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Labot in Dual Spaces and Land Conflict in Post-Conflict Northern Uganda: A Gender Discourse Analysis

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Abstract- This paper seeks to discuss the dual spaces which *labot*[1] occupy within the post-war land-conflict setting in Amuru District. From a gendered perspective, this is a critical discussion contesting the dominant discourse that represents women as occupying the dual spaces. This perspective has been accepted by society and women have been supported accordingly. However, *labot* in these same dual spaces have not been embraced in the same way. Analyses of the narratives and lived experiences of *labot* challenge the notion that men are less affected than women by land conflicts in post-war areas. Three themes emerged from the narratives: woman as security for land, *labot* and land conflict, and social navigation to reclaim land. This paper interacts with feminist discourse that tries to explain the relationships and interactions of women within the feminine master-narrative in relation to ownership, access and control over resources. Therefore, the paper argues that *labot* have crossed into the private space as well and taken on the character of dual spaces.

Keywords: land conflicts, labot, gender analysis, landownership, and dual spaces.

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Abstract- This paper seeks to discuss the dual spaces which *labot*[1] occupy within the post-war land-conflict setting in Amuru District. From a gendered perspective, this is a critical discussion contesting the dominant discourse that represents women as occupying the dual spaces. This perspective has been accepted by society and women have been supported accordingly. However, *labot* in these same dual spaces have not been embraced in the same way. Analyses of the narratives and lived experiences of *labot* challenge the notion that men are less affected than women by land conflicts in post-war areas. Three themes emerged from the narratives: woman as security for land, *labot* and land conflict, and social navigation to reclaim land. This paper interacts with feminist discourse that tries to explain the relationships and interactions of women within the feminine master-narrative in relation to ownership, access and control over resources. Therefore, the paper argues that *labot* have crossed into the private space as well and taken on the character of dual spaces.

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I. Introduction

From a feminism perspective, scholars like (Agarwal, 1997; Agawal, 1994; Agarwal, 2003; Adelman et al., 2014; Deininger et al., 2006) reveal women as taking on the head of the family roles and how them occupying these dual spaces is challenged by land conflicts. Society has accepted and supported women in dual spaces through feminism movements in post-recovery reconstruction (Mwambari, 2017; Rose, 2000; Peters, 2004); Kimkung et al., 2013; Ajala, 2017). On the contrary, the *labot* in the same dual spaces have been embraced differently. Dual spaces refer to the double gender roles that women and men perform in the absence of the other. In the Acholi community, *labot* is a man who does not have a wife either because he has never married or lost his wife and never re-married.

This paper focuses on *labot*, who married and lost his wife during the civil war and never re-married. A labot is less respected in the Acholi community than a married man. His power and control in the clan are limited, his identity is seen as an unmarried man. Before the civil conflict that rocked Acholi from 1987 to 2007, the traditional Acholi social systems supported the *labot.* His sister-in-law would assist *labot* in raising the children and the community assisted him to re-marry; helping him to pay his bridewealth. After the war, *labot* found himself in a changed community where people have migrated in their thinking, and social support systems collapsed—such circumstances in the community place *labot* in dual spaces against his will.

The paper focuses on how *labot*, who occupies the dual spaces as father and mother, relates to land and land conflicts in the study area of Amuru District, northern Uganda. This paper challenges the Social Feminist notion that women are disempowered in land relations with men. The individual narrative cases in post-conflict reconstruction land conflicts challenge this assumption. In the case of *labot*, we also see men disempowered in land ownership and use. The situation has forced him to occupy dual spaces simultaneously, in a model that depicts man as the landowner and woman as the land user. *Labot* has to perform the role of a father by paying school fees and similarly perform the role of a mother by cultivating food for the children after the death of his wife. This situation shows the gap left upon his wife's death, indicating the woman's vital role concerning land. The above land-use model makes the woman the "owner of crops" and the "mother of the garden". Thus, *labot's* narratives challenge the Social Feminist notion that women are disempowered in land relations. The paper shifts the importance of landownership to land use, thus positioning the woman as using and adding value to land.

Subsequently, we seek to show how this dual space plays out in a situation of *labot*. To examine this, we employ a case study approach expounding the narratives and experiences of the *labot*. A qualitative approach is applied through semi-structured interviews to understand *labot's* life experiences. Ten *labot* and 22 key informants were interviewed and emerging issues framed to validate arguments based on individual cases.

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[1] In the Acholi community, *labot* is a man who does not have a wife either because he has never married or lost his wife and never re-married. However, its meaning is disputed by the local and elite Acholi. To the local Acholi, *labot* can be used to mean a man who has never married or a widower. To Acholi elite, *labot* applies to only the man who has never married. Their assumption is that there is no permanent status of the widower in Acholi. This paper will take *labot* to mean a man who has never married or one who has lost his wife and never re-married.

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The paper critiques the Social Feminist perspective on gendered land relations. It contests the presentation of women as victims of land conflicts and as more disempowered in land relations. The paper argues that *labot* is disempowered and expresses the view that men too are victims of land conflicts. The death of his wife makes *labot* vulnerable and exposes him to numerous land conflicts. This is elaborated by analysing individual cases and expounding on previous studies on experiences of *labot* and land conflicts.

II. Land Conflicts and Labot

Land conflicts have gained notoriety in the last two decades and remain a global concern attracting many international scholars. Scholars like Krieger et al. (2016); Jackson (2003); Hacker (2010); Buvinic, Das, Ursula, and Philip (2012); Rubio-Marín (2015); Lombard (2016) and Socpa (2017), among others, have researched extensively on women and land conflicts, land conflicts and development, widows and land conflicts, and how land conflicts affect more women than men, sometimes making them acquire new positions and responsibilities as heads of families. Grabska (2013) argues that land conflicts affect women more than men in post-conflict areas. For example, in the case of South Sudan, Nuer community women who are house-heads are referred to as *wut pany*, meaning a 'real man'; women who have assumed the role of a father (Grabska, 2013). Adelman et al. (2014); Arostegui (2013); Stapleton and Wilson (2014); Agarwal (2003); Bob (2012); Bogale, Taeb, and Endo (2006) have also advanced the same claim.

In Acholi community, an unmarried man, occupying dual spaces is considered useless and called a *labot*. When men perform women's gender roles in the Acholi community, they are not respected and not considered 'real men'. This situation confirms that men experience similar challenges as women when their wives die, invalidating the assumption that women suffer more than men when their husbands die. Agarwal and Bina (1994); Agarwal (1997); Rugadya (2009). Doss et al. (2013) and other academicians claim that land conflicts affect women more, making them significant victims of conflicts than men in post-conflict reconstruction. Although there is another body of literature suggesting that conflicts affect the entire community irrespective of gender (Maganga et al. 2007, as cited in Massoi, 2016), there is little attention on how land conflicts affect *labot* who have assumed double spaces especially in post-conflict reconstruction.

Bogale et al. (2006) focused mainly on how the conflicts affect women in terms of placement, where to get food, water and firewood to enable women to play their social gender roles in the family. *Kimkung et al. (2013)* assessed land conflicts and gender dimensions that resulted from a government intervention that displaced Dorobos from their ancestral home on the slopes of Mount Elgon to the lower lands, thus causing land conflicts. However, Kimkung et al.'s analysis focus on the same women alone. *Massoi et al. (2016)* looked at land conflicts and their effect on pastoral Maasai women's livelihood in Tanzania. Therefore, much evidence has been provided on how land conflicts affect women in post-conflict areas, but little is known on how land conflicts affect the *labot* in similar situations. Therefore, the contribution of this paper is to address this gap by focusing on *labot* who have assumed dual positions in post-conflict situations of Amuru district, northern Uganda.

It is argued by *Nakirunda (2011); Cheng (2016)* that the underlying problems regarding land conflicts are that of equity and the inequitable power relations inherent in socially entrenched African land relations. This is further confirmed by *Kimkung et al. (2013),* who contends that land conflicts affect women and men differently relative to the social design of the community. Women and men have different roles in land matters, different levels of understanding and knowledge about land, and varying rights to land. The variations result in differing power relations and decision making at societal and family levels. These variations continue to manifest differently between women and men in society *(Deininger and Castagnini 2006; Adelman and Peterman 2014).* As conflicts unsettle the social design and gender power ideology that previously defined the community, power relations change hands in terms of decision making and responsibilities. Manhood also changes in situations where *labot* takes on the female gender roles in the family and is not respected by society *(Grabska 2013; Deininger and Castagnini 2006).*

III. Research Methodology

This research embraced a qualitative approach mainly using semi-structured interviews to understand how individuals form meaning in their lives as narratives that could not be achieved with a quantitative approach. The approach allowed a deep understanding of individual life experiences from a small sample size.

Thematic analysis was also adopted by coding different data relating to particular narratives. There are four major analytic approaches to narrative analysis including thematic analysis, performance or dialogic analysis, visual analysis, and structural analysis (Riessman, 2005; Braun & Clarke, 2006). For this study, Narrative analysis which is an analytical methodology was used in this research to generate, understand, and interpret individuals' lived experiences (Squire et al., 2019). It was used to understand the different ways of knowing and studying the lived experiences of *labot*. The methodology allowed capturing data within lived experiences, including insights into beliefs, feelings, images, and values of labot's culture and behaviours in

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post-conflict areas. It also considered labot's experience within the social and cultural context of Amuru District. Through narrative analysis, knowledge was created and constructed by listening to stories and making sense of *labot* experiences.

Ten *labot* were interviewed on their lived experiences during the civil conflict that lasted almost two decades (1986-2007) in northern Uganda (Cakaj, 2010). However, it was not easy to identify the *labot* from the community since they are not prioritised in post-conflict reconstruction and development. Therefore, Local Council Ones (LC 1s) were used to locate the *labot* in different sub-counties (Schiltz and Büscher 2018).

The selection criteria was based on having *labot* status; one who lost his wife during the LRA civil conflict, not yet re-married by the time of fieldwork and is consequently facing land conflicts. In order to validate the data from *Labot*, the researcher also interviewed one LC I chairperson and one LC II chairperson in each of 4 sub-counties (Amuru, Lamongi, Pabbo and Atiek), one female representative at LC II from each sub-county, four traditional leaders among whom was a female, 1 District Community Development Officer (DCDO), 1 District Gender Officer (DGO) and 1 elder from each sub-counties.

During the interviews, a recorder was used. For the labot a research assistant interpreted some statements from Acholi language to English for the researcher to follow while the Key Informants interviews were done in English. The storytelling evoked memories of them missing their loved ones and, in some cases, the *labot* shed tears (Senehi, 2002; Mwambari, 2019). In most African societies, a man is not expected to shed tears in front of a woman; the respondents, sometimes felt embarrassed (Shipton & Goheen, 1992) and excused themselves for a few minutes, returning after composing themselves.

Thematic analysis was used to analyse data collected through interviews and conversation patterns of experiences and stories of *Labot* and key informants. All experiences that fit a specific pattern were placed with the corresponding themes, highlighting some individual cases as seen in the discussion of findings section. The following themes emerged from the analysis: Woman as land security; *labot* and land conflicts; social navigation of *labot*; and, Living in guilt. The analysis of the individual cases included all ten interviews and twenty-two key informants. However, six out of the ten individual cases and one camp leader are included in the article to present experiences of *labot* who are in most cases forgotten during post-conflict reconstruction programs in Northern Uganda.

IV. Theoretical Framework

a) Socialist feminists' theory

Socialist feminists theory views patriarchy as a social system in which the role of men as the primary authority figure is central to the social organisation; men hold authority over women, children, property and influence resource governance in society (Kimkung and Espinosa 2013; Robins, 2008; Agarwal, 1994; Simpson, 1989). Socialist feminist theorists have argued that the patriarchal system promotes women's marginalisation and disempowerment in society (Deininger et al., 2008; Bayisenge et al., 2014; Peters, 2004). The theory further argues that establishment of private property in land, tools, and livestock created the possibility for men to exercise control over the means of production.

Socialist feminists theory argues that customary laws were eroded and transformed in ways disadvantageous to women's resource ownership (Tripp, 2004; Burke & Kobusingye, 2014; Bayisenge, 2015). This view is strengthened by scholars who argue that customary laws in the present day context have been used to selectively preserve practices that subordinate women (Jackson, 2003; Peters. 2004). Socialist feminists' theory continued to argue that women's resource ownership inequalities have contributed towards retarding women's economic development *(Agarwal, 2003; Bayisenge, 2015).* Women's ownership of land is essential from an equity and economic empowerment perspective, which is associated with positive outcomes for women and households (Kieran et al., 2017). Therefore, it should be noted that customary law should not promote women's subordination but be used as a tool to secure landownership for women. In customary law, the security of land tenure for women is, in essence, rooted in their structural role as lineage wives (Njoh et al., 2017; Agarwal, 1994; Grabe, 2010).

This paper contests views of Socialist feminists theorists who argue that as women perform their roles in the private sphere, they are burdened with additional roles when they become heads of the households and are at risk of poverty due to denial of landownership (Kieran et al. 2015; Kieran et al. 2017). Inequalities in landownership limit women's ability to perform their roles effectively because they have no security on the land they use (Doss et al., 2014). The theory assumes that all men are in a position of power over resources in society. However, it is evident that as men lose their wives, they also take on additional roles and thus live in dual spaces. The socialist feminist theory has ignored this as they narrow their focus on women as the most disadvantaged group. Although men dominate and own most of the resources, some men do not own and control land. In conclusion, it is essential to note that the patriarchal system is dominated by men as argued by

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socialist feminist theory; but not all men are in control and have power over resources like land in society.

V. Lived Experiences and Voices of Labot and Land Conflicts

Cases of individual men who lost their wives during the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) conflict that lasted for two decades were identified. The wives died under different circumstances. Some were captured by the rebels and killed instantly using machetes and axes; others stepped on landmines laid by the LRA rebels and were blown up. Others were captured by the rebels and tortured to death, others were raped, infected with diseases, and died slow, painful deaths after failing to get proper treatment from the health centres. When they were in Internally Displaced Peoples' (IDPs) camps, the sick only received first-aid from humanitarian agencies. Patients with serious ailments were referred to the hospital, but they couldn't go there because there was no transport. They also feared being waylaid and killed by the LRA rebels. Although all the ten interviewed *labot* lost wives in different circumstances, their experiences also vary according to their age and the number of people in their families.

The older *labot* quickly adapted and accepted the situation by coming to terms with their new reality. It was challenging for the younger ones who had just married to accept their new reality. One confessed that he was about to commit suicide because he did not know how to look after the children in the camp environment without food, water, and healthcare services. He had to look for food and at the same time take care of the children all by himself.

Similarly, the size of the family *labot* had to take care of determined how he reacted to losing his wife. *Labot*, who had many brothers, sisters, cousins, uncles, aunts and whose parents were still alive, were assisted in recovering faster from the shock and depression. Despite being together in the same IDP's camp, children were distributed among the different members of the family since *labot* could not manage alone. This made the life of *labot* much easier; he could manage the few children who remained with him.

In northern Uganda, a woman plays a central role in land use; that is why most of the wives killed during the LRA conflict were on their way back from the gardens. Therefore, a man who lost his wife lost his family's capacity to use the land upon return from the displaced people's camp. This affected the amount of food produced for his family and the size of land to be utilised, leaving most of the land unutilised. Since land was among the crucial resources for resettlement, fighting for land was much easier for those who returned with all their family members than *labot* who returned with only young children. These land conflicts made life hard for *labot* in dual spaces because they could not leave children alone at home while following up on land conflict cases in courts of law in Gulu or Kampala.

a) Case Scenarios

In order to understand the personal experiences of the *labot* in the dual spaces in relation to the land conflicts, it was essential to listen to their stories. Out of the ten interviews, only sex and one camp leader were presented as case studies since they offered something new and responded well to the research questions. Also, having more than seven cases would be too many for an article. The remaining four cases were also analysed, and their views are included in the article. Also, 22 key informants were interviewed to validate the told experiences of *labot*.

i. *Case 1*

Joseph had much land given to him by his father as an inheritance. He had four sisters and three brothers. Before the civil conflict, he cultivated the land with his wife and children; it was a happy family. However, in 1996 they were forced to move to the camp when the LRA rebels started to attack homesteads.

> It was late in the evening as we were preparing to have dinner, we started hearing people shouting that the rebels were moving towards Labilaom village to attack us. The local leaders told people to leave their homes and go to the camps. We did not eat our dinner; we left everything the way it was. We just picked a few things like clothes for the children, saucepans and decided to join the rest of the people to go to Amuru displaced people's camp. Since we had young children, we moved slowly while other people were in front of us. When we reached the camp, we found some people had already settled there. On arrival, the camp chief had to register everyone who had arrived, and they allocated us space in the tent where we stayed for the night. The tent was small and more people continued to join later. We were told to leave the tent and build our hut. We were given a small plot to construct our hut on.
>
> Food was distributed by the World Food Program (WFP), but it was not enough for the family… So we started growing foodstuffs until the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) started restricting men's movements. The reason was that some men might decide to join the rebels since the camp life was also not good. Another reason was the fear of being kidnapped by the rebels and forcing them to join the rebel group. So the men stopped going to the gardens, which was left for women. One morning, as usual, my wife sneaked out with my younger brother to collect some food from the garden. On their way back, they met the rebels. The rebels captured my wife and brother and killed them…. that was the end of my family members.
>
> In 2010, like other people, I also returned to my village with my six children without their mother. On our arrival, I noticed some of my land had been taken by those who came earlier than me. The children remained with me but were later taken by their aunt to look after them and take them back to school since I was financially unstable. I remained alone in the family house with much land underutilised, and other community members pressured me to sell it. I was being confronted by the issue of re-marrying, and the woman

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takes care of my property. I wondered whether I could manage a young woman at my age and that she would not mistreat my children. (Joseph, 54, Amuru Town Council, Amuru District, 2017)

ii. *Case 2*

Charles did not move to the camp; the camp moved to him. The land where the camp was established was his father's land. The huts were constructed everywhere, including in his compound. He lived with his parents in a crowded camp where people destroyed the environment. The camp life was depressing and stressful because there was not enough food for the family. The land where we used to grow food was taken over by the displaced people's settlement. A cousin gave us a garden; it was about four kilometres away from the camp.

In 2002, as his wife was going to the garden, she was captured by the LRA rebels. She was severely beaten, raped and left to go back home.

My wife came back from the garden when she was very sick due to severe beatings. We did not have money for transport to the hospital and medical treatment. I treated her using traditional herbs... She stayed for a few weeks and then died while at home... One thing that I will not forget is that I failed to protect my wife because of the restrictions on men's movements by the UPDF army. The UPDF army caused the death of my wife. She left seven children with me in the camp. This was a challenge because I had to look for food for them. For the older children, I gave them items like tomatoes and onions to sell within the camp. I was engaged in small businesses that made us survive in the camp. They gave us food, but my family had seven children, so it was insufficient. As the situation returned to normal again, I moved outside the camp and did business. In 2006, people started returning to their homes, and we thought that all of them would leave our land and we would receive it back. However, the case has been different because some people have refused to go back after discovering that others took their land… Some people are pressurising us to sell the land to them, but we do not want to sell it... This land was freely given to the local government for temporary resettlement of the people, but it has become complicated now. The land now is full of graves everywhere, nowhere to cultivate food for my family. My parents are very old and cannot pursue the land case at different government administration offices. In addition to that, I do not have a wife who could support me in pursuing the land case. I have to look for money to educate my children and, at the same time, chase land conflict cases. Now the children have grown and can cook for themselves.

The first three children do not stay with me; they went to look for jobs in Gulu and Kampala. The challenge I have is that the community is pressurising me to re-marry. Re-marrying is a good thing, but I am scared that I may fail to get the right woman for my children. Also, these days everybody has HIV/AIDS, which will kill me very fast. I survived the LRA bullets; I do not want to die of AIDS. In addition to that, the new wife will want to produce her children, yet I already have 7. Having more children will be a challenge to look after even if I had land to cultivate their food. I do not know when this land conflict case will be resolved. (Charles, 49, Amuru Sub-county, Amuru District, 2017)

iii. *Case 3*

Martin had no parents by the time he went to the camp in 1998. He used to stay with his uncle. However, when war came, it scattered them and up today, he has never seen him again. He started schooling in the camp and stopped in primary five at the age of 15. After dropping out of school, he decided to start a small business selling cooking oil that WFP was distributing. He saved some money until he got enough to marry a wife in 2007 and produced three children; two boys and one girl.

One morning when my wife was coming back from the garden, she stepped on a landmine as she was running away from the rebels. One leg was blown off, and she bled to death. Men were restricted to move because the army thought they could willingly or forcefully join the rebels. Women were the ones allowed to go to the garden. The women, including my wife, did not have the protection of men. The army restricted men from protecting their women, and it is the same army that did not protect our women. The army was aware that our women were in danger by moving alone without men's protection. In my culture, it is the role of men to protect women. The army refused men to protect their women, thus violating our cultural norms. I have always imagined that if I had escorted my wife to the garden, maybe she would not have died. I live with this thought all the time when I think about my wife.

The guilt that I live with is that I failed to protect my wife. If I had been there, maybe she would not have died. She left three children; the youngest was one year and eight months old. I went alone, and I came out of the camp without my wife but with the children only…It was challenging in the camp to look after one year child. I had to look for food for the children. There was an older woman who assisted me with the youngest child. Whenever I was busy looking for food, this woman looked after the children. She cooked and bathed them whenever I delayed coming back. She was a great woman. She treated me as her son, which made me feel that I had found a mother in the camp. I did not experience my mother's love, but this woman made me feel the mother's love. I did not have any relatives in the camp, but this woman became my relative. So in 2012, I decided to go back to my village, hoping that I would find my uncle back from the camp. When I reached my village, I found that my father's land was being encroached on by other people who thought I had died during the conflict. They knew that I was the only son remaining and my uncle who raised me.. I came back knowing that I had my father's land to cultivate food for my family, but I was confronted by land conflict. I did not have a wife to support me in this case and to raise our children together. I had to work hard for my children. Also, some relatives encroached on my land, assuming that land was big to be used by only me. Much of my land is not utilised as I am alone, and I do not have money for hiring a tractor to open it up. I reported the land issues to all the authorities that I could reach but was unsuccessful.

The remains of my wife are still in the camp. I plan to bring them back, but many rituals require money to perform. I am

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looking for the money, and when I get it, I will bring the remains back home. I cannot think of re-marrying before bringing the remains of my wife. Re-marrying these days is very expensive, and I still have young children to look after and educate. Also, the new wife may not love my children and start mistreating them. I have gone through a lot with my children, and I love them. I do not want anyone to separate me from my children (Martin, 39, Pabbo Sub-county, Amuru District, 2017)

iv. *Case 4*

Ochola got married in 1982 and produced six children; two girls and four boys. Like others, he went to the camp in 1996 with his family due to the LRA insurgency. During his stay in the camp, food was being provided by WFP, but the rations given to his family were never enough. Ochola and his family decided to start farming outside the camp to supplement the food that WFP provided. They used to move to the gardens in groups with other camp dwellers.

One day, when we were coming back from collecting food with my wife, brother, and other people, we were ambushed by the LRA rebels. My wife and brother were killed instantly. I managed to escape, leaving my brother and wife behind. Before that happened, I had been captured and tortured by the rebels. This experience made me leave my wife and brother behind to save my life for the second time.

After the death of my wife, life was not easy. I had to take care of the six children, with the eldest son aged 15 years and the youngest three years. My mother-in-law took all the children away from me, saying that I would not manage to take care of them. Life without my wife and children was the worst situation I had ever experienced. I went through stress and depression until I reconstructed myself and started living another life.

In 2008, I decided to leave the camp and return to my home village. I returned with only two children; four remained with their grandmother in the camp. After I returned from the camp, I was doing well and supporting my children, who had stayed with their grandmother until the government, through Amuru District Land Board, gave away my land to investors. We were chased away from the land. I became landless and homeless with my children. This situation rendered me economically powerless, failing to care for my family. Since the land taken was my home, my two children and I are currently housed by my brother. We are back to camp life of not having enough food for the family.

Life without a wife is not easy. A woman is vital in managing the family because she helps in the garden and ensures that the family has enough food to eat. I wanted to re-marry, but it is difficult because I do not have a home; my brother is housing me. A woman cannot accept me when I do not have a home; even the money to pay dowry is not available. It seems like this kind of life is going to be permanent. Where will I get the money to buy land and re-marry? (Ochola, 50 years, Lamongi Sub-county, Amuru District, 2017).

v. *Case 5*

Okot went to Amuru displaced people's camp with his mother in 1996 when he was six. While in the camp, food was provided by World Food Program. There were no healthcare facilities schools, and the UPDF restricted movements outside the camp.

When I was nine years old, I started going to school in primary one and stopped in primary six when my mother failed to pay school fees. When my mother fell sick, I dropped out of school. At the age of 15 years, I started a small business in the camp with 30,000 Ugandan Shillings (equivalent of US$8). I was buying maise from camp officers and selling it to people in the camp. I used to get 180,000 Ugandan Shillings (equivalent of US$48) in monthly profits. When I had saved enough, I bought piglets and started rearing them while in the camp. I also joined the saving group and managed to save up to 730,000 Ugandan Shillings (equivalent of US$200). In 2008, at the age of 17, I used this money to marry. My wife gave birth to a baby boy in 2009.

One day in the morning, I sneaked out with my wife to the garden as usual. While we were still in the garden, I heard some voices approaching us. When I looked behind, they were LRA rebels. I urged my wife to run very fast but, unfortunately, the rebels caught up with her. I managed to escape from the rebels, leaving my wife behind. The rebels told my wife that they hate people who run away from them. They killed my wife using axes. Her story was narrated by a relative who was hiding in a nearby garden. Our son was eight months old when his mother was killed. A relative of mine took the child and took care of him.

In 2011, I decided to go back to my ancestral home, leaving the graves of my wife and my mother in the camp. I was planning to shift the remains to my home village. When I returned alone without my mother, I did not know where the boundaries of my father's land were and how big the land was. My relatives took advantage of my ignorance to claim some of my inheritance. Most of my relatives on my mother's side had died, and I did not have enough support to claim my land back. My father's relatives told me that I did not have a big family, so I did not need much land compared to my other relatives. I left the land because I was powerless and with no finances to facilitate the land conflict case. I am currently alone, and I cannot re-marry; it adds more problems. Women today do not care like our mothers used to care for their children. Marrying is also expensive. I have to pay the bride price in terms of cows, goats, chickens and other items. I want to give a better future to my son; that is why I am working hard. (Okot, 26, Amuru Town Council, Amuru District, 2017)

vi. *Case 6*

By the time Ocan went into the displaced people's camp in 1996, he was a 16-year-old orphan. Before going to camp, Ocan had a sister who was already married and staying in the camp.

I was born with two boys and one girl; unfortunately, the two boys were captured by the rebels before I went to camp, and I have never heard from them again. I stayed with my sister in the camp. My schooling stopped in primary four, and I never went back to school while in the camp. I started a small business selling produce. Some organisations provided some foodstuff, but the camp officers used to sell them. I would buy some and resell them to make profits. In 1998 I married, and in the same year, my wife gave birth to a baby girl and another child in 2000.

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My wife stepped on a landmine while returning to the camp from the garden, and her leg was shattered. She was rushed to Lacho hospital in an ambulance. Unfortunately, before she got to the hospital, my wife died. She died in 2003; in 2008, I decided to return to my ancestral home. Returning home alone was a challenge because two children stayed with my sister. I settled down and started farming and selling my produce to Kampala and South Sudan traders. I managed to send money to my sister to care for my children. However, because I was alone and had a big piece of land to cultivate, I was being disturbed by relatives and neighbours encroaching on my land, saying that I was not optimally utilising it. Some relatives brought some Indian investors claiming that they had bought some of the land.

My relatives were encroaching on land, saying that I did not have enough family members to utilise the land. In our culture, we are respected according to the family's size. Those who have wives and many children are respected more than me. I lost my mother while in the camp life, and I did not have many people to support, not even the wife to utilise the land. When the wife is around the house, the house is respected. I am confronted by this reality whether to re-marry or not. It is challenging without a wife, and yet still debating whether I can manage to re-marry now because it is expensive and getting a good wife is another factor.

By the time of fieldwork, Ocen was still embroiled in land conflicts with the investors and his relatives. He was facing the challenge of being *labot*. During clan and community meetings, his views were not respected and he could not participate in clan activities like marriage and funeral ceremonies. Ocen was still being confronted by the cultural norms of his community that he must re-marry to be a real man and participate in clan activities. (Ocen, 38, Atiak Sub-county, Amuru District, 2017)

vii. *Case 7*

Opira was a camp leader when most of the people in northern Uganda were displaced by the LRA conflict. He was also the LC11 Chairperson at the time of this fieldwork and had vital information to contribute to this study.

I was among the first people who came to the camp and became camp leader. My village was among the places that rebels attacked first, and many people were killed. When the UPDF came around to check how the rebels had killed people, they forced civilians to go into the camp for their safety, saying that the place had become unsafe for civilians. We picked some few items and moved to the camp. There were few government and Red Cross staff in the camp by that time. They identified among us people who had finished S.4 and above to volunteer and register the people reporting in the camp. I offered myself and started registering people coming from different parts of Amuru. In that way, I was appointed as leader in the camp. I was in charge of all the new people who came to the camp and showed them where to sleep or stay. I was not paid a salary but an allowance that was only enough to facilitate basic needs for survival in the camp. My life in the camp was not as bad when compared to other members.

Camp life, in general, was not easy. It involved much suffering, looking for the food. In the beginning, when people were still few, we used to get enough food for every family. However, as the number increased, the food rations reduced tremendously with time. This forced some people, especially women, to look for food for their children outside the camp. By that time, moving outside the camp was very dangerous. The army tried to restrict them, but some escaped and went out. Most of those who went outside were killed while going to the garden or on their way back. So when people are hungry, you cannot keep them inside the camp; they had to find all means of going outside the camp.

As a leader, I was able to look after my family and close relatives. The facilitation that I used to receive helped me a lot. I started a small business inside the camp, and my wife operated it. Also, the leaders were given some extra food to motivate us. All this support assisted my family and me a lot, and there was no reason to go outside the camp looking for food. Even as a leader, I had to abide by rules governing the camp that no one should go outside without permission from the camp administrators. In 2009, I decided to come back here since the situation had started to normalise again. I thank God that I came back to my village with all my family members. When we came here, we found when some people came before us. This made us confident that the situation was normal for us to come home. In 2011, I was elected as LC11 Chairperson. Our land had no problem because here land belongs to the clan and family but not an individual. It is hard to grab land here as an individual because the family and clan will fight you. There is also no need to grab land since there is enough for every clan member. As a leader, I believe greedy people fuel the current land conflicts. When people came from the camp, their lives had changed, and some had forgotten their cultural norms and beliefs. Before the camp, it was rare to hear that someone had grabbed somebody's land. Our land boundaries were clear and known by all the community members.

The issue of *Labot* is tricky because culturally, we do not have the permanent status of such persons. When one loses his wife/ wives, he has to re-marry after a short period. This is however changing since marriage is becoming expensive. Parents ask for much and want to make businesses from their daughters. HIV/AIDS also scares some people from re-marrying *"…of course, we used to marry many wives for respect and prestige in society"*. The big family symbolised security; many children protected their parents. When a man is of age and has no wife or wives, the community doubt his manhood. This man is taken as someone who fears the responsibility of having a family and hence cannot be given any leadership role in the community. Our culture encourages men to marry to avoid circumstances that are not respected in the community. As earlier said, people's behaviours changed after being in camps for 20 years. This was enough time to make people forget their cultural norms and practices. These days they are grabbing their relatives' land because of greed and lack of respect for their clan and family practices. The Acholi traditional institutions used to resolve such issues disappeared because of the LRA conflict.

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> In most cases, youth are involved in land conflicts due to unemployement yet they need money … Back to *labot*, those who lost their wives during the war are expected to re-marry and live normal lives like other men. An unmarried man cannot live a normal life. Labot is not permanent in our community; they were expected to re-marry and live family life when they came back. Labot cannot utilise land compared to a married man.....They have issues with their land because nowadays, it is looked at as a resource that can bring money when sold. When people see the land that is not utilised or underdeveloped, they think it is wasted. *Labot* faces challenges because he does not have enough family members to use the land. These days, those who have big unutilised chunks of land have rented it out to other people from different parts of the country. Even some Indian investors have leased land, something that was not there before the war. Land conflicts in this region are increasing ad apart from *labot,* other members of the community are facing the same, except that the scenarios are different (Opira, LC11 Chairperson, Pabbo Sub-county, Amuru District, 2017).

VI. Discussion and Analysis of Narratives and Experiences

This section discusses all the ten cases and 22 key informants, making general theorisation across the narrative cases. The section is organised around overarching themes that emerged in this study. The central results demonstrate how the study fits into and expands on previous studies on experiences of *Labot* and Land conflicts. The study has revealed four themes including, 1) Women and Land security: 2) Labot and Land Conflict: 3) Social navigation of Labot: 4) Living in guilt.

a) Woman and Land security

The woman uses the land for cultivation, making it hard for the land grabbers to take the land in use. Cases 1 and 2 present and position the woman as the 'owner of crops', 'mother of the garden' and 'custodian of the land'. This shifts the debate that women are disempowered from land matters, thus challenging the discourse that women are left out from land governance.

In most African societies, women are still at the centre of family management (Odeny, 2013). Women have been culturally socialised as family caretakers, providing food and looking after the children and the elderly. This is reflected in case 1 when Joseph revealed that he was failing to utilise the land because the wife was absent in the house "This issue was confronting me on whether to re-marry, and the woman looks after my property and children". The key informants confirmed what Joseph was facing as *labot*; community pressure to re-marry to secure his land from greedy people. They continued to reveal that the garden with different crops is an indicator that there is a wife or wives in that house. When the land is bushy and not being used, greedy people disturb the owners and sometimes start to encroach on it (Batterbury & Ndi, 2018). Through Acholi socialisation, women's gender roles are specified clearly in the family and the community (Payne & Payne, 2014). These positioned women as the 'mothers of the land', implying that they have to provide for their families. A situation where the 'mother of the land' and 'owner of the crops' is absent challenges the productivity and utilisation of the land and the survival of the family. Therefore *labot* are facing land conflicts, not only because they owned much land, but also because they didn't utilise the land they had.

This paper argues that people's thinking has shifted from seeing land ownership as more important than land usage. From the perspective of the *labot* in Amuru district, owning land alone will not save the land from land conflicts; but having the land under cultivation may solve most of the land conflicts. Therefore, these case studies confirm that women are still central and better positioned in land relations in the post-conflict context

b) Labot and land conflicts

When a man loses his wife, means that the 'owner of the crops' and 'mother of the garden' is absent. This is reflected in case 3, where Martin revealed that "... Some relatives encroached on my land with the assumption that land was big to be used by only me" In African societies, family belonging is an essential principle in defining one's identity (Shipton & Goheen, 1992).

Through marriage, the husband and wife find new identities that define certain rights, responsibilities and duties in the community. In agricultural communities like Acholi, a man obtains his primary identity from his clan. Marriage becomes another defining identity that makes him an independent man, though still belonging to the greater community through its set systems and institutions (Sproule et al., 2016). An unmarried man of age is considered 'incomplete'. Also, unmarried women face the same (Hansen, 2014). Therefore, the man finds completeness in having a wife. With the wife's death, there are no known cultural restrictions after the mourning period for a man to re-marry. However, remaining unmarried would pose a challenge to the *labot* by giving him a new identity that no one deserving to be considered a man would like to be identified with. Such a person would be considered a 'lesser man' of sorts and a topic of discussion by many. Even if he has land and other properties, his net worth would still be less than that of a poor but married man. The tag '*labot'* that the community members and individuals give to him carries connotations of uselessness in the community. This is associated with the failure to utilise the land due to the absence of the 'mother of the garden' (wife) in his home. In this case, the land may be grabbed, not because the grabbers don't know the landowner, but because the *labot* has failed to utilise it. Since the social

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support system disappeared, the *labot* is powerless and cannot defend himself.

Information from Key Informants revealed that land not utilised in the present-day context where it has been commoditised and individualised attracts land conflicts and land grabbers. Sone (2011) argues that the commercialisation of land coupled with land scarcity has increased land conflicts. However, it should be noted that northern Uganda has not reached a level of land scarcity likened to other regions.

The position of *Labot* in society continues to challenge the argument that it is only women who are powerless and cannot defend themselves when their land is being grabbed. On the contrary, Case 3 (Martin) illustrates that the *labot* are also powerless; Martin found when his father's land was being encroached on by other people who thought he had died during the insurgency. He reported the land issues to all the authorities that he could reach, but he had not yet succeeded by the time of undertaking this study. Therefore, this paper argues that land conflicts affect the *labot* and the women equally. Scholars have to start looking at the *labot* as a group of people that is also vulnerable in society. The generalisation of socialist feminists' theory of looking at men as powerful, strong and not needing support overlooks this unique group, the "*labot".,*

c) Social navigation of Labot

As the *labot* tries hard to reclaim his land, he is faced with various options. One of them is occupying the dual spaces of head of the family and 'mother of the garden' and 'owner of the crops'. This narrative is revealed in Joseph's story (Case 1). "In 2010, I decided to return to my village since others had returned. I returned with my six children without their mother....." Joseph's narrative reveals how *labot* had shifted from public to private space (men engaging in gender roles of women). This violated the cultural norms of men only being in public spaces and leaving private space for women. This confirms findings from local and traditional leaders that civil conflict affected and changed the culture and norms of the Acholi people. Also, it has challenged the arguments of socialist feminists' theory that it is only women who are in private space.

Furthermore, the LC11 chairperson of Amuru sub-county revealed that being 'mother of the garden' suggests that the *labot* can utilise the redundant land that attracts the land grabbers. However, according to traditional leaders, this is being challenged by the *labot's* experience during the camp when men got used to doing nothing and receiving food from the World Food Program. The hardships of labot are reflected in Ochola's story in case 4, where all his children were taken away from him. "My mother-in-law took all the children away from me, saying that I will not manage to take care of them. Life without my wife and children was the worst situation that I had ever experienced.....Returning home alone was a challenge because two of my children were still staying with my sister" Ocen, Atiak Sub-county. Ochola and Ocen's stories continue to reflect labot's experiences and challenges in occupying the dual spaces.

The second option was for the *labot* to re-marry. According to traditional leaders, the process of re-marrying in the Acholi community is another hurdle; it requires money and cattle, which the *labot* may not have. They continued to reveal that before the social support systems collapsed, the community and clan members could get the *labot* a woman to marry and contribute to the dowry to be paid. The District Community Development Officer (DCDO) also revealed that gifting land to relatives was used as a navigating approach to reclaim land back by labot and even other land conflict victims was the third option used. "One of the *labot* decided to bring back his sister that had failed in her marriage to assist in managing his land", Amuru DCDO, 2017. Renting out or selling off the land is considered the last option to be applied to reclaim land from the land grabbers in Amuru District. However, selling land has a negative connotation of transferring the family's identity to another one, thus killing the lineage of the original family (Njoh et al., 2017). It should be noted that renting land also has challenging issues, like some people who have rented land wanting to take full ownership through forgery of landownership documents.

d) Living in guilt

From the narratives of the *labot*, UPDF was providing security to civilians by restricting the men from moving out of the camps. This is revealed in Joseph and Charles' stories, where they were restricted from escorting their wives to the gardens. *"We started growing some foodstuffs until the UPDF started restricting men's movements. The reason was that some men could decide to join the rebels since the camp life was also not good. Another reason was fear of men being kidnapped by the rebels and forcing them to join the rebel group" Joseph, Amuru Town Council*. Some of the *Labot* interviewed felt that the UPDF prohibited them from playing their cardinal role of protecting their family members. *"One thing that I will not forget is that I failed to protect my wife because of the restrictions on men's movements by the UPDF army. As a result, the UPDF army caused the death of my wife. She left seven children with me in the camp" Charles, Amuru Sub-county*. Making matters worse, *Labot's* guilt is not addressed because of the breakdown of community support systems that provided its people with psycho-social support.

According to Amone & Lakwo (2014), men in African society are expected to protect their families at whatever cost and when they fail, they are disrespected

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in society and among fellow men. However the UPDF argued that women were not seen as potential fighters and could not be captured by the rebels. On the contrary, many researchers reveal that women participate in conflicts as fighters and spies (Baumeister, 2006; Ntahobari et al., 2003; Mazurana & Proctor, 2013; Jonna, 2013). The UPDF did not realise the importance Acholi men attached to their women including being the 'mother of the land' and 'owner of the crops' who utilises and protects the family resources and property.

According to the narratives, the *labot* are living in guilt after failing to protect their wives in times of trouble. Some *labot* blamed the UPDF who prohibited men from moving out of the camp and failed to provide security to their wives outside the camp. The restriction of men's movement during camp time violated the cultural norms of the Acholi community and preventing men from carrying out their responsibility of protecting their families. It was noted that the UPDF did not involve other stakeholders who were to be affected by their decisions, making the civilians to act contrary. However, the former camp leader noted that during the war, there was no room for consulting all stakeholders. The socialist feminist theory asserts that if the stakeholders were involved, in decision making, these accusations would not have manifested (Jaspers, 2003; Connel, 1979; Graft, 1970; Pickering, 2008; Adelman et al. 2014).

In conclusion, the *labot* living in guilt implies that women have a central role in the life and survival of a man. This challenges the notion that women suffer more when their men die during conflicts. Narratives of *labot* reveal that men equally suffer a lot when their wives die.

VII. Significance of the Findings

a) No permanent labot in Acholi community

In the Acholi community, men used to marry more than one wife. So, when one wife died, the man would remain with the other(s). The Acholi believed that a man could not live without a wife in the house, which meant that there was no permanent status of *labot* in Acholi tradition. That is why an unmarried man is not respected; his manhood amounted to nothing. He could not attend marriage ceremonies or hold leadership positions in the clan. However, the *labot* who returned from the camps along with their children have challenged these beliefs and practices. Although they were excited to be home again, they were confronted with cultural norms and community pressures requiring them to remarry despite their limited capacity.

b) Changing land relationships

In the Acholi community, landownership by clans and families was respected; however, how they used the land was not considered necessary. The community protected the land in case of absentee landowners. As people returned from the camps where resources were limited and struggled for, they realised that land was essential for their resettlement. This changed their thinking from seeing land as a gift from the parents to a valuable commodity and can be sold (Doss et al., 2014). This facilitated commoditising land and shifting focus from ownership to usage as more critical to the community. The focus has thus shifted from landownership to land usage, suggesting that land cannot be owned without utilising it; which furher prevents encroachers. Therefore, the land is valued based on utilisation as opposed to ownership.

c) Coping strategies

It requires an independent mind for the *labot* to survive in a community that believes that their status is not meant to be permanent. Confronting longstanding cultural beliefs and practices is not easy. Thaler's (2012) contention that civil conflicts tear apart the social fabric of the society relates to the dual spaces that the *labot* find themselves in during and after conflicts. However, the *labot* have developed strategies to cope with their new position of occupying dual spaces. From the narratives, it is clear that the *labot* adopted different strategies depending on their circumstances. One *labot* decided to reconcile with his sister and bring her back to assist him in managing the family and utilising the land. This reflects the centrality of a woman concerning land usage. Others acquired practical skills and started businesses, making bricks, farming, or joined village savings associations to earn a living.

d) Relevance of family and community social networks

The *labot* who had many relatives were supported and recovered faster from the depression caused by the loss of their spouses than those who did not have many relatives (Massoi, 2016). The children were distributed among the relatives for care and schooling. This created space for the *labot* to reflect on his new life and adjust to the challenges surrounding him. This situation reflects the importance of a large family as a safetynet for the helpless and powerless, like the *labot*. However, it is crucial to note that despite the importance of the community and family support, it does not replace the figure of the wife/ mother in the family of the *labot*.

VIII. Conclusion

The *labot* is a group of people that have been ignored and neglected by NGOs, researchers and scholars alike. This has resulted from the generalised notion that men are powerful, strong and self-supporting. From the findings of this paper, the *labot* have been affected by land conflicts. Some have failed to reclaim their land due to a lack of social and economic support.

It is also noted that a wife remains central in land usage in northern Uganda, challenging the notion

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that women are disempowered in land issues. Also, having a wife enables the man to reclaim land because the focus has changed from ownership to usage. When the land is not utilised effectively, it attracts land grabbers and reclaiming it becomes almost impossible. To navigate this challenge, the *labot* are forced to change their social status by re-marrying, gifting the land to relatives for effective utilisation, or renting it out to people who can develop it—more on the misconception about women being more disadvantaged than men.

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