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Manhood on the Margins: Failing to be a Man in Post-conflict Northern Uganda

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Introduction

The domination of males over females is common in many societies, particularly in developing countries and often forms the basis for gender relations. While men as a group have been perceived to exercise power over women, at the individual level many men feel powerless. In reality there are abundant ways in which men experience powerlessness irrespective of their socio-economic standing or identity. This suggests that men are not always inevitably dominant (Esplen 2006). Many times men are also vulnerable, time and again finding themselves in extremely upsetting situations. Societies sometimes set up rigid systems not only for regulating their behaviour but also denoting what makes them men. And in so doing, many potential costs exist for men who conform to, or try to conform to those rigid social expectations.

For instance, most cultures expect men to be physically strong, robust and brave, to be risk-takers and decision-makers, to be providers for their wives and children. These are culturally accepted ideas about being a man in a particular society. Conventional gender norms for men and boys, such as those listed above, are often described as 'dominant' (or 'hegemonic') masculinities. Internalising these ideals is not enough, however; rather they must be repeatedly acted-out by men (Harris 2004) to demonstrate and prove that they are the men society acknowledges.

However, in times of civil wars, gender dimensions of social relations such as those mentioned above, experience remarkable adjustments. Any impact the war may have on social relations directly influences gender identities since they are deeply rooted in the social values, customs and beliefs. Wars dislocate spaces within which many social relations are constructed and the resultant changes often affect people's relationships. Such changes often confront gender roles and influence the hitherto known power structures. For men, it usually touches on the spaces where they derive their power, and in so doing, strike at the very foundations of interpersonal relations between men and women.

This paper attempts to understand the complexity surrounding men's social life especially in constructing what they consider manhood. It argues that realization of manhood depends upon the influence of distinctive social spaces that men are always in dialogue with. This is part and parcel of everyday life and social interactions that categorizes individuals and attaches them to some specific form of distinctiveness. The relation between them imposes peculiar customs among themselves that they must recognize and others have to recognize for one to be a man. In this paper the point of departure is that there is a specific social space within which manhood is constructed and it involves a structure of several relationships (Bourdieu 1989). Within this space men occupy positions that make their manliness known. It is from the practices and discourses that they engage in that space which forms the mechanisms for being man. The paper also argues that it is those practices and discourses that shape men's identity. Thus, using ethnographic data collected from Northern Uganda[2], the paper explores how men's everyday experiences and livelihood options were affected by the long years of war. In particular, the trajectories men employ to negotiate their ways into being 'men' are examined. Much as traditional systems of attaining manhood existed, environmental influences seem to play significant roles in determining manhood. Men as a group exploit some spaces of interactions that provide them with a structure for behaviour considered manly. This space is socially constructed, culturally complex, networked and reflexive[3]. In the face of war, the social space got reconfigured and has altered the manner in which men and society at large look at men's position and roles.

The case of Northern Uganda

For well over two decades, civil war has wreaked havoc in northern Uganda. The region had been overwhelmed by a violent armed conflict that pitted the *Lord's Resistance Army* (LRA) and the Government of Uganda army (UPDF) in endless fighting. The war displaced over 1.8 Million people, forcing them out of their homes and herded in

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[2] Data was collected in two phases; in August 2007, then in June/July 2008. Through the use of personal observations, focus group discussions and key informant interviews, data was collected from selected men and women were from two sub-counties within Gulu district. The process particularly looked at the intra-personal, family and local community relationships in the context of socio-cultural standards applied in gender differentiations in everyday life.

[3] Social space is employed as the system of relationships that men construct among themselves, the people within their environment and the community within which they exercise their power

Internally Displaced People's Camps (IDPs)[4]. The situation got so bad that the U.N. Humanitarian Coordinator Jan Egeland in November 2003 described it as "the world's worst forgotten humanitarian crisis." The war left the people of Northern Uganda decrepit and terribly battered, besieged by despair and fear. Thousands were killed, maimed, abducted, tortured and sexually abused. Many of those abducted were forced to commit atrocities against their own kith and kin or to helplessly gaze on as their dear ones were tortured, raped or murdered.

In this predicament, families were torn apart, livelihoods were wrecked and social network relationships that constituted their vital lifeline in times of adversities were thrown apart. The war dragged on until July 2006 when at the behest of the Government of South Sudan, Ugandan authorities and the LRA began negotiating for peace and cessation of fighting. This process has so far seen the halting of hostilities, the LRA withdrawing from Northern Uganda and a great improvement in the security situation. Despite the fact that the peace process has hit several setbacks, with the signing of the peace accord deferred, the people feel much safer. Many of them are beginning to leave the camps and move to their gardens during the daytime and a good umber of them have actually returned to their former homes[5].

But the reality of the matter is that the war left indelible scars in the society. The family structure, traditional settings, social configurations and generally the identity formations were all thrown in total disarray. The human and social capital base was completely distorted and above all, individual household economies were totally ruined. In the tentative aftermath of the war, uncertainty looms over what sort of society people will have back in their traditional villages given the near breakdown of social norms and values[6]. Hence, as people begin to trek back to what used to be their homes twenty years

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[4] Gulu District Three Year Development Plan 2004/5 – 2008/9
[5] By the time of fieldwork in July 2008, about half of the population in the camps had returned to their homes. But the majority of the school going children remained in the camps because of the schools, and many of the men still returned to the camps to sleep in the night for fear of any lapse in the security.
[6] Discussion groups indicated that the Acholi morals were destroyed in the camps, children stopped respecting adults, women took over management of the households and traditional authority got eroded with people resorting to violence to sort out disagreements. The clan court system was abandoned because

ago; new challenges throw them into another conflict of sorts[7]. For those who have already returned to their former homes, life isn't the same in the "new" villages. The process of rediscovering their long forgotten homes both physically, socially and psychologically have just began. The social pressure to conform to emerging fundamentals of life is so strong and deviation from the norm is not uncommon.

In this period of transition and recovery government and NGOs are putting a lot of efforts towards resettlement and reintegration of people into what remained of their former communities[8]. People are being facilitated to return to their homes, assure them of security, avail them with inputs for farming, ensure that they build their houses and begin a new life[9]. Their efforts have primarily targeted supporting ongoing political dialogue, trying to reverse the long years of decline in welfare and growth, and mobilizing resources for the people in Northern Uganda to address economic growth gaps. The ultimate goal is to bring northern Uganda to the same level of development as the rest of the country (PRDP 2007).

However, the long period war had had its dehumanizing effects on the nature and character of social relationships and the influences that people employ in their day to day livelihood relationships. For a long time, people lived in isolation camps, in fear, torture and humiliation[10]. People were living in squalid conditions, with mortality rates reaching the level of 1,000 people per week (Paul 2006). The camps predestined confinement where men were not allowed to move out, sit in groups or even interact freely. The

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elders either died in the war, got arrested, got displaced from other members living in different camps or were simply silenced as men were living under terrible fear

[7] There are a lot of disagreements over factors of production such as land. Yet there are no proper traditional structures for dispute resolution, more so, the breakdown in morals and particularly lack of respect for the elders swept away the power vested in them to restore order

[8] The return process seem to target rebuilding of physical structures rather than the social and cultural structures

[9] According to the discussions with people in the return process, the government provides them with basic equipments such as machetes, hoes and seeds to be able to start up. They are however critical of the nature of distribution and quality of these items. Many of the returned persons even claim they never received the said items, some of which they attribute to corruption in the procurement, delivery and distribution.

[10] Men spoke about the way they would be beaten before their wives and children, those taken by soldiers in detention were made to perform predominantly female roles such as collecting firewood and water for the soldier's wives. Some of them lost their wives to the soldiers who followed them up and had them tortured to scare them from raising complaints

situation for many years were characterized by a form of 'social torture' (Dolan 2005), and for men in particular it was a kind of 'enforced domination' (Finnstrom 2003). They in fact lost the freedom within which they sketched their relationships and independence, a loss that continuously affects every aspect of their lives.

The magnitude of maltreatment, living under constant fear and insecurity (HURIFO 2002; Finnstrom 2003; Dolan 2005) that men were subjected to greatly interfered with the social spaces men utilized in their everyday lives. They for instance lost the freedom to navigate their positions at the helm of familial relationships effectively redefining their individual as well as group relationships. Indeed, amidst these changes the gender disparities seemed to be amplifying by the disempowering effect of war on men[11]. On the other hand, for this and many other reasons, women got empowered in the course of the conflict by the unanticipated shifts in gender roles. So whereas the war was closing the men's social space, it tended to inadvertently open up spaces that give power to women. In so doing, the relationships started generating some social adjustments that have implications for redefining gender relations in the post conflict period. Furthermore, in the post-conflict season, these readjustments in gender relations tend to create ceaseless tensions often spiraling into violence both at household and community levels. This is because; men want to be real men again but the space within which manhood is validated has long changed.

The notion of manhood among the Acholi

Manhood is generally defined as the state of being an adult male being, usually made in fulfillment of certain traits such as; courage, energy and strength often considered being manly. Manhood therefore, is achieved and not merely ascribed when one is born male. It pertains to one's assumed behavior and feat accomplished that in specific ways conform to the social group's characterization of manhood (Connell 2003; Gilmore 1990; Pollack 1998). Attaining manhood is judged by the society at large and does not necessarily come through ones own convictions.

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[11] For instance men lost most of the empowering roles they used to perform in the household. Some of the key roles as provider and protector of the family were eventually lost to the women while they were ensconced in the camps.

Among the Acholi, the society have explicit expectations of a man and the roles that men perform are continuously evaluated to determine whether they meet those expectations. Manhood is a relational construct, a man is only man through the lived experiences that makes others (other men and women) to agree one is a man or not. It also points to power relations as an important step in the social process that men have to wield through to be able to not only express a given role but also demonstrate the power embedded in manhood. That is to say, there exists some clout among men which makes them feel, they are 'men'.

The notion of manhood brings up what society expects of male adulthood, usually structured along some societal standard form of behavior that Dolan (2002) calls the normative model. Dolan argues that the model is normative in the sense that it is what men are taught they should aspire to and judge themselves by, and in the sense that it is against this representation that men are evaluated, and then either validated, or belittled and punished (Dolan 2002:1).

In a discussion about what makes an African man Baker and Ricardo (2005) argues that the main social requirement for achieving manhood in Africa involves achieving some level of financial independence, employment or income, and subsequently starting a family. Quoting a young man interviewed in Lira in northern Uganda, they put it thus; "To call oneself a man it is simplest after (one is) married with children. No children and you are still a boy" (Baker and Ricardo 2005). This premise in the conceptualization of manhood in the African and more importantly in the Acholi context draws us to a discussion of some of the often overlooked aspects of gender analysis; when does a man become a man? And does is it really matter when men can no longer become men in the sense they perceive?

In various group discussions with men and women, their perspectives of manhood were sought and they gave their responses as to what makes a man. That a man;

- Must marry a woman, pay all the required bride price and have children
- Should be authoritative, strict and can punish especially at home
- Should have many women to show he is tough
- Must be respected by women and children, should not be insulted, demeaned
- Must own property, possess some investments like gardens, livestock
- Must establish a homestead, and be able to maintain
- Must have voice in his home, make his family do things the way he sees right
- Should own land, can inherit or buy it
- Should have beard, look like a man

They agreed that these standards for evaluation are of old and are still applicable to date. Failure to fulfill these expectations results into disparagement, name-calling, humiliation and many times leads to emotional distress. Most of the qualities associated with manliness are attributed to valor and self-reliance[12]. It involves being able to; influence decisions; win over respect and be able to move things one's own way. So manhood is not just about physical characteristics, it goes beyond transiting from childhood to adulthood and involves exercising certain peculiar social power.

Further than meeting the requisites for the normative model of masculinity, a man must let somebody see that he wields the clout known of men. It is a socially prescribed position attached to one's relations in the family, diverse social groups as well as the community. As one man put it, for the Acholi, a man is only a man when he is able to have "a voice as man, be in charge and be able to dispense punishments" to either a woman or the children in the family that he is the definite head. It means the man must have power; the ability to influence predispositions, ways of thinking, attitudes, beliefs, and actions.

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[12] By self-reliance, a man was expected to be economically powerful by having enough food and all household requirements that a family needs to run smoothly. A self-reliant man is one that does not run short of such supplies, but incase he is unable to have them, then he must be having many relatives, friends or neighbors who can be of help at the shortest call. So a real man is one connected to many other men

Furthermore, the discussions posted that a man is only a man when society approves of him. This lends us to the question of what would happen if a man failed to meet the requirements for manhood. The likely scenarios cited;

- Become a laughing stock, especially women will laugh at him, not respect him, even fight or beat him
- Name-calling – he will be given degrading nicknames especially by men
- Ostracism by fellow men – he will be shunned, not invited for beer parties, friends will shun him
- Considered a failure and subject to public humiliation by clan leaders so that he learns
- Having no voice among men – such a man cannot speak in the assembly of men
- Having no voice in the family – he cannot command and dispense 'punishments' to the wife or children in his own family

Thus when it comes to losing manhood, various aspects of social relationships particularly the man's social capital such as companionship of friends, support and sense of community with fellow men are withdrawn from the 'lesser' man. He is subject to the most importunate emotional tension, loneliness and apparent seclusion to let him learn a "lesson." And since what makes a man includes a combination of things one must possess and be able to perform, the 'lesser man's' ability to meet those requisites are further dampened. In a discussion of the "lesson" a man would be expected to learn in the likely event that he is ostracized, the men pointed out that he must learn to;

- Bond with fellow men wherever he is to reflect over issues, an Acholi man must be part of a community of men – this could be in drinking parties, at a friends home, among peers in the clan, in the community work groups, etc
- Work hard to earn a living, in the traditional villages before the war, men engaged in communal system of work. They gathered to dig, weed or plough the garden of one man at a time. After the work, they are served with *Kongo* (millet beer) where they talk about and mull over one another's performance within the social order

- Pull through subjugation, a man should not be enslaved and one should courageously fight it. For instance, men consider living in the camp subjugation and a man must not accept that

- Preside over the wife and demonstrate that he is in charge of her. The Acholi consider taking directives from a wife to be unmanly repression. A man in such a situation should openly show victory by beating or publically punishing the wife

- Get married (for instance if he is not married) and have children who must obey him, should be seen by neighbors or kin's when he is punishing the wife or children to prove he is in charge

Thus manhood is derived from the set of connections that consent to a man's decisions. Quite often public approval or display of manly power is required to assent to one's manhood status. At the end of the day being a man becomes a characteristic of social organization. It is deeply rooted in the quandaries of everyday lives, rooted in their vitality and highly valued.

Marriage as a significant marker of manhood

According to Dolan (2005), the Acholi have three main strands of the masculine roles; marriage, provision for, and protection of the household. Dolan argues that the entire socialization of young men into masculinity begins at a very early age and is bent on constructing the differences between men and women. Thus the net product of this process is the adult married man who is a fully constituted "married provider." In fact a man only becomes a man when he has married and fathered children (Finnstrom 2003). Marriage then becomes a significant marker of manhood.

As pointed out earlier, the Acholi attach so much significance to marriage as one of the key cornerstones of a man's social development. It is generally considered a curse or an abomination for a man to fail to get married. And marriage must as matter of fact, be consummated with children. Indeed apart from marriage, childlessness is counted as one of the most serious misfortunes to befall a man; normally women take all the blame. In such cases, the marriage could be dissolved or lead to the husband marrying another wife.

For the Acholi, children are the ultimate goal of any marriage. Thus the obligation that a man must marry a woman, pay all the required bride price and have children to be a man is part of the normative requirements for manhood. But of greater significance is the fact that marriage provides the much needed space within which a man exercises his power as proof of manhood.

Marriage is only considered complete upon payment of bride wealth. Among the Acholi, marriage involves a long elaborate process that at the end of it all must portray the typical male valor. It begins with a lengthy period of courting until the young man succeeds in winning the girl. This is followed by engagement where the boy's family pays an installment of bride wealth. It is only when the final payment of the bride wealth is done upon which the marriage is pronounced. Traditionally Acholi bride wealth was settled in terms of sheep, goats, spears and hoes. An elder explains that bride wealth items signaled the power expected of a man.

> At the time of paying bride wealth, the grooms entourage would bring certain items which were figurative, and a must, these included; a hoe (traditionally a small hoe known as *nget kwer*) and a spear (known as *tong alwir*) or bow and arrow (*atum ki atero*). These were availed before the marriage negotiations even begin. Sometimes if the girl to be married was a daughter a prominent man (a known fighter or a chief) in addition they would bring a leopard skin. One of the traditional symbols of power consisted of a leopard skin and a spear (tong ker) **(Acholi elder, 71)**

The symbolisms that accompany the bride wealth payment is therefore understood and interpreted in the context of what type of man is involved. Payment of bride wealth perhaps serves an array of functions but what is instructive here is the display of specific symbolisms within the Acholi society. These items symbolically relate to the construction of the male social identity, for the most part sexual and gender identities, but also the conferment of manhood. The spear (and so is the bow and arrow) is for hunting, fighting and signifies valor. Thus more than just being a weapon, the spear is a symbol of power,

virility and invincibility. A sign that the family has groomed a man and now acknowledges the nature of relationships between different peoples. Above all marriage maps out the social spaces within which manhood is constructed. The social production of a family avails the man with the foundation for social interaction. A man begins to map out spaces for social recognition[13]. So the meanings being conveyed by these symbols of power are intricately interconnected with a man's social capability.

The social space of manhood

The Acholi kinship groups are based on descent from a common ancestor. They are organized according to clans that are usually exogamous. Clan membership is very useful as they are invoked in securing mutual support and defense as well as in the mediation of disputes. Family lineage is highly prized, since most men live nearer or within their father's homesteads. This residence pattern draws them closer to one another forming more closely-knit supportive communities which share almost every activity. Actually many of the typical homesteads have a father's house surrounded by several of his sons' houses. Thereby creating both a corporal and social environment where a man exercised influence. First and foremost he demonstrates his power in the family where he is supreme, before harmonizing his position with fellow men in the community where they speak and endorse his manhood.

Apparently, the traditional rural settings before the civil war broke out provided this space that typically permitted them to assemble noticeable social conditions to be a man. In that setting a man would be able to have his influence; set the women and children 'obeying' his orders and fulfill what Dolan (2002) calls the normative requirements for being man. The village was then a venue conducive to figure out ways of being, seeing and doing whose product would be manliness. It facilitated that social condition which enables people to act in any particular ways that make sense to them and to others about what they were. For instance, a man would from time to time establish the degree of loyalty of his family members by meting out 'punishments' in the form of beating,

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[13] It is only after marriage that the other men begin to evaluate one as a man. The symbolic presentation of the spear signifies entry into the battle of manhood, that one is ready to fight it out as a man, and one's friends, neighbours and the in-laws are all witnesses to this public pronouncements

ridicule, sending away (in case of the wife) etc. This was how the man sustained the much cherished cultural values of manhood in the home where he is a 'man'.

Hence, everyman had his own life and obligations to honor to be considered 'man enough.' Some of them had difficult lives while others had it easy. But that depended on how he interacts with others and most importantly the social conditions under which he acts. It is this social condition that allows men to be men. It is largely the interrelationships of individuals in an environment where the man is mindful of the review process that makes a man. The typical daily life in the village was constructed around it. A man described what a typical day in his routine in the village used to be before the civil war broke out.

> My day would start early in the morning at around 6 am. I would get up, greet my wife, ask if the children are all okay, then proceed to brush my teeth and tidy myself. I would then pick a hoe; many times without breakfast proceed to the garden. As I walk to the garden, I would pass the compound of my parents to greet and communicate with them, also to find out if they are okay. I would come back from the garden at 10 or 11 am take a bath and eat any snack like a fruit, roast cassava or anything available as I wait for lunch. After lunch, I move to the trading centre where I sit down with other men and we start talking about our own things. The kind of things we would want to do, our imaginings about life, politics, weather, family, money, women and generally our thoughts about the future. As we share our thoughts every one of us goes about other things, business, others drinking and observing keenly what goes on. At about 9 pm for my part I would walk back home to rest **(Awich 58).**

The Acholi man has his life constructed around this social space provided by serene surroundings created by the family, lineage, village and the local community. In their existence, men create their social space of accomplishment where they put together their thoughts. This is the arena where evaluation of manhood takes place, where their

aspirations, everyday life, frustrations, successes, problems, habits, language, etc are all assessed. So a man is man because other people approve that he has power; the power to marry and have property, power to have children, power to command everyone in the family and move things his way. But this power is only discernible within the social space created in the relationships with the family, the kinfolk and the community. So marriage and the symbolic display of manliness is one such stride, but the actual 'man' is seen in the way he relates with the wife and children, then the neighbors/clan members and the community at large to authenticate his manhood. In other words, the ways in which the community interacts with someone, know him, and speak of him will add up to the social space within which they adjudge his manliness.

Civil war and changing masculinities

After suffering for many years, the effect of a brutal war greatly impacted on their ways of life. The entire population was forced out of the villages and moved into IDPs camps where they had to restart their lives. They were denied the opportunities and life chances that they had known all their lives. They lost everything they had and were subjected to the most difficult living conditions including exposure to frequent physical torture, psychological abuse, abductions, being maimed and all the shocks of war. Men were particularly denied access to their villages and were permanently confined to the camps. No man was allowed to leave the camp and they were always subject of suspicion by the soldiers as well as the rebels. They lived in constant fear and intimidation[14].

The net effect of this was a disorienting impact on the power relations between men and women. Men's social space dramatically changed[15]. Their daily lives that were previously marked by shared contentment and manifestation of influence all of a sudden

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[14] During the war, every man was potentially a suspect; either a suspected rebel or a collaborator. So the army kept men under captivity in the IDP camps, never allowed to move in and out of the camps. Women were allowed movement outside the camps, at least up to 7 pm. Many men allege that the soldiers used the confinement to seduce their wives each time hey move out of the camps and any man who dared complain was arrested and labeled a rebel or a collaborator – something that could easily earn one terrible torture and even death

[15] Men had their contacts with the outside world cut off, their movements heavily restricted and they were not allowed to even sit in groups within the camps. In this way, the sets of relationships that they knew and were used to prior to coming to the camps were all broken

changed. People were herded into the camps by compulsion disregarding familial, lineage or community ties and values. They lost the networks of influence; there was no more lineage, neighborhood or serene community that they prided in. Instead they were gripped by the terrible experience of war; marked by torture, killings and generally terror in their daily lives.

After so many years when they return, the village is all different. Their villages were bombed, houses looted and burnt. Several murders were carried out in what used to be some peoples homes. Most of the men returned to find no homes, no families, no farms to go to early in the morning and no salaried employment to fall back to. They begin to roam the village aimlessly through the remains of war, frustrated and helplessly gazing at a situation that has completely run out of their control. The shifts in gender roles and responsibilities while in the camps set in some ambiguity as to what exactly is the position of men.

In contrast, the years of war and life in IDPs camps elevated women to gain more and more access to property and money. Generally many of them became the economic powerhouse of their households[16]. In the end the typical masculine archetypes of manliness began breaking up in the face of new realities. Being man in the context of emerging power relations seemed to be resulting into more and more of 'lesser' men. In addition, given the spirited campaigns for female emancipation in the war zones, many men have been driven into fear of being engulfed by powerlessness and inadequacy. Being a man amidst the fluid and fast changing norms created by war began to afflict the significant spaces within which men crafted manliness.

The long years of chaos not only separated people from their traditional settings, but also separated children from their parents; men from their wives and relatives were lost[17]. It

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[16] By far, the life in the camps enabled women to start income generating activities that helped them provide for their respective households. In addition, several NGOs providing interventions in the war zones tended to focus on helping women and in so doing, managed to better their situation compared to men

[17] When people were forced into the IDPs camps, members of the same family, clan or lineage who used to live close by were separated and taken into different camps. Moreover, they were restricted and not allowed to move and find their relatives.

relentlessly distorted the social system within which people appreciated their distinctiveness. There was a total disruption of the significant institutions of the extended family and the clan system. For instance, while in the traditional rural settings neighbors normally supported one another, living in the camps brought new ways of life, full of indifference and mistrust. In the camp setting, the possibilities for carrying out the usual cultural standards became extremely difficult, making the passing on of cultural knowledge from the older to the younger generation severely limited. Hence, the loss of cultural values led to broken community coherence and the collapse of mutual support systems, both of which were very important in constituting identity. A case such as this illustrates it.

> I left my village as early as 1995. By then few people would still risk their lives to go there, after wards it became impossible, I never went back until the peace negotiations started. I was forced to move from place to place; many times I lived in the camp. That is where my family settled then. Life was very difficult; I had nine children when we relocated to the camp. But some of them died there. Many people died while we were in the camps. Some were killed by rebels, others died of diseases, and there were many diseases. Life in the camp was dreadful. The war affected us in numerous ways. For example, I lost five of my children. At my age they would be the ones helping me. I am now old and weak, and I cannot afford to work like I used to. I don't have people, all my people are dead. My brothers here and in the clan are all gone. So returning here isn't going to change anything much except for memories. We have a lot of things to settle, our people died and we didn't even bury them. Some were buried in the camps. That is not the way things were done here in Acholi, our ancestors cannot be happy with us. I have experienced the kind of life that I had never seen or even imagined I would see.

> It was most upsetting seeing our children go astray. I cannot say we have children left; they are all lost, lost completely. They have lost all morality and

we the elders are helpless, we cannot do anything to change the situation. Big men like me were being humiliated before the children, abused, beaten and demeaned before them. We (men) were made completely useless. We could not even provide security to a child in the home, leave alone providing basic needs. So children saw no significance in us and to them, there was no need giving us the respect we once had, young people developed some negative attitude towards us and they do not respect us any more. (**Rackara, 68**).

The forces of change overwhelmed men in the camps. The evolving state of affairs continuously induced fresh spaces in gender relationships. Men were no longer the 'men' they used to be. These transformations got embedded in the social structure of the society. With the return process as they move to their former villages, men can no longer trace the spaces upon which they acknowledged themselves. They can not be recognized in the very same way they used to be before the war. Women and children do not approve of their power. Women clearly indicate that men are not the same anymore;

Our men are spoiled; I think this sitting at home all these years have made men mad; they now behave as if they are cursed. The men spend most of the time wandering, drinking and after they are very irritable; usually any small problem they talk of fighting, wanting to beat you up. But these days some of them fear, they think twice before beating women, the NGOs are looking for those fighters… and we report them, which is why they look stranded **(Lawino 55)**.

Among these forces of change, the economic crisis inundated men, yet self-sufficiency and autonomy used to be attributes that authenticated manhood. For the Acholi, men feel they are 'not men' when they cannot provide for their families. In that way one becomes a laughing stock and is often ridiculed by women. In the period of the civil war, men lost their jobs and contacts when they were all herded into IDP camps. Their movements were also restricted to only areas within the camps. In this way, the men found themselves incapacitated since they could no longer go out to do odd jobs and contribute to the

family income. That is when the women took over the supposedly 'men's role' of providing for the family and becoming the effective bread winners, leaving the men feeling emasculated as captured in one man's testimony;

> The restrictions in the camp really affected our esteem as men; we were made useless, we could not go anywhere to chase for money and when you attempted, the soldiers would beat and humiliate you before the women and children. We were men under siege. The war completely put us out of action. We were ruthlessly treated; it was almost a crime to be a man, we were living in hiding. We lost all that we were doing to earn a living before the war. Before the war we were used to running up and down to do something to get money. But now we are like children; in confusion, helpless, and have become dependant on NGOs and government for hand-outs. Now they sent us back to the village, we have nothing, where do I start? I still depend on what the woman does, and so are my friends here **(Otim 42)**.

In such situations the relationships between men and their wives become fragile; some women divorce or separate with their husbands because they have become the "economically unviable" husband (Cornwall 2003); being short of the expectations of a real man. In the past, it was not about having paid jobs but men had created their networks, social spaces within which they would co-exist and support one another. These networks were among kinsmen, village mates and informal social supportive groups. Manhood then was an aspect of social assessment of one's performance in respect of the bond between the person's community and fulfilling the tenets of a socially recognized man. The war and encampment dismantled the ways of considering and being a man. In so doing, the responsibilities of being a man were lost. The war changed their everyday lives, thereby changing the roles, as well as social position of being a man. Indeed, the many years of turbulence and the failure to achieve this much longed for social standing puts one's manhood on the edge. In the end gender disparities are heightened as echoed by some women's experiences.

During the war I separated with my husband because he left a lot in my hands, I did not see why I continued suffering for him. He was very useless, because the entire management of the home was left directly under my care and we had orphans left by his and my own relatives to look after. This was too much burden for a woman like me. I stayed in Gulu brewing beer and doing some business. But when I heard that people were going back home I decided to return and look after my children. I now do some business at the trading centre to get some money to send the children to school. The man is just there, doing nothing. They were used to camp life where men would wake up and just sit, gossip and look for waragi (local potent gin) to drink. I think men are weak; they cannot cope with the destruction of the war. My husband is gone astray; he even has no proper friends to advise him. He used to have sex with prostitutes in the camp when I left him. But for me, am only here to take care of my children. I have refused to have any sexual relations with him because I don't know whether he is free of Hiv or not. I told him to go for testing but he refused, he has a woman he is seeing in the camp and that is where he sometimes sleeps. He cannot do anything to me because he doesn't contribute anything in this home. Even this house, I used my own money from my business to build it. All that cassava and the gardens you saw are my own efforts; he has nothing here and is too ashamed to stay here. That is why he just comes briefly and goes to the camp. I have now joined women SACCOs (Savings and Credit Co-Operatives) and soon I will get a loan to grow good yielding ground nuts in big scale. I don't need a man to do that, I have left him to do his own things. I think men here have lost control over themselves, many of them still fear the village, you see them here during the day but at night they run to the camps **(Lamunu 49)**

In some parts of sub-Saharan Africa as Baker and Ricardo (2005) have shown, violence and coercion in the form of verbal threats are sometimes employed by men in sexual relationships. This stems from the perceptions that such violence is a socially approved extension of men's power over women. And it becomes more emphasized when a man

has already paid bride wealth – a fact that assures others that he is 'man enough'. Thus to ensure that he fulfills his obligation as a man, he must have sex with or without consent from the woman. But the wheel has changed and women can now deny them sex and 'get away with it' because men cannot dispense punishments on such a woman. This has catapulted cases of domestic violence as men interpret woman's refusal to have sex with them even after they paid bride wealth as an outright challenge to manhood.

But here they are faced with a situation that saw men placed in confinement and restrictions on movement slapped on them. Furthermore, the relentless clamp down on domestic violence by the numerous NGOs looking for men who beat their wives for various reasons have silenced many of them. In fact the most important of the reasons acknowledged for women battering was denial of sex; men felt there was a direct assault on their manhood. But the problem to them is, they can no longer discipline (beat) their wives when they are denied sex. And what is more, is that the women are protected by the Human Rights activists who with the help of police arrest and prosecute the wife beaters. This is interpreted as loss of the power of manhood as a man laments;

> For us Acholi men, we have been condemned to lead a life on the breadline. We were made toothless. We can no longer provide for the family, the women who get some money are providing for the family and have lost respect for us. Right now we do not have any voice in our own homes as men. How can a woman you married and took bride wealth begin giving you instructions? A real man can not beg to sleep with a woman he married. That was unimaginable a few years ago, but look at what is happening now, we are now toothless, our influence is over and done with, the women do not listen to us; should you attempt to discipline them, they report us to the human rights people. There this thing called women's rights and children's rights, it came with the war and we cannot talk in our own homes anymore…The war went with many of our people. It is people who were our strength; a man without people is poor and a poor man has no voice; that is why we cannot do anything to change our situation. Where we have reached, a man is no longer

in charge; imagine you cannot even punish a woman or a child. Even when a case is taken to court, the judges take sides with the women. The issue of women's rights is being misused by our women to take away the power that we once had, we suggest that it should be removed. Women's rights should not exist; women should be left to their husbands like it used to be. It seems men have no rights; it is our rights that was removed and given to women …
(Okidi, 52).

This debilitation is closely associated with loss of social networks and economic power that has worsened men's position in the interim post conflict situation. Men identified the village ties, kinship ties, farm duties groups and drinking parties/groups as some of their key networks they need for social engagement. When they were forced into the camps, they lost the basis for attachment they used to have in the villages. I the camps they were not allowed to form groups, they could no longer farm together and they lost many of their individual kinship or lineage members. Thus the power that they derived from these networks was greatly impaired. The social connectedness that made manhood visible was lost. This is largely due to the fact that their consciousness with regard to interpersonal contacts with the social world of men continues to be narrowed.

The significance of the connections men hold can only make sense if it were possible for their power to be felt in the social sphere of family, kinship and acquaintances. The more socially unconnected they become, the greater the lack of their hitherto known masculine poise and self-control. When they lose that bearing violence becomes the only way men make their case known. And as long as men cannot familiarize within their social circles, band together their goals and boost their identity, they will continue to resort to extremes of violence to vent their frustrations and anger.

Implications for post-conflict reconstruction
The notion of post-conflict reconstruction is rather confusing. Many times it is dogged by historical circumstances connected to the conflict in question. Usually, the nature of

conflict determines the character of post-conflict reconstruction. So it is very unlikely that we can put forward a clear definition of the expression. But in general terms it refers to the rebuilding of the society's structures in a typical and on the same basis as it was before the conflict.

Attempts to return society to what it was twenty years back is rather a problematic move given that different social, economic and political transformations engender new forms of relations that cannot be modeled on the same basis as it was before the conflict. And this is exactly the case with the situation in Northern Uganda. Government views poverty as the most critical problem in Northern Uganda in spite of several targeted interventions. They point to the long period of insecurity, large influx of internally displaced persons and refugees, HIV/AIDS threat linked to migrations and human rights challenges as the key issues in post conflict reconstruction (MFPED 2004). However, they do not look beyond it to explore other broader social, political and economic inequalities that may explain the disparities.

Another difficulty is that while the government and International policy-makers may be concerned with security issues and with development strategies that rebuild organs of the state, the priorities of the local actors like men are usually very different. For instance as part of the first stages of post conflict reconstruction, the government and its donor partners are primarily focused on the return of the IDPs to their villages. A lot of pains have been put on meeting the immediate needs of utility and reconstruction of basic infrastructure like roads, schools and health facilities to facilitate the return of IDPs. But contrary to these efforts, many of the returning IDPs are complaining of little or even no facilitation for resettlement in the villages. Some of those who were lucky to get the resettlement packages talk of insufficient and substandard inputs such as; fragile panga, hoes and non-germinating seeds[18]. The people confess the items are not tailored to meet the actual needs of the local population. They never asked for the supplies they are being

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[18] The former IDPs who were facilitated to return to the villages by donating to them hoes, panga and seeds showed the research team some of the hoes that have already got broken and panga's that were broken on the very first attempt to use them. A good number complained that they never even received those items while the men insisted they did not even need them in the first place. Many of the men interviewed preferred oxen and ox ploughs to be able to produce food on their own so that they can again form their work groups, regain their economic potential and power in their households

offered, rather it is what government and the donors think the local people need to resettle in their former serene lives.

For men in particular, the situation seems to even draw more mistrust since changes brought by war only continues to challenge their power. The men perceive resettlement without actual empowerment as a serious assault on their way of life. It is clear that men are no longer the breadwinners in the household. They are not 'respected' by the women and children and they can not dispense punishments in the family as before. This new arrangement albeit unpleasant to them, leaped the women to positions where they took over the bulk of household management and the previously socially valued role of the men as decision makers. As a result, men lost the bargaining strength (power) to influence household decisions. Thus returning to the villages where men have no networks to turn to, where they no longer hold the clout they had and where they are going to be taking orders from women is only exasperating.

Life for men in the village is full of uncertainties. They still have fears over their own security and those of the family. They have serious doubts over their ability to protect the family and themselves. And indeed some of them cannot go back home for fear that the community will deride them for not being man enough. However, the resettlement process assumes men are still the same, taking no steps towards understanding the changes in gender relations over the years. Thus in their dilemma, not knowing exactly how they will be men again, men resort to extremes of violence to try to assert what they think their positions ought to be.

The men feel their situation has intolerably declined and their life world disconcerted. As custodians of family and society values, they perceive that some form of cleansing ought to have been done even before the return process started. Indeed, while they were in the IDPs camps no ritual processes of reconciliation and reintegration were carried out. This is for the reason that men who were supposed to spearhead such rituals were either killed or displaced in the war. Some men who participated in the war badly needed this ritual cleansing before they could get back to the villages. So they still live in fear, and put up

with denial by the community; in short they cannot demonstrate their sense of manhood. "If you are not cleansed and you beat your wife, you can kill her" which can cause you more trouble. So men find themselves caged and cannot live up to the new challenge elevating women to "superior" positions. According to the local leaders, such men are largely withdrawn but at the same time highly irritable in mood.

In addition, the Acholi revere their sacred places for rituals and up to now some men doubt that rituals that were performed while in the camps may be acceptable to their ancestors. One of those I talked to told me "our ancestors are not happy with us. Some people were performing rituals in those camps, the camp is not home and there is no way ancestors could be pleased there, no wonder our land is being grabbed by some people." They are sure that whatever they do, they will not succeed and the general public will not approve of. The point is that men generally lack confidence; they are worried about their social standing in the village. They do not have the 'the public approval' of manhood the way they know and being helpless, the frustration leads to frequent outbursts of anger, occasioned by extreme violence.

As pointed out earlier, men usually take charge of their familial environment. This includes controlling household wealth, inheriting familial property and especially family land which is usually the most important of them all. With the waning male influence, and many years of no contact with the villages, serious challenges began to arise. People returning are faced with a lot of land wrangles, many of them are haggling over land boundaries. Some of these wrangles are a result of common greed as vulnerable people like orphans and widows are denied the right to reclaim their land. Some men feel this is their only asset left to empower them and must make gains whatever the cost. The terms and conditions under which rights to land are acquired, retained, used, disposed of, or conveyed are nuanced by gender. Land in Acholi is mainly owned and controlled by male household heads in trust for all the members. Land is an identity marker for men. However with increasing powerlessness and narrowing the inequality gaps between men and women questions are beginning to arise over ownership and control of land. Women are questioning the productive roles of men, constituting a clear validation of their social,

economic and political autonomy over land matters. In some instances, land has been offered to widows whose husbands perished in the war – this is similar to granting them sovereignty, challenging the power of men in that clan, many times ending up in violence.

It is evident that war led to the collapse of Acholi communities and particularly the crucial role social relationships played in preserving male identity. In many African societies manhood is made manifest as a man grows older and usually the older men have more power than the young ones. The young men take instructions and seek guidance from the older men on how to approach any vital livelihood situation they are confronted with. Heavy sanctions were instituted for deviants who failed to show respect to the elderly. With the increasing frustration of men and the rising domestic violence, many NGOs started interventions that focused on raising the levels of awareness of women and children's rights. They also set up reporting mechanisms to address the violence meted out to women and children. In so doing, the men's power over women and children seemed to have been checked. This started in the camps and is now thriving in the villages. Women groups have special components of domestic violence. Children have peace clubs in schools that among other things provides domestic violence reporting mechanism. Hence the women just as the younger men and children began to question, if not dismiss some of the decisions men take and get away with it. Men in turn interpreted this as loss of power that allowed them to punish (typically by beating) the women and children.

The trauma of war that muddled the space of men rendered them vulnerable in many subtle ways. As already noted, there are a lot of challenges that men face resulting from the dissatisfaction posed by this new situation. For instance many respondents complained of the high level of alcoholism ensuing from the trauma of war. This has greatly undermined their capability to be productive. Alcoholism arouses men's desire to show their power and usually by violent means. Women, whom they perceive to have 'benefited' from the changes in gender roles, are usually the recipients of these violent outbursts. For this reason, the level of intolerance, which translates into acrimony in the

villages has escalated and directly impedes the reconciliation efforts. In many discussions men pointed out that a number of their friends and relatives "who were once okay" have failed to handle the trauma, have become introverts failing to relate with others and make choices. Indeed as the New Vision newspaper reported, a survey conducted by a team of British and Ugandan psychiatrists established that the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder in northern Uganda is higher than that ever recorded anywhere in the world[19]. They blamed it on the war that has lasted two decades. The team further reported that people suffering from the resultant stress and depression do not have access to the required mental healthcare. In the end many men in Gulu get apprehensive, anxious and stressed in a manner that grossly interferes with their daily lives. This state of affairs has generally affected how men think, feel and act in the way they cope with the life in the village.

Conclusion

Men are not born men but are culturally made men. In a war situation such as that in Northern Uganda, men are still expected to take actions and experience tribulations of being a real man. And when the space of man's real test changes, men get disillusioned time and again resorting to violence, often culminating into domestic violence especially as a reprisal against their new unprivileged position. With the economic power of the family sliding to the women, as well as the critical role of decision making going to the women, men as the culturally sanctioned heads of families seem to lose their grip on the household. No one in the household appears to succumb to manly control and they can no longer wield power. The changes in men's social space that the civil war cultivated, including the shifts in gender roles and relationships, has in effect altered the ways in which men and society at large look at men's position and roles. As a result men appear to seek confirmation of their masculinity in many other ways; some of which involve reckless drinking, introverted behavior and domestic violence.

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[19] *The New Vision, Sunday 31, August 2008*, "Mental illness – Northern Uganda tops Worldwide"
According to the findings of this research carried out in the districts of Gulu and Amuru in 2006, out of over 1,200 adults who were assessed by the psychiatrists, more than half (54%) were suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder

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