship is furthered because of the belief that “Museveni has taken people into camps” (Solina interview, 16 April 2009).

But while my informants disparaged the government for causing displacement, violence, and poverty, they were also extremely against the LRA/M and, despite the groups' voiced political agenda to protect natural resource and land rights, believe that the LRA/M has no viable political goals or program. In response to questions regarding why the LRA/M was fighting, answers ranged from “because they wanted to lead the country by force” (Odokos interview, 15 April 2009) to “because of sheer stupidity” (Solina interview, 16 April 2009). All of my participants stated that the real impact of the war was on the civilians—fellow Acholis—and that if the LRA/M did care about land, why would it have run?” (Grace interview, 17 April 2009). Furthermore, “if they had cared about land, they wouldn't let people stay in camps, just leaving land idle in the villages” (Milana interview, 16 April 2009). “They just slaughter [Acholis] like chickens,” Okelo says. “So what are [they] fighting for? Kony just kills the Acholi people” (Stella and Okelo interview, 21 April 2009).

The result of land alienation

It was uniformly stated that displacement and alienation from land results in poverty, malnutrition, homelessness, and death for the Acholi people. Acholi people have worked hard to return to their land; one informant told me that “people were seen as people of the same place. They still have [the land] despite the fact that the war spoiled everything” (Makamiko Claudia interview, 16 April 2009). Moving home after years of displacement in urban centers and IDP camps have ravaged Acholiland, but my informants strive to return to normalcy which, for the majority, meant the ability to continue digging.

Much of the responses stemmed from experience of being unable to access land due to the war combined with a lifetime of dependency on farming as the primary means of economic survival and stability. Solina rhetorically asked me, “If I didn't have land, what would my people eat? There would be a lot of poverty” (Solina interview, 16 April 2009) while Grace questioned “Now that I have kids, how am I going to feed them? How am I going to feed them? How am I going to send them to school? If Acholi people had no land, they would be sleeping in verandas, on the balconies of some rich people” (Grace interview, 17 April 2009). Others were more blunt, stating “If I didn't have land, I would just die, because land is what we live on,” (Stella and Okelo interview, 21 April 2009), “there would be famine” (Milana interview, 16 April 2009), and “when you don't have land, you are

homeless. There is no food for you also” (Otim William interview, 19 April 2009).

Many informants also stated that the land must be continued to be accessible for the sake of future generations of Acholis. Some believe that the Acholi people would cease to exist if there was no longer access to land. Opio Richard told me that “the Acholi people would not be there because of the struggles” (Opio Richard interview, 18 April 2009) while others believes that if there was no land accessible in Acholiland, the Acholis would migrate to neighboring countries such as Kenya, Congo, or Sudan (Otim William interview, 19 April 2009).

Some believe, however, that, despite current struggles, the Acholis will never lose access to their land. One elderly woman told me that Land is always there. Even you in your place have land. It's God given” (Stella and Okelo interview, 21 April 2009).

This prophesies a pessimistic and catastrophic ending for the Acholis if land access was no longer possible. Not only would Acholis not be able to economically support themselves in terms of both food production and other necessities such as school fees, according to my informants, future generations would not be able to survive without access to the land. Because land is connected to both physical and spiritual survival, displacement from that land would leave Acholis stranded with neither home, traditional food source, or hope for a stable future for the coming generations.

Fatalistically, yet perhaps realistically, it is believed that “[Acholis] would end up dying [without land]” (Stella and Okelo interview, 21 April 2009).

Research Discussion

Seemingly, the issues I explore throughout this paper are disparate. On the surface, some overlap while others seem to be far removed. What common thread can be woven throughout issues of war, privatization, sugar plantations, university expansions, and local land wrangles? Where are the connections in these wide ranging issues?

Closer analysis demonstrates that all of the land conflicts I have discussed, when understood comprehensively, create a larger narrative of land conflict in Acholiland, both in its theory and practice. How should land be used? Who should be able to access it? Can the Acholi people exist without subsistence farming practices and communally owned land? What are the long ranging consequences of being alienated from the land? The diverse answers to these questions form the complexities of land conflict in post-armed conflict Acholiland.

One of the clearest results of the armed conflict is the displacement of the Acholi from their land; through death, internment in camps and urban zones, and an acknowledged loss of culture because of decades of war, the Acholi have been forced away from “traditional” dependency on cultivation and cultural land. This displacement further reinforces the negative consequences of war, as stated by my fieldwork participants, who perceive that when Acholis are no longer able to access their land, economic and cultural stability are extremely challenging, if not impossible. The long-lasting consequences of war are seen in the land wrangles, poverty, and homelessness still experienced by many Acholis.

And the effect of alienation from the land via a widespread privatized land tenure system, according to the majority of my informants, would be strikingly similar to the effect of the armed conflict: displacement, famine, malnutrition, homelessness, and poverty. Privatization practices would thus reinforce and perpetuate displacement in Acholiland by continuing to deny Acholis the customary land and farming practices that are so key to the continuation of life. Seen at its most pessimistic, this creates a fairly genocidal portrait for the future of the Acholi: purposefully displaced and denied access to land will result in death due to starvation, loss of culture, the anger of ancestors, the breakdown of the family structure, and environmental contamination. For those who have survived the twenty-three year long armed conflict, struggle for survival continues when understood in the context of land access.

If Atkinson (2008) and Finnstrom (2008) are correct in arguing that alienation from the land was a purposeful military strategy of the Museveni government (carried out by the UPDF), then perhaps the governments investment plans, such as the Land Amendment Bill, the governmentally-

supported Madhvani sugarcane plantation, and the expansion of Gulu University, are also purposeful strategies to alienate the Acholi from their fertile land. While this may be understood as a “conspiracy” theory, the belief provides a logic and connection between the various outlined land conflicts and reinforces the fatalistic vision created if displacement continues. Through this lens, privatization and investment should be seen as a continuation of the economic goal (access to rich and fertile Acholi land) of the military strategy (forced displacement from that land) of the war. If, as many Acholis believe, Museveni started (or prolonged) the war in part to alienate Acholis from their fertile land in order to provide open access for investment, then land privatization is Plan B to the wars' Plan A.

And so, if continually difficult access to land is seen as a continuation of the military strategy, the war is not yet over. The LRA/M has moved into the Garamba forest of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and children no longer troop to Gulu Town by the thousands to take shelter in the verandas, the struggle for the survival of the Acholi people continues. Privatization and investment schemes, when enacted without the consultation and consent of the people most affected by the plans, are a different sort of war; not one fought with guns and machetes, but a slow process of social, cultural, and economic death that threatens to have the same lasting consequences as physical war. Time and again, my research participants reinforced that the Acholi will die if they have no land, staring sadly at their dwindling properties and explaining the sorrow they feel for their children and all future generations of Acholis.

But this fatalism can be reversed if the argument is made in the opposite direction: increased safe access to land could provide the secure backbone necessary for Acholiland to revitalize after the armed conflict. With safe access to land, families can revert to a culture of digging, providing food for their families and money for school fees. Ancestors appeased and rites of passage renewed, Acholis could move back to their villages and start their lives anew with the strong support of the clan-based customary land law. If access to land was secured and backed by the support of local government and cultural leaders, neighbors could create a nonviolent mechanism for demarcating the borders of their land plots, advocate for development that respects local land law and farming practices, and support the education of their children that is cited by many as key towards creating a sustainable peace in Acholiland.

There have been attempts by local government and traditional leaders to protect Acholi land from various potential land conflicts. Unfortunately, however, these plans have stalled or given up on due to time constraints, political ambitions, intra-group conflict, and/or the many obstacles facing

Acholiland that officials must deal with (Atkinson, R., 2008). These attempts, however, are important to note upon as a reference for future plans to help Acholis protect their land.

Local traditional and governmental figures drafted a proposal to create an Acholi Communal Land Trust and a donor government went so far as to meet the costs for preparing the document. The Trust would serve as an umbrella organization for overseeing and implementing an ambitious communal land-mapping project. Such a Trust would also form an important bridge between local government and cultural leaders (Atkinson, R., 2008).

The Land Mapping Project, which would have been the Trust's key project, would help protect land rights by delineating borders without titling them as privatized land. The project would conduct a needs assessment in consultation with local communities, aided by many different leaders and experts. Clan leaders would draw clan boundaries to come to a consensus regarding the delineation of clan land. These agreed upon boundaries would be digitized and printed in hard copy; this would provide the necessary proof to developers and investors that this land was not “free” or “idle” but protected by an agreement with the local government and cultural leaders, thereby enabling greater land security. It was proposed that the Land Mapping Project could also lead to the creation of Customary Land Associations and certificates of customary ownership, providing even more security against developers and land wrangles. Unfortunately, this plan has been shelved and there are no longer plans to continue forward with its implementation (Atkinson, R., 2008).

Continued activism towards safe land access that allows for customary land to be secure against privatization and so-called “development” projects has the potential to provide the stability necessary for creating a real peace in the Acholi sub region. With their voices integrated into development and investment policy and appropriate mechanisms formed to delineate land borders, Acholis could not only better support their economic and cosmological systems but secure the safe and stable future for the generations to come as well.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study is not to argue against development in Northern Uganda nor is it to equate all processes that result in land alienation; the expansion of Gulu University is not the same as the proposed Madhvani sugarcane plantation or IDP camps. The key objective of my research, rather, is to create a holistic understanding of the varying plans that have resulted in (or most probably would result in, according to my research) land displacement for the Acholi population. In doing so, I explain the numerous negative consequences of land alienation on both individuals and the Acholi community as a whole.

To fulfill those objectives, I outline the result of the armed conflict on the Acholi, looking out how both the LRA/M and the UPDF military strategies resulted in homelessness, poverty, malnutrition, destruction of property, and displacement from the land. I explain the cosmological significance and consequences of these effects and then explore three different investment and development plans. While very different from the armed conflict, I argue that, if implemented in their current form, these plans would have similar consequences to the war in terms of land displacement and its overall effects. Lastly, I analyze the fieldwork I conducted in Laroo, demonstrating that the majority of my respondents are firmly against the sale of their land and want to maintain subsistence farming practices on customary land.

It is my aim to demonstrate the harmful consequences of land alienation. Conversely, however, safe access to customary land and farming practices will result in a more stable, successful and peaceful Northern Uganda. Much of the future of security depends on the ability of citizens to exercise their right to continue with customary practices; land access is thus the cornerstone and key contributor to peace in Acholiland.

Recommendations

While my research points definitively to the devastating consequences of land alienation for the Acholis, four areas of future study would expand my own research and enhance understanding of land access issues.

Importantly, research should be conducted regarding how to implement development projects while maintaining respect for customary land law and subsistence farming practices. This research should also address where and how people displaced by development plans should change residences without aggravating preexisting conflicts such as land wrangles. Many of my interview participants stated a need for improved and expanded infrastructure such as schools and health clinics; aversion to land privatization does not indicate a lack of desire for genuine and sustainable development that will benefit the people in Acholiland. The challenge thus is to balance development with local land practices. This area of study will be very important as the Acholi sub region strives to move forward after the armed conflict.

In a similar vein, future research should address different mechanisms for cultural recovery after war and land alienation, particularly in terms of economic and digging processes as well as cosmological practices. Researchers should strive to learn more about local practices for recovering some of these traditions, which many elders claim were “lost” due to displacement and violence. In studying these mechanisms, community practices will be positively reinforced as Acholiland undergoes its process of establishing normalcy after armed conflict.

Thirdly, research should create further links between land alienation and social ills prevalent in Acholiland such as alcoholism, violent behavior, and teenage pregnancy. I predict that losing access to land increases the rate of those societal problems, but further research should be conducted to see if that hypothesis is correct.

Lastly, future studies should strive to discover a better mechanism for disseminating accurate information about private practice and governmental policies. My own research indicates that very few “regular” Acholi citizens know the details of the pending Land Amendment Bill, although many have heard of it. Providing accurate and timely information will help Acholis be more incorporated into public policy creation in Uganda, providing an important link to recovery in the often ignored region of Northern Uganda.

Works Cited

- Atkinson, Ronald R. "Land Issues in Acholi in the Transition from War to Peace." The Examiner. December (2008): 3+.
- Atubo, Daniel Omara. "Uganda: Land Amendment Bill to Protect Tenants from Eviction." Allafrica.com. 11 Mar. 2009. All Africa. 2 May 2009.
- Finnstrom, Sverker. Living with Bad Surroundings: War, History, and Everyday Moments in Northern Uganda. Durham: Duke UP, 2008.
- Gulu District NGO Forum. Follow up report in Gulu and Amuru in Land Issues. Rep. September/October ed. Gulu District, Uganda. 2008.
- Omara, James. "MPs from Northern Uganda oppose Land Amendment Bill." 19 Feb. 2008. Adungu: News and backgrounds by young radio journalists in Northern Uganda. 4 May 2009. <<http://adungu.org/?p=28>>.

Appendices

Appendix A

Questions asked to research participants in the Laroo Division of Gulu District:

1. Do you have land? If yes, where?
2. What does having land mean to you?
3. Do you think people should be able to buy and sell land?
4. What would happen if you didn't have land?
5. What do you think land means to the Acholi people? Is land important?
6. What would happen to the Acholi if they didn't have land?
7. Do you think any non-Acholi people want Acholi land? Who?
8. Why would non-Acholi people want Acholi land?
9. Should these people be able to buy land in Gulu? Why or why not?
10. Do you think the government is interested in Acholi land? If yes, why? How do you know?
11. [If said yes to previous question] What do you think the government is doing to get Acholi land?
12. How do you feel about this?
13. Should anything be done to either stop or encourage the government from buying land?
14. What should be done?
15. How did the war affect your land?
16. Do you have any problems with your land now?
17. Do you think the war made many problems for the government? What are some of these problems?
18. Do you think the war made it more or less difficult for the government to get land in Acholiland?
19. Do you think it is a good or bad thing that the war made it harder/easier for the government to get land?
20. Why do you think the LRA fought? Who were they fighting?
21. Do you think the LRA cares about land in Acholiland?
22. Have you heard of the Land Amendment Bill?
23. [If said yes to previous question] What do you know about it? Do you think it will pass into national law?

Appendix B

Compilation of responses to of fieldwork questions

Bold indicates good quotes for research paper

Italics indicate story of land conflict

Do you have land? If yes, where?

No (Odokos)

Has land in Unyama, about 10 kilometers away from current homestead in Laroo (Solina)

Doesn't have land (Makamiko Claudia)

Doesn't have land (Milana)

Doesn't have land (Grace)

I have this land [in Laroo, where interview took place] and land in the village. They are both cultural land. The land in the village is about 400 kilometers (Opio Richard)

Has cultural land in Anaka (about 150 acres). Elder brother inherited land from their now-deceased father. 7 men (brothers) and their families now work the land. (Otim William)

Yes, [owns] this small small land here. [It's] cultural land. I'm the only one with my son because most of my people are dead. I dig potatoes millet, cassava. (Stella and Okelo)

What does having land mean to you?

Land is very important because “we eat land.” (Solina)

I use the land for digging. (Opio Richard)

The land is important to me for farming cash crops and food crops. (Otim William)

When I dig, that's where I find it good. (Stella and Okelo)

Do you think people should be able to buy and sell land?

People should be able to buy and sell land for development. If you buy land from me, you develop it. I would take that money and buy land on the side of the village to develop it. (development means better and more buildings, changes, more new things” (Odokos)

Customary land is not supposed to be sold but because of the war it has begun to be sold. Th people who sell it don't think because what are their siblings going to do if they sell the land? These stupid people want to sell land of their parents. That is what drunk people do. If you drink, your life is over.

(Solina)

People should be able to buy and sell land to put it into more productive use, to generate some good things. Development, rent for farm use. (Makamiko Claudia)

Yeah. Because if they cannot make use of it, they should sell it to investors to make it be productive. When the land is idle, it loses nutrients. (Milana)

No, land is not supposed to be sold. Me, who's poor, I have to use it to dig, to till, to send my kids to school. (Rents to grow crops)

No, land should not be sold because there are children. (Opio Richard)

I don't think so because **we are also having our children. We replace to generation. We don't sell it.** (Otim William)

Land is not for sale. It is not good to sell or buy. This is cultural land. (Stella and Okelo)

What would happen if you didn't have land?

If I didn't have land, what would my people eat? There would be a lot of poverty. (Solina)

If I didn't have land, life would be very hard because I didn't read and it's the land that helps me. (Opio Richard)

When you don't have land, you are homeless. There is no food for you also. (Otim William)

If I didn't have land, I would just die, because land is what we live on. (Stella and Okelo)

What do you think land means to the Acholi people? Is land important?

Land is very important to the Acholi people. Before white came with education, land was useful to make them survive with digging, planting, your properties, harvesting to eat. To make life easy. Other people use land for hunting. (Odokos)

Land is very important because all was take by the war—land is the only resource for their well-being. (Makamiko Claudia)

Land means richness when you have land, you are rich. Out of the land you get food. It's pride. (Milana)

Land feeds the Acholi people and can keep my kids. (Grace)

The land is very good for the Acholis because they use it to grow cash crops like groundnuts, maize, rice, and boo. It's important that the land is cultural because **we've been on this land for years and we don't even know what a land title is. Nobody knows what it is.** (Opio Richard)

Wealth for Acholis is land. Farming, growing, grazing. (Otim William)

It's to feed us, we dig, and feed the young kids to grow. (Stella and Okelo)

What would happen to the Acholi if they didn't have land?

They would really get poor. People lived in town because of th war. **Before you sell your land, you should really think twice; would it solve problems, or would it gain more after?** (Odokos)

Land is communal. It would be hard [if Acholis didn't have land]. People were seen as people of the same place. They still have it, despite the fact that the war spoiled everything. They they came to the camps, elderly people died. Younger people now claim ancestral land. Many lives have been taken [in land wrangles.] (Makamiko Claudia)

There would be famine. Because the background is based on agriculture. (Milana)

There would be a very big problem. They [investors] would be chasing them all the time. **Now that I have kids, how am I going to feed them? How am I going to feed them? How am I going to send them to school? If Acholi people had no land, they would be sleeping in verandas, in the balconies of some rich people.** (Grace)

The Acholi people would not be there because of the struggles. (Opio Richard)

If all the Acholi people didn't have land, there would be poverty. They would go to another country like Kenya, Congo, Sudan. (Otim William)

Land is always there. Even you in your place have land. It's God given. They [Acholis] would end up dying [without land]. (Stella and Okelo)

Do you think non-Acholi people should be able to buy land in Gulu? Why or why not?

Investors want Acholiland [doesn't know from where]. Getting land is difficult for them because you have to buy. (Odokos)

We shall not allow them to have our land. Even Mao has been fighting. They can buy land in town, but in villages they can't have that land. *My cousin stopped constructing in town and is now constructing in the village so no one can take [the land]. They were really fighting. There's some gentleman who arranged a group to buy land in Pako [13 kilometers away].* The Dinkas [Sudanese] and the Alur [Ugandans near the Sudanese border want Acholi land]. (Solina)

Huge land with no use. Investors want it. I think it's fro the development of the place. [Madhavani tried.] The people refused. It would cause a lot of chaos if Madhavani got it. (Makamiko Claudia)

Foreign investors [want land]. Like Madhavani. (Milana)

Yes, they have interest. **I know the government wants to get all the land. Their thoughts may be for development, but I don't know.** (Grace)

There are some people interested. They are talking about investors from Indian and Western countries. (Otim William)

There are very many [people interested in Acholi land]. Like Madhvani, Gulu University. (Stella and Okelo)

Why would non-Acholi people want Acholi land?

These investors want Acholiland because in their places they don't have good land. They land here has been so long with being used by the people because of war. (Odokos)

It's big and fertile. *Some white men collided and bought land without consent of the other family members. The family sat down with the brother [that sold the land] and told him to take the money back to the white man. How could he sell cultural land? They got their land back, but some of money had already been spent.* (Solina)

Land is not equal to money. Money will just be scattered around, but land will always stay. (Solina)

They want the land to put factories, claiming they'll bring development, but **it's a land grab. Acholi people don't benefit because they take the money make to their countries.** Profit repatriation. (Milana)

It is fertile land. (Otim William)

[They want Acholi land] because of the goodness of our land. Other outsiders look at the people staying in the land as few so they need to take the land and make big farms. So the other people interested in our land have the equipment to detect the resource in our land like the ones in Amuru. Like maybe oil. Another reason is that land in Acholi is strategically located so you can see good features like mountains and also you can see Fort Patico. (Stella and Okelo)

Should these people be able to buy land in Gulu? Why or why not?

Big companies and investors shouldn't be able to buy land because where would the people go? It's difficult and not good. But if it were used for development, then it would be different. (Odokos)

They should buy the land but taken the land back to their owners [after] some years. Because when they grab land, Acholi people have no land for cultivation. (Milana)

Elders have a right to protect our land. They are doing a good job. Nobody has ever come [to buy my land]. It was given to me in 1992. (Opio Richard)

Other people sell land to them through the local government. That is ok because they bring development. (Otim William)

For us, we don't want [our land to be sold]. All the Acholis don't want our land to be bought. (Stella

and Okelo)

Do you think the government is interested in Acholi land? If yes, why? How do you know?

[Doesn't know] (Odokos)

The government is really interested and wants to finish the Acholi people with all of their land.[Museveni] cannot steal the land with all the people around. People are always there. (Solina)

All they want to do is maybe bring about development. (Makamiko Claudia)

Yeah, because he's [Museveni] encouraging investors to come grab land in Acholi, claiming they'll bring some development. Brought people in the airplane to show investors that Acholi people have idle land. (Milana)

Yeah, they have interest. When [Museveni] is talking about land, he talks about Acholi. Salim Saleh married an Acholi woman. He has land in Amuru. (Otim William)

They [the government] really have interested. They have sold everything. They want to scare us to take over land. They just intimidate the local people. Like Otema Owan has intimidated almost everybody in Anaka. Soldiers guard his land. If you come they just shoot you. (Stella and Okelo)

[If said yes to previous question] What do you think the government is doing to get Acholi land?

He's the only one who knows. (Solina)

[The government is] encouraging the landlords to sell land to those investors by telling them they'll be paid some money. (Milana)

I don't know. (Grace)

Using leaders and the paramount chief. When they get that land, they start growing crops like rice. (Otim William)

They're just scaring us [the government, as a strategy to get the land.] What's on ground is that the government has the policy whereby the more acres you have, the more you'll be taxed. Let's say you have one acre. Each year you have to pay 500,000 Ugandan Shillings. If you're a poor man, how will you pay all that? They take it. Even in town, it's happening. If you can't develop it, they take your land. (Stella and Okelo)

How do you feel about this?

I feel pain. All Acholi people feel pain. (Solina)

Good thing. Development means more construction, more trade here. (Makamiko Claudia)

To me if they are bringing development that would be ok. When they are just grabbing the land, that is

not good. What we need is development and employment. (Milana)

I see no problem if they are going to develop it for our kids. I would like my kids to study and come the way you [researcher] have. (Grace)

I'm not feeling bad if they're not chasing owners away. Land is for the people. (Otim William)

We are so sorrowful. (Stella and Okelo)

Should anything be done to either stop or encourage the government from buying land?

Acholi MPs have helped protect Acholi land [Mao, Okuma Reagan, Ocula]. Campaign against Museveni to form alternative government and land policy.

Should be given to investors for 5 years and then return it to the district. That would be enough for development. (Makamiko Claudia)

That one is the work of the poor to stop the government from buying land. (Otim William)

It's possible [to do something to stop the land from being taken]. Foreign bodies who come and give pressure to the government. (Stella and Okelo)

How did the war affect your land?

It was destroyed but not by the LRA but by the people, the neighbors. One lady took my land, but she gave it back. I spoke with my mouth and said everybody should bring back my land. If you want to dig, you should come ask me then I can help them. It is in accordance with the law. (Solina)

They burnt my house, carried everything out, even all the food I grew, all the properties. (Opio Richard)

There is nothing wrong with the land but they kept people in a poverty way because they lived in protected camps. (Otim William)

Do you have any problems with your land now?

Not all the land was given back. Problems continue. (Solina)

There is a land dispute between us and somebody who came early. So they came here and they stay here for about 29 to 30 years. The acres that they've been plowing—they expanded the boundaries on our land. With the dispute, we take it to the LC, but they've failed to solve. We talk to the paramount chief so there could be peace. (Otim William)

It [the war] has done many things. One, bullets that have not exploded. Once it rots or rusts, it becomes acidic to the soil. Two, some place in the village where many people were killed. People fear to go and till the land. They feel the demonic spirits, even the bones of dead or on the land. Three, it has scared the younger generation. Most boys have come to town instead of tilling. They

resorted to singing. Four, it has polluted the atmosphere. Rain used to fall in March but now it doesn't. That shows that the war has spoiled the atmosphere. Five, water has spoiled the most. It has led to numerous diseases like AIDS which is very hard now. All the soldiers are brought and just thrown here. Six, It has spoiled the family structure. The elders that were supposed to lead the people are the most stupid. They drink, not supportive, and don't give advice. The Gulu University fight [problem he has with his land now]. Today morning a surveyor came to survey the land to compensate people. The community called a meeting. (Stella and Okelo)

Do you think the war made many problems for the government? What are some of these problems?

The war has not brought him [Museveni] problems, only happiness because he knows he can do anything he wants. He insults the Acholi. Acholi people are like rotten mushrooms. He can call for water, but they give him milk. If he wants the war to continue, he can continue. (Solina)

Yeah, increased the government expenditure. Brought tension between the Acholi people and the government itself. (Makamiko Claudia)

[The war] made many problems because many Acholi people were blaming him—that he was the root cause of the war—and that's why the LRA is fighting. (Milana)

Has made many problems in two dimensions. It has made feeding people very hard for the government. Two, it has made us lose our people, our children. In some houses, nine out of ten people have died. Most of my people were killed, I have no land—then how am I to work and send my kids to the university? I have five kids. They have not read books. (Grace)

We face a lot of problems. When he came to power, they take all our property and leave us in poverty. **They caused the rebellion in Northern Uganda also.** They run to the bush and start fighting the government (Otim William)

There's fear and it has made it hard because the government fears to go to the villages since they will be attacked. Parliamentarians give pressure to the government which makes it hard for them to get land. (Stella and Okelo)

Do you think the war made it more or less difficult for the government to get land in Acholiland?

Museveni has taken people into camps. The land was just left, now people are going back. Mao is stopping [people from selling their land]. He'll arrest you if he finds you trying to sell Acholi land (Solina)

I think the war has made it hard for the government because they government has lost a lot of money over the years. (Grace)

The government has no close relationship with the Acholi people. (Otim William)

Why do you think the LRA fought? Who were they fighting?

The LRA fought because they wanted to lead the country by force. They were fighting the government.

They [the LRA and the government] are like two big elephants fighting. Who do you think suffers? The grasses. We are like the grasses. (Odokos)

Because of sheer stupidity. How do you collect your brothers, your sisters, your neighbors, and go with them to fight? They were fighting the Acholis. (Solina)

Claims it was fighting the government. But the impact was on the people. [Kony] wanted to gain the position of leadership. They were making money actually. (Makamiko Claudia)

The LRA is fighting innocent people and the government. (Milana)

I don't know why they were fighting. They have not taken power, so I don't even know why. They were fighting civilians. Look at diseases, like AIDS. They have killed everybody. (Grace)

I can't know why they fought. They fight civilians, soldiers, they kill themselves, I don't even know. (Opio Richard)

Those people [the LRA] don't care. They just slaughter us like chickens. So what are you fighting for? Kony just kills the Acholi people. (Stella and Okelo)

Do you think the LRA cares about land in Acholiland?

The LRA does care about land. If they didn't care, they wouldn't be fighting. They've left and given us a feeling of somehow peace. (Odokos)

No. They have become animals. Only violence. He [Kony] doesn't care about political things. If he cared about political things, he would have put his hand on the peace agreement. This peace is not long lasting because Kony is still in the bush, he's still alive (Solina)

I think [the LRA] did [care about land] because in most cases if they found foreigners on the land, they wouldn't survive. (Makamiko Claudia)

Doesn't care about land. If they had cared about land, they wouldn't let people stay in camps, just leaving land idle in the villages. They [the people] were getting free food from the World Food Programme. (Milana)

If they have run, how could they protect? (Grace)

No, they're just spoiling the land. Guessing [how] is very hard. We can't even hear everything they say. (Opio Richard)

Yeah, cares about Acholiland, but that is not the real issue. The LRA is a rebel that started by the evil spirit. A punishment from God maybe for the bad things the Acholi did when they were in power. They don't have a political belief. (Otim William)

Have you heard of the Land Amendment Bill?

I've heard of it but I don't know what it is (Odokos).

No (Solina).

Has heard of it. (Makamiko Claudia)

I've heard of it but I don't know something much about it. (Milana)

I've not heard. (Grace)

Yes, I've heard of it. **I have small land, why would I give it to investors? If I don't have this land, where would I go?** (Opio Richard)

Yeah, I heard but I didn't read. (Otim William)

I've heard of it, but I don't understand it. (Stella and Okelo)

[If said yes to previous question] What do you know about it? Do you think it will pass into national law?

I don't think it will pass. I don't think I would support it. If land is not being put into good use, it should be given to the government. [Museveni] could be having the best interests of the Acholis in mind. Central government intervention is necessary for development. They would be the best people to implement and monitor it. **I would advocate for this land to be put into productive use to raise the quality of life for people here.** [Defines productivity as investors that can bring employment.] People are suspicious that the land has oil, but they're still surveying. (Makamiko Claudia)

What I know is you pay some little money to the real owner of the land, so you can be the owner officially, so no one can grab it from you. I do support that. When you have all the documents that the land belongs to you. When you have the Bill, no one can disturb you. I think it will pass. (Milana)

This new bill is not correct because it gives power to the government and takes away from the people. But some parts are good, but some are not good. **The land belongs to the people.** (Otim William)

On Gulu University land conflict

Gulu University wanted to chase people off the land to start a farm institute. They've been in court for 5 years. [The University will succeed though] it is not right because in the same area there was even a graveyard. Those who have permanent constructions—no way to remove it. (Makamiko Claudia)

Appendix C: Interview Write-ups

Italics indicates my own thoughts and analysis.

Interview: Stella (mother) and Okelo (son)

Date: 21 April 2009

Ages: elderly mother, son around 30 years old

Occupations: Stella digs and Okelo is a student at the National Teacher's College

1. Yes, [owns] this small small land here. [It's] cultural land. I'm the only one with my son because most of my people are dead. I dig potatoes millet, cassava.
2. When I dig, that's where I find it good.
Indicates that digging leads not just to economic stability but holds some kind of personal spiritual importance as well.
3. Land is not for sale. It is not good to sell or buy. This is cultural land.
This is stated as a given, as gospel fact: why would cultural land be sold?
4. If I didn't have land, I would just die, because land is what we live on.
5. It's to feed us, we dig, and feed the young kids to grow.
6. Land is always there. Even you in your place have land. It's God given. They [Acholis] would end up dying [without land].
Again, land—especially cultural- can't be questioned in either its existence or importance.
7. There are very many [people interested in Acholi land]. Like Madhvani, Gulu University.
8. [They want Acholi land] because of the goodness of our land. Other outsiders look at the people staying in the land as few so they need to take the land and make big farms. So the other people interested in our land have the equipment to detect the resource in our land like the ones in Amuru. Like maybe oil. Another reason is that land in Acholi is strategically located so you can see good features like mountains and also you can see Fort Patico.
High level of awareness of the strategic importance of Acholi land, as well as issues of oil. This is the second person who has mentioned that there may be oil in Gulu which has interested investors.
9. For us, we don't want [our land to be sold]. All the Acholis don't want our land to be bought.
10. They [the government] really have interested. They have sold everything. They want to scare us to take over land. They just intimidate the local people. Like Otema Owan has intimidated almost everybody in Anaka. Soldiers guard his land. If you come they just shoot you.
11. They're just scaring us [the government, as a strategy to get the land.] What's on ground is that the government has the policy whereby the more acres you have, the more you'll be taxed. Let's say you have one acre. Each year you have to pay 500,000 Ugandan Shillings. If you're a poor man, how will you pay all that? They take it. Even in town, it's happening. If you can't develop it, they take your land.
In a very difficult spot between subsistence and "development." Government seems to define development as productive beyond individual use, which goes against Acholi subsistence farming that produces for the family and clan. Acholi "traditional" use of the land will never be considered "development" under this definition, and it will continue to define Acholis as backwards or an impediment to development.
12. We are so sorrowful.
13. It's possible [to do something to stop the land from being taken]. Foreign bodies who come and give pressure to the government.

15. It [the war] has done many things. One, bullets that have not exploded. Once it rots or rusts, it becomes acidic to the soil. Two, some place in the village where many people were killed. People fear to go and till the land. They feel the demonic spirits, even the bones of dead or on the land. Three, it has scared the younger generation. Most boys have come to town instead of tilling. They resorted to singing. Four, it has polluted the atmosphere. Rain used to fall in March but now it doesn't. That shows that the war has spoiled the atmosphere. Five, water has spoiled the most. It has led to numerous diseases like AIDS which is very hard now. All the soldiers are brought and just thrown here. Six, It has spoiled the family structure. The elders that were supposed to lead the people are the most stupid. They drink, not supportive, and don't give advice.

Use this!!! Very interesting analysis of result of war. Also interesting that he links the war to other social ills like AIDS and climate change-- shows the overwhelming importance and devastation caused by war.

16. The Gulu University fight [problem he has with his land now]. Today morning a surveyor came to survey the land to compensate people. The community called a meeting.
18. There's fear and it has made it hard because the government fears to go to the villages since they will be attacked. Parliamentarians give pressure to the government which makes it hard for them to get land.
21. Those people [the LRA] don't care. They just slaughter us like chickens. So what are you fighting for? Kony just kills the Acholi people.
22. I've heard of it, but I don't understand it.

Really interesting/sad that someone with such a deep analysis of other land issues in Gulu and their relationship to current difficulties doesn't know about the Land Bill. I wonder how hard the government has actually worked to make sure that people are aware of it...

Interview: John Olanya Odur

Date: 24 April 2009

Age: middle aged male

Occupations: Professor of development, religious, and peace and ethics studies at Gulu University

In the Acholi tradition, how is it decided who will occupy the land?

Land used to belong to the chiefs, the head of the clan. There was a structure where the *rwot* [chief] has land, and people belonged to him. Land is the means for economic survival, the whole of people in the clan. There's no enterprise other than land. People gathered and decided where land was depending on how long you've been there. Where you dig, that's your land. People own the land because they lived there. My father has communal land. It's at least 50 years old. Whether you like it or not, you must have a garden.

Sheds light on why people don't understand/need/want land titles. The clan-based system of dividing land has successfully worked based on local power structures and has its own logic. Introducing a new, competing logic to land ownership disturbs pre-existing system.

Can you explain different aspects of Acholi cosmology to me? I'm particularly interested in the process of funeral rites, death, and marriage.

Once you dig a grave, it is sacred. People fear the grave. They honor the grave in as much as they honor the person. If you step on the grave, it is not very good. If the grave sinks into a depression, people fear that the grave is opening. They sacrifice a goat as a ritual to appease. They fear the spirit will come up.

In addition to the homestead, there is a shrine, a place of worship called the *abila*. If it is destroyed, a very big aspect of the life of people is destroyed because it is the spirit of the ancestors. You leave meat at the shrine and bless children there.

The relationship [between the land and the ancestors] is very strong. There is a continuity in the ancestors to the living. They give blessings to the present generation. They are the source of life, source of blessing, and source of continuity. The life of the ancestors continues in the new one. The placement of burial depends on the family. Individual families have shrines, but a bigger, central shrine may be for the clan.

The land is so tied to the ancestors, who enable future generations. It links the past and the present to create (and bless) the future, which seems even more important now that so many people have been killed and the Acholis need all the blessings they can get. Destruction of the land would destroy the ancestral spirit and thus the future. Not only economic survival, but spiritual (and physical) survival as well.

What will the ancestors do if the land is taken over?

It depends on how people believe the ancestors will react. They fear that if the land is taken, ancestors will not be happy. So there is really a need to continue the relationship between life and the ancestors. If someone dies in Kampala, they will be brought right back. You come back to be buried with your

ancestors.

During the war, you couldn't bury everyone on ancestral land. That was very disappointing. If a lady dies at old age, she will be taken back to her clan. This signifies why these things are very important. There's always a ficus tree to indicate an abandoned homestead or marking very important people who died.

Developers would destroy the relationship and continuity. That would be very hurtful.

Marriage is also a continuation of life. Relationship is transferred through rituals such as naming ceremonies for babies, observance mother makes according to the rites of passage (depending on the clan). Pregnant women always follow certain instructions to make the son or daughter of the clan. All rituals are tied to ancestors. They are never individual children, but children of the clan, collective children, of the land.

Destruction of the land would greatly disrupt all of the rites that are tied to the land and ancestors. Seemingly, people would be very fearful of the anger of the ancestors as well as the result on the future generations. Again, this destroys the economic and spiritual survival of the people, which leads to their physical elimination.

What would the effect of land alienation be on the Acholi people?

It means they are completely uprooted from their ancestors. Nonexistence. If an Acholi goes to a place, they do an abila to mark life has begun for the family. They would not have any origin, as if they've been wiped from the earth.

How are the LRA and Acholi cosmology connected?

The LRA doesn't represent Acholi totally. You can't shed blood on your own land; this lost Acholi trust [in the LRA]. The LRA attached themselves to a spirit force—not an Acholi spirit. They are claiming Chinese spirits, what what. The manifestation of the spirit is not Acholi. It would have been different if the LRA claimed that it had been an Acholi spirit; people would have been more receptive. Hunting fellow people made it difficult to believe that it was a spirit who wanted to protect the land. The spirit first had the camouflage of Christian influence.

There are five main Acholi divinities. Olalteng, divinity of war. Lapul, fertility. Baka, mixture. Loka, rain. Lagoro, also mixture. Kony comes from the geographic headquarters of Olalteng.

So interesting! I wonder if people are afraid of Kony even more because of his connection to olalteng. Makes me understand more why some people believe that the LRA is the work of demon spirits-- this is backed up by Acholi cosmology.

How can development in Acholiland move forward considering the aversion to selling land?

Because this land has never been developed, it is the source of life for people here. We have very poor trading centers, in the village one household can get hardly 200,000 Shillings a year by my estimate.

Suppose the war was not there, what was going to happen? Still, this development would mean—if it didn't grant the individuals alienation from poverty—it would cause the same alienation [as war]. There's a distinction between development for people and development for profit. If individual needs are met, it can lead to community development.

Can you explain the current fight over land with Gulu University?

The University has come at least to give access to higher education. The majority are local students. Beneficiaries are locals, meeting demands of the individual. Link up the relationship between the university and the individual in development. The University has not come to fight them. They shouldn't be against it, because the university will benefit them. These [university and Madhvani] are not the same institutions. This one is not income generation.

People having negative ideas could be politically motivated. Because the university is linked to Museveni [because it's public], they link it to the NRM and very negative understanding in the context of war.

If it was a private institution, this would not be happening because the people would be compensated.

Avoids the connection between the university and land alienation—probably because he is employed by this institution. Also interesting that he cites distrust of Museveni as a motivating factor, because the members of the Gulu Concerned Land Owners Association are putting a lot of faith in Museveni to get them out of this mess.

Interview: Abonga Moses

Date: 24 April 2009

Age: around 30-35 years old

Occupations: Local Council (LC) Three Chairman of Laroo Division

In your opinion, what are the key land issues facing Laroo?

People are coming for land because Gulu is fast growing. People in Laroo are selling land very highly, there are a lot of land sellers-- and they can't have where to go. Investors buy land at any price you tell them. People are selling land to buy boda bodas.

Approximately half the land is communal, and half is titled. In Agwe and Irriaga, there is mostly communal land. People with communal land are the ones selling, those who get, get a title. Baganda, Westerners, some Indians, also some people from Laroo who already have land—they're all buying.

Can you explain more about land wrangles in Laroo?

These locals sell land to two or three people, bringing confusion and going to court. They sell land to one person cheaply, and then when the land is not developed, they sell it to another person at a higher price and return the money to the first person. 90% of cases seen by the Division Court Committees are land. [The procedure for dealing with land issues is] first you go to the LC2. Then you can appeal to the Division Court Committee.

I wonder if this is connected to some people not fully understanding how land titles function.

Can you explain the current land conflict with Gulu University?

Bringing Gulu University has increased the value of land [in Laroo, around the university]. The University originally was to be an agriculture school. The school buildings were originally a Farm Institute. They compensated and consulted with the people. They used it for classes, not an Institute. The government decided to expand.

The government gave 742 hectares for an agricultural school to the university [without consulting the people who already lived on that land]. They say they will compensate people. The government evaluator will decide how much land is worth.

There was a court injunction on 31 October 2006 ruling in favor of the community. The judge said if the university wants the land, they should approach the community. But now the community is rigid. They'll tell the government how much they want which could be in the hundreds of millions. On 30-31 July 2007, the Gulu District Land Board gave more power to survey the land.

There's been a lot of consultative meetings with the University. I proposed not using the roadside areas, which is very populated and instead use the more rural, less populated areas. By the roadside they're going to build trade centers.

Connection between the District Land Board and the court-- they seem to be trying to defy each other's jurisdiction. The Land Board has the final say with land issues, but can they overcome the court

injunction?

Where will people go if they are kicked off their land?

Displaced people will have to go back to the village. The land is cheaper than in Laroo because there's no university. This is if they use the money well. We're only going to expand site of schools that we have now, not build new ones.

It's ridiculous to suggest that people will move from Laroo to more rural areas. As he admits, there's not infrastructure, schools, hospitals—and no plans to build them! Further, there are very dangerous land wrangling conflicts in rural areas, so 10,000 people moving out would really do nothing except create more violence. There's no place for people to go!

Some people who are not focused are selling their land. Paradoxically, people on this side [South side, not University side] are not affected and they are selling. 40 by 40 meters on the other side will get you 40 million Shillings.

One man sold his land for 50 million and bought DVD players, generators, all in a grass thatched hut.

The Concerned Land Owners Association has poor leadership. They should have taken Gulu District Land Board to court. Agwe went to court and won because the university plan was originally there.

Laroo is five square kilometers.

The president will not allow for the university land to be squeezed. He's always in the forefront of these things of investment.

Interview: Six executive members of the Gulu Concerned Land Owners Association (Chairman Anyway Paolo, Secretary Odokonyero Isaac, Treasurer Ocitti Mak Abilli, LC-1 of Agwe Parish Ola Joe, LC-1 Secretary Bwangamoi Thomas, and Member Ojera Russell)

Date: 24 April 2009

Age: middle aged to elderly men

Occupations: retired police officers, diggers, members of the Association

How was the Association formed and why was it formed?

The Association formed on 8 September 2008. Formed to safeguard community land and the land owners. The constitution of the Association states that: “facing the threat of unlawful eviction and other injustices pertaining the land.” Formed after the University presented its plan, in opposition to the land. There were around 30 something founding members. Now, it represents more than 10,000 members. There are only three titled areas in the plan; the rest of the land is customary.

The main opposition is that the area is too large. Land owners were not consulted and not compensated. Our interested is that if we are to be compensated, it should be enough for us to move. We have no where to go. This is our grandfather's land. There's a hidden agenda. They want to bring investors to make factories to make students work during holidays.

Administrators ignore them. “The struggle continues without the consent of the land owners.”

I feel like Erin Brokevich! I anecdotally asked people if they were aware of the Association, and only some were. I think the claim to represent 10,000 people is stating the number of people who will be displaced as a result, not actually people who are active—or even aware—of the groups' existence.

Can you explain the legal case against the university?

31 October 2006: Court injunction against the University's plan. There were two court cases of the same issue against the University, represented by Ocen & Co Advocates. Civil Suit No. 19 of 2005: Obwoya and Others versus Gulu University. Cases No. HCT-02-CV-0019-2995 (Obwoya Robert and Others) and No. HCT-02-CV-0025-2004 (Nicolas Ochora and 34 Others).

31 July 2007: the Gulu District Land Board land to the University against the court injunction. The University had two weeks to appeal the court ruling and they didn't. The university should respect the court.

14 June 2008: University sent a letter stating surveys of the land would move forward.

18 June 2008: Anyway Paolo sent a reply letter stating that land surveys would be illegal criminal trespass because of the court injunction. Surveyors came, and youth chased them away.

April 2009: Forwarded the case to President Museveni via the Presidential Advisor to the North. “He is going to answer that. We are a very big population. He has to helped us.” Our argument is leaning on the Constitution of Uganda which says the land belongs to the people, not the government.

Compare this to LC 3's contention that the Association has poor leadership and should have taken the

District Land Board to court. I wonder who has the ultimate jurisdiction to decide the future of the land.

What will happen if the plan goes forward?

Ancestors can very much disturb.

If the police fail to control us, it shall end up in war [if the plan goes forward.]

They think they are superior, we are small.

We will fight, defend of land.

A citizen must not ignore whatever order from the court.

Do you think the University should be there?

The University should be there, but in a proper place. The university should not be concerned of industry, they're concerned about education. We want peace.

They want to displace us as if we have no children. We need development this is democracy.

All of the above are great quotes. Use.