

Intimate Enemies and Intimate Allies: Land Conflicts and Microreconciliation After War in Northern Uganda

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ABSTRACT

Land conflicts after war in northern Uganda have been given scholarly attention, often taking different directions. This article focuses on microreconciliation at the local level to unpack how people who returned to their ancestral lands are faced with the challenges of re-establishing intimacy after years of encampment during the war. Juxtaposing the notions of intimate enemies and intimate allies, I illustrate how intimacy and reconciliation may be difficult to achieve between families, clans and neighbours. Witchcraft accusations is not a new phenomenon but I show how accusations are used in new ways as strategies to outlaw and excommunicate others from customary land. Dividing land, another strategy to create closeness or distance between kith and kin is often seen as a solution to land conflicts even though it goes against the clan rules that used to govern Acholi society before the war.

Key words: Land conflicts, intimate enemies, intimate allies, microreconciliation, Acholi, northern Uganda

INTRODUCTION

In her work, on post-war Peru, coined the concept 'intimate enemies' to illustrate how victims were able to live again with those "who had learned to kill their brothers" during the civil war. She analyses the processes Kimberly Theidon [1] through which enmity was constructed, with some people stripping others of 'what makes them human', creating sharp divides between 'us' (the villagers/victims) and 'them' (the Senderistas/ rebels), the goal being to create distance. For Theidon, forms of violence suffered and practiced influence the reconstruction process when the fighting subsides. After the war in Peru in the early 2000s, communities had ex-soldiers (or rebels), widows, orphans, victims and perpetrators, living together side by side, in what she calls a 'charged landscape of moral complexities'. In living with 'intimate enemies', Theidon explored how people attempted to reconstruct moral orders after prolonged violence. Her thesis on microreconciliation is not unlike the on-going social struggles after war in northern Uganda.

For more than two decades, northern Uganda, particularly the Acholi sub-region, was engulfed in civil war – a war between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the government of Uganda. A myriad of literature on the war that took place between 1986-2006, exists [2,3,4], even though it is generally acknowledged that the war's history can be traced from the colonial period through to the post-independence era in Uganda, which witnessed violence on unprecedented levels. Approximately 1.8 million people in northern Uganda were forced out of their homes and ancestral lands and became internally displaced, most rendered helpless to

live in squalid conditions in camps, in what Dolan has called “social torture”. Although it is estimated that over 10,000 people were abducted into captivity, it is still unclear as to how many adults and children were forcefully taken to serve in the ranks of the LRA. Many of them were forced to loot, rape, kill, abduct and commit many crimes against the population in northern Uganda.

After failing to broker a peace deal, a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement was finally signed in 2006 between the government and the LRA. Those who had been interned for several years were told that the war was over, and that they should ‘go back to where the war found you’. By 2009, the camps that had been set up all over the Acholi sub-region were gradually decommissioned, as people returned home to rebuild their lives. The gradual process of return, however, meant that some people returned home much sooner (or later) than others, while many remained internally displaced [5]. The guns had gone silent, and many researchers began to view northern Uganda as a post-conflict society. It is now more than a decade since the camps were decommissioned and people returned home, but some researchers have begun to question the “post” in the post-conflict [6], that others constantly allude to. The everyday lived experiences of losing loved ones, property and subsistence are still very much present rather than past. New conflicts, particularly over land, emerged soon after the war was over, as people began to retrace their land boundaries, ownership and inheritance and to re-establish their attachment and belonging on their *ngom kwaro*, ancestral land.

During and immediately after the war, northern Uganda was a hub of critical ‘reconciliation work’, often done in post-conflict settings. Civil society, including NGOs, religious leaders’ groups and elders’ forums pushed an agenda to open spaces where communities could live together with those who had committed atrocities against them during the war. In 2000, the government of Uganda had also passed the Amnesty Act and issued amnesty to LRA rebels who wished to defect and return home. Many former LRA soldiers responded to this amnesty call. They were sons, fathers and brothers, many of whom had been abducted and forced into committing crimes against their will. But they had left people behind – families that they wished to be re-united with, reconciled with. For a time, there was a rush to promote and perform the *mato oput* ritual, a homegrown Acholi ritual that reconciled a murderer with his victim’s family [7]. There were also different kinds of local rituals performed around homesteads and fields, to cleanse the land of *cen*, evil spirits, and to ‘release’ the spirits of the dead – those unjustly killed as well as those who had been buried in the ‘wrong soil’ [8,9], i.e. outside their *ngom kwaro*. But there is also another group of people – the people who returned to their land after many years of the war, and got involved, in different ways, in conflicts over land. These are the people to whom this article now focuses attention.

The war had changed the social landscape, changed how people related to one another, more so, on and through the land. Until recently, the concept of reconciliation was often deployed in a top-down direction [10], leaving little space to speak about the sentiments of retribution or vengeance that often characterizes the local level and have implications for everyday social relations. There is often a gap between reconciliation on the national level (as we have seen in South Africa and Rwanda) and the micro-politics of reconciliation practiced in communities. In other words, I ask: how do Acholi people manage to live again, not only with those who had learned to kill them but those with whom they struggle over land in the everyday, after war? How do we as researchers catch sight of the micro-politics of reconciliation at the local level?

These are the questions I pondered in order to understand how people, especially family and clans, re-establish intimacy on customary land after being estranged in the camps and during the war.

Land in Acholi culture is said to be owned by three generations: the past (ancestors), the present (those living on it) and the future (the unborn) [11]. Over 90 per cent of land is held under customary tenure [12] under entrustment of clan systems. Acholi being a patrilineal society, land is mostly managed by men and passed on from fathers to their sons. In another article, I discuss how this idea is problematic because in everyday practice, women do have authority over land, albeit in different ways to men [13]. The seven tiers of Acholi customary land include homesteads, fields, grazing lands, hunting grounds, water points, forests, and rocks. Land is therefore not just a thing, to be worked, lived on, bought and sold or even divided up, but rather, it is a space for intimate relationships between kith and kin to be practiced. Extended families hold land in perpetuity for settlement and farming purposes, while other sections of clan land are commonly used. Customary land is a space for community and for social harmony – *ber bedo* [14, 15, 16].

This study was located within the recent history of armed conflict in northern Uganda, encampment and the return and resettlement process. With a focus on the Acholi sub-region of northern Uganda, it explores how the changing landscape of social relationships takes expression in tensions over land. Inspired by Theidon's notion of 'intimate enemies' I suggest that there is some inadequacy in trying to understand land relations by looking at enemies without understanding the allies – the other side of the same coin. I therefore employ the concept of "intimate allies", juxtaposed against Theidon's "intimate enemies", as fluid constructions of the other, to understand how microreconciliation is practiced through land conflicts. I do not in any way suggest that social relations after war should be reduced to binaries to understand processes of reconciliation, rather, I make the point that looking at two sides of the same coin helps us catch sight variations in affect, along a continuum, these relationships often oscillating back and forth.

I discuss two entry points into understanding microreconciliation in the post-encampment Acholi society: 1) witchcraft accusations and 2) 'dividing' or apportioning land among conflicting claimants of land. I found that these are just some of the strategies employed by kith and kin as ways of establishing closeness and distance, both socially and geographically on shared land. Witchcraft and witchcraft accusations are not new notions. Kinship relations and witchcraft in Africa have been studied for decades [17, 18, 19] but what I demonstrate in this article, is how these are used in new ways to explain land relations on contested land after war. Suggestions of dividing land go against Acholi cultural norms of land governance which promotes communal life through generational entrustment. I activate the notions of 'closeness' and 'distance' to show the dynamic meanings and practice of intimacy within charged landscapes and how this helps us to understand microreconciliation in northern Uganda.

FOLLOWING CASES: A COMMENT ON FIELDWORK

This paper is a result of an ethnographic study carried out from 2014-2018. I was pursuing my Ph.D. research, from which I tried to understand how women navigated access to customary land that had been pervaded by conflicts between families, clans, and close neighbours. My study began in Gulu District where I was employed, and later took me to other districts of the

Acholi sub-region, including Kitgum, Lamwo and Pader in eastern Acholi. I chose to go east because at the time, the area's land conflicts were relatively understudied compared to the west (Gulu and Amuru Districts) and because there were rising concerns among the media and Non-governmental Organisations dealing with land conflicts, that these areas were becoming epicenters of land conflicts in the Acholi sub-region. But more importantly, I wanted to understand why the common narrative, "women in Acholi do not own land", persisted and yet several stories that I had heard, countered this narrative.

I finally settled and lived with a family in Ogom sub-county, Pader District from where I could do participant observation, follow land conflicts in real time, and be able to move back and forth between the 'office' and the field as I did my data analysis [20]. I used the extended case method [21], and followed cases over time and space. Moving back and forth was particularly important because it allowed me to look at my data and return to the field with fresh eyes and newer insights and questions. Michael Whyte [22] explores the importance of absence from, and returning to the field, and how this impacts on relationships. My movement in and out of the field affected how the cases 'moved' when I was updated about them. Whenever I returned to my interlocutors, the cases had unfolded in different ways, some more dramatic than others. It proved quite useful to have a break from informants but also to give them a break from me and my constant comings and goings into their lives, asking questions and observing their daily activities [23]. Moving back and forth between seasons – rain and dry seasons also dramatically changed the social landscape, and thus, the degree of land conflicts between farming and seasonal rest from working the fields.

In total 86 in-depth interviews and eight group discussions were carried out with men and women of different age-groups, traditional and community leaders, political leaders, NGO workers and religious leaders. Using the extended case method, 10 individuals were followed for two to three years to capture how different land conflicts evolved over time and social space. Research ethics is of paramount importance, to which I remained committed throughout my journey. This study was approved by the Gulu University Research Ethics Committee as well as the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology. In this article, I use only pseudonyms to protect the identities of my interlocutors.

RE-TURN: FROM INTIMATE STRANGERS TO STRANGE INTIMACIES – TWO CASES

Traditionally, the Acholi live in patrilineal (clan or lineage) groups, in close proximity to one another, on large tracts of ancestral land. This proximity was, however, disrupted by the war when families, clans and affines were separated during encampment. Even though many extended families moved to the camps together in order to try and maintain close familial ties, as we shall see, this was not always possible. There was a breakdown of the social fabric and interconnectedness of several social groups, as people sought to find secure bode, some in the camps, and others, those who were able to, outside of the region. In many cases, however, strangers began to live in very close physical proximity within the small, confined spaces of the camps, coming to call this home for many years to come, as the war raged on.

In his article, *The displaced family: moral imaginations and social control in Pabbo, northern Uganda*, Ben Mergelsberg discusses the contrast between the 'home' and the 'bush', the former being a place of intimacy, accountability and familiarity and the latter, a place where there are no homes or cultivated fields, "a place of alien beings, uncultivated nature and powerful spirits"

[24]. Mergelsberg then goes on to describe life in one of the largest former Internally Displaced People's (IDP) camps in northern Uganda, the Pabbo camp, and likens it to life in the 'bush' where there was a lot of uncertainty and invisible threats because people were 'mixed up' and lived in close proximity with those whom they did not know.

According to him, the moral order in the camps was different from what it had been "back home". It was a different world and people had different concerns, but fears of witchcraft were also then a way to express these concerns. People were often afraid that their neighbours would poison or bewitch them. They were strangers whose habits and intentions were unknown. This differed from witchcraft and accusations of witchcraft that people knew from before the war, which had usually taken place between close relatives and people who knew each other well, but did not live in the kind of physical proximity that they did in the camps.

When the war was over and people ordered to return home, or rather, return to where the war had found them, for some, a mixture of hope and dread began to take. During encampment, the land question had been high on the political agenda, and a growing discourse was that land was the only remaining asset that people in the north were left with [25], and therefore should be guarded at all costs, including killing or dying for it. However, the role of other factors such as poverty, population growth and the realisation that land was an important and valuable commodity, should not be downplayed when analyzing how people began to relate with each other on customary land.

The return home, therefore, was not only about a physical or geographical change of location, but was also about changes in social relationships. Henrik Vigh's [26] concept of emplacement, has particular merit here when he argues that:

[The] experience of social displacement creates a struggle for emplacement, not as a question of physical localization but as a striving toward being positively situated in a relational landscape. It results in a longing to attain valued presence in respect to the life-conditions of one's important others...Displacement and emplacement are, in this perspective, questions of sociality rather than locality. Although they constitute multifaceted and open-ended processes, which stretch from the political to the existential... they refer to the experienced relational and positional quality of our lives.

As a heuristic concept, emplacement helps us to look further at perspectives of both sociality and locality in order to capture the legacy of war and geographical displacement, and how it has translated into social displacement in the context of the on-going land conflicts among the Acholi. As people returned to their former lands that had been left abandoned for several years, there was also a great need for individuals, clans and kinships to find themselves and each other, as well as find acceptable positions in the social landscape which in a sense had undergone a kind of transition, a (re-)turning of its own.

The return presented new challenges of intimacy between people – challenges of intimacy related to social belonging and attachment to land, with and through others. During the war, many marriages were broken or never consolidated, partners were lost, and many children grew up with no relationship to their fathers and often returned with their mothers to the mother's natal home, with or without the mother. Thus, the encampment period saw a rise in the numbers of widows, orphans, single mothers and nephews – categories of people who, more

often than not, fall outside of the patrilineal net in the context of land ownership and inheritance, at least, according to the Acholi norms of belonging that had governed before the war. Many tensions and anxieties over land involved exactly such issues of belonging and attachment to families, clans and to ancestral land.

Notions about closeness and distance [27,28] run throughout this article. These notions correspond to allies and enemies, revealing important ways of managing relationships on *ngom kwaro*. We begin to see how people become close or distant, in what fashions microreconciliation efforts in the everyday. While people had learned to live with 'intimate strangers' in the camps (and on strangers' land), there was now a need for the re-establishment of intimacy between kith and kin at 'home', even though home had become a source of conflict in and of itself.

I now turn to my ethnographic material. The following cases provide a basis for discussions of land conflicts involving witchcraft accusations and suggestions of apportioning customary land, which I posit, are entry points into understanding microreconciliation at the local level, after civil war in northern Uganda.

"Let us divide the land": Case 1

First, the case of Betty and Henry. Betty was a fifty-year-old widow living in Ogom sub-county in Pader District, her marital home. When the war started, Betty ran to Masindi, a district to the south of the Acholi sub-region. When the war ended, however, she did not immediately return to Ogom. Instead she stayed away for almost five years carrying out small businesses and farming with her two grown children. When she finally returned to Ogom in 2012, she found that her late husband's clansman, Henry, had taken over and sold off portions of her land, or rather her deceased husband's land which now fell to her to manage in trust for their children. When Betty asked why he had sold her land, Henry was quick to say that he thought that she had died during the war, since she did not immediately return when the rest of the *dog-gola*, extended family, did.

Betty's only son, who should inherit her land, was living in another district because, according to Betty, Henry's mother had bewitched him when he was young. Betty had taken him to a healer – *ajwaka*, who had made him well and had revealed the 'enemy'. After several run-ins with Henry as an adult, Betty's son decided to leave Ogom, with Betty's blessing, lest his clan brother, Henry, killed him. In the absence of her son, who would have been a more legitimate claimant to the land, Betty had tried to seek help from different social fora. She had entreated with the Local Council, clan leaders, NGOs (dealing with land issues and supporting vulnerable people) and the police. Several mediation meetings between Betty and Henry had failed. Left with no other alternatives, Betty sought the services of a lawyer and took the case to the Magistrate's court in 2016. When I returned to the field in March 2020 to do research on another project, I looked her up and she informed me that the case was still at the Magistrate's court in Pader Town where it had stalled since we last met in 2016.

There had been several suggestions made by Betty, her children and other supporters that the land be divided up so that each household would have their own land, in order to reduce the incidences of quarrels and Henry's violent attacks on Betty. Betty supported this idea so that she could have her share and secure it for her son and grandchildren.

When people were told to return home, a lot was taken for granted. In reality, when relatives who had not been living together for several years suddenly returned, their homes had changed and so had their social ties to each other, over time. People had become estranged. Many people had died. In this case, Henry found himself in a situation where he was the eldest surviving male on the land, (and in the sub-clan) meaning that its entrustment and care came to him, on behalf of his clansmen and women. According to Betty, Henry began to sell off clan land (Betty's husband's portion) without consulting other clan members, which one elder angrily stated, during a mediation meeting, was an illegal act on Henry's part. Clan land should never be sold, he had argued. In the meantime, Betty and Henry remained in a state of enmity and uncertainty on their ancestral land.

"If I am a witch, then you are also a witch!": Case 2

I now present the case of two sisters, Atim and Awor, whose relationship constantly oscillates between closeness and distance in time. Atim was a forty-nine-year-old woman living in Pader Town. Before the war, she divorced her husband of several years and returned to live at her natal home. When the war intensified, Atim's father's land became part of a bigger IDP camp in Pader. She soon met another man who had moved to the camp, and they began to live together. They had two sons, 12 and 13 years old, who were living with Atim when I first met her. When the war ended and people returned to their homes, Atim remained on her father's land but her 'husband' (they were never formally married) soon found a job as a soldier in the Ugandan government army, and went to fight as part of the peacekeeping force in Somalia. Atim had not heard from him for several years and had presumed him to be dead.

Atim's younger sister Awor, who had also been living with her husband in another camp, and had recently been separated, returned home with her five sons. The two sisters who were now living together on a small plot of land with their sons had begun fighting for space. Atim complained that Awor had built several huts on the bigger portion of the land and did not want Atim's son to construct his own otogo – bachelor hut. Awor on the other hand believed that the constant fights that she and her sister were having was a power struggle because, as the younger sibling, Awor stood to inherit their father's homestead, as per Acholi culture, since their parents never had sons; the youngest son inherits the father's homestead. On several occasions they had called clan members (their father's clan) to help them resolve their conflict until the clan decided that it was impossible for the sisters to live peacefully together. During their last clan meeting, the clan leader told them to leave the land, as a more permanent solution was sought. By early 2016, Awor had moved to a plot of land that she had bought during the war, to get away from Atim and their constant fights. Atim, however, remained stuck on the land, arguing with her deceased father's clansmen that she had nowhere else to go because the father of her two sons had not taken her to his home or married her, in other words. She had requested them to provide her with an alternative.

The Town Council had also been putting pressure on landowners in Pader Town to register their land, throw down huts and other temporary structures and put up permanent structures. Pader became a new district in 2000, and the physical planning is the responsibility of the Town Council. When it came to protecting their land from this external threat, the sisters quickly joined hands to establish their attachment on the land by cementing their mother's grave as a permanent symbol of ownership of the land. Their mother had been dead for several years so the 'mound' had to be traced and a cement grave constructed in its place. On matters of who

gets how much land, and who uses it for what, however, the sisters often slipped into a situation of enmity, sometimes accusing each other of witchcraft, even in public. Once, as the sisters openly fought each other in the presence of their neighbours, Awor accused Atim of being a witch. Atim had simply replied: "if I am a witch then you are also a witch because we are sisters."

During separate visits to Atim and Awor in March 2020, the two sisters seemed to have overcome their enmity. Awor still lived on her purchased land with two of her sons and their wives, while Atim, with the help of her 'lost and found' soldier husband, had purchased her own plot of land on the outskirts of the town. Atim's 'husband' had returned after several years in Somalia, looked her up and sent her money to buy a plot of land and build a house. He had, however, passed away before joining her in their new home. Atim's demeanour had changed; she was happier, independent, making money from her small business and when I asked her about Awor, she did not reveal any signs of resentment as she had done in the years before. Both sisters never visited each other's homes, in fact Awor did not know where Atim lived. They only met during clan gatherings and functions. Atim informed me that in their last clan meeting, the clan had agreed that the land would be surveyed, valued and sold. The money would then be shared equally by the sisters.

RE-ESTABLISHING INTIMACY: THE MICROPOLITICS OF RECONCILIATION

If we look at examples of accusations of witchcraft and dividing up land amongst kith and kin, we catch sight of the micro-politics and the difficulties of re-establishing intimacy in northern Uganda. Betty and Henry, Atim and Awor are typical examples of family members who had become strangers when they returned home from the 'bush'. We see the process of people still working on reconciliation at the local level, in the process of re-settling on their customary land after years of displacement. We also see that land conflicts are not just about land, they are also about attachment and belonging to a certain social group [29]. Land conflicts provide an avenue for people to begin to map out the social landscape – their allies and their enemies.

Re-establishing intimacy is an on-going process between people and land, and it is closely related to settling on and with intimate allies or dividing up land amongst intimate enemies. In the two cases, people use different social fora to make their arguments (claims and counterclaims) about land, attachment and belonging. Whether it is to stay on the land, or include or exclude someone else, there is an on-going process of contest and negotiation. Dividing up land is now often seen as desirable, even though it goes against the clan, *kaka* norms which promote intimacy and social harmony – *ber bedo*.

But people do not always succeed in re-establishing *ber bedo*, and one of the things that follow such failure is witchcraft accusations, or proposing to divide up the land, even while seeking help from different social and legal entities. In Case 2, clan members had observed that *ber bedo* was not possible between Atim and Awor and therefore opted to send them away. When Awor accused her elder sister of being a witch, *lajok*, Atim responded by saying "if I am *lajok*, then it means that you are also *lajok* because we are sisters." By calling her sister a witch, Awor sought to distance herself from Atim, while Atim reminds her that they are sisters and thus intimately bound together. In both Cases, a preferred strategy is to either leave the land (Case 2) or divide the land (case 1 and later Case 2 as well). Some cases are about the delayed re-establishment of intimacy, as well as examples of new kinds of 'intimate allies' that have now come to play a larger role in people's lives. For a widow, an ally could be an NGO, a priest or a court of law. For

single or divorced women, allies could be their children or neighbours and friends who support their cause. But we also see attempts to establish intimacy with the past – those who have died. When Atim and Awor put aside their differences in order to protect their land from outside “threats”, they put resources together to cement their mother’s grave. The grave became evidence that said more than just, “someone was buried here” it also helped, at least for a while, to establish their ownership of the land [30].

Witchcraft accusations

Witchcraft, *tim jok*, has always been a part of Acholi life [31] with accusations being meted on close relations or people intimately known to each other. However, in a new ethnographic situation – post-encampment – what we begin to see is the entwining of land conflicts and witchcraft accusations between and among close relations, particularly women. It is from this perspective of women that ambiguities over ‘ownership’ and authority over land between men and women begins to emerge. A common belief among the Acholi is that ‘women do not own land’ but when women actively conflict over land, sometimes using accusations of witchcraft as strategies to detach other women, then it becomes clear that there is a need to scratch beneath the surface to understand how land relations are negotiated and how reconciliation is achieved or not.

Witchcraft is about the ambivalence of social relations [32], about competition and conflict in close social relations. It is also about negotiating closeness and distance [33]. Peletz defines ambivalence as ‘...simultaneous “co-existence...[of two or more powerful] contradictory emotions or attitudes (as love and hate) towards a person or thing”, which may entail emotional or attitudinal “oscillation, fluctuation, variability” and so on’. The return after the war and encampment opened up questions about who is my enemy or my ally? The tension between Betty and Henry or Atim and Awor, expressed through witchcraft accusations are indications of the on-going process of microreconciliation being expressed through the inter-weaving of land conflicts.

By calling her sister a witch, Awor sought to distance herself from Atim, while Atim reminds her that they are sisters and thus intimately bound together. She wanted the physical distance between them because a certain level of social distance had been building up and was created, leading to feelings of ambivalence between the two biological sisters. Physical and social distancing are strategies of managing ambivalence in relationships, as Peletz reminds us, between kith and kin. In her article on Eastern Uganda, Mogensen [34] puts it this way: It is those with whom you are connected, on whom you depend, that can hurt you the most. And at times, you need to separate yourself (or protect yourself) from their impact on you. The ambivalence inherent in kinship a relation is expressed through the idiom of witchcraft in most African contexts...Quarrelling is inevitable among kin and especially among members of the same family, as the many instances of witchcraft suspicions show.

Abrahams [35] carried out a study among the Lango, an ethnic group in northern Uganda closely related to the Acholi, and cited different kinds of witchcraft and witchcraft accusations including poisoning, spoiling of childbirth, destruction of crops and night dancers, etc. As I analysed my data intermediately between fieldwork, I found that I mostly heard about witchcraft from women. I did not pay attention as to why this was, and I do not offer an explanation here, however, in his study in South Africa, Leistner [36] has argued that, “the fact

that women are more inclined to turn to witchcraft, while men are more likely to resort to physical violence, is one of the explanations why women in particular are believed to be witches. What became apparent to me was that many of my interlocutors used witchcraft accusations to explain what was going wrong with their land.

Evans-Pritchard [37] put forward a rationality debate about witchcraft, arguing that the notion of witchcraft explains unfortunate events. Magic in rural African societies has been used to explain what science does in modern life; it is used to make sense of, and deal with the afflictions of the world in order to secure an agreeable social life [38]. Witchcraft has been used to explain different things e.g. inequality, illness, untimely death of people and animals, accidents, crop failure, and among the Acholi today, it is intertwined with explaining how some women are able to 'grab' land from others, with impunity.

The tension between Henry and Betty or Atim and Awor, expressed in part through witchcraft accusations, are an indication of the ongoing process of micro-reconciliation, a process being expressed through the inter-weaving of land conflicts and witchcraft accusations. In her study in West Africa, Boone [39] found that witchcraft is considered a weapon of the weak or those who are threatened with the loss of their land. Accusations are made as people forge explanations and form what Martin Mills [40] calls 'moral sensibilities'. Just like the Azande that Evans-Pritchard studied, witchcraft is mundane or ordinary among the Acholi, and victims will seek explanations from among their intimate others e.g. co-wives, sisters and neighbours. As Leistner puts it, Suspicion naturally will not readily fall on distant strangers but on someone close by: a neighbour, an enemy in the community or, very often, someone in one's own family – a co-wife, a brother, one's husband, one's child or one's parents. Witchcraft has been called 'the dark side of kinship' that 'epitomizes the frightening realisation that there is jealousy and aggression within the intimate circle of the family where only solidarity and trust should reign' [41].

The 'ordinariness' of witchcraft comes from the fact that the term 'witchcraft' has become so generalised in everyday language that its meaning becomes increasingly vague and limitless [42]. What is significant, however, is that witchcraft is used to explain 'when things go wrong' [43]. But people often describe witchcraft as macabre or as Geschiere puts it, the 'antithesis of religion or moral order', an indicator of social tensions, and of particular relevance here, that the most dangerous aggression comes from 'inside'. For him, a major difficulty of focusing on the link between intimacy and witchcraft is that both terms are slippery. Witchcraft rumours (and perhaps accusations), are indicators of what people see as intimacy, and intimacy is a criterion of when fears of hidden aggression can be labelled 'witchcraft'. "Thus, notably, the relation to intimate settings – family or other forms of proximity – emerges as a possible anchoring point for the witchcraft notion in its many appearances".

I got a sense of Atim's feelings of insecurity living close to Awor, when she told me that, "I live here with my sister but I do not know what is in her heart". This reveals something about closeness and distance, and the constantly shifting relationship between the two sisters as they try to live together. For Ciekawy and Geschiere [44], witchcraft then becomes a discourse about action and the urgent necessity to handle dangerous but hidden forces, while Geschiere helps us understand witchcraft as an event, shaped by its ambiguous and volatile relation with intimacy, resulting in a continuous and uncertain struggle for establishing or maintaining trust.

The trust between Atim and Awor is a tricky one [45], tricky because they are aware of their closeness in blood but the distance in how they relate to one another while living together on their deceased father's land.

In another article [46] I looked at performance of property as an expressive enterprise hinged on signals and communication [47]. Witchcraft accusations, I argue, is one way of holding or (re-)acquiring land by making significant others 'out-laws'. Witchcraft accusations serve as a powerful tool of exclusion, where distance is created within and between intimate relations. By communicating that one is a 'witch' and/or making them social outcasts, people find workable ways to persuade others (relevant individuals and institutions) about their belonging to a particular *ngom kwaro*.

Sara, a neighbor of the family with whom I lived in Owele village made several accusations about Mary (her neighbour) being a witch. She told me that Mary had been chased away from her marital home because of practicing witchcraft and that the entire community was aware of it, and had shunned her. By the time I was leaving the field, Sara told me that Mary's brothers who had forcefully taken Sara's fields were not doing well. One of her brothers had become insane, and the other had been thrown in prison. Sara attributed this to Mary's constant practice of witchcraft against the innocent (Sara's family), which she suggested had now backfired and turned on Mary's family instead. Witchcraft accusations play a very significant role in land conflicts in Acholi today because they justify certain actions like exclusion and the dismissal of certain actors from the 'scene'. Where people are stuck or have no ability to access different courts, legal or otherwise, then witchcraft accusations become placeholders to help claimants and contestants to hold on to their land, by excommunicating others.

Apportioning land

In Acholi culture, it is customary for a father to allocate land among his sons who will also manage their land on behalf of their wives and children. According to one elder in Owele village, as the eldest brother in the sub-clan, *dog-gola*, he had agreed with his brothers that they would not divide up the land amongst themselves. "Dano pur atar" – people dig anywhere on the land. This, he added, was in order to ensure that the land remained in the 'home'. Allocating land to family members in perpetuity is not unusual, however, what is not acceptable is to sell clan or family land without the consent of the clan [48]. One fear today, however, is that when people within extended families divide up customary land, some members will opt to sell off their share secretly, allowing 'strangers' to come in without the clan's knowledge or approval. This comes with a fear that living among strangers is a kind of 'bush' life rather than the familiar intimacy of the home that Ben Mergelsberg described.

Dividing up *ngom kwaro* (ancestral land) is now seen as desirable and has become a commonly proposed solution for containing or resolving land conflicts between the various claimants. As already stated, however, the division of ancestral land goes against the spirit of the clan – *kaka* norms, which promote intimacy and living together in harmony – *ber bedo* – by collective use of unbounded customary land. Dividing up land amongst conflicting kith and kin, as a way to resolve conflict, is indicative of a departure from the ideals of the customs of Acholiland e.g. communal life and activity, and suggests a division of and within social relationships. It exposes the ways in which inclusion and exclusion are practiced between intimate allies and intimate

enemies. The centrality of customary land is that people with common ancestry or lineage share it, belong to and find meaning through it.

Dividing land also points us to ideas of private property, the infiltration of individualism and the shifting notion of land as a commodity, an exchangeable asset, rather than a space of sociality – the spirit of Acholi communal life. During the war, Acholi politicians had warned their constituents about this: the land was the only remaining possession of the Acholi people, since they had lost everything during the war. But today, it is precisely in this loss that the land becomes a valuable asset, especially conflicted land. Agnes, an 80+-year-old widow once told me that her only surviving son was pushing her to sell their land which she was contesting for with a neighbor. Her son's suggestion was that they sell it and use the money to buy another plot of land elsewhere, away from the constant fights. Sara's youngest son (our neighbor in Owele village), also told me that his only wish was to get enough money to buy land somewhere else and take his mother to a place where she could find peace. A place away from Mary, the witch, who was using her brothers to terrorise Sara and her family whenever they went to their fields. Land could be sold and exchanged for peace.

The relationship between sisters, especially married ones (or formally married) who have returned to their natal homes may become strained. Those who return home with children, particularly sons, have often complained that they are not fully welcomed and are 'encouraged' and sometimes forced to return to the homes of their husbands or fathers of their children. Besides sons becoming active threats and competitors for land (their mothers' fields/okang) among their mothers' kin, other kinds of competition may stem between sisters and their brothers' wives on ancestral land.

Because Atim and Awor were unable to resolve their conflict, their land was put up for sale in the hope that the proceeds would be divided equally between them and each would go her separate way. The tensions between genders and generations are intimately tied with the dynamics of division, exclusion and alliance [49]; allowing us to see a shift in the idea of belonging, i.e. from someone belonging to a place to a property belonging to someone. Awor had saved up money during the war that helped her acquire a plot of land to which she quickly moved when the clan asked the two sisters to vacate the family land. Betty also entertains ideas about dividing up the land as a way to get away from Henry and their constant fights.

It is logical to believe that dividing land necessarily has a negative impact on social relations. But it is also possible that the reason it has become a commonly proposed solution (even though not always achieved) is because people are trying to find ways not only to cope with uncertainty and fear of losing their land, but also as a strategy to manage their relationships with intimate enemies, with whom they must continue having a relationship, to reconcile their differences, albeit at a safe distance. The post-encampment environment and its impact on land relations has made it necessary for people to be proactive and think strategically about how and with whom they relate, on and through land. Dividing land, perhaps, becomes an important way for all the conflicting parties to continue living on common land, even though not necessarily 'together'.

Closeness may not be about locality *per se*, but rather it is more about sociality. Closeness and distance are continuously negotiated in social relations. What is interesting is that Atim and

Awor had previously expressed sadness and regret about their actions towards one another, but also stubbornness and the resolve not to back down. Henry had also expressed remorse about what he had been doing to Betty, but later changed his mind when her son approached him for a solution to their land woes. This is the kind of ambivalence and emotional oscillation that Peletz points us to. Ambivalence has implications for agency, structure and sociality. From what we have seen in the Cases, ambivalence shapes the way people relate to each other. As Peters has pointed out, divisions within social units reveal a narrowing of the definition of belonging and stricter definitions of who has legitimate claims to resources, as group boundaries are more exclusively defined.

The 'bush' comes home?: Some concluding thoughts

So how do the Acholi manage to resettle and start relating again and (re-)establish intimacy? This article does not focus on political reconciliation – vertical trust between citizens and their institutions, but rather, on social reconciliation – the establishment of horizontal trust under which kith and kin can once again trust one another and feel secure in one another to abide in norms and values that protect everyone [50]. Reconciliation seeks to humanize former enemies. But the notion has contextual variance and therefore, the definition of reconciliation should be adapted to specific characteristics of each society. The politics of reconciliation consists of devising social, political and memorial strategies that modify individual and collective identities and subsequently the representations of oneself and of others.

I have demonstrated that when studied at the local level, microreconciliation does not necessarily lead to the re-establishment of good relations and intimacy. Taking our starting point in contested land relations, we catch sight of the other side of the coin where people feel secure, not by trusting each other or by humanizing one another, but through mistrust and sometimes dehumanizing in order to justify the need to relate and live both geographically and or socially apart. The notions of closeness and distance help us to catch sight of intimate allies and intimate enemies, and how these sometimes oscillate within and between kith and kin. Year of war and displacement had an impact on social relations. The intimacy of home became strange and the notion of the 'bush' begun to take its place with people living with uncertainty and fear about who is friend or foe, at home. I have looked at this idea through witchcraft accusations and division of land, and how these are used in land relations in the post-encampment Acholi society today.

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