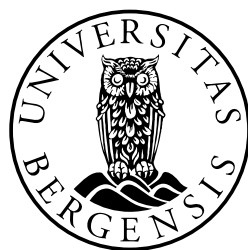


Moving in spaces: young women's aspirations towards an Acholi post-war sociality in Northern Uganda.



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Anne K. Flem Nogva  
Bergen, June 2012

## List of acronyms

ALP – Accelerated Learning Programme  
A4C - Activists for Change  
DP – Democratic Party  
EC – Electoral Commission  
EU – European Union  
FAFO – Institutt for arbeidsliv- og velferdsforskning (Institute for Labour and Social Research).  
FDC – Forum for Democratic Change  
OU – Odilo United  
HSM – Holy Spirit Movement  
HIV/AIDS – Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Virus  
ICC – The International Criminal Court  
IDP – Internally Displaced People  
LC – Local Council  
LRA – Lord’s Resistance Army  
MP – Member of Parliament  
NGO – Non-governmental organisation  
Norad – The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation  
NRA/M – National Resistance Army/Movement  
NRC – Norwegian Refugee Council  
UN – United Nations  
UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
UNOCHA – United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs  
UDF – Uganda Defence Forces  
UPC – Uganda People’s Congress  
UPDF – Uganda People’s Defence Force  
WB – World Bank  
WFP – World Food Programme  
YEP – Youth Education Programme



## Introduction:

### Contextualising ‘peace’

#### **Around *wang oo***

One evening in late February 2011, at the teachers’ camp in the village of Otici, we sat around *wang oo*, the outdoor fireplace of an Acholi household. I was visiting the place, remote some would say, as it was in Amuru District, for one week. Counting around 15 persons, we made a big circle with our chairs. The air was getting cool at last, and calm fell upon the dark surroundings. I could hear that people and animals were still awake, but the intense daytime activity had seized. Even the most talkative of teachers lowered their voices in intimate chats.

I sensed stories were told in a setting like this and asked the local teacher sitting next to me if that was so. He asked if I had heard the story of Labong and Gipiir.

A long time ago, two brothers came from Southern Sudan and into Uganda. Their names were Labong<sup>1</sup> and Gipiir, sons of Olum<sup>2</sup>. One day, Gipiir saw an elephant in their garden and he ran to get a spear. He found Labong’s spear<sup>3</sup> and threw it at the elephant. The spear got stuck in the elephant and the elephant ran away with it. When Labong came home and found out what Gipiir had done, he got annoyed and wanted Gipiir to go and get the spear. Gipiir said that it would be a difficult journey and asked if he could get Labong another spear instead. But Labong insisted; he wanted his spear, the exact same spear. Gipiir then prepared himself for the journey and left. After some time,

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<sup>1</sup> *Labonj* means someone who does not belong to the royal clan (Adong and Lakareber 2009:52).

<sup>2</sup> *Oluma* means chief, important person (Adong and Lakareber 2009:90). *Lum* means bush, children born in the bush Adong and Lakaraber 2009:185).

<sup>3</sup> Commonly taken to be an ancestral/royal spear (see for example Finnström 2008:47f).

he found the elephant and managed to get the spear. Then he met an old woman<sup>4</sup> who gave him some beads. Gipiir returned to the camp and gave Labong his spear. Later, the son of Labong<sup>5</sup> found Gipiir's beads and ate some. Gipiir turned to Labong and asked for his beads. He wanted them back. So they waited for three days, checking the excrements of the child, but they found no beads. Labong took therefore a knife and cut the stomach of his son open and there, they found the beads. The boy died from the wound, and now Labong and Gipiir could not live together anymore. So Gipiir left. He went west, across the Nile, while Labong stayed. He is the origin of Acholis.

The storyteller said that it was both a story of origin, but that it was also meant to teach social skills. It says that one should treat his brother well so that they can live peacefully together. One should also not take revenge of somebody but learn how to forgive. It seemed an important story for what one may call Acholi sociality as often many people live in a single homestead. I asked if they have a similar story for sisters. The storyteller did not seem to understand what I meant at first, but then he smiled and said that there is none such. It is only for brothers. "But the camps disorganised our culture", he continued. He recalled that the soldiers made people go inside their huts at 7pm. It would not have been possible to make bonfires either, because the camps were so crowded. If you stepped outside your hut, you would immediately be close to neighbouring huts. So the children and parents went to bed very early and the practice of storytelling was neglected during the war, he told me.<sup>6</sup>

Some seven-eight women came into the light of the fire and unfolded a big mat. They sat down. "They have come to greet you", one of the teachers said, and I walked over to them. We greeted in Acholi and I asked if I could sit on the mat. They made some space, so that seemed fine. I repeated all the greeting phrases I knew, but then I could not come up with any other and we went quiet.

### **A 'post-war society'**

Northern Uganda has gone through more than 20 years of insurgencies and unrest. What I will refer to as 'the war' has variously been called the Northern Uganda war, the Acholi war, or the Kony war, and took place in the period 1986-2006. On the ground, it may be understood

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<sup>4</sup> In one version, this woman nursed Gipiir because he had fallen ill on the journey (Finnström 2008:47f) and in another version this was the mother of the elephants (p'Bitek 1978:71).

<sup>5</sup> In some versions his daughter.

<sup>6</sup> How war – with emphasis on loss of cattle and staying in the camps – disorganised social life in Northern Uganda is also described by Ocitti (2011:8).



as a fight between the government army (National Resistance Movement/Army, NRM/A) and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), in which the civilians were caught in between.<sup>7</sup> What began as a political opposition with spiritual dimensions (Behrend 1999b), eventually led to the displacement of some 1,8 million people,<sup>8</sup> most of them from the Acholi ethnic group.<sup>9</sup> As a key state war tactic to fight the LRA, from 1996 onwards, people were more or less forced to move to internally displaced people's (IDP) camps, or so-called 'protected camps' where they suffered from material and social misery. The camps commonly hosted between 10 000 to 60 000 people. "People were packed", my informants emphatically told me, referring to the close proximity of huts, often less than a metre, and the amount of people in each hut.

Around 90 % of the Acholi people were displaced for a longer or shorter period (Finnström 2008:133). They had to move from spacious land to a place where movement was severely restricted and they became dependent on external food delivery. Moreover, moving outside the camps was also dangerous, as LRA groups abducted thousands of children and adults<sup>10</sup> to their rebel ranks in addition to mass looting, maiming and killing. As spatial dimensions and forced movement were crucial in war experiences, they are also central in Acholi understanding of 'peace' in Northern Uganda.

While the war is said to have ended in 2006, Finnström (2005) is critical to the application of a general war:peace dichotomy, and argues that "post-war societies" should rather be framed within a war- peace- continuum. Consequently – and building on long term fieldwork and their own perceptions – he rather sees the Acholi people as still living in "bad surroundings" (2003; 2008). This thesis supports the thrust of Finnström's critique of a stark war:peace dichotomy (see also Lubkeman 2008; Richards 2005:13). However, it departs from, or modifies such a critique by taking into account my informants' accentuation of a historical break between the two. I therefore find it appropriate to distinguish between the different epochs and label Northern Uganda a post-war society. By recognising such a break I am also able to explore the concept of 'peace' – an important term that should accompany 'war' in current debates on the 'new wars' (Richards 2005:2). *Piny maber* (good surroundings) – a commonly used Acholi term to designate an ideal social state – is shaped by

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<sup>7</sup> On a higher level, it was also a war of proxy in which other socio-political actors such as the Ugandan government gave support to various fractions of rebel armies in Eastern Congo and Southern Sudan and vice versa; the LRA allegedly received economic and military support mainly from Khartoum (Finnström 2008:85; Dolan 2009:82f)

<sup>8</sup> UNOCHA (2010).

<sup>9</sup> 1,3 million of the refugees were from Gulu, Kitgum and Pader districts, parts of what is recognised as 'Acholiland' (Bøås and Hatløy 2005:v).

<sup>10</sup> An estimated 30 000 abducted of whom 44% were between 18 and 35 years and a larger proportion were males (UNICEF 2001:4ff).

everyday choices and practices and, my informants tell me, not only a situation that people passively live in. Hence, peace I argue, as a broad term encompassing desired ways of living and socialising – what I will term ‘Acholi sociality’ – needs to be seen as consistently in the making and integral to the social order.

### **Reconstituting Acholi sociality**

It is on this background that I seek to answer how Acholi sociality is reconstituted after longlasting war. More specifically I ask: How do young Acholi women’s everyday practices reconstitute Acholi sociality? While recognising that a notion of Acholi sociality is cross-generational and cross-gendered, I have chosen to focus on young women for several reasons: Firstly, women and children are, in dominant international discourses, taken to be most marginalised in war. According to Malkki’s analysis of dominant discourses on war and conflict, the ‘refugee’ is a universalised category, often portrayed as “woman and child”, and coupled with powerlessness (1995:9f). Hence, and as my empirical material from Northern Uganda show, young women are key objects of the intervention programmes of different institutions like the local community, NGOs and the state. Such targeting, I propose, includes their social person in a tense struggle over power to define. Acknowledging in addition the large body of anthropological analysis of young women’s bodies as contested sites for cultural reproduction – bodily, culturally and cosmologically (see for example Douglas 2002, Dubisch 1986, Rosaldo and Lamphere *et al.* 1974, Taylor 1999a, Boddy 1989, Ong 1987), I propose that young women are an analytically rewarding focus in order to understand the dynamics of social reconstitution.

In my understanding of ‘sociality’, I am inspired by Giddens idea of ‘culture’ as what people take for granted; “culture defines what is normal and what is not, what is important and what is not, what is acceptable and what is not, within social context” (as quoted in Warf 2004:130). It is not my intention to treat ‘sociality’ as ‘culture’ in the sense of a homogeneising, reifying and essentialising concept, but I propose that the emphasis on a common understanding of values, norms and moral in Giddens’ definition, is valuable to my conceptualisation of ‘sociality’. Furthermore, that Giddens contextualises cultural behaviour, opens up for the dynamic and processual dimensions of sociality and gives space for the social actor (Giddens 1979:7). In Bourdieu’s theory of practice, society consists of social relations in which people are both affected by, but at the same time affect the structures. What people do is a result of internalised structures, or what he calls *habitus*, as well as personal motivation in the specific settings (Bourdieu 2006:408). To Giddens, subjects are to a great

extent shaped by culture and structures, but in contrast to Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*, the subject is afforded more consciousness. With all of this in mind, I take sociality to be everyday interaction in frames of collectively agreed upon norms in order to form groups or society.

Moreover, I hold that the concept of belonging – however broad, as there are many ways of belonging, and however difficult to pin down – is crucial to understand sociality and my analysis is further based on the presupposition that there is an innate motivation in humans to fundamentally belong to some supra-individual order, or, as Ortner says of subjectivity: “It is a major dimension of human existence” (2005:33). According to p’Bitek, an Acholi writer and philosopher, an Acholi person is ever in ‘chains’, that is, a person is always bound to the society in which one lives through duties, rights and privileges (1986:19). Hence, a focus on belonging implies an emphasis on the relational aspect of being a person, which is central to Acholi sociality. Ortner (2006) argues that, despite attempts in academia to unite structure oriented and individual oriented perspectives, there is too little focus on subjectivity in anthropological theory. ‘Subjectivity’ to her (2005:31) is:

The ensemble of modes of perception, affect, thought, desire, and fear that animate acting subjects. But I always mean as well the cultural and social formations that shape, organize, and provoke those modes [...].

Ortner's definition of subjectivity is useful in my understanding of ‘belonging’, since I hold it to have both a personal emotional component and as being shaped by cultural and social matters. Focus on subjectivity in practice is useful to explore how young women face dominant ideologies and conceptualisations of their social person and how they experience, understand and express belonging to particular places and social environment.

Werbner is, precisely, concerned with such subjectivities in the making and argues that subjectivity<sup>11</sup> is inseparable from the intersubjective – that which is understood or experienced by several (2002:1). The bond between the personal and collective is also evident in Ortner's definition of ‘subjectivity’ above, but Werbner takes the discussion of subjectivity to the level of state (2002:2f). In light of a tense relationship between the Ugandan state and the Acholi – articulated particularly during the time of fieldwork during and National

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<sup>11</sup> Subjectivity is defined as “[...] *political*, a matter of subjugation to state authority; *moral*, reflected in the conscience and agency of subjects who bear rights, duties and obligations; and *realized existentially*, in the subjects' consciousness of their personal or intimate relations” (Werbner 2002:2).

Elections of 2011 – this is a dimension also included in this thesis. As I will show in chapter five, Acholi memory functions as counter-versions of the state narrative, and this has particular consequences for how national belonging is perceived and acted upon.

As previously described, space is a particularly important dimension to Acholi narratives and inform and shape collective memories of war experiences. The camps were congested and people did not have enough space to play out Acholi sociality. Moreover, the fights between the government's army and the LRA were largely over control of space. Because social interaction always takes – and makes – place, I will also pay attention to how social space is reconstituted. Theorists on space and place widely agree that these are relative and socially constructed (see Bourdieu 1989; Giddens 1984; Lefebvre 1991; Thrift 2007:16), and by analysing space, I argue, broader dimensions of Acholi sociality can be explored.

Displacement and deterritorialisation are, as we know, increasingly normalised for large numbers of people today (Malkki 1995:1). This fact was also realised by many of my youngest informants who had not experienced peace since recently. So how – in a place that has been haunted by war for more than 20 years – could they know the agreed upon 'normal', the condition for 'peace', and more specifically for Acholi sociality? Such confusion as to what constitutes 'normalcy' is not, I claim, for the lack of ideals: As p'Bitek (1986:27f) describes normal sociality:

We have seen that the pregnant words *ber*, good, and *rac*, bad, refer first to the human condition, when things are normal, the society thriving, facing and overcoming crises. *Rac* is when things are out of hand. *Piny rac* means the whole thing is out of hand, that the entire apparatus of the culture cannot cope with the menace any more. [...]. The second meaning is about morality, manners, activities of individuals and groups which promote and sustain, or undermine societal life.

Inspired by p'Bitek, 'normal' in this thesis denotes what is generally and normatively valorised as good and positive.<sup>12</sup> Hence, although young people have lived in 'bad surroundings' (Finnström 2008), they can know Acholi sociality because the elders will tell them.

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<sup>12</sup> For a different perspective on 'peace' and 'normality' see Richards (2005:12f).

## **The notion of movement in peace**

Development-oriented approaches to peace-making are often political and pragmatic with a focus on avoiding relapse into conflict<sup>13</sup> and may be defined as “efforts to implement and consolidate violent peace agreement” (Jarstad 2008:17). Following Furley and May (2006:5), and reflecting a more anthropological approach, I rely instead on a contextually sensitive understanding of peace informed by local Acholi understandings. In the Acholi context, people repeatedly emphasised the notion of movement when they discussed both the war and the current period of peace. Firstly, during war, people were severely restricted from moving freely. Often, when I was travelling outside Gulu town – on dirt roads through what our host father called “no man’s land” and, significantly, “no way’s land”, my travel companions narrated how the LRA would hide in the bush, ready to attack. Movement itself was dangerous, they said. Contrary to free, or voluntary movement, there was forced movement; displacement, abduction and night-commuting. “Children were spoiled<sup>14</sup>”, one of my informants said. “At night they were moving, but now they are safe”, she said, referring to the fearful situation of the night-commuters; thousands of youngsters left their homes in the evening to spend the night elsewhere as the LRA came to villages to abduct children and youth to their ranks. Those who were abducted were forced to move with the rebels, some of them for very long distances. People who were not displaced into camps often went to the bushes to sleep at night.

Secondly, in more formal interview sessions, when asked to narrate how their lives had changed since the war, people emphasised the renewed ability to move freely. I travelled with an NRC employee, Atim, to a village – a former refugee camp, and met with people from the community whom the community leader had mobilised. Atim, the community leader and I sat on a bench under the mango tree on the school compound, and some 15 women between 15 and 25 years, and one elderly, sat on *kolos*<sup>15</sup> in front of us. After some initial questions, I asked them to give some concrete examples of how their lives had changed since war.<sup>16</sup> Atim translated as people talked; “they have returned from the camp and are now at home”; “in the camps they were dependent on food delivery but now they can make it themselves”; “free to move”; “education is normally formed”; “*mzungus*<sup>17</sup> were many in the

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<sup>13</sup> “The understanding of the United Nations is that peace building involves a range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacity at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundations for sustainable peace and development” (UN Peacebuilding Support Office 2012).

<sup>14</sup> The word «spoiled» was here, as it often is, used in the meaning of «damaged».

<sup>15</sup> Bamboo-mats.

<sup>16</sup> “I believe your lives have changed since the war. Can you give some concrete examples on how?”

<sup>17</sup> White people.

camps but now they rarely see them”; “when they slept in their houses they could hear gunshots, but not now”; “men took [girls] fast from home”. “Have the people changed?” I asked. “They are now free to forgive each other”, Atim forwarded. “In the camp, all watched, but now they are all in each home”; “in the camps they did not request other people to come with them to dig. It could be dangerous and you did not want to cause your friends death. Now they can again dig in groups. One day all dig in your garden, the next day in another one’s”.

Also in two other repatriation camps, Patiko Prison and Pabbo, people explicitly emphasised garden work as a sign of peace; “they have now returned back home and they can see traces of chickens and goats running around”; “great change: If you wanted to dig, you had to sneak away, or get soldiers to escort you. Now you can dig freely”; “in the camps there where restrictions. Now they are free”; “they had to [rent] gardens which surrounded the camps. Now they can dig freely”. Hence, from what these people tell, the freedom to tread ways and paths in this “no man’s land” is an important part of making peace. As I will discuss more in depth in chapter two, the idea of movement was tied, in particular, to garden work – the main productive activity by the households. However, I argue that such importance of movement for garden work – and the way it is seen as a healthy creative force – is constitutive of Acholi sociality.

Taylor (1999b) argues that symbolic boundaries and cosmological dimensions were structuring violence in the Rwanda genocide, and although ethnicity can be seen as *the* structuring dimension, issues of gender and sex were also significant (Taylor 1999a:42, 2002). Inspired by Barth (1969) and Douglas (2002), Taylor holds that in particular the Tutsi women were seen to occupy a threatening position to the Hutu order because if they were in a relationship with Hutu men, they blurred the ethnic boundaries. Hence, Taylor argues, “the genocide aimed at re-establishing the cosmic order of the Hutu state” by eliminating the “internal other” (1999a:42). In Hutu cosmology, the idea of movement is crucial and the circulation of water, blood and other fluids is perceived as life-giving. Thus, ways of physically and symbolically blocking or distorting life cycles of the internal other became a war strategy – or outcome, to fight the enemy. Examples of such cosmologically structured violence were road blockages, contaminated rivers by dead people, impaling the enemies with spear-like objects, rape, and forced incest.

Drawing on Taylor’s work, the concept of ‘voluntary movement’, as opposed to blockage and ‘forced movement’, informs my analysis. This focus is pertinent as also people in Northern Uganda have experienced severely brutal atrocities and been subjected to forms

of blockage (be it material, bodily, social or symbolic), like road blockages and rape, both at the hands of the NRM/A and the LRA. Moreover, the LRA were also infamous for mutilating bodies – to cut off ears, noses, mouths and tongues. In a story I was told, a young boy riding his bicycle, was surprised by a particular type of rebel group, *anek*<sup>18</sup>, on the road. They asked him what he was going to do; now that he knew of them would he not tell on them when he got back to the village? But he pleaded them not to kill him. In response, they cut off his buttocks and said: “Now you can ride back”. The boy bled to death before he reached home.

This story is one of many that on the experience of how messages were violently inscribed on bodies during the war. Moreover, people were also physically obstructed and prevented from talking and moving.<sup>19</sup> The sheer scale of displacement and the number of abductions described above constitute reasons for using the notion of ‘forced movement’. Since movement is an important condition for garden work and sociality and deprived of such possibilities to work in their gardens and other commonly valued activities, people can be seen as having been subjected to a socio-cultural obstruction – a form of blocking in Taylor’s terms. Hence, as my informants also emphasise, a revival of activities that enhances voluntary movement and fertile circulation is crucial to reconstituting Acholi sociality.

### **Discourse and practice – two complementary intakes**

The discussion of peace, war and normalcy above touches also another issue that Finnström relates to, arguing that on an existential level, “people in the war-torn region experience a lessened control over ontological security in everyday life [...]” (2003:8). A concern with uncertainty is nevertheless not confined to war-torn regions. As Durham also notes, “The most profound, lasting and pervasive reality of postcolonial subjectivities in Africa is surely the sense of uncertainty. [...]. It manifests itself in the small corners of peoples’ everyday life” (2002:139). Moreover, that the “solidity of social value is up for grabs” is not only a matter in post-war or post-colonial societies, however, but a global phenomenon (Weiss 2009:22). I still propose that tensions and explicit conflicts related to this are profound in Northern Uganda.

I argue that reconstituting sociality is a process in which different actors voice diverging and sometimes conflicting discourses on what ‘society’ and ‘person’ should be – two concepts that are inextricably intertwined (Ortner 2006; p’Bitek 1986:19; Giddens

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<sup>18</sup> “Death Squad”.

<sup>19</sup> In p’Bitek’s poem “Song of Soldier”, a cosmological order of flow/blockage can also be read: “All around him, The corpses opened their festering wounds, Bodies with stomachs cut open, The intestines full of holes, Bored by beetles, Corpses with penises in their mouths....” (1986:112).

1996:205). Given the prominence of voicing different views, I have partly relied upon discourse analysis in order to pursue this argument. Discourses are guiding for how to understand and act upon the world, and according to Geertz's analysis from Bali, the most basic fear is the fear of conceptual chaos (Ortner 2005:39). Discourse can be seen as a culturally structured way of thinking, often manifested in spoken language and ways of acting – binding structure, language and agency. In Latin, *discursus* means “running to and from”, indicating to the way discourse are simultaneously guiding thought and behaviour, but also shaped by it.<sup>20</sup> The existence of differently positioned discourses on ‘society’ and ‘person’ – be it of the traditional communal, international NGOs or the state – leaves open spaces for negotiation. Such spaces are realised in social arenas – for example in the football field or at school – where it is possible for the social actor to choose among, and emphasise and negotiate certain ethics and ‘truths’ that comes to make up the foundation for how to act and judge in the world. In chapter four, I will in particular focus on Life Skills trainings as such an arena to explore how young Acholi women manoeuvre in these discursively open spaces in their aspirations towards Acholi sociality. In the open spaces, I argue, forms of belonging and ideals of ‘person’, ‘woman’ and citizen are contested and how to morally practice ‘person’ is up for negotiation.<sup>21</sup>

My overall concern in this thesis – to analyse and contextualise peace-making in Northern Uganda – is complex. In order to shed light on different dimensions of the matter at hand I therefore have chosen to supplement discourse analysis with a practice perspective. The need to supplement discourse analysis can be conveyed through the words of the phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty (1962), that “meaning is in the action itself and cannot be reduced to what is thought or said” (as quoted in Moore 1999:9). In the seemingly same vein, Bourdieu (2003) argues that one cannot understand society merely from observing how people behave; it is the meaning of particular practices, the unspoken, that is to be analysed and understood. However, more than Merleau-Ponty, Bourdieu emphasises history, ideology, domination and power in his analysis, dimensions that are also important throughout this thesis. In the course of my research, a practice oriented perspective turned also out to be a fruitful approach amongst others since many aspects of Acholi sociality often are subtle and not spoken of. Like I described in the very beginning, when I met the women on the *kolos*, I

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<sup>20</sup> For extensive discourse analyses, see for example Pálsson (1995) and Abu-Lughod (1999).

<sup>21</sup> Local discourses, historically generated and maintained, are always challenged in relationship to powerful agents/macro structures like for example the British or the Ugandan state, and according to Ortner (2006) the fight over defining ‘person’ is ever continuing. After the war, however, this tension is also related to non-state structures/discourses like NGOs.



often had to read their body language as I did not know the vernacular language. Moreover, young Acholi women are daily preoccupied with practical work such as food preparation and garden work, activities in which they take on specific roles in relation to others. Such relations are always imbued with power. By focusing on everyday practices, I am able to show broader dimensions of how young women are subjected by various structures, but at the same time negotiate such subjection in creative ways. Such a strategy is in concert with the argument that anthropologists that focus merely on the spoken, miss many dimensions to their analysis by not including what is practised.

### **Outline of chapters**

In the first chapter, I will give a short introduction to the ‘field’ of my study and give an account of how my fieldwork was conducted. The following chapters will focus on young women in different contexts to show the many dimensions of how Acholi sociality is reconstituted. In Finnström’s justification of a research focus, he says that “religion, morality and politics have been of greater interest to me than, for instance, food production and subsistence systems. In other words, the issue of intellectual strategies of coping with war and armed conflict has guided the research” (2003:7). Unlike Finnström, I have chosen to focus on food production, and what is directly linked to it; cooking and consuming. To me, these dimensions of social life are not less “intellectual strategies of coping with war”. Rather, as I also tentatively outlined above in relation to an emphasis on practice, they are core activities in which young women are actively engaging and practicing peace.

In chapter two, I will show how ‘Acholiness’ and land is embodied through garden work and further embedded in collective norms and morals – important dimensions of sociality. Grounded on the notion of voluntary movement, and explicitly recognised by my informants as a sign of peace, I argue that agricultural practices and processes are, therefore, integral to reconstituting Acholi sociality. Moreover, in this particular post-war environment, garden work practices have gained additional meaning to my informants; more than being merely subsistence farming, it becomes a means of generating means for education.

In chapter three, I argue that cooking practices reconfigure social space and create ‘settings’ (Rapoport 1994) for social interaction and organisation. Moreover, as transformers of commodities and bodies and contributors to the ‘moving of things’, young women reconstitute Acholi sociality through cooking. Extending my argument from chapter two – that garden work produces Acholi persons – I will in chapter three show how women are collectively creating Acholi bodies by practicing ‘extended nurturing capacities’. In contrast

to war times, they are able to nurture beyond their household and thus also to display fertility and engage in different forms of circulation – both important aspects of peace. However, as new spheres of value transactions are created, young women also have to manoeuvre less familiar spheres which implies a need to negotiate their role as transformers and transactors.

While chapter two and three are oriented towards key and classic aspects of Acholi sociality in terms of historically established practices, chapter four will to a greater extent focus on the un-settled and contested dimensions of peace-making. In particular, I will show this through young women's participation in an NGO called Odilo United (OU) which provide football- and Life Skills trainings. The trainings are arenas where different discourses on the social person of young Acholi women meet and the conflicts manifest largely in the female bodies. With a focus on a particular kind of agency – understood through the notion of 'conviviality' – I ask how the presence of NGOs and their programmes create spaces for young women to negotiate their social person.

In the last chapter, I further develop the analysis of peace-making and reconstitution of Acholi society to encompass the level of the state. I will specifically look into an incident of public protest, the so-called Walk to Work demonstration 14. April 2011. This was part of a nation-wide opposition campaign unto which the state violently responded. Following Gluckman's approach, that "extended case method is better than series of morphological statements" (1961:9), I analyse the demonstration to better explore the ambiguous relationship between the Ugandan state and Acholi citizens. During the war in Northern Uganda, the Acholis were seen as 'potential enemies' to the state (Branch 2005), because most LRA combatants were Acholis and the area was a base for the opposition. Preceding the National Elections, however, a certain state rhetoric of 'unity' in their campaign prevailed. In light of being seen as potential enemies, I argue that the Acholis were undergoing an attempted purification into loyal citizens. In this particular setting, Acholi memories of marginalisation – linked to control of movement and space – were important to interpret the Walk to Work demonstration and furthermore their relationship to the state.

Thus, the aim of this thesis is not to provide an account of Acholi society or to make generalising statements on the concepts of 'war' and 'peace'. Rather, it is an attempt to explore different dimensions of young women's everyday life, in their aspirations towards peace, in order to provide a contextualised understanding of what peace may come to mean to particular people in particular places, and in which ways do people act it out in their own sociality.

## Chapter 1

### Setting

#### **Gulu – a “rural town”**

During fieldwork, which was undertaken from January-June 2011, I stayed with a host family in Gulu town. The town centre had two-store concrete buildings where cafes, restaurants and small shops had their points of sale. Some grander buildings – yet few in numbers – like the old and the new Kakanyero Hotel and a newly built ‘skyscraper’ bank with large windows of blue glass, stood out as landmarks in the urban landscape. Moreover, the main market, Owino, and the bus-park, were important sites of socialisation and trade.<sup>22</sup> Here, local vendors and business men from Kenya would offer a range of products and commodities, ranging from the traditional tasty oil, *moo-yaa*, to colourful *gomezes*<sup>23</sup> and cell-phones. The bus-park was continuously receiving or letting go national and transnational buses as Gulu is a nucleus on the severely dusty and potholed road system connecting southern Uganda, Kenya and Sudan. Outside the bus-park there were of stations for *bodas* (motorcycle taxis) – informal spots where the drivers, young men, energetically tried to capture customers.

On the one hand, Gulu town can be viewed as a meaningful and bounded place for analysing practices and everyday urban activities post-war. On the other hand, the continuous movement of people and goods along the roadside, perhaps all the way from Kampala, or even from Kenya, or perhaps just from a nearby village, makes Gulu town co-opted by a

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<sup>22</sup> Available on the market is a range of vegetables (maize, cabbage, tomatoes, onions, beans, potatoes, carrots, millet, sorghum, etc.), (seasonal) fruits (passion, banana, pineapple, avocado, etc.), fish, meat, and processed food like wheat, sugar, oil, and salt. Vegetables, most fruit types and meat mainly come from the villages while most of the fish comes from Victoria Lake and some from the district of West Nile.

<sup>23</sup> National costume.

“space of flows” to borrow an expression from Castells (1996).<sup>24</sup> Such an appreciation of Gulu being part of a wider space of flows also is clearly evident in the circulation of people and goods that characterises the urban landscape. Such diverse flows undermines and problematizes a town:village dichotomy often produced and reproduced in academia and elsewhere (see for example Danforth 1982; Liechty 2003. See also Grillo 1980 for a centre:periphery model).



**Figure 1: Construction material from China on the road to the Sudan. Photo: Endre Try Tufteland**

While Gulu should, then, be seen as integral to such a space of flows, informants nevertheless identified a town centre to be found within an area of three parallel main streets and several crossing streets. These were tarmacked, contrary to most other roads in the area. Following a tarmacked road further up-hill, to Senior Quarter, there were larger government buildings, fenced consulates and NGO properties. Despite the relatively small centre, some 150 000 inhabitants is said to reside in Gulu town, and the suburbs stretch far out. Here, most people live in grass-thatched huts, although square brick houses and one-store concrete buildings occasionally pop up. Largely because of war and displacement, Gulu town grew dramatically in terms of population numbers as people fled to town for safety. Many are not

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<sup>24</sup> Castells uses this expression to describe ‘network society’ in larger (global) context, in which the flows are characterised more as electronic information rather than those of material substances and people that I discuss.

staying permanently, however, and I came to know that most of my informants have homes both in town and in their parents' or grandparents' villages. Given this, they oscillate seasonally between rural and urban spaces – and socialities. The way these young women shift between different modes of living also affords, I will argue, Acholi sociality with a thoroughly open-ended character. Hardly to be characterised as a 'new economy', certain changes to the commercial market have nevertheless led to new spheres of value transactions. People recognise for example an increase in the use of money. This can be linked to the fact that more people are renting houses, and there has been an influx of both national and transnational imports to Gulu town and surrounding villages after having been closed off during war. Also in response to the presence and influence of NGOs, local 'hotels' and 'restaurants' are commonly found in rural places as well as in town.

### **Persistence of social organisation despite loss of cattle**

Traditionally, the Acholi depended on subsistence agriculture and cattle, but now there are not much cattle left in Northern Uganda, and agriculture is the main economic activity. Acholi land is organised into chiefdoms and customary (clan) land,<sup>25</sup> headed by a *rwot*, king, and traditionally, people lived in extended family households, and several brothers lived in near proximity. That is probably why there was no Gipiir and Labong story for sisters: It is the boys who inherit their father's land and individual claims were based on usage, not formal documents. Girls were often married into a different clan and could not own land. Recently, however, resulting amongst others from international pressures to realise Human Rights and the implementation of Land Act of 1998 (section 27) it has become easier for women to buy and claim ownership to land. The loss of cattle has led to certain implications such as delayed marriages according to the brother of my host mother, since it was the source of the customary bride price. Regardless of these changes, people still recognise patrilineal descent.

Despite patrilineal organisation, people are continuously seeking support from the matriline – a phenomenon neither new nor unknown to anthropology (Moore 1999:18, referring to James 1978). Achora, a girl from the football team invited me to her home one afternoon after training. When we arrived, I saw an old woman seated in the middle of the compound. She wore an old dress and more clothes were wrapped around her. She was bare-footed, somehow fat around her waist and her hair was short and grey. She warmed her hands on the small container of burning charcoal. Achora brought a chair for me, and her

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<sup>25</sup> Others are freehold, leasing and Mailo land (Bøås and Hatløy 2005:24).

grandmother pointed at a spot next to her mat indicating where I should sit. Achora sat down beside her grandmother, calling her “mama”. I asked Achora for how long they have stayed there. “Five years”, she replied. I asked her grandmother whether she likes it here. “Yes, I have all my children here”, she replied while pointing around at all the children in the compound. They have rooms in a permanent building, and at least four huts. One of the grandmother’s daughters sat down on a chair next to me. She said they have stayed there for ten years. Their village is some 24 km away. Their older brother passed away during the war and she points to the grave marked by a flat square stone. The grandmother takes care of the orphans, she said, but now it is the second son of grandmother to take care of them. But at the moment he is in Tanzania for one week. She pointed and explained who the other persons in the compound were in relation to the grandmother.

I thought that how Achora’s *mama* was seated outside her home, in the middle of things (children, work, activities), spatially expressed her social position where, as it were, her kin moved in centripetal and centrifugal directions around her. Finnström holds that Acholi social organisation is to a great extent matrifocal (2008:34), and from what I learned, especially grandmothers are important centres in the kinship system. As a teacher from Otici said; “the children and grandchildren of one grandmother stay together and feed from the same table. Each family has their homes and they dig in the garden to provide food”. It is however not given that all people know which clan they belong to. Heritance may be explained by blood, but people can also be defined into a family for other reasons, and Evans-Pritchard (1951) makes us aware that kinship is contextual rather than a simple structural product. This flexibility assumes importance in the context of war where many of my informants’ families have experienced changes in family relations and how certain relationships are categorised. For example, returnees can grow up in other families but still be counted as a “brother”. However, these are often already members of the extended family though.

### **A history of “purges and reprisals”**

Since the current president Museveni, leading the NRA/M, came to office in 1986, Northern Uganda has been ravaged by war. But, “even when the NRA took power in 1986, Uganda’s modern history had already, for 25 years, been one of ethnic purges and reprisals” (Van Acker 2004:340). From 1986, in opposition to the present government, and as an attempt to inculcate a new social order, Alice Lakwena and later her cousin Joseph Kony led opposition groups based in the North (Behrend 1999a:21). Alice and the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM) were at

times successful in their fighting, such as in their “March on Kampala” from late 1986. The Holy Spirit Mobile Forces reached all the way to Jinja in late 1987, but there, Alice was eventually defeated. Kony took the role as leader of the rebel army, now re-organised and renamed Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). Since the LRA mainly consisted of people of the Acholi ethnic group, the whole population was, in the government’s eyes, seen to be potential rebels in the Northern Uganda war. However, Branch argues that both the Ugandan government and the LRA failed to mobilise the population and “both came to see the population as a threat and potential enemy instead of as a potential support base” (2005:2).

From 1997, as a means of protecting civilians in the Northern districts, and to better control the area and single out enemies, the government started an intensive displacement of the local population into ‘protected’ camps. According to Finnström; “in its counter insurgency tactics, the Ugandan army has forced large portions of the population into squalid camps with strict curfews as a measure to deny the rebels food and other resources” (2009:125ff, see also Dolan 2009:228ff).

People report of the camps as bad places, and according to the storyteller in the Introduction of this thesis; places deprived of freedom. One could argue that they were in fact ‘protected army camps’ rather than ‘army protected camps’ as the military bases often were placed in the middle of the camps (Dolan 2009:144). How could they from that position prevent rebel attacks in outskirts of the camps? Today, most people have moved from the camps, either to repatriation camps, back to family land, or to town/village centres. Those who still stay within the camps are mainly women or orphans without better housing opportunities and these are labelled ‘extremely vulnerable people’ by the United Nations (UN). Some children and youth stay there because it is closer to NGO education centres I was told, and they occasionally receive a stock of food from home.

### **Some initial methodological considerations**

Although my research was not confined to that area, my starting point for field work was Gulu town.<sup>26</sup> Throughout my thesis I will refer to Gulu town as a field location, but following Trouillot (2003) without the intention of conceptualising it as a bounded area. More and more it became clear to me how movement of people and commodities transgress the often a priori

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<sup>26</sup> Sometimes I write of Northern Uganda in general, although most of my empirical material is from Gulu town. However, I travelled to other places and districts as well. Even if, geographically speaking, my data covers only a very small percentage of Northern Uganda, I take on the task to generalise from time to time, also because my informants come from a greater range of places and villages, from West Nile to Kitgum, Pader and Lira.

theoretical boundaries of ‘town’ and ‘rural villages’ – as also the example above shows. More than being connective nodes in “network of networks” (Hannerz 1992), people are physically moving as they have homes in both places.

Inspired by Amit (2000) to let the circumstances define the method; my goal was methodological flexibility, however limited within the wider framework of participant observation. Anthropology is to a large extent defined by this qualitative method which aims amongst others at establishing close and intimate relationships between researcher and informants. It emphasises participation as a way of being more intensively involved. Ultimately, this methodological living and working left my personal and professional roles constantly blurred (Amit 2000:7). My notebook and pen were always with me, and I also made some use of a voice recorder. In this section I will reflect upon my participation, person and the choices that led to the birth of this thesis. Insofar as I can speak of ‘field locations’, taken into account that these are always theoretically constructed, I will describe four arenas I hold to be the most important; my host family, my participation in Odilo United (OU), visiting acquaintances, and group interviews arranged through the NRC. For the sake of my informants’ integrity, the requirement for anonymisation, and to some extent security (which will be made clearer in the last chapter) people and some villages are given fictitious names.<sup>27</sup> Lastly, I will touch upon some ethical questions that I find appropriate to give extra consideration.

### **Staying with a host family**

My boyfriend at that time, Endre, went with me to work as volunteer teacher in Gulu. His work was organised through Lion’s Aid Norway, and they helped us find a host family. We first asked for two separate families, mostly for research related reasons. I figured that when I was going to make new acquaintances I would be less taken to be Endre’s ‘wife’ and rather seen as an autonomous researcher or student (although the former could be rewarding research-wise in some occasions). Hence, I got a host family in the police barracks. It was only for two nights however, as two police officers came to my hut the second day and told that no strangers were allowed to stay in the barracks. After that, we arranged with Endre’s host family that also I could stay with them.

Our home was located in Kolo Quarter, the quarter “where many bamboo mats were made”, approximately 3 km from town centre. It was an extended family of two parents, two

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<sup>27</sup> The Norwegian Data Protection Official for Research, *norsk samfunnvitenskaplig datatjeneste* (NSD), has given permission to fulfil this project.



boys (7 and 9 years), a baby girl, an aunt, two other girls (16 and 17 years) and a brother of the mother. My host family became the primary practical school for learning Acholi *te kwaro*, ways of living, including proper behaviour and some Acholi phrases. Especially the two boys were eager to teach me *leb* Acholi, their language, which I found helpful in my research. Not that I could converse in any complex way, but people, like the women around *wang oo* in Otici, found it amusing that I tried and gave me credit. We also went with them to their church since our host father was pastor there. Half-way in our stay, Endre and I moved into the neighbouring apartment as the previous neighbours moved out. I had previously felt like an integrated part of family, occasionally with the status of a ‘child’. However, I noticed a change when we moved to the neighbouring apartment and to a greater extent ran our own schedule.

Through Lion’s Aid, I also got the opportunity to travel three times to the village of Otici in Amuru District, some two hours’ drive from Gulu town. Two of the periods we stayed there for five days. That was where I got to know Aber, one of my main informants. She lived in Gulu town, but was visiting her fiancé who worked as a teacher in Otici.

### **Participating with Odilo United**

In the beginning, youth was my primary group of informants and I planned to get in contact with them through sports, and more specifically football. According to Archetti “the anthropological analysis of sport is not a reflection of society, but a means of reflecting on society. [...] Sports represent a complex space for the display of identities as well as an arena for challenging dominant social and moral codes” (2002:14914). Following Archetti, I took football to be a window to understand larger social processes. I was in contact with several NGOs to locate a football team. I could probably have turned up at the main arenas where youth played football, but I wanted to get in touch with a team that was somewhat organised and had regular trainings. I eventually got the phone number for a coach, and met with him on a bench in town. He was coaching the Odilo United<sup>28</sup> (OU) and was very positive to my participation. Illustrating Hammersley and Atkins’ (2004) notion of a gatekeeper, Lubangakene became such a key person for me. He asked if I would join the team, and later on he gave me the best opportunity to carry out my project. He even suggested that I could do interviews in the middle of the trainings. A man, who was presented as Lubangakene’ uncle, although he looked younger, asked me how I intended to repay these girls. This is a difficult

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<sup>28</sup> A programme of the Global Youth Partnership Organization. The first football team was started in a village outside Gulu town in 2006. Since then, teams in two other villages and one in Gulu town have been created.

but important question and one highly relevant to anthropological research. Although I did not come up with any well formulated answer there and then, I have figured out that the best I could do was to be open about my intentions and length of stay, and that I would give the OU feedback on my participation afterwards. To some extent I was also a resource to the OU since I took on the task to coach the girls when no one else could do it and I tried my best to show up at every training.

Football trainings were supposed to be carried out three times a week, but due to occasional rains, holidays and so on, there were (many) exceptions. The trainings were mostly undertaken at Awere Ground in the town centre, a ground of firmly red, packed soil. The players were between 13 and 25 years, but the total number was not clear. Attendance varied from day to day, normally ranging from 5 to 15 participants. In addition to Coach Lubangakene, there were two female coaches; Ayoo (24) and Acan (21). They also subscribed me the role as coach when they learned that I knew how to play. At the first training I got to introduce myself to the girls, and I asked for their permission to participate. “You are welcome”, the biggest girl said in a grave voice. I was somehow hoping for a more enthusiastic welcome, but as I later on was invited home to several of the girls, I suppose that I actually was welcome. Some of these girls became main informants. Because I was older than them, and as a white westerner had a different economic and social status, I could not expect to be one of them. However, I tried to behave mildly, and downplay socioeconomic difference through ways of clothing and riding a *matopted lela*, a “rotten bicycle” as they called it, to trainings.

From late March I travelled with the social worker, Adula, to three villages in order to participate in so-called Life Skills trainings. I got access to the Life Skills trainings through the OU administrator, Atimango. After I had been attending football trainings with OU in town for two months, she invited me to visit her place. When I came to visit, she gave me to see the book that Life Skills trainings were based on and said she wanted me to go with her and Adula the next day to do Life Skills training in a village. The trainings were supposed to be carried out once a month in each village as well as in town. However, when and where was not always set before the previous day. Adula and I usually travelled by *boda* to the village, about 40-50 minutes one way on dusty dirt roads. I participated in nine Life Skills trainings in all. At Life Skills trainings most of the girls understood and could express themselves in English, but they spoke Acholi to each other and Adula usually translated back and forth.



**Figure 1: Moving along the roadside. Photo: Anne Nogva**

### **Visiting friends and friends' families**

I also acquired valuable empirical material while I was visiting friends or friends' families. Most of my key informants, whom also became good friends to me, I got to know through OU. Two of these and the sister of a third, I visited regularly. In this way I soon became familiar to their homes – none of which were parent headed, and local environment. Highly appreciated among the Acholi is to receive visitors whom are very well treated and often given food. Hence, I was often invited home to people or I could go without an invitation. To have continuing relationships over an extended period of time, I argue, has been of great advance to my work because it has given me the opportunity to scratch the surface of things. I learned about routines, roles and norms within the household. In these settings I relied heavily upon a practice centred approach in my interpretation. In addition, I got the opportunity to have long conversations with people in a less formally structured setting.

One of those I visited often was Aber, whom I got to know from Otici. She stayed in an apartment complex in town together with her mother and many neighbours. Apart from her place and my host family, I did not spend much time in parent-led households. This can be of disadvantage to my analysis in terms of less data material on issues to do with the cross-generational and gender hierarchy.

### **Group interviews through the NRC**

Some of my data originated from group interviews I did with help from the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). After meeting with the NRC country director in Gulu, I got the opportunity to go with two local NRC employees to the “field”; locations for their Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP) and Youth Education Programme (YEP) in communities outside Gulu town. The interviews were mainly arranged by the NRC employee who was in charge of the field trip. She was in contact with the community leader and asked for him to gather people. Often, the group did not know the purpose of the meeting. I went on five trips altogether, and did seven interviews with groups ranging from 3 to 30 people. Apart from one group, all consisted of young women roughly between 15 and 30 years.

Some methods, for example interviews, are combinations of different data collection techniques (Hammersley and Atkinson 2004). The setting for example, is full of non-verbal information like dressing, how space is organised, and body language which I tried to pay attention to. Moreover, Briggs (1986) emphasise that the anthropologist participates in the construction of data in the interview context. This insight is furthermore important to transfer to other research contexts and I now take the opportunity to discuss some related and more general considerations for my research.

### **Doing fieldwork post-war: Ethical and representational issues**

There have been many NGOs in Gulu the past decades. Most of the humanitarian workers have been white westerners who have had specific roles and very different status position than the local population. This broader context of aid and development workers may have affected my ascribed position and, more generally, my research, access and which data I have been able to obtain (see also Knudsen 2005). I found it for example very easy to get access to various fields – like in the OU and through the NRC. Moreover, people expressed a positive attitude to the NGOs emphasising that they have provided help in times of need. However, some of my empirical material may have been shaped by what people believe I want to hear – in association with what they know about the NGOs and their goals. Since I did fieldwork for a fairly long period of time, and in many different settings, I hope to have countered some of these biases.

NGO workers have been in a special position because they have been able to leave when things get out of hand and few stay there for a long period of time. Although few things got out of hand while I was there, my stay was also temporally restricted. What I felt as the

most pressing question in relation to this was how ethical it was to participate as a coach for girls for some months and then withdraw. I hold that youngsters benefit from long lasting relationships with leader figures. To ease this dilemma, I tried to be clear from the outset when I was leaving. Yet, compared to NGO workers, my task was, of course, a different one. I was there to ask questions and participate – not telling, and to receive – not to give. Often, I presented myself as a university student wanting to learn more about *te kwaro*.<sup>29</sup> At the same time I stayed in Kolo Quarter – the opposite ends of the gated Senior Quarters where NGO workers and white people usually stay.

In this post-war society, with thousands of orphaned and thousands of previous abducted and child soldiers, many questions could be sensitive. I was afraid to make people uncomfortable and crossing lines for what was acceptable to ask about and usually asked Coach Lubangakene, social worker Adula or my local interpreters beforehand, whether or not specific themes and questions were problematic. Commonly they told me that these girls are “used to talk”, but in my notebook, many of the pre-planned questions are crossed out. Although it is important to historicise my argument, the focus in this thesis is not the past, but the present as I also made clear in the Introduction. Put differently, I was not interested in the war per se (see Dolan 2009; Finnström 2003, 2005), the phenomenon of the LRA and child soldiers (see Allen and Vlassenroot 2010; Behrend 1999a; Ehrenreich 1998; Mawson 2005; Van Acker 2004; Eichstaedt 2009), but the aftermath of war (see also Finnström 2008; Allen 2006 on the LRA and the ICC). Hence, I felt not the need to ask much about particular experiences from the war and, therefore, some of the ethical challenges pertaining to questions of trauma, war politics, etc., have been circumvented.

Lastly, I have tried to be cautious in the way I use my empirical material, especially in relation to how people are depicted. Throughout, I wanted to shed light on young women’s abilities to negotiate and create, and pose them not as passive subjects in a world of humanitarian help and state projects. Inspired by Ortner (2006) I also want to emphasise complexities, ambivalence and dilemmas within individual subjectivities. I have sought to do that on my informants’ premises, by following their lead in conversations and which activities we do. Yet, this thesis is just as much a product of my choices and person.

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<sup>29</sup> Acholi ways of living.



## Chapter 2

### The dual aspirations of garden work:

#### Embodying Acholiness and generating educational money

Chabal states that in Africa there has been economic “regression” and agricultural decrease in production following independence (1996:33). In Northern Uganda however, agricultural production is just about to recover and people finally have the chance to again grow their own food. As presented in the Introduction and which I will discuss further in this chapter, people link this increase in garden work activity to peace. Specifically, they emphasise the ability to move freely, to dig in the garden and that they can see “business moving around”. In this chapter, as agricultural practices and processes are grounded on voluntary movement – a key Acholi value at the heart of wellbeing and growth, I argue that garden work is important to a reconstitution of Acholi sociality.

Garden cultivation is the basis for Acholi economy, and since most people participate in it, it is central to Acholi life and culture. In general terms, it can be characterised as slash and burn agriculture and is mainly for subsistence. The cultivated area is called *poto*, locally translated to ‘garden’. It is a piece of land where different types of crops, like millet, sorghum, beans and bananas are grown, and it can be of various sizes, depending on how much arable land one access and how many people work on it. Bigger *poto* are found in the rural areas, but also in the suburbs of Gulu town small plots are being cultivated.

My informants explicitly linked the physical nature of garden work and consumption of its produce to ethnic identity.<sup>30</sup> Inspired by Bashkow’s analysis of Orokaiva constructs of ‘race’ with reference to food, I suggest that a particular notion of ‘Acholiness’ – a collective

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<sup>30</sup> My informants commonly use the word ‘tribe’, but following Finnström (2008:30ff) I hold that this concept is infused with too much (negative and ambiguous) meaning, stemming from colonial and pre-colonial time.

identity construct of physical, symbolic and moral attachment to Acholi norms and values as well land – is celebrated and practiced through garden work.

Garden work can be seen as the main activity that connects town and villages. Its processes of physical labour and sale, purchase of food and other commodities, enforce movement of people and goods – from the rural areas and the gardens, to the villages and more densely populated areas, and to Gulu town and Owino market<sup>31</sup> and back again. Furthermore, due to war and later, repatriation, there has been a steady migration to Gulu town and other village centres. This, I argue, has heightened the circulation of people and commodities between town and rural areas in significant ways that prove fertile to my female informants.

Reconstituting sociality is not simply a return to past practices however. As a consequence of the introduction of obligatory Universal Primary and Secondary Education (UPE/USE), children and youth, a natural part of the work force, often spend 8-10 hours a day, six days a week in school. Thus, they can work the land only on weekends and during holidays. The agrarian cycle – a basis for ‘social time’ (Bourdieu 1990) – has thus been challenged by a new temporality, school time. My informants expressed great desire for being educated and gardening was seen as an important condition for getting school fees. Hence, practicing peace, I argue, also means to be able to successfully combine the two temporalities of agriculture and school, as I hold them to be socially constituted in different ways.

### **Organisation of garden work**

This spring, rains were late. One Saturday in May, almost two months after the rains were expected, I joined my host family to dig in the garden. It was early in the morning when the eight of us, Laliya, Awor, Uncle Tim, Ogena, Omony, Endre and our host father went to their small, un-cleared plot some twenty minutes’ walk from our home. Aunt Susan had previously gone by bicycle to some other relatives’ garden to dig. When I asked where it was, she said it was “faaar” while she pointed towards a distant place. Our garden was located near the road, between the church and the school. Since the plot had not been cultivated before, it first needed to be cleared of bush and grass, and while some of us dug, others removed grass, roots and big stones. Laliya and Ogena took the first turn to pick up what we had dug loose, and dumped it in a natural hole. Occasionally we swapped tasks because we only had three big hoes and a smaller one for the boys. Besides, it was good for the body to get variation. We

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<sup>31</sup> The main market in Gulu town



worked upon the soil with hoes, to make it porous. It was physically hard work since the soil was compact from months of drought, and tenacious grassroots were difficult to cut through. My host father soon lost his pants in the heat and kept working in his blue-checked boxer-shorts. When a plot was sufficiently porous, the soil was prepared into fifty centimetre tall rows. Uncle Tim prepared the rows, and as he finished one by one, one of the boys walked from row to row and laid down the seeds in their right places while his brother buried them in soil. Around 1pm we went home to have lunch. The girls had already left to prepare the meal.

The wet and the dry seasons are the main dimensions around which garden work is organised and there are mainly two wet seasons: from early March till May, and from October till November. When people believe that rains are coming, often forewarned by some “drizzle”, they go to the gardens to prepare by digging and sowing, as we did. This year, there was some drizzle already at the end of February, but those who went out to prepare, lost all of their seeds as rains did not come until late April. The delay ate into people’s food storages and caused serious concern for the coming months. However, compared to war times, when Northern Uganda faced greater menace, late rains eventually come to an end.

As described above, garden work is a highly social activity – organised around roles and tasks. On the way to and fro the field, and while in the field, people socialise. They share food, tools, goals, and not least the physical hard work. It is a joint cooperation, either between family- or clan members, or between neighbours. Both women and men participate in this work, but at least previously, particular practices of agricultural labour were divided among the sexes (Murdoch 1959:335). Furthermore, Storaas have noted that women took part in weeding, but were not supposed to hoe (1987:124). However, according to my informants, gendered divisions are now fading as women most often take part in all processes of cultivation. As a family-friend told me when I asked him about how work is shared; “both women and men do garden work nowadays. Previously, the women looked after the children. It is many women who do all the work even, and the men is just drinking and waiting for their food”. Illustratively we just then sat under the mango tree, waiting for Awor to serve us beans, *posho*<sup>32</sup> and millet bread for lunch.

In addition to participate in all processes of cultivation, women also prepare lunch and take care of the children. In the rainy season, while travelling to the villages with the OU, I saw people walking along the roadside with hoes over their shoulders, and women often

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<sup>32</sup> Firm dough of maize flour and water. Also called ‘maize bread’.

carried babies on their back. When the social worker and I went to teach Life Skills in Awac, we arrived at noon, since people come home from the garden around 12-1 o'clock. Only two girls were present however because the others were in the garden or prepared lunch for their co-workers like Awor and Laliya did at our place. After some two hours, seven other girls turned up. Hence, I argue, garden work structure Acholi 'social time' in response to an annual agrarian cycle (Bourdieu 1990). Firstly, human labour is organised seasonally, depending on the rains. Secondly, daily activities are also fitted into an agricultural scheme; people go to the garden very early to work while it is not too hot and have some two hours lunch break in the middle of the day.



**Figure 2: Garden work in the outskirts of Gulu town. Photo: Anne Nogva.**

### **The making of Acholi bodies through garden work**

People often referred to garden-related matters like the crops they grow, type of food, and tools they use, when they talked about the distinctiveness of Acholi culture. How this was further linked to a physical production of the Acholi body was conveyed in a group interview I did through the NRC. The interview took place in the newly built NRC centre, in one of the classrooms. It was empty apart from the blackboard, but people had brought some benches and mats to sit on. Around 15 women aged 17-36, 3 men aged 20-31 and 6 babies were present. The men sat on a bench behind the half circle of women who sat on mats. Atim (a local NRC employee), the head of the Community Member Committee and I sat on chairs. After a general introduction, I asked if they were okay with being a mixed group. Some nodded. The chairman had gathered them on Atim's request the previous day, but they did not know that they would be interviewed. I clarified that the interview was voluntary, and if anyone did not want to participate, they could leave. All remained. The chairman closed the presentation round by thanking us for keeping our promise and come.

“What is typical for Acholi culture?” I asked. Atim translated.<sup>33</sup> After mentioning their language, someone said “tools for working in the garden”. That started a discussion between the interviewees and my interpreter, Atim, who is of the neighbouring ethnic group, Langi, in which they vigorously compared Acholi and Langi tools. Although it was seemingly minor variations to me, like the shape of the hoe-blade and length of the wooden shaft, they expressed that it made big difference in terms of use and efficiency. A woman further claimed that the Langi do not know how to grind to which Atim protested emphatically – at least *she* knew how to. “There are also differences in what food we eat”, someone commented. “The Acholi eat millet and beans, compared to those of the Central [Uganda] who eat bananas and *matoke*<sup>34</sup>”. “Is it because of the soil, or cultural differences?” I asked. They laughed again. “It is not the soil! They want things that are soft, like bananas, but Acholis are farmers who want hard food, such as millet, that can last long”.

The way differences between Acholi and Langi tools were described and compared, supports Cohen's (1982) argument that it is often mundane things and everyday practices that are the most significant cultural markers and that ‘culture’ is realised by the boundaries created by such differences. To modify Cohen's point, however, I argue that belonging in Acholiness also depends on the physically carrying out of everyday practices and, moreover, that gardening tools are not simply sources of imagined boundaries but also ‘things’ of

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<sup>33</sup> She used the expression *te kwaro* when she translated ‘culture’.

<sup>34</sup> A dish of bananas.

creation. ‘Things’, says p’Bitek, are cultural markers – not as artefacts in a museum, but by virtue of being crafted and used by *dano* (humans) who “participate in the philosophy of the life that the [thing] celebrate” (1986:22f). In the interview, distinctions between Acholi and Langi ethnic groups were made through specific differences of their gardening tools. In light of p’Bitek’s view, that there is a communicative relationship between people and its ‘things’, I propose that the outcome of this relationship is significant in reconstituting Acholi sociality in several ways.

An obvious outcome is agricultural products – food. Food in itself is life-giving and hence, integral to the continuity of human production. Moreover, but not new to anthropological analysis (see for example Douglas and Isherwood 1996), food takes on cultural dimensions. In the case above, my informants made specific links between food and body. They said for example that millet makes the body hard and strong. According to Bashkow (2006), the Orokaiva people of Papua New Guinea symbolically construct ‘race’ with reference to food; Whitemen eat boiled white rice and tinned meat and fish whereas the Orokaiva eat taro and pork. The different ‘menus’ explain, according to the Orokaiva, why Whitemen are bright, light and soft, and the Orokaiva are dense, hard and strong. Furthermore, race is related to a difference in activities. So while Whitemen do business, the Orokaiva, being rooted in the land, do garden work (2006:146, 209). Thus, because ‘racial’ identities are tied to food and activity, they are stable and long lasting. In relation to Bashkow’s argument, I argue that also Acholi people see themselves as physically and symbolically produced Acholi bodies through hard work and by consuming its products. In other words, through eating and transforming “hard food” such as millet, the Acholis get hard bodies.<sup>35</sup> The categorisation of soft and hard, however, has not always to do with material hardness, but especially ‘millet bread’ – firm, compact dough, is actually tough and lasts for long.

Furthermore, the garden and the workers stand in a mutually constitutive relationship in which both needs the other to be able to produce; the hard body of the Acholi is needed to manage the tough soil, while the latter makes the worker strong enough. Crucially, this embodiment is not only the work of an individual, but from the nature of garden work – a collective effort. It did not come clear to me what activities of ‘soft bodies’ were, but like people from the Central, also I – and *monos*<sup>36</sup> in general – were taken to eat ‘soft’ food such

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<sup>35</sup> Our host father also told about how he turned darker after long days in the garden. One time he wore a t-shirt, and his skin peeled on the arms. He has to use long-sleeved he said.

<sup>36</sup> White(r) people.

as bananas and bread of wheat. In sum, therefore, it is not mundane things and practices in themselves that are cultural markers, but what they do.

To some extent, garden work is also tied to inner moral qualities – adding another dimension to the embodiment of Acholiness.<sup>37</sup> Finnström (2008) writes about the *boo kec bandits* that operated in the area during the Northern Ugandan war. *Boo* is a local green vegetable while *kec* means bitter. The name indicates that the bandits prefer to steal good food, like meat at gunpoint, rather than to work like honest people in the garden and to live off local vegetables and similar bandit groups in Kitgum (another district) were called *pit kumi*, “feeding the body” (Finnström 2008:3). According to Finnström, people are more afraid of the *boo kec bandits* than the LRA rebels, because the last ones are at least “open in their business, but if you encounter *boo kec*, never look them in the eyes” (ibid.).<sup>38</sup> Thus, by growing their own food; local vegetables, such as *boo*, the Acholi constitute themselves as moral beings and the hard body of the Acholi is tied to honest work.

In sum, by working in the garden, people embody Acholiness and land. My informants stated that physical work and consuming local garden produce makes strong and hard bodies, the bodies of farmers. Hence, as a modification to Cohen’s (1982) theory, more than being merely cultural markers, tools and work physically ties the worker to the ethnic group, and I argue further that the cultural ideals of Acholiness is made stable and set through such embodiment.

### **Accounts of peace**

Another day, Atim and I left for a different village to visit a Youth Education Programme (YEP) centre. They were not informed that we came because the NRC wanted to see the centre “as it is”. We talked to the centre leader, and she allowed me to talk to some of the students. When we entered the classroom, the students were in the process of electing a student’s representative. I presented myself and the purpose of my visit. Several girls raised their hands when I asked for volunteers for the interview and the four quickest came with me to the building for teaching carpentry.

The building had walls only on the short ends and we could see wide and far – yellow-green fields into the horizon. The girls brought chairs for us and a mat for them. They all had nice skirts just below their knees and well-used t-shirts. One of them sat with her child in her

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<sup>37</sup> (See also Bashkow 2006).

<sup>38</sup> For a similar phenomenon among Hutu refugees in Burundi, see the narrative panel “We cultivate a lot, they eat a lot” in Malkki (1995:118f).

lap. After we all were presented by name and age, I asked them about how their lives had changed since war. The girls were eager to answer and took their turn; “in the way of feeding. Now the feeding system is back to normal. Previously we were given food in the camps, but now we can look for ourselves. Now we see the learners going to school which they could not before”; “people did not go to cultivate, but now, in the future to come, people will be okay”; “the good thing is that people have gone back to their original homes. Money from the garden can now be used to pay. Peace has now come for good”; “now people can move to farther places so that they can do business. We see now that businessmen are active”; “when you go back to the village, you are given land from your relatives. Girl children are now going to school”; “now there is peace and parents and children are growing happy. The future [of our children] will be more active than ours”.

After visiting the YEP centre, we stopped by a tailor shop. Atim wanted to see how the place was since the tailors, two women and one man, had had education at the YEP centre. At the moment, one woman and the man were present. Atim asked if I wanted to ask them some questions, and we sat outside the tiny brick-house building, squeezing all our butts together on a bench in the shadow of the roof. I asked them how their lives had changed since war. “For one”, the man said, “they have now come back to their original land. We do not have to wait for the UN food, but we can grow our own crops. When I am at this shop, I can also work until night hours”. “Teaching young people was very difficult in the camp where people were *packed*”, the woman said. The translator clenched her fists and knocked the one against the other to illustrate how they were packed. “Now they have access to free land”, the woman continued. “In time of war there was [a] lot of immorality. That’s why I delivered early”

In these interviews, people conveyed a particular view of peace that was directly related to the ability to move freely and in order to go and dig in the garden – activities Acholi people were deprived of during war.



Figure 3: Business men are active. Photo: Endre Tufeland.

### **The notion of movement and circulation in garden work**

In the interviews above, people recognised several things that had changed since war, but I find that three themes related to garden work are repeatedly emphasised; freedom to move, generating money and the ability to grow their own food. The latter will be discussed more thoroughly in chapter three.

My host family and I walked some distance to reach their garden, as was common. Hence, in Gulu, cultivation depends on physical movement since many gardens are located some distance from the houses. Most people I observed moved by foot, others, like our aunt Susan, by bicycle. Modifying a view of agriculturalists as settled, and following Stepputat (2000), I argue that movement and circulation is vital to garden work processes. He (2000:133) describes how garden work in Guatemala implies movement of people and products:

Movement is an important element of ‘peasant’ livelihoods [since] the impossibility of commercial relations, migrant labour, cultivation of land at different altitudes, and other activities involving movement outside the village, amounts to a serious problem of survival.

Furthermore, garden work also enhances movement. Like in Guatemala, obstruction of such fertile forms of movement during war was severely destructive to Acholi sociality. One of the girls from the YEP centre noted on the change since times of war that now, businessmen were active. By businessmen, she probably referred to people – both women and men that were moving along the roadside with garden work produce. This is a label that is commonly applied to such activity; sale and purchase of garden produce because there are not many other areas of economic activity apart from some tailoring, carpentry and second-hand clothes business in the rural areas.

Broch-Due, in her work among the Turkana in the Northern Province of Kenya, debates the European “root metaphor” of nation making as opposed to the Turkana idea of personhood and land as fluid and constantly reconfigured (2000b:60f; see also Malkki 1992). “In this nomadic vision”, she writes, “path, motion, and exchange are the keys, not the fixity and boundedness of an agrarian world” (2000b:61). Adapting her distinction between a sedentary model and a pastoral model of place and identity to a non-nomadic Acholi setting, I argue that although the Acholi are cultivators, they are in many ways – both in their vision of



sociality and in practice – not living a fixed and bounded agrarian world. Moreover, the idea of the relative degree of ‘fixedness’ of land may depend on type of cultivation; “more recently, the land has come to take on an even more fixed aspect as it becomes usable only for irrigated rice cultivation, and not the transient form of slash and burn agriculture which depends on regenerated forest” (Hirsch 2003:10, on Bloch’s [2003] work on Madagascar).

In relation to my argument above – that the Acholis are not living a fixed and bounded agrarian world, Broch-Due’s use of the “path” idiom is useful also to my analysis. She describes it as “the cross-cutting pathways linking camp and countryside are physical signposts conjuring up a social landscape – a web relations and potential transactions that might come along these paths” (2000b:61). I described above how people move along the roadside to reach their gardens. Contrary to war-times, when they were either not allowed to move outside the camp, or they were in danger of encountering LRA groups, they are now free to move and they do so. More importantly, people move for a common purpose as garden work is a collective effort. An informant pointed out that garden work should be performed in groups:

In the camps, they did not request other people to come with them to dig. It could be dangerous and you did not want to cause your friends death. Now they can again dig in groups. One day all dig in your garden, the next day in another one’s.

In other words, garden work practices can be seen to recreate paths between peoples’ homesteads and gardens as people regularly trod these routes. In addition, paths are also generally seen as safer than the un-trodden bush. According to the Acholi, the bush is often associated with snakes and more broadly – danger. Young boys often have the task to sweep their homesteads every day not to have long grass where snakes can hide. Building on Hirsch’s perspective of landscape as a socio-cultural process, rather than objectively perceived features that can be mapped (2003:5), through movement and garden work, Acholi landscape is thus socially made. Significantly, these paths are not mere physical features in the ground, but can also be seen as symbolising social bonds between people who work in each other’s gardens. As the women described, people participate in reciprocal labour relations; they dig one day in one garden and the next day in another. Such labour organisation can be likened with how the Acholi Farajok companies functioned (see Storaas 1987:124ff). According to p’Bitek, a man is forever, in chains – bound to be part of social relations. This membership gives the man, and I suppose also the woman, certain privileges

but also duties. Hence, if Acholi sociality is to be reconstituted, people are obliged to participate in such reciprocal relations that the woman described. Hence, both as physical features and as symbols of social bonds, the paths are fertile connections of people in which the ‘flow’ (Taylor 1999b) of Acholi sociality – concretised amongst other as business activities and labour exchange by my informants – is revived. In sum therefore, movement is a prerequisite for garden work and fertile forms of circulation in several ways. I will now proceed to give a concrete example of how.

### **Town and village: a fertile relationship**

One day I visited Ayoo (24) from the football team. I met her at the roadside, just outside Layibi centre after she finished school.<sup>39</sup> From there, we went together to her home – a grass-thatched hut in the western suburbs which she rented together with her husband Peter. The hut was located near the main road to Sudan and the air was severely thick with dust from the broad dirt-road. I took a seat in the living room while Ayoo prepared lunch for us on the stove behind a curtain. Her four-year-old daughter was also there. I asked Ayoo how Peter was. “Peter is in Paicho digging in the garden”, she told me. “To plant some cassava and some other things. Yesterday but when I came back with some cassava it got over, so I’m planning to go and get more. When I come back from school in the evening I can go and sell them”. “So, did you get to sell the cassava?” I asked. “Yes, some I sell, some I put them out to dry”, she replied. “How’s Paicho by the way?” I asked. “Paicho is fine”, she said, “it’s so boring”. “Do you have a home there?” I wondered and she said that she has a hut there. “Are you renting or is it yours?” I asked. “No, no, not renting”, she emphasised; “that’s a *home*. Where we have been even staying. Opposite the school. We even fetch water at the bore hole which is next to the poultry keeping. We are staying opposite the school, behind the church”. She explained the location since I have been there. “How’s it to dig in the garden?” I asked. “Digging is there”, she replied, posing it as a necessity, “and it’s also giving some of my school fees. I thought before next term, the seeds, the plants, will be ready now, the seeds will be ready for harvesting. So by that time if I harvest it, then I’ll sell some [in order] to get [money for] that school fees. Meanwhile, the beans will help me. I’m planting beans. It will help me feeding”. Ayoo sees school as important for job opportunities. Although, when I asked her what she wants to do when she finishes, she said “Oh that I cannot tell. You know it’s difficult to answer. In Uganda, there are not many jobs.”

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<sup>39</sup> She is sponsored by the OU.

Ayoo and Peter have two homes they move between; their rented hut in Gulu town and one in Paicho some 45 minutes' drive with a *boda*, where Peter comes from.<sup>40</sup> Ayoo emphasised that the latter, which they own, is a *home*. This division implies a temporal dimension in how Ayoo convey the idea of 'homeness' when she said about Paicho; "where we have even been *staying*". From other visits I also knew that Ayoo and Peter planned to move from the rented hut and buy a hut with a small garden in a more rural area of Gulu's eastern suburbs. Thus, as Ayoo and Peter are in a situation of 'in between', their home in Paicho can be seen as more stable and secure. Later I asked her if she would spend some time in Paicho the next week, on which she replied "no, no, no, he's coming back the next day" (she thought I meant Peter). This implies that they do not spend very long periods in Paicho, but travel rather often.

However, their home in Paicho alone is not providing the right opportunities or fulfilling enough of Ayoo's aspirations, expressed as: food for the family and money for school fees. Previously, she also expressed concern for school fees for her daughter. When I asked her if it was cheaper to stay in the village, she confirmed – "but somehow even difficult. Because from there, there is no money, eh? So where to get money?" Thus, although it is cheaper to stay in the village, it is more expensive in relative terms because there is no way for her to make money. Ferguson (1999) argues that rural villages, the countryside, were for Zambian miners something to go back to when copper export rapidly declined in the mid-70s. For Ayoo on the other hand, it is necessary to continue moving from their garden in Paicho – the source of income, to Gulu town, to exchange for example cassava into money so she can pay for her school. Hence, the village-town relationship provides a necessary context for her dependence on both spheres and economic systems in order to fulfil her aspirations.

To manage schooling, garden work business and being a mother, Ayoo has to plan – a necessity she also makes explicit. She has to plan for some time ahead and know the specific times for when it is good to plant which crops, and which crops she can use for feeding, savings and/or sell. The cassava, for example, she can use both for selling and drying, while the beans she relies on for feeding, she said. This way of conceptualising and living time, can be compared with Bourdieu's idea of agrarian social time in Kabylia. Agrarian time is different from capitalist time because it is not confined to long-term planning or investment. Rather, it is grounded in an ethos of egalitarianism; surplus should be divided to those who

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<sup>40</sup> In light of Acholi organisation of land (see chapter one), it is probably Peter's father's property on which the couple take part in.

need more (1990). Furthermore, in Alice's situation, the agricultural cycle must be combined with the school cycle – a combination of times which makes up Ayoo's everyday time frame.

Under some circumstances though, garden work did not contribute to a fruitful produce. While the two of us were walking in the town centre, Ayoo described her early years with her baby girl, Akec, as rather difficult.

I never planned for it [the pregnancy]. I suffered a lot with Akec and Akec herself suffered a lot. Because we could go to the garden. You may find a certain garden they throw it and they shoot. They make you stand under sunshine all day long. So for us we went to the garden in the morning. We stayed for almost a day and we come back afternoon or in the evening. So we may cook for supper and lunch in the evening and we go with the food in the garden. So Akec suffered a lot. Sometimes you may find they told them [us] to go to the garden. Suffered with the sunshine. Suffered with the hunger [...]. Sometimes when I was breastfeeding there was even no milk. Actually, that was because of lack of food for myself. And there were lots of problems.

Being in the garden with a young child was a challenge for Ayoo and she said that she was forced to go there. She described it as physical suffering in which her body did not function properly; she did not produce milk for the baby. In Taylor's analysis of Rwandan cosmology, he claims that a root metaphor of flow and blockage underlies conceptualisations of the body. Furthermore; "[in] the unfolding of human and natural events, flow/blockage symbolism mediates between physiological, sociological, and cosmological levels of causality" (Taylor 1999b:111f). It is important that bodily flows such as blood, semen, breast milk and menstrual blood – flows that are directly linked to human reproduction, are not obstructed or follow a disorderly flow. The latter are characterisations of pathological states. For example, the fertile illness of a woman who lacks breast milk is called *igihama*. It derives from the verb *guhama*, which means to cultivate a field hardened by the sun; to have sexual intercourse with a woman who lacks vaginal secretions (Taylor 1999b:117). In Ayoo's narrative, bad physical surroundings: forced to work in the garden, heat and lack of food, is summed up in this infertile state of lacking breast milk. In this case, garden work was not based on any 'voluntary movement' and not productive.

### **Human Rights in situ: Fulfilling the ‘right to dig’**

During Life Skills trainings on the topic “Child’s Rights”, many of my youngest informants placed garden work well within an international development framework and stated that to work in the garden is a child’s right. It was posed as a child’s right together with the right to eat and to go to school. When the social worker, Adula, and I went to Laminto village in early June, we reached ten girls during their lunch break. We sat in a classroom and the girls paired up, two and two on each bench. “What are Child’s Rights?” she asked. “You’re free to do what benefits you” a girl answered. Adula commented; “[it is] referring to what you are free to do without being suppressed. What are those rights?” One by one, the girls raised their hands; “education”; “eat well. To sleep in a good place”; “right to dig also”; “education, being paid to school, help your parents dig”; “fetching water, playing”; “ask for certain things”. The second last girl answered “education, digging to pay school fees”, and Adula said that the last girl had the same answer.

Children and youth are natural partakers in gardening chores. Most of my young female informants from Gulu town come from rural villages where their parents or grandparents still live, and during holidays, they go there to work in the garden. Since the introduction of so-called free UPE and USE in 1997, school has been obligatory. There are, however, some problems with parents keeping their children away from school. In a conversation with a man responsible for much teaching in Gulu, he expressed frustration that children were kept at home. This is more common in rural areas, where they are less likely to be sanctioned by the government, than in town. One reason why some parents might be reluctant in sending their children to school is that they cannot afford it. My informants often expressed dissatisfaction that although the UPE is said to be free, in reality it is not: some schools are charging additional money to pay parent teachers and other expenses, and school uniforms and books must be bought.

To Ayoo and the girls in Laminto, garden work was closely associated with education as a source of school fees. Naturally, some of the answers to the “Child’s Rights” discussion may have been inspired by the others’ (Briggs 1986), but according to Adula, in all villages the girls mentioned digging as a child’s right: “They said it was their right to dig in the garden so as to get food and school fees”, she said. On the background of war experiences, it is understandable that they hold garden work to be a common good since they were deprived of their right to dig. Those living in refugee camps did not have areas to dig, and it was generally not safe to move around in other places because of the rebels. Hence, to be able to dig again is tied to essential needs and rights. Moreover, and nuancing the belief that work get in the way

of education, or that ‘traditional life’ is opposed to ‘development’, garden work is by my informants not understood as opposed to education, but to constitute a necessary prerequisite for it. Put differently, garden work was seen as a concrete means to fulfil their aspirations.

Aspirations for education may problematize the idea of the rootedness of an Acholi person described earlier in this chapter because it encourages young people to at least dream of other places. So although many young women participate in the traditional and embodying activities of gardening, its purpose may not primarily be to create bonds to clan<sup>41</sup> or land, but a tool for accessing a higher goal. Ayoo put great effort in planning and working to get school fees, but was somehow also conscious that they will not give her better job opportunities. So why did she collect money for school? She is not alone. In Northern Uganda in general, many children and youth did not finish primary school because of the war and most of them have now started where they left. However, few are convinced that they will be employed in the near future as unemployment is a general problem. In my view, from how the newspapers are in periods filled with education-related information and success stories, and from how UPE and USE are promoted, the government and the media are creating a utopian view of education. Those who can afford it, send their children to boarding schools which are regarded the best. Aspirations are intersubjectively created, subjugated by socio-political actors like NGOs, the state and the media. Hence, for Ayoo and other young women in Northern Uganda, the villages are not only something to return to as described by Ferguson (1999) – as they continue to move, the village-town relationship becomes a creative connection of possibilities and spaces for the pursuit of aspirations.

## **Conclusion**

The notion of voluntary movement is central to understand how people conceptualise peace in Northern Uganda and in this chapter I have discussed various forms and implications of movement – linked to garden work in particular. Firstly, there is a particular idea that garden work, its produce, and bodies are intimately linked and mutually constituted. In this perspective, through garden work practices land and Acholiness is embodied. Hence, as opposed to wartime, when they received food from the WFP, Acholi bodies are now being reconstituted.

Furthermore, when describing how things have changed since war, my informants emphasised that they are now free to move to the gardens, along the road, and to town for

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<sup>41</sup> Moore (1996) argues that the main function of women’s garden work practices is to create bonds in the ‘exogamous society’.

business. Hence – and also in accordance with my daily observations – garden work implies a circulation of people and goods. They are also digging together while during wartime gardening was mostly individually undertaken if at all. Such circulation is experienced as healthy and productive as opposed to forced movement and stagnation – like when Ayoo was forced to work in the garden. Moreover, how Ayoo and Peter’s moved back and forth between their two homes, illustrates how garden work practices linked town and villages together. In other words, my empirical material indicates that strict conceptual separations of town and village should be modified as my informants transgress these theoretical boundaries in their everyday life.

The implementation of UPE and USE has to some extent led to changes in gardening organisation as youngsters only participate in garden work during weekends and holidays. Posing education as a child’s right and something they aspire towards, my young female informants largely see garden work as a way of acquiring school fees. Hence, although garden work may be viewed as impeding education, this is not how my young female informants understand it. Contrarily, they see garden work as a necessary basis for it by being an income source.





## Chapter 3

### *Ceko cam*:<sup>42</sup> cooking, fertility and mobility

The large World Food Programme (WFP) warehouses on the outskirts of Gulu town testify to years of UN food distribution.<sup>43</sup> My informants say that in times of war, UN *gipoko cam ki dano* – the UN ‘gives people food’, and peoples’ descriptions of time of war were often connected to food issues. For instance, an elderly man recalled how people lined up outside the warehouses and told me, with hints of irony, about the distribution process: “People would go and get bags of rice and then sell it to get some small money. Later, when they were hungry, they would go and buy rice from Kampala, the very rice they had sold some weeks ago, but now it was old”.

As I showed in chapter two, people are now digging in their gardens again, and garden work and its produce is directly related to the symbolic and physical production of Acholi bodies. Moreover, people explicitly recognised garden work activities – concrete examples of what I call ‘voluntary movement’ – as a sign of peace. Expanding on these arguments, in this chapter I argue that, as transformers of commodities and bodies and as contributors to a fertile ‘moving of things’, young women reconstitute Acholi sociality also through cooking.

In particular, I will focus on cooking because it is perhaps the single most time-consuming activity in a household undertaken by women. In Acholi, *camo* means ‘cooking’ in a rather broad sense, implying a range of tasks.<sup>44</sup> Several processes of preparing food, for example un-shelling and pounding groundnuts for the *odi* and sorting rice and beans, are carried out throughout the day. This wide range of activities that go into term *camo* are,

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<sup>42</sup> *Ceko cam* means fertility. *Cek* means high yield or to get ready, cooked, ripen. *Cam(o)* means food, (to eat) (Adong and Lakaraber 2009:15f, 136).

<sup>43</sup> The UN withdrew from Northern Uganda in January 2012.

<sup>44</sup> Versus *tedo* which means the specific act of cooking/boiling (Adong and Lakareber 2009:109).

crucially, often also conducted outside and together with others. Cooking also thereby structures space – a way of creating what the archaeologist and anthropologist Rapoport (1994) calls ‘settings’ – in which specific activities are carried out in certain contexts according to what is considered proper. What is more – and as the collective aspects underline – the social nature of cooking extends beyond the household, as neighbours often join each other while processing food. By providing for others outside their household, women practice what I will call ‘extended nurturing capacities’. Hence, they contribute to a fertile circulation of locally produced food as opposed to war times when such flow was ‘blocked’ (Taylor 1999b). However, there are some problematic aspects related to this which I shall touch upon at the end of the chapter. As new spheres of value transaction is created in post-war Northern Uganda, what can circulate where – and by whom – is up for negotiation.<sup>45</sup>

### **In the rural village of Otici**

In mid-March, Endre and I went to the village of Otici. It was a rather small village; it did not take many minutes to journey from the school compound on the hill in the west to the outer huts in the east. At the time of our visit, the village served partly as a repatriation camp, and many of the huts had been put up on someone’s land and were meant to be temporary. Since Endre was there to teach at the primary school, we stayed in the teachers’ compound. Ayaa was the only woman among the seven teachers there. Except one, none of the village’s teachers were originally from Otici and Ayaa, for instance, had another home and two children in Gulu town. Four huts; one for Ayaa, one for the head teacher, one for two other male teachers, and the kitchen, were located around *wang oo*. A path led to two other teachers’ huts some ten and twenty metres away. Another woman, Aber (24), had arrived the day before to visit her fiancé, Opwonya, who was one of the teachers.

I woke up the first morning to the sounds of rattling cups and chairs being dragged across the firm ground. When I got out, chairs and a table with a white table cloth had been put up next to *wang oo* and Ayaa and Aber were busy carrying things from the kitchen; a thermos with boiled water, cups, a bowl of sugar, Blue Band margarine and deep-fried buns of maize flour that they had bought from the local market. Soon, the other teachers appeared and we had ‘tea with escort’ before the school bell rang. Ayaa stayed behind and started to

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<sup>45</sup> Empirically, this chapter is based on empirical material from my stay at the teachers’ compound in Otici village. Since I stayed here just some ten days divided in two periods, I also rely upon my everyday experiences from my host family in Gulu and other households I visited more often in order to generalise. On the other hand, precisely because I was just visiting, I found the cases presented here illustrative of how young women practice extended nurturing capacities.

prepare for lunch as it is a long process; beans are supposed to boil for several hours – after they have been sorted. Commonly, two main meals are prepared during a day; lunch and supper. Lunch time is between 12 and 2 pm, while supper is often served just after dark. Cooking includes a range of preparation activities; as with beans, rice grains also need to be sorted to get rid of small stones, maize and millet have to be taken to the grinding mill and the leaves for *boo*, a spinach-like vegetable dish, must be picked.<sup>46</sup> Eventually, Ayaa left the work for Aber and went to teach Primary 1 (P1). Aber went to fetch a chair that she placed outside the kitchen hut. Then she gave me a knife and cabbage to cut while she sat on the rim of the hut sorting rice.

The day after, Ayaa, Aber and I sat in the kitchen – supposedly in order to look after the beans that boiled on the fire hearth. Aber told us about the time when she was introduced to Opwonya’ parents – the so-called ‘introduction’. First, she recalled, she had to present herself. She said she was from [the name of the father’s village], and she also told the name of her mother’s village. “Did you fear?” I asked. “Like *nothing!*” Aber emphatically answered. I asked why. “I don’t know”, she said. “I feared although she [her mother in-law] is talkative and calls me ‘daughter’”. “[Because of] respect,” Ayaa commented. Aber continued her account from the introduction. Opwonya’ parents introduced themselves and then they said that she should make tea. She did so and served. The in-laws said that Aber should also take, but she did not. Not until they gave her money, she said. “Why?” I asked. “You should not take anything unless you are given money,” Aber explained. “The father gave me 2000 shillings and I had tea”. Afterwards, the in-laws had asked her to mingle *posho* and she did. But she called her mother to come and serve. Again she refused to eat until they gave her yet some more money, she said.

Later in our stay, Oteka, one of the parents of the pupils, came to the teachers and asked us to visit him. He wanted to slaughter a goat, they said – a sign of a great event or big guests. So Endre, two teachers; Opwonya and Ocol, and I went on our bicycles in the afternoon. Oteka’s compound – a thoroughly swept area without grass – was big. Around eight children and two women were present when we arrived. One of the women, Oteka’s wife, just arrived from the garden carrying cabbage. Her sister sat on a chair in the middle of the compound. In front of her was a wooden calabash which she had fastened between her legs. With a wooden pole she pounded groundnuts in the calabash. The wife was 32 years she said, and Oteka

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<sup>46</sup> Staple food and dishes are *posho* (firm dough from maize or sorghum flour) and millet bread, cassava, rice, and sweet potatoes, served with *boo* and beans in a sauce. Seasonal fruits and vegetables are also parts of the menu. Beef, chicken and fish are appreciated, but more expensive and thus served according to what people can afford.

claimed that he was the same age. Six of the children were theirs, while two they were taking care of for his brother. Before we arrived, the teachers had told us that Oteka was a hard-working man, which I now realised; the main hut was the biggest I had ever seen. It was a grass-thatched hut, but contained several rooms divided by brick walls – not only sheets as is common – and the ceiling was high. In addition, there were two other huts at the compound; one for the wife’s sister, and one for the kitchen. After a presentation round, Oteka took us around on his land. We went to the anthills and he explained thoroughly the processes of how to catch the white ants. Then we proceeded to where he had been digging and he showed us the virgin land he planned to clear. I found it big, and told him so. “Compared to this one, the garden of my father is big”, he answered. “15 square kilometres”. Oteka told us that he moved to this place so that his children can go to school, but that he now considers to go back to his father’s place, take another wife and let his current wife and children stay in Otici. Opwonya turned to me; “you know, our culture is funny. Men can marry many women. They are his workforce”. “But what about the left over men?” I asked. “No, but in this place there is more women than men”, he grinned.

When we came back to Oteka’s compound, we had food in the main house. The women had prepared several dishes for us, amongst others *boo*, white ants in groundnut sauce, *posho* and millet bread. One of them brought a can with water before we started to eat. She bent thoroughly forward while she helped each of us to wash our hands. Next, we prayed and served. The women, one of them with a baby in her lap, sat on a bench nearby and looked excitedly at us while we were eating. They laughed constantly while gesticulating. Opwonya and Ocol told us that they commented on how and what we ate. “The neighbours will come the next day and ask so and so. And the women can proudly say that the *monos* ate our food”, Opwonya said. The women had been asking Opwonya beforehand what we could eat, he amusingly confessed. He told them that we can eat what they eat; “they are also human beings”. When we left, we received a chicken, rice and cabbage as presents.

### **Making space for Acholi sociality**

People were *packed* they emphatically tell me, when describing how it was to stay in the refugee camps. Such spatial obstruction was detrimental to Acholi sociality in several ways. As the storyteller in the Introduction of this thesis recalled, they were not allowed outside the camps and movement was severely restricted. The military ordered people to stay inside their huts from 7pm when the sun set and socialising around *wang oo* was therefore prevented. There was anyway no space for such gatherings and it was too dangerous to light a fire in the

narrow paths between the huts (see also Finnström 2008:155). Furthermore, big families had to share small huts and it was difficult to separate the indoor space into ‘rooms’ – which is common as we saw above in the case of Oteka. A normal separation of rooms is into where people sleep, the living room, and the kitchen. “It was no good”, the storyteller commented upon the situation. My nine-year old host brother moreover reported on some other perceived consequences: “That’s why there were many babies”.

The spatial organisation of the camps, I argue, made it difficult to uphold practices and norms constitutive of Acholi sociality – not least because separation of Acholi interior and exterior spaces relegates certain activities to these.



**Figur 2: Beans are boiling. Photo: Endre Tufteland.**

Organising space creates what Rapoport calls ‘settings’ – “a milieu with an ongoing system of activities, where the milieu and the activities are linked by [contextualized and culture-specific] rules as to what is appropriate and expected in the setting” (1994:462). At Oteka’s place, concrete building and walls were put up to separate specific spaces. On the other hand, how his wife’s sister made her ‘cooking-place’ outside – in the middle of the compound – and, furthermore, how Aber created a social space for me and her to prepare food in by arranging the chairs outside the kitchen, show that settings for cooking are not confined

to physical building. In Acholi homes, curtains often make the necessary separation of spaces inside huts if there are no physical walls or separate buildings. In other words, it is not necessarily the building or the physical separation in itself that makes space, but a shared cognitive creation. The Acholi arrangement of ‘kitchen’ can be seen as such a setting. For one, this space is gendered, which my host father so illustratively explained: If there are no women in the house, the man will not eat even though there is food in the kitchen and he is starving, because men are not allowed in. In Otici, it was only Aber and Ayaa who spent time in kitchen, and to them, it was a space for transforming food and socialising. As remarked by one of the (male) teachers in Otici; it is the women who are the main defenders of this separation. “The women do not like it when the men do their work”, he said. “They call the men things if they do. Nobody encourages the men to help, but the women abuse them the most”. At Oteka’s place, from how his wife and her sister laughed and paid great attention to how the meal was consumed, I believe that they took pride in their cooking – an observation that also Opwonya confirmed. He moreover made clear that having visitors was not only a matter to the household, but also to the neighbours who would come the next day. These examples indicate a more general social pattern pertaining to cooking, I argue, where women actively in their day-to-day activities reconstitute settings for appropriate activities. Put differently, as opposed to the congested spaces of the refugee camps, they now re-inscribe space with meaning.

I noticed two exceptions to this general pattern, though. Because Endre and I borrowed the head-teacher’s hut, he slept in the kitchen during our stay. The other exception was when Opwonya and Ocol got hold of an *anyeri*, an edible rat, and they took responsibility for smoking it in the kitchen. These cases, however, did not correspond to proper activities for the broader domain of cooking, I propose. Firstly, the head teacher was just sleeping in the kitchen at night – which is not a proper time for cooking (suggesting that the construction of settings also have a temporal dimension). Next, even though the Opwonya and Ocol actually were preparing food, they did not fulfil a dish or serve people. In addition, as *anyeri* is commonly hunted by men, smoking it may be seen as a ‘male project’. Thus, how space is organised, or, with Rapoport, how settings are created, does not depend so much upon the physical building but on the activities that are carried out.

Inspired by Ricoeur, Moore argues that space can be viewed as a (cultural) text (1986:79). She holds that space is only a representation of reality and that space is a reflection of categories and classification that are, ultimately, based on ideology. In this perspective, space acquires and holds pre-given meaning – an assumption which is problematic to the

Northern Uganda context. According to how my informants described the anti-social space of the congested refugee camps, space could not be a reflection of cultural categories. Rather, space *became* the realities in which people had to struggle to give meaning.<sup>47</sup> In Moore's perspective and in the context of space in particular I argue, social actors become rather passive as they are not given the possibility to act in and recreate space as a resource of reconstitution and negotiation.

Cooking also in this context assumes importance and underlines this argument: In addition to providing a setup for gendered and morally informed socialisation, cooking activities are for women a way to practice belonging in others' households. During a visit, while I was escorted towards the kitchen by the mother in the house, I was told that "in Acholi, we use to say that a woman is never a guest". This saying can be illustrated by for example how Aber participated in household chores together with Ayaa in the teachers' camp. She already seemed integrated in the household work when I arrived, although she had just stayed there for one day. Contrary to Aber, I chose to participate in one particular situation and that was even commented more or less jokingly upon by the rest of the staff. Aber on the other hand, was implicitly expected to fill Ayaa's role when the latter one day fell sick.

Due to these strong expectations to women's role regarding cooking practices, I argue that belonging is effectively extended beyond their own kitchen. This view of such an extensive (and socially expansive) belonging may be understood in terms of Acholi social organisation being highly patrilineal. This patrilineal structure asserts, in a sense, that women are categorically moving, and belonging beyond their household thus becomes a structurally logical effect of this. In the kitchen, Aber told Ayaa and me about her 'introduction' – an important ritual in Acholi marriage procedure in which the in-laws explore whether or not the woman is a suitable match for their son. From Aber's description, it can be seen as a test of practical and moral knowledge, particularly related to cooking. Hence, cooking practices can also be included into a new household having moved away from her old.

Like Moore, also Rapoport builds on a basic assumption that space is 'cognised' and linked to cultural classification and organisation (1994:479). Contrasting Moore, however, he claims that space is thought before it is built, a view that makes space more of a creative act than a mere reflection. If we follow Rapoport, the way young women restructure post-war Acholi space through cooking, should, therefore, not be seen as passive adaptation but rather as an active effort in reconstituting Acholi classification and organisation – key aspects of

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<sup>47</sup> See also Finnström on 'existential insecurity' in Northern Uganda (2008:28).

Acholi sociality. In sum, therefore, young women, through cooking activities, actively reconstitute settings for practicing Acholi norms and morals. Moreover, as I have shown, these settings are not solely confined to the woman's household members. How this space is actively structured, I argue, shows important aspects of belonging in Acholi sociality, which have crucial implications for the wider society. I will now show how these settings enhance socially important practices of visiting.

### ***Welo, kelo yengo* – visitors bring satisfaction to the home**

As described in chapter two, due to rebel activity and state-enforced restrictions on movement, it was difficult and dangerous to join each other in garden work during times of war. Additionally, people also recalled that they were often not able to pay visits – a desirable part of Acholi sociality.

A friend of mine, Ayoo,<sup>48</sup> pointed out this significance of visits. We were walking along the Kampala-Gulu road, on our way to her hut, when she told me that her neighbours wanted me to come, and that they had prepared *boo* for me. I told Ayoo that I found people friendly around here – inviting guests and serving food. She agreed and said it was their culture. “It is good to have visitors because then you can make good relationships. Relationships are important. And also that people see that you have a big heart”, she said.

As Ayoo made clear, sharing food creates and maintains relationships. Illustrating this point further, Finnström (2003:234) describes a difference between the Acholi terms *muno* [a white person] and *lawake* where the latter – as he was told:

[...] is “like a *muno* who refuses to eat what is offered; who doesn't mingle with locals”. To share a meal is perhaps the greatest manifestation of humanity among the Acholi. Once you have invited a stranger to your table, or even offered the foreign traveller some water to drink, that person cannot be your enemy Acholi say.

Moreover, according to Ayoo, it was also good to have visitors because then people can “see that you have a big heart”. The visitors and other people will, then, recognise such a big heart by the food served – and its abundance. In Goffman's (2009) analysis of social life as a theatre, people behave according to how they want to be perceived or how they think they are expected to behave; they are motivated by the urge to make a ‘good impression’. In the

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<sup>48</sup> She has been introduced in chapter two.



teachers' camp, we were served meat almost every day and we were even given Blue Band margarine, which is considered a luxury. Also at Oteka's the women served us in abundance. Opwonya claimed that Oteka's neighbours would come the next day to ask "so and so", and although the neighbours were not present at the face-to-face interaction, they can, in Goffman's terms, perhaps be seen as an indirect audience.

Moreover, serving in abundance, I propose, conveys more than a 'big heart'. One day I travelled with a social worker from Gulu town to a rural village, we saw two old women walking along the dusty roadside, carrying 20-litres jerry-cans on their head. What caught my attention was that they were wearing lovely, colourful *gomezes* – which are usually not worn unless it is a special occasion. I wondered why they used such nice clothing on their way to the bore hole. The social worker was not sure, but perhaps the women wanted to say that "they are now ok", she said.



**Figur 3: Woman wearing *gomez*. Photo: Anne Nogva.**

By wearing *gomezes*, they can be seen as actively trying to change the image of themselves, from poor victims of war to someone who can manage on their own. While I cannot ascertain the women's reason for wearing *gomezes*, the social worker's interpretation is interesting and, since she is local, her explanation is plausible. In comparison, providing for guests can also be seen as comments of war, conveying the message that "we are ok". It reflects the social conditions in which they live, or at least, their aspirations for how they want it to be. The 'audience' might not be only that of the physically proximate neighbours, like at Oteka's, but also, through Endre and me, an international audience.<sup>49</sup>

Another interpretation may be linked to the issue of sorcery. By serving in abundance, women present themselves as un-selfish, of which the opposite is characteristic of sorcerers. In addition, to have many relations lessens the chances of being judged as a sorcerer. Through cooking, the women also display themselves as fertile, as opposed to witches whom mostly are seen as barren.

To sum up, both creating relationships and making a good impression, I propose, is crucial in Acholi peace-making, and achieved through cooking.

### **Reviving *kite ber***<sup>50</sup>

Works of several anthropologists maintain the proposition, also made by philosophers and historians, that people are dehumanised in war (Taylor 2002; Malkki 1995:92f; Nordstrom 1997). According to Malkki, the 'refugee' is discursively constituted as 'bare humanity' – lacking culture, history and attachment to a place (1995:12). This concept she compares with Turner's (1967:98f) characterisation of the liminal personae as "naked unaccommodated man", "undifferentiated raw material" (Malkki 1995:11; see also Nordstrom 1997:166 on the process of 'animalisation').

My informants in some ways mirrored this argument by providing accounts of forms of dehumanisation in relation to war. When they talked about the camps, they recognised the heavy presence of immorality like violence, prostitution and drinking, and children in the camps were said to be undisciplined and lacking respect for the elders. Having manners, *ber kit*, is in Acholi directly related to that of being a human (p'Bitek 1986:27). This is

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<sup>49</sup> See for example Malkki on the importance of conveying messages to an international audience (1995:146ff).

<sup>50</sup> Good manners.

exemplified with the saying *pe kit – pe dano* (no manners – no human).<sup>51</sup> Hence, having manners and realise these is a way of negotiating the refugee category and to bring the Acholi person back to a socially meaningful state. For example, cooking tasty dishes is praised as a part of *kite ber* (p'Bitek 1986:26f). Oteka's wife and her sister had prepared several dishes, contrary to two dishes, *posho* and beans, which is common. We were amongst others served white ants in groundnut sauce, which is seen as a delicacy, and *boo*. Despite its short word, Acholi women can prepare the *boo* plant in a range of ways and it is dense with meaning. Taking pride in knowing a great number of dishes of *boo*, women often explained in detail around 10-12 ways of preparation.

To serve the food is also a part of cooking, and strongly attached to serving are norms of bodily submission. At Oteka's place, the women kneeled when we greeted outside, but when they helped us wash our hands and served the food in the main house, they thoroughly bent their backs forward, or simply sat on their knees to not tower above we who were seated. They took even greater care in bodily submitting themselves when we were having the meal. Also when we were having lunch at the school in Otici the girls who served bent their backs forward or simply walked on their knees when they served. I asked the driver for the Norwegian teachers (who was from southern Uganda) why they did this.<sup>52</sup> "It is our culture", he said. He explained that it is polite to behave like that for the women, and they are paying respect to those who are older. Some places even young boys kneel for those older. If a woman behaves modest, she shows that she is from a good family.

Bourdieu (2003) – and others<sup>53</sup> – holds that the body is a site for cultural reproduction. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's (1962) ideas of how human activity is incarnated, he uses the concept of habitus to understand cultural (class) belonging. In his words "[...] social distances are inscribed in bodies [...]" (Bourdieu 1989:17). How Acholi women bodily submit themselves – kneeling or looking down – can be seen as such an inscription of social distances attained through habitus. Insofar as it is fulfilling certain expectations, such behaviour is – according to p'Bitek's (1986:25f) perception of an integrated society – an important part of belonging in Acholi sociality:

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<sup>51</sup> To illustrate further; a person who has reached physical and educational development is, according to p'Bitek, "described as *odoko dano*, he or she has become human. This is because in his or her conduct, behaviour, and manners, cultural refinement is manifest" (1986:26f).

<sup>52</sup> Two teachers and a Parent-Teacher Association member from a Norwegian school that supports Otici Primary economically through Lion's Aid, were visiting.

<sup>53</sup> See Introduction of this thesis.

How does [society] bring things under control? If every member, each individual plays his numerous roles and thus participates fully, to the best his ability, then there is no danger, whatsoever, of societal disintegration. There is no threat of personal disintegration either; because it is by participation alone that life is made meaningful.

As a way of reconstituting sociality, I propose, female bodily submission goes beyond being subjected. The structures that young Acholi women operate within differ according to situation and persons, but in many circumstances, it seemed like women were proud to, and took great care in, being bodily submissive. De Boeck argues for the parallel existence of two gender models where female submission is but one side of the coin, while male dependency is the other (1991:40). Also in Northern Uganda it is clear that men depend upon women for many reasons – a fact that is often explicitly commented upon. This complementary relationship may explain why the women in Otici took great care in submitting themselves also because they know they are needed.

Compliance to norms is besides context bound and negotiated. An uncle of my host family paid his visit and teased Laliya in his usual way. He asked her for water which she brought to him. When he received the cup, he managed to throw some little water on her pretending he was angry because she did not kneel when she gave him. He laughed heartily. It was not that Laliya's behaviour was particularly funny, but he pretended to be the guardian of traditional norms which they were not really operating within. The joke worked because they had a common reference frame – and Laliya understood the joke. This brief example shows that Acholi, like other people, are not merely 'cultural robots' but able to be exterior to cultural norms and ideals – and interpret, valorise and play with these. In other words, one should also look at the relation between habitus and the socially structuring situation in which the agents' interests are defined (Bourdieu 2006:408).

In sum, visiting is socially significant for many reasons and on several levels; it ties people to each other, provides the setting to constitute themselves as moral beings, brings about news of the world, and contributes to a socially fertile flow of people and commodities as it is tied to food. I argue that by reviving these practices, an active progress towards Acholi sociality is being made. More specifically, I propose that visits are 'bringing satisfaction the home' because, amongst others, these provide the setting for practicing *kite ber* – the essence of being human, bound to moral expectations of what it means to be a part of a community.



**Figure 4: Un-shelling groundnuts. Photo: Endre Tufteland**

### **Extending nurturing capacities**

In chapter two, my informants conveyed an idea of “you are what you eat”. They said amongst others that the Acholi are farmers who have strong and hard bodies because they eat hard and long-lasting food from their gardens. Not only garden work, but also cooking requires a strong body, for example in the making of *odi*. One day I watched Laliya grind. We were at home, outside, and she had just showed me how to pound groundnuts into fine pieces by thrusting them with a solid pole in a wooden calabash. It was quite tiresome for my back and arms to lift that pole over and over again. While I rested in the shadows, Laliya continued to make the *odi*. She sat on her knees and with both hands she rubbed a stone against a larger stone beneath and groundnut ‘flour’ was squeezed between the stones. A sheet in front of the big stone collected the running sauce. Pounding, carrying and blending take some strong arms and backs, and one also needs endurance. Referring to such practices, the head teacher in

Otici once announced that “in this place, the women are stronger than men”.

By transforming garden work produce into food, women are not only making their own bodies – they are also producing others’, and first and foremost those of their own households.<sup>54</sup> Oteka and his wife were said to be “taking care of” the children of his brother. Perhaps it was only temporally, but generally, such a statement means that the children are orphaned and have been taken into the other family – a common practice in the Northern Uganda post-war society. Although many people do not have in abundance as the long-lasting war caused widespread and severe economic and material losses, women contribute to demonstrate their capacity as nurturers. To cope with death and loss, I suggest, this potentiality for nurture may be even more important to release in war-torn societies more generally: As Hutchinson and Jok write of the Nuer and Dinka from the Sudan “as the primary agents of cultural and individual continuity, women have come under heavy pressure to conceive and procreate, even in situations that threaten their physical well-being and their nurturing responsibilities toward their children” (2002:105).

Furthermore, by taking the role of a nurturer, young women deny and foreclose the continuance of their status as refugee. As noted above, people who lived in refugee camps in Northern Uganda depended for many years on food relief. Like the elderly man in the beginning of this chapter described, they have received ‘gifts’ in forms of humanitarian aid and food relief from the UN. Notably, the food distributed in the camps was not produced locally, but came from outside. In an Acholi perspective that valorises the relationship between food and body, by consuming imported WFP food, the Acholi body can be seen as made into a refugee body. In this perspective, through cooking, young Acholi women are thereby not only physically transforming and making bodies but they are also un-making the ‘refugee’. More importantly – they are creating new socially meaningful relationships.

Moreover, as women belong in others’ households and prepare food for visitors, women also contribute to the production of bodies of the broader society – or the ‘body social’ if you will. As mentioned previously, women often un-shelled groundnuts together. While *pok* in Acholi means “to peel, remove the shell”, it has the key additional meaning of “divide, distribute” and *poko* means to give (Adong and Lakareber 2009:98). As *pok* and *poko* indicate, it is a common Acholi practice to give food as a gift – especially in relation to visits. As noted above, when we left Oteka’s we were given several types of food from their homestead. Gift-giving is also associated with blessing, and, as a friend, Lamwaka, told me,

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<sup>54</sup> See also Dubisch (1986) for a symbolic analysis of women’s maintaining of boundaries in Greece.

“you cannot give away blessings”. Rather, as it substantially transforms bodies, it is important to consume it yourself. Hence, it is not only about the act of giving – to show that you have a good heart – it is also about what it does in a bodily sense.

Jacobson-Widding reminds us that “the concept of fertility may refer to a wider spectrum of creative potential than simply a woman’s capacity to give birth” – that is – reproduction writ large (1999:284). Hence, the women prove fertile as they expand their nurturing capacities beyond their households. In a centrifugal fashion, the household can therefore be seen as the locus of production from which the food is distributed outwards. Moreover, this relation also may be linked back to sexual reproduction in such a way that the household is a symbol of the female stomach where babies are produced, transformed and eventually brought out to life as a blessing for the community. Symbolic structures of flow/blockage can also be linked to the broader, physical environment.<sup>55</sup> Paths, both symbolic and physical,<sup>56</sup> between huts that may not have been used for some time are now once again trodden. Paths provide a connective force, by the power of being used and thus, physically manifest social relations. As far as the hut can be viewed as an open conduit, in Taylor’s sense, paths are the necessary links to spread the flow of food, gifts and people.

In the process of transforming and consuming locally produced food, women are not merely reproducing categories symbolically but also materially. They are not merely displaying wealth or saying that they are “ok”, but as the food literally becomes part of peoples’ bodies they partake in subsistence transformation. Such practices – “transformation, recreation, reproduction, rebirth can all be seen as issues of fertility” (Jacobson-Widding 1999:284). What is more, women show that their nurturing capacities extend beyond the household. In a post-war society, I argue, these capacities are crucial in the transition from war to peace.

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<sup>55</sup> Also Taylor (1999b) points to the relation between food and the social construct of being human in Rwandan cosmology. In a ritual called ‘eating the baby’s excrements’, children in the newborn’s age group receives food, allegedly with a tiny portion of the baby’s excrement mixed in. This is to celebrate that the baby’s body is an ‘open conduit’; an “adequate vessel for perpetuating the process of flow” (1999b:114).

<sup>56</sup> See also chapter two in this thesis.



Figure 5: Pounding groundnuts to make *odi*. Photo: Anne Nogva.



## Money and milk

So far, I have been concerned with food circulating in the household or between people in close proximity. However, circulation of particular food items may also be problematic.

Lamwaka (23) was a money-maker. She came from Pader District to Gulu town in November 2010, just a few months before me. Upon arrival, she only knew her sister, Ayoo, and some relatives. Furthermore, she and her boyfriend rented a room some 15 minutes' walk from town centre. One day I called to invite her for lunch. She was not available, however, as she had some business to do now, she said. She was going sell milk at Layibi market that day, and we agreed to meet the day after. Previously, Lamwaka had been working in an Indian restaurant – a common enterprise in the expanding town. She had worked from 7am till late evening, seven days a week. They paid her only 50 000 shillings (25 USD) per month, her sister told me.

The next day, Lamwaka and I met outside Paragon Hotel. It was hot and sunny as usual, and Lamwaka wore a short brown dress with white dots and thin straps. She had been working earlier that day. As we walked along red dusty roads towards town, I got to know more about her business: She buys milk wholesale for 3000 shillings<sup>57</sup> from a place in town, and then she goes home to boil it and pours it in a 10 litre jerry-can. She claimed that she sells it again with a profit of 3000 shillings and explained merrily: “I pour much water in my milk to make more money”. She explained further; if the customers want to take milk there and then, she has a cup, if not, they get it in a *kaweera*, a small plastic bag. “If they want ‘coffee’, they pay 600 shillings. That is milk with tea and sugar. It is not coffee actually, that’s another taste,” she said. When we approached town, Lamwaka grew more pensive and made me aware that there is a problem though. She confessed that some of her friends say it is shameful to sell milk from the roadside. According to her, they say that “it is almost prostitution”. She asked what I thought, but as I did not know what to say, she continued that she does not agree: “it is better than stealing. And what can I do? I am poor and also have to make a living”.

In Gulu, both women and men sold foodstuff from the roadside far and wide. It could be everything from raw vegetables and fruits to fried cassava, ‘rolexes’<sup>58</sup> and freshly squeezed juice. When the main market in town closed at 7pm, some women still sat along the streets in

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<sup>57</sup> 2000 shillings were approximately 1 USD in April 2011.

<sup>58</sup> A thin omelet put on top of a chapatti and rolled together.

town selling vegetables till long after dark. Though, I never saw anyone else selling milk.<sup>59</sup> Previously, in addition to subsistence farming, the Acholi were predominantly cattle holders, but according to some sources, it seems like women should not deal with cattle. For example Murdoch writes that “[a]mong several tribes, including the Acholi [...], cattle are strictly taboo for women. Only men and children do the milking” (Murdoch 1959:329). It seems that, among the Acholi, milk has not been a commercial commodity treated by women, on the other hand, women should not deal with that matter. While I was in Gulu, milk was available in cartons in supermarkets, however, and a couple of times I joined to get milk elsewhere.<sup>60</sup> Hence, Lamwaka can be seen to violate long-established categorical separations between women and milk. In addition, she participated, I propose, in a new sphere of value transaction when she was selling fresh milk from the roadside.

However, Lamwaka may have met those reactions – that it is shameful to sell milk from the roadside – for other reasons. Milk is linked to the young female body and the reproduction process, and can thus be a sensitive matter. In Turner’s work among the Nkang’a he shows the importance of milk and nurturing: “The most important theme among the Nkang’a is the tie between mother and child through nurturing, not the bond of birth” (1967:21). Milk is here seen to symbolise an intimate and meaningful relationship. In this logic, sharing particular substances, like milk, on the market, may be problematic as they are closely related to more intimate processes, and thus, matter out of place. In Douglas’ (2002) symbolist theory, the world is organised into categories and that which is not easily categorised is potentially dangerous. Furthermore – and famously – matter out of place is considered dirty. In Lamwaka’s case, she did not have an intimate relationship with her customers, and by selling and sharing something that signalled intimacy, the association was made to prostitution.

From the analyses of my visits in Oticí and the case of Lamwaka, it is possible to detect two different spheres of movement. One is the sphere of the social and the gift – a place where norms and morals can be played out, like the settings of visiting in Oticí. This sphere is

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<sup>59</sup> According to p’Bitek – when writing of the market some 25 years ago – he states that you could get “everything” from the market, also fresh and sour milk (1986:121).

<sup>60</sup> Once I went with Awor, one of the girls in the household, to get milk for the baby girl. We walked for some 5-10 minutes to a certain compound. Awor – with the baby tied to her back and a thermos in her hand – went into the main house and fetched the milk. Another time I accompanied Lamwaka to a backyard in town when she worked with the Indians. She was supposed to bring milk to the restaurant from there, and rang a man who came and let us into a small room containing only a refrigerator box. He poured milk from a big container in two double *kaweer*s. (Since Lamwaka had the phone number to this man, I guess that this was the place where she bought her milk for business from.) It is only recently that Gulu has electricity supply and it has therefore not been possible to store milk in a cool place.

differently constituted from Lamwaka's short meeting with the customers at the roadside – a sphere one may call the market. The latter in contrast, is not a socially structured setting for practicing *kite ber*. How Lamwaka deals with food in this sphere, then, does not take on the same meaning or produce relationships in the same way as within the sphere of the social and the gif; it does not start from the fertile locus of a homestead

According to Bertelsen (2012), in Chimoio, different items of substance (maize and charcoal) that are potential products for the market, are diversely socially evaluated based on how the items are produced – a differentiation explicitly gendered and corporal, and linked to fertility and sexuality. Lamwaka is making money by adding water to the milk, thus she makes it last longer. While, on the one hand, the liquid in the jerry-can is milk, on the other hand, it has 'magically' gained more value. This, Lamwaka takes out in profit. In anthropological analyses of witchcraft, extracting 'extras' is often a sign of sorcery (Englund 1994), and accumulating wealth is a way of sorcerers (Nyamnjoh 2002:119ff).<sup>61</sup> In relation to Bertelsen's point, my comparison of Lamwaka's versus the women in Otici's ways of transforming food items and the different social meanings attached to it, shows that how the items are produced – and more specifically transformed – and in which setting (or sphere), is crucially important to analyse in order to understand the density of meaning in cooking practices.

## **Conclusion**

The transformative processes of cooking includes a broad range of preparation activities that women do together. Not only women from the same household, but also neighbours prepare food together. As the saying goes; a woman is never a guest.

In this chapter, I have showed how cooking practices create 'settings' for young women to reconstitute Acholi sociality. In the act of serving, young women practice norms of bodily submission which is closely tied to Acholi morals and values. Moreover, the household, and in particular, the kitchen, can be seen as a locus for movement and transformation. Extending my argument from chapter two, by preparing locally produced food, I argue that young women are collectively producing Acholi bodies. Furthermore, cooking for visitors and gift giving can be seen as comments of war. By sharing in abundance, the women are commenting upon war and refuting categories such as 'refugee', 'poor' and 'victims' – all statuses that evoke notions of infertile dependency.

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<sup>61</sup> I was once told a story of how people in Amuru pay for a service that make their bodies work at night, the idea of gaining some extra without actually producing also exists in Northern Uganda.

Through their diverse activities they are stimulating the flow of that household, and, more broadly, circulation in the community. By making and giving food outside their households, they establish extended nurturing capacities. Further understood in a fertility/obstruction dichotomy, such capacities can be seen as opposing the death and stasis of war experiences.

Moreover, women are contributors to the 'moving of things' as cooking implies a circulation of values such as food, gift, and people – as opposed to a war state of 'obstruction' (Taylor 1999b). However, moving in new spheres and circulation of specific substances is sometimes problematic. As the case with Lamwaka showed, especially milk may be a problematic item for young women to distribute. My main argument is, however, that the specific ways and settings of food transformation are socially significant for how Acholi sociality is reconstituted.

## Chapter 4

### Life Skills trainings:

### Football, morality and the female body in convivial arenas

From 1996 and onwards, as the refugee situation turned more and more precarious, humanitarian and development NGOs became an increasingly more integrated part of the environment in Northern Uganda.<sup>62</sup> Travelling on dirt roads in rural areas, I saw signposts reading “Unicef”, “Nusaf”, “NRC” and so on, decorate the landscape at regular intervals. They pointed towards locales for NGO programmes. Although humanitarian organisations like the NRC<sup>63</sup> are now phasing out, development organisations are still highly involved in assisting – especially children, youth and women – with material, psychological and educational help. Given that these NGOs provide an important aspect of how post-war dynamics unfold, in this chapter I will focus on the activities of a particular NGO called the Odilo United (OU) in order to show how young women manoeuvre in what I see as discursively open spaces in search for a common and morally valid ground for how to use their bodies. In my introduction I stated that the female body is an arena for cultural reproduction – hence, it is also a site for social destruction (Taylor 1999a) and reconstitution. By exploring how the female body is contested and negotiated, I will show that Acholi sociality is open-ended and an on-going project. More generally I argue that peace-making is not simply a return to how things were before – as also evidenced by the intervention of programmes like OU.

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<sup>62</sup> WFP (1999). See also Finnström (2003:204ff).

<sup>63</sup> Previously, the NRC ran 34 out of 202 refugee camps in Northern Uganda. They are now limiting their involvement and expect to be out of the country by 2014. The humanitarian and transitional support to repatriated refugees has been important to stabilise the situation (Norad 2012).

The OU programme is twofold; weekly football trainings and monthly Life Skills trainings. It is described as “the community based women’s soccer program using sports to empower the young women of Northern Uganda”. This goal of empowerment reflects a notion that young women are in some ways marginalised and need assistance,<sup>64</sup> an idea which resonates with a general international development discourse, as noted also in the Introduction. I argue that the trainings are arenas where comments – representing diverging and sometimes conflicting discourses of what I take to be on the one hand, an international development discourse and, on the other, a localised Acholi view – on life and person are being made, in particular centred on the female body. The trainings thus comprise socio-political arenas where different forces<sup>65</sup> manifest themselves in the minds and bodies of young women. However, this is not a one way process; at the same time as the forces are subjectifying, they are also played off against each other. Hence, the trainings, I argue, become discursively open spaces, not in terms of an empty-ness, but affording an openness for the girls to negotiate their social person.

Peoples’ ability to act within and against structures needs particular attention according to Ortner (2005) whose academic project is, amongst others, to bring subjectivity into the forefront of anthropological analysis. In line with her project, but perhaps to some extent ethnocentric, Ortner puts great emphasis on the individual actor. Nyamnjoh on the other hand, argues for a more relational understanding of agency; how individuals are able to be who they are – agents – through relationships with others (2002:111) – a view that also resonates with p’Bitek’s conceptualisation of Acholi ‘society’ and ‘person’ (1986:19). Informed by the general thrust of Ortner’s argument and with reference to Nyamnjoh’s concept of ‘conviviality’ – yet, somewhat modified – I will show how young women actively negotiate their social bodies – and thereby Acholi sociality – in their participation with the OU.

### **Training in Paicho**

The first time Adula (26), the social worker, and I went to teach Life Skills trainings, our destination was the village and previous location for an IDP camp, Paicho. Atimango, the OU administrator was also going. We met at 10am in the bus-park in town. It was filled with women selling fruits and foods, and men who walked around selling small things like soap,

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<sup>64</sup> Young women prove this otherwise in chapter three, were they practice extended nurturing capacities and are the one assisting others.

<sup>65</sup> These forces can be Christian ideology, individualism, Western ‘modernity’ and consumption, confirmation to community morals, peer pressure and international- and state development agency.

necklaces and newspapers. We got seats in the bus, and waited for another hour – till it was filled up, before it left. I watched three women seated outside in the sun, of which one of them looked very old. They were selling bananas from the lower steps of some apartments. They shared an umbrella which they kept passing around while they waited for their customers to show up. Next to them, a little girl looked after her younger brother. With some effort she lifted him onto her hip and climbed some few steps up the concrete stairs to get him into the shadows. I turned to Atimango and asked if she recognised a divide between town and village according to female clothing and she confirmed. She said that modernity has made it more convenient for women to wear trousers; now they have to ride the *boda bodas* and they need to climb the vehicles to get up. Village girls will soon “learn how to dress”, she said. Adula was reading the “women’s part” of the newspaper, a story of a woman’s destiny in love. After she finished, she gave Atimango the paper and we read it together on our way to Paicho. After approximately one hour, the bus stopped at the *boda* station next to the market place before it left for Southern Sudan. From this place, one could always see who was coming and going.

The school and football field were located some five minutes’ walk along the dusty red road that carved through endless golden-green fields. There, we met Coach Okeny and 17 girls who were busy playing football. The girls played in their school uniforms; dark blue skirts below their knees and a random t-shirt.<sup>66</sup> Compared to the rough compact sand field in town, the field in Paicho was good for the bare-footed girls as it was of grass. Atimango, Adula and I joined them in the field. Atimango wanted me to teach them, so I organised some passing exercises. They were easy to instruct and did not laugh at each other when some of them failed to give a pass, but clapped when someone did well. Suddenly, there was a loud “bang” – a ball had burst under the heat of the sun.

Life Skills trainings were normally carried out in the lunch break on school compounds; outside a teacher’s hut, under a mango tree, or in the newly built poultry. Today, we were in a classroom. The school buildings were all of concrete with square holes for windows which gave a breath of fresh air. Atimango sat on a desk on one side, while Adula and I sat on a bench in front of the blackboard. The girls were seated in front of us, two or three on each bench as if they were pupils. After I had introduced myself, I started to teach a

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<sup>66</sup> In general, most of the OU participants are school girls, aged 14-19, while a few do not attend school. The latter could easily be recognised as they did not wear uniforms. To be OU members means that they ought to have their parents’ permission to attend these trainings. Many girls have delayed handing in their registration scheme though, thus the OU lacks many of their parents’ signature.

theme called “I’m Special” from a “Life Skills book”.<sup>67</sup> The introduction to the theme was based on Biblical reasons for why we should feel special and I opened up for discussion by asking “what factors or people can stop you from feeling special?” Several girls raised their hands and I pointed at one of them. She stood up and answered; “*boda bodas*”. “Why?” I asked. “Because they say things like ‘you’re ugly’ when you’re on the way to play football. And they say ‘see *you*, kicking the ball’ in an ironic voice”. The girl twisted her voice to imitate. Another girl said “*boda bodas* saying bad things”. One by one, the girls raised their hands to answer; “parents in the community. They say you get spoiled by playing football. It can get you pregnant”; “some friends’ parents are discouraging”; “friends saying you will drop down in studying because of football”; “boys saying you are practicing prostitution”. During the session, Adula occasionally encouraged them in an authoritative yet playful voice; “*mukene* [another one]”.

When they seemed to run out of answers, I asked another question; “think of someone you like, that can be a friend or a family member, what makes them special to you?” “My uncle because he always is encouraging me and giving me good advice”, one of them said. Others pointed out their parents as special, and especially their mothers and two girls mentioned their friends; “my friend because she is giving me good advice” and, “my friend because we can share things”. Then I instructed them to imagine a mother and her baby: “What is it about the baby that makes it so special to the mother?” There were two young women with babies present and when Adula translated, she asked them specifically. “Because I’m the mother and have gone through birth – the father has not. When there is no one around I talk to the baby and tell her things”, one of them said. The other one smiled and covered her face with her hand as if she was shy; “also because I gave birth”. Atimango had arranged with the *boda*, who had come to drive us home, to buy a box of sodas from the village centre, and after the training, the girls received a soda each. They came forward, bent one knee towards the ground and picked one.

### **Urban storytelling: verbalising competing discourses of morality**

Towards the end of May, Adula and I had Life Skills training with the team in Gulu town. The training was inside Pece Stadium – a large wall-fenced football field with a grandstand at the entrance. Twenty girls in addition to Adula and me were present, and we sat on the grass

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<sup>67</sup> Atimango and Adula translated from English to Acholi while I talked, and Adula translated what the girls said to me. She spent some time and tried to capture every word. The teaching was inspired by the book and approved by the social worker.



on the side line of the football field.

Adula sat in the middle of the group and taught the topic “I’m Special”. First, she urged the girls to tell us why they are special. They did not wait for permission to talk, but succeeded each other in turn. “The parents are wasting money on my education”, one girl said. Other answered; “I am the only big girl left at home and I am special to my parents because I do all the work at home”; “I am special because I go and fetch the water”; “I am special because I am created in Gods image”;<sup>68</sup> “because I always make people happy around the place I stay”; “because I help the needing people and the disabled”. Then Adula asked; “who in a community can make you feel not special?” The girls answered “a jealous person”; “parents”; “jealous friends, neighbours or stepmothers”; “brothers”. A girl gave an example in Acholi which Ayoo translated for me: “some people in a community, that could be a mother and a neighbour, were fighting. Then the neighbour could start hating the child of the other person”. Another girl said “while for training, the coach can be barking which makes me feel not special. It can make me discouraged and leave the training”. “[I am] talented but the discouraged”, Achora (15) said. During the session, the girls sat very close. One rested her head in the lap of another. Suddenly I found one girl stroking my foot with a flower. She smiled calmly. At another point, a girl behind me scratched my spine up and down with a finger. Yet another girl moved her feet close to mine so that they touched.

Then, Adula told the story of a boy who was rather dull and had rather low self-confidence until the teacher discovered that he drew very good ‘manila cards’.<sup>69</sup> Her narration elicited stories from five other girls. They all switched to Acholi, and Ayoo translated for me again.

Acan (21) began playing football for the Red Cross team and later she started to play for OU. Because she played football she was abused<sup>70</sup> by people – especially from her husband’s side. But she fought with them, even physically. As she described how she fought her aunt, the girls laughed loudly. She narrated for a while. She did not use to

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<sup>68</sup> The girl answered in English.

<sup>69</sup> Adula’s story about the dull boy. “The story is about a person who was very dull in class. Every teacher insulted the child. Even the pupils. The boy was very dull, but he was good at drawing pictures. Although, he used to be idle while drawing, because after all the insults... hah... One day they replaced the teacher for maths. The new teacher called him and tried to talk to him. The boy was now happy because the teacher consulted him and wanted him to take extra lessons. When the boy was used to the teacher, the teacher discovered his talent for drawing. He told the boy to draw very nice pictures and put them on the wall in the classroom. The teacher bought 20 manila cards, and the boy drew very well. The fellow colleagues of the boy found the classroom very nice and organised. When they learned it was him, the boy got many friends. They asked him to draw pictures for them. They discovered one talent and saw that he was also important”.

<sup>70</sup> Most often used in the meaning of verbally abused.

feel special, she said, but now, as a good player, she feels special.

“God created us all differently and we are all valuable”, she concluded. Then, Achora stood up and confessed that “the same thing happened to me”.

She moved from Arua to Pece to study. Her father sent her to stay with her stepmother [her mother’s co wife]. Both at school and at home she was abused. But then she started to play football. She played very well, and she became popular at school. Her stepmother did not want her to play and said ‘I will chop off and roast your chicken leg’. One time, she took off Achora’s clothes and beat her. The headmaster at school was a relative of Achora and when he heard about the incident, he informed her father. He came and quarrelled with the stepmother and went back. The next day the same happened, and Achora’s father made her move to her grandmother.

All the girls sat very close and listened carefully. They laughed when Achora told us about the chicken leg. Adula commented on her story; “Achora thought she was not special because of her stepmom. In this world you should not hide your problems. A friend will help you and it will be so good”. “I tell my problems only to men”, Acan said. “But that is no problem”, Adula replied, “as long as they can give you advice. In this world you have to know you are special. For example that you are talented in football – even if you are moving you are special”. Three other girls stood up in turn and narrated. They did so in Acholi however, and no one offered to translate for me.

### **Discursive (re)production of the moral female body**

A central aspect of Acholi social organisation is that women are married into their husbands’ clan which make them, in a symbolic perspective, “the door of entry to the group” (Douglas 2002:156; see also Taylor 1999a). According to Douglas (2002), the body is a symbol for the society at large, and boundaries protecting the inside from the outside should, according to principles regarding dirt and pollution, be strictly guarded. In this logic, how the female body is used becomes an issue not only for the individual and her closest associates, but for the whole community. Hence, the female body becomes a contested site for cultural reproduction.

During warfare in Northern Uganda, gendered sexual violence was common. Although such crimes firstly is associated with the LRA (Allen 2006:184f), incidents of government

soldiers raping Acholi women<sup>71</sup> in the camps are commonly reported (Finnström 2003:247f; Allen 2006:58). There were amongst others great concerns about the spread of HIV/Aids among the Acholi, with specific association to the atrocities and physical conditions that people endured (Allen 2006:58).<sup>72</sup> According to Finnström, young Acholi women were to a greater extent exposed to association with the HIV disease as many young Acholi women allegedly attained soldier ‘boyfriends’ for protection in the camps, and rumours even had it that HIV was a state weapon against the Acholi (Finnström 2003:250ff). Rumours of health threats were furthermore linked to ideas of womanhood in the traditional cosmology of the local moral world; they were “closely associated with the forces of domination that are alleged to destroy female sexuality and women’s reproductive health but also, in extension, the wider surroundings” (Finnström 2003:244f). Thus, “the social collective and cultural life [was] threatened through women” (*ibid.*). As Acholi sociality was obstructed through the misuse of female bodies during war, I propose that they become crucial sites for cultural reconstitution in the war aftermath.

The process of reconstructing common grounds for how to use their bodies has, for young Acholi women, gained further complexity by the introduction of a certain international development discourse. The book that the Life Skills trainings were based on represented such a discourse. It was written and produced in the United States and grounded on a Christian world view. A strong sense of individualism – in the meaning of an egocentric view of the world in which the ‘I’ is responsible for its actions and happiness – was communicated. In the same vein, much of the explicit purpose of the Life Skills trainings was to heighten the girls’ self-esteem and make them well-equipped to deal with challenges. More generally, the OU program also emphasised gender equality, promoted for example through female leadership training. In sum, Life Skills trainings conveyed a specific view of ‘life’: The contents and challenges in everyday life, social relations, and morals guiding this life in addition to provide the ‘skills’ needed to deal with and improve this ‘life’. Hence, the way Life Skills trainings represented and constructed ‘life’ and ‘skills’, can be interpreted in Arce’s framework as a ‘development language’: “[A] combined set of linguistic representations and linguistic constructions of how to relate ‘problems’ to ‘solutions’” (2000:33).

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<sup>71</sup> Also boys and men were occasionally raped, as Finnström asserts (2008:191).

<sup>72</sup> However, Allen questions the common view that HIV/Aids spread because of IDP camp environment, and points to indicators showing that “the concentration of people in the IDP camps has actually coincided with a decline in rates of infection, not a rise” (2006:59).

Furthermore, the Acholi female body is not merely a symbol, but as the landscape marked by signposts and, worked upon by different forces. Contextualised within the workings of a development discourse, this can be compared to the management of Malay factory women in Ong's (1987) analysis. She argues – while referring to Foucault (1979) – that “the effects of power/knowledge relations [...] are to implant disciplinary techniques in the body and human conduct, thereby complementing more overt forms of control in everyday life” (1987:3f). The development discourse convey certain ‘truths’ – or knowledge(s) – about the social person of Acholi women, and coupling this with the economic and socio-political influential role that the NGOs hold in Northern Uganda, the OU, through its programme, can be seen to exercise both overt and more concealed control over the girls.

Ways of attempted management were also experienced from other sources. As anticipated, the international development discourse differed from ideas and values in the communities where Life Skills trainings were carried out. In Paicho, community perceptions of young women's bodies and morality were revealed as the girls expressed how people commented upon them playing football. According to the girls, the *bodas* were *seeing*; they uttered comments about how the girls looked when they were on their way to play football or when they were playing. The act of *seeing*, I propose, is significant to shed light on how the girls experienced forms of control. Taking the nature of *boda* activity into account, they were in a key position to see and know what was going on around them. The *boda* stations are located in central positions by the roadside, where people often pass by, and they are easily accessed. Furthermore, they exchange news and information with their colleagues and passengers and are the first to know and give away news. Hence, by *seeing* and commenting negatively upon the girls when they were playing football, I suggest they passed on more general community perceptions. Moreover, since the girls were said to be ugly in association with football activity, I argue that it was not exterior looks per se that was deemed ugly, but a way of sanctioning moral ugliness.

Then again, it was not only *boda bodas* who made utterances on the matter. Several girls specifically mentioned ‘parents’ as being negative and one girl also mentioned the neighbour. The girls did not use more generic terms such as ‘adults’ or ‘people’, but termed them through their social relations. Significantly, it was mainly people in close proximity who said negative things, or uttered ‘words’, as one girl put it. Such negative approaches, I suggest, can be likened with a sort of ‘aggression among kin’ in the Cameroonian Grassfields in which “it is not enough to belong to a group or community; such belonging or community

must impact positively on one's kin to be recognized" (Nyamnjoh 2002:120). Such a relational view of the Acholi person is also described by p'Bitek: "Who am I?" cannot be answered in any meaningful way, unless the relationship in question is known" (1986:20). In this view, people are not accountable only to themselves, but also to those with whom they stay in a relationship with.

What is more, not only words were used. For example, in Achora's story, her stepmother took off Achora's clothes and beat her because she played football. Moreover, her stepmother said that "I will chop off and roast you chicken leg". The 'chicken leg' can be seen as an image of a football player's leg, since the thighs often get bigger and more muscular, hence the shape of a chicken leg. Cutting of the leg is a powerful image of how to stop Achora from playing football. It is a rather evocative threat directed at controlling her actions.

Also in the two other villages where OU carried out their programme the girls reported on negative attitudes to them playing football. Crucially, in all three villages, these attitudes were communicated through messages of sexually spoiled bodies with specific reference to prostitution. The girls said for example; "boys saying you are practicing prostitution"; "my brother says I will get infected by HIV" and "parents in the community – they say you get spoiled<sup>73</sup> by playing football. It can get you pregnant". Prostitution is a highly resented act of immorality, and consistent with Douglas' (2002) theory on symbolic boundaries, this seemed as a concern for the rest of the community. Football is thus not a positive or 'neutral' activity, as it often is presented in development discourses, but, representative of prostitution – and thereby an immoral activity. It is not to say that people took football to *be* prostitution. Football is commonly played among boys and in school, so the content of the activity is very well known, and when I asked the girls if football would make them pregnant they emphatically shook their heads; *ko!* Making football a symbol of prostitution was, nevertheless, a powerful way of condemning the activity, at the same time as it revealed key cultural expectations towards the female social person and body.

Moreover, the degree of sanctioning and verbal abuse against girls who played football also depended on the girls' age and social status and especially mothers were criticised. At Life Skills training I asked them what they thought was good and bad about being with the OU. One of the girls answered that "they always hear [bad words] – not young girls, but mothers. Many get discouraged. But [they are] encouraged by topics taught, for

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<sup>73</sup> In the meaning of broken or damaged.

example ‘I’m Special’”. One of the mothers told us that she planned to quit, but then she was taught “I’m Special” and she decided to continue. Although most girls seemed to be sanctioned by people in the community, mothers were reported to be criticised the most.

To sum up, through diverging discourses, young women experience – which they also make explicit at Life Skills trainings – forms of control and management, for example through Life Skills lessons, *seeing* and comments. These forms of control and management become manifested in the young women’s bodies as well as their minds as they cause great concern as to what is proper conduct.

### **Manoeuvring and negotiating in discursively open spaces**

Despite that they were subjected to the different discourses, the girls nevertheless actively engaged and negotiated the contents of them in order to reconstitute a moral ground for how to use their bodies. They did so in several ways, amongst others through storytelling and clothing.

At Life Skills training in town, the girls did not pick up on the issue of football being immoral in the same way, or as explicitly linked to prostitution as the girls from the villages did.<sup>74</sup> However, through storytelling the town girls narrated how they had gotten in trouble because of playing football and referred to people in close proximity as those who gave them a hard time. For example, Acan said that she had gotten in trouble with her family because she wanted to play football and she had even fought her aunt physically. Achora recognised Acan’s experience; she said that the same thing had happened to her. In her story, it was mainly her stepmother who bothered and abused her because she played football, while she apparently received support from others.

When the girls told their stories, they received open and emotional support. The girls were listening actively to each other and laughing at others’ stories as if to encourage each other in order to face such overt control as discussed above. They also get advice – which my informants often pose as a general appreciation – both from co-players and the social worker Adula. In other words, through story-telling, they encouraged each other to participate with the OU despite negative sanctions from people in the community. Yet, they participated to a great extent on their own terms.

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<sup>74</sup> Answers to the question “who in a community can make you feel not special” in the Life Skills training differed from the villages to town. However, as many of the girls in town also have lived, or still periodically live, in the villages, knowledge and people may be seen as situated.

As described above, in Paicho, the girls played football in their school uniforms. Perhaps that was most convenient since that day the training was conducted in the lunch break. On the other hand, also OU players in the other villages as well as in town played in their uniforms, or in skirt in general, every training – also outside school time. At a training in town, Coach Lubangakene complained that the players were not serious since they did not bring shorts for trainings, and urged them to. However, only his daughter, the two female coaches and Achora showed up in shorts since. The rest of the players continued to play in skirts. In Northern Uganda – as in most other communities, I propose – how women should dress was in general a controversial issue. Conventionally, women should wear dresses or skirts, and it was regarded indecent to wear anything that reached above your knees. However, my host brother Ogena (9) reported on some changes. We sat in the cool and dark hut of his uncle’s and had a rather sophisticated conversation when he explained to me:<sup>75</sup>

They [women] cannot sit on a chair, eat chicken, go somewhere or take an air plane. Why? I don’t know.<sup>76</sup> Men can go to America and Europe. Women cannot wear trousers or shorts or [short] skirts like you do. They must wear dresses. Why? I don’t know. If they go to get water with an [x] and not a [y],<sup>77</sup> they are beaten with a stick. “By whom?” I asked. “By their mothers. It’s not like that here, now. Things have changed”.

Except Adula and Atimango, all women I saw in the villages wore trousers. Aber, another friend of mine said that she can wear trousers in town, but skirt in the village. Relating to this convention, for the village girls, it could be a problem that football is commonly played in shorts. However, the girls negotiated a middle way. On the one hand, they did participate in the football activities despite negative sanctions. On the other hand, and seemingly confirming to Acholi norms of clothing, all the girls in the villages played in their school uniforms, with skirts below their knees. Although it is severely inconvenient to wear skirt while playing football, I propose that the girls played out their moral standards while manoeuvring in the two discourses. The girls have been subjected to Acholi conventions on proper dressing for a long time – and thus, I suggest – following Bourdieu’s idea of embodied structures – these standards are well-known and to a great extent their own. The question of

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<sup>75</sup> He talked about what women in the villages, especially in Amuru District as opposed to in town, cannot do.

<sup>76</sup> Previously I probably had asked “why” a lot and he anticipated me here.

<sup>77</sup> This may be linked to certain rules, based on ideas of cleanliness, for which containers are appropriate to fetch water in and which are for food.

whether or not they should play football, on the other hand, is rather new and hence, up for negotiation.

Another way of negotiating their participation with the OU was in the actual completing of the football trainings. In general, it was not the same girls who showed up from day to day as they were seemingly busy with other activities. One day I went to Awere Ground, I met two of the players outside their school. They did not plan to come for training. “We have to go home to cook, we are both mother and father in our families”, Atuku explained. Later, when I visited Atuku’s sister, Nyakoker, I shared my concern that many of the OU girls did not show up for training. Nyakoker tried to explain:

For girls in this place they have many things to do. They cook for their families. And some people, parents and brothers, may discourage them. They ask ‘why are you playing football?’ In this house the girls don’t have to cook, because I am the one cooking for them,<sup>78</sup> but I don’t know for this other girl. She has got one elder sister at least.

When Atuku said that both she and her friend were both mother and father in their families, I interpreted it as both were the oldest in a child-headed household. Because of war, many children were orphaned and when someone is said to be both mother and father in their home, it generally means that they are the eldest of siblings and take care of the rest. However, this was not the case for the two OU girls. It is not my intention to doubt Atuku’s words, but to show how – through playing expectations from different “hold” – against each other and create a space in which she can decide what to do with her time. Moreover, as the discourses that the young women operate within are less hegemonic, I do not see these acts as forms of ‘countertactics’ (Ong 1987:213), ‘counter-agency’ (Ortner 2005) or ‘weapons of the weak’ (Scott 1998), but as parts of deciding for themselves the contents of their every day.

### **Convivial arenas**

As described above, Life Skills training in town evolved into an arena for storytelling. After a more formally structured lecture by Adula, the girls were encouraged – both by Adula and by the other girls – to share from their lives. At Life Skills training, I argue, a mix of serious and ‘joking relationships’ were evolving – central elements to what Nyamnjoh calls a ‘convivial’

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<sup>78</sup> Their mother works as a teacher in another district (see chapter five).



atmosphere. Analysing Bum personhood in Cameroon, Nyamnjoh understands agency in relational terms (cf. Ortner 2005), and asks: “How are individuals able to be who they are – agents – through relationships with others?” (2002:111). In order to answer this question he introduces the notion of ‘conviviality’.<sup>79</sup> In Werbner’s (2002:11) words, summarising Nyamnjoh, ‘conviviality’ can be seen as

[...] the congenial fellowship, often lighthearted, merry, and even hilarious, created between active agents otherwise perhaps in competition or even in conflict with each other, but determined to empower and not to marginalize each other.

The background for Nyamnjoh’s usage of conviviality is a public debate in Cameroon on *convivialité culturelle*; a national project to enhance “unity in diversity” (2002:112). My focus – a particular NGO activity – is somewhat narrower. However, empirically, Nyamnjoh also bases his analysis on specific meetings – or gatherings. Yet, I understand these to be more spontaneous and temporary than Life Skills training as the latter provides a more fixed and bounded setting in terms of time, place and participants. Despite this, I find that we aim at much the same; to “understand better how postcolonial subjects can transcend their vulnerability while they negotiate their subjection through relationships with others” (Werbner 2002:11).

Life Skills training can be seen as a convivial space first and foremost because it provides a setting for young women to acquire agency by virtue of being together as a group – a football team. However, the structural conditions for a congenial fellowship were formed in a somewhat different manner than how it is described by Nyamnjoh. According to Nyamnjoh; “conviviality involves different or competing agentive forces which need a negotiated understanding” (2002:111). Although the girls at Life Skills trainings cannot be seen as otherwise in conflict, ‘agentive forces’ – which can be what I above have described as an international development discourse and localised Acholi views – behind them can. As exemplified above, differing views on ‘person’ and the female body were communicated through the OU, and Adula and Atimango, representatives of the girls’ local community. At the same time as these forces are subjectifying, they are also negotiated by the girls and used as a means of empowerment. For example, a valorisation of the traditional communal is

evident in the acts and words of many of the girls and can be seen as a statement of establishing themselves as moral beings. The girls behaved properly when they greet us; with one hand to the inner elbow while shaking hands and one knee bent towards the ground. They did all that they were asked to do; fetched water, bought buns, arranged seats and participated in the discussions. Hence, the Life Skills training, I propose, is framed by the NGO development discourse, but in dynamic interplay, the girls negotiated and gave meaning to their experienced subjectivation.

The girls took actively part in defining the content of Life Skills training. As Acan started to narrate, she switched language – from English to Acholi – although she speaks English fluently. This was the case for Achora and the other girls as well. During the first two stories, Ayoo translated for me, but after a while she just stopped. The switch in language I interpret as a move – away from a session of teaching – to a more personal section in which the girls could raise and discuss matters of their concern. Through storytelling, the girls shared challenges and happiness in their lives.

Although they talked about serious matters, the stories were conducted in a playful mood. Both Acan and Achora told about how they were abused by family members, but in the way they described the particular happenings, they did so in a joking manner. However, the atmosphere was less *hilarious*, as Nyamnjoh (2002:111) suggests it can be in describing a convivial atmosphere:

One can risk a glass too many, and be hilarious in extreme, without fear of being taken advantage of, because one knows that one is in fellowship, that one is secure, that one is part of a whole imbued with the spirit of togetherness, interpenetration, interdependence and intersubjectivity.

This particular description, I argue, would not be of an atmosphere that created a space of empowerment for young Acholi women. Rather, I suggest that Nyamnjoh's example of conviviality is somewhat male biased. For example, in the Acholi context, it is men who are seen and said to drink most – young women would not 'risk a glass too many' – and certainly not in an attempt to be 'hilarious'. I agree that it is important to pay attention to particular moods and atmosphere in anthropological analysis of subjectivity and agency, but the greater the need to take into account the particular individuals who take part. What is an atmosphere they can act comfortably in and be empowered in? What is 'conviviality' to them?

If I am to describe the atmosphere when the girls came together during Life Skills trainings, it must be secure, intimate and soft. They often sat very close although there was space enough. The girls in town behaved a bit tougher than the village-girls though. They tended to laugh at each other's mistakes, and be more bold in how they talked; loudly and with more irony. But as described above, they were also physically intimate; scratching each other's back and lying in each other's lap. In this atmosphere – as also they make explicit – they were empowered. The girls also saw Life Skills trainings as an arena for new possibilities and options. At the end, the stories were commented upon and they got support and advice. They commented themselves upon the training as “giving them good advice” and “teaching them to feel special”.

Moreover, I argue that conviviality should also be understood as a positive force or mood which is generative of the social. The girls seemed to be confident in each other, something the social worker confirmed later; “the football has made the girls to get to know each other. Previously, they did not talk to each other, but they do now”. This congenial fellowship is made possible for young Acholi women because Life Skills trainings are conducted on a regular basis – not spontaneous and temporal meetings such as those Nyamnjuh describes.

### **Conclusive remarks**

As the plenty of NGO signposts indicates, the impact of humanitarian and development organisations in Northern Uganda has been substantial. In this chapter, I have focused on a particular NGO, Odilo United, in order to explore how young women are subjected to different post-war discourses. Especially through so-called Life Skills trainings, OU represented a certain international development discourse that conveyed specific ‘truths’ and values. This discourse was countered by a localised discourse. At Life Skills trainings, the girls reported of a collective communal sanctioning – conveyed through linking football and prostitution – when they played football.

In a Foucauldian analysis, these discourses can be seen to manage and control the female body, but instead of viewing these processes as repressing – they should be seen as producing (Ong 1987:3). At the same time as the girls are subjected by these forces, they are playing them off against each other – creating an open space of conviviality where they can, inter-relationally, negotiate their social person and more specifically their contested bodies. Through Nyamnjuh's notion of ‘conviviality’, however modified, I have showed how these trainings may in general be viewed as agentifying – imbuing the young women participating

with particular forms of agency. The girls are negotiating the meaning of their bodies and how they can use it in creative ways. By negotiating what is normal and normative, I argue, the girls are partakers of reconstituting sociality.

## Chapter 5

### Memory and purification in peace-making:

#### From potential enemies to citizens in the Ugandan nation state

As outlined in chapter one, the relationship between Acholi people and the state is crucially conditioned by a history of violent conflicts and mutual distrust. Accounts of past marginalisation constitute vivid parts of what one may term Acholi collective memory and especially the ‘protection camps’ are objects of controversy. Branch argues that during the war, both the Ugandan government and the LRA failed to mobilise the Acholi civil society and “came to see the population as a threat and potential enemy instead of as a potential support base” (2005:2). As potential enemies, Acholi people were displaced into the camps – in 2005, more than 90 % of the ethnic group were displaced (Finnström 2005:127) – in order to make the environment ‘legible’ (Scott 1998). This troubled relationship now assumes even greater importance in the context of so-called peace-making efforts as the Acholi are currently undergoing being redefined from potential enemies into attaining a status as citizens. In this chapter, I will show how Acholi memory is central in negotiating the Ugandan state’s attempted ‘purification’ of the Acholis.<sup>80</sup>

Analytically, this chapter will probe this bifurcation between ‘citizen’ and ‘enemy’, employing Werbner’s (2002) notion of subjectivity as such statuses are continuously in the

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<sup>80</sup> This chapter is not an attempt of a state analysis, however, and I treat the state as an external aggressor/political formation.

process of becoming and always intersubjectively created. Status transformation, from potential enemies to citizens implies, in the Ugandan state project, a form for submission to certain craves, amongst others to unify. Inspired by Douglas (2002), I see this process as a state attempt of categorical ‘purification’ in which ambiguous inhabitants are sought to be made into loyal subjects. Such subjection however, is not un-problematic. In Acholi aspirations for peace, a status transformation is desired, but not on state terms. By focusing on memory – and collective Acholi memory in particular – as contextualised interpretive constructions of the past (Antze and Lambek 1996a: vii), I will show how political and moral subjectivity is managed and negotiated. I argue that being citizens is not only a matter of being subjected to state structures, but also a question of how people generate their own subjectivities.<sup>81</sup>

Empirically, the chapter deals with the political dynamics of the National Elections in mid-February 2011 where a distinctive ‘unity discourse’ was prominent in the leading political party, the NRM’s, campaign. Crucially, this unity discourse was contradicted by the state’s response to the “Walk to Work demonstration” in Gulu town 14. April same year, and the ambivalent status of the Acholi ethnic group was more clearly revealed as government forces took violently action to control movement and space – measures that were directly linked to war experiences by the local population. In order to better understand the dynamic and ambivalent relationship between the Ugandan state and its Acholi citizens, I will analyse how this particular incident was experienced and morally judged by the local population.

#### **14. April: The Walk to work demonstration in Gulu town**

In the afternoon 14. April, Endre and I were visiting Aber (24) in town. She stayed in her mother’s place – two rooms of a square one-storage apartment complex. The complex was located between two streets in the very centre of town, comprising two shops, around ten rooms and some four toilets. The apartments were owned or rented by several families. The apartments surrounded an open backyard that the neighbours shared. When we arrived, passing from the main street through a narrow side street and in through a red, screeching iron gate, some women were cooking in the backyard and Aber’s mother was there, seated on a *kolo*. It was possible to get to the place from two streets, and also through the neighbour’s shop. Aber had prepared supper for us that we took in the living room, an eight square metre room, containing her mother’s bed, two chairs and a TV. While we were eating, we suddenly

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<sup>81</sup> See also Foucault 1982:208.

heard gunshots outside and a woman came rushing in, shouting “teargas!” The sharp odour stung my nose, and my eyes hurt. The woman hurriedly closed the window and the door as we heard more bullets go off.

Previously, in the aftermath of the National Elections, opposition leaders (mainly Kizza Besigye, the main opponent through the last three elections) had encouraged Walk to Work demonstrations in several cities.<sup>82</sup> Unclear whether Norbert Mao, the presidential candidate from the North, purposely wanted to arrange a Walk to Work demonstration in Gulu or not, the effect of a speech he held that afternoon developed into violent clashes between demonstrators and police and military. When rumours about Mao being arrested spread, demonstrators (mostly young men) gathered and went to the police station to insist on his release. They also blocked roads in the town centre with stones, wood lodges and burning tyres. The police allegedly felt the situation as out of control and therefore called for military assistance. From around 5pm, when we heard gunshots from Aber’s living room, and throughout the evening, police and military mambas patrolled the streets. They refused people moving in the streets, and if they saw someone walking, they would cane him since they saw him as a part of the demonstration just because he walked.

Back at Aber’s, the neighbours gathered in the shared backyard. Aber urged us to stay inside; “this is not good for you”, she said, “but for us, we’re used to. This is nothing”. She went out to check upon the situation from time to time and used the neighbour’s shop as a door to the main street. After a while though, she took me and Endre through the neighbour’s shop and we stood outside together with some neighbours, observing what went on. We did not see much from the dim outdoor lamps, but once in a while a *boda* passed and some men hurried to cross the street. When military patrols approached, we went into the shop, not to be spotted. When a mamba passed on a crossing street, one of the men commented “their role is to protect the state from external forces”.

In the backyard, people were discussing the situation in a rather playful way and several links were made between the times of insurgencies and this episode. “They haven’t shot for five years so today is their chance”, a young man said. Another asked, “why are they shooting now? They’re wasting government money”. People laughed. Someone had brought a radio outside, and it was tuned in on Mega FM, the local radio station. Norbert Mao – apparently released – and a UPDF<sup>83</sup> representative were interviewed about the situation. “As

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<sup>82</sup> The Walk to Work campaign was organised by the Activists for Change (A4C), as a protest against rising food and fuel prices and government corruption.

<sup>83</sup> Uganda Police Defence Forces.

if the one of Kony was not enough”, the latter commented. Mao was provoked by the statement and asked in a raised voice, “what did he mean by that?!” As we heard shooting continue throughout the evening, Aber’s mother decided that we could not go home, and she gave up her bed for us and slept outside on a mat.

Perhaps more than the National Elections in February – which were, by national and international monitoring agents, judged somewhat free and fair (at least *improved* since the first multi-party election in 2006) – the Walk to Work incident took up a lot of people’s attention and concern, and was heavily debated long after. I will now turn to my friend, Nyakoker’s story to shed light on how she, through acts of remembrance, conveyed her understanding of the incident in the historical context of Acholi war experiences.

### **Nyakoker’s story and the looted cattle**

Two days prior to the demonstration, Nyakoker (23) and I went to a café in town. Nyakoker knew of a shortcut to get from her place to the town centre, and she guided me through the muddy paths of the valley-settlement. The seemingly ramshackled buildings were put up very closely in this area which they called the “slum”. “If you want to get malaria, this is the place to go”, she said. When we rounded a corner, we were suddenly out on a broad street in town. We went to Café Lariem and enjoyed our fresh pressed mango juice while observing life in the streets. I could not help wondering if those nicely dressed women in high heels that occasionally came out from the valley-settlements actually lived there. After a while, some three or four military workers in uniforms passed on a crossing street. “UPDF”, Nyakoker commented dryly. “There is also the UDF. Some of them have done really bad things, and now they call themselves UPDF because it is sounds better and is updated. Newer. There is also the President’s Private Force – PPF, the investigation unity and the marine”.

Nyakoker stayed with her two sisters close to the centre of Gulu town. She studied social work, while her sisters were in primary and secondary school. Her mother worked as a teacher further south and came home during holidays. A month after the Walk to Work demonstration, I visited Nyakoker in their home. It was around 3 pm. It had just been raining and the path to their place was very muddy. When I arrived with my *matopted lela*<sup>84</sup>, Atuku, one of the sisters, met me outside the house and greeted me. They were renting two grass-thatched huts; one where the living room is, and one for the kitchen and Nyakoker’s bedroom. Nyakoker and I sat in the couch and chatted as usual. A black transistor radio and a cat kept

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<sup>84</sup>. “Rotten bicycle” as Atuku and her friends used to call my means of transportation.



us company. Nyakoker had been alone this holiday, she said, since her sisters and her mother went to the village. It was lonesome, but she had to read for her exams. “Where do you want to work when you finish?” I asked. “I can take any”, she said. “I don’t say like this and that type I don’t want. But I don’t want to stay in Kampala. Kampala is very noisy and crowded”. She continued to compare prices with those of Gulu and found the latter cheaper. “But to buy clothes are cheaper from Kampala”, she said as she quickly got up. She went behind a big curtain that separated the room in two, and got back with a skirt and some dresses while she exclaimed which prices she had bought them for. “Atuku managed to buy a nice dress next to our church, Holy Rosary. She paid only 1500 shillings<sup>85</sup>”, she said. “If you want to get nice clothes cheaply, you have to take your time. People think I buy my clothes expensively, but I don’t. What I can spend money on, is shoes. The cheap ones are of bad quality and they don’t last for long”.

While Atuku prepared lunch from the other hut, Nyakoker told me about their village, and named all the different crops they had planted. “Next season they will plant groundnuts, but I don’t know what they will plant it with”.<sup>86</sup> Her grandmother plants mostly for consumption, but some she can sell, like sorghum, Nyakoker said. “From sorghum you can make alcohol”. I commented that I did not believe her grandmother participated in that. “But she does!” Nyakoker empathetically said, followed by an explanation on how. She concluded; “I fear digging, but weeding I can do”. Nyakoker told me more from life in the village, amongst others about the ‘traditional wedding’ as she called it:

The elders from both families come together with the boy among them. The girl is not allowed to be there. Then they discuss the payment. The man should give presents. An oil lamp, a *gomez* for the mother in-law and a sitting chair for the father in-law, *gomez*’s for the aunties, some other clothes for the father in law, a hen, cows, goats... After they have settled the price, they have a big party; they sing and dance. After some two or three days, the aunties escort the girl together with one of her uncles to her husband’s family.<sup>87</sup>

“Does the woman belong to the husband? I asked. “Yes, she has been paid for”, Nyakoker said. “How is that for the woman?” I wondered. “It is not good to be made an object. That’s

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<sup>85</sup> Almost one USD.

<sup>86</sup> Usually they plant several types of crops in the same field, and the crops may vary according to season.

<sup>87</sup> This section is not a quote, but a paraphrase.

why there is a lot of domestic violence”. She said that many women are now against it – “thank God people are now being sensitised!” If she is getting married she would tell her mother not to ask for more money than the boy can afford. She wondered; if the boy is poor, what should they eat if he gave all the money to her mother? Nyakoker told me yet another story – about a girl who was so beautiful that they married her off when she was six years.<sup>88</sup> She laughed, “it’s so funny! The [beautiful] girls have to go and stay with the husbands family till they are women and then they [the in-laws] tell you that this man is your husband”. She said that if the girl is from a royal clan, like herself, the bride price can be very high. Her grandparents had 8000 cows and more sheep than they could count. But the state took much of the cattle in the North, she said. “You know, we Acholis are seen as bright, rich and good warriors. So the state fears. They rather want us to be poor. They camouflaged it by blaming the Karamojong.<sup>89</sup> Those people looted some cattle, but it was the state who took most”, she said. “How did they take it?” I asked. “Through war”, she replied, “but they camouflaged it”. We went on to talk about ‘that night’ – the evening of the demonstration. “This is no democracy”, she said.

You see, they use military when they should use police. The military is trained for war. In battles they are trained to shoot and kill the enemy. So what do they do with the civilians? They shoot and kill. Police are trained to secure law and order. This is a military state.

Her sisters were now ready to serve a late lunch, and Nyakoker prayed before Atuku came with water and helped us wash our hands. The radio was playing “It’s the sound of a victory” in the background. “So, it’s a military regime?” I asked. “Yeah, it is”, Nyakoker replied, “but you know, the government claim it is democratic, but it is not”.

### **Incongruent versions of history**

Werbner, with a focus on politicised memory, claims that “in postcolonial Africa, memory as public practice is increasingly in crisis” (1998:1). “Memory”, he holds, is a contribution to the critique of power and “to the very grounds of political subjectivity”. However, memory is ever more broadly contested and its moral force is becoming more uncertain, indefinite and ambiguous (1998:1). Here, I understand the existence of a ‘memory crisis’ not as absence of

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<sup>88</sup> Previously she narrated about how her mother ran away from several suitors.

<sup>89</sup> A neighbouring ethnic group, mainly pastoralists, in North-eastern Uganda.

memory<sup>90</sup> – perhaps an immediate interpretation of the term, but rather as the increasing questioning of counter-versions of so-called official versions of history. Furthermore, “the wartime memory crisis, at once existential, moral and political, varies significantly – from the remembrance of political violence by the victim to the deliberate forgetting by the perpetrator” (Werbner 1998:4). Hence, it is a crisis over what to be remembered and forgotten and over the very means and modes of remembrance.<sup>91</sup>

In Northern Uganda, as I will show, it certainly exist incongruent versions of history which relates to such a crisis. Museveni and the NRM, who are in central positions to write national history, claim in the media that they – in cooperation with the local community – ended the war. The NRM’s (2011) official internet page reads:

President Yoweri Museveni who is also the NRM Presidential candidate in the 2011 general elections has hailed the people of Northern Uganda for joining hands with the Uganda Peoples Defense Forces (UPDF) to end the war against rebel leader Joseph Kony. [...]. Four years ago in a show of might, the UPDF with support from the local communities dislodged him from the region, enabling people to return to their homes and resettle. [...] Museveni was addressing a campaign rally at Lukung Sub county headquarters in the newly created Lamwo district in Acholi region. He wondered where all other parties were when the innocent civilians were being killed and massacred, lashing out at the opposition leaders who went telling people lies that it is the NRM that forced people into camps. “These opposition leaders were here telling you lies that I brought you in camps. You came to camps because you were running away from killers. It is the army that protected you”, he said, urging people to vote for the NRM which has initiated national programs such as mass immunization, Universal Primary Education, Universal Secondary Education and Prosperity For All.

The excerpt above is an example of memory politicised. Situated within the context of National Elections and as part of campaign rhetoric, a specific version of the government’s role in ending the war was presented. It portrayed the government and the local population as united against a common enemy, and that they won the fight together. As I will get back to,

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<sup>90</sup> Terdiman also speaks of a ‘memory crisis’ but the crisis refers to loss, and his effort is to retrieve (1993:3f, 106).

<sup>91</sup> See also Papadikis *et al.* (2006) on similar processes on Cyprus.

this rhetoric of unity was elaborately carried out in the election period, partly contributing to a state attempted purification of Acholi citizens.

### **Memories of past marginalisation<sup>92</sup>**

While the government take pride in having ended the war, Nyakoker's story is one of many examples of countering views. Firstly, she claimed that the war was initiated by the state when they looted Acholi cattle. Secondly, she remembered state forces as oppressive, as having done bad things – not as protectors and liberators as portrayed by Museveni and the NRM. Another counter-view of official history was told to me in Caro.<sup>93</sup> Upon our first visit to the village we were introduced to the man who founded the school in 1945. He told the school's story:

At that time it was a community school, but became a government school in 1973. In the 1980s the government forgot about the school. It is a Roman Catholic school. From 1986 up to now, the Northern part of Uganda experienced total insurgencies. People were forced to flee and forced to move into IDP camps. Pacifying started in 2007. The huts below the school compound are part of a repatriation camp, where people settled on their move from the IDP camps to their home villages.

This story tells about a *forgetting* by the state, concurrent with the question many ask: Why it took twenty years to end the war (Finnström 2008:105; Dolan 2009).<sup>94</sup> Moreover, the state is also remembered to have had a more active role than one of negligence. There are accounts of government troops being perpetrators of violence aimed at non-combatants (Finnström 2008:71) and even an idea that the war was an attempt to get rid of the Acholi – a “secret genocide” (Finnström 2008:169). These accounts and rumours fit into a broader cosmological perspective in Nyakoker's story of the looted cattle.

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<sup>92</sup> Different ethnic groups – not only the Acholi, have been marginalised at different epochs by the Ugandan state in the 1980s and 1990s (see for example Alnaes 2009; Storaas 2009:149ff; Jones 2009).

<sup>93</sup> For sake of integrity the name of the village (*caro* simply means village) and the years have been changed.

<sup>94</sup> In group interviews I did through the NRC, the interviewees were divided in whether or not the government did much to end the war, but they generally agreed that otherwise, it had done nothing for them.



**Figure 6: The forgotten school. Photo: Anne Nogva**

The story of the looted cattle shed light on a historically constituted opposition between the Acholis and the state – an example of Acholi collective memories on which the present relationship is interpreted. Historically, the Acholis were well-represented in the colonial and later, government armies, and partly because of this position, they are often stereotyped warriors. Nyakoker picked up on this stereotyping, but contrary to a less positive depiction which is often conveyed, she posed this characteristic as positive. According to Nyakoker, the reason why the state took the cattle was because they *feared* the Acholi as they were seen as “bright, rich and good warriors”. The state is personified in the narrative; it *fears*, a human trait. What is more, Nyakoker speaks of the state as “they” – a group of deliberate intentions. By personifying the state, it is easier to raise a critique imbued with a moral force that, following Malkki (1995), is important in establishing their group and important for the sense of belonging. Nyakoker’s political remembrance then relates to Antze and Lambek’s argument that memory constitutes the experience of nationhood and ethnicity (1996b:xx). In

other words, in Nyakoker's story, the Acholi are morally constituted as an ethnic group in opposition to the immoral state.<sup>95</sup>

Based on ethnography from Burundi, Malkki has constructed a narrative panel of a Hutu history of stolen wealth (1995:67-82). According to this narrative, all wealth in the country originally belonged to the Hutus – the natives, but was taken away by the immigrating Tutsis. In this story, the Tutsis are characterised as lazy, foreigners and thieves with an “innate cleverness” (Malkki 1995:67f). A form of innate cleverness was also revealed in Nyakoker's story as the state *camouflaged* their misdeeds; they took the cattle through war and blamed the Karamojong. In other words, they were not even open in their business, which can often be the most dangerous bandits of all (Finnström 2008:3). Another point is made in Nyakoker's story: As in the Hutu mythico-history, the Acholis also are the original owners of land and wealth. According to the myth of origin presented in the Introduction in this thesis, the Acholis were also the first to arrive. Nyakoker gave an account of an original state of royalty and great wealth from which her grandparents and Acholis in general were unlawfully deprived of. Hence, she posed them as righteous owners. Such a narrative may further feed political cravings for compensation, which, according to Branch (2005) is an important means to bring justice to the peace-making.

Nyakoker is taking part in a collective narrative of Acholi marginalisation, but it is first and foremost her own story she is telling. Thus memory is also about the production of personhood and the subject (Antze and Lambek 1996b:xxv) as well as ethnic identity. Nyakoker is unmarried and from what she has told me previously – with no prospects of getting married soon. She has had boyfriends, but the relationships did not last. As I described in the setting, since the Acholi has lost much of their cattle – the primary source of bride price, Nyakoker is in the same position as many others. Young people wait to get married now, because they cannot afford and sometimes the women help the men raising the money. As Nyakoker put it: If she was to get married, her mother should not ask for too much money, for, what should they eat then? On the background of memories of looted cattle, the state can be seen as an obstructive force that hinders Acholi cultural and human reproduction (Taylor 1999b). Nyakoker's story-telling is a concrete example of how subjectivity and intersubjectivity merges (Werbner 2002:1f).

In Aber's backyard, people also drew upon collective memories of previous marginalisation in their discussions of the incident. Because, in the words of Antze and

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<sup>95</sup> The same dynamics of constituting in-group can be seen in Basso (1979), however through the means of joking.

Lambek: “Stories require interlocutors, and the right to establish an authoritative version never rests with the individual storytelling alone” (1996b: xvii). They made concrete parallels between similar experiences such as violent control of movement and shootings; “they haven’t shot for five years”. Although people sometimes sounded resentful when they talked about the demonstration, paralleling the demonstration with the war was often done in a more joking manner. In the backyard, the neighbours made fun of the police and the military that were “wasting government money”. Hence, my informants did not understand this as a real conflict because in their view, they were not aggressors or enemies. In other words, the state forces are seen to have invented an opponent. In this way, I argue, they morally constituted themselves as a group, in opposition to the state that performed the mischief. At the same time, being able to portray past atrocities with some form of humour, can be a way of distancing themselves from it and letting go of grudge. Hence, the backyard can thus be seen as a space for collectively understanding the Walk to Work demonstration and more broadly, a set up for Acholi history production.

Like Nyakoker, also people in Aber’s backyard expressed dissatisfaction with the UPDF. The military forces that patrolled Gulu town 14. April were by Aber’s neighbours talked about as the same who “shot” five years ago. When Nyakoker spotted the military on the street, she conveyed a negative attitude to them and claimed that “some of them have done really bad things”. Nyakoker took the UPDF soldiers as representative for previous forces – the UDF, only that they now had changed the name. Thus, she interpreted the change in name as a form of camouflage, which I discussed earlier. According to Antze and Lambek, “nations are held to have continuing responsibilities and obligations. Both persons and nations have enduring identities in our memory discourses” (1996b:xxv). In relation to Antze and Lambek’s argument then, I suggest that in Acholi memory, the state military is seen as a continuous repressing force, and because it represents the state, the latter is not seen as fulfilling its responsibilities and obligations.

Through Nyakoker’s story and ‘conversational remembrance’ (Middleton 1997) in Aber’s backyard, I have tried to show how political subjectivity was negotiated – an important function of memory according to Werbner. “Memory”, he describes, “as a public practice brings together, uneasily and with much tension, the making of political subjectivity and the significance given to violent death” (1998:7). Previous to the Walk to Work demonstrations in Gulu, there had been several demonstrations in Kampala and other cities. The first causality from the demonstrations on national basis, however, was in Gulu. In discussions of the incident, my informants generally reported three persons dead as a result; an elderly woman

who died from shock, a young man in Layibi and another 32 year old man, of whom the last two were allegedly killed by ‘security bullets’. The latter was buried next to the Lukodi Monument, where the LRA had killed 44 people in 2005.<sup>96</sup> This can be seen as a symbolic action, an effort to “register memory for future accountability (Werbner 1998:1). Hence, memory is not only about the past, but also future oriented.<sup>97</sup>

In Uganda, the state, as an effort to construct a nation state and secure accountability, is presenting itself as liberator and unifier while Nyakoker’s story and other accounts, are a critique of the state’s legitimacy of exercising power.<sup>98</sup> She is challenging the state’s war narrative by presenting its actions as a political and violent tactic to control the Acholi. In conclusion, Acholi memory can be seen as a way of negotiating their political subjectivity in relation to the state and furthermore reconstitutes the Acholi ethnic group against the state, thus contributing to the general postcolonial memory crisis that Werbner has identified for postcolonial states.

### **Movement and space**

Analogous to how space and movement were controlled during war, the Ugandan state exercised physical and symbolic control over the inhabitants of Gulu 14. April. Armed with guns and tear gas, police and military forces displayed and enacted the state’s physical superiority. Like I describe above, people were to a great extent hindered to move – at least in the main streets; the more open and public areas. There were other spaces to move in however; as state forces did not transgress more illegible places. For example in Aber’s backyard and on narrow connecting paths to other places, people could freely move and discuss. Aber was one of those who regularly went out of the apartment complex to be updated on the situation and she informed the neighbours what she had seen. To get more information, a transistor radio was brought out in the backyard, and the neighbours gathered around it. It seemed to be important to know what was going on to be able to interpret and act on the situation. As people were left without any choice but to keep inside safe places, government succeeded to a large extent to control physical movement in public areas. On the other hand people were free to move within more illegible places – which they did extensively.

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<sup>96</sup> AllAfrica (2012).

<sup>97</sup> See also Falk Moore (1998).

<sup>98</sup> Compare to De Boeck (1998) on colonial nostalgia.





**Figur 4: News through the transistor-radio. Photo: Anne Nogva**

In a chapter on the Guatemalan frontiers, Stepputat writes of how fights between guerrilla armies and the government army caused displacement and a certain political organisation of space. Such state attempted ‘population management’ (Foucault 1990:140f) can be compared to the Northern Ugandan situation. Stepputat argues that “movement and the control of movement are important substances for the construction and reproduction of the sovereignty of [territorial] nation-states” (2000:128). But – as in the Guatemalan border-land – people did move in Gulu town, just not in open areas. Hence, I argue, it the violent state response was not so much a fight for control over physical movement per se, but over movement in the public, where people could see. Moreover, state forces were highly visible and audible as they drove around in the main streets and patrolled central public places such

as Pece stadium, Awere ground and Layibi Centre. By controlling main roads and ‘closing off’ Gulu town, state forces symbolically practised control over the area.

Furthermore, not only the visual, but also hearing, smelling and feeling was part of the experience of the demonstration. Phenomenologists have inspired to an awareness of the more sensory experience of place in anthropological analysis.<sup>99</sup> Although we sat inside the backyard, we could easily hear that the streets were being controlled, and partly through the sounds, I argue, control of movement also became embodied. The people in the backyard commented upon the shooting and linked it to memories of war; “they haven’t shot for 5 years so today is their chance”. (At this time, it was 5 years ago the official end of war in Northern Uganda.) Also another friend of mine, Ayoo, commented upon the demonstration by relating it to sounds. She remembered that I had planned to go to Kampala on the 15. April and asked concerned if I had to spend the night in town. “But that day [was] very noisy in town. From the guns”, she said. “Did you hear?” I asked. Ayoo shook her head and sighed emphatically; “ai, it was too much!” Teargas that reached into people’s houses was also a part of the experience. However, my informants commented especially upon the shooting and I argue that the auditory in addition to the visual was part of the experienced state control.

According to Finnström, “independent Uganda has suffered a more or less constant postcolonial debacle” and although geographic locations have been shifted to the peripheries, systematic state violence has continued”. Furthermore, “in today’s emerging global realities, to echo Kapferer (2004), war and violence are the very means of order and control, especially at the peripheries” (Finnström 2009:124f). As I have showed, my informants also expressed concern that they were victims of continuing state violence. However, to modify Finnström, I suggest that one should not reconsider Northern Uganda as periphery. As I described in chapter one, Gulu town can be seen as a locus in a ‘space of flows’ that connects rural and urban areas as well as countries. To compare with an account of another so-called Ugandan ‘periphery’, Jones (2005) has written about the state’s presence and argues that Oledai falls in between. Contrary to Northern Uganda, where the state arguably is present through the school system and ‘development-projects’, in Oledai, people organise things through religious and traditional institutions are there is ‘development’ outside the state. Should Gulu and Oledai be seen as different types of peripheries at least? That discussion I will leave for another project. Whether or not Gulu town is characterised periphery, it was striking what heavy deployment of military was used there 14. April compared to other areas like Kampala and other places –

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<sup>99</sup> See for example Casey (1996) and Feld (1996:95) on ‘auditorio space’.

in which tough fights between Besigye and supporters, and state policing did erupt. It was specifically in Gulu that the military was called in to help, and as a man commented; “their role is to protect the state from external forces”. This, I suggest, has to do with the Acholis’ historically constituted ambiguous position as potential enemies.

### **Purification and limits to it: From potential enemies to citizens**

Historically, state building in Uganda can be seen as a “subordinate inclusion of the northern parts” (Dolan 2009:136), but due to international pressure of ‘good governance’ and casting democratic elections, to get loyal citizens has to the Ugandan state become a greater need in recent times.<sup>100</sup> Lacking a tradition of national unity, President Museveni and the NRM have recently made more effort to establish this – at least in a specific ‘rhetoric of unity’ prior to the National Elections. This rhetoric was consistently carried out in Museveni’s speeches as he regularly encouraged listeners to unite and to “vote for unity”. Furthermore, the third goal in NRM’s 10 Points Programme was: “Consolidation of national unity and elimination of all forms of sectarianism” (Museveni 2011). What the specific meaning of ‘unity’ and ‘sectarianism’ was, and furthermore, what was meant by ‘elimination’ is not clear, but both may hint to a rather tough political line.

Through the rhetoric of unity, I argue, a certain pressure to co-opt and to participate in the election was exercised. Upon being sworn in, Museveni said “I would, therefore, call upon those who have been pushing sectarian ideas and pushing opportunism to join the national consensus instead of being desperate and embarking on disruptive schemes” (NRM 2012). In this rhetoric, national unity was not merely government policy and responsibility; to unite was also seen as the citizens’ responsibility and it could be fulfilled by voting. Moreover, that people were encouraged “to join the national consensus” can also be interpreted as that they should vote for the NRM. In this interpretation, what Museveni above labelled “sectarian ideas” would then be those of the opposition. However, voting – no matter for which party – was in general encouraged by the state. Although people might vote for an opposition party, their vote would at least contribute to a more successful election according to international demands – proving that the Ugandan government was practicing ‘good governance’.<sup>101</sup> In sum, the particular state rhetoric of unity, I propose, was an attempt to make people partake in so-called democratic processes (see also Cole 1998). Moreover, by holding its citizens partly

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<sup>100</sup> Efforts to unite postcolonial Uganda are, however, not new (see for example p’Bitek 1986:48).

<sup>101</sup> Give power to stay in power, I suggest, has become a global tendency for many authoritarian regimes, for example Burma.

responsible for a project of national unity, in this rhetoric – if people failed to unite, the government could not alone be blamed for failing politics.

In the Walk to Work demonstration in Gulu, where the politico-historical background of the Acholi people also informed national belonging, the particular state response to some extent contradicted the unity rhetoric. In addition to armed police forces, military mambas were patrolling the streets and hindered people from walking. My informants told me that if the patrols caught someone walking, they would cane him.

Although the conceptual separation between ‘police’ and ‘military’ forces should not be taken for granted since these policing groups often are intertwined (see Baker 2008), Nyakoker and the people in Aber’s backyard, made a clear distinction between the two. How they were distinguished, I propose, is significant to understand their perception of Acholi relationship to the state. Nyakoker pointed out that the state used the military when they should have used the police and specified the role of the two actors. The military is trained for war, and crucially, to shoot and kill enemies. The police, on the other hand, are supposed to secure law and order. Also one of Aber’s neighbours commented that the military is meant to protect the state from external threats. As described above, my informants made several parallels between atrocities during war and the Walk to Work demonstration in which they the military was portrayed as an oppressive force. Hence, merely being Acholi was made political, I argue, as my informants still experienced a status as potential enemies and as this ambiguous position within the nation state was violently dealt with in the hands of the state. In this view, state reactions to the Walk to Work demonstration can thus be seen as a parallel to state attempted purification of Acholi potential enemies during war as both were through physical control over movement and space.

The organisation Activists for Change (A4C) who organised the Walk to Work demonstrations, had chosen a means that turned a common activity into demonstration. In this context, the activity of walking assumed crucial importance. Hence, walking – in itself apolitical and avoidable for the people in Gulu – became politically laden. Anyone who walked was demonstrator and – in state rhetoric of unity – a potential enemy. Also few *bodas* were active the evening of 14. April which imply that it was dangerous to move in the streets in general. Insofar as people can be out of place in terms of categories of citizenship, to draw upon Douglas, the state undertook specific purification measures in order to redefine who were ‘in’ and who were ‘out’.<sup>102</sup> Situated in a different socio-political environment compared

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<sup>102</sup> See also Stepputat (2000).

to wartimes, different measures were taken to categorise citizens, amongst other to criminalise the political opposition. Museveni tried to formally outlaw opposition politicians and others engaging in demonstrations,<sup>103</sup> and several opposition leaders like Kizza Besigye (FDC), Norbert Mao (DP) and Olara Otunnu (UPC) were arrested – some of them several times.

State rhetoric of unity exercised a pressure to participate in the elections, which can be seen as a way of bringing powerlessness onto its subjects (Werbner 1998:9). However, through collective memory and remembering practices, Acholi political subjectivity was negotiated during the election period – practices that concretise the limits of purification of citizenship. Firstly, Acholi memory of past marginalisation depicted the Acholis as righteous owners of wealth and land in Northern Uganda. In this history, certain demands for spatial autonomy are put forward and at the same time it raises moral critique of both past and present state attempt to control and manage people and space. Secondly, by – through memory - reconstructing themselves as an ethnic group they also naturalise the right to have their own leader. In the backyard, as among my informants in general, Mao was frequently called ‘our president’ and he also won the majority of votes in Northern Uganda. Informed by memories of past marginalisation, most of my informants who were old enough to vote stated that they would not vote because it was no use. Nyakoker shared this critical perspective and despite that the state casts elections, she stated that it was a military state – not a democracy.

As my material show, moving from the camps, so-called repatriation and multi-party elections are steps on the way, but not in itself completing the process towards peace. Following Dolan’s argumentation, the IDP camps in Northern Uganda were areas of state control, and the refugees were, due to measures of controlling, made objects (2009:236). Hence, peace-making can then be seen as a fight for bringing subjectivity back in – both on the political arena – as showed in this chapter – as well as in theoretical analyses of ‘peace’.

## **Conclusion**

The Ugandan National Elections in February 2011 were undertaken in relative peaceful measures. The Walk to Work demonstration 14. April, however, showed that even though the relationship between the state and Acholis is seemingly unproblematic in daily life, a violent past is still present, creating tensions that are dormant and potential but occasionally realised in actual confrontations. In this chapter I have showed how collective memories of past

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<sup>103</sup> In April 2012, Activists for Change (A4C), the organizer of the Walk to Work demonstrations, was judged unlawful in court (Human Rights Watch 2012).

marginalisation, in key ways, inform the relationship between the Ugandan state and its Acholi citizens.

War operations were largely a contest over movement and place – a state attempt to regain control. As I have shown in earlier chapters, people emphasise the ability to move freely as a characteristic of what has changed since war and a sign that peace has now come. Therefore, as freedom of movement was severely restricted during a Walk to Work demonstration 14. April 2011, people explicitly linked the incident to war-time memories.

In his account of a ‘memory crisis’ Werbner points out that there is incongruent versions of history. In Uganda, the government, in an effort to construct a nation state and secure accountability, is presenting itself as liberator and unifier while Nyakoker’s story and other accounts comprise critiques of the state’s legitimacy in exercising power. Hence, Acholi memory can be seen as a way of negotiating their political subjectivity in relation to the state. Moreover, resisting a wholesale state-attempted purification Acholis redefined their position within the nation state on their own premises.

In a broader perspective, Acholi memory was not only about the past. In addition to have a particular political meaning, acts of remembrance was a way of morally reconstituting the Acholi as an ethnic group in opposition to the immoral actions of the state. It also posed demand for state accountability, oriented towards the future.

## Conclusion:

### Towards an Acholi post-war sociality

I set out to explore how Acholi sociality is reconstituted after long-lasting war in Northern Uganda. Although, as the LRA continue to operate in different areas of central Africa, one might argue that the war has not ended. Or, as different forms of war relics such as muted landscape, mutilated bodies and a large body of less visible wounds are not fully healed – and perhaps never will be – there will always remain bits of war in peace, as Nordstrom argues: “If peace starts in the midst of war, aspects of war continue past peace accords to affect the daily life of a society until they are dismantled, habit by habit” (2004:156). In this way, the subject of my thesis also contributes to broader anthropological debates about the nature of war and peace – and, significantly – what constitutes war’s end and the beginning of peace and vice versa.

In the Introduction of this thesis, I briefly presented Finnström’s (2005) view on peace-war as a continuum – a view also influential in the book “No Peace, No War”, edited by Richards (2005), of which Finnström’s chapter is part. Richards (2005) reflects however less upon the meaning of ‘peace’ than ‘war’, although chapters towards the end of the book increasingly discuss issues of peace. Towards the end of this peace-war-peace continuum is also where I empirically locate my thesis, and hence, it is the concept of peace that has been my focus. In my effort to make sense of such a term, and because it is “still the case that no one lives in the world in general”, as Geertz subtly puts it (1996:262), I have tried to contextualise ‘peace’, within the Northern Ugandan setting to “[give] shape to things:

exactness, force, intelligibility” (*ibid.*). According to Nordstrom, “peace is not the resting pulse of humanity, reestablished the moment a peace accord comes into being” (2004:156). More than being some sort of an aggregate of political decisions on national and international levels, implemented as agreements, laws and projects, I have explored peace from another angle asking what it means to the local population. Some five years after Finnström’s work in Northern Uganda, my own research gives me reason to suggest that we should pay more attention to the break with war that my informants accentuated and called peace. Throughout my thesis I have therefore attempted to discuss what this break means to them and, more importantly, how they in significant ways take part in the making of it in their aspirations towards Acholi sociality.

When my informants told me about how life had changed since war, they emphasised the renewed opportunity to dig in the garden – a practice inextricably linked to the notion of movement in several ways. Throughout the thesis, I have drawn on Taylor’s (1999b, 2002) analysis of flow/blockage in Rwandan cosmology as a general perspective of order in disorder. Building on a local understanding of ‘peace’, I have used the notion of the ‘movement of things’ in understanding how Acholi sociality is reconstituted and peace is made. Crucially, on the background of the nature of war insurgencies, I also acknowledge the difference between ‘volunteer’ and forced movement.

I have defined Acholi sociality as everyday interaction in frames of collectively agreed upon norms, values and morals in order to form groups or society. On the one hand, simply by talking about ‘Acholi sociality’, I may be in danger of reifying the Acholi as a bounded ethnic group and particular society – a challenge that has haunted the discipline of anthropology since its inception. On the other hand, I have argued that my informants aspire towards what is collectively agreed upon in order to make sense and do right. Hence, to counter the danger of reification, throughout my thesis I have tried to present such everyday interaction as expressions of aspirations towards belonging and a common ground in terms of meaning – and not as a recourse to a fixed set of ‘traditions’. This implies that social ‘truths’ are rather unsettled and that Acholi sociality is analysed as fundamentally open-ended.

Reflecting this, and perhaps needless to say, Acholi sociality is constituted by complex practices. As I made clear in the introduction, I have chosen to focus on some of these, in particular garden work and cooking. To again contrast Finnström research focus; “Religion, morality and politics have been of greater interest to me than, for instance, food production and subsistence systems. In other words, the issue of intellectual strategies of coping with war and armed conflict has guided the research” (2003:7), I have argued that these practices are



not less intellectual dimensions of social life, but crucially important in understanding post-war realities in Northern Uganda. Furthermore, the way my young female informants are structuring social relations, morals and social space and time, these practices comprise central elements in the reconstitution of Acholi society. I have chosen to focus on young women to nuance a view of women in post-war societies as vulnerable victims – a view I see to be disempowering and simplified. Most of them, as the rest of the population, are truly victims and many of them are, as I have showed in thesis, vulnerable, but they nevertheless embody great powers to reconstitute Acholi sociality to form a desired environment and to pursue a cherished way of living. As I argued in the introduction, women, and especially young women, comprise contested sites for struggles over cultural reproduction. Hence, focusing on young women is a unique intake to understand post-war problematics in Africa. However, as suggested by many anthropologists on gender thematics, women and men often take up complementary roles in society (see for example Jacobson-Widding 1991; Bourdieu 1990; Feldman-Savelsberg 1995; Beidelman 1993), and it is of great importance to also look at men's role in the reconstitution of Acholi sociality to reach a better understanding of post-war dynamics.

In chapter two, I argued that movement is the basis for Acholi agricultural practices; people usually walk some distances to get to their own (or their neighbours') garden and also in order to transport things to sell on the market. Deprived of the possibility to dig during war, reviving these practices is important to the reconstitution of Acholi sociality as it contributes to the circulation of 'things' and enhances fertility in the broad sense. Moreover, through working in the garden and consuming locally produced food, people are also physically and symbolically embodying land and Acholiness. Hence, food, work and belonging to ethnic group can be seen as mutually constitutive and additionally negating a refugee status. Furthermore, to young women, garden work was largely seen as a means of education, and in an international development discourse posed as a human right of which they were deprived during war. Visits – another important Acholi value and practice, was not easily undertaken during war, and, because providing food for the guests is a proper way of receiving them, it contributes to make socially meaningful 'pahts' between homes. To provide for others, I argued in chapter three, is a way for young women to practice extended nurturing capacities. This again demonstrates that young women are an important focus if we are to grasp post-war dynamics of peace. However, as the case of Lamwaka made clear, not everything can circulate everywhere and in new spheres of transactions, young women have to negotiate their role.

Complementing Finnström's view and building on Mozambican material, Lubkemann (2008) underlines that war and violence are integral to social transformations and, accordingly, that periods of peace and war should therefore not be neatly separated. It is fair to say that most social phenomenas are part of social transformations, but what does that tell us about the nature of these transformations? About the implications of them and about the meaning people attribute to these transformations? On the one hand, I have argued that there is persistence of the social through war. Although many young people have grown up in the antisocial and disruptive conditions of a refugee camp, they can know what is 'normal' because the elders tell them. On the other hand, war – and peace – or rather the melding of the two, have brought more profound changes. Increase in the use of money and flow of national and international commodities and ideas have opened up for new spheres of transactions and new arenas for activities.

In this post-war environment of new spheres and arenas, young women's social person and perhaps even more so their bodies, become contested sites for cultural (re)production as several actors, like international NGOs and the local community, compete for the power to define. In chapter four I showed how young women manoeuvre a 'discursively open space' negotiating not only their social person, but what Acholi sociality is or should be. Insofar as their lives are shaped by an "ontological insecurity", as Finnström (2008:5) claims, they nevertheless act upon and address such insecurity. Hence, to my informants, such post-war transformations afford them with renewed agency to convivially negotiate how they can use their bodies.

While recognising a break between times of war and peace, I nevertheless hold that peace is always seen in relation to, and in communication with, periods of war, amongst others through memory. My last chapter, on memory and citizenship, takes the discussion of peace-making to another level – encompassing the issues of movement and space with a direct link to war-time experiences through the act of remembering. Acholi memories of war, I argue, were crucially important to how my informants interpreted the Walk to Work demonstration 14. April 2011 and, more broadly, their relationship to the state. More specifically, the state's authority and legitimacy to exercise physical and symbolic control in Gulu town was evaluated on the background of how state forces had operated in Northern Uganda during war and, in particular, in the refugee camps. The struggle for spatial autonomy and freedom of movement became yet again contested issues. Nonetheless, in specific ways of negating war and violence, in their aspirations towards peace, my informants interpreted

the violent state responses to the demonstration as illustrating the state's excess in terms of physical force.

In the Northern Uganda setting, I suggest it is, therefore, appropriate to distinguish between war and peace in order to allow for people's experiences of different times, modes and ways of living. To continue Nordstrom's passage on peace "it is the pulse of humanity – but it does not rest: it is wild, erratic, fragile, sweet, and too often elusive" (Nordstrom 2004:156). Peace as understood from the Acholi context does not mean a life without troubles and challenges, as p'Bitek (1986:25) puts it:

Of course, there are always some problems, some greater than others: sickness and death, famine, raids, cattle diseases, barrenness and so on. [...]. Problems, crisis, challenges are, have always been and will continue to be, a necessary ingredient in living. And, it is precisely the facing and tackling and solving of them, that life is all about. Let the cowards, the hermits, hide themselves in caves. The Acholi tell a coward to do the impossible, 'O, cowards, return into your mother's womb!'

In this thesis I have seen peace as practiced among the local population and showed how young women in particular, in their complex aspirations and by local means and agentive forces reconstitute Acholi sociality – in the recapturing of social space and gathering around *wang oo*, in the making of future plans, in the preparation of the tasty *boo* for guests who tread old and new paths between homes.

## Glossary: Acholi – English

*Acholi* – *Col* means black, thus “the black people”.

*Anek* – “Death Squad”. Particular groups among the LRA

*Awak* – Work party

*Ber* – Good

*Boo* – A green vegetable

*Boda boda* – Motorcycle taxi. From English “border”, originally meaning “from border to border”. Is also used as a nickname for the motorcycle driver

*Cak* – Milk

*Cam(o)* – Food/ to eat

*Caro* – Village

*Ceko cam* – Fertile

*Dano* – People

*Dek* – Food

*Gomez* – Traditional Ugandan dress

*Kaweera* – A plastic bag

*Kite ber* – Good behaviour

*Ko* - No

*Kolo* – Bamboo mat

*Labon* – Someone who does not belong to the royal clan

*Lela* – Bicycle

*Lubaŋa* – God

*Lum* – Bush

*Marac* – Badly

*Matoke* – A dish of bananas

*Mono* – A white(er) person

*Moo-yaa* – Traditional oil made of Shea nuts

*Mukene* – Another

*Mzungu* – Kiswahili for a white person

*Odi* – Groundnut butter

*Oluma* – Chief, important person

*Piny* – Earth, climate, weather, ground, down, on ground, (surroundings).

*Pok* – The outer cover or shell of things/peel, remove the shell, divide, distribute

*Pok dek* – To serve food

*Poko* – To give; UN *gipoko cam ki dano* (the UN gives people food)

*Posho* – Also called “maize bread”. Firm dough made of maize flour and water

*Pur i poto* – To work in the garden

*Rac* – Bad

*Rwot* – King. Refers both to the leader of an Acholi clan and to Jesus

*Te kwaro* – Custom(s). Ways of living

*Wang oo* – The fireplace outside where people gather in the evenings

*Welo* – Guest

*Yom-cwiny* – Happiness, kindness.

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