



**CPAID**

Centre for Public Authority  
and International  
Development

2021 Report



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## Cover image

During the 2014-15 Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone, many young people moved from working in the informal economy into formal employment through the government's 'hazard pay' system for frontline workers. Many of these people then shifted between formal and informal work, using new opportunities to maximise financial circumstances and support their families. Artwork by Didier Kassai / Cartoon Movement.

# Introduction

**The Centre for Public Authority and International Development (CPAID) was established in 2017. Members of the team had been doing long-term fieldwork in collaboration with each other for a decade or more, and several had already employed a public authority lens. CPAID brought together these scholars, and others less familiar with this approach, to facilitate a more systematic exchanges of ideas, and to develop new avenues for investigation and analysis. Amongst the latter, based on close cooperation, co-research, and co-authorship, there has been an engagement with decolonising agendas, especially with respect to Africa.**



A street hawker in Zanzibar.  
Credit - Kara Blackmore.



Professor Tim Allen, Principal Investigator  
for the Centre for Public Authority and  
International Development.

The Centre began with a relatively narrow focus on locations of armed conflict, population displacement, and social reintegration in Central, East, Northeast and West Africa. That has remained a core concern – to know and better comprehend what is happening in these places. However, others have joined the team and over the last four years new considerations have come to the fore, notably linked to the epidemics of Ebola and COVID-19. The Centre's regional orientation also increasingly engages with comparative work outside of Africa, including in Europe.

Colleagues working at CPAID have never taken the view that a public authority lens is only applicable in Africa. Indeed, the concept itself has long been

used elsewhere, notably with reference to the legal obligations of those providing services, exercising statutory powers, or acting on behalf of governments.

Applying the Centre's substantial research findings and insights from Africa to pressing problems and debates outside the continent will be an important aspect of future research trajectories. It will not only enable on-going recognition of the multiple ways in which socio-political dynamics influence livelihoods, disease outbreaks, health, and well-being, but also contribute to re-thinking core concepts underpinning contemporary policies and practice – health security, resilience, sustainability, the Anthropocene, to name but a few.

*'Applying the Centre's substantial research findings from Africa to pressing debates outside the continent will be an important aspect of future research trajectories.'*

# What is Public Authority?

For CPAID, public authority is any kind of authority beyond the immediate family that commands a degree of consent – from clans, religious institutions, aid agencies, civil society organisations, rebel militia, and vigilante groups, to formal and semi-formal mechanisms of governance. The Centre recognises too that families may be large, and that the boundaries of public and private authorities may occasionally blur.



CPAID researchers devising research methods in the DRC. Credit - Pat Stys



Burundian refugee camp in Lusenda. Photo by MONUSCO-Abel Kavanagh.



Ubiri village dairy innovation platform meeting in Lushoto, Tanzania. Photo by ILRI-Peter Ballantyne.

A 'public authority' lens seeks to understand the full range of actors claiming or being allocated power through appeals to popular social norms, the provision of public goods, and, sometimes, coercion and violence. This includes those considered part of the state, such as village or street-level bureaucrats, and those seemingly far removed from or even standing in opposition to it – like customary leaders, civil society organisations, religious leaders, and armed groups.

## Thinking in terms of public authority

A public authority lens focusses research on who benefits and who is excluded from different actors' claims to authority, and how they are received by their rivals and those they seek to govern. While not excluding state institutions from analysis or overlooking the fact that those seeking power may co-opt or subvert those institutions, a public authority lens tends to challenge state-centric normative frameworks and biases at various scales – not just the local and the national, but also the regional and global, as nonstate actors increasingly shape global governance.

Thinking in terms of public authority also enhances our understanding of what is actually happening on the ground, and why some policy interventions persistently fail. That is especially so in challenging places affected by acute social upheavals, such as those associated with armed conflict, displacement, and epidemics, or where the legitimacy and reach of formal governance is challenged or weak. It also usefully reveals the potential of existing arrangements to contribute to or obstruct provision of services, promotion of wellbeing, and economic development.



## Conceptual framework and logics



A DDR outreach activity in El Srief. Photo by Albert Gonzalez Farran - UNAMID

The term ‘public authority’ has long been used to refer to instruments of formal government, and to institutions of the state, such as the police, army, and various sanctioned forms of local administration. More generally, public authority is a term used to refer to matters associated with public rather than private law. However, even in places where the idea of public authority has a long legal history, there is, in practice, a large arena of social life that occurs between the private spaces of the family and the public domain of formal governance.

In a flexible way, CPAID researchers have developed ‘logics’ to explain how public authority is claimed, accrued, and employed. These logics have been useful in drawing out comparisons between places, specific public authorities, and delineating patterns. Examples of these logics include moral populism, political marketplace, social harmony, public mutuality, and intimate governance. They have been used to refer to ways in which actors and organisations

appeal to social norms and provide public goods, thereby gaining a modicum of legitimacy to govern others.

Over the course of the programme, the strengths and weaknesses of the logics’ interpretive value has become clearer, and directions for how they could be analytically used and improved upon in future research have emerged. An important aspect of the latter is the way in which researchers have drawn on fieldwork in

Africa to explore how logics of public authority are discerned elsewhere, including in the Global North.

The logics encourage investigations of public authority’s fluidity and, potentially, its fragility, as actors seize opportunities to advance or resist one another’s claims. This was illustrated by a recent [collaborative working paper](#) for which CPAID’s researchers contributed vignettes from across five countries. Each provided insights into how actors were responding to the COVID-19 crisis, with some viewing it as an opportunity to solidify their power, others as a moment to challenge the status quo, and some as a threat to their livelihood networks.



A CPAID presentation in Gulu, Uganda.

## Uncovering the actors shaping everyday lives

The logics enable insights into the informal and hidden processes that structure societies, and the wide range of actors and phenomena that shape people's everyday realities. For example, research in Sierra Leone has shown how customary authorities organised **under-the-radar responses to Ebola**; while investigations of intimate

governance have asked how Ugandan youth caught in COVID-19-related lockdowns have found room to challenge marriage traditions.

The logics are also starting points for new investigations. For example, work on rituals in South Sudan has shown how appeals to moral populism can be used to claim authority, and how those same morals can be used to restrain the excesses of those seeking it. Such insights accompany calls to conduct research on how

*'Even in places where the idea of public authority has a long legal history, there is a large arena of social life that occurs between the private spaces of the family and the public domain of formal governance.'*

moral populism affects political leadership in less fragile and conflict-affected contexts, such as the contemporary United States or parts of Europe. The aim is both to understand how it shapes politics and how morality can be used as a form of resistance or protection.

## Examples of CPAID logics

### Intimate governance

is the personalised or private aspect of authority. Various forms of public authority enter private spaces and become bound up with family relationships, while simultaneously familial logics are applied in public relations to evoke social ordering. Intimate governance also refers to dynamics relating to non-kin individuals who are treated as kin, as well as kin who are excluded or oppressed.

### Political marketplace

is the notion that elites avoid destabilising levels of violence and claim public authority by buying off rivals and, thereby, incorporating them into elite coalitions. When this fails, elites turn to periodic bouts of violence to signal their value, and apply a price for support in any new arrangement to establish public authority.

### Moral populism

allows elites to secure the backing of a constituency, by excluding groups or creating an 'other' to blame for social ills and misfortunes. This can be relatively benign, or even socially positive, but it can also be linked to violence against the other, be it an individual, neighbouring group or entire ethnic identity or religion, as well as moral panics.

### Social harmony

describes the efforts of populations to maintain neighbourly relations. This likely necessitates adherence to gendered norms and age hierarchies and does not always allow for dissent. It may provide stability and enhance trust but can be enacted in ways that restrict choice and accountability.

### Public mutuality

is the act of treating others as you would like to be treated yourself, often referred to as the Golden Rule. Much more common than many would anticipate, people often find ways of sharing and helping that is almost instinctive, even in the most extreme social circumstances. However, there will, inevitably, be those who are excluded, because all groups require social boundaries.

## Research and projects

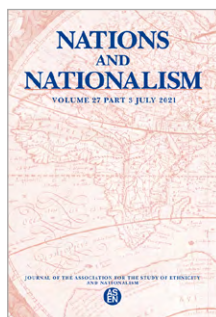
CPAID researchers **have published** numerous books, journal articles, working papers, and blogs. To maximise the impact of the research, these publications are made widely available and, where possible, open access for public and scholarly audiences. Moreover, while widely cited academically, and with research papers viewed in the tens of thousands, the research continues to draw interest from **national news media**, especially in Africa, increasing CPAID's capacity to **inform public debates**.

See over 100 CPAID publications on UKRI website

## Themed journal issues

CPAID has published themed journal issues showcasing the breadth of its work from researchers and partners in Africa. Special issues in the **Journal of Refugee Studies**, **Nations and Nationalism**, **Political Geography**, and the **Journal of Eastern African Studies** have addressed, respectively, the complex dynamics of displacement and 'return' in Central and East Africa, self-determination in the Horn of Africa, conservation in violent environments, understandings of customary authority in development interventions and everyday realities of UN protection of civilians.

Bringing together scholarship from CPAID's expanding international network, these themed journals have centred notions of public authority and its five conceptual logics within debates on African development and humanitarianism.



## Rural radicalism

A forthcoming special issue, Rural Radicalism, will analyse forms of rural protest and resistance in the DRC, Sudan, South Sudan, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. Based on a workshop held in February 2021, the issue will speak to wider questions of order, legitimacy, and sovereignty by developing a new framework for investigating how historical and contemporary forms of radicalism in rural areas is shaped by, and affects, diverse forms of public authority.



## Book projects

Seven monographs and edited collections by CPAID researchers have explored issues of public authority in diverse contexts across Africa. Topics range from **sexual violence and post-conflict reconstruction** in Uganda, social control and **modern authoritarianism**, links between **globalisation and pan-Africanism**, the life and works of Acholi poet **Okot p'Bitek**, and a study of the '**Third United Nations**', which explores the role of research communities, civil society, and the private sector as underappreciated sources of public authority and global governance. Also published are two textbooks: a Routledge guide to humanitarianism and an Oxford University Press publication on **poverty and development** in the 21st century.

CPAID additionally actively supports book projects with partners in Africa. Among books nearing completion is a comprehensive work on African public policy, edited by Gedion Onyango of Nairobi University, to be published by Routledge.

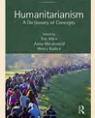
## Endorsements for CPAID books



### Poverty and Development

*'Essential reading for students of international development, policy-makers, and anyone thinking about the human condition in our interdependent, globalised world.'*

– Kevin Watkins, Chief Executive, Save the Children UK



### Humanitarianism: A Dictionary of Concepts

*'Humanitarian agencies have been subject to intense critical attention for over two decades now. With this volume's vast expertise, comprehensive scope, and compelling presentation, perhaps this time they will listen!'*

– Adam Branch, Director of the Centre of African Studies, University of Cambridge



### Lawino's People

*'Lawino's People could not have come at a better time when the Acholi people, recovering from the 20-year insurgency with its epicentre in Acoliland, are looking back in time to discover their precolonial and colonial cultural history.'*

– Charles Okumu, Associate Professor, Gulu University



### After Rape

*'Porter combines incredible empirical depth with provocative insights on sex, violence, and justice that extend far beyond the Ugandan case to inform some of today's most pressing debates in politics, law, gender studies, and anthropology.'*

– Phil Clark, Professor of International Politics, University of London



### Arbitrary States

*'This masterpiece is a must read for scholars of contemporary African politics.'*

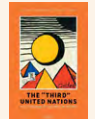
– Aili Mari Tripp, Wangari Maathai Professor of Political Science and Gender and Women's Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison



### The New Pan-Africanism

*'The book sets a scene for an important discussion on a much-needed alteration of political infrastructure of the African continent.'*

– Thembisa Fakude, Al Jazeera Center for Studies



### The 'Third' United Nations

*'Unromantic and sometimes mischievous ... an excellent handbook for researchers wondering how to get the UN to listen to their big ideas.'*

Richard Gowan, UN Director, International Crisis Group, World Politics Review

## CPAID blogs by African researchers

CPAID researchers have published findings on the [Africa at LSE blog](#) as part of the 'Public Authority' series, and over 40 African research partners have written on an extensive range of issues, from land reform and human displacement to football teams and witch doctors. The series has also published in [French](#) and generated a large readership across the continent, making long-term scholarly work accessible to broader publics.



### Watching the ICC Judgement of LRA commander Dominic Ongwen with Ugandan victims of enforced marriage

The conviction of Lord's Resistance Army commander Dominic Ongwen has been met with mixed reactions in northern Uganda. Jackline Atingo watched the ICC Judgement with six formerly abducted women forced into marriages with LRA commanders.



### What are the drivers of child homelessness in the DRC?

Like many cities in the DRC, on Goma's streets are children employing coping strategies for survival. Ishara Tchumisi explains the causes of children's homelessness and the action needed by national government.



### The illegal economy of refugee registration

Charles Ogeno examines locals' reactions to the influx of South Sudanese refugees in Uganda, shedding light on a high-profile scandal: the buying and selling of refugee registration.



### What do witch doctors actually do?

Robin Oryem interviews local witch doctors in Uganda to understand how public authority operates in marginal and conflict-affected places.



### Land policy is crucial to peacebuilding in South Sudan

Despite the presentation of relative peace, underlying issues driving conflict in South Sudan are going unaddressed. Arop Anei Garang explains how shifting understandings of land in South Sudan have fuelled local tensions.



### What it means to be a 'refugee' in South Sudan and Uganda

After decades of armed conflict in South Sudan and Uganda, labels of 'refugee' and 'internally displaced person' fail to reflect people's complex realities. Leben Nelson Moro examines the history of movement across the region's borders.



### International development frameworks force civil society to mimic western NGOs

Jimmy Awany describes about how civil society groups have deprioritised connections with their communities as a means of deriving public authority.



### An Ebola screening point highlights the gap between local needs and international agendas

In 2019, a suspended health centre in southwestern Uganda was turned into an Ebola screening point. Grace Akello writes why the case highlights the gap between local health priorities and international agendas.



### Savings groups can tackle financial precarity in Goma's woman-headed households

AVECs are associations providing credit and savings options for members to expand their businesses or manage financial shocks. Citing their success, Papy Mazuri recommends AVECS formalise and expand across the DRC.



### Football as reconciliation in the aftermath of war

As northern Uganda recovers from the LRA war, peace and youth interventions using sports are playing a vital role. Francis Aloh, a former Ugandan football star, explores the game's potential to foster dialogue between groups previously at war.

CPAID in numbers



PUBLICATIONS

7

Books

34

Journals published in

17

Open access publications

45

Journal papers

251

Journal citations

4

Special journal issues

2

Edited collections

32

News articles  
featuring our research

4

Reports



SOCIAL MEDIA

880

followers

2.3k

engagements

892

tweets



PUBLIC AUTHORITY BLOG SERIES

44,505

Total page views

104

Total posts

Popular blogs

What do witch doctors actually do?

The humanitarian response to COVID-19 in Somalia will increase capital flight and violent conflict

Land policy is crucial to peacebuilding in South Sudan

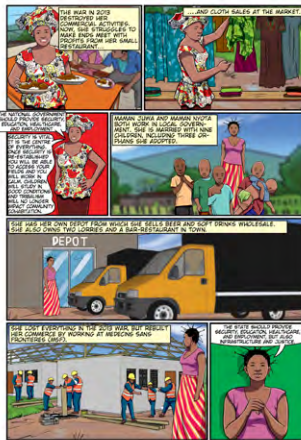
CAR's peace accords and rebel warlords

Sudan's political marketplace and the prospects for democracy

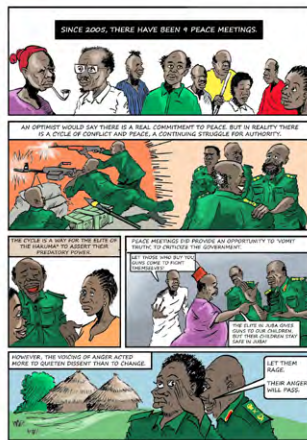


## CPAID Comics

A six-part series of graphic comics on public authority across Africa, CPAID Comics presents research findings from long-term ethnographic fieldwork in new ways and for new audiences. Based on work conducted in Uganda, South Sudan, the DRC, and Sierra Leone, the series uses real-life stories to show how different, and often competing, public authorities affect people's everyday lives.



Topics in the CPAID Comics series range from perceptions of threats in **refugee settlements** to **vigilantism and public justice**, from the impact of **conservation on local livelihoods** to the ways informal support networks responded during the West African Ebola crisis and how they are routinely used to access 'public' services in the DRC.



## Public Authority Podcast

The **Public Authority Podcast**, launched in 2021, asks how governance and humanitarianism in conflict-affected areas actually functions. Inviting experts to discuss the ways public authorities beyond state actors shape daily lives, political control, and economic activity across Africa, the podcast examines aid delivery, development initiatives, localisation, access to justice, and service provision. It presents original thinking about the structures necessary for, and barriers to, thriving economic, political, and social life.

In the two-part start to the podcast, CPAID researcher Naomi Pendle explores the findings and implications of a recent study into the localisation of humanitarian aid in South Sudan, and the struggles and strategies of South Sudanese NGOs as they navigate the delivery of aid in a context of armed conflict.



## Research projects

### Accessing basic social services in eastern DRC

*Public authority of service provision*

**Lead Researchers:** Patrycja Stys, Samuel Muhindo, Papy Muzuri



Photo by Pat Stys.

*'Most fieldwork participants expect state authorities to provide services such as education ... in reality, it was found to be provided by INGOs or religious institutions.'*

In conflict-affected eastern DRC, how expectations of and access to basic social services varies across different governance arrangements is under-researched. A new study examines people's relationship to these services using focus groups with community representatives, semi-structured interviews, and participatory mappings with residents in four sites, each governed by a distinct constellation of actors from national representatives to national and foreign militias. The project aims to uncover which service providers – public authorities in their own right – are most effective, and for whom, in such contexts

#### Preliminary findings

Across all sites and socioeconomic strata, most

fieldwork participants expect state authorities to provide services such as education, security, justice, healthcare, and even employment and housing. In reality, healthcare was found to be provided by INGOs or religious institutions which also run schools. Justice and security, the only state domains, are viewed inadequate and discriminatory. Because these services are costly and can paradoxically exacerbate insecurity, instead residents resort to customary authorities.

Research has found the poorest residents struggle to access most services and even healthcare is limited to small pharmaceutical purchases. The relatively wealthy purchase services outright, with money or by cashing in past favours. The middle-class

access services through chains of intermediaries, relying more on who they know than how much they have.

Most precarious are transitions between governance arrangements, when dominant authorities and rules are contested and uncertain. Previously marginalised public authorities, such as business associations, can assert their dominance and counter military rule. Yet accompanying violence also leads to displacement, changing resident populations and economies, which challenges new authorities' efforts to consolidate their governance.

## Public authority and nature conservation in eastern DRC

**Lead Researcher:** Esther Marijnen

Current literature on public authority in conflict areas, including in eastern DRC, targets the role that a range of state and state-like actors play in the provision of basic services, taxation practices, and the governing of civilians and territory. Meanwhile, research often overlooks how these public authority structures are also shaped by, and influence, nature-society relations. Given this gap, this research project placed nature-society relations at the centre of its investigation.

### Findings

In a [special journal issue](#) on conservation in violent environments, research findings approached conservation authorities as a distinct actor in the complex patchwork of public authorities in the conflict landscape of eastern DRC.

An analysis of conservation in Garamba National Park shows that regulation on anti-poaching activities exists within these areas through

the persistence of social contracts that bind different actors. These contracts have long histories and change substantially over time, and yet continue to function as reference points for populations and authorities with regards to (anti-) poaching activities, and the organisation of social life in and around the park.

*'Regulation on anti-poaching activities exists through the persistence of social contracts that bind different actors, which have long histories and change substantially over time.'*



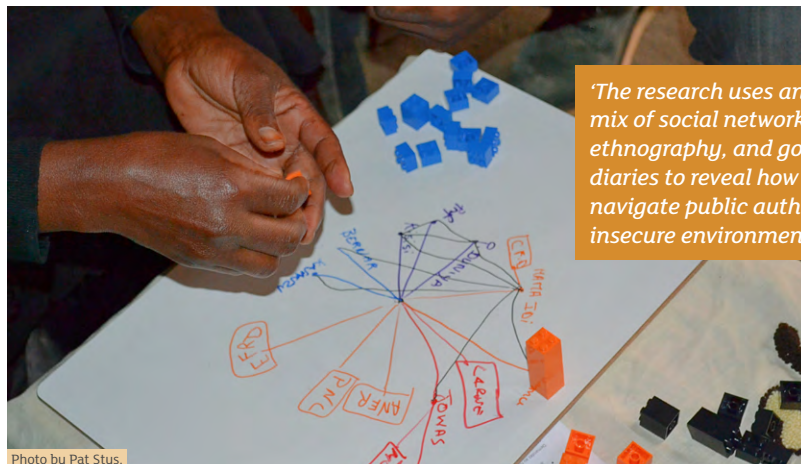
Photo by WildlifeDirect.



## With or against the flow?

### Public authority of water utilities in eastern DRC

**Lead Researchers:** Duncan Green, Tom Kirk, Patrycja Stys



*'The research uses an innovative mix of social network research, ethnography, and governance diaries to reveal how residents navigate public authority in an insecure environment.'*

In Goma, eastern DRC, CPAID has partnered with an international NGO, Mercy Corps, to study its **IMAGINE program** to improve access to water, sanitation, and hygiene promotion. The program established the first public-private partnership in the DRC's water sector and set up a Congolese company, which manages part of the water utilities in Goma and Bukavu.

Covering two broad areas, the research first explores how adaptive management has enabled the program to navigate the challenges posed by an extremely fragile context. Second, the project examines households' daily management, financial governance, access to water,

and other basic social services. It uses an innovative mix of social network research, ethnography, and governance diaries to gain in-depth data to reveal how residents navigate public authority in an insecure environment and cope with unforeseen shocks.

Data was collected every two weeks by five Congolese researchers over a period of 11 months. It has yielded a range of outputs from co-authored academic articles to policy briefs and **blogs**.

#### Research findings

The study found households' top priority for spending is friends, family, and neighbours. By paying off past 'moral debt'

and creating new obligations of future reciprocity, this flow of capital provides a vital form of informal social protection – a bedrock of household security – though it remains a considerable sacrifice for families living in poverty.

The research suggests that INGOs and other aid organisations seeking to boost community resilience could contribute by broadening reciprocity beyond the immediate family. This could involve, for example, bringing together residents of different backgrounds to diversify **social networks** and promoting mutual social obligations between different groups.



Photo by Corporal Paul Shaw-MOD.



*'The workings of family authority in Sierra Leone often entail overtly democratic principles, which are exemplified by formal family meetings'.*

## Familial authority and governance during and after Ebola in Sierra Leone

**Lead Researcher:** Jonah Lipton

The project explores family-based public authority in urban Sierra Leone. In a region marked by a history of political instability, economic decline, conflict and crisis, family networks – spanning between rural, urban and diaspora – have long acted as primary modes of governance and a means of re-establishing and maintaining social and political order. During the 2014–16 Ebola outbreak and resultant state of emergency, the family was a primary unit of care and material support.

Although the arena of family-based governance is

often written off as 'corrupt', 'patrimonial', or 'customary', the workings of family authority in Sierra Leone often entail overtly democratic principles, which are exemplified by formal 'family meetings'. Women, particularly elders, often hold positions of authority and influence. Equally, family modes of governance are adaptable and dynamic, as individuals move between connected homes in rural and urban locations.

### Findings

The project drew on two years of ethnographic fieldwork in a neighbourhood of Freetown, before, during and after the Ebola outbreak. The research uncovered how ordinary families understood, experienced, and **responded to the crisis**, and the assemblage of international, state, and local

public authority structures that constituted the state of emergency.

Notably, the research found that ordinary people drew on personal and collective histories of crisis that allowed them to **negotiate loss in meaningful and long-term ways**, in contrast to the short-term priorities of the international intervention. Young adults took advantage of the unusual conditions of the emergency – including employment in the official Ebola response – to initiate honourable family formation, which had been challenging beforehand. As a result, the research argues that familial authorities, priorities, and practices must form a central part in global responses to epidemics and other emergencies.

## Public authority and mutuality during the Ebola epidemic in Sierra Leone

**Researchers:** Tim Allen, Melissa Parker, Tommy Hansen, Ahmed Vandi, Lawrence Sao Babawo



A village meeting in Sierra Leone. Credit - Tim Allen.

Home-made protective clothing used by an informal Ebola burial team in Sierra Leone. Credit: Melissa Parker.

Resolution declared the 2014-16 Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone ‘a threat to international peace and security’, it marked a new step in legitimising enforcement for a public health purpose. By linking the outbreak to state instability as well as regional and global security, the UNSC facilitated a highly militarised approach to treatment and containment, providing justification for forms of public authority to impose quarantine and enforced containment on a large scale.

In practice, while the nature of military engagement varied between Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, all three

governments used their armies to control access to hospitals and Ebola Treatment Centres, identify new cases, impose roadblocks, and assist with ‘lockdowns’. Focussed on rural Sierra Leone, this project assesses the effects of militarised humanitarian responses on public authorities, during and after the epidemic.

### Findings

Fieldwork in Ebola-affected areas of Sierra Leone took place with many of those involved, who have **written blogs** on the lived experience of the virus. The team has additionally published several articles, highlighting the diverse ways in which multiple forms of public authority were apparent.

The realities of what happened on the ground were **found to be remarkably diverse**. In some instances, military force was deployed, while in others chiefs found their authority greatly enhanced. In some locations, forms of public authority were also linked to secret societies and a **logic of public mutuality**, which enabled people to act in ways that subverted constraints imposed upon them. They used public health messages to care for sick relatives in secret places, while preventing infection of both those doing the caring and those who buried the dead at night in ways that were considered morally appropriate.

## Diaspora returnees and business actors in Somalia

### *New perspectives on political agents in non-state governance*

Lead researcher: Claire Elder

Research in Somalia examines how diaspora returnees and business actors understand their 'social' and 'public' role, including how they affect social and political transformation and contribute to state failure. The project draws on hundreds of interviews, in addition to focus groups and surveys, to interrogate canonical ideas about diaspora-centred development and business self-interest. The work challenges core assumptions within development practice and academic scholarship about non-state actors and formal statehood, offering new insights into the evolving nature of political agency and statehood amidst globalisation. In-depth ethnographic field

research additionally examines how business actors serve as 'social institutions' in local and national development, and how diaspora are contested 'public authorities' in state and politics. It explores the ways in which these actors challenge the formation of bureaucratic central states, including around conceptions of public goods, patronage politics, technocratic reform, and ideas of good governance.

### Findings

In addition to a monograph in progress on the emergence and persistence of 'diaspora states' in post-war transitions, research on the Somali business response to COVID-19

challenges core assumptions about business self-interest in conflict-affected areas. Relying on 76 interviews with small, medium, and large businesses, conducted from March 2019 to December 2020, the paper explores what the COVID-19 crisis reveals about how businesses articulate social and national interest and moral legitimacy.

Contributing to research on the shifting relations between government, business, and society in the developing world, research findings further reveal how the twin legacies of civil war and Islamic development ideology create more socially responsible private sector actors.

Photo by Claire Elder.



*'The fieldwork offers new insights into the evolving nature of statehood amidst globalisation.'*



Photo by Ryan O'Byrne.

*'Scholarship and policy has ignored the potential for legal norms to shape the relationship between hunger and dignity.'*



**This project has received  
50,000 GBP of support from  
the British Academy**

## Hunger and human dignity

### *The politics of hunger courts in South Sudan*

**Researchers:** Naomi Pendle, Jok Madut Jok, Abraham Diing Akoi, Awien Mou, Ngot Mou, Julia Luka Joseph

Hundreds of millions of people remain chronically hungry and famines persist worldwide. Extreme hunger not only threatens life, but it can also remove human dignity from the living and the dead. While vibrant ethnographic work has shown how people living through hunger support each other, almost no attention has been paid in these situations to the use of legal norms and institutions. Scholarship and policy, therefore, has ignored the potential for legal norms to shape the relationship between hunger, social responsibility, and dignity.

This project explores these questions through a study of South Sudanese hunger courts

– chiefs' courts that redistribute food to the hungriest people. Using historical, ethnographic, and quantitative methods across four sites in South Sudan, the dominantly South Sudanese team will explore socio-legal constructions of norms of welfare and dignity, as well as social hierarchies and inequities.

#### **Findings**

The project's first **significant report**, in collaboration with the LSE Conflict Research Programme, used ethnographic observations and large-scale quantitative data shared by the World Food Programme. Findings demonstrate the widespread use of chiefs'

courts to redistribute food to the hungriest in times of acute hunger and famine, especially in the most famine-prone regions.

Humanitarians in South Sudan often struggle to target humanitarian aid in times of famine, particularly when famine-levels of hunger occur in small, geographic pockets that are easily overlooked by internationally standardised monitoring tools. The data highlights how chiefs use a complex set of criteria to judge extreme hunger, suggesting that paying attention to chiefs' courts may be an important way for humanitarians to identify and target the communities most in need.



## Law during war in South Sudan

**Researchers:** Gatwech Wal and Naomi Pendle

Periods of war are often viewed as chaotic and, therefore, devoid of law and order. A public authority lens, however, can draw attention to the prevalence of order, governance, and law itself during war, and show how its application is not necessarily benign. Scholarship in Sudan, Rwanda, and Somalia has recently highlighted that war can be used as a tool of war or authoritarian regimes.

This project explores the politics of legal institutions in Unity and Lakes States in South

Sudan during recent years of war and peacetime, placing the discussion in the context of other legal norms and reforms elsewhere in South Sudan in recent years.

### Findings

A forthcoming report highlights the significance of legal institutions and norms for the making and entrenching of public authority. The armed opposition in Unity State from 2014, for example, quickly established a court system to help assert its authority and control over the local population. When legal institutions are absent, it has been easy for military leaders to mobilise armed forces

by inciting a popular moral demand for revenge.

Findings also explain how legal reforms, including those that claim to promote the rule of law, can create legal uncertainties that further exaggerate authoritarian governance and moral populism. In Lakes State after the 2005 peace agreement, the UN and government promoted legal reform that they argued would promote the rule of law. As the High Court competed for cases with the chiefs' courts, however, various rulings in cases involving serious crimes were overturned on minor procedural matters, which ignited further armed conflict.

*'A public authority lens can draw attention to the prevalence of order, governance, and law itself during periods of war.'*



UNDP Launches Pilot Projects for Recovery and Reconciliation in South Sudan. Photo by UN-JC McIlwaine

## Localising humanitarian aid during armed conflict

**Lead researcher:** Alice Robinson, Naomi Pendle, Leben Moro and Lydia Tanner ([The Research People](#))

In contexts of armed conflict, international humanitarian organisations increasingly rely on local and national actors to deliver aid. South Sudan is no exception: while international organisations have worked with and through South Sudanese organisations for decades, the number of local and national NGOs involved in the South Sudanese humanitarian response has increased substantially since the outbreak of widespread armed conflict in 2013.

The proliferation of South Sudanese NGOs and their increasingly central role in the humanitarian response has been driven, in part, by the significant access constraints and risks associated with operating in South Sudan.

These shifts are also taking place in the context of global commitments to ‘localise’ humanitarian responses, with humanitarian organisations and donor governments committing to shift power and resources closer to affected populations.

### Findings

**Our research found** that South Sudanese NGOs have expanded in waves during humanitarian crises, with many of these organisations having decades of experience. At the same time, long-term donor funding patterns have consistently undermined the capacity of South Sudanese NGOs.

Notably, NGO founders in South Sudan have often been found

to make significant personal and financial sacrifices to maintain donor trust and keep serving their communities. Furthermore, South Sudanese NGOs are not simply politically polarised by the conflict but interact with warring parties in complex ways. At the local level, the assets and resources of South Sudanese NGOs, as well as their service delivery, often mean that they are a significant public authority, meaning they have to carefully navigate relationships with other authorities, including local government.

**This project has received 120,000 GBP of support from the FCDO’s East Africa Research Hub**

Photo by UNDP South Sudan-Brian Sokol



*‘The number of local and national NGOs involved in the South Sudanese humanitarian response has increased substantially since the outbreak of conflict in 2013.’*

Photo by Alun McDonald-Oxfam.



*'Many NGOs lost donor funding or were forced to pivot their activities towards COVID-19 and, as the threat of the virus was almost invisible, these shifting priorities alienated communities.'*

## Local authority and NGO responses to COVID-19 in South Sudan

**Lead researcher:** Naomi Pendle, Alice Robinson, Peter Justin and Linda Ahimbisibwe ([The Research People](#))

This research explored the dynamics of South Sudanese NGO and local government responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in South Sudan. It considered how these public authorities responded to the pandemic, and how these responses shaped and were shaped by wider social and political dynamics. While a vacuum in local government leadership undermined the response to COVID-19 in some areas, the research examined how governance by local

authorities continued irrespective of shifts in state and county leadership, creating continuity and a level of governance without government.

Based on 99 interviews and regular observations, the research was conducted across six sites in South Sudan between November 2020 and February 2021. The fieldwork presents a snapshot of a moment in time, reflecting primarily on the first year of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

### Findings

The global pandemic took precedence as a threat over many other pressing crises facing South Sudanese people, and research uncovered the trust and mistrust felt in relation to the virus. Many

**This project has received 70,000 GBP of support from the FCDO's East Africa Research Hub.**

South Sudanese NGOs lost donor funding or were forced to pivot their activities towards COVID-19 and, as the threat of the virus was almost invisible, possibly due to a lack of testing, these shifting priorities alienated communities.

Although pivots in humanitarian priorities were top down, the fieldwork revealed that it was often South Sudanese NGOs and aid workers who were more accessible to communities and who were confronted by their frustrations. The loss of trust, however, might have significant consequences for trust in vaccines and future demands for behaviour change.

## Making land government-controlled

### *Public authority and land surveys in South Sudan*

**Lead researchers:** The Bridge Network (a South Sudanese cohort of researchers)

Over the last decade in South Sudan, it has become common for urban and quasi-urban land to be ‘surveyed’ – a process often led by the county commissioner or state governor, supported by chiefs, and with the help of ‘technical’ support from the state-level Ministry of Physical Infrastructure.

Land surveying has happened in large and growing urban centres such as Juba and Kuajok, as well as relatively rural markets, county capitals, and internally displaced persons settlements.

Repeatedly resulting in conflict and claims of land misallocation, land surveying has often involved the removal of previous rights of occupants, the arrangement of plots in a grid system, and the sale of land. In this research, The Bridge Network used a public authority lens to explore the full impact of these surveys and the realities of the politics around them.

## Findings

Research has reinforced the significance of land in causing conflicts in South Sudan and the need for clarity over land to [promote peacebuilding](#).

Findings from Nimule, Kuajok, Juba, and Gogrial highlighted how the surveying of land in quasi-urban settlements allowed private economic gains at a time when land had an increasing monetary value, turning land from communal and family ownership into being privately-owned and rented. At the same time, these reforms were often an act of asserting authority over an area and making it government-controlled.

*‘Land surveying in South Sudan has often involved the removal of previous rights of occupants, the arrangement of plots in a grid system, and the sale of land.’*



UNEP meeting in South Sudan. Photo by UNMISS.



## Peace-making and public authority in South Sudan

Researcher: Naomi Pendle



Photo by UN Photo-Isaac Billy.

*'Peace-making in South Sudan is an opportunity to reconstitute politics, ethics, and the cosmology that underpin them.'*

During peace-making processes, different actors compete over the authority to shape the meaning of life and death, the boundaries of war and peace, the ethics of war, and visions for the future. Peacemakers grapple with the militarised authority used by those who wage war, including in South Sudan, where claims to authority are made by diverse actors. During peace-making processes in the country, as part of such claims, notably both religious authority figures and those that are not ostensibly religious draw on, reinterpret, and reassert **notions of divine authority**.

A forthcoming book, *Peace and Purity*, explores the evolving way that war is ended or that

violence is altered through colonisation and post-coloniality. The project moves beyond the dominant political science literature and draws on notions of public authority to pay attention to a wider spiritual and moral setting, acknowledging that peace-making is an opportunity to reconstitute politics, ethics, and the eschatology and cosmology that underpin them.

### Findings

Based on ethnographic, historic, and qualitative research around local and national peace meetings in South Sudan, the book draws on evidence suggesting that peace meetings are a key site for the entrenching and remaking of

public authority. It focusses on the wars and peace-making efforts in South Sudan since the early late 19th century, studying the roles of a range of actors from international diplomats and chiefs to Nuer prophets and local priests.

The research highlights the various cosmologies and invisible entities that authorities draw on and reinterpret to (re)claim authority over war and peace. Crucially, it shows that a large part of these contestations is based around notions of purity after the violence of war, and whether rituals allow for inclusive communities after conflict.

Photo by UNAMID - UN Photo-Olivier Chassot.



*'The everyday use of law in South Sudan's humanitarian protection sites has shaped relationships with the political communities outside.'*

## Safety of strangers

### *Understanding the Realities of Humanitarian Protection*

**Lead Researchers:** Tim Allen, Grace Akello, Leben Moro and Naomi Pendle

Humanitarian protection is morally and logistically complicated, especially when violence is inflicted by people's own governments. Interested in how people deal with the complex moral, logistical, spiritual, and intellectual problems such protection raises, new research examines the daily practices of keeping strangers safe in specific localities during conflict.

While exploring the hidden moral anxieties of humanitarian protection actors as they work in local contexts, the research explores how

other actors contest or co-opt these humanitarian ideas and provide different forms of safety. This project uses history, anthropology, curation, ethnomusicology, and theology to investigate the practice of the UN and NGOs, as well as church leaders, chiefs, and other local authority figures.

A dozen projects are ongoing as part of Safety of Strangers, many of which designed by early career African scholars. These projects are focussed on South Sudan and its borderlands, which for over forty years have been a seminal site for testing humanitarian protection ideas. The country, moreover, is currently experiencing a protracted conflict and extreme humanitarian violations, which makes understanding the safety of civilians paramount.

## Findings

In 2013, the UN peacekeeping mission allowed its bases to be used as a sanctuary in the escalating conflict, and 40,000 and 120,000 people lived on the Wau and Bentiu bases respectively. Early findings highlight how the everyday use of law in these sites, and its relationship to law beyond the sites, has differed and has shaped continuities with the political communities outside.

Additionally, Professor Sylvia Antonia Nannyonga-Tamus at Makerere University, Uganda has explored how ethnomusicology can deepen our understanding of people's needs and methods of protection during armed conflict. Through workshops with South Sudanese scholars and practitioners, **the work** informs how music in protection contexts allows 'open-speech'.

## Shifting logics of authority in South Sudan's cattle camps

**Researcher:** Ngot Mou

Far from political deal-making in Juba, cattle camp leaders in South Sudan, known as *majokwut*, are often a more influential factor in people's everyday lives. Indeed, in many parts of the country, cattle are a significant part of politics and the economy.

*'Cattle camp leaders are an influential factor in people's everyday lives ... in many parts of the country, cattle are a significant part of politics and the economy.'*

New research focused on the *majokwut* in Gogrial, South Sudan, asks how the logics of authority that shape this institution have changed over time. While many institutions in South Sudan with long histories have been incorporated and co-opted by government structures, the *majokwut* has remained relatively discrete from government incorporation and has often been ignored. At the same time, the *majokwut* play a key role in governing both the cattle and martial labour of the cattle guards, a power which means they often interact with government actors and other public authorities.

### Findings

First highlighting the **importance of the *majokwut*** for many people in South Sudan, the research has shown how the institution often governs the cattle-wealth of families and the labour of many young men, which has been relatively ignored by academics and international aid actors. Secondly, the research has found that the logics underpinning the *majokwut*'s authority have been especially affected by being forced to resist or co-opt monetised and militarised logics of governance.



## The political marketplace

*Identifying financial incentives and constraints shaping political struggles in conflicted societies*

**Lead researchers:** Alex de Waal and Mary Kaldor



Election day in Bunia, DRC. Photo by MONUSCO. Licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0.

Much social and political science is premised on a deep underlying assumption that we are gradually creating social and political orders – paradigmatically, states – that reduce disorder in the world. The starting point for this analysis is often that political and economic forms, including states, are being disordered by public authorities affected by the logic of a ‘political marketplace’.

This marketplace refers to an extreme form of neo-liberalism in which political and **social relations are monetised**.

In this context, powerful public authorities – who may compromise aid donors, philanthropists, political entrepreneurs, private sector actors, and other transnational

intermediaries – challenge the legitimacy and authority of traditional, local or national actors.

### Findings

A series of collaborative working papers and a 2021 special journal issue in **Conflict, Development and Security** explore the relationship between the political marketplace, identity politics, and violence. The research shows how political marketplaces emerge out of the experience of civil war, the internationalisation of conflicts, and the perpetuation of disassembled states.

Research on Sudan and Somalia studies how modalities

*‘Political and economic forms, including states, are being disordered by public authorities affected by the logic of a political marketplace’.*

of finance and economic relations within conflict-affected political economies interact with identities and violence in ways not captured by existing political economy models. In these countries, the research demonstrates how these relations inhibit the formation of institutional, formal political orders and instead engender violent competition. Such relations are further found to drive insecure, exclusivist **identity politics**, such as racism, ethnic nationalism or religious fundamentalism.



*‘Understanding how South Sudanese refugees practice resilience might contradict the agendas promoted by humanitarian agencies.’*



Photo by Ryan O'Byrne

## An ethnography of public authority, resilience and mobility

*South Sudanese in Palabek Refugee Settlement, Uganda*

**Lead Researchers:** Ryan O'Byrne and Charles Ogeno

Palabek Refugee Settlement in northern Uganda currently has over two million South Sudanese refugees, most resulting from the 2013-18 civil war. Based on twelve months of ethnographic fieldwork, primarily in Palabek Refugee Settlement, research investigating the dynamics of mobility among South Sudanese in Uganda documented diverse understandings, experiences, and practices of migration, and how the dynamics of

displacement link to diverse aspects of public authority.

How South Sudanese refugees understand and practice resilience is crucial to the way public authority operates in the region. These understandings might, importantly, contradict the normative agendas promoted by humanitarian agencies. Exploring individual, communal, and cultural forms of resilience, this project draws links between the movement of people, ideas, and things across and within borders, shedding light on how these movements affect how public authority operates.

### Findings

An article in the [Journal of Refugee Studies](#) investigated the cross-border journeys

undertaken by South Sudanese refugees, highlighting them as direct responses to oppressive or exploitative forms of formal and informal public authority. Due to ongoing violence in South Sudan, the research demonstrated that cross-border movements are more often about overcoming negative resettlement experiences than forms of voluntary repatriation.

Along with the difficulties of resettlement, the research concluded that localised development and national peace and security initiatives are additional important parameters affecting cross-border mobility.

*'The perception that the state has effective surveillance tools makes instances of state non-intervention appear as much an intentional choice as instances in which it intervenes.'*

A woman in a face mask by her fruit stall in Kampala, Uganda. Photo by De Lovie.



Photo by Spc. Jason Nolte, 21st Theater Sustainment Command.

## Arbitrary governance and modern authoritarianism in Uganda

**Lead researcher:** Rebecca Tapscott

Scholars of authoritarianism have increasingly noted a trend in which democratic institutions have been hollowed out to facilitate the exercise of arbitrary power. Studying the micro-dynamics of public authority and governance, including the activities of vigilantes, militias, and community police, new research contributes a view from below on everyday practices of **modern authoritarianism**. It analyses hundreds of interviews and non-participant observation of

local security arrangements in Uganda to uncover how unpredictable state intervention can destabilise societal organisation needed to hold rulers accountable, while leaving democratic institutions formally intact.

### Findings

Through detailed qualitative evidence, Dr **Rebecca Tapscott's book** traces how public authorities unpredictably claim and deny jurisdictional authority – with the result that it is never clear which actor, if any, will be (made) responsible in a given scenario, and which rules will apply. The result in Uganda is an environment of pervasive unpredictability, where diverse public authorities compete for control over people, resources, and territory.

Though public authorities may present themselves as emerging governance actors, they are vulnerable to potential violent and unaccountable state interventions, which usurp and fragment growing claims to power. The perception that the state has effective surveillance tools makes instances of state non-intervention appear as much an intentional choice as instances in which it intervenes. This allows for pockets of civic organisation while rendering those spaces precarious and causing citizens to self-police. Using a micro-analysis of public authority, the book shows how modern authoritarianism plays out in everyday life, allowing the regime to project social control.

## Epidemics and the military

### *Responding to Ebola and COVID-19 in Uganda*

**Lead researchers:** Grace Akello and Melissa Parker

Deploying armed forces to contain epidemics is not a new phenomenon, and they are now used with ever increasing frequency in diverse socio-political and geographic settings to contain cholera, dysentery, measles, polio, SARS, Ebola and, most recently, COVID-19. Yet the nature of engagement varies. In some instances, UN peacekeeping forces have worked closely with humanitarian agencies, while in others, these agencies have worked alongside international and domestic armed forces.

In spite of the widespread use of armed forces, there is surprisingly little research about the day-to-day impacts of such engagement. Working in Gulu, Kasese, and Pakwach districts in Uganda, new research explores how the Ugandan armed forces worked with humanitarian agencies in anticipation of an Ebola outbreak on the Uganda-DRC border in 2019. Central to the investigation was how these relationships were perceived locally and with what impacts on health-seeking behaviour. With respect to COVID-19, the project also sought to understand how the top-down, militarised response was shaped by relationships with other kinds of formal, informal, and hybrid forms of public authority.

## Findings

Ongoing research has revealed that while the practice of health security varies, militarising responses to outbreaks of disease exacerbates state-citizen tensions and **accentuates inequalities**. Official narratives about how to prevent the spread of Ebola and COVID-19 are frequently questioned. Indeed, at some field sites, people openly question whether COVID-19 exists, and evidence suggests that local endeavours by village health workers are being undermined by the armed forces. Politicising outbreaks of infectious disease, while simultaneously failing to hold army officers to account for acts of violence when enforcing containment measures, is shown to have counter-productive consequences.



*'Findings reveal that militarising responses to outbreaks of disease exacerbates state-citizen tensions and accentuates inequalities.'*

A Red Cross volunteer wearing protective clothing for an Ebola response training exercise. Photo by IFRC.

## Intimate governance and gender relationships in northern Uganda

Researcher: Holly Porter

Ugandan women celebrate a legal aid clinic opening in Kawempe. Photo by Kate Holt-Africa Practice.

*'Public authorities in Uganda interact with the norms of 'private' authority and impact people's intimate relationships.'*



While public authority is often defined as being outside the family, much violence and injustice occurs within the family – particularly for women, with male relatives often acting as an access point through which women's public concerns are funnelled. Examining issues of gender and sexualities in contexts of war and post-war return, this project unpacks how public authorities in Uganda interact with the norms of 'private' authority and the ways they impact people's intimate relationships.

To understand the relationship between various public authorities, their respective interventions and family-level gender relations, the research uses the lens of 'intimate

governance' and extensive ethnographic fieldwork. It addresses a range of issues in the conflict-affected region of northern Uganda, such as intimate violence, sexual and reproductive health, abortion, and conformity to sexual norms.

### Findings

Based on the research, [an article](#) drawing on long-term ethnographic fieldwork examines how experiences of displacement and return reshape constructions of 'home' in relation to love and intimate relationships. The fieldwork included over 200 'love-life' history interviews, including with formerly displaced people and ex-combatants.

Crucially, the research highlights the spatial dynamics of affinal relationships, which is central to notions of 'home' and the creation and maintenance of certain gendered roles, intimacies, and divisions of labour that underpin Acholi life. As war drastically changed the region's moral geography, the well-trodden paths of beginning a sexual relationship, establishing a new home, and acquiring the blessing of ancestors on one's off-spring were nearly impossible to follow for several decades. Consequently, many thousands of relationships began, and pregnancies occurred, that do not conform to Acholi 'ideals'. The reverberations of this continue in the present.



*'A comparative study of magistrates' courts finds that people can be simultaneously deeply critical of their government, while also conferring state institutions with a degree of legitimacy.'*



Photo by Ryan O'Bryne.

## Justice in transition?

### *Justice and accountability in northern Uganda*

**Lead Researcher:**  
Anna Macdonald

This project focuses on justice, accountability, and social order in northern Uganda, in the aftermath of the twenty-year war between the Lord's Resistance Army and the Government of Uganda. Based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork, participant observation, interviews, and archival research, this project falls under two strands.

The first strand of research explores how different ideas and practices of justice, accountability, social order, and reconciliation are promoted by a range of different public authorities, from International

Criminal Court prosecutors and donors to domestic state actors and local cultural and religious leaders, and how this connects to the everyday negotiation of social repair in northern Uganda.

The second strand focuses on the 'life of disputes' that move in and out of a busy magistrates' court in northern Uganda. It explores how and why engagement with rule of law institutions is regularly sought, even though people are deeply critical of the state.

#### Preliminary findings

Courts of first instance, such as magistrates' courts, are the focus of both international and national access to justice policies but remain systematically understudied across sub-Saharan Africa.

A **comparative study of**

**magistrates' courts** in Uganda and South Africa finds that people can be simultaneously deeply critical of their government and its agents, while also conferring state institutions with a degree of legitimacy.

The study further finds that people engage with, cooperate with, and eschew lower state courts for moral and social reasons that are not necessarily rooted in conventional measures of procedural fairness. Rather, reasons can be utilitarian or based on personal, communal gain and advantage. During a period of leveraged national and international support for access to justice, these findings should stimulate debate and further research on the actually-existing dynamics of lower state courts and prospects for reform.

## Return and reintegration among child soldiers

**Lead researchers:** Tim Allen, Jacky Atingo and Melissa Parker

In northern Uganda, more than 50,000 people were recruited by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) between the late 1980s and 2004, mostly by force. Around half of those taken were children. A large number were never seen by their families again, but more than 20,000 returned through aid-financed reception centres. Endeavours were made to reunite them with their relatives, who were mainly

living in insecure displacement camps. Relatively few were subsequently visited, even after the fighting ended in 2006, and thousands of vulnerable children were largely left to their own devices.

Little is known about the longer-term challenges facing such returning child soldiers, and there have been surprisingly few studies anywhere in Africa. This project follows up on a random sample of former child recruits who passed through an officially registered reception centre, ten or more years ago, after spending a period with the LRA.

## Findings

Articles in the *Journal of Refugee Studies* and *Conflict and Health* demonstrate that the implementation of best-practice guidelines for relocating displaced children with their immediate relatives had negative consequences. The majority of children who returned are now settled as young adults on ancestral land, where they are commonly abused because of their LRA past. With few exceptions, it is only those who spent a long period with the LRA and who are not living on ancestral land who have managed to avoid such experiences.

*'The majority of children who returned are now settled as young adults on ancestral land, where they are commonly abused because of their LRA past.'*



Community outreach on the Uganda border. Photo by Anna Dubuis-DFID.

## Vernacular approaches to land holding in Acholi, northern Uganda

**Researcher:** Julian Hopwood

Photo by Lauren Parnell Marino.



*'In a context of no jobs or likelihood of industrial development, landlessness translates into slow mass starvation.'*

In the Acholi region of Northern Uganda, many of the pressures common to much of Africa are at play: population growth, land degradation, deforestation, climate change, and commodification. Most Acholi land, however, remains in collective hands, undocumented, and unregistered. Overwhelmingly, landlessness is driven by land filling up, the bush-forest frontier closing, long-term cash crops contributing to land individuation, and an increasing number of people losing access. In a context of no jobs or likelihood of industrial development, this translates into slow mass starvation.

Pressure for land reform in Acholi has been building since the end of the LRA conflict in 2006, driven by external

bodies: UN agencies, donor governments and international NGOs. National advocacy NGOs variously support and oppose particular externally-devised and funded reforms.

This project explores changing patterns in rural Acholi land-holding communities, using four main case studies: one community remaining land rich and others struggling to respond to their members' needs and demands for land. Using the lens of intimate governance, the research analyses the diversity of strategies adopted by groups in the face of land shortage.

### Findings

Research into the mechanisms of **coloniality in land reform** questions why Europeans have

opposed collective land holding from the earliest contacts with Acholi to contemporary development agendas. It also explores why colonial and current policies of reform have had minimal impact, unpacking misunderstandings around Acholi ideas of how land is owned and managed.

Early findings show that the notion of 'land conflict' is unanalysed such that most intra-family conflict is included, which grossly inflates the problem. Similarly, the idea of 'customary land' is shown to generate enormous confusion as both the default legal status of unregistered land and an invented quasi-legal status.



## Knowledge sharing and capacity-building



A gathering of CPAID researchers.

**Collaboration with African researchers is embedded into CPAID during all stages of the research life cycle. By foregrounding local perspectives in project design through to fieldwork and analysis, CPAID's work is driven by African understandings of public authority and how governance is experienced on the ground.**

Through a range of initiatives, over 20 researchers and practitioners based in Uganda, South Sudan, the DRC, Somalia, and Sierra Leone are supported to advance their scholarship and produce outputs in globally esteemed publications. Writing

workshops, a collaborative approach to data collection and evaluation, and engagement with local organisations have widened professional networks and developed an international ecosystem of knowledge production.

### Courses for early career African researchers

Through the Safety of Strangers research project, 100,000 GBP of funding to CPAID has allowed the Centre to invest in piloting new, innovative ways for building the capacity of early career African researchers.

In 2020-21, the Centre hosted an online course on humanitarian protection and research skills, with forty people attending from Sudan, South Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, DRC, and Sierra Leone. Lectures were given by researchers and staff from the Centre, as well as scholars from the University of Juba (South Sudan), Makerere University (Uganda), and the University of Gulu (Uganda). Participants attended lectures, received readings, and completed four assignments. Many of the participants from the course have now won small research grants from the University of Gulu to put their learning into practice.



## CPAID workshops

Researchers at CPAID have run workshops on the African continent to strengthen the research and communication skills of doctoral students, early career researchers, lecturers, and practitioners.

In 2018 and 2019, Leben Moro (University of Juba, South Sudan), Grace Akello (University of Gulu, Uganda), and LSE's Naomi Pendle hosted two British Academy-funded writing workshop processes in Kenya and Uganda. In total, over twenty early career researchers attended from Kenya, Uganda, and South Sudan. The second workshop prompted a range of papers on different questions surrounding public authority. Additional workshops in Uganda, run by researchers Ryan O'Byrne and Naomi Pendle in August 2019, supported new writing projects for 8-10 Uganda-based colleagues in Gulu and Moroto.

In eastern DRC, Patrycja Stys and Tom Kirk delivered a series of workshops developing skills in research methods and social science practice. In 2019, sessions in Bukavu and Goma addressed population enumeration, cognitive interviewing, and **social network research**, including training in social services mapping and innovative methodologies such as financial diaries. A further short course was provided with the global NGO Mercy Corps for

practitioners and graduate students in Goma.

In partnership with the University of Sierra Leone and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, CPAID's Tim Allen, Melissa Parker, Georgina Pearson, Jonah Lipton, and Liz Storer facilitated a week-long writing **workshop at Njala University**. Focussed on developing articles for publication, the workshop created a space for early-career scholars from across Sierra Leone to produce work rooted in personal experience or ongoing projects.

CPAID's Africa-based researchers have also participated in the annual **LSE Africa Summit**, where they have contributed to public discussions on social issues affecting the continent and, in London, joined workshops applying a public authority lens to contemporary academic debates.

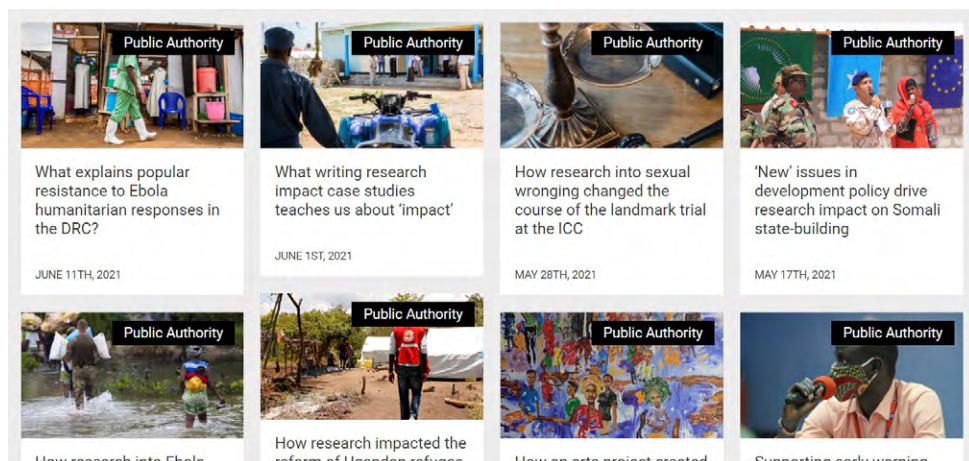
### Njala Writes: read articles from the workshop



Lawyer and artist Pamela Ryenell commenting on the citizen's duties to displaced persons at the Grammar of Images symposium



Credit - Pat Stys



## Collaborative blog series

### Public authority series

Many written outputs resulting from workshops and collaborative projects by CPAID's Africa-based researchers have been published as part of the [Public Authority series](#) on the [Africa at LSE blog](#). Over 30 contributions from researcher partners based in Uganda, South Sudan, the DRC, Kenya, Burundi, and Sierra Leone have covered issues ranging from epidemic management and infrastructure investment to the reintegration of ex-combatants and land rights – findings which enhance broader discussions on the dynamics of public authority.

### Bukavu series

CPAID has supported the 'Bukavu series' of blogs by Congolese researchers, based on a two-day workshop in

January 2018 in partnership with Ghent University, Université Catholique de Bukavu, Angaza Institute, and Groupe d'Etudes sur les Conflits-Sécurité Humanitaire. Over 30 long-term collaborators from Central Africa deepened conversations about the visibility of African researchers in global North-South research arrangements, which generated rich outputs feeding into growing debates on decolonising knowledge production.

The Bukavu series led to widespread interest from aid donors as well as researchers, and was subsequently published in [book form](#), with Congolese cartoonist Kash Tembo illustrating the key concepts for an [online exhibition](#).

### Idjwi series

CPAID, with the Open University, supported the

Idjwi Island (DRC) Writing Workshop in 2019. It included 19 participants, ranging from researchers, lecturers, and graduate students to humanitarians and human rights activists. Participants came from Uganda, Burundi, and the DRC, representing l'Université du Burundi, l'École Normale Supérieure, Impunity Watch, Uganda Christian University, l'Université du Lac Tanganyika, and LSE. The workshop was a unique opportunity for scholars to exchange ideas, interact, and have the space and support to work on published outputs in a serene environment, while receiving mentorship from more senior academics. Published in English and French, the 'Idjwi Blog Series' produced by the workshop has spurred [debates](#) on regionalisation and decolonisation in practice.

## Research collaborations

CPAID works in partnership with numerous organisations to draw on a diverse pool of scholarly and practical expertise, ranging from universities to both local and international NGOs, and even illustrators to help communicate research findings to public audiences. Co-authorship with African researchers is particularly encouraged, and almost one third of CPAID's **peer-reviewed publications** are produced from these formal collaborations.

### RESCONGO network

In the DRC, CPAID supported the creation of a Congolese research network, RESCONGO (Réseau congolais de recherche sur la paix et la sécurité), led by the Social Science Research Council to increase collaboration among scholars, build a platform for knowledge exchange, and improve the rigour of engagement with peace and security issues. After funding the network's two annual conferences in **September 2018** and **October 2019**, RESCONGO continues to be a valuable community for driving effective research programmes and informing policy in the country.

### The Bridge Network

To support research studying experiences of land regimes in South Sudan, CPAID has partnered with the Bridge Network of researchers in urban, quasi-urban, and rural areas. Exploring how public authorities from the state to local chiefs and religious leaders try to reassert their authority over land occupation, the collaboration is producing an insightful body of work to push forward conceptions of the drivers of violence through a public authority framework.

### RAKO Research and Communication Centre

In Somaliland, CPAID supported the capacity of the RAKO

research network, co-funded by the Peace Research Institute Oslo, to increase the capacity of junior scholars and researchers and build a platform for knowledge exchange. Through RAKO, CPAID has been able to appoint fellows and engage its researchers as advisors and collaborators on further projects, including the Danish Institute for International Studies' Diaspora Humanitarianism project in Somalia (**D-HUM**).

### Mercy Corps

CPAID's collaboration with Mercy Corps has supported research into how access to basic social services varies across different governance arrangements in the eastern DRC. Aiming to uncover which service providers are most effective in conflict-affected contexts, the collaboration draws on a network of Congolese researchers to elucidate which providers are most durable following major changes in governance, building on Mercy Corps' aims to transform local livelihoods.



Researchers discussing a project in the DRC.  
Photo by Pat Stys.



Researchers at a CPAID writing workshop in Njala, Sierra Leone.



A CPAID writing workshop in Njala, Sierra Leone.



A writing workshop on public authority and peace with the British Academy and the University of Juba.



Research in Somalia.  
Photo by Claire Elder





## Impact

CPAID research has direct implications for governments, intergovernmental organisations, NGOs, and, more recently, courts of law. Based on empirical evidence, its researchers strive to make real-world impact through clear recommendations, expert reports, and policy-oriented workshops.



An exhibition for the Politics of Return project in Gulu, Uganda.



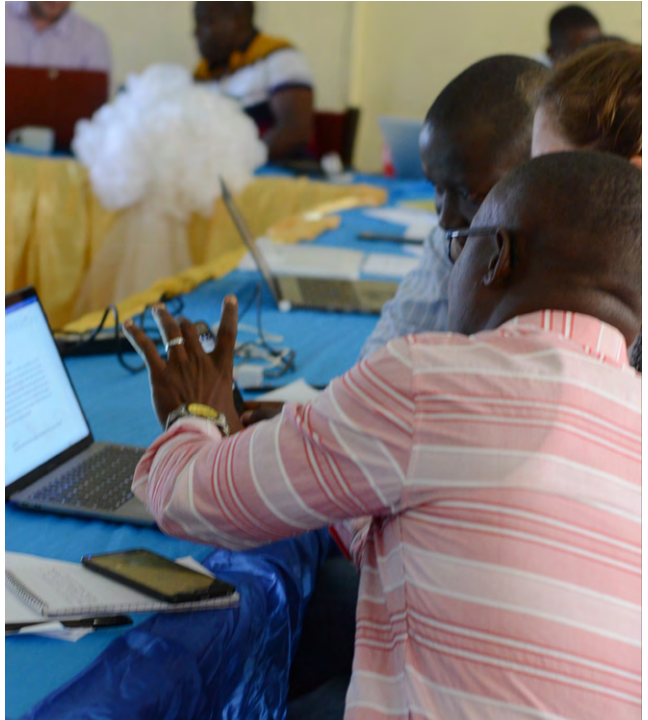
## Advising the OECD

Core members of CPAID have formed a reference group and met with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to shape the organisation's understanding of effective peacebuilding.

### Rethinking approaches to peacebuilding

As part of a **two-day workshop** in March 2020, CPAID researchers questioned the ways aid donors often enter conflict and fragile state contexts, uncritically assuming that certain actors – governments, civil society organisations and the private sector – should remain at the heart of their work. The CPAID group cautioned that this blanket approach to interventions may have adverse effects, such as contributing to ineffective 'peace economies' and thereby creating forms of economic dependence, hierarchies of peace actors, and hegemonic narratives.

During the workshop, researcher Claire Elder presented the need to challenge the often-bifurcated understanding of both the diaspora and the private sector as agents for peace or conflict. Based on long-term fieldwork, she drew attention to how foreign aid subcontractors in Somalia have constituted an established



class of economic and political brokers with a destabilising influence on state-building. Researchers Naomi Pendle and Anna Macdonald highlighted the importance of

rethinking transitional justice programming, reconciliation, and the importance of understanding how local peace processes impact national peace agreements.



Landmark trial at ICC

## Changing the course of a landmark trial at the ICC

CPAID research conducted in northern Uganda has had a significant **impact on a landmark trial** at the International Criminal Court (ICC), based on anthropological work on cultural understandings of sexual wrongdoing and its relation to international humanitarian law.

### Acholi understandings of sex and consent

Ahead of the trial of former Lord's Resistance Army commander Dominic Ongwen in 2015, CPAID's Tim Allen, Holly Porter and Anna Macdonald were invited to talk about rape at the ICC. Drawing on their research into how **public authority relates to sexual violence** and accountability, they explained how key issues such as consent are understood by the Acholi of northern Uganda.

Porter provided evidence of a complicated and nuanced explanation of rape and its aftermath, arguing that Western understandings of what is appropriate are dependent on consent, a concept that does not similarly exist in the Acholi context. Instead, through analysis of the Acholi-specific context, Porter was able to show that the LRA sex was nonetheless transgressive.

## Evidence for the prosecution of Dominic Ongwen

Porter's insights had significant impact by helping the prosecution expand the charges against Ongwen to include sexual and gender-based crimes: forced marriage, rape, sexual slavery, and enslavement. As well as formal briefings and research evidence to the prosecutorial team, Porter prepared a confidential expert report based on her research with former LRA women. The report described some of the dynamics amongst women who spent time in forced marriages in the LRA.

In addition, Allen was invited to act as Witness 1 (the 'expert witness') in the trial. His testimony provided further information about the organisational relationships within the LRA, its training and use of child soldiers, and also the spiritual beliefs that informed the actions of LRA members.

In February 2021, the ICC found Dominic Ongwen guilty on 61 counts. The ICC judges stated explicitly that Allen's testimony was accepted to be credible by both Defence and Prosecution. The first 14 paragraphs of the published judgement are drawn directly from his testimony, which is cited in relation to several subsequent points in their judgement.

## Setting a precedent for the international trial of sexual crimes

The research established an important precedent in the international trial of sexual crimes. Drawing on Porter's long-term observations of former LRA women, the expert report argued that it would reduce the risks both to the potential witnesses, and to the veracity of their testimony, if they were able to participate in the trial as quickly and with as little exposure as possible.

The report was a key submission in a successful proposal to allow victims of sexual violence to provide witness testimony and be cross-examined from Uganda, before the commencement

of the trial. This aspect of the Ongwen case sets a ground-breaking precedent in the ability to prosecute international crimes of a sexual nature. Should the precedent be applied more broadly, this will ease the prosecution of crimes of sexual violence in both domestic and international jurisdictions.

The *International Criminal Law Review* has hailed the Ongwen case as 'a milestone precedent for future cases, not just in terms of circumventing situations of witness interference but, more importantly, in safeguarding vulnerable victims and witnesses, and preserving their evidence for any eventual trial'



EUTM Somalia – Opening ceremony. EUTM Somalia. Credit European External Action. Licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.



## Advising on development and diaspora policy in Somalia

### Business-state relations and aid contracting

CPAID's research into business networks and business-state relations in Somalia has revealed perverse incentives created by the aid sector within the local political economy, which are linked to political violence and terrorism. Research on public procurement and logistics powerbrokers finds that the aid sector has for decades funded key monopolies and cartels. Rather than becoming essential for peace, infrastructure development consequently becomes a core contributor to violent conflict.

Through presentations and workshops, Claire Elder has pushed the World Bank, OECD, UN, and the UK government FCDO to rethink aspects of private-sector development and privatisation agendas. She has advised on how to understand

the private sector's interests in conflict contexts, and how contracting and procurement undermines a legitimate central authority. Based on the work, the [Aid Coordination Unit](#), responsible for overseeing the country's aid architecture, has informed decisions to rethink support for infrastructure development that might perpetuate insecurity.

### Diaspora policy in Somalia

As seen in many post-war contexts, diaspora-centred development dominates post-war development and peacebuilding. The impact of this shift in development, however, remains largely untracked and highly contested. Through long-term research on diaspora return to politics in Somalia, Claire Elder's work develops a new theoretical framework to understand impacts on governance and society.

*'World Bank staff told me that my paper was 'eye-opening' about how the international community had systematically reinforced a system of political violence and corruption.'*

Dr Claire Elder, Centre for Public Authority and International Development, LSE

Based on her research, Dr Elder has advised on different aspects of diaspora policy, including the formation of national legislation and specific programmes targeting technical assistance. Her research has prompted an internal investigation by the Aid Coordination Unit and prompted donors, including the World Bank, to abandon the diaspora component of its Capacity Injection Programme in 2019. Since 2020, she has also become an expert adviser for an International Organization for Migration working group to draft a new diaspora policy for the Somali government.



## Supporting early warning systems for famine in South Sudan

Famines in South Sudan have been common in recent years, and the aid community have often been slow to anticipate and respond when it happens.

CPAID research has uncovered that local chief-run courts – named *luok cok* or ‘Hunger Courts’ – are used during famines in South Sudan to redistribute food during these periods. Part of government structures, these local chiefs’ courts suspend all but the most serious cases to rule on how to redistribute food within clans.

Based on research into local justice systems, Naomi Pendle found that the Hunger Courts responded to a period of severe food shortages in May 2018, even though humanitarian agencies failed to notice the famine-level hunger until July. Because they were closer to the ground, the chiefs could see the emergency coming earlier.



### Supporting the World Food Programme

The World Food Programme conducts large surveys in South Sudan twice a year to assess hunger, which is chronic in the country but sometimes reaches famine proportions. After informing the Word Food Programme and the UN-affiliated REACH initiative about these findings, these

organisations agreed to include questions on Hunger Courts in their surveys, asking Dr Pendle to help draft the text. While incorporated into four surveys so far, the project continues to feed into UN discussions about how Hunger Courts can be used as early warning systems.



UNDP Launches Pilot Projects for Recovery and Reconciliation in South Sudan. Photo by UN-JC McIlwaine.

## Ideas for the future

Since early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic came to dominate government policies, global conversations and scholarly attention. Around the world, the pandemic brought unfamiliar levels of government spending and intervention, as well as a sizeable increase in public health awareness. It also prompted new uncertainties about the near and distant future, new questions about how to respond to the losses of the pandemic, and new advocacy that in the present moment should be seen as pivotal in relation to future planning for pandemics, but also in relation to global and racial inequities, and climate change.



Professor Tim Allen, Director of the Firoz Lalji Institute for Africa.

COVID-19 has directly affected CPAID's ongoing fieldwork in Africa but has, at the same time, foregrounded the significance of a public authority lens. On the one hand, it contributes to understanding such matters as vaccine hesitancy, or incidence of public mutuality in response to public health

concerns. On the other hand, it has contributed to analysis of pandemic-related moral panics, and reinforcement of autocratic governance linked to enforced social compliance.

To some degree, building on its longer-term work on public authority and epidemics, notably with respect to Ebola,

CPAID has become much involved in researching these issues, and not only in its African research sites. This work is reflected in the new Horizon 2020 [Periscope project](#) on COVID-19 in Europe, in which a public authority lens is applied, as well as a host of projects underway in the Centre's established field-sites.

A CPAID presentation in Gulu, Uganda.



### Applying a public authority lens beyond the Global South

The pandemic has pushed CPAID researchers to reflect on the role of public authority in how scholarship (re)understands the present and reimagines the future. In late 2020, CPAID's core and affiliated researchers were interviewed to discern what a future CPAID 2.0 may look like. In general, it was felt that CPAID should increase efforts to demonstrate more broadly how a public authority lens helpfully unpicks critical dynamics omitted from state-centric approaches. Notably, there was a desire to apply the lens beyond Africa and the Global South, and comparatively address social dynamics in the Global North.

Researchers noted that the rise of populist leaders, participation in social and protest movements,

challenges to 'mainstream media' and 'experts', and the retreat of cosmopolitanism, points to a gap in academic understandings of localised, sometimes digitally mediated and often transnationally networked public authorities. Furthermore, it suggests that – as CPAID researchers have documented in Africa – state authorities are often adept at using crises to advance their followers' and their own ends while the power of other public authorities is expanding and changing amidst globalisation.

CPAID insights will continue to be gathered through the strength of bottom-up theory and concept-building based on ethnographically-grounded and conceptually innovative research. Inevitably, the approach will persistently challenge existing analyses of state systems but will also continue to highlight opportunities for insightful

ways of seeing, and more effective social policies. The Centre's work reverses the gaze, rather than scripting African countries as the aberration of a supposed universal norm of statehood, and the approach should be applied elsewhere.

By building a research programme that is based on knowledge exchange, decolonising knowledge production and research networks, and reciprocal capacity-building, CPAID is developing new interpretations for understanding globally the crises of liberal democracy, neo-authoritarianism and democratic 'backsliding', and violent conflicts. The next phase of CPAID will push forward comparative projects around select themes established during the first phase, bringing together the study of African and non-African contexts.

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# Contact the Centre for Public Authority and International Development

The Centre for Public Authority and International Development explores how governance works in marginalised and conflict-affected regions. It investigates the complexity of public authority and the risks and opportunities this creates for international development and inclusive growth.

Contact us for more information:

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