

IDPS AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF NORTHERN UGANDA: GENDER AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN GULU TOWN

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Résumé

Cet article est fondé sur une enquête de terrain menée dans la municipalité de Gulu (nord de l'Ouganda) pendant l'été 2007 avec des personnes déplacées¹. L'enquête révèle que les personnes déplacées vivant dans la ville de Gulu subissent des changements importants qui désorientent leurs rôles, responsabilités et actions liés aux genres. Ces changements ont été provoqués par un certain nombre de facteurs, incluant des processus et conflits historiques, et sont expérimentés partiellement en relation avec les modèles hégémoniques dominants des rôles liés aux genres actuellement à l'œuvre en Ouganda. Les effets des relations inégales et non coopératives entre les genres ont été soulignés par le Processus Participatif Ougandais d'Évaluation de la Pauvreté de 2002 comme une des causes fondamentales de la pauvreté.

Bien qu'en théorie le paradigme de développement de « Femmes en développement » ait été remplacé par « Genre et développement », en pratique les programmes de développement tendent en général à se concentrer sur les femmes. Les implications du présent article pour les pratiques de développement sont : la nécessité d'assurer des moyens d'existence viables tant pour les femmes que pour les hommes; le besoin, afin de poursuivre l'objectif d'équité entre les genres, de prêter davantage d'attention à la masculinité; la nécessité que les hommes puissent être convaincus de pouvoir trouver des éléments positifs pour eux et leurs famille dans les programmes qui visent les femmes; et enfin, la nécessité de prêter plus d'attention aux possibilités de changement d'attitude à long terme autour des concepts de famille et de travail.

1. INTRODUCTION

The 21 year conflict in Northern Uganda has led to the displacement of 1.7 million people, with an estimated 1.1 million living in camps in the Acholi districts alone. Hundreds of thousands of people have also been displaced to the major towns², but there has been little research or humanitarian focus on “urban IDPs” (Internally Displaced People): agencies and government officials suggest that the town has been declared an ‘IDP-free zone’³. The significant lack of data on the IDPs living in the town is amply illustrated by the fact that no agreed estimate of the numbers of “town” IDPs exists, government and aid officials provided estimates ranging from 20,000 to 60,000 and the figure could even be higher. Although town life has advantages over camp life (such as better access to public services and income generating opportunities and a perception of better security), many of the areas in the town show “camp like”

¹ It is also based on the Master's Thesis resulting from this fieldwork, see WOODBURN, U., “Women have become like Men: IDPs in Gulu municipality: Gender and Livelihoods”, MA Thesis, Institute of Development Policy and Management, University of Antwerp, 2007.

² Interview with World Food Programme Official, 27th July 2007 – a “validation” exercise aimed at counting IDPs for return packages, carried out in the camps in August 2006, registered around 200,000 more IDPs than had been registered in the camps.

³ For example, during an interview with a UN OCHA official, 26th June 2007.

characteristics⁴, including a lack of proper access to water, and most “town” IDPs have also experienced trauma relating to the war⁵.

This article is based on fieldwork carried out in July and August of 2007 in Gulu municipality, a capital of one of the Acholi districts of northern Uganda, with IDPs surviving on marginal livelihoods. The research showed that, similar to the situation in the camps⁶, the family and gender relations are key arenas where the strains of displacement and day-to-day survival are being played out. Many husband/wife and family relationships have become very tense, with men being unable or unwilling to fulfil their expected gender roles and with women being perceived as having lost their respect for their husbands and families and become “spoiled”.

The implications of this situation are important; as has happened in many other contexts, women seem in many cases to be taking on the majority of the burden of income generating activity as well as continuing to take responsibility for domestic work and childcare: this “double burden”⁷ has severe implications for their health and ability to gain enough income to support their family. Many men are said to have “folded their hands”, abjuring responsibility for income generating activities and drinking away income needed for the household whilst at the same time endeavouring to maintain their authority over the household.

Similar gender tensions and violence are not unique to the north of Uganda, having been identified as a problem throughout Uganda and elsewhere. However, given the effects of displacement, insecurity and context-specific aspects in the north, the situation there is relatively extreme: the 2002 UPPAP (Ugandan Participatory Poverty Assessment Process) notes that in areas of high unemployment or where urbanization has been driven by insecurity (such as in Gulu) men have proved less adaptable in the face of crisis, taking refuge in drinking, a situation ultimately leading to an increase in domestic violence⁸. The impact of gender tensions was also flagged up by the UPPAP, which states that “unequal, non-cooperative gender relations are a fundamental cause of poverty.”⁹ Research conducted in the north in 1999¹⁰ also highlighted very similar discourses and issues.

⁴ REPUBLIC OF UGANDA MINISTRY OF HEALTH/WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION, “Health and mortality survey among internally displaced persons in Gulu, Kitgum and Pader districts, northern Uganda”, 2005, see for example p. 46.

⁵ WOODBURN, U., *op. cit.*, pp. 27-42.

⁶ A summary of these issues is provided in PAUL, D., “Fulfilling the Forgotten Promise: The Protection of Civilians in Northern Uganda. A study of protection of civilians sponsored by members of InterAction’s Protection working group”, Washington, InterAction, January 2006.

⁷ In fact, women often have a ‘triple burden’ since they are also involved in community activities: see also MOSER, C., *Gender planning and development: Theory, Practice and Training*, 2003, p. 27.

⁸ UPPAP (Uganda Participatory Poverty Assessment Process), *Second Participatory Poverty Assessment Report: Deepening the Understanding of Poverty*, Kampala, Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, 2002, p. 27.

⁹ UPPAP, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

Although the impact of the conflict, urban life and individual strategies of responding to the changes are important in order to understand such gender tensions, this article argues that there is also a need to go beyond the immediate conflict and displacement and assess the wider historical and cultural processes at work. Several authors have pointed to ways in which gender and relationships become transformed and contested during times of social change. Hodgson et al.¹¹, for example, state that “marriage and household relations, as the primary locus of production, reproduction, consumption, distribution and social control in societies, become key sites of struggle in the context of broader economic and social transformations... Although often articulated in terms of moral crisis, contests over conjugality are really about shifting power relations.”

It is also important to highlight the role of development interventions. In the context of northern Uganda, for example, food for the household is distributed to the woman in camps and credit schemes target women in the hopes of improving family welfare and gender equity. Although these interventions were designed in this way for very good reasons – including the propensity of men to sell the family’s food in order to buy alcohol – they can be counterproductive. They may lead to increasing tensions within the households since men’s status as the primary breadwinner and decision maker is usurped. Several NGOs and officials working in Gulu district indicated that programmes targeting women have been problematic, leading to an increase in gender-based violence. This effect has also been noted in other contexts: Chant et al. conclude from their research that “projects aimed at raising women’s access to income in situations where men have difficulty being breadwinners were often unsuccessful”. They also note that in Costa Rica evidence suggests that poverty alleviation programmes focusing on female heads of household can “drive men still further from assuming family responsibilities”¹². During the research, NGO workers noted the need to implement holistic programmes, ones that ensured women got the assistance they need but which also ensured men either participated or understood the benefits of the programme for them and their families¹³.

These issues point to the fact that, although “gender and development” (GAD) replaced “women in development” (WID) as the dominant paradigm in

¹⁰ Cf. DOLAN, C., “Collapsing Masculinities and Weak States – A case study from Northern Uganda” in CLEAVER, F. (ed.), *Masculinities Matter: Men, gender and development*, London, Zed Books, 2003 (version used here from a print-off provided by Chris Dolan); DOLAN, C., *Understanding war and its continuation: the case of Northern Uganda*, London, London School of Economics and Political Science, University of London, 2005.

¹¹ HODGSON, D., McCURDY, S., “Introduction”, in HODGSON, D., McCURDY, S. (eds.), *‘Wicked’ Women and the Reconfiguration of Gender in Africa*, Portsmouth, NH, Heinemann, 2001.

¹² CHANT, S., GUTMANN, M., “‘Men-streaming’ gender? Questions for gender and development policy in the twenty-first century”, *Progress in Development Studies* 2, 2002, p. 275.

¹³ For example, Interview with ARC official, 25th June 2007.

the 1980s, development practice as regards gender issues still tends to follow the WID model, focusing on women's economic role and participation in development rather than a more sophisticated and in-depth understanding of gendered relations¹⁴.

A consideration of the concept of gender can further illuminate why development policy and practice should integrate both female and male perceptions and why understanding the social constructs that influence gendered behaviour, including perceptions of masculinities or ways of being a man, are so important to achieving development goals. Gender is considered here to be both a symbolic construct and a social relationship where the categories "woman" and "man" are culturally constructed in relation to powerful sets of ideas about personhood, family and society. These ideas are also, however, lived by people and negotiated in the context of social and economic relationships. Discourses and experiences of masculinity and femininity are not only framed through male-female relationships but also through intra-sex comparisons and power relationships¹⁵. For example, not only women are vulnerable in the gender power game, groups of men might also be victims of gender-based domination, by groups of more powerful men.

Adding an understanding of power to gender relations has allowed several authors to develop the concept of "hegemonic masculinity" or indeed femininity¹⁶, this article will argue hegemonic models crucial to understanding the Gulu context and indeed for the success of development initiatives. As stated by Moncrieffe¹⁷: "Understanding and addressing the adverse power relations that underpin poverty are, in turn, necessary for building capabilities and ensuring that assets and opportunities have the best prospects." Furthermore, the adverse power relationships ongoing in northern Uganda should not just be understood and addressed at the level of individual gender relationships. Dolan's insight that "there is a crucial connection to be made between state level dynamics and micro-level behaviour"¹⁸ is crucial, especially given the history of north-south division in Uganda and ethnic stereotyping which has fed into the current conflict and political marginalisation of the north.

In order to further unpick the processes at work in transforming gender relations, this article will focus on the important role of hegemonic models

¹⁴ CHANT *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 269.

¹⁵ For discussions on gender, see for example MOORE, H., *A passion for difference*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1994.

¹⁶ MORRELL, R., "Of Boys and Men: Masculinity and Gender in Southern African Studies", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 3, 1998, pp. 607f.; DOLAN, "Collapsing Masculinities and Weak States (...)", *op. cit.*; id., *Understanding war and its continuation (...)*, *op. cit.* on masculinity; and on femininity: KYOMUHENDO, G. B., McINTOSH, M. K., *Women, work and domestic virtue in Uganda 1900-2003*, Kampala, Fountain Publishers, 2006.

¹⁷ MONCRIEFFE, J. M., "Beyond categories: power, recognition and the conditions for equity", Background paper for the World Development Report 2006, Discussion Draft, London, Overseas Development Institute, December 2004, p. 32.

¹⁸ DOLAN, "Collapsing Masculinities and Weak States (...)", *op. cit.*, p. 3.

governing male and female roles in Uganda¹⁹, and the ways in which the ability and willingness to play these roles have been undermined or transformed over the recent historical period. The influence of state and donor interventions will also be highlighted, since many interventions are highly gendered. Firstly a contextual sketch of the political background will be provided, followed by a description of the fieldwork methodology and key findings from the research. The final section will analyse the literature on the subject, illuminating how masculinities and femininities have shifted during the recent historical era and due to the conflict. In the conclusion, the implications for development policy and practice in the north of Uganda will be assessed.

2. POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Uganda has been governed by Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Movement (NRM) party since it took power in 1986. At that time Uganda had experienced around two decades of "chaos, violent civil conflict, and catastrophic economic and political governance"²⁰, and it is generally considered that significant results were achieved during the first decade of the NRM's rule – apart from in the north. In the 1980s Uganda became an "aid darling" following Museveni's implementation of donor friendly policies such as decentralization, affirmative action on gender and support for civil society: donors currently provide around 50% of Uganda's budget²¹.

However, the northern districts (mainly the Acholi districts but also the West Nile and Karamoja) have suffered from an ongoing conflict since the NRM takeover and have "experienced either de facto martial law or a relative absence of effective state presence for much of the last two decades"²². Although there are conflicting accounts as to how and why the conflict really started, the most credible account would seem to be that since President Museveni's National Resistance Movement/Army (NRM/A) toppled Tito Okello's transitional government in 1986, the NRM/A has fought a variety of rebel movements in the north, with the main rebel force currently named the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and lead by Joseph Kony²³.

¹⁹ DOLAN, *Understanding war and its continuation (...)*, *op. cit.*; KYOMUHENDO *et al.*, *op. cit.*

²⁰ ARD, Inc., *Democracy and Governance Assessment: Republic of Uganda 2005*, Washington, U. S. Agency for International Development, 2005, p. V.

²¹ MARYSSE, S., ANSOMS, A., CASSIMON, D., "The aid 'Darlings' and 'Orphans' of the Great Lakes region in Africa", *European journal of development research*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 2007, pp. 433-458.

²² ARD, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

²³ See for example LOMO, Z., HOVIL, L., "Behind the violence: Causes, Consequences and the Search for Solutions to the War in Northern Uganda", Working Paper No. 11, Kampala, Makerere University, Refugee Law Project, 2004; DOLAN, *Understanding war and its continuation (...)*, *op. cit.*

The intense suffering in the north has been highlighted by a number of authors, Dolan²⁴ shows that over the course of two decades “the average citizen... had ... experienced a relentless series of violations” and furthermore that “the levels of violence, brutality and impoverishment are extreme – and underacknowledged”. The conflict has been characterised by the abductions of children and adults by the rebel forces and the forced displacement by the Ugandan army of hundreds of thousands of people into so-called “protected villages”, referred to here as “camps”. These camps have been the site of horrendous suffering since they were set up, in reality unprotected from rebel attacks or human rights violations by the army, with a lack of access to food, water or health services and with high levels of gender based violence.

Until Jan Egerland, the UN Undersecretary for Humanitarian Affairs, described the conflict in the north of Uganda in 2003 as one of the “worst humanitarian disasters in the world”²⁵ the plight of the millions of internally displaced people in the northern region suffered from a severe lack of international attention. However since around the year 2000, donors have become increasingly concerned about the political and economic marginalisation of the north and apparent lack of political will to resolve the conflict.²⁶

President Museveni, as ever a clever reader of donor intentions, has in the past couple of years engaged more substantively in the peace process in the north. Furthermore, in October 2007, he officially launched a three year \$600 million Peace Recovery and Development Plan aimed at increasing stability and kick-starting development in the north. This plan contains many potentially positive actions although concerns exist as to whether much of the money will be diverted given high levels of corruption. The deepening international engagement in achieving sustainable peace and development in the north and the signing of regional agreements between Uganda, South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have raised hopes that the conflict is coming to an end. The South Sudan sponsored talks have led to a series of steps towards peace, with the most recent being the signing of what has been described as a “permanent” ceasefire by the Government of Uganda and the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA)²⁷ on 23 February 2008.

The humanitarian situation has improved to some extent over the past year, with increased security and freedom of movement. People in the camps and the town have been better able to access their land and build livelihoods, although many, for example, many town IDPs are far from their land and thus

²⁴ DOLAN, *Understanding war and its continuation (...)*, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

²⁵ BBC NEWS, “Uganda Conflict ‘Worse Than Iraq’”, last updated 2003/11/10 16:56:09, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3256929.stm>.

²⁶ Donors are also having significant concerns about the lack of democratic consolidation and progressive consolidation of neo-patrimonial politics, where power is increasingly centralised in the figure of the President and his close associates. ARD, *op. cit.*, e.g. p. 9.

²⁷ REUTERS FOUNDATION, “Uganda rebels, government sign ‘permanent’ ceasefire”, 23rd February 2008, www.reliefweb.int.

find it difficult to benefit from the new-found security. Gulu town itself is benefiting from increased trade with Southern Sudan and the presence of hundreds of NGOs and UN Agencies. However, although hundreds of thousands of IDPs have started to return home, confidence in the sustainability of the peace is still low among IDPs. In addition, the lack of infrastructure in the villages is leading to a situation where many IDPs, mostly men, commute between camps and “return sites”, leaving women and children in the camps. Furthermore, the recent heavy flooding in Uganda’s northern and eastern districts have led to an estimated 323,000 people (including recently returned Internally Displaced People) being directly affected by the flooding and being at risk in terms of food security and disease²⁸.

Northern Uganda is thus potentially at a turning point, with the prospect of peace and increased development efforts but with many challenges to address given the widespread devastation caused by the war and lack of trust in the peace process or legitimacy of the government. As people return home, elders are keen to reassert traditional ideas of community life, including in relation to gender roles. It is too early to assess whether life will return “to normal”, but it is certainly true that many youth raised in more urban environments are not attracted by the idea of returning to agricultural life in the village and many women have now had a taste of greater financial autonomy and working possibilities. It is expected by development agencies that a large number of IDPs will stay in urban environments. But for those returning home the disjuncture between the attempt to revive the remembered traditions of the village past and the new experiences of life in the town may prove difficult.

3. FIELDWORK: VOICES FROM THE TOWN

The research took place in July and August 2007 in Gulu Municipality²⁹. It was carried out using qualitative techniques, a combination of semi-structured interviews with individuals and with groups of either men or women, with the invaluable help of co-workers from Gulu Municipality. These techniques were used in order to make the voices, perceptions and lived experience of the IDPs living in Gulu town visible. Where possible interviews were recorded and transcribed by a co-worker.

²⁸ UNITED NATIONS OFFICE FOR THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS, “Regional Humanitarian Update”, OCHA Regional Office for Central and Eastern Africa, Reporting period 1st to 31st of October, Vol. 1, No. 8, 2007, <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/SSHN-795F27?OpenDocument&query=regional%20humanitarian%20update>.

²⁹ The research methodology was assessed as complying with the Ugandan guidelines on ethical research from the Ugandan National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST). It was undertaken in the context of a Masters degree in Governance and Development at the University of Antwerp. During the research project I became an “Associate Researcher” of the Refugee Law Project (RLP). The RLP is an autonomous project within the Faculty of Law of Makerere University based in Kampala, an organisation which has considerable expertise on the conflict in Northern Uganda.

Gulu Municipality is one of Uganda's fastest growing towns and increasingly a hub of activity in the north. Gulu houses the offices of several hundred NGOs and Agencies and is benefiting from the growing trade with Southern Sudan. The Municipality covers around 54.4 square kms, according to the 2002 census³⁰ it has a population of 113,144 (the total population of Uganda that year was estimated at 24.4 million persons) but the figure is likely to be much higher now, following migration to the town and population growth. Since nearly 50% of the population were younger than 15 years and around 16% of children are orphans, there is a high dependency burden. Gulu Municipal Council³¹ reports that in 2002, 70% of houses were made with temporary construction materials and that women headed 30% of the households (10% of households were headed by people over 60 years of age). Around 21% of the working age population were engaged in paid employment.

Congested 'camp-like' zones within the municipality known to have large numbers of IDPs were targeted during the research³². Respondents within the areas were identified through the help of the Local Councillors (LCs), through contacts and through chance meetings while walking through the wards. The focus was on IDPs pursuing marginal livelihoods, women engaged in various kinds of *awaro* ("petty trade") or beer-brewing, men doing *leja leja* ("casual labour"). This focus was chosen since these livelihoods are used by a large majority of people, particularly those without education, to gain income in both the town and the camp. Six additional interviews with individuals and one group interview of women in camps outside Gulu municipality were carried out (Anaka, Wianaka and Purongo), in order to gain perspective on differences between the "town" and the "camps".

The interviews with IDPs were mainly carried out in Acholi with one or two in English. Although the focus was on IDPs surviving from marginal livelihoods, interviews were also conducted with other categories of "well-informed-people" including well-known Elders, a traditional healer, religious leaders and the research assistants themselves. A total of thirty-eight interviews were carried out: the majority were with only one individual, in five interviews there were two people present (several different groupings including parent with child and brother and sister), twenty with mainly women, eighteen with mainly men. The ages ranged from 18-80. In addition to the individual interviews eleven group interviews were carried out, five with women and six with men. The aim was to achieve a rough equivalence in numbers of men and women interviewed and to speak to a range of different ages. The group

³⁰ GULU MUNICIPAL COUNCIL, "2002 Population and housing census analytical report", Gulu Municipal Council/Government of Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2007.

³¹ GULU MUNICIPAL COUNCIL, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

³² The areas were identified through interviews with co-workers and government officials and included: Kasubi Central and Kasubi Goan's Quarter, Kiroombe, Kanyagoga and Limu medical flats. The first four mentioned were located in the Bardege division of Gulu municipality and Limu in Laroo Division. Several of the areas corresponded with those identified as being "camp-like" by the 2005 WHO/Government of Uganda Report (REPUBLIC OF UGANDA MINISTRY OF HEALTH/WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION, *op. cit.*, p. 46).

interviews averaged around six people, although one group interview of men had around fourteen participants.

In order to gather existing information on IDPs within the municipality and to assess the perceptions of various actors about “urban IDPs” and issues surrounding gender roles, twenty-two interviews with seventeen different organisations (NGOs and UN Agencies working in Gulu district) and sixteen interviews with government officials (including LC1s, LC3 and LC5³³, gender officials, community development officers and disaster management committee representatives) were carried out.

Constraints on the interviewing included having to work through translators, the difficulty of scheduling interviews in advance given the uncertain nature of the participants’ livelihoods and the general lack of data on urban IDPs. The information on IDPs in Gulu seemed to be limited to certain specific groups, such as formerly abducted children or “child mothers”. In terms of the representativeness of the group targeted heard, the size of the sample was by necessity small due to constraints on time and resources, therefore it cannot be said encompass the total range of views of IDPs in Gulu municipality. For example, some variation depending on levels of education and income could be expected and, although some youth (under 20s) were interviewed, it would be interesting to expand the study further to include more youth of both sexes.

However since the responses are clearly very similar to those collected in other studies on the camps and are expressed frequently in the media³⁴, it is clear that many of the views are commonly held by people in the Acholi districts. It should be noted that most people in northern Uganda have had some experience of displacement or been affected by the conflict either personally or through their families, given the widespread devastation. Consequently, societal changes have been felt at all levels.

The respondents interviewed had come to Gulu at different phases in the conflict, ranging from the very beginning in 1986 to about 2003. Without exception the respondents gave “insecurity” or “conflict” as the reason they fled from their villages, most had had family members killed by the rebels or the UPDF, and/or property destroyed, some were themselves abducted and escaped or injured as they ran. Displacement to the urban life has proved a shock to what was previously a predominantly rural culture – the congested life of suffering in the town was compared unfavourably with the ideal of life in the village where people had space, they could dig³⁵ and they did not have to pay for everything. The main problems immediately identified by the IDPs as affecting their lives included: access to water, inability to regularly pay school

³³ LC1s represent the most decentralised level, the LC5 takes responsibility for Gulu district.

³⁴ See for example IRIN NEWS, “Uganda: Traditional ways could be a tool against HIV”, www.plusnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=73909, September 2007.

³⁵ ‘Digging’ is a key component of Acholi life, with the opening up of fields carried out by men in the past and the weeding and other associated tasks mainly carried out by women – see GIRLING, F.K., *The Acholi of Uganda*, London, Colonial Research Studies No. 30, 1960.

fees; paying rent; lack of jobs (and capital); sanitation (pit latrines); congested living areas³⁶; problems paying for health care; lack of access to land; high rates of robbery in some areas; and generally caring for their families. Many families are suffering under severe strain, with large numbers of dependents and in many cases, men are not providing income. Most are caring for at least a few extra children, following the deaths of their relatives due to the conflict or from HIV/Aids – during an interview one Community Development Worker estimated that the rate in Bardege is around 9%³⁷.

The respondents commonly pursue a mixture of livelihood strategies depending on various factors including access to capital, state of health, the season, whether they own land nearby the town or could rent it, their skills, contacts and so forth. Men are engaged in various different forms of *leja leja* (casual labour), including carrying water for construction, working in other people's gardens and cutting grass. However, it was clear that men believe only certain types of work were "fit" for them, citing the necessity of having a "big job" that your children could be proud of. Furthermore, there were many complaints about the lack of jobs and exploitative nature of some of the jobs. Most available jobs are often uncertain and short-term, respondents often expressed the task of gaining a living through the use of the term *puru lam* ("we are digging the tarmac").

Women seem to be engaged in a wider range of jobs, they do *leja leja* as well, including a range of domestic tasks for other people, as a housegirl, washing clothes or smearing huts for example, but also are moving into construction work³⁸. Many women spoken to are brewing beer³⁹, in combination with *awaro*, a form of petty trade. *Awaro* involves almost any type of food or drink and varies in scale from selling a few tomatoes or cups of ground maize by the road to selling in the main market. Some women focus almost entirely on *awaro*, but to make a good profit it is necessary to build up enough capital to be able to buy in bulk, a few women are accessing loans from micro-credit companies or NGOs, others build up the capital through doing *leja leja*. Carrying out *awaro* often involves protracted absences from the home, either travelling to get the vegetables or sitting for hours in the market or by the road to sell them. In fact, travelling long distances is said to represent a real change in women's work. On the other hand, long absences can also have an impact on child welfare in the absence of family support mechanisms and the ability of women to carry out their domestic tasks, sometimes leading to

³⁶ Congestion was associated with problems like huts burning down, too many people living in the same small hut and associated with the perceived decline in morality.

³⁷ Community Development Worker Interview, Gulu municipality, 19th July 2007.

³⁸ Traditionally more a male concern, in the cases I came across they were for example working with their husbands on construction sites carrying water.

³⁹ Although it is a source of income for many women, beer brewing as a livelihood is frowned upon by many development agencies and government officials since it is seen to contribute to the cycle of alcoholism and poverty: women are brewing beer to earn an income and many men are spending money needed for their families buying it.

conflict within the family. Girls often bear the burden of the housework while their mother is out working, sometimes affecting their school attendance.

Tensions around what was considered to be proper work for women and men are also apparent, *awaro* and brewing beer are considered by some men as leaving women “open to being persuaded by men”⁴⁰ and if men did have jobs or a choice in the matter it would seem that they attempted to control or limit the work their wives were carrying out.

When respondents were asked about their family status and relationships with their spouses and other relatives a whole new set of problems became apparent, problems which were also observed to involve a negative impact on the health, income and happiness of the respondents and their families. Many of the women are now single, either their husbands had been killed or they had been separated by the elders because of severe domestic violence (often linked to alcohol abuse). Several of the men had lost wives, either killed or “they ran off with rich men”. Many men were very paranoid that their wives would do this, one arguing that he wanted to go to the village so that his “wife would be far from any rich men”⁴¹. Men considered that the women would go to the soldiers and “bring them back HIV/AIDS”⁴².

Of the women I spoke to who had husbands it was rare to find one that had a good relationship with their spouse, where the husband would contribute well to the running of the house and the upkeep of the children. Women complained that the men are “turning away from their responsibilities”⁴³, that they use their income to “drink, thinking that they are enjoying life”⁴⁴, to chase women and in general to spend it on themselves. Instead of being married to them several complained that men are “married to alcohol” (*onyo coo dong gunyomee ki kongo*⁴⁵). Many men confirmed that this was happening, some condemning the practice (one elder saying “these men should be strangled!”⁴⁶) and others explaining it by referring to the woman’s behaviour, complaining that because of women now lack of respect, men would get angry and go and drink. Others said that the men get such small amounts of money per day that it was not worth giving it to their wives. Several cases were mentioned of men taking income that the women had earned or even selling household items for income for their own purposes. Men were also described as having become “idle” and described themselves “useless” (*konyi dong peke*) because they had no land to dig or owned no cattle⁴⁷.

⁴⁰ Focus group interview (men), Thursday 19th July, Gulu municipality.

⁴¹ Focus group interview (men), Gulu municipality, 10th July 2007.

⁴² For example, interview (man), Gulu municipality, 18th July 2007.

⁴³ A constant theme, but e.g., during focus group (women), Gulu municipality, 20th July 2007.

⁴⁴ See footnote 43.

⁴⁵ Discussion with co-worker on her notes on terminology.

⁴⁶ Interview with elder, Gulu municipality, 13th July 2007.

⁴⁷ Interview (man), Gulu municipality, 18th July 2007. Furthermore, studies have noted that women in general have a higher “marginal propensity than men to spend on goods that benefit children” (See for example CAGATAY, N. *et al.*, “Introduction”, *World Development*, Vol. 23, No. 11, p. 1828); however, in northern Uganda the perception is that in the past men did in

According to Acholi cultural norms, it is said that the man should make decisions about money in the household and that the man has the right to decide what to do with the income, since traditionally he would have “married the wife” and paid brideprice for her, she and all she produces belongs to him and his lineage. In fact men are also suspicious of the uses which women might make of money, arguing that men might also need to save for big projects rather than spending it all on small things all the time. Some men complained that “women plan negatively”⁴⁸, saying that if women know you have money they will try and arrange it so that it goes towards paying off their brideprice or generally to their relatives. Women told me that quarrels over money quite often could become violent or involve abusive language, so in many cases to avoid conflict they would hand over their income when asked. It is also the case that many women consider submitting to the husband’s orders forms part of the legitimate respect that she as a woman should pay her husband. Women are also accused of hiding money that the men give them and then refusing to give men “the respect they deserve”⁴⁹, men consider that “the respect has gone”⁵⁰ because women have access to money. Women in general only tended to have real control over their income if they were divorced or widowed.

Although the perception is that men drink the most, many women were said to go drinking with their husbands and neglect their family or even to go drinking separately and for the couple to have a fight when returning home. Drinking seems to be a driver and a result of gender tensions, as well as an arena where gender is asserted: Soldiers are said to spend large amounts of money on women and other men may blow large amounts of money in order to “compete” with the soldiers to show them that they are also men.

The sense of the lack of control over people’s behaviour is extended to opinions on the youth’s morals, they are considered to have no respect for elders, to be drunkards with lax morals who attend the video halls and bars. Morals are said to have declined due to the exposure in the town to “mixed” people and early exposure to sex through sharing huts with their parents rather than being in a separate hut as was the practice in the past. Girls are thought to be getting pregnant earlier and becoming older men’s girlfriends for the price of a mobile phone.

People were therefore considered to have changed, to have been “spoiled” (*obale/bale*), several people said that “it was the war that brought all these problems”, suffering which made women “become men” and the loss of land and livestock which made men “useless”. Anger was directed at the government and NGOs who provided them with no assistance since they were considered as “town IDPs”, or in the eyes of men “had imposed women’s’ and

general take responsibility for their families and, for example, paid for school fees but that now very few men do.

⁴⁸ Focus group interview (men), Gulu municipality, 10th July 2007.

⁴⁹ A constant theme, but e.g. focus group interview (men), Gulu municipality, 10th July 2007.

⁵⁰ See footnote 49.

children's' rights on the Acholi culture"⁵¹. Men were refused loans but not the women, in the men's opinion making the women "bigheaded", men complained that their children did not respect them any longer since they were unable to beat them⁵². Women in a group discussion mentioned how there was now no cooperation between people, that there is a need to address the enmity between people because of the many killings and that there will be conflict over land since some people are now occupying their land⁵³.

Other interesting characterisations of how people had changed included, for example, that women are now "sharp" (seen as both positive and negative). Both women and men said that women's brains had become brighter, one man saying that women were more adaptable⁵⁴. This can be compared with the ideas expressed to Dolan in 1999 that men are better and brighter and that women are weaker and more of a burden⁵⁵. Further indications of the perception that women were increasingly moving into male domains included how respondents characterised women speaking in public. In the past women did not speak in public and generally did not participate in clan meetings. Now women do, and, although their political presence is not by any means as powerful as men's, their views are classed as being listened to, especially in the context that so many men were "drunkards". The views of men were classed as often being "irrelevant" as compared to a "right-thinking woman"⁵⁶. This state of affairs was personified in the two female LCs I spoke to, who argued that people had voted for them because they wanted to see if women could do better than the alcoholic men who had previously been the LCs⁵⁷. However, this of course does not throw too much of a positive light on women, as they are not being compared to "right thinking men" but to "drunkards".

There was therefore a significant dissonance between what is considered "good behaviour" and the perceptions of the reality of how life is, with the men unable or unwilling to provide for the family and women not seen as respecting their man, but, as respecting money. For example a good man is also characterised as having cows and livestock, in reality this is rarely the case. A clear association was made between the displacement, men's lack of livelihoods and possessions and women gaining an income and losing their love and respect for the man. Family desertions by men are blamed on women's lack of respect for them. People are seen to have changed for the worse following the war. Although a perception of disorder and the assertion of the need to improve control and behaviour are well-known reactions to social

⁵¹ Interview with elder, Gulu municipality, 21st July 2007.

⁵² Focus group interview (men), Gulu municipality, 10th July 2007.

⁵³ Focus group interview (women), Gulu municipality, 7th July 2007.

⁵⁴ Interview (man), Gulu municipality, 22nd July 2007.

⁵⁵ DOLAN, *Understanding war and its continuation* (...), *op. cit.*, pp. 251-257.

⁵⁶ Focus group interview, Gulu municipality, 7th July 2007.

⁵⁷ Interviews with LC1s, Gulu municipality, 9th and 11th July 2007.

change⁵⁸, with the crisis and disorder of the present being compared to the ideal of life in the village, it is clear that changes are occurring. All the respondents agreed that, for example, men were not living up to their responsibilities, and that there was frequently conflict in the home over issues such as income and alcoholism. We could also observe from the reactions of the respondents that conflicts were causing a great deal of psychological strain.

4. SHIFTING ROLES, MASCULINITIES AND FEMININITIES

The existence of powerful hegemonic discourses defining masculinity and femininity are important to understanding people's gendered experiences and whether they are able to live up to expected norms. In the case of northern Uganda for example Dolan⁵⁹ has argued that there is a hegemonic model of masculinity which "rests on polarised stereotypes and models of what women and men are like, what they should do, how they should relate to one another, and what their respective positions and roles in society should be. At its simplest it can be described as based on sexist, heterosexist, ethnocentrist and adultist premises, and as entailing considerable economic responsibilities and a particular relationship with the state". Hegemonic masculinities tend to silence or subordinate other masculinities "positioning these in relation to itself such that the values expressed by these other masculinities are not those that have currency or legitimacy⁶⁰. Dolan identifies three key elements making up the masculine role in northern Uganda: an ability to marry properly and then to protect and provide for the family that has been created.

As regards femininity in Uganda, Kyomuhendo et al.⁶¹ argue that a "model of domestic virtue" delimits how women could be "proper" and good women. This model developed during the colonial era and was reinforced during post-colonial times. Dominant ideas in the "domestic virtue" model relate to how a proper woman is married, has children, obeys her husband and who controls what kinds of work a proper woman can do (or not do). The authors observe that the reality of women's lives tended to break out of what was expected and the resulting tensions lead to positive variants in the model but also domestic conflict and that these hegemonic models shift over time.

As we can see from the respondents there is a powerful sense that both men and women are no longer playing their expected roles. For many men in northern Uganda, there is a sense that they have been displaced in many fields of action, from their land, from their position as head of the household, even

⁵⁸ See for example CORNWALL, A., "Wayward Women and Useless Men: Contest and Change in Gender Relations in Ado-Odo, S.W. Nigeria" in HODGSON, D., McCURDY, S. (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 67-84; LOVETT, M., "'She Thinks She's Like a Man': Marriage and (De)Constructing Gender Identity in Colonial Buha, Western Tanzania, 1943-1960" in the same volume.

⁵⁹ DOLAN, "Collapsing Masculinities and Weak States (...)", *op. cit.*, p. 4.

⁶⁰ See also MORRELL, *op. cit.* and his discussion of Mike Donaldson's concept of hegemonic masculinity, p. 608.

⁶¹ KYOMUHENDO *et al.*, *op. cit.*

from their perceived status as being more intelligent and their claim to the political domain and public decision making. Their space of operation has been closed down, the work they used to do is now unavailable, their role as the protector and provider of the household has been usurped by soldiers and by women. Dolan⁶² considers that the concept of “thwarting” applies to northern Uganda, in that men have been unable to live up to their expected model of behaviour and, left without alternatives, men’s aspirations and desires have been thwarted. This can then be linked to the assertion of masculinity in destructive ways, such as through exerting force on their wives.

Women’s roles on the other hand have expanded to some extent, with tasks previously conducted in the home being sold for money, but their responsibilities have increased so much it is having an effect on their health. Many female respondents also said that being married was not necessarily helpful for them, rejecting marriage despite marriage continuing to be essential for women to comply with models of domestic virtue and thus be considered “good women”. Women are pushing the boundaries of the “model of domestic virtue” and being considered uncontrollable and big headed, men are failing to live up to the hegemonic model of masculinity and being continually humiliated by other men who can do so⁶³. These transformations have been exacerbated by the poverty and traumas created by the war, as will be explained below. Such destructive patterns can also be noted in many other contexts where male livelihoods have been destroyed or where there has been rapid urbanisation⁶⁴.

To look more specifically at how masculinity has become undermined for many Acholi men and at shifts in female gender roles it is useful to focus on key social institutions and their changes over time. Historical processes should also be taken into account since it is not just the conflict that influenced changes in gender roles and societal norms. Acholi society has experienced a series of “shocks” in recent history; we can perhaps see the processes of the war as further pushing already existing historical processes acting in conjunction with the marginalisation of the north.

4.1. Colonial transformations, the Obote and the Idi Amin eras

Similar to many other African contexts, colonial processes of control and reification came into play in the north of Uganda, including in relation to gendered identities⁶⁵. The work of the anthropologist F. K. Girling in the

⁶² DOLAN, *Understanding war and its continuation (...)*, *op. cit.*, p. 250.

⁶³ DOLAN, “Collapsing Masculinities and Weak States (...)”, *op. cit.*

⁶⁴ See for example AMUYUNZU-NYAMONGO, A. *et al.*, “Collapsing Livelihoods and the Crisis of Masculinity in Rural Kenya” in BANNON, I., *op. cit.*, pp. 216-244.

⁶⁵ MORRELL, R., *op. cit.*, p. 605, TAMALE, S., *When Hens Being to Crow: Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*, Kampala, Fountain Publishers Ltd, 1999, p. 8; HODGSON *et al.*, *op. cit.*; WOODBURN, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-22.

1950s⁶⁶ suggests that established ideas of masculinity were already being undermined during the colonial era with prohibitions on hunting and warfare as well as the denigration of and manipulation of traditional forms of authority. He also considers that women's status improved in relation to men through their growing involvement in the monetary economy. Kyomuhendo et al.'s⁶⁷ data also show that issues over controlling women and discourses about how the current generation of women were "out-of-control" were prevalent during the colonial time.⁶⁸

Following a relatively peaceful period immediately after independence, the whole country experienced a great deal of insecurity and political violence between 1971 and 1986. This period spans Idi Amin's time and "Obote II" which followed Amin's fall from power and even the short-lived Tito Okello regime. During this period, the formal economy collapsed and there were shortages of even basic goods, leading to a high level of economic insecurity and great suffering. These changes forced women further into the cash economy, since many had been left without a husband or their husband's salaries had devalued followed the rampant inflation. However at the same time Amin's government conducted a repressive campaign against women, aimed at controlling their appearance and behaviour. Female submission and deference were stressed along with an exhortation that men should discipline their wives⁶⁹.

Kyomuhendo et al. link this to the ongoing political violence, noting that during violent times reactionary notions of women's proper place in society are often brought out, noting an expansion of the "domestic virtue" model at around the same time. They identify a "petty urban trade" variant: if a woman was obliged to work to feed her family, she could make or sell food and drink, or do other types of service work and still be considered a good woman. The necessity therefore to be a good mother trumped marriage as a requirement. Kyomuhendo et al. show that many of the women involved in the urban petty trade at this period had little if any education. Their work "posed little direct challenge to male roles, since few men wanted to engage in trade at such a low level or to earn money through jobs linked to a domestic setting". However "the fact that female household heads were earning their own money and deciding how to spend it undercut earlier assumptions about male dominance within the family."⁷⁰ This insight certainly applies to the north with the added proviso that currently men perceive that there are few options to

⁶⁶ GIRLING, *op. cit.*

⁶⁷ KYOMUHENDO *et al.*, *op. cit.*, quote the British Governor of Gulu district in 1927 as propagating the idea that the recent ban on corporal punishment of women when found guilty in the native courts « coupled with the free exercise of the rights of women to complain to the Courts in cases of marital punishment has had a deleterious effect on domestic life for the reason that the women are beginning to realise that they can misconduct themselves with comparative impunity. »

⁶⁸ KYOMUHENDO *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

⁶⁹ KYOMUHENDO *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

⁷⁰ KYOMUHENDO *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 146, 17, 162, 178.

engage in trade or business at a higher level, leaving them dependent on women's income.

4.2. The National Resistance Movement era

From around 1981 onwards there was a bloody struggle between Museveni's guerrilla insurgency and Obote's army in the Luwero triangle, which had a significant impact on families in the north given the high numbers of Acholi soldiers killed. Families in the North were already experiencing the dislocating impacts of conflict before the war came to their territories in 1986.

Museveni took power in 1986, taking Kampala from Titus Okello. Although the NRM's rhetoric included gender equality and they implemented affirmative action policies, there is definitely a concern that the regime was less concerned with gender equality per se than with using it gaining international and national legitimacy following their topping of Okello⁷¹. The 1995 Ugandan Constitution guaranteed formal equality between the sexes and provided for affirmative action policies aimed at bringing women into education and political decision making. However these government-run policies did not seem to lead to significant changes in traditional gender patterns⁷², in fact as noted by Kyomuhendo et al.⁷³ the use of gender equality as a method of undermining traditional power blocks can lead to simmering tensions. This was confirmed by several of my respondents, one elder saying "because of women's rights you can't talk to your wife"⁷⁴. According to Ottemoeller⁷⁵, given that African politicians have been limited by the liberalisation of political and economic systems, women constitute a potentially powerful voting bloc, and this is one factor in the expansion of women's formal participation in politics. This insight can be complemented with the insight from Goetz and Hassim⁷⁶ that in many cases, gender equity concerns are "counter-cultural: they challenge the interests of individual men, and of groups constituted on the basis of patriarchal privilege": gender equity demands can provoke social conflict.

As described by several authors⁷⁷ the structural adjustment packages (SAPs) implemented by the NRM at the end of the 1980s had number of adverse effects. The combination of privatisation, cutbacks in public spending, dismantling of social welfare, retrenchment of the formal labour force and the

⁷¹ See TAMALE, *op. cit.*, for an example.

⁷² KYOMUHENDO *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

⁷³ KYOMUHENDO *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

⁷⁴ Interview with elder, Gulu municipality, 21st July, 2007.

⁷⁵ OTTEMOELLER, D., "The politics of Gender in Uganda: Symbolism in the Service of Pragmatism", *African Studies Review*, Vol. 42, No. 2, 1999, pp. 87-104.

⁷⁶ GOETZ, A. M., HASSIM, S. (eds.), *No Shortcuts to Power: African Women in Politics and Policy Making*, Cape Town, Zed Books, 2003, p. 6.

⁷⁷ CAGATAY *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 1828 illuminate this issue, as well as TAMALE, *op. cit.*, p. 21, KYOMUHENDO *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

deregulation of labour markets meant that women had to take on extra family responsibilities as the subsidies were withdrawn from their children's education, health care, food and transportation and as the possibilities of formal employment for their husbands diminished. Women responded to the economic crisis through moving more into petty commodity trading and production in the informal economic sector, especially as their husbands found it more and more difficult to access formal employment.

SAPs are therefore thought to have increased gender inequalities in economic power within households, intensifying unpaid labour for women⁷⁸. It is also considered that the NRM period brought increased gender tension and domestic violence "due to the lack of consonance between women's new roles outside the family and the continued strength of Domestic Virtue expectations of how good women should behave at home."⁷⁹ Other important factors increasing strain on families include the growing impact of HIV/Aids, although this article does not have space to develop this further here. Families have had to nurse sick relatives and take the children of dead relatives, or those sick with HIV/Aids have had a decreased capacity to care for their families.

4.3. The conflict in the north and the destruction of Acholi identities

The war has contributed to the destruction of livelihoods, for example through limiting access to land, but on a symbolic level there has been a widespread destruction and undermining of Acholi identity. Sverker Finnstrom conceptualises displacement in northern Uganda as a process which "entails an imposed redefinition of the individual's status from citizen to subject... eventually, the process of redefinition continues from subject to object, as human agency is increasingly restricted"⁸⁰. The shifts he identifies stem partly from the issue that this mass displacement has taken place in a context of extreme social stress and fragmentation. Finnstrom further identifies two separate aspects of displacement, the structural and the individual, the structural dimension of this violence has led to an "extreme level of individual and collective suffering among the displaced people."⁸¹ If we take his work one step further and consider that the subject is also gendered, we can see how this might affect the space available for agency and control over gendered identities.

Firstly, there has been an erosion of traditional structures and systems of social control by displacement and the associated violences and a high level of collective depression and traumatising. The systems of social control which were at work in the villages, and which might have worked to ensure "responsibility", respect and cooperation, have therefore been largely

⁷⁸ KYOMUHENDO *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

⁷⁹ KYOMUHENDO *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

⁸⁰ FINNSTROM, S., *Living with Bad Surroundings: War and Existential Uncertainty in Acholiland, Northern Uganda*, Uppsala, Uppsala University, 2003, p. 183.

⁸¹ FINNSTROM, S., *op. cit.*, p. 191.

destroyed. Acholis quite frequently mention their concerns about the “disappearance of the Acholi people”⁸². In discussing the camps, Finnstrom assesses that “young men and women complained that there is no guidance from more senior people, while older men and women saw few possibilities to guard and guide the youth. Thus traditional values, cultural knowledge and social institutions of everyday life are threatened...[and] Even the wider balance between the living and the dead, or between the human and extra-human worlds, is jeopardised.”⁸³

Furthermore, the connection with land has been broken. Bøås & Hatløy⁸⁴ argue that land is the “fundamental asset” of the Acholi, because it is “material life but also spiritual well-being (...) the connection with the past through the burial of the dead, but also the future by maintaining it for the coming generations.” It is very important in Acholi culture that the dead should be buried on their lineage land to preserve harmony but this has not been possible and the dead have been buried around the huts in the camps. The IDPs thus are not just exiled in life but also in death. Barker & Ricardo⁸⁵ also note that men in the IDP camps said that if they had no land to dig, they could not be considered men. In Gulu municipality, very few men had access to their land until quite recently, but they are also not necessarily taking responsibility for digging if they have land, something which points to a more general level of alienation.

A key factor in this sense of cultural debilitation is the excess consumption of alcohol: Paul⁸⁶, reports that in most camps women consider that “70% of husbands spend all of their daily cash earnings, and they even sell food aid, to buy drink”. Alcohol and drunkenness are considered an important problem in the town, elders attribute the destruction of parental authority, the rise in domestic violence and the spread of HIV/AIDS partly to increased rates of drinking since it is considered to loosen people’s inhibitions.

Secondly, the loss of the Acholi cattle is an important factor. When discussing the impact of the conflict upon their lives, several of the respondents pointed to the impact of the loss of their livestock. During one focus group with male leja leja workers they complained bitterly that “before people had plenty, but now cows are no more, they could have been sold for capital, but now there’s nothing to sell and money is a problem”⁸⁷. At another focus group (again with men) the view was expressed that “other men have changed, if they get any money they go and drink because of anger and suffering. In those days,

⁸² FINNSTROM, S. also describes this, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

⁸³ FINNSTROM, S., *op. cit.*, p. 201.

⁸⁴ BØÅS, M., HATLØY, A., *Northern Uganda Internally Displaced Persons Profiling Study*, under the auspices of the Office of the Prime Minister, Department of Disaster Preparedness and Refugees, Tøyen, Fafo, 2005, p. 20, http://www.fafo.no/ais/africa/uganda/IDP_uganda_2005.pdf.

⁸⁵ BARKER, B., RICARDO, C., “Young men and the Construction of Masculinity in Sub-Saharan Africa: Implications for HIV/AIDS, Conflict and Violence” in BANNON, I., CORREIA, M. C. (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁸⁶ PAUL, D., *op. cit.*, p. 18.

⁸⁷ Focus group interview (men), Gulu municipality, 10th July 2008.

they used to have cattle, now a man will see his friends have some cattle and compare to how it used to be.”⁸⁸

Forced displacement to the town and the cattle rustling activities of the rebels, Karamojong and the UPDF, have deprived the Acholis of this form of wealth. One mzee (elder) referred to a survey in 1962 showing that each family household had chickens of an unknown number, and about 12 goats per household⁸⁹, but now many do not have livestock. Finnstrom⁹⁰ cites a study showing that only two percent of the Acholi's cattle remain and Dolan points out that although cattle are considered not to have been the main source of income or subsistence for the great majority of the Acholi, “the symbolic significance of this cultural loss should not be underestimated”⁹¹. There was in fact a concerted government strategy to destroy the civilian food stocks and domestic animals in order to prevent the rebels from accessing food stocks⁹². By 1989 the impact of the lack of cattle had led to people paying dowries in cash and to add insult to injury (from a male point of view), key government figures were involved in programmes distributing cattle to women⁹³.

Thirdly, as argued by the Justice and Reconciliation Project⁹⁴: “although cultural beliefs on marriage continue to be held, most can no longer be practised in the context of conflict, displacement and poverty”, given very high prices for bridewealth, for example, leading to a situation where only rich men or soldiers can properly marry. The inability to marry and to carry out the roles expected in marriage has undermined the ability of men to achieve respect with the idea that if you are not married, no one at home is going to respect you. Dolan⁹⁵ considers that power over other men rests on being “married”, since it marks the difference between adult men and youth. “The right to exercise control over wife and children is also based on successfully making material provision for them as well as protecting them.” Thus the achievement of manhood becomes very difficult. Several women also noted that a “good woman” should be married and socially sanctioned marriage is an important plank of the model of domestic virtue.

Finally, it is important to highlight the complicity of state actions in influencing this state of affairs, for example the use of women's emancipation as a political tool and the promotion of a crude and militaristic normative model of masculinity. The state's role can partly be understood in terms of an attempt to consolidate power, in the belief that a disempowered North can

⁸⁸ Focus group interview (men), Gulu municipality, 18th July 2008.

⁸⁹ Interview with elder, Gulu municipality, 13th July 2008.

⁹⁰ FINNSTROM, S., *op. cit.*, p. 57.

⁹¹ DOLAN, *Understanding war and its continuation (...), op. cit.*

⁹² FINNSTROM, S., *op. cit.*, p. 119.

⁹³ DOLAN, *ibidem*, p. 35.

⁹⁴ JRP, “Young Mothers, Marriage, and Reintegration in Northern Uganda: Considerations for the Juba Peace Talks”, Vancouver, University of British Columbia, Liu Institute for Global Issues and the Gulu District NGO Forum, *The Justice and Reconciliation Project: Field Notes*, No. 2, September 2006, p. 2.

⁹⁵ DOLAN, *ibidem*, p. 258.

contribute towards this end. Dolan⁹⁶ considers that state power has consistently modelled “masculinity” in its crudest sense, enforcing its power over men and driving out “non-military” alternative forms of masculinity. He argues that the state had a central role in creating conditions for thwarting and humiliation, for example through the creation of the camps and perhaps also in terms of the lack of attention to the town IDPs. There were also many incidents of rape and army violations that were not dealt with. In 1989 there were even persistent incidents of male rape by the second division of the NRA, which took place over a period of six or seven months until the division was transferred⁹⁷.

Dolan⁹⁸ further discusses two ways in which masculinities collapsed, “firstly a hegemonic masculinity emerged in the face of which alternative masculinities largely disappeared. Secondly, although the war consolidated expectations of hegemonic masculinity, it simultaneously undermined men’s lived experiences of their own masculinity, thereby aggravating a process set in motion by colonialism.” Dolan⁹⁹ therefore considers that the continued military presence is “a constant reminder of civilian men’s failures”, since soldiers also exercised a great deal of control over women while girls were often encouraged to become soldier’s wives. Furthermore the many rapes of women and of men by soldiers compounded the sense of humiliation for both women and men. Dolan sees this as a war tactic, one that reinforces the masculinity of the perpetrator and undermines that of the victim¹⁰⁰.

Women have also become a weapon in the state’s armoury, with the State co-opting many women into the “movement” through affirmative action policies and implementing women’s empowerment. The association of the state with women’s empowerment is perhaps linked to the anger that many men feel about “empowerment”, women are thus linked to state power. Distributing cattle and other humanitarian goods to women can be seen as playing a part in this picture. Humanitarian interventions targeting women and associated with state power complicate the picture and contribute to the disempowerment of men.

Dolan¹⁰¹ suggests that the more men struggled to attain the hegemonic model, the less they succeeded and this contributed to the sense of “thwarting” and increased violence. Men can no longer hunt and women leave them because, as they perceive it, they have no money and cannot provide. Dolan also shows data implying that cases of impotence are very high and that male suicides in the camps are linked to their inability to have satisfactory relationships. Kyomuhendo et al.¹⁰² bring the important insight that the less that men are able to provide for their households, the “more they are likely to cling

⁹⁶ DOLAN, *ibidem*, p. 282.

⁹⁷ DOLAN, *ibidem*, p. 35.

⁹⁸ DOLAN, *ibidem*, p. 251.

⁹⁹ DOLAN, *ibidem*, p. 269.

¹⁰⁰ DOLAN, *ibidem*, p. 250.

¹⁰¹ DOLAN, *ibidem*, p. 271.

¹⁰² KYOMUHENDO *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

to their decision-making role and to seek to stamp their authority on the household.”

5. CONCLUSION

IDPs in Gulu town and indeed elsewhere in Acholiland are experiencing disorientating changes in gender roles, responsibilities and actions. These changes have been stimulated by a number of factors, including historical processes and conflict and are experienced partly in relation to dominant hegemonic models currently available in Uganda. How the changes wrought by the war and recent historical processes will play out in the future is difficult to guess, since the north is currently undergoing further changes and shifts, with IDPs returning to their villages and the prospect of high levels of investment in the region.

There are causes for concern however, as expressed by Dolan, “at its extreme, men’s thwarted masculinity, frustration and anger can leave them vulnerable to engagement in conflict and war”.¹⁰³ If the promised improvements do not lead to benefits for the population in general, the large amounts of arms available in the region in conjunction with large numbers of disaffected and traumatised youth could be an explosive combination. Although the rebels appear to have stopped their attacks, former rebels, former soldiers and underpaid members of Local Defence Units have easy access to arms and reports suggest an increasing amount of “banditry”. It is also important to assess whether the return to “the village” might lead to increased attempts to control women and reassert traditional roles, in the context that women have become more independent. Although most women expressed their desire to return to the rural life and to “dig”¹⁰⁴, many also concurred that it would be difficult to do so given their businesses in the town and the fact that their children were in school. Single women may also find it difficult to access land belonging to dead husbands or family without the support of wider family and clan. The Ugandan Government and Humanitarian agencies have also so far failed to assess properly the needs of IDPs in Gulu Municipality and whether many will need support to return and access their land. Based on the research carried out here, development or humanitarian interventions should integrate actions for urban IDPs in their programmes.

The data here suggest that gender tensions are both caused, to some extent, by poverty and cause poverty, and tackling negative manifestations of masculinity could be an important way of fighting poverty. It is clear that ensuring viable livelihoods and economic empowerment for both women and men is vital. Violence can however often be increased through development

¹⁰³ DOLAN, *ibidem*, p. 250.

¹⁰⁴ In itself this is already a shift, given that men had the most responsibility for digging in the past.

interventions that target women without involving men. As by Bannon & Correia¹⁰⁵ note that women and girls still remain disadvantaged compared to men in developing countries (and many developed countries) and should continue to receive focused assistance but since gender is inherently a relational structure the status of women cannot be improved if men are not included.

The implication for development practice is that, in order for gender equity to be achieved, men need to be convinced of the benefits of programmes targeting women and long term attitudinal change around concepts of the family and work need to be addressed. Programmes that address the household level may assist as well as programmes that can focus on positive expressions of masculinity, for example “fatherhood” and providing for the family need to be considered alongside initiatives that support women and children. This is likely to be a difficult balance to tread, to ensure that both men and women can benefit but it is vital to undertake the effort.

Brussels, February 2008

¹⁰⁵ BANNON, I., CORREIA, M. C. (eds.), *The other half of gender: men's issues in development*, Washington, The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank, 2006.