Geographical versus social displacement: The politics of return and post-war recovery in Northern Uganda

ABSTRACT

The civil war in Northern Uganda in the period 1986–2006 fundamentally altered former ways of life and created diverse and complex needs. Protracted conflict and displacement create, reveal, and enforce vulnerability, which can undermine resilience. Based on in-depth interviews with internally displaced persons and returnees, both before and after their return to Amuru District and Gulu District, the author argues that war and displacement constitute more than a temporary disruption. The physical and social wounds of war are engraved and embedded in people's lives. Therefore, recovery interventions must take these effects into account to forge a new post-war future.

Keywords: post-war recovery and return, vulnerability, Northern Uganda, protracted displacement

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Introduction

Northern Uganda is currently recovering from a period of protracted conflict (1986–2006) in which both killing on a large scale and massive displacement occurred (Government of Uganda 2007). The effects of the 20-year conflict are immense and gruesome: tens of thousands of people, many of them children, were abducted and abused, mutilated, maimed, or killed in what was one of Africa's most brutal conflicts (Dolan 2009). In 1996, the Government of Uganda instituted a 'protected villages' policy, which was intended to provide better security and tactical advantages for the army. The purpose and function of the displaced persons' camps has been contested and is debatable. However, as a point of departure, this paper focuses on the consequences of protracted displacement into the camps and the repercussions for the recovery process.

At the peak of the conflict in 2002, the government decided to enforce the protected village policy, which displaced an estimated 1.8 million of the Acholi rural population to urban areas and trading centres, usually within a radius of 5–20 km from their residential and agricultural lands (reliefweb 2010). Many people were denied access to residential and agricultural land. Most of the displaced people were dependent upon limited relief supplies, with restricted livelihood options and barely any regular sources of income (Human Rights Watch 2005). Education and health services were severely disrupted and those remaining were under enormous strain. For these reasons, forced encampment in Northern Uganda has been condemned and criticized (Branch 2009; Dolan 2009).

Based on data collected from Gulu District and Amuru District in Northern Uganda, this paper highlights the impact of protracted conflict and displacement on the lives and livelihoods of the affected population. Specifically, I argue that protracted conflict and displacement create,

reveal, and reinforce structural and physical vulnerabilities that are particularly challenging in the post-war period.

Protracted displacement and recovery

Displacement is often considered 'a temporary deviation' from normal life, a deviation that can be corrected. However, displacement that lasts for decades, such as in the case of Northern Uganda, ceases to be a temporary deviation. During displacement, people lose all forms of physical, social, human, political, and financial capital (Cernea 1999). Furthermore, conflict and displacement do not occur in a 'vacuum', but alter communities in diverse ways, creating unpredictable and insecure environments (Finnström 2008).

After a conflict, the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) is promoted by state actors as a major step towards recovery. However, since war causes massive destruction, many returnees find their physical homes have been destroyed or are unidentifiable, occupied, or that others have taken possession of them. Some IDPs do not know where 'home' is, especially those born during displacement. The loss of the physical home is symbolic and has great significance for the embedded meanings that people harbour about particular settings. When formerly loved surroundings are transformed into a space of trauma, people seek to avoid them. Thus, return is not merely about going back in time to regain what was lost, but involves moving to something entirely new and complex (Haug 2002). For example, relations and traditions are reconfigured through separation, abduction, and deaths of family and community members.

Post-war recovery involves addressing the impacts of conflicts, which are often embedded in pre-existing challenges (Author 2009). Thus, any recovery interventions require recognition of dynamic needs during both the conflict and the post-conflict period. Recovery is a

context-specific and multifaceted process that reflects the differential impacts of conflict on individuals, households, communities, and countries. It entails shifting the focus from the provision of logistics to addressing systemic challenges such as those relating to livelihoods, food security, governance, social justice, and marginalization (Author 2012).

Additionally, recovery entails a set of activities and interventions designed to build the capabilities of war-affected people, to enable them to cope with the effects of conflict and displacement. Broadly, these activities include return to pre-displacement areas, reconstruction of infrastructure, social and economic revival, governance, implementing justice, and reconciliation. Many actors are involved in such activities, in addition to the affected people, and therefore different approaches and aspects have to be emphasized and prioritized. Nevertheless, the overriding objective is the creation of secure socio-economic and physical environments that facilitate the transition from war to peace and the re-establishment of functional communities, which can be a daunting task.

Methodology

A qualitative approach was used to assess the effects of conflict and displacement in the studied area: Gulu District and Amuru District. This paper draws on periods of formal research undertaken for my doctoral thesis, which was conducted in the same two districts during March and April 2007, the period January–March 2008, and August 2009. In the period May–June 2013, I carried out research with a focus on recovery processes. The research covered the period when the IDPs people were still in the original camps to the time when they started moving towards the pre-displacement areas. For the entire research, I visited three different types of sites: the IDP camps, the transit sites, and the return villages. I visited camps at Tetugu, Awoo, Pabbo,

Lugore, and Unyama, and the return villages and villages of Koro-Abili, Bar-dege, Tyena Kaya, Palema Patuda, Koch Kweyo, Pawel Angany, Lukodi, Unyama A, Unyama B, and Dika. The transit sites were smaller 'satellite' camps that had been created in order to relieve the congestion in the main camps and were much closer to the return villages.

In-depth and semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, specifically the IDPs and returnees at multiple sites. Data were collected with help of three research assistants, who also served as translators. Most of the interviewees were able to express themselves in English but for some there was need for translation from Acholi into English for better articulation. Most of the interviews were recorded and transcribed. I used manual coding and categorization for the data analysis.

The interviewees were mainly heads of households who were considered the key decision-makers and therefore likely to provide relevant information. Both women and men were interviewed. The findings in this paper are based on interviews with 35 people at different sites, of which 5 were key informants, including local leaders and NGO representatives. In order to identify the most relevant interviewees, we asked them to specify where they came from and how long they had stayed in the camp. In the return villages, interviewees were asked to specify how long they had been displaced and when they had returned to their village. My aim was to secure interviewees who had lived in the camps and villages for three or more years, since I anticipated they would provide more reliable accounts than would other types of interviewees. However, the distinction between interviewees at the transit sites and in the return villages was not clearly drawn. The majority of people at the transit sites could not access their land due either to the ongoing land wrangles or to their inability to locate their land. During the fieldwork, we encountered people who were not displaced but were equally affected by the displacement.

These included members of the host communities and the owners of land on which the camps were established.

During the interviews, emphasis was placed on eliciting detailed narratives about the IDPs' experiences before the war, during the war, and during displacement, as well as their efforts towards recovery. The multiple visits facilitated an understanding of the complexities of displacement and recovery. However, the main challenge in the data collection was that the security situation was rapidly changing, driven by the peace negotiations in Juba, in the former Sudan. There were enormous back-and-forth movements between the camps and the return villages, which meant systematic follow-up of interviewees was problematic because many interviewees lacked any reliable means of contact. Therefore, I adopted a flexible methodology that enabled me to highlight the experiences of different individuals at the three types of sites.

Positionality

During my stay in Gulu, I was hosted as a research affiliate by the Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development ACORD, a pan-African organization that seeks promote grass roots development and was actively engaged in the post-war recovery programmes in Northern Uganda. This greatly facilitated my access to the camps and villages. My familiarity with the study districts and continued engagement with the conflict and displacement issues significantly facilitated rapport building with my research participants. Additionally, my experience as a development practitioner proved helpful, since I had the opportunity to facilitate dialogue between the communities and the organization regarding interventions.

Displacement and the "bad surroundings"

In this section, I use Finnström's conceptualization of "bad surroundings" to describe the context and impacts of protracted displacement. Finnström (2008) and Dolan (2009) provide comprehensive analyses of the devastation and suffering in the IDP camps. Drawing on the extensive literature and my own findings, I describe the vulnerabilities created by the protracted conflict and displacement in Northern Uganda and the implications for the post-war recovery in the study districts.

Constrained mobility and immobility

Restricted mobility and confinement in the camps caused significant disruption to livelihoods and traditional production systems. There was no access to the fields or access carried great risk due to strict military curfews. The hours during which people were permitted to go to the villages and farms to cultivate and gather firewood were restricted to 10 am – 4 pm. According to my interviewees, if anyone was found outside the designated camp, they were considered a rebel or a rebel collaborator. This was a punishable offence and the persons could be arrested, tortured, or killed. Men and boys were particularly vulnerable in this respect. The IDPs were only allowed to cultivate and collect firewood within a few kilometres of the camp, near roads that were patrolled by the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) (Finnström 2008).

Subsequently, restricted mobility and restricted access to land significantly affected the livelihoods of the rural agrarian Acholi. Additionally, immobility and dependency on aid grossly affected the economic infrastructure as well as the production and distribution systems. All economic activity stagnated and people relied mainly on aid supplies for survival.

Dependence and deprivation

There was a constant struggle for food and daily sustenance: food distribution was erratic with delays of up to three months. Food rations and diets were determined by aid organizations. The rations were very basic and lasted at most three weeks. Deprivation was thus a key constraint:

> Food rations have made us become dependent. We are always waiting for the WFP [World Food Programme] to provide rations, and we live like beggars. The food is not enough. We can only afford two meals a day and this decreases as the food ration decreases. We have limited access to land to cultivate food to supplement the rations. Accommodation is also a big challenge. We live under constant threat of eviction by the landowners. Sometimes, they even threaten to burn down our huts. My biggest challenge is lack of access to my garden. I have been reduced to a beggar [...]. (Lilil, female, 35 years, 2007)

Many of the IDPs were heavily dependent on aid supplies for all their basic needs. Therefore, humanitarian aid became a form of control and discipline (Branch 2011). The IDPS' inability to provide for themselves and their heavy dependence on food aid affected the collective pride of the Acholi people (Vorhölter 2017). According to my interviewees, they were reduced to beggars, left destitute with constrained livelihoods and at the mercy of the government, humanitarian organizations, and landowners. Dependency on food aid led to the breakdown of agricultural systems, which aggravated food insecurity in the households.

Humiliation and torment
Dolan (2009) describes the IDP camps as "social torture" due to the fundamental violation of human rights, humiliation, and cultural and economic debilitation of the Acholi people. He argues that the situation in the camps caused more fatalities than the actual conflict: the camps

were "death traps". Fatalities were caused by the high HIV/AIDS prevalence rates, massacres, and suicides. Life in the camps was inhumane, chaotic, and precarious.

The mud and grass-thatched huts in the IDP camps were built so close to each other that their roofs touched. Some huts were covered with tarpaulins or plastic sheets provided by the UNHCR, but all were very basic and small, c.4 m in diameter, and on average accommodated family of five people. The lack of sanitation facilities created squalid and filthy environments:

> There is limited privacy due to overcrowding. Hygiene is a problem due to lack of toilets. Child defilement is a common problem. The quality of education is poor, which has resulted in limited learning achievements for our children. There is no law and order, and discipline for children is deteriorating. Restricted movement limits access to our gardens. (Oling, male, 30 years, 2007)

My interviewees decried the social, cultural, and economic challenges in the camps. Before the war, the Acholi rural homesteads had widely spaced huts, surrounded by their fields and gardens, with a clear separation of living spaces by age and gender that was linked to cultural norms (Vorhölter 2017). The household was the main site for socialization of children, where boys were taught gender-appropriate behaviour, activities, and responsibilities (Atkinson 1994). Thus, the congestion in the camps led to a new settlement form that was alien to the inhabitants (Joireman, Sawyer, and Wilhoit 2012). According to my interviewees, this was considered a form of humiliation, which led to social decay, and dysfunction. An IDP camp was seen as a 'concentration of strangers' who were devoid of responsibility and accountability (Mergelsberg 2012).

Fear and death

Fear was an aspect of daily life caused by random and repeated attacks, incursions, and abductions of children by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Death was prevalent even from preventable diseases such as malaria and cholera. The congestion in the camps accelerated the spread of communicable diseases such as Ebola (Accorsi et al. 2005). Mass killings, looting, and burning of houses were common occurrences in the camps. The persistent violence and brutal death created fear, grief, trauma, and stress:

> I remember of an incident in Pader (neighbouring district) where the rebels killed and cooked people in pots. They should confront the soldiers and not their brothers and sisters [civilians]. (Oling, male, 30 years, 2007)

Stories of rebels and conscripted children killing their kin and community members were horrifying and had devastating effects on social relations, especially hatred and mistrust in the post-war period.

Impoverishment

Degradation in the standards of living was characteristic in the IDP camps. The inhabitants' quality of life was dramatically different compared with in the villages. There was a significant decrease in local agricultural production and trade due to large-scale abandonment of agricultural and pastoral production during the conflict. Displacement resulted in a critical economic shock for many households (Fiala 2015), and finding and creating alternative livelihoods in the camps was particularly challenging.

Impoverishment was a key consequence of displacement and conflict, as demonstrated by Okwera's account. Okwera was a landowner in his seventies. He was born in Tetugu IDP camp

in Gulu District, but he left the area in 1993 due to the conflict. He later returned in 2003, when Tetugu was officially designated an IDP camp. Okwera described his experience of the war and how his situation had changed, as follows:

> I had the means to get everything I wanted before the conflict. I was working with the Ministry of Works' road construction unit. Because of the war, I became disabled and since then I have not been able to work. I had a large family, which I could sustain. I always had visitors from afar who could come and stay for weeks and I could host them comfortably. I had six cows, forty goats, sixty pigs, and poultry. However, with the conflict, I have lost everything. All my children are in town and cannot even come back to pay me a visit. I had a large chunk of land, six acres [c. 2 ha], where I could carry out my activities, but now I cannot because the IDPs have occupied all of it. Even though I was employed in the civil service, I am not entitled to pension because I left the service prematurely due to disability. I have children who also need a place to belong and that is on their ancestral land. I want to regain control over what I had. For example, when my hut is leaking, I also have to buy grass to repair it. (Okwera, male, 70 years, 2007)

For Okwera, disability had led to vulnerability, which in turn significantly affected his quality of life and livelihood. Moreover, the loss of his ancestral land to the IDP camp undermined his resilience and recovery. Although not displaced, Okwera had suffered massive effects due to conflict and displacement, which had significantly reconfigured his homestead. In common with many landowners' whose land had been requisitioned for camps, he lost the opportunity to derive his main source of livelihood from his land. He also mentioned the loss of control and the extensive damage to his land in the form of many graves, pit latrines, and indecomposable waste,

such as plastics, resulting from the camp. Okwera's narrative also reflects a strong sense of identity and ancestral heritage, which he wanted to maintain by reclaiming his land.

Breakdown of social services

Access to good quality education was a key challenge (Author 2016). Many of the children were unable to attend school or acquire a basic education. High dropout rates, limited motivation for education, and fear of being abducted all affected school attendance rates:

> Before the war, I was a student at a vocational school in Gulu. I was studying business administration. I dropped out of school for fear of abduction by the rebels. Besides, the intense warfare disrupted the livelihoods and interrupted the means for paying school fees. I dropped out of school due to the conflict. Government should give opportunities to students who dropped out of school in the earlier years of the conflict. We feel the need to go back to school, if given the chance. (Ojok, male, 35 years, 2007)

> As the war intensified, I dropped out of school and got married. The conflict has disorganized my entire life. If I had the opportunity, I would have loved to become a doctor. I still have hope but the way forward is still difficult. (Akello, female, 28 years, 2007)

Although there were schools and learning centres in the camps, overcrowding was a key challenge and the quality of education was considered poor and elementary. Access to secondary and tertiary education was limited due to poverty and distance from schools. This affected the IDPs' acquisition of knowledge and skills, thus leading to a severe depreciation of human capital and lack of local skilled labour during the post-war period.

Social distress

The camp setting and lack of security did not allow for the traditional practice of *wango-o*, whereby elders educated their children about Acholi culture and values. Gauvin (2016) argues that displacement severed channels for the transmission of local knowledge and cultural practices between generations. Thus, the camps consisted of dysfunctional family units that affected the socialization of children and youths. The youths lacked mentors and role models due to a diminished social hierarchy. The parents I interviewed were concerned about the negative socialization of their children in the camps. They preferred the traditional homestead set-up that allowed monitoring of their children's movements and the enforcement of discipline. The social breakdown in the camps was one of the most compelling reasons behind the IDPs desire to return to their former homes. The interviewees often mentioned social vices, including witchcraft, HIV/AIDS, domestic violence, alcohol abuse, early marriages, multiple sexual partners, and quarrels and conflicts with neighbours.

Coping in new environments

Displacement meant that IDPs had to find alternative ways of coping in the camps, which entailed both negative and positive strategies, as narrated by Acaa. She was a widow and some of her children had been abducted and had not returned. Acaa was originally from Patek, in Bobi Subcounty, Gulu District, and had been in Awoo Camp since 2003. She described how her income earning activities had changed, and how she yearned to regain her self-reliance, which had been compromised through displacement:

Cultivation was a major activity. However, as the war intensified, I turned to charcoal burning and selling firewood because these bring quick income. I used to cultivate on my land. Now, I have to beg and pay for land, which I have in plenty back at home. Those days, firewood was not a problem because it was abundant on my land and I would use the excess for charcoal burning, which I would sell. Now, I cannot do it. Educating the girl child was very valuable because once she could read and write, suitors would come formally to ask for her hand in marriage, but now this has vanished. Now, it is a relief when your child is taken, because of poverty … I hope to return home because I want to be self-sustaining, as I used to be. I want my children to grow up in a home, not a camp. (Acaa, female, age unknown, 2007)

As exemplified by the above quote, conflict and displacement caused significant economic and social stress. Acaa emphasized the impact of displacement from her own land, which was a vital asset. She also alluded to the changing social norms and practices regarding marriage and raising children.

Protracted displacement also meant that people had to strategize in order to cope with the new camp setting. Lalam described the situation before and after arriving at the camp as follows:

Before the war, we used to have a variety of foods in abundance. Here [in the camp], we are limited to specific and few foodstuffs. This is affecting the way we feed our children. Making money was easy. I used to grow cassava, which I used for brewing. Now, I have to buy the cassava. I also believe the conflict is one of the reasons why I broke up with my husband. I stayed in the village with the children and he went to town. Ever since he left, he has never communicated. Crime rates such as robbery and rape are common. My mother was mobbed and raped by a boy who is now under arrest. (Lalam, female, age unknown, 2007)

Lalam's account illustrates how the displaced people maintained an image of 'home' as they knew it when they left, and where they hoped to resume life. However, the post-conflict situation has presented new realities about home that the displaced have had to encounter.

Vorhölter (2017) argues that the breakdown of spatial arrangements facilitated uncontrolled sexual behaviour. Additionally, poverty in the camps that I studied led to negative coping mechanisms such as transactional sex, which became a key survival strategy:

> Our children have lost morality values due to congestion. The girl child is most vulnerable because they [girls] are getting married at a very young age… Old men lure young girls into sex using monetary incentives. Now, we also have cases of soldiers sexually abusing our daughters and these we cannot handle. Whenever such an incident happens, the offender is transferred to another location. Sometimes, the abusers are arrested but released shortly after. (Christine, female, age unknown, 2007)

However, it is also important to note that the limited sensitization about the risk of HIV/AIDS, and lack of testing facilities and health services all aggravated the prevalence of HIV. Thus, the breakdown of sexual taboos, broken marriages, and fatherless children created significant post-war vulnerabilities, especially for women and children.

Cultural breaches

Displacement had significant impacts on the social organization and caused the breakdown of social structures, which in turn led to cultural debilitation (Dolan 2009). Due to restricted movement and poverty, it was difficult to transport the remains of the dead back to their former homes and to perform customary funeral rites. Many of the dead were buried in the camps, and

the unburied remains of the war victims are considered *Cen*, who represent the haunted and dangerous spirits of the dead who were brutally killed and did not have a decent burial (Finnström 2008). Lack of proper burials represents a violation of moral order that has consequences for the living (Behrend 1999). In Acholi mythology, the lack of proper burials constitutes a serious disorder, as the dead are supposed to return to the patrilineal clan to join the living family as well as the ancestral spirits (Meinert and Whyte 2013).

The problem relating to proper burials is particularly challenging for people who have returned to their homes in the post-war period. The unburied remains on their land and in their gardens need special rituals to avert dangerous spirits. The returnees also need to exhume the dead buried in the camps for proper burial on their ancestral land. The inability to give the dead a decent burial is believed to aggrieve the spirits of the dead, leading to misfortune, illness, and even death to the living relatives and the wider clan members (Baines 2010). Given the huge numbers of deaths during the war, exhuming and reburial of the dead has been a major post-war challenge.

Many of the interviewees were concerned about the return of the remains of their relatives who had been buried in the camps. For this reason, some of them remained in the camps until they could perform rituals for the return and reburial of their dead relatives. This was a key concern for the landowners, who reported that their land was filled with many graves of strangers.

Land rights and access

Land represents the most valuable and immovable asset of rural households. Grievances over landownership and access are widespread in post-conflict settings. Land is occupied

opportunistically. Legal, institutional, and customary aspects of land management are problematic (Pantuliano and Elhawary 2013). Major land constraints include overlapping and competing claims, corrupt and dysfunctional land registration, inadequate land laws, and the collapse of communal land governance systems.

Adelman and Peterman (2014) argue that the experiences of households and individuals in relation to land are deep-rooted in social and cultural traditions, which are amplified by natural, economic, or political shocks. In Northern Uganda, displacement caused a breakdown of clan cohesion and leadership structures that previously governed land rights and access (Whyte et al. 2012). The breakdown of the traditional land governance system through the deaths of landowners and clan elders caused the loss of institutional memory and knowledge of customary land boundaries. Further, the evolution of stakeholders' claims to land rights through death, separation, marriage, and remarriages poses significant challenges. The major land disputes include boundary disputes and contested ownership or access rights:

> Some neighbours want to encroach on our land. We are constantly going to court over that issue. The setting up of a camp on our land in 2008, when people were returning home, also spoilt our land. That is why we can no longer grow crops around the land until it regains its fertility. (Odongo, male, 45 years, 2013)

> I came back home when my marriage failed, with my children, but my brothers are not happy about our stay. They claim that I should take back my children because they cannot accommodate them on this land. They say it is OK for me to stay here, but not with another man's children. (Adyee, female, 35 years, 2013)

In Northern Uganda, the patrilineal inheritance structure gives preference to male kin in the transfer of land rights (Rugadya, Nsamba-Gayiiya, and Kamusiime 2008). Whyte et al. (2012) highlight the practice of patrilineal fundamentalism, which asserts the right to territory on the basis of patrilineal descent. This enforces male authority and emphasizes blood relations and formal marriage. Adyee's case illustrates the challenge of patrilineal affiliation where her rights of access are recognised but not her children. Thus, marital regimes are vital in securing land rights and access for women. Pre-war access and usage was not restricted to patrilineal descent (Girling 1960). In the aftermath of the war, the flexibility and elasticity of customary tenure has diminished (Branch 2013). The processes of capitalism, such as privatization and commodification, are taking shape and fundamentally altering the traditional tenure rights and systems. Increasingly, there is manipulation of land tenure by those with money or power. Although national laws protect women in matters relating to tenure, they are often sidelined by traditions.

Loss of cattle

In Northern Uganda, cattle have economic and symbolic value as a source of wealth and bride price payment (Atkinson 1989). However, during the war there was large-scale cattle rustling and raiding, resulting in many people losing their livestock and livelihoods. However, there is uncertainty about who was responsible for the cattle raids.

Finnström states: "people in the war-torn north [Northern Uganda] saw the army's looting of their cattle as a deliberate strategy … they removed cattle to make the Acholi poor to be able to control the Acholi" (Finnström 2003, 106). My interviewees confirmed the loss of livestock:

I had livestock [goats and hens] but these were taken by the rebels. We lost everything we had. (Akello, female, 28 years, 2007)

In Awoo, I was keeping animals before the war and these were lost due to cattle raids. We also lost our animals because it was difficult to look after animals in the camp. (Ojok, male, 35 years 2007)

The loss of cattle and livestock during the conflict in Northern Uganda created significant economic and social dilemmas. Cattle were used as dowry to validate marriages (El-Bushra and Sahl 2005). Thus, both the loss of cattle and poverty led to a decline in socially sanctioned marriages, which in turn led to the transformation of marriage practices and norms, with significant implications for social relations and land rights in the post-war period.

Lack of identity and belonging
According to Atkinson (1994, 5), lineage is the most fundamental sociopolitical unit of the Acholi people in Northern Uganda. Such lineages comprise groups of people who share a common ancestry and have common traditions, taboos, and totemic observances. Membership of a lineage can be claimed through marriage or by descent (Finnström 2008). Therefore, either separation or the death of a husband or father signifies the loss of a key link that mediates social belonging. Displacement into the camps fractured social structures and support networks. It caused massive disruption and fragmentation of families and clans, which weakened social cohesion. Women and children were particularly vulnerable in this respect:

Supporting my children alone, without their father, is not easy, especially since their father passed

away. (Apio, female, 38 years, 2013)

Like Apio, most of the women I interviewed were widowed or separated due to the war. For

many of them, their relatives were unwilling to help their children, especially if the dowry was

not paid. Furthermore, single motherhood is disdained by society as a whole and the children of

single mothers have an ambiguous social position; they often take on the mother's lineage

(Whyte et al. 2012). If she remarries, she takes her children to the new marriage, but they are

often denied a sense of belonging and access to land. Fathers and brothers have an obligation to

care of their separated or widowed sisters and their children but seldom fulfil that obligation

(Baines and Gauvin 2014). The matrilineal village offers an alternate source of refuge. Many of

the separated women or single mothers preferred to return to their natal villages. However, as

illustrated by Adyee and Akot their social affiliation can be contested. Therefore, the lack of

identity and belonging creates critical challenges in access to social resources needed for

recovery:

I just stay here, but it is not our home. My mother stayed here because she had helped the owner

of that house with iron sheets a long time ago, and in exchange, he granted her a peaceful stay in

his compound. I also came and joined my mother after the death of my husband because I had

nowhere else to go. Now, after the death of the elders, the other children want me to leave their

land. I do not have a place to go to because my relatives are long dead and I do not know any

other relatives … The issues of land that I am battling with make me wish I had never come here

to live with my mother. I sometimes wish I had stayed in the camp and probably been transported

to Atiak [her late husband's home]. If that had been the case, I would have a piece of land to my name without someone *bagging* [harassing] me about it. (Akot, female, 44 years, 2013)

Similarly, the abduction and recruitment of children by the LRA as combatants created significant vulnerabilities. The case of returnee child mothers and their children is socially intricate, as they are blamed for the atrocities committed by their husbands and fathers. Mukasa (2017) reports discrimination, stigma, and rejection of war-child mothers by new in-laws, family members, and communities. As a consequence, the children suffer an identity crisis and have limited possibilities for integration because they are denied access to paternal names, resources, and property. The conflict in Northern Uganda led to the transformation of important social links, resulting in the loss of social affiliation or insufficient social affiliation, which in turn has affected people's access social resources. In addition, death and separation severely undermined social care systems and networks, mainly affecting orphans and the elderly.

Direct injury from conflict
Many people suffered direct injuries from the conflict. Many war victims suffered permanent scars and disabilities as a result of the notorious incidences of massacre, murder, rape, physical assault, maiming, and torture (Anyeko et al. 2012). Many of the victims were IDPs, who were physically wounded and mentally scared:

> Every night the rebels were attacking us. One fateful night, they broke into my house. I did not hear the alert signal, I just saw a torch light. They ordered me to get out of the house. They demanded money, which I did not have. They got a hoe handle that I had made. They hit my chest and back, and then they used the axe to hit my waist. This broke my spine and damaged my

kidneys. From here, I was admitted to Lacor Hospital for two months and I have never recovered since then. Their acts were evil. I do not know who is right or wrong. The abducted children who are trained are very dangerous. The crimes committed are too big and no justice can be achieved. The way forward is to forgive and forget that it ever happened. (Okwera, male, 70 years, 2007)

I have been a victim on a number of occasions. Once, I was forced to carry looted luggage and in the process we were beaten ... My only plea is that the rebel commanders let go of our children so that we can do the cleansing. (Christine, female, age unknown, 2007)

I have seen and met them. I was one time bundled up and beaten by the rebels and they robbed all that I had…. They have looted things that we will never get back. They have maimed and disabled people, which has affected their performance abilities. My close friend lost a son. He was taken and killed by the rebels. They have done horrible things and destroyed people's lives. (Lamino, female, 35 years, 2007)

The direct injuries resulting from torture and maiming created physical vulnerabilities and grossly undermined the functional abilities of affected people. The accounts presented above exemplify the permanent wounds of war, the trauma experienced, and the hope for justice. Parents still anticipate the return of their abducted children. Many of my interviewees still hoped for reunions with their missing family members. Okwera's injuries and disability required lifetime medication, which was very expensive and he could not afford to pay for it. His status had changed from being a provider to a dependant. Death and disability have been irreversible impacts of the conflict, with significant post-war liabilities. This entails adjusted roles and responsibilities to cope with the loss of a breadwinner, a parent, or child, which is often challenging.

Discussion

Overall, the war in Northern Uganda affected every aspect of life. However, in the following, I discuss two aspects that are particularly significant for post-war recovery interventions.

Geographical versus social displacement

Return policies often prioritize those who have suffered geographical displacement. However, I would argue that sociocultural displacement also has significant implications, as exemplified by the narratives presented above. The loss of social links and support networks through death and separation affects people's access and control over both material and non-material resources. It weakens their claim to social rights and protection, especially in the case of women and children.

Furthermore, moving people into camps significantly undermined their ways of life. The dispossession of agro-pastoralists of their cattle and the deprivation of their access to land significantly altered their livelihoods: they changed from being self-reliant farmers to dependants on aid and a non-cash based economy. Thus, the conflict displaced traditional livelihoods and created precarious survival strategies. Cattle were a significant cultural symbol for mediating social interaction such as through marriage, ritual performances, and when settling disputes. The loss of cattle created significant social anomalies that led to social displacement, which still prevails in the post-war period.

Geographical displacement undermined the traditional land governance systems, creating significant dilemmas relating to claims and access. The death of land custodians led to the loss of institutional memory, and most of the displaced people lacked any legal documentation or social affiliation that would have validated their ownership claims, which has been a source of land

disputes in the post-war period. The case of Northern Uganda illustrates the intricate aspects of social and geographical displacement and the consequences for post-war recovery.

Gender-differentiated vulnerability

Women are generally disadvantaged in terms of access to resources and the burden of care in the post-war period. Protracted conflict and displacement in Northern Uganda significantly altered the nature of their access to land and their control over its usage. This is particularly challenging because land is a socially mediated resource.

Deininger and Castagnini (2006) observed that widows and separated women had a higher probability of experiencing land conflicts, and lower levels of access due to loss of social affiliation as a result of death and separation. Widowed and single mothers are chronically disadvantaged because they need strong and validated social links to secure social resources and protection. Therefore, underlying social structures create gendered land access and varying degrees of property rights, which undermine post-war recovery strategies. The gendered access to social resources reflects the situated fields of power that favour men and marginalize women and children.

Conclusions

Conflict and displacement reinforce social, economic, and political inequalities. Social dimensions of displacement have significant implications for economic recovery. The ability to mobilize both social and economic resources is crucial in post-war recovery. In this paper, I have demonstrated that people who have access to land and strong social networks are more resilient than those who do not have the same access.

The return by IPDs to their original places is not always a durable solution to end protracted displacement. The notions of home that subsume the knowledge that home is 'fixed and static' are thus challenged. Protracted conflict and displacement reconfigure the constitutive elements of home to include or exclude people. War and displacement create permanent social and physical impacts from which people seldom recover. Consequently, recovery entails working with new norms and adapting to new patterns of living in order to forge a new post-war future.

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