



Identity, Culture And Conflict Among Returnee Populations Of Uganda: A Comparative Study Of Gulu And Orukinga Valley Communities

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Much of the critical ethnography on refugees has drawn on theoretically anthropological essentialist notions of “home”, “belonging” and “identification” based on “community” within a given “culture” and mostly “rural space”. However, for IDPs born and bred in camps for over 20 years, as in Gulu, or for the Rwandan “returnees” who have returned to Orukinga Valley Refugee camp, identifying with “home” and “welcoming community” may be notions long destroyed by the historical events.

A large number of returnees may be trying to relocate themselves to what has grown into unfamiliar geographical, cultural and even linguistic settings where they may not “feel at home” and “are not made welcome” (Weiss Fagen, 1996:6). Elsewhere it has been noted that in recently war-torn areas where levels of poverty are particularly high, “sharp declines in living standards, loss of political influence, unmet aspirations for forms of cultural expression and recognition of ethnic identity may create fertile ground for conflict” (Weiss Fagen, 1996:2)

This study intends, therefore, to find out whether there are patterns of re-integration or rejection of the returnee populations linked to culture and identity. It will also endeavour to establish whether the socio-economic measures taken to resettle returnees are causing alterations in balances of powers and privileges thus exacerbating hostilities. From the onset, the study will strive to use comparative lenses to gauge differential impacts for the intra-country returnees (Gulu IDPs) and the cross-border ones (Near Orukinga Valley Refugee Camp).

In spite of the significance of returnee issues, there is still dearth of research into the psycho-social and cultural dimensions of “retuning home”. Consequently, the overall objective of this study will be:

- To examine the displaced person’s process of “returning home” in order to determine emergent social, cultural and policy issues.

Under that main objective, the study will try to fulfil the following specific objectives:

- To trace returnees’ identity struggles and challenges
- To assess emerging socio-cultural issues continuum of “returning home” that may be linking to conflict.
- To gauge whether the existing returnees’ policy guidelines encompass their needs and enhance peace consolidation.