

**CONSEQUENCES OF CONFLICT IN POST-INDEPENDENT  
ACHOLILAND, 1986- 2006.**

People in Acholiland are tired of war; they want peace and development. Internally Displaced People (IDPs) need more help to build schools, medical centers, water points, farm implements and needs (UN-Special Envoy for Lords Resistance Army (LRA) affected areas-JOACHIM CHISSANO).<sup>749</sup>

**Introduction**

This chapter seeks to examine the costs and general consequences of the twenty-year-old conflict in Acholiland between 1986 and 2006.

Acholiland in northern Uganda has suffered from persistent conflict and insecurity since 1986. For twenty (20) years – (1986-2006) the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) under Joseph Kony and its predecessors like the Uganda Peoples Democratic Army under Odong Latek, the Holy Spirit Movement forces of Alice Auma Lakwena and the Holy Spirit Movement of Severino Lukoya waged a civil war against the government of Uganda and terrorized the civilian population of Gulu, Pader and Kitgum. Neighbouring districts of Arua, Lira, Adjumani, Moyo, Yumbe in West Nile and Teso sub-region in eastern Uganda have also been affected. Indirectly but significantly, the conflict in Acholiland has drained the country's economy and disrupted the National Resistance Movement government record as the longest serving regime when most parts of Uganda has at least enjoyed relative peace and economic development.

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<sup>749</sup> Joachim Chissano- Quoted in *Daily Monitor* 20 May, 2008.

### **The Genesis of Conflict in Acholiland: A Recap**

Conflict in Acholiland began as early as May 1986 when former Uganda National Liberation Army soldiers who had been defeated by the National Resistance Army of Museveni in Kampala regrouped in Southern Sudan and decided to take up arms against the NRA.<sup>750</sup> Under the command of Brigadier Odong Latek and his newly formed Uganda Peoples Democratic Army (UPDA), ex-UNLA soldiers, who formed the bulk of the UPDA, attacked the NRA in Acholiland on August 20, 1986. Beyond this, the UPDA did not have much impact in the area. As Acker Frank<sup>751</sup> notes, the UPDA and UPDM did not enjoy widespread support from the Acholi people. It was based in refugee camps in Southern Sudan without clear co-ordination with its political wing- the UPDM based in London and could not easily claim to represent the Acholi political voice. Once it did re-enter Uganda, the overall commander Odong Latek had difficulties in co-ordinating and controlling his troops which operated in quasi-independent units.<sup>752</sup>

In June 1987, President Museveni offered an amnesty to anyone who voluntarily left the bush and surrendered to the National Resistance Army (NRA). In December 1987 alone, 1300 to 1800 rebels of the UPDA surrendered<sup>753</sup>. This led to a split in the ranks of the UPDA between two of its leaders, namely, Angelo Okello who wanted peaceful resolution of the conflict and Odong Latek who remained defiant and wanted to continue fighting. In May 1988, more than

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<sup>750</sup> Ogenga-Otunnu, "Causes and Consequences of the War in Acholiland", 4.

<sup>751</sup> F. Van Acker, "The Lords Resistance Army: A New Order No One Ordered", 20.

<sup>752</sup> F. Van Acker, "The Lords Resistance Army: A New Order No One Ordered", 20.

<sup>753</sup> H. Behrend, Alice *Lakwena and the Holy Spirit War in Northern Uganda, 1985-1997*, 172.

10,000 rebels surrendered in Gulu and Kitgum, paving way for a peace agreement with the UPDA on 3 June 1988.<sup>754</sup>

The brief period of insurgency by the UPDA in Gulu and Kitgum had some consequences. As a result of the activities of UPDA, the NRM government declared the Gulu and Kitgum Districts war zones. Acholiland in particular and northern Uganda in general was then isolated from the rest of the country, hence widening the north-south divide. Roadblocks erected in most of Gulu and Kitgum regulated transport access and trade collapsed almost completely around the end of 1987.<sup>755</sup>

As early as March 1987, the NRA forced large segments of the population in Gulu District to leave their farms and homes and take 'refuge' in camps or in Gulu town. This led to the first wave of Acholi 'Internal refugees, fleeing', not from rebels, but from the NRA. The NRA is also accused of 'looting livestock, burning houses, supplies and agriculture fields.'<sup>756</sup> These camps were not secure as the rebels frequently attacked them thereby adding to the frustrations of the displaced people.

This marked the beginning of the exodus of refugees from Acholi villages to towns; a feature that came to be referred to as 'Night Commuter' in 2002 at the height of the conflict. By December 1987, some 33,000 Acholi refugees were living in various camps distributed throughout Gulu town. At the beginning of

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<sup>754</sup> C. Lamwaka, "The Peace Process in Northern Uganda, 1986- 1990", 13.

<sup>755</sup> H. Behrend, *Alice Lakwena and the Holy Spirit War in Northern Uganda*, 1985-1997, 172.

<sup>756</sup> Interview with Simon Oyet (MP) September 2007.

1988, the number of refugees had grown to 171,200. There was not enough to eat, sanitary conditions were inadequate, and, except in Lacor hospital, medical care had more or less collapsed<sup>757</sup>. Religious leaders from northern Uganda condemned the government's decision to create these IDPS and called on the NRM government to facilitate the people to go home; but to no avail. In the words of Archbishop of Gulu Archdiocese, Baptist Odama:

The people have been living in camps for more than five years now and their living condition is horrible. The camps are overcrowded and there is no privacy for parents. Besides, rebels come and attack the people in the camps where there are many NRA army and the army do nothing about it. Children in the camps are malnourished and about 4 die per day. Girls as young as 13 years have resorted to prostitution as a way of earning money.<sup>758</sup>

The policy that the government came up with of creating these so-called protected camps also had negative consequences with regard to land use and rights in Acholiland. Travelling through the Acholi region, one is indeed struck by its "emptiness". The Gulu District Development Plan 2001/2002 established that a total of 10,301 square kms of arable land makes up 87.4 percent of the districts land area. Yet less than 10 percent is cultivated each year.<sup>759</sup> This anomaly largely affected food production and partly accounts for the famine that this area, once considered Uganda's food basket, suffered. Besides, there is also the fear among the Acholi in IDPS on how land rights under a system of communal tenure can survive and be protected against encroachment by

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<sup>757</sup> C. Lamwaka, "The Peace Process in Northern Uganda", 2.

<sup>758</sup> *Leadership Magazine*, Catholic Church, *Leadership Magazine*, 398, (Uganda: Catholic Church, Oct.2001).

<sup>759</sup> For details on this see the 2001/2002 Gulu district Development Plan. This is a summary of what each District intends to do in the path of Development and is presented to the District Council and Ministry of Finance for approval and funding respectively. This Document is available at Gulu District Planning Office.

outsiders in the face of depopulation and a seemingly empty land.<sup>760</sup> Many Acholi in IDPs fear that government may take control of mineralized land areas in Amuru and other parts of Acholi where people are still living in IDPs. This mistrust may fuel more conflicts in the region.

In terms of labour, the same policy of regrouping people in camps contributed to turning the northern districts into a labour reserve for sugarcane plantations in the south. The London based Acholi Association, which organized the Kacoke-Madit (or big meeting) of 1998, observed that the ‘policy’ of protected villages is converting self-sufficient farmers into destitutes and dependents.<sup>761</sup> The LRA responded to this policy by attacking the camps, destroying the fabric of society and a generation of Acholi children by abducting them and turning them into traumatized killers.

As in many subsistence economies in Africa, capital in Uganda is accumulated in the form of cattle. Cattle were a source of power and prestige, a store of wealth from which to finance educational expenses for growing children and to pay family medical expenses, and to meet dowry payment and payments for rituals such as cleansing and atonement that are common in Acholi culture.<sup>762</sup>

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<sup>760</sup> L. Larubi, “Highlights of Conflict and Means of Livelihood Research”, in COPE Working Paper 32 (ACCORD), Kampala, April 2000, 21.

<sup>761</sup> C. Lanker P’Okot, “The Causes and Effects of the Northern War in Uganda and the Quest for a just and speedy Permanent Resolution”, Kacoke Madit meeting, (4-6 April 1997).

<sup>762</sup> J. Dorsey & S. Opeitum, “The Net Economic Cost of the Conflict in the Acholiland Sub-region of Uganda”, Commissioned by Civil Society Organisations for Peace in Northern Uganda, (Kampala, (CSOPNU), September 2002, Unpublished).

The near total de-stocking of Gulu and Kitgum districts is frequently cited by many respondents as one of the notable tragedies of the war. Westbrook asserts that the cattle population in Kitgum fell from 156,667 in 1986 to 3,239 in 1998, while, in the same period, the national cattle population increased from 3-5.6 million.<sup>763</sup> Apart from having serious economic consequences, this has destabilized the social fabric, as cattle rearing has been the traditional contribution of Acholi men to household welfare. Consequently, the household economic burden now falls on women's shoulders while the men have resorted to heavy drinking.<sup>764</sup>

The loss of cattle also contributed to the deepening suspicion of NRA activities in Acholiland; and, hence, the Acholi's indirect support to rebel activities in the areas. Even when the government argued that cattle rustling was carried out by Acholi neighbours, the Karamojong, local informants argued, to the contrary, that the NRA was responsible. As Behrend highlighted, the confusion regarding the identity of the cattle thieves remains an issue among the Acholi in as far as there is an often repeated accusation that NRA soldiers often disguised themselves as Karamojong cattle raiders.<sup>765</sup> This perception among the Acholi may make them take years to reconcile with the NRA/NRM government.

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<sup>763</sup> D. Westbrook, "The Torment of Northern Uganda: A legacy of Missed Opportunities", in the *Online Journal of Peace and Conflict Resolution*, 3-2 (June 2000), 5.

<sup>764</sup> ISIS-WICCE - Women International Cross-cultural Exchange, Women's Experience of Armed Conflict in Uganda, Gulu District 1986-1999 (Kampala, July 2001, Unpublished), 38. See also Chris Dolan, "What do you Remember?", A Rough guide to the war in Northern Uganda, 1986-2000, COPE fieldwork findings, COPE working paper 33 (ACCORD, London, April 2000), 10.

<sup>765</sup> ISIS-WICCE, "Women's Experience of Armed Conflict in Uganda, Gulu District", 10.

Besides, the NRA's brutal methods of waging war also drove a number of people to seek protection under different resistance movements that sprung after the defeat and collapse of the UPDA. It was this that partly boosted the rank and file of the Holy Spirit Movement Forces of Alice Lakwena; and Lords Resistance Army (LRA) of Joseph Kony after 1987.

The rise and brief resistance of Alice Auma Lakwena and the Holy Spirit Movement against the NRM regime is part of the history of conflict in post-colonial Uganda. Unlike its predecessor, the UPDA, the Holy Spirit Movement Forces (HSMF) of Alice Auma Lakwena never thought of direct armed struggle with the NRA/NRM from a purely military perspective.<sup>766</sup> Alice Auma and the Holy Spirit Movement forces' main concern was to deal with the consequences of the Luwero war (1981-85) and the war that had started in Acholiland by cleansing the Acholi Society of witchcraft and sorcery which she believed was the main source of evil in that society.<sup>767</sup> She also wanted to cleanse UNLA ex-soldiers because of the atrocities they were accused of in the Luwero war and the NRA and soldiers accused of looting, raping and disrespecting Acholi culture. Her movement attracted the political and military elite from outside Acholiland. This gave it a broader national outlook than UPDA.

The Holy Spirit Movement operated easily in Acholi, Lango, Teso and some parts of Tororo before it was defeated in Busoga, 100 kms from the capital, Kampala. The consequences of Alice Lakwena and the Holy Spirit Movement war against

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<sup>766</sup> S.S. Kayunga, "The Impact of Armed opposition on the Movement System in Uganda", 113.

<sup>767</sup> S.S. Kayunga, "The Impact of Armed opposition on the Movement System in Uganda", 113.

the National Resistance Army were not as significant as that of the LRA-NRA conflict. However, activities of the HSMF in Teso brought rivalry between the Iteso and the Acholi with the Iteso accusing the Acholi of destroying their crops, looting cattle and causing insecurity as the Lakwena troops passed through their land.<sup>768</sup> In other parts like Tororo, elders interviewed believe that the Holy Spirit Movement Forces largely attracted thieves and the youths who believed that if she stormed Kampala City, they would loot shops and other valuables. Most of them were, however, either killed or taken prisoners of war after the defeat of Lakwena.<sup>769</sup>

With the defeat of Alice Auma and the Holy Spirit Movement Forces, her father Severino Lukoya, took over the leadership of the rebellion. He was arrested and briefly detained in Gulu before he was released under the Amnesty Act. This gave way to the rise of Joseph Kony and his Lord Resistance Army. The Lords Resistance Army under Joseph Kony has proved to be the most enduring and most difficult to defeat.

### **The Lords Resistance Army and Conflict in Acholiland**

Joseph Kony was a soldier in the Uganda Peoples Democratic Army (UPDA). He is said to have joined the rebellion against the NRA because of the NRA's abuse of power. When the UNLA Generals in the UPDA decided to sign the Peace Agreement of 1988 with the National Resistance Army/Movement, Joseph Kony split off from the leadership and launched war against the NRA/M government

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<sup>768</sup> Interview with Minister-Musa Ecweru-2007

<sup>769</sup> Interview with Ex-chiefs Y. Tanga Obbo, Obadia-Ochwo, and Alfred Othieno – Ex-Agriculture officer- 4 March, 2007.



with those fighters who did not accept the peace agreement.<sup>770</sup> It is the LRA, more than its predecessors, that has been the most difficult to defeat despite President Museveni's blustery rhetoric of the might of Uganda's national Army (UPDF). Most of the consequences of the 20 year old conflict are directly related to the combative activities between the LRA and the NRM government under Yoweri Museveni.

When Museveni captured power in 1986, a new wave of insurgency erupted in the northern part of Uganda generally, but was most persistent in Acholiland. The 20 year old war (1986-2006) in Acholiland has led to abandoned homesteads and fallow farmlands that once provided most of the country's cassava, millet and beans.<sup>771</sup> Social infrastructure like roads, schools and health centers have been destroyed, while economic growth has been greatly undermined and human development retarded. For instance, a health professional from Kitgum reported that, at the height of the war (2002-2005), the health centre in Amuru was completely destroyed. In the same period, schools were abandoned, while most of them were either occupied by soldiers or by displaced people.<sup>772</sup>

As a general rule, destruction of physical assets has not been a major focus of the LRA. Their major interest has been in looting goods they can carry easily, particularly drugs from health centers and food from Internally Displaced

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<sup>770</sup> Uganda: *Abducted and Abused: Renewed Conflict in Northern Uganda*, July 2003.

<sup>771</sup> *Sunday Life Magazine*, 15, May 2005: 8.

<sup>772</sup> "The Net Economic Cost of the conflict in Acholiland Sub-region of Northern Uganda", 7.

People's (IDPs) fields, homes and shops.<sup>773</sup> However, even then, many buildings left for years without periodic maintenance during the insurgency became unsuitable for occupancy. Their loss as useful assets, therefore, becomes costs of the conflict on the government of Uganda as the well as Acholi people.

Moreover, displaced people have lived in filthy camps; children have either been abducted or forced to commute from villages to nearby towns (the so-called night commuters) and school going children lost opportunities for education.

Malnutrition has been common among children despite efforts by the government and World Food Programme (WFP) and other Non-government organizations to supply essential requirements and food rations.<sup>774</sup> The supply of relief supplies to IDPs or any humanitarian activity was always influenced and regulated by government agents. The government argued that relief programmes are a response to a state of emergency; which according to them, was not the case with Acholiland.<sup>775</sup>

Therefore, while there is relative peace and prosperity in most of southern Uganda, there has been correspondingly increased misery and abject poverty in the north, estimated at 70 percent above the country's average of 40% in northern Uganda.<sup>776</sup> Children and women who constitute 80% percent of the Internally Displaced People (IDPs) have been the direct targets of attack, abductions and sexual exploitation and violence. UNICEF's Humanitarian Situation Report also indicates that the HIV prevalence rate was high for

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<sup>773</sup> Interview with Omara Atubo, 7 May, 2007.

<sup>774</sup> "The Net Economic Cost of the Conflict in the Acholiland Sub-region of Uganda", 7.

<sup>775</sup> F. Sverker, *Living With Bad Surroundings*, 187.

<sup>776</sup> "The Net Economic Cost of the Conflict in Acholiland Sub-region of Uganda", 7-8.

women at 9 percent to 7 percent for men in the conflict affected districts of Lira, Apac, Gulu, Kitgum and Pader. The National average stands at 6.7 percent UNICEF, in conjunction with its partners, provided voluntary counseling, testing, and prevention of child-to-mother transmission services to approximately 13,300 people in northern Uganda in 2006.<sup>777</sup> The 2007 UNICEF Report, however, emphasizes that despite the ongoing expansion of humanitarian assistance and programmes, the region still faces the challenges of providing essential health services, clean water, nutrition, quality education and decent shelter.

After 20 years of civil war, more than 1.5 million Acholi inhabitants have either fled to Internally Displaced Peoples Camps; preferring to risk slow death by disease and malnutrition,<sup>778</sup> or migrated to other parts of Uganda. Areas like Masindi have benefited from a large influx of people from Acholiland who tend to have above average qualifications and levels of education, especially teachers and nurses. About 40,000 Acholi are reported to have moved to Masindi district by mid 2003. A few hundred also moved to West Nile, crossing the Nile river.<sup>779</sup> Gulu town alone that was home to some 40,000 people before the war harboured, around 140,000 by 2003.. In addition, in periods of intense rebel activity, St. Mary's Missionary Hospital in Lacor, located a few kilometers outside Gulu town, accommodated more than 40,000 people between July 2002

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<sup>777</sup> UNICEF Report 2007, on War & Health Related Issues (UNICEF Uganda Country Office, Unpublished).

<sup>778</sup> *Sunday Magazine* 2005.

<sup>779</sup> F. Sverker, *Living With Bad Surrounding*, 193.

and August 2003.<sup>780</sup> Many people also migrated to Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States. This represents a net loss to Uganda.

Apart from the lack of supply of essential goods to the Internally Displaced Camps, the frequent attacks on some of the camps (e.g. Pabo and Mucwin camps) by rebels of the LRA added to the frustrations of the displaced people. The government responded to rebel attacks on villages in Acholiland and to general insecurity in the region by resettling many people in the so-called protected villages; more accurately described as displacement camps. By 2003, around 800,000 persons or 70 percent of the Acholiland population had been internally displaced.<sup>781</sup> Gulu district alone housed thirty five camps in 2001, while Kitgum and Pader together had eight such villages.<sup>782</sup> In mid 2003, the World Food Programme (WFP) distributed relief in thirty-three camps in Gulu, seven in Kitgum and twenty in Pader.<sup>783</sup> The largest camps, notably Pabo, Amuru and Anaka, all in Gulu district, housed between 34,000 and 47,000 people in 2000.<sup>784</sup>

Political observers have argued that the above situation has made Museveni's regime hated by the Acholi. Subsequently, his regime has created "two Ugandas" where being born in Acholi is a curse. As Alice Alaso notes, "For the twenty years of his (Museveni's) rule, any child born in northern Uganda (Acholiland in particular), is literally condemned to poverty, no education, life in

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<sup>780</sup> F. Sverker, *Living With Bad Surroundings*, 193.

<sup>781</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Abducted and Abused*, 6.

<sup>782</sup> *Acholi Religious leaders Plan (ARLP), Magazine*, 2001, 27.

<sup>783</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Abducted and Abused*, 66.

<sup>784</sup> See *Acholi Religious Leaders Plan Magazine*, 27.

camps and ill-health.<sup>785</sup> This situation has created terrible hatred and feeling of revenge by the Acholi against the people of the south, and in particular, the Banyakole tribe of Museveni.<sup>786</sup> As one Acholi elder from the north put it,

Leadership may trivialize the problems of northern Uganda but some day, the ‘night commuters’, school dropouts and unemployed youth will descend upon the educated rich and the well-to-do (in the south and especially Banyankole) as thieves, prostitutes, street children, then the whole nation will realize that it was wrong to have ignored the crisis in the North.<sup>787</sup>

These views confirm that the divided nation may not be about to heal from the effects of internal conflicts. There is bitterness in northern and eastern Uganda where it is perceived that the “prosperous” Uganda stops at Karuma Bridge, namely, the bridge on River Nile that divides the geographical North from the South.

Indeed, one notices a contrast in the level of development as one drives across the bridge northwards. Scholars hailing from the north like Ginyera-Pincywa and Obong have argued that the “moods of the people of northern Uganda are moods of marginalization, frustration and desperation.”<sup>788</sup> Indeed, the people in this sub-region have been left behind economically and this is partly why they have also shunned Museveni and his NRM government.

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<sup>785</sup> A. Alaso, “We Need Equal Resource Distribution”, *The Daily Monitor*, July 19, 2006, 23.

<sup>786</sup> The ‘two’ Ugandas here is always used refer to the socio-economic differences and general condition pertaining to the North and South, where the North (largely Acholiland) has not enjoyed the degree of peace and economic development the south has in the period of Museveni as President (1986-2006).

<sup>787</sup> R. Okumu, quoted by S. Makara, “Uganda’s 2006 Multiparty Elections”, 59.

<sup>788</sup> A. Ginyera-Pincywa and Q. Obong, “The Moods of Northern Uganda”, in Sabiti Makara and G. Tukahebwa (Eds.), *Voting for Democracy in Uganda*, (2003), 54-80.

From 1994, conflict in Acholiland between the Lords Resistance Army rebels and the NRM government ceased being a purely local rebellion against the Uganda government fought within Ugandan borders. It became a proxy war between the government of Uganda and that of Sudan where each supported rebels opposed to either government. The conflict therefore had international-consequences on the diplomatic relations between Kampala and Khartoum.

Sudan's support for the LRA started in 1994 and this support was critical in turning LRA into a deadly organization. Sudan then argued that its support for the LRA was in retaliation for Uganda's support for the Southern Sudan Peoples Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M). As president Omar Bashir of Sudan once stated:

On the previous relationship, we used to support the LRA. We used to provide them with logistics, ammunition and everything. That was a response to the support Uganda used to give to SPLA. But now the situation is different because both parties are committed to peace.<sup>789</sup>

In spite of the fact the government of Uganda claimed it did this partly because the SPLA was a "black man's struggle for emancipation in Sudan"<sup>790</sup>, its action negatively affected the relations between Kampala and the government in Khartoum. Both the LRA and the UPDF then intensified their military actions to the detriment of peace and stability in Acholiland. Despite the promise made by President Bashir to stop supporting the LRA rebels, Sudan clandestinely

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<sup>789</sup> A. Bainomugisha and G. Tumushabe, *Torturous Peace Process in Northern Uganda: An Analysis of Peace Initiatives and Prospects for a Settlement*, (Kampala: Makerere University Printery, 2005), 12.

<sup>790</sup> HURIPPEC Report, 58.

continued to supply arms and other logistics. A report released by the Acholi religious leaders (ARLP) in 2002 confirmed this.<sup>791</sup>

Sudan's support for the LRA also had the effect of deepening the political rift between the government and opposition members of parliament hailing from the region. Government believed that the war was not only fueled by Sudan and Acholi in the Diaspora but also by Acholi MPs, businessmen and the elite. Opposition politicians were accused of colluding with Sudan by, among others activities, leaking government military plans to the Kony and the Bashir government in Sudan.<sup>792</sup>

The years 2002 and 2003 marked the height of LRA rebel insurgency in northern Uganda. As noted earlier, in 2002 and 2003, the NRM government came up with what they called "Operation North and Operation Iron Fist",<sup>793</sup> respectively. President Museveni was encamped in Gulu and then Soroti in Teso in order to oversee the operations himself. Both operations failed to damage the Lords Resistance Army rebels significantly. Instead, it flushed out the LRA rebels from their camps and hideouts in Southern Sudan to permanent residences on the doorsteps of the Acholi and her neighbours like Teso, West Nile and Lango sub-regions. The rebels were able to take advantage of this period to increase attacks on the population and further enhance their abductions of children. The result was that over 800,000 people were displaced

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<sup>791</sup> *Acholi Religious Leaders Plan* (ARLD) Magazine, 27.

<sup>792</sup> Interview with Okello-Okello, 2007.

<sup>793</sup> The operations involved heavy deployment of military hardware and infantry in Acholiland as if Uganda had been attacked by one of its neighbouring states. It involved a state of emergency where the army would arrest any suspected rebel collaborators and try them in military (Kangaroo) courts.

and this increased the pressure on the already over-crowded Internally Displaced Peoples Camps.<sup>794</sup>

As a response to the LRA attacks in Teso and Lango sub-region, the government began to rely on “Bow and arrow” groups, leading to the possible emergence of warlords in these localities. The use of ‘Bow and Arrow’ militia<sup>795</sup> which first appeared in Soroti and Katakwi in Teso region, then spread to Lango where the local people demanded to be armed since the government had failed to defend them, first, from the Holy Spirit Movement forces of Alice Auma Lakwena and, later, the LRA of Joseph Kony. In mid August 2003, three ministers of government, including the Minister of State for Defence Ruth Nankabirwa, called on the people of Acholi to emulate the Iteso and Langi who decided to actively participate in the war. “She urged the people in displaced camps, local councils, and non-governmental organizations to persuade people “to join this crusade” of “bow and arrow” vigilantes.<sup>796</sup> This clearly demonstrated that, at the height of the conflict, the NRM government had failed in its responsibility of defending the population and was, instead, trying to mobilize the victims of the conflict to engage in war. In this way, the conflict generalized into a culture of worriorism.

In addition, as the conflict took its toll on Teso, especially following the LRA massacre of innocent civilians at Obalim village in Katakwi in 2002, some

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<sup>794</sup> HURIPEC *Report*, 71.

<sup>795</sup> These were ill-trained village vigilantes armed with local bows and arrows to defend the population from well-armed LRA rebels. In some cases like in Amuria in Teso, some of these ‘arrow boys’ began to use their new power to revenge against their different enemies and to fight for control of vast land areas in the area.

<sup>796</sup> *The Daily Monitor*, Aug, 24, 2003.



leading figures in government, hailing from Katakwi and Soroti, called on the people to “kill any LRA collaborator or suspect above the age of 18”. They also called on the Iteso to attack “the Acholis” in their area and in Acholiland.<sup>797</sup> Thus, what began as an ethnically inspired war in the Luwero triangle in Buganda was about to become a generalized ethnic war in the whole country.

After the death of LRA commander Brigadier Tabuleh, the LRA structure in Teso got disorganized. The LRA moved some of its units out of Teso into Lira.<sup>798</sup> Nevertheless, the damage had been done and the epicentre of the humanitarian emergency had also shifted eastwards, albeit temporarily. In Acholiland, the effect of operation “Iron fist” flashed out the LRA from Southern Sudan only to increase their desperation and massacre of local people in Acholiland. The Mucwini massacre of July 24, 2002 was one case in point.

The LRA attack on Mucwini had disastrous and devastating consequences on the local people. The death toll was 56 men, women and children killed in the most violent ways. At the request of the victims, the first memorial prayer was organized with the help of Rev. Fr. Cena, a parish priest at Kitgum Catholic Mission, who asked the people to pray for the 56 people killed on 24 July 2002.<sup>799</sup>

Other massacres in the history of the conflict in Acholiland, for instance at Atiak and Barlonyo, remain officially unacknowledged by the government. The

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<sup>797</sup> *International Crisis Group Africa Report* 77, (14 April 2004), 8.

<sup>798</sup> *International Crisis Group Africa Report* 77, (14 April 2004), 8.

<sup>799</sup> *Sunday Monitor*, December 2008.

responsibility for the Mucwin and other massacres in Acholiland remains controversial and unresolved. Local informants and, especially, family members of some of the victims and survivors do not blame the LRA for the attack but the Uganda Peoples Defence Forces (UPDF) for failing to protect them. This has distanced the people of the area from the NRM government. Current Minister of Defence, Crispus Kiyonga, in a late apology to the people of Teso and Acholi sub-region (in 2006) said:

It is very sad for me to be here today to remember that very sad day when LRA rebels entered Teso, Acholi and Lango where they butchered people like chicken. I would like to apologize to the people of Teso, Acholi and Lango. It is because of government's failure to provide security that led to these deaths of innocent Ugandans at the hands of the LRA rebels.<sup>800</sup>

The local people also accuse the UPDF of contributing to the humanitarian crisis by raping women, sometimes killing civilians and failing to provide security in the camps.

The Mucwini Massacre of 24 July 2002 also exacerbated division among the local clans. The victims of this massacre were from various clans (Bura, Padibe, Akara, Pajong, Pubec, Lumelong, Yepa, Paimera, and Pachua). The massacre renewed disputes over land and other social issues like contested boundaries and past animosity over cattle, goat theft between two rival clans- the Pubec and the Pajong.<sup>801</sup> The dispute involves a contested claim that a Pubec man abducted by the LRA intentionally told them he was from the rival Pajong clan and then escaped with a gun, knowing that the LRA would retaliate against the

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<sup>800</sup> *The Daily Monitor*, July 17, 2006.

<sup>801</sup> *Sunday Monitor*, December, 7, 2008

Pajong. For this reason, whether true or not, surviving Pajong have not related well with the Pubec despite attempts by the Acholi cultural leader, Rwot Acan II, to reconcile them.<sup>802</sup>

The abductions and massacres associated with the LRA-UPDF war in Acholiand have left behind a scar of fear among the Internally Displaced People (IDPs). As Joseph Mazige notes in *The Daily Monitor* of Nov. 18 2008, “Mr. Gilbert Opio of Coo-pe Internally Displaced People’s Camp in Bungatira sub-county wants to return home. However, his wishes have not materialized because of uncertainty about government protection and the truth about LRA acceptance to sign a peace truce”. As he is quoted to have remarked:

We are confused over what to do. Kony is not reliable. He could be refusing to sign because he wants to come and terrorise us. Though the government has told us to go back, I am not sure of my security going by what I went through during the insurgency.<sup>803</sup>

Such fear is expressed by many IDPs across Acholiland and fear has become a major deterrent to development and post-war recovery of the area. The Kitgum Woman Member of Parliament, Beatrice Anywar Atim, shares the same sentiments with her electorate in various camps in the sub-region. As she emphasized, “this is a challenge at hand for those who care. There is a lot of untold truth and the people have all the reasons not to gain confidence despite the prevailing peace now in the sub-region.<sup>804</sup>” As a result, the Inter Agency Standing Committee estimates that only 24 percent of the former IDPs are back

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<sup>802</sup> *Sunday Monitor*, December, 7, 2008.

<sup>803</sup> *Daily Monitor*, Nov. 18, 2008, 14.

<sup>804</sup> Interview on 20, November 2008.

in their villages of origin, 42 percent in transit areas 24 percent remaining in the camps in Acholi sub-region.<sup>805</sup>

The war also increased the people's mistrust for President Yoweri Museveni and especially his attitude towards the peace process as a way to end war. Reagan Okumu argues that the period of conflict has shown that "history repeats itself" on the grounds that Museveni sabotaged the peace process in Nairobi in 1985 between Tito Okello and his NRM and was not committed to the JUBA peace process of 2006<sup>806</sup>. Likewise, an elderly man, Charles Obwana in Unyama IDP, is quoted to have said that he could not return unless "I see Museveni and Kony shaking hands and hugging after the signing of the peace deal. Besides, there are no health centers, schools are far and no safe water and roads".<sup>807</sup>

The LRA insurgency also affected some other parts of the country like the West Nile region in economic ways. Such areas have suffered through loss of investment and higher costs due to insecurity along the roads to the region. Some of the costs that this region has suffered represent a net loss to the country rather than simply a displacement of activity to other regions. People living in the West Nile region (i.e. Arua, Moyo, Nebbi, Adjumani and Yumbe) have a vivid memory of their own conflictive past and the effects of LRA incursion into their areas, apart from the losses on the common routes to their areas. This region suffered immensely in the war that overthrew Idi Amin in

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<sup>805</sup> At the height of the conflict, at least 467 camps were created during the rebel insurgency that ravaged Acholi and Teso sub-region. For details see *Daily Monitor*, November 28 2008.

<sup>806</sup> Interview Dec. 4, 2007, Kampala.

<sup>807</sup> *Daily Monitor*, 18, Nov. 2008.

1979 and most of the population was in exile from 1988 to 1993 largely due to fear of ethnic reprisals and, when they returned, most of the infrastructure and most activities of the regional economy had been devastated. The people are, therefore, well-attuned to the conflict in Acholiland and acutely aware of its impact on their region.

Former Minister in the Amin regime, Brigadier Killi, in an interview in September 2007, divided the impact of the Acholi conflict on West Nile into four broad categories. These included its impact on development programmes and projects, on the cost of transport, on the quality of life and on the price of commodities that the region sells or “imports” from the south through their only road that the rebels planted landmines on.<sup>808</sup> At each level, there is a direct and immediate impact and an indirect long-term impact. Overall, the conflict has had a strong negative impact on the region, which also translates into losses for the national economy. For instance, the Japanese government decided to stop its intended plan to rehabilitate three hospitals in Yumbe, Moyo and Adjumani from the 21 hospitals to be rehabilitated country-wide due to insecurity along the roads to the districts and the higher costs of transport. Indirect consequences of such a decision are poorer healthcare and less satisfactory levels of indicators of public health of the general population.<sup>809</sup>

All products coming into or leaving the region have to be transported on one of the two roads: Arua via Karuma-Pakwach (117kms) or Arua-Adjumani and Gulu

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<sup>808</sup> Interview-September 2007, Koboko.

<sup>809</sup> “The Net Economic Cost of the Conflict in Acholiland-Sub-region of northern Uganda” 18.

(97kms). Either way, all transport has to pass through Acholiland. During the height of insurgency and, hence, insecurity, between 2002 August to 2003, goods like Kenyan Cement which then cost 16,000 Uganda shillings elsewhere, cost 25,000/= in Arua, Sugar rose from 1500/= Ug shs to between 2500-3000/=810. Ordinary citizens also paid exorbitantly for products such as petrol, diesel, Kerosene, cooking oil and other essentials due to the insurgency.

Just as nearly all manufactured items consumed in the region came in by road, all the commodities produced in West Nile region were transported by road to Kampala and other markets through Acholiland. Insecurity affected petty traders and prices traders in the region were willing to offer for products farmers produce. Competition was then reduced as the number of traders willing to risk their vehicles and to come into the region to buy products declined as a consequence of the threat posed by fighting in Acholiland811. Trucks were sometimes delayed for between two to five days, as the roads were made secure and the risk of attack reduced.

This conflict also exposed the dictatorial nature of the NRM government and especially its negativity to free press. An independent voice, *The Monitor* Newspaper and Buganda Kingdom's Central Broadcasting FM Radio suffered most. When *The Monitor* Newspaper criticized the use of the "Bow and Arrow" groups to fight LRA, the president called the "newspaper an ally of Joseph Kony and the LRA and an enemy of the people of Uganda". He called the Bow and

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<sup>810</sup> "The Net Economic Cost of the Conflict in Acholiland Sub-region of northern Uganda",

<sup>811</sup> Interview with Peter Ariko, 4 Sept. 2007, Luzira, Kampala.

Arrow groups, the country's reserve army and promised to "deal with the Monitor Newspaper".<sup>812</sup> He also described opposition politicians critical to the handling of the northern conflict as rebel collaborators.

After the September 11, 2002, bombing of the World Trade Centre in the USA, the NRM government declared the LRA a terrorist organization partly as a way to solicit support from the USA. According to the then (UPDF) Army spokesman, Shaban Bantariza, "the term terrorism has to be distinguished from the term war". Whereas terrorism means the indiscriminate unleashing of violence against unarmed civilians, 'war' means 'conflict between belligerents'.<sup>813</sup> In these terms, the LRA was said not to be fighting the government but killing civilians. The Anti-terrorism Act was subsequently passed to deal with Kony and rebel collaborators, including the independent press and media houses like Buganda's Central Broadcasting Service.

In October 2002 a reporter from the newspaper and the Managing Editor were arrested because the newspaper reported that the LRA rebels in parts of Acholiland had shot down one of the new helicopter gunships which government had just procured<sup>814</sup>. Instead of the army refuting this report or updating the nation on what had happened, the journalists were hurriedly arrested, and their news offices and publishing house closed for one week.

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<sup>812</sup>HURIPPEC Report, 75.

<sup>813</sup>*The Monitor*, September 17, 2002.

<sup>814</sup>*The Monitor*, September 17, 2002.

The 20 year insurgency in Acholiland created instability and caused untold suffering and the loss of countless lives. The humanitarian and social crisis, coupled with economic hardships, translated into a complex political question. While the NRM government has for many years failed to deliver a peaceful end to the conflict, the rag-tag insurgent forces, and especially the LRA, without a clear political agenda, have concentrated on-inflicting violence on innocent civilians, killing, looting, abducting and abusing children.<sup>815</sup>

Conflict in Acholiland has also had far reaching political costs on Museveni and the ruling National Resistance Party. While Museveni has gained praise as a successful post-conflict reconstruction leader,<sup>816</sup> failure to contain the conflict in Acholiland has tarnished his otherwise admirable record. Many critics, for example Andrew Mwenda,<sup>817</sup> and Charles Onyango Obbo,<sup>818</sup> argue that Museveni has presided over a fairly peaceful and prosperous south, leaving northern Uganda to the dogs, Hence, he has ruled over a terribly divided country; more divided than ever before in history<sup>819</sup>. Such critics assert that the war has brought out clearly Uganda's two distinct faces; the disgruntled North and the 'satisfied' "South".<sup>820</sup>

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<sup>815</sup> S. Makara, "Uganda 2006 Multiparty Elections", 60. See also Adam Branch, "Neither Peace nor Justice: Political Violence and the Peasantry in Northern Uganda", in *African Study*, (2005). See also Chris Dolan, *What Do You Remember?* 13.

<sup>816</sup> *The New Vision*, **March** 10, 2006.

<sup>817</sup> Mwenda is a journalist and Managing Editor of *The Independent Magazine* critical of the political performance of Museveni. Also worked as editor with the Monitor Newspaper and has seen the inside of Luzira prison more than any other journalists in Uganda. Onyango-Obbo is a freelance journalist with the Daily Monitor.

<sup>818</sup> Onyang

<sup>819</sup> Makara S., "Uganda 2006 Multiparty Elections", 60.

<sup>820</sup> P. Omach, "Conflict in Northern Uganda: The Elusive Search for Peace and Stability", Paper presented at the Pagwash workshop under the "Security Architecture in the House of Africa", (Nairobi, 17-19 March, 2006).



Besides, the conflict also became a booming business for army officers executing the war. Critics have argued that the longevity of the insurgency was a deliberate policy by government and its functionaries since it benefited them economically. Billions of shillings are drawn to pay soldiers who do not even exist. On 27 July 2003, it was announced that the president had, at the army High Command meeting held at the army headquarters-Bombo, ordered an inquiry into “ghost soldiers” on the army payroll. In the press release that accompanied the announcement, it was emphasized that the High Command had “received credible reports about the existence of ghost soldiers on the payroll”.<sup>821</sup>

The human and social cost of the northern conflict is immeasurable. It is estimated that 1,167,000 people in northern and eastern Uganda live in squalid camps, 3500 people die daily from preventable diseases, extreme violence and torture.<sup>822</sup> The cost of the war over the last two decades is estimated at US dollars 1.3 to 1.7 billion (about US dollars 100 million per year).<sup>823</sup> Despite this huge economic cost and the immense suffering of the people, attempts at a peaceful resolution have not been successful.<sup>824</sup> As the conflict dragged on 20 years down, the Acholi people came to believe that the government of Uganda ended at Karuma Bridge. As Archbishop of Gulu, Baptist Odama said:

The Acholi people are now resilient to the situation and they bear it patiently because they have nowhere to go. To the Acholi people, Uganda ends at Karuma Bridge that divides

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<sup>821</sup> *The Sunday Monitor*, July 30, 2003

<sup>822</sup> P. Omach, “Conflict in Northern Uganda: The Elusive Search for Peace and Stability”.

<sup>823</sup> Oxfam Press Release 30, March 2006, Kampala Head Office.

<sup>824</sup> At the time of writing this chapter, the JUBA peace attempt under Southern Sudan Vice President had failed and the NRM government in alliance with DRC and Southern Sudan decided to attack Kony bases at Garamba forests in Congo.

the north and south geographically. All they want is a movement of peace not (NRM)- National Resistance Movement.<sup>825</sup>

The political cost of the prolonged conflict in Acholiland has been diverse. First, there is belief that the NRM government under President Museveni has been reluctant to bring the war to an end because it has solid political support in central, western and parts of eastern Uganda and, therefore, does not value the north. As Aswa County Member of Parliament, Reagan Okumu argued:

Through the policy of divide and rule, the north has been used to sustain and justify the movement government's hold on power. In 2002, Operation Iron Fist came into force. This together with the slogan of terrorism is to smear all political opposition in Uganda; suppress them once and for all together with the LRA rebels and subdue the Acholi to support the movement and Museveni.<sup>826</sup>

This understanding of the situation is widespread amongst the people of Acholi.

The war situation has also been exploited, especially by opposition politicians to defeat the Yoweri Museveni's movement. In the parliamentary and presidential elections of 1996, 2001, and 2006, Museveni and the NRM have generally scored poorly in Acholiland, in particular, and the north, generally. In the presidential election of 1996, in Gulu alone, Museveni received only 8.5 percent of the vote, while Paul Semwogerere, the Democratic Party leader from Buganda; a region traditionally opposed to northern domination, got 90.5 percent. In Kitgum, Museveni obtained 10.5 percent and Semwogerere 88.4 percent. In

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<sup>825</sup> *The Daily Monitor*, 4 May 2005.

<sup>826</sup> R. R. Okumu in *The Daily Monitor*, 16 July 2003.

2001, Museveni did slightly better with 11.5 percent. In Kitgum, Museveni won 21.3 percent, while Besigye secured 72.2 percent.<sup>827</sup>

During the 2006 elections, Museveni's little support in West Nile and Teso region was eroded by the opposition, clearly dividing the country into two distinct parts; the south and south-west for Museveni, while the whole of the North and a large section of the East was lost to the opposition, especially the new party, Forum For Democratic Change (FDC), formed by Kiiza Besigye.<sup>828</sup>

There is no doubt that the effects of the conflict in Acholiland and other parts like Teso have had a bearing on the popularity of the National Resistance Movement Party and its leadership. The voting in Acholiland since 1996 was not based on ethnic or religious politics but was a remarkably widespread protest vote against the National Resistance Movement and Museveni. The parliamentary election followed the same pattern.

At the local level, the Acholi generally perceived the continuation of the conflict as punishment for their refusal to endorse Museveni's leadership. They argued that the insurgency in the area provided the NRM with an ideal opportunity to keep northerners, in general; and Acholi, in particular, at the periphery of national politics and resource allocation. This situation has led to suspicion against the NRM and the failure of its programs in the area. One such government programme is the Security and Production Programme (SPP),

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<sup>827</sup> For a thorough analysis see The Directorate of Research, "Comparative Statistical Analysis of the 2001 and 1996 Presidential Elections", (Kampala: NRM Secretariat, 24 July 2001).

<sup>828</sup> S. Makara, "Uganda's 2006 Multiparty Elections: Consolidating and Building Peace", 61.

introduced in May 2003. This was a programme designed as a transitional socio-economic effort to create better conditions for those in the Internally Displaced Peoples Camps (IDPs) of Gulu, Kitgum and Pader districts. Based on the experience of the Israel-Kibbutz and Moshau-system, the SPP was meant to use communal and government land to create farms called Security and Production Units (SPUs). The main crops grown would be maize, beans, upland rice and Sorghum. This programme caused tension among the IDPs who viewed it as a ploy by government to grab their land. Acholi politicians also argued that mass cultivation would destroy their traditional boundaries where ownership of land is not title based but passes through traditional inheritance.<sup>829</sup>

The failure of peace in Acholiland has also been used by the government to justify heavy expenditure on defence at the expense of poverty reduction ventures in northern Uganda. According to figures of the cost of military expenditure for the conflict in Acholiland, the government spent more than 300 billion Uganda shillings annually on defence; about 10 percent of locally raised government revenue since 2000.<sup>830</sup> However, it is perceived within some quarters, especially by opposition politicians, that much of the money is used to fund NRM activities, such as elections. In addition, it is also argued that Museveni uses the war for divide and rule politics, whereby southerners and donor countries hail him as a champion of peace.<sup>831</sup>

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<sup>829</sup> *International Crisis Group report 77*, 14 April 2004: 11

<sup>830</sup> Background to the Budget-Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, Kampala, 2002, (Unpublished)

<sup>831</sup> R.R. Okumu, *The Daily Monitor*, 16, July, 2003.

Acholiland, which has been a battlefield for the 20 year insurgency, has suffered devastating effects socially and economically. In the 20 years of conflict, children born in Acholiland have little grasp of Acholi cultural ways since all they have known is life in squalid camps. The elders have lost their important role of inculcating morals and Acholi norms to the youth. The elders are therefore increasingly being challenged to look at Acholi as a unit in place of the old clan-based structures which the war has disrupted by displacing people.<sup>832</sup>

Moreover, Acholi traditional ways of organizing the economy by pooling and sharing labour as well as food have been destroyed. This was largely because of the 20 years of insecurity in the Acholiland countryside and also because the population was then cramped in different internally created camps.<sup>833</sup> Large tracts of land are left unattended, leading to wild vegetation growth that has even encouraged the spread of tsetse flies. An epidemiological report from the district surveillance team in Gulu states that “tsetse flies have heavily infested vast internally Displaced persons returnee areas in Omoro and Aswa counties in Gulu district forcing a number of people to flee back into camps where conditions are comparatively a little better.<sup>834</sup> The report indicates that, Paicho, Palaro, Bungatira, Patiko, Pagik and Lalogi sub-counties, located in the forested belt of the district, are the most affected. The Gulu District Entomology officer Maya said his department does not have the capacity to contain the tsetse flies because it lacks the necessary equipment.<sup>835</sup>

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<sup>832</sup> Interview with Hon. Okot-Ogong, December 2007- Lira Town.

<sup>833</sup> *HURIPCE Report*, 78.

<sup>834</sup> *Daily Monitor*, 25, September 2008.

<sup>835</sup> *Daily Monitor*, 25, September 2008.

Furthermore, in the internally Displaced Peoples Camps, the concentration of up to 450,000-800,000 rural people in one place has had dramatic effects on the surrounding environment and resources; particularly the soil. Average camp size, according to data in mid-2000 by Willet Weeks,<sup>836</sup> is 12,800 persons. Where a rural population, cooking with fuel wood and charcoal and wanting to grow crops to supplement their food supplies, is concentrated in a small area, dramatic environmental degradation is to be expected. Meanwhile, on the outskirts of the camps, contamination from fecal material and urine must have been massive.

It is reported that in some places that within a 2 hour walking distance of 7 kms, all trees; including fruit trees like mangoes, were cut down for fuel. With no other economic activity, large numbers of people, estimated at 1 percent of the population or about 5000 people, engaged in making charcoal and cutting firewood for sale; each using approximately 5 hectares per year over the 20 years of conflict.<sup>837</sup> Some land in the region was rendered useless by anti-personnel land mines.

As the conflict dragged on, only the few rich people in Acholiland could afford to send their children to schools outside Acholiland. Formal education in the villages was seriously affected by the conflict. Other social values of the Acholi society were also affected. The Acholi people love dancing and cultural festivals. These have been undermined by camp life where there is nothing to celebrate

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<sup>836</sup> S.S. Kayunga, "The Impact of Armed Opposition on the Movement System in Uganda", 113.

<sup>837</sup> Interview with Forest Officer –Gulu, November 2007.

but only much to agonise about. Traditional religious life of the Acholi has been interfered with and has been undermined and traditional religious shrines have been destroyed. The destruction of shrines has also undermined the conciliatory role of elders. The 2000 report of Civil Society Organizations (CSO) working in Acholiland notes that:

The conflict situation has drastically undermined elements of social and cultural lives of the Acholi people, as well as bringing new challenges. The active roles of the traditional leaders and chiefs have been eroded. The young generation being brought up in the camps do not know the Acholi culture any more. This phenomenon of internal displacement has further exacerbated the problem resulting in the breakdown of the whole traditional social system, marital breakdown and family separation, moral degeneration and all that is characterized in the Acholi culture. Cherished Acholi rich African culture will never be the same again in the social and cultural context.<sup>838</sup>

The above statement speaks volumes by itself. Even if the NRM/A did not intend it, they are partly to blame for putting the people of Acholi in the situation described above.

Asked how these problems could be overcome, many respondents advised that these aspects of cultural degeneration could only be addressed in a proper home setting but not in the existing Internally Displaced Peoples Camps (IDPs). Others argued that only foreign intervention could help stop the war in order for the Acholi culture to be rejuvenated, while some elite argued that the only solution to the conflict is Museveni relinquishing political office as president.

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<sup>838</sup> This and other details on the socio-cultural effects of the war can be found in a brief paper on the situation in the North presented by James Otto; chairperson Gulu District Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) Gulu, Uganda, (2003, Unpublished).

From the economic angle, the conflict has compounded the impoverishment of the Acholi community. The Uganda Bureau of Statistics estimates that almost 67 percent of the population in northern Uganda in general live below the “poverty line” The main cause of poverty in this region is said to be the persistent insecurity in the region, especially in Acholiland and Karamoja.<sup>839</sup> This poverty is not only due to the uneven development of the country that colonial policy promoted but also of the concerted looting that took place immediately after the NRM/A came to power in 1986. Member of Parliament for Arua Municipality Akbar Godi emphasizes that the NRA looted domestic animals such as cattle, goats, chicken, food granaries, and, in some instances, destroyed whole households. The Karamojong cattle rustling activities into Acholi only exacerbated the situation.<sup>840</sup>

Acholiland, like other regions in the north (i.e. Karamoja, Teso and Lango), was largely a cattle based economy. Cattle were a source of power and prestige and a store of wealth. According to data from Veterinary officers at Gulu and Kitgum, in 1985, the cattle population in these two areas stood at 285,000. Cattle raids and looting reduced the herd considerably. In 1997, the combined herd for both districts was estimated at 5000 heads; less than 2% of the original number. By 2006, the figure has not changed much (i.e. 5200).<sup>841</sup> The replacement cost of the plundered cattle herd was estimated at US dollars 25 million. As Gersony notes:

In an instant, the Acholi farmers were deprived of the milk their cows provided, the additional acreage and higher yields

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<sup>839</sup> HURIPEC Report, 70.

<sup>840</sup> Interview Nov. 2007- Arua.

<sup>841</sup> Gulu and Kitgum Districts Annual Report, 1998.



which their oxen permitted them, their fall back for marriage dowries and education, and the savings which carried them through drought, hard times, like sickness and old age.<sup>842</sup>

The war situation and the looting also disrupted the cultural functions and self respect that cattle ownership was associated with among the Acholi. This makes it one of the greatest economic blows of the war in Acholi. Today (2006); after public and private restocking efforts, cattle numbers have risen to a little over 5000 herds of cattle. Reduction in the goat and sheep population, each estimated at about 100,000, was drastic, and though their numbers have since improved, particularly for goats (now over 50,000), they have not reached pre-conflict levels.<sup>843</sup>

In terms of human cost, the impoverishment of the people has led to extensive malnutrition of both children and adults, resulting in high mortality rates, especially among children. Apart from the abduction by the different rebel groups; especially the LRA rebels and the enhanced recruitment of children in government controlled armies and different kinds of para-military groups like the “Arrow boys”, the children of Acholi have also suffered in other ways. As for the babies born under IDP conditions, they have experienced more stunted growth than the national average, with figures of up to 52 percent of stunted children compared to the national average of 38 percent.<sup>844</sup> In all reports, the high level of poverty, malnutrition and stunted growth are attributed to impoverishment as a result of the twenty-year conflict. Children who are

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<sup>842</sup> R. Gersony, *The Anguish of Northern Uganda*, 20-36.

<sup>843</sup> Interview with Veterinary Officer-Gulu –2007.

<sup>844</sup> *HURIPPEC Report*, 71.

impoverished and malnourished over long periods never recover fully and may suffer permanent damage, affecting their mental and physical productivity<sup>845</sup>.

The World Food Programme (WFP) estimated that in the Anaka and Pabbo camps in Gulu district, malnutrition of the encamped population stood at the levels of 31 and 18 percent of the population in terms of global acute malnutrition. The continued conflict has had the consequence of worsening the food supply situation. According to the 2001 report of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), out of the five (5) IDP camps in Gulu, Kitgum and Pader districts, there had been a drastic fall in food production of cereals such as maize and rice due to the forced displacement of the population in these areas.<sup>846</sup> As one respondent put it:

We were forced by government soldiers (UPDF) to assemble in trading centers and then to move to displaced persons' camps. In areas where people resisted, villages are shelled by UPDF. We left our fields and food ready for harvest.<sup>847</sup>

In Odek, where Joseph Kony hails from, the people were given a 48 hour ultimatum to leave their villages and move into gazetted camps in order to deprive the LRA of local support and recruits. This resulted in over 800,000 of the population confined in IDP camps becoming dependent on food aid provided by World Food Programme (WFP). Whilst only 110,000 to 240,000 people were being provided with 30 percent of their food requirements in 1996, at the height of the conflict in 2003, more than one million people needed such support for

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<sup>845</sup> W. Willet, *Pushing the Envelope*, 60.

<sup>846</sup> *International Committee of the Red Cross Report, 2001.*

<sup>847</sup> Interview, 30 November, 2007.

100 percent of their food requirements.<sup>848</sup> In May 2003, Action Against Hunger (ACF-USA) completed a national survey of 21 IDP camps in Gulu district alone, which revealed that 88 per cent of the camp population depended entirely on food aid. All this was the result of the fact that the people were not allowed to access their land to grow crops. In the camps, the Acholi people were controlled and registered in various ways by the Ugandan army and government officials, as well as by International agencies and organisations. Food and relief distributions to them are perhaps the most glaring examples of how dependence is created.

Apart from people living in camps, there are those who live in abject poverty in the areas surrounding the towns. Some of them flock to missions and churches to seek refuge there because of the deplorable conditions in the camps. Since the churches were unable to feed them, they become a permanent sore in these areas where they could not even be provided with food aid.<sup>849</sup> When the congestion and health conditions become unmanageable, the church authority have to evict them just to keep the churches functioning. Those evicted end up becoming squatters in squalid locations around the municipality and small towns; constructing any kind of shelter in any available space, using materials ranging from sacks and reeds to grass thatched huts to accommodate themselves.<sup>850</sup> The situation was made worse by the fact that those assembled in these areas were not regarded by the government as eligible for food

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<sup>848</sup> "World Food Programme Report on Northern Uganda", (Kampala, 2003, Unpublished).

<sup>849</sup> Interview with Bishop Onono-Onweng- 15<sup>th</sup> June 2007.

<sup>850</sup> Chairman Local Council five (5) Norbet Mao attributes cholera outbreak in Gulu Town in 2007, August to this rather pathetic situation. He also defended municipal authorities accused of not doing a lot to clean the town on grounds that they were overwhelmed by the population of such refugees at the height of the rebellion in 2003.

assistance. The effects of these developments on the people of Acholi were indescribable. For instance, the number of mentally sick people has greatly increased in the town areas due to stress. In Gulu hospital alone, at the height of the war and insecurity, trauma became the number three cause for hospital admission in addition to gun-shot wounds, panga wounds, landmine injuries.<sup>851</sup> The cost of treating such patients becomes an additional on government expenditure, leading to budgetary constraints.

Most of the abductees who managed to regain their freedom in different ways also suffer from psychological trauma. This problem is also faced by the entire Acholi population in different degrees as a result of the twenty year war. Girls abducted in 1996, Acan Grace (then 14 years), Charlotte Awino (then 16 years) and Akello Janet (then 16 years), still recall with sadness how killing was the crux of their initiation into LRA rebel family. Owino George, a rehabilitation counselor at Gulu, narrates how all new recruits were forced to murder within the first week of their abduction; not only to illustrate to them the peril of trying to escape but also to make escape psychologically difficult since they had been converted into murderers and would fear to associate with other normal people outside the rebel family.<sup>852</sup> The conflict in Acholiland has had impact on the collective mental health of the population in the region; so much because of its intensity and persistence in the 20 years between 1986 and 2006. Available data on funding for health in Acholiland is difficult to obtain. However, AVSI

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<sup>851</sup> “The Net Economic Cost of the Conflict in Acholiland Sub-region of northern Uganda”, See also *Huripec Report, Human Rights Watch Report*, (2003).

<sup>852</sup> *New Vision*, 20<sup>th</sup> September 2008, 9.

invested between 10-15 million dollars in the region between 2002 and 2006; most of it in health.<sup>853</sup>

According to Gulu Local Council Chairman, Five-Norbert Mao, most donors have avoided the region, preferring to operate in regions where access is easier and security better. As a result, there is a large disparity between funding for health in Acholiland and funding going into other regions where problems are less severe. This situation may change in the future as the security situation in the area normalizes and new donors start taking an interest in the sub-region. The main hospital in Gulu, LACOR hospital, normally has a budget of 2.5 billion Uganda shillings. However, according to Chairman Norbet Mao, expenditure on war victims and associated health care costs necessitated by the conflict make it impossible to provide basic health care to the population with this budget<sup>854</sup>. Other hospitals and health care institutions are also struggling to meet the costs of the conflict and to provide adequate care for the patients who find the way to their doors.

A study conducted by Medicines Sans Frontiers (MS-Uganda), a non-governmental organization, indicated that the war in northern Uganda had by 2002 already cost the country 26 million dollars or 10 percent of the country's economic output (GDP).<sup>855</sup> The study also highlights that the conflict caused major economic disruption and human suffering. The country's draft Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) of August 2004 put the cost of the conflict in

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<sup>853</sup> The Association of Volunteers in International Service, Report, 2006, Unpublished.

<sup>854</sup> Interview-August 2007.

<sup>855</sup> A. Bainomugisha & G. Tumushabe, *The Torturous Peace Process in Northern Uganda*, 6.

Acholiland at 3 percent of GDP,<sup>856</sup> although the figures could be much higher if one computed the human losses. This conflict has diverted government spending from social services such as roads, health, education, and other economic sectors to military spending.

The war has been responsible for not only poverty and loss of economic assets, but also the spread of HIV. As the Health Superintendent Gulu hospital put it, “sex has become a commodity in Gulu; and in many areas, the only people with money are soldiers. In a ‘buyers’ market, women and girls have little choice in making sure that condoms are used. Rape; particularly by soldiers of the UPDF and LRA is common and has gone largely unpunished”.<sup>857</sup> The LRA abductees were also infected. An article in *New Vision Newspaper* (2005), quoting GUSCO, stated that 85 percent of the female abductees who returned were affected by sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS. Population movement and displacement of people also helped to exacerbate HIV/AIDS spread. Gulu is now one of the worst affected districts (4<sup>th</sup> of all the 90 districts in the country) with a reputed 16 percent of the population affected.<sup>858</sup>

The conflict in Acholiland has contributed to immeasurable loss of life through other diseases like tuberculosis, especially in the IDPs, Diarrhoea due to poor sanitation problems especially in the squalid camps, skin diseases and tropical ulcers. Delayed treatment due to lack of the necessary medicines and equipment has further compounded the situation.

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<sup>856</sup> Draft Poverty Eradication Plan Report, Kampala, August, 2004, Unpublished.

<sup>857</sup> Interview 2007- Gulu Hospital.

<sup>858</sup> “The Net Economic Cost of the Conflict in the Acholiland Sub-region of northern Uganda”.

Other affected sectors that impact on the national economy are tourism and production of cash crops like tobacco. In 2001, tourism accounted for almost a quarter (or 24.9 percent) of export revenues.<sup>859</sup> In the 20 years of NRM administration, tourism should have been much farther along than it is and should have contributed much to GDP. For almost 20 years rebels took refuge in the main National Parks (i.e. Kidepo National park, and Murchison Falls National park) and this affected the industry adversely. The murder of 11 students at Murchison Falls Park and several tourists in western Uganda was widely reported internationally.<sup>860</sup> This greatly scared off tourists.

Foreign exchange was also lost due to the conflict because the region produces most of the country's tobacco and cotton. Virtually all tobacco, 98% or more, for export comes from northern Uganda. The consequences of the conflict in Acholiland are, therefore, not entirely restricted to Acholiland even if the Acholi have felt the brunt of war more than any other community in Uganda. The level of poverty in northern Uganda has increased and strengthened the north-south divide that has characterized Uganda since independence.

## **Conclusion**

After 20 years of fear, displacement, dislocation and disempowerment, Gulu, Kitgum and Pader (that constitute Acholiland) represent a society in crisis. Although the Acholi people have been hailed for their resilience<sup>861</sup>, the intense

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<sup>859</sup> "The Net Economic Cost of the Conflict in the Acholiland Sub-region of northern Uganda".

<sup>860</sup> 10 students of Jimmy Sekassi Institute were cruelly murdered; allegedly by rebels of Lords Resistance Army while on a study tour of the Murchison Park in 2003.

<sup>861</sup> In an address to a gathering in Gulu celebrating the return of peace at PECE, Stadium (9/10/2008), Bishop Odama of Gulu Archdiocese praised the Acholi for their resilience.

pressure of living in the midst of a conflict over such a sustained period of time has taken a massive toll over them.

As the war continued between 1986 and 2006, families were forced to make impossible choices and to live with the shame of abduction, whether as abductees returning and trying to come to terms with the guilt of atrocities they committed or as families trying to re-integrate their ex-rebel children into normal life.

The consequences of the war have continued to perpetuate grievances that are, in turn, identified as the cause of the conflict. Both the conflict and the way the conflict has been portrayed as Acholi affair by some politicians, has generated a feeling of marginalisation that serve to perpetuate the conflict. The North-South divide is today more real and feasible than the British left it in 1962.

## **GENERAL CONCLUSION**

This study has argued that conflict in post-colonial Acholiland is largely a product of the political dynamics of successive post-colonial regimes, including the extensive manipulation of politicized ethnicity and ethnic stereotyping.

It has maintained that the conflict that has bedeviled post-colonial Uganda is largely about political power and that it has been the tragedy of Ugandan politics that violence became a solution of first, rather than last resort, in which every war could be justified since it was always embedded in the country's



history of revenge and ethnic retaliation. At the core of the conflict lies the failure of consecutive Ugandan leaders to construct and consolidate a modern state that legitimizes and promotes collective aspirations, and to wield the magnitude and levels of power a modern state conveys, other than by divide and rule tactics.

Whereas it is true that after establishing the multi-ethnic state of Uganda, the British colonialists made no effort to forge its inhabitants into one unified and viable political entity, much blame should be laid on Uganda's post-colonial leaders and their failure to act differently after over 40 years of independence. Instead, post-colonial leaders in Uganda invented their own version of "divide and rule" where more attention and economic resources were given to members of their own ethnic community than to the nation at large. In such cases, ethnicity was used to obtain and use state power in order to gain access to scarce resources commanded by the state. This, in turn, generated ethnic rivalry and competition which led to conflicts. As Brass observes, "by monopolizing access to cabinet posts and top positions in the military and parastatal enterprises, dominant groups stir up ethnic hostilities thereby provoking coups and conflicts".<sup>862</sup>

Conflict in Uganda is largely as a result of such misrepresentation of political power and ethnicization of politics. It is true that ethnicity is neither immutable nor inherently conflictual. However, it becomes politically dangerous when and

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<sup>862</sup> Quoted in J. Auvinen, "Political Conflict in Less Developed Countries, 1988-89", in *Journal of Peace Research*, 34, 2 (1997), 177-195.

where people are mobilized on the basis of objective characteristics such as culture, language, and territory. In such a situation, ethnicity becomes an instrumental and a destructive feature in a country's politics. The history of conflicts in Uganda is rich in examples where ethnicity has been instrumentalized.

Conflict in Acholiland (1986-2006) has exposed all the dangers associated with politicization and manipulation of ethnicity. Many Acholi claim that they have been singled out and treated by the NRM government as targets of state violence because of their numerical majority in the army of former President Milton Obote. The Museveni regime has not done much to allay their fears. Instead, many commanders and President Museveni himself explain the conflict as an Acholi affair on account that 'it is the cultural background of the people here, they are genetically violent'<sup>863</sup> and, therefore, don't see the conflict as part of Uganda's history where the gun has been used more frequently to solve political differences. Since the inception of the Uganda state in 1962, ethnic rivalry has been exacerbated by those in top political leadership position. Ever since Obote attacked the Buganda Kingdom in 1966 (1966 Crisis), the country has not healed as successive leaders have not been sincere in their dealing with the different ethnic groups beyond exploiting ethnic differences to retain power.

History has taught Ugandans some painful and costly lessons in the political theory of the modern state; notably that rulers will not necessarily serve their constituents, that power corrupts, and that whole societies decay when force is

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<sup>863</sup> This statement was made by the then Army Commander-James Kazini.

used for private benefit. Tragedies, such as the twenty-year old conflict in Acholiland can only be avoided when both leaders and citizens understand the cost of using the gun to settle political differences and are willing to genuinely compromise and share, even when they have the power to take everything.

The conflict in Acholiland also demonstrates that once an entire ethnic group is stereotyped or singled out for repression because of the assumed mistakes of a few (in this case Obote, Okello and Acholi soldiers), repression will automatically generate opposition and lead to a civil war. Whereas the National Resistance Army/Movement regarded the southerners as brothers and integrated most of their political and military leaders into their regime change programmes, it viewed the northerners; the Acholi in particular as enemies of change to be forcefully conquered. By so doing the NRM/A re-invented the repressive practices of its predecessors. The cost of doing this has been the 20 year conflict that destroyed Acholiland and has cost the country dearly economically. Unless the process of genuine reconciliation and ethnic purges are stopped, Uganda will not heal and conflicts are bound to continue or re-occur.