The effects of conflict and forced displacement on citizen engagement
A case study from Northern Uganda

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Overview of this presentation

• Contextual background to the conflict in Acholi
• Theoretical framework
• Case studies and Methodology
• Findings:
  - Experiences during the war and in the displacement camps
  - Implications for citizenship
Context

- Starting from 1986: an Acholi rebel group, the LRA
- Fluctuations in intensity of LRA violence
- Forced displacement camps 1996-2006/7
- Ambiguous role of the state; southern domination, aiming to control the north.
- North-South divide
- Stability after the Juba Peace Talks 2006-2008
Research objective

1) To understand the intersection between citizenship and violent conflict, and to contribute to an understanding of ‘active citizenship’: as status and as practice.

2) To analyse state-citizen relations and how these were affected by the experience of protracted violent conflict and displacement.
Theoretical framework

1) Citizenship: a sense and a practice
2) Theories of citizen engagement
3) Ethnicity and citizenship
4) Conflict studies:
   - Transformation of social and political institutions
   - Forms of agency in situations of war and chronic violence
   - Citizen agency
5) Forced migration and displacement camps
Research questions

In the case of the Acholi sub-region in Northern Uganda, how does the experience of protracted conflict and displacement affect citizenship and state–citizen relations?

a) How has this experience affected people’s perceptions of themselves as citizens, and of the national and the local state?

a) How has the experience affected socio-political processes at local level?

a) What are key characteristics of the relationship between citizens and local authorities in this post-conflict setting?

a) Which contextual factors shape the relationship between citizens and local government institutions, e.g. cultural values, political history, and the democratic system?
Argument

In terms of citizen engagement challenges exist across Uganda. The experience of conflict adds a layer of complexity in the Acholi region.

The war undermined a sense of citizen agency and crucial citizenship skills that enable forms of *political* agency in particular, by limiting people’s experience with the state, and by curtailing spaces of (political) socialisation where strategies for substantive, active citizenship could be learnt.
Objects of the Past
Memories of the Past
Case studies

Acholi: 2 locations
Protracted conflict since 1986 and sustained threat by the LRA
Displacement for 5 and 10 years respectively
Rural area

Lango: 1 location
No LRA rebel activities
Rural area
Fieldwork Methodology

Qualitative research methods emphasising an historical approach, e.g. life history interviews, semi-structured interviews, time lines, and 3 biographic interviews.

Participatory research methods emphasising the effects of conflict, and forms of socio-political organisation, e.g. Flow diagrams, venn diagrams and institutional mappings.
Early war period 1986 – 1990s

**Acholi - events**

Regime change to NRA > taking revenge on Acholi

Karamojong cattle raids in 1988 not stopped by NRA

Population caught between the military and the LRA

**Implications**

A *warscape* developed in which people survived through ‘social navigation’

Coping agency rather than citizen agency

Social interactions limited

Local leadership became security oriented

Unfamiliar with local governance procedures and services.
Displacement Camps 1996-2007

Camp characteristics

1.4 million Acholi (>90%)

Humanitarian actors take over district government

Camp governance regime replaces local government without accountability mechanisms in place

Militarised environment

Isolated in insecurity

Remnants of the camp
Implications for Acholi Citizenship

Sense of citizenship

Feelings of stigmatisation; the Acholi as ‘violent, barbarian warriors’

‘From citizen to IDP’

Abandoned by the state, or worse; the ambiguous role of the regime is interpreted as the deliberate attempt to ‘undermine’ Acholi.

The cultural entity of the Acholi as ethnic group becomes entangled with the war experience.
Implications for Acholi Citizenship

Practices

Social and political institutions transformed: no opportunities to build experience with formal political processes/ institutions

Little space for collective agency

Self-censorship and internalisation of silence
Citizenship Practices at Present

**Acholi**

People still focus on day-to-day survival
Their engagement limited to interactions with a small number of leaders, unaware of other options
No trust that engagement will lead to anything
Collective voice still weak

**Lango**

Functioning, though poorly, local institutions for development planning
Multiple channels used to raise concerns/interests
More citizen-led initiatives to improve services
## Citizenship Practices at Present

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acholi</th>
<th>Lango</th>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural barriers to challenge power holders</td>
<td>Cultural barriers to challenge power holders, respect for leadership often prevails.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Silences from the war internalised</td>
<td>Formal mechanisms at local level used to correct leaders</td>
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