

6-2014

"We are Refugees in Our Own Homeland": Land Dispossession and Resettlement Challenges in Post-Conflict Teso, Uganda

Matt Kandel

Graduate Center, City University of New York

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“We Are Refugees in Our Own Homeland”: Land Dispossession and
Resettlement Challenges in Post-Conflict Teso, Uganda

By Matthew Kandel

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, the City University of New York

2014

This manuscript has been read and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in Cultural Anthropology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Matt Kandel

Date

Chair of Examining Committee

Donald Robotham

Date

Executive Officer

Gerald Creed

Ida Susser

Marc Edelman

John Collins

The City University of New York

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Abstract

“We Are Refugees in Our Own Homeland”: Land Dispossession and
Resettlement Challenges in Post-Conflict Teso

by

Matt Kandel

Adviser: Donald Robotham

This dissertation is based off of fieldwork that I conducted in post-conflict Teso region in northeastern Uganda from 2012-2013. It focuses primarily on land dispossession and challenges to resettlement. Conflicts over land intensified in the early 1990s, coinciding with the early stages of resettlement in southern Teso after a period of regional civil war and large-scale cattle rustling. In contrast to the large-scale “land grabs” in Sub-Saharan African that have occurred since the 2007-08 global commodities crisis, land expropriations occur mainly on a small-scale in Teso. I argue that there are a number of drivers to land dispossession in the region, although the most structural impetus is fundamental transformations in the regional political economy. A central thrust of this work is that there is significant intra-regional differences with respect to patterns of displacement and resettlement. For instance, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), an Acholi-based insurgent group, infiltrated Amuria and Soroti districts in 2003, but did not seriously impact other districts. People from parishes in Teso that directly border the predominantly pastoralist region of Karamoja to the north have undergone a number of cycles of displacement/resettlement since the mid-1960s. While cattle

raiders from Karamoja have devastated Teso for decades, there have been significant improvements in inter-regional peace within the last 5 years, and they have largely been due to the grassroots efforts of local civil society organizations. I critique the dynamics that underlie the long history of enmity between Teso and Karamoja regions, including the longstanding dispute over the correct inter-regional border. At the heart of this confounding problem—like most challenges facing Teso—is the issue of tenure rights to an increasingly fragmented supply of land.

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Introduction

In Uganda, land conflicts, or “land wrangles,” as they are popularly referred to in the country, have erupted in recent years with a cataclysmic effect, reverberating throughout the countryside, towns, and Kampala, the capital city. Depending on the region, anywhere from 33 to 85 percent of the population has dealt with a land dispute or felt their tenure rights threatened (Mercy Corps 2011; Rugadya 2009). The majority of all criminal cases in the statutory courts have some relation to land, including cases of murder, assault, and domestic violence (Rugadya 2009). Of course, there are differences throughout the country with respect to the immediate drivers of land conflicts. For instance, with regard to villages along the Albertine Rift in Bunyoro region, the disputes are centered on the relocation of the local population for purposes of oil extraction. While cash buyouts were given to those who were relocated, many feel that the compensation was inadequate. They also feel it was conducted in a deceitful manner since the purpose of their relocation was not made clear at the time of negotiations (Kwesiga 2013; Sseskika 2013; Mugerwa 2013). In and around Kampala, an immediate catalyst for disputes over land is overlapping tenure rights. A large portion of the land remains under *mailo* tenure. This is a special form of landholding that emerged out of the unique alliance between the Baganda, the dominant ethnic group in Uganda, and the British during the early colonial period.¹ The disputes typically involve absentee *mailo* rights holders and the actual occupants, who, according to the 1995 Constitution, are formally considered “bona fide occupants” if they have

¹ At the time of British intervention, the Baganda were the dominant ethnic group in Uganda. However, Jean-Pierre Chretien (2003) notes that the Banyoro were the dominant group in the country up until the mid 18th century. G.S.K. Ibingira (1973) also emphasizes that the Banyoro were the dominant tribe in Uganda for a very long time and that the Baganda have only been dominant for a few centuries.

used the land for 12 or more years without being challenged (Hunt 2004; Palmer 2007; Rugadya 2009; Pedersen, et al. 2012).

In Teso, where I conducted my fieldwork during 2012-13, the intensification of conflicts over land emerged when people first began resettling the southern areas of the region in the early 1990s. The returnees had initially been displaced in the late 1980s because of civil war and large-scale cattle rustling. The disputes centered on disagreements over plot boundaries and cases of “squatters,” who were accused of resettling on someone else’s land. Another cycle of displacement occurred in northwestern Teso in 2003 with the infiltration of an Acholi-based insurgent group, the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA).² This phenomenon of cyclical displacement/resettlement is far from novel in Teso. It has recurred in areas bordering Karamoja region since the mid 1960s. Along these northern stretches, it is only now that people are finally starting to resettle in large numbers after decades of displacement. While Teso is nominally a post-conflict region, small-scale cattle rustling remains a challenge along the northern belt. This continues to complicate efforts at resettlement.

For people in Teso, the central driver to land conflicts is unequivocally the displacement caused by the violent conflicts. Research in Teso and similarly affected regions in the North has found strong correlations between tenure insecurity and displacement-resettlement challenges (Rugadya 2006, 2008b; Burke and Egaru 2011; Hillhorst et al. 2011; Mckibben and Bean 2010). Furthermore, customary land tenure predominates throughout Teso, so there is no written documentation delineating legitimate rights holders and property boundaries. As in other parts

² One informant of mine argues that the LRA actually first infiltrated in 1999, although I could not corroborate this. The Refugee Law Project (2008), which conducted research in Obalanga Sub-County in Amuria on the LRA invasion, also marks 2003 as the year when the LRA first infiltrated Teso.

of Uganda, the ever important nature of land is always discussed. It is not only a site for household economy and agricultural production, but also culture and ancestry. The common refrain often repeated to me by Iteso elders was they only ask for three things: “Don’t touch my land, cows, or women.”

While an enormous amount of literature on “land grabbing” has been generated since the 2007-8 global commodities crisis, the focus has generally been on large-scale land acquisitions involving external states and transnational corporations. Even though there are a handful of accusations of land grabbing in Teso that involve external investors and the central government, the vast majority of disputes involve local actors and small plots of land. One frequently comes across reports that local government officials on the district, sub-county, parish, or village levels are grabbing land; but, even more pervasive are disputes on an intra-clan or intra-family basis. Aside from the displacement/resettlement dynamic, there are numerous other immediate drivers of land conflicts in Teso. Increasing population density, a weak traditional justice system, corruption in the formal justice system, the declining power of the elders, tensions between land tenure systems, and ecological shifts, among other issues, are also catalysts for the rapid growth in land disputes.

It is important to situate these disputes within a broader historical framework, for conflicts over land are not a wholly new development in Teso (Vincent 1971, 1982).³ It is also

³ Vincent (1977) discusses land conflicts in Gondo Sub-County in Serere during the late 1960s, although their number and intensity pale in comparison to those in present day Teso. She remarks that most of them are resolved through the traditional justice system. She also notes that they tend to have a “seasonal rhythm” in that they are more frequent during the dry season (see p. 217). The reasons she gives for this is that more money is circulating during this time because of the cotton harvest. Additionally, cultivators are less busy during this time. In contrast, as of 2013, the traditional justice is generally failing to resolve land disputes. Also, I did not discern a seasonal rhythm to the land wrangles. Interestingly, she mentions that one of the drivers of land

necessary to conceptualize them within the political economy of Teso, for they are inherently tied to agrarian class relations. Along with the other more immediate drivers, I would argue that the current intensification of land conflicts is also being caused by a second phase of capital accumulation which has been unfolding in Teso since the early 1990s. For the first time since the early twentieth century, Teso is undergoing fundamental transformations in class relations. It is not coincidental that this process is coinciding with the exponential rise in land conflicts. In my view, therefore, fundamental changes in the Teso political economy are underlying and interacting with catalysts like resettlement obstacles and demographic pressures, creating a very particular context for the intensification of land conflicts.

Moreover, the legacy of the violent conflicts is central not just to understanding the rise in land disputes, but also the ways in which capital accumulation and social differentiation have proceeded from the early 1990s to 2013. In many ways, by displacing vast numbers of people from their traditional land for prolonged periods of time, the violent conflicts have inadvertently contributed to creating one of the necessary conditions for capital accumulation. The process by which direct producers are separated from the means necessary for their social reproduction in order to allow for the accumulation of capital is often referred to as “primitive” or “original accumulation” (Marx 1994; cf. Hall 2012, 2013; Glassman 2006; Perelman 2000, 2007). One way to conceptualize the effects of the violent conflicts is that they have incidentally contributed to this deeper social process. In this sense, the current wave of land conflicts should not simply be viewed as mere disputes over land among two or more antagonistic parties that can easily be resolved through the appropriate legal channels; rather, they are part of a deeper process of land

disputes is poor land demarcations, which is one of the central drivers in 2013 as well. See pp. 211-217.

alienation that is necessary for the accumulation of capital. Given this deeper structural driver, simply changing the way properties are demarcated, reducing corruption in the formal courts and district government offices, or strengthening traditional justice reconciliation mechanisms will not be sufficient to halt conflicts over land.

One of the most striking aspects with respect to land conflicts in Teso is how they are contributing to an increasing polarization of wealth. A small number of Iteso, comprised of local government officials, civil servants, clan leaders, military officials, and NGO workers are consolidating the largest landholdings. Often in collusion with the local government, these actors are engaging especially in speculative land purchases. Land speculation is problematic because it often involves land that the local investor and district land office deem “free,” while many in the villages simply claim it has yet to be resettled. There are also several cases in Teso where the central government has attempted to alienate large portions of wetlands for purposes of commercial agriculture. In sum, increasing numbers of people in Teso are being dispossessed of rights to their customary land. Consequently, there is a growing segment of the population that is either completely landless or forced to pursue alternative means of social reproduction in addition to cultivating their traditional land. These people typically resort to informal wage labor, tenant farming, or attempt to migrate from their village in search of cultivable land. Especially along the northern belt, there are many who have never left what were once internally displaced persons (IDP) camps but are now considered “trading centers,” continuing to cultivate small plots of land nearby while also performing wage labor. Complicating this picture even more is that it is not only those with the greatest wealth in Teso who are acquiring greater tracts of land. Many smaller disputes within villages—such as disagreements over the boundary line between one’s cassava garden and another’s potato crop—simply involve an opportunistic in-law

who is attempting to expropriate land from a widow who lost her husband during the civil war, or an individual who has usurped land from an elderly couple within the same clan. These latter forms of land expropriations are certainly not at the loci of capital accumulation in Teso; instead, they perhaps can best be viewed as attempts to hedge one's bets against a rising tide of land fragmentation and general productivity challenges to peasant farming.

The central focus of this work is how these various processes—be it the varying dynamics of land conflicts or the alternative forms of social reproduction that are sought out as a result of land dispossession—intersect sharply with the legacy of the violent conflicts. I will focus specifically on the period from the early 1990s to 2013, as it encompasses both the intensification of land conflicts and the origins of the second phase of capital accumulation. The Introduction will proceed as follows: First, I will consider how the widely discussed global “land grabs” contrast from land alienation in Teso. I will also underline how land dispossession is often exacerbated in active war zones and post-conflict areas. Second, I will provide a brief historical outline of Uganda and Teso, concluding the section with a discussion of the differences between the first and second phases of capital accumulation. I will argue that the central difference between the two phases is that while the former was superimposed on the region, the latter is proceeding organically. Third, I will summarize a history of the civil war, large-scale cattle rustling, and the LRA invasion that swept across Teso from the late 1980s to mid 2000s. Lastly, I will discuss my methods of research, as well as provide a chapter outline for this work.

“Land Grabbing,” Scale, and Primitive Accumulation

There are key differences between the nature of land conflicts in Teso and the more commonly discussed “land grabs” in the Global South, which have garnered widespread

attention in both academia and public policy circles over the last five years.⁴ In Sub-Saharan Africa especially, many have focused on the agreements made between transnational actors (e.g. global agribusinesses, sovereign wealth funds, private equity firms) and national governments over land that can reach into the millions of hectares. The emphasis has often been laid on the opaque nature of these agreements, and how one of the consequences is mass displacement of local populations. However, the land grab literature has come under recent criticism from scholars. In an effort to provide a more nuanced historical framework for this phenomenon, Saturnino M. Borras Jr. and Jennifer Franco (2013) define “land grabbing” as large-scale acquisitions of land or natural resources by transnational capital through the use of extra-economic coercion since the 2007-08 commodity crisis. To be specific, they argue that the land grabs are a response by transnational capital to a “convergence” of global crises since 2007-08.⁵ Like Borras and Franco, others have also called for properly historicizing land grabbing. For instance, many have advanced the point that large-scale land alienation is not something new and that such developments are embedded within preexisting social relations and processes (Cotula 2011; Pedersen et al. 2012; Borras and Franco 2013; Scoones 2013; Edelman et al. 2013). Moreover, some have described specific cycles of land alienation that have transpired in certain

⁴ Within academia, for example, see the *Journal of Peasant Studies* Volume 39, Issue 3-4, 2012; *Third World Quarterly* Volume 34, Issue 9, 2013; and *Canadian Journal of Development Studies* Volume 33, Issue 4, 2012; In public policy circles, and specifically with respect to Africa, the Oakland Institute has been at the forefront of publicizing big land grabs (see <http://www.oaklandinstitute.org>); Oxfam has also published material (written and visual) on land grabbing (see <http://www.oxfam.org/en/grow/landgrabs>). FarmLandGrab.org (GRAIN) is a website that consolidates resources from around the internet on land grabbing (although it is mainly non-academic). The Land Matrix database is another popular resource on land grabbing.

⁵ They also argue that land grabs are due to “the demand for resources from newer hubs of global capital.” Borras and Franco (2013), p. 1725.

regions or countries throughout their history (Patnaik and Moyo 2011; Peluso and Lund 2011; Moyo, Yeros, and Jha 2012; Edelman and León 2013).

Additional criticisms of the land grab literature have been articulated as well. Some have pointed out that oftentimes the basic facts of the land deals are misconstrued and that the research is poorly done (Borras et al. 2011; Borras and Franco 2012; Edelman 2013; Scoones et al. 2013). Others have remarked that it is not only transnational entities but also national actors who are behind the large-scale land acquisitions (Palmer 2010; Deininger 2011; Alden-Wily 2012; Peters 2013; Edelman and León 2013; Oya 2013). Also—and a point central to this work—many have asserted that the vast majority of land conflicts in the Sub-Saharan Africa are actually small-scale affairs, where the quantity of land in dispute might only be several acres or a simple plot of land (Green 2006; Deininger and Castagnini 2006; Fred-Mensha 1999; van Donge 1999; Berry 2002). Lorenzo Cotula (2012) has even suggested that when calculated cumulatively, the number of hectares involved in small-scale disputes might be greater than the hectares involved in large-scale land acquisitions.

Moreover, the impact and influence of local actors in Sub-Saharan Africa is often lost or misunderstood in the land grab literature. This has motivated Carlos Oya (2013:1554) to call for a deeper understanding of the role of “national capitals” in the region. In a point which resonates strongly in Teso, Elena Baglioni and Peter Gibbon (2013) note that in comparison to large-scale capital, indigenous capital usually has a “lower profile but remains relentless and cumulatively significant” (2013:1563). Thea Hillhorst, Joost Nelen, and Nata Traore (2011:10) have shown that in Benin, Burkina Faso, and Niger, 95 percent of recent land transactions involve local civil servants, politicians, traders, and business people. Baglioni (2011) has argued that local actors

in Senegal rely directly and indirectly on local government officials for acquiring land, a practice quite common in Teso as well.

Some have proposed alternative terms to “land grabbing” in order to move away from these apparent conceptual ambiguities. “Large-scale land acquisitions” is preferred by a variety of researchers (Songwe and Deininger 2009; Vermula and Cotula 2010; Cotula and Leonard 2010; Schutter 2011). Nancy Lee Peluso and Christian Lund (2011:669) suggest using the term “land control,” emphasizing that there is no “one big land grab.” Instead, there are constantly shifting ways in which a variety of actors in particular historical moments have gained access to and excluded people from land. Others have argued that the term “land grabbing” has become overly political and ideological (Pedersen et. al 2012; Borras and Franco 2012). In addition to these criticisms, I would add that another flaw with “land grab” is that there is a strong presupposition of intentionality inherent to the concept (something which also gives it its political and ideological character). An underlying argument in this work is that social processes and events can unfold inadvertently. For example, the violent conflicts in Teso have unintentionally had the effect of contributing to current processes of capital accumulation by dispossessing large segments of the population from their customary land. The resettlement challenges are a direct result of the conflict-induced displacement. While there are opportunistic actors who are asserting their agency when attempting to acquire land (legally or illegally), there are other structural factors at play which cannot directly be attributed to a specific action undertaken by these actors.

Like others (Watts 2001; Hammer 2002; Bloomely 2003; Sikor and Lund 2009; Grajales 2011), Peluso and Lund remark that the use or threat of violence are often central to these processes. As they put it (2011:671), “Land ownership and primitive accumulation are processes

to which conflicts and violence—actually and threatened, physical or structural—are integral.” They also underline that issues pertaining to land control are heightened in active war zones and post-conflict areas. In support, Christopher Cramer and Paul Richards (2011) assert that primitive accumulation has often followed war and conquest, and they stress the strong agricultural dimensions to violent conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa, in general (see also Besteman 1996, 1999; Chaveau and Richards 2008).⁶ Moreover, because land in peasant-based societies carries broader symbolic importance as a site for the reproduction of culture (Berry 1993, 2002; Shipton 1994; van der Ploeg 2010), the potential for violence is arguably only heightened in post-conflict areas (Borras and Ross 2007). In Teso, therefore, resettlement of land is not only important for regaining access to the means necessary for agricultural production. It is also wrapped up in broader social reproduction objectives, some of which are not materially based. This pertains to other post-conflict areas in Northern Uganda as well.

Uganda and Teso Region: A Brief History

Uganda is a landlocked country in East Africa and part of the Great Lakes region. On its northern border is South Sudan; to its east is Kenya; to the south are Tanzania and Rwanda; and to the west lies the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Uganda shares Lake Victoria (the largest freshwater lake in Africa and the source of the White Nile) with Tanzania and Kenya, and shares Lakes Albert and Edward with the DRC (UBO 2012). It has historically relied on Kenya and Tanzania for access to commerce in the Indian Ocean. While there are two distinct mountain chains in Uganda—the Ruwenzoris in the southwest and Mt. Elgon in the southeast—

⁶ They also add that primitive accumulation has often been a key feature of the “rearrangements secured during violent conflicts.” See p. 289.

and isolated inselbergs (such as in Karamoja), approximately 85 percent of Uganda is a plateau (Bamutaze 2010). Bodies of water cover 20 percent of the country's total surface area (BakaNume and Sengendo 2010). Climatologically, there are sharp differences throughout the country. For instance, the Lake Victoria Basin (in the south) receives the heaviest and most predictable rainfall, which gives it a certain agricultural advantage. Geomorphological changes in Uganda—such as the receding of the polar ice caps on the Ruwenzori's—are indicative of climate change (Matete and BakaNume 2010). While the current population is estimated to be at 34.1 million, this figure is expected to double every 24 years, reaching an estimated 84 million by 2050 (Tumwine 2010; UBO 2012).⁷ Similar to the rest of Africa, Uganda is also experiencing a “youth bulge.” According to the 2012 State of Uganda Population Report, over 52 percent of the population of Uganda is under fifteen years of age and 78 percent is under the age of 30.⁸

A non-settler colony, Uganda became a British Protectorate in 1894.⁹ The Buganda Agreement of 1900 solidified the alliance between the British and the Baganda. Among other things, the formalization of this alliance codified the alienation of roughly 8,000 acres of land to the Kabaka, the king of the Buganda, along with other royalty and notables (Meek 1946; Richards 1960; West 1972; Richards et al. 1973). This land became *mailo* land and is one of the four constitutionally recognized forms of land tenure in present day Uganda along with freehold,

⁷ Peter M. Gukina (1994) notes that the population of Uganda was six million in 1959. Most estimate that the population was only six or seven million at Independence in 1962 (see e.g. Mittleman 1975; Mutibwa 1992).

⁸ See *New Vision* (2013).

⁹ “Uganda” was actually the Kiswahili term used to refer to “Buganda,” but it became adopted as the name for the entire protectorate by the British.

leasehold, and customary tenure (Coldham 2000; Rugadya and Obaikol 2004; Pedersen et al. 2012). Additional large tracts of land were also alienated during the colonial period to become national conservation areas and game reserves. Historically, Uganda has been viewed as ethnically and politically split between a South and a North. The former consists of Bantu ethnolinguistic groups (including the five historic kingdoms) and the latter of Nilotes and Central Sudanics. Over 50 indigenous languages are spoken throughout Uganda and there has never been a nationally recognized language (English and Kiswahili are informally recognized) (Kasozi 1994).¹⁰ Indigenous ethnic groups in the South—or at least the kingdoms—became known for their centralized political structures, and authors (e.g. Richards 1960; Mair 1977b; Twaddle 1993) have noted how enthralled the British were for this reason when arriving in the Kingdom of Buganda. Indigenous groups in the North, on the other hand, have historically been characterized as “acephalous” or “non-stratified,” noted for their highly decentralized political structures (Richards 1960; Fallers 1965; Cohen and Middleton 1970; Mair 1974, 1977a, 1977b).

In collaboration with their British military and civil counterparts, Baganda officials, or “Ganda agents,” as they are often referred to (Mamdani 1975; 1996; Kasozi 1994; Kisekka-Ntale 2007), formed the backbone of colonial expansion in the North in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. For instance, Kakungulu, a Baganda prince whom the British relied heavily upon for colonial expansion to the east and north, was the first Baganda official in Teso (Vincent 1982; Twaddle 1993; Jones 2008). British military superiority (including the use of firearms, which

¹⁰A.B.K. Kasozi (1994) marks the absence of a common language as one of the eight reasons for the extraordinarily high levels of violence in Ugandan history. In the Appendix, Kasozi reviews the attempts to reach a consensus on a national language on the eve of Independence. English, Kiswahili, and even Luganda were all in consideration. The latter is the traditional language for the Baganda, which is an obvious reason for why it was rejected by different factions. However, Luganda does have traction outside of Buganda. Ivan Karp (1978) notes that the form of Ateso spoken by Iteso in Uganda (as opposed to the Iteso in Kenya) has incorporated some Luganda.

had not yet reached the North) and the lack of a history of organized warfare in the North (unlike in Buganda, where a centralized military command corresponded with the centralized political structures) made effective indigenous resistance in West Nile, Acholi, Lango, and Teso very difficult (Barber 1968; Karp 1976; Omara-Otunnui 1987). Karamoja, however, the northeastern most region in the country, presented a more challenging operating environment militarily. Historically renowned for its pastoralist warrior clans, the region was never fully pacified even by the end of the colonial period.¹¹

By 1955, only seven years before Independence, A.B.K Kasozi (1994:117) posits that Uganda could be conceptualized as a series of four “concentric rings”: a core, capital accumulating region, centered in Buganda; a semi-periphery of cash-crop producing areas, consisting of regions in the South like the kingdoms of Busoga, Bunyoro, Ankole, and Toro, but also Teso in the North; a periphery of labor supplying regions, made up of West Nile, Acholi, and Lango in the North; and then an outer periphery, largely politically and economically unincorporated, consisting solely of Karamoja. Similar to Acholi and Lango, Teso has historically provided a disproportionate amount of people to the police and military (Jorgenson 1981; Omara-Otunnei 1987; Brett 1995).¹² While Uganda was experiencing industrial growth across the Entebbe-Kampala-Jinja nexus in the South toward the end of the colonial period and

¹¹ Aside from the military challenges, Karamoja is also the most arid region in the country. It is classified as semi-desert (Matete and BakamaNume 2010). This in itself presented difficulties to British military excursions, as these early expeditions were carried out on foot. Barber (1968) remarks that one of the most formidable logistical challenges was organizing the transport of water and food, since natural access to the former was limited in the arid environment. However, the decision by the British to largely leave Karamoja unincorporated was multifaceted. See Chapter 4 for a more extensive discussion.

¹² However, under President Yoweri Museveni, who has been in power since 1986, a concerted effort has been made to diversify ethnic representation in the security forces (Brett 1995, Kasfir; Tripp 2004).

into the first decade of post-independence, it was severely curtailed upon the rise of President Idi Amin in 1972 (Smith 1980; Jorgenson 1981; Carbone 2005).¹³ Even after the overthrow of Amin in 1979, general economic decline continued into the 1980s, undoubtedly hastened by the civil war that gripped large parts of the country from 1981-85. The National Resistance Movement (NRM) eventually emerged as the victors in 1986 and one of its leaders, Yoweri Museveni, became president. He remains in power as of 2014. While Museveni initially struck a more nationalist tone upon taking power, he was soon to embrace the economic liberalization reforms pushed for by the West, although their impact on the country is viewed as mixed (Twaddle and Hansen 1988; Himbara and Sultan 1995; Carbone 2005).¹⁴ As of 2014, even in the South, where there is a larger degree of agricultural commercialization (coffee and sugar are the primary cash crops), most farming remains peasant based as in the North.¹⁵ Roughly 80 percent of the total population is involved in agriculture (BakaNume 2010). Under Museveni,

¹³ Giovanni Carbone (2005) notes that between 1971-86, the Ugandan economy shrunk by 40 percent. See p. 52.

¹⁴ Twaddle and Hansen (1998) advance the popular argument that economic liberalization—and especially the Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs)—had a negative impact on the economy and the Ugandan people. They contend that liberalization precipitated the crash in farming cooperatives and saving loan agencies. They also argue that the reforms exacerbated poverty in the countryside. Giovanni Carbone (2005), however, argues that most Ugandans actually benefited from liberalization since the policies resulted in the breakup of the non-productive parastatal firms and created the opportunity for upward mobility.

¹⁵ The central government under Museveni has long supported “market-oriented farming,” as well as has simply called for the outright commercialization of agriculture. The central government argues that peasant/subsistence farming is characterized by low productivity and that it also degrades the ecosystem. For instance, *NDP* (2010:43) envisions Uganda as “a transformed society from a peasant to modern and prosperous country within 30 years.” See also *Proposed Action Plans for the Agricultural Revolution of Uganda*, November 2012, Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries: Kampala. President Museveni often argues for the benefits of agricultural commercialization in his public speeches. For example, he specifically highlights this in his 2014 New Years address to the country. See Museveni (2014).

the manufacturing sector has regained steam and has become one of the fastest growing sectors in the economy (BakaNume 2010).¹⁶ It is projected that oil extraction along the Albertine Rift will begin in 2017, potentially creating a significant revenue stream for the country, although there are a handful of challenges that could delay this deadline.¹⁷ While GDP figures continue to show steady growth, some have recently questioned the reliability and value of economic statistics in Africa (*NDP* 2010).¹⁸ Like Teso, other regions in the North are still recovering from large-scale displacement issues. Karamoja remains the least economically developed region in the country.

Teso is a semi-arid/arid region that currently consists of the districts of Soroti, Ngora, Kumi, and Bukedea in the south; Serere and Kabermaido in the southwest; and Amuria and Katakwi in the north.¹⁹ It has been estimated that there are 1.6 million people in the region (Chapman and Kagaha 2009). In addition to Lakes Opeta, Bisina, and Kwania, Kyoga is the

¹⁶ According to the UBO (2012), the total manufacturing index has increased by 2.6 percent in 2011. See p. vi.

¹⁷ Aside from local pressure, there have been disagreements between the Ugandan central government and its corporate partners over certain issues. For example, while Museveni has stood steadfast in his position that Uganda should possess a crude processing facility, the oil corporations have argued that the crude should be processed elsewhere. See e.g. Izama (2012) and Wacha (2012).

¹⁸ According to the *NDP* (2010), Uganda is projected to average 7.2 percent GDP growth per annum from 2010-2015. See p. i.

There has recently been another debate in popular media about whether Africa is finally “rising.” For those who make the argument that “Africa is rising,” see e.g. *The Economist* (2011), Robertson and Moron (2013), Sadek (2014). For those who argue against the “Africa is rising” argument, see e.g. Rick Rowden (2013) and Soni (2013). Morten Jerven (2013a, 2013b) has questioned the validity of economic statistics in Africa in a variety of articles in popular media.

¹⁹ Some classify Soroti as a northern district (e.g. Vincent 1982; Ndyabahika and BakaNume 2010).

largest lake in Teso (100 miles long), and lies on the western side of the region. It once served as a major transport system and trading hub for eastern Uganda until the introduction of rail in the 1920s (Vincent 1971, 1982), and remains important for the small-scale fishing industry. Teso consists of a number of swampy wetlands as well (13 percent of the surface area of Uganda is wetlands), which are a tremendously important resource for both agriculture and pastoralism (Matete and BakaNume 2010).²⁰ The region is located within the Ugandan “cattle corridor,” which makes up one quarter of the country’s total surface area and cuts diagonally from the southwest to the northeast (Vincent 1982; Kisamba-Mugerwa et al. 2006; Rugadya 2009). There are important climatological intra-regional differences. While the south and southwest experience two distinct rainy seasons, the north experiences one prolonged rainy season. Monomodal rainfall patterns pose greater challenges to agriculture, as runoff is more common than with bimodal rains. The majority of the soil in Teso is vertisol (Nakileza 2010). While not agriculturally ideal, as the higher clay content causes the soil to crack during the dry seasons and become overly moist during the wet seasons, it is still very cultivable (Nakileza 2010).²¹ The best soils lie in the south (Bukedea was once referred to as the “breadbasket” of Teso), followed by the southwest, and then the north, where the soil quality is poorest (Vincent 1982:9; Nakileza 2010). As the rainy seasons are becoming more unpredictable throughout Uganda, correctly

²⁰ However, in the flatter and drier northern areas of the region, the wetlands are more seasonal. In addition to the agricultural and pastoral benefits, the wetlands have traditionally been a site for hunting big game, such as rhinos and antelope. As a tribe, the Iteso were originally known for combining pastoralism with hunting. See Karp (1978).

²¹ The best soils for agriculture are in the Ugandan South (cf. BakaNume 2010). For instance, the bimodal rainfall patterns in the Victoria Basin are distinctly different from the monomodal rainfall experienced in much of Northern Uganda. Bimodal rainfall patterns are less likely to cause runoff, which can damage agriculture. The *NDP* (2010) divides Uganda into different “agro-ecological zones.”

timing harvests is becoming more difficult (USAID 2011; United States Geological Survey 2012). Recent research projects an increase in the likelihood of droughts across all of East Africa, something which some have argued strongly correlates with political instability (Homza and Corendea 2012; Musinguzi 2013).

The Iteso, the dominant ethnic group in Teso, were originally part of the Karamojong ethnic cluster (both are Eastern Nilotes) which migrated southwest from Abyssinia, modern day Ethiopia, several hundred years ago (Karp 1978).²² “Iteso” is an umbrella term for the smaller sub-groupings of Iusuko, Ingoratok, Iseera, and Ikumama, although all Iteso speak Ateso (Burke 1964; Karp 1978).²³ The Iteso are believed to have initially settled in Usuku (now Usuk Sub-County in Katakwi District) sometime between the mid 17th and 18th centuries, although the northwestern parts of Teso were not settled until the colonial era (Karp 1978; Vincent 1982). According to oral tradition, younger groups of men and women in Karamoja defied the elders and migrated southward during the dry season into modern day Teso before returning home

²² While at times I will just use the term “Karamojong” when referring to cattle raiders in Teso, it should be noted that not all indigenous groups in Karamoja should be classified as “Karamojong.” As others have discussed, there are a multitude of different interrelated ethnic groups in Karamoja (as well as interrelated groups in bordering South Sudan and Kenya) but not all are Karamojong. For instance, the Ugandan Pokot, or Upe (who are also in Kenya) are considered closer to the Kalenjin in Kenya, while the Acholi-Labwor (who are from southwestern Karamoja in Abim District) are closer to the Ugandan Acholi and Langi. The Bokora, Pian, and the Matheniko are the largest of the Karamojong clans or sections. Other ethnic groups in Karamoja include the Jie and Dodoth, both of which are not part of the Karamojong cluster. I generally use “Karamojong” as a general referent to any tribes in Karamoja for purposes of expediency. Iteso also use the term as a referent to any indigenous groups in Karamoja. However, they will also sometimes be more specific and clearly reference the Jie, Bokora, Pian, or Matheniko. See e.g. Gulliver (1952); Dyson-Hudson (1966); Narman (2003); Mkutu (2006)

²³ While these sub-groupings are not as politically relevant in Teso as of 2013, G.S.K. Ibingira (1973) points out that according to a 1958 Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Management of the Teso District Council, there were ongoing “inter-tribal” conflicts between “Teso’s two major halves, the Issera and the Ngaratok.” See p. 67.

during the wet season. They continued to repeat the process until they decided to permanently settle. People from both ethnic groups often emphasized the historical connection between Iteso and Karamojong. The Karamojong explained that the Iteso were their sons who, upon splitting off, became referred to as *Atesin*. This means “dead corpses” in Karamojong, aptly termed since the elders did not believe they would survive if they migrated south.²⁴ Ateso and Karamojong are considered mutually intelligible linguistically, although based on my experience, Karamojong can generally understand Ateso, but Iteso have difficulty grasping Karamojong.

On the eve of colonization, there was widespread intra-regional war and political unrest in Teso. This was especially true around the wetlands, or regional “no-man’s lands,” such as in Kolir (currently a sub-county in Bukedea district) (Vincent 1982:90). The wetlands were—and remain—a highly sought after resource. In the pre-colonial and colonial periods, prolonged droughts, famine, and disease plagued Teso, resulting in widespread death (including of livestock).²⁵ The Baganda and British first intervened in Teso in 1907. By 1912, Teso was formally incorporated into the Protectorate of Uganda. The dominant Iteso leaders were integrated into the colonial administrative structure, although they were initially placed under Baganda county chiefs, or *sazas* (Burke 1964; Mair 1974; Vincent 1971, 1977, 1982). As Joan Vincent puts it, the newly created counties were “alien creations” since a Baganda political structure was superimposed onto Teso (although the indigenous “sub-counties,” or *itemwan*, remained) (Vincent 1982:102). In her view, colonial policies and practices in Teso centered primarily on one thing: the production of cotton for the imperial market. As a result, indigenous

²⁴ *Karamojong* or *ikarimojong* means “tired old men” (Karp 1978).

²⁵ Famine, drought, and flooding are all current threats to Teso as well. Katakwi, especially, is prone to flooding. Many people in the district were predicting high levels of food insecurity for 2013-14 due to the poor harvest caused by the floods.

political systems were destroyed and Teso became a “monocrop” exporting society for the purposes of the British metropolitan market (Vincent 1982:7).

This early colonial period in Teso—Vincent refers to 1908-17 as the “first development decade”—marks what I refer to as the first phase of capital accumulation (Vincent 1982:161). As Vincent discusses, the introduction of cotton into the region resulted in a fundamental reorganization of the indigenous economy. Previously, the economy centered on subsistence farming, hunting, fishing, and pastoralism. Vincent also characterizes the period as one marked by significant social differentiation.²⁶ Ultimately, a peasantry emerged for the first time in Teso, along with a distinct wage laboring group and a smaller segment of wealthy landholders. The cultivation of cotton also further undermined the position of women in Teso, as it created a monetary economy from which women were largely excluded (cotton was cultivated exclusively by men who were 18 years of age and older).²⁷ Cultivation was compulsory and this increased the potential for famine in an already famine prone region, as food production became a secondary activity (Vincent 1982).

²⁶ However, Vincent also notes that there were important intra-regional differences. For instance, while Kumi, Ngora, and Bukedea experienced an economic boom, the economy of the southwest (Serere and Kabermaido) deteriorated. Also, much of the north remained outside of the cotton economy. Vincent marks the Agu swamp (which is in present day Soroti) as not only the dividing line between the north and the south in the region, but also the line that divided those who experienced upward mobility (those in the south) and the underprivileged (those in the north). See Vincent (1982), pp. 162-163.

²⁷ The introduction of cash crops and the reduction in power for women in rural societies is a common trend. Allen F. Isaacman (1993) notes that colonial policy tended to enable men to assert greater control over family labor. He points to cases in West Africa where women were often relegated solely to food production and denied access to highly profitable cash crops. As Vincent (1982) discusses, this was certainly the case for Teso. The growth of a monetary economy (which typically emerged with the introduction of cash crop production to colonies) and the devaluation of women labor is also interrelated. Colonial polices stipulated that men perform wage labor.

While the production of cotton continued after 1917, it reached its peak levels at this time and then slowly declined. The industry was largely decimated under the presidency of Idi Amin from 1972-79 (Vincent 1982). As of 2013, only a small number of people—mainly “very old men,” as local people put it—continue to grow cotton and most of the gins have been converted into sites for small commodity traders and shop owners.²⁸ For Vincent (1977, 1982), this can largely be explained by the fact that cotton was never integrated into the indigenous agricultural cycle, so the reproduction of Iteso labor was never premised on its cultivation. In her opinion, it was this fundamental detachment of cotton cultivation from Iteso social reproduction which inhibited the full development of a Teso agricultural working class. Simply put, “Cotton as a cash crop for the peasant did little more than take care of that part of his divided world that related to the surplus or rent demanded of him by the urbanized political class of the country” (Vincent 1982:210). At most, a “nascent capitalism” developed during this early period (Vincent 1982:230). By the end of the “development decade” and into the mid 1980s (right before civil war and cattle rustling devastated the region), the Teso economy largely remained rooted in smallhold commodity production, subsistence farming, fishing, and pastoral activities. Even levels of agricultural productivity could not vary too greatly, as the central innovation in production during the first phase—the introduction of the oxen plow—never achieved a widespread presence in Teso. Ultimately, ongoing transformations in processes of production and class relations did not continue during this interceding period. While smallhold commodity production remained as a legacy of this first phase, the development of a (capitalist) “middle class,” as Vincent terms it, never materialized (1982:230).

²⁸ The *Proposed Action Plans for the Agricultural Revolution of Uganda* (2012) mentions that approximately 300,000 people in Uganda “earn a living from cotton,” although it does not specify in which regions or what exactly is meant by “earn a living.” See p. 22.

This phase of capital accumulation was characterized by four main developments: 1) The accumulation of capital proceeded “from above,” as this process was organized on the state level by the British and the Baganda. While the Baganda-controlled estates (including the rights to compulsory labor for cotton production) were eventually transferred to Iteso chiefs, this process was a direct consequence of state action 2) The primary driver behind capital accumulation was a single cash crop: cotton 3) The state was the driver behind social differentiation. The newly formed hierarchy of Iteso county chiefs was a creation of British and Baganda initiatives. Wage labor and smallhold commodity production—or the emergence of a peasantry—developed only through extra-economic coercion 4) Land alienation occurred very minimally. The land acquired by the Baganda during 1907-12 had not previously been permanently settled. There was also never any land alienated for the purpose of constructing cotton plantations. Cotton production in Teso always remained exclusively a household activity.²⁹

In contrast to the first phase, the second phase of capital accumulation is rooted in a fundamentally different set of dynamics: 1) Capital accumulation is proceeding “from below”; that is, it is the autochthones of the region, Iteso, who are the driving force behind this process 2) Capital accumulation is not reliant upon the cultivation of a single cash crop but on a variety of different wealth generating activities. This includes agriculture (although mainly food crop production), but also land speculation 3) While many in the accumulating group certainly maintain strong ties to local and central government (some are government officials themselves), the state is not the sole source of social differentiation. An excellent example of this can be seen

²⁹ The fact that cotton plantations never developed in Teso during the colonial era is not exceptional with respect to countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. As Elena Baglioni and Peter Gibbon (2013) note, plantation farming tended to predominate in countries with access to a seaboard. In contrast, landlocked countries in Africa south of the Sahel (aside from the Congo and the settler economies of southern Africa) remained largely rooted in small-scale farming.

in the increasing number of people who are voluntarily turning to alternative income generating activities such as wage labor. While wage labor is not desirable (it carries very negative cultural connotations in Teso), it is not being performed as a result of extra-economic coercion. Even though it has existed in Teso for decades it (either as a form of monetary compensation or compensation through another medium), it was not always premised on the partial or complete separation of agricultural producers from their land.³⁰ As Vincent notes with respect to the late 1960s, wage labor was only performed several months of the year and it was fundamentally a function of the local “Big Men.” The Big Men would use the “working parties” they hired out as a means to justify or symbolize their political power. In other words, wage labor during this period was premised on the reproduction of political relations.³¹ In this second phase of capital accumulation, those who are performing wage labor are either fully separated from their traditional land or maintain very minimal access to it. Their social reproduction is increasingly reliant on monetary compensation for their labor. Therefore, wage labor is no longer premised on the reproduction of a segment of Big Men but rather the reproduction of class relations. It is now firmly a function of the market³² 4) The alienation of land is precisely one of the central

³⁰ Vincent (1982) comments that beer was actually the preferred means of compensation by the working parties, not money. See p 193.

³¹ Obviously, there was an economically “rational” benefit as well to having working parties, for the Big Men still benefited from having more hands on their land. However, the point Vincent (1977) underscores is that this was not wage labor in the “modern” sense. See pp. 188-204.

³² Prior to the current phase of capital accumulation, the market in Teso was more “socially embedded.” As Polanyi (1944) discusses, the development of the market in societies is simultaneously accompanied by a reaction to it, specifically seen in the way traditional structures/practices attempt to coopt or incorporate it (he also refers to this as the “double movement”). In the case of Teso, while smallhold commodity production remained after the first phase of capital accumulation (Vincent’s [1982] “development decades” was 1908-17), the market (or “market relations”) did not penetrate deeply enough by the 1960s to upset traditional political structures. It is only in this current phase of capital accumulation—the early 1990s-

components to this second phase of capital accumulation. However, the origins of the current period of land dispossession in Teso are strongly tied to the three violent conflicts that enveloped the region from the late 1980s to the mid 2000s.

Three Violent Conflicts: Civil War, Cattle Rustling, and the LRA in Teso

The civil war in Uganda from 1981-85 resulted in the collapse of Milton Obote's government (or "Obote II") and the rise to power of Yoweri Museveni and the National Resistance Movement (NRM), a southwestern-based group made up primarily of Bayankole (Omach 1986; Omara-Otunnu 1987; Kasozi 1994; Jones 2007).³³ While a variety of oppositional groups were involved in the civil war (most were firmly based in region/ethnic background), the fighting was more intense in places like the Luwero Triangle in Baganda, which is where the National Resistance Army (NRA) (the militia of the NRM) engaged the government's Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA).³⁴ Two of the strengths of the NRM/A towards the latter stages of the 1981-85 civil war were its ideological coherence (manifested in the NRM's 10 Point Platform, a document meant to be the guiding light for Uganda) and its more effective military strategy and tactics, including the protection of the local population

2013—that the market is increasingly becoming a dominant institution in Teso at the expense of traditional political structures. This is seen, for instance, in the rapid decline of power that the elders possess. See Cotula (2013).

³³ Obote also was president from 1966-72, which Ugandans often refer to as "Obote I." Of course, he came to power after orchestrating a coup of the previous government in which he served as prime minister. See e.g. Gukina (1994).

³⁴ As highlighted above, the UNLA—like its predecessors up to this point—consisted disproportionately of Northern ethnic groups like Acholi, Langi, and Iteso (Kasozi 1994; Brett 1995). Obote was also a Langi.

(Omara-Otunnu 1987; Kasfir 2005).³⁵ In December of 1985, after Acholi generals had already overthrown Obote and taken control of the government, a peace agreement was made with the NRM/A. However, the agreement quickly collapsed and the NRA overtook Kampala relatively easily by January of 1986 (Brett 1995). Consolidating power over other parts of the country proved more difficult for the NRM/A. This was particularly true in the North, where many perceived the NRM/A's victory as a Southern takeover. Former Acholi and Lango soldiers in the UNLA feared marginalization, in particular. Initially, the NRA was welcomed in Teso, as Acholi soldiers formerly in the UNLA were abusing the local population. However, NRA troops soon drew significant resentment for attempting to disarm local militias and for using violence against the Iteso population (Brett 1995).

The Uganda People's Front (UPF) and its military wing, the Uganda People's Army (UPA), was the Teso-based reaction to the NRA. It was comprised mainly of former UNLA soldiers and members of the regional militia (Brett 1995; Jones 2005; Lindemann 2011).³⁶ While the UPA drew support from local Iteso during the early stages of the insurgency in 1987-88, the support increasingly dissipated as the UPA deteriorated into an assemblage of fragmented militias, each under its own commander. The UPA often killed those suspected of collaborating

³⁵ This more "population-centric" policy evolved out of NRM/A experiences in the Luwero Triangle. According to Nelson Kasfir (2005), most NRM/A leaders did not initially consider protection of the local population as a necessary strategy for winning the war. It was only towards the latter stages of the war that this strategy shifted. Kasfir argues that this was probably due to the influence that the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) had on the NRM/A, including Museveni, who met the president of FRELIMO when he was a student at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. In the early 1970s, FRELIMO also trained Museveni and a small cadre from the militia group, Front for the National Salvation of Uganda (FRONASA), which was a precursor to the NRM/A. FRONASA attempted to overthrow the Amin government in September of 1972, although this attempt failed. See pp. 272-76.

³⁶ Initially, the UPA went by the name, Force Obote Back Army (FOBA) (Jones 2005).

with the NRA on the basis of dubious and scant evidence (Jones 2005). According to an elder from Bukedea, the main problem with the UPA was that it had no centralized structure, so lacked the capacity for strong organization and effective communication. While the local population did not simply turn to wholeheartedly embracing the NRA (far from it, in fact, as resentment for the NRA and Museveni is still high in Teso, and there are many who believe that Museveni still wants to “conquer” Teso), the tactical and strategic failures of the UPA created the opportunity for a NRA victory. By 1993, the insurgency was defeated.

One of the common accusations heard in Teso against the NRA is that it directly contributed to another violent force in the region: cattle rustling. However, cattle rustling had plagued Teso for decades. Elders in Teso contend that Karamojong warriors first began launching raids on a major scale in the mid 1950s or early 1960s.³⁷ There are significant intra-regional differences in terms of which parts of Teso experienced (and still experience) the worst of the cattle rustling. While I will discuss this in more depth in Chapter 4, the areas of Teso closest to the border with Karamoja have historically borne the brunt of the raids. For example, for those from the south or southwest of Teso, large-scale cattle rustling-induced displacement did not occur until the late 1980s. In contrast, elders from bordering Tisai Island in Kumi recall first being displaced in large numbers in the mid 1960s. Those from the bordering sub-counties of Amuria, Katakwi, and Bukedea mark mass displacement as beginning in 1979, which is when Moroto Barracks (a depot for armaments) first fell to the Karamojong (Mkutu 2006, 2008, 2010; Bevan 2008; Leff 2009; Knighton 2010). This event also transformed the nature of the raids. As an elder from bordering Ongongoja Sub-County in Katakwi noted, the warriors still largely used

³⁷ The term “warrior” is widely used throughout Teso and Karamoja to refer to the Karamojong men who participate in cattle raiding and still “move in the bush.”

spears during the raids he remembers when working as a veterinarian for the local government in the 1950s and 60s. After 1979, the AK-47 (the most common automatic weapon in Karamoja), along with other automatic weapons such as the SAR and G3, replaced the traditional spear (Mkutu 2006).³⁸ Another windfall of arms spread across the region in 1986, which is when recently demobilized Karamojong soldiers from the UNLA (initially recruited into the government army to buttress the failing Obote government) returned with their weapons (Mkutu 2010). While there were previously militias in Teso which were formed to protect the region from Karamojong cattle raids, they disbanded with the collapse of the Obote government (Mkutu 2010).

While Iteso commonly attribute the raid on Moroto Barracks in 1979 to the vacuum of power in the country caused by the overthrow of Amin, the proliferation of arms after 1986 is viewed by most as taking place under more mysterious circumstances. Virtually all believe that Museveni and the NRA chose to support Karamojong cattle raids in Teso in an effort to further destabilize the region. As others have corroborated (Refugee Law Project 2008; Mkutu 2006; Eaton 2008a), many Itesot feel that the NRA directly collaborated with Karamojong warriors. They contend that the NRA supplied Karamojong with small arms and cut deals with the raiders on recently stolen cattle. At the very least, the cattle rustling—typically involving large groups of men and the theft of hundreds of cattle—proved devastating across Teso. The vast majority of

³⁸ Along with others I spoke to, this elder first recalls Karamojong warriors using firearms towards the end of 1960s, although the spear was still more popular at this time. Also, while the raid of Moroto Barracks in 1979 is often spoken of in Teso as the origin for Karamojong acquisition of small arms, there has been a trade in firearms in Karamoja region that goes back to the colonial period. This trade has historically involved Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan, and Uganda, although now Somalia is a contributor to this trade as well. The trade in arms between Uganda, Kenya, and South Sudan is also referred to as the “triangular trade.” See e.g. Barber (1968), Bevan (2008), and Mkutu (2006). For a more in depth discussion of the trade in small arms and light weaponry across Uganda’s northeastern borders, see Chapter 4.

livestock was lost during this time period, including goats, turkeys, and chickens (Jones 2005; Mkutu 2006). Houses were burned down and people's crops were often destroyed. While the large-scale cattle raids largely ceased in southern Teso by the early 1990s, they continued along the northern belt into the 2000s. Ultimately, the region has never recovered from the destruction that was caused by these two conflicts from the late 1980s to the early 1990s.

A third violent conflict took hold in parts of Teso in 2003 (Refugee Law Project 2008). Now globally infamous, the LRA originally emerged as an Acholi-based reaction to the NRM/A victory in 1986 (Gersony 1997; Dunn 2004; Allen 2005; Kisekka-Ntale 2007).³⁹ Making its way southeast through Otukei Sub-County in Lango region, the LRA entered Teso through Obalanga Sub-County in Amuria. The insurgent group advanced south to Soroti Town before being repelled. A locally formed militia known as the Arrow Boys, since they were made up mainly of young men, participated in counterassaults on the LRA in conjunction with the UPDF to drive

³⁹ The LRA was first known as the Lord's Salvation Army and then the United Christian Democratic Army before changing to its current name in 1992 (Gersony 1997). Also, another Acholi-based reaction to NRM/A victory, The Holy Spirit Movement (which was led by Alice Auma Lakwena, who believed that she was some sort of spirit medium), actually preceded the LRA (Gersony 1997; Nisekka-Ktale 2007).

There were other active regional/ethnic-based insurgent groups during 1981-85. They included the Uganda Freedom Movement (UFM) and Federal Democratic Movement of Uganda (FEDEMU), both of which were made up mainly of Baganda. There was also the Uganda National Rescue Front (USRF), which was West Nile-based. While the Uganda government military at the time was the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA), it was made up disproportionately of Northerners like Langi, Acholi, and Iteso (Omara-Otunnui 1987). As of 2013, one of the remaining insurgent groups aside from the LRA (which is believed to be somewhere in the jungles of the Democratic Republic of the Congo [DRC] and Central African Republic) is the western-based Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). It is located in the border area between Uganda and the DRC along the Ruwenzori mountain chain. However, the ADF differs historically from many other regional insurgent groups as it maintains a strict Islamicist orientation (Haynes 2007).

them out of Teso.⁴⁰ In comparison to the regional civil war and large-scale cattle rustling, the LRA had a smaller impact in Teso, as it inflicted suffering mainly in Amuria and Soroti. However, as a small group of people in the bordering district of Ngora intimated, they were very close to leaving everything once again upon hearing that the LRA had reached Soroti, despite having only recently resettled their villages. Acholi and Lango (the former by far more than anywhere else) have experienced the worst of the killings, maiming, rape, and child abductions for which the LRA has become known.

While estimates vary, it has been suggested that there were at least 300,000-600,000 people across the entire North who were displaced into IDP camps or elsewhere in the country during the peak years of the various conflicts (Refugee Law Project 2008; Rugadya et al. 2008; Refstie et al. 2010).⁴¹ In Teso, estimates of displacement also vary. One estimate is that during the peak years, there were 160,000 people displaced in Katakwi, 136,112 displaced in Soroti, and 59,207 displaced in Kumi (Nannyonjo 2006).⁴² While these years are in the past and recovery-resettlement is now the focus, many have strongly criticized the way that the central government has handled the IDP crisis in the North (Refugee Law Project 2007, 2008; Lomo 2001; Miller 2006; Mukwana and Ridderbos 2008). There are many who were displaced outside of Teso and have yet to return. There are also scores of people who were displaced into IDP camps in the

⁴⁰ It is now believed that an estimated 100-200 LRA “hardcore” rebels are left (including Kony) and that they are hiding somewhere in the dense jungles of the Central African Republic. They came under accusations of participating in the illicit ivory trade in 2013. See Agger and Hutson (2013).

⁴¹ The Refugee Law Project (2008) suggests 639,760 people in the North were at one point displaced.

⁴² This estimate likely includes Amuria in the Soroti figure, as Amuria did not become a district until 2006. There is currently estimated to be 1.6 million people in Teso. See Chapman and Kagaha (2009), p. 2.

region specifically along the northern belt and they have yet to resettle their ancestral villages. Furthermore, throughout all of Teso, many who have attempted to resettle their customary land have found themselves embroiled in tense disputes—often culminating in violence—with other parties over legitimate tenure rights. Many youth in Teso explicitly state a willingness to fight and die before being displaced from their traditional land. Iteso elders simply intimate, “this is the land of our fathers.”

Methodology and Chapter Outline:

During my research, I was based in Soroti Town in Soroti district, which is the largest town in Teso. I collaborated with a variety of local civil society organization (CSOs) throughout Teso. The CSOs focus on a wide array of issues, including Iteso-Karamojong reconciliation initiatives, advocacy work for women, land conflict mediation, and human rights abuses.⁴³ They are directed and staffed by the local population, although funding is generally acquired from external sources. These partnerships proved to be immensely helpful as they provided me with a rich network of relevant actors in Teso and Karamoja. It is also important to note that many CSO members are not full time staff (paid or volunteer) but are part of what I would describe as a loosely affiliated, decentralized, and highly dynamic network that can be mobilized by full time CSO actors as needed. The achievements of local CSOs in Sub-Saharan Africa have not gone

⁴³ I use the term “CSO” in order to make a clear distinction from the term Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). The point I want make here is that the CSOs in Teso are local, grassroots organizations, although they receive the majority of their financing from international donors. In contrast to NGOs, which are generally internationally managed (and ubiquitous in Uganda), CSOs are locally directed and staffed. CSO networks run very deep in local communities, which make them an invaluable resource for any research. In addition, NGOs in Uganda are much more populous in places like Gulu and Kitgum in Acholi region due to the international attention that the LRA has received.

unnoticed (Susser and Kreniske 1997; Smit 2001; Robson 2001; Susser 2002, 2004, 2009; Devarajan et al. 2011). Moreover, as Ida Susser (2002, 2004, 2009) points out—and this was something I was to find out for myself—it is often women community leaders who spearhead initiatives for social change. Because the CSOs are largely based in Soroti Town and traveling across Teso can be logistically and financially challenging, the CSOs rely on local contacts in villages for real time information on issues. They also rely on these local members for mobilizing people when traveling there themselves. The non-full time actors also engage in non-CSO affiliated village and parish-based community initiatives. Undoubtedly, they are indispensable components of CSO operations.⁴⁴

While I was able to travel to every district in Teso, my fieldwork was mainly in certain areas. For instance, while I traveled to Katawki and Amuria on multiple occasions, I visited Serere just one time and this was only to observe a justice of the magistrate court hear a case in a village. Before traveling to each district outside of Soroti, I would typically contact a CSO member (the name of whom was recommended to me by a fulltime CSO actor in Soroti) who worked/lived in the relevant area and explain the intentions of my research. I would then meet this person in the town or a trading center in the district. We would typically depart for villages on *boda boda* (a motorbike). Most of the people I spoke to were already informed by my local contact that I would be arriving to conduct research. Due to the poor infrastructure in the region, I would sometimes need to stay several days in a district before returning to Soroti. Because Soroti Town is a central location along the northeastern corridor of Teso and Karamoja, I was often able to meet people in town who were passing through on their way to Kampala. I was

⁴⁴ Due to the political sensitivity of some of their activities, I withhold the names of some of the CSOs that I collaborated with in this work. I also alter the names of those with whom I worked. I occasionally alter the locations of my fieldwork as well.

able to rely mainly on a single volunteer for one of the CSOs to serve as an interpreter for Ateso, Kumam, and Luganda when needed (at times, there were several others with whom I worked who also assisted with interpretations). When I was in Karamoja, I relied on CSO actors to interpret local languages.

My data were almost all generated through structured and unstructured interviews, and the cross-section of people I interviewed was broad. It included civil society actors (e.g. organization directors, “peace monitors,” women’s rights activists), religious leaders, local and central government officials, Justice Law and Order Sector (JLOS) officials (which includes the police, district security personnel, and officials of the courts), small business owners, elders, and local inhabitants in villages. I interviewed most of the research participants in villages, although I also conducted interviews at trading centers, local government offices, CSO offices, or during lunch breaks at CSO organized workshops and conferences.⁴⁵ The interviews would last anywhere from ten minutes to two hours and I spoke to many people on more than one occasion. Additionally, I conducted focus group discussions in villages and trading centers, which usually involved anywhere from three to twenty people. I also had plenty of opportunities to speak to people informally in Teso on a wide array of issues.

In the early stages of the research, I became especially interested in the border area between Teso and Karamoja. It had become obvious that a primary factor for why there was significant differentiation between northern and southern Teso with respect to patterns of resettlement was the shared border. This new research focus also took me into southern Karamoja. Because a number of Teso-based CSO actors also engage in community projects in

⁴⁵ According to the UBO (2012), the length of paved roads in the country is 3,264 kilometers and the length of unpaved roads is 16,736 kilometers. The UBO (2012) also states that Uganda has a total surface area of 241,550.7 square kilometers, 199,807.4 of which is land.

Karamoja (some CSOs actually focus specifically on Iteso-Karamojong reconciliation initiatives), I was able to acquire my initial contacts in the region through these actors. I conducted research in the southern districts of Abim, Napak, and Moroto. Traveling in Karamoja is even more difficult than in Teso, as access to public transportation is more limited and the road networks are poorer. In both regions, the rains and floods often necessitated that I adapt my research objectives. While I was often reminded that only five or so years ago the roads were too dangerous to travel on because of the Karamojong warriors who were still “in the bush,” the roads connecting the two regions are now generally viewed as safe. This is considered by many to be an achievement of the grassroots Iteso-Karamojong reconciliation initiatives carried out by local CSOs.

This work is structured along the following lines: Chapter 1 delineates the central drivers of land conflicts in Teso. It considers the issue of scale with respect to these disputes. In Chapter 2, I construct a typology for the forms of land conflicts in Teso. I provide concrete examples of these forms. Chapter 3 focuses specifically on the displacement/resettlement dynamic in Teso. In this chapter I draw out the clear intra-regional differences in the region. I conclude with a discussion of how claims for autochthony in Teso are rising as a result of displacement-resettlement challenges. In Chapter 4, I analyze the sub-national border dispute between Teso and Karamoja. While the border remains largely unpopulated and has historically acted as a “buffer zone” between the Iteso and Karamojong, its fertility makes it a highly valuable resource. In Chapter 5, I focus on the capstone of the CSO-led Iteso-Karamojong reconciliation initiatives, the “peaceful coexistence camps” or “joint Iteso-Karamojong settlements.” I argue that while the joint settlements have partially functioned as a safety valve for pressures on land in Teso and Karamoja, a host of obstacles are challenging their potential for

greater success. I conclude the work by considering how recent political developments in Uganda carry significant relevance for Teso.

Chapter 1

Drivers of Land Conflicts in Teso

Teso has never fully recovered from the civil war, large-scale cattle rustling, and LRA invasion that overwhelmed the region from the late 1980s to mid 2000s. The loss of life, internal displacement, and the destruction of the agricultural and pastoral economies are legacies of these violent conflicts. Widespread land dispossession became another legacy once people began resettling the southern belt of the region in the early 1990s. While conflicts over land transpired prior to this period, they were more isolated and less volatile. They were also managed more effectively by the traditional justice system (Vincent 1977). Since the early 1990s, they have become a deeply entrenched feature of the Teso social landscape. Virtually every village contains land over which disputes have risen. Due to the failures of the formal and informal justice systems, vast amounts of people are being dispossessed from their customary land without any viable legal recourse. Many others only maintain very minimal access to their traditional land. Both segments are part of the rapidly developing surplus labor population in Teso. These people can no longer rely on peasant farming for their social reproduction. They are necessarily turning to alternative social reproductive activities such as agricultural wage labor and cultivating rented land.

The intensification of land disputes in Teso should be situated within the historical context of the three violent conflicts. However, there are a number of drivers to land dispossession in the region. One of the reasons that this phenomenon is so difficult to resolve is precisely because of the wide array of different catalysts. I would argue that there are six immediate drivers: 1) The displacement (and ongoing efforts at resettlement) of the population due to the violent conflicts, or what I refer to as the “displacement-resettlement dynamic” 2)

Increasing population density (especially an exploding youth population) 3) An inadequate system for land demarcation 4) The ineffectiveness of the formal and informal justice systems 5) Unscrupulous actors who seek to acquire land through dubious means, often displacing people in the process 6) Ecological transformations such as increasingly unpredictable seasons, flooding, and drought, all of which affect harvests. I prefer referring to these drivers as “immediate” in order to underline that the a more structural impetus for land dispossession in Teso lies in political economic transformations. Therefore, a second historical context for the intensification of land alienation in the region is the second phase of capital accumulation, which I mark as beginning in the early 1990s. This current phase is strongly tied to the consequences of the regional civil war, large-scale cattle rustling, and the LRA invasion. In contrast to the first period of capital accumulation in the early 20th century, this second period is deeply rooted in the separation of peasant producers from their traditional land. Because the three violent conflicts induced mass displacement, they have inadvertently facilitated this process. In this sense, the three violent conflicts have served as a form of primitive accumulation.

I will begin this chapter by briefly discussing the four constitutionally recognized forms of land tenure in Uganda. In Teso, customary land tenure predominates. There is a voluminous body of literature that critiques customary land tenure in Sub-Saharan Africa. I will highlight several of the debates in this literature. I will then delineate the six immediate drivers to land conflicts in Teso. I will draw on my fieldwork in order to substantiate the six drivers, although a more in depth discussion of specific cases of land conflicts will be found in the following chapter.

Land Tenure Challenges:

There are four forms of land tenure recognized by the 1995 Constitution and the 1998 Land Act: mailo, freehold, leasehold, and customary (Coldham 2000; Hunt 2004; Rugadya 2009).⁴⁶ Mailo land originated with the Uganda Agreement of 1900, which codified the alienation of 8,000 square miles of land to the King of Buganda and his notables. Mailo land is only found in the central region of Uganda. Freehold land is formally titled land that is held in perpetuity. Leasehold land involves an agreement between a lessor and lessee. It is the common form of landholding in the towns and trading centers in Teso. In Soroti Town, the initial lease is five years, although as long as the lessee “develops” the property, the lease is renewed for 49 years.⁴⁷ All indigenous forms of landholding fall under the customary tenure category. Customary tenure predominates in Uganda and this is especially the case in the North. In Teso, roughly 70-80 percent of the land is held under customary tenure. Outside of the towns and trading centers, virtually all land is customarily held. According to the Land Act, customary landholders can apply for a Customary Occupancy Certificate (COC). A COC serves as a title

⁴⁶ The 1998 Land Act restored the four forms of land tenure that the 1975 Land Reform Decree had abrogated. The 1975 decree promulgated that all land is Public Land. The Decree formally converted all *mailo* and freehold land into leasehold. It weakened the power of customary landholders, as the Decree stipulated that customary land could be alienated without their consent. However, Diana Hunt (2004:176) notes that landowners and administrators generally ignored the Decree. It has been argued (Coldham 2000; Hunt 2004) that the 1998 Land Act clearly favors the conversion of all land into freehold tenure. The Uganda’s government’s *National Land Policy* (2013:19) states, “it is clear that public policy regards freehold as the property regime of the future.”

⁴⁷ This was explained to me by an official from a district Land Office, although it was not clear what constitutes “developed.”

for customarily held land. However, very few people in Teso are aware of this option and it is unclear whether possessing a COC would bestow any tangible benefits.⁴⁸

Traditionally, clan elders are the administrators of customary land. The (male) head of the household manages his family's land and is responsible for ensuring that the next generation will have access to the land. He cannot sell the land without permission from the clan elders. If the head of the household dies, the widow becomes the steward of the land and manages it until her eldest male child becomes an adult and marries. However, the traditional system of land governance in the village is presently fractured. Land sales (including the sale of land to someone outside the clan) are increasingly made without approval from clan elders. Opportunistic actors frequently expropriate land from the most vulnerable in society, such as widows, women, the poor, elderly, the infirmed, IDPs, orphans, and children. Clan political channels are easily manipulated with bribes. Because of the instability in the customary tenure system, the vast majority of people in Teso express interest in having their land "surveyed," or converted to a freehold plot. They point to the extremely high costs of surveying as the main impediment. Nonetheless, most people are unaware of the different set of rights that pertain to freehold tenure, so their professed interest in the formal titling process should be understood in

⁴⁸ Applying for a COC costs 50,000UGX (20USD), which is an expensive cost for most people in Teso. It is also not clear whether the COC is worth the cost. While Land Office officials argue that a customary landholder who has a COC is more likely to receive a loan from a bank, there are so few COCs that have been issued in Teso that this cannot be corroborated. Judy Adoko and Simon Levine (2007) report that 28% of the people they interviewed in Teso expressed interest in a COC due to the weakness of the customary tenure system. Most people to whom I spoke were unaware that COCs existed. Jaap Zevenbergen, Thea Hilhorst, and Eddie Nsamba-Gayiiya (2012) also note that very few in Northern Uganda know of the existence of COCs. Informal credit is available in Teso. There are networks on the village level through which one can mortgage their the land to another person for a cash loan (Adoko and Levine 2007).

light of this. Undoubtedly, the high levels of tenure insecurity in Teso are a powerful force that is driving the desire for some kind of change in land governance.

While it had long been popular to argue for the benefits of privatizing customarily held land in Sub-Saharan Africa (Liversage 1945; World Bank 1974; Harrison 1987; Feder 1986; De Soto 2000), the views on this have largely shifted.⁴⁹ Many emphasize the inherent adaptability of customary land tenure regimes (Cohen 1980; Boserup 1985; Bruce 1988; Migot-Adholla et al. 1991). It has been noted that indigenous tenure systems have historically allowed for degrees of commercialization (Berry 1993; Lund 2000; Chimhowu and Woodhouse 2010) and that market transactions in customarily held land are on the rise (Deininger and Mpuga 2009; Holden et al. 2009; Colin and Woodhouse 2010). Many have also pointed to the increase in rental markets in land that is customarily administered (Lyne et al. 1997; Deininger and Mpuga 2009; Place 2009). While some have argued that customary tenure constrains agricultural productivity (Doner 1972; World Bank 1974; De Soto 2000), others point to evidence that suggests the contrary (Migot-Adholla 1991; Pinckney and Kimuyu 1994; Hanan and Minten 2007). It has been argued by many that indigenous tenure systems prevent the development of credit markets (Feder et al. 1986; Feder and Noronha 1987; Brasselle et al. 2002). Nonetheless, there is a body of research that casts doubt on whether formal titling schemes improve access to credit markets (Shipton 1988; Hanan and Minten 2007). At least several scholars (Hanan and Minten 2007; Toulmin 2009) have noted that the cost of establishing and maintaining a formal register are so high that it would offset any potential economic benefits. Nevertheless, it has been noted that the Ugandan 1998 Land Act clearly favors the conversion of all land into freehold tenure (Coldham 2000; Hunt 2004). This contention is supported by the Ugandan government's

⁴⁹ However, Hernando De Soto's (2000) recent work has reignited this debate.

National Land Policy (2013:19) which states, “it is clear that public policy regards freehold as the property regime of the future.”⁵⁰ The World Bank reports that 18 percent of land in Uganda is currently registered (Oketch 2014). This number drops to 5 percent when solely accounting for land in rural areas (Oketch 2014). Obviously, any titling program would require a significant amount of resources.

One of the central points of contention in the debate over customary tenure and land privatization is the protection of secondary and tertiary rights holders. Many have argued that formal titling schemes tend to discriminate against second and third parties (Migot-Adholla et. al. 1991; Shipton and Goheen 1992; Lastarria-Cornheil 1997; Lund 2000). They argue that the formal title-holder (who is a man in patrilineal societies) will often illegitimately exclude others (mainly women and children) from access to the land. In contrast, they contend that customary tenure regimes protect the rights historically conferred to second and third parties. However, it has been argued that customary tenure systems can also be exclusionary (Whitehead and Tsikata 2003; Adoko and Levine 2007; Pedersen et. al. 2012). A case has been cited in Kigezi District in southwestern Uganda where women are actively seeking to acquire formal titles to land in order to circumvent discrimination from the traditional justice system (Pedersen et. al. 2012). Due to several decades of violence in Northern Uganda, exclusionary processes are complicated by resettlement efforts. In Teso, the displacement-resettlement dynamic is one of the central driving forces behind land alienation.

Immediate Drivers of Land Conflicts in Teso

1) Displacement/Resettlement and Insecurity

⁵⁰ Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development, 2013, *Uganda National Land Policy*,

While Chapter 3 provides a much more in depth analysis of the displacement-resettlement dynamic, I will briefly describe the issue here. I use this term in order to underline the ongoing connection between the conflict and post-conflict years. While separating “conflict” and “post-conflict” might be analytically convenient, the historical continuities between the time periods deserve emphasis. As others have discussed, there is a strong relationship between displacement and tenure insecurity in post-conflict environments (Rugadya 2006, 2008; Wily 2008, 2009; Burke and Egaru 2011; Hillhorst et al 2011; Mckibben and Bean 2010). During the peak years of the violent conflicts, tens of thousands of people in Teso were displaced. While many left the region (and some have yet to return), others remained but were forced to live in IDP camps due to regional insecurity. For those who have attempted to resettle, disputes have often arisen over boundary agreements. This is common throughout Teso. In northern Teso especially, many still live in what were once IDP camps but are now considered trading centers. Even though they do not receive food aid and health supplies from NGOs like they did during the conflict years, people remain for a variety of reasons. As one CSO actor puts it, “people have grown accustomed to living in the trading centers due to all the years they spent in the camps.” Furthermore, traversable roads, public markets, schools, and medical clinics are no longer located near villages which have now been uninhabited for several decades. These all serve as strong impediments to resettlement. In parts of Katakwi, large swaths of land are still too unsafe to resettle. While large-scale cattle rustling no longer plagues Teso, Katakwi still copes with small groups of warriors from Karamoja who raid cattle and occasionally kill people in the process. Those who live in the trading centers often rent land nearby to cultivate or farm someone else’s land for a wage. They will then return to the trading centers for the night. They lack the capacity to supplement these activities with the cultivation of their traditional land

because they have yet to resettle. Wealthier people in Teso are commonly accused of “grabbing” land that has simply yet to be resettled by taking out a formal title on it. This is a common practice in resettlement contexts (Toulmin 2009).

There are many trading centers that were once IDP camps in Katakwi where people still live. One of these I visited remains home to several hundred people, all of whom come from four separate villages in what they refer to as a parish from the “West.” According to the LC1 chairman, they have remained here in the “East” because the security situation around their villages is still very poor. Their villages still function as “staging grounds” for Karamojong cattle raiders. Moreover, there are no good roads, public markets, medical facilities, or schools nearby to act as incentives for their resettlement. As a result, they borrow land to cultivate from people in the Eastern parish. While the UPDF has a number of small barracks that are located throughout Katawki (one sees more UPDF personnel in Katawki than any other district in Teso), security in some parts of the district is still poor. Those who continue to raid cattle in Katakwi tend to be from the Jie or Pian clans in Karamoja.

2) Population Growth/Density

Many have written on the relationship between population density and tenure insecurity (e.g. Middleton 1988; Basset and Crummey 1993; Okoth-Ogendo 1998; Bosworth 2003; Deininger and Castagnini 2006; AU 2010). Exponential population growth is proving to be a strong challenge for countries throughout Sub-Saharan Africa. As fertility rates increase, infant and early childhood mortality rates decline, medical attention is more accessible, food/water aid

reach people more effectively, and diseases such as malaria and HIV/AIDs are better treated, populations are growing more rapidly. In peasant-based societies like Teso, land scarcity is a growing problem of immense magnitude. Formal and informal labor markets cannot absorb the growing surplus labor population. Therefore, people who cannot sustain a livelihood from cultivating their traditional land face a bleak outlook. Consequently, struggles over an increasingly scarce supply of land are becoming more volatile and violent. There are approximately 35 million people in Uganda (Tumwine 2010; UBO 2012; UN 2012).⁵¹ The 2012 State of Uganda Population Report notes that 52 percent of the population is under 15 years of age and 78 percent is under the age of 30 (*New Vision* 2013).⁵² With poor employment prospects on their horizon, the youth population in Uganda is facing dire straits. According to the United Nations (2012), there will be over 100 million people in Uganda by 2060 and over 200 million by 2100.⁵³ If Uganda remains a peasant-based society that is characterized by very low levels of agricultural productivity, the pressures exerted upon land will become only more immense. Along with the displacement-resettlement dynamic, rapid population growth is the strongest immediate driver to land conflicts in Teso.

3) Customary Land Tenure: The Demarcation Issue

One of the central flaws with the customary land tenure system in Teso is the absence of a formal land demarcation process. As others have discussed (Rugadya 2004; Adoko and Levine

⁵¹ Peter M. Gukina (1994) notes that the population of Uganda was six million in 1959. Most estimate that the population was only six or seven million at Independence in 1962 (see e.g. Mittleman 1975; Mutibwa 1992).

⁵² *New Vision* (February 2013).

⁵³ United Nations (2012).

2007; Murindwa-Rutanga 2007; Peters 2009), disagreements over boundaries are a central driver to small-scale land conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa. In Teso, clan elders traditionally adjudicate land demarcation disputes.⁵⁴ Typically, people in Teso rely on boundaries such as mango trees, grass lines, traditional plants like the *seiso* or *elgoy*, burial grounds, and accounts from elders. As land becomes increasingly scarce, the informal lines of demarcation are more frequently challenged. Those who are accused of boundary encroachment are known for attempting to eliminate the informal demarcations. For instance, they might intentionally plant cassava inside someone else's tree line or destroy another family's burial grounds. The displacement-resettlement dynamic also pertains to property demarcation disputes. Especially in Amuria and Katakwi, where many villages are only just recently being resettled, disputes often arise because the informal demarcations are no longer visible. Another growing issue is the "fake elder" problem. In these cases, someone spuriously claims to trace their ancestry to a village they resettled and then serves as an adjudicator for a boundary dispute. These men will often be bribed to provide a false testimony for someone who is illegitimately claiming rights to land.

One of the central motivating factors for having one's land surveyed is that it would allow for the "opening up of boundaries," or the formal demarcation of their plot. Those who convert their land to freehold tenure receive a formal blueprint of their property boundaries and have formal "mark stones" planted to serve as demarcations. The main impediment to converting one's plot of customary land to freehold tenure is the cost. Therefore, formal land titling is only something the wealthy can afford. Not only are there a number of steps that one must take if they wish to have their land surveyed, but they all incur separate fees.

⁵⁴ However, it was not uncommon prior to the three violent conflicts for those in disagreement over property boundaries to seek legal recourse with the local government (Vincent 1977).

Moreover, according to those who have gone through the process, the various steps and fees are vague and arbitrary—if not outright extortive. First, one must speak to the LC3 Chairperson and set up a meeting with the Area Land Committee (ALC). The ALC then conducts an assessment of whether there are any outstanding boundary disputes with neighbors. After this, one will then apply for a freehold title at their respective district land office. A district surveyor (who actually works in a private capacity and is often accused of being arbitrarily appointed) will then visit the plot of land and draw out a blueprint. Following this step, one then proceeds to Entebbe to acquire the blueprint of their land and finalize the conversion process. Converting just several acres of customary land to freehold tenure costs at least several million shillings (800-1,200USD). This price is totally unaffordable for the vast majority of people in Teso. For those who can afford freehold conversion, the process is a lengthy one and can take months, if not years. The easiest way to expedite the process is reportedly through well-placed bribes.

4) The Ineffectiveness of the Formal and Informal Justice Systems

Those who are illegitimately dispossessed of their land face limited legal options. Both the statutory (formal) and traditional (informal) justice systems are largely inept and ineffective. Elders, ALC members, witnesses, local government officials, and court officials are all susceptible to bribery. The formal court system is simply overwhelmed with a backlog of land cases. Court officials fairly point out that they lack the resources to adjudicate all the disputes. While the wealthier can expedite the legal processes by more easily covering the necessary fees (and issuing bribes), the majority of people in Teso cannot do this. I met one elderly man who has a case in the magistrates court that has been pending for 20 years. It is not uncommon for victims of encroachment to seek assistance from the police and Resident District Commissioner

(RDC, who is a central government appointee and oversees district security forces) even though neither are part of the judicial system. These two steps are part of the array of bewildering legal channels that people will attempt to pursue in an effort to reclaim rights to their land. There are no formal procedures one must follow. Oftentimes one will approach clan elders, the LC1 chairperson, LC2 chairperson, LC3 chairperson, magistrates court, high court, the police, RDC, and a Teso-based CSO/NGO that focuses on mediating land disputes. If someone feels that a ruling on one level is unfair, they will seek another ruling in what amounts to a de facto appeals process.

The creation of the ALCs (which operate within the informal justice system) by parliament in 2011 was intended to reduce the backlog on the formal courts. The ALCs function specifically to adjudicate intra-clan land wrangles (which include intra-family disputes). However, many people point to how easy it is to “sideline,” or bribe ALC members in one’s favor. Wealthier people in Teso possess the means to illegitimately sway an ALC decision in their favor. A common practice is to acquire a fraudulent formal title to land, dispossessing the legitimate right holders in the process. These expropriators are typically part of the newly forming “accumulating group” in Teso. As the elders are declining in power, they are more easily compromised through bribery. One of the underlying narratives with regard to land dispossession in Teso is the erosion of the traditional justice system. Historically, elders were the central power brokers in Teso. However, the violent conflicts have accelerated their decline in power, as they wiped out much of the livestock that once served as the primary capital assets for the wealthiest in the region. Despite the high fees, people most vulnerable to land dispossession in Teso cite a preference for pursuing their cases within the statutory courts because they no longer trust the elders.

5) Unscrupulous Actors

People with wealth and political power in Teso are known for illegitimately acquiring land. The expansion of agricultural production and speculation are both premised on increasing land acquisitions. It is not always easy to distinguish legitimate from illegitimate land acquisitions. In the post-conflict resettlement context, local investors are often accused of formally purchasing land that only appears as “free land” because it has yet to be settled. While the investor might possess a legitimate freehold title to the land (although the titles can also be forged), it oftentimes overlaps with customary tenure rights. This dynamic is especially common around wetlands. Regardless of the legitimacy of the transaction, people are still dispossessed from their customary land.

There are also many cases in Teso of illegitimate land acquisitions. Those most commonly accused of illegal land expropriations are local government officials and military officers. Most people in Teso feel intimidated by these actors because of their political power. Local government officials from the LC1 to LC5 levels are often accused of co-conspiring. The poorest in Teso feel helpless against these local Big Men. However, there are also many cases of intra-family and intra-clan land dispossession level which simply involve opportunistic peasants. In an environment of heightened tenure insecurity, these actors often target the most vulnerable people in Teso. Orphans who have spent their entire lives in IDP camps are commonly dispossessed of their customary land. While not necessarily wealthy or powerful, opportunistic clan members can easily expropriate parts of their land because the orphans do not know the traditional boundaries. These land acquisitions are not premised on expanding capital

accumulation, but rather in ensuring that their families maintain adequate access to cultivable land.

6) *Ecological Transformations*

Ecological transformations are a driving force behind land conflicts in Teso. Recent research shows an increase in the frequency and duration of droughts and flooding in Sub-Saharan Africa (USAID 2011; United States Geological Survey 2012; Homza and Corendea 2012; Musinguzi 2013). The seasons are becoming more unpredictable, which makes timing the harvests correctly more challenging. Therefore, increased food insecurity is another byproduct of the ecological shifts. For instance, Katakwi is very prone to flooding. Many of the local farmers emphasize how unexpected flooding in recent years has detrimentally impacted their harvest cycles. Several CSO actors and local government officials are predicting severe food insecurity in some Katakwi sub-counties in 2014 because of the increased rate of flooding. They argue that the expectation for flooding reduces the incentive to cultivate land that is located in the floodplain. Increased risk of flooding in some areas drives up the value of land in less flood prone areas. The land around trading centers also becomes more hotly contested, as people from flood prone villages will often relocate here.

In one flood prone northern sub-county in Katakwi, I saw hundreds of kilos of recently delivered rice and *poscho* (maize grits—a local staple) lying idle in the local government office. Many people from the northernmost villages of this sub-county had already relocated to the trading center near the government offices because their land was too wet to cultivate. This sub-county had been waiting two months for food aid but because the adjoining roads to Katakwi Town had been so inundated with water, the delivery could not be made. The parish and sub-

county political officials relied on canoes to travel to the district headquarters for meetings in previous months because of the flooding. The issue now became one of distributing the food, something for which the parish official admittedly had no plan. The combination of a lack of access to the necessary vehicles and poorly maintained roads created a perplexing logistical problem.

Conclusion:

The exponential growth in land conflicts since the early 1990s has been driven by a variety of factors. These drivers do not operate independently but interact with one another, creating a very complex environment of tenure insecurity. The three violent conflicts form the historical backdrop to this phenomenon. While land disputes predated the onset of these conflicts, they were sparser and less volatile. They were also more easily mediated through the informal and formal justice systems. Land conflicts have now evolved into the most pressing issue in Teso. I have described six immediate drivers to this phenomenon. I characterize these drivers as “immediate” in order to emphasize that the most structural driver to land dispossession lies in the second phase of capital accumulation.

This phase differs from the first one in the early 20th century because it is proceeding organically. In the first period, British and Baganda initiatives drove processes of class transformation and social differentiation. In this period, local actors and local structures are the driving force behind these processes. One of the most important components to the current phase of capital accumulation is the separation of peasant producers from their traditional land. The growing numbers of people who must depend on alternative means of social reproduction

such as wage labor is illustrative of fundamental transformations in the Teso political economy. They are not performing compulsory labor as Joan Vincent describes in the early 20th century; rather, they are voluntarily seeking out market-based livelihood approaches because they are either fully dispossessed from their traditional land, or they must supplement cultivation of their customary land with other forms of work. Those in the accumulating group are acquiring the largest land holdings in Teso. They are the driving force behind the current period of capital accumulation. However, the majority of land conflicts originate on the intra-family and intra-clan levels. Cumulatively, more people in Teso are dispossessed of their traditional land because of these smaller scale land expropriations.

The second phase of capital accumulation functions as the most structural driver to land dispossession in Teso, although this process interacts with six other drivers. I have argued that the displacement-resettlement dynamic and demographic pressures are the two most important immediate drivers. The former is the direct result of the three violent conflicts that created such sweeping change in the region. They strongly contributed to creating the necessary context for the current period of capital accumulation. One of the reasons for this is that they induced large-scale displacement of the population. While tenure rights were never fully secure prior to the conflicts, the post-conflict environment in Teso is one of extreme tenure insecurity. The displacement-resettlement dynamic continues to facilitate larger landholding acquisitions (legitimate or illegitimate) along the northern belt as many villages are yet to be resettled. While the southern belt has largely been resettled (although some who were displaced outside the region have not returned), economic conditions are very fragile. Stakes over land have therefore risen considerably in comparison to the pre-conflicts context.

Not all land conflicts in Teso resemble one another. For instance, intra-family and intra-clan land wrangles differ from conflicts over the “free land” that surrounds the wetlands. While each case presents challenges, the latter tends to involve many more people and carry broader regional implications. In the following chapter, I will lay out a typology of the forms of land conflicts in Teso. I will concentrate not only the different dynamics and actors, but also on the issue of scale and regional differentiation. I will draw on my fieldwork to provide in depth detail on the various forms.

Chapter 2

“We Were Told by Our Fathers What This Land Is for”: Forms of Land Conflicts and the Relevance of Scale

Land conflicts intensified in the early 1990s when southern areas of Teso were just beginning to be resettled. A peace agreement between the UPA and the central government in 1993 formally ended the civil war. It would be ten years before the LRA infiltrated south all the way to Soroti Town. While the continuation of Karamojong large-scale cattle raids along the northern belt of the region prevented the possibility for resettlement in Amuria and Katakwi, people began resettling their villages in southern districts such as Soroti, Ngora, and Kumi.⁵⁵ Many who had fled Soroti Town also began to resettle. Land conflicts in Soroti Town differ slightly in character from those in the countryside because leasehold is the dominant form of land tenure. Many people who had leasehold titles in Soroti Town encountered squatters on their land when they attempted to resettle in the 1990s. Even though they had acquired the leasehold titles prior to the onset of the civil war and large-scale cattle raids, new titles had been taken out in their absence, creating a situation of overlapping tenure rights.

The sheer destructiveness of the violent conflicts in Teso from the late 1980s to mid 2000s was immense. Not only did many lose their lives, but tens of thousands of people were displaced, and the agricultural and pastoral economies were decimated. It has been estimated that virtually all livestock was lost (Jones 2005; Mkutu 2006). Aside from the small-scale cattle raids that still occur primarily in Katakwi (although people insist that they are more like “thefts” since they do not resemble the major raids of the late 1980s and early 1990s), Teso is a post-

⁵⁵ Ngora (and another southern district, Bukedea) were not yet formally districts at this time. Ngora became a district in 2011.

conflict environment. However, people still cope daily with the legacies of the violent conflicts. One of these legacies is the transformation in relationships to the land. While access to cultivable land was never necessarily ensured prior to the violent conflicts, the customary tenure regime was more stable. Moreover, the agro-pastoral economy of Teso remained largely intact, although cotton production—the driving force behind capital accumulation in the early 20th century—declined drastically during the presidency of Idi Amin from 1972-79.

The violent conflicts effectively triggered radical change in Teso society. I have termed one of the key drivers to land disputes the “displacement-resettlement dynamic” in order to emphasize the historical continuities between the conflict and post-conflict years. The violence due to civil war, cattle rustling, and insurgent groups might have largely ceased, but the legacy of these years is a lasting one and this is realized nowhere more than with respect land tenure insecurity.

It is my argument that the violent conflicts have inadvertently functioned as a form of primitive accumulation by inducing the separation of peasant producers from their customary land. Land alienation is one of the primary components to the second phase of capital accumulation in Teso, which I mark as beginning in the early 1990s. Widespread land dispossession has forced many people to turn to alternative social reproductive activities such as informal wage labor and tenant farming. In contrast to compulsory forms of wage labor during the first phase of capital accumulation in the early 20th century (Vincent 1982), wage labor is now performed voluntarily. It is relied upon as a key alternative livelihoods approach, which also differs from the reasons for performing wage labor in the mid 20th century (Vincent 1977). The growing dependency on alternative forms of labor, the expansion of a land market, and the increasing instability of the customary tenure regime are all aspects of the current phase of capital accumulation. These developments—which are part of the broader processes of class

transformation—are proceeding organically. This is perhaps the most fundamental difference between the first and second phases of capital accumulation. In the former, radical transformations to the indigenous political economy were a result of exogenous forces; that is, British and Baganda colonial initiatives facilitated capital accumulation and social differentiation.

This chapter focuses on the various forms of land conflicts in Teso. The majority of land disputes in Teso occur between family members and within the clan, although there are also more complex cases in the region. While there is often overlap between the forms (for instance, intra-family disputes are often intra-clan), I think there is analytical value to constructing a typology for land conflicts. A typology assists in creating a clear map of the different dynamics to land disputes. I would argue that there are seven forms of land conflicts in Teso: 1) Intra-family 2) Intra-clan 3) Inter-clan 4) Inter-ethnic group 5) A disagreement between people and the local government 6) A dispute between local people and the local/central governments over prospective land for development initiatives and/or military installations 7) A dispute between local people and the Ugandan Wildlife Authority (UWA) (which is formally under the central government) over newly alienated land.

This chapter will describe each form of land conflict in Teso. I will provide examples of the various forms in order to draw out the different dynamics. I will also call attention to how scale is important for understanding the differences between the forms. While intra-family and intra-clan disputes might only involve a single garden or an acre of land, the two forms that involve the central government can involve several hundred acres or more. Furthermore, these latter two forms tend to involve many actors, as entire parishes might claim tenure rights (or at least specific land use rights) to the land in question. Nonetheless, the sheer number of intra-

family and intra-clan disputes dwarf the number of cases that involve the central government. As others have noted (Cotula 2012; Oya 2013; Edelman 2013; Becker 2013), the element of scale is often uncritically considered in the land grab literature. Too much emphasis is placed on the amount of land expropriated as the best indicator for understanding qualitative impacts on local communities. I would argue that the multitude of the most localized struggles over land impact Teso more significantly than the several high profile cases in the region.

In the Village: Intra-family, Intra-clan, Inter-clan, and Inter-Ethnic Disputes

The most common forms of land conflicts in Teso occur within and/or between families and clans. They are also the most small-scale disputes, as a disagreement might simply be over the correct location of a tree line that has traditionally served as the informal property demarcation. Inter-ethnic disputes over land are also very localized, although they are not as common. While they can serve as the central dynamic to a land conflict, they can also operate on a more secondary level. For instance, the brother of an orphan's deceased father might attempt to take advantage of the latter's weaker political position by encroaching on his traditional land. This is clearly an intra-family and intra-clan dispute. However, the brother might also be motivated to do so if the orphan is a product of an intermarriage and his sister-in-law is not Iteso, but Kumam. Therefore, this case involves three overlapping forms, as it is also inter-ethnic. This particular example is also emblematic of those who are most frequently victims of land expropriation. Along with orphans, widows, women, the elderly, children, IDPs, the poorest, the disabled, and those who are infirmed are considered the most vulnerable in Teso. As the most powerless members of society, they are the easiest targets for a family or clan member who is seeking to aggrandize his landholdings.

The path that one takes to challenge land encroachment is circuitous, time consuming, financially draining, and often wholly futile and disheartening. Part of the problem stems from the absence of any clearly stipulated procedures for pursuing one's case. As I have argued in Chapter 1, the ineffectiveness of the formal and informal justice systems is one of the six immediate drivers to land conflicts in Teso. Typically, the procedural incongruencies mean that plaintiffs pursue their case within both the informal and formal justice systems. While one will often begin the process of addressing their grievance on the LC1 level, this is not necessarily the case if the LC1 official is the accused encroacher. The magistrates and high courts have been utterly inundated with cases of land conflicts in recent years. The result is that many cases can pend for ten, 15, or even 20 years. Officials in the formal court system concede how problematic it is for cases to languish for so long, but they (fairly) point out that the system is overburdened. Area Land Committees (ALCs) were created by an act of parliament in an attempt to resolve land wrangles on the village level. However, the ALCs can only attempt to adjudicate disputes within the clan, so they cannot assist in resolving inter-clan or inter-ethnic land wrangles. In these cases, clan-based informal justice mechanisms are generally nullified.

Aside from navigating the different legal channels for pursuing a land case, one also has to contend with the existing field of power relations. One of the main reasons why people in Teso currently prefer seeking legal redress through the formal courts is the erosion of the traditional justice system. The ineffectiveness of the elders in mediating land disputes has created a vacuum of power on the village level. However, the cost to pursue a case in the formal courts often exceeds what people can afford. Therefore, the wealthiest in Teso are at a distinct advantage as they can more easily pay the necessary legal fees. Moreover, they tend to maintain strong ties to powerful local political actors such as LC3 and LC5 chairpersons. Of course, it is

very often the most powerful political officials (who are also very wealthy) who are accused of expropriating land.

Those with the necessary means can also manipulate cases by bribing elders, witnesses, and members of the formal justice system (including police). While bribery is nothing new, it is occurring on an unprecedented scale. For people in Teso, the erosion of the traditional justice system and the ways in which money can now be used to acquire desired legal outcomes are direct results of the violent conflicts. People lament that everyone from members of the ALCs, elders, LC1s, LC2s, witnesses, the police, and court officials can now be bribed. Complaints that elders, ALC members, and local government officials are conspiratorially collaborating with a wealthy encroacher are quite common. For the most vulnerable populations in Teso, it is often assumed—rightly or wrongly—that the elders, ALCs, local government officials, and wealthy members of their clans are plotting against them.

Bribery is only one of the ways through which one can illegitimately influence a case. Many fear pursuing legal recriminations against someone who might know “Big Men” in the police, military, or local government. Many widows, elderly people, and orphans feel too powerless to seek legal redress against someone who is believed to associate with powerful actors in Teso. Furthermore, the threat of violence is seen as increasing when the encroacher is a member of the police or military, for it is assumed that they then possess weapons. In general, the presence of firearms in communities (or the ease with which one can acquire them through informal markets) impacts whether a victim of land expropriation seeks retribution. It is not only current or former members of the police and military who possess firearms. There are still many holdover firearms from the civil war. There are also holdovers from the government-sanctioned militias during the years of “Obote II” from 1981-85. Police in Soroti Town maintain a list of

those who are believed to be in possession of illegal guns. They offer some form of compensation to those who voluntarily relinquish their firearms.

Intra-family, intra-clan, and inter-clan disputes are relatively evenly widespread throughout Teso. Inter-ethnic disputes are most common in areas with higher rates of ethnic diversity. In addition to Iteso, there are Kumam and Bantu groups who maintain customary rights to land. According to the police and magistrate court, the worst violence stemming from land conflicts occur in Serere and Kabermaido districts. These areas were settled much later than other parts of Teso such as Katakwi and Soroti. Therefore, the clans possess weaker traditional ties to the land, making challenges to tenure rights more common. While Amuria was largely unsettled until after the colonial era, the process of resettlement has proceeded much more slowly because of its close proximity to Karamoja. As southwestern districts, Serere and Kabermaido do not pose similar resettlement obstacles.

It is difficult to estimate the number of intra-family, intra-clan, inter-clan, and inter-ethnic land conflicts in Teso. Aside from the issue of conceptual overlap, there are more practical ones as well. There have never been any systematic surveys conducted on the number of land wrangles (regardless of the different forms) in every village in Teso. The district, sub-county, and parish-level governments have never performed such research. While CSO/NGO-led research has been conducted on land conflicts in certain villages in Teso, they have not been systematic in their approach.⁵⁶ The central problem is the lack of a coherently organized system of record keeping across all levels of local government in Teso. While sub-county local government officials track the number of people who report land disputes to their offices (there are usually around three to five new cases every month), not all cases reach the sub-county level.

⁵⁶ See Adoko and Levine (2007) and RLP (2008) as examples.

Some are resolved on the parish level and others are successfully mediated on the village level. Unfortunately, there is no written documentation of land wrangles on the parish and village levels. The statutory courts cannot provide an estimate for the number of regional land disputes either, since they do not hear all of the cases. Similarly, not all cases are reported to the police, although they recently opened a “land desk” due to the explosion of land conflicts in Teso. The development of an integrated system of record keeping in Teso is unlikely in the near future. Of course, one of the challenges is that local governments on the sub-county, parish, and village levels have no access to electricity, so any documentation is currently done by hand or typewriter.⁵⁷

I provide two examples of intra-family, intra-clan, inter-clan, and inter-ethnic land disputes below. Many of the dynamics that I have discussed above are readily apparent in the two cases. Both cases contain conceptual overlap, which is very typical for land wrangles in Teso. While one involves three acres of land in dispute, the other conflict is over a larger amount of land. Not all small-scale land disagreements are over a few acres or less. “Small-scale” also denotes the number of actors involved. With regard to land conflicts on the village level, there are typically two families in disagreement. It is not uncommon for conflicts over a plot of land to recur. A former colonial era county chief of Teso district has dealt with three separate attempts by families to encroach on his land, the first time dating back to 1969. It is also quite common for the losing party to ignore a verdict on a land conflict. As of 2013, neither of the two disputes below have been resolved.

⁵⁷ While some district headquarters maintain access to the electrical grid, electricity tends to be intermittent. Other districts are not necessarily connected to a functioning electrical grid. Only 15% percent of households in Uganda draw electricity.

“They Threatened Me At Gunpoint, Killed My Son, and Burned Down My House”

Atungo Monica is an elderly woman from Asuret sub-county in Soroti. She and her husband bought three acres of land from a fellow clan member in 2000. However, the man from whom she bought the land almost immediately instructed his son to reclaim the land. She has been attempting to fend off encroachment on her property for over ten years. Over this time period, she and her husband have been subjects of different forms of abuse. The encroachers have threatened to kill her if she does not leave the land, even once holding her at gunpoint. Her son was killed as a result of the dispute. Her livestock has also been attacked. Eight of her cows have been cut and one was even killed. The encroachers also burned down her house. According to Mrs. Atungo, the family seeking to expropriate her land has circumvented the traditional and formal justice systems. One of the men in the family is very wealthy and they have used this to their advantage by bribing elders, political officials, and the police. Mrs. Atungo believes that the police are actively conspiring with this family. While she has reported the various forms of abuse to the police, the police have denied that her livestock were attacked. She believes that the police are urging her to sell the livestock so that any evidence of the slashes on her cows is destroyed. While some of the accused are related to her husband, he is very weak, so he is unable to prevent the attacks. Recently, the encroachers ploughed over maize that Mrs. Atungo had planted. The aggressors were arrested and Mrs. Atungo received 150,000UGX (60 dollars) as compensation for damages.

The legal path that Mrs. Atungo has pursued is one well-traveled by people in similarly placed positions. She initially took her case to the LC1 chairman, but he sided with the accused party. She thinks he was bribed. She then proceeded to speak to the LC2 and LC3 chairpersons, but believes that they were also bribed to rule against her. Aside from approaching the police on

multiple occasions, she has also brought her case to the magistrate court. A hearing for the case was scheduled for October of 2012. Mrs. Atungo professes more confidence in the formal justice system because she thinks the traditional justice system is too easily manipulated. While she believes that her husband has some form of paperwork that indicates they are the rightful stewards of the land, there are no formal demarcations for the property (trees are used as informal boundary lines). She accuses the original seller of falsely claiming her husband's paperwork is fraudulent.

The land dispute in which Mrs. Atungo is engulfed shares many characteristics with other cases in Teso. For one, it is both intra-family and intra-clan. Secondly, the land in question was sold through informal channels, and it only amounts to three acres. The practice of informally selling customary land has increased in Teso since post-conflict resettlement began. While the clan must formally sanction any sale of land, this procedure is now often ignored. The growth of a land market in Teso has weakened this aspect of traditional political structures. Third, Mrs. Atungo is part of one of the most vulnerable groups in Teso, the elderly. If her husband was not also old and weak, he would be in a better position to confront the encroaching clan members. The ongoing nature of this dispute is also quite common to land wrangles in Teso. Finally, the encroaching family has used their wealth in dubious ways to aggrandize their landholdings. They have already consolidated control over the majority of land in her village. It is often one family in a clan who abuses their power to acquire greater tracts of land. Many of those in her village who are already dispossessed of access to their own land have been forced to

cultivate someone else's land for a daily wage, which generally amounts to only 2,000UGX (80 cents).⁵⁸

"We All Lived Peacefully Together Before the Wars and Displacement"

Andrew is a middle-aged science teacher on the secondary level in Kabermaido district. While he formally owns property on the outskirts of Kabermaido Town, he still maintains customary tenure rights to more than ten acres of land in a village in Bululu sub-county, over 15 miles away. The northern part of the village is located very close to the shores of Lake Kyoga. Wetlands surround the village from the southern end. In order to reach it, one must travel over a murrum-constructed bridge of very low elevation. "Murrum" is a hard, dried out, stone-based road. It provides better traction than a simple dirt road, although it is still very impermanent. As most murrum bridges in Teso sit only several feet above wetlands and lakes, they are prone to flooding and deterioration.

While Kumam first settled in this part of Bululu, Bantu ethnic groups were permitted to settle here decades ago. Inter-ethnic settlement laid the grounds for intermarriage and Andrew is such an example. His father is of Bantu origin and his mother is Kumam. Andrew spends most of his time on his freehold property in Kabermaido Town, but he still seeks to ensure stewardship over his land in his village. Therefore, he visits his customary land usually once a week to "check up on it." He has reached informal agreements with several families that allow them to live on and cultivate the property without any kind of charge. Any payments by the

⁵⁸ To provide a context for understanding how little 2,000UGX (80 cents) amounts to, a dinner plate in Soroti Town consisting of rice, beans, cabbage, and two or three ounces of meat (half of which comes from the fat) costs 3,500UGX. A liter of gas costs 4,000UGX at small shops in the sub-county trading centers.

families tend to be impromptu and non-monetized. This was illustrated when one of the families gave Andrew a goat upon our arrival. For Andrew, it is more practical to leave his customary land under informal stewardship than to let it lie fallow. This also likely deters people with whom he has not reached an agreement from cultivating and building on his land.

However, this has not prevented his uncle on his mother's side of the family from attempting to dispossess him of his land. His uncle is clearly motivated by the fact that Andrew's father is Bantu. In patrilineal societies, descent is traced through the father, so Andrew is at a disadvantage in a Kumam-dominant village (despite the fact that his mother is Kumam). His uncle is one of the leading voices in the village for forcing all families of Bantu origin off the land. He has physically threatened to kill Andrew if he remains on his customary land, which has influenced Andrew's decision to permanently live in town. Exacerbating his fears is the presence of a cache of weapons in one of the homes in the village. It is also easy to purchase firearms through informal markets in town. In Andrew's view, the civil war and cattle raids are to blame for Kumam who seek to dispossess all Bantu of land. Prior to the violent conflicts, "Bantu and Kumam coexisted peacefully and intermarried," but the mass displacement engendered a new social environment. He believes that current inter-ethnic tensions in the village are simply a manifestation of the deep social ruptures caused by the violent conflicts.

Andrew's case is instructive for the similarities it contains to other land conflicts in Teso, but also for the several anomalies. It is predominantly inter-ethnic, although it is also intra-family on a secondary level. Informal justice mechanisms are inapplicable to the inter-ethnic land disputes in this village, since the systems of traditional justice differ. Therefore, ALCs cannot attempt to mediate the dispute either. While Andrew (like many others in Teso) describes a state of peaceful coexistence between the different ethnic groups in Teso prior to the violent

conflicts (excluding those from Karamoja), it is likely more of an issue of degree of “peacefulness.” His point is similar to the one that many in Teso make when they insist that the problem of land wrangles only emerged in the post-conflict context. The issue is not whether there was a complete absence of conflicts over land in Teso, but the degree to which they occurred. While disputes over land predate the late 1980s, it is only during the ongoing recovery process in which they have surged exponentially and increased in severity.

One practice that has become increasingly common in Teso is the informal borrowing of land, or what is called *alipi amisiri* in Ateso. Many who were displaced into IDP camps during the violent conflicts resorted to this practice as a supplemental social reproductive activity. While they were unable to access their traditional land for security reasons, they borrowed land to cultivate from families nearby. In Amuria and Katakwi, many still reside in what are now trading centers but were once IDP camps, continuing to depend on this form of tenant farming. They often choose to do so because they have encountered difficulties when attempting to resettle their traditional land (particularly the vulnerable groups) or their villages are still not yet safe for resettlement. Many cultivate borrowed land during the day and return to their small living areas around the trading centers at night.

There are also those in Teso who have been dispossessed of their customary land and now permanently reside and cultivate on borrowed land. This is likely the case for the several families who have borrowed land from Andrew. This practice has its risks for the lenders though. One of the reasons why many in Teso would rather let their land lie fallow than lend it out—and even if a formal fee is charged—is the concern that the tenants will claim tenure rights to the land after a period of time. Therefore, even though a family can realistically only cultivate four or five acres given current levels of agricultural technology, there is a disincentive to lend

out vacant land that is also under their stewardship. In Andrew's case, the threat of violence, his status as an ethnic outlier in a Kumam-dominant village, and his ability to reside elsewhere have swayed his calculus.

Indeed, Andrew's situation is rare in that he has a viable alternative living arrangement. While the size of his property in Town does not allow for much cultivation, he can still maintain livestock. His teacher's salary—though minimal—also provides him with a cash flow on which to draw, something uncommon for most peasants in Teso. Andrew is also not the prototypical victim of land encroachment. Those in Teso with salary-based incomes tend to be the ones who are purchasing properties (as he did in Kabermaido Town), and not those facing dispossession. His inter-ethnic background provides the strongest explanation for his predicament. It functions as the central motivation for his Uncle's determination to expropriate his property. Similar to inter-ethnic land disputes, those involving the local government, central government, and UWA tend to occur less frequently.

Expanding Scale: Local and Central Government Involvement

Conflicts over land that involve the local government and/or central government differ from those that are intra-family, intra-clan, inter-clan, and inter-ethnic in form. They necessarily operate on an expanded scale qualitatively, but not necessarily with respect to the amount of land in question. In other words, "scale" should be conceptualized not just *quantitatively*, but also *qualitatively*. Village-level land disputes typically involve just two families. They are also isolated to a specific village. Local and central governments are both institutional actors, which necessarily expands the (qualitative) scale of the land conflicts. In these cases, the state is at the center of the dispute. In contrast, the state is peripheral to village-level conflicts. It is implicated

if political officials are accused of accepting bribes or viewed as complicit in dubious land acquisitions. It is also implicated in terms of how it has failed to substantively intervene in an intractable problem. However, it is not a central actor in either of these contexts.

An added dynamic to cases with local and/or central government involvement is that the legitimacy of the state is directly called into question. Some in Teso even believe that the central government is purposefully choosing not to intervene on the issue of land conflicts because Museveni seeks retribution against Iteso for the civil war. In their view, Museveni is orchestrating a program of ethnic oppression against Iteso. They see a connection between the absence of central government intervention on mediating land conflicts and the failure of the central government to compensate them for property damage caused by the civil war and cattle rustling. In the early stages of resettlement, people were instructed by local government officials to submit government-issued forms with a list of all the property damages they incurred because of the violent conflicts. However, no one has ever received any compensation.⁵⁹

Nonetheless, it is important to note that the local and central governments do not necessarily work in concert. On the parish and sub-county levels especially, local government officials feel intense pressures because they operate between the space of local populations and the district.⁶⁰ Village and parish-based local government officials often blame the district government for failing to heed attention to problems on the village level (sub-county political officials are usually more reserved in their remarks, as they interact more with district

⁵⁹ On the government forms, people would list everything from the number of acres of crops that were destroyed, the number of livestock killed (including which kind of livestock), and whether their houses were burned down.

⁶⁰ I do not include the village-level (LC1) local government officials, because LC1 officials are not very powerful outside of the village. They are also typically not much better off than the average person in terms of wealth or living conditions.

personnel). Local government officials on the district level like to blame the central government for their incapacity to stem the rise of land conflicts. In their view, they are an underresourced institution. They argue that because the central government disburses funds to them only once a year and then allots them just one week to make budgetary decisions, they operate ineffectively.

Out of the three forms of land conflicts that involve the local government and/or central government, only those involving solely the local government may be quantitatively small in scale. Similar to the four village-level land conflicts, they may involve only an acre or less. They typically consist of disputes over the expansion of trading centers or the location of newly constructed district offices. In Teso, there are at least four separate accusations against the central government for grabbing land. They are each quantitatively large-scale, as at least one involves approximately 300 acres. Three of them involve land that the central government has slated for development initiatives. The one accusation of land grabbing against the UWA in Teso is also quantitatively large-scale, as it involves land that was previously occupied by a number of villages. The three forms of land conflicts that involve the central government involve the highest number of actors, as entire parishes might be in protest. Below, I provide an example of a local government land conflict. I also analyze two accusations against the central government for expropriating land under the rationale of development projects, and consider the case involving the UWA.

Retroactive Justice? “We Want Our Land Back”

Accusations that the local government is encroaching on or has illegitimately expropriated land are common throughout all the districts. It is either a single family or several families who make these claims. Three types of accusations of land grabbing against the local

government are found in Teso: 1) The district or sub-county government is constructing government offices on land to which members of the local population claim tenure rights 2) The sub-county or district government is constructing a public institution like a school, central market, or hospital that infringes on the property of a family or families nearby 3) The district or sub-county government is leasing customary land for the purposes of constructing or expanding a trading center without the permission of a family or families. Trading centers are commercial strips under leasehold tenure that are comprised of small traders and small shop owners. They are found throughout the various sub-counties. Some may only contain several permanent concrete structures and few traders or shop owners. They are often located in close proximity to schools and medical clinics. Many trading centers were once IDP camps.

A case involving two sisters from Kachumbala sub-county in Bukedea illustrates the third type of accusation of land expropriation against the local government. Sarah and Betty live in a village that is adjacent to the Kachumbala trading center. They are accusing the sub-county government of leasing a part of their customary land in order to allow for the expansion of the trading center. According to Sarah and Betty, they have repeatedly confronted the LC3 chairman on this matter and have accused him of accepting bribes. They have sought the assistance of a NGO in Soroti Town, which has visited their land at least once to document the case. This move ignited the wrath of the LC3 chairman who argues these sisters are circumventing the normal legal channels for addressing a land dispute. Sarah and Betty contend that they cannot afford to lose access to any more land. They have already been dispossessed of most of their customary land. Consequently, they supplement the cultivation of their several remaining gardens with informal agricultural wage labor. They earn 2,000UGX/day (80 cents) to cultivate someone

else's plot of land in their village. For them, the "small money" they earn from performing wage labor (or *leja leja* in Ateso) is still not enough to maintain an adequate livelihood.

Sarah and Betty's case is complicated by the fact that elders in the village claim their grandfather "donated" the land to the sub-county government over 50 years ago. The practice of "donating" land to the local government was common during the colonial and early post-colonial periods when there was a more abundant supply. Land was donated with the intent that the local government would construct public facilities such as a public market, a school, or a hospital on the property. Those who relinquished rights to some of their customary land believed that there would be a greater benefit to them and the local population. Therefore, for others in Sarah and Betty's village, the sisters are making an illegitimate retroactive claim. In their view, they cannot reclaim a piece of land that was released by their grandfather, even if they are currently unable to meet social reproductive demands. Unfortunately for the sisters, the traditional justice system is not supporting them in their case against the sub-county government. As women, their position as the sole stewards of their land is not something that is in their favor. Even if the accusation of retroactive justice is correct, they are still very likely victims of discrimination.

In Teso, access to public facilities tends to decrease the further one is geographically removed from the township and district government offices (both of which are usually located in the same vicinity). Therefore, especially for the sub-counties that are furthest from the townships, securing access to public infrastructure is a serious priority. Sarah and Betty's case illuminates the complexities of this matter. Many other accusations of land expropriation against the local government also involve just a single family. While the expansion of district government offices is not something that local populations would necessarily be in favor of (in point of fact, local government is viewed as terribly corrupt in Teso), constructing or expanding

schools and medical clinics elicits a different response. Families who attempt to block such initiatives find themselves on unstable ground. While many who live in the same village do not want to appear to be in outright opposition to appealing family, they also realize that the entire parish would benefit from improved access to public services. Indeed, the primary justification for political decentralization in Uganda (which has resulted in a veritable explosion of new districts in the country) is that the devolution of power from the central government to local governments would more effectively and efficiently facilitate the delivery of public services to local populations (Green 2006, 2009, 2010).⁶¹

“We Were Told by Our Fathers, Who Were Told by Their Fathers, What This Land is For”

One of the most volatile land conflicts in Teso pertains to the use of a wetland known as Amodine, which is located in eastern Malera sub-county in Bukedea. The severity of conflicts around wetlands has not gone unnoticed in the land grab literature (Borras and Ross 2007; Peters and Kambewa 2007; Kay and Franco 2012; Duvail et al. 2012.). Wetlands are a highly valued natural resource for agricultural and pastoral societies in Sub-Saharan Africa (Scoones 1991; Taylor et al. 1995; Rebello et al. 2010). Amodine shares a sliver of a border with Karamoja and a much larger border with Bugisu region. It is estimated that the total surface area of Amodine is 25 square kilometers (approximately 6,178 acres). Local populations from each region have historically used it for hunting, fishing, the grazing of animals, and accessing water. Many people in Malera believe that Amodine should only be used for these activities. As one elder puts it, “we were told by our fathers, who were told by their fathers, what this land is for.” However, in 2008 the district chairman of Bukedea suggested to the central government that

⁶¹ In 1991, there were 34 districts and now there are over 110 (Green 2008; MOLG 2010).

Amodine be the site for a development initiative, noting that it is largely vacant and underutilized. In collaboration with the local government, the central government has since proposed that Amodine be the location of two separate development projects: a sugar plantation and an irrigation system. The central government contends that Amodine constitutes a “free land”; in other words, it is not permanently settled or cultivated so no one can claim customary tenure rights. According to government officials, the sugar plantation will provide a much-needed alternative source of income for people in Bukedea. They argue that the irrigation system will provide a stable, year-round supply of water to a sub-region that is already prone to drought and flooding.

This is not the first attempt by the central government to introduce commercial agriculture to Teso. The location of a sugar plantation in the Agu wetlands in Soroti was proposed several years ago, but it met fierce resistance. Local populations argued that the government was illegitimately grabbing their land. Despite efforts from local government officials to explain to people that they would benefit from the commercial agricultural initiative, local people continued to mount stark resistance. As a result, a new site outside of Teso is being proposed for the sugar plantation.

Similar to the Agu case, local people in Malera have mounted significant resistance. Many argue that communities in Busoga region which had their land alienated for sugar plantations are not benefiting. People note that the main reason for why Amodine appeared to be so vacant in 2008 was that a large segment of the displaced population had yet to resettle. Youth continue to threaten violence against anyone who attempts to expropriate their land. While they do not have access to firearms, they have announced that they will use any means available to them in an effort to ward off encroachers, even burning cars. In late 2010, the district speaker (a

local government official who works under the district chairman) and a town clerk experienced the severity of the threats firsthand. Several people from a village nearby Amodine visited the speaker and clerk at their homes, and gave them poisoned mangos. While the district speaker survived, the town clerk died. After several months of recuperating, the district speaker resigned his post. Both men had been tasked to build grassroots support for the development initiative, so they were strongly identified with the projects.

One of the main reasons that members of the local community express such strong disapproval for the development initiative is that they feel they have been excluded from any decision making. This is a common explanation for why most government initiatives—even if they are ostensibly in the interest of local populations—are resoundingly rejected. CSO leaders emphasize that without a “bottoms up approach” on development projects, local people are bound to oppose them. According to a Bukedea local government official, the former Minister of Northern Uganda recently conducted research on the Amodine development initiative. The Minister concluded that the vast majority of people opposed it because they assumed exclusion from the planning process. While the Minister of Teso Affairs concurred with him, the Minister of Parliament (MP) for Malera and the Bukedea district chairman still pushed for the initiative to proceed. It is rumored that the district chairman has threatened the Malera sub-county chairperson with her life if she does not support the initiative. While some believe that the youth would be largely supportive of the projects if they were properly “sensitized,” others assert that “ignorance” and the lack of education is too pervasive in the general population. As one Bukedea local government official puts it, just hearing the words “development” and “investment” induces visceral opposition in the local community.

While the failure of the local and central governments to seriously engage the local community on the development initiative is a key reason for their heavy opposition, it also because the state operates with a legitimacy deficit in Teso. Most people harbor deep resentment and suspicion of the state on both local and central government levels. They remember NRA abuses during the civil war (especially their collaboration with Karamojong cattle raids) and believe that any “real” development projects occur in the southwest, President Museveni’s home region. They point to the roads that local governments promised would be paved years ago, and note the lack of secondary schools, medical clinics, and markets. They believe that most of the money for the development initiative would simply end up in the pockets of local government officials and the companies contracted to build the facilities. Especially given the wetland’s rich natural resources, the development project requires too much trust to be placed in a government which most see as bias and corrupt.

Adukut: For Whom Does It Benefit?

The dispute over 300 acres of land known as Adukut in Kapelebyong sub-county in Amuria is just as volatile as the conflict over the Amodine wetlands. Adukut lies along the highly valued “green belt,” which is a fertile tract of land that stretches from southeast Karamoja to northwest Teso. The northern side of Adukut borders Lokopo sub-county in Napak district in Karamoja. Like Amodine, the dispute over Adukut revolves around its historical use. The local and central governments maintain that it has never been permanently settled, so it constitutes a free land. With the support of the Kapelebyong MP, the Amuria district government, and high-ranking members of the Kapelebyong sub-county government, the central government has proposed that Adukut become the site of a livestock breeding center and a military barracks.

Local government officials contend that the livestock breeding center will bring necessary investment to Kapelebyong and that the military barracks will provide security against the ongoing threats of cattle raids from Karamoja. They maintain that the local population has been requesting security against the cross-border raids for years, so the barracks fulfills a central government promise. In the view of one local government official, project will not only block a historic “gateway” for Karamojong raids, but the enhanced security will also attract the construction of hospitals, schools, and markets.

Members of the local community describe a very different situation. They contend that Adukut is not actually a free land, since people hold customary rights to at least some of the land. The problem is that the people who once maintained tenure rights have yet to resettle. Similar to Amodine, Adukut’s position on the border with Karamoja means that those who lived in nearby villages were displaced well before the peak years of the cattle raids in Teso in the late 1980s. Many living along the border in Amuria, Katakwi, Kumi, and Bukedea were displaced in mass shortly after Moroto barracks fell to the Matheniko (a Karamojong sub-group) in 1979. Some have undergone recurring bouts of large-scale displacement due to Karamojong cattle raids since the mid 1960s. As a counter proposal, an advocacy group in the local community has suggested that the 300 acres be evenly divided into separate plots and distributed to widows who lost husbands during the violent conflicts. In contrast to the government’s proposal, they argue that this initiative would address the most pressing in Kapelebyong, which is landlessness. Many former IDPs are still living in congested trading centers because they lack access to land that they can (re)settle.

There is also strong community dissent from the government’s position that the military barracks is necessary for preventing ongoing cattle raids. Instead, many argue that the

construction of a military barracks is not only unneeded, but that it delivers the wrong signal to the Karamojong. In their view, it runs counter to the inter-ethnic reconciliation efforts that have been made over the last seven years. Community leaders attribute the origin of these gains to the peaceful coexistence policies that were pioneered by the former district chairman of Amuria, Ochen Julius (2006-11). A central tenet of the peaceful coexistence policies is that Iteso and Karamojong must find ways to interact and live together with resorting to violence and bloodshed. The capstone of the Iteso-Karamojong reconciliation initiatives are the peaceful coexistence camps, which are newly created joint living areas along the border belt. While people in Kapelebyong admit that they had requested a military presence along the border for years, it is simply no longer needed. Security along the border is now so improved that people feel safe walking along the road from Oditel parish in Kapelebyong to Apeitolim parish in Lokopo. Five years ago no one would dare to walk along these roads in fear of being killed by Karamojong warriors.

There is another sharp divergence in the dueling narratives presented by officials in the central and local governments and the local population. The former maintain that the ultimate beneficiaries of the initiative will be the local population. They cite the desperate need for investment and development in a tremendously poor district. Residents counter that their interests are not what lie at the center of the Adukut proposition. In fact, they believe that the justifications for the development initiative serve as a subterfuge for the real intentions that underlie the motivation for the project. One of the popular theories is that there are natural resources that lie underground the Adukut territory. People point to the proven presence of gold, bauxite, iron ore, and other natural resources in Karamoja. They suggest that the similar geology along the border belt probably means there are similar subterranean resources on the Teso side.

Many people believe that a “gold belt” stretches along the border. One theory is that knowledge of the gold belt goes back to the colonial period. Reportedly, there is a long, dark line of what was described to me as “black ash” that is visible across several sub-counties in Amuria. They believe that the British dropped this ash from planes with the intent of creating an identifiable marker for natural resource deposits. People point to old “mark stones” in Obalanga sub-county as likely indicators of where gold or minerals lie. Planes have also been spotted flying overhead within the last several years, which many think might be part of a surveying initiative.

It can be difficult to disentangle the substantiated theories from the more conspiratorial ones (and, therefore, those minimally or non-supported with hard evidence). However, regardless of the accuracy of some of the popular theories, they are indicative of the general lack of trust that the local government has for the local and central governments. The state legitimacy deficit ensures that any proposed development projects will be met with automatic skepticism. After land conflicts and resettlement challenges, many people cite corruption in government as the central problem facing Teso. Scandals on the local and central government level abound throughout Uganda, which has even resulted in the suspension of foreign aid. Generally speaking, the skepticism runs so deep that whenever one sees high ranking military officers, central government officials, or people presumed to be investors, it is assumed that the a land grab is being orchestrated.⁶²

“Green Grabbing”: UWA Consolidation of the Green Belt

⁶² A group of youth at a parish located only several kilometers from Amodine thought that I was an investor.

In another conflict along the green belt, residents of a parish in Magaro sub-county in Katakwi are accusing the UWA of land dispossession. The UWA contends that alienation of this part of the green belt is for preservation purposes. This is a common explanation for the phenomenon that has become known as “green grabbing” (Vidal 2008; Fairhead et. al 2012; Borras et. al. 2013). James Fairhead, Melissa Leach, and Ian Scoones (2012) assert that justifying land alienation along lines of forest preservation, biodiversity imperatives, or ecosystem services goes back to the colonial period in Sub-Saharan Africa. They argue that “green grabbing,” or “the appropriation of land and resources for environmental ends,” is not necessarily conducted with eco-friendly intentions (2012:238). In point of fact, the appropriation of nature can inhere to deeper processes of primitive accumulation and capital accumulation (Peluso 1993; Perelman 2007; Alice 2011; Fairhead et. al. 2012). While large tracts of land in Uganda were turned into national parks and forest reserves during the colonial period, the practice of alienating new land is viewed as highly problematic. In addition to land dispossession in Magaro, the UWA has also been accused of consolidating control over other parts of the green belt in bordering Napak. Given the rapid population growth across the country, people in both Teso and Karamoja are highly critical of any new UWA land alienation.

Magaro is one of the five sub-counties in Katakwi that lies along the green belt and borders Karamoja. Residents were blocked by the UWA from resettling their parish when they attempted to return in 2007. They were informed by the UWA that the land has now become part of a game park, so they are not permitted to resettle. While there were once ten villages in their parish, they have been reduced to two. The concentration of the entire parish into two villages—which people now refer to as “camps” because of how they elicit memories of the congestion in IDP camps—has created an economically unviable situation. Not only is there not

enough land for families to cultivate, but the UWA also expropriated the most fertile parish land. The land they were left with is prone to flooding, which residents blame for recent crop failures. As a result, many people have chosen to live by the trading center in Magaro. When a group of these migrants attempted to return to their land for cultivation purposes (but not resettlement), the UWA confiscated their oxen plow. CSO actors in Katakwi and informed local government officials foresee a potential for famine in sub-counties along the border belt in coming years. Food insecurity is already high.

Similar to Adukut, a popular theory for new UWA land alienation is that the central government is merely intent on accessing subterranean natural resources along the green belt. Many point to this as the only possible explanation for what would otherwise seem to be highly problematic public policy. Given resettlement imperatives and increasing population densities, how else can new land dispossession for conservation purposes be rationally justified? Members of the local community call for land use policies that are more “people friendly” rather than “animal and plant friendly.” In a context of heightened land scarcity, the local population considers new UWA land dispossession another example of a government that is failing them.

Conclusion

Conflicts over land abound throughout every district in Teso, although the forms differ. I have constructed a typology of these forms in order to draw out the varying dynamics. The typology enumerates seven in total. Frequent overlap between the different types of land disputes calls attention to the complexity of this social phenomenon. Four of these types (intra-family, intra-clan, inter-clan, and inter-ethnic) are micro-level disputes that occur on the village level. The three other forms involve the local and/or central government. These can either be

quantitatively small in scale (as is often the case with disagreements over land use between families and the local government) or can involve much larger amounts of land. I have underlined how these latter three forms also directly raise the issue of state legitimacy. The state operates with a legitimacy deficit on both the local and central levels in Teso. When institutional actors like the UWA are accused of unfairly alienating land, it only serves to further enhance skepticism toward the state in the region.

There are no instances in Teso of millions of hectares of land being alienated. The largest (potential) expropriation of land pertains to a wetland in Bukedea known as Amodine, and this amounts to just over 10,000 acres. The other most volatile conflict over land in Teso is located near the border belt between Amuria and Karamoja. In this case, the land in question is known as Adukut and totals 300 acres. I have argued that scale should not only be conceptualized quantitatively. Research on land grabs has too often emphasized quantity as the most important characteristic of scale. This narrow conceptualization tends to elide more nuanced critiques of the qualitative impacts of land alienation on local communities. As Marc Edelman argues, scale pertains not only to the amount of expropriated land, but to “the application of capital to that land, the availability of water, and the types of accumulation and social reproduction that these factors facilitate or impede (2013:497). Conceptualizing scale along these lines requires a richer understanding of the “on-the-ground realities,” as Edelman puts it, which are much more difficult to unravel (2013:490).

In my view, the multitude of village-level land conflicts is exerting a more powerful impact on people in Teso than the handful of large-scale cases. Entire parishes are affected in the cases of Amodine, Adukut, and the UWA “green grab.” Yet, these are relatively isolated and small in number when considering all of the other instances of land dispossession in Teso. Not

only are the number of families impacted in these cases significantly greater, but I would argue that these land disputes are also tearing apart Teso “from within”; in other words, they do not involve institutional actors who are already distrusted and delegitimized, but family members and clan mates who also claim rights to traditional land in “Mother Teso.” The reality here is a dark one: endogenous actors—fellow Iteso—are driving land dispossession in the region. A central government with a perceived Southwestern bias or a president who still seeks to “conquer Teso” cannot be blamed for this reality.

Opportunistic Iteso who seek to aggrandize their landholdings at the expense of other people in their community did not emerge overnight. The destructiveness of the three violent conflicts—and specifically the mass displacement—created a set of conditions in Teso which have facilitated processes of land dispossession in very particular ways. Conflicts over land abound throughout all of Uganda (and in Sub-Saharan, in general), including many areas that are not post-conflict environments. However, the dynamics within these context necessarily differ. In Teso, the violent conflicts lie at the center of any attempt to explain the particularities of land dispossession. This is precisely why I have emphasized the importance of the displacement-resettlement dynamic as a key driver to regional land disputes. The violent conflicts also sharply intersect with the emergence of the second phase of capital accumulation. For this reason, I have argued that they can be conceptualized as a form of primitive accumulation. Sisters like Sarah and Betty in Kachumbala who rely on informal wage labor to supplement their social reproduction; or the families who are forced to borrow land from men like Andrew in Bululu, are part of a rapidly growing surplus labor population in Teso. Faced with limited or no access to their traditional land, their social reproduction is increasingly reliant on non-traditional economic practices.

For people in Teso, any attempt to understand the fundamental social transformations in recent years begins with the displacement caused by the violent conflicts. However, there are regional differences with respect to the impact of the conflicts. While all of Teso was strongly effected during the peak years of from the late 1980s to early 1990s, there are divergences in experiences before and after these years. Processes of displacement and resettlement have not unfolded uniformly. The next chapter seeks to illustrate these divergences. I will focus specifically on the areas of Teso that border Karamoja, because no where more has violence and displacement been experienced over a longer period of time.

Chapter 3

Resettling Amuria, Katakwi, and Tisai: Elders-For-Hire, Reconciliation Diplomacy, and the Forgotten IDPs

Just as the mass displacement caused by large-scale cattle rustling, civil war, and the LRA invasion devastated Teso from the late 1980s to mid 2000s, entrenched processes of land dispossession are currently impacting the region with a similarly deleterious result. They also share a similarity in that they both induce(d) displacement. Military officers, local government officials, civil servants, NGO workers, and others with adequate capital are acquiring new landholdings in Teso. Those who purchase land under freehold tenure might possess legitimate titles to the land (although forgery of land titles in Uganda is an ongoing issue).⁶³ However, a problem commonly emerges when a local family protests that a newly acquired freehold title is infringing on their customarily held land. The matter is complicated even further when the family has yet to fully resettle. In this case, the new titleholder might have acquired legitimate freehold rights to what appeared to be vacant land with the intent of developing a commercial fruit growing farm. However, in Teso there is hardly any land that is actually “vacant” or “free”; instead, there is land that has yet to be resettled.

This example serves as an illustration of how the violent conflicts and primitive accumulation intersect. For Christopher Cramer and Paul Richards, primitive accumulation “has been carried out by violence and has followed warfare and conquest, and it has often been a feature of the rearrangements securing during violent conflicts” (2011:289). It is my assertion that the violent conflicts have incidentally contributed to accelerating processes of capital

⁶³ In February of 2014, the Mbale District land board the district land board has been accused of operating a forgery scheme for leasehold titles. See Mafabi (2014).

accumulation by causing mass displacement. In this sense, they have functioned as a form of primitive accumulation. Teso is rife with seemingly “vacant” or “free” land because of resettlement obstacles, which creates a fertile environment for cases of overlapping tenure rights.

Those who participate in land speculation or acquire freehold titles for land with the intention of immediately investing capital in a productive enterprise such as a fruit farm are at the loci of the second phase of capital accumulation. I have characterized this phase as an ongoing process that began in the early 1990s. Two key components to this phase have been land alienation and the growth in voluntarily performed, market-based wage labor. The alienation of customary land is necessary for the expansion of a land market. The separation—or “freeing up”—of peasants from their traditional land has created a surplus labor population which relies at least partially on wage labor for their social reproduction. The first period of capital accumulation from the early 1900s to mid 1920s differs in this respect (Vincent 1982). Land alienation occurred only on a secondary level and wage labor was only performed as a result of extra-economic coercion (Vincent 1982).

The majority of cases of land dispossession tend to operate at the periphery of the processes of capital accumulation. They typically involve opportunistic family or clan members who seek to aggrandize their landholdings, but not with the intention of transitioning from peasant farming to commercial agriculture. Instead, they seek to augment a social reproduction that is based on peasant farming. Their primary concern is the growing problem of land scarcity, not one of potential opportunities for capital investment. In Teso, most still cling to an economic vision that is rooted in peasant farming. Their decision to attempt to expropriate vulnerable people from their customary land is better understood as a kind of hedging against rising land fragmentation.

I have argued that the displacement-resettlement dynamic is the most important of the six immediate drivers to land conflicts in Teso. These drivers interact with the deeper, more structural process of capital accumulation. The violent conflicts are central for understanding these phenomena, which is why I consider the displacement-resettlement dynamic to be the most important of the six immediate drivers. The thrust of this concept is to emphasize that there are clear continuities between the conflict and post-conflict years. Richards and Cramer suggest the idea of “a continuum of violence or peace-war continuum” in order to emphasize the principle of historical continuity (2011:209). While I have drawn on the concept of “post-conflict,” I find it valid because it indicates that previous levels of violence in Teso have at the very least significantly declined. Ultimately, there are never any clear breaks in history. The concept of the displacement-resettlement dynamic seeks to underline this point. Moreover, many events can trigger—or contribute to—the unfolding of deep, structural processes without consciously formulated intentions by actors who are directing their trajectories. This second historical point forms the basis for my argument that the violent conflicts have functioned *inadvertently* as a form of primitive accumulation. Stated differently, the violent conflicts have incidentally contributed to processes of primitive accumulation; they were not orchestrated with the intention of achieving this effect.

Processes of displacement and resettlement have evolved unevenly in Teso. Generally speaking, people began resettling the southern districts of Kabermaido, Serere, Soroti, Ngora, Kumi, and Bukedea in the early 1990s. This period coincided with the culmination of the civil war and the drop off in large-scale cattle raids, which permitted the beginning stages of resettlement to begin. This was not the case for the northern districts of Amuria and Katakwi, which share long borders with Karamoja. Similar resettlement obstacles existed for the small

sections of Kumi and Bukedea that border Karamoja. The continuation of large-scale cattle raids along the border belt (as well as in Karamoja itself, Lango and Acholi region to the west, and Sebei region further south) prevented the possibility for resettlement. In contrast to other parts of Teso, the central problem for areas that lie closest to the border with Karamoja has long been one of cyclical displacement. This chapter concentrates on the three areas most affected by Karamojong cattle rustling in Teso: Amuria, Katakwi, and Tisai Island in Kumi. While land conflicts are a feature of the entire Teso social landscape, there are intra-regional differences with regard to their characteristics. In the case of Tisai Island, I look at the rise of a phenomenon that has become increasingly widespread across much of Sub-Saharan Africa, but is still relatively isolated in Teso: struggles over autochthony. I will consider how this development more broadly intersects with the violent conflicts.

Resettling Amuria: The LRA, Long-Term Displacement, and Customary Tenure Instability

Amuria is located in the northwest corner of Teso. Both Lango and Karamoja regions border Amuria to the north. In addition to Kabermaido and Serere, it was one of the final sections of Teso to be settled (Karp 1978; Vincent 1982). Along the Amuria-Karamoja border, some areas have never been permanently settled, although efforts have been made. Some of the families that claim customary rights to land that is closest to the border first attempted to permanently settle in the mid 1950s, but they were displaced by Karamojong cattle raiders. Additional efforts over the next several decades were also stymied. Any further attempts to settle after 1979, which is the year when the Moroto Barracks fell to the Matheniko and automatic weapons proliferated across Karamoja, would have been futile. Most people from sub-counties along the border in Amuria, Katakwi, Kumi, and Bukedea tend to mark 1979 as the

initial onset of displacement. Those from the northernmost parishes in Amuria such as Arabet and Okoboi experienced displacement earlier on. However, the border has long served as a strategic buffer zone between Iteso and Karamoja clans. Land along the Amuria-Karamoja border had historically been an open area that was used for hunting or the grazing of animals before Iteso first attempted to permanently settle in the mid 1950s. Part of the problem stems from the fact that Teso and Karamoja regional governments have never reached a consensus on the actual location of the border.

The close proximity of Amuria to Karamoja has meant that local populations have experienced the brunt of cattle rustling. Amuria also experienced the worst of the LRA invasion in 2003, as the Acholi-based insurgent group initially infiltrated from the north through Obalanga sub-county, which borders Lango. Some argue it was at this time that Amuria underwent the worst violence within the last thirty years, as the LRA invasion coincided with ongoing cattle raids. For at least one person from Obalanga, the LRA invasion ranks worse than the Karamojong cattle rustling because the former forced people to live in IDP camps alongside UPDF soldiers. In the case of the cattle raids, people would be displaced, but they could still voluntarily return to their villages. Even though they would often have to repeat this process, there was no element of coercion. This differed with the LRA invasion. The UPDF employed “cordon and search” tactics in their attempt to combat the LRA, which is premised on the enclosure of the local population into designated areas. The goal is that this will isolate the insurgents, as they will not be able to then blend into the local population. However, many have been critical of the cordon and search tactics, which the UPDF has also employed during disarmament exercises in Karamoja. Several scholars have referred to these IDP camps as “internment camps” because of how people were forced against their will to live in them (Jones

2007, 2009; Kratli 2010). Ultimately, the process of resettlement is still in the early stages in Amuria. People only began resettling parts of Obalanga in 2007. Unlike districts along the southern belt, one can travel many miles across Amuria and still see no signs of permanent settlement. The closer one travels to the border, the more likely one will find large swaths of land that are not home to villages, but to bush that has grown seven or eight feet high in the absence of any settlement.

The unique dynamics in northern Teso have created a slightly different context for land conflicts. In the view of one Soroti-based CSO actor who has worked extensively in Amuria, the mass displacement induced by the violent conflicts is the main driver to land disputes in the border areas. In contrast, he considers the primary drivers in southern Teso to be population density and the commercialization of land. Both of these drivers have caused an increase in the market value of land, which he sees as a development more specific to the “interior” of Teso. One of the complicating factors to resettlement in Amuria is the length of time that people spent in displacement. Large segments of the population have been displaced for thirty or more years. Not everyone from southern Teso initially returned to their traditional villages after the peak years of violence from the late 1980s to early 1990s. However, many did begin to resettle and the shorter time period of general displacement reduced the potential for people to expropriate land that had simply yet to be resettled. The different experience of displacement in Amuria has made it more prone to what one researcher, when considering the post-conflict situation in Northern Uganda altogether, describes as a context of “rampant land-grabbing by politicians, civil servants, the business community and local and national investors vying for the ‘spoils of war’” (Onegi 2012:31).

Like Serere and Kabermaido, the customary tenure system in Amuria has reduced traction because of the later date of initial settlement. The long period of displacement has exacerbated its instability, specifically with respect to land demarcation. I have argued that the disagreement over plot boundaries is one of the six immediate drivers to land disputes in Teso. As no formal system of demarcation exists, families rely on informal markers such as mango trees, traditional plants, or grass lines. Disagreements over boundaries are heightened in the context of Amuria because of the greater length of time that people have spent in displacement. What once served as informal demarcations may no longer be visible. Permanent structures might have been destroyed long ago. Land has been left fallow for so long that the location of former villages is less identifiable.

An example of a demarcation dispute can be seen with the so-called “squatter problem.” While many families have only begun resettling in the last five years, others managed to resettle the areas further removed from the border over twenty years ago. However, some of these early returnees resettled on another family’s land. Now that the families that maintain legitimate tenure rights to the land are attempting to resettle, they are encountering “squatters,” or other families on their land. The families that resettled twenty years ago view the squatting accusation as baseless, especially because they have already been cultivating the land for many years. Another variation of the squatter problem in Amuria involves members of a family who are attempting to resettle on their traditional land, but find another family already settled and claiming that they bought the land from the other family’s father. In a section of Teso where customary rights to land was already less clear, the possibility for these kind of issues increase. Unlike cases of overlapping tenure rights in Soroti, which involve an overlapping of customary

and leasehold tenure rights, cases in Amuria involve multiple families claiming customary rights to certain plots of land.

Another form of boundary disagreement can emerge in the cases of orphans, widows, and children who are attempting to resettle.⁶⁴ Many youth who lost fathers and older brothers during the violence are now trying to resettle their ancestral villages. However, because they have spent their entire life in IDP camps, they do not know the correct boundaries. This heightens their vulnerability to land dispossession. Many families have been accused of grabbing an orphan's land by expanding the demarcation of their plot. They expropriate land that had traditionally belonged to the family of the orphan. Widows are also victims of this tactic. In-laws are often accused of blocking or "chasing away" women from resettling on their deceased husband's land. CSO actors are actively working on educating women of their tenure rights, but in the view of one parish councilor (who also works with regional CSOs), most women in Teso remain "uninformed" and easy targets. A similar problem emerges for widows and children when there are no male children who are old enough to be legitimate heirs to the family's land.⁶⁵ In such a case, the widow then has to negotiate with the clan over access to land, although the verdicts frequently disadvantage the family because women are traditionally "not meant to own land." Indeed, one of the reasons why the debate over the use of the Adukut in Kapelebyong is so volatile is that it could provide land to the most vulnerable members of society who are finding their access to land severely restricted or even cut off.

⁶⁴ In Teso, people use the term "orphan" to refer to any one who lost fathers during the violent conflicts. For instance, they use "orphan" when referring to a man who is now 30 years of age but grew up in IDP camps.

⁶⁵ One is a legitimate heir around 20 years of age.

Each of these forms of boundary demarcation disputes becomes more complicated by what is being referred to as the “fake elder” problem. This new development is also tied to the weakness of the customary tenure system in Amuria and the longer period of displacement. “Fake” elders often become an issue when two families are attempting to resolve a conflict over a piece of land through either the traditional or formal justice system. One family might call on an elder to provide a testimony that confirms the boundaries of the land to which they are claiming rights. Yet, it has become a common practice for families to find elders who will testify on their behalf even if they are not actually from the same village. Or, the elder lives in the same village but only settled there after the initial years of displacement, meaning it is not his traditional village. Families will simply bribe elders to provide corroborating testimony. In effect, they are elders-for-hire.

The resettlement process is underway in Amuria, despite the significant obstacles. Nonetheless, there are not ongoing security threats that are preventing resettlement. In the assessment of a local government official in Obalanga, resettlement is proceeding “unimpeded.” The LRA was driven out of Teso in 2006. Large-scale cattle rustling is no longer occurring. Many in Amuria emphasize the tremendous advances in Iteso-Karamojong relations. They point to the number of Karamojong who engage in commerce in the district (mainly through the sale of alcohol) and to the successes of the joint Iteso-Karamojong public market in Kapelebyong, which is open twice a week. Moreover, it is emphasized that the Amuria local government is in continuous contact with their counterparts in Napak and Abim districts in Karamoja, something that is also a new development. For Amuria’s neighboring Teso district to the east, however, the situation is very different.

Settled First, But Resettling Last: Katakwi and the Result of Failed Policy?

Katakwi is a northeastern district in Teso. Usuku in northern Katakwi was the original destination of the first Karamojong migrants who broke off from their clans in the mid 17th or 18th century (Karp 1978; Vincent 1982). Karamojong elders referred to them as *Atesin*, or “dead corpses,” because it was believed that they would not survive if they left Karamoja. These first migrants became the forbearers of the Iteso. They continued pushing south, establishing modern day Teso.⁶⁶ Katakwi occupies a special place in the history of the Iteso for this reason, as it is the location of the first ancestral lineages. While Katakwi differs from Amuria in this respect, it shares the problem of maintaining a border with Karamoja. Moreover, the Katakwi-Karamoja border is twice as long as the Amuria-Karamoja border. It lies adjacent to the traditional homelands of two separate sections of the Karamojong cluster: the Bokora (the only Karamojong homeland that Amuria borders) and the Pian. Similar to the Amuria-Karamoja border, the Katakwi-Karamoja border has traditionally served as an unpopulated buffer zone. It also contains a section of the highly valued green belt. This is a very important point because of the climactic differences between southern and northern Teso. Unlike the more fertile south (which Joan Vincent [1982] considers the primary reason for its historically greater level of economic development), the north is more arid. It is also disadvantaged because it experiences monomodal rainfall patterns (as opposed to bimodal in southern Teso), which are less conducive for agriculture. Finally, like the Amuria-Karamoja border, there has never been a consensus on the demarcation of the border between the Iteso and Karamojong who claim customary or communal access rights nearby.

⁶⁶ Some even migrated further southeast into what is now western Kenya (Karp 1978).

Cattle rustlers from Karamoja remain more active in Katakwi than in any other parts of Teso. The most affected areas of Katakwi are the five sub-counties that border Karamoja: Ongongoja, Usuk, Palam, Ngariam, and Magaro. The miles of uninhabited land that are visible across many of these sub-counties are a testament to the resettlement challenges, the most important of which are the ongoing security threats. On the first day I traveled to Katakwi, a village was still in mourning over the loss of a *muse*, or old man, who was killed several days earlier by Karamojong cattle rustlers on his way home from a baptism. This is emblematic of the cattle rustling that continues to pose a security challenge to Katakwi. The large-scale raids that once occurred involved a large group of men, sometimes numbering in the hundreds (Mkutu 2006). Now, cattle rustling is only conducted by a very small group of men and a much smaller number of cattle are stolen. Therefore, local people refer to them as “thefts” in order emphasize how they differ from the raids of the peak years. They describe a situation of small bands of warriors—maybe only two or three at a time—who “move stealthily in the bush,” a tactical shift that is at least partially due to the increased presence of UPDF personnel along the border. One community leader from Aketa parish in Ongongoja describes them as occurring “every day, every week.” While the timing of the thefts is largely unpredictable, people cite increases in frequency during certain times of year, such as in January when Karamojong boys must pay their school fees.

UPDF personnel and barracks are more visible in Katakwi than in any other part of Teso. They guard the kraals, which are enclosed areas for herding cattle. There is also a special police unit, the Anti-Stock Theft Unit (ASTU), which is tasked with recovering and returning stolen cattle to people in Teso. However, their performance has received mixed reviews. Some have questioned their competence, while others suggest that they are too scared of the Karamojong

warriors to track stolen cattle once they are taken across the border into Karamoja. Some even believe that they are complicit in the thefts.

The continuous threat of cattle rustling has made resettlement a challenge in many parts of Katakwi. For instance, families began leaving the trading center in Aketa to resettle their villages in 2008. This trading center was once one of the largest IDP camps in Katakwi. It began offering refuge to families in 1979 and at one point it was home to 7,026 people. In Kaikamosing parish in Palam, only 96 families out of the original 246 families have since returned. Furthermore, the “Western side” of Kaikamosing remains too dangerous to resettle, so families from this section have been forced to borrow land to cultivate from families on the “Eastern Side.” These tenant families either return to the nearby trading center (which was previously an IDP camp) for the night or erect temporary structures on the borrowed land in which they can sleep. The practice of informally leasing land to families that cannot resettle their villages either due to ongoing security threats or because they have been dispossessed of their tenure rights continues apace throughout Katakwi. However, not all families sought refuge in IDP camps upon being displaced, as many left Teso altogether. Similar to the people who stayed in the IDP camps, these returning families are also facing obstacles to resettlement. In general, the areas closest to the border are still considered too unsafe for resettlement. Only the Ongongoja local government is actively encouraging families to return to their traditional land along the border. These families will typically travel there during the day for cultivation purposes, but then return to the trading center at night. Permanent resettlement is still too risky. Many also accuse Karamojong of occupying disputed areas of the border belt and believe that they are continuing to encroach further south.

Conflicts over land share similar characteristics to those in Amuria, although because resettlement has proceeded more slowly in Katakwi, they are not as abundant. Most disputes involve disagreements over demarcation. The long periods of time that families have spent in IDP camps (or in locations outside of the region) have made reaching agreements over plot boundaries more difficult. Similar to Amuria, the erosion of traditional forms of demarcation have increased the potential for boundary disputes. The obstacles that orphans, widows, and children face in Amuria are also found in Katakwi. The vast majority of land wrangles are small-scale affairs and can be characterized as intra-family, intra-clan, or inter-clan.

However, there are several larger-scale conflicts along the border belt, including UWA alienation of land in Magaro. Another case involves families who are attempting to resettle Olilim parish in Ngariam. They have been blocked from returning to their villages by the UPDF, which has constructed an artillery school in the parish. While a training school for Local Defence Units (LDUs) and a military barracks has been located in Olilim since the early 2000s, the artillery school is a more recent addition.⁶⁷ The local population is suspicious that there might be oil in Olilim, which would explain why they were never consulted over the location of the artillery school. For families from Olilim, this is only the latest turn in a long history of displacement. Karamojong cattle raiders initially displaced people from certain parts of Olilim in the late 1960s. A larger wave of displacement occurred in 1979 upon the windfall of arms that spread across the region after the collapse of Moroto Barracks.

Public sentiment in Katakwi towards Karamojong differs from that which is expressed in Amuria. Many in Amuria emphasize the improvements in Iteso-Karamojong relations and cite a

⁶⁷ LDUs are paramilitary units comprised of Karamojong (all male) youth. Teso also has a history of mobilizing LDUs. Karamojong have accused Iteso LDUs of committing violence against them.

willingness to finally forgive Karamojong for the cattle raids. While bitterness remains, reconciliation is seen as necessary. In Katakwi, there have been no real improvements in reconciling relations with Karamojong. CSO actors who work on Iteso-Karamojong reconciliation projects blame the persistence of cattle thefts in Katakwi on the fact that the district has never sought peace with local governments in Karamoja. They attribute the improvements in Amuria-Karamoja relations to the pioneering efforts of the Amuria district chairman, Ochen Julius, beginning in 2006. When Ochen was elected District Chairman, Amuria was still dealing with the threat of the cross-border raids that continue to pose an issue for Katakwi. Recognizing the long history of enmity and distrust between the people and local governments of the two regions, Ochen proposed a compromise with the Karamoja districts of Napak, Abim, Nakapiripirit, Moroto, Kotido, and Amudat. It was decided that Amuria would no longer push for a formal demarcation of the Amuria-Karamoja border or call for a greater UPDF presence along the border (two extremely contentious policies that were pursued by his predecessors).⁶⁸ Instead, CSOs would develop grassroots initiatives that would seek to improve Iteso and Karamojong relations. These initiatives would be rooted in “bottoms up” engagement; CSO members and their affiliated grassroots actors would spread out across the Amuria, as well as into certain parts of Karamoja, encouraging mutual forgiveness a of Karamojong. Some of the CSO leaders learned substantially more about the shared history between Iteso and Karamojong by speaking to Karamojong elders across the border. They also worked with their counterparts in Karamoja on developing concrete reconciliation platforms such as joint Iteso-

⁶⁸ Amuria was not formally incorporated into Teso as a district until 2005 (Ochen’s first year in office). It was previously part of Katakwi District. When I refer to his “predecessors,” I mean Katakwi district chairmen or others in local government who prioritized formal demarcation of the Teso-Karamoja border.

Karamojong public markets and settlements. Ochen's reconciliation diplomacy created the opportunity for cooperation between Amuria and local governments in Karamoja as well.

The policies pursued by Ochen are unanimously credited with restoring stability to the Amuria-Karamoja border and allowing for the resettlement process to continue without the fear of Karamojong cattle rustling. Katakwi, on the other hand, is considered to have pursued the opposite course to its detriment. It continued to press for formal demarcation of the border. It also emphasized the need for a military solution to the cross-border raids, rather than seeking political rapprochement. However, Katakwi may have finally decided to employ some of the principles undergirding Ochen's reconciliation diplomacy. The District Chairman who was elected in 2011 is considered to be more supportive of peace-based initiatives than his predecessor. The previous Katakwi District Chairman was considered extremely hostile to Karamojong. Many believed that his administration encouraged revenge attacks against Karamojong. Indeed, the twelve Karamojong who were killed by Iteso on a bus that was traveling through Katakwi on Moroto-Soroti Road in 2007 is forever seared in the memories of Karamojong. Distrust remains on both the Katakwi and Karamoja side of the border, although it is more concentrated on the level of local government. On the village level, Iteso and Karamojong tend to emphasize a desire for "peaceful coexistence."

The Forgotten IDPs: Tisai Island and the Struggle over Autochthony

Tisai Island is part of Ongino Sub-County in Kumi District. It sits in Lake Opeta and is approximately eight square kilometers in mass. Nakapiripirit borders Tisai on its eastern shores. One needs a canoe to reach Tisai from the Ongino mainland. The dug out, rudimentary canoes are operated by local fisherman. Similar to most waterways in Teso, the water is no more than

five or six feet deep, and is chock full of swampy marshlands. It is approximately a 30-45 minute ride to Tisai from the mainland, depending on the skill and strength of those paddling. During the dry season, the water levels reduce enough so that one can reach Tisai from Nakapiripirit on foot.

Iteso who claim customary rights to land on Tisai refer to themselves as the “forgotten IDPs,” because they feel that they have never been recipients of the kind of aid that other displaced populations in Teso once received. Moreover, they trace their first wave of displacement to the late 1960s. Since then, many families have experienced four or five separate waves of displacement. One of the reasons why Tisai is so sparsely inhabited is that most families have elected to not yet resettle. Instead, many of them reside on the mainland of Ongino by the trading center. Some of these families frequently “check up” on their land. They travel to Tisa and visit those who have fully resettled, before traveling back to the mainland. The threat of cattle raids by the Pian from Nakapiripirit is the primary disincentive to resettlement. Unlike the Bokora in Napak District (which borders Amuria and Katakwi), the Pian have not participated in the disarmament exercises in Karamoja, so are still heavily armed. It is not uncommon to spot Pian off the shores from Tisai. They are more likely to cross over to Tisai during the dry season, because their cattle can wade across.

In addition to the threat of Pian cattle raids, Tisai natives point to another pressing problem, although this one is more recent. This pertains to the “western” pastoralists who graze their animals on the island. Their presence has incensed local Iteso. For both those who have permanently resettled and those who still reside on the mainland, these pastoralists are infringing on their customary tenure rights. Complicating matters even more is that they are not Iteso, but a combination of Bayankole, Banyarwanda, Batoro, and other Bantu ethnic groups from southwest

Uganda. They are commonly referred to as *Balalo*. Many local people conspiratorially draw a direct link between them and the fact that President Museveni is also from the southwest. They believe this is proof that President Museveni seeks to permanently displace them from Tisai. Some of the herders are former soldiers, which only adds another layer of complexity to the situation, as they are considered more likely to possess weapons. Local Iteso will at times refer to the herders as “Museveni’s people.” In their view, if anything is “owed” to them after decades of displacement, it is access to their customary land. After all, in the absence of any public services on the island (there is not even one bore hole, not to mention a public market or murrum roads), can they at least not maintain tenure rights to their traditional land?

For Iteso, the southwestern herders simply do not belong on Tisai. In this inter-ethnic context, Iteso ground their accusations of land grabbing within a framework of autochthony. In other words, who is a “true son of the soil”; or, who truly “belongs” in Mother Teso? The rhetoric differs from small-scale land disputes that are intra-family, intra-clan, or inter-clan. This is similar to the Kumam in Bululu who have drawn a clear distinction between those who “belong” (Kumam) and those who are “foreigners” (Bantu groups). The growth in claims for autochthony across Sub-Saharan Africa has been well documented by scholars in recent years. Many argue that this phenomenon is specifically linked to the era of “globalization” (Nyamnjoh and Rwolands 1998; Meyer and Geschiere 1998; Kragberger 2005). Some have suggested that democratization initiatives such as political decentralization have increased its salience (Jackson 2003; Geschiere 2004; Ceuppens and Geschiere 2005). For Peter Geschiere and Francis Nyamnjoh (2000), the rise in the significance of autochthony is also connected to the development of one of the necessary conditions for capital accumulation: the creation of wage

laborers. Those who are dispossessed of their land because they are not considered autochthonous to a region enter the labor market as potential wage laborers.

On Tisai, the growth in the significance of autochthony strongly intersects with the violent conflicts. The challenges of resettlement have heightened sensitivities over tenure rights. People are keenly aware that in combination with a rapidly growing population, one of the stark realities in Teso is growing land fragmentation. On Tisai, a further justification for only Iteso having customary rights to land is that the local population has undergone cyclical displacement for decades. This is why they feel that if anything is “owed” to them, it is at the very least access to land. It is also significant that the southwestern herders are solely pastoralists, as they do not practice settled agriculture. Many Iteso look at the Karamojong, who refuse to practice settled agriculture (or at least in combination with pastoralism), as inferior.

However, the southwestern pastoralists are not simply herding their own cattle. Local Iteso acknowledge that it is wealthy Iteso “businessmen” from Kumi Town who have hired the skilled southwestern pastoralists to herd their cattle on Tisai. Moreover, some Iteso have been accused of selling their customary land to the migrants without consent of the clan. Nevertheless, none of this has changed the view of Iteso towards the herders. Some Iteso have threatened to kill the pastoralist migrants who remain on Tisai. They accuse them of grazing their cattle on their customary land. This has influenced at least one of the Banyarwanda pastoralists in his decision to soon leave Tisai. He migrated to Tisai from Luwero region with his family in search of grazing grounds, following the historic Ugandan cattle corridor, which makes up one-quarter of the country’s entire land mass (Vincent 1982; Kisamba-Mugerwa et al. 2006; Rugadya 2009). He now herds the cattle of Iteso from town as well. Similar to other pastoralist families on Tisai, he and his family live in makeshift huts and subsist primarily on

milk from the cows. In his view, many Iteso accusations against the southwestern herders are baseless. For instance, the land they use for grazing cattle is not being used, so it is unfair to accuse them of infringing on a family's customary tenure rights. Indeed, most of Tisai is very barren and there is currently little cultivation. The Banyarwanda herder is also quick to point out that it is not only Iteso who live in temerity of the Pian. He notes that just the previous week he saw several Pian warriors nearby on shore. Yet, since he possesses no firearms, he knows that all he could in a raiding situation would be to "accept his fate." One of the Bayankole herders emphasizes that they are poor, just like the Iteso on Tisai. He chuckles at the accusation that they are "Museveni's people" (President Museveni is also Bayankole) who are here to conquer Iteso, but understands that the resentment and jealousy stems from the fact that they have paved roads and better services in the southwest. He intimates that he and his family are merely trying to survive, just like Iteso.

Conclusion:

The peak years of the violent conflicts caused death, the destruction of property and livelihoods, and a decline in wealth across all of Teso. However, along the northern rim of Teso, the devastation was prolonged because of cattle raids that continued well into the 2000s and the LRA invasion of Amuria in 2003.⁶⁹ Therefore, while people began resettling southern Teso in the early 1990s, resettlement across the north is still in its early stages. In Amuria, the combination of the long duration people spent in displacement and a weak customary tenure system has created the perfect storm for illegitimate, small-scale land expropriations. One of the more insidious practices to emerge is the hiring of "fake elders" who provide false testimonies

⁶⁹ The LRA also infiltrated Soroti and Kabermaido.

on property demarcations in favor of a family who is illegitimately seeking to acquire more land. Widows, orphans, and children in Amuria are the most heavily impacted by this innovative and discriminatory scheme. Along the border belt in Katakwi, the continual threat of cattle raids has prevented resettlement in many areas. In Magaro and Olilim, local populations have attempted to resettle but have found that their traditional land was alienated by the central government in their absence. On Tisai Island, resettlement is barely underway. Most families that claim traditional rights to land on Tisai have remained on the Ongino mainland in fear of the armed Pian warriors across the shore in Nakapiripirit. An added dimension to their struggle to regain access to their land is the presence of southwestern migrant pastoralists. This has sparked claims that only Iteso are autochthones of Tisai, so only they should decide land use rights, not the *Balalo* herders who do not truly “belong.”

For the areas of Teso that border Karamoja, displacement has recurred for at least several decades, if not longer. This stands in contrast with southern Teso, which has not had to withstand the brunt of the cattle rustling, and, later on, the LRA invasion. Cyclical displacement has also created a slightly different context for conflicts over land. For instance, in Amuria and Katakwi, the long term displacement of populations has resulted in the greater salience of boundary disputes. In villages that have not been inhabited for decades, identifying informal demarcation markers such as the *elgoy* or *seiso* plant, grass lines, or mango trees is nigh impossible.

Ultimately, there is a certain fluidity to processes of displacement and resettlement. I have argued that the thrust of the displacement-resettlement dynamic is to underscore the continuity between the conflict and post-conflict years. The dynamic can also call attention to the non-linear way in which displacement and resettlement develops. As evidenced by cases in

Amuria and Tisai, many families have oscillated between fleeing and resettling. There are not single points of displacement and resettlement that can be plotted on a chart. Instead, there are multiple points that indicate the varying intensity in violence over decades. A similar process unfolds one scale removed on the village level. It is not that every family in a village is displaced and then all families simultaneously return. Instead, some families return earlier than others, some remain outside of Teso, and others continue to reside near the trading centers. Many who attempt to to resettle—and this is especially the case for the most vulnerable segments of the population such as widows and orphans—encounter efforts by others in their clan to dispossess them of their land.

Elements of this process are not unique to the northern belt. Even though many families began resettling districts such as Ngora, Kumi, and Bukedea in the early 1990s, some have yet to return. These families have so far chosen to remain outside of Teso in regions like Bugisu or Basoga, and even Kampala. However, the areas of Teso that border Karamoja have unequivocally experienced the worst of the displacement. Cattle raiders from Karamoja not only induced displacement much earlier on, but continued to do so for much longer as well. One of the central obstacles to resettlement closest to the border in Katakwi remains the security risks. However, even in Amuria, which first initiated reconciliation diplomacy with Karamoja, problems around the border abound. Many of these problems are due to long-standing complexities surrounding its demarcation that go back to the colonial era. In the following chapter, I will focus on the particularities of the border dispute between Teso and Karamoja, and how this has impacted access rights to land.

Chapter 3

The Border as “Political”: A Sub-National Dispute and the Value of the Green Belt

The sentiment that virtually all was lost in Teso because of the violent conflicts has profoundly shaped the Iteso collective memory. In an effort to illustrate this point to me one day, a CSO coordinator in Soroti pointed his finger to open countryside and after casting a pensive gaze, said, “You see over there? Before the insurgencies, you would see many, many cows. But now, there are none.” Anger towards the UPA for their targeted killings of alleged informants remains palpable in Teso. Of course, bitterness over the NRA still runs deep and has carried over to resentment for the central government. While the LRA terrorized Amuria, Soroti, and Kabermaido, its regional impact was more limited in scope. More than the other two violent conflicts, Karamojong cattle rustling has caused greater lasting destruction in the region, especially because of how the memory continually resurfaces when one looks afar and sees few cattle across the open landscape. Nowhere in Teso have the cattle raids caused greater loss than in Katakwi and Amuria. The small slivers of land in Kumi and Bukedea that share borders with Karamoja also fall into this category. Local populations closet to the Teso-Karamoja border experienced the earliest waves of mass displacement. While 1979 was a watershed year in this case, as this was when the Matheniko overran the Moroto Barracks and brought about the greatest proliferation of small arms across Karamoja in its history, people in places like Aketa Parish in Ongongoja and Tisai Island in Ongino were first displaced in the late 1960s.

While IDP camps proliferated across Teso, their highest concentration was in Katakwi and Amuria. The growth in informal wage labor as a key alternative social reproductive strategy traces back to the days of the IDP camps. Some IDPs could cultivate their traditional land during

the day before returning to the camps at night, but others were forced to cultivate someone else's land nearby because it was too unsafe to travel to their own village. Even though there are no longer formal IDP camps (these are now trading centers), wage labor has remained a central alternative livelihood approach. Many people like Betty and Sarah in Kachumbala, who maintain access to only a small amount of customary land, supplement their income with the little money they can earn from performing informal wage labor. The reliance on wage labor is increasing as more and more families are being dispossessed partially or entirely from their customary land. It is also relied upon by many who face impediments to resettling their traditional land. An obstacle might be a fellow clan member who hires a "fake elder" to provide false testimony regarding property demarcations, or in-laws who seek to "chase off" a widow from land that once belonged to a husband who was killed during the civil war.

The violent conflicts have strongly contributed to shaping the particularities of land dispossession in Teso. This is especially evident in a place like Amuria where the long period of displacement in combination with an already weak customary land tenure system has created the perfect storm for boundary disagreements in villages. Larger land acquisitions are also facilitating land dispossession. The accumulating group in Teso is made up primarily of local actors such as government officials, civil servants, clan leaders, and NGO workers. For instance, in the north there are cases of freehold titles being acquired on land that the local buyer and district land board consider "free," but which the local population contends has simply yet to be resettled. For poorer peasants in Teso, these kinds of acquisitions best exemplify the ongoing onslaught on their customary tenure rights. By accelerating processes of land alienation in Teso, the violent conflicts have indirectly functioned as a form of primitive accumulation. The second phase of capital accumulation that is currently unfolding in Teso is being driven by these

processes of primitive accumulation. This is not only evident in the larger acquisition of landholdings for speculative or commercial agricultural purposes, but in the rapid growth of a segment of a population that can no longer depend solely on peasant farming. In addition to performing wage labor, many families also rely on the informal borrowing of land. These processes are part of a broader trend of social differentiation.

Conflicts over land in places such as Adukut, Amodine, Magaro, and Olilim comprise the largest-scale land alienations in Teso. These cases of expropriation are not simply large-scale because they involve the greatest quantity of land (although none come close to the deals in the millions of hectares that garner global headlines), but because they dispossess the largest number of people and involve institutional actors. This latter component is a particularly interesting dynamic because any institutional involvement (be it on the central or local government levels) necessarily results in the further delegitimization of the state. The conflict over the potential location of a commercial sugar plantation in Amodine can also be classified as large-scale, because it pertains to an extraordinarily valuable natural resource, a wetland. In this case, not only would local populations lose access to crucial natural resources, but there would also be a segment of the local population that would perform (formal) wage labor at the plantation. Similar developments would likely ensue if a sugar plantation is constructed on the Agu wetlands between Soroti and Ngora. With regard to both Amodine and Agu, scale would be a measurement for the amount of capital invested into the land, along with the deep, structural transformations to the local political economies.

However, I have argued that it is the small-scale land dispossessions in Teso that are exerting the most resounding impact on the region. I have classified these forms of land conflicts as intra-family, intra-clan, inter-clan, and inter-ethnic, emphasizing the high degree of

overlap. Not only are the cumulative number of families affected in these cases greater than those in the smaller number of large-scale land disputes, but these are also more telling of the severity and insidiousness of the intra-regional dynamics that are tearing apart the Teso social fabric. The actors dispossessing families of land in these cases are not simply military officers or private investors, but clan and family members. They are fellow Iteso from the village.

The social ruptures in Teso cannot be understood apart from the violent conflicts. While resettlement of the southern rim of Teso began in the early 1990s, the northern belt is only in the early stages of resettlement. In areas of Katakwi that lie closest to the border with Napak and Nakapiripirit districts in Karamoja, it is still too unsafe to begin resettling (or at least permanently). Tensions around the Teso-Karamoja border are far from a new development. The history of the border—or, more aptly, the very question of where it lies—is a complex one. It is also intriguing because the dispute is a sub-national one; this is not a disagreement between Uganda and Kenya or Uganda and South Sudan, but between two adjacent regions in the northeast. The presence of the green belt along the border has always been enticing for Karamojong pastoralists who need to graze their cows during the dry season. For Iteso peasants, the fertile land serves as an opportunity to expand agricultural production, as well as provide resources for their livestock or to hunt. Iteso have long accused Karamojong of using the unpopulated buffer areas along the border as a “highway” for launching cattle raids into Teso. Karamojong have also accused Iteso (and especially Iteso Local Defence Units [LDUs]) of killing many Karamojong in disputed areas of the border over the years. As of 2013, large sections of the green belt remain part of the de facto “no man’s land,” preventing the possibility for Iteso or Karamojong cultivation.

This chapter focuses on the complexities surrounding the Teso-Karamoja border dispute. At the heart of the issue is not solely an inter-ethnic conflict between two groups with an intertwined history, but the common tensions found across Sub-Saharan Africa between pastoralism and settled agriculture. First, I will consider the role of pastoralism in Uganda and Karamoja. I will also look at the emergence of large-scale cattle raiding and state-led disarmament initiatives in Karamoja. Second, I will focus on the history of the Teso-Karamoja border. I will describe the views of local populations regarding the importance of the border, followed by a discussion of the perspectives of local government officials. A divergence in opinion emerges here. For local populations on both sides of the border, the dispute has simply become “political”; in other words, it no longer pertains to local needs, but rather has become grounds for politicians who seek to rile up an electorate or who are in pursuit of self-gain. Their concern with demarcation revolves around the need to access fertile land in ecologically challenging environments. While local government officials also (ironically) claim that the dispute has become “political,” they clearly attach a greater importance to dispute. For them, the disagreement encapsulates the history of inter-ethnic strife, enmity, and bitterness; it carries symbolic resonance.

Pastoralism, Borders, and Disarmament: A History of Instability and Poorly Conceived Government Policy in Karamoja

Many ethnic groups across Africa have long relied on pastoralism for their livelihood. Not only is 40 percent of the African land mass comprised of pastoral areas, but pastoral activities contribute anywhere between 10-44 percent of the GDP of countries in Africa (both north and south of the Sahara) (AU 2010). In Uganda, pastoralist and small livestock producers contribute the fourth largest share of foreign currency earnings (AU 2010). Roy Behnke and

Margaret Nakiryia (2012) note that while pastoralism does not contribute to the Ugandan GDP as much as that of other countries in East Africa such as Sudan, Ethiopia, or Kenya, it still comprises more than the cash crop or fishing sectors.⁷⁰ Uganda's 84,000 kilometers of rangelands (most of which is known as the cattle corridor and runs diagonally from the northeast to southwest across the country) supports 90 percent of the national cattle population (Kratli 2010). Karamoja comprises 33 percent of Ugandan rangelands and contains 25 percent of the country's total livestock (Kratli 2010). It is estimated that there are 2.2 million cattle in the region, which is more than twice the number of estimated people (Mkutu 2006, 2008; Kratli 2010).⁷¹

Since the colonial era, Karamoja has been viewed as a region that is backwards and hostile (Barber 1965; Kasozi 1994; Rugadya 2009). Along with the Bokora, Matheniko, and Pian (the three largest sub-tribes of the Karamojong cluster) in southern Karamoja, there are the Jie and Dodoso in the north; the Upe (also referred to as the Ugandan Pokot or Suk), which are located in the in the southeast; the Tepeth, which are in the south; and the Labwor (also referred to as Acholi-Labwor), found in the southwest and the only tribe in Karamoja that is primarily agriculturalist (Gulliver 1957; Dyson-Hudson 1966; Narman 2003; Knighton 2005).⁷² Its semi-

⁷⁰ It is notoriously difficult to reach an estimate of the livestock sector in the Ugandan economy. While Roy Behnke and Margaret Nakiryia (2012) estimate that the number comes to 3.2 percent, the Ugandan National Environment Management Authority (1996) suggest that the number was about 9% in the 1990s. Behnke and Nakiryia estimate that pastoralism only makes up a quarter of the value accrued through food crop production. See p. 7.

⁷¹ Kennedy Agade Mkutu (2006, 2008) estimates that there are close to 1 million people in Karamoja.

⁷² The number of tribes/sub-tribes in Karamoja is greater than this. Ben Knighton (2005) points out that while researches have long contended that there are ten Karamojong sections, there is disagreement over some of the classifications. Knighton states that there are 11 sub-tribes in the

desert climate (it averages only 350-700 millimeters of rain annually) makes pastoralism well adapted to the region (Rugadya 2009; Mkutu 2010).⁷³ Challenges such as erratic rainfalls, the alternation between heavy droughts and major flooding, and the absence of highlands makes it largely inhospitable for settled agriculture (Bevan 2008; BakamNume 2010; Levine 2010).

Many argue that not only have these climactic and topographical realities predisposed Karamoja to pastoralist development, but that it has in fact made pastoralism a major strength in the region (Baker 1975; Kratli 2010; Levine 2010). Indigenous groups have developed effective coping strategies over the years, be it to counter droughts or disease in livestock (Leff 2009; Kratli 2010; Levine 2010).⁷⁴ It is for this reason that attempts to alter traditional pastoral activities in Uganda—such as changing indigenous livestock and rangeland husbandry—have proven largely unsuccessful (Bazaar 1994; Kisamba-Mugerwa 1995; Muchunguzi 2011), if not resulted in an

Karamojong cluster, in addition to the Jie and Dodoso. See also (Gulliver 1952), Dyson-Hudson (1966), and Narman (2003).

⁷³ It should be noted that clans in Karamoja have not only relied on pastoralism, but have also practiced agriculture. While pastoral activities have been at the center of livelihoods for groups in Karamoja, many have also cultivated sorghum, ground nuts, and millet for supplemental resources (the Bokora local brew is fermented sorghum). Therefore, while some areas of Karamoja are largely pastoralist, others are better classified as agro-pastoralist. Anders Narman (2003) separates Karamojong into two separate groups, one which he calls “pastoralists” and the other “cultivators.” The former includes the Jie, Dodoth (Dodoso), Tepeth, and Pokot. He places the Ethur, Nyangia, Ik (Teuso), and Mening in the second group.

Along the green belt, agro-pastoralism predominates. Simon Levine (2010) argues that pastoralism and agro-pastoralism are so well adapted to Karamoja that it is only in the areas where settled agriculture is practiced (which is a direct result of central government intervention) that relief aid has been necessary (see p.151). In his view, most households in Karamoja would be able to cope on resources internal to the indigenous pastoral system if they were allowed to manage it without central government intrusion (see. p. 148).

⁷⁴ However, Karamojong have still had to deal with a number of natural challenges. For instance, between the late 1960s and early 1980s, there was a drought from 1967-68, rinderpest epidemic from 1968-69, cholera outbreak in 1971, another drought from 1974-75, and a combination of famine, crop failure, and a major loss of livestock in 1980 (Gray and Akol 2002).

outright “ecological catastrophe” (Gray and Akol 2002). Furthermore, such attempts not only negatively impact the indigenous pastoral economies, but can also upset traditional cultural practices. Sharon Hutchinson captures this when asserting that pastoralists not only rely on cattle for material purposes, but they also serve as the “principle means by which people created and affirmed enduring bonds amongst themselves as well as between themselves and divinity” (1996:59).

The Bokora in Napak district exemplify the problematic nature of attempts to transform indigenous pastoral societies. Similar to the case of Magaro in Katakwi, the UWA has recently alienated more land in Napak, extending the Bokora Game Reserve.⁷⁵ For the Bokora, this is a highly contradictory policy. On the one hand, the central government is pushing for Bokora to transition to a livelihood that relies predominantly on settled agriculture. On the other hand, it is continuing to alienate additional land for (ostensibly) eco-conservation purposes. Moreover, the most recently expropriated land is part of the green belt, which makes up the most fertile section of Napak. The Bokora feel as if they are being left with the land least conducive for settled agriculture. As one confounded district government official puts it, “We tell President Musevini: Karamojong always vote for you. We don’t have a problem with Kadepo [National Park]. But why take land from the green belt?”⁷⁶

⁷⁵ I was told in January of 2013 that the UWA might be unofficially allowing Karamojong to settle on and cultivate recently alienated land by the UWA, such as near Matany and Irir Sub-counties. However, the *Daily Monitor* reports that the UWA evicted Karamojong in March of 2013 for allegedly cultivating on Bokora-Matheniko game reserve territory. According to the article, the Moroto district councilor pleaded with the UWA that by evicting the cultivators they were basically “asking them to commit suicide.” *Daily Monitor* (2013).

⁷⁶ Kadepo National Park is located in Kaabong District, which borders South Sudan.

Government alienation of land in Karamoja has occurred for decades. Between 1955-65, approximately 95% of the land in Karamoja was alienated for conservation purposes (although the reserves remained open to livestock) (Kratli 2010). This comes as no surprise to John Galaty who posits that pastoral people have historically been more vulnerable to land alienation because of their “systematic refusal to embrace a bounded, alienable, and exclusionary notion of landed property, or attitudes of the land seekers” (2013:144). In Karamoja, state practices have alternated between alienating land (typically referred to as “gazetting” in Uganda) and then re-privatizing land (or “degazetting”) (Leff 2009; Rugadya 2009; Rugadya et al. 2010). Since the 2000s, the central government has re-privatized land in an effort to attract Foreign Direct Investment (Rugadya 2009; Rugadya et al. 2010). The presence of gold and other mineral deposits in Karamoja have made local populations suspicious of any new land alienation by the central government, especially when it seems to run counter to the development policy of establishing settled agriculture (Knighton 2002; Rugadya et al. 2010; Miti 2010). Local populations along the border in both Karamoja and Teso believe there is a “gold belt” that begins in Kapelebyong, continues through Morulem in Abim, and ends in Otukei in Lango region. Out of Karamoja’s total surface area of 27,700 square kilometers, almost 25 percent is licensed for mining (Rugadya et al. 2010).⁷⁷ Ultimately, processes of capital accumulation in Karamoja contrast from those in Teso; in the former, mining of subterranean resources is the driving force behind these processes, while land speculation and the commercialization of agriculture serve as the primary impetuses for capital accumulation in Teso.

⁷⁷ This mining area is licensed by the Exclusive Mineral Exploration Licenses and Location Licenses. Another 20 square kilometers for mining is leased (the only mining lease in Uganda) to Tororo Cement Ltd for limestone mining in Moroto District (Rugadya et al. 2010). See p. 19.

The origins of the complications surrounding the Teso-Karamoja border can be traced back at least over a century to the end of the pre-colonial period. By the early 1890s, the British were intent on creating a permanent buffer zone between Abyssinia (the Ethiopian Empire) and British settlement in the highlands of British East Africa (what is now Kenya) and in Buganda region in Uganda (Barber 1968; Gray and Akol 2002). This buffer zone included vast sections of land where pastoralism had been practiced for more than two thousand years (Gray and Akol 2002). While rinderpest devastated livestock holdings in Karamoja during the very early colonial period, they returned to pre-rinderpest levels (if not reach higher) by 1910, largely due to the benefits Karamojong accrued from the ivory trade with Swahili, Ethiopians, and Europeans (Gray and Akol 2002). However, the ongoing encroachment of Ethiopian ivory traders on the buffer zone motivated the British to draw clear political boundaries between British East Africa and Uganda (Barber 1965; Gray and Akol 2002). This was the beginning of the demarcation of specific tribal zones within the Uganda-Kenya-Sudan pastoralist areas. Colonial and post-colonial policies have been predicated on restricting pastoral mobility, a crucial strategy that had evolved over generations in order to cope with the challenging ecology. In James Bevan's opinion, processes of land reallocation have "severely impacted traditional migratory patterns and brought new tensions between clans" (2008:21). The fragmentation of tribal homelands into specific geographical units have also sometimes benefited one tribe at the expense of another, as is the case with the Pokot (in both Uganda and Kenya) over the Turkana (in Kenya) and Karamojong (Gray and Akol 2002).

Pastoralist groups in Uganda, Kenya, and South Sudan have historically viewed the political borders as meaningless and nonexistent, and cross-border cattle raids have been a feature of this expansive area for decades. While small-scale cattle rustling occurred well before

the arrival of the British (Barber 1968; Dyson-Hudson 1966; Lamphear 1976), it increased in the 1950s and 1960s when it became clear to Karamojong that the Protectorate government (and then the post-colonial government) would not continue to carry out punitive expeditions (Barber 1965). This is also around the time when automatic weapons started to replace the traditional spear as the primary weapon system for raiders.⁷⁸ The Turkana, Toposa, and Didinga (the latter two pastoralist groups are in southern South Sudan near the Ugandan border) took advantage of their greater access to firearms to frequently raid Karamoja from the 1950s and into the 1970s. The successful Matheniko assault on Moroto Barracks in 1979 served as a partial corrective to this imbalance. The large-scale cattle raids—like those that devastated all of Teso in the late 1980s—began occurring in Karamoja in 1979 (Mirzeler and Young 2000; Mkutu 2006, 2008; Bevan 2008). The largest raids could involve hundreds, if not thousands, of warriors (Mkutu 2006). Motivations for Karamojong cattle raiding include restocking, retaliation, and theft with the intention of selling cattle on the market (Mkutu 2010).⁷⁹ While the “commercialization” of cattle raiding has increased over the last several decades due to the proliferation of modern weapon systems, it dates back to the colonial period (Mkutu 2010).

Small arms and light weaponry currently infiltrate Karamoja in a variety of ways, creating a context for what Kennedy Agade Mkutu refers to as “localised arms races between the

⁷⁸ However, the presence of firearms predates the establishment of the Ugandan Protectorate. An Ethiopian-led trade in firearms existed in the pre-colonial period (Barber 1968; Narman 2003).

⁷⁹ Mkutu (2010) makes the important point that unlike the raiding that is based on restocking and retaliation, commercial raiding (known as *akoko*) operates outside of the informal governance system of the elders. Commercial raiding has become a major informal industry in Karamoja. Cattle that are stolen in raids can be found throughout Uganda. Military officers, local leaders, and the merchants in cattle control the illicit network in Karamoja. David Eaton (2008a, 2008b) has referred to the rapid growth in commercial raiding as the rise of the “traider.” See also Jonah Leff (2009).

related clans of the Karimojong” (2008:99). These include illicit trafficking routes that span across Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya, and South Sudan (Narman 2003; Bevan 2008; Mkutu 2010). The presence of civil war, insurgencies, and general political instability in neighboring countries facilitates the ease through which arms trafficking routes can develop.⁸⁰ There are also weapon sales to Karamojong by members of insurgent and paramilitary groups (such as the LRA, the Allied Democratic Forces, and the Toposa militia). One of the more problematic sources for acquiring firearms in Karamoja is through Ugandan security forces. UPDF personnel, ASTU units, and LDUs have all been accused of participating in the illegal trafficking of arms (Narman 2003; Bevan 2008; Mkutu 2010). Comparative analyses of Karamojong and UPDF stocks of ammunition suggest a close match (Bevan 2008). UPDF personnel have also admitted to selling ammunition to Karamojong warriors (Bevan 2008). While the AK-47 is the most popular assault rifle in Karamoja, the presence of the G3 rifle suggests that the Kenyan military also maintains some involvement in arms trafficking (Mkutu 2010). Mkutu characterizes the Kenya-Uganda border as one of “East Africa’s most severely affected areas in terms of firearm-related insecurity” (2006:47).

In 2001, the central government implemented the first UPDF-led disarmament program in Karamoja, although it is generally considered to have been a failure. This was not the first time that a Ugandan central government initiated a disarmament exercise in Karamoja.

⁸⁰ This issue expands beyond the Karamoja-Kenya-South Sudan border. As Mkutu notes (2008), the Ugandan security forces simply do not have the resources to provide security along the 765 kilometer border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 435 kilometer border with South Sudan, and the 933 kilometer border with Kenya. Political instability surrounds Uganda. For instance, the DRC is arguably one of the most unstable states in the entire world. South Sudan has been engulfed in a civil war since late 2013. One of the complicating elements to the 2006 disarmament initiative was that the UPDF had to remobilize units that had initially been committed to Karamoja in order to combat the LRA (Mkutu 2008, Stites and Akabwai 2010).

Numerous attempts at disarmament have been carried out since the colonial period, including the years of 1945, 1953, 1954, 1960, 1964, 1984, 1987, 2001, and 2006 (Bevan 2008).⁸¹ The 2006 disarmament initiative has also widely been viewed as unsuccessful. Some have even argued that it actually increased the proliferation of arms in the region, not the least because UPDF personnel participate in the arms trade (Mkutu 2006; Bevan 2008). The 2001 and 2006 disarmament initiatives also garnered criticism for the use of heavy handed tactics. Many contend that the UPDF and paramilitary groups (which are armed and trained by the UPDF) unjustifiably beat, tortured, and killed Karamojong (Mkutu 2006, 2008, 2010; Leff 2009; Stites and Akabwai 2010). Many blame the “cordon and search” tactics that have been used since 2006 for displacing population and making the theft of livestock even easier (Mkutu 2008; Leff 2009; Stites and Akabwai 2010).⁸²

Part of the problem stems from an imbalance in disarmament (Bevan 2008; Knighton 2010). For instance, while the Bokora in southern Karamoja have participated in the disarmament exercises, other groups in Karamoja like the Matheniko, Jie, and Dodoso have largely refused disarmament. Oftentimes these groups justify refusal on the grounds that both the Turkana and Pokot in Kenya, and the Toposa and Didinga in South Sudan, still launch cross-

⁸¹ Bevan argues that they have all proven ineffective with respect to reducing armed violence in Karamoja.

⁸² Kennedy Agade Mkutu argues that the UPDF guarded *kraals* are actually enticing to raid by warriors because they are so poorly guarded. He also notes that the wealthier in Karamojong use privately guarded *kraals*, which are reportedly much more secure. Another criticism against disarmament stems from alleged abuses by Acholi and Iteso soldiers in the UPDF against Karamojong (see also Bevan 2008). Iteso and Acholi troops have been accused of deliberately targeting civilians as part of a larger plan to seek revenge for all of the destruction that has been caused by Karamojong cattle raiders in their regions over the years. Local government officials in both Napak and Abim accuse UPDF soldiers who are stationed in Teso of various forms of abuse of Karamojong.

border raids against them so they need the weapons for self-defense. However, warriors from these tribes still launch raids against each other in Karamoja, as well as into Teso and other regions in Uganda. Ultimately, one of the central flaws of the disarmament initiatives has been the stated desire of the central government to convert pastoralist peoples to agriculturalists.⁸³ Most view the push for the “sedentarization” of Karamojong as an anachronistic development policy that flagrantly ignores Karamoja’s ecological realities (Stites and Akabwai 2010:29; Gray and Akol 2002; Levine 2010).

Local Voices from the Border: It is now Only a “Political Issue”

At the crux of the seemingly intractable sub-national border dispute is the presence of the green belt. The largest amounts of disputed land lie between the Katakwi sub-counties of Ongongoja, Usuk, Palam, and Ngariam, and the Napak sub-counties of Lorengecora, Matany, and Irir. A long “gap”—as it is often referred to—or unsettled (fertile) land, runs between Ololim Parish in Palam Sub-County and Irir Parish in Irir Sub-County due to inter-regional disagreements over the border. There are also points along the border between Amuria and Napak where Iteso and Karamojong settlements intersect, and disputes have arisen over cultivation rights. These are particularly thorny conflicts to resolve, since some of the settlements are only a decade old. These areas were once part of the unpopulated buffer zone, so

⁸³ Elizabeth Stites and Darlington Akabawi (2010) cite the Karamoja Action Plan for Food Security (KAPFS) and 2010 National Development Plan (NDP) as examples of the push for “sedentarization.” The latter document also characterizes pastoralism as a security problem.

customary tenure systems have largely never existed.⁸⁴ These new settlements have emerged as a result of the improved political relations between Amuria and Napak.

For Iteso who have either been dispossessed of access to most of their customary land or who have not yet resettled their villages because of ongoing security problems, the supply of fertile land along the border is a strong economic incentive for settlement. They point to rising regional land fragmentation and the rapidly growing population as two of the central motivations for settling the border belt. Many contend that there was greater clarity regarding the border prior to the onset of cattle rustling in the 1960s. A local community leader in Palam Sub-County in Katakwi argues that Karamojong used the momentum they gained from the raids in the 1960s to continue pushing further south. Karamojong have since been encroaching on land in the Palam parishes of Amutungo, Aeselem, Okameta, Okolonyo, and Amendera. Many people in Katakwi accuse Karamojong of still occupying the de facto buffer zone between Olilim Parish in Katakwi and Irir Parish in Napak. Some Iteso from parishes like Arabet in Kapelebyong claim tenure rights to land along the border that they have yet to resettle. While they initially settled these areas in the late 1950s, they were displaced only several years later because of cattle rustling. However, some of these areas along the border are formally under the jurisdiction of Morulem Sub-County in Abim. This serves as a perfect example of the lack of clarity regarding where the border actually lies, for Amuria and Abim do not share a formal border. Official maps show a sliver of land from Napak District that runs between Amuria and Abim.

⁸⁴ The system of land tenure in Karamoja has historically been characterized as “communal land.” Communal grazing areas in Karamoja are classified (and constitutionally protected) as “common land management schemes” or “communally owned land” in the 1998 Ugandan Land Act. See Articles 23-26.

Even local Iteso disagree amongst each other on when the border was demarcated or where it exactly lies. For instance, one Iteso oral tradition states that the the border was demarcated in 1958 by a Teso County Chief, Akobo. The Chief reportedly drew a boundary between Teso and Karamoja, promulgating that no Karamojong could graze their cows on his side of the land. Another oral tradition states that the border was actually demarcated a few years earlier in 1954 by an Iteso named Epaku. While the oral traditions vary, Iteso unanimously agree that Karamojong maintain an incorrect view of the border. They accuse Karamojong of believing that Karamoja begins at a small bridge over the Alaacutuk waterway, one of Lake Kyoga's many estuaries. This is located many miles south of the northernmost sub-counties in Katakwi, meaning large parts of the district would be annexed by Karamoja. Even the official border that was drawn by the government in 1962 would result in the annexation of some of Katakwi. However, Iteso in Katakwi are generally supportive of the 1962 map. In their opinion, it is the logical map to rely on since the date of issue coincides with the founding of independent Uganda.

Similar to the Iteso, demarcation of the border matters for local Bokora in Napak in so far as they can gain access to the green belt. This section of fertile land holds the primary hope for creating sustainable livelihoods that are premised on settled agriculture.⁸⁵ Bokora livestock holdings have largely been decimated by intra-Karamoja raiding. Therefore, access to cultivable land for Bokora is not simply an opportunity for supplemental livelihood activities, but is a crucial necessity. While the different sections of Karamojong were once known for never

⁸⁵ In Irir Sub-County, Bokora now grow food they have never grown before, including green grams, cassava, bananas, and oranges. They also export food to other parts of Karamoja such as Moroto, Kotido, and elsewhere in Napak. However, many families feel restricted from expanding cultivation because of the de facto "no man's land" between Irir and Usuk, Palam, and Ngariam in Katakwi.

raiding each other, this changed in the mid 1970s (Gray and Akol 2002; Knighton 2010). The Bokora (who were once one of the dominant raiding tribes in Karamoja) have emerged as the main losers of the disarmament process. They point to the Pian (from Nakapiripirit, which borders Napak to the east) as the group that currently carries out the most raids against them. According to a local man from Irir, the Pian now taunt Bokora, accusing them of no longer being “real men” because they “do not know how to anymore.” This contributes to a deeper feeling of emasculation amongst Bokora men. The few remaining cattle are kept in protected kraals, although their security is not necessarily guaranteed.⁸⁶ Bokora similarly refer to growing “congestion,” or population growth, as a serious problem in Napak. They consider it to be one of the driving factors for pushing settlements further south into disputed parts of the border. These new settlements lead to accusations by Iteso that Bokora are settling in areas of the gap that belong to people in Katakwi.

For Robert and Simon, who are both Bokora CSO actors, the proper demarcation of the border is also about rectifying decades of Iteso expansionism. Full-time CSO employees tend to possess a higher level of formal education (many hold university degrees) than local people from the villages. While some still reside in the village, many live in towns nearby CSO offices. Robert and Simon believe that Iteso have the right to feel resentment towards the destructiveness of the cattle raids. However, they feel that the Iteso should also understand that the Bokora remain bitter from decades of government mistreatment. They blame the Iteso for some aspects

⁸⁶ Assaults on guarded kraals by the warriors are still carried out. As Mkutu (2010) points out, many consider the UPDF-guarded kraals to be easily penetrable. The second day I was in Irir Sub-County in Napak, I was told that just the previous night several (presumably) Pian warriors attempted to raid a UPDF-defended kraal. The UPDF engaged in them in a firefight, although no cattle were stolen. Four days prior to my arrival in Irir, a Pian warrior killed a woman and stole 46 of her cows.

of government discrimination against Karamojong. In Robert's view, the Iteso were welcoming of the colonial government, whereas the Karamojong resisted it. This created a large divergence between Iteso and Karamojong in terms of formal education. It also lies at the heart of the Iteso "superiority complex" and the Karamojong "inferiority complex" (see also Bainomugishu et al. 2007). Robert contends that Iteso who served in both the Teso and Karamoja local governments (during the colonial and post-colonial periods) took advantage of their position to redraw the Teso-Karamoja border in their favor. Simon argues that the central government is continuing a general policy of exploiting Karamoja for its minerals and gold, providing no benefit to the local populations in return. As he puts it, Karamojong feel defenseless, mainly because they are still "ignorant" and do not yet fully understand the value of land. As an example, he references a group of Iteso from Okolonyo Parish in Palam who used forged documents to dispossess a Karamojong of his land. In his opinion, the border dispute—and specifically that between Katakwi and Napak—is a central reason for why Karamojong-Iteso relations remain very fragile.

However, they both remain at least slightly optimistic regarding the border dispute. They point to significant improvements in Iteso-Karamojong relations since the mid 2000s, in which they have both been actively involved. Robert considers the Iteso-Karamojong peaceful coexistence camps to be a beacon of hope, pointing to the growth in intermarriage as a crucial "unifying factor." Another peaceful coexistence initiative was the first annual joint Iteso-Karamojong religious prayer ceremony that took place in November 2012, an additional positive development in Robert's opinion. Similar to Robert, Simon argues that the border dispute has become a political issue. He blames Teso politicians from the village to the district level for playing a dangerous game by prolonging the disagreement about the border.

For people from the villages of Teso and Karamoja, the border dispute has become “political.” It is now only an issue that politicians draw on in an effort to score political points with their electorates. Elders in Teso and Karamoja no longer have the power to negotiate a consensus on border demarcation. Therefore, any potential for a solution can no longer emerge from the local level. CSO actors such as Robert and Simon also describe the border dispute as “political,” emphasizing how it is completely detached from the local level. Ultimately, while cattle rustling by Karamojong into Teso has caused countless deaths, property destruction, and mass displacement, Iteso proclaim a desire to “forgive” and pursue “brotherhood policies” with Karamojong. Despite incidences of Iteso violence against Karamojong over the years—not to mention what Karamojong consider to be decades of Iteso political exploitation of Karamoja through their greater share of power in government—Bokora also maintain a desire for “peaceful relations” with Iteso. In sum, people from villages across Amuria, Katakwi, and Napak indicate that they simply want an end to any inter-regional conflicts. It is for these reasons that local people view the long-standing matter of the border as an albatross for the two regions. Chris Chapman and Alexander Kagaha make this point as well when they cite that the leading desire for people they spoke to in both Katakwi and Moroto is to “live peacefully within their homes” (2009:3).⁸⁷

Verifying the Border: The Views of Local Government and Prospects for Renewed Violence

⁸⁷ Napak District was carved out of Moroto District. Napak became a district in 2011.

For local government officials in the bordering districts of Teso and Karamoja, the demarcation, or “verification of the border,” as it is often described, stills stands as one of the most hotly contested and volatile issues between the two regions. The issue elicits very strong feelings of bitterness and resentment from Abim and Napak local government officials. For them, Iteso encroachment on land that they consider to be under their jurisdiction reminds them of the decades of Iteso exploitation of Karamojong political weakness. For Katakwi government officials, the persistent presence of Karamojong warriors along the border belt with Katakwi—and the flow of automatic weapons into the district which they blame on Karamojong—simply hardens their resolve to see harsher disarmament measures implemented in Karamoja. The fertility of the green belt also looms large for members of local government. Members of Napak local government in particular are acutely aware of how important it is for the local population to gain access to the green belt. This is one of the reasons why the long gap between Olilim and Irir is seen as so problematic. Ironically, they also offer the opinion that the matter has become “political,” although it is unclear with this statement whether they are seeking moral absolution or simply expressing a sentiment of resignation.

Local government officials in Napak and Abim contend that the border problem stems from a long history of Iteso manipulation. They believe the Iteso benefited from early collaboration with the central government, exploiting Karamojong relative “backwardness.” They used this advantage to continue pushing the Teso border much further north from its original location during the pre-colonial era. One official believes that the first Teso-Karamoja border was somewhere in Wera sub-county in Katakwi.⁸⁸ It was then was moved up to Komolo Parish, moved further north again to Orugno Parish, and finally redrawn at Ololim (where it lies

⁸⁸ Wera Sub-County is now part of Amuria District.

today). He accuses Iteso of destroying a signpost in Orugno that supposedly once welcomed people to Karamoja. Iteso politicians are generally blamed for moving the border. For instance, a sub-county chairperson believes that in the early 1960s the former Minister of Teso, Omaria, took advantage of Karamojong ignorance and drew an incorrect boundary. Another local government official contends that the former Minister of Karamoja—who was an Iteso—redrew the boundaries in the late 1960s or early 1970s.

Napak and Abim government officials believe that the new border should be drawn according to maps from the colonial era. This would place the border at the Alaacutuk waterway in Katakwi. Local government officials in both Teso and Karamoja believe that many official maps of the border have been drawn over the years, including 1927, 1958, 1959, 1962, 1978, and 1998. The demarcations are considered to often contradict Iteso and Karamojong oral histories regarding the location of the border. Moreover, some of the official maps are seen as topographically problematic. Two local government officials in Napak emphasize this point when attempting to make their case of Iteso manipulation of the border. In their view, there are at least several instances in the new maps where the border is inconsistent with major topographical features. For instance, they point to a border line in a newer map that cuts across the middle of one of Karamoja's inselbergs. Both opine that any dubious (re)demarcations such as this probably means that there are minerals or gold in the area, so the redrawn line ensures that these resources fall under the jurisdiction of Teso. They also assert that while the 1927, 1958, and 1962 maps are in relative agreement with one another regarding the border, the 1998 map appears to be artificially superimposed onto the other maps. According to them, the adjacent districts in Teso and Karamoja are in the process of conducting "verification reports." They even believe that Amuria's recent verification study shows that some schools in the district

are located in areas that belong to Karamoja. However, these studies are conducted on the district and regional level, so it is not clear how much impact they carry nationally. While the dispute has reached to the level of parliament, there has yet to be any formal adjudication.

In recognition of the seeming intractability of the disagreement, Teso and Karamoja local government officials unanimously call for central government intervention. Both sides acknowledge that the issue is now too large to be resolved inter-regionally. However, inaction on the central level has become a major irritant. It is unclear why the central government has failed to step in and resolve the dispute, especially since political leaders on both sides of the border have requested this action. Some local government officials from Napak hope that Karamoja political leaders take the central government to the supreme court on the matter.

However, local government officials on both sides point to the general improvement in political relations between the adjacent districts as at least a moderate sign of progress. Napak and Abim local government officials make a point to emphasize that they “have no problem with Amuria,” although relations with Katakwi are more delicate. Indeed, one of the main components to former Amuria District Chairman Ochen Julius’s peaceful coexistence policies was to delay a discussion over the formal demarcation of the border while the two regions sought to improve general relations. Napak government officials believe that Katakwi should have followed this political track rather than continuing to push for greater militarization of the border. They accuse Katakwi political officials of bringing people from southern parts of the district to the bordering sub-counties in order to incite violence and “confuse” local people on the location of the border. They also blame Katakwi for sending members of their LDUs to Lorengecora to intimidate Karamojong from settling on certain land. In their opinion, this might

be due to the presence of minerals and gold in the areas. It is their belief that local Katakwi political leaders have sold land along the border to private investors.

Nonetheless, even Katakwi-Napak relations stand on firmer ground than five years ago. Napak political leaders note that local Bokora now feel safe travelling all the way from Olilim to Soroti Town. The two districts have also finally established a line of communication, a sharp contrast from the years when they refused to speak to one another. While officials on the sub-county levels in Napak and Katakwi do not currently communicate with one another (Napak and Amuria sub-county officials do communicate), this could change at some point. It was only recently that the relationship was so mangled that when the Moroto District Chairperson had to travel to Kampala (which required him to travel along Moroto-Soroti road), he would pass through Katakwi in a heavily armed motorcade out of fear of attack.

The primary concern for local government officials in Teso and Karamoja is the prospect of renewed violence between Iteso and Karamojong if no solution is reached on the border disagreement. A Napak political leader argues that a mishandling of the dispute could jeopardize the growing rates of Iteso-Karamojong intermarriage and the peaceful coexistence camps along the border belt. Several Abim officials underscore the seriousness of the situation by emphasizing that the Karamojong with guns are not afraid. A retired parish chief from Amuria understands the volatility of the border debate. He adamantly urges Teso officials to avoid haphazard decisions and simply start reclaiming land along the border that they believe belongs to Teso. In his opinion, this kind of rash behavior could once again trigger conflict between the peoples of the two regions.

Conclusion:

In the words of a Napak political official, “things are always changing” along the Teso-Karamoja border. However, intransigence within local governments on both sides likely means that this dispute will not be resolved without some kind of external intervention. Despite repeated requests from Teso and Karamoja local government officials, the central government appears intent on avoiding the role of arbiter. Without a resolution, members of local government foresee a potential for renewed violence between the two regions. Many scholars have called attention to the predominance of intra-state rather than inter-state violence in Sub-Saharan Africa (Mujaju 1989; Kum 1990; Stedman 1996; Jackson 2002). Ugandan post-colonial history is replete with examples of intra-state violence, including the LRA insurgency and large-scale cattle raiding in Karamoja. While numerous others have discussed complications surrounding international borders (or their “artificiality”) in Sub-Saharan Africa and how they have served as drivers for violent conflicts (Clapham 1996; Englebert et al. 2002; Starr and Most 2008; Feyissa and Hoehne 2010), the case of the Teso-Karamoja dispute is characteristically sub-national. Here, the history of intra-state violence (and the prospects for a renewal) is rooted in sub-national dynamics.

Local Iteso and Bokora both profess that they are “tired” of violence; instead, they seek to live peacefully alongside one another. The divergence in opinions on the importance of the border dispute between local people and government officials is glaring. While the issue clearly strikes a powerful chord in political leaders, it is at best a secondary problem for people in villages along the border. Their primary focus is achieving social reproduction, and accessing the green belt figures as a key element for attaining this objective. It has become even more important for the Bokora in light of their disarmament. The shift in the regional balance of

power that was caused by the 2006 disarmament initiative has pushed them into a position of dependency on settled agriculture. With their livestock holdings so heavily depleted, they must acquire access to cultivable land. The green belt serves as the main hope, as pastoralism has historically predominated in most of the region for clear ecological reasons.

Ultimately, Iteso and Bokora who reside along the border belt believe that the entire dispute has simply become “political.” Since traditional justice mechanisms in Iteso and Karamojong local communities cannot play a constructive role in mediating the dispute, the issue is out of their hands. As a result, politicians simply draw on the matter when they are intent on trying to stir up the deep-seated, inter-ethnic hostility within their respective regions. A shared geography and intertwined history means that the futures for Iteso and Bokora along the border are necessarily interlinked. While it is too difficult to predict if a resolution over the demarcation of the border will be reached anytime soon, there have been ongoing efforts on the grassroots level that focus on improving local Iteso-Karamojong relations.

The Iteso-Karamojong reconciliation initiatives trace back to the mid 1990s. There are a handful of Teso and Karamoja-based CSOs that focus specifically on improving Karamojong-Iteso relations. Rather than engage a larger issue like the inter-regional border dispute, they focus on local level initiatives. They work predominantly in the bordering districts (although some also have expanded their activities to include districts like Kotido and Amudat, which are further north in Karamoja), as well as along the border belt. Iteso grassroots actors were some of the first from the region to travel over the border and into Karamoja in the late 1990s and early 2000s. There were still high levels of intra-regional violence at this time, and crossing through the unpopulated areas of the buffer zone was a risk in itself. Karamojong CSO actors also crossed over in Teso. Some currently live and work in places such as Soroti. One of the earliest

reconciliation initiatives was simply bringing Karamojong into Teso in the hope that mutual interaction would lay the grounds for improved relations. However, the leading initiative has been the “peaceful coexistence camps,” or “joint Iteso-Karamojong settlements,” and they are the only permanent settlements that exist along the disputed border belt.

Chapter 4

“Because No One Wants to Kill their Son in Law”: Iteso-Karamojong Joint Settlements and Prospects for a Sustainable Peace

The Teso-Karamoja border remains a politically unstable environment, although tangible improvements have been made. While Bokora now feel safe traveling from Irir to Olilim and down to Soroti, they still accuse Teso LDUs and Iteso soldiers of committing violent retaliatory acts against Karamojong, including murder, assault, and rape. Iteso from villages across the border belt in Amuria and Katakwi are still bitter over decades of cattle rustling, but most profess a desire to find a way to reconcile relations with Karamojong. More than anything, Iteso and Bokora geographical proximity makes reconciliation a necessity. The primary concern for both groups is attaining the necessary means for basic social reproduction, and acquiring access to the green belt is crucial in this regard. This is especially vital for the Bokora, as they have emerged as one of the weaker tribes in southern Karamoja in light of the 2006 disarmament. The regional balance of power has once again shifted and they are now relatively powerless against the Pian, Matheniko, Jie, or Kenyan Pokot, all of whom are still heavily armed. The sub-national border dispute is a secondary issue that has merely become “political.” It is something politicians use when trying to rile up decades old sentiments of inter-ethnic enmity among their constituents. It has become unresolvable through traditional justice mechanisms, so it is fundamentally detached from the local level.

Teso and Karamoja local government officials offer a slight contrast in perspectives. They, too, express a desire for Iteso-Karamojong reconciliation, although their enthusiasm is more tempered. The longstanding disagreement over the location of the Teso-Karamoja border triggers deeper sentiments of anger and resentment. Political officials in Teso believe

Karamojong have long defied the border by launching cross-regional cattle raids. Members of the local government in Napak accuse Iteso politicians of decades of border manipulation, as well as years of exploiting Karamojong political weakness in other ways. The one issue that both sides unanimously agree upon is the central government must intervene if the dispute is to be resolved. However, the central government has abstained from intervening in any meaningful way. Ultimately, sentiments of victimization are shared on each side of the border—both in the village and local government.

Sustained attempts at Iteso-Karamojong reconciliation can be traced to the mid 1990s. While NGOs have a long history of operating in the two regions (such as through the distribution of food aid or medical services), indigenously led CSOs have created the Iteso-Karamojong reconciliation initiatives. These organizations have a distinct advantage over foreign managed NGOs. They are mainly comprised of local Iteso and Karamojong. One Bokora CSO coordinator liked to brag that unlike the NGO workers who travel to their destinations in SUVs and then return to the nearest town before nightfall, they move on foot and sleep with the people in the villages. The joint Iteso-Karamojong settlement camps, or “peaceful coexistence camps,” are the capstone of the CSO-led inter-ethnic reconciliation efforts, and they are located along areas of the border belt that were once too dangerous for settlement. While other initiatives such as the joint Iteso-Karamojong public market in Kapelebyong and the annual Peace Week (also held in Kapelebyong) illustrate the concrete advancements that have been made in inter-ethnic relations, the peaceful coexistence camps are the greatest achievement. They provide a space for Iteso and Karamojong to live together. They also create opportunities for intermarriage, which is tremendously important. However, they also provide another crucial function within a context of resettlement challenges and widespread land dispossession. The peaceful coexistence camps

serve as a safety valve by providing plots of land to Iteso and Karamojong who have been dispossessed of access to their customary land.

Many scholars have argued that one of the central challenges in post-conflict contexts is resettlement (Kibreab 2002; Rugadya 2008; Alden-Wily 2008, 2009; Fitzpatrick 2012). I have maintained that one of the key drivers to land conflicts in Teso is the displacement-resettlement dynamic, which serves to underline the historical continuities between the conflict and post-conflict years. As others have also pointed out (Unruh 2004, Bruce 2007; Richards and Cramer 2011), there is rarely an absence of violence after major conflicts, and this is certainly the case along the Katakwi-Napak border where small-scale cattle thefts remain a problem. Not only do settlement patterns and the general composition of communities change after violent conflicts (Richards et al. 2005; Alden-Wily 2009), but many obstacles can stand in the way of returnees who are attempting to regain access to customarily held land. Liz Alden-Wily (2009) emphasizes that conflicts over land tend to increase in the post-conflict period, which is usually due to a failure of understanding and managing the shifting contexts of property relations. In her opinion, “far too little attention is paid to the role of a mismanaged peace in distributing property relations in post-conflict states” (2009:31).

The peaceful coexistence camps—along with other Iteso-Karamojong reconciliation initiatives—are concrete examples of the ongoing efforts to ensure that the peace is not mismanaged. This chapter focuses on three of these camps: Apeitolim, Kobulin, and Nyarkidi. I will first explain the origins of the joint settlements and the role that CSOs have played in their construction. I will then look at each settlement individually. While all three camps lie along the border belt and each one shares similar reconciliation objectives, their inner dynamics vary. Indeed, some of these dynamics even threaten their very viability.

Peaceful Coexistence? Successes and Challenges for Apeitolim, Kobulin, and Nyarkidi

Organizations such as Christian Initiative for Peace (CHIPS), Teso Initiative for Peace (TIP), Teso Karamoja Woman Initiative for Peace (TEKWIP), and Teso Karamoja Initiative for Peace (TEKAPIP) have formed the backbone of Iteso-Karamojong reconciliation efforts. Beginning in the late 1990s, Iteso CSO actors started traveling into Karamoja. They worked alongside Karamojong CSO members and met with warriors who were still “in the bush.” During this time period, traveling across the border still presented significant risks. There was a high potential for Karamojong ambushes along the roads that connected Teso and Karamoja. Even taking the bus on Soroti-Moroto road, the primary connecting road way between Teso and Karamoja, became a harrowing journey once one passed the final Iteso villages in Katakwi and entered unpopulated areas of the buffer zone. The warriors also used specific locations within the border gap as “staging grounds” for their raids into Teso and other regions.⁸⁹

Rebecca, one of the most prominent community leaders in Teso, first traveled into Karamoja around 2000. She was accompanied by a small group of female Iteso CSO members, and they were all fearful and uncertain about what to expect. They feared an ambush of their vehicle more than anything else. However, their fears subsided once they arrived. As Rebecca describes, once they started meeting some of the warriors, speaking to elders and women, and “moving in the bush,” they realized that the Karamojong wanted peace just like the Iteso, and that it was only mutual mistrust and suspicion that served as the main obstacles. Karamojong CSO actors describe a similar situation. Julius considers a pivotal period of time for Bokora to be the early to mid 2000s, which is when they were largely disarmed. He explains that the

⁸⁹ “Staging grounds” is one of the terms used by local people to refer to areas where Karamojong warriors typically prepare for cattle raids. This is one of the reasons why certain parts of the border belt have been referred as to a “gateway” or “highway” for cattle raiding.

Bokora then realized that the “warrior culture” was no longer feasible. Instead, it would be more practical to pursue formal education and develop agricultural skills.

Along with Apeitolim, Kobulin, and Nyarkidi, there are a handful of other Iteso-Karamojong joint settlements that have sprouted up along the border. These include Lomaratoit, Okolonyo, and Aserugwa (another, Turtuko, was disbanded by the central government). The scarcity of available land in both Teso and Karamoja meant that the border belt was the only logical site for the construction of new settlements. Local governments have consented to the construction of the camps, although some of them (such as Kobulin and Nyarkidi) are located in disputed areas along the border belt, so they occupy a tenuous position. Almost all the land at the camps is customarily held, although there are no clan-based systems of governance. Local institutions such as Area Land Committees (ALCs) control plot allocation and adjudicate disputes. Each camp had an original land allocation committee that began the initial process of plot assignment.

There is a large body of literature that discusses redistributive land reform for landless populations across the Global South (e.g. Moyo 1995; Gutierrez and Borras 2004; Greenberg 2004; Lahif 2003; Rosset et al 2006; James 2007). I would argue that the peaceful coexistence camps differ in several respects from many of these cases. For one, they are not necessarily products of land *re*-distribution. The joint settlements have been constructed along areas of the border belt that were not permanently settled. While the land may have been used communally by Karamojong for grazing livestock, many areas along the border are known for traditionally serving as staging grounds for raiders. Kobulin is a perfect example, as it lays along one of the historic “gateways” for Karamojong cattle raids into Teso. One of the justifications for the location of Kobulin was that it would serve the strategic objective of blocking Karamojong

warriors from accessing traditional staging grounds. Secondly, local government approval is informal and it is not always fully endorsed. Kobulin has been constructed along a disputed area of the border belt between Abim and Amuria. Nyarkidi—at best—is begrudgingly accepted as a legitimate settlement by the Abim local government. One of the issues that threatens the viability of the joint settlements are disagreements within local government regarding their legitimacy, especially on the district level. District officials in Napak and Abim explicitly blame Iteso for “settling without their permission” in some of these areas. Therefore, even state approval is absent in some cases.

Ultimately, none of the joint settlements owe their existence to state-based initiatives; rather, innovative indigenous civil society members drove their creation. These actors have played the lead role in developing the peaceful coexistence camps in a variety of ways. Not only have they provided direct material assistance in their construction, but they have also played a prominent role in the institutionalization of peaceful coexistence policies. For instance, plots of land have been assigned in ways such that Iteso and Karamojong are not be segregated from one another. The hope has always been that Iteso and Karamojong will socialize together, and one of the most important achievements of the camps has been their fostering of intermarriages. These Iteso-Karamojong unions (many of which remain informal due to the lack of adequate dowry) are viewed as a crucial step for creating sustainable inter-regional peace. As one Karamojong CSO actor puts it, “no one wants to kill their son-in-law.” CSO actors also continue to hold meetings with settlement leaders and attempt to mediate any disputes that might challenge camp stability. While the peaceful coexistence camps provide an obvious economic function by acting as outlets for Iteso and Karamojong who are dispossessed of access to their customary land, CSO actors stress the political nature of the settlements. In their view, they are not simply relieving

pressure on a deeply fragmented supply of land in Teso and Karamoja, but are organic embodiments of Iteso-Karamojong reconciliation. Among the joint settlements, Apeitolim serves as the benchmark.

Apeitolim: The Joint Settlement Standard

Karamojong CSO actors—and specifically those working with CHIPS—first proposed a settlement camp at Apeitolim Parish in 1995 (Gomes 2002). However, the first incarnation of Apeitolim (along with the joint settlement at Lomaratoit) was destroyed by the UPDF in 2000, which alleged that it was illegally constructed. It was not until 2007 that Apeitolim was fully functioning once again. It is located in Lokopo Sub-County in Napak, bordering Kapelebyong to the north. The entire parish consists of one trading center and four “sub-settlements.” There are approximately 10,000 people at Apeitolim. People who reside at Apeitolim come from many different parts of Teso and Karamoja. There are Iteso from Kumi, Soroti, and Amuria. Those from Karamoja migrated from places such as Moroto, Kotido, Kaabong, and Abim. Inter-marriage occurs between Iteso and Karamojong. For example, the sub-county vice chairman, who is Karamojong, is married to an Iteso parish councilor. However, most of the inter-ethnic unions remain informal due to the fact that most men lack the means for an adequate dowry. Those who seek to live at Apeitolim generally fall under three categories: 1) they are dispossessed from their customary land 2) they are vulnerable to losing tenure rights (many are former IDPs) or currently possess minimal access to land 3) they are small traders and shop owners at the trading center.

When I visited Apeitolim in November of 2012, I came by way of Oditel Parish in Kapelebyong, riding along roads that only five years ago were considered too dangerous for

travel. The vastly improved safety of the roads that connect Teso and Karamoja are considered one of the most tangible markers of inter-regional improvements. However, one of the common problems shared by all three of the settlements is the poor quality of connecting roads. My travel to Apeitolim proceeded without difficulty partly because it was dry season, so the roads were manageable. Nonetheless, some stretches of the roads had become very narrow, particularly over elevated portions where water runs during the wet season. It would have been very difficult to traverse these parts even with a small vehicle (I traveled on a motorbike, or *boda boda*).

Plot allocation and household construction at Apeitolim follow certain guidelines. The first families that migrated to Apeitolim received an estimated ten acres of land. This number soon dropped once it became apparent that the supply of land could not meet the incoming demand. Many families now share their plot with newly arriving families because there is no vacant land left to allocate. Since Apeitolim's inception, families have been instructed not to keep cows or goats within their household perimeters. They have also been advised to not construct kraals in the center of the home, a practice traditionally followed by Karamojong.⁹⁰ Land that is closest the trading center is the most highly valued. This is because access to potable water decreases the further one is removed from the trading center. Certain ethnic groups such as the Matheniko are prevented from settling at Apeitolim due to their ongoing participation in cattle raids within the vicinity of Apeitolim. The Jie were also once prevented from settling, but because they have desisted from raiding cattle in the area, they are now

⁹⁰ There are several living arrangements for the transhumant Karamojong. One of these is known as *manyattas*, which is the most permanent form. *Manyattas* traditionally keep the kraal in the center of the household. A defensive wall (which is made up of wood) is constructed along the perimeter of the *manyatta* in order to protect livestock from potential raids.

permitted. A decision to block the settlement of any groups emerges out of joint Iteso-Karamojong discussions. No livestock has recently been raided at Apeitolim.

The viability of the joint settlements depend heavily on access to public services. At Apeitolim, there are only seven boreholes, four primary school classrooms (there are no secondary schools), and one health center. One of the most important services for local people are markets and this is not simply for purposes of reducing food insecurity. The absence of any public markets nearby is a commonly listed reason by people along the border belt in Katakwi for not yet resettling their traditional land. Markets are considered critical for improving security in both Karamoja and Teso. The presence of public markets increases the movement of people along the roads in the given area, reducing the potential for cattle raids. Markets are also valued for creating spaces of interaction between a variety of peoples. One of the celebrated achievements of the inter-ethnic reconciliation initiatives is the joint Iteso-Karamojong public market in Kapelebyong. Young Karamojong women can be seen setting out on foot early in the morning from Apeitolim in order to reach the market in Kapelebyong, which is open twice a week. While this is a round trip of well over several hours, Apeitolim does not yet possess a functioning market, despite the fact that the rudimentary structures already exist. Local leaders held a council meeting earlier in the month on finally opening the market, but decided it is still not sensible given the inaccessibility of many of the adjoining roads. Flooding during the wet season destroyed many of the small bridges, turning Apeitolim into an “island,” as one community member characterized it. Nevertheless, daily transactions occur at a small temporary market. Iteso, Karamojong, Acholi-Labwor, and even Masai from Kenya, who bring medical herbs for sale, participate in these exchanges. Members of the UPDF who are stationed nearby (ASTU units also operate in the area) bring food crops to the market as well.

While Apeitolim serves as the model for the other inter-ethnic settlements, obstacles still remain. One of these challenges pertains to land tenure. There is no history of clan-based systems to govern permanent settlements in Apeitolim. In this sense, it faces similar (although more challenging) problems of tenure instability like Amuria, Serere, and Kabermaido in Teso, where customary tenure systems are weaker because of the fact that they were settled later. There have also been disputes over plot demarcations at Apeitolim, particularly near the trading center. Part of this problem stems from the unsystematic approach to the original demarcation process. Similar to Teso, families rely on informal markers such as grass lines and trees to serve as plot boundaries. There is also at least one case of a person being accused of illegitimately expropriating land at the trading center. A more complex conflict over land involves families who possess tenure rights to land that lies directly on the border with Okoboi Parish in Kapelebyong. While the location of the Apeitolim-Okoboi border is considered less vague than the Olilim-Irir border in Katakwi, it is still hazy. Iteso in Kapelebyong and Karamojong in Apeitolim have accused one another of encroaching on each other's land. Iteso in Kapelebyong state that they have been cultivating the disputed areas for a long time. Karamojong acknowledge that this might be the case, but retort that the land is still formally part of Karamoja, so it falls under their tenure rights. As there are no prospects for resolution within a traditional system of justice, the parties in disagreement in all these cases tend to look to local government for assistance. While one of the strengths of Apeitolim is that the Napak local government (including the district) stands fully behind its existence, neither parish nor sub-county political officials have been able to resolve the Apeitolim-Okoboi cultivation disputes.

Kobulin: Legitimacy Struggles

The Kobulin joint settlement was established in 2008 and consists of two separate camps, Kobulin 1 and Kobulin 2. I visited Kobulin 1, which is made up of a trading center (called Kanaan) and three villages, or sub-settlements. Both camps are located west of Apeitolim along a disputed area of the border belt. The Abim mountains are visible to the north. Kobulin is generally considered to be under the political jurisdiction of Abim, although many Iteso who live at Kobulin would prefer that it be formally annexed by Amuria. For instance, one of the original members of the land allocation committee, who is an Iteso, contends that his father first settled at Kobulin in the mid 1950s, only to be displaced several years later by Karamojong warriors. He credits the support of the Amuria district government for resettling Kobulin as the main reason why Iteso began returning. The ethnic composition of Kobulin 1 and Kobulin 2 differs. The former is comprised predominantly of Iteso, and then mainly Nyakwai (a Karamojong sub-group), Acholi-Labwor, and Bokora. Kobulin 2 consists largely of Nyakwai and Acholi-Labwor, and then smaller numbers of Iteso and Bokora. Kobulin shares certain similarities with Apeitolim. While there are intermarriages, most inter-ethnic unions remain informal because of the challenges men encounter to presenting a proper dowry. Those who migrate to Kobulin tend to have similar motivations to those who migrate to Apeitolim, and they also come from different parts of both Teso and Karamoja. Most people have either been dispossessed of their customary tenure rights or lack access to adequate land in their traditional villages. Many are also former IDPs. The main road connecting Kobulin and Amuria is of even poorer in quality than the roads between Kapelebyong and Apeitolim. The land surrounding Kobulin is more prone to flooding, so even during the dry season there are stretches of the road that are extremely muddy. When I traveled there we were forced to disembark from the motorbikes several times and walk on foot. A passing truck became stuck in one of the muddier sections of the road.

Similar to Apeitolim, the original families that migrated to Kobulin received ten acres of land, although this number soon dropped to five due to high demand. There is no more open land left to allocate, so families will lend out parcels to new migrants, although the prospect of accommodating more families is not enticing for residents. The highest population densities are found around the trading center, which is where the only bore hole for all of Kobulin is located. Those who were allocated land furthest removed from the trading center feel very disadvantaged due to the distance they need to travel in order to access potable water. People feel more secure residing at the trading center for other reasons as well. Unlike Apeitolim, Kobulin continues to deal with cattle raids, which they blame on the Jie. Therefore, the Jie are prohibited from settling at Kobulin. One of the problems for Kobulin is the quality of the land. Many people have had difficulty cultivating crops because of the wetness of the soil, which has exacerbated problems of food insecurity. Even cassava, a particularly hardy crop valued highly for its caloric content and starchy qualities that was introduced by the British during the colonial period, is proving difficult to grown (Uchendu and Anthony 1975).

In addition to the serious issues of water and food insecurity, Kobulin is highly disadvantaged regarding access to other public services. There is not a single hospital, school, or market at Kobulin. One women laments that she has to walk 13 kilometers to the nearest medical clinic in Kapelebyong when acquiring medical treatment for her small child, carrying him the entire way. People also complain about the very poor conditions of the roads, the absence of dams to prevent flooding, and the lack of basic amenities such as machetes, axes, and jerry cans, which is due to the fact that the closest market is to the south in Kapelebyong. Residents travel to the market either on foot or by bicycle. The main reason for the dearth of public services is that Kobulin receives very little assistance from the Abim local government.

Amuria district had proposed drilling bore holes nearby, but Abim rejected this proposition, claiming it infringed on its jurisdiction.

While people resent the dwindling supply of available land, there are also small-scale conflicts over tenure rights among the local people. Most of these disputes originate around the trading center, as the value of the land in its vicinity is significantly higher because of its central location. Some complain about residents who sell portions of their land to a family member or friend without first seeking approval from local political committees. Despite the fact that the Jie continue to threaten the security of livestock, community members are unanimous that this does not damage Iteso-Karamojong relations and is instead viewed as a “shared problem.” UPDF and ASTU units are stationed nearby, but they are not located in the villages. Residents opine that this reduces their effectiveness in preventing Jie raids. The largest conflict over land at Kobulin involves the a dispute over the legitimacy of the entire settlement.

While Kobulin’s location along a disputed area of the border between Abim and Amuria is an ongoing issue, the most pressing problems stems from a Nyakwai clan leader’s argument that the settlement is located on his traditional land.⁹¹ The Nyakwai are the closest tribe in the area who maintain customary tenure rights to land. According to this elder, Kobulin was constructed without his consent, so he considers the original land allocation process to be completely spurious. He maintains that his clan would have never allowed for the land to become a joint Iteso-Karamojong settlement. The Nyakwai elder also voiced his disapproval of Kobulin during the Iteso-Karamojong inter-clan dialogue at the sixth annual Peace Week. No solution was reached at the time. He has threatened to start charging fees to those who live at the

⁹¹ There is a similar problem with one of the camps in Usuk in Katakwi. An Iteso man is claiming that the joint settlement was constructed on his land, and he is trying to have all residents removed.

Kanaan trading center, something that particularly worries residents. Some blame him for blocking the construction of an Amuria-funded medical clinic at the settlement. This dispute is compounded by the fact that he holds a position in the Nyakwai sub-county government. Moreover, the Abim district government is backing his claim.

There are a number of local people who vehemently disagree with the clan leader's claim. An Acholi-Labwor parish-level local government official for Kobulin argues that the Nyakwai elder only recently raised his objection to Kobulin. In his view, the proper venue for the elder to pursue his case is through the newly elected ALC for Kobulin. He also criticizes him for attempting to reacquire tenure rights to land that was already allocated by the joint Iteso-Karamojong original land allocation committee. Two Iteso men who served on the original land allocation committee note that the Nyakwai elder was actually present at their meeting, and did not voice any objections at the time. They also contend that the elder has only recently claimed customary rights to the Kobulin land. In one of their opinions, the elder has only staked rights to the land—which was previously a “free land”—because his clan is the closest one to Kobulin. However, the elder is in a strong negotiating position because his clan is known to possess a cache of firearms. People who are actively engaged in a dispute over a plot of land with the clan leader have desisted from mounting greater resistance out of fear of attack.

Nyarkidi: A Joint Settlement?

Whereas CHIPS has played the most active role at Apeitolim, TIP has been the lead organization in the construction of the Nyarkidi joint settlement. It is located along the southwestern tip of Abim in Morulem Sub-County, not very far from Lira District in Lango region. Nyarkidi is comprised of two camps, both of which I visited. Camp A is made up six

villages and Camp B consists of five sub-settlements. Out of the roughly 3,000 residents at Nyarkidi, the vast majority of the people in both camps are Iteso. There are a smattering of other ethnic groups, including Acholi-Labwor, Nyakwai, Bokora, Jie, and Bagisu. The number of Iteso-Karamojong unions is estimated to be 30 at Camp and 10 at Camp B. A sizeable number of veterans of the UPDF (and former soldiers from earlier Ugandan militaries) live at Nyarkidi. A problem Nyarkidi shares with Kobulin and Apeitolim is the lack of public services. There is only one bore hole for both camps. The nearest school and medical center are located roughly ten kilometers to the north, and the closest market is twelve kilometers away. There is an initiative in progress to dig pit latrines for every household, but many still do not have one.⁹²

The peaceful coexistence camp at Nyarkidi also demonstrates the challenges of creating new settlements along the Teso-Karamoja border. While Nyarkidi is formally under the jurisdiction of Morulem, some Iteso also believe that it is located directly on the border with Amuria (one man estimates that Camp A is seven kilometers from Teso and Camp B only one), although the most recent maps shows that a sliver of land in Napak intercedes Amuria and Abim. The disproportionate number of Iteso at both camps complicates this matter. There are Iteso who claim customary rights to land at Nyarkidi that predate the current settlement. For instance, one of the settlement leaders notes that his grandfather first migrated to the Nyarkidi area in the 1950s for hunting purposes. While he and his family remained for a number of years, they were displaced by Karamojong warriors in 1979. Iteso first attempted to settle again at Nyarkidi in

⁹² In areas without running water, pit latrines are the preferred mechanism for human waste disposal in Uganda. They are created by digging a large hole in the ground (depth can vary, but it might be as little as two meters). A cement base covers it, and a hole (the size of which can also vary) is drilled through the cement. A wooden or cement structure (including a door) is erected around the cement based in order to provide privacy. Pit latrines are crucial for health reasons. For instance, they help to prevent human waste from contaminating water supplies in communities that source drinking water from lakes or rivers.

2008, although they were displaced by raiders. They successfully settled in 2010 and have since not encountered many issues with Karamojong rustlers. The significant presence of UPDF and police personnel at both camps (members of both the UPDF and police live at Camp A, and police officers live in Camp B) serves as a deterrent for potential raiders. Nyarkidi historically served as one of the staging grounds for Bokora and Jie warriors.

The settlement ALC, which is made up of nine members, has controlled the land allocation process. Five acres of land were allocated to the initial families, although this number was soon reduced in an effort to allow for new migrants. The most common complaint heard from people when they are allocated land is that the amount is inadequate. The land is considered fertile though, so harvesting crops has not been as much of an issue as at Kobulin. Similar to the other joint settlements, many families share their plot of land with new migrants. There are also young men who perform agricultural wage labor on other people's land. In an effort to reduce the potential for boundary disputes, gaps of approximately five meters are left between plots.

While there is no clan elder who is attempting to assert customary rights over the land as is the case at Kobulin, Nyarkidi is still facing an existential threat. Abim local government—and specifically at the district level—considers the presence of Nyarkidi in Morulem to be illegitimate. At the heart of this issue is not only a disagreement over where the Teso-Karamoja border lies, but also how heavily the population is skewed towards Iteso. The Morulem sub-county chairman is also Iteso, so is considered sympathetic to Nyarkidi. Some believe that the ethnic composition of the camp is the reason why public services are so abysmal. This part of Karamoja is historically Acholi-Labwor, and Abim local government officials are quick to point out that Acholi-Labwor (who are the only group in Karamoja to historically rely predominantly

on agricultural) have been victimized by Karamojong just as much as Iteso over the years.

Similar to Iteso in Amuria and Katakwi, Acholi-Labwor are also in the middle of resettling their traditional land after decades of cattle rustling-induced displacement. Moreover, land conflicts also abound in Abim.

Several district officials argue that the major issue at Nyarkidi revolves around land ownership, and that the vast majority of Iteso who have migrated to Nyarkidi simply think that the “land is free.” They fault Iteso for settling without the permission of the district, as well as for preventing local Acholi-Labwor from having the opportunity to settle the area. While they acknowledge that a very small number of Iteso possess legitimate tenure rights to the land since they first settled Nyarkidi decades ago, they consider the rest to be grabbing land. They also accuse Iteso of bribing local leaders in order to acquire land, and then alleging that they possess customary rights over the newly settled. The district officials would like to see local elders put together a committee to determine who legitimately possesses tenure rights to Nyarkidi land, but this has not yet occurred. In their view, the volatility of this issue is laying the seeds for a violent conflagration. They emphasize that youth in particular are willing to resort to violence if they deem their land is being illegitimately expropriated.

Conclusion:

The Iteso-Karamojong joint settlements at Apeitolim, Kobulin, and Nyarkidi all face a variety of challenges. Some of the problems can be more easily resolved as long as the settlements receive adequate funding. Public service improvements in the form of more bore holes, public markets, and maintained roads fall into this category. Of course, acquiring sufficient funding would only provide a partial resolution. The public infrastructure projects

would also have to be implemented properly. There are other challenges facing the camps that are more structural in nature. Several of these even pose existential threats to the settlements, as they call into question their very legitimacy. One of the structural problems at Apeitolim pertains to small-scale disputes over plots of land along the shared border with Okoboi Parish in Kapelebyong. At Kobulin a Nyakwai clan leader is asserting customary rights over settlement land. Several Abim district officials feel the Nyarkidi settlement is preventing Acholi-Labwor from resettling their traditional land. In concluding this chapter, I will highlight several of the positive developments to emerge out of the joint settlements but will then expand the discussion of the more problematic aspects.

First, the settlements provide a safety valve for those have been dispossessed of their customary land in Teso and Karamoja. Many migrants are former IDPs, and plots of land have been designated specifically for widows and orphans. Second, the settlements are a crucial element of Iteso-Karamojong reconciliation efforts. They are not only a new feature of post-conflict property arrangements along the border belt, but they are also part of the efforts to avoid a “mismanaged peace” (Wily 2009). They are the most important component of the peaceful coexistence policies. The fostering of inter-ethnic unions at the camps is especially important and serve as a tangible sign of progress. Third, in conjunction with the presence of security forces, the location of settlements along the border belt has contributed to the reduction in raids on livestock. The construction of more settlements (and preferably those that are Iteso-Karamojong) along the border belt could continue if security conditions keep improving and if there is increased access to public services.

Indeed, the lack of public services threaten the viability of the camps. One of the highest priorities is improving access to potable water. While boreholes are ecologically problematic

because they upset the water table levels, they are relied upon across most of Uganda (BakamNume and Sengendo 2010). Water sourced from bore holes is used for drinking, bathing, and cleaning. Improved access to ground water also reduces the potential that residents draw on contaminated water sources. The construction of a public market at each of the settlements is also a high priority, as they can help to reduce food insecurity. The roads adjoining the settlements to other parishes in Teso and Karamoja must be improved. The main reason why the Apeitolim market is not yet open is because of the substandard quality of the roads. The camps become isolated when elevated portions of the roads are flooded during the wet seasons. Poorly maintained roads also reduces the response time of security forces to active threats. Each settlement needs a functioning medical clinic. For example, residents of Kobulin must travel too far to acquire medical attention. Unfortunately, CSOs do not receive enough to funding to finance these projects. Therefore, the onus falls on the government, although in the cases of Kobulin and Nyarkidi, their problematic status hinders service delivery.

Another challenge to the viability of the joint settlements is population density. Initial migrants to Apeitolim and Kobulin received an estimated ten acres, and the first to settle at Nyarkidi were allocated approximately five acres. However, all three settlements have reached saturation levels. Some new migrants are now turned away, and this is not simply because they are from one of the ethnic groups (such as the Jie or Matheniko) that are prevented from settling because of their ongoing participation in cattle raids. Many families now borrow land from those who settled earlier on. The prospect of acquiring new land tenure rights for families in Teso and Karamoja that have been dispossessed of their customary land creates a constant population flow into the settlements. Aside from security and public service challenges, constructing new settlements along the border also poses a funding problem. Land needs to be cleared, homes

need to be constructed, and bore holes need to be drilled. New settlements also pose a management dilemma. As of now, the CSOs can still remain active in the affairs of the settlements, serving as critical interlocutors in the case of disputes between people over land. CSO leaders also spend time lobbying local governments for better public services at the camps. The creation of more settlements would place increased demands on the already overstretched CSOs that they might not be able to meet.

Poor service delivery and population density threaten the viability of the joint settlements, although they are not fundamentally existential challenges. The location of Kobulin and Nyarkidi pose an existential threat because this places their institutional legitimacy at stake. One of the reasons why Apeitolim is the joint settlement standard is because it has acquired the full support of the Napak district government. It lies along the Teso-Karamoja border, but is firmly located in Lokopo in Napak. The land conflicts between families adjacent to one another in Apeitolim and Okoboi do not challenge the political legitimacy of the settlement. The locations of Kobulin and Nyarkidi are more problematic. There has been disagreement between Abim and Amuria regarding which government has jurisdiction over Kobulin. On the local level, Nyakwai and Acholi-Labwor residents at Kobulin prefer formal incorporation into Abim, while Iteso would rather be under the jurisdiction of Amuria. While Abim now maintains jurisdiction over Kobulin, service delivery to the settlement is very poor, leaving residents to complain that the district is ignoring their presence. Iteso argue that Amuria would provide better public services, and point to the fact that the district would have constructed a medical clinic and drilled bore holes for them if it had not been blocked from doing so by Abim and the Nyakwai clan leader. In the case of Nyarkidi, local governments and settlement residents agree that the camp is located in Morulem in Abim. The issue lies in whether the settlement process of

Nyarkidi was legitimate. Abim is mainly the traditional land of the Acholi-Labwor, and even though Nyarkidi may have appeared to be a “free land” when people began settling in 2010, this might have been because displaced Acholi-Labwor had yet to resettle.

Sharp deviations in the ethnic composition of the settlements pose another existential threat. Once again, Apeitolim serves as the standard, for it contains a more equal distribution of ethnic groups. However, population skews at Kobulin and Nyarkidi prove very problematic. At Kobulin, Camp A is predominantly Iteso and Camp B is predominantly Nyakwai. While other ethnic groups are present, they comprise a statistical minority. This problem only exacerbates the dispute over which government has jurisdiction over Kobulin, as Iteso comprise the majority of the population in Amuria, and Nyakwai make up the majority of the people in Nyakwai sub-county (which is located in Abim). The ethnic composition of Nyarkidi is even more problematic, because it appears to be an exclusively Iteso settlement. This raises the question of whether it is indeed a “joint” Iteso-Karamojong settlement. It leaves Iteso open to the accusation that they are illegitimately occupying Acholi-Labwor land. The current ethnic composition of Nyarkidi raises doubt about whether peaceful coexistence principles underlie its foundation. This is something that the Teso and Karamoja-based CSOs need to address.

Despite the various challenges facing the joint settlements, I would argue that they are an overall success. They have provided land to dispossessed families from Teso and Karamoja. They are also organic embodiments of Iteso-Karamojong reconciliation efforts, making them intrinsically political institutions. Their viability hinges on whether current problems are appropriately addressed. More than anything else, their creation is a testament to the innovativeness and willpower of indigenous CSO actors, both Iteso and Karamojong. This includes the full-time members and volunteers, as well as the men and women who are affiliated

with them on the village and parish levels. These organizations are undoubtedly smaller and vastly undercapitalized in comparison to international NGOs, many of which inundate Africa. Scholars have debated the role of NGOs on the continent, as well as whether they are effective in fostering civil society development (Chaazaan 1991; Marcussen 1996a, 1996b; Hyden and Hailemariam 2003; Hyden 2006; Bierschenk and Sardan 1997, 2003). Some have been more critical of their involvement in the affairs of local societies than others (Tvedt 1992; Thomas 1994; Assal 2002). While Teso and Karamoja CSOs certainly lack the international visibility of NGOs, they possess a rich combination of local knowledge, local networks, and a long term vested interest in the success of the reconciliation initiatives along the border belt. These qualities are their greatest strengths.

Conclusion

In late October of 2012, I met with a group of community leaders in Kolir Sub-County in Bukedea to discuss land dispossession in their communities. Amongst those present were a pastor, primary school teacher, retired civil servant, former local government official, several elders, and a CSO member. They believe that the local and central governments are maliciously exploiting communities that have yet to resettle because of the violent conflicts. All are deeply concerned that entire parishes near the Amodine wetland will have their land alienated. They are adamant that the only reason why Amodine appears to be a “free land” is that it has yet to be resettled. Suspicions of future land alienation were also raised recently when UPDF officers were spotted in Kamatur Parish surveying a vast stretch of land that is still not resettled along the Bukedea-Nakapiripirit border.⁹³ Local government officials on the sub-county and parish levels are known for their participation in small-scale land dispossessions within Kolir. Yet, the meeting participants report that they are “silenced” by local political officials when they protest government involvement in illegitimate land acquisitions. They fear that future generations in

⁹³ The UPDF has been accused of illegally acquiring land throughout Uganda. It has also been accused of dispossessing people from land. Most local people are intimidated by any UPDF soldiers (including enlisted personnel—both activity duty and retired), but they are especially fearful of high ranking officers. They believe that they can operate with impunity. People are also intimidated by active and former UPDF members because they are assumed to possess weapons. This is one of the reasons why many desist from accusing them of grabbing their land. For instance, in Bululu Sub-County in Kabermaido District in early January of 2013, a UPDF officer shot a clan leader with his AK-47 over a dispute regarding tenure rights to three acres of land (Odeke 2013). See Owich (2013) and Kaaya (2014) on accusations of land grabbing against UPDF personnel.

Kolir will not possess any rights to land. They fear they might already be on the doorstep of this future. In the words of one man, “we are refugees in our own homeland.”

This work has focused on how conflicts over land in the Teso region of Uganda are deeply interwoven with processes of displacement and resettlement. Large-scale cattle raids, civil war, and the LRA insurgency all decimated Teso, although they affected the region differently. Along the southern rim of Teso in districts such as Soroti, Ngora, Kumi, and Bukedea, people began resettling their villages in the early 1990s. However, in the case of Soroti—in addition to Amuria and Kabermaido—the LRA infiltration in 2003 caused another cycle of displacement. Across the northern belt of Teso in the districts of Amuria and Katakwi, large-scale cattle rustling induced mass displacement in 1979. Yet, families from parishes in Amuria and Katakwi that directly border Karamoja mark an even earlier initial onset of their displacement. Like residents of Tisai Island in Ongino Sub-County in Kumi, they trace their first cycle of displacement to the late 1960s. It is only since 2007 that bordering parishes such as Arabet and Okoboi in Amuria became safe enough to begin resettling. The conditions in the bordering parish of Kaikamosing in Katakwi are still too dangerous for resettlement because of the ongoing threat posed by Karamojong warriors.

The intensification of conflicts over land coincided with the earliest stages of resettlement of southern Teso in the early 1990s. Disputes often arose when families attempted to resettle their traditional land, but instead found another family cultivating it. Land conflicts that are rooted in a similar dynamic now abound throughout northern Teso as well. In Amuria, the focus has recently been on the problem of “fake elders,” or elders who are bribed by a family to provide a favorable corroborating testimony regarding their customary rights to land, even though the testifying elder is actually from another village. The majority of cases of land

dispossession in Teso are small-scale affairs, as they occur on the intra-family, intra-clan, and inter-clan levels. Disputes typically center on only an acre or two of land in the village. Widows, the elderly, and orphans are some of the groups most commonly victimized by land dispossession. These small-scale illegitimate expropriations are led by opportunistic actors within the village—fellow Iteso—who are seeking to hedge their bets against rising regional land fragmentation. They comprise the vast majority of cases of land dispossession in Teso. Their cumulative impact on people in the region is the greatest.

I have argued that there are six immediate drivers to land conflicts in Teso, including increasing population density, an inadequate system for land demarcation, ineffective traditional and statutory justice systems, unscrupulous actors, and ecological shifts. However, I consider the most influential immediate driver to be what I have referred to as the displacement-resettlement dynamic. This concept seeks to place the violent conflicts at the center of any analysis of land conflicts in Teso. It also emphasizes the historical continuities between the conflict and post-conflict contexts. I qualify these drivers as “immediate” in order to underline that a more structural process of class transformation also underlies the rise of land dispossession in Teso. The six drivers are interacting with deeper changes to the Teso political economy to create a particular context for conflicts over land.

It is the first time since the early twentieth century that transformations in class relations are unfolding in Teso. Joan Vincent (1982) marks 1908-17 (which she refers to as the “development decade) as the height of this first period of capital accumulation. Therefore, I refer to this period as the second phase of capital accumulation, which I mark as beginning in the early 1990s. The violent conflicts also feature strongly in the development of this phase. It is my argument that they have inadvertently functioned as a form of primitive accumulation by

causing the initial uprooting of the population from their traditional land. In this way, they have contributed to the acceleration of the most important component to this period of capital accumulation: land alienation.

The driving force behind capital accumulation are members of the local accumulating group—which includes current and former local government officials, NGO workers, and civil servants—who acquire freehold titles to land. Many of these purchases are speculative, but some acquire land with the immediate intent of investing capital in a commercial agricultural project. Capital investments from local actors currently occur only on a small-scale, and they do not lie at the heart of conflicts over land in Teso. However, they are substantively important because they are indicative of fundamental political economic change within the region. While the central government promotes the commercialization of land and agriculture, it is not controlling local processes of commercialization.⁹⁴ One of the primary differences between this phase of capital accumulation and the first is that the current one is proceeding largely organically. Local Iteso are the driving force behind commercial land acquisitions. In the first phase, British and Baganda-led initiatives were superimposed onto Teso, facilitating processes of capital accumulation and social differentiation. The central government is also attempting to introduce commercial agriculture in several places in Teso, especially around wetlands such as Amodine

⁹⁴ See *National Development Policy* (2010) and *Proposed Action Plans for the Agricultural Revolution of Uganda* (2012) on Ugandan national development policies. Along with prioritizing commercial agriculture, the Ugandan central government has also stated its desire to increase agricultural practices in areas that have historically been predominantly pastoralist. The Uganda's government's *National Land Policy* (2013:19) states, "it is clear that public policy regards freehold as the property regime of the future."

and Agu. The government argues they are “free lands,” but local people counter that the areas in question have just not been resettled.

Another central component to the second phase of capital accumulation is the rapid growth in a segment of the population that is increasingly reliant on voluntarily performed wage labor as a supplemental social reproductive activity. They turn to borrowing others’ land for cultivation as an alternative means of social reproduction as well. People in this group have been dispossessed either partially or entirely from their customary land. They rely on what some have called a “pluriactive” (Van der Ploeg 2009; 2010; Borras 2009; Edelman 2013) or a “multiplex livelihood” (Bryceson 2002) approach to their social reproduction. The combination of wage labor with the cultivation of their remaining customary land provides the basis for their sustenance.

I purposely refer to ongoing processes of capital accumulation as a “phase.” Like the first period of capital accumulation, it is not determined that current processes of capital accumulation will continue to transform class relations. The growth in a social group that relies at least partially on market-based wage labor for their social reproduction is certainly evidence of social differentiation. Nonetheless, it should not be assumed that this group will inevitably transform into a traditional working class, or rural proletariat; in other words, processes of “depeasantization” (Araghi 1995; Bryceson 2000, 2002; McMichael 2011) do not necessarily operate linearly. Some have even argued that there has been a retrenchment of peasant forms of social reproduction, or a “repeasantization” in recent years (Edelman 1999; Van der Ploeg 2009). This is also why I prefer the concept “phase” over the use of “stage.” “Stage” denotes a clearly demarcated category of time. It presupposes events or processes that precede or follow according to a single strand of connecting logic. Therefore, “stage” also tends to connote linear

developments. I have intentionally drawn on the concept of “capital accumulation” rather than “capitalist transition” for similar reasons. Phases of capital accumulation do not necessarily entail transitions to capitalism, as evidenced by the case of Teso in the early twentieth century.

The political conditions in Teso—as well as in Uganda, on the whole—will continue to exert a strong influence on the ways in which the current phase of capital accumulation (along with ongoing land dispossession) continues to unfold. One of the reasons why post-conflict Teso has been so rife with cases of illegitimate land expropriation pertains to the role of the state. I have argued that one of the drivers to land conflicts in Teso is an ineffective formal justice system. Traditional justice mechanisms cannot fill the political void, as the elders will likely never regain their political power. Some scholars have characterized state dysfunction in Sub-Saharan Africa as a “power projection” problem (Hyden 1980, 2006; Bierschenk and Sardan 1997, 2003; Herbst 1990, 2000). They argue that central governments have never been able to effectively extend political control over the African countryside. Or, as Goran Hyden (1980) puts it, they have never “captured the peasantry.” Jeffrey Herbst (2000) is adamant that any emphasis on the “artificiality” of African state borders to explain general state dysfunction is sorely misplaced. He supports political decentralization as the best solution to the incapacity of African governments to broadcast power across their entire territories.

The core argument behind political decentralization is that the devolution of power from the center to the local levels will result in more efficient public service delivery. Uganda has been one of the leading countries in the world in political decentralization. While there were only 34 districts in 1991, there are now 111 (Green 2008; MOLG 2010). Paul Francis and Robert James consider Uganda’s decentralization policy “to be one most far reaching local government reform programs in developing world” (2003:325). However, most researchers have

been very critical of political decentralization in Uganda (Saito 2000, 2001; Mao 2006; Green 2008a, 2008b; Jones 2008). Elliot Green (2008a, 2008b) argues that while it has reduced the potential for national-level conflict, it has led to the expansion of patronage networks between the center and the periphery. He believes that President Museveni has purposely used political decentralization to improve his prospects at winning elections. Moreover, he asserts that it has politicized ethnicity in a country is already deeply fragmented ethnically (Green 2010).

In post-conflict Teso, more efficient delivery of public services is terribly needed. People from the “Western” side of Kaikamosing Parish indicate that aside from the continual presence of Karamojong warriors in the vicinity, the lack of a public market near their villages and poorly maintained roads have also affected their decision to not yet resettle. The peaceful coexistence camps along the Teso-Karamoja border are desperate for service delivery of any kind. Both the Kobulin and Nyarkidi joint Iteso-Karamojong settlements have only one bore hole. Along with poorly maintained roads (which can become impassable during the wet season), the absence of a public market, medical clinic, and schools are considered security threats by local people. Residents feel safer when there is a greater movement of people along the roads, but this will not occur without the presence of a market or hospital. There is a larger political imperative for improved service delivery to the joint settlements as well. Their viability is a crucial step to creating a sustainable peace between Iteso and Karamojong. The inaction of the central government on the demarcation of the Teso-Karamoja border only reinforces the legitimacy deficit. It is especially pronounced in this case because district governments in both regions have openly called for the central government to intervene.

Poor service delivery, a failure to intervene on the proliferation of land conflicts, and dubious intentions regarding natural resources along the border belt all contribute to the glaring

legitimacy gap for the state in Teso. Another sore point for Iteso is that they have never been compensated for damages incurred during the violent conflicts, despite government promises otherwise. Many Iteso simply see all of this as part of President Museveni's grand strategy to finally "wipe out us out"; in a word, to complete what he had set out to do during the civil war in the late 1980s and early 1990s. While this belief leans to the conspiratorial, the illegitimacy and ineffectiveness of the central government in Teso is real.

The status of his regime adds another layer of complexity to the political situation in Teso and across Uganda. Museveni has now been in power for over 27 years, one of the longest presidential tenures in the history of Africa.⁹⁵ Uganda is formally a parliamentary democracy, although the dominant political party in the country—the National Resistance Movement (NRM)—is largely viewed as a puppet of Museveni. Many Ugandans feel that Museveni exerts too much personal control over the UPDF. He acted without the consent of parliament in December of 2013 when he deployed several UPDF battalions into South Sudan to back the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) in quelling an internal rebellion.⁹⁶ The most recent

⁹⁵ Teodoro Obiang of Equatorial Guinea, Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, and Jose Eduardo Dos Santos of Angola are the other presidents to have remained in office for this long (Burnett 2013).

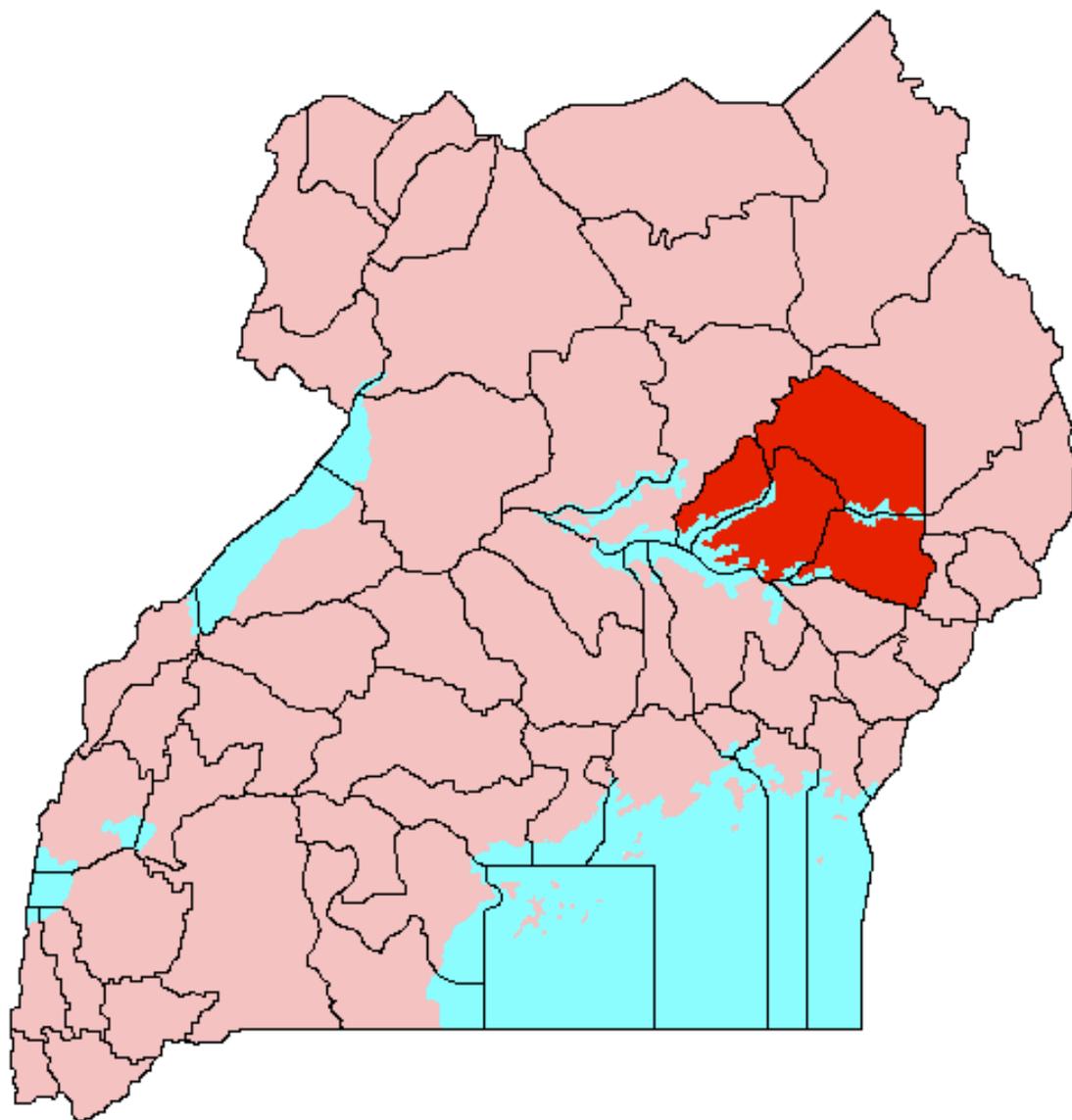
⁹⁶ It has been reported that units from the UPDF Special Forces Group (which is under the command of President Museveni's son, Brigadier General Muhoozi Kainerugaba) were deployed to South Sudan within seven days of the onset of the civil war. Museveni publically justified the mobilization of UPDF resources into South Sudan along humanitarian grounds, and also cited a letter from South Sudanese President Salva Kiir that requested his intervention. Ugandan Parliament retroactively approved the deployment, although changed the constitutional justification of the deployment. UPDF intervention in South Sudan has been criticized by many across the world as an infringement on the sovereignty of South Sudan. In East Africa, it has been suggested that any intervention should have come under the auspices of the African Union or East Africa's Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). Military intervention would inevitably prove problematic in some ways regardless of whether it proceeded under the approval of an international body. One can certainly make the argument that there were (and

high-level official to publically announce his break with Museveni is General David “Tinyefuza” Sejusa (he is now in self-exile in the UK). His defection reportedly stems from his opposition to the “Muhoozi Project,” which refers to what some believe is Museveni’s plan to transition his son, Brigadier General Muhoozi Kainerugaba, into the presidency once he steps down.⁹⁷ Yet, Museveni has stated his intentions to run again for the presidency in 2016. If he wins reelection he will be in office when oil production in Hoima is projected to begin. Uganda is currently experiencing the least violent period in its post-colonial history. However, every transition of political power during this period has been accompanied by violence. Ugandans can only hope that a new precedent will be set in coming years.

remain) clear Ugandan national security interests at stake to justify unilateral intervention at that point in time. For a discussion of these series of events within popular print media, see e.g. Kasasira (2013), Kimbugwe (2013), Malou (2014), Kigambo (2014), and Mugerwa and Nalugo (2014).

⁹⁷ Museveni has always denied that there are any plans of transitioning his son into role of president once he vacates the seat. However, many people speculate that Muhoozi is being groomed for the presidency, and point to his rise to Brigadier General—the fastest in the history of Ugandan militaries—as indicative of Museveni’s intent. See Mehumuza (2013).

Appendix
Teso Region



Source: OHCA

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