

AFTER THE SMOKE CLEARS:

Understanding the dynamics of ethnic identity in protracted conflict and displacement affected Acholiland, northern Uganda

WORKING DRAFT

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Working Abstract

Since the end of the Cold War, dominant conflict management literature has illustrated how socially constructed ethnicity is an important contributing factor in explaining the causes of many intra-state conflicts. While the literature also considers how these conflicts are becoming increasingly protracted in nature, it has not yet considered how the experience of prolonged conflict and displacement may in turn affect socially constructed ethnicity. As a result, this thesis seeks to address this gap in literature, by exploring the dynamics of protracted conflict and displacement concerning the factors that influence the social construction of ethnicity in Acholiland, northern Uganda. By utilizing a synthesis of dominant social construction theory, a case study and fieldwork findings collected in Lord's Resistance Army affected, northern Uganda, this thesis will suggest that the dynamics of protracted conflict and displacement can affect the important factors involved in the social construction, or rather reconstruction of ethnic identity.

Introduction

Mind the Gap

An important feature of the post-Cold War era has been the drastic reduction of inter-state conflicts, which in turn, have been replaced by a rather marked rise of localized intra-state conflict.¹ These 'new wars' have been frequently hallmarked by identity-based violence, civil insurgency, coup d'état, and even genocide.² More recently, these conflicts have also been characterized as being increasingly protracted in nature, with many also resulting in problematic situations of prolonged displacement.³ As a result, these emerging intra-state conflicts and their consequences have become an important focus of conflict management literature in recent years.

When television news aired images of the Rwandan genocide, headlines documented massacres such as Srebrenica, and the scourge of violent coup d'état began recurring in many regions of the global South, an increased impetus arose for conflict literature to explain the cause of these 'new wars.' Consequently, ethnic identity became increasingly recognized in conflict management literature, with many arguing that the end of the Cold War resulted in new dynamics of ethnicity, and with that, new forms of conflict.⁴ Indeed, when one now reviews conflict management literature, separating ethnic identity from analysis of intra-state conflict becomes increasingly problematic.⁵

By the end of the 1990s, explanations of socially constructed ethnicity as a potential cause of intra-state conflict began to occupy a significant portion of scholarship, and while some differ on the degrees to which ethnicity can cause conflict, socially constructed identity is consistently emphasized as an important factor.⁶ Whether assessing Balkan violence or the modern conflict in northern Uganda, neither primordial nor instrumental models appear as key a factor in explaining ethnicity-based conflict, as social construction theory.⁷

With respect to this ongoing discussion of ethnic identity, conflict and displacement, two important themes have emerged from conflict management literature in recent years. First, there is an important emphasis on socially constructed ethnic identity as a salient factor in explaining the cause of intra-state conflict. Secondly, there is a more recent effort to explain the increasingly

¹ Harbom, L. and Wallensteen, P. (2007), *Armed Conflict, 1989 - 2006*, Journal of Peace Research, Vol. 44, No. 5 and Harbom, L. and Wallensteen, P. (2010), *Armed Conflict, 1946 - 2009*, Journal of Peace Research, Vol. 47, No. 4.

² Duffield, M., (2001), *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security*, New York, Zed.

³ Gebre, Y. and Ohta, I., (2005), *Displacement Risks in Africa: Refugees, Resettlers and Their Host Populations*, Kyoto University Press, Kyodai Kaikan; Loescher, G. and Milner, J., (2005), *Protracted Refugee Situations: domestic and international security implications*, Routledge, New York ; Kaiser, T., (2000), *The Experience and Consequences of Insecurity in a Refugee Populated Area in Northern Uganda: 1996-1997*, Refugee Survey Quarterly, Vol. 19, No. 1. And Kaiser, T., (2006), *Between a Camp and a Hard Place: Rights, Livelihood and Experiences of the Local Settlement System for Long-Term Refugees in Uganda*, Journal of Modern African Studies, Vol. 44, No. 4.

⁴ For example, see: Duffield, 2001; Toft, M., (2003), *The Geography of Ethnic Violence: Identity, Interests and the Indivisibility of Territory*. Princeton, Princeton University Press and Mueller, J. (2000), *The Banality of Ethnic War*, International Security, Vol. 25, No. 1.

⁵ For examples of ethnic lens of analysis, see: Gross Stein, J., (2001), *Image, Identity, and the Resolution of Violent Conflict*, *Turbulent Peace: The Challenges of Managing International Conflict*, United States Institute of Peace; Vinci, A., (2005), *The Strategic Use of Fear by the Lord's Resistance Army, Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 16, No. 3; Obershall, A., (2001), *From Ethnic Cooperation to Violence and War in Yugoslavia*, in: *Ethno-political Warfare: Cause, Consequences and Possible Solutions*, edited by Chirot, D. and Seligman, M., Washington, American Psychological Association; Laremont, R., (2005), *Borders, Nationalism and the African State*, Colorado, Lynne Rienner; Dolan, C., (2009), *Social Torture: The Case of Northern Uganda, 1986 - 2006*, New York, Bergham; Kaufman, S., (2006), *Symbolic Politics or Rational Choice? Testing Theories of Extreme Ethnic Violence*, International Security, Vol. 30, No. 4. and Mueller, 2000.

⁶ For example, see: Toft 2003; Vinci, 2005; Kaufman, 2006; Marinova-Zuber, 2007; Obershall, 2001; Wilkinson, 2002; Dolan, 2009 and Schlee and Watson, 2009.

⁷ For examples: Obershall, 2001; Toft, 2003; Peterson, 2002; Mueller, 2000 and Marinova-Zuber, B., (2007), *The Rebirth of Nationalism in the Balkans in the 1990s: Causes, Consequences and Possible Solutions*, International Relations and Security Network, Report; Allen, T., (2006), *Trial Justice: The International Criminal Court and the Lord's Resistance Army*, London, Zed Books; Schlee, G., and Watson, E., (eds), *Changing Identifications and Alliances in North-East Africa*, New York, Bergham; Murithi, T., (2008), *African indigenous and endogenous approaches to peace and conflict resolution*, in: *Peace and Conflict in Africa*, edited by Francis, D., London, Zed Books and Clapham, C., (1998), *African Guerrillas*, Kampala, Fountain Publishing.

protracted nature of modern conflict and displacement, including the challenges of ending hostilities and building peace.⁸

Thus, while literature does consider how ethnicity may contribute to intra-state conflicts and how these conflicts and situations of displacement are becoming increasingly protracted, it appears that there is little consideration, if any, on how protracted situations may in turn affect ethnic identity. In response to this gap, this condensed paper aims to examine and explore two inter-connected and important aspects of conflict and displacement literature.⁹ First, this paper aims to illustrate the considerable gap in literature concerning the affects of protracted situations on socially constructed ethnicity. For example, where factors such as socioeconomics, individual agents and discourses have been argued as mechanisms involved in the social construction of ethnic identity, seldom if ever have these mechanisms been examined in protracted situations of conflict and displacement.

The second aim of this paper is to suggest that the dynamics of protracted conflict and displacement can affect the factors involved in the social construction of ethnic identity, by employing the case study of Acholiland, northern Uganda. However, it is important to note, due to the lack of current baseline data in this regard, these affects cannot be conclusively demonstrated. Yet, what can be provided is a highlight of the gap in literature, and more importantly, an illustration that the factors including socioeconomics, elite manipulation, externalities and divergent discourses,¹⁰ are present and prevalent in the responses collected from Acholiland, while also being viewed as important for the further social construction, or rather reconstruction of ethnic identity. To support this argument, this condensed paper will use a brief synthesis of literature focusing on ethnicity, conflict and displacement, a case study and in-depth fieldwork conducted in Lord's Resistance Army/Movement (LRA/M) – National Resistance Army/Movement conflict affected Acholiland.¹¹

Literature Review

The Dominant Discussion of Ethnicity: In Brief

In dominant literature, the most widely used conceptualization of ethnicity follows the contours of Weber's depiction which argued ethnicity was a product of "subjective belief in common descent" due to "similarities of physical type," "memories of colonization or migration."¹² This definition provides some distinct and recognizable criteria concerning the foundation of ethnicity. Yet equally important, is that the explicit and implicit criteria noted in Weber's depiction are also recognized and widely utilized in broader social science literature.¹³

⁸ See: Crocker, C., Hampson, F., and Aall, P., (2004), *Taming Intractable Conflict: mediation in the hardest cases*, Washington, United States Institute of Peace and also Crocker, C., Hampson, F., and Aall, P., (2005), *Grasping the Nettle: analyzing cases of intractable conflict*, Washington, United States Institute of Peace.

⁹ For the full-manuscript please contact the author, Ryan Butyniec, ryan.butyniec@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

¹⁰ Concepts will be elaborated in Chapter 2.

¹¹ Fieldwork consisted of 150 quantitative surveys and 40 qualitative interviews conducted from September through December 2010.

¹² Weber, 1996.

¹³ ¹³ For a discussion of the concept 'nation' see: King, C., (2003), *Nations and Nationalism in British Political Studies*, in: *The British Study of Politics in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Hayward, J., Barry, B. and Brown, A., Oxford, Oxford University Press, also Eriksen provides a concise argument of the differences between nationality and ethnicity in stating: "The distinguishing mark of nationalism is by definition its relationship to the state. A nationalist holds that political boundaries should be coterminous with cultural boundaries, whereas many ethnic groups do not demand command over a state. When the political leaders of an ethnic movement place demands to this effect, the ethnic movement therefore by definition becomes a nationalist movement" Eriksen, T., (1993), *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, London, Pluto Press, p. 14. Additionally, for perspectives discussing the 'communication' of ethnicity, see: Gellner, E., (1983), *Nations and Nationalism*, New York, Cornell University Press; Barth, F., (1969), *Ethnic groups and boundaries. The social organization of culture difference*, Oslo, Universitetsforlaget and Deutsch, K. (1953), *Nationalism and Social Communication: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality*, Cambridge, MIT Press.

For instance, where this concept emphasizes collective memories of colonization or migration, these criteria have also often been further linked to a distinct territory or homeland in both modern and historical depictions of ethnicity. Additionally, the notion of shared colonization and customs imply that socioeconomic, discursive, communicated and symbolic processes are involved in the transmission or formation of ethnic identity, something noted recurrently in the broader discussion of ethnic identity and its social construction.¹⁴

Socially Constructed Ethnicity

In literature, nuanced explanations concerning the social construction of ethnic identity have increased, due to the adaptable, social interaction and communication based depictions forwarded by Weber, Barth, Deutsch and Gellner. An example of this further refinement of theory is evident in the argument of Fearon and Laitin. In *Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity* (2000), three factors were highlighted to influence the social construction of ethnicity, namely: socioeconomics, discourses and individual agents.¹⁵ Within these factors, the requisites of Weber, Barth, Deutsch and Gellner's depictions of ethnic (or national) identity such as: customs, territory, ancestry, history, language, interaction and means of production, can all be traced.

Concerning the influence of socioeconomics in identity creation, Fearon and Laitin refer to the arguments of Gellner and Deutsch that stated "the idea of nationality (ethnicity) became compelling to people only in the modern period as a result of economic and attendant social changes" and also that "national (ethnic) identities are the local political and psychological consequences of macrohistorical forces."¹⁶ As a result, Fearon and Laitin argue that social and economic processes are integral to the social construction of ethnicity, and that these processes are likely divergent amongst distinct ethnic groupings in the modern era.

Similarly, to socioeconomics, the factor of discourse provides multiple levels to which it can influence the construction of ethnicity.¹⁷ Whether education, language or transmission of ideology, or the theoretical perspectives of Deutsch, Gellner and Barth; numerous works in conflict affected east African and southeastern European regions have emphasized that the manner of differentiation, recollection and communication are as important as the distinct stories being told.¹⁸ Consequently, the social construction of ethnic identity is heavily influenced by the

¹⁴ For socioeconomic or discourse elements, see: Fearon and Laitin, 2000, Marinova-Zuber, 2007, Finnstrom, 2008; Obershall, 2001; Gellner, 1983; Eriksen, 1993 and Kaufman, 2006 while symbolic aspects are illustrated by Horowitz, D., (1985), *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, Berkley, University of California Press and Kaufman, 2006. Additionally, While numerous authors have been left out of this examination, it is due to their perspectives being either overtly or tacitly endorsed by the nuanced depiction provided by the authors herein. One can find use of: Weber, 1996; Eriksen, 1993 and Horowitz, D., (1985), *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, Berkley, University of California Press - in the wider ethnicity, conflict and displacement literature authors such as: Kasozi, A., (1994), *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda, 1964-1985*, Toronto, McGill-Queens University Press; Mamdani, M., (1996), *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, Princeton, Princeton University Press; Petersen, R., (2002), *Understanding Ethnic Violence: Fear, Hatred, and Resentment in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press; Fearon and Laitin, 2000; Gross Stein, 2001; Malkki, 1995; Finnstrom, 2008; Obershall, 2001; Toft, 2003; Marinova-Zuber, 2007; Kaufman, 2006; Laremont, 2005; Atkinson, 1989 and Atkinson, 1994. Additionally, While numerous authors have been left out of this examination, it is due to their perspectives being either overtly or tacitly endorsed by the nuanced depiction provided by the authors herein. One can find use of: Weber, 1996; Eriksen, 1993 and Horowitz, D., (1985), *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, Berkley, University of California Press - in the wider ethnicity, conflict and displacement literature authors such as: Kasozi, A., (1994), *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda, 1964-1985*, Toronto, McGill-Queens University Press; Mamdani, M., (1996), *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, Princeton, Princeton University Press; Petersen, R., (2002), *Understanding Ethnic Violence: Fear, Hatred, and Resentment in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

¹⁵ Fearon and Laitin, 2000, p. 851 – 857.

¹⁶ Fearon and Laitin, 2000, p. 851.

¹⁷ "... discursive formations can set one group in opposition to another or predispose them to see the other as a threat or natural subject for violence ." Ibid., p. 852.

¹⁸ Marinova-Zuber, 2007, Uvin, 1999 and Obershall, 2001.

stories and perceptions of groups, which are perpetuated both internally and externally.¹⁹

Fearon and Laitin also outline the importance of individual actors or agents as a factor in the social construction of ethnic identity. Here they argue, “content and boundary rules of ethnic categories, might be constructed by the actions of individuals.”²⁰ As such, they imply that local elders, political agents and radicals can play an integral role in the further construction and formation of ethnic identity.²¹ Consequently, this theory follows (and finds continuity in the wider discussions of ethnic identity construction), that individuals can act as a catalyst for creation of identity, or in extreme instances as accelerants to violence.²²

Interestingly, all of the criteria outlined by Fearon and Laitin dovetail with the depictions and assumptions of ethnic identity forwarded in the earlier literature of Weber, Barth, Deutsch and Gellner. Also of note, is that all of these processes are incredibly dependent upon human interaction and communication, a fluid and evolving caveat, one also strongly linked to history and its subsequent influence upon social interaction and thus social formations of identity.

Socially Constructed Conflict

Initial assessments of intra-state conflict in the 1990s, emphasized that ‘age-old’ hatreds and primordial vehemence were the basis for ethnic divergence and thus conflict. However, as quickly as they were forwarded, atavistic perspectives became contested and alternative theories grew in contestation to rigid primordial outlooks. Moreover, in reviewing the literature of Fearon and Laitin, Obershall, Toft, Marinova-Zuber and Kaufman, the nuance of social construction is consistently emphasized. For instance, where primordial and instrumental theories hinge on assumptions of the role of ethnicity in causing conflict based on factors such as: atavistic tendencies, economic incentives or political power in isolation, social construction models involve these factors, in addition to a much wider array of alternates as part of their more expansive explanation of socially constructed ethnic conflict.

An example of this nuance is illustrated by Toft and Marinova-Zuber, both who touch upon the criteria of Fearon and Laitin in arguing that divergent primary educations, perspectives of territorial linkages and historic and modern injustice shaped identity and the possibility of ethnic conflict in the Balkans.²³ Kaufman furthers this sentiment in his work surrounding conflict in the Sudan, exhibiting that not only instrumental political and economic choices shaped decisions to fight, but also culturally recognized and communicated symbols and myths from history.²⁴ Additionally, Peterson, who discusses fear, hatred and resentment, forwards another perspective implying social interaction and communication as affective to identity construction and conflict. As with Toft and Kaufman prior, communication of perceived injustices, resentment for such and security dilemmas due to became cited as factors in the creation of distinct identity and conflict thereafter.²⁵ As a result, in light of the contestation of instrumental and primordial theories, it appears that social construction of ethnic identity and its many moving parts, also better suggests a wider degree of the causes of conflict.

¹⁹ Gross Stein, 2001.

²⁰ Fearon and Laitin, 2000, p. 852.

²¹ Ibid, p. 852 – 854.

²² The term is slightly different, but the theory of elite manipulation in conflict is very similar in operation to individual agents. Kaufman argues that individuals of an elite nature are integral for the inception and perpetuation of conflict along ethnic lines. These individuals are noted to incite violence, shape discourses and have authority over many socioeconomic processes that construct ethnic identity and quite possibly, conflict. See: Kaufman, 2006.

²³ Toft, 2003 and Marinova-Zuber, 2007.

²⁴ Kaufman, 2006.

²⁵ Peterson, 2002.

Returning once more to the work of Fearon and Laitin, the same three mechanisms involved in the construction of ethnic identity, also prominently feature above and in the broader conflict causation literature. Consequently, the three broad mechanisms of socioeconomics, individual agents and discourses appear as important to the cause of conflict, as they do to ethnic identity creation. This is emphasized in the manner that social and economic interaction, injustice, marginalization and communication are all touched upon implicitly or explicitly in the above and wider conflict causation literature.

For instance, from the Rwandan genocide, violence in the Balkans during the dissolution of Yugoslavia, or the ongoing insurgency in Uganda, the Sudan and DRC, socially constructed ethnicity (or the factors influential to) have continually been cited as a means of creating social and economic divides, marginalization, hostile discourses and elite manipulated ethno-political divergences that have resulted in violent conflict perpetrated by either the general population or specifically trained militia forces.²⁶ As a result, from the sheer magnitude of literature emphasizing the role of elites in exacerbating difference between groups, issues such as social and economic disharmony, and distinct discourses with hostile iterations towards 'outsiders,' the social construction model appears as apt to explain causes of conflict, as it did identity formation.

Concerning the objective of this paper, an important continuum has become evident, and in the overall discussion of ethnicity and the causes of conflict, social construction theory looks to have succeeded in three very important respects. First, social construction theory appears in primacy, as the most convincing argument with regard to the broad contours of ethnic identity and the myriad of manners in which it is created. Secondly, where Fearon and Laitin illustrate the expansive use of social construction theory in ethnic identity and conflict studies, they in turn illustrate its potential in even broader discussions, such as those of protracted situations. Finally, the broad contours and factors involved in the theoretical social construction of ethnic identity, also touch on many of the varying assessments of the causes of conflict in dominant literature.

Framework

Fearon and Laitin's factors of socioeconomics, individual agents and discourses describe some very distinct processes in the broad discussion of ethnicity, conflict and displacement. Yet, by including the broader discussions of ethnic identity and conflict, their approach can be expanded in the aim of providing a more holistic analysis. However, their initial socioeconomic factor is already most elaborate, and one will find it difficult to argue that the factors of socioeconomics have not shaped identity in many situations, as distinct means of production, political organization, cosmology, territory, and social systems are all very distinct factors that often carry strong linkages to a distinct ethnic identity.

Next, as Fearon and Laitin's individual agents have been illustrated in broader literature to influence ethnic identity, it is evident that these individuals have largely been what one terms, an elite. That is, persons with the ability to use ethnicity as a means of union or aggravation. Whether presidential candidates, anti-colonialists, resistance leaders of religious figureheads, these individuals either were or became elites in society due to their involvement in political

²⁶ For some of the numerous examples of work which employ or reference contingents to Fearon and Laitin (2000) socially constructed conflict model, see: Uvin, P., (1999), *Ethnicity and Power in Burundi and Rwanda: Different Paths to Mass Violence*, Comparative Politics, Vol. 31, No. 3; Behrend, H., (1998), *War in Northern Uganda: the Holy Spirit Movement of Alice Lakwena*, Severino Lukoyo and Joseph Kony (1986-1997), in: *African Guerillas*, (ed) Clapham, C., Kampala, Fountain Publisher in addition to: Vinci, 2005; Obershall, 2001; Toft, 2003; Kaufman, 2006; Dolan, 2009; Finnstrom, 2008; Schlee and Watson, 2009 or Marinova-Zuber-2007.

action. As such, rather than using the framework of individual agents, this thesis prefers the delineation of elite manipulation,²⁷ as most work emphasizes that few individuals have the ability to create massive social change, unrest or action as easily as the elite portion of the polity.

Interestingly, one could also elaborate on Fearon and Laitin's discourse paradigm. While discourse certainly applies herein, it is necessary to identify who is taking part in creating or shaping the discourse. As Malkki, Marinova-Zuber, Peterson and Toft all illustrate, local realities are often shaped in different manners, and certainly by different demographics (village member versus urban resident). Due to this, the demographics delineation has been added to discourse. While continuity may exist in the discourses and recollection carried in distinct ethnic communities, there is a high likelihood that these are narrated in different manners by different members in the group.

Finally, as was evident in the literature of Mamdani, Rodney and Iliffe, external influences on local communities have often been influential in shaping identity, particularly in the case of Africa. As a result, a section in the framework for externalities has been added. Whether in the form of colonial administrators or international agents becoming involved in development and conflict mitigation, these factors appear very important in shaping identity, especially in situations of conflict.²⁸

In summary, the four factors of socioeconomics, elite manipulation, externalities and discourses noted from dominant social construction theory and broader ethnicity-based literature, will be employed in the case study and research findings to follow. As a result, in the context of northern Uganda, the case study of modern conflict and subsequent research findings based on narratives and quantitative data, will be viewed through a lens of social construction of identity, with a distinct focus on the ways that socioeconomics, elite manipulation, externalities and discourses may have shaped identity, and in turn, been further shaped by protracted conflict and displacement.²⁹

Case Study: Acholiland, northern Uganda in Brief³⁰

The 'Bush War' and LRA/M Conflict (1986 – Present)

Stability for a second Milton Obote tenure in Uganda did not last, and the alliances used to oust his predecessor Idi Amin, were reassembled into the National Resistance Army/Movement (NRA/M) to topple the final two northern leaders in the early-to-mid 1980s.³¹ This NRA/M coalition was comprised of Yusuf Lule's Uganda Freedom Fighters (UFF) and a mercenary named Yoweri Museveni with his Ankole tribally dominated Popular Resistance

²⁷ See: Kaufman, 2006.

²⁸ Uvin, 1999 and Iliffe, 1995. Additionally, this also carries linkages to Weber's (1996) definition of ethnicity, as the colonial administrators and their affects to the local population would certainly involve social processes such as: socioeconomic involvement, elite manipulation and discursive elements.

²⁹ The additional theories of Malkki, 1995: 'recreation' and Gross Stein, 2001: 'crystallization' will only be attached to the case study or research findings when necessary.

³⁰ For the full case-study or manuscript, please contact the author, Ryan Butyniec, ryan.butyniec@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

³¹ While the first Obote government of the Uganda National Congress (UNC) held nationalist aims, the old Buganda kingdom that was a seat of power during the British administration split amongst support for nationalism and an old authority. Subsequently, political parties fragmented and in less than twenty years after independence, Uganda had lost over one million of its population due to ethno-political violence. Consequently, political parties including the UNC which became the Uganda Peoples Congress (UPC), the Democratic Party (DP) and the Kabbaka Yekka party (KY) all aimed at controlling the country along ethnic lines, using their loyal military to crush political descent, while providing incentives for the support from ethnic kin. In this respect, the Obote UPC was most successful in setting an ominous precedent for Ugandan political violence. See: Kasfir, N., (1979), 'Explaining Ethnic Political Participation', *World Politics*, Vol. 31, No. 3; Kasfir, N. (1976), *The Shrinking Political Arena: Participation and Ethnicity in African Politics*; with a Case study of Uganda, Berkeley, University of California Press; Karaguire, S., (1996), *The Roots of Instability in Uganda*, Kampala, Fountain Publisher; Odhiambo et. al, 1977, p. 174; Kasozi, 1994, p. 3. Additionally important to note: Tito Okello was part of the coup that removed Obote, only to then be removed himself by the Museveni 'Bush War'.

Army (PRA). As a result, the final overthrow of northern leaders sparked a guerilla war including belligerents from numerous ethnic factions within the state, dubbed the 'Bush War'. Understanding that powerful insurgency would be required to obtain power, Museveni built a politico-military movement based on sharp ethnic divides. Going beyond ethnic kinsmen and in addition to the support he received from compatriots in Rwanda and FRELIMO with whom he trained with in Mozambique, Museveni also sought British and Libyan assistance in his quest to command Uganda.³²

During the 'Bush War,' Museveni's NRA/M was notorious for employing kadogos (child soldiers), land-mines, forced displacement and rights abuses that included the infamous Mpawo Atalikaaba³³ in areas such as Luwero.³⁴ By 1986, Museveni's NRA/M took control of Kampala and through a rebuffed peace treaty in Nairobi and the use of ethnic allies, Museveni consolidated total control over Uganda. Museveni then became Uganda's President, focusing now on the task of destroying what he perceived as a northern ill influence in Uganda.³⁵

With Museveni intent on ending insurgency in the north, numerous groups resisted the southern regime. These northern-based movements began to consolidate their attacks against Museveni, in the fear that directed marginalization and a potential ethnic cleansing was pending.³⁶ As a result, from 1986 onwards, rebel movements including the Allied Democratic Front (ADF), the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM) and the Uganda Peoples Democratic Army (UPDA) formed small, but tactically proficient northern ethnic and grievance based resistances, of which the HSM is most notable for a few important reasons.³⁷

First, the HSM is where Acholi culture and cosmology initially presented itself as a grievance based resistance, by using local culture and cosmology to keep troop discipline, aid indoctrination and consolidate community loyalty.³⁸ Additionally, the HSM was a springboard in many respects from which the modern day LRA/M arose. Lastly, a spiritual mystic by the name of Alice Auma 'Lakwena' headed the HSM, and her merging of Acholi cosmology and Christianity became the template from which Joseph Kony's LRA/M would begin and continue to this day.³⁹

Like Lakwena before him, Kony employed mysticism, Acholi cosmology and spiritual inhabitants to induce fear, retain loyalty and provide tactical direction.⁴⁰ Interestingly, in the broader discussion of the LRA/M conflict, Kony is most widely recognized as being born in Odek sub-country, dropping out of primary-school and holding a familial relation to Alice Lakwena of the HSM; although degrees of separation and to what importance this has on the

³² Ngoga, P. (1998), Uganda, the National Resistance Army, in: (ed) Clapham, C., Kampala, Fountain Publishing., p. 96 – 98.

³³ Translation: a bus which killer's ride to disburse the murdered throughout the countryside, A.L.E. [b], 2010.

³⁴ Museveni has been cited as conducting mass campaigns of terrorism that appear directed along ethnic lines. In the report to the United Nations Tribunal on Rwanda, Arusha and Tanzania, members of the NRA/NRM guerilla movement were tied to a larger interstate politico-military movement that aimed at controlling the majority if not all of east Africa on Tutsi-Ankole and Buganda alliances. The wing was known as the Front for National Salvation and was founded in 1971. See: Report to the United Nations Tribunal on Rwanda, <http://www.mail-archive.com/ugandanet@kym.net/msg18926.html>, retrieved on, July, 5, 2010 and: Behrend 1998.

³⁵ Vinci, 2005.

³⁶ The continued use of northerners in the Ugandan military to oppress the non-Nilotic portions of Uganda was a hallmark of the first and second tenure of President Milton Obote. Additionally, in the years after Obote's regime fell to a coup staged by Idi Amin, Sudanese forces that already held enmity for and from the Acholi, were again used by Amin to slaughter the existing Acholi and Langi dominated military. In addition to these violent cycles that northern Ugandans became linked to in a military respect, development and economic disparity with the rest of the state had continued, if not expanded. See: Lautze, S., (2008), Livelihood systems of enlisted Ugandan Army soldiers: honour and reform of the UPDF, Small Wars and Insurgencies, Vol. 19, No. 4 and also, Schlee and Watson, 2009, p. 17– 19; Atkinson, 1994; Finnstrom, 2008 and Dolan, 2009.

³⁷ Branch, A., (2005), Neither Peace nor Justice: Political Violence and the Peasantry in northern Uganda, 1986 – 1998, African Studies Quarterly, Vol. 8, No. 2, p. 13.

³⁸ Behrend, H., (1999), Alice Lakwena and Holy Spirits: War in Northern Uganda, 1986 – 1997, Kampala, Fountain Publishers.

³⁹ Branch, 2005, p. 13.

⁴⁰ Vinci, 2005; Finnstrom, 2008 and Dolan, 2009.

conflict, is debatable.⁴¹

In the early 1990s, Kony's LRA/M war against the south was concretely attributed to ethnic grievances, and using techniques similar to the HSM in addition to broader Acholi cosmology, Kony indoctrinated and mobilized recruits who feared NRA/M rule.⁴² During this period, the LRA/M's tactics involved attacking government installations and the Uganda Peoples Defense Force (UPDF) to gain strongholds in the region and amass weapons or supplies. While still debated, the primary aim of the LRA/M appeared to be the overthrow of the NRA/M, if not autonomy for northern Uganda.⁴³ Consequently, support for the LRA/M was initially positive in Acholiland, as the NRA/M tactics both during the 'Bush War' and afterwards signaled a southern approach of abuse and ethnic mistreatment to the north.⁴⁴ However, the LRA/M struggled to gain traction against the NRA/M, and in 1991, 'Operation North' was created with the aim of ending the LRA/M insurgency.⁴⁵

During 'Operation North', the NRA/M occupied northern Uganda, installing its military as the de facto government. With this, widespread abuse and torture of civilians by government soldiers occurred, documented in perhaps the greatest detail by The Refugee Law Project's Chris Dolan.⁴⁶ After the occupation of Gulu and increasingly heated exchanges between the LRA/M and the UPDF, ethnic support for the LRA/M appears to have dwindled in mid-to-late 1990s for a few important reasons. First, the government in Khartoum began aiding the LRA/M to engage in a proxy war against the NRA/M supported Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA). In addition to combating the NRA/M regime,⁴⁷ LRA/M attacks on the Museveni supported SPLA only fueled increasingly virulent UPDF treatment of the Acholi community.⁴⁸

Secondly, where UPDF military could not reach, the NRA/M coercively created poorly armed Local Defense Units (LDUs) from the under-siege Acholi. Consequently, those displaced by UPDF violence or returning from resistance movements were subsequently coerced into LDUs, forced to attack the LRA/M when they entered districts, trading centers or IDP camps.⁴⁹ This creation of LDUs coincided with a shift in LRA/M tactics, who then violently turned their guns and pangas (machetes) towards the population that once supported them.⁵⁰ In addition, with the LRA/M alleged use of land mines and systemic UPDF mistreatment of displaced Acholi, overt support for Kony dropped, as the cause became increasingly isolated from the displaced community.⁵¹

With recruitment becoming problematic in the new dynamics of conflict, the LRA/M began to employ abduction as a means to build force capacity. During the span of the conflict,

⁴¹ Finnstrom, 2008.

⁴² Doom, R. and Vlassenroot, K., (1999), Kony's Message: A New Koine? The Lord's Resistance Army in Northern Uganda, *African Affairs*, Vol. 98, p. 20 – 33. And also: "It was Museveni who was oppressing the Acholi people, our wealth, our property was destroyed by Museveni. He want to destroy all Acholi so that the land of Acholi will be his land. I did not kill the civilian of Uganda, I kill the soldier of Museveni", See: Mukasa, H., New Vision, Retrieved, <http://www.newvision.co.ug/D/8/12/506533>, May 20, 2011.

⁴³ Finnstrom, 2008 and corroborated by: LRA/M Communiqué [a], (2010), Letter to Ban Kim Moon, Gulu District, September, 6. Copy retained by author.

⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch, (1997), *The Scar of Death: Children Abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda*, HRW, September; ICG Report, (2007), *Northern Uganda: Seizing the Opportunity for Peace*, International Crisis Group, Africa Report, No. 124, April and Otunno, 2007.

⁴⁵ Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999, p. 23.

⁴⁶ "The NRA forcibly cleared approximately 100,000 people from their homes in and around Gulu town ... soldiers (UPDF) committed hundreds of extra judicial executions as they forced people out of their homes, burning down homestead and granaries." Dolan, 2009, p. 45.

⁴⁷ Vinci, 2005, p. 366.

⁴⁸ This was noted as causing decimation in the area inhabited by Acholi, largely viewed as collaborators or sympathizers by the UPDF, see: Branch, 2005 and Finnstrom, 2008.

⁴⁹ Branch, 2005, p. 15.

⁵⁰ Finnstrom, 2008, p. 9 – 19 and Dolan, 2009, p. 46 – 47.

⁵¹ Behrend, 1998. P. 116.

some 30,000 youths are noted to have become victim to such practices.⁵² Due to these charges of enslavement, possible crimes against humanity and UPDF inability to end conflict, the Ugandan government was provided involvement of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 2003. Argued as a major stumbling block for the outcome of the Juba Peace Talks,⁵³ the ICC issued five outstanding warrants for Kony and his (mostly deceased) top leadership. Yet, even with the warrants and widespread condemnation, Kony did and often still does receive support. Whether this is due LRA/M fighting for the community, or because the NRA/M treated the northern population much worse, is debatable.⁵⁴

The principal means to which the NRA/M vilified itself for northern Ugandans, was in the early 1990s when it forced essentially all Acholi into IDP camps.⁵⁵ Said to be in the best interests of the community, IDP camps caged all Acholi in a barrage of violence perpetrated by the LRA/M and that of the UPDF. In the unsecured, squalid, over-crowded and disease rampant camps, the Acholi became recurrently abused by the UPDF for being rebel sympathizers, while also becoming a target of the LRA/M for traitorous acts (i.e. LDUs) to resistance.⁵⁶ Moreover, ongoing UPDF abuses such as rape, screening exercises and use of land mines created a difficult decision for northern Ugandans. A choice based on either allegiance to an increasingly vilified LRA/M, or support for a hostile and ethnically divergent NRA/M.⁵⁷ Since its inception in 1986, the LRA/M – NRA/M war has reportedly claimed in excess of 500,000 lives, and in spite of its argued military superiority, after some 25 years, the UPDF has still failed to bring peace and security.⁵⁸

The case study of Acholiland was used for several important reasons. First, the chronological case study of Acholiland clearly illustrates the importance of the four framework factors involved in the social construction of ethnic identity. Secondly, the case study also emphasizes that little, if any literature proceeds beyond analyzing the construction of ethnic identity, and its potential influence concerning the cause of conflict. The case study succeeded in this respect. Moreover, for the objective of this paper, the four framework factors involved in influencing the social construction of ethnic identity, are illustrated in the literature whether in the pre-colonial period or era of modern conflict.

Fieldwork Findings: Qualitative Narratives

The Social Interaction of Violence, Fear and Marginalization

As a result of the more than two decades of violence, numerous failed peace talks, widespread use of child soldiers and displacement of approximately two million persons, the LRA/M – NRA/M conflict has been analyzed and reinterpreted by a myriad of governments, academics and international and local NGOs. Yet, no matter how current perspectives⁵⁹ of the conflict may have changed since the initial shots of the ‘Bush War’ in 1986, LRA/M leader Joseph Kony continues to provide reasons for resistance focusing on ethnic marginalization. Due

⁵² Baines, E., Stover, E. and Wierda, M., (2006), *War-Affected Children and Youth in Northern Uganda: Toward a Brighter Future*, Chicago, MacArthur Foundation Assessment Report and Allen, 2006

⁵³ See: LRA/M Communiqué [b], (2010), Juba Assessment, Nairobi, Kenya, November, 2. Copy retained by author

⁵⁴ Behrend, 1998, p. 1998

⁵⁵ Dolan, 2009, p. 40 – 40.

⁵⁶ Vinci, 2005; HRW, 1997; Branch, 2005; Schlee and Watson, 2009 and Behrend, 1998.

⁵⁷ Finnstrom, 2008, p. 202 – 206.

⁵⁸ ACR, retrieved: <http://www.ploughshares.ca/libraries/ACRText/ACR-Uganda.html#Deaths>, on May 18, 2011.

⁵⁹ See the de-politicization of the Acholi resistance created by advocacy networks such as Invisible Children, Enough and Revolve Uganda as noted in: LRA/M Communiqué [d], (2010), Covering Letter, Gulu, Uganda, November, 2. Copy retained by author and also: Finnstrom, 2008 and Dolan, 2009.

to this, a good number of Acholi appear to have been, and continue to be supportive of the LRA/M, with most perceiving the conflict in a sense that, “Self-defense is an obligation, God protect those who protect themselves as well as others. I feel obliged to protect my rights and that of the other (Acholi) people”⁶⁰.

Concerning social interaction and violence, interviews consistently revolved around the levels of violence directed at the community in Acholiland, and the manner to which this appeared affective to identity. For instance, in some of the most affected areas of Gulu, respondents from Pece and Bar Dege division believed that the major impetus for the LRA/M, HSM and WBNF resistance, was a response to the NRA/M’s attempt to smash the distinct northern tribes and their cattle or land wealth.⁶¹ However, the violence was perceived as something greater than just physical domination, with many noting psychosocial themes.

I was only nine when the war started for real, I mean when the *panda garis* (get on the lorry) came around ... They (NRA soldiers) would tell us where to long call (defecate) and short call (urinate), then they would burn us in our huts for being Acholi.⁶²

In addition to the constraining and violent control over the lives of northern Ugandans, psychosocial violence was exemplified in the NRA/M practice of burning huts, something noted as “one of the worst things you can do to an Acholi.”⁶³ Most important to note, is that the theme of socially and psychologically directed ethnic violence was consistently noted, as were the incidents of NRA/M extra-judicial killings and rapes.⁶⁴

What is most interesting in this respect, is the sheer consistency in negative and violence-based narratives and the overarching perception that social violence and constraint was directed at the north simply for who they were, ethnically speaking. Consequently for the Acholi, it appears social interaction during the conflict was consistently shaped and even regulated by negative socially reinforced perspectives.⁶⁵ Also interesting, was the narrative of violence against the Acholi as a specific NRA/M campaign was cited from the most random households to the most influential members of resistance.⁶⁶ Equally interesting, is this narrative of marginalization was consistently forwarded by respondents, illustrating that due to the fear of the southern government, many Acholi willingly joined the resistance.⁶⁷

Economics of Theft and Deprivation

Distributed by the Rwot (Chief) of a clan, land was traditionally a corporate and communal holding in Acholi.⁶⁸ Due to this, respondents would argue one’s wealth was not

⁶⁰ LRA/M Peace Team correspondence, (2010), Concept on Final Peace Agreement (FPA), Gulu District. October, 20. Copy retained by author.

⁶¹ “They only wanted us in camps to control the land, look who builds on our land now, Museveni’s brother Saleh ... it was all about stealing from us (Acholi), and controlling us” P. Okello [b], Pader District, 2010

⁶² D. Okello, [a], Gulu District, 2010

⁶³ Burning a hut requires a distinct and specific process to ameliorate, something nearly impossible in the case of Acholiland due to the sheer amount and intensity of wang odi (burning huts) J. Okello [a], Gulu District, 2010 and P. Okumu, Pader District, 2010.

⁶⁴ “When the *panda garis* came, you would get in the back to be ‘screened’, you would probably be raped or die later that night by some [expletive] NRA man”, J. Ocan, Kitgum District, 2010 and “Only men from areas around Gulu were being screened, executed as rebels. Only the Acholi and Langi were screened. You know the *panda garis* didn’t exist in Buganda or Jinja. Screenings and executions were only for us (Acholi)” D. Okello, [b], Gulu District, 2010.

⁶⁵ “look, these things like camps, tek gungu, *panda garis* – they didn’t happen because there was a small threat from the north. They knew of our land, they knew of our support to keep it our own, they knew we would fight for it. This is why they use much force, not just to end the UNLA, it was to end Acholi”, G. Okello [a], Gulu District, 2010.

⁶⁶ Quote, General Josph Kony: “We fight to regain the wealth of Acholi. The wealth they (NRA/M) stole, and to rebuild what they destroyed and change what they did to make you weak people where you were once strong.” LRA/M Peace Team correspondence [a], 2010.

⁶⁷ “The NRA was slaughtering Acholi, doing mutilation, burning huts and raping women. Why would I then fight the people (LRA/M) who were fighting the government that came to create hell here? I fought willingly.” J. Okena, Gulu District, 2010.

⁶⁸ Atkinson, 1994 and D. Okena, Kitgum District, 2010.

measured only in tangible possessions, but in the land they worked with other members of their heptarch.⁶⁹ Thus for the resistance and wider Acholi community, the NRA/M's theft and extraction of land became a consistent political, social and economic grievance.⁷⁰ This assists in explaining Kony's early references to wealth, to which numerous Acholi elders affirmed.⁷¹ Emphasizing not only the historical and social importance of land, respondents also implied the potential consequences of conflict on such a critical component of Acholi socioeconomic life. Consequently, with ongoing violence and the growing fears of extracted wealth, the social interaction between Acholiland and the NRA/M appear dominated by negative imagery, fear of theft and hostility.

They only wanted us in camps to control the land, look who builds on our land now, Museveni's brother Saleh ... it was all about stealing from us (Acholi), and controlling us.⁷²

Respondents noted that in addition to the NRA/M stealing land, the economic disparity that already existed between Acholiland and the rest of Uganda, became exacerbated due to the displacement of the community.⁷³ This perspective of a growing disparity was recurrently linked to overarching assertions concerning the marginalization of the Acholi. For example, many in Acholiland believed that their children waste away due to the forced "by-products of poverty"⁷⁴ and that inability to stem simple illnesses were a direct result of NRA/M "ambivalence to Acholi suffering,"⁷⁵ or the "south wanting to keep the Acholi poor and weak."⁷⁶ Thus, for the Acholi under the constraints of conflict and displacement, without land or a manner to farm, there would also be no health, education nor security.

Elite Manipulations of Identity, the Conflict and IDPs

In regards to the village Mzee (elder) respondents provided two interesting continuums. The first was with regards to the importance these individuals played in shaping Acholi society and identity, from the pre-colonial period continuing into the current situation. However, this role was equally noted as constrained and reshaped by external sources, whether in the form of British administration, political marginalization or due to the duress of the protracted situation.⁷⁷

Emphasized in nearly every interview, discussions of the Mzee consistently drove at the historical importance of these individuals, as noted:

We were once here to teach the children ... we were those who would give lessons at wang oo (community fire), now we are not much more than witnesses to history and the LRA war ... we survived the British, Obote and Amin, but now this LRA and Museveni war has made it difficult ... us traditional Mzee no longer have the strength to keep the tribe together.⁷⁸

This narrative is important for two reasons. First, it was the most dominant theme forwarded

⁶⁹ J. Kilambus, Gulu District, 2010; P. Okello, [a], Lamwo District, 2010 and G. Okello, [b], Pader District, 2010.

⁷⁰ F.G. [2], Kitgum Corner, Gulu District, 2010.

⁷¹ "... land, just like the cattle and our ability to live was our wealth. We did not rely on a cash economy like the south, our wealth was our land." Acholi Local Elder, A.L.E., [a], 2010.

⁷² P. Okello [b], Pader District, 2010

⁷³ M. Ojara, Gulu District, 2010.

⁷⁴ J. Akallo, 2010. Furthermore, using the data provided by the Ugandan Bureau of Statistics and a study by Ssewanyana, et. al, this noted economic disparity is clearly illustrated in Uganda. See: GoU, (2007), Uganda Demographic and Health Survey 2006, Kampala, Uganda Bureau of Statistics; GoU, (2002), Nature, Distribution and Evolution of Poverty and Inequality in Uganda: 1992 - 2002, Uganda Bureau of Statistics, Nairobi, Regal Press; Government of Uganda, (1961), Uganda Census: Annual Report of the Education Department and Ssewanyana, N., Okidi, A., Angemi, D. and Barungi, V., (2004), Understanding the Determinants of Income Inequity in Uganda", Centre for the Study of African Economics, Makerere

⁷⁵ J. Akallo, Gulu District, 2010.

⁷⁶ R. Okena, Nwyoa District, 2010.

⁷⁷ O. Obitta, Gulu District, 2010.

⁷⁸ A.L.E., [c], 2010.

concerning traditional leadership under the constraint of war, and secondly, it outlines a critical aspect of Acholi culture over which the Mzee presided. The wang oo (community fire) that was essentially abolished during displacement due to curfews and insecurity, was previously the site where elders educated the village on social norms, conflict mitigation while also bringing together many of the families in the heptarch.

According to respondents, Yoweri Museveni was by far the most polarizing figure of all elite agents involved in the conflict and displacement of northern Uganda. Respondents spoke in near unison concerning the man that incited the 'Bush War' and the subsequent two decades of conflict in Acholiland, which included three military campaigns (hallmarked by abuse, torture and ethnic cleansing) aimed at ending all northern resistance. Indeed, Museveni was consistently posited as the man who commanded the hostile army that committed rape, destruction, murder and widespread repression of the Acholi.⁷⁹ Consequently, with his use of widespread social violence, Museveni appears to have successfully crystallized northern ethnic identities, and as a result, Acholi resistance. Thus, violence directed by Museveni against the north was a rallying point for many Acholi to join insurgencies or resist the NRA/M government, as options in Acholiland appeared as black and white, subjugation or resistance.⁸⁰

Initially many didn't want to fight, but you would hear what was being done in Odek to someone's father, then a whole clan in Acet. From that it became very tribal, because more and more clans were being destroyed by Museveni's NRA.⁸¹

Responses concerning Joseph Kony of the LRA/M illustrate a similar theme as above. Yet, in sharp contrast they do also provide sentiments of support, admiration and solidarity. What may be most important to note, is the consistent support showed for Kony often that came from respondents who noted a fear in speaking publicly of the UPDF, while also being wary to engage in discussions outside their home or during daylight hours. Nevertheless, for those respondents who did support the resistance, it appears to have provided a sense of pride and solidarity in ethnic kinship.

Kony's men would win against the NRA, my Uncle was part of his group, it was amazing. We provided them food and water when they came into camps. With the small guns, Kony's men used the support of *Jogi* (Spirits) and could defeat the NRA Mambos and Buffaloes (Tanks and APCs).⁸²

The small victories and skirmishes gained by the LRA/M, appear to have provided hope in its early ethnic narrative, with many perceiving the conflict in terms of David (Acholi) versus Goliath (Museveni) framework. However, with LRA/M victories came more virulent attacks on the north, in turn, creating increased constraints to the local community. Of these constraints, the most recurrently noted was forced usage of Acholi in LDUs to combat the LRA/M, something

⁷⁹ For example, "You know, it was even before the LRA that Museveni's NRA came here with the panda garis, sticking us into camps, leaving us to die. They couldn't win a war against Acholi outright, instead he brought Karamoja to steal cattle, then he cages us in camps, where he kept us to steal our land", J. Okello, [b], 2010.

⁸⁰ "I spent 20 years in camps, who put me here? Museveni's latuku tuku lweny (gunships) forced me here. Go to Awere, go to Atiak, go to Madi-Opeii. We were put here by Museveni, not by Kony – he lies about that. Museveni made us (Acholi) suffer, so I am sure many (Acholi) fought him because of this" R. Okena, Gulu District, 2010. And "When Acholi think about who killed wan goo, who did rape, who came and did murder, mutilation, burning huts? This was all Museveni's NRA, so it is not us to blame for the men taking to much drink, or not having boys who can hunt, we were made this way by war" J. Okello, [b], 2010.

⁸¹ D. Okello, [a], 2010

⁸² F.G., [1], 2010.

essentially dividing previous solidarity and resistance.⁸³

Externalities, Influencing Identity Through Conflict

The government of Khartoum became involved in the LRA/M – NRA/M conflict in the early 1990s. Due to Khartoum's employ of the LRA/M as a proxy force to combat the SPLA, disenfranchisement of many devoted LRA/M soldiers and loyalty issues in the resistance increased. While many initially joined the LRA/M believing in the ethnic narratives and grievances laid out in manifestos, as time passed the belief diminished.⁸⁴ What is important to note, is the sentiments of uncertainty or disenfranchisement were a common theme concerning Acholi perspectives of the Sudanese involvement in the LRA/M – NRA/M conflict in the early 1990s.⁸⁵ Equally important, is that this is also the period where allegiance to the LRA/M was consistently noted as losing traction.

I was marched to Sudan after my abduction. Sudanese men came and communicated with Kony when he arrived the first time, but if I was to fight Museveni, then why would I be in Sudan? Museveni is in Kampala. I think Kony got some money and forgot what he fight for. All I did was abduction and shoot SPLA, I only once fired at a UPDF man.⁸⁶

While many noted an understanding of the need for the LRA/M to retain support and supply of arms, they felt continued loss of life against the SPLA in Sudan and recruitment by abduction began to negate the overarching goal of fighting for the Acholi community, its culture and cosmological systems.⁸⁷ Therefore, while Kony's protracted war necessitated a turn to Khartoum for support, this appears to have disenfranchised many Acholi who believed they would continue to defend their territory and kinsmen. Because of the attacks upon the IDP camps and LDU members who were often staffed by family members, respondents would argue "I was told never to kill another Acholi by my father, so how could I do all of this?"⁸⁸

Where Kony's turn to Khartoum and attacks against the local community diminished his support base, the international insistence on either a military solution or ICC warrants did not galvanize this growing perspective. In fact, if anything is to be argued from the narratives, it is that ICC insistence and the failed peace processes are direct results of the disregard of the Acholi community and ambivalence to their suffering by the government. This was emphasized in the open hostility recurrently forwarded concerning the ICC, often in a manner that implied a crystallizing Acholi perspective.

This man Ocampo (chief prosecutor), does he know what he is doing? I wonder. He published in

⁸³ "When Museveni came, he made you fight in the LDU, you had no money in the camp, the (NRA/M) would say you fight the rebels or you are rebels. I think this is where Kony became the monster we know." G. Okello, [a], 2010 and "Kony came here once when I was a boy. He said I couldn't join, I was too young, even when I want to join ... not until I aged. By the time he came again, Museveni created the LDUs to fight the LRA. Kony's men were attack by men from the same tribe. When the LRA came the third time, it was not to ask for help with food, it was to kill the Acholi who fought the Acholi. Now, Kony wants to get Museveni, but also those Acholi who let him down" D. Okello, [b], 2010.

⁸⁴ "We became more focused with attacking camps to settle things with LDUs or informants. Then I started to question how we worked. Later, I talked to my family, they said we know you cut limbs from people. We don't have you in the family anymore. Then I became desperate, I didn't know why I fought anymore." F.G., [1], 2010. In addition, the incident referred to here was narrated by two of the few remaining survivors of the Opota Trading Center Massacre. The attack resulted in the killing of 27 individuals, who were then dismembered and subsequently cooked in large basins. This was argued as being done for a LRA/M deserter who had stolen some LRA/M weapons. J. Akulla, Pader District, 2010 and A. Zidonia, Pader District, 2010.

⁸⁵ "We started getting boys and girls younger and younger, they couldn't fight for us soon enough, so we would take them into the Sudan. I had to learn Arabic. Sudanese men started supplying us food and guns. They said they assisted us to fight Museveni ... and the bullets came in boxes with Arabic writing ... But what did this have to do with Museveni, we weren't fighting him anymore. For a long while I only fought SPLA or Acholi brothers or the Madi or Congolese." F.G., [1], 2010.

⁸⁶ F.G., [2], 2010.

⁸⁷ "If I was always fighting UPDF, I would still fight today. Instead I left, because I only fought people from my tribe", F.G., [1], 2010.

⁸⁸ F.G., [1], 2010.

the state-run New Vision to tell us Kony needs to be hung for crimes against us, but what about Museveni? When does he pay compensation for his crimes?⁸⁹

What appears most important to note in this and the similar narratives, is the appearance of an increasingly crystallized identity. For example, many Acholi worried that Kony's arrest would signal an end to Acholi independence, even if constrained by the Ugandan state, "When Kony is taken from here, then Museveni wins. The white men have created this charge so that Museveni can control our wealth."⁹⁰ This narrative was commonplace, and the overarching sentiment in regards to the consequences the ICC holds for locals, and subsequently their identity is as follows.

Look, we suffered many things. Acholi die because of Museveni, then because of Kony, then we are removed from the peace process by EU and US people. So now what happens? We are removed further, instead of coming home to pay compensations, do *mato oput* and *gomo tong*, Kony is taken from us? This isn't right, if it is then it means us as Acholi are dated and cannot solve problems. This is all very insulting, because before the British, Obote and Museveni we did life just fine.⁹¹

In short, the two external forces of Khartoum and the ICC appear to be playing important roles in influencing the social construction of ethnic identity in Acholiland, although in completely different respects. First, the influence of Khartoum created a more complex proxy war, one that many Acholi simply refuse to fight as it goes beyond the security provision of their ethnic kin. Rather, respondents spoke of returning home and recreating their identity as Acholi, one free of militancy and violence.⁹² Alternately, the presence of the ICC looks to be potentially crystallizing identity around the importance of traditional customs and conflict mitigation.⁹³ Rather than empowering local social cohesion systems, the ICC dehumanized the resistance and created a local reliance for international assistance in regards to conflict mitigation. For most this is insulting, as many in Acholi already feel reliant for services provided to them by international NGOs.

Discourses, Aged, Displaced, and the Violence Affected

For those individuals who were displaced, certain recurring themes would dominate discussions. For instance, qualitative narratives by Acholi respondents consistently referred to a potential and desired return home. This was emphasized in the manner to which the displaced in the municipality found numerous problems in the towns, while the predominance of those in IDP camps or resettlements longed "... to return to where I can farm my land again, I know it's grown over but I want to return and live for myself."⁹⁴ What is interesting in the narrative above, is that the theme centers upon a few distinct aspects of life in displacement. First, displaced persons feel completely reliant in their daily lives, as:

After 20 years in the camp, I don't know where to go anymore. Shall I go home? How will I get the water, the land turned? Everything was provided in the camp by the WFP Now, if I need health services, how far will they be? My home is too distant to get the thing I need and now if I

⁸⁹ D. Okello, [a], 2010.

⁹⁰ P. Okumu, Pader District, 2010.

⁹¹ F.G., [1], 2010.

⁹² R. Okena, 2010 and F.G., [1] – [3], 2010.

⁹³ G. Okello, [a], 2010 and A.L.E., [a] – [c], 2010.

⁹⁴ J. Okello, [b], 2010.

leave here, nothing will be provided, I start from nothing.⁹⁵

Important to note, these concerns of reliance were also tempered with cultural nuance, as many argued the conflict mitigation and development programs offered by international NGOs aimed first at assisting women, which, in turn created domestic issues such as gender violence, widespread alcoholism and suicide in men, concisely illustrated in the following.

In a camp I had no land to farm for my family, so my wife tried to get in NGO programs. That did not provide enough money. So in time she became a prostitute to a barrack of UPDF soldiers in Acet, we separated. I now have these six children and still no means to provide.⁹⁶

What the above comment emphasizes, is the recurring belief that cultural aspects of social identity in Acholiland were changing due to displacement. Consequently, narratives often centered on the apparently changing domestic roles. To this effect, many noted it was now women who became the center of the Acholi household, as once dominant men became:

Those animals that drink through the day, do not teach their children to farm or work, take many wives, beat their families. These are not Acholi men, they are a product of living like animals.⁹⁷

Incidentally, these changes in social behavior looked to not only affect the social setting, but also the wider cosmological picture for many:

When war came to my camp, things like burning huts, mutilation and rape happened. When war left, we still lived in the camp with those memories and with the tipu malac (bad spirits) surrounding us, we could not lose the cen (vengeful spirits) so now we suffer.⁹⁸

Consequently, if anything can be suggested from the masses of IDPs, in addition to the sentiments in the previous three sections, it is that changing social roles, a yearning to return to ancestral lands and a heartfelt belief of constant suffering flooded their language. In near unison, the respondents used language centering on the difficulty of returning to who they ‘were’ from who they ‘are’ now, and for the Acholi community and its cosmological order, this is no simple task.⁹⁹

Violent Discourses

The second group of individuals providing a consistent narrative or concerted discourse concerning ethnic identity was the ‘new Acholi’, namely the former combatants, victims of war and persons with severed ties to lineage. One of the most notable of these groups are children who were born into rebellion, returned home and have no tie to familial lines or ancestry. As one remarked,

When I came back ... they couldn’t find my family. I was an orphan in the bush because my mother was killed by the UPDF. Now, at 20 I still don’t know where I came from, so I sit here like a man with not dignity. I drive a boda (motorcycle taxi). I know from others in Gulu, that they had different times, sat by fire and listen to Mzee. When I sit by fire I do Gulugulu (local brew). Did I learn to farm? No, I carried a gun and shot UPDF, now I drive boda.¹⁰⁰

For those who were victims of violence, the LRA/M appeared lost from its ethnic and

⁹⁵ F.G., [2], 2010.

⁹⁶ F.G., [3], 2010.

⁹⁷ J. Akulla, Pader District, 2010.

⁹⁸ J. Ocan, 2010.

⁹⁹ “I am my brother, sister and neighbor, my wrong is my fathers, his uncles and neighbors. So when one is reliant, commits rape or does theft, we all have. So where one of us becomes lazy and drinks, beats his wife and leaves his children in camps. We all have” D. Komakech, 2010.

¹⁰⁰ F.G., [1], 2010

initially admirable bearings. Now, as a result, the victims were left with unanswered questions. As one respondent noted, in attempting to reconcile his abduction by the LRA/M with his cultural upbringing, he was at a loss.

When I was abducted, my wife and I sat by the fire. Someone heard rebels and sounded an alarm, so we hid inside the hut. The rebels came to my hut and put a torch in the window and ordered me and my wife to come out. They beat us badly and tied us. My wife was nearly killed, they only let her live because she was carrying baby (pregnant). This type of thing is not allowed. To beat women. Acholi don't do this. So, Kony and his men, they are not Acholi they are like something else.¹⁰¹

Beyond themes of strange and culturally degrading practices now used by the LRA/M, the sheer magnitude of violence aimed at the civilians looks to have possibly crystallized the identity of victimized respondents. Two survivors of the Geregere massacre, where the bodies of the deceased were dismembered and cooked in basins, retold harrowing stories of the attack on Opota Trading Center. Here, violence directed at civilians was shocking. Being marched to the roadside, the women witnessed bludgeoning of neighbors, who were subsequently cooked in large basins.¹⁰² A focus group member discussed the ramifications of such social violence, emphasizing:

Before the war, mob justice did not happen, but because the UPDF and LRA treated people so badly, when someone returns home from the Army or from the LRA, often we let them know they are not welcome, sometime they are even killed.¹⁰³

This is an interesting sentiment, as mob justice was often on display in northern Uganda, one could question how much of this was tied to violence in the past. Equally important, as the following discourses from elders exhibits, this violence is completely out of line with the cultural systems of compensations and atonement. While arguably not perfect institutions, they previously had the ability to avert mob justice, although these traditional institutions were also never tested by incidents such as the Opota Trading Center massacre in Geregere before.

Aged Discourses

As noted earlier, elders provided the social glue that often held together Acholiland's villages and communities. The education of youth, cultural norms and systems of social cohesion passed through these vessels. Yet, in camps the elders were often reduced to mere caregivers to orphans (a still invaluable job), overwhelmed by often hosting five or more orphaned children. As a necessary aspect of Acholi culture, the strength of the elders had never before been stressed in the manner it has during the protracted LRA/M conflict. In noting this cultural system of orphan adoption, one noted:

Traditionally, we take in those children from a family member that dies, but we also never had to deal with something like this (LRA war). I know women over 80 years who now have seven children under age 10, how can that be positive?¹⁰⁴

Moreover, often the comments centered on the difficulty in accepting children, knowing their military of LRA/M history:

In the past, things like murder, stealing would still happen, but these things would be dealt with

¹⁰¹ J. Kilambus, 2010

¹⁰² A. Zidonia, Pader District, 2010 and J. Akullu, 2010.

¹⁰³ F.G., [2], 2010

¹⁰⁴ A.L.E., [a], 2010.

over time ... now it is difficult. Some are rebels but they are children all the same. Some are UPDF. Some have too much shame to come home, other's don't want them home¹⁰⁵

Significant to note, is that in near unanimity, elders attributed violence and displacement as the two most critical aspects of the changing Acholi identity. This emphasized how Acholi youth are growing up in negatively shaped scenarios, distant from their culture and the traditional grounding of prior generations.

Now it is not the same. UPDF shoot and rape women, LRA is not the same people anymore from the UNLA so they attack their own. Museveni has done many things to offend our culture, but we can bring it back safely. But look at me, I am old, when I die the children here will be taught that gomo tong is from history. And maybe even some white man will perform it for them¹⁰⁶

To summarize, the displaced community, victims of violence and the elder all appear to have very distinct discourses concerning the conflict, displacement and the ongoing construction, or reconstruction of ethnic identity. For instance, reconstruction appears to be occurring for many former combatants, victims and former or current IDPs. While returning to ancestral and territorial ties is an option for some, for many the ties just simply do not exist. While elders romanticize cultural systems such as fireside education and conflict mitigation tools, newer generations either don't know them or are having them provided by an NGO backed function (see: GUSCO, JRP, and so on).

Conclusion in Brief

Taking the literature review, case study and fieldwork findings into consideration, this paper can suggest that in the context of Acholiland, the dynamics of protracted conflict and displacement do appear significant for the four factors of: socioeconomics, elite manipulation, externalities and discourses, which, may in turn, influence the social construction of ethnic identity. Consequently, it appears in the protracted situation of Acholiland, that ethnic identity was socially constructed prior to conflict, but then also susceptible to change during and thereafter, often in manners that appeared negative, crystallized or socially reconstructed.

In addition to suggesting that the dynamics of protracted situations can influence the four factors involved in socially constructed ethnic identity, fieldwork findings also intimate that this may potentially be occurring on multiple levels. For instance, as was illustrated in the fieldwork findings, individuals were affected by and reacted to conflict and displacement in different manners; whether the Mzee, the former combatant, the displaced, the victim of violence or those with severed tie to their origins. Therefore, while the overarching research findings and paper provide a meta-narrative of social constructed ethnicity in Acholi, it also appears that distinct micro-narratives may exist, as suggested in the distinct discourses and experiences provided by the elders, 'new Acholi' or the victims of prolonged displacement and violence. These findings provide some important and very interesting considerations for research, policy and practice. As the LRA/M - NRA/M conflict has lasted over 20 years, spilled into numerous states and been failed by peace processes and international involvement, the time for reconciling local truths and narratives appears pertinent. For another 20 years of violence and a return to displacement are not impossibilities, particular when the modern social reconstruction of ethnic identity shaped by such negative, constraining and violent processes.

The ICC says it wants traditional leaders to know the ICC is important, that it will replace

¹⁰⁵ A.L.E., [c], 2010.

¹⁰⁶ A.L.E., [a], 2010.

traditional systems that we have, that peace can happen if we give up on Acholiland systems like mato oput (bitter root – reconciliation), gomo tong (bending spears – conflict cessation), and neko del (slaughtered goat – spiritual atonement). He said this is easy for the ICC, when you take a poor Rwot from Acholi and bring him to Europe to drink nice wine in a fancy place, with people giving him things. Yes he will like the ICC, but that doesn't mean it will work for us here.¹⁰⁷

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¹⁰⁷ F.G., [3], 2010.

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