ASR Forum: Land Disputes and Displacement in Postconflict Africa

Cement, Graves, and Pillars in Land Disputes in Northern Uganda

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Abstract: Cement pillars and graves play significant roles as land markers in disputes over land in postconflict northern Uganda. Contemporary land cases from Acholi and Ikland display different histories of land use and conflict. In Acholi, cemented graves constitute concrete indices of belonging in wrangles. In Ikland, national nature authorities have brought cement pillars into the landscape. We explore how cemented graves and cement pillars are used for land claims in societies affected by conflict and displacement and how articulations of belonging are created, with the specific materiality of cement signaling modernity, permanence, and inflexibility.

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Résumé: Tombes et piliers de ciment jouent un rôle important en tant que marqueurs de terrain dans les conflits fonciers après le conflit dans le nord de l'Ouganda. Dans la région Acholi de l'après-guerre, les tombes en ciment sont des preuves de propriété, la réinhumation des parents dans les terres contestées peut être une stratégie dans les conflits fonciers. Dans les frontières terrestres de Ikland, le placement des morts vient maintenant marquer les différends sur le territoire entre les autorités nationales de protection de la nature et les habitants locaux. L'article montre comment les tombes sont utilisées à la fois comme ancêtres spirituels d'appartenance et preuves de la propriété foncière dans les tentatives de créer permanence.

Keywords: Cement; graves; land; conflict; postconflict; northern Uganda; Acholi; Ik

Introduction: Placing the Dead, Grounding Belonging, and the Logic of Cement

Why do cemented graves and concrete pillars become hot issues in disputes over land in postconflict northern Uganda? What is it about the properties of cement that makes this material particularly suggestive of solidity and permanence? These questions relate to discussions in various bodies of literature concerning graves and the placement of the dead, as well as discussions of land tenure changes and land conflict. Our contribution to these discussions links concerns about burial placement, land claims, and articulations of belonging through the materiality of cement.

The placement of the dead and their graves has been a universal human concern throughout history.[1] We use graves and the dead as social symbols, as political and spiritual resources, as forms of communication to tell something more than merely that "a person has died." Some of these stories are about land, territories, and belonging. In our study from northern Uganda, we focus on how graves relate to land in societies affected by conflict and displacement.

In his seminal work on Luoland in Kenya, Parker Shipton (2007) pointed to how graves had become an earthly anchorage for Luo grounding of belonging. In Luoland, home used to be described as "where the placenta is buried," but over time, as Shipton shows, home has increasingly become perceived as "where the grave is" (see also Geissler & Prince 2010).[2] Shipton argues that African societies have evolved from kinship-based associations to those based in territorial polities, with all this entails in terms of an exacerbation of land competition and a hardening of clan structures. Ancestral graves and their placement have thus become more and more significant, with graves functioning as land markers for those who can claim descent from them. On a more existential level of analysis, recent explorations into the relationship among death, materiality, and time have shown that our awareness of death—which is supposedly unique to human beings—is

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what provides us with our basic sense of time (Willerslev et al. 2013; Christensen & Sandvik 2014; Bjerregaard et al. 2016). However, it is mainly through the perishable world of material things that we sense the duration of time. This insight has further ramifications, since it not only points to the fact that our conceptions of time inevitably hinge on the material world, but it also reveals that our experiences of both death and time are in some fundamental sense shaped, even forged, by the materiality of things (Willerslev et al. 2013).

In this article we expand this argument, not only in relation to the placement of graves and the materiality of graves, but also in relation to concrete pillars placed by official institutions to demarcate a landscape. We explore practices of cementing graves and land markers in postconflict situations and argue that the properties of cement both embody and symbolize processes of making something *appear* permanent, inflexible, and nonnegotiable. Cement is effective for the communication of these principles and therefore is troublesome to those actors in a land dispute who contest the permanence and legality of a land claim. The logic and power of cement, we argue, is in its materiality, and it offers much more than a structural "logic of the concrete" (Lévi-Strauss 1986). The concreteness of cement does not only help human cognition as a sign with meaning. It is also a material that people and authorities use actively and with design, planning, and labor to communicate abstract ideas and claims over land. Meaning and matter are interwoven in the use of cement. When cement is wet, it is flexible, mobile, and negotiable. Once it is dry, it is hard, immobile, and persevering. It is precisely this material quality of making a transformation permanent that people and authorities make use of with cement. Yet it creates friction when principles such as borders, which used to be flexible, mobile, and negotiable, are marked and set in cement in the form of pillars and graves. Indeed, as we shall show in two cases—in Acholi and Karamoja, respectively—attempts to cement one's authority over place seldom pass without contestation.[3]

Two Histories of Land, Conflict, and Displacement in Northern Uganda

Before we delve into the properties and uses of cement in land disputes, it is essential to appreciate the significantly different conflict histories and contexts in which our two cases are situated. Northern Uganda is too often described as if it were one homogenous region affected equally by the Lord's Resistance War (see, e.g., Perrot 2010). Yet across northern Uganda there is great variation in terms of land use and tenure systems (Atkinson 2010) among areas dominated by agricultural production, areas primarily based on pastoralist economies, and areas that mix different forms of livelihood. Between 85 and 95 percent of land tenure in northern Uganda is classified as "customary," with a few islands of mainly "freehold" tenure around urban areas in mid-northern Uganda (Batungi 2008; Ravnborg et al. 2013).[4]

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Differences across northern Uganda are also significant in terms of conflict histories and the experience of displacement. In the Acholi region, the displacement of over one million people during the twenty-year war between the Lord's Resistance Army and the Ugandan government strongly influences current land conflicts. In Ikland in Karamoja—an area that is dominated by cattle herding and whose residents combine agriculture with seasonal hunting and gathering—decades of cattle raiding and the disarmament of groups by the military have set the scene for conflicts over territory, which now involve mainly interethnic conflicts as well as displacement and threats of eviction in relation to national parks and forest reserves.[5]

There are also important demographic and climate differences between Ik and Acholi territories. Ik County in Kaabong District, a semi-arid territory dominated by savannah grasslands and mountains, is scarcely populated, with 54.7 persons per km^2. The population density in Gulu District, by contrast, is more than double that amount, with 114.9 persons per km^2. The climate here is tropical and lush, at least in the wet season. Perhaps it is not surprising, therefore, that competition over land is more intense in the Acholi region. However, as we shall show, in these two areas the procedures for territorial marking work differently. In the Acholi region cemented graves mostly work through the principle of centricity. This creates a strong sense of belonging near the center of a territory and often "softer" borders at the edges, which might be blurry and therefore accommodate flexibility. In Ik County, by contrast, pillars and fences mark the periphery of a territory. These create "harder" borders at the edges with less or no flexibility, in line with a cadastral logic of land tenure. Yet both kinds of markers may produce intense feelings of belonging, contestations, and dispute.[6]

Acholi: From Entrustment to Land Sale, from Camp to Village

The twenty-year LRA wars created a historical rupture in land use and tenure systems in the Acholi and Langi regions of northern Uganda.[7] During the conflict the population was forced into camps for Internally Displaced Persons (IDP), which prevented them from staying in their homes and farming their gardens, creating a radical break in the usual way of life (Finnström 2008). When peace was restored in 2008, IDPs had to leave the camps and faced the monumental task of reestablishing their homes, renegotiating access to land, and marking out boundaries with neighbors.

In these regions the customary system of land use and inheritance is—to borrow Shipton's term from Luoland in Kenya (2007)—one of entrustment; a family's land is entrusted to the living by their ancestors, with the understanding that it must be passed on to future generations. With entrustment, there is no formal "ownership" of land as such. Instead, the right to the land is reaffirmed by a lineage's continued occupation and use of it. The lineage has its roots where the ancestors are buried, and the ancestral land binds relatives together, even if they do not all live there anymore. In Luoland the burial of the placenta used to mark the lineage, but today

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the placenta appears to have been replaced by graves as earthly anchorages of belonging (Shipton 2009). The family land is thus not just something to be lived on and farmed, but a tangible part of a family's history and identity that is "co-possessed" by the living, the dead, and the generations to come. In this respect, the Acholi system for land tenure, as we shall see, is somewhat different from that of the Ik, for whom plots of land, although considered clan territory, can be allocated to in-laws, both male and female, as well as others outside the clan as long as they work on it.

In the Acholi entrustment system land is passed on in the patrilineage, usually from father to sons, and settlement is virilocal. Between 85 and 95 percent of land tenure in Acholi is customary (Ravnborg et al. 2013), but this form is being increasingly questioned by younger generations, along with the wealthier and educated (see Whyte and Acio, this issue). As national and international donor programs are promoting land titles and sales, the traditional system of entrusted land is up for discussion. In rural areas, most land is still passed on through the entrustment system, but land titling and sales are growing. Many still hold the ideal of the ancestral land in which one is to be buried, yet in practice many people, especially in urban areas, are buried in their more temporary locales or in newly purchased plots that do not possess any connection to the family lineage. In other words, among today's Acholi land is owned, entrusted, rented, lived on, passed on, or bought in many different ways.

Ikland: From Semi-nomadic Practices to Military-Controlled Mobility

All land tenure in Ik county is considered customary, except for forest reserves and national parks. Customary land includes agricultural land as well as beehive and hunting areas, and access to these follows flexible organizational principles with virtually no restrictions. Agricultural land is entrusted within the clan and passed through both male and female lines, supervised by clan elders. There is a general emphasis on collective "ownership" and high flexibility, reminiscent of small-scale hunter–gatherer societies. Rights to agricultural land are reaffirmed by its continued occupation and use; if land is not used it may be given to or taken by another family. The Ik consider themselves patrilineal and subscribe to an ideal of virilocal residence, according to which a married couple resides within the husband's parents' compound. However, in practice about a third of Ik men settle within their wives' compounds, at least temporarily, either due to insecurity in their own family area or because they can have easier access to land through their wives' families. By far the most valuable aspect of bridewealth is bride service in the form of agricultural labor for the husband's in-laws, which is another reason for the tendency toward matrilocality.

The Ik communities of the mountains in Karamoja were more nomadic in the past than they are today. Ik farmers used to cultivate gardens lower in the valleys, and before World War II hunters went to the forested mountain slopes near Kidepo National Park, many of which are now protected as

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game reserves and animal corridors. John Mark, a fifty-nine-year-old elder, remembers living in six different villages before he was ten years old, which indicates that villages were moved every one to two years. Ik elders mentioned several reasons for the high mobility at this time. The first was insecurity: Turkana and Dodoth herders passed through the Ik territory on their cattle raids and the Ik communities tried to escape looting and violent encounters by constantly moving their villages to other locations. A second reason was soil fertility: families cultivated gardens for a maximum of three years and then left them fallow. A third reason was death and illness: if many people had died in one location, it was considered contaminated by spirits and inappropriate as living space. Finally, internal conflict could make a village split up.

However, since around 2007 these patterns of hypermobility have been changing. In 2001 the government initiated disarmament programs and the military (the Uganda People's Defence Forces, or UPDF) established detachments of soldiers in the Ik territory. One of the UPDF strategies for providing security in the area was a requirement for villages to be moved close to the barracks, which are placed high on hilltops for better surveillance. Most villages, therefore, have been placed near army detachments and follow the movements of the military. The average time spent in a village before moving or splitting it is now closer to eight years.

Graves and the Grounding of Belonging

In both Acholi and Ikland graves are placed within the homestead or in a familiar landscape, and public cemeteries are rare.[8] But in recent decades events in both regions have given rise to a reconsideration of burial practices. In Acholi, twenty years of war have disrupted lives, homes, and graves and have created both new challenges and opportunities when it comes to choosing a place and manner of burial (Meinert & Whyte 2013; Seebach 2016). In Ikland, changes in burial practices include the demands from the government and UPDF to bury the dead only at home instead of taking them to the valleys, encouragement from Christians and missionaries to create formal gravesites, and the increasing exposure to other modes of burial and the possible benefits of adapting new burial rites.

Acholi: Graves as Indices of Belonging

According to Acholi custom, as we have seen, the family is supposed to live together, the living alongside the dead, and graves ideally constitute a link between a lineage and the land through time. Furthermore, graves stand as tangible markers of belonging in space, solidifying a family's presence and continuity through generations. But graves also signify belonging on a different level; the person interred retains a space, both physically and socially, within the structure of the family. The placement of a grave is significant. Graves are traditionally distributed carefully

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around the compound, with their exact placement determined by a person's gender and age and sometimes by the manner of death or other defining characteristics.[9]

Graves are thus powerful indices of belonging. They can tell the story of a person's position in the social structure of the family, and they can signify a family's belonging on a piece of land and in the larger context of a community. When the LRA wars ended and people moved out of the IDP camps, many were faced with a dilemma, as the relatives they had lost had been buried in the camps, on other people's land. Some were able to rebury their relatives in the home they were returning to, but though this was the proper thing to do, many did not have the funds for transporting the bodies, goats for the ritual slaughter, or the food needed to conduct a proper reburial. The family's land is where the ancestors rest, and as such, the violation of this practice is twofold, as the dead have not only been buried away from home, but on other clans' land. Cultural ideals, however, can be difficult to live by and can be bent, and in many cases outside influences cause a family to rebury their loved ones.

In August 2013 approximately one hundred people were reburied from Limu Village, a neighborhood bordering Gulu Town. They were exhumed to make way for a new road, which was to cut through an area containing many graves. Building on top of an Acholi grave would disturb the spirit of the deceased, and when disturbed, the spirit might seek vengeance (Meinert & Whyte 2012). The local government created a system of compensation to meet some of the costs for the many reburials. The government owns the land in Limu, and the people living there are renting, so they would only be compensated for the loss of buildings, trees, and graves, but not for the land itself. The compensation for a grave differed depending on what material the grave was made of; a simple mound of soil was worth 80 shillings (about U.S.$30), whereas a cement grave was worth 200 shillings (about U.S.$73). A cement grave is more expensive to construct—partly because of the higher price of cement, although perhaps for other reasons as well (which we will discuss below).

Although the lower compensation was not enough to pay for a proper reburial, surprisingly few people complained about the compensation or the road. Most of the dissatisfaction was overshadowed by the advantages of a main road leading through the village, and the economic benefits that were expected to follow. What the Limu case brings to the fore is that though many people still speak of the idealized notion of the ancestral land where the family lives and the ancestors are buried, and though many believe that the dead will take revenge if they are not honored (Meinert & Whyte 2012), during and after the war there were high levels of flexibility and adaptation to alternative placements of graves and ideas about belonging to land. Many families have had to consider the resting place of their relatives not so much in terms of creating a stronger bond to the ancestral land, but in terms of practicalities and resources.

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Ikland: From Graves in the Landscape to Graves in Villages

When talking to people in Ikland about reburials in Acholi, we found that most were astonished to learn that some of their countrymen farther west were moving their dead after the LRA war. The idea of digging up a grave, being in physical contact with human remains, and transporting them to another place seemed revolting. Yet burial practices, and the location of graves in particular, have changed significantly over the past ten years and are a subject of continuous discussion.

Interviews with twelve elders in Timu Parish showed that almost all had buried their parents in or close to a village, whereas their grandparents had been buried in the valleys farther away. As John Mark recalled,

> They used to bury dead family members in the valleys, which were considered the best places of all, close to the rivers, where spirits would also be. They found cracks and naturally indented places and would put rocks and thorns on top of the body to avoid . . . hyenas, wizards from Karamoja, and others who would dig up the bodies. . . . In the old days they did not like having graves and the dead inside the homes, and villages were very mobile at that time because of security and famine. (Interview, Lokinene, Aug. 13, 2014)

In the 1960s, several factors contributed to the changes in burial location. First, after the 1966–1968 drought and famine in the region, people started moving higher up in the mountains and settling closer to Timu Forest. Thus they were farther away from the good burial locations in the valleys. Second, food relief was distributed from Kasile in Kotido district, and as people went there to get their rations, they became inspired by other burial practices. Third, the missionaries who also arrived in Timu around 1968 promoted the idea of burying the dead inside villages. According to John Mark,

> Some of the missionaries thought that Ik burial practices were like the Karimojong's, who used to leave their dead warriors out in the open. But this was not Ik custom. The missionaries had been preaching to the Karimojong that they should bury their dead properly and they thought the Ik were the same, because they also buried their dead outside of villages. (Interview, Lokinene, Aug. 13, 2014)

In the 1980s and early 1990s another serious famine and cholera epidemic in the region made large groups migrate for food relief to Kakuma refugee camp, which had been established in Kenya, mainly for Sudanese refugees. Many Ik people died there and were buried in the cemetery in the camp. In recent years, after the establishment of UPDF detachments in Timu Parish, the military—with soldiers from various parts of Uganda, where burials are commonly in homesteads—has encouraged people to build their villages closer to the barracks for safety and to bury their dead

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inside the villages. As mentioned earlier, this strategy is officially employed to create security against raids from neighboring groups, but it also works to control mobility and create stability. Attempts by governments to settle nomadic and semi-nomadic groups are well known from other parts of Africa. A lieutenant from the UPDF explained,

> These Ik people should not be moving around. . . . We want them to settle permanently in one place and be stable. They are farmers. They don't need to move around with their cattle for pasture. They don't have cattle! These people are backward and they keep moving around, but they have security now, we [UPDF] are here! They should establish their villages properly, build latrines and bury their dead in the villages. (Interview, Tultul, Aug. 14, 2014)

Several interesting misunderstandings are implicit in the above statement. According to the military, since the Ik do not have cattle, the only reason for their semi-nomadic mobility patterns was security against attacks from neighboring groups. Yet the mobility patterns have always been closely related to food security and sustainable land use. Ik farmers do not use fertilizers or pesticides; they use lash-and-burn methods to keep crop diseases and insects at tolerable levels, fertilize with ashes, and leave gardens fallow for long periods of time. This necessitates village mobility in a relatively large territory. Another reason for their mobility is the general belief that if the village is full of graves, it is a sign, according to many residents, that "too many people have died" there and that people should move on. Whereas burials and reburials in Acholi and other parts of East Africa are designed to place the dead in close proximity to living relatives, until recently burial sites in Ikland have been chosen with the goal of placing the dead at a distance from the living in the wider landscape. "People here say that when you are dead, you are dead," said one of the elders in Timu. "But they also say that even when the dead are dead, they are hiding somewhere . . . and are still watching," so that having the dead in the village would seem "too close a watch."[10] The families in Tultul village who had a visible grave in their compound said that the presence of the grave made them sad and worried. One young woman who had recently buried her daughter near her home said she regretted the decision because "I don't like to be reminded of the death of my daughter every day when I see her grave here in my compound." She said she preferred the burial site of her mother, "in the village where we used to live on the mountain" (interview, Tultul, Jan. 25, 2014).

In the period from June to August 2014, Turkana from Kenya killed twenty-four people in the bush in Kaabong district, including six Ik men. One of them was buried inside his home village, because, according to neighbors of the family, his family was Christian and "saved" and among those who felt strongly that all dead should be buried inside the village. The five other bodies were left in the bush. Three of the deceased were attended

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to by their relatives and covered with leaves, while two bodies were left unattended. The bodies left in the bush created intense debate. John Mark, who saw himself as a guardian of Ik customs, commented on this neglect with regret: "The practice of leaving bodies in the bush is not indigenous Ik culture. I suspect that this is something inherited from the Karimojong. Those bodies should be buried, really" (interview, Lokinene, Aug. 13, 2014). Another elderly man names Charik had a different opinion, however: "We never bury a person who has been killed by a gun. . . . People believe that if you bury a person killed by a bullet, other family members will also be killed by bullets. So we leave the body outside and cover [it] with leaves and some put stones and thorns [on it]" (interview, Lopokok, Aug. 11, 2014).

Discussions increased further when the UPDF caught four young Turkana men and two young Ik men who were trading spaghetti and cooking oil for marijuana in the bush. They were all punished by caning and the Turkana were then officially "taken back to Kenya"—although the local residents knew that they had been shot by the soldiers and their bodies left in the bush "as a warning" to other Turkana. The situation was complicated because the Ik feared that the Turkana would come back and take revenge against the Ik, especially if the UPDF left the area. They also did not dare report the executions to the authorities out of fear that the UPDF would turn against them (Gade et al. 2015).

The unburied bodies in the landscape became silent but effective symbols of protest and territorial claims. The Turkana bodies left in the landscape were signs of the conflicts between ethnic groups in the Karamoja–Turkana region and of the border disputes between Uganda and Kenya. The Ik bodies left in the landscape were simultaneously cries of protest and subjects of internal cultural disagreement. One man remarked, "This way of leaving bodies in the open is not the Ik way." Another man responded, "This is precisely why we are leaving the bodies there—to show that we disagree—we do not accept these killings" (Tultul, Aug. 14, 2014).

Governing with Graves

The anthropologist Katherine Verdery has written about the ways in which the dead, in effect, have ongoing political lives. She points out that a dead body, through its treatment and placement, can be used by the living to send a desired message, and that it can be especially useful for "*localizing* a claim" (italics in original). Dead bodies, in this way, are ascribed a multitude of meanings and intentions; they are imbued, as Verdery says, with "ambiguity, multivocality, or polysemy" (1999:28). At the same time, as Finn Stepputat has pointed out, "governing the dead" is often a highly important issue for states.

> States tend to establish a range of laws, institutions and practices to take control of the transition from life to death including the whereabouts of

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> dead bodies. . . . Even though state entities, at will or by default, delegate specific responsibilities and faculties to private, social and religious entities, they usually claim the ultimate authority to define and govern the dead within their jurisdiction through legislation and institutionalised procedures. (2014:4)

In Acholi the graves of the dead, especially those that have been interred and reburied, function as significant markers of belonging, both in terms of local social structures and cosmologies, and also in the physical landscape and judicial territories. In the case of the Ik, the materiality and "thereness" of bodies and graves are clear and tangible expressions of belonging, as well as of exclusion and protest. It can be questioned how far back Acholi homes, which are considered ancestral land, have actually been occupied by a certain lineage. The opportunity to select the place of burial is therefore an opportunity, both literally and figuratively, to cement one's authority over place. Though the government may be trying to interfere with how the Ik choose to bury their dead, most of the contact with dead bodies, and the decisions regarding their treatment and placement, still lies with the immediate family. Thus decisions about where to bury, or re-bury, the dead can be seen as acts of micro-governance in support of the autochthony argument that origin and ancestry confer authority and rights over a particular location. The dead, in effect, are employed to work for the cause of the living, to help them in their ongoing effort of establishing the right to belong.

This micro-governance is particularly salient in the Timu Mountains, where differing stories of "who were where when" have been created for various purposes and the politics of establishing Ik origin are complicated by several factors. Colin Turnbull's version in his controversial book *The Mountain People* (1972)—that the Ik were expelled from the plains that were made into the Kidepo National Park and had to retreat to the mountains, where they suffered a prolonged famine—is questionable, not to say inaccurate (Heine 1985). Many Ik confirm that their ancestors used to live closer to the valleys, but claim that they both hunted and lived in the areas that were later turned into the park (Willerslev & Meinert 2017). At the same time, the Ik "origin story" in the mountains is potentially problematic as authorities are currently working to officially re-demarcate the Timu Forest Reserve, with its high biodiversity. While it is likely that the migration history of the area is one of interethnic sharing of the territory, this story would not work very well for establishing authority over a territory for a single ethnic group. And in general, claiming authority and sovereignty through stories of ancestry can be tricky in any case due to lack of concrete evidence.

The Properties of Cement

In the reburial case from Acholi described above, a significantly higher compensation was given for cement graves than for soil graves. This is

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probably the case not (or not only) because the breaking of cement is more labor intensive and cement is more expensive, but because special meaning is attributed to cement. In most rural areas in Uganda the common building materials for houses and other constructions are tree trunks, mud, grass, and other natural materials. Cement is a comparatively new building material, and it is associated with modernity, urbanity, authority, and permanence.[11] Families with sufficient financial resources will build a "permanent" brick house with a corrugated roof and cement floors and walls. A cemented house cannot easily be cut down like a tree, nor can it be moved like a stone, or disappear and burn like a piece of paper. The chemical properties of cement are such that when mixed with sand and water it can produce "hard evidence" in a literal sense: a tough, stiff, heavy, and long-lasting material. "Cementing" a family house in this way is not only a sign of prosperity and permanence, but also a way of "cementing"—fixing and making permanent—the family's place in the environment.

Not only "permanent" houses, but also cement graves and cement pillars, are important markers in the landscape for claims about belonging, land use, and ownership. These cement markers may thus also be seen as attempts at cementing otherwise fluid, flexible, and temporary property relationships between people and land. The first case we describe below concerns cement graves in Acholi. The second concerns cement pillars that mark the Timu Forest Reserve in Karamoja.

Acholi: Breaking the Cement Graves

Traditional graves in Acholi are mostly mounds of soil, perhaps covered with rocks as markers and protection against erosion and animals. Soil graves are still the most common, but among the people who can afford them, cement graves are very popular.[12] A cemented grave radiates permanence in a way that a plain mound of soil never could, and its material social "life" is thus prolonged. The names and dates scratched into the surface of the wet cement harden in place, proving who was buried there and when. As such, cement graves "speak for themselves," and in their very concreteness constitute powerful evidence that a lineage has resided on the land over time.

Often when people in a land dispute are asked to present evidence of ownership, they offer, in the absence of an actual land title, the evidence of marking stones outlining the land, trees planted by parents or grandparents, houses, or the graves of their ancestors. However, as we learned from the following land dispute, even with cemented graves, the durability of concrete can be questioned.

The story of this conflict was narrated in 2014 by Alii, the acting subcounty chief of the village of Awach, and concerns a quarrel between his uncle, Stephen, and a young man named Oyo who had been rejected by his clan and taken in by Stephen, who treated him as an adopted son.[13] They lived together amicably for years until Oyo, one day, accused Stephen of

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trying to encroach on land that he farmed and that therefore belonged to him. Stephen called on the clan elders to adjudicate the matter and the elders suggested that Stephen give Oyo some land, a settlement that Stephen accepted. Nevertheless, when they attempted to divide the land Oyo was not happy with the size of the plot he was assigned. He proceeded to appeal the claim through various levels of the local government, from Local Council 1 (LCI) to LCII and LCIII, all of which sided with Stephen.[14]

Finally, Oyo took the matter to the magistrate's court, but at that point he had little hope that he would win. One night, therefore, he and some associates went to the disputed territory and destroyed six cement graves. Horrified by the destruction, the local residents managed to identify Oyo as the mastermind and detain him. Oyo claimed that he had destroyed the graves because, in his opinion, they were located on his land and did not belong there. Stephen's family conducted some rituals to calm the spirits so they would not go after Oyo, and it was decided that Oyo had to pay for the reconstruction of the graves. In the magistrate's court, Stephen brought pictures of the destroyed graves, and it was decided that Oyo was to receive no part of the family's land. In the end, Oyo was ostracized from the community, and eventually he bought a small piece of land for himself, away from both his own and his adopted clan.

This story of insiders and outsiders, and of disputing generations, shows how cemented graves are seen as significant markers of ownership over land. Stephen and Oyo represent two generations. Stephen grew up before the war and before Ugandan independence in 1962. Though the time after independence was not entirely peaceful for northern Uganda, the period remains in local memory as a relatively tranquil period in comparison to the turbulent decades of war, which began in the 1980s.[15] Oyo, by contrast, grew up in a time of disturbance and uncertainty, when people were moved about and put into camps, where some suffered silently and others acted with brazen self-interest, and when the rules of social interaction were in flux. In some ways, then, Oyo and Stephen stand not only for two different generations, but also for two different systems of land distribution and dispute settlement. Stephen relied on traditional ways, in which land is passed on in the family and marked by graves and disputes are settled by the elders. Oyo's claim to Stephen's land was based on his farming of it, and he took his case to government institutions and courts. His claim also, in a sense, demonstrated a new way of social maneuvering. In this case, however, his "social imagination" (see Lubkemann 2008) and creativity fell short, and he then resorted to the drastic measure of smashing the graves.

This was not only a devastating physical act, but a powerful symbolic one. In erecting the cement graves, Stephen had not only created monuments for the dead, but also anchors of belonging for the future of his lineage (see Geissler & Prince 2010; Shipton 2009). After the war ended and the internment camps closed, some families, similarly, were quick to mark graves, and if possible cement them, as a way to reassert their land rights. More than even a traditional earthen mound, cement monuments

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send out a signal of permanence and stability. They are large, square, and so tangibly solid that they seem to radiate a determination to remain forever and to stand as ancestral reminders for the generations to come. When asked why cementing graves is important, a woman named Nyeko explained,

> For [the graves] not to disappear. You protect the sign. So people can see who they belong to. If it is only soil, they will disappear. It [cement] is important because you can label name, date of birth, and death, so you can recognize [who is buried there]. The children know the graves. When they are about ten years they can go to the graves and say "this is uncle Peter, this is aunty Vicky. . . ." I hear them say it. (Interview, Feb. 26, 2014)

Of course, in reality, they are not durable in the way that Nyeko hopes for; a cement grave can be broken down surprisingly quickly, as Oyo proved. What is interesting, then, is not only the actual physical properties of the substance, but also what lies behind the idea of cementing: the motivations, plans, and intentions that drive the desire for cement graves, and thus the properties that are ascribed to, rather than inherent in, the substance.

What is significant in the use of cement, in other words, is the signaling effect. Cement stands for permanence and possession, for a timeless and indisputable right to belong. This quality is also what makes cement graves so valuable in the tumultuous postwar era, as in the case of the Limu reburials described above. After years when boundaries were in flux, and when people were allowed to manage their land, cement comes to stand as the ultimate symbol of stability and of the possibility of actively *creating* belonging and the claim to land. Thus the symbolic value of cement, and people's ability to manipulate it, can help them reclaim some of the control they lost during the war. By destroying the graves, Oyo attempted to destroy the most tangible and sacred proofs of Stephen's ownership, the concrete symbol of his right to the land.

The Cement Pillars: Timu Forest Reserve

In Ikland, almost no families have cement graves. Cement graves may be admired, but few can afford to create them, and cement as a building material, in general, is rare and considered quite exotic. But the symbolic effect of cement may thus be even stronger, which is why the event described below—the marking of a forest reserve in the area with this material—evoked deeply felt anger.

On a number of occasions since 1948, when the Timu Forest Reserve was established, Ik families living in the area were asked to move out and stop using the resources in the forest. In 1958, when Kidepo National Park was established on the plains, Ik communities were expelled and had to stop using their former hunting grounds. Some of the elders recall, or have been told about, the time when the area of the Forest Reserve was first

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demarcated (group discussion, Timu, Jan. 30, 2014). According to their account, about fifty years ago a man called Hillary quarreled with a representative of the British colonial administration who had come to set the boundary. They gave him the nickname of "Lokok," which means "Termite with red head—the one that guards the white ants." This referred not only to his skin color, but also to his role in leading the work of gathering stones to demarcate the boundary. Hillary encouraged the hired workers to abandon the project, but they were receiving needed food as payment and told Hillary that they could always dismantle the heaps of stones after the white man left. Even fifty years later the name "Lokok" and the story of the dismantled land markers caused laughter (group discussion, Timu, Jan. 30, 2014).

With long intervals, officials would travel to the area or call Ik representatives to meetings to remind them of, and establish the rules of, the Reserve: People were not supposed to live, farm, hunt, burn grass, or cut down trees. Most were probably aware of the rules but did not follow them all. There were few actual villages in the forest, but families had their gardens in the area, which had fertile soil. During the dry season hunters would burn grass in certain areas of the forest as part of hunting techniques for compounding and chancing game. For many years the shadowy existence of the forest reserve seemed to work out for both stakeholders, as well as for the forest. Philip, a local security officer, recalled that in 1999–2000 two officials came to reestablish the boundaries. They mobilized people to collect stones again and they even planted trees. As Philip explained,

> The officials told people that there was to be no human activity in the forest: no burning of grass, no hunting, no boreholes were to be made. But then they also said that if people were to go digging in the forest, they should not do it near the road, so that the big people [officials] would see it, when they drove past. (Interview, Lokinene, Sept. 5, 2013)

There was an implicit understanding of the mutual benefits of keeping a façade of a forest reserve with no human activities, but behind the façade families could continue to use the land and take care of the forest. The officials even marked some areas in the forest where families stayed and could continue to do so.

This relationship between Ik people and officials took a turn in 2012–2013 when representatives of Uganda's National Forest Authority (NFA), in collaboration with the Kaabong District environmental officer and supported by USAID, put up a line of cement pillars across a section of Timu Parish in an effort to demarcate a "biodiversity program" in the Timu Forest Reserve. The markers were 1.5 meter–high cement cones (around 5 ft.), which could not easily be dismantled or moved by hand. The line created by the numerous cement pillars cut across the territory and the only road in the area in a very visible, unfamiliar, and permanent-looking way.

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The officials were adamant, according to Philip, that there was to be "absolutely no human activities in the forest from now on and that this would be monitored closely." (interview, Lokinene, Sept. 5, 2013). This provoked outrage among Ik people, who at this particular time were struggling to feed their families due to drought and two consecutive years of poor harvests. In these periods, the forest served as their reserve for hunting game, cultivating gardens that were less susceptible to drought, and collecting honey. Sangan Aldo, an Ik elder, explained the response of local residents to the erection of the pillars.

> People are asking: Why did they plant the big cement stones? Do they want to grab the land? They never communicated to us what they are doing. . . . What will happen? There are a lot of complaints now. Animals will finish the people and eat our crops! It is a very big piece of land, and if they come by force . . . We don't trust that if they want to negotiate, we will get some [land]. They will trick us, so it is better to refuse to negotiate. (Interview, Kololo, Jan. 28, 2014)

Obviously there was something about the cement pillars that made the demarcation of forest reserve disturbing in a new way. Cement is not a common building material in the Ik communities. All of their structures—houses, graves, fences, latrines—are made from natural and degradable materials, some of which can be moved and reused when a village moves to a new place. The only cement buildings in Timu Parish are a school, a small health center, a Pentecostal church, and two houses built by an American couple. Thus cement is generally associated with modernity, authorities, and strangers.

In this debacle Philip, the security officer, got in trouble with both the NFA and the community members because, on the one hand, he was the person who attended the meetings with "the forest people," while on the other hand, he was not successful in persuading the community members to leave the area. They called for the officials to hold a meeting in the forest rather than in their offices in the district capital. This demand was turned down, and the Ik were then told to write a letter to the sub-county with their complaints, which would be taken to the district and from there to Parliament. But they did not want to do this either, since they did not trust what was going on. Philip was frustrated and said that

> people are even accusing me that I am the one selling off the land. They are accusing the ones that are trying to help them, thinking that we are selling the land when we are trying to keep it for them. So, I also get discouraged. But when we saw that they are cementing the poles like in Kidepo Park, we get very worried, and this is also happening in the forest around Morungole and also in Moroto (Interview, Lokinene, Jan. 28, 2014)

According to Sangan and Philip, by 2014 the situation had "cooled down—at least for some time," although not because of any official resolution to

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the controversy. We were not able to get in touch with the District Environment Officer or with the National Forest Authority officer responsible for the area, but we learned from Uganda Wildlife Authority officials at Kidepo National Park that in August 2014 the district environment officer had been suspended from work because of mismanagement of funds (interviews, Kidepo, Feb. 2, 2015). The cement pillars that were supposed to demarcate the whole of Timu Forest Reserve had only been put up around the road, and the Ik community continued to use and take care of the forest as they had for decades. By 2014 the grass had grown tall and buried the cement pillars.

Conclusion: The Logic of Cement in Conflicts Over Land

As these two cases from northern Uganda suggest, cement graves as well as cement pillars in the landscape easily become contentious issues in disputes over land, partly because of the specific properties of cement as a material. Once hardened, cement is a stiff and unyielding substance that radiates permanence, urbanity, sedentariness, and modernity. With these material qualities cement is used by actors as attempts to "cement" authority over space and property relationships between people and land. In the Ik case, authorities used cement pillars to strengthen the boundary between the forest reserve and Ik villages. The boundary had been marked by heaps of stones for more than a half-century, but stones were considered mobile and indigenous, and thus were not as offensive to Ik mobile livelihood as the foreign, permanent, and powerful material of cement.

The Acholi case involves representatives of two generations who enacted their conflicting land claims via the actual and symbolic significance of cemented graves. For the older generation the presence of cemented graves on a person's property confirms land ownership. A younger family member (or at least a young man who considered himself a family member) contested the older man's authority by demolishing the cement graves. What is interesting is that the authority over the land was demonstrated not by possession of legal papers or a land title, or even by putting up a fence, but by designing and creating cemented graves on the one side, and by destroying them on the other side.

The act of demolishing the cement graves was, of course, a powerful attack on the perceived permanence of cement as a material because even cement can be broken and dissolved. And cement pillars, as we have seen in the case of Ikland and the Timu Forest Reserve, can disappear in long grass and slowly desolidify. What we want to highlight here, however, is the human intention and action to create permanence in the "here and now," and the properties attributed to the use of cement in this endeavor. As Sara Berry has shown with examples of "tradition" across Africa, "no condition is permanent," even though attempts to establish traditions as permanent are popular (1993). The same can be said about cement. Cement is not a "permanent material," but the imagined and symbolic eternal temporality

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of cement seems to exceed its actual lifetime. We have seen how the placement of dead bodies—in graves or aboveground—is a means by which families, clans, and communities express issues related to social position, cosmology, belonging, exclusion, and protest. Governments, missionaries, militaries, and other institutions also have a stake in regulating the placing and burial of the dead because these are such expressive and powerful tools for governing, especially in relation to matters of sovereignty, ownership, and belonging. When graves are cemented they last longer than mounds of soil, but the qualities of permanence attributed to cement are even more important than the actual material quality of the substance.

Cement, in this way, does not only work by "the logic of the concrete" (Lévi-Strauss (1986 [1962]), by showing a metonymical (and metaphorical) relationship among abstract categories of belonging, territory, and time. The materiality of cement, on graves and pillars, is part of the project of justifying belonging and claims of land over the long term. Yet the imagined temporality and quality of cement often outweigh the actual temporality and properties of the material. Such is the real logic of cement.

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Notes

1. See Hertz (1990 [1907]); Ariès (1982); Bloch (1971); Bloch and Parry (1982); Huntington and Metcalf (1979); Verdery (1999); Shipton (2007); Willerslev et al. (2013); Stepputat (2014).
2. For Uganda this is further elaborated in Susan Whyte's "Going Home?" (2005) on belonging and burials in relation to AIDS and family conflicts. Maurice Bloch (1971) points to similar phenomena among the Merina of Madagascar,

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where the placement of the dead reflects their placement in the social order of kinship.

3. We base the comparison on ethnographic fieldwork in Gulu and Kaabong districts. Lotte Meinert carried out six months of fieldwork in Gulu district and six months in Kaabong district between 2008 and 2016. Meinert has worked in other parts of Uganda since 1994 for a total of seven years. Sophie Seebach carried out twelve months of fieldwork in Gulu district between 2011 and 2014. Rane Willerslev carried out fieldwork in Kaabong district for four months between 2012 and 2015.
4. The four types of tenure in Uganda include (1) customary tenure, under which land is entrusted over generations in clans; (2) freehold tenure, which is individualized and titled and accessed through the market; (3) leasehold tenure, which provides access to public land according to a time-limited contract; and (4) tenant rentals of Mailo land owned by the Baganda king. See Batungi (2008), Ravnborg et al. (2013).
5. We are aware of some of the complications of using categories such as Ikland, Acholiland, Ik, and Acholi. These categories are politically loaded and have their colonial legacies and invented natures (Ranger 1983). But they are the very terms used in the regions, sometimes as "arguments" about tradition and origin in disputes over land.
6. Thanks to Jane Guyer for making this point in her discussion of the original draft of this article, which was presented as a paper at the ASA annual meeting in 2014.
7. Similar changes from entrustment of customary land to land titling and sale also occurred in other parts of Uganda in the same period.
8. Some churches in Acholi do have a cemetery on their land, but the people buried there are mostly priests, nuns, or others who work closely with the church. Some Acholi families have begun to bury their dead in a more cemetery-like fashion, designating a certain area of their compound as the place of burial and lining the dead up in the chronological order in which they died. The cemetery tells a different story about chronology and sequence, compared to the messages concerning the gender and generation of the deceased previously conveyed through the placement of graves. Overall, great care is employed in the placement of the dead to create a certain kind of aesthetic, social, judicial, and cosmological order.
9. Traditionally, although always with some variation, men and women are buried on either side of the home: women on the side of the cooking hut and men on the opposite side. Children are buried closer to the home than adults, as they are perceived to be more in need of the display of love that such a placement signifies. Some people, such as murder victims and the victims of certain illnesses, are buried in a different manner, due to the unusual circumstances of their deaths.
10. The general notion of the deceased is that his or her shadow, or *kurkur*, joins a parallel invisible society, the so-called Kijawik, which represents a prototypical notion of the spirit world as "experience reversed" (see Leach 1976). The Kijawik live in societies that are a true copy of those of the living. If they are Kijawik of the Ik group, they will rely on agriculture and hunting, while the Kijawik belonging to the Turkana are said to roam the land with their herds of cattle and goats. Yet basic things are turned upside down and inside out: When it is night in the world of the living, it is day in the world of the Kijawik, and

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the same goes for the rainy and dry seasons. Likewise, the moon is said to be the sun of the Kijawik. Also, the conception of time among the Kijawik is understood to be the direct inversion of ordinary forward-running time, so that "now" and "then," "before" and "after" are turned on their heads. Accordingly, people who get abducted by the Kijawik and travel to their world often report being away for months although only a few days have passed in this world.

The Kijawik are considered to be highly dangerous and might abduct living individuals and make them crazy or even kill them. Although various sacrifices address the Kijawik, these are not aimed at establishing communion with the deceased. In fact, quite the opposite is true. Sacrifices are made not only to the deceased (see Evans-Prichard 1954), but also against the deceased, who need to be kept at a distance from the living. Likewise, a dead person is not to be mourned, let alone remembered in dreams. Rather, he or she should be forgotten by the living relatives. Otherwise, people might fall ill from grief.

11. There are two cement factories in Uganda, Hima Cement and Tororo Cement, which were privatized in the 1990s as part of structural adjustment programs. Before then, the factories were part of Uganda's National Cement corporation, established in the 1950s, which for some stood as an icon of high modernity of that era but which later collapsed and was privatized. These days cement is also bought from neighboring countries.
12. It is difficult to pinpoint when the practice of cementing graves began. One informant stated that for the wealthy it had been going on for many years, but that it was a relatively new practice in low-income households. The oldest reference to a cement grave that we have been able to find is in the Paula Hirsch Foster archive at the African Studies Library at Boston University. Foster's notes have never been published, but they provide much valuable information about Acholi life in the 1950s. In one field note from December 1955 she describes having to paint the date and manner of death of a deceased woman on the woman's "very dirty cement grave" with black poster paint. Field note, December 1, 1955, Paula Hirsch Foster Collection, The African Studies Library, Box X, Folder G.e.2, Boston University Libraries, Boston, Mass.
13. The interview that forms the basis of this story was conducted by Susan Whyte along with Sophie Seebach.
14. Local government in Uganda is structured through five levels of local councils, from LCI to LCV, which are responsible, respectively, for the village level, the parish level, the sub-county level, the county level, and the district level. Interpersonal conflicts such as land conflicts can be appealed from one council to another, as was the case in the dispute between Oyo and Stephen.
15. That is not to say that all people who have grown up in "warscapes" are emotionally or socially damaged. On the contrary, the social chaos that often accompanies war also offers possibilities and opportunities to create new pathways in terms of both social life and livelihood. Lubkemann argues that we should "investigate the energized process of the unmaking and remaking of hegemonic social relations and cultural framings" in terms of "social imagination" (2008:323–24).

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