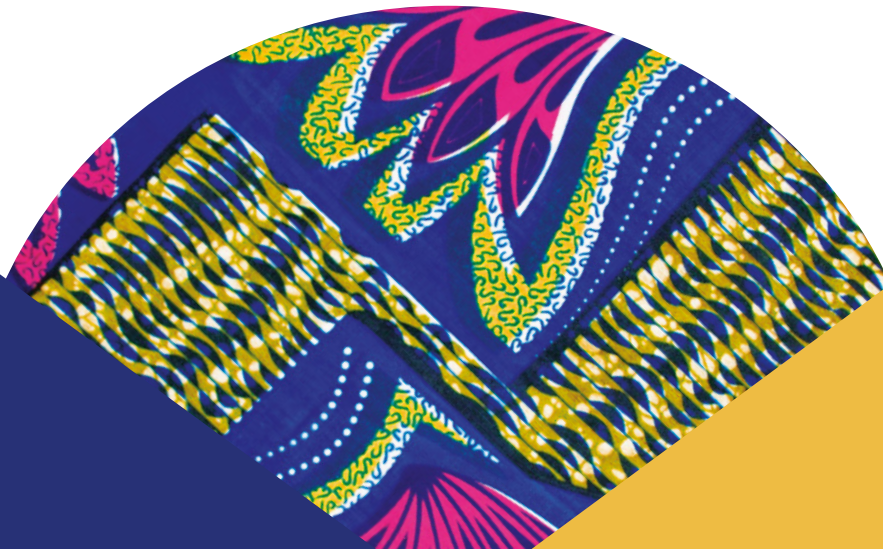


MAKING JUSTICE WORK FOR WOMEN

Uganda Country Report

LUCY FISKE &
RITA SHACKEL



Making Transitional Justice Work for Women:
Rights, Resilience, and Responses to Violence
Against Women in Democratic Republic of the
Congo, Northern Uganda, and Kenya



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

IN CONJUNCTION WITH



MAKING JUSTICE WORK FOR WOMEN

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Lucy Fiske and Rita Shackel

Making Transitional Justice Work for Women: Rights, Resilience, and Responses to Violence Against Women in Democratic Republic of the Congo, Northern Uganda, and Kenya

August 2016

Funded by:
Australian Aid, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

In collaboration with:
Action Aid Australia
Action Aid DRC
Action Aid Uganda
Action Aid Kenya

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This publication was made possible through the Australian Development Research Awards Scheme, a programme that supports primary research to improve the quality and effectiveness of Australian aid in developing countries.

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All maps adapted from Free Vector Maps.

Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the generous support of many people and organisations who gave freely of their time and expertise. We would like to thank the team at Action Aid Uganda, who have been integral partners from inception to conclusion – in particular, Arthur Larok (Country Director), Nickson Ogwal (Director, Partnership Funding and Sponsorship), and Hellen Malinga (Women’s Rights Coordinator), for their input in designing the research, facilitating the fieldwork, and ensuring all logistics throughout the last two-and-a-half years. We would also like to thank Loy Adepit, Hope Masika, Josephine Laker, Kevin Aciro, Mercy Achiro, David Abwang, and David Okwii for excellent research collaboration in the field, introduction to their networks, and generous hosting of us several times during the project. In Australia, we would like to thank Carol Angir (Senior Program Co-ordinator – Addressing Violence Against Women), Casey McCowan (Partnership Coordinator), and Michelle Higelin (Deputy Executive Director). The team at Action Aid initiated the research project, and have collaborated with us closely throughout the project; their passion for women’s rights in conflict-affected societies, knowledge of the country environments, and determination to “make it happen,” are unsurpassed. Thank you also to Lara Warren, AVID Volunteer, whose timely stewardship of fieldwork and transcripts was very much appreciated.

Many people have contributed to this project in a range of ways – from transcribing interviews, organising databases, conducting literature reviews, setting up NVivo, and the multitude of tasks necessary to ensure successful completion. The many research assistants, interns, and volunteers who assisted on this project are listed in Appendix A.

We are grateful to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (Kampala office), Uganda’s Department of Public Prosecutions, FIDA Uganda, the Refugee Law Project, Uganda High Court International Crimes Division, the Justice and Reconciliation Project, the Women’s Advocacy Network, Worudet, and Uganda Police Pader District for sharing their thoughts and insights with us.

We acknowledge in particular, Ms Joan Kagezi, Head Prosecutor of the International Crimes Division, who was killed on March 30, 2015, and who worked tirelessly to uphold justice in Uganda.

This research would not have been possible without the generous financial support of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (through the Australian Development Research Awards), and for the Department’s ongoing interest in the project.

Finally, the authors wish to thank the women of northern Uganda, who shared their opinions, experiences, and feelings with us. We are grateful for your openness and trust in us, and hope that this report makes a contribution to improving access to justice for all women in northern Uganda.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACCS	Advisory Consortium on Conflict Sensitivity
ADST	Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
AI	Amnesty International
ARLPI	Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative
CAR	Central African Republic
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DPP	Director of Public Prosecutions
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EHAP	Emergency Humanitarian Action Plan
EVI	Extremely Vulnerable Individual(s)
FIDA-U	Federation of Women Lawyers – Uganda
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GoU	Government of Uganda
HC1	Health Centre One
HCII	Health Centre Two
HRW	Human Rights Watch
HSM	Holy Spirit Movement
IA	International Alert
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICD	International Crimes Division
ICG	International Crisis Group
ICTJ	International Centre for Transitional Justice
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IDP	Internally Displaced Person(s)
JLOS	Justice, Law and Order Sector
JPCGA	Justice and Peace Commission of Gulu Archdiocese
JRP	Justice and Reconciliation Project
LC	Local Council
LCI	Local Council I
LCII	Local Council II
LCC	Local Council Courts
LCV	Local Council V
LDU	Local Defence Unit
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
MoH	Uganda Ministry of Health
MoES	Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NDP	National Development Plan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRA	National Resistance Army
NUSAF	Northern Uganda Social Action Fund
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
PRDP	Peace, Recovery and Development Plan
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
RDC	Residence District Commissioner
SGBV	Sexual Gender-Based Violence
SPLM	Sudan People's Liberation Movement

TJWG	Transitional Justice Working Group
UBoS	Uganda Bureau of Statistics
UHRC	Ugandan Human Rights Commission
UNLA	Ugandan National Liberation Army
UPDF	Uganda People's Defence Force
UPE	Universal Primary Education
WAN	Women's Advocacy Network
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organisation

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Background to the project

In a series of three country reports, we present the findings of the project, *Making Transitional Justice Work for Women: Rights, Resilience and Responses to Violence Against Women in Democratic Republic of Congo, Northern Uganda and Kenya* (Grant ID: G160214). This report details findings from northern Uganda; the other two country reports present findings from Democratic Republic of Congo and Kenya. A summary report has also been produced for each country.¹

The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) funded this project under the Australian Development Research Awards Scheme (ADRAS) 2012.² The scheme, which is no longer available, funded primary research into Australia's priority development themes, with the purpose of informing policy development. This research project addressed the priority themes of "Gender" and "Africa." It was a multi-partner collaboration between the University of Sydney (Sydney Law School), University of Technology Sydney (Arts and Social Sciences), and ActionAid Australia, DRC, Uganda, and Kenya. The project ran from April 2013 to October 2015.

The research was designed to investigate transitional justice processes for addressing women's rights and justice priorities in three countries in sub-Saharan Africa: Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Uganda, and Kenya. This regional focus reflects the priority accorded by the international community to transitional justice, as a means to address past human rights violations experienced during civil war and other mass violence, and to promote lasting peace and stability. The countries for study were selected because each has transitional justice processes in place; gender-based violence is significantly prevalent in each conflict; and the researchers had existing partners on the ground who could facilitate a logistically feasible, meaningful, and culturally and gender-sensitive research process.

1.2 Project methodology

1.2.1 Introduction

This project investigates the efficacy of transitional justice for women in conflict and post-conflict contexts in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, northern Uganda, and Kenya. The research sought to identify women's priorities for justice, their experiences when seeking

¹ Rita Shackel and Lucy Fiske, "Making Justice Work for Women: Kenya Country Report" (August 2016) <http://opac.library.usyd.edu.au:80/record=b5334992~S4>; Rita Shackel and Lucy Fiske, "Making Justice Work for Women: Democratic Republic of Congo Country Report" (August 2016) <http://opac.library.usyd.edu.au:80/record=b5332962~S4>; Lucy Fiske and Rita Shackel, "Making Justice Work for Women: Uganda Summary Report" (August 2016) <http://opac.library.usyd.edu.au:80/record=b5365444~S4>; Rita Shackel and Lucy Fiske, "Making Justice Work for Women: Democratic Republic of Congo Summary Report" (August 2016) <http://opac.library.usyd.edu.au:80/record=b5365440~S4>; Rita Shackel and Lucy Fiske, "Making Justice Work for Women: Kenya Summary Report" (August 2016) <http://opac.library.usyd.edu.au:80/record=b5365443~S4>

² This grant scheme was originally administered by the office of Australian Aid for International Development (AusAID).

justice, and both enabling factors and obstacles in justice processes. Justice was defined in a fluid, broad, and holistic way to include legal, health, economic, social, and psychological elements (Olsen et al. 2010, 983; Fischer 2011, 412; Szablewska and Bradley 2015, 261). The project has developed a rigorous, reliable, and substantive evidence base of the experiences, views, and opinions of women affected by violence in the research sites. The project entailed researchers travelling to multiple locations within each country, including major regional towns and villages in remote and difficult to access areas; this was done to enable women who are rarely, if ever, able to participate in research, consultations, and decision-making processes to contribute to this project. The extensive fieldwork, conducted over a two-year period and engaging 274 women affected by violence, provides unique insights into women's access to justice, and the efficacy of different justice strategies and mechanisms in conflict and post-conflict sites. These insights are extended further by interviews with 68 key informants, including local community leaders, prosecutors, judges, health and welfare workers, policy workers, and development workers, as well as those working in transitional justice, human rights, and women's rights internationally.

1.2.2 The research questions

The research addressed the following key research questions:

1. What do women in northern Uganda, Kenya, and eastern DRC identify as their priorities in relation to justice?
2. What efforts have been made to provide justice and rights protection for women who have experienced violence in northern Uganda, Kenya, and eastern DRC?
3. How have women responded to these justice interventions, and what impact have these had on addressing women's rights and justice priorities?
4. How can transitional justice interventions be adapted to better address women's rights and justice priorities, build resilience, and prevent violence against women?

The research partners, in consultation with in-country researchers, formulated the research questions for this project.

1.2.3 Methodology

Epistemology and paradigm

The research is qualitative, feminist, and phenomenological. It was designed to capture and interpret women's experiences and opinions of justice in conflict and post-conflict settings. The methodology recognises that the voices of women are often muted by social, economic, and political factors, which are further enlivened during war and then systemically embedded into justice processes. This project proactively sought to understand transitional or post-conflict justice from the perspective of women affected by conflict and post-conflict justice initiatives. A phenomenological method was selected as it is particularly suited to research of this kind, where the aim is to make women's perspectives a central concern in policy development and practice. Phenomenological enquiry begins with individuals' unique accounts of a shared experience, and uses multiple individuals' accounts to discern key structural characteristics of the meanings the participants ascribed to the experience, in order to situate personal experience within a broader political context (Dukes 1984, 198; Gatta 2010, 12). Individuals' experiences and perspectives are then triangulated with key informant perspectives, and with existing literature and research. It is in this way that phenomenological

enquiry mediates the transition of private experience to public political concern. Phenomenological research requires in-depth interviews with multiple participants, and secondary research and analysis to enable the generation of knowledge with relevance beyond the anecdotal.

The research team

The research was conducted by a multidisciplinary and multi-country research team with expertise in a range of fields necessary to conduct a rigorous, high-quality research project with vulnerable and difficult-to-access populations.

Researchers

Name	Organisation/Position	Role in Project
Associate Professor Rita Shackel	Sydney Law School, The University of Sydney	Principal Investigator, Project Lead
Dr Lucy Fiske	Social and Political Sciences, University of Technology Sydney	Principal Investigator (2)
Carol Angir	ActionAid Australia, Senior Policy and Program Coordinator	Principal Investigator (2)
Casey McCowan	ActionAid Australia (Partnership Co-ordinator) (April 2013 – Sept 2015)	Program Manager
Michelle Higelin	ActionAid Australia (Deputy Executive Director)	Advisor
Miriam Chelo Huguette	Consultant ActionAid DRC,	Transcription and Interpreting
Nicole Iafola	ActionAid DRC, Youth Advisor	Researcher
Serge Kalubi	Consultant ActionAid DRC,	Transcription
Clement Kone	ActionAid DRC (Country Director)	Advisor
Adalbert Lumpali	Consultant ActionAid DRC	Transcription
Anne Songa Murekatete	Consultant ActionAid DRC	Interpreting
Makena Mwobobia	ActionAid Kenya, Acting Country A/Director Head of Programs (August 2013 – March 2014)	Researcher, In-country Coordinator, Kenya
Justine Ndabugi	ActionAid DRC, Administrative and Logistical Assistant	Administration and Logistics Support
Raisa Ndogole	ActionAid DRC Policy and Campaigns Coordinator	Researcher
Mireille Ntambuka Nzigire	ActionAid DRC (Consultant September 2013 – April 2014)	Researcher
David Abwang	ActionAid Uganda Local	Field Research Assistant

	Rights Program Coordinator Amuru	
Kevin Aciro	ActionAid Uganda Local Rights Program Coordinator Pader	Field Research Assistant
Martha Wanda Mercy Achiro	ActionAid Uganda Research Assistant (April 2013 – December 2014)	Data Collector, Research Assistant, Interpreter and Transcriber
Hellen Malinga Apila	ActionAid Uganda, National Women’s Rights Coordinator (April 2013 – October 2015)	Principal Researcher, In- Country Uganda
Okello Emmanuel	ActionAid Uganda/Lango Language Board.	Translator
Josephine Laker	ActionAid Uganda Women Protection Centre Project Officer Amuru/Nwoya	Field Research Assistant
Arthur Larok	ActionAid Uganda Country Director (April 2013 – October 2015)	Co-Researcher and Advisor
Hope Masika	ActionAid Uganda Women Protection Centre Project Officer Gulu	Field Research Assistant
Nickson Ogwal	ActionAid Uganda (Director, Partnership Funding and Sponsorship)	Advisor
Lucy Atieno	ActionAid Kenya (Consultant)	Transcriber
Mabel Isoilo	ActionAid Kenya (Consultant)	Lead Researcher
Alice Kimani	ActionAid Kenya (Project Officer August 2013 – August 2014)	Researcher
EllyJoy Kithure	ActionAid Kenya Women Rights Coordinator (June 2013 – September 2014)	Researcher
Lawrence Mwachidudu	ActionAid Kenya (Local Rights Program Manager)	Translator
Naomi Wambui	ActionAid Kenya-PO Women Rights (July 2013 – August 2015)	Researcher, Administration and Logistics

A number of other people also participated in the project in various roles. Appendix A lists all research assistants that contributed to, and were a part of, this research project.

Research management and process

Associate Professor Rita Shackel, Dr Lucy Fiske, and Ms Carol Angir designed and coordinated the research project. ActionAid’s Country Directors and Women’s Rights

Coordinators in Uganda, DRC, and Kenya provided context-specific input throughout the project, coordinated activities in each country, participated in data gathering, and assisted with aspects of data analysis. The two academic researchers made numerous fieldwork trips and provided mentoring, research methods, skills training, and support to in-country researchers, as well as conducting a large number of research interviews and focus groups in all three countries. Several strategies were established to ensure consistency, quality, and integrity of data across a large and diverse team; these included:

- Regular Skype meetings between researchers throughout the project
- Regular and ongoing email correspondence
- A week-long intensive induction and training program involving Australian and country researchers (Nairobi, September 2013)
- Collaborative pre-test fieldwork in each country, with one-on-one mentoring and debriefing between in-country and academic researchers (September– November 2013)
- A follow-up skills and inception workshop with Australian, DRC, and Kenyan researchers (Goma, November 2013)
- A public stakeholder forum including Australian, DRC, and Kenyan researchers (November 2013)
- A follow-up interview skills workshop with Australian and Ugandan researchers (Kampala, April 2014)
- Multiple fieldwork trips (3–4 each year) by academic researchers working with in-country researchers in each country (2013–2015), including detailed planning and exit meetings
- Development of a comprehensive “Fieldwork Handbook” tailored for each country (available at <http://www.justiceforwomen.net.au>)
- Staged collection and transcription of interviews, with written and verbal feedback on interviews, data quality, and emerging themes for further probing provided after each transfer of data
- Additional in-person team meetings in New York (March 2014), Netherlands (April 2015), and Sydney (September 2015) with researchers from ActionAid Australia, Kenya, Uganda and DRC

The multidisciplinary and multi-country collaboration enhanced the quality of the research, as it enabled the team to draw on expertise in several different fields, including social and legal theory; legal frameworks; qualitative research methods; development work; and country- and culture-specific knowledge. The collaboration with in-country ActionAid offices meant that otherwise difficult-to-reach populations and locations were included in the research. The project’s reach beyond larger regional towns, into remote villages, is a distinguishing feature of this research.

Definitions

In recognising justice as fluid, we defined it broadly and in a holistic way to include legal, health, economic, social, and psychological elements (Olsen et al. 2010, 983; Fischer 2011, 412; Szablewska and Bradley 2015, 261). This definition was expanded and refined through the input of women participants, who were invited to reflect on what was necessary for them to feel justice had been done. This open question led to a rich understanding of justice as understood or desired by women participants, and forms the backbone of the reports. Justice

was often expressed as a process spanning the past, present, and future, with the elements of, and demands for, justice varying in each temporal phase. Restoration, however, was consistently viewed as a key element; women wanted to be restored to a position which resembled, at least subjectively, their pre-conflict state. For example, truth-telling was important to establish recent history and acknowledge wrongs done; reparations, health, and detraumatization were required in the present; while education of children and enabling them to have a “better future” was almost universally cited as central to justice.

Data collection

Data was gathered from three distinct sources:

- Women affected by violence
- Key informants with experience in justice initiatives
- Documentary and other secondary sources

Primary data was gathered using semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with both women affected by violence and key informants. Documentary and secondary data were gathered through extensive literature reviews addressing the conflicts in each country, the histories of each country, justice interventions, and reform in each country; these were supplemented by thematic searches addressing transitional justice, justice, gender, human rights, development, poverty, violence, and related themes in law, anthropology, sociology, psychology, history, and women’s studies. Documentary and secondary material included academic articles and books, policy and research reports, relevant public databases, case law, legislation, reports of government and non-government inquiries and investigations, and media reports.

Women affected by violence

The project interviewed a total of 274 women affected by violence, with 113 women in DRC, 98 in Uganda, and 63 in Kenya. Women were selected for inclusion in the project if they met the following criteria:

- They were 18 years of age or older.
- They were living in a conflict affected area and a selected research site.
- They had been affected by conflict, either directly or indirectly.
- They had experience of some form of transitional justice process (including criminal prosecutions, truth commissions, amnesties, reparations, informal traditional approaches, or community-based initiatives).
- They were willing and able to speak about their experiences.

Fieldwork was conducted in Acholiland in northern Uganda in Pader, Gulu, and Amuru, and in several villages and parishes outside these central towns (a map of research sites is provided in Chapter 2). A total of 98 women in northern Uganda participated in the research – 50 through individual interviews, and 48 through focus group discussions. Ages ranged from 21 to 90 years. Thirty-five women’s primary experience of the conflict had been abduction by the LRA, and 51 women identified being in an Internally Displaced Person’s (IDP) camp as their primary conflict experience. While many women had experienced both internal displacement and abduction, one experience was usually spoken about as dominant or definitional by the woman. Of the women interviewed, only five identified both abduction

and encampment as equally significant experiences of the conflict. Women participants were married, cohabiting, never married, separated, divorced, and widowed.

All interviews were conducted in a language in which the participant self-assessed as proficient. The majority of interviews used a female interpreter, a small number were conducted in English. Interpreters were sourced locally through ActionAid networks. Interviews and focus groups lasted between 45 minutes and two hours, with most taking 90 minutes to two hours. Focus groups had between three and seven women participants. Fieldwork was conducted in stages to ensure a broadly representative sample of women was recruited (age, marital status, ethnicity, experience of war [i.e. internally displaced, abducted, or both], experience of justice [i.e. formal and informal]), to enable transcription of data and feedback to non-academic researchers from the academic researchers, and to enable identification of emerging themes and further probing of particular issues that emerged. Interviews in Uganda were conducted from September 2013 to June 2014, both by ActionAid Uganda staff members and by an academic researcher. All except three interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Extensive notes were taken during the three interviews, for which permission to record was refused. Notes were also taken during the recorded interviews.

Interviews and focus group discussions were semi-structured, following pre-identified themes and relevant unanticipated themes as raised by participants during the interview. Pre-identified themes were generated through consultation with ActionAid staff, a literature search conducted before fieldwork, and through a one-week pre-test fieldwork trip in September 2013. Initially identified themes included: legal, economic, social, political and health justice, psycho-social and emotional well-being, traditional and/or informal justice mechanisms, roles of women in justice processes, and the effects of justice. Women were advised during the consent process that violence was not the focus of the research, and that researchers would not be asking direct questions about their experiences of violence. Participants were, however, asked indirectly about the sort of violence experienced, in order to provide context to their subsequent discussion of justice. A number of women chose to share their accounts of violence.

The number and diversity of women interviewed provided an extensive survey of issues, such that saturation, although not a goal of the research, had been reached by the end of the fieldwork process. The semi-structured in-depth interviews allowed for rich information to be elicited and probed thoroughly. Focus group discussions helped present women with a range of views for them to reflect upon, and to compare and contrast with their own experiences, views, and opinions. The staged nature of the fieldwork enabled emerging themes to be further explored with later respondents, thereby allowing them to be tested for structural, rather than individual, significance. The resulting evidence base is rich; it is both extensive and of a high quality.

Key informants

Interviews with key informants were conducted from September 2013 to June 2015. A total of 68 key informants participated in the research across the three countries under study; this consisted of 28 in DRC, 26 in Kenya, and 14 in Uganda. The 14 key informants interviewed in Uganda included senior prosecutors, a magistrate, an inter-governmental policy officer, a police commander, lawyers, NGO workers, a parish level councillor, a former IDP camp leader, and a law and policy advocate working at the international level. Interviews were sought with health and policy workers in Uganda, but could not be conducted due to

timetabling or logistical issues. Consequently, the range of key informants interviewed in Uganda was not as broad as was hoped. Interviews with key informants were conducted by the academic researchers, together with the Uganda country researchers. Most interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Notes were also taken.

Interviews with key informants were semi-structured, and the focus of each interview varied depending on the participant's area of expertise and experience in justice processes. For example, the interview with the former IDP camp leader followed very different themes to that with the senior prosecutor, which was different again to the police commander and the NGO workers.

Data analysis

The majority of recorded interviews and focus groups were transcribed. The two academic researchers read and re-read these multiple times to identify themes using inductive analysis – that is, by allowing the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis to come from the data (Srivastava and Hopwood 2009, 77). This method of analysis was chosen, because the primary objective of the research was to understand women's experiences and opinions on justice post-conflict. The research did not seek to test any pre-existing theories or hypotheses. To pre-determine themes risked imposing external meanings on participants' accounts, thereby skewing the analysis and working against the feminist epistemology of the research by displacing women's views from the centre to the margins.

Themes were identified and pursued if they related to the research questions, and

- were repeated frequently (either in a single interview, or across more than one interview);
- were discussed by several participants;
- extended existing theoretical understandings or provided further insights into literature available on the theme; or
- provided a basis for developing new theoretical insights and a contribution to understanding women's experiences of justice processes (Bryman 2012, 580).

Emerging themes were incorporated into later interviews, with women affected by violence and key informants asked to elicit their perspectives on issues or opinions put forward by earlier participants. This process of continual review and analysis of data enabled further probing of issues, as the project progressed and assisted in refining participant-generated understandings of key issues.

Identified themes then formed the basis for further secondary research, and provided the structure for the reports on each country.

Transcripts were also analysed with NVivo software for word repetition and thematic repetition. This analysis confirmed the strength of recurring issues and themes raised by women as identified by the researchers. Despite the use of NVivo, the primary mode of analysis was manual.

This project also incorporated a novel and important step in analysis and validation of themes. The two academic researchers travelled to each country in June 2015, and, together with the ActionAid researchers, conducted "validation" workshops in Goma, Kampala, and

Nairobi. In Uganda, a full day validation workshop was conducted with 12 women who had already participated in the research (June 18, 2015). A half-day workshop was conducted with a small group of key informants, including local and international NGO workers (June 19, 2015).

Women participants for the validation workshop were selected on a number of criteria, including:

- Ensuring a spread of research site location, age, and experience of war
- Including all women who had asked for follow-up about the research
- Including women who were particularly articulate in their interviews
- Including women whose interview transcripts provided insight on particular themes
- Including women whose transcripts were largely emblematic of identified themes

In the workshop with women affected by violence, an overview of themes and issues identified was presented to the participants. Participants were then given the opportunity to discuss the findings in small groups, including using (non-identifiable) key, emblematic, or potentially controversial quotes from research participants (both key informants and women affected by violence). Small group and plenary discussions were audio recorded with the women's permission, and transcribed. The benefits of this process include the ethical benefit of feeding back progress on the research to participants, and, furthermore, of including women as co-analysts (an advantage for which all women participants expressed great appreciation); providing confirmation and/or clarification of particular issues put to the group; enabling further refining of themes, and enabling researchers to hear how women spoke with one another about justice without a researcher or NGO worker present. While the validation workshop with women participants confirmed the themes identified, it added two important elements in particular. The first related to the surrender to the ICC of Dominic Ongwen, and the beginning of the first ICC trial regarding the Uganda situation. At the time of fieldwork, no Ugandan indictees had been captured and discussion of international prosecutions was largely hypothetical. One of the small groups spontaneously began discussing the ICC prosecution of Ongwen, which allowed the research team to pose questions regarding this to the whole group. The second issue which arose generally during fieldwork, but was demonstrated during the workshop, was the capacity for formerly abducted and formerly displaced people to speak about the rift facing their communities. Women had expressed a desire for community dialogue and reconciliation to researchers during fieldwork; however, during the validation workshop, the transcripts of small group work revealed women from different groups discussing the issues of conflict in their communities with each other in considerable depth. This demonstration of self-directed reconciliation is important in itself for future reconciliation work and engagement with conflict-affected communities in northern Uganda.

The researchers presented an outline of initial themes at the workshop with key informants, distinguishing between perspectives of women affected by violence, different categories of key informants, and areas of convergence and divergence between the two. Participants were then invited to discuss issues raised in an unstructured format. This process enabled key informant participants to hear what issues and priorities women affected by violence had identified, hear what other key informants had raised, and respond to themes. This workshop provided further validation of the themes identified, and initial analysis of those themes. In Uganda, an important outcome of the key informant validation workshop was the observation that participants strongly echoed the views of women on the lasting effects of the conflict on

the communities, and the need for local-level work addressing reconciliation, trauma, alcoholism, and leadership. In particular, the key informants helped clarify the interaction of customary and formal systems of land tenure and justice, and identified some tensions in the conceptual framework of human rights, women's rights, and international justice when discussed in Acholi communities

The Uganda country researchers also participated in the key informant workshops, adding their perspectives and views to discussion and analysis.

Ethical approval and permissions

Formal ethics approval for this project was granted by the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (approval number 2013/380). Ethics approval was also granted by University of Technology Sydney (UTS HREC 2014000246), Uganda National Council for Science and Technology, National HIV/AIDS Research Committee (approval number ARC 144), and Kenyan National Council for Science and Technology (approval number NCST/RCD/14/013/1335). The DRC does not have a formal human research ethics committee; however, an extensive consultation process was undertaken, including hosting a public inception and stakeholder workshop – the project was introduced in this forum, and stakeholders were invited to ask researchers any questions or raise concerns. Attendees provided feedback on the current state of conflict and security in the area, the project's methodology, and the recruitment of participants and site selection. Following the workshop, key stakeholders were further engaged in a consultative process through which the research sites in eastern DRC were finally selected. Approval for the research was granted by the Provincial Minister of Justice in Goma, Christophe Ndibeshe Byemero. Local permissions were also obtained as necessary during conduct of fieldwork, from relevant formal and traditional authorities in each research site.

In addition to complying with all formal ethics requirements, the researchers embedded ethical research processes throughout the project, and engaged in critical reflective practices at all stages (including design, development, fieldwork, data handling, research team relations, analysis, and writing). The well-being of individuals participating in the research (both as informants and researchers) was held as paramount at all times.

It is important to canvas, albeit briefly, at least some of the ethical issues raised in this research, and steps taken to care for people and principles that underpinned this work.

Recruitment processes

This project sought the views of adult women and did not include children. Research with children requires specific design and methodology, responsive to children's levels of development, cognition, capacity to give informed consent, and particular vulnerabilities. It also requires particular knowledge and skills from the researchers. At the outset, we took the definition of adult as 18 years and over, and sought ethics approval accordingly. However, once in the field (particularly in DRC), it became clear that this age cut-off excluded some young women who were, in many respects, living adult lives, and who wanted to participate in the research. In every stage of fieldwork in the DRC, teenage girls approached the research team asking to be included. These girls were typically between 13 and 17 years of age, and were responsible for the care of younger children (whether younger siblings, their own children, or orphaned children). No girls under the age of 18 years were included in the

project; chronological age was carefully scrutinised during the consent process. However, turning away young women/girls raised significant ethical dilemmas for the researchers. The concept of “adult” and “child” is contextual and contingent on a range of social, emotional, political, and individual factors. The experiences, opinions, and views of young women/girls acting as heads of households, despite being under 18 years of age, are important and need to be considered in future research projects (Arnett and Galambos 2004, 92; Nugin 2010, 49–50). Due to ActionAid’s involvement in the project, underage girls who were not included in the research were able to be counselled and provided support through appropriate ActionAid services and programs, and, as appropriate, were referred to other services and agencies.

Recruitment occurred through multiple channels, including referral by health, legal, and social service providers, as well as self-referral. However, most participants were recruited indirectly through ActionAid’s networks. Furthermore, ActionAid in each country provided all logistical support during fieldwork. This involved using ActionAid vehicles for transport, and ActionAid-managed travel reimbursements for participants (see below). Although all researchers stressed that the research project was led by the University of Sydney, and was not an ActionAid project, it must be acknowledged that this distinction may not have been clear to some participants. Given the prominence of NGOs in essential service delivery in many of the research sites (particularly in eastern DRC, where there is still live conflict and humanitarian aid is much relied upon), it is possible that ActionAid’s lead role in recruitment may have impacted on expectations of prospective participants, and on populations targeted for recruitment.

These issues were addressed in a number of ways. Demographic information of participants and fieldwork included recruitment process as a standard field. This enabled academic researchers to provide feedback about diversity of recruitment sources, as the project progressed. The issue of participant expectations was addressed directly during the information sessions with women participants, and is explained in greater detail below. Nonetheless, while partnering with an NGO enabled the conduct of in-depth and extensive fieldwork with difficult-to-reach populations, the possible impacts of visible NGO participation in the project need to be considered; it is possible that some women saw participation in the research as an opportunity to also access other services and assistance.

Free and informed consent

Particular care was taken to ensure that consent was both informed and freely given. Information about the project was provided both individually and to groups of prospective participants. Project information was provided through written participant information sheets, which participants could take away, as well as orally in a language understood by participants. Information provided to participants covered the membership of the research team (taking care to distinguish between academic and NGO organisations, and the individuals involved); the aims and methodology of the research; confidentiality; storage and security of data; the nature of questions to be asked; participants’ rights to not participate, to withdraw at any stage, and to decline to answer some questions and not others; and the risks and benefits of participation. The project’s public documents were translated into the languages spoken by women participants; translated public documents were certified locally. Prospective participants were encouraged to ask questions, and any concerns raised were addressed by the research team. Participants provided consent in writing or orally, and were specifically asked if they consented to their interview being recorded. In the case of focus group discussions, it was made clear to participants that it was not possible to erase

recordings if they decided to withdraw after the focus group discussion had commenced, because of the group nature of the interview. No participants withdrew from the research after consenting.

A significant number of women affected by violence in northern Uganda (as in the other research countries) asked how the research would benefit them, and whether the researchers would bring the research back to them later in the project. Several women said that they had participated in research before, and had neither personally benefited nor been informed of the progress or outcomes of the research. The researchers explained that there would be no direct benefit to individuals who participated in the research, and possibly not to the population of women affected by violence in northern Uganda (or in the other countries under study). The researchers explained that the research would produce reports with particular attention to amplifying the views and experiences of women who participated in the project, and that the reports would be disseminated widely. The academic researchers would write the reports, drawing together views of all women interviewed, and would present the analysis at a range of academic and policy forums. The NGO partner would use the reports to inform their programming and advocacy. It was explained that neither the universities nor the NGOs had the power to promise changes in the women's lives, and that, while this research would make a significant contribution to the field, it could not assure direct benefit to participants or their communities.

The researchers assured prospective participants that every attempt would be made to return and present the research to them, and to provide access to the report. This aim has been partially achieved through holding the validation workshops in June 2015, during which much of the initial analysis was presented to the women present. Every participant who had asked for follow up on the research was invited to attend this workshop, although not all were able to attend. ActionAid Uganda, Kenya and DRC will deliver the report to women who participated in the study, when it is complete.

Reimbursement of travel costs was provided to all participants in the research. This typically ranged from UGX5,000 to UGX10,000 (AU\$1.25–AU\$2.50). Refreshments (water) were sometimes served. No rewards that might rise to the level of inducement were offered, being particularly mindful of the particular context of poverty and need amongst participants.

The interview

In recognition of the fine balance that people affected by violence may find talking about traumatic experiences difficult, and yet may also have a strong desire to testify to their experiences and participate in the research process, interviews with women affected by violence were designed to enable the women respondents to have as much control over the interview process as possible. All interviewers had experience working with women affected by violence. Additionally, the researcher introduction to the project emphasised the primary value of participant well-being, and that the respondents' well-being was more important than eliciting data. Researcher induction also included significant training on research interviews addressing sensitive topics, responding to trauma in an interview, referral options for participants, and role plays on sensitive interviewing. This was further included in the fieldwork manual, and embedded in all fieldwork briefings and debriefings.

An example of sensitive interviewing

Violence was not a key focus of the research; however, some information about the nature of violence experienced was necessary in order to provide context for participants' subsequent discussion of justice. Interviewers avoided asking directly about experiences of violence, instead asking open questions to which the participant could decide how to respond. A typical phrasing of this line of questioning was to ask, "How has the conflict affected your life?" Respondents were then able to respond with as much or as little detail as they felt comfortable with, and were able to avoid recounting traumatic episodes, focusing instead on the present day after-effects of the conflict. Alternatively, respondents were able to tell their stories of violation and injustice if they wanted to. Many of the women chose to talk about their experiences of violence to varying degrees of detail. The way in which women responded to this question provided important information to the interviewer both about possible themes to be further explored and about the probable boundaries for further probing. This was an important element in enabling maximum control of the interview to reside with the respondent while still meeting research focus requirements. Despite using open-ended questions to enable women to control the interview, and to choose whether or not to discuss their experiences of violence (including how, and to what extent), we initially perceived that women's responses may have reflected their pre-existing expectations about what information they should be providing in the interviews – expectations that were perhaps influenced by their previous interactions with NGOs, the media, or other researchers. However, by allowing the women to control the interview, most women, in time, moved beyond this expected script and into opinion, emotion, the meaning of violence on their lives, and shared deep insights on a number of issues important to their personhoods. This is reflected in the length of most of the interviews. This self-constructed space for deep reflection and sharing by the women made the interviews themselves affirming, enabling them to be more than a "victim" of violent experience, and acknowledging their own persons.

Ongoing consent

Even though consent was given prior to any interview beginning, this project took consent to be an ongoing and iterative process. The onus was placed on the researcher to check in with respondents periodically throughout the interview about her continued willingness to participate, particularly if a respondent became distressed during the interview. When respondents did feel upset, they were offered the opportunity to take a break, abandon the interview, or to move to a new area of questioning. Very often, enabling women to have control of the direction and depth of the interview assisted in reducing their level of distress, and, in some instances, helped participants feel better after the interview than they did before. By way of example, one woman said at the end of her interview, "*What I see is that your coming is really a sort of counselling for us ... [you] give us hope and make us look at life with a different perspective.*"³ Another woman, when offered the opportunity to pause or end the interview, explained that "*I have been looking to this opportunity with whom I can share this past experience. So from yesterday when I got this information that you are coming, I have been looking forward to meeting you ... because as much as it's painful and I speak and shed tears, cry ... at least it helps me to heal. It takes away that pain that I have been holding this whole time.*"⁴

³ Interviewed in Agago, June 18, 2014.

⁴ Interviewed in Amuru, June 26, 2014.

Confidentiality and security

Women participants were reassured in the consent process that interviews were confidential, that what they shared with the researchers would only be used for the purposes of this research, and that they would not be individually identifiable in any reports. It was explained to participants that this would be achieved by removing any identifiable information from the interview transcripts, so that they could not be identified, and that any quotes used in reports would not be attributed to a woman by name. In the case of focus group discussions, the importance of confidentiality amongst participants was stressed as part of the consent process.

Key informants were given the option of consenting to be identifiable in whole, in part, or not at all, in the reports.

All interviews were conducted in a safe and secure location. Interviews were rescheduled or relocated where security concerns warranted such a response.

Data management and security

Interviews were recorded on hand-held audio recorders. During fieldwork, all recordings of interviews were coded and copied onto the researchers' password protected laptops, backed up onto a password protected external hard drive, and then deleted from recorders. Project materials were copied and stored on the academic researchers' password protected desktop computers, located in their Sydney offices. Project materials were at times temporarily stored on Dropbox and/or exchanged via USB sticks between researchers, and then permanently deleted.

Secondary trauma

The potential for secondary or vicarious trauma for researchers (Alexander et al. 1989, 58), as well as others working with traumatic material and trauma survivors, is well recognised (McCann and Pearlman 1990, 134–35; Mouldern and Firestone 2007, 67–8). Several strategies were used to support team members, including researchers, interpreters, transcribers, and research assistants, throughout the project.

Self-care principles and practices were discussed during training and induction workshops. A section on self-care was included in the project handbooks. Most interviews were conducted by at least two people. Debriefs were integrated into fieldwork, most commonly at the end of each day, and/or when work was completed at a research site. At the end of each period of fieldwork, which typically extended for two to three weeks, an exit meeting was held; this created a space for team members to talk about their experiences of the fieldwork, their feelings, and raise any issues of concern. It also created an opportunity to check in with one another. The academic researchers also regularly checked in with research assistants through face-to-face meetings, via Skype or email, to allow issues to be raised and discussed. At the end of the validation workshops (conducted in June 2015), secondary trauma and strategies for self-care were directly discussed within the research team.

CHAPTER 2: THE CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND TO CONFLICT AND TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE IN NORTHERN UGANDA

2.1 Background

Uganda is a land-locked country in the Great Lakes region of East Africa. It is bordered to the north by South Sudan, while the Democratic Republic of Congo lies to its west, Tanzania to the south, and Kenya to the east. South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo are both currently experiencing armed conflicts, and Kenya has experienced a series of violent upheavals in recent years. There has been a history of the conflicts in each country breaching national borders and impacting on neighbours. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) insurgency in Uganda, for example, has had significant impacts on both South Sudan and the DRC, while cross border raids by the Turkana (into Uganda) and Karamojong (into Kenya) have increased tensions in both Uganda and Kenya. There have been regular flows of combatants, refugees, and weapons across Uganda's western, northern, and eastern borders. The regional instability has exacerbated and prolonged Uganda's twenty-year war with the LRA, and continues to impact on recovery efforts.



Uganda has a population of 34.9 million people, made up of more than 40 different ethnic groups; as such, it is among the most ethnically diverse countries in the world (Blake 2013; UBoS 2014, 6). The largest ethnic group is the Baganda in the south, who make up 16.9 percent of the population. The Acholi, according to 2002 census figures, make up 4.7 percent of the population, the seventh largest ethnic group.⁵ Uganda has a very young population; the median age is 15.5 years and 78 percent of the population is under 30 years of age (GoU Pop Sec 2013, 11). Uganda has also been struggling with a high HIV/AIDS infection rate, with an estimated 7.3 percent of the population living with HIV/AIDS, 140,900 new infections in 2013, 1.1 million children orphaned due to HIV/AIDS, and 62,000 deaths in 2011 (UBoS 2014, 1; GoU Pop Sec 2013, 13, 137–38; UAC 2014, 5). All of these indicators are on a downward trend in response to national HIV/AIDS reduction strategies, but nonetheless HIV/AIDS presents a considerable challenge. Life expectancy in Uganda today is 54.5 years nationally (UNDP 2013, 2), compared to 44.3 years in northern Uganda in 2007 (Podszun 2011, 130). Women can expect to live on average two years longer than men.

Uganda is struggling with widespread poverty. The Government of Uganda, using income as a singular measure, reports that 19.7 percent of the population is living in poverty, with a further 43 percent at risk of poverty (GoU 2014, v). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), however, reports that 69.9 percent of Ugandans are living in multidimensional poverty (measuring income, health and education), with a further 19 percent at risk of multidimensional poverty (UNDP 2013, 5). Uganda's Bureau of Statistics reported poverty in northern Uganda to be roughly double that of other regions (UBoS 2010, 20; Nystrand 2014, 824).

The Government of Uganda has committed to addressing gender inequality as a priority goal and has introduced a number of pieces of legislation and planning instruments towards this end.⁶ The government has a one third quota for women's representation in parliament, and every district must have at least one woman representative.⁷ Despite this, gender inequality is pronounced across almost all axes of measurement. Uganda was ranked 110 of 148 countries assessed in the 2012 UNDP Gender Inequality Index (UNDP 2013, 4). Uganda has achieved gender parity in primary school enrolments (MoES 2011); indeed, this research did not find any instances of parents preferring to educate their sons before their daughters, even including situations where poverty meant that not all children in the household could be kept in school. On all other measures, however, Ugandan women and girls are disadvantaged. Although Ugandan women have the formal right to own property (land and housing), "male-headed households hold more than twice the land size held by female-headed households," with flow on effects to women's income earning capacity, participation in decision-making, and vulnerability to gender based violence, particularly from intimate partners (GoU Pop Sec 2013, 7). The Government of Uganda Population Secretariat reported in 2013 that women

⁵ Uganda conducted a census in August 2014 and has released a report titled *Provisional Results*. The *Provisional Results* provide a breakdown of population according to age, sex, and administrative district, but not ethnicity. The final comprehensive results of the census are due to be released in December 2015. For this reason, the 2002 figures are used for matters not yet reported on from the 2014 census.

⁶ The Constitution of the Republic of Uganda (1995) contains provisions for women's equality with men at Article 33, including in accessing economic opportunities (Article 33(4)). The Constitution also states that "[l]aws, cultures, customs or traditions which are against the dignity, welfare or interest of women or which undermine their status, are prohibited by this Constitution" (Article 33(6)). Additional key legislation passed to promote women's equality include (but are not limited to): The Customary Marriage (Registration) Act (1973) Cap. (248); The Divorce Act (1904) Cap. (249); The Domestic Violence Act (2010); and The Equal Opportunities Commission Act (Act No. 2/2007).

⁷ Constitution of the Republic of Uganda (1995), Article 78(1)(b).

earn 39 percent less than men, and that men continue to make most major household decisions: only 30 percent of couples reported making joint decisions about children's education, and 38 percent of currently married women reported participating in decisions about their own health care (GoU Pop Sec 2013, 7). The same report found that gender based violence causes more deaths and disability each year in Uganda than malaria, motor-vehicle accidents, and war, combined (GoU Pop Sec 2013, 55).

Uganda's maternal morbidity rate, while almost halved in the last 25 years, remains among the world's worst, at 310 deaths per 100,000 live births (GoU Pop Sec 2013, 66). Twenty-four percent of Ugandan teenaged girls become pregnant each year, and 18 percent have a live birth (GoU Pop Sec 2013, 52). Twelve percent of Uganda's children under the age of 18 years are orphaned, almost half of whom due to HIV/AIDS. Most orphaned children are cared for informally by extended family members; "however, many of these care-givers are overburdened and often lack the socio-economic capacity to provide adequate care and support for these children" (GoU Pop Sec 2013, 17).

Famously called the "Pearl of Africa" by Winston Churchill, Uganda's 241,038 sq km is mainly good quality agricultural land. Seventy-one percent of the land is classed as agricultural (World Fact Book 2015), and 82 percent of the population lives in rural areas (UBoS 2013, xix). However, there is a north-south divide with most of the pastoral land for the grazing of cattle in the north, and most of the permanent cash crops in the south. Eighty percent of women in Uganda work in agriculture, most of whom are engaged in subsistence farming (GoU Pop Sec 2013, 67). Given the predominance of agriculture in the Ugandan economy, equal ownership of land is critical for gender equality.

2.2 The Acholi

As has occurred in many other parts of Africa, colonialism created more rigid ethnic identities in the north of Uganda. There is some debate as to how strong the identity of Acholi was before colonialism, and the actual word "Acholi" seems to have come into more common usage during the period of colonisation (Allen and Vlassenroot 2010, 4). Whatever the impact of colonialism, distinct cultural practices have long existed in Acholiland, and among the most significant are those of conflict resolution practices. Researchers describe an "elaborate system of conflict containment and resolution," exemplified by *Mato Oput* (drinking of the bitter root) and *gomo tong* (bending of the spears), with the rituals overseen by anointed chiefs (Doom and Vlassenroot 1999, 11).

The Acholi Sub-Region (also known as Acholiland), comprised of Amuru, Gulu, Kitgum, Agago, Pader, and Lira districts, is not densely populated. Traditionally, the Acholi were farmers and cattle herders, with cattle being the source of wealth and prestige, and binding families through dowries (Doom and Vlassenroot 1999, 12). It is possible that, because the south was the site of lucrative cash-crops under colonial rule, the Acholi constituted the main pool of recruitment for the Army, while the civil service was primarily comprised of southerners. As Ali AlAmin Mazrui explained in *Soldiers and Kinsmen in Uganda: The making of a military ethnocracy* (1975), the Acholi were thus "transformed into a military ethnocracy" (quoted in Doom and Vlassenroot 1999, 8); subsequently, they have dominated the military since independence from Britain in 1962.

2.3 The North-South divide and the Civil War

As noted above, North-South divisions – in particular, in terms of access to power and differing development policies – were already present under colonisation. Uganda became independent in 1962, with a federal constitution, and a President, Milton Obote. However, Obote soon abolished the federal structure, and in particular sought to consolidate his power by moving against The Kabaka, the traditional king of the Baganda, the main ethnic group of the South. Obote exiled The Kabaka, Sir Edward Mutesa, and ordered the head of the army, Idi Amin, to storm The Kabaka's palace. In 1967, Obote abolished the Kingdom of Buganda; at the same time, he built up a personal following of army officers from his own tribe, the Langi, and the neighbouring Acholi, who already dominated the army. However, Amin, watching these manoeuvres, was likewise building up a collection of loyal officers from his home region of West Nile.

In 1971, Idi Amin took power in a military coup while Obote was out of the country. Amin was greeted as a hero by the Buganda, but, fearing a counter-strike by Obote, began mass killings of Langi and Acholi with “truckloads of corpses” dumped into the Nile. By the end of his eight-year reign, the death toll was estimated at 250,000 (Meredith 2005, 232–38).

Amin was eventually toppled when he tried to invade Tanzania in 1978, and elections in 1980 (viewed by most observers as flawed) brought Milton Obote back into power. The disputed elections led to a five-year civil war, with Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Army (NRA) forming in 1981; “in Museveni's eyes there was no room for the old political circles, held responsible for the disaster of Amin” (Doom and Vlassenroot 1999, 9). Museveni's support was particularly strong in the south, while Obote's military, the Ugandan National Liberation Army (UNLA), was again made up of northerners; this “northern” army “was accused by human rights groups of being responsible for 300,000 civilian deaths” (Meredith 2005, 238). In July 1985, Acholi soldiers, angered at finding themselves always on the frontline compared to their Langi colleagues, overthrew Obote (ADST 2014). The coup was led by Lieutenant-General Basilio Olara-Okello and General Tito Okello Lutwa, and the latter eventually became president. President Okello Lutwa immediately began negotiations with Museveni, and this led to the Nairobi Peace Agreement. However, in January 1986, the NRA captured Kampala, and the Acholi-dominated UNLA forces fled north to reorganise in Sudan.

As ethnic purges were one of the main characteristics of the recent political history of Uganda, many Acholi feared the NRA would wreak vengeance for acts committed under previous governments. The setting aside of the Nairobi Peace Agreement by the NRA, and the undisciplined behaviour of parts of the NRA in both Gulu and Kitgum districts during the first months of the NRA takeover, served only to fuel this anxiety. When the NRA High Command issued a directive over Radio Uganda, urging all former UNLA soldiers to report to Mbuya army headquarters within ten days, the memory of a similar order after Amin's coup (orders which had resulted in the massacre of many Acholi soldiers) convinced many UNLA soldiers to join those that had already fled to Sudan. As one member of Human Rights Focus observed, “The order was just like in Amin's days. The Acholi boys said to each other, ‘This time we are not going to die like chickens. Let us go to Sudan and join our brothers, and fight to save the Acholi’” (Doom and Vlassenroot 1999, 13–4).

The merging of various anti-Museveni forces in Juba eventually led to the Ugandan People's Defence Army (UPDA). The UPDA was initially an effective fighting force, and attacks and counter-attacks followed. Of particular note was the UPDA's successful overrunning of the

NRA's 35th Battalion at Ukuti in August 1986. The 35th Battalion withdrew to Namu-Okora and organised a series of massacres. Doom and Vlassenroot wrote that "this galvanized the fear held by many Acholi of massive retaliation or annihilation" (Doom and Vlassenroot 1999, 14–5). Mistreatment of the population confirmed fears of reprisal (Bevan 2007, 344).

The UPDA was a spent force by the end of 1987, and in June 1988, the Gulu Peace Accord was signed. However, the civil war led directly into the Holy Spirit Movement and the formation of the LRA; for the Acholi, this meant over 20 years of destruction and terrorisation.

Other legacies of the civil war include the mistrust in Acholiland of the Museveni government, and, arguably, the long history of violence after independence, which has led to a tradition of impunity. The International Centre for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) argued that "gross human rights violations committed under the regimes of Milton Obote, Idi Amin Dada and Tito Okello have largely gone unpunished, perpetuating a legacy of impunity that remains in the country to this day" (Otim and Kihika 2015, 1).

2.4 The Holy Spirit Movement (HSM) and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA)

Alice Auma's Holy Spirit Movement (HSM) began as the UPDA ran out of ammunition and energy. Auma reported that, starting in August 1986, spirits told her to liberate young people from her neighbourhood who had been kidnapped by the NRA and held in the barracks of Gulu town. She was able to do this with the support of 150 former UNLA veterans and forty guns (Allen and Vlassenroot 2010, 8). Auma was said to be particularly in touch with the *Lakwena* spirit, and she became known as "Alice Lakwena." The HSM had considerable military successes for a while. They were noted for being fearless in battle, "walking straight at the enemy without taking cover" (Bevan 2007, 344), as they had been anointed in protective oil (Allen and Vlassenroot 2010, 8).

The HSM was eventually defeated in October 1987, in a battle only 80 miles from Kampala. Importantly, Auma was not only fighting against the NRA; she felt she was fighting against bad spirits in the Acholi (Allen and Vlassenroot 2010, 8). This is why codes of conduct, initiation rites, and spirituality played such an important role in her movement. The HSM was also occasionally violent to the Acholi who did not support them (Allen and Vlassenroot 2010, 18). Occasionally, the HSM forcibly recruited members (Bevan 2007, 345).

Joseph Kony, alternatively described as a cousin or nephew of Auma, tried to join the UPDA-HSM alliance, but he was rejected by Auma. Nevertheless, Kony continued to recruit for his own rebel army, using techniques and ideas similar to HSM's. Those members of the UPDA who did not agree with the Gulu Peace Accord found a home after June 1988 with Kony; of particular note is one of the UPDA's "most ruthless and effective commanders, Odong Latek ... [from whom] Kony seems to have learned a lot about guerrilla tactics. His ally was killed in battle, but by 1990 Kony's force was the only significant armed unit still fighting in the Acholi homelands" (Allen and Vlassenroot 2010, 10).

2.5 Civilian abuse, displacement and the prolonged, scorched earth nature of the conflict, complicated by regional dynamics

Civilian abuse and destruction of infrastructure by both the NRA and the rebels was common from 1986 onwards, resulting in large-scale internal displacement which would later become a huge feature of the conflict (see below). In particular, the NRA forcibly cleared approximately 100,000 people from homes around Gulu town in December 1988, during which there were reports of systematic male rape by the NRA, as well as the looting of cattle for food by the army (Dolan 2009, 44–45). This situation continued until 1991, when things got worse as Operation North was launched. This consisted of a four-month campaign by government troops forcibly restricting travel and rounding people up for screening (Dolan 2009, 44–45), and where “arrest and torture to force people to cooperate with the government were common practices” (Doom and Vlassenroot 1999, 23). During Operation North, the Ugandan Army urged Acholi elders to set up civilian bow and arrow defence units (Dolan 2009, 45); Doom and Vlassenroot (1999, 23) noted that

[t]he majority of the Acholi were deeply disturbed by the permanent state of terror, and although the blame can be put on [Ugandan Minister of State for Defence, Major General David] Tinyefuza (who was replaced in 1992), people also wanted to rid themselves of the LRA... participation rate [in the bow and arrow brigades] was quite high.

However, this participation was noted by Kony, and “1991 saw the beginning of LRA mutilations and maimings reminiscent of those of the Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO) in Mozambique, including the cutting of lips and noses and the use of padlocks on the mouths of people they thought might report them to authorities” (Dolan 2009, 45).

In 1991, the conflict in Acholiland also began to be influenced by regional politics. Museveni’s government supported the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) in its conflict with Sudan’s central government, including by allowing the passage of arms through northern Uganda. The Khartoum government responded to Museveni’s support for the SPLM by supporting Kony and the LRA. International politics were also at play, as the USA was using Uganda and the SPLM as a bulwark against the “regional jihad” proclaimed by the Khartoum government (Meredith 2005, 594). Ultimately, the fact that the LRA was involved as a proxy fighting unit in these regional and international disputes was a major factor in prolonging the conflict.

2.6 The failed 1994 peace talks and the resulting escalation of abductions and terror

The conflict changed nature again with a huge escalation in violence in 1994, after the failure of peace talks led by the Government of Uganda Minister for the North, Betty Bigombe. At considerable personal risk, Bigombe, an Acholi resident of Gulu, had negotiated with Kony for a comprehensive peace agreement. Kony asked for six months to organise the involvement of the Acholi people as a whole, and to gather members of the political wing living outside Uganda. President Museveni believed that the LRA would use the six-months to gain time and re-arm with help from Sudan (Doom and Vlassenroot 1999, 24). He “rejected the idea and gave the rebels a seven-day deadline to assemble and surrender, a condition that effectively ended the peace process” (Atkinson 2010, 205).

The collapse of the peace process led to three outcomes. The first was the escalation of violence towards the Acholi. Kony reportedly felt betrayed by elders, and blamed civilians for his failing war (Doom and Vlassenroot 1999, 25). The second outcome was a large

increase in support from Sudan: “Sudan began providing the rebel group with significant financial assistance, military training, weapons, other supplies and sanctuary” (Atkinson 2010, 206). There was a quid pro quo; Kony had to pay for this increase in support from Sudan by turning the LRA into a major fighting unit in the war against the SPLM in southern Sudan. This required a larger fighting force, and, being unable to recruit volunteers, the LRA dramatically increased its rate of abductions. At the same time, the LRA used ever more extreme violence, in particular by forcing children to commit atrocities against their own families and communities. This was a deliberate tactic aimed at keeping the children in the bush, by making them feel they could not return to their communities (Bevan 2007, 344). The extreme nature of the violence used caused widespread terror among the population, which in turn strengthened “the immediate power of [Kony’s] field commanders far beyond their logistic and military capacities” (Doom and Vlassenroot 1999, 26).

Kony had no other natural resources at his disposal to continue his war; rather, the people of Acholiland became his resources, as soldiers in his role as a proxy force for Sudan. It was initially estimated that 25,000 to 30,000 children were abducted by the LRA between 1987 and 2007 (Bevan 2007, 343), but that figure has since been revised upwards to 66,000 (Annan et al. 2006, 16), and even as high as 75,000 (HRW 2005).

The third outcome of the collapse of the peace process was another blow to the trust of the Acholi in the Museveni government. Museveni chose the military option as Uganda was headed towards the 1995 constitutional reforms. Some commentators argue it was in Museveni’s interest to take the “strong man” position, highlighting his role as a fighting general, for who else would “protect [southerners] from the Acholi and other wild northerners?” (Allen and Vlassenroot 2010, 12). In addition, from 1995 onwards, the Ugandan army’s attention was split as it was largely occupied in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), turning DRC gold into a major Ugandan export (Meredith 2005, 541). The Uganda People’s Defence Force (UPDF) was particularly criticised for deploying forces to fight the Rwandan army over the mineral wealth at Kisangani, during a peak in LRA attacks on civilians in northern Uganda in 1999.

2.7 The camps

From 1996 onwards, a key tactic of the Government of Uganda (GoU) consisted of government troops forcibly displacing thousands of people into “protected villages” or Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps, and subsequently perpetrating numerous human rights abuses. The process by which people were displaced into camps involved threats of aerial bombing if the homestead was not vacated within a specified time frame; burning homesteads and granaries; and direct violence against civilians, including shooting, beating, and raping women (Dolan 2009, 154). Amnesty International reported multiple specific incidents of the UPDF using force, including raping women, beating men and women, shooting people, destroying homes and granaries, looting food and livestock, and shelling villages, to enforce compliance with their directive that villagers should leave their homes and move to an IDP camp (AI 1999, 34–36).

As the war dragged on, the numbers of displaced people increased such that, towards the end, estimates suggested two million people were displaced (MoH and WHO 2005, 1), with almost 1.8 million in camps or “protected villages” (UNHCR 2012). In Gulu, Kitgum and Pader districts, the districts most affected by violence, nearly 90% of the population had relocated to camps by 2005 (MoH and WHO 2005, ii). People were either forced into camps

because of the scorched earth tactic of the government, or forced into camps by fear of unpredictable and frequent LRA violence (HRW 2005, 62). However, the camps were no safe haven.

From the beginning, the poorly fed and equipped government rank and file soldiers saw the fighting as an “Acholi affair” and left the protection of IDP camps, wherever possible, to the Local Defence Units (LDU) (Doom and Vlassenroot 1999, 31). Initially, these local militias were armed with bows and arrows (Allen and Vlassenroot 2010, 11); more modern weapons were later provided to the local militias, but they were still poorly equipped and trained. Reports from survivors of LRA attacks on IDP camps claimed that the LRA’s weapons were still superior to the LDUs’ (IRIN 2004, under “Rebels Well Armed”). With the LRA specifically working on a policy of abduction, the camps became targets for violence. Lira county saw one of the worst single attacks of the war at Barlonyo IDP camp (IRIN 2004, under “No Warning”). On 21 February 2004, the Barlonyo IDP camp was being defended only by the Amuka Boys, a poorly trained and poorly equipped Local Defence Unit. “The Amuka/LDU had no radio communication with the Ugandan military and it would be three hours before the UPDF responded. By then, the LRA had butchered over 300 people” (JRP 2009, 6).

The policy of encampment made it easier for the “LRA as well as the UPDF to loot both the camps and the remaining scattered rural population” (Nystrand 2014, 823).

For women, life inside and outside of the camps was marked by violence and insecurity. Chris Dolan (2009) documented an array of acts of violence and deprivation targeted specifically against women. The insufficient food relief provided in IDP camps meant that women were compelled to leave the camps during the day to cultivate their fields. This exposed them to heightened risk of abduction by the LRA, beatings by the UPDF, and the risk of death by landmine (estimated at two people a week) (Dolan 2009, 120). Inside the camps, women were targeted for beating and rape by soldiers as a form of psychological torture to the civilian men who were unable to protect “their” women, or simply for their own pleasure (Dolan 2009, 211–12; UNICEF and GoU 2005). There are reports of soldiers buying beer for young boys in exchange for them finding a woman for them to rape, and of women missing out on food distributions because of looting by youths and men (Dolan 2009, 123, 126, 147).

As well as providing questionable levels of protection, there was very little food and few services. The visit of Jan Egerland, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to the IDP Camps in November 2003, “marked a turning point as he raised awareness and prompted the intervention of hundreds of state and non-state actors” (Perrot 2010, 187). Yet, even after this intervention, a 2005 joint World Health Organisation and Ugandan Ministry of Health report found crisis levels of crude mortality rates in the camps, and suggested 1000 people a week were dying in the camps. Disease was the main culprit, but the same survey found violence to be the third most likely cause of death, with over 30 percent of violent deaths occurring inside the camps (MoH and WHO 2005, ii). Furthermore, the enforced dependency on aid, lack of productive activity, and severe over-crowding had devastating consequences, as economic and social structures collapsed (ARLPI and JPCGA 2001; Okello and Hovil 2007). The effects of “camp life” have proven to be lasting, and most Acholi communities continue to struggle to recover from this period. The policy of encampment, conditions in IDP camps, and their present day effects are discussed in further detail in Chapter 4.

2.8 Cattle, land, oil and widows

One of the consequences of the camps and the war was that the delicate balance of shared cattle grazing, which included cattle rustling from neighbours, was disrupted. The Karamojong are traditional cattle raiders who have historically raided the Acholi region regularly. The violence associated with these raids has escalated as a result of the war. The war facilitated Karamojong access to weapons, making their raiding both more effective and more deadly. In 1987, the Karamojong launched massive raids through Kitgum and eastern Gulu districts, and removed almost the entire herd. This represented a vast economic blow, as well as producing the loss of self-respect and social function attached to the cattle (Gersony 1997, 28). For example, in Agago district, a Ugandan High Court judge recounted that there were 50,000 head of cattle in 1985, but that the herd had been reduced to a mere 400 by 1990 (Sserunjogi 2013, 2). The cattle herds have not been restored, which has made land (much of which was formerly held communally) all the more important as the only resource left to the Acholi; as such, family and neighbour land disputes are a legacy of the war. The loss of cattle also meant the loss of ploughs in the form of bullocks; therefore, even for those with land, farming is now more difficult as it must almost all be done by human labour (Sserunjogi 2013, 2).

Land pressures are further complicated by the discovery of oil and the GoU's development plans, which focus on large-scale industrial projects like sugar and biofuel (GoU OPM 2011 [objectives]; ICG 2008, 7–8; Sserunjogi 2013, 1).

Land disputes are estimated by various studies to affect between 29 percent and 59 percent of the population in Acholiland (Burke and Egaru 2011, 4). Women, particularly widows, are disadvantaged in these hotly-contested land disputes (ICG 2008, 8; Burke and Egaru 2011, 25). This issue was foreseen by all parties, and mentioned in the comprehensive peace agreements (below). Some policies that might ameliorate the issues widows and women-led households face have been put in place, including mandating that at least two women be part of the five-person quorum of local court hearings (Burke and Egaru 2011, 11). However, gaps remain; for example, although the “Land Act (Cap. 227) makes provision for the rights of a spouse, it does not address the land rights of widows, divorcees, women in co-habitation, and children” (Burke and Egaru 2011, 25). Furthermore, the Burke and Egaru UN study suggests significant variation between the east and west of the Acholi Sub-Region as regards traditional leaders' views as to whether women have the right to own land:

The traditional leaders in Amuru, Gulu and especially Nwoya reported equal roles for men and women; however in Lamwo, Pader, and Kitgum approximately 10 percent of the respondents claimed there was no role for women. This was even more marked in Agago District where almost 30 percent of respondents reported no role for women in the mediation process over land disputes, especially in Adilang Sub-county where 50 percent claimed there was no role for women. (2011, 26)

2.9 Operation Iron Fist and the end of Sudan's support for the LRA

After September 11, 2001, the situation in Acholiland changed again. The Sudan government sought to improve relations with the US, stating that it would stop supporting the LRA and start working with the UPDF. Operation Iron Fist was launched, targeting the LRA in both northern Uganda and southern Sudan. At first, the operation was a complete disaster for northern Uganda, as the LRA both increased its attacks on civilians and increased its areas of operation in Uganda. The Sudanese government's claims of no-longer helping the rebels were brought into question. However, in January 2005, the Sudanese government signed a peace agreement with the southern Sudanese rebels, which would eventually lead to the creation of the Republic of South Sudan; now, the LRA really was cut off from Sudan's support. By this time, too, the International Criminal Court had brought charges against Kony and four other LRA Commanders.⁸ The LRA leadership began to consider peace negotiations, and the Juba peace talks opened on July 14, 2006 (Atkinson 2010, 205-214).

2.10 The Juba peace process, the aftermath and today

The Juba talks eventually resulted in a comprehensive peace agreement. Although Kony pulled out at the last minute without signing the document, the peace agreements were wide-ranging and, as the LRA has effectively stopped operating in northern Uganda since 2006, these agreements have been viewed as the building blocks for reconstruction. Of particular note were the agreements on Agenda items 2 and 3.

2.10.1 Agenda item 2 – Comprehensive solutions

Agenda item 2 specifically recognised the unequal development between the north and south of Uganda, mentioning mechanisms for redress and for post-conflict rebuilding.

In particular, the agreement set the groundwork for the Government of Uganda Peace, Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP). However, despite being discussed since 2006 and PRDP 1 officially starting in 2007, funding was delayed and nothing came into effect until 2010. Even after programs began in earnest, they were criticised from the outset for not involving locals in decisions on spending, and yet simultaneously expecting district governments to oversee the delivery of the programs that had been decided centrally (Nsamba 2012, 67–68). This is despite the fact that years of conflict had left the district councils with a significant lack of institutional, human, and financial resources (Nsamba 2012, 67–68). In June 2012, when announcing the funding for PRDP 2, the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) acknowledged these faults, including “inadequate critical technical staff” and “no community involvement in PRDP planning” (GoU OPM 2012). That same month, the scheme was rocked by scandal, with UGX50 billion (USD14 million) stolen by people working inside the Office of the Prime Minister (Office of the Auditor General 2012): “The funds were meant for a broad range of projects and programs, such as road construction, school and health facilities, and included one specific and very tangible element for the local population – compensation for cattle lost during the forced relocation to government-controlled IDP camps ... The OPM scandal led to more public outrage than previous ones,

⁸ The ICC issued indictments against Joseph Kony, Raska Lukwiya, Okot Odhiambo, Dominic Ongwen, and Vincent Otti. Odhiambo and Lukiywa are confirmed to have died, and proceedings have been terminated. Otti is also widely believed to have died, but the ICC has not terminated proceedings against him; instead, it was reaffirming as recently as September 2015 that the indictment against Otti remains in place. Dominic Ongwen surrendered to US forces in the Central African Republic in January 2015, and is currently in custody at the ICC. Actions taken under International Criminal Law against the LRA commanders is addressed in greater detail in Chapter 7.

not the least because the funds were intended to bridge the long-standing north-south divide” (Nystrand 2014, 825). The scandal resulted in the international community withdrawing funds from the PRDP 2 program for a period of time; however, the program has been reinstated, even though corruption scandals related to the initial flow of funds continue to surface (Odongo 2015). Despite its link to the Juba Peace Process, the PRDP does not only fund initiatives in the Acholi region, but throughout all of northern Uganda (International Alert 2013, 42); the latest incarnation, PRDP 3, is particularly focused on the Karamoja region (Munghinda 2015).

2.10.2 Agenda item 3 – Accountability and reconciliation

The agreement on Agenda item 3 had several important repercussions. Firstly, there was the recognition of traditional justice and *Mato Oput*, the drinking of the bitter root, which have been crucial to the reintegration of former LRA combatants/victims. Secondly, in terms of formal mechanisms, there was a focus on special prosecution mechanisms for the actions of non-state actors, leaving the actions of Ugandan army personnel to be handled by existing justice structures, but essentially leaving them out of the equation. Given the considerable human rights violations perpetrated by the Ugandan army over the long course of the war, this exclusion has been criticised (Otim and Kihika 2015, 7; Wijeyaratne 2008, 9–10; ICG 2008, 10–11). The special mechanism set up for non-state actors is the Ugandan International Crimes Division (ICD). In 2010, Thomas Kwoyelo, a former mid-level commander of the LRA, was charged with war crimes. His trial, the ICD’s first, began in July 2011 (Kihika and Regué 2015, 4). However, one month later the case stalled while Uganda’s Constitutional Court considered an application made by Kwoyelo’s lawyers that he was eligible for Amnesty under the Amnesty Act 2000. In April 2015 the Supreme Court of Uganda ruled in *Uganda v. Kwoyelo* ([2015] UGSC 5) that the Amnesty Act will only apply to “crimes committed in the furtherance of war and rebellion,” not “crimes committed against innocent civilians or communities” (at 41). This ruling leaves the ICD clear to continue prosecution of Kwoyelo (Nakandha 2015), however the commencement of his trial at the ICD has been repeatedly postponed throughout 2016 (Ogora 2016). Since 2011, the ICD’s role has been expanded to include other international crimes, not just war crimes, and it now has nine cases open, most of which are related to terrorism and human trafficking (Kihika and Regué 2015, 3). Dominic Ongwen, a high-ranking LRA commander and former LRA abductee and child soldier who surrendered in the Central African Republic in January 2015, will not be tried in Uganda, but at the International Criminal Court in the Hague.

There was considerable confusion over the legality of the Kwoyelo trial. Its controversial nature stemmed mostly from other senior LRA commanders being granted Amnesty (Kihika and Regué 2015, 4). The prospective trial of Ongwen has also raised questions among Acholi people and Ugandans more broadly about issues such as whether Ongwen should be entitled to Amnesty for surrendering; whether he should be tried in Uganda; and whether he should be tried at all, given his history as an abducted child soldier (Loyle 2015). These divergent views show the gaps, inconsistencies, and contradictions in the justice system for addressing the crimes committed during the conflict.

In 2008, the Justice, Law and Order Sector of the Government of Uganda (JLOS) established a Transitional Justice Working Group (TJWG) with a view to addressing how formal justice mechanisms, traditional justice mechanisms, and truth-seeking and accountability mechanisms can be integrated into a coherent policy (Otim and Kihika 2015, 4). According to the ICTJ, when discussions began in 2008, there was “initial goodwill towards inviting civil

society to participate in TJWG’s meetings and deliberations”; however, relations soured when some civil society groups started lobbying in 2013 for the reinstatement of the Amnesty Act (Otim and Kihika 2015, 4). The ICTJ report also describes the engagement process as being overly top-down, with debates rarely involving victims at a grassroots level; victims were thus left believing transitional justice “is only about reconciliation and forgiveness” (Otim and Kihika 2015, 8). Nevertheless, the Transitional Justice Policy is now awaiting cabinet approval: “the Policy proposes an autonomous body to implement the provisions, which will entail, a national reparations programme, the traditional justice system, a fact finding and truth seeking system, which by design will have to be incorporated into the national budget” (JLOS 2015, 18).

The Accountability and Reconciliation Agreement specifically spoke of reparations, both monetary and symbolic. Item 3 states:

Reparations may include a range of measures such as: rehabilitation; restitution; compensation; guarantees of non-recurrence and other symbolic measures such as apologies, memorials and commemorations. Priority shall be given to vulnerable groups.

In 2010, President Museveni publicly recommitted to reparations; however, no mechanisms are yet in place. In April 2014, the parliament passed a resolution to create a gender sensitive reparations fund (ICTJ 2014), but the draft legislation is yet to be enacted. Some reparations have been paid; for example, an umbrella case representing over one million victims of cattle rustling during the conflict was brought against the Government of Uganda, and recently settled out of court. Nonetheless, JLOS reports that an analysis of the claims suggests “victims are not necessarily catered for through the representative action which has led to misrepresentation and misappropriation of victims’ entitlements” (JLOS 2015, 102). Furthermore, a nationwide study by JLOS was conducted in the last 12 months and will soon be released, with indicative findings showing “overwhelming needs of the community for urgent reparations especially for those suffering from medical and psychosocial effects of the episodes of armed conflict especially in Northern Uganda” (JLOS 2015, 102).

2.11 Women’s participation in the talks

The agreements of both agenda items 2 and 3 use language that recognises the specific challenges to women in post-conflict situations. In the Comprehensive Solutions agreement, widows and female-headed households are mentioned in the texts among other vulnerable groups which need special assistance programs for protection, resettlement, and advancement. In the Accountability and Reconciliation agreement, clause 11 of item 3 deals specifically with the needs of women and girls in accessing both reparations and justice. The sub clauses state that parties will:

- (i) Recognise and address the special needs of women and girls.
- (ii) Ensure that the experiences, views and concerns of women and girls are recognised and taken into account.
- (iii) Protect the dignity privacy and security of women and girls.
- (iv) Encourage and facilitate the participation of women and girls in the processes for implementing this agreement.

However, women were initially not included in the talks, and it was only after November 2007 that a gender advisor was appointed in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1325

on Women, Peace and Security. There were women delegates in both the LRA and government negotiating teams, and there were also women civil society groups granted observer status. However, the overall success of their efforts is debatable (Diaz and Tordjman 2012; Wijeyaratne 2008, 12–14).

In particular, one report claims that important grassroots women's civil society groups from northern Uganda were not included, and that the two women's coalitions which were granted observer status at the talks did not "sufficiently include the most vulnerable sectors of the communities affected by the conflict" (Wijeyaratne 2008, 12). Furthermore, the two women's coalitions replicated north-south divisions, with the Northern Uganda Women's Coalition perceiving the Ugandan Women's Peace Coalition "as being dominated by elite women from the south who were not directly affected by the conflict" (Wijeyaratne 2008, 13). These tensions were exacerbated by "differences in capacity between women living in the south, who had more access to education and jobs compared with women living in the north who had been living in IDP camps" (Wijeyaratne 2008, 13).

2.12 Conclusion

Uganda's war with the LRA has continued for over 20 years, and although there have been no armed engagements since the 2008 Juba Agreements, the Final Peace Agreement has not been signed; the LRA continues to exist and terrorise populations in the DRC and Central African Republic. The conflict has been characterised by extraordinary violence against civilians, primarily by the LRA, but also by UPDF forces. Northern Uganda, already disadvantaged relative to other parts of Uganda, has suffered enormous economic, social, and human losses through the conflict. Men, women, and children have all directly suffered from the war through the loss of family members, social ties, land, homesteads, and livestock. Women have been particularly targeted for sexual and gender-based violence, and are now continuing to be disadvantaged in struggles for land and other resources in the post-conflict recovery and rebuilding stage. Widows, child-mothers, and women returning from abduction are further disadvantaged. Communities in northern Uganda are struggling with a complex and dynamic array of legacies of the conflict, including severe damage to the social and cultural fabric; economic devastation; high rates of mental and physical illness; and the reintegration of former LRA combatants, most of whom were abducted and are therefore both victims and perpetrators. This report addresses Acholi women's views and experiences of justice in this difficult milieu.

CHAPTER 3: UGANDAN WOMEN SPEAK TO JUSTICE

*Justice helps women to stand firm without any fear in their homes.*⁹
– Harriet¹⁰

3.1 The research focus

In examining the efficacy of transitional justice approaches for women, this research project asked women participants some broad questions about what constitutes justice, and how it is working for women within their communities. Understanding how women see justice (its role, and how they experience different justice processes) is important for informing the development of justice mechanisms and strategies that are responsive to women's needs and priorities for justice. This is especially the case within the specific context of communities transitioning from conflict to post-conflict states, during the course of rebuilding communities. In northern Uganda, 86 women shared with this research project their experiences, understandings, and views of justice.

This chapter presents the voices of women speaking directly to justice. It presents how the women in this research project have experienced, thought and felt about justice. Women's voices alone are presented here, so that they are clearly heard and not muted by all the voices and views of others. The following chapters of this report situate the voices of women participants within broader discourses of justice, by drawing also on the views of key informants interviewed in this research, the opinions of other commentators, and the findings of other research studies.

3.2 Gender in context in northern Uganda: A new kind of war

The women we spoke with described an epidemic of domestic violence within a context of deeply embedded gender inequalities, and extraordinarily high levels of alcoholism and violence within communities. Women spoke of holding the status of “*mere women*,” of being viewed as “*worthless*,” and of being the “*property of men*.” The low status of women both heightens their vulnerability to violence, and severely curtails their capacity to realise justice after violence. Widows and formerly abducted young women, along with their children, occupy the lowest status positions of all. Many communities are struggling with conflict over land, and there is a deep and concerning rift between former Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and former abductees – a rift which may threaten northern Uganda's future stability. Most women attribute the violence, division, and lack of effective justice mechanisms to the war, lasting trauma, and long years in IDP camps.

3.3 “Camp life”

At the height of the LRA conflict, 1.8 million people were internally displaced in northern Uganda. The vast majority were displaced to IDP camps, living in overcrowded and squalid conditions, and entirely dependent on aid for survival. Although almost all IDP camps are

⁹ Interviewed February 6, 2014.

¹⁰ All women respondents have been allocated pseudonyms.

now closed, with the majority of people returning to their original homes, the prolonged encampment and enforced dependency continue to have profound effects on communities.

Women who lived in IDP camps spoke in unison about the devastating social effects of the camps. The war and camp life have left a lasting legacy of trauma, alcohol abuse, and violence. Women told us of a dangerous mix of major increases in the levels of violence and drinking, coupled with severely ruptured social structures – the same structures which once would have been called upon to stop the violence, and restore familial and community relationships.

Annabel explained that, prior to the war, *“life was very good, we were free, everything was there in plenty, we had an abundance of food. It was so peaceful. You would not hear of land disputes, we wouldn’t ever hear about HIV/AIDS. ... When the war started, it started coming in with so many things.”* She went on to say that her community is now riddled with alcoholism, land conflict, and domestic violence. Annabel described a perfect storm of resource pressures, trauma, and social breakdown; she explained that many of the elders who used to provide guidance and stability for communities were killed during the war, and that *“very many kids lost their parents, so the children have been left on their own to do a lot of things.”* This young generation have little respect for the elders, and little knowledge of traditional ways of life. She added that the few elders remaining *“who can clearly maybe settle a matter between two people regarding land or family matters, this person does not use the truth and all this is really causing so many problems among the people in society.”*¹¹

In every community visited in northern Uganda during this research project, women told us of the enormous damage that has been done to the social fabric of Acholi communities as a result of the war, and prolonged, forced encampment. Florence said that *“life became meaningless. The confinement in camps was undevelopmental.”*¹² The policy of encampment has also had lasting effects on Acholi families and communities. Many women, such as Faith, see a direct link between encampment and the problems communities are facing today:

*Camp life was generally a little strange from our normal way of life because there were a lot of things that were happening, a lot of loss of morals. ... There is a great link between the experiences of camp life and the problems the people are facing up to today. Before people came to live in the camps, life was very different, life was different and people were thinking in a different way. But once people were in camps, confined in the camps, they started behaving in the camp way.*¹³

Women talked to us about their forced dependency on food aid for survival, and the psychological and social effects of being cut off from any productive activity. Sophie believed that this forced dependency continues to affect people today, thereby hindering their recovery:

*Since people are back home, people need to be taught how to work hard and empowered to be self reliant, to desist the dependant syndrome which was in the camps.*¹⁴

¹¹ Interviewed June 18, 2014.

¹² Interviewed January 22, 2014.

¹³ Interviewed June 17, 2014.

¹⁴ Interviewed February 10, 2014.

3.4 All work and no power

Due to the inability to continue their livelihood activities, and the enforced dependency on aid for all their needs, most men began drinking alcohol in the camps – a practice which many have continued after returning home. Women in all places visited spoke of the men in their communities and families drinking from the morning, and throughout the day and evening. The women explained that the high levels of alcoholism have led to men refusing to work in the fields, leaving all the labour to the women. Men continue, however, to exercise exclusive control over the income generated by women's labour.

Joyce explained that Acholi women have taken on most of the responsibilities in the household, but do not have decision-making power over household income or resources:

*Women face so many difficulties. They have to work tirelessly hard to provide for their families. You see these women here digging (points to women working in the field near us)? You will find their husbands at the trading centre drinking. The children are sent home for school fees or books or pens. It is the women to look for this and help the child. Even food in the house. Women are the bread winners in the home. The women work tirelessly hard. (But the husband) is the one who decides. Because all are his property. Everything in the house belongs to him, it's his to make decisions over. So even if you do some casual work, he will ask "So, you went to dig in so-and-so's garden. How much did you earn?" And you have to share. You feel painful about it. It hurts, but what can you do? You're in his house and so you have to bear.*¹⁵

Pauline put it more bluntly, stating that "the men grab the money which we struggle to earn."¹⁶ Rosemary was similarly direct:

*I dig and work tirelessly, but during the harvest period I do not have any say on the yields. My husband even stopped me from group savings. The men ensure that women are economically disempowered.*¹⁷

The problem of women doing all the work, only for men to take the proceeds and spend it on alcohol, was repeated at every research site. Sally linked the problem to women's low status in the community, which makes it difficult for them to get any community-based solution to the widespread problem:

*Our husbands sell the harvests and foodstuff in the house and drink all the money. Women do not have a voice to speak out in the community.*¹⁸

Hannah linked the origins of this problem to the period spent in camps:

In the camps, men's behaviour really changed. Some men would steal the little supply (food aid) to sell. Such money they would use to buy alcohol. This kind of behaviour has continued up to now. Men have left all their responsibilities. Today women carry all the burden to look after the children and provide for their families. Women

¹⁵ Interviewed June 24, 2014.

¹⁶ Interviewed January 22, 2014.

¹⁷ Interviewed February 13, 2014.

¹⁸ Interviewed March 13, 2014.

*struggle to cultivate and grow crops, while the men steal, sell and drink the foodstuff produced.*¹⁹

Women in northern Uganda have been left with an enormous burden of responsibility, without the commensurate economic and decision-making power to meet these responsibilities. Many men are not only not working alongside women in the fields, but are also commandeering the produce and selling it to buy alcohol, which all too often fuels violence.

3.5 Domestic violence: Another war...

Men's excessive drinking was invariably associated with violence, directed both at other community members, and (more often) at women. For many northern Ugandan women, the end of the LRA war has not brought peace, as Evelyn explained:

*Having basic needs alone when one is still experiencing a lot of violence does not qualify as peace. For instance, having a drunken husband, being beaten hostilely, preventing me from freely associating with my fellow women.*²⁰

Jennifer likely experiences violence more frequently now than she did during the war. When asked to describe a typical day, she responded, *"I go to the garden early and he goes drinking. When I return he beats me. Every day."*²¹ For many women, the extent of domestic violence is such that the war is effectively continuing in their personal lives. Jane expressed a clear continuum of violence in her life:

*Well, when the calm was restored ... now people came back home, and now another violence has started ... from the husbands. So some peace came and we went back home, but again, the men started another violence.*²²

The extent of domestic violence in northern Uganda cannot be overstated. Most women traced the origins of this violence to the war, and to life in IDP camps. Angela explained that *"[p]eople are now very violent. Men are so hostile and behave in a way like it was during the war."*²³ Although the LRA war has ended, many women continue to live with extraordinary and life-threatening levels of violence on a daily basis.

Women told us of extraordinarily high rates of domestic violence. Domestic violence is so widespread that when asked about her feelings of safety, Ada replied *"I feel safe because my husband died in 2001 and I don't plan to take another man, so I don't have to fear."*²⁴ Dorine's husband survived the war and she explains that *"when he comes back drunk and starts to cause problems, as the lady, as his wife you must run for your life. You have to run and hide somewhere in the bush."* The level of domestic violence is so high in her area that she often meets other women hiding in the bush at night: *"we give support and share ideas among ourselves. It's all a result of the war."*²⁵

¹⁹ Interviewed March 13, 2014.

²⁰ Interviewed January 31, 2014.

²¹ Interviewed June 17, 2014.

²² Interviewed September 25, 2013.

²³ Interviewed March 13, 2014.

²⁴ Interviewed June 17, 2014.

²⁵ Interviewed June 21, 2014.

Leaving a violent marriage is often not possible for women in northern Uganda. The local economy and culture centre on the cultivation of land. There are ongoing disputes about land in most communities visited, some of which have resulted in violence and sometimes death. Women are particularly affected by land conflicts, as they traditionally realise only secondary rights to land, firstly through their relationship with their fathers, and later their husbands and sons. Women with no surviving male relative willing and able to defend her access to land are seldom able to realise any land rights they might have in law. This has a significant impact on the most vulnerable women in communities – most notably, widows and women who were abducted as girls, and who have subsequently been either orphaned or estranged from their families.

Beth explained how vulnerable people are most targeted in land disputes in her area:

The land grabbing is mostly happening in families that lost all their parents and elders in the war and thus, the grabbers take advantage of their vulnerability and little knowledge regarding their land to deprive them of the same. The grabbers also have a high financial ability and they use this to influence the leaders, even the Residence District Commanders (RDC).²⁶

The competition for land is particularly impacting single mothers (who either became pregnant during an abduction, or became a child mother in the camps), as well as women wanting to leave violent marriages and return to their parents' homes. Beth explained that, previously, women could return to their parents' home if they needed to, but that *"today, children are not welcome in their mother's family because (the families) think they should live in their father's family where they can inherit land in order to avoid future land misunderstandings."*²⁷

Widows are also an extremely vulnerable group within society, and many are being forced off their husband's land. Harriet, a widow, told us:

Since women are regarded as "mere women" they are disinherited of their land, such land is grabbed from them and sometimes it is trespassed upon to force the woman to abandon her land and return to her parents' home. The widows are also disinherited of their household property and the children are sometimes taken away from them, this has happened to me. There is a lot of land grabbing, this is coupled with threats and violence. For instance, three of my huts were burnt down as a result of land conflict to make me vacate the land for the grabbers.²⁸

Hope, widowed during the war and now caring for orphaned grandchildren, described the land conflicts as *"like another war in itself. Your neighbour that ... before the war you have been living very happily together, and doing things together. This very neighbour, because of this land conflict – will pick a spear to kill you. This war is so painful. This conflict is so painful."*²⁹ She spoke of a widow who, just days before we met, had been physically assaulted and tied to a tree in an attempt to force her off her land.

²⁶ Interviewed February 7, 2014.

²⁷ Interviewed February 7, 2014.

²⁸ Interviewed February 6, 2014.

²⁹ Interviewed June 25, 2014.

Alice was also widowed during the war, and said that in her community, “it is facing very many widows in this area, even myself. They had started very badly to grab land from me. They say I’m just a woman, a mere woman with no land.” Alice was “lucky my father in law was on my side and he came and spoke very strongly.”³⁰ Her father-in-law, however, is quite old, and she fears for her fate when he is no longer able to defend her rights.

Young women returning from abduction, particularly those whose fathers have died, very often found themselves unable to access land, thus forcing them into marriage or into precarious, low-paid, and often exploitative work as the only way to survive. Grace returned from abduction with one child, to discover her parents had both died. With few other options, she married upon return, but her husband and his family are abusive towards her and her child. She eventually had to send her daughter to live with an aunt:

[A]s the child’s mother, I could not resist the pain anymore that was being caused by the ill treatment my child was getting so ... It would sometimes make me think very highly about going back to the bush, but somehow I just said that to save the situation, to save my child from all this, let me just take this child to live with my Auntie.³¹

Francine returned from abduction with one child. Her parents accepted her back, but her brothers have been pressuring her to leave, fearing that her child will “in the future, bring land shortage problems.” She is worried about her and her child’s futures:

Well, if there is no ... if my parents are no more and these [brothers] begin to demand or chase me to get rid of me, then I will have to go back to the LC and try. If the matter cannot be resolved I will have to leave and go, I don’t know, maybe to the trading centre. I don’t know.³²

3.6 A deep rift

In all of the communities visited during this research, there is a significant and troubling rift between former abductees and their children, and those who were forced into IDP camps. While some work to assist in the reintegration of former abductees has been conducted, longer-term reconciliation and mediation work is not happening except on a very small scale, in isolated pockets. Women who were not abducted told us of the difficulty of integrating former abductees back into the communities. They described former abductees as being “haunted,” as not having learned how to live in the community, and as being psychologically scarred or even “insane.” They told us that former abductees were quick to anger, and that, when angry, were dangerous and extremely violent. Beth explained that

[t]here are a number of returnees, we welcomed them and try to understand them. However, they have a temper and they can maim anyone at any time using any deadly weapon they come across once they pick a quarrel. The children born in the bush also behave in the same way. Once they are upset ... they are capable of doing anything because what they went through in the bush, nobody has ever experienced. The community were told to be very patient with them and try to understand them,

³⁰ Interviewed June 23, 2014.

³¹ Interviewed June 19, 2014.

³² Interviewed June 28, 2014.

*however, their behaviour is sometimes very alarming. ... There are some who have been haunted to a point of permanent insanity and others to a point of death.*³³

The women who spoke of integrating returnees expressed some ambivalence about accepting them back; they recognised on the one hand that they had been victims of an injustice, yet on the other viewed them as capable of great violence, not trusting their presence in the community. Josephine's comment captures this duality:

*Those other girls when they begin to quarrel they fight using pangas and deadly weapons and when they start, they never want to be stopped. This has continuously been a big threat to the local community members. The communities accepted them and treat them in a very understanding manner, we understand that it was not their making that they behave that way but the bush has made them what they are today.*³⁴

Pauline, whose son was abducted and whom she still hopes will one day return, described the return of another former abductee:

*I know of only one child who was abducted in 1993 and returned in 2004. When he returned he stayed in Gulu reception centre. We performed some rituals to welcome him back in the community. The relationship between the child and the local community is not good, the community discriminates him, he cannot easily socialise with the community.*³⁵

Many women thought that formerly abducted people should be allowed to return, but that they needed much greater support and education to help them reintegrate back into the community successfully. They also believed that stronger mechanisms needed to be in place to protect other people from violence. Beth recommended that

*[t]he returnees should be placed in a home or school where they are counselled and trained on how to cope with life. They should be engaged in group work. Religious groups should also be invited to engage with them spiritually. Those who engage in violent behaviour should be imprisoned so they can learn from jail. A law should also be put in place to safeguard their stay within the communities in order to tame down their actions.*³⁶

Women who have returned from abduction spoke expansively about their reintegration back into communities. While some have successfully managed the transition and feel moderately accepted, many more spoke of daily discrimination, name-calling, insults, and exclusion. This discrimination is particularly heightened for those women who returned with children born "in the bush," Grace said that the "insults" and "abuse" from her husband's family became so bad that she sent her child to live with another relative. Her husband's family said "that us who were abducted and stayed in the bush are illiterate, we never studied and that we have bush mentality."³⁷ Helen said that, when collecting water, she and other returnees must wait until everyone else has collected their water. She said her "reception was very bad in the community," and that "they call us names and that 'you who have returned from the

³³ Interviewed February 27, 2014.

³⁴ Interviewed February 11, 2014.

³⁵ Interviewed January 22, 2014.

³⁶ Interviewed February 7, 2014.

³⁷ Interviewed June 19, 2014.

bush with the rebels, you are mentally disturbed.” She has often been told that she should go “*back to the bush from where you have come.*”³⁸

Joyce explained that the children of returnees face the same discrimination. She returned with a son, has since married, and had a further two children. Her husband refuses to pay the school fees for her son born in captivity: “*I feel pained because, in my thinking they [the children] should all get equal treatment.*” The exclusion affects her son, who is “*living a lonely life because he cannot interact freely with these children [his younger siblings] – when they come back from school, there’s nothing he can share.*”³⁹

Joyce went on to explain that, in addition to overt name-calling or unequal treatment, she is frequently reminded of her marginal status:

*When I am working in my garden and I spend some time working longer hours and they are tired, they will say “Ah, for us people, we are retiring. You people are used to such a life, we cannot compete with you.” Or when we are walking together and it reaches some point they will say “Let those ones go at that pace.” Which “those ones?” I ask myself.*⁴⁰

It is not unusual for such comments to escalate into a fight. Jacqueline expressed the anger she feels when she is called names:

*I keep thinking of how the whole trouble started and I get hurt because I am fined [for fighting] and yet I was provoked to behave the way I did. Because what do you expect from a person who is discriminated against, yet it was not our wish to get abducted. You see with us, when we are very angry we can do anything to anybody. Because if I am to start to fight with you, I will fight so bad. I will fight just the way we were doing it in the bush. If there is anything sharp that can kill somebody, I will just pick that something and use it on them ... at that time I am capable of doing anything.*⁴¹

Her friend Veronica agreed, saying that “[w]hen we are very angry, at this point nobody can advise me, I cannot listen to them at that time.” She said the name calling and being accused of having a “*bush mentality ... hurts us the most.*”⁴²

This rift between former abductees and their communities needs urgent attention. Where programs have been put in place offering counselling to former abductees, educating the community about abductee experiences and calling upon people not to call returnees names, both former abductee and former IDP women reported significantly better relationships within the community. Notably, they reported far fewer incidents of physical violence.

3.7 The future generation

Women in every interview expressed a strong desire for their children to have consistent, uninterrupted access to education. This was cited almost universally as the most important

³⁸ Interviewed June 18, 2014.

³⁹ Interviewed June 24, 2014.

⁴⁰ Interviewed June 24, 2014.

⁴¹ Interviewed June 18, 2014.

⁴² Interviewed June 18, 2014.

contribution to justice, whether by women who had experienced abduction, or those who had experienced displacement into camps. Women want a better future for their children and see education as key to this. Eliza returned repeatedly during her interview to the issue of educating her children. She had successfully kept two children in school up to the end of primary school, but did not have enough money to pay for their exams to enable graduation:

I'm really struggling so hard to see that my children have a bright future. ... Now as I speak, I have two children in primary seven – they are candidates – they have to sit to go to the next level. ... At school they want me to pay – 36,000 (USD10) for each one of them – I don't have this money. I don't know. ... I really really want to struggle so hard. I think so much about these children. I want them, at least one of them should be able to go to the next level. I am struggling with these children, the school fees.⁴³

Hope, a 76-year-old widow, is now raising seven of her orphaned grandchildren, but finds the physical toll of working her land increasingly difficult. She said that she divides her money between food and school fees, but that this is becoming increasingly difficult, as she doesn't "have the energy anymore, the strength":

I am not able to cultivate much, after every two days I must go hungry. I try to do casual labour but it is also very difficult. Now with seven children, yesterday I got a report from school – that I must pay each five, five, five thousand for several children in order to do exams. I don't have that money. <pause> I don't know what to do. I'm short of what to do.⁴⁴

Sadly, in most communities visited, women were unable to pay school fees for their children; this meant that children could only sporadically attend school, and that mothers often had to choose which children to send to school, and which to keep at home. Faith is able to keep only one of her four children in school and explained that

[t]his hurts me a lot, it hurts me a lot that sometimes I do not even sleep in the night because I keep thinking about them. It comes with a lot of pain. ... I have not been able to look after them and pay their school fees as I should be doing as a parent.⁴⁵

3.8 Never again

Women in northern Uganda have suffered enormously throughout the war. Women and girls have been abducted and enslaved; forced into squalid IDP camps; witnessed barbaric attacks by LRA cadres; endured beatings, rapes, and other humiliations; and suffered the loss of parents, children, and husbands. They have sustained economic devastation and are struggling to rebuild viable, safe, and dignified lives. LRA attacks have been ceased for several years, the north has been largely demilitarised, and most people have returned to their homes; however, a great number of women continue to feel insecure, fearing that this is merely a lull in the fighting, rather than the end of the conflict. Carla doesn't want her children to go through a war, but she is worried that they will:

⁴³ Interviewed June 26, 2014.

⁴⁴ Interviewed June 25, 2014.

⁴⁵ Interviewed June 17, 2014.

*Sometimes I hear that the war is about to restart and they say it has already started in the Sudan and will only spread here very soon. I feel the war should not restart so we can have some peace and our children should not go through our experience.*⁴⁶

Very many women shared with us their fears that the war will resume. They have not received any assurance of non-recurrence, the Final Peace Agreement remains unsigned, and Kony and the LRA still exist. Several women listen to the radio for news of the LRA's whereabouts. Perhaps more than anything else, women in northern Uganda want an assurance that the war will not happen again:

*What I need to tell you is that – in your reports I know you are going to include all these three countries, and all of them have suffered violence during the conflicts. What I want to say is that, women at least should be given a chance to live peacefully, to have some peace. Women have gone through so much in conflict areas, they use women as a tool for satisfaction and women are dying, women are suffering, women are being washed away by water during these times. Women are suffering all these things in all parts of the world where there's conflict, so my humble prayer is that this should stop. I have seen it with my own eyes and I appeal to the whole world to at least give women some peace.*⁴⁷

3.9 Access to justice

When women are faced with land grabbing, violence, or discrimination, they have a difficult time accessing justice. Formal criminal justice mechanisms such as police or courts are usually some distance from the communities in which many women live. The cost of travelling was noted by many women as prohibitive. There are also costs associated with filing a court case, or even lodging a complaint with police.

Women reported that, in the instances in which they do seek justice, they are more likely to access someone in the community – most commonly a male relative, an LC1 (a local administrative position), or a clan chief (a traditional position). While local justice mechanisms are physically more accessible, they have also been affected by the social, emotional, and economic devastation of the war. Many women complained of being asked either for bribes or transport costs, in order to have their complaint heard; they also observed that the other party usually had greater capacity to pay.

One woman told a harrowing story of the difficulties in accessing justice:

The biggest challenge we face (in accessing justice) is financial constraints because the responsible institutions and persons succumb to bribes which leads to loss or abandonment of our case files. If the matter is not resolved it culminates in more troubles in the home. The police ask for money to transport them to catch the perpetrators, this ranges from 10,000–15,000 Ugandan Shillings, and sometimes even more.

Sexual violence cases are given little or no attention. For instance, my daughter was defiled at the age of 14. When I tried to open a case file they advised me that it was

⁴⁶ Interviewed February 12, 2014.

⁴⁷ Interviewed June 27, 2014.

not helpful as she was already pregnant. She started living with the man, however their stay became so bitter. She had three children (with him), with so many threats of violence to her life. She decided to come back to me. I welcomed her back. ... The father of her children (came and) took off with her. He stayed with her in the bush for three days, tying her to a tree during the day and raping her in the night. I reported the matter to the police who asked me to get transport so they can search for him. I hired a motorcyclist who charged me UGX300,000 (USD89) in vain. The case has since died a natural death.⁴⁸

After telling the story of her unsuccessful efforts to help her daughter, the woman surmised that “*this kind of situation leaves us in a dilemma on whether justice is meant for us women.*”⁴⁹

The socio-political status of women is a major obstacle for women seeking both formal and traditional forms of justice. Irene was granted a house when she returned from abduction, but was forced out of her home by a relative of a local leader. She described that she has

tried so hard to seek justice with the local leaders and local courts but in vain. Those people have a lot of money and they use their financial power to dispossess the poor and underprivileged like me. In my house case, the LC wanted me to first become his “wife” which I refused. Thereafter, my case was given no attention. I feel so cheated. I know I was wrongly disadvantaged.⁵⁰

This economic, geographical, and socio-political distance as a barrier to accessing justice was repeated a great many times, whether in matters regarding domestic violence, sexual assault, or land disputes. Fawsia saw that women’s low status was at the heart of her difficulties in accessing justice:

Women are always shut down in local courts, they do not give them the space to speak out. When they try to speak out, men call them disrespectful.⁵¹

Josamary believed her lack of success in resolving a land dispute was due to sexism in the justice system. She said simply, “*My case is overlooked because I am a woman.*”⁵² Phoebe felt similarly disadvantaged, following her attempts to access justice in regards to violence from her husband. She explained that

[w]hen I called a clan meeting they all supported my husband’s side. I have now resorted to keeping quiet.⁵³

The effects of being unable to access justice very often lead women to “*keeping quiet*” and submitting to their secondary status. While there is extensive fatalism and passivity among many women in northern Uganda, there are also women who refuse to accept the denial of justice to women, and who are determined to improve their own lives as well as the lives of other women. As Harriet defiantly said:

⁴⁸ Interviewed February 7, 2014.

⁴⁹ Interviewed February 7, 2014.

⁵⁰ Interviewed January 21, 2014.

⁵¹ Interviewed March 20, 2014.

⁵² Interviewed February 6, 2014.

⁵³ Interviewed March 20, 2014.

*Every time women try to fight for justice they are insulted, despised, accused of bias and impartiality. However, I pay no attention to such reactions.*⁵⁴

3.10 Claiming power

The agency and defiance of Harriet and a small but significant number of other women is a source of hope and potential for transformation in post-conflict northern Uganda. The Women's Advocacy Network in Gulu is an inspiring example of women organising to provide each other with support, as well as gradually developing their confidence, knowledge, and skills. The group was started by seven former abductees who were facing discrimination and stigmatisation from their community upon returning from the bush. It has now grown into a network of twelve groups in communities across the north. Importantly, these groups include both former IDP and former abductee women. The women provide emotional and social support to one another, run livelihood programs to enable members to earn an income, and mediate family and community conflicts, including domestic violence, reintegration and reconciliation problems, and land disputes. The Network has also been instrumental in successfully lobbying for a motion supporting gender sensitive reparations for survivors of the GoU–LRA war. The motion received unanimous support in the Ugandan Parliament in April 2014.

Through their practical, psycho-social, and political activities, the women of the Women's Advocacy Network are building a deep sense of empowerment. Julia, a member of the Network, calmly but firmly stated that *"I do not allow for any violence to happen to me again."*⁵⁵ Other women of the Network expressed similar confidence in their right to live free from violence. Joyce, facing discrimination from her community and violence from her husband, quietly said *"I think women should have rights,"* and explained that women in her community are getting organised to fight for their rights. She thinks big changes are *"not so far"* away.⁵⁶ Dorine, a former IDP woman whose husband is often drunk and violent, also reported that the women in her community are planning how to bring the alcoholism and violence in their homes to an end: *"As women we are trying to see a way, we are discussing the matter among ourselves and then we shall see how to go ahead."* Dorine has already raised the matter publicly in her role as Vice Local Councillor 1, and explains that she has some level of respect in the community: *"They listen to me. Sometimes I even call the men and talk to them and they listen to me."* She expressed her determination to rebuild a peaceful life: *"I will continue to fight this battle against alcohol because I have seen this year is not as bad as last year. So I will continue."*⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Interviewed February 6, 2014.

⁵⁵ Interviewed June 27, 2014.

⁵⁶ Interviewed June 24, 2014.

⁵⁷ Interviewed June 21, 2014.

CHAPTER 4: LEGACIES OF CAMP LIFE

*Life became meaningless. The confinement in camps was undevelopmental.*⁵⁸
– Florence

4.1 Introduction

“Camp life” emerged strongly as a major theme in this research. A majority of the women who participated in this research had lived for several years in Internally Displaced Persons’ (IDP) camps, and spoke extensively about both “camp life” and the effects that the prolonged encampment continues to have today. Many women traced a direct causal line between encampment and the social breakdown, alcoholism, violence, land conflict, and poverty with which most Acholi communities are now struggling. As Faith explained:

*Yes, indeed there is a great link between the experiences of camp life and the problems the people are facing up to today. Because before people came to the camps life was very different, life was different and people were thinking differently but once people were in the camps, confined in the camps, they started behaving in the camp way, doing things in a direction that was never done before ... doing a lot of things that you know are not befitting and it is from that that you find that there is a lot of family breakdown, a lot of divorce, there is a lot of HIV/AIDS rate, there is a lot ... just because of that life we were exposed to in the camps.*⁵⁹

A marked feature of the conflict in northern Uganda was the mass forced displacement of people into IDP camps; “[a]t the conflict’s peak in 2005, there were 1.84 million IDPs living in 251 camps across 11 districts of northern Uganda” (UNHCR 2012). In the Acholi Sub-Region, 1.1 million people were displaced into approximately 150 IDP camps (UNHCR and AVSI 2010, 5). Large-scale encampment began in 1996 through the Ugandan government’s policy of forcing people into “protected villages,” often using violence (or threats of violence) to make people leave their homes.⁶⁰ Most “protected villages” or IDP camps were centred near army barracks in larger towns or trading centres (UNHCR and AVSI 2010, 4).

4.2 “Camp life”

4.2.1 Conditions and experiences in camps

All women who spoke about life in the camps described extreme deprivation, over-crowding, forced dependency, and a profound breakdown in social norms and relationships. There seemed to be little variation between camps or different areas. Although not asked where they were encamped, women spontaneously named ten different camps located across Acholiland. Twenty-five year old Mary, who spent several years in a camp in the Kitgum region, summarised a range of issues succinctly:

⁵⁸ Interviewed January 22, 2014.

⁵⁹ Interviewed June 17, 2014.

⁶⁰ For more on the violence and coercion used by Ugandan government forces to force the population into camps, see in particular Dolan (2009) and Branch (2007).

Life in the camp was difficult. There was nowhere to cultivate as one would do at home to get food. There were no health facilities, no water source because the camp was located in a trading centre. Camp life affected peoples' lives. Girls got involved in risky sexual behaviour at an early age, there were early child pregnancies. Men got deeply addicted to alcohol. Women were entirely left to provide for the children and take them to school. Men became irresponsible; they are not bothered about meeting family needs. Sometimes in the camps we were given expired food like posho.⁶¹

Joy, a 51-year-old woman who was forced into the Patongo camp near Pader, described a similar situation:

Afterwards, we were all told by the government to relocate to Patongo camp, like prisoners of war, we were solely dependent on WFP relief. Life was very hard, we had to move amidst fear and danger to come and till land in the villages because the food supplied was never enough for our families. In the camps, there were no schools, no hospitals and the sanitation was very poor, the suffering was even worse than in the homes. Water was a big problem and is still a very big challenge in our homes. I used to feel so bad about the rebels and the conflict generally but now, I have tried to forget.⁶²

The conditions in camps in the Gulu area were the same, as Harriet, a 72-year-old widow, explained:

During the war, life was very hard, people were sleeping in the bush in fear that they would be terrorised or abducted by the rebels, not until the government ordered that people relocate to the IDP camps. In the camps, there was exchange of bullets, all the time people were living in fear. There was no food, the WFP would give us food but such food was a bare minimum. The whole family had to share one hut. The children began to lead very reckless lives that most of the youth today are living [HIV] positively.⁶³

Women spoke of an all-encompassing insecurity; loss of dignity; loss of autonomy; and loss of feelings of control and purpose during camp life. Several organisations and researchers were highly critical of Uganda's IDP camps. Murru, in "Uganda: Between Tragic Past and an Uncertain Future" (1998), referred to them as "concentration camps" (quoted in Dolan 2009, 109); others variously described them as "virtual prison[s]" (MSF 2004, 15), "dangerous" (Okello and Hovil 2007, 439), and "social torture" (Dolan 2009). Women participating in this research told of a range of harms suffered through enforced displacement in camps, including:

- the process through which people were forced into camps;
- the inability to engage in any productive or meaningful activity, and the forced dependency on food aid;
- shortages of food, firewood, and water;
- over-crowding;

⁶¹ Interviewed March 19, 2014.

⁶² Interviewed January 31, 2014.

⁶³ Interviewed February 6, 2014.

- poor sanitation;
- profound insecurity resulting from violence between camp residents, from soldiers, and from LRA attacks;
- poor health services;
- poor or no education services for children;
- breakdown in social structures, family structures, and social norms, particularly around conflict resolution and sexual relations;
- high rates of alcoholism among men and boys;
- high levels of sexual violence against women and children;
- high rates of child pregnancies, and an increase in prostitution;
- high rates of disease, including HIV/AIDS, malaria, cholera, *two lango*,⁶⁴ and Ebola; and
- high levels of fear, trauma, and death.

Rather than being zones of protection, northern Uganda's IDP camps were dangerous and degrading places in which survival was a daily struggle. The Ugandan Human Rights Commission and UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights highlighted "the violence, impoverishment and humiliation that occurred as a result of forced displacement" (UHRC and UNOHCHR 2011, xv). Most women in this study, despite having returned home up to six or eight years earlier, spoke strongly about the conditions in the camps, and the profound impact encampment continues to have on their lives.

4.2.2 Food shortages, poor sanitation, and high mortality

Little planning had been made for provisioning the IDP camps, leading to life-threatening shortages of food, water, and sanitation. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) reported that food relief was delivered once every two or three months, was usually sufficient for two or three weeks, and often attracted rebel attacks, causing people to be fearful of storing any food in their huts (MSF 2004, 6). Food insecurity was such that MSF established a therapeutic feeding centre in Lira to reduce the death rate due to malnutrition (MSF 2004, 12). The World Food Program (WFP) ran a number of therapeutic feeding centres in the Gulu district as early as 2002 (Dolan 2009, 124).

In a 2005 joint study, the Ugandan Ministry of Health and the World Health Organisation reported that in the first half of that year, at the peak of encampment, almost 1000 people died per week from preventable causes. AIDS, malaria, malnutrition, and diarrhoea were the biggest killers, followed by violence (MoH and WHO 2005, ii).

People were cramped into such close quarters that huts were often built one meter or less apart, and many people would sleep in a single hut (Ogwal 2004). The overcrowding created a fertile environment for the spread of disease, and was exacerbated by the woefully inadequate sanitation infrastructure. For example, Odek IDP camp housed 8,000 people and had three pit latrines (Dolan 2009, 112). Caroline (aged 38) remembered the overcrowding of the camps, the poor sanitation, and the diseases that resulted:

⁶⁴ *Two lango* is "a local illness concept encompassing oral thrush, malnutrition and diarrhoea" (MoH and WHO 2005, ii).

There was no space to construct more than one hut for a single family therefore the entire family lived in one hut, there was no privacy. There was also no space for building latrines so people would defecate in the open, some even near the water sources/wells. Life in the camps was difficult, there was too much congestion. ... [Now] there are diseases like nodding disease and HIV/AIDS.⁶⁵

4.2.3 Violence and a lack of security

Although ostensibly for the protection and safety of people in northern Uganda, security in the camps was extremely poor. The camps became very violent places, subject to fighting among IDPs, raids by the LRA, and beatings and sexual violence from soldiers charged with the people's protection. Pauline expressed her despair that even with all the deprivations of the camp, they were still not safe from attacks:

If the UN did not supply any relief we would starve and we were always on the run for our dear lives. There were no health services, we did not have any source of income, the men were never supportive and they left all the care burdens to the women. Much as all this happened when we were confined in the camps, we were still attacked by the rebels.⁶⁶

Many women participating in this research told of surviving rebel attacks on their camp. Linda broke down in tears as she recounted the day rebels locked her husband and daughter, along with many other displaced people, in a hut in Amyel camp and set it on fire, killing all those inside.⁶⁷ Alice recalled multiple rebel attacks on her camp: *"There was fighting all the time, all the time gunshots. My hut was attacked and bullets were shot ... immediately I ran, and my hut was put on fire."*⁶⁸ Chris Dolan, from the Refugee Law Project at Makerere University, reported in his extensive study of IDP camps in northern Uganda that the army barracks were placed in the centre of IDP camps, with displaced people spanning a considerable distance all around, prompting some to speculate that the UPDF were using displaced people as human shields (Dolan 2009, 108, 112).

People in camps feared the Ugandan government soldiers as much as the LRA. Rosemary explained that *"in the camps the soldiers mistreated civilians. They tortured us and sexually abused girls and women."*⁶⁹ One mother explained that young girls would often "elope" with soldiers "in order to have these material things," and that it was difficult for mothers to prevent their daughters from going with the soldiers, as *"the soldier, remember, they have the gun. They [can] shoot and kill you."*⁷⁰ MSF reported in 2004 that beatings by government soldiers were a "regular phenomenon" and that it was common practice for soldiers to take displaced women and girls to their barracks at night time and rape them (MSF 2004, 9). A joint investigation by UNICEF and the Government of Uganda in 2005 found that 60 percent of women and girls in Pabbo IDP camp near Gulu had experienced sexual assault, with the highest incidence among girls aged between 13 and 17 years old (UNICEF and GoU 2005, iii); the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) were named first among the list of perpetrators. The report further went on to state that "despite the awareness of [Sexual and

⁶⁵ Interviewed March 18, 2014.

⁶⁶ Interviewed January 22, 2014.

⁶⁷ Interviewed June 17, 2014.

⁶⁸ Interviewed June 23, 2014.

⁶⁹ Interviewed February 13, 2014.

⁷⁰ Interviewed June 17, 2014.

Gender Based Violence] (SGBV), no specific government programmes have been put in place to address the problem” (UNICEF and GoU 2005, iv).

The dire situation in the camps prompted the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), Jan Egeland, to describe the humanitarian crisis in northern Uganda in 2003 as the “biggest forgotten, neglected humanitarian emergency in the world today” (Mukwana and Ridderbos 2008, 21).

Despite the clear injustices done in forcibly displacing almost the entire Acholi population into camps; the life threatening (and all too often fatal) conditions of the camps; and the ongoing effects of this mass displacement, encampment has not caught the attention of justice leaders, and is not targeted for a justice response.

A number of commentators have questioned whether the forcing of northern Ugandan civilians into IDP camps by the Government of Uganda, and the subsequent treatment of people in those camps, might constitute a crime against humanity (Branch 2007; Dolan 2009; HRW 2005; Lawino 2012; Okello and Hovil 2007). The International Criminal Court (ICC), however, has issued indictments only against LRA leaders. The ICC has been criticised by a range of actors for its investigations in northern Uganda, and its reluctance to prosecute possible crimes committed by government authorities (Branch 2007; Glasius 2009, 519; JRP 2013, 5; Lawino 2012; UNOHCHR 2007, 51–52).⁷¹ Phil Clark was particularly critical, stating that “the ICC has based its case selection in Uganda in part on the gravity of crimes committed but also on a desire to avoid prosecuting government officials, upon whom it relies heavily for security and evidence during ongoing conflict” (Clark 2010, 43). The ICC initially explained its decision to issue indictments against LRA leaders, and not the UPDF, in the following manner: “Crimes committed by the LRA were much more numerous and of much higher gravity than alleged crimes committed by the UPDF” (Moreno-Ocampo 2005, 2–3). More recently, the ICC has refrained from discussions of the gravity of crimes, arguing instead that alleged UPDF crimes fall outside the ICC’s temporal jurisdiction (IRIN 2010). While UPDF actions committed during the initial process of forced encampment in 1996 did indeed occur prior to July 1, 2002 (when the ICC commenced), the period of encampment and much of the suffering reported by respondents in this research continued well after this date.

4.2.4 Trauma

These harms all converged to create high levels of fear, trauma, and death among IDPs. Anna, from the Agago region, explained very simply and directly that “*it was traumatizing, living in the camps.*”⁷² Alice, after recounting witnessing multiple traumatic deaths in the camp, explained that camps had “*that smell that was there ... that smell, even now ... it comes straight over us.*” Still troubled by memories and sensory recollections, Alice’s coping

⁷¹ As recently as February 27, 2015, a delegation of ten Members of Parliament from Acholi, Teso, West Nile, and Lango sub-regions met with ICC Chief Prosecutor Bensouda, requesting that the ICC investigate alleged atrocities committed by the UPDF (Walusimbi 2015). The Justice and Reconciliation Project conducted research into community views of ICC involvement in northern Uganda in the Lango and Acholi sub-regions, and reported that “we encountered great frustration and disappointment at the ICC’s apparent disinterest in crimes committed by the Ugandan military. Some discussants mentioned violent acts by the Ugandan People’s Defence Force (UPDF) in their own communities” (JRP 2013, 5). In April 2012, the retired Bishop of Kitgum Diocese, the Rt. Rev. Macleord Baker Ochola II, publicly accused the Government of Uganda of attempting a genocide against the Acholi people, and has criticised the ICC for failing to launch any proceedings against Government agents (Lawino 2012).

⁷² Interviewed January 30, 2014.

strategy is “*just to persevere and try to console myself that this was in the past ... I should rest and let go of these hurts and feelings.*”⁷³

An extensive survey of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and depression, conducted in November 2006 among 1220 people living in 28 IDP camps across Gulu and Amuru districts, found the incidence of PTSD and depression to be “amongst the highest [levels] recorded globally” (Roberts et al. 2008, 44). The researchers found that 60 percent of women (45 percent of men) met the symptom criteria for PTSD, and that 78 percent of women (51 percent of men) met the criteria for depression (Roberts et al. 2008, 41). The overwhelming majority of respondents in the Roberts study had been exposed to traumatic events, with almost two-thirds of respondent having experienced eight or more of the traumatic events on the survey. Importantly, “over half of the traumatic experiences had occurred whilst the participants were living in a camp,” and “93 percent did not feel safe in the camp” (Roberts et al. 2008, 4). These results largely accorded with similar studies; a 2005 study of 2585 people in IDP camps in northern Uganda found that 74.3 percent of respondents met the diagnostic criteria for PTSD, while 44.5 percent met the criteria for depression (Pham et al. 2007, 549). This study also found higher prevalence for both conditions among women than men (83.3 percent for PTSD and 53.4 percent for depression) (Pham et al. 2007, 549).

Assistance with psychosocial needs in northern Uganda is inadequate across the entire population, and the little counselling and psychological support offered to northern Ugandan women has been targeted at women returning from abduction and captivity in the LRA. Very few, if any, women have received counselling or other supports to help them recover from the trauma experienced in IDP camps. The Advisory Consortium on Conflict Sensitivity (ACCS) (2013, 36) reported that “[i]ndividuals are still living with the trauma of forced displacement, sexual violence, torture, and physical wounds and mutilations that need to be addressed.” Importantly, the report makes a direct link between unhealed trauma from displacement (and abduction), and the future success of reconciliation:

Without the needed physical and psychological repair, it will remain difficult for affected individuals and communities to perceive that justice has been done and to meaningfully engage in a broader process of social rehabilitation, reconciliation or development. (36)

The ACCS findings accord with findings in this research which indicate ongoing trauma, grief, and resentment among formerly displaced women and their communities, thereby impairing the ability of communities to successfully reintegrate returned abductees. Most former abductees interviewed in this research complained of being “*constantly reminded*” that they are “*from the bush,*” and of being called “*rebel,*” “*killer,*” or the possessor of “*a bush mentality.*” The traumatisation of displacement and the lasting effects of the broad range of experiences during the war – including “camp life,” LRA attacks, and violence from the UPDF – needs to be acknowledged. There is a need for trauma healing assistance for all women in northern Uganda, whether formerly displaced or abducted.

4.2.5 Social breakdown

There is no doubt that “camp life” has caused profound harm to the social fabric of Acholi communities. Time and again, women told us that “*camps changed people’s mentality,*” “*people lost a sense of humanity,*” “*girls engaged in very risky behaviours,*” “*men started*

⁷³ Interviewed June 23, 2014.

misbehaving towards us,” and *“life became meaningless”* in the camps. Women described a spiralling disintegration of social norms: people were forced to live in over-crowded huts; the necessities for survival (food, water, and sanitation) were scarce; and people were cut off from any opportunity to maintain their livelihoods. As a result, alternate economies emerged as ways for people to meet their survival needs. Young men began to steal and to form gangs which used violence to extract food, sex, and other goods and services from fellow IDPs. Women and girls engaged in survival sex with men who could offer a small payment or a degree of protection. UPDF soldiers had the greatest access to food, money, and the means of protection (UHRC and UNOHCHR 2011, 52). Women also had to take great risks to their safety to go outside the camp in search of food or firewood, an activity which not infrequently resulted in attacks by rebels or beatings by soldiers (Dolan 2009).

Meanwhile, Acholi men in the camps, having lost much status as well as productive roles, quickly took to drinking. Those who drank typically took out their trauma, frustration, and anger on their wives in the evening. Camp rules required that all people were back in their huts by 7.30 p.m. or 8.00 p.m.; not only did this leave women vulnerable to attacks from a drunk husband, but it rendered people unable to continue important cultural traditions, such as participating in *Wang oo*, a family gathering around the fire and a key practice in passing on cultural traditions to children.

The Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative and the Archdiocese of Gulu released a report in 2001, explaining the devastating cultural and social effects of the camps, and warning against the future implications if left to continue in this way:

As one moves through any of the displaced camps, one of the most depressing sights is to see scores of unattended children everywhere, idle youth loitering about and men drinking alcohol. This is just the surface of a deeper problem that most people, especially elders, feel as something very painful: the collapse of the good cultural values that people used to feel proud of. A whole generation is growing up in a moral and cultural vacuum, and considering that children under the age of 15 account for more than 55 percent of the total population in the IDP camps in Acholi this is a very serious situation.

The main means of transmitting the Acholi traditional culture to the younger generations is the evening family gathering at the fireplace, referred to in the Acholi language as *Wang oo*. Army-enforced regulations in most camps state that everybody is expected to be indoors or at least next to their huts by 7:30 p.m. Those who break this rule are routinely beaten. The consequence is that since there is no more *Wang oo*, children – adults often complain – are not taught good cultural values. (19)

Children were getting neither traditional nor formal education in the camps. The Archdiocese reported just four classrooms for 1050 students in Acholibur IDP camp (ARLPI and JPCGA 2001, 19) – only slightly larger class sizes than the Acholiland IDP camp average of 160 students per class in 1999 (UNOCHA 1999, 30). The Uganda Human Rights Commission and UN Office of the High Commission for Human Rights also noted the devastating social and cultural impacts on the culture of the Acholi, particularly those who were children during encampment. Specifically, they noted the loss of both formal and cultural educational opportunities resulting from the regimes of camp life (UHRC and UNOHCHR 2011, 54–54).

As Margaret explained:

The way I see it, the problems we faced in the camps and what is happening now is because of congesting people together. Many people did not know each other so people started knowing each other and they started seeing different negative ways of life. Because of that kind of behaviour, even your young child could be defiled. And it is the reason diseases spread among people. Because of congesting people together in the camps.

It has made men's drinking rates to skyrocket because although they would drink in the past, it would be from their own harvest but nowadays they just drink aimlessly. It has made men to waste household resources because before going to the camps, they did not know these white man's drinks that were brought.

The reason boo kec (thugs) are many is because of congesting people in the camp. Some people who return from the bush pretend to be armed so they become robbers.

My thought is that now that people have returned home, they should not return to the camp because camp spoilt our girls, it spoilt our boys. Things like disco and video that people did not know has made our children to get spoilt. It has increased violence, and prostitution is widespread. We should never return to the camp. It has arrested the future of our children. They are not productive.⁷⁴

Margaret's views were echoed by other women with whom we spoke. Josephine explained that the current generation of young people, both those who were abducted and those who lived in camps, have had little guidance on living in Acholi society:

The children who were abducted grew up in anti-social environments and therefore they never got to learn how to work hard, even those who grew up in the period of war never went through the training that we went through of how to engage in the community – loss of social norms.⁷⁵

Annabel said that she sees the next generation as being in trouble. Many have “lost their parents” and so “the children have now been left on their own to do a lot of things.”⁷⁶ She also identified that the elders who previously would have been called upon to correct anti-social behaviour have either died or lost their integrity, and do not “use the truth, and all this is really causing so many problems among the people in the society.”⁷⁷

Many women rued the loss of trust and social bonds that existed before the period of encampment. Ruth explained life before the camps in the following way:

We were united, we cultivated our gardens as a group ... collective digging known as Wang Kweri. People would do collective digging for an individual/family and the members would not be paid but served with a meal and drink in appreciation. Family members were living together. There were several friends who would come to one's rescue. Life was much more meaningful. After camp life people have changed, people are so disgruntled, people have become so individualistic.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Interviewed September 25, 2013.

⁷⁵ Interviewed February 11, 2014.

⁷⁶ Interviewed June 18, 2014.

⁷⁷ Interviewed June 18, 2014.

⁷⁸ Interviewed March 20, 2014.

Ruth's description of life before the camps closely matches the descriptions of collaboration between neighbouring Acholi households during planting and harvesting seasons. Adelman (2009, 31) reports that

[f]armers' groups are critical institutions in both Lango and Acholi culture. While they were formed for an economic purpose, the features of these groups making them good economic institutions – namely, daily contact, trust between members and reciprocity – make them useful in other ways as well.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of the damage done to social, cultural, family, and economic relations through the policy of encampment. Multiple groups and organisations warned about the breakdown in social norms and the ties that bound Acholi communities together from very early in the period of encampment (ARLPI and JPCGA 2001; Gersony 1997; UNOCHA 1999). As early as 1999, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported on the multi-agency Northern Uganda Psycho-Social Needs Assessment conducted in IDP camps in 1998, emphasising findings of

negative social trends of magnitudes previously unknown to the affected areas. These problems include social and cultural breakdown e.g. increased crime rate, consumption of alcohol and drug abuse, loss of respect and values, as well as breakdown of family structure e.g. separation, orphanhood and increased domestic violence. (UNOCHA 1999, 30–31)

However, it seems that such warnings did not lead to changed practices in camp management or regulations governing social life in camps. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) reported in 2008 that

[o]ver 800,000 IDPs have been traumatized by terrorist attacks and have remained physically and mentally idle in camps for over five years. Nearly all traditional community and family mechanisms for ensuring cohesiveness and stability in society have broken down. Children have lost years of schooling, preventing them equal access to employment and future opportunities for participating in the national political system and economy. (139)

While the Government of Uganda promised a range of programs to assist in the return of displaced people – including economic and psychosocial support – very little assistance was delivered by either Ugandan authorities or the international community. Subsequently, all communities visited in this research reported a toxic mix of family and social breakdown, including men and boys lost to alcoholism and crime, violence, corruption, trauma, and poverty.

4.3 Lasting legacies

*There was a total mess in the camps. ... People lost a sense of humanity.*⁷⁹
– Beth

Although almost all IDP camps are now closed and most people have returned to their homes (IDMC 2008), the legacies of “camp life” continue to shape people's lives. Time and again, women told us that “camp life changed people,” and is a large causal factor in the high levels of trauma, alcoholism, and violence in their communities today. Camp life led to extensive breakdown of social norms – norms which previously guided behaviour in a wide range of

⁷⁹ Interviewed February 7, 2014.

social relations, including conflict resolution, sexual relations, parenting, marital relations, land allocation, resource distribution, economic activities, and decision-making. This is in keeping with findings by the Ugandan Human Rights Commission and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which stated that encampment and “being cut off from their agricultural lands and traditional homesteads had a devastating economic, livelihood, social and cultural effect on people” (UHRC and UNOHCHR 2011, 51).

The loss of elders, traumatising of surviving elders and leaders, and the breakdown in social norms, are having a doubly harmful effect in that large numbers of people are engaging in behaviours that previously would have been rare; this is compounded by the fact that the mechanisms to deal with transgressions have been profoundly damaged. While this phenomenon is impacting on the lives of women in multiple ways, three were raised in almost every interview: widespread alcoholism; land conflict; and high levels of violence resulting from both.

4.3.1 Alcoholism

One of the most commonly reported issues by women participating in this research was that men had started drinking alcohol excessively in the camps, and have continued the practice after returning home. As Annabel summarised:

*Men drink a lot and this was as a result of their stay in the camps, and they have continued with this. They continuously drink and they don't do anything productive and they don't do anything to help their families – this is what they do, the best they can do is drinking.*⁸⁰

While accurate baseline figures for alcohol consumption in northern Uganda are not available, several studies have reported high rates of excessive alcohol consumption, including by women, but more commonly by men (Annan and Brier 2010; Kizza et al. 2012; Okello and Hovil 2007). A 2008 study into war-affected young women found that 43 percent surveyed reported brewing alcohol as their primary economic activity, and that brewing alcohol “dominates all agriculture and herding activities combined” (Annan et al. 2008, 13). During fieldwork for this report conducted in 2014, the researchers observed that many men in villages were visibly highly intoxicated by mid-morning in most of the villages visited. One NGO worker based in Amuru commented on this during the Validation Workshop in June 2015: “In the villages, for example where I work in Amuru, you’ll get men actually even at this time (10.00am), they are already drunk.” Two other NGO workers based in Pader responded, “Eh, this is late!”⁸¹ Annan and Brier (2010, 155) reported similar observations during their fieldwork in 2010, stating that “[a]lcohol abuse seemed ubiquitous, with public drinking seen early in the morning and public intoxication common.”

Excessive alcohol consumption has, and continues to have, several negative effects on northern Ugandan communities, including

- being a key driver in both domestic and inter-personal violence;
- causing a profound reduction in the productivity of men; and

⁸⁰ Interviewed June 18, 2014.

⁸¹ KI, interviewed during Validation Workshop, June 19, 2015.

- being a major contributor to ongoing (and possibly intergenerational) poverty, particularly as money that would otherwise be spent on food for the family and on children's education is instead being spent on alcohol.

4.3.1.1 Reduced productivity, legacies of dependency and poverty

Women see excessive alcohol consumption, along with years of enforced dependency on food aid, as the major causal factors in men abrogating their work duties. Dorine (aged 53 years) explained that her husband started drinking during their ten years in a camp, and now does little else: *“He started the habit from the camp. All from camp life, because from the camps, you wake up, you must start drinking. No work, nothing.”*⁸² Furthermore, she elaborated, that *“all the men in this area do equally like this.”* Faith similarly said that *“you find very early in the morning the husband or a man is already drunk. They are not going to the garden, they are not doing anything productive, they are already drunk in their homes.”*⁸³

Hannah, a 45-year-old woman, explained that *“people were stopped from cultivating”* in the camps, and made to *“depend on food supply from WFP.”* This made children, families, and the community *“miserable.”* She continued:

*In the camps, men's behaviour really changed, some men would defile girl children, others would steal the little (food) supply and sell, such money they would use to buy alcohol. This kind of behaviour has continued up to now. Men have left all their responsibilities. Today women carry all the burden to look after the children and provide for their families. There are so many cases that have been registered at the District and Sub-county offices regarding neglect of responsibilities. ... Women struggle to cultivate and grow crops while the men steal, sell and drink the foodstuff produced.*⁸⁴

Amelia similarly attributed the lack of productivity, high alcohol consumption, and lack of commitment to family responsibilities to the enforced dependency and lack of opportunity for productive work in the camps:

*For example, my husband ... When we were in the camps, because of the relief that we were being supplied with, we produced so many children. Now that we have returned home, we cannot look after these children very well. The men are not supportive at all. ... They are drinking so much. Some are violent. But mine used not to be very violent except his habits of being a womaniser. [Now] he comes as a visitor home. ... [Before the camp] we would dig together, we would do things together. When we went to the camp, it was just terrible. Camp life made the habit intensify and given the fact we were being given relief, so he thought everything was fine for us, he could just continue with his life the way he chose to.*⁸⁵

Scholars and practitioners working in the field of internal displacement have long argued that *“while camps may be useful in the initial reception phase, ... long-term encampment should be avoided, since it leads to hopelessness, inactivity and dependency”* (Castles and Van Hear 2005, 31; Black 1998; Malkki 1995). A Brookings Institute study into the economic impacts

⁸² Interviewed June 21, 2014.

⁸³ Interviewed June 17, 2014.

⁸⁴ Interviewed March 13, 2014.

⁸⁵ Interviewed June 26, 2014.

of IDP camps surmised that “encampment is not good for economic self-reliance” (Tajgman 2010, 450). Long-term encampment is known to create lasting negative individual, social, and economic effects, and indeed, this orthodoxy has borne out in northern Uganda.

While only a few key informants spoke in depth about the effects of the camps on present day life in northern Uganda, those key informants based in the north confirmed that the incidence of heavy alcohol use among men since returning from camps is very high. They also explained a causal link between the trauma of the conflict and the prolonged dependency and enforced idleness during encampment:

*In reflection to the IDP camps where food was given to people for free, you do not have anything to do, the only thing you can do is to go for leisure, a woman is supposed to cook and there's nothing that you can do. So some of these men become addicted [to alcohol] and when they returned back to their original land they could not do anything because they were addicted to alcohol, they have to continue drinking and leave their women to do domestic and agricultural work. Then another thing could be that something of them resort to drinking because of either health issues or trauma of the war or even HIV. So the only thing maybe they can do is go for drinking alcohol.*⁸⁶

One key informant made a very similar observation, adding that NGO's practices of working with women rather than men in the camps compounded the problem, and further displaced men from any meaningful and productive roles:

*[There was] a reversal of roles because men as traditional breadwinners lost their places in that regard because they were confined in the IDP camps, food was being distributed to them, they could not farm their gardens so they could not play their traditional breadwinning roles, so that reverted to the women. And actually why it reverted to the women, the World Food Program and NGOs preferred working with the women.*⁸⁷

Key informants also said that, however little psychosocial help has been offered to women, there has been even less targeted at men. As one key informant explained: “People didn't know that they also needed some bit of rehabilitation. People neglected them and that is why the drinking is just continuous.”⁸⁸ While trauma (as northern-based key informants explained) is likely an important element in understanding the very high levels of alcohol consumption by men in northern Uganda, the extended periods in IDP camps, enforced dependency, and limited opportunities for productive activities, has resulted in excessive alcohol consumption, and significantly lowered productivity by effectively taking a large number of men out of the work force. NGO orthodoxy, which dictates that working through women is a more secure way of ensuring aid reaches children and other vulnerable groups within a target population, appears to have had unintended effects on post-conflict behaviours and gender relations, and is working against present day poverty reduction efforts.

In addition to the profound impacts alcohol consumption has had, and continues having, on productivity, it also distorts how household incomes are spent, and is a key driver in exacerbating poverty; in too many instances, it ensures poverty continues into the next

⁸⁶ Interviewed June 19, 2015.

⁸⁷ Interviewed June 25, 2014.

⁸⁸ Interviewed June 19, 2015.

generation. Many women said that they were struggling to find enough money to buy food and pay school fees for their children, and that often, a key cause of this was husbands' taking of household funds to buy alcohol, resulting in children being sent home from school due to unpaid fees. Margaret explained that men's drinking *"has made men to waste household resources."*⁸⁹ Santina, whose husband is a Local Councillor in the Gulu district, identified this, along with alcohol-related violence, as one of the main concerns that her husband has to deal with in his leadership role:

*When it comes to harvesting the crops from the garden, most of the men when these crops have been harvested will just pick or steal and sell and drink the money off.*⁹⁰

The District Police Commander in Pader described the same dynamic in the communities with which he works, saying that *"the man sells (the harvest) but does not give the proceeds to cater for buying food and all that is needed in the home. The women are not given anything. As a result the man drinks all the money and becomes very violent."*⁹¹ He went on to say that poverty eradication and education of children are two of the most urgent issues facing the Pader District, and are essential for improving the lives of women and all people in the district.

One key informant saw drinking, poverty, despair, and inadequate education of children as cyclical. She explained that *"the children of the poor and those in the grassroots do not get the opportunity to benefit from scholarships,"* before going on to ask that this research project advocate for scholarships for students with talent and drive, but no funds to continue their education. *"Such children should be helped,"* she explained, because *"at the end they would make a very big change in the communities and to their parents who are living in the communities."* However, at the moment,

*most of them (parents) have taken to drinking and they are not providing the basics for these children. Some women too in the communities are, because of the different problems they are going through, the different burdens, the difficulty they are going through to make ends meet for their families, they are worrying, they are hurting so much that they have taken to drinking also to make them forget some of these problems which is also creating more problems in the community.*⁹²

The high rate of excessive alcohol consumption is a major issue in a cycle of violence, poverty, trauma, and despair, and is shaping the next generation through children having disrupted and incomplete educations. Excessive drinking however, remains largely unaddressed by both the Government of Uganda and NGOs delivering services in the area. Worudet, a Ugandan NGO based in Pader, told us of some work it has conducted with men addressing violence, drinking, productivity, and shared-household decision making, which they believe has been highly effective. This work, however, is small scale and subject to changing funding priorities. A number of studies have demonstrated the efficacy of psychosocial and psychiatric interventions targeting Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, depression and anxiety in northern Uganda, with three separate programs each reporting a halving of symptoms following treatment (Baingana and Mangan 2011; Nakimuli-Mpungu et al. 2013; Sonderegger et al. 2011). Although they currently form a limited evidence base,

⁸⁹ Interviewed September 25, 2013.

⁹⁰ Interviewed June 23, 2014.

⁹¹ Interviewed June 20, 2014.

⁹² Interviewed June 24, 2014.

these studies indicate that high quality, appropriately modified psychosocial and psychiatric services could assist war affected individuals and communities in their recovery; this would likely include secondary improvements to productivity, poverty-reduction, and violence reduction.

4.3.1.2 Alcohol and domestic violence

In addition to lost productivity, excessive drinking is a major driver in alarming rates of domestic violence in post-conflict northern Uganda. A great many women in this study reported that their husbands or partners are violent towards them, particularly when he had been drinking. As Jennifer starkly put it, *“I go to the garden early and he goes drinking. When I return he beats me. Every day.”*⁹³ Pauline said that the problem is widespread and directly attributable to alcohol: *“The men are alcoholic and every time they get drunk they become abusive. Apart from alcoholism, there is no substantive cause of domestic violence.”*⁹⁴

The level of domestic violence is so high that several women described it as a continuation of the war. Evelyn said:

*Having basic needs alone when one is still experiencing a lot of violence does not qualify as peace. For instance, having a drunken husband [and] being beaten hostilely.*⁹⁵

Jane also drew comparisons between the violence of the war and the domestic violence of post-war life, stating that *“peace came and we went back home, but again, men started another violence.”*⁹⁶

The link between alcohol consumption and domestic violence is widely accepted globally (Brookhoff et al. 1997; Foran and O’Leary 2008; Koenig et al. 2003; Leonard 2001). While there are few studies specifically addressing alcohol and domestic violence in northern Uganda, those that do exist support the testimonies of the women in this study; namely, that alcohol use is “rampant” and is a major cause of widespread domestic violence. Okello and Hovil (2007, 442), in their study of gender based violence in IDP camps, noted men’s excessive levels of alcoholism, and argued that this “provides a context for GBV that is critical to understanding [the phenomenon].” Saile et al. (2013, 17) reported that 80 percent of women in their sample had experienced domestic violence in the preceding twelve months. Annan and Brier (2010, 6) reported that “alcohol was stated as a problem in every case of intimate partner violence” that they encountered in their research. An inquiry conducted by the Uganda Law Reform Commission in 2008 reported that 92 percent of 6,000 respondents across Uganda claimed that domestic violence was occurring in their communities, with the highest incidence found in northern Uganda (IRIN 2008).

International Alert surveyed 775 people (404 women, 371 men) in the Acholi sub-region about a range of issues, including Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) and alcohol, in 2011, 2012, and 2013. The survey found that SGBV has increased dramatically in Acholi communities. In 2011, 41.1 percent of respondents reported that SGBV was present in their

⁹³ Interviewed June 17, 2014.

⁹⁴ Interviewed January 22, 2014.

⁹⁵ Interviewed January 31, 2014.

⁹⁶ Interviewed September 25, 2013.

communities; this figure had risen to 99.7 percent in 2013 (IA 2013, 42). Thirty-nine percent of respondents identified alcohol and drug use as the leading cause of SGBV, with poverty the second major cause, and “lack of respect” the third (IA 2013, 41). An important finding was that 0.1 percent of respondents said that tradition condoned SGBV, and no-one said that it was “normal/legitimate” (IA 2013, 41).

Much of this violence goes largely unaddressed and unpunished, a phenomenon that Liza said is creating a culture of impunity, and is enabling further and greater violence:

What is causing so much unwarranted killings in the community is the fact that those who kill in the community are jailed for a very short period of time and released, they return to the very same community and this encourages the other members in the community to also do the same. They say so and so also killed his wife and he has been set free. So it encourages them to also do the same. This affects us women the most because the men are killing us so rampantly. This makes us women so worried and we live in fear because a small issue can lead to death, we are not so certain what will happen next when the man gets drunk. These things used not to happen before the war. During the war people were exposed to seeing these behaviours and killings.⁹⁷

Many of the social and cultural norms which would previously have prohibited much of the violence have been severely disrupted by encampment and conflict. Neither formal legal nor traditional justice systems are effectively responding to violence in communities – violence which, women told us, has risen significantly since returning from the camps. The result is a cycle of escalating violence and further social breakdown. Women of all ages, irrespective of whether they were abducted or displaced into a camp, expressed a strong preference for family and clan mechanisms for responding to domestic violence, but were more willing to engage police and formal mechanisms when the violence was outside the immediate family. As Evelyn explained:

If gender based violence occurs, the case is reported and resolved within the family chaired by the family head. If he fails to resolve the matter, it is reported to the clan head then finally to the clan chief. They handle such matters like house fights, disagreements, cases in which the husband drinks all the family income. ... The LCs handle cases involving minor theft, quarrels and disputes among neighbours. ... However if the matter involves serious wounding then it is reported to the police.⁹⁸

Overwhelmingly, women said they wanted to stay in the relationship, and other women in the community believed that women should remain in their marriages. However, women also wanted the violence and exclusive control over household resources to stop:

When it's a case of gender based violence, on reporting the matter, the girl is always advised to forgive. Sometimes the women can advise her to remain resilient for some time and give room for the man to adjust because this eventually helps to strengthen their family relationship. However, if it persists then she is advised to report the matter to the local clan leaders who may order for his arrest and detention in cells.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Interviewed June 17, 2014.

⁹⁸ Interviewed June 31, 2014.

⁹⁹ Interviewed January 30, 2014.

While this research reveals excessive alcohol consumption and domestic violence to be crucial issues affecting Acholi communities post-encampment, they are issues which affect both former IDPs and people who have returned from abduction. Access to justice, and women's experiences of justice regarding violence (both between neighbours and within families), is addressed further in Chapters 7 and 8.

4.3.2 Land conflict

The importance of land for one's livelihood in northern Uganda cannot be overstated. Acholiland remains a predominantly agrarian economy, making access to control of land a key element of people's capacity to generate and sustain livelihoods (Burke and Egaru 2011). Since the return of people from IDP camps, land has become a central focus for new, sometimes deadly, conflict. Several studies looking at land conflicts in northern Uganda have been conducted in recent years (Burke and Egaru 2011; Burke and Kobusingye 2014; Rugadya 2008; Asiimwe 2001). While the full extent of land conflicts is not known, Burke and Egaru (2011, iii, 5) reported that over 12,000 land disputes are dealt with by Local Councils I and II (LCI and LCII) annually, that land disputes account for 94 percent of matters heard by LCII executive court committees, and that 70 percent of matters dealt with by traditional leaders in Acholiland are of the same nature. Furthermore, they report that respondents in their study believe that land conflicts are increasing. The issue of land conflicts was raised by women participating in this study in most communities visited, indicating that it remains a significant issue facing communities.

Rugadya (2008), Burke and Egaru (2011), and Burke and Kobusingye (2014) identify multiple factors fuelling the land conflicts, including

- inconsistencies between customary and free-hold tenure;
- inconsistencies between formal and traditional justice systems;
- widespread poverty and widespread loss of resources/assets (including the loss of livestock, resulting in a heavier reliance on agriculture);
- breakdown of social systems and changed family structures during the period of encampment;
- foreign interest and investment in oil and large-scale cash crop farming; and
- corruption in many systems designed to allocate land and resolve disputes about land.

Amidst this complex and dynamic environment, the large-scale displacement of communities from the land has created ideal conditions for disputes over land:

The tremendous demographic distortions and the dramatic reduction in the number of elders custodians of cultural norms, rules and principles responsible for mental records of land ownership and boundaries -- were overwhelmed by the scramble for land as people returned to their homes and villages from the IDP camps with the end of the protracted civil conflict around 2006. (Burke and Egaru 2011, 3)

4.3.2.1 Causes of land conflicts

Christine, a 62-year-old widow from Atiak, explained how displacement had upset pre-conflict land tenure agreements, and is now causing conflict over land:

*From the time we returned, there were some people who were given land before the war and they had settled on this land for a very long time. After the camps people are returning home and they want to return to where they were before the war and that other family say “no no no no you cannot come here anymore. You have to look for land somewhere else. This land was given to you sometime back by our forefathers but now we want it back.”*¹⁰⁰

Beth, from a village in the Pader district, described a more deliberate and predatory nature to the land conflicts in her area, saying that *“land grabbing is mostly happening in families that lost all their parents and elders in the war and thus the grabbers take advantage of their vulnerability and little knowledge regarding their land.”*¹⁰¹ Many of these *“grabbers ... have a high financial ability and they use this to influence the leaders, even the Residence District Commissioners (RDC).”*¹⁰²

Many women told us of specific examples where neighbours and even family members had used serious violence against one another over land disputes. In the worst instances, such violence resulted in death. Christine and Hope, interviewed together, told us anxiously of a current dispute in their community in which a widow had been tied to a tree and beaten, in an effort to drive her off her late husband’s land. The woman’s son had reported the incident to the police, but three days later, no police officers had attended. Christine warned that if the issue is not resolved *“People will be killed.”*¹⁰³ Hope agreed, saying, *“If the matter is not settled properly won’t it lead to death?”* She poignantly added that land conflict is particularly painful because *“it is from the land, the soil, that we get food.”*¹⁰⁴

Women – especially widows, former abductees, and those whose parents died during the conflict – are particularly disadvantaged in struggles for land. Women’s secondary status in northern Uganda disadvantages them in the struggle for land; given that more than 50 percent of Uganda’s GDP is generated through agriculture, when women are denied access to land and denied control or ownership of land, they become more economically disadvantaged, and more socially and politically marginalised (Asiimwe 2001, 179).

4.3.2.2 Tensions between customary and statutory law

Most land in northern Uganda is held under customary tenure, and the concept of “ownership” is problematic. Customarily, land is “owned” by the clan. The elders of the clan allocate land to clan members, typically men, who may build their homestead on the land, and cultivate crops. A young man is allocated land when he gets married and he shares this land with his wife (or wives, in polygamous marriages). Women are rarely allocated secure tenure of land in their own selves through the clan, but have access to land through their male relatives – fathers, husbands, and sons (Asiimwe 2001, 175; Burke and Kobusingye 2014, 21). Individually held freehold ownership of land is only recently being adopted in northern Uganda, and less than 1.2 percent of land in northern Uganda is held through a freehold title (Burke and Kobusingye 2014, 2).

¹⁰⁰ Interviewed June 25, 2014.

¹⁰¹ Interviewed February 7, 2014.

¹⁰² Interviewed February 7, 2014.

¹⁰³ Interviewed June 25, 2014.

¹⁰⁴ Interviewed June 25, 2014.

Women's rights to own property and land are protected in Ugandan statutory law through multiple instruments, most notably the Land Act 1998, and the 1995 Constitution (Asiimwe 2001; Burke and Kobusingye 2014). There are conflicting views about women's rights to land under Acholi custom, with most reporting women have little or no rights to land (Asiimwe 2001, 175). Burke and Kobusingye (2014, 21) argue, however, that women do have traditional rights to land, but that the clan responsible for meeting these rights is determined by her marital status. Some women interviewed in this research also reported their understanding that women do have customary claims to land, and some have been successful in asserting these claims. Regardless of land rights that women may theoretically hold in both statutory and customary law, there is wide agreement in the literature and in women's testimony to this research that, in practice, women do not enjoy equal access to land under either system (Asiimwe 2001; Burke and Egaru 2011, 26; Kindi 2010).

There is significant confusion in northern Uganda about whether customary or statutory law has authority over land matters. Burke and Kobusingye (2014, 16) identify "over 40 separate acts of legislation relevant to land rights and tenure security in Uganda." Theoretically, statutory law has supremacy over customary law where the systems come into conflict; however, most people (women and men) access traditional and local land administration systems in practice (Rugadya 2008, 13; Asiimwe 2001, 176). The reality on the ground is that there is a significant degree of confusion about jurisdiction and supremacy, and little understanding both of what regulations govern tenure, and which systems and authorities are empowered to arbitrate disputes. Rugadya (2008, iv) warned that "[t]here is an institutional and policy gap that has increased tenure insecurity for the majority of people in Acholi and Lango regions and increased marginalization of vulnerable groups." Indeed, Rugadya's prediction of serious land conflicts and the disadvantaging of vulnerable sub-sections of the community (women, widows, former abductees, and younger people) came to pass, prompting Burke and Egaru (2011, 8) to observe that the confusing "situation is amenable to forum shopping with some disputants simultaneously appealing to LCI, LCII, Sub-county Courts, Chief Magistrates Courts, RDC, LCV, Land Officer, traditional leaders and CBO, District Land Board, MPs, police, religious leaders." The lack of clarity governing land ownership and inheritance has combined with the damaged social fabric to further disadvantage women (in particular widows, child mothers, and formerly abducted women):

The disorder that has characterized much of northern Uganda in recent decades has provided unscrupulous individuals with opportunities to take advantage of the lack of knowledge and appreciation of the norms, rules and procedures associated with customary tenure to cheat others, very often women. (Burke and Kobusingye 2014, 19)

4.3.2.3 Impacts on women

While land conflicts affect many communities and impact all – men, women and children – they have particular effects on women. Women may have claims to land under both statutory and customary law, but they are struggling to realise those rights, particularly in light of the social devastation of the war, and newly perceived anxieties about land scarcity (Rugadya 2008; Burke and Egaru 2011). Contemporary interpretations that women have no independent rights to customary land mean that women can often only realise land rights through their relationships with male relatives. This is particularly problematic for both unmarried mothers (both through sexual servitude in abduction, and those who became pregnant outside of marriage in an IDP camp) and widows. The reliance on damaged social relationships provides, at best, only tenuous land tenure; as Burke and Kobusingye describe:

Where the family or clan is strong and organized, the rights of each member of the clan including women and future generations are generally better protected. In instances where the clan or family is weak or fragmented women's rights to land are often abused. When questioned on what they mean by the "strength" of the family or clan very few people referred to the physical size of the family. The majority of respondents referred to the financial resources at the family's disposal and levels of education while others spoke of "love," "unity" or "cohesion" within the family institution. Strong families or clans are also more likely to respect the rights of neighbouring clans, enjoy higher levels of social capital and are respected within the community. (2014, 18)

Many widows, unwed mothers, and women with poor familial relationships reported to this project that they are struggling to realise any rights to land, and are consequently thrust into ever deeper poverty:

*It [land grabbing] is facing very many widows in this area, even myself. They had started issue very badly to grab land from me. I was lucky my father-in-law was on my side and he came and spoke very strongly. They say I'm just a woman – a mere woman with no land.*¹⁰⁵

As land is the primary productive asset in northern Uganda, land rights have a direct link to one's ability to produce sufficient food both for subsistence, and to generate an income. Access to land is a major determinant of poverty and economic well-being. Asiimwe notes that women provide 70 percent of Uganda's subsistence agricultural labour force (and 60 percent of labour for cash crops). However, the lack of land rights, including for married women, means women have "little control over household decision-making"; this includes decisions over what crops to plant, how to spend income earned from the land, and decisions about land transactions (Asiimwe 2001, 179). A large majority of women participating in this study complained of their lack of power in household decision-making, particularly women with husbands who drink alcohol. Santana explained that "*when it comes to harvesting the crops from the garden, most of the men when these crops have been harvested will just pick or steal and sell and drink the money off.*"¹⁰⁶ Rosemary likewise said:

*Here the community think that a woman has no rights absolutely and the talk of women's rights is just a fallacy, it's a myth that can never come true. As for me, I dig and work tirelessly but during the harvest period I do not have any say on the yields. My husband has even stopped me from group savings. This is the kind of treatment that most women go through in this community. The men ensure that women are economically disempowered.*¹⁰⁷

Land conflict affects both former abductee and former IDP women, with particularly negative impacts for widows and unwed mothers. While some women reported that they had been able to successfully resolve land disputes through traditional and local mechanisms, most had not. Only one woman had launched legal proceedings, and was awaiting an outcome. Most women had very limited understanding of their rights in law, and of the procedures for realising any rights. Many women trying to use traditional and local mechanisms for resolving land disputes complained that the male dominated forums discriminated against women in relation to land claims, and that they are "*insulted,*" "*abused,*" and "*not taken*

¹⁰⁵ Interviewed June 23, 2014.

¹⁰⁶ Interviewed June 23, 2014.

¹⁰⁷ Interviewed February 13, 2014.

seriously.” One woman said that when she refused to sleep with the Local Councillor, her case was dismissed; another said that her “*case is overlooked because I am a woman.*”¹⁰⁸

The traditional and formal justice systems – and women’s experiences of them – are discussed in detail in Chapter 7. Land conflicts are a major issue affecting the current and future stability and livelihoods of Acholi communities, and continue to further disadvantage those already most vulnerable within communities.

4.4 Conclusion

The women interviewed spoke extensively of the harms suffered in camps as a matter requiring justice. The policy of encampment was raised not only in regard to the violent and coercive means used to force people into camps, but also the consequent loss of property, people, and social bonds. During encampment, women were exposed to significantly increased rates of sexual and physical violence from husbands, community members, UPDF, and LRA members; this violence was also of increased severity. They endured life-threatening hardship resulting from a lack of basic necessities, such as food, water, and sanitation. In its current form, the GoU’s draft Transitional Justice Policy (May 2013) only elliptically acknowledges the harms caused by displacement, stating at clause 34:

These years of conflict have disrupted development efforts, destroyed formal and informal institutions and disintegrated the socio-economic fabric of communities. Consequently, various communities in post conflict Uganda have been faced with several challenges including: poverty and untold suffering as a result of limited livelihood options, negative perceptions about efforts at enhancing peace, recovery and reconciliation; and dissatisfaction with the formal justice system. (JLOS 2013, 15)

While this inclusion demonstrates an understanding of the consequences of displacement, it does not acknowledge the systematic nature of mass forced encampment as policy, nor the role of the Government of Uganda and the UPDF as agents in the policy. Furthermore, clause 4.1 of the Agreement on Accountability and Reconciliation (Juba Agreement) excludes State actors from “special justice processes” established under the Agreement, effectively assuring “guaranteed impunity for the senior military” (ICG 2008, 10).

In a 2011 joint report, the Ugandan Human Rights Commission and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights specifically recommended that

[t]he Government of Uganda, the Justice Law and Order Sector, and the Transitional Justice Working Group and its United Nations and Development Partners should:
... Consider accountability for the full range of actors, ... and accountability for forced displacement and the associated crimes and violations in the camps. (57)

The marginalisation of forced encampment in Uganda’s transitional justice efforts, and the exclusion of State actors from transitional justice processes, is a significant justice gap, one which threatens to undermine the Government of Uganda’s stated intention of addressing “root causes” to the conflict in order to build lasting peace. While the GoU is making progress in addressing the high-stakes, delicate, and complex land conflicts in northern Uganda, corresponding efforts to address both past violence and current levels of alcohol consumption, trauma, and violence against women are lacking.

¹⁰⁸ Interviewed February 6, 2014.

CHAPTER 5: LEGACIES OF ABDUCTION

*I was abducted at 13 years. I returned after eight months. I was forced to carry huge luggage and trained to become a child soldier. The war disrupted my studies. I suffer from trauma and stresses because of what I experienced in the bush, like seeing people being killed. I also suffer from stigma because the community up to today call me names.*¹⁰⁹

– Gladys

5.1 Introduction

A notable feature of the conflict between the GoU and LRA was the LRA strategy of abducting children into their ranks. An estimated 66,000 children and youth were abducted during the 20-year war, with most abductions occurring between 1995 and 2005 (Annan et al. 2006, 16, 55).¹¹⁰ A 2006 survey of 10,747 people in northern Uganda found that a third of young men and one sixth of young women surveyed had been abducted for at least one day (Annan et al. 2006, vi). The LRA would regularly raid villages and IDP camps, looting food and other goods, terrorising and killing people, and abducting people (particularly children and adolescents). Several women who participated in this research project had experienced abduction, ranging in length from one day through to well over ten years. For some, they were forced to carry the looted goods back to the rebels' camp, and were then released; others managed to escape, often during the confusion of an encounter with Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) forces. Others were kept as forced recruits into the LRA and trained as combatants, used as forced labour (cooks, porters, and nannies), or given to Commanders and other senior LRA members as "wives."

Most surviving abductees have now returned to their communities or to regional centres in northern Uganda, and while the overwhelming majority of both former IDPs and former abductees told us that they want reconciliation and to live together in harmony, the process of reintegration and reconciliation is extremely complex (Baines and Rosenoff Gauvin 2014; Ladisch 2015). The ICTJ released a study in October 2015 in which the organisation interviewed 249 formerly abducted women, their children, community members, and local and religious leaders. The report noted that reintegration programs were not designed to respond to the specific needs of women and girls returning with children, and that subsequently, they "have been left without official recognition or support from the state to overcome the consequences of abuses while also facing stigma, rejection, and blame in their communities" (Ladisch 2015, 2). This chapter outlines some of the experiences women endured both during their abduction, and importantly, since returning home, as told to us by women participants. Returned women, particularly those with children and those whose

¹⁰⁹ Interviewed January 23, 2014.

¹¹⁰ Precise figures of abductions are not known, and there is significant variation in estimates. UNICEF, for example, estimates 25,000 children were abducted (UNICEF 2007, 99), calculating this figure based on the numbers of returned abductees passing through reception centres, such as Gusco, World Vision, and CCF. Human Rights Watch calculated between 52,000 and 75,000 children were abducted (HRW 2005). The higher figure proposed by the SWAY report incorporates the UNICEF figures, and also notes that significant numbers of people did not pass through these centres. There were several women in this research project who did not pass through a reception centre, including those who were abducted for a short period; those who returned before the reception centres were established; and those who refused to go to a reception centre, instead returning directly to their village.

parents have died, are struggling with trauma, discrimination, poverty, and stigma, and are finding it difficult to rebuild a place for themselves within a damaged social fabric.

5.2 Experiences of abduction

The process of abduction itself was extremely traumatic, invariably occurring as part of a violent attack. Abductees were forced to carry looted goods and food back to the LRA camps, sometimes in the vicinity of the village or IDP camp, but sometimes several days' walk across the border into South Sudan. Those who could not manage the march back to the rebel camp were typically beaten and killed. As Santina explained:

*You see when you are given this loot, if you start to feel tired, they would ask, "Do you want to rest?" If you say yes, they would say, "Let's go there and allow you to rest." They would escort you and kill you from there. So you have to find all ways to ensure that you take the loot to its final destination, to ensure that you carry the loot to the final destination. If the head is tired, you change it and put it at the back, so by the time they release you to go back, you have pain all over and you start nursing the pain and wounds. If you are lucky, they send you back.*¹¹¹

The march was described by participants as physically arduous, carrying very heavy loads across difficult terrain, for long distances, and in constant fear of being killed. Celia recounted her experience:

*I was 12 years when I was abducted. I was made to carry a very heavy load, I could not move any step because of the weight of the load on my head, at my back, saucepans and then in my hands ... I had to move with such luggage and cross a seasonal river. They beat me and blamed me for losing some luggage in the river. When I asked for water, they denied me, one of the rebels suggested that I be killed since I could not move. I moved on, but my foot got swollen, I could not lift my hands up, we kept walking over dead bodies ... We finally reached Sudan at their base, we were immediately sent to fetch water. This time I was feeling a lot of pain especially in my hands, they again said they would kill me, this time I surrendered, they hit me with a machine gun. I said, "Kill me, if you want to kill me."*¹¹²

Those who survived the journey to the rebel camp were often forced to witness (and not infrequently, participate in) extreme acts of violence involving transgressions of deeply held moral principles, such as killing a family member or eating human flesh.¹¹³ The victims of such violence may have been accused of breaching one of the rules of the LRA, such as attempting to escape, refusing to carry out an order, or showing "weakness" through crying (Veale and Stavrou 2007, 282; Bevan 2007, 352–353). Such ritualistic violence was thought to both induct the newly abducted young person into the consequences of disobedience, as well as instilling in them deep shame; this served to sever their connections with their

¹¹¹ Interviewed June 23, 2014.

¹¹² Interviewed January 21, 2014.

¹¹³ Several participants in this research told us of transgressing profound taboos, such as this woman's account: "They turned me into rebel soldier. Every time they killed, we would be told to eat while sitting on the dead bodies" (interviewed March 19, 2014). We have decided to omit further details of the actions some abductees were forced to participate in, and instead concentrate on the effects such actions have had (and continue to have) on former abductees. The Justice and Reconciliation Project, based in Gulu, has published a detailed account of one girl's experience, titled *Alice's Story* (2006).

families and communities, making a return home feel impossible (Bevan 2007, 344). Very often, this tactic had the desired effect; Sophie was abducted when she was six years old and reported that *“anyone who tried to escape was cut into pieces in our presence to scare us. This made me stay calm and I was made part of the rebels.”*¹¹⁴

Abductees that survived the initial process of abduction were then exposed to multiple episodes of violence throughout their time with the LRA. Women and girls abducted into the LRA performed both “domestic” and combatant roles. A 2007 survey of young women in northern Uganda found that two thirds of girls abducted by the LRA for more than two weeks reported their primary role was in support, rather than direct combat. However, most girls were trained in the use of a weapon, and 11 percent reported that combat was their primary function in the LRA (Annan et al. 2011, 882). The authors noted, however, that “this figure likely underestimates the number of females who fought” (Annan et al. 2011, 882). “Domestic” roles included carrying luggage, preparing food, looking after young children and babies (some of whom were born “in the bush”), and being given as “wives”¹¹⁵ to senior Commanders or longer term members of the LRA who had performed well in battle.

5.2.1 Forced marriage

Studies have reported that the LRA preferred to abduct and keep young girls – either prepubescent, or in very early adolescence (Annan et al. 2009; Beber and Blattman 2013; Vindevogel et al. 2012). There are several reasons for this preference, including a concern that older girls were more likely to carry sexually transmitted diseases, and that younger girls (and boys) were “more easily indoctrinated,” and therefore less likely to escape (Annan et al. 2009, 7). When Claire, who was abducted when she was eleven years old, recounted her experience of being *“made a wife to one of the rebel leaders,”* she emphasised her *“very tender age,”* and added that it was common for *“young girls”* to be *“made wives to elderly rebels – almost our fathers’ age mates. And any of the girls who refused would be killed.”*¹¹⁶

Girls who refused to marry the man to whom they were given were beaten to death in front of the other new recruits, or tortured as a warning to other girls (UHRC and UNOHCHR 2011, 39). Irene explained that *“I had no choice but submit to whatever they said and accept one of them as my husband.”*¹¹⁷ Lillian did refuse the man to whom she was given, and after being beaten for her refusal, was given a very limited (but nevertheless rare) degree of “choice”:

During the LRA war I was very little, an adolescent about 12 years, when I was abducted. I was given to one of the rebels older than my father as his “wife.” I refused. They gave me 150 lashes of the cane. After all these canes, they still wanted to give me more canes, I was put under gun point ... I ran for my dear life to their

¹¹⁴ Interviewed February 10, 2014.

¹¹⁵ We note here some difficulty in the use of language. Although the word “wife” is used, the relationship described by the women is better understood as one of sexual and domestic servitude. Such marriages were not entered into freely, and participants in this research did not continue in the relationship after return from abduction; this was the case even when the opportunity was available; when the consequences of refusing the relationship meant single motherhood; when refusing risked further disadvantage in accessing land; and in situations of difficulty entering a new relationship. We have chosen to use the words “wife,” “husband,” and “marriage” because this is the language that women participants in this research most commonly used. The words appear in inverted commas to indicate their atypical meaning, and to differentiate them from other marital relations entered into outside of abduction, with greater consent.

¹¹⁶ Interviewed March 20, 2014.

¹¹⁷ Interviewed January 21, 2014.

*leader Joseph Kony who ordered that they stop treating me that way, that if any of them wanted me to be their wife, they should lure me into the relationship and if I am convinced, I shall take on the man who convinces me. Indeed, I accepted one of the young rebels as my “husband” due to the fear that if I did not, one of those old ones would force me to elope with him. They were very disappointed with my decision and warned me not to go for any help from them if my choice of husband failed to offer me the necessary support.*¹¹⁸

While most women that we spoke to used the euphemism of “wife,” no one that we met had continued in the relationship after returning from the bush (including in situations where the “husband” wanted to continue the relationship). Annan et al. (2009, 10), in an extensive study of 1,300 women and men returning from abduction, reported that “fewer than five percent of all forced wives stayed with their LRA husband upon return from captivity.” The same report also noted the systematic use of “slavery and sexual and physical violence within ‘forced marriage’” (Annan et al. 2009, 10). A number of women in this research used the language of “sexual slavery,” “rape,” and “sexual abuse” to describe their experiences:

*While in abduction, we experienced sexual slavery, forced to become a rebel’s wife and on attempting to reject, some girls were beaten to death.*¹¹⁹

Regardless of the language used, all women emphasised their lack of choice in entering into the relationship.

5.2.2 Combatants

Many abductees were compelled to perpetrate violence against others, including close relatives and friends (Bevan 2007). As Sarah recounted with continuing shock, “*Sometimes they give you ... uh ... even your real mother, to kill, you kill your real mother or your relative. And if you don’t kill, you’re the one going to be killed by them.*”¹²⁰ Many formerly abducted women who participated in this research told of being forced to commit atrocities against their will and under threat of death, as well as being forced to witness a great many killings. Celia explained apologetically to the interviewer that

*the war was very intense, I was also forced to participate in the killing, they tied people on trees and I was told to hit them to death. Anyone who did not follow their instructions was killed, indeed I had no choice but killed, not because I wanted it that way but because it was the only way I had to keep alive.*¹²¹

Girls were trained as fighters from very young ages. Olive told of how, when she was abducted, she “*was so young I was still [being] carried*”; she was trained as a combatant before reaching puberty, at which point she was given to a Commander as his “wife.”¹²² Abducted girls had no more choice about participating in combat than they did in “marriage.”

Eleanor expressed bad feelings about her actions during the war. She said

¹¹⁸ Interviewed January 21, 2014.

¹¹⁹ Interviewed January 23, 2014.

¹²⁰ Interviewed September 24, 2013.

¹²¹ Interviewed January 21, 2014.

¹²² Interviewed June 19, 2014.

*they forced me also to go to train to be a soldier. So for me it's not good. All the time I just keep on thinking ... And to go also to take things from the people ... Forcing you to go and take things from the people is also not good because you make the people be annoyed and yet we took things, we were hungry, we wanted that thing to help us. So it is not easy.*¹²³

While Eleanor felt bad about the things she did, she was also clear that she was forced to fight and steal, and that she did not “*go freely to join the rebels.*” Among the most frequently repeated phrases from formerly abducted women were that being abducted “*was not my wish,*” that “*I did not choose.*” Regardless of the lack of free will exhibited, several women told us that they were still “*haunted*” by the spirits of those they killed, and traumatised from witnessing other atrocities and acts of extreme violence.

While all women spoke of their experiences in the LRA as traumatic and as something that happened to them against their will, a small number of women, particularly those who spent longer periods in abduction, formed close bonds with other abductees and became adjusted to life “*in the bush.*” Jacqueline, who returned home in 2007 after more than three years with the LRA, explained that some aspects of life “*in the bush*” were easier than living in the community:

*[L]ife out here is very difficult compared to the kind of life we were leading in the bush. Because in the bush, everything ... you want food, you just go and loot. You want medicine, you just go and loot. You want clothes, you just go and loot and get these things. But now, we have returned home, if you want clothes you have to buy. You are sick, you have to buy the drugs. You need food, you have to struggle so hard. So if somebody is to compare this kind of life.*¹²⁴

The conflict in northern Uganda presents complex challenges for justice, reconciliation, and peace. Most combatants were forcibly recruited into the LRA through abduction, making distinctions between “*victim*” and “*perpetrator*” difficult to draw; this distinction is further obfuscated given the ages at which many were abducted (ASF and JRP 2013, 8).¹²⁵ Much has been written about the violence and terror to which abductees were exposed, both in the initial stages of abduction, and throughout their time “*in the bush.*”¹²⁶ While the LRA continues to exist, and is active in Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Central African Republic (CAR), communities in northern Uganda are currently wrestling with the legacies of the LRA war and the reintegration of “*returnees*” – many of whom are simultaneously their daughters and sons, and perpetrators of violence against their communities.

5.3 Return home

Women’s initial experiences of returning home ranged from happy reunions with family members, to grief at discovering parents, siblings, and friends had died; rejection as a rebel; being blamed for attacks on the community; and ambivalence about their return.

¹²³ Interviewed September 24, 2013.

¹²⁴ Interviewed June 18, 2015.

¹²⁵ For further discussion of the difficult distinction between “*victim*” and “*perpetrator*” in the case of child abductees, see the discussion of Dominic Ongwen in Chapter 8.

¹²⁶ See, e.g., Baines (2007), HRW (2005), and Vinci (2005).

Lydia described her overwhelming joy at being reunited with her mother: *“My mother highly welcomed me. They were all so happy that I had returned and I was carried the whole time. I was so happy.”*¹²⁷ Few women whom we spoke with told of unmitigated happiness and welcome upon their returns. More commonly, women spoke of mixed emotions as they were reunited with some family members, while also learning of the deaths and disappearances of others. Helen *“was happy to come and find my mother still alive,”* but this happiness was countered by grief at discovering that *“most of my relatives were killed in the war ... my grandmother dead, my grandfather dead, my brother had been killed, my sister in law”*¹²⁸ Some women had been rejected by their families upon their return, particularly if their father had died and their mother had remarried. Carmel felt very hurt by her mother’s rejection, and repeated several times over the course of the interview that *“I really don’t understand it, I don’t understand....”*¹²⁹

Some, like Camilla, returned to find no surviving family members: *“When I returned I found my parents dead, only my brother was alive who was also later killed. I am the only survivor in my family.”*¹³⁰ Apart from the emotional impact of lost family and community members, whether one’s parents were alive or dead is a major determinant of a formerly abducted young woman’s ability to resettle in her community (Burke and Kobusingye 2014, 18). As one woman explained:

*For some of the girls who returned and found their parents and relatives alive and are in good marriages, they are OK. But the ones who returned and found their parents and relatives dead, their husbands are not supportive and their husband’s relatives are not supportive, they mistreat them. These women have no option but to endure since they have nowhere else to go.*¹³¹

In Acholi tradition, girls live with their parents until marriage. They do not have control over any productive resources, and can only access land through their fathers. At marriage, a bride price is paid by the groom’s family to her father; she then joins the matrimonial family, and gains access to productive resources through her husband (Burke and Kobusingye 2014, 21; Ladisch 2015, 16). For women who return to find their parents (their fathers, in particular) have died, marriage is often the only viable way to find both an economic and social location for themselves. Many returnee women in this research reported *“unhappy”* and violent marriages. Those with no surviving parents or another male relative willing and able to “speak up for” them have little choice but to remain in such relationships, and have little authority themselves to access justice or other assistance to improve their lives. The International Centre for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) similarly found that women returning from abduction are often

caught between the pressure to get married in order to access land and resources and being stigmatized for their association with rebels and for having a child out of wedlock, many mothers have very limited options and risk being trapped in emotionally and physically abusive relationships. (Ladisch 2015, 16)

¹²⁷ Interviewed June 19, 2014.

¹²⁸ Interviewed June 18, 2014.

¹²⁹ Interviewed June 25, 2014.

¹³⁰ Interviewed January 23, 2014.

¹³¹ Interviewed March 20, 2014.

A number of women in this research reported that they were entirely unable to return to live in their communities; this was particularly so for those women who had been held in abduction for many years, and those who came from places where massacres had been committed by the LRA. Julia spent eleven years in abduction; when she returned, she discovered that both her parents had been killed during the war, and that furthermore,

*my community members in my village, where I come from, think that the massive massacre that happened in my village, I had a hand in it. It was me probably that led people to that place, the rebels.*¹³²

Julia explained that she and her children faced such intense stigmatisation and abuse from the community that she moved to a regional centre. She was particularly concerned for her children, explaining that

*I am a mother. Just like my parents worried so much, especially my mother, worried so much that time when I was abducted. I think that having returned with these children and the way the community looks at me in that area, maybe ... I thought that if I don't leave that place something could happen to my children. So before anything happens to my children I should better find a safe place for them. That's why I moved to the town.*¹³³

Eleanor also feared for her and her children's safety, explaining that she was abducted along with twenty children from her village. She was the only one who returned, and faced both repeated questioning about what happened to the other children, and accusations from the children's parents. Eleanor said that her community blamed her for the deaths of the others, and that the accusations reached the point where "at the end of the day you feel you are not safe."¹³⁴

Eleanor and Julia enjoy the anonymity of living in town, and have formed close relationships with other women in similar situations nonetheless, being dislocated from their communities has had a material impact on their lives, as they must now live entirely within a cash economy. In addition to the cost of school and health fees (which women living in villages are also having difficulty meeting), women who now live in regional centres must also find ways to earn enough money to buy all food for the household, and pay rent for their homes.

5.3.1 Return with children

While returning from the bush has presented challenges for all women, returning with children born in captivity presented additional, often lasting, difficulties (UNHRC and UNOHCHR 2011, 46; Ladisch 2015). Many women spoke of trying to care for children as a "burden," both economic and social. Children present immediate and ongoing financial burdens for their mothers – they need food, accommodation, clothing, health care, and education – but they also present additional challenges for social reintegration. Given Acholiland's patriarchal social and economic structure, and its attendant patriarchal and patrilineal land tenure system, women get their social and economic needs met through their relationships with male relatives (Burke and Kobusingye 2014, 18); in order to have access to

¹³² Interviewed June 27, 2014.

¹³³ Interviewed June 27, 2014.

¹³⁴ Interviewed September 24, 2013.

productive resources (most commonly land) to be able to meet the financial costs of raising a child, most women must enter into a relationship with a man.

All participant women who returned from abduction with a child spoke of tensions, difficulties, and verbal and physical abuse in their new families, arising from having a child “from the bush.” Olive explained that “*these children are a stumbling block in our way. Even when we get a husband, or a man in our lives, these men don’t want these children in those homes.*” She explained that, while she and other returned women face an economic burden from the children, “*it’s not only about the money,*” but also social acceptance, and the ability to build a “*harmonious*” life in the home.¹³⁵ All women who returned with children reported serious discrimination and animosity directed at their children born in captivity. This creates very difficult situations for the women, and very often, she must choose between a limited range of unappealing “solutions.” Grace had sent her child away to live with a relative, as she was unable to protect her daughter from abuse by her husband’s family:

*[A]s the child’s mother, I could not resist the pain anymore that was being caused by the ill treatment my child was getting so ... It would sometimes make me think very highly about going back to the bush, but somehow I just said that to save the situation, to save my child from all this, let me just take this child to live with my Auntie.*¹³⁶

Other women kept their children with them, and continue to experience abuse. Phoebe explained the treatment her children receive from her husband’s family:

*They say helping my children is worthless. They pick black ants and put in their clothes so they can bite them. When I called for a clan meeting, they all supported my husband’s side. I have now resorted to keeping quiet.*¹³⁷

Phoebe has tried to leave the marriage, but her family received a dowry for her marriage, and would be required to repay it if she left her husband:

*When I try to move from this marriage, my relatives become so perplexed and urged me to be patient because they cannot pay back the bride price. They even went ahead to advise me that if I can afford to pay back the bride price then I should do that and move away. My male relatives can afford to pay it back but they simply do not want. It’s this bride price issue that makes women endure all the mistreatments they get from their (marital) homes.*¹³⁸

Land conflicts and the perceived scarcity of land post-conflict are further constricting the options available to women returning with children, as their sons, in particular, are often perceived as competition for land traditionally handed down through the father’s clan (Ladisch 2015, 15). Francine returned from eight years in abduction with one child, now ten years old. Her parents accepted her back, but

¹³⁵ Interviewed June 19, 2014.

¹³⁶ Interviewed June 19, 2014.

¹³⁷ Interviewed March 20, 2014.

¹³⁸ Interviewed March 20, 2014.

*my father had two wives, so my step brothers were not happy with me. And up to now, they're still not happy with me being around. Because I came back with these children and they say these children will, in the future, bring land shortage problems.*¹³⁹

While her father is still alive, Francine and her son have a measure of security; however, she remains worried because her father “is 80 years old and weak,” and “these brothers of mine, they are very aggressive.” She doubts the local leaders could enforce “anything against them.” She is worried about her future:

*Well, if there is no... if my parents are no more and these [brothers] begin to demand or chase me to get rid of me, then I will have to go back to the LC and try. If the matter cannot be resolved I will have to leave and go, I don't know, maybe to the trading centre. I don't know.*¹⁴⁰

Christine and Hope, two women in their 60s and 70s, see many returnee women stuck in violent relationships, with no power to change things. They

*face so many problems in these homes; sometimes the men in the homes abuse them, are violent, are cruel to them. What can they do? You have produced one, two, three children – you have to persevere in that home.*¹⁴¹

The ICTJ found that many children born “in the bush” are growing up socially dislocated, with no identity or place in Acholi culture, and with potentially serious consequences for their future:

For children who do not know their fathers, the fathers' perceived association with rebels will nevertheless loom over them, obscuring their possibilities for advancement and integration in the community. Fathers, despite their absence, pass on their identity as LRA combatants, but the child does not get any potential benefit of clan membership, land access, or belonging that would come with knowing his or her father's full identity. ... For many children, not knowing their father leads to a situation where they cannot access land and thus are not able to earn an income. As a result, they cannot pay their school fees or courses in skills training, leaving them with very limited opportunities for the future. (Ladisch 2015, 17)

Children born in abduction are dislocated from traditional social structures, particularly in a post-conflict society in which many people are traumatised, social norms have largely broken down, and conflicts over productive resources are widespread, many Acholi communities are struggling to accommodate these children. The ACCS warns that “[n]ew constituencies with specific and distinct protection and development needs have arisen from the war, including ... those born in captivity in LRA hideouts. Communities are struggling to integrate this new reality into a decimated social fabric” (ACCS 2013, 37). Victoria explained some of the difficulties this has been causing:

When you are abducted in the bush, and from there you get pregnant and come home, there's nobody to support you, you don't know where the father is. And that is the problem they're getting. Because in the bush there, all the soldiers they have

¹³⁹ Interviewed June 28, 2014.

¹⁴⁰ Interviewed June 28, 2014.

¹⁴¹ Interviewed June 25, 2014.

*nicknames, and it is very difficult here, especially in Uganda, back home here, to trace where the family of this man is.*¹⁴²

Allen and Schomerus (2006, vii) anticipated that children born in the bush, outside of Acholi social and economic structures, could create tensions over inheritance and land in the future, stating that

social attitudes to the children of “child mothers” may be affected by their lineage status. Without transfer of bride-price, the children are meant to be incorporated into the lineage of the mother. But this implies that they will have claims over her lineage’s land when the camps are broken up. Her brothers and their wives may resist this. At present it is difficult to assess the problem, partly because those “child mothers” who have been sent to IDP camps have not been there long. However, it may be a material factor in the reported abuse that is commonly directed at these children.

Formerly abducted women and their children, along with young women who became pregnant outside of marriage in the camps, are the most directly affected by this rupture in patrilineal identity, and yet lack the authority to resolve the issue (Ladisch 2015, 14–17). Victoria explained that women who returned with children from the bush are

*trying to cope with all this. They are trying to get the community around them, to sit with them, to discuss with them. And when they come home they ask people around, “Do you know so-and-so, so-and-so?” and people say, “No we don’t know that person,” and they will tell you a different name.*¹⁴³

When no paternal relatives claim the child, it is the woman who is left with the burden of caring for the child; this very often creates tensions within her own family and clan, who fear present and future competition for resources. Victoria is not alone in her search for her child’s paternal lineage; Baines and Rosenoff Gauvin (2014) documented a group of single mothers, most of whom were abducted, and who have come together to search for their children’s fathers’ families. The women’s motivations for their searches were partly economic (such as securing inheritance, and a physical place where their children can belong), but also ran far deeper (such as establishing a place within Acholi social, cultural, and ancestral systems, to ensure that their children have an identity and a sense of belonging).

Women returning from abduction with children are a particularly vulnerable group. Their capacity to successfully reintegrate into society is largely dependent on the quality and nature of relationships with male relatives (Burke and Kobusingye 2014, 18–19). Those with fathers that survived the war, and are willing to stand up for them, have greater protection and access to the means of production than those without. Returned women with no male relative willing to offer them care and protection are too often left with little option but to enter marriages that are abusive and exploitative. The added burden of children to care for further constrains her options, and heightens her vulnerability to violence.

5.3.2 Missed learning

Many returnee women complained that being abducted meant that they missed out on both formal and informal education, and that they are now “*behind*” their peers. Women

¹⁴² Interviewed September 24, 2013.

¹⁴³ Interviewed September 24, 2013.

expressed the significance of this missed learning as material, social, relative, and trans-generational. Missed education has had a direct material effect on their current skills base, and their subsequent capacity to generate livelihoods, whether through farming practices, running small businesses, or working for an income (Ladisch 2015, 15). Many believed that, had they been able to complete their schooling, or to learn gradually from their parents and communities about farming and managing community relationships, they would be more able to meet basic needs and feel happier. Eleanor, who now lives in a regional centre and must therefore earn cash income, explained the economic impact of lost education:

*For us we come from captivity, we didn't study. ... Living now is not easy because we don't study, we have children, we don't have land, we are renting. If you don't study you will not get a job. You will just go to wash the clothes for the people.*¹⁴⁴

Helen has returned to live in her parents' village and works on their land. She is also feeling the effects of lost learning:

*Also now, as I speak, I spent a lot of my time in the bush and this has affected my future and I cannot go back to school or do anything better for myself at the moment. It wasted a lot of my time and retarded my knowledge of how I can grow with the rest and learn how to do other things. Now that I am home I find that my mother has to start again all over to try and teach me things here and there that I should have done at an earlier stage.*¹⁴⁵

Paska focused more on missing the cultural and social learning that her mother would have passed on to her. She attributes part of her difficulty reintegrating into the community to this lost learning:

*When I returned and came back home we were given the fact that I was taken when I was a little girl. I did not get so much mentoring or some kind of lessons from my parents because I also found when my mum for example had been killed so I did not have this parental figure in my life to guide me and to share how to do certain things in that community or how to go about life, so this made the situation very difficult. I found it very difficult to go back home.*¹⁴⁶

The effects of missed education were also expressed as a relative notion, enhancing returnee women's feelings that they were disadvantaged relative to their peers, and compounding their feelings of inequality and injustice. Eleanor said that she and other formerly abducted friends "are hurting, because when we see our friends have studied, we grew up together with them ... Sometimes you sleep hungry with your child and life can be difficult. Your heart keeps hurting. You cannot have an easy life."¹⁴⁷

Missed education was also talked about as generating internal feelings of lost hope and missed potential. Eliza's grief at being denied a chance to fulfil her dreams was palpable as she told her story; her childhood aim was to become a doctor: "I was a very brilliant girl but the rebels came between me and my education."¹⁴⁸ Eliza said that her father was a teacher

¹⁴⁴ Interviewed September 24, 2013.

¹⁴⁵ Interviewed June 18, 2014.

¹⁴⁶ Interviewed June 18, 2014.

¹⁴⁷ Interviewed September 24, 2013.

¹⁴⁸ Interviewed June 26, 2014.

“and he knew the importance of having his children study.” Her siblings were not abducted; her brother is now a priest, one sister is a teacher, and the other is a medical worker:

They were never abducted, they were never – the one who is a teacher is my follower and the last born. ... All these problems I’m facing is a result of this war. Because, if it were not for the war... My dad really, those days, wanted us to go to school. You never know, I might have been very far right now. All these problems I would not be facing.¹⁴⁹

Eliza has given up on any chance of obtaining an education for herself, but is focused on ensuring her children get a good education. However, she is struggling to pay fees to keep them in school:

I’m really struggling so hard to see that my children have a bright future but as I, the way I look at it, the look of things, I seem to be defeated now. I’m getting defeated.¹⁵⁰

All women interviewed in this study, whether abducted or not, spoke passionately about the need for education as a core component of justice and healing. Women expressed a strong desire for their children to have a solid, uninterrupted education, identifying it as the single most important factor to give them a “brighter future.” Almost all women, however, reported that their children were not receiving this education, as they were being sent home from school due to unpaid fees. This issue is further explored in Chapter 7.

5.3.3 Trauma

Regardless of the degree of welcome they received upon returning home, all returnee women had survived traumatic experiences, and were affected by them in different ways (Bayer et al. 2007; Nakimuli-Mpungu et al. 2013, 6). Most of the women we met demonstrated great resilience; nonetheless, their ability to go on with daily activities masked feelings of sadness, grief, confusion, anger, and of being “haunted” by the spirits of people they had killed. Irene was abducted in 1995, and although she did not give details about her experiences in abduction, she said that she remains “haunted by the spirits of those I killed in captivity ... I am always ill and all my male children die.”¹⁵¹

Carmel described what her sense of being haunted feels like:

One thing I want to tell you ... is that many times when we have returned from the bush there are things that come over us, our thinking ... We see things, we are haunted. We’ve been haunted by what we saw happening. So when this feeling comes in my mind, all of a sudden, my body ... I feel something holding me and then everything comes over the memories come just the way I used to do them when I was there.¹⁵²

She went on to explain that these “attacks” come regularly – every month or so – and that they also affect her children:

¹⁴⁹ Interviewed June 26, 2014.

¹⁵⁰ Interviewed June 26, 2014.

¹⁵¹ Interviewed January 21, 2014.

¹⁵² Interviewed June 25, 2014.

*It affects them, it comes like ... there's an attack ... diseases on the children – that when they are suffering from these ... when they are sick, they don't even respond to medication ... the white man's medication. So these children keep shouting, some of them just move, they start to walk. ... I want to live like any other person, I cannot. I cannot live normally like any other person because these problems keep setting in.*¹⁵³

Both Carmel and Irene believe that traditional ceremonies would help them, but they are unable to afford to pay for such ceremonies. Irene said that she would “*feel free from the spirits if a traditional ritual is performed on me to appease the gods to leave me alone*”; she knew of some mass rituals organised by World Vision, and believed that the returnees who had participated “*live more happily*” than she does. Carmel had been given some herbs to help her cope and said that they helped a great deal, but when they ran out, she was unable to purchase more; consequently, the symptoms have returned.

Esther, whose parents both survived the war, went through traditional cleansing rituals.¹⁵⁴ She explained that she “*was traumatised when I had just returned. I would get scared on hearing any voice,*” but that

*[r]ituals were performed to cleanse me. I was made to step on eggs, a goat was also sacrificed and its waste was smeared on me. This was performed to help me recover from the trauma and illusions that I would get. ... If they had not performed this ritual on me, I would have killed people from home because the illusions would drive me to kill people the way I used to while in the bush.*¹⁵⁵

Many women told us that they have difficulty sleeping; they are either unable to sleep at night, or have their sleep interrupted by nightmares. Valerie spent nine years “in the bush” and returned with two children. She described a mix of trauma, grief, and regret, and explained that, although she was not a combatant, she feels responsible for many deaths: “*[M]uch as I never held a gun to fight, I was a part of those who massacred.*”¹⁵⁶ She suffers from nightmares and hypervigilance: “*[E]very time I see people in army uniforms I get very nervous and restless, I lose control.*” She is acutely aware of the effects that abduction has had on her life:

*The war affected my studies, I missed my teenage and youthful life. My children have different fathers. If they all had the same father, they would have had a better life, they would be able to go to school, have enough food, medication ... but the man I have now cannot offer the children equal treatment, he favours his and cares less about the ones I returned with from the bush.*¹⁵⁷

Almost everyone interviewed, whether formerly abducted or formerly displaced, talked of grief over lost hopes and dreams, and for lost family members and friends. Veronica was abducted as a very young child and is unsure of how long she spent in the bush (she estimates the length of her abduction to be fourteen years). She formed her closest relationships with fellow abductees, many of whom did not survive. She grieves for her lost friends, and feels

¹⁵³ Interviewed June 25, 2014.

¹⁵⁴ For more on Acholi rituals, see, e.g., Liu Institute for Global Issues et al. (2005), Baines (2007), and JRP (2006).

¹⁵⁵ Interviewed March 19, 2014.

¹⁵⁶ Interviewed January 23, 2014.

¹⁵⁷ Interviewed January 23, 2014.

that the community does not “*understand and sympathise ... When I look back, very many of my friends died in the bush. They never made it back.*”¹⁵⁸ She recalled one incident in particular, in which she and some fellow rebels were sent to steal food when they encountered UPDF forces:

*When we went on this mission, my closest friend in the bush was shot, she was just next to me when she got shot. She was called Florence. I was disturbed but I never lost focus, I picked up her gun and ran.*¹⁵⁹

There has been little space, either while in the bush or since returning, for women to express their grief and to rebuild trust. These multiple and repeated losses, particularly so early in life, have had a profound effect on Veronica and many other young women. More commonly, women told us that this manifests as sadness, anxiety or fear, but some young women told us of “*uncontrollable anger.*” Jacqueline said that

*when we are very angry, at this point nobody can advise me. Sometimes it’s too much even if someone talks to me, I cannot listen to them at that time. ... I listen to my parents, but there are times when I do not feel like listening to them. That time when it gets so bad and when I am very hurt, I cannot listen to them at that time. ... You see when I have just been where there is a lot of noise or when I have just been listening to so much noise, I do not want to listen to any more noise, I just need to be left alone.*¹⁶⁰

Jacqueline explained how her anger sometimes reaches a point where she feels she has no control. Jacqueline describes what is probably a post-traumatic flashback – a traumatic memory in which the person feels as though they are back in the traumatic experience; such flashbacks are often accompanied by smells, sounds, images, and bodily sensations associated with the traumatic experience (Herman 1997, 37). In such instances, Jacqueline is overwhelmed with anger and memories, and feels out of control:

*You see, with us when we are very angry we can do anything to anybody, because if I am to start a fight with you, I will fight so bad, I will fight just the way we were doing it in the bush. This is the thing, if there is anything sharp that can kill somebody, I will just pick that something and use it on them, if it is a knife, anything, I will just pick and stab this person with it. At that time, I am capable of doing anything. I do anything. I do it just the way we were trained to do from the bush. So it’s after doing this that I begin thinking about a lot more other things that were happening in the past, memories from my bush experience.*¹⁶¹

Veronica nodded in agreement with Jacqueline’s statements, and added, “*Yes, we do react in the same way. It’s the same for almost all of us.*”¹⁶² Many returnee women reported feeling angry, particularly when they received “insults” or discrimination from the community. Most said they kept the anger inside, but many also reported several “fights” with other community members; Joyce clarified that “*when we say ‘fight,’ it means ‘physical’.*”¹⁶³

¹⁵⁸ Interviewed June 18, 2014.

¹⁵⁹ Interviewed June 18, 2014.

¹⁶⁰ Interviewed June 18, 2014.

¹⁶¹ Interviewed June 18, 2014.

¹⁶² Interviewed June 18, 2014.

¹⁶³ Interviewed June 24, 2014.

Many women in northern Uganda, both former IDPs and former abductees, are living with significant levels of trauma, grief, and pain, and there are very few services and other supports available to help people recover emotionally and psychologically from their wartime experiences (Sonderegger et al. 2011, 237). Some formerly abducted women returned through reception centres,¹⁶⁴ where they received counselling prior to returning to their communities. Some women spoke highly of this counselling and found their time in the reception centres to be positive, “*very warm*” and “*kind*.” The counselling provided, however, was not therapeutic counselling designed to reduce trauma, grief or distress; rather, it was aimed at advising the women on how to behave when they returned to their communities.

Paska described the counselling she received in Gusco:

*There was a big house, a hall, where we were all be taken and they would teach us how to behave when we went back to the communities that we should not behave the way we had been in the bush. That we should live very well with the community and also that we should try and forget; that home is better than living the other side in the bush.*¹⁶⁵

She said there was no counselling that allowed her and fellow returnees to express their feelings: “*There is nothing very serious ... [W]e were not given the opportunity or there were no sessions of sharing our experience about the bush. There wasn't.*” She said that the returnees in the centre, however, would sometimes talk to each other in the evenings, away from staff, about their experiences in the bush and their fears about returning. She has maintained friendships with other returnees that she met in Gusco, and they continue to support one another today.

Nicola came through World Vision, and said, “*we were given a warm reception, we were given clothes. ... [T]hey gave us good food and clothes.*” When asked about counselling, she replied:

*Yes, there was a counsellor, for instance there was a counsellor who would come and speak to us after every 3 days, talking to each person independently, telling us how we should behave, how we should settle back into the communities.*¹⁶⁶

An extensive research project involving participant observation, interviews, and focus group discussions with staff and former abductees,¹⁶⁷ also questioned the therapeutic value of

¹⁶⁴ Reception centres were services designed to assist people returning from abduction in transitioning from life in the LRA to life in the community, very often in IDP camps. Returning rebels would stay in a reception centre anywhere from a few days through to several months. The centres were designed to provide counselling, information (such as about the terms of Amnesty), skills training, medical treatment, and preparation for reintegration into the community. The actual services provided, however, very often fell short of stated objectives, and provided little more than food, accommodation, and a safe place in which returnees could heal from physical wounds and begin the process of adjusting to life outside of the LRA. For a comprehensive review of reception centres, see Allen and Schomerus (2006).

¹⁶⁵ Interviewed June 18, 2014.

¹⁶⁶ Interviewed June 19, 2014.

¹⁶⁷ This research project was conducted in eleven reception centres in Gulu, Kitgum, Pader, Pajule, Lira, and Apac, during 2005.

services provided under the rubric of “counselling” (Allen and Schomerus 2006). The report highlights that

[t]he team also found that the term “psychosocial” is used in a very loose way. Little or no psychological assistance is provided, and none of those observed giving counseling to FAPs [formerly abducted persons] were trained therapists. Counseling is interpreted as teaching FAPs how to behave. (vii)

The report provides in-depth descriptions of counselling services provided in different centres, as well as an extensive critique of those services, highlighting that therapeutic counselling was not being provided in any centres:

The term “psychosocial” has become a catchphrase amongst agencies working in northern Uganda (not just the reception centers) for just about anything to do with assistance that is additional to giving FAPs food. It appears to have become a prerequisite for funding proposals to mention it. A misleading aspect of its use is that it implies that psychotherapeutic care is being made available. This is not the case. (Allen and Schomerus 2006, 50)

The resilience of women who survived the war, whether formerly abducted or forced into camps, is remarkable. Nonetheless, a small number of women described feelings, thoughts, and behaviours which are indicative of profound trauma, and many more women talked of pervasive feelings of sadness, grief, and anxiety. Several women said that “*professional counselling*” would help them and their communities recover, particularly by helping reduce conflicts within the communities, and improving communities’ capacity to deal with conflicts when they do arise. This assertion is supported in the literature, with Betancourt and Williams (2008, 40) finding that post-war trauma disorders “cause intense suffering and dysfunction resulting in effects far beyond the individual, which underscores their public health significance.”

5.3.4 “Back-biting” and discrimination

All returnee women in every research site said that one of their biggest difficulties was coping with “back-biting” and discrimination from the community. Returnee women are frequently addressed as “*you who have returned from the bush*,” and accused of having a “*bush mentality*,” of being “*mentally disturbed*,” and “*illiterate*.” Clara said this problem is widespread throughout her community:

*We have all experienced the same problem and you find that many of us who returned, they discriminate against us. We are called names ... they utter so many words against us, they refer to us as “mentally disturbed persons,” “you do not understand,” “you are returnees from the bush” ... So this is the kind of ridicule we get. It does not occur to one person only but to each one of us who have returned from the bush.*¹⁶⁸

Helen explained that

[w]hen I returned, of course the reception was very bad at the community at the time. They would call us names and warn us that “you, who have returned from the bush,

¹⁶⁸ Interviewed June 18, 2014.

with the rebels – you are mentally disturbed. You have mental disorders. Take them back to the bush from where you have come from.”¹⁶⁹

When asked why she thought the community responded in this way, she said that *“this was to make life very difficult for us basically.”* Helen went on to say that it is not only name-calling, but the requirement that returnees be deferential to other community members, that constituted discrimination faced exclusively by returnee women. She gave the example that *“even when we go to the spring to fetch water we have to stand and wait for everybody else to fetch their water and when we try to tell them to allow us to also fetch they would start the same statements.”*¹⁷⁰ Helen experiences this discrimination and name-calling as dehumanising:

*I continue to live with the pain and the hurting of that reception. But I am also human and I was supposed to feel free in the society.*¹⁷¹

Nancy, likewise, said that she continues to be called names. She said, *“The community has not accepted me, they abuse me and call us ‘Olumolum,’ meaning ‘rebels’.”*¹⁷² Sarah described it as *“hatred from the community.”*¹⁷³ Angela has been back from abduction for more than ten years, and complained that *“they still abuse us and call us names.”*¹⁷⁴ Grace said that she is *“not happy”* because *“there are so many insults that I have to endure. The insults from his relatives and my husband as well; that us who were abducted and stayed in the bush are illiterate, we never studied and that we have bush mentality.”*¹⁷⁵

Women told us that the children they returned with faced the same name-calling, discrimination, and marginalisation as they did. Claire explained some of the treatment her two children received at school:

*My children are all the time provoked and reminded of the rebel in them. They are stigmatised. I endeavour to counsel my children. Many times they ask me questions that fellow children at school ask them, they are taunted; whether they are really children of rebels and whether they are born mentally sick and whether they will also grow up and turn into brutal adults like they say their father who is a rebel, “Mummy, shall we be as violent as our father or for us shall we be good, calm and free from the violent manners that people say shall become of us?”*¹⁷⁶

Claire said that, sometimes, *“[w]hen they disagree or quarrel or fight at school, the other children’s parents follow them home to quarrel”* with her about her children. The other children’s parents tell her that *“they do not want children of rebels to keep disturbing their normal children.”* Claire, already upset at the discrimination she faces herself, said that the treatment of her children is particularly painful, and that *“sometimes I breakdown and cry because my innocent children are being mocked because of their parents’ record.”*¹⁷⁷

¹⁶⁹ Interviewed June 18, 2014.

¹⁷⁰ Interviewed June 18, 2014.

¹⁷¹ Interviewed June 18, 2014.

¹⁷² Interviewed March 12, 2014.

¹⁷³ Interviewed September 24, 2013.

¹⁷⁴ Interviewed March 13, 2014.

¹⁷⁵ Interviewed June 19, 2014.

¹⁷⁶ Interviewed March 20, 2014.

¹⁷⁷ Interviewed March 20, 2014.

Olive returned from eight years in captivity with a six-month old son. She said that giving birth was her motivation to escape when she did, as she did not want her son to grow up in such a violent environment: “*When I had that baby, we both first died and then rose again. I said no, this child comes first and he is my future.*” She was determined that her son would have a “normal” life, and would know nothing of “bush life.” Her son is now 10 years old, and

*he did not even know that he was born from the bush. We lived like nothing happened. But one day he sat me down and said, “Mama, David told me that I have no father and yet I know that this is my father. He said that that is not your father. You are from the bush.”*¹⁷⁸

Olive said, “*Right away my heart dropped.*” She explained that

[t]he child who said that thing is my half-brother’s son. I thought maybe grudge from being a half-sister. Or maybe he thought that one day this child could obtain their land. ... I think the little boy was told what to say during their games in the sand. I think the child heard them as they talked and he was told what to say. I was in a lot of pain.

Olive felt powerless to do anything:

*I realized that ... because I used to ignore people talking behind my back, they had found their way through my child. I wanted to get back at them but I said no if I do something bad, they will say “bush mentality.” ... I brought out the issue to the family. Family referred me to the clan. Clan gathered us and counselled us but there is no change.*¹⁷⁹

Many returned women told us that they want to protect their children from insults and exclusion, but felt powerless to do anything about it. Many advise their children to stay quiet and try not to react. Some of the children are now reaching adolescence, and are feeling the effects of marginalisation. One woman said her fourteen year old nephew has begun to react to the name-calling by asking his mother to return to the bush: “*Mama, let’s go. People are disturbing us, let us go back to the bush. Let us go to Baba.*”¹⁸⁰

5.3.4.1 Effects of name-calling

Name-calling and discrimination have various effects on returned women. All women said that it makes them feel excluded and marginalised in society. For some, it triggers traumatic memories, and for many, it silences them, as they feel any complaint they make will be disregarded as the words of “*evil spirits,*” or a product of their “*bush mentality.*” For some women and their children, it triggers both doubts about their return to the community, and thoughts of re-joining the rebels.

Grace explained how name-calling brings back traumatic memories, and makes her feel afraid:

¹⁷⁸ Interviewed June 18, 2015.

¹⁷⁹ Interviewed June 18, 2015.

¹⁸⁰ Interviewed June 18, 2015.

*I have a fear because every time I am moving and people are back biting me, or they are pinpointing me saying I am a returnee, a former abductee, this brings fear in me. Because when they say these things and they are talking behind my back, this makes me remember what I was subjected to do when I was in the bush, and when I think about these things, it brings fear in me.*¹⁸¹

One young woman said that when she hears people saying, “*the evil spirits you have come with from the bush,*” she feels “*hurt deep down,*” and that it prolongs her recovery from trauma: “*You cannot heal. You can only get relief for a short time.*”¹⁸² She became quite agitated, repeating, “*At home there is discrimination ... You are the one to struggle ... there is discrimination on people who have returned from the bush. There is a lot of discrimination!*”

Joyce, who has settled reasonably well back into her community, still faces subtle reminders of her marginality:

*It's very difficult to get people's thinking changed from that I returned from the bush. Even with all these lessons and sharing, they don't forget that I returned from the bush. That thinking, that mentality stays with them. Of course, they mention some things that are not good, that are provocative. For example, when I am working in my garden and I spend some time working longer hours and they are tired, they will say, “Ah, for us people, we are retiring. You people are used to such a life, we cannot compete with you.” Honestly! What life are we used to?! Even when we are walking together and it reaches some point they will say, “Let those ones go at that pace.” Which “those ones?” I ask myself.*¹⁸³

Many women said that the name-calling makes them feel silenced, that if they complain about anything or any other person in the community, their view will be disregarded. Eleanor said that “*you don't even talk about anything from the community. If you talk, they will say, “That one is Kony.*””¹⁸⁴ Camilla reported a similar dynamic in her community:

*There is a lot of oppression from some members of the community for instance we are shutdown every time we try to say something – “those are evil spirits.” They call us lawless people of little or no benefit to the society. This kind of treatment makes us feel out of place, it's as though we intended to go to join the rebels in the bush.*¹⁸⁵

Similarly, Jacqueline said that, as a returnee, “[w]e cannot do much because we do not have the ability, we do not have the voice.”¹⁸⁶ Olive said that the leaders in her community, in recognition of the problem, encouraged returnees to report those who called them names, but that she has not done so, for fear of becoming known as a trouble-maker:

Some time back they said when you hear someone talking bad about people who have returned from the bush, you should report them but think about it, you hear something

¹⁸¹ Interviewed June 19, 2014.

¹⁸² Interviewed June 18, 2015.

¹⁸³ Interviewed June 24, 2014.

¹⁸⁴ Interviewed September 23, 2013.

¹⁸⁵ Interviewed January 23, 2014.

¹⁸⁶ Interviewed June 18, 2014.

– you report, tomorrow the same thing. Those same authorities in the sub-county will start saying you are a trouble causer.¹⁸⁷

Women cope with the abuse in a number of ways. The most common is to keep quiet and try to contain their emotions. Grace’s parents both died in the war, and her brother lives in a different village as a chronic alcoholic. With no family support, she feels powerless to challenge the insults. Instead,

*I just look on, because it is true I came from the bush, I lived there, and I returned from the bush. I do not have any authority or capacity to do anything. So I just look at them, I just look at things because there is nothing I can do.*¹⁸⁸

Nicola said that, when she is called names, she remembers “*the teachings that we got from the reception centre; that when somebody does bad or hurts you, forgive, do not retaliate against this person.*”¹⁸⁹ Her friend Olive agreed:

*It’s the same, because what I know is that many times the best thing is to forgive, to try and forgive always because if you let this pain accumulate or keep on accumulating within your heart then at the end of the day it turns into something so bad that I may not even be able to look after my child much as I want to. But if I keep on accumulating this pain then I cannot be able to give them the best that I want to give them.*¹⁹⁰

Despite women’s efforts to be “quiet” and “very cooperative,” “the stain of being associated with a rebel group never goes away” (Ladisch 2015, 16); as Valerie explained:

*[T]he community keep reminding me that I am from the bush, I am insane, I do not reason normally. My children are segregated and are called ‘children of Kony’.*¹⁹¹

Although she feels remorseful about her role in the LRA, Valerie also thinks the community “*should not discriminate against us, they should forgive us.*”¹⁹²

During the validation workshop, a group of returned and never-abducted women discussed the issue of name-calling and discrimination. The group agreed that forgiveness is the best response, but they also agreed that “*forgiveness is a gift,*” and that it “*is not easy.*” Maryanne said that she tries to forgive those that insult her, but that

*sometimes the insult is painful, you may not resist talking back but at least sometimes you can cool that anger. Even myself when I get angry I let go something but I can’t do it everyday. At least one day I’ll not be able to hold it.*¹⁹³

Joyce said that she usually manages to not respond when community members call her names, but that “*words hurt,*” and “*if you don’t have any other redress, then you must*

¹⁸⁷ Interviewed June 19, 2014.

¹⁸⁸ Interviewed June 19, 2014.

¹⁸⁹ Interviewed June 19, 2014.

¹⁹⁰ Interviewed June 19, 2014.

¹⁹¹ Interviewed January 23, 2014.

¹⁹² Interviewed January 23, 2014.

¹⁹³ Interviewed June 18, 2015.

fight.”¹⁹⁴ Joyce explained that she normally speaks to friends about her pain and frustration at being called names or reminded of her time in the bush, but that when this is not possible, “this is when I continue to think about it and it’s continuous. Then I want to continue and pick a quarrel.”¹⁹⁵ Veronica, Jacqueline, and Cilla all related a similar pattern, whereby they are called names by community members, and, without any forum in which they can get redress, they physically attack the other person. Cilla said, “if there is anything around me I will just pick anything my hands land on and hit this person.”¹⁹⁶ Jacqueline agreed: “What do you expect from a person who is discriminated against, yet it was not our wish that we get abducted?”¹⁹⁷

All formerly abducted women told us that they experience at least some level of name-calling or back-biting from their communities, and that this name-calling makes them feel hurt, sad, and marginalised. The majority of women respond by staying quiet and drawing on the advice they were given in the reception centres – namely, talking to others who had also been abducted, or praying for relief. However, it was not uncommon for women, both those who were formerly abducted, and those who have never been abducted, to report regular physical fights between former abductees and the rest of the community. These fights usually begin with name-calling, and quickly escalate. Joyce explained that the community must intervene rapidly to avoid serious injury: “If they don’t come fast, sometimes the ears are cut, are bitten off. The cheeks are bitten. ... Many times it is the returnees who will inflict the most injury. They fight with so much anger.”¹⁹⁸ Olive expressed the depth of pain that name-calling can create:

*You are an enemy, they stigmatize you. “Oh you lived there,” where ... it brings back past memories. You get suicide thoughts to end your life or want to commit a grievous offense so that if that action will fix it, so be it. That is our problem.*¹⁹⁹

Veronica expressed similar pain and frustration, and described how name-calling can escalate into serious violence:

Veronica: *When somebody calls us names and do all these other bad things and then you try to get into confrontation with this person, the whole community in that area will come against you, this one person. This extends even to our marital relations. For example, if I have a disagreement with my husband/boyfriend in the house and I try to settle it out with him, it becomes the whole community’s business. They will start to throw such words like “You see? You are the people who went ahead and settled with murderers, killers and this is the kind of thing you get!” So it becomes everybody’s business. And it is not business to have it resolved in the right way, but business to attack you that one person. This is the thing that hurts us the most. Personally, this is the very reason why I was jailed in <location> because when it gets too much and I cannot take it anymore, I fight badly, I fight to a point between life and death, I fight to kill.*

¹⁹⁴ Interviewed June 24, 2014.

¹⁹⁵ Interviewed June 24, 2014.

¹⁹⁶ Interviewed June 18, 2014.

¹⁹⁷ Interviewed June 18, 2014.

¹⁹⁸ Interviewed June 24, 2014.

¹⁹⁹ Interviewed June 18, 2015.

Interviewer: *Has this happened, have you been in a fight before?*

Veronica: *Yes I have been in a fight and this is why I have been jailed in <location>, because when I fight, I fight to kill!*²⁰⁰

Of equal concern were the comments of a small number of women, who told us that the level of discrimination in communities sometimes makes them consider returning to the LRA, where they felt accepted. Grace said that the treatment from her husband's family and the community "*would sometimes make me think very highly about going back to the bush.*"²⁰¹ Sophie Akayo from Worudet confirmed that she has heard similar sentiments among some returnees in the Pader region. She had recently spoken with a young man who returned two years ago, after seventeen years in abduction, who "*said he is very scared and he is ready to go back.*"²⁰² Several returnees said that, when they first returned, they found reintegration difficult, and not infrequently had thoughts about returning to the LRA; however, they have now settled sufficiently back into the community, so that they no longer have such thoughts. As Paska described:

*I found life very difficult when I returned to the home that I even wished maybe if it was possible and if Kony returned and abducted me and I would go back to the bush because life was very hard. But with such things my uncle kept talking to me and in the end I would come to feel relief and kept the thoughts going down.*²⁰³

A key informant said that the issue of stigmatisation in communities is a major issue, with serious implications for the future:

*It is a problem that in the future in a year or ... we cannot accurately predict the future, but it is a problem that will affect the future generation as they grow. Nobody has any concrete solutions on how this should be addressed. The best people do is to have their own local solutions, for example here at JRP we conduct a lot of outreach and a lot of community sensitisation with the hope that this will help to reduce the stigma, the name-calling. It will definitely affect the future. ... It is a problem that could create drastic results, maybe stigmatised persons will remain bitter that their needs were never met, were never attended to and maybe we could have the next generation of people who will maybe cause instability in northern Uganda.*²⁰⁴

Several formerly abducted women said that there had been concerted efforts to disseminate information about the Amnesty Act, to encourage abductees to return home, and to improve support for their initial reception, but that follow-up of both psychosocial support and reconciliation work had been insufficient (ACCS 2013, 32). Anita passed through Gusco, where she was advised to "*forgive and forget,*" but now that she is back home, "*there's nothing completely. You're just there and there's nobody to follow you. You're just there and you just continue your life. But it's hard work you know.*"²⁰⁵

5.4 Conclusion

²⁰⁰ Interviewed June 18, 2014.

²⁰¹ Interviewed June 19, 2014.

²⁰² Interviewed June 19, 2015.

²⁰³ Interviewed June 19, 2014.

²⁰⁴ Interviewed June 25, 2014.

²⁰⁵ Interviewed September 24, 2013.

Women who have returned from abduction are facing enormous challenges “integrating into the community and becoming self-sufficient citizens who live with dignity” (Ladisch 2015, 2). While most show considerable resilience and determination with regards to handling both past trauma and present challenges, many formerly abducted women have not received adequate support to help them reintegrate and build safe, dignified, and sustainable lives. Neither the Amnesty process nor reception centres took account of gender-specific needs in their design or delivery, and, since returning to communities from IDP camps, formerly abducted women are continuing to be disadvantaged in accessing the limited post-conflict support and justice mechanisms available (Ladisch 2015, 2; Burke and Kobusingye 2014, 19). Formerly abducted women and their children are also socially dislocated, and experiencing significant discrimination and stigmatisation. The result is the creation of a small but significant section of society profoundly disadvantaged and excluded in many ways, with possible implications for the future peace and stability of the region. The following chapter addresses the rift developing in communities between those who were formerly internally displaced and those who have returned from abduction.

CHAPTER 6: RIFT AND CONCILIATION

6.1 A deep rift

A deep and troubling rift is developing in the communities visited during this research, with a clear division emerging between formerly abducted people and those who were not abducted. Both formerly abducted women and former Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) spoke of the “*division between returnees and camps.*”²⁰⁶ There is increasing evidence of this appearing in more recent empirical work in northern Uganda. The Advisory Consortium on Conflict Sensitivity (ACCS) consulted representatives from local government, civil society, and cultural and religious institutions in eight sub-regions in northern Uganda; they reported that respondents

emphasised the deeply held sense of injustice amongst their communities due to a lack of reconciliation and reparation efforts following the devastating effects of the wars in the North. ... They described palpable tensions between “victims and perpetrators living side by side in the absence of reparations” that are hampering peace and stability in many communities. (2013, 33)

International Alert reported that Acholi confidence in sustained peace and security has declined in each of the three annual surveys it has conducted, from 79.2 percent in 2011 to 68.1 percent in 2013 (IA 2013, 23). The International Centre for Transitional Justice, examining the reintegration of women who returned from abduction with children, described the complex and concerning ways in which stigmatisation against formerly abducted women and their children is creating profound intergenerational exclusion. This is resulting in a new generation of young people who have no recognised place in the Acholi clan structure and, for some children born in captivity in what is now South Sudan, no Ugandan registration of birth or other evidence of citizenship (Ladisch 2015, 16). The report notes that an increasing number of children born in captivity are rejected by their stepfathers and maternal family. Consequently, they are becoming homeless, living on the streets of regional centres; they “are treated as social outcasts whose basic rights are routinely violated” (Ladisch 2015, 18).

The ACCS noted that the demobilisation process in northern Uganda has focused predominantly on the provision of formal Amnesty, and that “[l]ittle support has been given to facilitate integration following the issuance of certificates of amnesty, leaving victims and perpetrators to face each other” (ACCS 2013, 34). Women in this study spoke of a number of community-based and NGO initiatives to help communities reconcile. Many women also noted that NGO-supported programs concluded some years ago, and that there has been little, if any, follow-up with communities; the delicate task of reconciliation has largely been left to conflict-affected communities themselves. Nadia explained that her community has reached out to religious leaders for support after the conclusion of two NGO-led reintegration programs:

*Religious leaders have also tried to deliver some of them (reconciliation programs). Gusco and World Vision also tried to support them [but] withdrew their interventions. They no longer operate in this area.*²⁰⁷

²⁰⁶ Interviewed June 24, 2014.

²⁰⁷ Interviewed February 7, 2014.

Women in all the communities visited during this research project spoke of tensions and a growing rift between formerly displaced people and those who have returned from abduction. One of the legacies of the 20-year conflict is the “tremendous” damage to the social fabric of Acholi communities (Burke and Egaru 2011, 3). The economic destruction, alcoholism, violence, loss of respect for elders and traditional structures, fracturing of families and communities, loss of loved ones, and conflict over productive resources and property have all resulted in many communities becoming deeply divided. In several communities visited, women spoke of jealousies and distrust, particularly focused around two issues: the lack of transparency in the distribution of livestock (and other forms of assistance) after the return home, and the perception of favourable treatment in dispute resolution processes, particularly around land issues.²⁰⁸ These divisions are all important and require attention; however, the particular division between those who were abducted and those who were not is particularly concerning. This abducted–displaced division is important not only because it was raised time and again during fieldwork in every village visited, but also because it contains a qualitative difference – one’s experience of the conflict is at risk of becoming definitional in social identity formation, by demarcating “who” someone is and to which group they belong. The experience of abduction by, and membership of, the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) is coming to represent a line of inclusion and exclusion for many communities. There is a risk that such identities could become points of mobilisation in the future.

A clear “us” and “them” was embedded in many women’s language as they spoke. When asked about her use of “us,” Veronica replied, “*Us who returned from the bush. When I say ‘us,’ I mean ‘us who have returned from the bush’.*”²⁰⁹ Similarly, Joyce tried to explain the subtle divisions that mark her daily life in the community:

*For example, when I am working in my garden and I spend some time working longer hours and they are tired, they will say, “Ah, for us people, we are retiring. You people are used to such a life, we cannot compete with you.” Honestly! What life are we used to?! Even when we are walking together and it reaches some point they will say “Let those ones go at that pace.” Which “those ones” I ask myself.*²¹⁰

An ICTJ report reveals a similar use of language, indicating that the experience of abduction may be transforming into an identity. In explaining his exclusion from both his paternal and maternal clans, a fifteen-year-old boy told the ICTJ:

Some of us know where our fathers come from and yet our paternal relatives do not want us and have refused to give us land. *Because of my identity as a child from the bush*, others also look at me as a land grabber. (Ladisich 2015, 18; emphasis added)

In addition to the different identities embedded within language used by respondents, many women spoke openly about the rift in their communities. Rose described “*conflicts and disunity among the community members*,”²¹¹ while Esther said she wants the community to “*be counselled because the war caused a rift among the community members. No-one can come up with good advice to the other, people are against each other.*”²¹² The issue of the

²⁰⁸ Women’s views and experiences of post-conflict reconstruction programs, and of justice mechanisms pertaining to land and violence, are addressed in greater detail in Chapters 8 and 7 respectively.

²⁰⁹ Interviewed June 18, 2014.

²¹⁰ Interviewed June 24, 2014.

²¹¹ Interviewed March 20, 2014.

²¹² Interviewed March 19, 2014.

rift was confirmed by both formerly abducted and formerly displaced women in the Validation Workshop held in June 2015; Agatha, who was not abducted, said that “*it is happening there at our place in a bad way.*”²¹³ Women from several different villages in different districts, both formerly abducted and not abducted, all immediately agreed.

While all women who spoke of this division agreed that it was happening, opinions as to why a rift was forming were largely divided depending on whether the interviewed woman was abducted or not. Former abductees stated very clearly that the rift is a result of the community calling them names, stigmatising them and their children, discriminating against them, and treating them “*unequally*” and “*unfairly.*” Veronica complained that “*we returned, we [are] not treated the same way with the rest of the women. ... It’s a big problem. They think we have mental problems.*”²¹⁴ Her friend Jacqueline agreed, adding that, when she fights back against the name calling or insults,

*sometimes they report these cases to the leaders and sometimes they fine us. Thereafter of course I keep thinking of how the whole trouble started and I get hurt because I am fined, yet I was just provoked to behave the way I did because, what do you expect from a person who is discriminated yet it was not our wish that we get abducted.*²¹⁵

Edith gave an impassioned speech to explain what she sees as the main causes of this divide:

*For me I see that for us who have returned from the bush ... The reason they say people who have returned from the bush are violent [is] because the people at home do not handle us politely. So for us who were abducted as children, who grew up from there we should be handled carefully. There are some people who when they drink alcohol, they insult and stigmatize you badly. It brings that anger and provokes one to talk about “the head from the bush.” So we request the people who remained at home to treat us politely and equally so that we live in peace amongst people.*²¹⁶

Women who were not abducted however, were more likely to see former abductees and their “*bad behaviour*” and readiness to anger as the primary cause. Santina, whose son was abducted, places the blame for name-calling squarely on the conduct of the returnees. Her son, she said, “*behaves well*” and is accepted by the community, but

*[t]he others are called names because of the way they behave with the community members. They provoke the community that is why they call them names. Once you enter into exchange of words with such a person, they will tell you, “I will show you how to live life, what life is if you do not stop ...” Immediately, this person will take a panga and threaten or aim it at you saying, “You do not know what we have been through, I will show you what I am capable of.”*²¹⁷

Agatha held a similar view, although her words implicitly acknowledged both the trauma that some returnees are struggling with, and the provocative nature of some non-abducted community members’ actions and words, saying that “*there is one problem that I see. When*

²¹³ Interviewed June 18, 2015.

²¹⁴ Interviewed June 18, 2014.

²¹⁵ Interviewed June 18, 2014.

²¹⁶ Interviewed June 18, 2015.

²¹⁷ Interviewed June 23, 2014.

you insult this person, their head flashes back to the experience in the bush."²¹⁸ She continued on to explain that many of the returnees have learned "bush ways" of doing things, some of which do not sit easily with local Acholi customs. She gave the example of a boy standing up while he was eating, rather than sitting. Agatha described a cycle in which the community tries to offer instruction or guidance to the returnees, only to be met with an often threatening, and sometimes violent, reactions. In response, the community has become increasingly fearful of formerly abducted people, and does not trust that they will not suddenly become violent:

*When they do something wrong and you try to correct them, they become violent. You say this is wrong and in response they say, "I will show you my head that I returned with from the bush. Do you know how much suffering I went through in the bush?" So you become fearful. When they say that, you fear that "head from the bush," you become afraid to discuss or counsel them so that they can correct their wrongs. You become fearful. ... Handling these people is difficult but we pray that if God can change hearts, some mercy ... Because handling them is difficult.*²¹⁹

The concern that former abductees and their children are quick to anger and are capable of great violence if they are provoked, was widespread across many communities visited. Many women expressed an ambivalence in relating their fears about returnees, acknowledging the trauma that former abductees have experienced, but maintaining that their behaviour is frightening. Josephine explained that

*[t]hose girls, when they begin to quarrel, they fight using pangas and deadly weapons and when they start, they never want to be stopped. This has continuously been a big threat to the local community members. The communities accepted them and treat them in a very understanding manner, we understand that it was not their making that they behave that way, but the bush has made them what they are today.*²²⁰

Nadia's explanation was similar:

*Some people still suffer the trauma of having witnessed their relatives killed in their presence. Some returnees have developed a mental disorder, when they start to fight, they fight to a point of killing the other party. For instance there was a scenario where one tied up his friend and got an axe to hit him saying he wanted to show him how they trained them to fight from the bush. There are a number of returnees, we welcomed them and try to understand them, however, they have a temper and they can maim anyone at anytime using any deadly weapon they come across once they pick up a quarrel. The children born from the bush also behave in the same way. Once they are upset, their parents try to calm them down, but in the process, the other party must run and hide from his sight. They say that they are capable of doing anything because what they went through in the bush, nobody has ever experienced. The community were told to be very patient with them and try to understand them, however, their behaviour is sometimes very alarming.*²²¹

²¹⁸ Interviewed June 18, 2015.

²¹⁹ Interviewed June 18, 2015.

²²⁰ Interviewed February 11, 2014.

²²¹ Interviewed February 7, 2014.

6.1.1 Scarcity of resources, and jealousy

There was some agreement however, that the issue was being inflamed by both alcohol and jealousy, with the latter provoked by a lack of transparency in the distribution of limited material aid, with each side believing the other was receiving favourable treatment. There have been a number of programs which provide material assistance to people living in communities affected by the war, including a “reinsertion package” that some formerly abducted people received through the Amnesty process. This package, funded by the World Bank through the Multi-country Demobilisation and Reintegration Program (MDRP), provided basic household items such as pots and blankets, as well as a single cash payment of UGX263,000 (USD70) (World Bank 2011, 219; Allen and Schomerus 2006, 11). While not all people who received Amnesty also received a reinsertion package, the packages were nonetheless “a cause of resentment among people who had not been ‘abducted’ who perceived ‘that people are being rewarded for having been with the LRA’” (Allen and Schomerus 2006, 11 and 8). The ICTJ reported that this resentment continues today, with former IDPs perceiving returnees to be benefiting from their abduction (Ladisich 2015, 23). This resentment is likely fuelled by the fact that much of the assistance promised by the Government of Uganda to help formerly displaced people return home was not delivered (RLP 2012, 23).

The Government of Uganda has also provided some assistance to individual households through the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF), and to communities through the Peace, Recovery and Development Program (PRDP). NUSAF has provided material assistance, including seeds, tools, and livestock, but has also generated frustration and jealousy in communities because “it often gave just one or two animals to a group of people with the idea of sharing its offspring” (RLP 2013, 42). While International Alert (2013, 96) reported that respondents in its survey of 3,972 people in NUSAF and PRDP areas commended both programs, they also noted complaints that both programs “benefit only a few people.” Whether through a lack of transparency or explanation about how distribution decisions are made, these distributions have exacerbated tensions and jealousies in communities in northern Uganda.

Eleanor spent several years in abduction and received a reinsertion package upon receiving Amnesty.²²² She was grateful for the package, but recognised that the lack of compensation for those who suffered in camps was also a problem. She identified it as one factor, among many, that complicated her return:

For me, the way I think, it should be given to everybody but those [who] were in the frontline should be given more than people who remained at home. Because the people who remained at home also went to the IDP camps and suffered. If there is reparation, they should see the people who were in the real fight and as well as those who suffered at home, because if they give only us it does not look good.²²³

Mary was unsure about which programs were operating in her community, but she said that “some NGOs, I do not remember their names, gave resettlement packages – pangas, hand hoes, and seeds” to people returning home from the camps. Mary was critical of the program, as it

²²² The Amnesty Act (2000) Cap. (294) is discussed further in Chapter 8.

²²³ Interviewed September 24, 2013.

*was not sufficient because only a few people benefitted. Reparations should be given to all the members because those who missed were very unhappy, they grumbled and developed grudges against those who got. This has brought division among the people who received and those who missed.*²²⁴

She went on to note that some returnees, particularly women who returned with children, were given “clothes and food and counselling services” – items and services which she thought the whole community needed.

Josephine, from a different district, had observed a similar pattern in her community. She explained that

*[s]ome NGOs came up with programs to cater for the returnees and their parents, they were grouped and support given to them. ... This was to ensure that they feel a sense of justice by repairing the loss that existed. Of course the community looked at them with envy. [They] hold them in contempt, they sarcastically say that the abduction of their children has today brought them wealth. This program came to an end.*²²⁵

While particularly vulnerable groups need to be targeted for specific support to assist in their recovery from the conflict and to ensure their access to justice, it is important that service providers (whether government or NGO) are conscious of the risks associated with targeted programs, including the potential to inflame existing tensions within communities.

6.1.2 An intimate conflict

The rift is further complicated by the intimacy of suffering; these are not merely abstract views on the course of the conflict; who suffered more and who is to blame. Several women related stories of neighbours, abducted children or unknown others informing the LRA of where particular individuals were hiding:

*When I was in the bush somebody told the rebels where I was sleeping in the bushes, because the people have other places in the bush apart from home ... just to go and sleep somewhere in the bush in fear of the rebels, but, uh, somebody told the rebels where I was sleeping.*²²⁶

Josephine explained how the enforced intimacy of living alongside someone who led the LRA to their homes causes tensions between the two affected families, and impacts on the whole society:

*Sometimes these abductees were forced to show them where they would find people to abduct or where they can get foodstuff to loot. Sometimes, the other members recognise them and when death occurs, there is a rift that begins to be created within the two families creating a lot of unrest in society.*²²⁷

²²⁴ Interviewed March 19, 2014.

²²⁵ Interviewed February 11, 2014.

²²⁶ Interviewed September 24, 2013.

²²⁷ Interviewed February 11, 2014.

She continued, relating how she herself was struggling this issue:

My cousin was abducted and told to bring them [LRA] to where they would find people. They came home and got two men, these men were killed in a very brutal manner, in front of us and their immediate family, their brains all scattered in the compound ... It was a very disturbing experience.²²⁸

Even where the suffering is not known to be directly attributable to a returned abductee, suspicion abounds and is undermining community members' trust in one another. Rose explained,

[t]he rebels sometimes killed or abducted members from one family and not the neighbours. Such families would hold grudges over the neighbour because they suspected that those whose children were not touched had collaborated with the rebels. Such families do not talk.²²⁹

Eleanor and Jacqueline, from Gulu and Pader districts, both spoke of living with their respective communities' suspicion. Eleanor said that, in her village, the parents of other children who were abducted, but have not returned, blamed her for their children's fates:

So me I came back, when I reached there, some other people who lost their children, they don't see with a good heart. ... They blame you for the death of their children or why they have not returned. That's very hard. Yeah, because they see you are back and their children they are not back, they are not happy.²³⁰

Jacqueline spoke of a pervasive belief among community members that the returnees were responsible for the killing of other members of her community, and that there was little she could do to change that view:

People in the communities have different views, some have this perception that it was us, the returnees, who killed the people in this area. So we do not know what we can do. Maybe all we can do is to leave it to God and also our parents who have accepted us back.²³¹

Although not a longitudinal study, women's testimony in this project indicated that this rift is becoming greater as time goes on, especially as sensitisation programs advising communities to welcome returnees home have largely closed. Jacqueline explained that

[w]hen we had just returned in the homes, the community members were told to treat us, give us a very warm reception, to help us get together and live in harmony with them and this was by the leaders. But these days there is no leader who bothers about it, there is nothing, everybody is quiet, and there is nothing being done about it.²³²

²²⁸ Interviewed February 11, 2014.

²²⁹ Interviewed March 20, 2014.

²³⁰ Interviewed September 24, 2013.

²³¹ Interviewed June 18, 2014.

²³² Interviewed June 18, 2014.

6.1.3 Future conflict risk

While empirical evidence is still emerging, there are also concerning signs of a deep rift growing between communities and both formerly displaced individuals, and the children of formerly abducted persons. This rift becomes even more concerning when viewed in the context of ongoing land conflicts, weak justice mechanisms, weakened traditional leadership, low trust in governance and a declining confidence in the stability of peace (Burke and Eguru 2011; IA 2013, 23; UHRC and UNOHCHR 2011, 51). Ladisch (2015, 23) notes that, in the absence of “state acknowledgement about what happened during the conflict and why,” communities are developing their own “decontextualised” narratives of the conflict. In this narrative, blame for the conflict, and for much of the subsequent harm, is placed on the LRA. “Without a broader, more official process to examine and provide historical clarification [of the conflict],” anger and resentment is being directed against returned abductees (Ladisch 2015, 23). The ICTJ study further presents concerning evidence of a new generation (the children of abducted women and girls) who are facing profound rejection, and who are effectively shut out of society:

The widely held perception that children born of sexual violence lack potential or a future stems in large part from the shadow of their father’s identity. For children who do not know their fathers, the fathers’ perceived association with rebels will nevertheless loom over them, obscuring their possibilities for advancement and integration in the community. Fathers, despite their absence, pass on their identity as LRA combatants, but the child does not get any potential benefit of clan membership, land access, or belonging that would come with knowing his or her father’s full identity. ... For many children, not knowing their father leads to a situation where they cannot access land and thus are not able to earn an income. As a result, they cannot pay their school fees or courses in skills training, leaving them with very limited opportunities for the future. (Ladisch 2015, 17)

The ACCS concludes its *Northern Ugandan Conflict Analysis* with a sobering reminder of the precarious nature of the current “peace” in northern Uganda:

Many communities in the North remain trapped in conflict cycles that are supported by drivers and fed by grievances, pushing them towards what many respondents believe is an inevitable return to overt conflict. As grievances grow and drivers become more entrenched, the potential for trigger events already taking place in the North to lead to greater social unrest or increasingly organised forms of violence increases. In order to build sustainable peace in the North and pave the way for development it is necessary to address the three dimensions of the conflicts identified: the drivers, the legacies, and the grievances. (2013, 53)

6.2 Desire for reconciliation

While the rift is possibly deepening, there is also a strong desire for reconciliation among all women that we spoke with, whether formerly abducted or displaced. Women agreed, in principle at least, that a person is not responsible for being abducted, and should be forgiven and accepted back into the community. Women spoke of a strong desire to live together in harmony, and to heal both individually and collectively from the war. Women recognised that everyone had suffered during the war; several formerly abducted individuals acknowledged that life in the camps also entailed suffering, and that people who had spent years in the camps also needed help to recover, and to be given the opportunity to speak publicly of their experiences. Juliet, when asked if the views of people who lived in the camps were important

for reconciliation, replied, “Yes, they can also come up to say something and share their experiences of the war.”²³³ Edith was more explicit:

*For me I see that, if there is support, then mercy should be upon people who returned from the bush to receive it. Likewise, the people who lived in the camps – because they were many and went through various hardships. Nearly everybody suffered equally, whether you were in the bush or not because taking refuge in the bushes, killings from home were all the same. So people should be supported in any way that they can be.*²³⁴

Similarly, most women who were not abducted understood that being abducted was an injustice, and not a situation which was chosen by the abductees. Abductions in Acholiland were so widespread that few families were untouched by it, and many women understand that the returnees could be their own children; as Simone eloquently expressed,

*[t]he people who were abducted did not go to the bush at their will. So when they return or yours did not return, why look at it negatively? You should look at it positively because he/she is like your own child.*²³⁵

Pauline, whose son was abducted and has not yet returned, acknowledged that the abductees may have some basis for feeling unfairly discriminated against:

*I know of only one child who was abducted in 1993 and returned in 2004. When he returned he stayed in Gulu reception centre. We performed some rituals to welcome him back in the community. The relationship between the child and the local community is not good, the community discriminates him, he cannot easily socialise with the community, but this is also influenced by the fact that he is a quiet boy who keeps to himself.*²³⁶

No family has been untouched by the conflict, and the myriad ways in which they have been affected makes the post-conflict healing process more complex. However, the fact that most families have experiences of prolonged encampment, loss of loved ones in rebel attacks, and the abduction (and sometimes, return) of children, also provides a basis for building mutual understanding of the conflict, and the suffering of all parties involved. Despite this, this research project found very little sustained reconciliation work being done in Acholiland. While there are some NGOs and community groups doing excellent reconciliation and mediation work, this work remains *ad hoc* and small scale. Where reconciliation and mediation work is being done, however, it is proving to be effective. The following section will profile examples of reconciliation work being conducted in Acholiland by three different parties: a community member trained by an International Non-Governmental Organisation (INGO); a collaboration between the Justice and Reconciliation Project and Women’s Advocacy Network; and Radio Mega.

²³³ Interviewed June 19, 2014.

²³⁴ Interviewed June 18, 2015.

²³⁵ Interviewed June 18, 2015.

²³⁶ Interviewed January 22, 2014.

6.2.1 INGO reconciliation

Joyce participated in a mediation and reconciliation training program run by CARE, and said that it has benefited both her personally, and the community as a whole:

*From my experience with the other women facing problems, when they come to me and tell me their problems, I see my situation is not so very bad. It has had a positive impact in my life, this sharing.*²³⁷

When asked to describe the reconciliation processes that CARE facilitated, Joyce explained:

*In the meetings, village meetings, a former abductee or a former camp member would tell their story, then they would pick up from there and start to teach, send these messages of non-discrimination. They would tell them “these people also went through very difficult times as you have heard. Let’s not treat them this way, let’s not discriminate against them, let’s not call them names. You’ve just heard what they said, let’s not back-bite them.”*²³⁸

Having spent several years in abduction, only to return during the peak of encampment, Joyce has had experience of both situations. She said that, when she first returned, she experienced considerable discrimination and name-calling, but the reconciliation workshops helped those who were not abducted to understand what she had been through:

*I shared my experience in those community meetings. After telling my story they would ask the community, “Have you heard what Joyce is going through?” Some of the community members would feel very concerned and would immediately condemn the act, the calling of names and all this.*²³⁹

Joyce said that the opportunity to talk about her experiences, as well as seeing the community’s empathic response, “felt good. I felt there was a chance of me living like any other woman in the society without being discriminated against.” She and her community have now returned to their homes, and she continues to act as a mediator for the community when disputes arise. She added, however, that while the workshops had been very helpful, discrimination continues, and her sense of belonging and of being accepted remains marginal.

6.2.2 Women’s Advocacy Network and Justice and Reconciliation Project

Julia and Suzanne²⁴⁰ both spoke about their work with the Women’s Advocacy Network (WAN), an umbrella organisation of women’s groups whose goal is “[t]o seek reintegration, reconciliation, and justice for war-affected women” (WAN, n.d.). WAN runs a broad range of programs to assist returnee women in reintegrating back into their home communities, including reconciliation activities, conflict mediation, community education, economic development, and larger scale political advocacy for women’s experiences to be addressed within Uganda’s transitional justice framework.

²³⁷ Interviewed June 24, 2014.

²³⁸ Interviewed June 24, 2014.

²³⁹ Interviewed June 24, 2014.

²⁴⁰ Interviewed separately on June 27, 2014.

Some women in WAN have received training in mediation skills and Julia explained that members of the network can invite a mediator in to help them if they are experiencing intra-familial conflict, or conflict with clans and/or community members. She gave the example of a recent conflict that she had helped mediate, in which a young woman had returned from abduction but was being rejected by her family: “[her] father says his daughter has been through so much violence, she has become very violent, she has become a thief. So he cannot take her back to mix with his other children.” Julia then described the process of mediation; she and a small delegation, comprising “a legal officer who helps us, a policeman and also one of the clan elders,” travelled to the village and spoke with the returnee and her father. Julia said that the mediation “took us a lot of time because her father, at a certain point, even said the girl is not his daughter.” She and her team then invited other members of the community into the process: “[W]e called his brothers, relatives, and everybody in that area and they all said this was his daughter.” The community then advised him that “the best he can do is to try and forgive, try and reconsider his thoughts and each, him and the daughter, should forgive each other.” Julia explained that the process took a number of visits, and that, while she was uncertain about whether the father and daughter had forgiven each other “from deep down in [their] heart[s],” the mediation succeeded in allowing for a situation where, “before everyone else, [the daughter] said she had forgiven her brothers, she had forgiven her dad, she had forgiven everybody in the community who were mistreating her.” The father also made a show of public forgiveness and acceptance of his daughter.

Julia explained that the involvement of the community was important as a way of binding the parties to their word: “The father of the girl understood that if he does anything to the girl then he will be in trouble.”²⁴¹ The involvement of a legal officer, police officer, and a clan elder were also important in ensuring the message about the daughter’s right to live in the community, and the family’s obligations towards her, had the necessary authority. The daughter later called Julia and reported that her father and brothers had allocated her a piece of land to cultivate; WAN will follow up the family’s progress in three months’ time.

In addition to specific conflict mediation, WAN has also had some success with healing and reconciliation through its small group work. Julia explained that the groups brought together both formerly abducted and formerly displaced women: “[A]s a group, we did not group people depending on what they had gone through. When we are sharing these thoughts and difficulties everybody is going through, we would do it openly.” She said that the sharing has “had a very big impact on ourselves and the community.” Suzanne explained the sense of reconciliation and healing that occurred through sharing:

*The beginning is always hard. Sometimes people are angry or have fought with each other. [Then] the original women come and help, also me, I am often there. Slowly people tell their stories. That story telling ... people start to relax, start to interact. If something has really been paining you and you bring it out in the form of a story, it comes out a bit. People then start to help each other.*²⁴²

Suzanne explained that when people started returning from abduction, “people were focused on receiving them through reception centres, but no program was in place to cater for returnees in the longer term. What’s the effect of all these people returning?” She “fears for

²⁴¹ Interviewed June 27, 2014.

²⁴² Interviewed June 27, 2014.

the future generation, the bush children are rejected and stigmatised. They may one day rise up, especially if their mother dies.”

Suzanne sees the need for ongoing reconciliation work as essential for northern Uganda’s future peace and stability. This work, she said, needs to happen “*at the local ward level, at the village level,*” and “*women must be involved.*” In her experience, whenever women are given the opportunity “*to make a contribution to [their] community through mediation or through drama, then the community sees she brings something.*” This realisation has gradually helped to raise formerly abducted women’s standings in their communities.

6.2.3 Radio Mega

Another important reconciliation project still running in northern Uganda is Radio Mega. Radio Mega broadcasts throughout Acholiland, into Teso and Langi Sub-Regions, and throughout South Sudan and eastern DRC, with a principle aim of facilitating peacebuilding. Radio Mega played a key role in disseminating information about the Amnesty Act (2000) to people still in abduction, encouraging rebels to return. It now focuses more on disseminating information to resettled communities, addressing some of the key issues and conflicts communities are currently facing. Some of its programs include *Dwog cen paco* (“Coming Back Home”), which addresses the reintegration of returnees; *Lok Atyer Kamaleng* (“Straight Talk”), which addresses sexual and reproductive health issues; and *Wang-oo* (“Fireplace”), which recreates “how the fireplace used to be, in the peaceful days, where important issues about society were discussed. This program is played at 8 p.m. every Thursday, and is dominated by advice from elders and lawyers on how to deal with land conflicts” (Otim 2009).

Several women spoke about the importance of Radio Mega, saying that there was a noticeable reduction in name-calling from community members following a reconciliation broadcast. A group of four formerly abducted women who all returned with children said that “*sometimes when they are warned over the radio, they [name calling and insults] come down a bit.*”²⁴³ They said that, for a time, the reintegration broadcasts stopped being effective and the community continued its name-calling; the sub-county leaders then broadcast a message that those caught discriminating against returnees would be sanctioned. One young man was arrested and fined, following a complaint from a formerly abducted woman. The women in the focus group said that they felt affirmed by the community and the authorities taking discrimination seriously. As Olive explained:

*At least [it] gives us hope that somebody is there, they are looking forward to our safety and [makes us feel] that we are still needed in the communities where we returned, because if it was not this, then feelings sometimes come that maybe we should return where we are from, but because it is happening this we, we have the strength, we have the hope and the courage to still continue living in these communities.*²⁴⁴

Anecdotally, women living in villages that did not receive broadcasts spoke of more regular and more intense violence than those within the broadcast range. Notably, Radio Mega was not broadcast in the village in which all women interviewed spoke of the deepest rift between

²⁴³ Interviewed June 19, 2014.

²⁴⁴ Interviewed June 19, 2014.

returnees and the rest of the community, pervaded by daily insults and frequent physical fights.

Radio Mega is very much grounded in the Acholi community. It is listened to widely and avidly, and is seen as an accessible public forum in which “ordinary” people can speak. We met several women who had spoken on Radio Mega, including Claire:

*I was taken to testify on Radio Mega in Gulu. The purpose was to make the rebels who are still in the bush hear and also to notify my parents of my return. When I was asked to go on radio, I thought I was going to be taken to jail or killed. But upon arrival we were given a warm reception, encouraged and we got relaxed. After testifying I felt happy because I saw good houses, I saw the town and its beauty having lived most of my childhood life in the bush. The house was all white like I was going to heaven. If am asked to testify again, I will happily do so.*²⁴⁵

She said that speaking on the radio helped her “[feel] a sense of justice,” and that by testifying on the Radio, she “*did not only get justice for myself but for others as well.*”²⁴⁶ The Radio gave Claire an opportunity to participate in demobilisation efforts.

Radio Mega was spoken about by many women across Acholiland as a trusted source of entertainment, news, and information, and the programs it runs are assisting communities in many ways. It holds great potential for any future reconciliation projects in consideration, and for keeping communities informed about national transitional justice developments.

6.3 Conclusion

While the efforts of individuals, NGOs, and civil society organisations towards reconciliation are important, it needs to be understood that these parties constitute only one layer of reconciliation, and should not detract from efforts to instigate macro-level reconciliation programs. Community-based reconciliation efforts address inter-personal and inter-familial relationships, but in the absence of formal, national-level reconciliation programs, there is a risk that the conflict will increasingly be understood as a “northern problem,” and enable the GoU to side-step its role in the conflict, as well as the massive human rights violations that were perpetrated by both sides during the war (Hansen 2009, 3). Failure to engage in a national process of reconciliation risks omitting the structural and historical “root causes” of the conflict, and undermining the stated goal of the draft National Transitional Justice Policy: “a peaceful and stable Uganda” (JLOS TJWG 2013, 3–4).

²⁴⁵ Interviewed March 20, 2014.

²⁴⁶ Interviewed March 20, 2014.

CHAPTER 7: JUSTICE

*Justice helps women to stand firm without any fear in their homes, it also helps to settle the matter once and for all.*²⁴⁷

– Harriet

7.1 Introduction

Seeking to identify women’s understandings and experiences of “justice” were core objectives of this research. While there were a range of views and experiences of justice, there was also significant coherence across the views of women interviewed. Justice is universally held as highly important, with a high level of agreement about the objectives and constitution of justice. Women also reported similar obstacles and difficulties in accessing justice. The war between the Government of Uganda and the Lord’s Resistance Army continued for twenty years and directly affected every individual, family, community, and social institution in Acholiland. Consequently, there are multiple and significant justice challenges facing the Ugandan government and the Acholi people today and into the future, including meeting socio-economic needs essential to a dignified and sustainable life for all; effectively responding to disputes (which sometimes erupt into violence, exacerbating the already weakened social fabric); ensuring safety and security; and responding to the many injustices and mass human rights violations of the past. The justice landscape in Acholiland is complex and challenging, requiring sustained, creative and sincere efforts. There are also pre-existing strengths and examples of effective initiatives to draw upon in this task.

The range of views that women expressed about what would constitute justice for them reflects in large part wider debates about “justice.” Justice can be approached from a socio-economic vantage-point, drawing on ethics, philosophy, and political philosophy as “moral fairness,” and leading to concerns about social justice and the fair distribution of resources and opportunities (Sen 2009). It can also be approached as a response to a violation or injury, leading to concerns about restorative and retributive justice, as well as a subsequent array of possible mechanisms aimed at rehabilitating the offender, restoring the victim, and/or reinforcing the rule of law (Porter 2012). All of these conceptions of justice were expressed by women participating in this study, and all have important contributions to make in efforts to rebuild the rule of law, social relations, and the well-being of individuals in northern Uganda.

In keeping with the feminist methodology of this study, we have taken women’s statements about justice as the starting point for discussing justice in northern Uganda, following the 20-year conflict with the LRA. The definition of “justice,” therefore, is broad, and includes social, psychological, economic, and legal conceptions of justice.

7.2 Importance of justice

Justice is widely accepted as a “public good” – an essential part of stable, secure, and prosperous societies (World Bank 2011; Alexander 2003; Cox et al. 2012; Sen 2009). It is also acknowledged as important for individual well-being (Laplante and Theidon 2007;

²⁴⁷ Interviewed February 6, 2014.

Mercy Corps and USAID 2009; Bothmann 2015; Mertus 2000). Women in northern Uganda spoke about justice as important for both pragmatic and personal reasons – it has a preventative effect on future violence; it builds trust in society and in the legitimacy of governance structures (including political, legal, and traditional structures); it facilitates personal/individual healing and psychological recovery; and it assists in the restoration of relationships.

7.2.1 Protection against violence (future armed conflict and criminal violence)

Effective legal, social, and economic justice systems are critical to recovery after intra-State conflict. A World Bank study (2011, 2) into conflict, security, and development noted that “90 percent of the last decade’s civil wars occurred in countries that had already had a civil war in the last 30 years.” The report further cautioned that even where successive intra-State violent conflicts have been avoided, many post-conflict societies face heightened levels of violent crime, which adversely affects development and recovery. The report highlighted the importance of justice to stability, stating that

[w]hen State institutions do not adequately protect citizens, guard against corruption, or provide access to justice; when markets do not provide job opportunities; or when communities have lost social cohesion – the likelihood of violent conflict increases. (xi–xii)

Uganda has experienced “22 armed conflicts in as many years” (Dolan 2008, 2), and the communities of northern Uganda are currently experiencing heightened levels of criminal violence. Many systems are compromised by corruption (Winkler and Sondergaard 2008, 19; Nystrand 2014; World Bank 2011, 127),²⁴⁸ unemployment is extraordinarily high (Wielders and Amutjojo 2012, 10);²⁴⁹ and social cohesion is weak (Jallow and Englert 2011, 77). Restoring justice and legitimacy is essential for Uganda’s future stability and prosperity.

A small but significant number of formerly abducted women expressed the importance of justice in helping them adjust to life back in their communities, to feel a sense of belonging, and to avoid thinking about re-joining the LRA. As Olive said:

*At least it [justice] gives us hope that somebody is there ... and that we are still needed in the communities. ... If not then maybe we should return [to the bush].*²⁵⁰

Justice is important both as a good in itself, and as prevention against the risk of future armed conflict. Justice is also essential in protecting against violence in society. Most communities across Acholiland are experiencing heightened levels of inter-personal and domestic violence. Many women saw the heightened violence as an effect of the long years of the war, and the breakdown in social structures which would have previously both prevented such violence and responded effectively to it when it did occur. Importantly, many women also saw that widespread, ongoing impunity for violence was having an enabling effect on yet

²⁴⁸ Transparency International’s East African Bribery Index (2012) ranked Uganda as the most corrupt country in the East African region.

²⁴⁹ The Government of Uganda reported a national unemployment rate of 9.4 percent in 2014 (GoU 2014, 77). Contemporary unemployment figures for northern Uganda could not be found; however, Dolan reported that, in 2008, the unemployment rate in northern Uganda was 92 percent (Dolan 2008, 2). Wielders and Amutjojo (2012, 10) reported that employment is “very low” in Acholiland, with most young people working an average of one day per week, for very low wages.

²⁵⁰ Interviewed June 19, 2014.

more violence. Women saw justice as crucial in stopping this ongoing violence, and preventing further violence.

Liza explained that people had been exposed to significant violence during the war, “*had witnessed much death, violence, killings,*” and that “*this changed their perception, changed their thinking.*”²⁵¹ Violence has become normalised as a response to disagreements, interpersonal disputes, distressing emotions, and bad memories. “*During the war people were exposed to seeing these behaviours and killings. ... And killing somebody... death begins to look like it is a normal thing, it’s not anything that somebody tries to guard against.*” Most of this violence, Liza explained, is directed against women: “*This affects us the women most because the men are killing us so rampantly. This makes us women so worried and we live in fear because a small issue can lead to death, we are not so certain what will happen next when the man gets drunk.*” She described that,

*those who kill in the community are jailed for a very short period of time and released they return to the very same community, and this encourages the other members in the community to also do the same. They say so and so also killed his wife and he has been set free. So it encourages them to also do the same.*²⁵²

This leniency not only fails to deliver justice for the murdered women, but also has the important effect of tacitly condoning and further normalising violence in the community.

Justice, as described by Liza, is a crucial part of preventing ongoing violence, and resisting the normalisation of violence that has occurred due to the prolonged conflict with the LRA and the resultant high level of exposure to violence among the whole community. Additionally, ineffective justice responses to violence are eroding people’s trust in both formal and traditional systems. Annabel, who lives in a different village to Liza, told of an instance in which, having reported a young man who she described as “*a serial killer*” to the authorities who had arrested and released him several times, the community took matters into their own hands and killed him. Annabel agreed that this sort of vigilante justice is not desirable, but in the absence of effective protection against an individual’s violence, the community could see no other option, “*so the best is to catch him and kill him, and that was resolved by the whole community.*”²⁵³

The ability of the State and traditional leaders to ensure justice is crucial in building community trust in those institutions and in building institutional standing as legitimate (Carrabine 2005, 898). There is much higher self-regulated compliance when authorities are seen as legitimate rather than simply powerful. Women in this study repeatedly expressed a view that there is no authority widely accepted as legitimate in their communities. The damage done to the social fabric of Acholi communities during the war has undermined women’s trust in both traditional leaders and the State to provide fair and transparent justice and leadership. Chris Dolan (2008, 3) described that “[i]n many places the combination of past experience and present reality has resulted in a State which has little trust in its citizens and a population which has even less faith in its government.” Addressing this trust deficit is a key challenge for both the Ugandan State and Acholi traditional leaders if violence is to be reduced, a necessary pre-condition for social, economic and political development (Cox et al. 2012, 7).

²⁵¹ Interviewed June 17, 2014.

²⁵² Interviewed June 17, 2014.

²⁵³ Interviewed June 18, 2014.

7.2.2 Justice for healing

In addition to the pragmatic violence prevention and reduction effects of justice, women also talked about justice as having important healing effects, both for individuals and for relationships. For some women, such as Martha, an elderly widow and former IDP, justice “brings joy and happiness ... and restores relationships.”²⁵⁴ Bernadette, who was successful in accessing formal justice systems in a land conflict, but who has not yet engaged in any justice processes following her husband’s death in a massacre, said that justice is “important because it helps relieve pain, bitterness and the sadness we experience in our lives.”²⁵⁵

A group of formerly abducted women talked about feeling a sense of justice when their community leaders decided to take action against community members discriminating against returnees. Juliet said that this “gives us more hope and a hope to live on, move on every day.”²⁵⁶ While Gladys, who participated in *Mato Oput* upon her return from abduction said the experience “has made me believe that my family members still love me.”²⁵⁷

There is strong evidence in academic literature that certain justice processes and mechanisms can assist individuals and communities to heal following the violence. Bothmann (2015, 46) notes that victim-centred justice processes can promote healing through public acknowledgement of the rights of not only the individual(s) participating in justice processes, but also of the rights of the peoples affected by the conflict. Julie Mertus (2000) argues that justice, broadly conceived, helps survivors reclaim their personhood and status as citizen-subject within a society. Mertus argues that formal legal mechanisms, while necessary for rebuilding the institution of law and trust in social and political institutions, are insufficient mechanisms for the realisation of the affective benefits of justice and that less formal and less tightly prescribed processes are also needed. Peru’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission identified the importance of delivering justice for survivors in order to repair both individual psychological well-being and social relationships necessary for the health of the nation, stating that “psychosocial disorder[s] weigh like a serious mortgage on our future” (quoted in Laplante and Theidon 2007, 233). Laplante and Theidon (2007, 239) noted that survivors who participated in the TRC reported the experience “dissolve[d] feelings of isolation and even self blame,” and helped them to realise the abuses were “systematic and not their fault.” A 50-year-old woman described the process as healing, “I felt as if I healed a sickness. ... I talked about my pain in front of the public like a person healed of an illness” (quoted in Laplante and Theidon 2007, 240). Although culturally and geographically distant, her words resonate with a comment from a survivor of LRA abduction upon the passing of a resolution in the Uganda parliament in support of reparations who said, “Today my healing has begun” (ICTJ 2014).

Although issues of restoring social order and concerns about restoring interpersonal relationships and individual healing tend to be approached by quite separate systems in policy making and program delivery, for the women interviewed in this research, the values of social order, personal relationships and individual healing were intimately connected parts of a single whole.

²⁵⁴ Interviewed January 30, 2014.

²⁵⁵ Interviewed March 11, 2014.

²⁵⁶ Interviewed June 19, 2014.

²⁵⁷ Interviewed January 23, 2014.

7.3 Acholi principles of justice

Women participating in this study reported a broad range of views about “justice”; however, two principles concerning the nature of justice were repeated almost universally – firstly, that justice is an ongoing process rather than an event, and secondly, that mediation and restorative modes of justice aimed at reconciliation and restoration of relationships are strongly preferred. Both these principles are evident in Annabel’s words:

I would say the mediators, the local, the people that mediate these cases, the community members, are the best as far as resolving these conflicts and any matter within the community is concerned. Because for them they would not say the Government way of saying that “You are wrong or you are wrong,” no. They will just keep giving us lessons, just keep talking and talking and showing us the right thing. You know at the end of the day, that person who has wronged me or who is from the teachings from the lessons will come and say “I’m so sorry I did this kind of thing” and this brings a lot of reconciliation among the parties, among the community members. And even if there is maybe a fine or some payments that was made by the complainant at the beginning, through good will and through good faith the person who is on the wrong side will come up open and say, you know – I am going to refund you the money that you paid in to help this dispute. So I think the mediators are the best.²⁵⁸

The high degree of agreement on foundational principles for a justice strategy to be seen as “just” (and therefore legitimate) among Acholi women provide important points of reference in designing any justice strategies to be implemented. The preference for restorative justice approaches expressed by participants in this research is supported by many other studies, and by the actions of Acholi leaders, particularly in their efforts to bring the conflict to an end through dialogue rather than military victory (Otim 2009; OP ICC 2005; Liu Institute for Global Issues et al. 2005; Quinn 2009). Acholi religious and cultural leaders campaigned consistently for Amnesty, dialogue, and reconciliation to be the official policy for bringing the conflict to an end (Liu Institute for Global Issues et al. 2005, 3; Latigo 2008; Otim 2009).²⁵⁹

An extensive nation-wide consultation with political, religious, public service, and civil society leaders found a strong preference for reconciliation to address a number of armed conflicts the country has experienced: “The majority of respondents pointed to the fact that a military campaign alone will not produce lasting peace. They also asserted that sustainable peace is more than the absence of armed conflict and the peace process must involve Ugandans from throughout the country” (Hansen 2009, 2). The report noted the social and cultural value of forgiveness and reconciliation, especially in the northern districts (Hansen 2009, 6), but that national, formal reconciliation processes have never been undertaken.

²⁵⁸ Interviewed June 18, 2014.

²⁵⁹ Examples include the formation of the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative in 1997, which was instrumental in the legislation of the Amnesty Act (2000); organised several dialogues and rallies for peace; met with members of the LRA and the Government of Uganda; and sent a delegation to speak with the international community in the US, UK, Canada, and at the UN, to bring pressure to bear on both the LRA and the GoU to enter negotiations (Branch 2007; Otim 2009). In March 2005, a delegation of Acholi leaders visited the ICC in The Hague to discuss their concerns that ICC prosecutions could work against their traditional justice and reconciliation process – see ICC (2015). The Civil Society Organisations for Peace in Northern Uganda (CSOPNU) was a coalition of 50 Ugandan and international civil society organisations also calling for both the LRA and the GoU to seek an immediate end to hostilities and to engage in dialogue – see CSOPNU (2006).

These findings are in keeping with anthropological and other academic studies, which emphasise the centrality of forgiveness and the restoration of relationships to Acholi conceptions of justice (Liu Institute for Global Issues et al. 2005, 2; Porter 2012; Hovil and Lomo 2005; Quinn 2009). A 2007 study, conducted while the Juba peace talks were ongoing, reported that people in northern Uganda (including, but not limited to, the Acholi) overwhelmingly wanted both accountability and peace. Ninety-five percent of respondents wanted a written historical record of the events of the war,²⁶⁰ 90 percent believed that peace could be achieved through dialogue with the LRA, 86 percent believed the LRA members should be pardoned, and 70 percent reported that they would be comfortable living with former LRA cadres in their communities (this figure was higher in Acholi regions) (Pham et al. 2007, 4–6). The same survey reported some ambivalence, however; 41 percent of respondents supported punishment and prosecution of LRA leaders, and 55 percent supported prosecution of UPDF members (Pham et al. 2007, 5).

While such findings may initially seem contradictory, it is important to understand that Acholi processes of forgiveness, reconciliation, and restorative justice are multi-stage, comprehensive processes. As Annabel explained, for reconciliation and restoration, the parties must “*keep talking and talking.*”²⁶¹ Anyeko and others (2012) reported that Acholi processes of achieving reconciliation involved multiple phases, and sometimes took several years before reconciliation was reached; only then can they be marked ceremonially. The process begins with forgiveness, which is seen as an expression by the wronged person or persons as a willingness to engage in dialogue. Mediators then facilitate a process of truth telling, during which the perpetrator(s) sincerely acknowledge their wrong-doing and apologise for their actions (and the consequences of those actions). The parties then agree to a means of compensation, which Anyeko et al. (2012, 117) reported could be symbolic, in the specific case of the LRA conflict due to widespread severe poverty. Finally, they would engage in a shared ceremony (often *Mato Oput*) to mark the reconciliation between the two parties.

Many women spoke about the importance of mediation, reconciliation, “*restoring relationships,*” “*truth telling,*” “*seeking forgiveness,*” “*compensation,*” and “*apologising*” as necessary conditions for justice. That restoration and mediation processes of justice are so widely held as significant and meaningful by Acholi women is important to consider when thinking about transitional justice in Acholiland. It is also important not to idealise or reify traditional justice processes. Many women also spoke about the effects of the war on the capacity of traditional and local leaders to fairly and effectively lead justice processes. Annabel, who preferred mediation and traditional processes of reconciliation, also cautioned that “*if you find an elder in a village who can clearly maybe settle a matter between two people regarding land or family members – this person does not also use the truth ... is not truthful and all this is really causing so much problem among the people in the society.*”²⁶² She also explained that many of the young people, having grown up in IDP camps, have not learned the traditional ways, and have little respect for the elders. This is borne out by other studies examining traditional justice systems in Acholiland. The UNDP reported that “*traditional authority is weakening and the level of trust of people in traditional leaders is decreasing,*” but that traditional systems remained highly relevant as “*the majority of people*

²⁶⁰ A separate study conducted in 2011 also found over 90 percent support for a truth-telling process. “In particular, people want to know why this war happened, who is to be held accountable and what has happened to their loved ones who are missing” (Anyeko et al. 2012, 114).

²⁶¹ Interviewed June 18, 2014.

²⁶² Interviewed June 18, 2014.

in Acholiland still look to traditional justice mechanisms for various reasons, including the higher costs and longer duration of formal processes, and the stronger focus on restoration of relationships in traditional mechanisms” (Wielders and Amutjojo 2012, 9). Baines, who conducted an extensive study of Acholi traditional justice mechanisms and their potential efficacy for responding to the multiple and complex justice needs following the LRA war, concluded that while *Mato Oput* and other traditional processes may not be adequate “in its current form ... the principles, values and symbolic meaning of *Mato Oput* were considered [by Acholi leaders] essential to rebuilding a devastated Acholiland, and should be carefully taken into consideration in the design of any future justice program in that region” (Liu Institute for Global Issues et al. 2005, iii). Many women interviewed in this research echoed these sentiments, preferring a locally-owned and accessible mediated resolution to conflicts, but backed up by enforceable law when such processes failed to deliver fairness, safety, and resolution.

7.4 Social and economic justice

The conflict in northern Uganda has caused massive harm to the physical, emotional, social, and economic well-being of the people. While accountability measures are critical forms of justice, they are insufficient in themselves. Criminal prosecutions, lustration, and even truth-telling mechanisms will likely have only a limited effect in delivering a sense of justice to the women of northern Uganda. Laplante and Theidon propose that justice mechanisms which focus on criminal prosecutions and other retributive justice mechanisms may replicate class privilege:

[A] preference for retributive justice may follow class lines and is a luxury afforded only to victim-survivors without economic hardship. Among the rural poor, demands for justice are overwhelmingly expressed in an economic idiom: the struggle to survive results in practical considerations such as the need for farm animals, suitable housing, or education for their children. (2007, 243)

The Government of Uganda initiated the Peace, Recovery and Development Program²⁶³ (PRDP) in 2007, which aimed to assist with post-conflict reconstruction, and to bring northern Uganda up to parity with other regions of Uganda in terms of infrastructure, services, education, and economic activity. The PRDP has delivered some important benefits to northern Uganda, particularly in terms of increased police services, and rebuilding infrastructure such as schools, health centres, roads, water, and sanitation facilities. The PRDP has also been criticised for some serious problems, including the embezzlement of USD14 million of PRDP funds (Nystrand 2014, 825). Of particular relevance is the very low priority accorded to women in the PRDP, prompting the UNDP to launch a project specifically aimed at building gender-sensitive policy and budget design capacity within several Government of Uganda agencies responsible for the PRDP. The UNDP reported that,

[w]hile the PRDP focusses on areas that are critical to women’s human rights, all its priority interventions and expected outcomes accord low priority (if any) to gender and women’s concerns. Consequently, women have not benefited equally from the resources that have been allocated for the implementation of the PRDP. In fact available statistics on the socio-economic status of women and men indicate that the gender gaps are widening. (2011b, 1)

²⁶³ The PRDP is discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

When asked about what would help them feel a sense of justice, most women responded with measures that would help them re-establish a sustainable economic base for themselves and their children, and supports to enable them to attain an acceptable level of physical and emotional health. In light of the widespread poverty throughout northern Uganda, a focus on criminal justice, to the exclusion of economic and social justice, is unlikely to meaningfully satisfy northern Ugandan women's justice needs. Gender sensitive social and economic justice need to be centrally included in Uganda's transitional justice programs.

7.4.1 Health

The conflict in northern Uganda has caused extensive damage to people's psychological and physical health, with women consistently shown to be suffering worse health than men on almost all measures (Accorsi et al. 2005; Nakimuli-Mpungu et al. 2013; Liebling-Kalifani et al. 2008). Many women told us of long-term persistent health problems, including injuries sustained during the war, injuries sustained during child-birth, trauma, depression, infections and illnesses (including HIV/AIDS), and intrusive pain from war-related injuries or from prolonged physically demanding work. Pauline described a range of health problems common in her community:

*Women suffer from HIV/AIDS, [high blood] pressure, diabetes, TB, joint pain, STDs, skin irritations that I believe were as a result of the foods we were being fed on because the posho we fed on was very substandard and had maggots.*²⁶⁴

Nine years after her return from abduction, Grace continues to suffer from lower back pain after giving birth while in the bush. She explained that *"when I gave birth to my child, I was very young and had complications ... my lower backbone got disfigured, so I feel a lot of pain."*²⁶⁵ Nighty described how she *"was made a sex slave, so many rebels abused me sexually during my entire stay of two months. When I returned, I was taken for medical check and unfortunately, I tested HIV positive and now am on Septrin drugs."*²⁶⁶

These findings are consistent with numerous studies into the health needs of northern Ugandan women. Kinyanda et al. (2010, 28) reported that, of 813 women screened in two IDP camps, almost one-third had experienced at least one incident of sexual violence; of those, almost three quarters had "at least one gynaecological complaint" (72.4 percent) and at least one surgical complaint (75.6 percent), while 69.4 percent had "significant psychological distress scores." The authors concluded that sexual violence was extensive, and that there is "a strong association between war related sexual violence and the later development of specific gynaecological complaints" (Kinyanda et al. 2010, 34). Similarly, Liebling-Kalifani et al. (2008, 178) documented extensive health problems facing women affected by the war in Kitgum, Gulu, and Teso, including a high prevalence of gynaecological injuries from sexual violence.

Women's health problems, however, are not limited only to those resulting from sexual violence. Liebling-Kalifani and colleagues also found that women had a higher incidence of PTSD and depression than men, and were two-and-a-half times more likely than men to

²⁶⁴ Interviewed January 22, 2014.

²⁶⁵ Interviewed June 19, 2014.

²⁶⁶ Interviewed February 13, 2014.

present with direct war-related injuries and disabilities. The authors reported the registration statistics of patients at Gulu Rehabilitation Unit in 1996:

By 1996 the Gulu Rehabilitation Unit had registered a total of 628 children, 386 women and 147 men as disabled by bullets, landmines, brutal attacks with machetes, burning and other forms of cruelty (Isis- WICCE, 2001b). Recurrent back pain was the most common complaint especially amongst women and was thought to be due to the strenuous activities they engage in. Other injuries included soft tissue injuries, neglected fractures, arthritis and osteomyelitis. Of the general surgical conditions, hernias were most common, as well as tumours and cancers and intestinal obstruction. (2008, 181–82)

A study of admissions at Lacor Hospital (five kilometres from Gulu town centre) between 1992 and 2002 showed that 79.8 percent of admissions were women and children. Carla described how both she and her sister sustained permanent impairments as a result of the war:

*My elder sister was shot in the head and she also lost her foot. She lost her concentration ability and is very short tempered and traumatised. My leg was cut with a panga and it is still swollen to date, I have to tie a rope around it because one of the veins was fractured. I cannot move for a very long distance because it pains to a point that I get bed ridden. I am partially disabled.*²⁶⁷

In addition to managing their own illnesses and injuries, women have also taken on an increased care burden for others. Florence, a 60-year-old widow, has taken on the care of her orphaned grandchildren, one of whom “*is paralysed and I have no means of taking him to the hospital.*”²⁶⁸ Sonia is now caring for her husband, who “*became disabled as a result of the war.*”²⁶⁹ The high level of illness and injury, coupled with the lack of social and health infrastructure, is having a compounding effect on women in northern Uganda.

Having access to healthcare is critically important, particularly in a context in which livelihoods overwhelmingly require physical work, there is no public social security system, and social networks (which once would have provided care for the sick and disabled) are so profoundly damaged. Nighty, who was infected with HIV during a series of sexual assaults during her abduction, and whose husband was killed during the war, is very worried about her children’s future, and especially who will care for them when she is no longer alive. She explained the inter-linked importance of physical and mental health and education:

*I cannot heal from HIV/AIDS but if my children can have a good education, that is my only wish therefore if there is a way, my children should be given a bright future by ensuring that they study since my health deteriorates every day.*²⁷⁰

Nighty’s determination that her children receive an education compels her to continue working long hours in her garden to produce enough food, not only for the six of them to eat, but to produce a surplus for sale to enable her to pay school fees. Nighty explained that she is “*weak,*” has “*chest pains,*” and that her “*health has deteriorated*”; she further said that if she did not have to pay school fees, “*then my rate of digging will also come down and I shall also live longer.*”²⁷¹

²⁶⁷ Interviewed February 12, 2014.

²⁶⁸ Interviewed January 22, 2014.

²⁶⁹ Interviewed March 13, 2014.

²⁷⁰ Interviewed February 13, 2014.

²⁷¹ Interviewed February 13, 2014.

Poor health and poverty have a mutually reinforcing effect on one another. Poor health limits women's ability to work and earn an income, which in turn increases her vulnerability to poverty related illnesses, and reduces her ability to access health care:

*My head was affected badly, I can not carry any load on my head, my eye-sight is so poor, I cannot carry fire wood nor water on my head, I have to just lift using my hands in small amounts which makes life very difficult. I can not dig for a long time.*²⁷²

Many women participating in this study said that access to medical and psychosocial health services would greatly assist them to feel a sense of justice and to heal, quite literally, from the war. Esther, like Nighty, saw health as central to economic and social recovery:

*Justice is having good health. When one is healthy, they can cultivate and have plenty of food and sources of income to support the children.*²⁷³

Most women, particularly those not in a regional centre, reported being unable to access necessary medical services. The barriers to accessing health services are multiple. Not least is that the "health service infrastructure in northern Uganda remains thoroughly inadequate" (ACCS 2013, 42) for both physical and mental health needs (Nakimuli-Mpungu et al. 2013, 2). There are simply not enough health services in northern Uganda to respond to the needs of the population. Uganda's health services nationally are among the world's worst. The World Health Organisation in 2009 ranked Uganda at 186 out of 191 countries (Kelly 2009). In its 2012/13 annual report on performance, Uganda's Ministry of Health (2013) recorded improvements in a number of fields, including TB detection and treatment of HIV/AIDS. It also reported, however, that a lack of skilled health workers was constraining the health sector's ability to reach set targets, and that government spending on health has declined from 9.6 percent of GDP in 2009/10, to 7.4 percent in 2012/13 (MoH 2013, xiv).

Declining health spending notwithstanding, the percentage of the population living within five kilometres of a health centre increased from 49 percent in 2000 to 72 percent in 2005, and remained at that level in 2010 (MoH 2010, 16). In 2006, the UNOCHA reported that less than 30 percent of the population of northern Uganda lived within five kilometres of a health centre (UNOCHA 2006, 10). More recent figures for northern Uganda were not available; however, the available figures imply support for many women's assertion that health services are simply not available to them, and that the distances required to travel to a health centre are prohibitive for most, particularly in light of the poverty in which most women participants in this research are living.

Valerie spoke about her mother's physical illnesses and her own post-traumatic responses, both of which go untreated because

*we don't have a nearby health facility. I get nightmares, every time I see people in army uniforms, I get very nervous and restless, I lose self-control. ... The only hospital that one can get medical attention from is very far away, takes one, two days to reach on foot.*²⁷⁴

²⁷² Interviewed January 31, 2014.

²⁷³ Interviewed March 19, 2014.

²⁷⁴ Interviewed January 23, 2014.

Often, women told us that the only health service they could access was a village-level health centre (an HC1), which is rarely staffed with qualified medical personnel, and can offer only limited advice. Baingana and Mangen (2011, 293) describe an HC1 as “the first point of contact for patients ... There is frequently no physical infrastructure, but relies on outreach activities held under a tree, or in a community building.” Services are usually provided by community volunteers, many of whom have not had training for the role; a 2013 audit reported that only 55 percent of villages had a trained village health team (MoH 2013, 25). Women wanting slightly better health services must travel to a village that has an HCII (a small out-patient health centre), or to the sub-county or a regional centre for higher quality, in-patient care needs (Baingana and Mangen 2011).

Many women complained that the health services available to them locally were ineffective, both in terms of the knowledge of the staff and the quality of medicine available. Furthermore, it was difficult to travel to better health services further away. As Evelyn explained:

*I have never received any substantive medical treatment, I have tried but I never get any improvement. The nearest health centre in this area is Geregere which is about four miles from here, then Patongo is six miles and the one in Omot is further. The drugs I am given in these health centres never improve my situation, I see no change. Sometimes I think that I probably never got any good medical attention or the drugs I took were expired.*²⁷⁵

Bicentina’s village has an HCII, but she said she is reluctant to attend there:

*We have Latanya Health Centre II. If one has a serious sickness, one does not have to go to Latanya but to Kitgum where there are highly qualified staffs. The health workers in Latanya are very unfriendly and hostile, only the in-charge works well with the community but the rest of the workers don’t help.*²⁷⁶

The Ministry of Health Annual Performance Review in 2013 reported significant failings in meeting its own set targets for service delivery and staffing of parish and sub-county level health centres. In addition to HCIIIs and IVs operating with only 58 percent of required staff, the absentee rate had increased from 46 percent in 2011 to 48 percent in 2013 (MoH 2013, 25–26). The overall poor quality of health care available at village and parish level health centres was a common complaint, and is summed up by Hannah, who roundly condemned her local health centre:

*There are no services offered, the best they do is to make referrals to other health centres. The health centres lack equipment, they need to be restocked with drugs and equipment. The health centre staff should be monitored, they abscond duty. They leave work at midday instead of working the whole day. No one attends to patients after midday. Even women who are in Labour are not attended to.*²⁷⁷

²⁷⁵ Interviewed January 31, 2014

²⁷⁶ Interviewed March 20, 2014.

²⁷⁷ Interviewed March 13, 2014.

In addition to the geographical barriers to accessing health centres, several women said that they are often required to pay for medication, a cost which few can manage. Louisa, who has a chronic illness, explained that when she goes to the hospital,

*sometimes the drugs are not there, then they prescribe and ask you to buy at the chemist. If the money's there, you can buy. If it's not, you go back home. Most of the time, people here don't have money.*²⁷⁸

Marlene was also given a prescription for her to meet the cost of filling privately. She could not afford it, and so continues to struggle with her ill-health. She has concluded that “[t]here is no treatment rendered in government facilities.”²⁷⁹ The Government of Uganda has decreased its funding of health services as a proportion of GDP, and leaves most provision for individual households and the non-government sector. In 2010, the Government of Uganda financed only 15 percent of the health budget, in comparison to 35 percent from donors and 50 percent from private households (MoH 2010, 14).

7.4.2 Mental health

Women also spoke frequently about the lack of counselling and psychosocial assistance available, and identified this as an important need in their communities. Women recognised the level of trauma in their communities, and the impacts the trauma is having on social relationships:

*Counsellors are very important, they should be brought in the area because people are so traumatised, they will help relieve trauma.*²⁸⁰

Some women saw a link between unaddressed trauma and alcohol use, including one woman who linked trauma to her own drinking:

*I have not accessed any counselling except sometimes I take some alcohol to forget ... it would be very helpful if counsellors are brought to help people cope with their problems.*²⁸¹

Some women had received some counselling and spoke of its positive effects. Claire said, “The counselling they [an NGO in Kitgum] give is very helpful especially when one gets hurt or worried or traumatised.”²⁸² Agnes received some counselling upon her return from abduction and said that it helped her a lot, but that “I have not accessed enough counselling because it needs to be continuous. I feel these services are important in providing justice to women.”²⁸³ A number of small-scale counselling and psychotherapeutic treatment programs have been introduced in northern Uganda, and are yielding positive results. A 2010 evaluation of the EMPOWER program reported a halving of both depressive and anxiety symptoms among people participating in the program (Sonderregger et al. 2011, 244). Nakimuli-Mpungu et al. (2013) reported similar improvements in people accessing five psycho-trauma centres established at district hospitals in five northern districts.

²⁷⁸ Interviewed June 25, 2014.

²⁷⁹ Interviewed March 20, 2014.

²⁸⁰ Interviewed February 13, 2014.

²⁸¹ Interviewed March 11, 2014.

²⁸² Interviewed March 20, 2014.

²⁸³ Interviewed February 12, 2014.

One key informant²⁸⁴ highlighted the need for counselling and psychosocial support services for all people of northern Uganda, but especially for women survivors of sexual violence. She reported that the ICD had been involved in lobbying the Government of Uganda for long-term funding for psychosocial services, particularly for prospective witnesses, but also more broadly. She was critical of the current approach, which left counselling and therapeutic interventions to the NGO sector, as this resulted in a lack of continuity of service provision following donor priorities and funding cycles. Additionally, NGO provision tended to repeatedly target particular individuals and groups, rather than offer services to the whole population as a matter of right. Two key informants wanted to see a greater role for the Ministry of Gender in the provision of psychosocial support to ensure that women's needs were maintained as a priority area and not lost in the many rebuilding tasks facing district and other local levels of government in the north.²⁸⁵

In addition to the importance of improved mental health and functioning for the individuals affected, the UN Peace Building Fund identified the “drastic increase in mental illness” in Acholiland as a potential driver of future conflict (Wienders and Amutjojo 2012, 10). The study links poor mental health with “a decrease in trust, social cohesion and community resilience,” and notes that “the health system lacks the capacity to offer adequate psychosocial care” (Wienders and Amutjojo 2012, 10). Laplante and Theidon (2007) make similar observations about the implications of war-related trauma, depression, anxiety, and other mental health problems on the social bonds, and trust in governance and public institutions, necessary for building a stable and just society after mass conflict. They note that, given the logistical and legal difficulty of delivering individualised criminal justice for all survivors, the State provision of mental health services for survivors has a double positive impact in that it both assists individuals in recovery and detraumatization, and represents an “important symbolic value by signalling the state’s assumption of responsibility for past wrongs and in acknowledging victims’ suffering” (Laplante and Theidon 2007, 245).

As outlined above in Chapters 4 and 5, women in northern Uganda are continuing to suffer a range of serious mental health issues, ranging from grief, depression, and anxiety through to acute post-traumatic symptoms, including flashbacks and overwhelming sensory hallucinations. The poor mental health status of many Acholi women is seriously affecting their quality of life, impairing their ability to engage in social, political, and economic activities which are essential for the comprehensive improvement of their economic and social situations, and is impairing their ability to ensure a better future for their children. Counselling and other psychotherapeutic pilot programs have demonstrated that appropriately tailored mental health services are effective in reducing trauma, depression, and anxiety among the war affected population of northern Uganda.

Women very clearly told this research project that getting access to effective physical and mental health care is a key element of justice. Access to healthcare will improve women’s health, reduce the pain and trauma with which many are living, reduce their care burden (caring for husbands, children, and other relatives in poor health), improve their productivity, and enable them to better support their children’s education. Improved health care now will have long-term and intergenerational benefits for entire communities. The Government of Uganda currently leaves most health care funding to the private and not-for-profit sector; a

²⁸⁴ Interviewed May 5, 2014.

²⁸⁵ Both KIs interviewed separately May 5, 2014.

significant and long-term commitment to raising the standard of health care across Uganda is urgently needed.

7.4.3 Education for children

While women reported a diversity of views about what sorts of things would help them feel a sense of justice, and help them to move on after the war, there was one answer that was consistent across every interview – enabling their children to receive an education that was not disrupted due to difficulty paying school fees. Women universally volunteered this as the single most important factor to help them in their recovery from the war, with many further explaining that seeing their children complete their schooling would give them confidence that their children would have a better life than they had had, and would ensure a better future for their communities.

Although Uganda has a high rate of primary school enrolment (90 percent), it also has the second highest primary school dropout rate in Sub-Saharan Africa, with 68 percent of students dropping out before completing seven years of primary school education (Mwesigwa 2015; UNESCO 2012). Women interviewed in this research expressed a strong desire to send their children to school, but all said they are struggling to pay school fees, and that their children are routinely sent home from school due to non-payment. Uganda has a nationally funded program of Universal Primary Education (UPE), which claims to make primary education free for all Ugandan children. However, “the term free primary education as defined in Uganda’s UPE policy is misleading ... It is legal for schools to charge parents for uniforms, exams, tutoring, food, sports and other activities” (Lincove 2012, 803). A 2012 study into primary education in Uganda concluded that “nearly 80 percent of families contribute to the costs of primary education,” and calculated the mean cost per annum at USD16.74 for boys and USD18.26 for girls (Lincove 2012, 803–804). These costs are unattainable for many northern Ugandan households, where 44 percent of people live on less than one US dollar per day (GoU 2014, 11). Women in this research overwhelmingly cited an inability to pay fees as the reason for their children not being in school.

Eliza returned repeatedly during her interview to the issue of educating her children. She had successfully kept two children in school to the end of primary school, but did not have enough money to pay for their exams to enable graduation:

Now as I speak, I have two children in primary seven – they are candidates – they have to sit to go to the next level. I have to struggle, I don’t know, I don’t know what I can do. At school they want me to pay – 36,000 (USD10) for each one of them – I don’t have this money. I don’t know. I don’t know where to start at all. I really really want to struggle so hard. I think so much about these children. I want them, at least one of them should be able to go to the next level. I am struggling with these children, the school fees.²⁸⁶

Most women interviewed were struggling to keep their children in school at much younger ages. The consequences of a disrupted education can embed poverty trans-generationally, with particular effects for girls, as Faith explained. Faith has four children, and is only able to send one of them to school because of an inability to pay school fees. Faith was widowed during the war and has since been forced off her land, contributing to her poverty. She

²⁸⁶ Interviewed June 26, 2014.

explained that she feels “trapped in so many difficulties, especially when it comes to the children. I have not been able to look after them and pay their school fees as I should be doing as a parent.”²⁸⁷ She was particularly sad about the intergenerational effects of her children’s missed education. Regarding her daughter, she explained that

when she reached P.6 [primary grade six], she had to drop out and now she also has produced children and now she is also there with me in the home, I have to take care of her and the children.

Caring for her daughter’s children has added to her financial burden and affected Faith’s ability to pay for her youngest child to go to school:

*[T]he little one who is supposed to be in P4 is also not going to school. [He] helps me ... he can do casual labour so we can get some little money to be able to cope up with the daily demands in the house. This hurts me a lot, it hurts me a lot that sometimes I do not even sleep in the night because I keep thinking about them. It comes with a lot of pain.*²⁸⁸

When the Ugandan government introduced UPE in 1997, it attached subsidies to girls’ primary school enrolment rates. The policy was successful in achieving near gender parity in primary school enrolments (90 percent for girls and 91 percent for boys) (Lincove 2012, 802). The level of poverty in northern Uganda and the costs of sending a child to school mean that parents are having to make difficult decisions about which child(ren) to educate, and for how long. When asked about how they make these difficult decisions, no women expressed any preference for their sons to be educated ahead of their daughters. More commonly, the male head of the household would make this decision and children born in captivity routinely missed out, whether a boy or a girl (Annan and Brier 2010, 157). Widows also reported particular difficulties in paying school fees, a difficulty closely linked to their disadvantage in accessing land and other productive resources, and women caring for orphans are facing increased costs for feeding, housing, and clothing additional children.

Joyce explained that she has one child born in captivity and a further four children with her husband, who she married after returning home. The four younger children are all in school, but her husband refuses to pay school fees for her first born son. “*If I had the capacity I would have sent him, but I can’t. ... [My husband] is the one who decides.*”²⁸⁹ Although her children were born after returning from abduction, Eliza faces a similar problem in her lack of decision-making power over household expenditure:

*I’m really struggling so hard to see that my children have a bright future but as I, the way I look at it, the look of things, I seem to be defeated now. I’m getting defeated. ... Last year was the time when I [had] my baby and I had a caesarean birth and I could not work so much in my garden and this year we have this problem coming in, the problem of school fees. When I tried to talk to my husband that one of these goats be sold to pay for these children’s school fees and the balance I also see how to help with to meet our daily needs in the home. He refused, that I should not do it.*²⁹⁰

²⁸⁷ Interviewed June 17, 2014.

²⁸⁸ Interviewed June 17, 2014.

²⁸⁹ Interviewed June 24, 2014.

²⁹⁰ Interviewed June 26, 2014.

Harriet is now 72-years-old, and the war has left her widowed and with several orphans to care for. She explained that, during the war, she, like all people in Acholiland, lost all her livestock. Since returning from the IDP camp, however, she has been “*disinherited*” of her land and is now “*faced with poverty and ... orphans to take care of.*”²⁹¹ Josephine is also caring for orphans and was damning about the failings of Uganda’s UPE policy, which she accused of placing additional burdens on women:

*There should be free education to all the children, UPE has failed to help the local community. There should also be adult literacy for the ladies who were abducted and they want to go back to school. Women are the people who suffered the most and the care burden still falls squarely on them, on top of looking after their own children, they have to take care of orphans.*²⁹²

Uganda has made significant progress in making primary education widely available, but more remains to be done. While Uganda’s spending on education is comparable to many OECD nations (Ugandan households and government combined spend 7 percent of GDP on education, compared to an average of 6 percent in most OECD countries), corruption and inadequate accountability within the system compromises its effectiveness (Winkler and Sondergaard 2008, 4). A World Bank study in 2008 into efficiencies in the Ugandan education system found unacceptable “leakage of resources between the central government and the school through ghost teachers [and] misuse of UPE grants to district governments” (Winkler and Sondergaard 2008, 5), and that “over three-quarters of teachers are not in class teaching when unannounced school visits are conducted” (Winkler and Sondergaard 2008, 6). Furthermore, the practice of permitting schools to charge additional fees to parents, and denying education to those unable to pay, is undermining the government objective of attaining universal primary education, and has a disproportionate impact on Acholi women living in poverty, and their children. Women in northern Uganda are trying hard to provide for their children, and see the guarantee of an undisrupted education for their children as a cornerstone of justice following the devastation of the war. One key informant²⁹³ made the important observation that, when children are educated, it not only benefits that child, but the whole community, as they reinvest their knowledge and skills back in to the community.

7.5 Dispute resolution and responding to violence

Women reported that mediation in response to a range of conflicts is common and often desired, depending on the type of conflict and the relationship between the parties to the conflict. There are multiple actors involved in conflict resolution in Acholiland: traditional leaders (family heads, clan leaders, clan chiefs, and clan courts), Local Councillors (levels I, II and III),²⁹⁴ local specialist mediation teams (usually members of the community who have received training from NGOs in mediation), the police, and courts. Establishing which body is either the culturally or legally correct authority to mediate a dispute is not possible due to

²⁹¹ Interviewed February 6, 2014.

²⁹² Interviewed February 11, 2014.

²⁹³ Interviewed June 24, 2014.

²⁹⁴ The position of Local Councillor is a civil administrative post and, as such, is part of formal governance and justice systems. Local Councillors I (LC I) are elected by the community, and live among the community. Although the positions are a relatively recent creation, “[m]any LCs, especially at the LC I level, have become firmly embedded within the moral community of his/her village,” (Porter 2012, 89). LC Is now occupy a position which straddles both traditional and formal justice mechanisms, and were spoken about as either or both by women in this study; therefore, the role of LC Is are discussed in both sub-sections of this report.

multiple over-lapping, sometimes complementary, sometimes contradictory, functions and jurisdictions (Burke and Egaru 2011, 8). There is also a wide variation in different women's preferences based not insignificantly on the competence, or perceived competence, of the individuals holding particular positions in different communities (UNPB 2013, 16; Porter 2012, 88). The following sub-sections report on some of the strengths and barriers that women reported in both traditional and formal justice mechanisms.

7.5.1 Traditional justice

As stated earlier, women in this study expressed a strong (but not unanimous or exclusive) preference for traditional and mediation-based responses to conflicts and disputes. This was particularly so in relation to domestic violence, but much less so in relation to land. This is in keeping with other reports addressing conflict resolution in northern Uganda. International Alert reported that 71 percent of the 3,972 people surveyed preferred mediation as a response to SGBV, with clan leaders identified as the most appropriate authority to handle the case (IA 2013, 48). Qualitative data in the same report explained that respondents largely thought that domestic violence should be dealt with by the clan, and that police should be called when the SGBV involved either an assault by a community member or child defilement (IA 2013, 50). It should also be noted, however, that the average distance between Acholi towns and police stations is 33km, a fact which ACCS suggests may significantly account for women's preference for "informal community-based processes" for responding to SGBV (ACCS 2013, 39).

Several women explained that the "proper" pathways for resolving domestic violence began first with the male family head, followed by the clan leaders, and sometimes the LC. Evelyn explained that "*the case is reported and resolved within the family chaired by the family head. If he fails to resolve the matter, it is reported to the clan head then finally to the clan chief.*"²⁹⁵ If the violence is life-threatening or persistent, it may be reported to the police, as Pauline outlined:

*The process of achieving justice is in this hierarchy; father in law, brother in law, clan leaders, LCs and other people who look into matters of domestic violence. If the matter is gross they report to the police, for instance when the man beats you to a point of becoming unconscious, or where the man always fights and uses instruments that can cause death like pangas, spears, knives.*²⁹⁶

Women told us of several strengths of traditional and local dispute resolution mechanisms, including that they are accessible (women do not have to walk the long distances required to reach a police post or court), fast, culturally appropriate, they aim to restore the relationship, and they engage the community (who will then also take a role in monitoring the perpetrator's behaviour). Using traditional mechanisms builds the capacity of those mechanisms, and restores community confidence in cultural leaders.

Women overwhelmingly wanted to restore their relationships with husbands or others with whom there was a dispute, and to be able to live "*in harmony*" and "*happiness.*" Nekolina summarised the feelings of many women we interviewed when she said, "*Peace is living*

²⁹⁵ Interviewed January 31, 2014.

²⁹⁶ Interviewed January 22, 2014.

happily with my husband in my home, living in harmony with the community.”²⁹⁷ Nekolina further explained that traditional justice

*helps in restoring the relationship between the two parties involved ... To me I feel the traditional way of settling disputes with local leaders would be a better process to acquire justice instead of the modern way of police.*²⁹⁸

Traditional mechanisms were also seen in many instances as more effective than “modern ways.” Marlene saw traditional justice as “*preventive, because it prevents the same problem from reoccurring.*”²⁹⁹ Camilla explained that clan leaders are present in the community and have authority, so that when they “*caution the perpetrators, that caution results in some relative peace in the home.*”³⁰⁰ Bernadette had witnessed similar improvements in her community, stating that “[*m*]any times after being cautioned and advised there is a change. For instance, the men who over drink are advised to change and most cases there are changes after such mediations.”³⁰¹ Esther spoke of the healing power of traditional justice, saying that “*I felt good because my husband asked for forgiveness afterwards.*”³⁰²

Although the authority of clan leaders has been weakened by the war, traditional leaders do still hold authority. Women reported that where cultural leaders are strong, are perceived as having good knowledge of customary laws, and are seen as making fair judgements, their advice and rulings can be more effective than formal police or court orders, which are often seen as both physically and culturally distant. The effectiveness of some traditional institutions is explained by Porter (2012, 88–89) as stemming from the legitimacy ascribed to respected leaders:

When the authority is recognized and trusted, parties accept the outcome of such arbitration, restoring broken social harmony. However, if an institution has legal, but not moral jurisdiction, outcomes of such processes are viewed with suspicion, seen as unfair and usually exacerbate existing tensions.

There is a compounding positive effect of traditional leaders making fair judgements and being present to enforce them. Esther explained that “*when one finds justice, the community members gain confidence in the available justice mechanisms hence continue to report cases.*”³⁰³ Rose expressed a similar sentiment when she explained that traditional justice mechanisms involve clan leaders and community members, and that the more such mechanisms are used, the stronger traditional codes of behaviour and traditional justice mechanisms become, as “*the community is also reminded of their [traditional codes] existence in the gatherings and when settling matters.*”³⁰⁴

It is beyond the scope of this project to explore traditional Acholi approaches to conflict and domestic violence. It is worth noting, however, that traditional Acholi institutions do have mechanisms for responding to domestic violence. The Liu Institute for Global Issues, the Gulu District NGO Forum, and Ker Kwaro Acholi (2005) explore traditional mechanisms

²⁹⁷ Interviewed March 12, 2014.

²⁹⁸ Interviewed March 12, 2014.

²⁹⁹ Interviewed March 20, 2014.

³⁰⁰ Interviewed January 23, 2014.

³⁰¹ Interviewed March 11, 2014.

³⁰² Interviewed March 19, 2014.

³⁰³ Interviewed March 19, 2014.

³⁰⁴ Interviewed March 20, 2014.

within Acholi culture for addressing conflict, and identify both processes and positions (the *Atekere*) specifically to address “domestic quarrels” (2005, 111). The existence of such mechanisms, particularly when viewed in conjunction with Porter’s (2012) observations about the importance of moral as well as legal authority, could hold potential for effectively addressing the high levels of domestic violence in many Acholi families and communities.

Utilising traditional mechanisms for dealing with domestic violence and family disputes was widely seen by women as the most appropriate course of action. Sometimes, this was because (as outlined above) such mechanisms were seen to be “proper,” more effective, and more likely to improve harmony. Some women, however, indicated that their preference for traditional mechanisms was attributable more to avoiding possible negative consequences for breaking with custom. Grace had been persisting with traditional mechanisms for over six years when we met her. Her uncle and brother (as her sole surviving male relatives) had not recommended that the LC1 or another formal justice institution be involved. Grace explained that she “*does not have the authority*” to report the matter herself, as she “*fear[s] that when I report the matter and I return back to my house, it will bring a lot of problems to me in this home especially as to why I had to report.*”³⁰⁵ Several women living with violence similarly said that the decision to involve LCs or the police should be made by family or clan leaders, not women.

7.5.1.1 Barriers

Bribery and corruption

While most women who seek justice for domestic violence use traditional justice mechanisms, and all agreed that they were faster and more accessible than formal mechanisms. Most women interviewed also reported serious problems with traditional mechanisms; they widely reported that local leaders (both clan and LC I leaders) asked for money and would decide in favour of the party that was able to pay (which very often was the man). The weaker financial position of women in the household meant that, when a leader does ask for money, she had little or no hope of receiving a fair hearing and accessing justice. Karena explained that:

*The wife is left in a powerless position to defend herself. She can’t get any redress from clan leaders because they are always bribed and sometimes they ask for some fee to open and hear a case, this is a compulsory requirement in these courts.*³⁰⁶

Marlene had had a similar experience. She explained that if a woman reports domestic violence to traditional leaders “*after hearing the matter, those who come to hear the case ask for ‘Ojony pyer’ (sitting allowance). This is paid by the woman whether or not she is at fault. One has to sell anything in the house to get this fee.*”³⁰⁷ Another woman explained that, without money, women have nowhere to go for justice:

*You find that whoever has money takes charge. That would be another problem on you the same woman. You have nowhere to go. You do not have anything. You don’t have money. When they go there [to the clan leaders], they will use money.*³⁰⁸

³⁰⁵ Interviewed June 19, 2014.

³⁰⁶ Interviewed March 13, 2014.

³⁰⁷ Interviewed March 20, 2014.

³⁰⁸ Interviewed during Validation Workshop, June 18, 2015.

Hannah explained that if women find the funds to pay the bribes, it is invariably at the expense of children, as such money would have been spent on food, school fees, or other necessities. She further added that, in traditional forums,

*women are often dominated by the men, they therefore become voiceless and thus keep quiet about their problems. To make matters worse, women are always ignored when they try to complain of any abuse on them.*³⁰⁹

Rugadya (2008, 30), in her review of land conflict in Acholiland, noted the advantages of traditional justice mechanisms (they were close, fast, affordable, and responsive), but cautioned that “they are prone to some of the same faults as statutory institutions such as corruption,” a risk heightened by the lack of documentation, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms in traditional justice processes. Burke and Egaru reported that some traditional leaders charge a small “sitting fee” for hearing cases (2011, 24).

Given the significant number of women who told this research project that clan leaders ask for money from both parties, and that women’s lower capacity to match their husband’s or neighbour’s payment effectively put justice beyond their reach, this issue needs further investigation. Agatha, who is experiencing a land conflict with her deceased husband’s family, explained that “*when you go to officials or the leaders, they will always go to the side of those who have money. If you don’t have money no one listens to you. This issue is terrifying us.*”³¹⁰

Power/patriarchy

Importantly, many women spoke about the power imbalance between men and women as a significant obstacle in traditional justice forums. Women complained of “*being shut down in local courts,*” that “*many times, men do not take us seriously,*” that “*women are regarded as ‘mere women,’*” and that “*when they try to speak out, men call them disrespectful.*”³¹¹ Harriet, a 72-year-old woman, said that

*Every time women try to fight for justice, they are insulted, despised, there are allegations of bias and impartiality however, I pay no attention to such reactions.*³¹²

Many women were not able to be as defiant as Harriet, however, and reported instead that they are “*silenced*” and become “*voiceless*” and “*quiet,*” and try to “*bear on her own.*” Hannah explained the bias as stemming from the fact that women marry into the clan, and that therefore, the clan leaders are related to the man and are unwilling to rule against him:

*Local authorities refer domestic violence cases to be settled by the family head who are direct relatives to the husbands. These family heads always side with the men, this causes more tension and violence in the homes.*³¹³

³⁰⁹ Interviewed March 13, 2014.

³¹⁰ Interviewed during Validation Workshop, June 18, 2015.

³¹¹ Interviewed March 20, 2014.

³¹² Interviewed February 6, 2014.

³¹³ Interviewed March 13, 2014.

Other women told us that “*men are very aggressive during dispute resolution,*”³¹⁴ and this intimidates them into silence, or forces them “*to stop the mediation.*”³¹⁵ Some women also reported that their local leaders do not see domestic violence and other complaints brought by women as serious matters. Carla said that “*sometimes the local leaders tell us to our faces that they are fed up with the same stories and that we should stop approaching them but persevere.*”³¹⁶ Importantly, a number of women reported that, having tried and failed to access justice, they have now given up and are trying to manage alone. Phoebe tried to use traditional mechanisms to address violence from her husband, but explained that “*when I called a clan meeting they all supported my husband’s side. I have now resorted to keeping quiet.*”³¹⁷

Acholi culture is highly patriarchal; family and clan membership is patrilineal, land and property ownership is overwhelmingly male, local cultural and religious institutions are exclusively male, and local governance institutions are dominated by men (Annan and Brier 2009, 157; Burke and Kobusingye 2014, 29; Oosterom 2011, 400). Although women in this study expressed a strong preference for traditional and local structures when responding to domestic violence, the patriarchal structure of Acholi traditional institutions is a significant hurdle for women when seeking justice. A number of observers have noted a significant trust deficit between Acholi communities and the Ugandan State, and that many formal State institutions are viewed with suspicion (Burke and Egaru 2011, 14; Porter 2012; Oosterom 2011). Porter (2012, 87) reports that among Acholi women, particularly in regard to protection from violence, the government is seen as “the only institution with the latent potential to uphold their rights, yet they rarely choose to involve the government.” Porter proposes that this is explained in part by the high cultural value placed on social harmony, and that women are reluctant to take actions which may be viewed as detrimental to social harmony (Porter 2012, 93). Pursuing formal criminal justice would undoubtedly disturb social harmony, and women risk significant material and social disadvantage by doing so without a referral from an appropriate male authority. It is also questionable that formal justice mechanisms offer better justice outcomes for women experiencing violence, as compared against traditional mechanisms. Some women had tried to access formal criminal justice in cases of domestic violence, but met patriarchal attitudes among police. As Rosemary reported, “*Most of the cases we report to the police are referred to be settled from home, and in the homes a woman’s side of the story is always disregarded.*”³¹⁸ Ideally, traditional justice mechanisms would take seriously domestic and other types of violence against women, and would provide protection for women in the communities.

A number of NGOs have provided training for traditional and community leaders on women’s rights and the importance of eradicating violence against women. Oosterom reported both a distortion of women’s rights messaging coming from international NGOs, and a masculine backlash against the message:

Messages about gender equality seemed to have led to suspicion among men that women would take over power rather than gain equal power. This came on top of the humiliation of badly damaged “manhood” during the war, which increased the likelihood of aggressive responses by men. (Oosterom 2011, 401)

³¹⁴ Interviewed March 13, 2014.

³¹⁵ Interviewed June 23, 2014.

³¹⁶ Interviewed February 12, 2014.

³¹⁷ Interviewed March 20, 2014.

³¹⁸ Interviewed February 13, 2014.

This finding resonates with the words of key informants in this research. Many informants reported that “women’s rights,” including the right to be free from violence, was interpreted by the community and traditional leaders as a threat to men’s status and power, and was resisted:

*During the IDP camps, there were many NGOs sensitising on women rights. As the people hear the message, you interpret in your own way. The interpretation of the cultural leaders on the women’s rights is much more related to power. When you say “women’s rights”, they hear like you are saying “women power” or authority. So they interpret that “how can women have more power than us in a family?” ... In that manner the moment you go to and talk about women rights, automatically they take it negatively. And they don’t let women enforce their right in any way. Whether the woman wants to access any justice, they (traditional leaders) want first to block it until they understand properly what your intention is. So, it means that for women to access justice properly, there must be recognition from the husband first of all, then the family members. If that happens, they can easily access justice either the informal or formal. Because if the family does not support, she cannot proceed.*³¹⁹

Efforts to restore Acholi culture and its institutions may hold promise for the reduction of many types of violence and disputes in the communities, but there needs to be a commensurate recognition of the potential risks for women in reaffirming patriarchal beliefs and structures. These have been shown to be significant barriers in women’s efforts to access justice (Wielders and Amutjojo 2012; UNPB 2013; ICTJ 2014). At the same time, simply importing globalised training programs on women’s rights are not only likely to be ineffective, but in fact risk a backlash, and a stronger commitment among traditional leaders and Acholi men to entrenched patriarchal beliefs (Allen and MacDonald 2013, 14–15).

7.5.2 Formal and legal justice

While a majority of women reported that they preferred traditional mechanisms for domestic violence and other familial disputes, they also stated a desire for formal justice when traditional mechanisms had failed to stop the violence or resolve the dispute. Women engaged in conflicts or disputes over land also expressed a preference for formal mechanisms, as they saw little hope of having their land rights recognised by traditional mechanisms. In many instances, women were not prepared to entirely trade in their rights (to either land or freedom from violence) for the sake of social harmony. The Gulu District NGO Forum surveyed 1029 people across 15 sub-counties in Acholiland about a range of issues, including justice mechanisms. They reported that, while both men and women said traditional justice is more accessible, “most male respondents preferred the traditional justice system while female respondents preferred the formal justice system” (Gulu District NGO Forum 2013, 46). However, despite an expressed desire for access to formal justice mechanisms, very few women had had any experience with such mechanisms beyond taking an issue to the LC I. A cluster of factors effectively put most formal justice mechanisms beyond women’s reach.

Bernadette, a widow, had a positive outcome in her land dispute. Bernadette’s husband’s family tried to chase her away from their land. She took her case to court and the “*judgment*

³¹⁹ KI, interviewed in Pader, June 19, 2015.

was in my favour.” She explained that the process of achieving justice had been difficult. She had to “*walk long distances*” and sometimes had to “*go hungry,*” due to the “*very high financial implications, like court fees. I had to part with a lot of money and the process takes a long time.*” She considered the process worthwhile, however, as the judgment in her favour had

*improved [my] standard of living. When I won the case I was able to sell part of the land and I used the money to build another house and from which I earn some money that helps me look after the children and pay school fees.*³²⁰

More commonly, women spoke of the barriers they face in accessing formal justice, in particular a lack of understanding of the processes involved, the distances required to travel, prohibitive costs, bribery and corruption, length of judicial processes, and the low status accorded to women in formal proceedings.

7.5.2.1 Barriers

A number of reports have documented the barriers that women face in accessing formal justice for both land and inter-personal violence matters. The ACCS reported that the cost and travel distances for Acholi men and women often meant land disputes could not be taken to court, a factor which they identified as fuelling “mob justice” (ACCS 2013, 43). Women wanting to prosecute husbands or family members for domestic violence face particular difficulties, as violence between spouses is largely seen by society, LCs, the police, and others in the justice system as a private matter “best handled within the home” (Wagman et al. 2012, 1408; Nainar 2011, 16; Kaye et al. 2005). The US Department of State has reported high levels (70 percent) of community acceptance that spousal abuse is justified in certain circumstances, such as if a woman burns the food or refuses sex (US Department of State 2008, 5). Uganda introduced legislation prohibiting domestic violence in 2010,³²¹ following years of lobbying from women’s rights groups, and both challenges and neglect in the Parliament (GoU Pop Sec 2013, 77; Wagman et al. 2012, 1408). The legislation, however, is very new, and implementation is lagging. The GoU identifies three key obstacles to the effective implementation of the legislation – cultural preferences for “societal cohesion and harmony,” delays in adopting regulations, and an as-yet unreceived “allocation of an adequate budget” for the legislation (GoU Pop Sec 2013, 77). Any charges brought under the laws require the services of the police, who, according to High Court Judge Kasule based in Gulu,

do not spend resources to perform some of the basic investigative functions such as visiting the crime scene, interrogation of key witnesses, forensic verifications and medical examinations of victims and survivors. Bad investigation by the police is often the reason for acquittal of offenders for lack of evidence. (Nainar 2011, 27)

One key informant³²² additionally pointed out the interconnectedness between the law’s capacity to respond adequately to domestic violence, and the lack a broad range of social services necessary to ensuring a woman’s safety. He said that a woman may decide to take a case to court, and, even if she is able to meet the myriad costs associated with such an action (police transport and investigation fees, medical report costs, photocopying, prisoner and

³²⁰ Interviewed March 11, 2014.

³²¹ The Domestic Violence Act (2010).

³²² Interviewed May 2, 2014.

prison warden transport costs, and witness transport costs), without psychosocial support services, women's refuges, and witness protection, she may still experience "secondary victimisation." Another key informant³²³ further pointed out that women's continued economic dependence on men meant that to pursue formal charges against her husband (or against another person without her husband's support) risked severing the relationship, and risking even worse poverty. She believed that the potential economic consequences of becoming a single woman coerces women to accept resolutions that do not meet their justice needs. Formal legal mechanisms are only one link in a chain of legal and social structures necessary to effectively prevent and respond to domestic violence.

Patriarchal attitudes to women (as dependent on, and secondary to, men) extend also to formal courts adjudicating land matters involving women as litigants. A joint UNDP, IOM, and NRC report on land conflict in northern Uganda found that, while Ugandan law "strictly prohibits customs that alienate or undermine women," government officials charged with responsibility for administering the law "are time and again not addressing women's and girls' needs in northern Uganda" (UNDP et al. 2010, 10). Women's disadvantaged position in asserting land rights has a flow on-effect upon her ability to enforce her legal rights to be free of violence. High Court Judge Kasule explained that

because women do not have an income/homestead of their own and men refuse to pay for the cost involved if a woman wants to seek justice, the woman ends up with no justice for the violation she suffered. (Nainar 2011, 28)

Lack of familiarity

Most people living in Acholiland have very limited understanding of statutory law, their legal rights, and of legal processes. This lack of knowledge further impairs people's ability to access legal justice mechanisms (Rugadya 2008, 26), and is further compounded for women who have lower levels of formal education, lower literacy levels, and fewer interactions with formal systems (Burke and Kobusingye 2014, 17).

Liza was going through a court process at the time of interview. She believed she had bought her late husband's land from the sub-county, but her husband's family took the matter to court, disputing her ownership. Throughout the interview, she repeated, "*It is not really now clear to me,*" "*I do not know,*" "*I cannot really say...*" Liza was finding the whole process highly stressful, and feared that her in-laws would bribe the Magistrate. She wondered if "*they just went to the courts of law which I do not know, whether it's just a way of intimidating people or something like that.*"³²⁴

Another woman who had unsuccessfully attempted to take a land matter to court talked about how stressful the process had been:

*For a fact you cannot sleep. Your head will pain. Even when you are eating some good food you prepared purposely, you will not enjoy. You will not sleep. You sleep for a few minutes and find that your mind is on that issue.*³²⁵

³²³ Interviewed May 5, 2014.

³²⁴ Interviewed June 17, 2014.

³²⁵ Interviewed during Validation Workshop, June 18, 2015.

She was concerned that she had no-one to help her in the process, and did not understand what was required. She was also sure that her in-laws had paid a bribe to the judge, and that this determined the final judgment.

The lack of familiarity with formal justice mechanisms heightens the need for legal representation or advice in engaging formal justice mechanisms. Legal aid is not provided by the Government of Uganda, but some legal assistance services are provided by NGOs. One key informant³²⁶ notes that this directs legal aid provision according to NGO priorities rather than justice needs. He further notes that the limitations of donor-funded legal aid work means that some NGOs require a co-payment from clients, and that the most vulnerable, along with those with no access to resources, are therefore excluded from the service. The UNDP, IOM and NRC recommended that free legal aid be provided to target women engaging formal legal mechanisms in relation to land rights, as they risk “double victimization in the post-conflict transition,” and face “gross marginalisation” in legal processes (2010, 47).

Money (costs and corruption)

The financial costs of accessing formal justice were the most repeated barrier, in terms of paying for the transport costs of police to investigate a matter; the court costs associated with running a case; and the cost of paying bribes. Many women remarked that given women’s lack of decision-making control over family resources, and their greater poverty relative to men in their communities, the costs of running a case were prohibitive. Nancy explained that *“the biggest challenge we face in accessing justice is that it attracts financial implications it’s for only those who can afford and the women in this community cannot afford to pay for it.”*³²⁷

Women told us of many cases in which an inability to meet all these costs resulted in them not being able to access formal justice. Beth told us that her former son-in-law kidnapped her daughter and took her into the bush, where he tied her up and raped her for three days. Beth *“reported the matter to the police who asked me to get transport so they can search for him.”* Unable to pay the money asked for, *“the case has since died a natural death.”* Beth surmised that *“[t]his kind of situation leaves us in a dilemma on whether justice is meant for us women.”* She saw the failings as a responsibility of the Government of Uganda, saying that *“[t]he government should enforce the laws in place to help the poor. The police should be provided with transport to help us achieve justice and not turn to us for money for their facilitation.”*³²⁸

Improvements to police services and police effectiveness have been significant targets of the PRDP. Efforts have included: building new police stations and police posts; purchasing hundreds of new vehicles to enhance police mobility and ability to respond in a timely manner; and improved training for police officers on a range of matters, including gender sensitivity³²⁹ (Gulu District NGO Forum 2013, 42; Wielders and Amutjojo 2012). Nonetheless, women continued to report that police seek funds for transport costs, and if these are not paid, no action is taken. Judge Kasule highlighted the police practice of seeking

³²⁶ Interviewed May 2, 2014.

³²⁷ Interviewed March 12, 2014.

³²⁸ Interviewed February 7, 2014.

³²⁹ Gender sensitivity training for police is not included in the PRDP plan or budget. However, several UN agencies and international NGOs have implemented extensive gender and SGBV training programs with the Uganda Police Force. For more, see UNDP (2011b).

fees as a particular frustration in women's efforts to obtain services rightly due to them. Although these transport and investigation costs are "rightfully the responsibility of the State, ... the State lacks or does not allocate resources to cover such expenses, those that want their case to be pursued have to bear such costs" (Nainar 2011, 27). Given the increased resourcing of police, and the provision of additional police vehicles under the PRDP, it is unclear whether the request for transport costs is actual reimbursement of police costs incurred (setting aside questions about who ought to bear responsibility for such costs), or if they have other roots.

Some costs associated with accessing formal justice mechanisms are scheduled fees. The ACCS estimates that a woman wanting to pursue prosecution in a case of SGBV can expect to pay UGX250,000 (USD71.43), "which is beyond the means of most Ugandans" (ACCS 2013, 39). Burke and Kobusingye (2014, 47) note the "tremendous inaccessibility [of courts] in terms of cost," and report that the NGO provision of legal aid to widows and Extremely Vulnerable Individuals (EVIs) in court adjudicated land disputes ranges from USD200–USD600 per person (Burke and Kobusingye 2014, 51). These costs alone put legal justice mechanisms beyond the reach of the vast majority of Acholi women. Nancy reported that financial costs prevented her family from being able to pursue charges against her sister's husband, following a life-threatening assault:

*My sister was stabbed by her husband in her lower abdomen. She reported the matter, a statement was made and the matter taken to court. However, in the courts they were asking for money that my family and sister could not pay, therefore the case could not continue. The husband was release from cells and my parents couldn't do anything, they just had to look on. It's painful but without money it's null and void.*³³⁰

In addition to scheduled fees, many women reported that bribery and corruption is rife in formal justice systems. These additional costs further amplify the effects of women and men's unequal social and economic status, as women are less able to pay. One woman highlighted the disparity between men's and women's ability to access justice, remarking that "while you talk using your mouth, for them they use money. So women do not have power."³³¹ When Nancy's family (cited above) could not afford the costs associated with criminal charges, they sought justice from the LC, but were unable to match the perpetrator's capacity to pay a bribe:

*The organs that are to provide justice are also bribed. For instance in matters of domestic violence reports to LCs are asked for money to start up on the case but because the lady has no money, the husband rushes to pay the money and the case is closed for good without a fair hearing.*³³²

Women's lack of economic power, alongside both scheduled costs and bribery and corruption, was cited by almost every woman interviewed as a major barrier to accessing justice. It is having a cyclical impact, in that, without the protection of justice, women are denied the means and opportunities to improve their economic status, and live lives free from violence (Fiske and Shackel 2015).

³³⁰ Interviewed March 12, 2014.

³³¹ Interviewed during Validation Workshop, June 18, 2015.

³³² Interviewed March 12, 2014.

Time and distance

Formal justice mechanisms were widely perceived by women as being unreasonably slow in the delivery of justice outcomes. They were also usually located several kilometres away from the woman's home, meaning either additional costs for transport or long walks. As most formal institutions require a series of hearings before a case can be decided, such burdens are borne several times, acting as a significant deterrent to women contemplating legal action. Margaret, upon the recommendation of her LC, had tried to bring charges against her husband for persistent and severe violence. She was not successful in securing a prosecution, despite repeated efforts on her behalf. When asked what sort of problems she had encountered during the process, Margaret replied:

*The problem I faced was that I would walk on foot to these places with great difficulty. Sometimes it would rain on me. I would get so hungry and would not even have milk for the baby because I had not eaten.*³³³

In the end, Margaret abandoned her efforts to get justice through the law, and instead sought protection through an NGO providing services for women experiencing domestic violence. While this service provides her with important safety in the short-term, her longer-term issues with obtaining protection from her husband, child custody, and access to land, remain.

One key informant saw distance and time as a major barrier for people in northern Uganda in their attempts to access formal justice mechanisms. He explained that, in an effort to improve the standard of judicial services in northern Uganda, "lay magistrates courts" based in sub-counties were phased out, and replaced with Magistrate Courts based in district headquarters. While the quality of legal decision-making may have been improved by this move, "it's a challenge for people who are far from the centres and do not have the money, with so many adjournments and delays, so most people fall out along the way."³³⁴ This accords with testimony from many women, who said the courts were "far," involving "long distances" and required either hours of walking (as Margaret described above), or finding money for transport. This accords with the findings of other studies; International Alert reported that people in Acholiland were reluctant to access the court system because it was seen as too slow, too far away, and corrupt (2013, 52). The "the tremendous inaccessibility in terms of cost and distance of Magistrates [and High Courts]," for the vast majority of people in northern Uganda, may in part explain why only 3 percent of land cases are dealt with by these courts (Burke and Kobusingye 2014, 9, 47).

Status of women

As discussed earlier, formal justice mechanisms, including police and courts (particularly Local Council Courts [LCC]) are also patriarchal institutions dominated by men, and "biased in favour of men" (Kaye et al. 2005, 630; Nainar 2011). Although Uganda has introduced a number of affirmative action and quota systems to improve women's representation on a range of courts and committees, particularly those in relation to land, Burke and Kobusingye (2014, 17) note that selection processes "tend to favour socially conservative women who do not necessarily support the broader interests of women." The appointment of women to decision-making bodies is an important and welcome step; however, many negative attitudes

³³³ Interviewed September 25, 2013.

³³⁴ Interviewed May 2, 2014.

towards women remain, and the deeply entrenched view that women should not speak in public forums is a significant barrier for women in seeking justice.

Women spoke extensively about the ways in which women's social positions in the community are replicated in formal justice institutions. Fowsia echoed the words of many women interviewed, when she said that "[w]omen are always shut down in local courts, they do not give them the space to speak out. When they try to speak out, men call them disrespectful."³³⁵ Karena saw the problem as stemming from women's very low status in society, saying that "[w]omen are considered worthless and mere property that men can do away with at any time."³³⁶ Rosemary complained about the shared beliefs among both formal justice workers and traditional leaders, saying that "[m]ost of the cases we report to the police are referred to be settled from home, and in the homes a woman's side of the story is always disregarded." She believed that justice would help her to "not suffer like I am now. I would be looked at like a person and not a worthless woman like the community here perceive us."³³⁷

Formal justice mechanisms are important and powerful institutions in society. When they replicate, rather than challenge, patriarchal attitudes and behaviours towards women, they miss an important opportunity to work towards the Government of Uganda's stated aim of improving gender equality throughout the nation.

Compliance with rulings

The final barrier to be discussed, regarding women's struggles to achieve justice through formal mechanisms, is that of weak enforcement mechanisms, and a reliance on police attending in a timely manner. Coupled with the fact that courts and statutory law are generally perceived as "distant" and lacking "moral jurisdiction" (Porter 2012, 86–87), many people do not comply with court decisions that go against them. Traditional justice mechanisms have both higher rates of compliance (due to their greater moral jurisdiction), and are able to be monitored and enforced by local and traditional leaders, as well as fellow community members that observed the proceedings.

Marlene had successfully pursued a land case through the LC2 court, the sub-county court, and eventually the Magistrate's Court in Gulu. The respondent, however, has repeatedly broken court orders, and continues to trespass on Marlene's land:

*My son reported the case to the police who arrested him. He was remanded and sentenced to community service, he apologised and was released. When he returned on the land, he continued to trespass on my land and now he has trespassed eleven feet. The police came and inspected the extent of his trespass. I have to follow up the case with the police but I have no money from last year. I am financially constrained.*³³⁸

Although Marlene was able to secure her land rights through the formal justice system, she continues to have her land rights infringed upon. The costs associated with enforcing the

³³⁵ Interviewed March 20, 2014.

³³⁶ Interviewed March 13, 2014.

³³⁷ Interviewed February 13, 2014.

³³⁸ Interviewed March 20, 2014.

court order fall to her, but, after spending all her money on multiple legal processes, she is unable to meet enforcement costs.

Christine explained that her community is deeply affected by land conflicts, many of which result in violence and sometimes death. She gave the example of her neighbour (a widow) who had been tied to a tree and beaten by the other party. Christine was highly sceptical about the formal justice system's capacity to resolve land disputes, or the violence resulting from it:

Many times, the real owners of the land, the ones who are not causing trouble will be satisfied with the ruling. But the people who are trying to grab many times they are never satisfied. They want to push and push and push. So after this ruling has been done, of course the other party will not be satisfied and this rift between the two will still continue and they cannot look at each other in the right way. The disputing parties ... when they go to the place, one must carry a panga or a spear... So there is no happiness.³³⁹

Christine returned to the issue of her neighbour, and explained that the neighbour's son had been to the police three times, but that the dispute was escalating rather than receding. She feared that, without an adequate response from the police, the son would enact vigilante justice: *"If the matter is not settled properly won't it lead to death?"*³⁴⁰

7.6 Conclusion

Women in Acholiland are struggling to build dignified and sustainable lives for themselves, their children, and their families. In the post-conflict landscape of northern Uganda, marked by poverty, trauma, and a damaged social fabric, women are being disenfranchised in conflicts over land and economic resources, and are exposed to "rampant" levels of domestic violence. Both formal and traditional justice mechanisms are failing to adequately respond to women's urgent justice needs, effectively leaving women in a justice void. Women want counselling and psychosocial support to recover from the trauma of the war; the means through which they can escape poverty; and the means for their children to complete their school education without disruption. Women told this research that they see a greater role for the Government of Uganda in ensuring they are able to access land, be free from violence, and to live in harmony with their communities. The Government of Uganda will need to work closely with traditional leaders and institutions in this task, and ensure that women's justice needs are recognised, valued, and embedded within all policy and budgeting processes.

³³⁹ Interviewed June 25, 2014.

³⁴⁰ Interviewed June 25, 2014.

CHAPTER 8: POST-CONFLICT JUSTICE

*The wrongs done to us doing the war should be made right especially the young generation should have a different experience from what we went through.*³⁴¹

– Carla

The Government of Uganda's post-conflict justice regime finds its roots in the Juba Peace Process (concluded in 2008), and the Agreement on Accountability and Reconciliation (signed June 2007). These documents set out broad agreement on mechanisms for accountability, including legal justice, traditional justice, reparations, and reconciliation. Although the Final Peace Agreement has never been signed, the GoU nonetheless began the process of establishing a framework for post-conflict justice. The GoU has subsequently taken several steps towards establishing a framework, as well as the institutional mechanisms necessary for implementation.

Below is an overview of key events and mechanisms in establishing a post-conflict justice framework in Uganda.

2000	GoU Parliament passes the Amnesty Act
2003	GoU refers LRA war situation to ICC
2004	ICC launches investigation
2005	ICC unseals indictments against five senior LRA Commanders
2006	Cessation of hostilities between LRA and GoU GoU and LRA engage in the Juba Peace Process
2007	GoU and LRA sign the Agreement on Accountability and Reconciliation GoU launches the Peace, Recovery and Development Program (PRDP), scheduled to run from 2007 to 2012
2008	Juba Peace Process concludes, Final Peace Agreement not signed by LRA GoU initiates the Justice, Law and Order Sector Transitional Justice Working Group (JLOS TJWG) charged with responsibility for drafting a national transitional justice policy Return to homesteads from IDP camps begins
2009	PRDP effectively begins
2010	Ugandan Parliament passes the International Criminal Court Act, to domesticate the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998) Establishment of the International Crimes Division within the High Court of Uganda
2011	ICD's first case begins, against Thomas Kwoyelo, a mid-level Commander of the LRA. Trial halted later that year while the Supreme Court heard an appeal relating to his eligibility for amnesty under the Amnesty Act
2012	GoU allows Part II of the Amnesty Act (providing blanket amnesty) to lapse PRDP-II launched (acknowledges more work needed to achieve development parity between northern and southern Uganda); scheduled to run to 2015, and then further development to be incorporated within the

³⁴¹ Interviewed February 13, 2014.

- National Development Plan (NDP)
Corruption within the Office of the Prime Minister revealed to have resulted in the embezzlement and misappropriation of US\$14 million from PRDP I projects
- 2013 GoU reinstates Part II of the Amnesty Act
- 2014 JLOS-TJWG finalises draft of the National Transitional Justice Policy, and forwards to Cabinet for approval
- 2015 (January) Dominic Ongwen surrenders and is transferred, with GoU consent, to ICC custody for trial
(April) Supreme Court confirms Kwoyelo prosecution can proceed; due to resume in ICD in 2016
(May) GoU announces PRDP III; scheduled to begin December 2015

8.1 “Transitional” justice in Uganda

Although preceded by the International Criminal Court Act (Act No. 11/2010) and the establishment of the International Crimes Division, the centrepiece of Uganda’s post-conflict justice regime is the draft National Transitional Justice Policy. The draft Policy sets out the blueprint for post-conflict justice, accountability, and reconciliation in Uganda, and identifies five “thematic areas” for transitional justice: amnesty, criminal justice, truth-telling, traditional justice, and reparations. The document proclaims the GoU’s “commitment to building institutions that will bring justice to the past while showing their commitment to good governance in the future” (JLOS TJWG 2013, [7]), and furthermore acknowledges that

[t]he lack of a holistic and coherent Government Policy and the inadequate legal framework to deal with crimes or wrongs in pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict situations has culminated into dissatisfaction with the extant justice systems among the public especially victims of conflict situations countrywide. (2013, [10])

The draft Policy promises to be instrumental in changing this legacy, and draws upon a range of strategies from the increasingly standardised transitional justice tool kit – prosecutions, truth commissions, amnesty, reconciliation, reparations, and alternative and traditional justice mechanisms. The draft Policy is currently awaiting approval before the Ugandan Cabinet; if it is accepted and ratified by Parliament, it will commit the government to multiple initiatives and justice strategies. One such initiative is the establishment of a truth commission with a mandate to hear testimony on matters occurring from 1986 onwards; to pay reparations (both collective and individual) to those most affected by conflicts; to support traditional justice processes; to prosecute certain crimes falling within the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court Act (2010); and to continue to offer amnesty for lower ranking combatants (JLOS TJWG 2013; Otim and Kihika 2015). The policy has a national application; however, the discussion here is restricted only to the policy’s references and application to the GoU-LRA conflict in northern Uganda.

Transitional justice has rapidly become an international norm, directing a range of interventions that “attempt to deal with past violence in societies undergoing or attempting some form of political transition” (Bell 2009, 7). Transitional justice grew out of situations (e.g. post-WWII Germany, or Argentina and Chile in the late 1980s) in which there was a change of government, from an authoritarian regime to democratic rule underpinned by the rule of law (Teitel 2003). It aimed to both address harms committed by the former regime, and to fortify the position of principles such as accountability, justice, and truth as

foundational to a stable, democratic nation. Conceptions of transitional justice have broadened over the last two decades, and no longer require regime change; rather, its role in supporting countries transitioning out of conflict has been foregrounded. It is this conception of transitional justice that is promulgated in the UN Secretary General's 2004 report, in which Kofi Annan stated that transitional justice is

the full range of processes and mechanisms associated with a society's attempts to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuses, in order to ensure accountability, serve justice and achieve reconciliation. (UNSG 2004, [8])

The result of this normative shift has been that transitional justice, with its broader state and bureaucratic appeal, "was now adopted enthusiastically by policy makers and viewed as necessary to sustaining ceasefires and achieving a successful transition from conflict" (Bell 2009, 9).

This shift is relevant when considering transitional justice in Uganda, where there has not been a political transition of the kind in which most transitional justice mechanisms find their roots. If transitional justice is taken as the more pragmatic "transition out of conflict," Uganda's conflict has not formally ended – the Final Peace Agreement has not been signed, the LRA remains an active fighting force, and the UPDF continues to be engaged in military actions against the LRA. While not active in northern Uganda for some years, "the LRA remains active across the border and continues to be a cause for insecurity and anxiety" (Wielders and Amutjojo 2012, 10).

In the absence of either a political transition or a confirmed end to the conflict, the ICTJ proposes that "transitional justice logic and objectives face specific challenges" in Uganda (Otim and Kihika 2015, 4). The ACCS, while welcoming Uganda's "holistic" draft National Transitional Justice Policy, is also concerned about the GoU's tight control over the transitional justice agenda, and the lack of consultation in the policy's drafting. It stated that

[a]s a result, the government-led and government-owned transitional justice processes, without broader participation and inclusion of civil society voices, cannot bring the transformation needed in societies emerging from conflicts. (2013, 5)

Women participants in this research articulated a number of justice needs that fall within the scope of transitional justice; some of these needs are addressed within the draft National Transitional Justice Policy, while other important elements are absent. Five key elements of transitional justice needs were articulated by women, with almost universal agreement across all research sites, ages, marital statuses, and experiences of the conflict:

- Guarantee of non-recurrence and peace
- Reparations
- Reconciliation
- Apology
- Accountability

Women were additionally asked about their views on what should happen to Joseph Kony and other Senior Commanders of the LRA, as well as the ICC indictments. It is important to note that, at the time of conducting most of the fieldwork, the indictments had been issued for nine years and the three surviving indictees all remained at large, thus making the question a

somewhat hypothetical one. However, in the time between the conclusion of the initial fieldwork (July 2014) and the Validation Workshop (June 2015), Dominic Ongwen surrendered, was transferred into ICC custody, and is currently awaiting trial, thereby re-livening the issue of the ICC's role in northern Uganda. When the ICC first unsealed its indictments against five senior LRA members (Joseph Kony, Vincent Otti, Okot Odhiambo, Dominic Ongwen, and Raska Lukwiya), it triggered heated debate among the Acholi people of northern Uganda. Many feared that the indictments would discourage the LRA from entering peace negotiations, and would work against the intentions of the Amnesty Act (2000) Cap. (294) ("Amnesty Act"). The ICC's involvement was further criticised for focusing exclusively on the atrocities committed by the LRA, and not on the actions of the UPDF and other State actors; this led some to question the impartiality of the ICC.³⁴² Questions of ICC involvement in northern Uganda, and women's thoughts about justice as it pertains to LRA leadership, are addressed further throughout this chapter.

8.1.1 Guarantee of non-recurrence and peace

Women in northern Uganda have suffered enormously throughout the war. Women and girls have been abducted and enslaved; forced into squalid IDP camps; witnessed barbaric attacks by LRA cadres; endured beatings, rapes, and other humiliations; and suffered the loss of parents, children, and husbands. They have sustained economic devastation and are struggling to rebuild viable, safe, and dignified lives. LRA attacks have not occurred for several years, the north has been largely demilitarised, and most people have now returned to their homes; however, a great number of women continue to feel insecure, fearing that this is merely a lull in the fighting, rather than the end of the conflict.

The desire for a guarantee of non-recurrence was repeated by almost all women interviewed, often without prompting:

*The government should also intervene to help the local community and guarantee that the war will not reoccur and that they will remain peaceful and happy.*³⁴³

*I feel the conflict should not reoccur, so women and people in Uganda can have a permanent settlement and rebuild their homes.*³⁴⁴

*It my wish that the government should not provoke Kony, we are tired of war and we do not want any more war. What we went through was way too much pain. Now that we are just beginning to forget about the war ... that we shall not go through the same experiences again. We hear rumours that Kony is preparing to make a comeback any time to again terrorise us. This has raised so much fear among the locals, especially myself. I feel so insecure.*³⁴⁵

Women explained that continued fear affects them both emotionally and materially. Dorine explained that her land lay fallow for many years when she and her husband were in an IDP camp. Since returning, the land needs a lot of work, including re-digging drainage ditches,

³⁴² The ICC's involvement in northern Uganda has generated large amounts of scholarly and public commentary, and is well covered in many places. For further discussion on this issue, see, e.g., Waddell and Clark (2008), Branch (2007), Souaré (2009), and Clark (2010).

³⁴³ Interviewed January 31, 2014.

³⁴⁴ Interviewed February 6, 2014.

³⁴⁵ Interviewed February 13, 2014.

clearing of land mines (one unexploded land mine was observed near her home during fieldwork), and re-conditioning the soil. Dorine said that she feels ambivalent about doing this work, in case the war resumes and she is again forced to flee. This ambivalence also extends to regular agricultural tasks:

- Dorine: *And you know, even when we plant, we just plant it now as an after thought. We still have this fear, “Maybe I’m wasting my time. Maybe the rebels will come back and all this will be a waste.”*
- Interviewer: *Do you fear the rebels will return?*
- Dorine: *Yes, because they have. I have gotten very many disappointments from them.*³⁴⁶

The fear of a resurgence in conflict works counter to programs and initiatives aimed at improving the security, economic prosperity, and development of northern Uganda, and may even be contributing to the identified food insecurity facing the region (SPRING 2010, 21).

This fear of recurrence also impairs women’s ability to recover psychologically from the war. Dorine said that fear of the LRA returning meant that *“now my heart is not at ease. I cannot be settled in mind.”*³⁴⁷ Lorna explained the precarity of the peace, and how it affects her:

*We are a little settled, there is no more running for our lives, but we do not have any guarantee that the war has ended, we still live in fear and I believe that unless Kony is captured, he can come anytime and resume terrorising us like in the earlier years. I feel I am a prisoner of war in my own homeland, I feel terribly wronged by this war.*³⁴⁸

Joyce said she listens to the radio for news of the LRA’s location, and that if she hears that they are in South Sudan, she will know that the war is about to resume. Her main concern is

*about my children. Where will I leave my children? I worry my children will go through the same mistreatment, the same suffering I went through. Every time I think of him [Kony] returning I think of where I should keep my children safe, but there is no safe place.*³⁴⁹

Laplante and Theidon (2007, 240) found similar needs for a guarantee of non-recurrence among survivors of Peru’s conflict with the Shining Path insurgency, arguing that such a guarantee is crucial for survivors to establish the necessary sense of safety for participation in truth-telling, and other transitional justice processes. In addition to its foundational value in civic and justice objectives, the establishment of psychological safety is widely accepted as a pre-requisite for psychological healing from trauma (Herman 1997; Johnson and Thompson 2008). Judith Herman’s (1997, 155) model of trauma recovery outlines that “recovery unfolds in three stages. The central task of the first stage is the establishment of safety.”

The Advisory Consortium on Conflict Sensitivity (ACCS) also found widespread concern throughout northern Uganda about the risk of a recurrence in fighting, reporting that

³⁴⁶ Interviewed June 21, 2014.

³⁴⁷ Interviewed June 21, 2014.

³⁴⁸ Interviewed January 31, 2014.

³⁴⁹ Interviewed June 24, 2014.

[m]any communities in the North remain trapped in conflict cycles that are supported by drivers and fed by grievances, pushing them towards what many respondents believe is an inevitable return to overt conflict. (2013, 53)

While the Juba Agreement on Accountability and Reconciliation refers briefly in clause 9.1 to “guarantees of non-recurrence,” this critically important aspect of transitional justice does not appear in the draft National Transitional Justice Policy. Women reported very clearly to this research that a guarantee of non-recurrence provides an essential foundation for the achievement of justice, healing, and rebuilding. Julia, who was abducted for twelve years, made an impassioned plea for peace, not only in Uganda but globally:

*What I need to tell you is that – in your reports I know you are going to include all these three countries, and all of them have suffered violence during the conflicts. What I want to say is that, women at least should be given a chance to live peacefully, to have some peace. Women have gone through so much in conflict areas, they use women as a tool for satisfaction and women are dying, women are suffering, women are being washed away by water during these times. Women are suffering all these things in all parts of the world where there’s conflict, so my humble prayer is that this should stop. I have seen it with my own eyes and I appeal to the whole world to at least give women some peace.*³⁵⁰

8.1.2 Reparations

As outlined throughout this report, the people of northern Uganda have suffered acutely and sustained enormous losses throughout the war. Every woman interviewed wanted some form of reparation for her experiences and losses. As Patricia clearly stated, reparations are “*the best kind of justice because it restores me to my previous position, then I am able to forgive and move on normally with life.*”³⁵¹

Reparations are a critical element of transitional justice. The UN Secretary General’s (UNSG) report on transitional justice noted that, after widespread human rights violations,

States have the obligation to act not only against perpetrators, but also on behalf of victims – including through the provision of reparations. (2004, [54])

Reparations serve multiple purposes in post-conflict situations. Reparations help people to rebuild economically after conflict; to access medical and psychological treatment for injuries, illness, and traumas sustained during the war (which often inhibit the most vulnerable individuals and groups in society from participating equally in post-conflict social, economic, and political life); and, importantly, can have a restorative effect, helping in “restoring victims’ confidence in the State” (UNSG 2004, [54]). The UNDP noted that

Reparations, if well designed, acknowledge the victims’ suffering, offer redress, some form of compensation and acknowledge the responsibility of the State to make amends for past wrongs. (2011a, 20)

The draft National Transitional Justice Policy recognises the central importance of reparations as a general principle. It goes further, however, by acknowledging that

³⁵⁰ Interviewed June 27, 2014.

³⁵¹ Interviewed March 11, 2014.

in traditional justice, justice is not done unless some form of compensation or reparation from perpetrators is received by the victim, their families or community members for the wrong. (JLOS TJWG 2013, [49])

The draft Policy recommends that the GoU establish a State-funded reparations program; guaranteeing a secure budget allocation sufficient to meet the costs of reparation commitments is essential for the desired reparative effects to be realised. The ICTJ noted that the final draft of the National Transitional Justice Policy recommends that a specific fund for reparations be established, financed from consolidated revenue (not *ad hoc* budget measures) (Otim and Kihika 2015, 6). The security of funding for a reparations program is critical to its success, and delivery must not be exposed to the vulnerabilities that face *ad hoc*, NGO, or donor funds. Many women expressed a lack of trust and confidence in government and NGO programs, as revealed in Rosemary's response when she was asked what transitional justice mechanisms are:

*Nothing really. When we returned from the camps, the government told us of a plan to compensate the people whose land was used as camps, but this has never been raised again. An organisation called Gusco also tried to resettle some few people who returned from the bush but their program also ended.*³⁵²

The ability of reparations to be able to contribute to restoring community trust in the government requires that any prospective reparations fund be able to deliver on commitments made.

In April 2014, the Ugandan parliament voted unanimously in support of a resolution calling on the GoU to establish a gender-sensitive reparations program for women and men affected by the GoU-LRA war (ICTJ 2014). The resolution was the result of coordinated lobbying from victim-survivor groups and civil society organisations in Uganda. Suzanne, who was abducted for eight years, had been involved in advocating for the resolution on reparations. She emphasised that “*women must be involved in the process for designing reparations, otherwise women and children will not be helped.*”³⁵³ She further pointed out that women will need support in their involvement in designing reparations processes, as “*women feel low. They must first be picked up.*”

A number of women outlined some principles that any reparations program must incorporate. The first, as per Suzanne's recommendation above, is the inclusion of women in the design process, and onwards. Uganda's patriarchal systems, entrenched in both formal and informal political and justice systems, are highly likely to produce a distribution of reparations (whether individual or collective) which do not adequately respond to women's justice needs. Secondly, reparations should have in-built mechanisms which ensure that the most vulnerable are reached. For Suzanne, this meant “*getting out to the villages, and make sure you reach the real beneficiaries. Often it's the better off that know about these programs.*”³⁵⁴ Caroline observed a similar phenomenon in the distribution of NUSAF goods; she had received an ox to help her re-establish her agricultural activities after the war, and, while she was happy to have the ox, she recognised that those most in need had missed out:

³⁵² Interviewed January 13, 2014.

³⁵³ Interviewed June 27, 2014.

³⁵⁴ Interviewed June 27, 2014.

*The government programs designed for the affected community during the war have not fully supported people affected. For example, those affected very much during the war such as those who lost their limbs, ... women whose husbands were killed during the war and those who sustained permanent injuries and became lame as a result of the same have not benefited, yet, in my opinion they should be given first priority. Unfortunately or fortunately, people like me who have strength benefited.*³⁵⁵

The third principle identified by women was the requirement that the processes by which reparations are awarded be transparent and widely disseminated. Women had observed some members of the community benefiting from grants under the PRDP and NUSAF, as well as from aid distributed by NGOs. Without any public information explaining the rules by which recipients were selected, such distributions had triggered anger and jealousy between community members. As Mary explained:

*NGOs, I do not remember their name gave resettlement packages such as pangas, hand hoes and seeds, however this help was not sufficient because only a few people benefitted. ... More support in terms of reparations should be given to all the members because those who missed were very unhappy, they grumbled and developed grudges against those who got. This has brought division among the people who relieved and those who missed.*³⁵⁶

Reparations are effective tools of justice, “providing concrete remedies, promoting reconciliation and restoring victims’ confidence in the State” (UNSG 2004, [54]). Transparency and fairness in delivery are critical in reparations’ achievement of reconciliatory and civic objectives.

Finally, women said that reparations should be designed in consultation with the community (noting Suzanne’s aforementioned advice about deliberately including women in consultations). Nadia took care to stipulate that such consultations should be genuine, and that community views need to be evident in the final policies produced:

*The government’s decision should be informed by what the local community thinks is best for them and thus the local community must be consulted before any decisions are reached because it is us, the locals, who suffered most. And what the local community advises should not be altered.*³⁵⁷

The GoU has the opportunity to make significant gains in the restoration of Acholi women’s and men’s trust in the State. While all aspects of transitional justice will have an effect on civic confidence, reparations are particularly important. As Laplante and Theidon (2007) noted, the justice needs of people living in poverty are often expressed primarily in economic terms. The people of northern Uganda are living in greater poverty than any other region in Uganda (GoU Pop Sec 2013). Many women perceived their current poverty to be a direct consequence of the war; this includes their inability to ensure their children received an education, to ensure access to medical care, or even to give “visitors the kind of welcome I would wish.”³⁵⁸ Dorine was aware of exactly how much she had lost, as well as the current impact of the losses, and the government’s lack of action to redress those losses:

³⁵⁵ Interviewed March 18, 2014.

³⁵⁶ Interviewed March 19, 2014.

³⁵⁷ Interviewed February 7, 2014.

³⁵⁸ Interviewed February 6, 2014.

*Why I'm saying this, I had very many animals. I had about 25 cattle, 38 goats. But gone! Everything! I lost everything to the Kony war. I had so many chickens, about 60, over 60. So all these were gone. Because from these I would be easily able to pay my children in school. So when we came back from the camps, they [the government] said they were going to do something about the effects of the war, they're going to do something. But nothing! Nothing has ever been done.*³⁵⁹

Anna similarly said that “*I lost trust in our government because they promise a lot but never fulfil their promises.*” Nonetheless, she believes that transitional justice is important, as it “*will make me feel the government feels our pain.*”³⁶⁰

The ACCS (2013, 34) also noted that the government’s failure to deliver on its promises of compensation fuels “bitterness towards the government,” and identified it as a key conflict driver. Avocats Sans Frontieres (ASF) argued both that “[t]he duty on the State to repair is well established and a basic human right” (2013, 21), and that reparations should be “prompt” (2013, 22). The timeliness of the reparations program is an important element for the GoU to consider within its overall policy goal of improving civic confidence. One key informant with whom we spoke acknowledged the urgency of reparations:

*I think when we talk about transitional justice processes complimenting each other, the ideal strategy is to have these processes compliment each other – the practicality is that this may not be able to be achieved, so in that case, if we are to do a sequencing approach, reparations should be high on the radar, because unless these victims are healed, unless these victims have that confidence that they are well, that their wounds are healed, they are not going to be very keen to support other processes. You cannot talk about justice when someone is still hurting.*³⁶¹

Reparations can be a mixture of individual and collective, material and symbolic. Women spoke of all these types of reparations, with a particular focus on the following: provision of health care and counselling services; provision of land, capital, and training for small business development; provision of livestock; financial compensation; and funding for children to complete their education. Additionally, a number of women wanted memorials for those killed in the war (particularly at massacre sites), assistance in locating people who had disappeared during the war, and assistance with the cost of ceremonies (e.g. for mourning people killed during the war, for traditional justice, and for celebrations of culture that “*help women revive their lives and forget their miserable past.*”³⁶²) The forms of reparations identified during this research closely matched those found by the UHRC and UNOHCHR (2011), in their extensive report on victims’ views on remedies and reparations in northern Uganda; they also paralleled the joint consultations of the Justice and Reconciliation Project and the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, which identified compensation and livelihood, education, medical care, psychosocial support, acknowledgement, and memorialisation as priority areas for reparations (JRP and IJR 2011).

³⁵⁹ Interviewed June 21, 2014.

³⁶⁰ Interviewed January 30, 2014.

³⁶¹ Interviewed May 6, 2014.

³⁶² Interviewed March 18, 2014.

Women spoke of the need for both individual and collective reparations. Many women wanted individual financial reparations, particularly through the replacement of the livestock, seeds, and tools necessary for rebuilding agricultural outputs. As Sonia said:

*People should be helped, they should be given reparations, like animals to help them meet their basic family needs. Justice means helping us find alternative means of living. Providing for us seeds or finding means of economically empowering us.*³⁶³

While agricultural inputs would help women who have access to land, those without land wanted help with forming a non-land-based livelihood, both through training in vocational skills and the provision of start-up capital. Francine said that help establishing a small business would be acceptable, but that she would prefer monetary compensation so that she could buy her own land, as it represented greater inter-generational wealth than a small business:

*This is my first preference because at least my children are male children, so at least if they can have some land to look to, then it's good for them to have a place they can call their own. Even if I get another man, the same problem will re-occur of not wanting my children.*³⁶⁴

Phoebe also preferred land over start-up capital, but she suggested that the government “should find some piece of land for such women to relocate.”³⁶⁵

Many women also wanted collective reparations, particularly in the form of counselling, health, and education services; they recognised that much of the damage done during the war impacted everyone in the community, and continues to affect social relations. Both Rosemary and Nighty emphasised the widespread need for counselling in their community:

*Counselling and health related services should be increased for the people, especially those whose children were abducted. Even the few who returned need counselling.*³⁶⁶

*Counsellors are very important, they should be brought in the area because people are so traumatised, they will help relieve trauma and one is to open up to them on their worries and troubles.*³⁶⁷

Gladys said that, while she did not lose economic property during the war, she was traumatised, and is now also stigmatised. She wanted psychosocial support and education as reparation:

I suffer from trauma and stresses because of what I experienced from the bush like seeing people being killed, I also suffer from stigma because the community up to today call us names “returnees from the bush.” Being a young girl, I had no property but other women lost their property, some women’s legs, nose, hands, mouth were cut in my presence which still traumatise me. I feel really traumatised. Justice to me means giving me support, when government gets support from donors; I should be

³⁶³ Interviewed March 13, 2014.

³⁶⁴ Interviewed June 28, 2014.

³⁶⁵ Interviewed March 20, 2014.

³⁶⁶ Interviewed February 13, 2014.

³⁶⁷ Interviewed February 13, 2014.

*one of the people to be supported. It also means forgiveness, compensation of properties. The survivors should be educated, they should be given continuous psychosocial support.*³⁶⁸

As discussed in Chapter 7, children's education was universally raised by women as a primary justice mechanism. Women linked the disrupted education of their children to the conflict, both in terms of the widespread disruption to education caused by fighting and other violence, and the inability of mothers to pay school fees in the post-conflict phase. Women saw the reconstruction of schools as critical for ensuring a better future for their children and the community, and wanted this to be complemented by either the abolition of all associated school fees, or the establishment of a fund to assist parents in paying these fees. Marlene highlighted that orphans are particularly vulnerable, and that reparations should target their education in particular:

*Support should also be given to support the children, especially the orphans who were left behind. The government should be able to give us support. UPE does not work because we as parents have to meet so many requirements - PTA and other scholastic materials.*³⁶⁹

The GoU has contributed significant funds to development in northern Uganda through the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP). The PRDP was launched in 2007, and effectively began in 2009; its successor, PRDP 2, launched in 2012, with a third stage due to begin in December 2015. The PRDP aims

to stabilise Northern Uganda and lay a firm foundation for recovery and development. Specifically, the PRDP aims at promoting socio-economic development of the communities of Northern Uganda to bridge the gap between the North and the rest of the Country, so that the North achieves "national average level" in the main socio-economic indicators. (GoU OPM 2011, i)

The PRDP entailed some new project funding (30 percent from the GoU and 70 percent from donors), and consolidated pre-existing recovery programs, such as the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF), the Emergency Humanitarian Action Plan (EHAP), and the Northern Uganda Reconstruction Programme (NURP), to enable more coordinated and effective service delivery (Claussen et al. 2008, 16). The PRDP has four strategic objectives:

- Consolidation of State Authority
- Rebuilding and empowering communities
- Revitalisation of the economy
- Peace building and reconciliation

The PRDP has initiated several important projects since its inception, including improving police services and infrastructure; examples of the latter include developing community buildings (e.g. health centres, schools, court houses, and police stations), as well as digging latrines, boreholes, and roads (RLP 2013).

While the PRDP has played an important role in the post-conflict development of northern Uganda, it is critically important that it not be seen as a substitute for reparations. While

³⁶⁸ Interviewed January 23, 2014.

³⁶⁹ Interviewed March 20, 2014.

some of the goods and services which have been provided under the PRDP and NUSAF overlap with items which women have called for as both collective and individual reparations, the PRDP has focused far more on “consolidating State authority,” with only 2.7 percent of its budget being directed to “peace building and reconciliation” (Dolan 2008, 6). Most importantly, it is not embedded within any State acknowledgement of responsibility for harms suffered during the war, in any State obligations towards citizens who have suffered injustice, and nor was it designed as a response to specific war-related harms. Reparations gain much of their restorative power, their ability to build confidence in civic institutions, from their structural location *within* a transitional justice framework. Reconstruction work undertaken outside of a justice framework, such as the PRDP, cannot deliver the justice dividends possible through reparations. As the UHRC and UNOHCHR stated:

In efforts surrounding reparation, it is necessary to distinguish the primary differences between reparation and post-conflict reconstruction or development. ... Reparation signifies public acknowledgement of the State’s or perpetrator’s commission of harms or violations and/or the State’s failure to prevent violations and harms. Reparation signifies State responsibility to redress these serious violations. By contrast, development policies do not entail State responsibility for wrongdoing or an acknowledgment that harm has been suffered. Development policies are not conceived to achieve justice for victims of serious violations or address irreparable harms. (2011, 19–20)

The PRDP, while an important reconstruction program, is not attached to any kind of justice mechanisms, and does not contain within its design or operation the necessary features to enable it to have reparative justice effects. Women expressed some confusion about the PRDP, and the NUSAF in particular, as the NUSAF makes payments and provides items to individuals directly. Many women were unsure if the NUSAF and PRDP are reparations programs, and expressed concern that these programs are not responsive to harms suffered during the conflict. In some instances, this has been fuelling anger that “*favouritism*,” “*sectarianism*,” and “*connections*” are unfairly advantaging some, and disadvantaging others (RLP 2013).³⁷⁰ Mary, who received an ox through the NUSAF, said that

*[m]ore support in terms of reparations should be given to all the members because those who missed were very unhappy, they grumbled and developed grudges against those who got. This has brought division among the people who relieved and those who missed.*³⁷¹

The GoU currently has a window of opportunity to rebuild trust, and contribute to the satisfaction of Acholi women’s justice needs through the provision of reparations explicitly embedded within a justice framework, and directly linked to specific harms caused by the conflict. This needs to be clearly separated from general post-conflict reconstruction, to avoid exacerbating division and to enhance social cohesion.

8.1.3 Apology

Women also raised the importance of a formal apology from the government. The call for an apology was particularly strong among formerly abducted women, many of whom considered

³⁷⁰ The NUSAF, like the PRDP, has also been beset by corruption allegations, with more than twenty people charged with corruption offences in the distribution of NUSAF funds by 2008 (RLP 2013).

³⁷¹ Interviewed March 19, 2014.

that the government had failed to protect them against abduction, and were thereby responsible for all the subsequent harms they suffered. Suzanne said:

*I did not sign for Amnesty and I do not want it. I was abducted from school. I consider that the government failed to protect me and should apologise to me.*³⁷²

Eleanor did apply, and received Amnesty under the Amnesty Act (2000). She said that, while she has apologised and asked for forgiveness, she believed that the government had failed to protect her and other abducted children, and that the government should seek their forgiveness:

*And yet we came back home the government they didn't protect us, then we came back home then also government give us the amnesty. So we are not feeling good for that one. Because they have failed to protecting us. It is the govern who ... it is not for us to ask for the Amnesty ... We want also government to ask for the apology ... because they didn't protect us. Like for us women we suffering for nothing.*³⁷³

Cilla thought that an apology would help with her reintegration into, and reconciliation with, the community:

*Yes that can really make us feel a sense of justice because if the government comes up openly to apologise to the people, that comes in with another kind of relief because we begin to see that there is also somebody who is also taking on this blame because the people will also begin to perceive it, that it was not us but also some other people who were causing this problem to us. So it will also make me happy.*³⁷⁴

Julia perceived that the continuity of political leadership throughout the war, and now into the post-conflict phase, made an apology all the more important:

*First, they should apologise to us for all the suffering we've been through. Because all the sufferings we've been through has been, we met them during the current regime and the President has been the same person all the way through. There has not been any change of Government.*³⁷⁵

This desire for an apology was also found by the UHRC and UNOHCHR, who reported that war-affected men and women

overwhelmingly stated their need for public acknowledgement of and apologies by the Government of Uganda for harms and failure to prevent harms. Numerous interviewees said that until the Government of Uganda made this important step, they would consider any other reparation efforts as little more than attempts to buy their silence about what had happened. (2011, 89)

President Museveni issued an apology on January 26, 2014, for past abuses committed by members of Uganda's armed forces, citing specific massacres as well as acknowledging that "there were incidents of looting property including cattle," and rape. He committed to

³⁷² Interviewed June 27, 2014.

³⁷³ Interviewed September 24, 2013.

³⁷⁴ Interviewed June 18, 2014.

³⁷⁵ Interviewed June 27, 2014.

“personally organize *Mato-put* ... with the concerned families and communities” (Museveni 2014). This apology is a welcome development, and an indication that war-affected women’s calls for an apology for the government’s failure to protect them may yet come. It is important, however, that any apology acknowledge the State’s complicity in the harms caused during the war, whether through its failure to protect its citizens, the enactment of government policies (such as forced encampment), or harmful acts committed by agents of the State. Furthermore, an apology must arise out of a holistic justice process, and be attached to both a documenting of harms (including prosecutions where appropriate), and material reparations.

8.1.4 Reconciliation

Reconciliation is foundational to Acholi principles of justice (Porter 2012; Liu Institute for Global Issues et al. 2005; Quinn 2009). Hansen (2009, 6) reports that “[i]n Uganda, and in particular in the north of the country, the cultural history is often defined by people’s alleged ability to forgive and to reconcile.” In keeping with other studies of justice in northern Uganda,³⁷⁶ women in this study repeated reconciliation as a central element and goal of justice. Reconciliation was spoken about in two distinct but overlapping ways: on an individual level, between a specific perpetrator and a specific victim of violence, and collectively, within communities deeply and widely affected by the conflict. The terms “*restore relationships*,” “*restoring the community*,” “*harmony*,” “*united*,” and “*peaceful*” were repeated frequently by participants. Harriet explained that “*no justice can be reached unless both sides are heard*,” and that a good process “*settles the matter once and for all. A spirit of brotherhood then ensues and the long lasting feud is broken.*”³⁷⁷ Kathleen explained that justice involves testifying to the truth, apologies from wrongdoers, forgiveness by victims, and then “*reconciliation of the two parties.*” Reconciliation, however, “*takes time*,” and requires “*patience.*”³⁷⁸

The draft National Transitional Justice Policy acknowledges the central importance of reconciliation in the development of peace and justice, and its place “as a necessary precursor to sustainable development” (JLOS TJWG 2013, [3]). Furthermore, the draft Policy recognises the multi-layered demands of reconciliation, and the vital requirement of national engagement in order to deliver lasting peace and stability dividends:

Peace and reconciliation demand comprehensive societal transformation that must embrace a broad notion of justice, addressing the root causes of conflict and the related violations of all rights. (JLOS TJWG 2013, [3])

This acknowledgement of the need for a national reconciliation that seeks to address the “root causes of conflict” is vitally important. The draft Policy proposes that a truth commission be established, as a key national mechanism to promote reconciliation. There is broad support for this among the women we interviewed, who spoke of “truth-telling” as the first step in building justice. As Bernadette explained:

³⁷⁶ See, for example, Anyeko et al. (2012), Jeffery (2011), Porter (2012), and Quinn (2009).

³⁷⁷ Interviewed February 6, 2014.

³⁷⁸ Interviewed January 23, 2014.

*Justice to me is a fair hearing which involves truth telling and witnesses called to testify to the truth pertaining to that matter. To me the most important type of justice is apology and restoring peace between parties.*³⁷⁹

Most key informants in this research also supported truth-telling, and saw it as integral to any reconciliation process. One key informant emphasised the need for truth-telling nationally as a foundation for justice. He perceived that a lack of truth-telling about many conflicts post-independence “*is sitting at the bottom of our problems. ... [T]he issue of truth telling is very demanding in this country, it is the basis of other processes.*”³⁸⁰ Another key informant likewise recognised the importance of truth-telling, and thought it might be an effective way of affirming women’s experiences and promoting healing. In her opinion, a truth-telling commission would provide women with a safe forum in which their experiences can be heard:

*I have come across so many women who, they have never had anybody to listen to their story, they remain there and are traumatised, they are not moving forward. It’s quite healing if somebody came out and told her story, either in truth telling and reconciliation or the formal, because I think that really is the healing process.*³⁸¹

One key informant was also supportive of a truth-telling commission, based largely on her long engagement with women in northern Uganda. She was also cautious, however, about possible repercussions for women, and noted that any truth-telling process would need to carefully think through gender issues, particularly those relating to sexual violence. She pointed out that women currently “*feel so unsafe*”:

*So the mechanism should be where every woman will feel very safe and very confident to speak the truth. That “what I am going to speak here will not be used against me whether by the community or by the State, or by my family or by the press. It will not turn against me, you know, where I will be vindicated at a water point after all you know.” And then that blame game, it should be a mechanism where the blame game... “After all it was your fault, where were you going at that particular hour?” That faulting of especially victims of gender based violence. If you did not do that, that would not have happened to you. So it is too frustrating. So you would rather keep quiet than you know being faulted and endlessly blamed.*³⁸²

Anyeko et al. (2012) reported that over 90 percent of the 1,414 respondents in their study wanted some form of truth-telling process. “In particular, people want to know why this war happened, who is to be held accountable and what has happened to their loved ones who are missing” (114). The authors reported that many Acholi see truth-telling as necessary to prevent future conflict. Importantly, they further outlined that reconciliation is a process, of which truth-telling is only one part. Respondents told them that the policy of Amnesty was highly valued, and an important step in encouraging LRA members to escape the LRA and return home. They were clear, however, that the forgiveness offered through Amnesty is only the beginning of a process towards reconciliation, and that justice must occur in order for reconciliation to be achieved:

³⁷⁹ Interviewed March 11, 2014.

³⁸⁰ Interviewed in Kampala on May 12, 2014.

³⁸¹ Interviewed in Kampala on May 5, 2014.

³⁸² Interviewed in Kampala on May 5, 2014.

Forgiveness, therefore, is like an olive branch – a way for civilians to indicate their willingness to reconcile. It is not, however, the same as *mato oput* (reconciliation) which is a process involving truth-telling through mediation, acknowledgement, compensation and symbolic reconciliation. ... Truth-telling was imagined as a process wherein former LRA members, UPDF soldiers and communities would sit to discuss what happened, to explain why it happened and to identify, with the assistance of a mediator, a means of agreeing on compensation (which could be symbolic) and reconciliation (*mato oput*). (Anyeko et al. 2012, 116–117)

The Liu Institute of Global Affairs, Gulu District NGO Forum, and Ker Kwaro Acholi (2005) also found that reconciliation in Acholi culture is a multi-faceted process, one which requires truth-telling, acknowledgements, apologies, forgiveness, and compensation before it can be achieved. Reconciliation is an integral element of justice, and indeed its ultimate goal. This is not only an Acholi cultural value, but accords with studies into truth-telling, justice, and reconciliation in other parts of the world (Laplante and Theidon 2007; van der Merwe 2001); it likewise corresponds with global standards of transitional justice (UNSG 2004; ASF 2013).

Some communities are undertaking reconciliation processes at localised and inter-personal levels, with some positive results emerging regarding the improved reintegration of formerly abducted women, and in improvements to social relations within the community. Joyce participated in some mediation and reconciliation workshops run by CARE, who also trained some community members in mediation skills: “*If there is any conflict in the community, they are trained to help.*” Additionally, the trained community mediators would facilitate community reconciliation meetings. Joyce explained that

*[i]n the meetings, village meetings, a former abductee or a former camp member would tell their story, then they would pick up from there and start to teach, send these messages of non-discrimination. They would tell them “these people also went through very difficult times as you have heard. Let’s not treat them this way, let’s not discriminate against them, let’s not call them names. You’ve just heard what they said, let’s not back-bite them.”*³⁸³

Additionally, the Women’s Advocacy Network (WAN), based in Gulu but with members across much of Acholiland, offers free community and family mediation and reconciliation assistance. Radio Mega also runs several weekly radio programs aimed at improving community reconciliation (Otim 2009); women living in areas with FM reception reported that the radio programs make a substantive difference to their lives.³⁸⁴

While the efforts of local communities and civil society organisations towards reconciliation are important, they need to be understood as only one layer of reconciliation, and should not detract from efforts to instigate macro-level reconciliation programs. Community-based reconciliation efforts address inter-personal and inter-familial relationships, but in the absence of formal, national-level reconciliation mechanisms, there is a risk that the conflict will increasingly be understood as a “northern affair,” and the national and structural “root causes of the conflict” will remain unaddressed (Hansen 2009; RLP 2004, 23). The Government of Uganda has an important role to play in establishing national-level reconciliation processes. The Transitional Justice Working Group has produced a series of discussion papers and reports addressing reconciliation and truth-telling, including

³⁸³ Interviewed June 24, 2014.

³⁸⁴ These community based reconciliation programs are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6.

discussions of critical issues to be considered in the design and enactment of such processes (e.g. reparations, witness protection, and interaction with key legislation, such as the Amnesty Act and the International Criminal Court Act). Notwithstanding the difficulties and complexities involved, women in northern Uganda have expressed a strong desire for reconciliation, and government steps towards this would likely be well received.

8.1.5 Amnesty, accountability, and prosecutions

8.1.5.1 Brief background to amnesty and prosecutions in Uganda

The Government of Uganda has employed a range of strategies to end the war with the LRA, including military strategies, offering Amnesty, peace negotiations, and legal prosecutions. These strategies have at times represented an inconsistent approach, and have generated contradictions and tensions between different approaches. This section focuses in particular on women's views of the GoU's use of Amnesty, and the prospective prosecution of LRA leaders for war crimes and crimes against humanity.³⁸⁵

Following sustained pressure from civil society organisations, particularly Acholi CSOs, the GoU introduced the Amnesty Act (2000). The Amnesty Act offers indemnity from prosecution for any combatant who reports to the relevant authorities, and "renounces and abandons involvement in the war or armed rebellion" (s 4(1)(b)). The Amnesty Act had been an effective tool in encouraging LRA members to desert the LRA and return home (JLOS TJWG 2013, [20]); over 26,000 former LRA members have been granted Amnesty since its introduction.

In 2003, the GoU referred the "situation concerning the Lord's Resistance Army" to the ICC, the first State to self-refer (Nouwen and Werner 2010, 946).³⁸⁶ In 2004, the ICC began investigating the situation, and in 2005 issued indictments against Joseph Kony, Raska Lukwiya, Okot Odhiambo, Dominic Ongwen, and Vincent Otti (ICC 2015).

The GoU welcomed the indictments against the five LRA leaders; however, its initial enthusiasm has since shifted over the years (Nouwen and Werner 2010; Clark 2008). The first major shift occurred in the lead up to the 2006 Juba peace talks, when it appeared that the ICC indictments might be an obstacle to the peace process (Ssenyonjo 2007; Traylor 2009–2010, 34; Branch 2007); the GoU then emphasised the existence of the Amnesty Act, and downplayed the significance of the ICC indictments, to provide reassurance to the LRA leadership. President Museveni went further, publicly announcing a "total amnesty" for LRA combatants, including Joseph Kony, as part of the Juba peace talks (Vasagar 2006). Museveni perhaps over-estimated the degree of control he could exercise over the ICC's involvement in Uganda; he had previously stated publicly that "[i]f we told the ICC that we had found an internal solution, they would be happy" (quoted in Ssenyonjo 2007, 425).

³⁸⁵ The full history and complexity of issues raised by the Amnesty Act, ICC indictments, and GoU legal frameworks are beyond the scope of this report, but have generated a large amount of other academic and legal scholarship. See, for example, Waddell and Clark (2008), Nouwen and Werner (2010), Ssenyonjo (2005), and Traylor (2009–2010).

³⁸⁶ Nouwen and Werner (2010, 948) argue that corruption scandals, criticisms of Uganda's military actions in northern Uganda, and increasing international attention directed at the humanitarian emergency in northern Uganda, were "beginning to tarnish the government's reputation," raising concerns within the government that its status as a "donor darling" may be at risk. They further noted that, in 2004, between 35% and 50% of Uganda's national budget came from international donor aid (2010, 948).

During the Juba peace talks, the LRA insisted that the ICC indictments be withdrawn – a demand the GoU was unable to meet. The GoU did, however, agree to a clause in the Juba Agreement on Accountability and Reconciliation, which stipulated that “accountability mechanisms shall be implemented through the adapted legal framework in Uganda” (cl.4.4). The GoU then began taking steps to enable domestic proceedings as an alternative to ICC prosecutions, widely assessed by legal observers as an effort to trigger the complementarity provisions of the Rome Statute (Nouwen and Werner 2010, 952; Otim and Wierda 2010, 3). Key measures taken include the passing of the International Criminal Court Act (2010), and the establishment of the War Crimes Division of the High Court of Uganda (now the International Crimes Division [ICD]) (Otim and Wierda 2010, 3). Jeffrey has argued that the aim of the ICD’s establishment was to “allow the ICC to withdraw its indictments against the LRA leaders” (Jeffery 2011, 90).

There is widespread public support for the Amnesty Act in Acholiland, the area most affected by the war, primarily because it was seen as the most effective way to bring the war to an end (Branch 2007, 184). However, the Amnesty Act is incompatible with the Rome Statute and international criminal law; as Cassese observes,

as international crimes constitute attacks on universal values, no single State should arrogate to itself the right to decide to cancel such crimes, or to set aside their legal consequences ... the requirement to dispense justice should trump the need to respect State sovereignty. (quoted in Newman 2005, 344)

It is unlikely that the ICC would have withdrawn the indictments, regardless of any agreements made at Juba. This was pointed out in 2005 by Peter Onega, the Chairperson of Uganda’s Amnesty Commission:

Since the ICC takes precedence over our national laws, even people already granted amnesty could be taken for trial before the ICC – if this happens the amnesty process and the law will be rendered useless. (as quoted in Ssenyonjo 2007, 425).

The Juba peace talks ultimately did not result in a signed agreement, and the LRA moved away from northern Uganda and into neighbouring Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Central African Republic (CAR). Northern Uganda gradually adjusted to a relative peace, and IDPs began returning to their homes from late 2008 onwards. Concerns in northern Uganda progressively shifted away from the legal and political conundrums raised by the tensions between the Amnesty Act and possible prosecutions of LRA leaders (whether domestic or international), towards more immediate issues. In 2013, “as years passed without arrests, the Court has begun to look at winding down operations” in Uganda (Tenove 2013, 5). It increasingly seemed that the many difficult questions raised by the Ugandan situation would remain unresolved; the January 2015 surrender of Dominic Ongwen, allegedly the second-in-command of the LRA, however, has re-enlivened many of these debates. Dominic Ongwen surrendered to United States forces in the CAR in January 2015, and is currently in custody at the ICC. Charges against Ongwen were confirmed by the ICC in March 2016 and the trial date is yet to be set (ICC 2016).

8.1.5.2 Acholi women’s views on amnesty and accountability

The majority of women interviewed expressed views which are broadly supportive of the ICC’s approach to criminal prosecutions – namely, that Joseph Kony and senior LRA

commanders need to be held accountable for their actions, and that lower ranking LRA cadres, particularly those who were abducted, should receive Amnesty and be permitted to return to live in their communities. Irrespective of whether women supported prosecution, or preferred that Kony and senior LRA commanders be granted Amnesty, almost all expressed their views in the context of needing a resolution to the conflict, and a guarantee of non-recurrence. Caroline was of the opinion that the prospect of prosecutions would prolong the war, and therefore wanted Amnesty to be extended also to senior LRA commanders:

*No, they should not be punished. ... Punishing them will bring us more crisis in the region, they should instead be given Amnesty and later undergo traditional peace building mechanisms to restore their relationship with the community.*³⁸⁷

Marlene, however, was firm that Kony has had multiple opportunities to make peace, and can no longer be trusted. For Marlene, only his capture will assure peace:

*If the ICC can, it should arrest Joseph Kony himself as a Chief Rebel Commander. Kony can never surrender or come to apologise. He needs to be captured. He should be killed in the same way he has done to people including other rebel leaders in his company. Many peace talks have been held but he just keeps changing his position.*³⁸⁸

A small but significant number of women do not support prosecution of any of the LRA leadership, including Joseph Kony. This was expressed primarily as a desire for peace, and a belief that peace would be best achieved through complete Amnesty.

Carmel saw prosecution as “*the government’s way of doing things,*” and that it was not in keeping with Acholi traditional justice.³⁸⁹ Rosalyn expressed compassion for Kony, and a desire for recognition of their shared humanity:

*I know Kony wronged, but I think he does not have to be punished. They need to be forgiven, we need each other, they are also human beings.*³⁹⁰

Florence based her views on what would be most likely to bring her some healing. She saw little value in prosecuting:

*If Kony comes up to apologise it would relieve me from the pain I have accumulated as a result of his action. Arresting and trying Kony for his actions can not relieve me of the pain he has caused me.*³⁹¹

The opinion that Kony and other senior LRA commanders should be Amnestied or forgiven, however, was the less common view. The more prevalent view expressed by women was that Kony and other senior LRA commanders needed to be brought in from the bush, so they could be assured that the war was over. The overwhelming majority of women saw two main criteria for determining who should be prosecuted, and who should receive Amnesty: the nature of crimes committed; and whether the person “went willingly,” or was abducted. Most women believed that people who were abducted should not be prosecuted, and that the

³⁸⁷ Interviewed March 18, 2014.

³⁸⁸ Interviewed March 20, 2014.

³⁸⁹ Interviewed June 25, 2014.

³⁹⁰ Interviewed January 23, 2014.

³⁹¹ Interviewed January 22, 2014.

Amnesty Act should remain in place for lower-ranking LRA cadres and abducted individuals. As Josamary explained:

*They should not be punished because this will hinder them from coming back. They should be forgiven. ... Punishment should be done to those who did the most atrocities during the war.*³⁹²

Helen's words reflect a majority view – a desire that efforts to encourage the voluntary return of LRA members be continued:

*Kony has caused us so much suffering. It is because of Kony that I never got a chance to go to school. Today I don't have a future – I am labouring, I am suffering. I think the government, if the government can get Kony and capture him wherever he is... He should be captured. They should prosecute him and send him to jail. But those people who are still in captivity ... they should ... if there was a way A possibility that should see how to help them return home. Because for us, we heard from the radio that they would send announcements that those who are still in captivity, "Please come home, there is nothing wrong with your case but please come home." These announcements are not running on the radio anymore – I don't even know why but they should send these announcements to them to give them the courage to return home. They should be allowed to also settle back home.*³⁹³

Some women thought that both LRA commanders and some agents of the State should be prosecuted for their involvement in the war. As Sophie said:

*I believe in forgiveness for all, but if there is to be punishment then it should be for Kony and some people in the government.*³⁹⁴

Indeed, the ICC decision to prosecute only LRA members has been criticised from a range of stakeholders, including Acholi community leaders (Lawino 2012; Walusimbi 2015), civil society organisations (ASF and JRP 2013, 8; JRP 2013, 5), and legal and international politics scholars (Otim and Kihika 2015, 7; Waddell and Clark 2008, 42).

When the ICC first began investigating the GoU-LRA war in 2004, many Acholi leaders were concerned that indictments would hinder the peace process. A delegation of Acholi leaders travelled to the Hague to meet with the ICC Prosecutor and to discuss their concerns. While some concerns that prosecution will impair efforts at peace still remain (as evinced by lobbying for the reinstatement of Part II of the Amnesty Act in 2013 – footnote refs), it seems that a mix of targeted Amnesty and targeted prosecutions is acceptable to Acholi women participating in this study. This echoes the findings of other consultations and surveys of "victims' views" conducted over the last five or more years (JRP 2013; UNOHCHR 2007; ASF and JRP 2013). A study by the UNOHCHR noted a diversity of views, but

certain trends do emerge in perspectives on these themes. Most notably, this research study shows that the population broadly believes that both the LRA and the Government – and specifically their leaders – should be held accountable for the harms they have caused during the conflict. (2007, ii)

³⁹² Interviewed February 6, 2014.

³⁹³ Interviewed June 18, 2014.

³⁹⁴ Interviewed February 10, 2014.

A 2013 consultation by Avocats Sans Frontieres (ASF) and the Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP) returned similar findings – ongoing support for the continuation of grants of Amnesty for lower-ranking LRA members and abductees, but prosecution of Kony and senior commanders for their crimes committed (ASF and JRP 2013, 12). The report also noted the difficulty in determining who is a perpetrator and who is a victim. The impending case of Dominic Ongwen will crystallise many of these unclear boundaries; Ongwen was abducted as a young boy (around ten-years old), but rose through the ranks to become a senior commander who gave orders for horrific atrocities. A group of women discussing Ongwen’s situation during the Validation Workshop held on 18 June 2015 appreciated the difficulty:

- Woman 1: *The issue of Dominic is a hard one*
Woman 2: *He was very close to Kony.*
Woman 3: *Dominic was also abducted when he was young.*
Woman 4: *Yes, he was abducted when he was young.*
Woman 1: *But when he gives you an order you have to follow. If you don’t you also die. You die.*
Woman 2: *(Deep sigh) The kinds of killings that some people have done in this world is so so painful.*³⁹⁵

Women’s understanding of the ICC and its processes was very low; many had never heard of it, while others had only a vague understanding that “*it is a very high court,*” “*it wants to catch Kony.*” Some women had heard of the ICC, but misunderstood its purpose and function. Victoria, who had been abducted and was a forced “wife” of a commander, was supportive of ICC prosecution, but (reflecting a lack of detailed accurate knowledge about the ICC) was concerned that the ICC would also seek to prosecute her:

*Kony should be prosecuted, but not those who were abducted. It makes me afraid that when they start prosecuting Kony, they will come also for us.*³⁹⁶

Most women were interested in knowing more about the ICC. Esther recommended that meetings should be held in villages, so that women can more easily attend and participate:

*Such meetings (ICC discussions) should be brought nearer to the village so that everyone can benefit. We are hoping that some support shall be given to people who attend these meetings in future.*³⁹⁷

Anna felt she had been excluded through a lack of knowledge of the ICC, saying that, had she known, she would have liked to participate as a witness in proceedings:

*The community has to be educated on transitional justice and the processes involved there in, they should be made aware of what is involved and how it functions, because most of us do not know how to demand or mobilise for realisation of justice. I did not get any chance or opportunity to participate otherwise I would have testified as to how my husband was killed and my son abducted in my presence.*³⁹⁸

³⁹⁵ Interviewed June 18, 2015.

³⁹⁶ Interviewed September 24, 2013.

³⁹⁷ Interviewed March 19, 2014.

³⁹⁸ Interviewed January 30, 2014.

As already stated, the researchers returned to Uganda in June 2015 and met with a group of women who had participated in the research, to present initial analysis to them and to allow them input as to the direction and progress of the research. This Validation Workshop was timely in that, unlike fieldwork interviews, it was held after the surrender of Ongwen.³⁹⁹ During discussions, women raised Ongwen's surrender and said that it had sparked a number of debates in their communities. In particular, it has enlivened questions about the nexus of Amnesty and prosecution, and of the distinction between "victim" and "perpetrator." Importantly, it has also fuelled fears among people who have received Amnesty, afraid that they, too, may be prosecuted; this has had a destabilising effect on them, and their relationships within their communities. Olive, who had spoken to researchers in 2014 about the stigmatisation she and other returnees were facing in the community, said that this had escalated dramatically following Ongwen's surrender, and that some community members were taunting returnees about soon being prosecuted and hanged. Finally, women said that the surrender of Ongwen, and the revival of community-level discussions about his prospective trial, had brought back traumatic memories of atrocities and mass human rights violations committed by both UPDF and LRA forces during the war, indicating an increased and urgent need for psychosocial support.

Little up-to-date information is available about the impact of Ongwen's surrender and prospective ICC trial; however, the Refugee Law Project held a consultation in Gulu on January 16, 2015 (ten days after Ongwen's surrender), to hear community members' views (RLP 2015). The report which followed that consultation reflects similar tensions – difficulty distinguishing between victims and perpetrators; indecision between prosecution and Amnesty; debates over whether Ongwen should face criminal or traditional justice; and further debates as to whether he should be tried in an international or domestic court. The report also addresses questions of government liability, with some participants arguing that "the Government, the army, the police, the community, the parents, the school, all different groups or categories who failed to protect this child from abduction are liable" (RLP 2015, 5).

Given the contentious history of ICC involvement in Uganda, the low levels of understanding among many Acholi women, and the precarious peace that currently exists in many communities, it is imperative that the ICC work in collaboration with multiple civil society organisations and community leaders to engage all affected communities, including those that are not directly implicated in the prospective trial of Ongwen. This engagement needs to be bi-directional, so that the ICC is kept updated about debates, tensions, rumours, and fear-mongering that may be happening within communities; this is necessary to allow the ICC to be able to disseminate accurate information about the implications of Ongwen's surrender, and the progress of proceedings. These engagements need to ensure that women are included, and are able to ask questions and express their views. This may mean separate meetings or avenues of communication for women.

³⁹⁹ Conducted on June 18, 2015.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION

The twenty-year war between the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army has wrought devastation throughout Acholiland and other regions of northern Uganda. Women have suffered particular harms during the war, and are experiencing ongoing violence, marginalisation, and deprivation in the fragile post-conflict environment.

This research spoke with 98 women impacted by violence in northern Uganda, ranging from 21 to 90 years of age, who had lived through the war. This report presents their views and experiences about women's justice needs, and highlights some key harms (both past and ongoing) that require a justice response.

A key message arising from this research is that gender sensitive justice cannot be approached in an atomistic manner. For justice to be effective for women, it needs to be holistic, and to take into account the complex social, economic, cultural, and political contexts in which harms are inflicted, and in which justice needs to be delivered. Poverty, violence, and patriarchy combine to produce a landscape in which women are exposed to an intersecting web of harms. Justice, accordingly, needs to be designed to incorporate legal, psychosocial, economic, and politico-cultural remedies that, together, will better enable women to live sustainable, dignified lives, free from violence and with opportunities for their children into the future.

This report has highlighted the legacies of harm and injustice that have been created, both by enforced and prolonged mass displacement, and from forced abduction. The war has caused enormous damage to the social fabric of Acholi communities; women, men, and children have all been directly and personally affected by the war. While many women showed admirable resilience, the war has, as the UN Peace Building Fund observed in 2012, “[led] to a drastic increase in mental illness, which is linked to general distress and a decrease in social cohesion and community resilience” (Wielders and Amutjojo 2012, 10). A great many Acholi men began drinking alcohol excessively in the IDP camps, and continue to do so today. The high rates of drinking are fuelling alarming levels of violence, much of which is directed against women. For many women, therefore, the war has not ended, as they continue to live with extraordinary levels of violence.

Women have been left to take almost exclusive responsibility for household productivity, including both work in the home and in the fields; in the latter, they work long hours doing backbreaking agricultural work without adequate tools, livestock, or other agricultural inputs (such as seeds and fertiliser). Despite their disproportionate contribution to household economies, women have not achieved a commensurate level of power over household economic decision-making. Too often, the fruits of women's labour are spent on alcohol, which in turn feeds greater violence against them.

Since returning home from IDP camps, there has been a significant rise in conflict over land. Widows and unwed mothers (whether through abduction, encampment, or family breakdown) are especially disadvantaged in access to land. Given the centrality of land to the Acholi economy and social structures, this exclusion has profound ramifications for women's economic, physical, and social well-being.

Women who have returned from abduction, particularly those who have returned with children, are facing stigmatisation and discrimination in their communities. The process of reintegration focused almost exclusively on initial reception and return, leaving communities to wrestle with the complex and delicate task of reconciliation. While some communities and groups are doing important and effective reconciliation work, such efforts are isolated and small scale. There is an increasing body of evidence emerging to indicate a growing rift between former abductees and other members of the communities. In the absence of government leadership and a national discussion about the war, communities are beginning to blame their past and current suffering on returnees. This rift has the potential to destabilise northern Uganda's fragile peace, particularly in the context of widespread poverty, trauma, alcoholism, violence, and land conflicts.

Acholi women expressed a strong desire for reconciliation, and a willingness to talk and listen. Acholi culture values forgiveness and social harmony highly. These attributes provide a strong foundation for reconciliation and healing, but this task cannot be left to impoverished, war-affected communities alone.

In all these issues, women are profoundly distanced from justice. Healthcare services, education and legal protection in northern Uganda are all inadequate, and are failing to respond to women's justice needs. Police posts and courts are too expensive and too far away from communities to provide effective legal protections. They are often patriarchal and sometimes corrupt. Health services are under-staffed and lack necessary drugs and equipment. Despite a policy of free Universal Primary Education, schools charge fees for tuition, books, uniforms, and other items, with the result that few Acholi children are able to attain a complete primary education. Disrupted and incomplete education is a major concern for women in Acholiland, who told this research project that they see a proper education as foundational to their children's and communities' future stability and success.

There are many women in northern Uganda that are ready to take an active role in delivery of justice and in harnessing political action towards women's greater benefit. Many women in this study talked about wanting to see other women as actors in justice and political spaces throughout society however, few women are currently in such roles.

Traditional justice mechanisms are far more accessible to women, and it is to these that most women turn for help with violence, stigma, or land disputes. Traditional leaders, however, vary greatly in their appreciation of women's justice needs. Due to Acholi culture's patrilineal structure, women move to their husband's home upon marriage, and it is from his clan leaders that women must seek justice. Too often, this results in an inadequate response, in which women are advised to "be patient," and to learn to cope with injustice.

Transitional justice for most women is very distant and theoretical. While reparations and compensation have been promised, little has been delivered. Women see the Government of Uganda as having the power and responsibility to drive transitional justice, including through the payment of reparations, the memorialisation of victims, and the delivery of an apology for the conflict. They also, however, have very little trust in the government to deliver them justice; women were aware of many instances in which the government made (ultimately unfulfilled) promises of help, particularly relating to assistance in returning home from the camps.

The Government of Uganda has produced a draft National Transitional Justice Policy addressing five key thematic areas: amnesty, criminal justice, truth telling, traditional justice, and reparations. If approved and enacted holistically, this policy holds great promise to substantively address many of the harms caused by the war. The policy currently does not include an acknowledgement of violations committed by State actors, a formal apology for the State's role in the war, or a guarantee of non-recurrence of fighting, all of which were raised by women as important elements of justice. The policy has been awaiting approval from Cabinet for the last twelve months.

Women overwhelmingly believe that the leaders of the LRA need to be held accountable for their actions, whether by the Government of Uganda or the International Criminal Court. There is general support for the involvement of the ICC, but a low understanding of how it works, who it is prosecuting, or how it affects those who have returned. Women were also critical of both the ICC's and the Government of Uganda's focus on violations committed by the LRA, to the exclusion of those committed by State actors – chiefly, the UPDF – leading up to, and during, the period of encampment.

9.1 Recommendations

To the Government of Uganda:

- Progress the draft National Transitional Justice Policy, and take immediate concrete steps towards its implementation.
- Broaden the terms for reparations to include violations committed in relation to internal displacement, and to address harms arising from encampment. Reparations need to be embedded within other transitional justice mechanisms (such as a truth-telling process, a national apology, and prosecutions), in order to maximise their reparative value. Victim-survivors, however, should not have to wait for such mechanisms to conclude in order to receive reparations; a mechanism for interim reparations should be immediately established.
- Ensure the representation of women from identified vulnerable groups (notably widows, formerly abducted women, former IDP women, and child mothers) in the design of transitional justice mechanisms (including reparations).
- Acknowledge the harm caused by both the action and inaction of the State during the war, including its failure to protect its citizens against abduction and attacks from the LRA, and the violations committed against Ugandan citizens by the UPDF and government-backed militias, including looting and destruction of property, beatings, rape, and killings.
- Prohibit the charging of any fees for primary education, to ensure that all children can receive a full and uninterrupted primary education.
- Continue efforts to address land conflicts, with particular attention on the vulnerability of women (notably widows and unwed mothers).

To the international community:

- The ICC should ensure that, as proceedings against Dominic Ongwen progress, it proactively seeks to learn and understand the effects this may be having in northern Ugandan communities, and to communicate information about its processes among

communities. Outreach activities need to be designed in a gender-sensitive manner to ensure that women are accessed directly and through any intermediary.

- Governments of donor nations and inter-governmental organisations can maintain pressure on the Government of Uganda to remain committed to its transitional justice agenda. The Cabinet has held the draft National Transitional Justice Policy for twelve months; some commentators within Uganda speculate that the policy has been shelved until the country's elections (due in 2016) are completed. It is unacceptable for political concerns to delay urgently needed reparative justice for victim-survivors of the war.
- The international community must maintain its determination to capture Joseph Kony and the remaining LRA commanders and cadres. The capture and disarmament of the LRA is foundational to women's security, as well as the communities' ability to move on.
- Governments of donor nations and inter-governmental organisations should particularly encourage the Government of Uganda to progress efforts at national reconciliation and reparations. There are concerning indications of escalating tensions and grievances, which risk the future durability of the current peace.

For service delivery and programming:

- Psychosocial and trauma counselling services are needed to assist women and men to recover from the conflict. Such services should be tailored to respond both to severe trauma (possibly requiring psychiatric intervention), and less acute trauma, including depression and anxiety. Programs that are being delivered in northern Uganda are proving to be efficacious. Such approaches should be expanded, perhaps through matched Government of Uganda and donor funds.
- Programs addressing alcohol consumption (particularly by men) are urgently needed. Current social services provision tends to focus on women more than men, but given the central role that excessive alcohol consumption plays in both reducing productivity and driving violence, helping men to significantly reduce alcohol consumption and resume productive and caring roles is likely to have a positive effect on families and communities.
- Domestic violence support services are urgently needed. While domestic violence shelters are a new phenomenon in northern Uganda, women have reported high levels of trust in them, and satisfaction with their services. Domestic violence programs will need to engage with traditional leaders and LCs, who are very often the first contact point for women outside the family. There is growing evidence that concern about the rate of domestic violence is shared by Acholi communities and their leaders (taking note in particular that International Alert reported that only 0.1 percent of Acholi respondents nominated culture as the cause of domestic violence, and none said that culture condones it). Top-down imported strategies are unlikely to be effective; rather, programmatic strategies that include traditional leaders from the inception and design stage are more likely to achieve success. Such programs should be considered in conjunction with trauma and alcohol services, as recommended above.
- Formal legal justice is effectively beyond the reach of most women in northern Uganda. Legal education and legal aid services for women have proven effective in improving women's access to justice, particularly in land disputes.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Research Assistants

Name	Role in Project
Christen Athos	Research Assistant
Andréa Brown	Research Assistant
Lucy Cameron	Research Assistant
Emma Campbell	Research Assistant
Natalie Czapski	Research Assistant
Lydia Gitau	Research Assistant
Chrisanthi Giotis	Research Assistant
Justine Gleeson	Research Assistant
Shirley Huang	Research Assistant
Alesia Kurlek	Research Assistant
Georgina Meikle	Research Assistant
Jesica Mwithia	Research Assistant
Danny Noonan	Research Assistant
Fiona Vuong	Research Assistant
Lara Warren	Research Assistant
Ellie Wolfenden	Research Assistant
Remona Zheng	Research Assistant
Judy Zhu	Research Assistant

Appendix B: Demographic information – Uganda women participants*

		TOTAL	Agago	Amuru/Gulu	Pader
Total interviewed		98	23	57	18
Marital status	Married	18	5	8	5
	Widowed	16	4	9	3
	Cohabiting	8	0	7	1
	Separated	4	0	3	1
	Single/unmarried	5	1	4	0
	Unknown	47	13	26	8
Age	18–25	11	4	3	4
	26–40	37	7	21	9
	41–55	24	6	13	5
	> 56	9	3	6	0
	Unknown	17	3	14	0
Educational level	None	6	0	6	0
	Primary 1–3 (Lower Primary)	13	2	7	4
	Primary 4 (Transition Year)	3	1	0	2
	Primary 5–7 (Upper Primary)	15	2	10	3
	Secondary 1–4 (Lower Secondary)	4	1	3	0
	Secondary 5–6 (Upper Secondary)	0	0	0	0
	Diploma	1	0	1	0
	Literate, no other information given	1	1	0	0
	Unknown	55	16	30	9

*Locations reflect location of interview. Amuru and Gulu were treated as one location due to proximity. In some instances, incomplete demographic data was collected and is presented as “unknown” in this table.