

A Research on Co-existence and Conflicts among Refugees and their Host Populations

A Case Study of Northwest Uganda

Year: 2013

Place of Fieldwork: Republic of Uganda

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Keywords: West Nile Region, Ma'di, Lugbara, Displaced migration, State and Society

■ Research Background

Many armed conflicts have been making people leave their homeland and forcing them to live in neighboring countries, and this situation can be seen in the Sub-Saharan African region as well [Crisp 2005]. As refugees stay longer in the host society, researchers, UNHCR, and other humanitarian agencies consider this situation and study relationships between refugees and their host populations. Previous studies have tended to categorize and regard both communities as monolith groups. Even though some researchers had already pointed out that it is necessary to pay attention to complexities or dynamics and the intra/inter relationships in both communities [Hansen and Oliver-Smith 1982], many focus on how refugees themselves integrate into their host communities and they were unable to investigate how the host communities receive new “members” of their society.¹

■ Research purpose and aim

This research aims to understand how refugees and their host communities establish their personal relationships, somehow influenced by “top” or “outside” factors, such as the state’s refugee strategy and international aids. In addition, it is also significant for this research to investigate what influences the relations between actors in post-conflict situations.

In Africa, it often happens that people share a culture, language, or ethnicity in several areas beyond international borders or the geopolitical space, and this is true of my research area too. Many Ma'di people—the Central Sudanic linguistic group—live in southwest South Sudan and also in northwest Uganda, including the Moyo and Adjumani Districts. Quite a few Lugbara people, who also belong to the Central Sudanic linguistic group, live in Arua, and this area has also been receiving refugees for long. I visited the Adjumani, Moyo, and Arua Districts².

¹ Ohta [2012] refers to complex relationships between refugees and their host populations through the case of the Kakuma refugee settlement in Kenya. According to Ohta, host populations sometimes negatively represent refugees and are also aware that refugees have varied backgrounds.

² Allen [1996] tells us how people fled from armed conflicts or humanitarian abuses and crossed the border between Southern Sudan and Northern Uganda. See Tim Allen, 1996. “A Flight from Refuge”. In Tim Allen ed., *In Search of Cool Ground: War, Flight and Homecoming in Northeast Africa*. London: James Currey, pp. 220–261. About Arua, see. Mark Leopold. 1998. *Inside West Nile: Violence, History & Representation on an African Frontier*. James Currey.

■ Result and Achievement of this fieldwork

I conducted this fieldwork between July 3 and September 7, 2014 in Uganda. I obtained research permission from UNCST (The Uganda National Council for Science and Technology) and a letter from the OPM (Office of the Prime Minister), which is required to visit refugee settlements, and I was able to find a research area where I could continue intensive field surveys.

In Kapmala, the capital city of Uganda, I collected documents at the Main Library of Makerere University, at the Makerere Institute of Social Research (MISR), or in the Refugee Law Project. After that, I left Kampala to make my way to Adjumani District, in the Northwest region. In Adjumani District, UNHCR and other international or local agencies were working at 13 refugee settlements at that time. I visited 8 settlements and found out their locations and surroundings, ethnic ratios, and populations of each settlement. I enquired about the process of land distribution for settlement. The OPM and local governments are supposed to hold a meeting with representatives of the local community in order to ask for their cooperation for getting land to build settlements when a large number of refugees arrive. If they reach an agreement at the meeting, the host community supplies their land for free to open a settlement. I saw that refugees and their host populations interact with each other and build their socioeconomic relationships in everyday life, such as sharing boreholes or buying and selling at the markets. I also conducted interviews with local staff and foreign staff of agencies. One day, I realized that some staff members, who had spent several years as “refugees” themselves, play an important role when they face challenges in the field partly because they can understand both opinions (that of refugees and agencies) from their own experience.

After I left Adjumani, I visited Moyo and Arua Districts. In Arua, I met some displaced people from Southern Sudan (including present Western Equatorial South Sudan) who have been living in Uganda for 20 years. Every displaced person from there has every reason for staying in Uganda [Kaiser 2012]. Those whom I met in Arua also associate educational, financial, or security problems with difficulties in repatriation. Moreover, I understood how difficult it was for some refugees, especially elders and little children, from arid areas in Northeast South Sudan to get accustomed to the environment in Northwest Uganda, where it rains heavily during the rainy season.

■ Implications and directions for future research

With financial assistance from JASSO’s (Japan Student Services Organization) Explorer program, I could conduct this fieldwork and accomplish my preliminary research purposes. I would like to express my gratitude to Professor. E. Kirumira at Makerere University for research permission and to all others who helped me.

During this field trip, I focused on refugees and aid staff so that I could extend the research subject to local populations, such as Ma’di and Lugbara people, in my next visit. For instance, I will conduct interviews and participate in observations with more number of individuals and households about the following topics: how many trading partners or friends (including refugees) they have and how/when/where they got acquainted with each other, and how often they mutually visit, and so on.³ Thanks to this stay, I could listen to the specific tone of local languages and could learn much more about Ma’di and Lugbara languages in order to communicate with them.

³ These research topics are in reference to Toru Sagawa. 2009. “Persistence of Cross-Cutting Ties in East African Pastoral Societies”, *Journal of Asian and African Studies*. No.78: 131–163.



Fig 1: At a settlement in Adjumani District, a refugee lady went for distribution with her registration card. Children were playing with a kite beside the distribution point.



Fig 2: Children play music (practice, sing, and dance) at a settlement in Adjumani District



Fig 3: At a temporary tent in a Collecting Point, refugee people are waiting for buses that bring them to Nyumanzi Reception Centre through this collecting point. When I visited this point, the water tank was broken.



Fig 4: Elegu, border point between South Sudan and Uganda. Many tankers pass through and the traffic jam was serious.



Fig 5: A tributary of the river Nile from Panjara region, Moyo District



Fig 6: Arua Hill. There are radio towers, a radio station, and hotels on the top of the hill and many houses lie on its stretch. You can find former Arua Hill's view in [Leopoldo 1998].



Fig 7: Breakfast at petro station in Arua District. Nearest restaurant delivers meal. Steamed Irish potato, cassava, boiled beans, noodle on steamed rice, and a cup of tea. This prices about 60 yen (September 2014).



Fig 8: Breakfast with a local family in Moyo District. This is a “porridge” composed of millet with sugar and milk.

Reference

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