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Gender Biases and Armed Conflict: Assessing the Reintegration Experience of Women from the LRA

Pavelich, Kimberly

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Gender Biases and Armed Conflict:

Assessing the Reintegration Experience of Women from the LRA

by

Kimberly Susan Pavelich

A THESIS

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ABSTRACT

Women are actively involved as combatants in many irregular armed forces. This runs counter to a common belief that when involved with an armed group, women are limited to traditional gender roles such as cooking, cleaning, and being a wife. By opposing traditional gender assumptions during conflict, these women are often rejected or stigmatized by their community following their return from the force – indicating that they have failed in their reintegration post conflict. This represents the case for women who have returned from the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Northern Uganda. In seeking to explain this outcome for ex-LRA women in comparison to women who did not serve in the LRA, and to men who returned from the force as well, this thesis raises the question: *why are women who are returning from the LRA unsuccessful in their reintegration?*

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Lastly, I would like to thank the women that participated in my focus group discussions. Their candid accounts of their time in the LRA and experiences after they returned from the force will be forever etched into my memory. This thesis is dedicated to them and is testimony to all that they have been through and continue to experience.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CRNU	Community Reintegration in Northern Uganda: Challenges Facing Females
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FIDA	Uganda Association of Women Lawyers
FRONASA	Front for National Salvation
HRW	Human Rights Watch
HSM	Holy Spirit Movement
HSMF	Holy Spirit Movement Force
IAU	International Alert Uganda
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICTJ	International Center for Transitional Justice
IDDRS	Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
KKA	Ker Kwaro Acholi
LC	Local Council
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
MDRP	Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
NRA	National Resistance Army
NRM	National Resistance Movement
SCR	Security Council Resolution
SWAY	Survey of War-Affected Youth
TDRP	Transitional Demobilization and Reintegration Program
UFM	Uganda Freedom Movement
UN	United Nations
UNLA	Uganda National Liberation Army
UNRF	Uganda National Rescue Front
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UPDF	Uganda's People's Defence Force
UPF	Uganda Popular Front
UWONET	Uganda Women's Network

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“There are even women who fight more than men. Women contribute a lot to the war; they fought and did so many bad things. But when it comes to the justice process, only men were involved. Like any kind of support or services they were always for the men, so women are left out. It makes women fail to recover from the trauma that they had gone through. Because no one ever pays attention to what happens to them so they try to fight things by themselves. In the end some recover, some don’t...”

– Female returnee from the LRA speaking on women not being recognized as combatants.¹

In 1987, Joseph Kony – a self-proclaimed prophet – formed the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda’s northern Acholiland.² He claimed to receive orders from the spirit world, which called for a purification of the Acholi people for past sins they committed during previous conflicts. To carry out these orders, he led his army in vicious guerrilla warfare against the Ugandan government and anyone who collaborated with it.³ Violence committed in Uganda by the LRA, included raids, abductions, forced marriages, rapes, tortures, murders, and massacres.⁴ To increase its ranks and carry out this violence, however, the LRA relied heavily on the abductions of villagers. Not only were men and boys abducted into the fighting force, but women and girls were targeted as well.

Contrary to traditional gender roles in Uganda, women in the LRA participated in combat alongside men and took on diverse and multifaceted roles. Women helped to maintain LRA operations through support functions, including fetching firewood, raising crops, and selling goods, in addition to more strategic roles, such as carrying out reconnaissance

¹ Focus groups (20 August 2011), Koro Pancwala, Gulu

² Acholiland refers to the predominantly Acholi populated areas of Uganda, primarily located in the northern districts of Gulu, Kitgum, and Pader. See *Appendix I – Ethnographic Map of Uganda* and *Appendix II – District Map of Uganda*.

³ Tim Allen, *Trial Justice: The International Criminal Court and the Lord's Resistance Army* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2006). 39

⁴ The LRA is still active; however, they are no longer operating in Northern Uganda. It is suspected that LRA bases are now in the Central African Republic, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

missions, transporting ammunition and weapons, and defending LRA camps.⁵ Women also served in combat alongside men, abducted children, raided communities, killed civilians, and led troops into battle.

As active combatants, these women challenged traditional perceptions of gender in conflict, which tend to perceive women as victims. These perceptions perpetuate stereotypes that women in war are victims, powerless as individuals, and lack the ability to devise strategies to cope and survive, even in the most extreme circumstances.⁶ This ability to survive when faced with adversity is the agency of women that is often neglected in conflict and post-conflict settings by observers of the LRA. Considering women as legitimate combatants alongside men means they cannot simply be cast off as victims in conflict. If women remain categorized as victims, then their post-conflict needs cannot be adequately addressed.

Uganda is a country with a history of political upheaval. In addition, it is a country that is comprised of a multitude of cultural groups each rich with its own traditions, as is the case with the Acholi. To support the reintegration process of ex-combatants from the LRA in Northern Uganda, services and programs were created and implemented by governmental, non-governmental, and traditional actors. The reintegration process, however, is particularly difficult for women ex-LRA members to benefit from; which is in part due to these women being left out of discussions that shape such services and programs. This oversight stems from the prevailing assumption that while in conflict women were merely victims, giving the perception that they lacked any agency while in the force.

Problem to be explained

Upon leaving the LRA, ex-combatants (commonly referred to as formerly abducted persons or returnees) transition back to civilian life through formal and informal

⁵ Susan McKay, "Reconstructing Fragile Lives: Girls' Social Reintegration in Northern Uganda and Sierra Leone," *Gender and Development* 12, no. 3 (2004): 22

⁶ Fionnuala Ni Aolain, and Dina Francesca Haynes, Naomi Cahn, *On the Frontlines: Gender, War, and the Post-Conflict Process* (New York: Oxford, 2011): 8

reintegration processes. According to the United Nations (UN), reintegration is a long-term process consisting of both social and economic aspects. The social aspect requires ex-combatants to achieve community acceptance. The economic aspect requires ex-combatants to secure a sustainable and reliable income.⁷ Successful reintegration is extremely challenging to begin with, but when it needs to occur in a community that has nearly been torn apart by conflict it is almost unattainable.

In attempts to reintegrate socially and economically, women face a seemingly endless set of gender-specific barriers.⁸ Women and girls who act against gendered biases and cultural norms by participating in the LRA struggle to achieve social acceptance because of those same biases and norms once they return from the fighting force. Women are also prevented from gaining a reliable and sustainable income because of these same impediments, and because they return to a very poor economy. To show that women have not been successfully reintegrated, this thesis now presents data on the social and economic aspects of their experience.

Supporting data

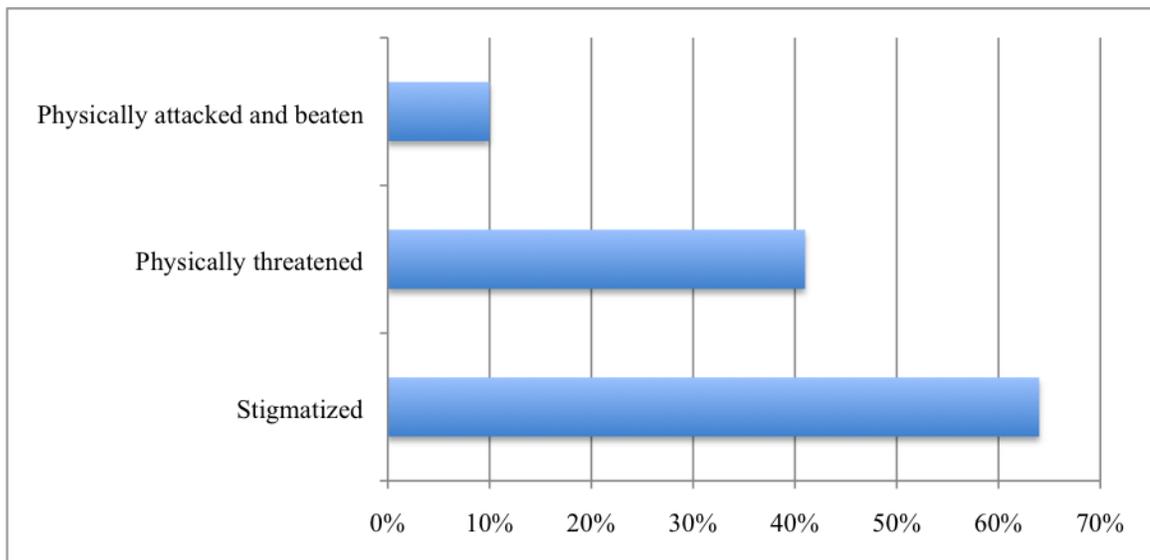
High levels of social stigmatization towards women returnees indicate that they have failed to reintegrate successfully. For example, although women physically returned to their community, they are still considered as “being from the bush”. This label suggests that they have not been fully accepted as a community member. In Northern Uganda, “being from the bush” is a colloquialism used when referring to individuals who have returned from – or were born in – LRA captivity, and is a term that holds negative connotations. The “bush” is in reference to the LRA operations being primarily based out of remote rural areas. All returnees face social stigma upon returning from the LRA, but for women the combination of stigma, shame, and social exclusion is particularly intense.

⁷ "Introduction to the IDDRS," in *Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards* (United Nations, 2006). 2

⁸ Anthony Finn, "The Drivers of Reporter Reintegration in Northern Uganda," (Washington. DC: Transitional Demobilization and Reintegration Program (TDRP), 2012). 1

Mazurana and Carlson, in their study “Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration: The Experiences and Roles of Girls in Sierra Leone and Northern Uganda”, examined the reintegration experience of girls returning from the LRA. For girls who attempted to reintegrate, the study found that the majority, 64 percent, reported feeling stigmatized, 41 percent reported being physically threatened, and 10 percent reported being physically attacked and beaten (see Table 1-1). Women who returned from the LRA with children reported the highest rates of stigmatization, threats, and abuse to themselves and their children.⁹ Findings from this study suggest that women and girls who return from the LRA have not been successful in the social aspect of their reintegration. Being treated as outcasts continuously reminds returnees of their role in the LRA, and physical threats and violence do not project community acceptance. As long as women and girls continue to experience stigmatization and physical threats when returning from the LRA, they cannot be considered fully accepted as community members.

Table 1-1: Challenges to Reintegration



⁹ The study did not provide numbers to differentiate between women who returned with children and those who did not. Susan McKay, and Dyan Mazurana, *Where Are the Girls?*, ed. Rights and Democracy Women's Rights (Montreal: International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, 2004). 84

A 2011 report, published by the Uganda Association of Women Lawyers (FIDA Uganda), found that out of 35 “girl mothers”¹⁰ interviewed within the community of Kasubi, only two had identified as having been successful in their reintegration.¹¹ The young women interviewed were faced with family rejection, inadequate land access and neglect from their community, all because of their alleged role in the conflict. A parallel study was conducted by FIDA in the community of Laroo, and involved girl mothers and women who did not return with children. This study produced findings similar to the study carried out in Kasubi reinforcing the argument that women have not fully gained community acceptance. These include, rejection by family, suspicion by community members and failed or fragile relationships with new partners.¹²

Studies on the post-conflict life of returnees, such as those presented above, suggest that women experience heightened levels of stigma and community rejection because of gender biases. These biases stem from gender perceptions that dictate the role and “ideal” image of women. Deviating from these images during conflict (even if was a means of survival) leads to their inability to meet gender expectations post-conflict. Chastity, for example, is a highly valued trait for women and girls in Acholi culture.¹³ Although women and girls in the LRA were forced to commit sexual acts against their will, when they returned to their community they were stigmatized as “spoiled goods.”¹⁴ Since community members continue to connect women returnees to their experiences in the LRA, these women are defamed, instead of being accepted.

Similar to women returnees, the post-conflict life of men who returned from the LRA is also rife with community stigmatization and rejection. These men are, however, received differently by their community in comparison to ex-LRA women. For example, men returning from the LRA are not barred from land ownership as a result of traditional

¹⁰ The term “girl mothers” originated to describe the high number of women who were abducted into the LRA as girls, but returned with children of their own.

¹¹ Kaari Betty Murungi, "Bearing Witness: Girl Mothers of Gulu District," (Kampala, Uganda: The Uganda Association of Women Lawyers (FIDA Uganda), 2011). 40

¹² Ibid. 40

¹³ Grace Maina, "Questioning Reintegration Processes in Northern Uganda," in *Conflict Trends* (Accord, 2009). 27

¹⁴ McKay, "Reconstructing Fragile Lives: Girls' Social Reintegration in Northern Uganda and Sierra Leone." 25

practices. Nor are men subjected to the ramifications associated with having children born while part of the LRA as women are. Community members also treat men differently when it comes to marriage. For example, when comparing men and women returnees it becomes apparent that ex-LRA men are more likely to be married than women upon return from the force. Ex-LRA men are also more likely to marry a non-LRA member than women returnees. This is because women who are identified as once being part of an armed group are among the least desired group for marriage (as a result of the above mentioned gender expectations) whereas men are not since they are not subjected to the same expectations.¹⁵ Marriage, land access, and negative implications associated with having a while in the LRA are just some examples showing how men returnees are received differently in comparison to women by their community. These differences will be further explored in the subsequent chapters, which address the mechanisms associated with reintegration.

In addition to social factors, there are also important economic factors in reintegration. The long-term goal of economic reintegration is the financial independence of ex-combatants. Markers of success in this area are more difficult to conceptualize than those in the area of social integration. The poor market economy in Northern Uganda causes both civilians and returnees to struggle in achieving a reliable economic livelihood. This makes measuring data pertaining to the economic aspect challenging, as it is difficult to discern whether the failure to economically reintegrate is connected specifically to returnee status, or whether it is primarily due to the broader economic environment.

According to a 2008 study by Survey of War-Affected Youth (SWAY), young women (who were either abducted or affected by the war in other ways) are the most economically constrained population in Northern Uganda.¹⁶ These young women are more likely than others to be illiterate, and less likely to transition into secondary school. They are also the most restricted population in terms of occupational options and

¹⁵ Ibid. 12.

¹⁶ Data gathered for this SWAY study was obtained from interviews with 619 young women and girls between October 2006 and August 2007. Jeannie Annan, and C. Blattman, D. Mazurana, and K. Carlson, "The State of Female Youth in Northern Uganda," ed. Survey of War-Affected Youth (Survey of War-Affected Youth, 2008). 86

opportunities for land ownership.¹⁷ These economic constraints, which overlap with social constraints in some aspects, contribute to the lack of reliable and sustainable income of women returnees from the LRA. Findings from the study identified a substantial economic gap between men returnees and their non-abducted male peers, and indicated that returnees earn approximately one third less in wages. In contrast, the study's findings indicated a much smaller gap between the wages of formerly abducted women and their non-abducted peers. Employment among formerly abducted women was shown as moderately lower than that of non-abductees, with only a slight difference in their daily wages.¹⁸ The difference between men and women's economic opportunities can be explained by the fact that women generally have far more limited economic opportunities than do men. Women are limited by factors such as lack of education and limited access to resources, which is explored in further detail in Chapter 4: Economic Mechanisms.

Although the SWAY study was conducted in 2008, in an economic environment quite different from the present day, it is still somewhat reflective of the current economic situation for women returnees. Women remain economically constrained due to limited occupational options, education gaps, high rates of illiteracy, and marginalization from land ownership. Out of these constraints, access to land ownership is a large indicator of reintegration failure as land is a primary source of livelihood for the Acholi.¹⁹ Many women with no access to land decide to reintegrate to urban centers in order to secure another form of livelihood, such as selling and hawking goods in the marketplace.²⁰ But participation in sporadic economic activities, such as hawking goods, is not necessary an indicator of reintegration success. This is because reintegration is an ongoing process, and until an individual has a reliable form of income to support themselves and their family they will not be considered successfully reintegrated.

¹⁷ Ibid. 86

¹⁸ Refer to Chapter 4 for a detailed socio-economic comparison between men and women, returnees and community members.

¹⁹ Gareth McKibben, and James Bean, "Land or Else: Land-Based Conflict, Vulnerability, and Disintegration in Northern Uganda," (International Organization for Migration 2010). 7

²⁰ Murungi, "Bearing Witness: Girl Mothers of Gulu District." 39

Research question

Women who returned from the LRA suffer disproportionately when compared to other Ugandan women. This is because, in addition to gender biases embedded within their society, returnees experience challenges associated with reintegration. Such challenges are shown through experiences of stigmatization, shame, social exclusion, and the inability to secure the necessities of life. Women are also failing to reintegrate differently when compared to their male counterparts. Although ex-LRA men and women are struggling in the social and economic dimensions of reintegration related to being once part of the armed group, women experience unique challenges stemming from deeply entrenched gender biases found within their community and reintegration services. In seeking to explain this outcome for women ex-LRA, this thesis raises the question: *why are women who are returning from the LRA unsuccessful in their reintegration?*

This thesis answers the question by first explaining why women are failing to reintegrate, and by identifying and assessing the possible explanations found in the literature. With a gender responsive objective,²¹ influenced by feminist theory, this thesis concludes by arguing that an important and misunderstood *cause of the failure of women to reintegrate is the neglect of their agency as combatants by outside observers of the LRA (such as those holding Acholi cultural beliefs, the Ugandan government, non-governmental organizations (NGO), and any other actors involved in the reintegration process.)*.

Literature Review

The reintegration process encompasses factors that both enable and obstruct an individual's successful reintegration. One way to conceptualize reintegration failure is in the presence of visible differences in the economic and social factors between returnees and community members.²² In Northern Uganda, the main factors associated with the reintegration process include:

²¹ "Gender Responsive Objectives" refers to the ambition of this thesis to conduct its argument in a way that is non-discriminatory, equally beneficial to women and men, and aimed at correcting gender imbalances. "Women, Gender and Ddr," in *Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards* (United Nations, 2006). 25

²² Julian Hopwood, and Chessa Osburn, "Sharing the Burden of the Past," ed. Justice and Reconciliation Project and Quaker Peace and Social Witness (2008). 6

“...community sensitisation, formal disarmament and demobilisation, a period of transition in an Interim Care Centre, tracing and family mediation, family reunification, traditional cleansing and healing ceremonies and religious support, school or skills training, ongoing access to healthcare for those in school or training, and individual supportive counselling, facilitation and encouragement.”²³

In the efforts of service providers and developers to address these factors, there is a tendency for reintegration programs to be uniform in their assistance to returnees. This is because there is a strategic benefit in this approach as it is able to reach the mass amount of returnees from the LRA. While implementing uniform reintegration programs is a practical choice, there is the risk of neglecting diverse combinations of factors that contribute to reintegration success or failure.²⁴

Anthony Finn emphasizes the need to be cognizant of the individualistic nature of reintegration. He describes the reintegration process as unique to each individual because of the various combinations of barriers returnees experience when navigating the physical and symbolic terrain as they re-enter their community.²⁵ Finn also recognizes that there are common factors that affect each returnee. Common factors that influence returnees include social and economic experiences, characteristics of armed group, demographic factors, and each individual’s life circumstances. Finn describes that it is not individual factors that make reintegration unique, but how each factor influences the others. For instance, the way various factors combine with one another in each individual case presents each returnee with a different set of barriers to reintegration.

In assessing reintegration, four broad factors emerge as being critical in influencing various elements within an individual’s reintegration experience: the *individual*, the *community*, the *environment* into which the reintegration is taking place, and *gender*.

²³ Ibid. 6

²⁴ Finn, "The Drivers of Reporter Reintegration in Northern Uganda." 2

²⁵ Ibid. 2

They are interrelated factors that either positively or negatively influence the various elements within an individual's reintegration process. Each of the four broad factors embodies explanations for the reintegration failure of LRA returnees.

The idea that the *individual* influences reintegration stems from the argument that the process of reintegration is shaped by life circumstances. Akello et al. identify failed reintegration at an individual level to be the result of the psychosocial trauma of an individual, which leads to behavioral problems or to the habitual return to violence as a survival strategy.²⁶ Individual influencers also include the length of time or experience within the LRA, and how the individual identifies himself or herself, either within or outside of the LRA. For example, a returnee from the LRA reflected that while in the LRA she was "someone," and now that she is back in her community she is "no one."²⁷ In this case, her negative experience in the community upon returning from the LRA led her to romanticize how life would have been if she never returned from the force. Her experiences, both during- and post-conflict, have negatively influenced her ability to successfully reintegrate. The argument that the individual is the determining factor in examining the success of reintegration centers on the drive and life circumstances of the returnee. The weakness of this explanation is that it is incomplete. It neglects the external factors that are not controlled by the individual, such as the community's willingness to welcome back the returnee.

Explanations for reintegration failure that focus on the *community* encompass the argument that the reintegration process is dependent on, and influenced by, the ability of the community to accept the returnee. For women, especially those who return with children, the community may be hesitant to fully accept them back as a community member. According to Akello et al., the reluctance of a community to accept a child who was forced to kill others, or a child fathered in the "bush" by a rebel father, often leads to

²⁶ Grace Akello, and Annemiek Richters, Ria Reis, "Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers in Northern Uganda: Coming to Terms with Children's Agency and Accountability," *Intervention* 4, no. 3 (2006). 229

²⁷ Focus groups (20 August 2011), Koro Pancwala, Gulu

the rejection or stigmatization of the woman and child returnee.²⁸ Since community acceptance is a key component of reintegration, if the returnee is unable to gain community this acceptance they are not successfully reintegrated. While explanations at the community level offer a clear argument for reintegration failure, these explanations are inadequate on their own. They do not account for the ability, or lack thereof, that an individual has in making decisions which shape their life post-conflict. Nor do they account for the market or political environment, which are external influencers to reintegration (separate from the community factors).

Explanations for reintegration failure are often sought at an individual or community level, despite the gaps presented above.²⁹ This is because these factors, particularly when combined, address the fundamental reasons why an individual will succeed or fail in their reintegration – self-determination to succeed and willingness of the community to accept the returnee as a community member. A further analysis probes into the importance of these factors: for example, what influences the community's ability to accept the returnee back into the community? Or, which factors influencing the life experiences of a returnee lead to reintegration success or failure? Two general themes emerge when the individual and community levels are further examined: the specific environment into which the returnee is reintegrating, and the gender of the returnee.

Individuals as a whole in Northern Uganda experience difficulties in their daily lives due to the social and economic challenges found in a post-conflict setting. The tenuous *environment* in Northern Uganda is not conducive to a “normal” or productive life for returnees, and undermines attempts at reintegration.³⁰ The challenging environment is a consequence of the two-decade long conflict and a lack of post-conflict reconstruction in the region. Although gradually improving, inhabitants of war-affected Northern Uganda continue to be plagued by high mortality rates, strains on kinship networks, low security, land devastated as a result of the war, limited livelihood opportunities, and an overall

²⁸ Akello, "Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers in Northern Uganda: Coming to Terms with Children's Agency and Accountability." 229

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Tim Allen, and Mareike Schomerus, "Lessons Learned Form the Reception Center Process in Northern Uganda," ed. Independent Study (USAID and UNICEF, 2006). 5

weak micro-economy.³¹ The devastation caused by this conflict has made reintegration in Northern Uganda virtually impossible.

The poor economy and altered social structure (resulting from people being displaced following the conflict) impedes the chances of reintegration success for ex-combatants. The altered environment and social structure has disrupted traditional roles and customary practices. This has caused people to find new ways to acquire an income, interact with others (particularly between men and women, elders and youths), and carry out traditional justice practices (Chapter 5 addresses how traditional practices for justice and reconciliation are not in place to deal with many of the atrocities resulting from LRA actions). In addition to the easily identifiable social and economic factors, political factors play an important role in the reintegration process.

Unaddressed grievances and a perceived lack of interest by the government in capturing Kony have fostered an environment of mistrust and animosity towards the government by the Acholi people. Until the root causes of the conflict are addressed, the environment in Northern Uganda will not be conducive for successful, long-term, reintegration. This is because the root of the current political grievances is partly found in the story of sectional alienation between the northern and southern parts of the country. This division resulted in decades of war between the north and the south.³² Because of the cycle of brutality, many Acholi believe that their present troubles stem from Museveni's (who is from the south) continuing hostility towards them.³³ If the bitterness of the Acholi people towards the government remains unaddressed, the reintegration process will be undermined because returnees are faced with returning to an environment where people remain angry and frustrated with the government. Due to the history of rebellions in Uganda (to be further addressed in Chapter 2), for reintegration to be a successful process, the feelings of resentment held by the Acholi people must be addressed and incorporated into the actions taken by the Uganda government. This step is necessary in order to prevent a resurgence

³¹ Ibid.

³² Faith McDonnell, and Grace Akallo, *Girl Soldier* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2007). 70

³³ Ibid. 74

of violence being taken as a means to address unmet grievances, which is the crux behind the implementation of reintegration programs for ex-combatants.

Individual, community, and environmental factors offers explanations for why returnees are failing to reintegrate, regardless of gender. These explanations, however, fail to fully address the unique obstacles or barriers facing women ex-combatants. Gender is an influencing factor present within the arguments of reintegration failure involving the environment, individual, and community. It centers on the argument that the reintegration process is influenced by the patriarchal structures forming the society into which individuals are reintegrating. Using gender as an explanation for reintegration failure addresses the social and institutional structures that are shaped by the gendered environment. These components are often overlooked by the general explanations based on individual, community or environmental elements.

Gender has an overarching influence on each of the addressed explanations of the reintegration failure. This is because of the embedded gender biases at cultural and institutional levels, which influences the reintegration process. Due to these biases, when seeking explanations to explain the reintegration failure for women explanations that encompass a gender component need to be addressed. For instance, in comparison to men women and girls are more likely to experience difficulties in certain areas that contribute to reintegration success. These factors include: literacy, incidences of domestic violence, limited access to reintegration services, unreliable income, lack of education, marginalization in terms of land access, multiple child dependents, and family conflicts upon return.³⁴

According to Finn, in Northern Uganda, gender influences the reintegration process for women because of four main assumptions: 1) the perceived economic burden to the family of supporting women returnees and their children; 2) a lack of acceptance of the value to fully reintegrate of returnees, or a lack of understanding for the reasons for accepting family members who often spent a long time in captivity; 3) the social burden

³⁴ Annan, "The State of Female Youth in Northern Uganda." 85

of having a woman household member who will possibly never marry; and 4) the cultural standard of not accepting children into the family who are not part of the patriarchal bloodline.³⁵ In addition, women who are struggling to reintegrate are likely experiencing difficulties in accessing land, and family credit. Those returning with children often have more difficulty maintaining stable relationships or family structures. Finn argues that the barriers “informed by negative traditional perceptions of gender will transform into the systematic exclusion of women and forced poverty for those women without the social capital to establish themselves independent of hostile kinship networks and restrictive traditional practices where they occur.”³⁶

In addition to systematic exclusion and forced poverty of women, gender biases causes analysts to gloss over the reality that many women and girls participated in the LRA as combatants. A FIDA-Uganda publication, "Bearing Witness: Girl Mothers of Gulu District," cautions that these perceptions create a flawed analysis that “leads to inaccurate statistics and disadvantages the girls in the provision of demobilization services and reintegration packages which are almost entirely designed for male ex-combatants.”³⁷ The publication goes on to state that gender perceptions exclude women in other support services since the “lack of acknowledgement of girls’ roles as ex-combatants has also meant that women did not receive relevant counseling or support.”³⁸ Consequently, women are excluded from services that assist in the reintegration of returnees, which are almost exclusively catered to men.³⁹ The caution that gender perceptions influence the ultimate success of reintegration is an approach that will be used to support the argument put forth in this thesis. But the cultural biases and exclusion in reintegration services alone prove to be not enough when assessing explanations for the reintegration failure of women. What must be addressed, as the following section does, are the gaps in the literature (particularly those influencing policy) that perpetuate the neglect of women returnees’ unique reintegration needs.

³⁵ Finn, "The Drivers of Reporter Reintegration in Northern Uganda." 3

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Murungi, "Bearing Witness: Girl Mothers of Gulu District." 37

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

In a critique of the study of war, Cynthia Enloe asks: “where are the women?” Enloe’s question represents a critique shared by many feminist security scholars. At present the study of war is blinded by gender and neglects the wartime experiences of women.⁴⁰ Examinations of reintegration focus mainly on adult men and how they succeed or fail in reintegration. In contrast, examinations of women in post-conflict settings are limited and portray them as victims or passive participants. Subsuming women combatants, or ex-combatants, as victims creates gaps in the literature on armed groups. Although the literature is cognizant of the gendered biases, there has been little success in addressing these problems in reintegration policies and programs. The literature neglects to recognize that women in conflict are social actors with agency. This in the gap in the literature on the wartime involvement of women led to the research of this thesis. From the research findings the central argument of this thesis emerged, which argues that the ways women are portrayed and addressed in post-conflict services overlooks their agency as wartime actors – subsequently causing their reintegration attempts to be unsuccessful.

Methodology

This thesis approaches the problem of women failing to reintegrate in two parts. First, it assesses the reintegration experience of women returnees from the LRA by examining their experience in the social, economic, and political processes found in their community and then comparing it to the rest of the population. This thesis next uses these mechanisms to link the issue of agency to reintegration failure. Utilizing feminist security literature, this thesis identifies how the embedded gender biases influence the way women returnees are perceived and engaged. This thesis presents that these biases subsequently influence the way that women experience the social, economic, and political processes in their community, and subsequently their reintegration. The goal of this thesis is to reveal that without properly engaging women returnees as social actors in the conflict, their sustainable reintegration for is unlikely. However, before discussing the methods this research used, this section begins by conceptualizing key terms influencing the scope and language used in the analysis: reintegration, *cen*, and combatants.

⁴⁰ Megan MacKenzie, "Women, Gender, and Contemporary Armed Conflict," in *The International Studies Encyclopedia* (Robert A. Blackwell Publishing, 2010). 1

Key concepts

In the case of Northern Uganda, there has been limited success in the *reintegration* of returnees from the LRA because of the tenuous environment they must return to.

Assessing reintegration successes and failures in conflict and post-conflict environments comes with an important caveat: there is an absence of performance indicators in the reintegration process.⁴¹ With the absence of standardized criteria in evaluations of successful reintegration, this thesis conceptualizes reintegration in accordance with the UN established definition of reintegration.

“Reintegration is the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income. Reintegration is essentially a social and economic process with an open time frame, primarily taking place in communities at the local level. It is part of the general development of a country and a national responsibility, and often necessitates long-term external assistance” (Secretary-General, note to the General Assembly, A/C.5/59/31, May 2005).⁴²

Utilizing the UN definition of reintegration, this thesis identifies reintegration as a long-term two-part process encompassing social and economic aspects. The social process of reintegration has the end goal of social inclusion. The economic process of reintegration encompasses the ultimate aim of a sustainable income for an ex-combatant. This thesis identifies reintegration as part of an ongoing process, making reintegration more than simply reinserting an individual back into their community of origin. Readers should be careful to not confuse reintegration with the more immediate goals of reinsertion, which refers to the process involving the physical return into a community.

Cen is a cultural concept that must be addressed in assessments of reintegration in Northern Uganda. It mirrors post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in symptoms and

⁴¹ Maina, "Questioning Reintegration Processes in Northern Uganda." 51

⁴² "Glossary: Terms and Definitions," in *Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards* (United Nations, 2006). 19

cause. PTSD is anxiety disorder characterized by an individual reliving a traumatic situation. It includes a variety of symptoms (such as flashbacks, nightmares, depression, insomnia, and memory loss) that may occur soon after the event or even years later. The two concepts differ from one another because of cen's spiritual aspect and because the Acholi people believe that it can be healed through cultural practices. According to a report issued by Justice and Reconciliation Project and Quaker Peace and Social Witness titled "Sharing the Burden – Peer Support and Self Help Amongst Former LRA Youth" cen "refers to being possessed or attacked by vengeful spirits of the dead, causing nightmares and flashbacks; delusions, anxiety and confusion; disturbed behavior; unpredictable rages; physical and often debilitating pain; and severe misfortune, such as a sufferer's child dying or their home catching fire."⁴³ Cen contributes to higher levels of stigmatization because the Acholi fear that cen is contagious. It is a concept that can affect men, women, boys, and girls – anyone who had committed an act causing them to be "possessed by vengeful spirits."

After reviewing the literature available on the LRA, the recurring titles used to identify individuals who were once part of LRA include the following: returnee, formerly abducted person, and reporter ("reporter" is a colloquialism used by service providers in reference to individuals who reported their experience to their local government). In addition to these titles, women who have returned from the LRA are also called young mothers. This title reflects the phenomenon of young women who entered the LRA as children and re-entered their original community with children of their own.

This thesis uses the terms *ex-combatant* and *returnee* interchangeably when referring to both men and women who were once members of the LRA – these are both accepted terms within the literature addressing reintegration. The preferred term used in this thesis is *returnee* because it encompasses those who have, or have not, reported their experience within the LRA to their local officials, those who entered the LRA through abduction and those who did not, and those who returned from the LRA with children (typically categorized separately as girl mothers).

⁴³ Hopwood, "Sharing the Burden of the Past." 10

Gender Responsive Reintegration Assessment Framework

Recognizing there is limited literature on women in conflict and their reintegration, this thesis addresses that gap by assessing the reintegration experience of women returnees through employing a gender responsive framework (see Figure 1-1: Gender Responsive Reintegration Assessment Framework). This framework offers a comprehensive assessment of the reintegration of women returnee through comparing their post-conflict status to men returnees, and to women who were never abducted. This is to determine whether the challenges facing women is a result of being a returnee, a woman, or both. The components to be assessed within the framework used in this thesis were developed by the author in line with recommendations taken from the IDDRS publication and other literature targeting specifically women and girls in armed conflict.

The idea of this framework was first based on recommendations within the literature on women and girls returning from armed conflict. McKay and Mazurana, in their book “Where are the Girls?”, call for an application of a holistic approach when assessing women’s reintegration.⁴⁴ They argue in favor of this approach in order to overcome the tendency of assessments on women and girl’s post-conflict beginning from a place of “healing a victim”. The problem with the “healing a victim” approach, according to McKay and Mazurana, is that it encompasses a notion of regaining a norm that will never be regained.⁴⁵ They instead argue for a comprehensive assessment, to reflect the current environment in which women and girls are reintegrating into. This necessitates addressing the political, economic and social dimensions of the ex-combatant’s environment. Assessing the reintegration of women ex-combatants in these three dimensions is also a strategy recommended in the IDDRS publication.⁴⁶ Aware of the specific needs and concerns of women, section 5.10 of the IDDRS outlines recommendations for carrying out gender-responsive field/needs assessment. It

⁴⁴ McKay, *Where Are the Girls?* 122

⁴⁵ Ibid.

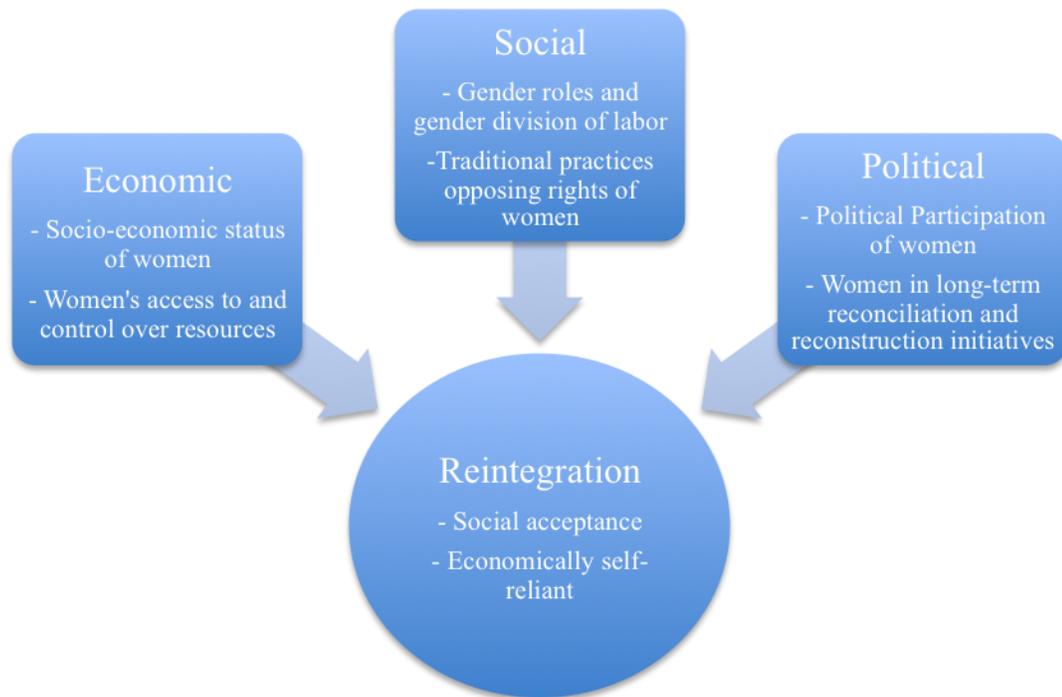
⁴⁶ "Women, Gender and Ddr." 28

recommends data to be collected in five areas: social and cultural context, political context, economic context, capacity and vulnerability, security, and specific needs.⁴⁷

The gender-responsive framework utilized in this thesis was developed from a combination of the recommendation for a comprehensive reintegration assessment and the recommendation for data gathering outlined in the IDDRS (see Figure 1-1 for a detailed description of the framework). The framework developed involves assessing the experience of women in comparison to others within their community in the social, economic, and political dimensions in the post-conflict environment. In the assessment, however, these dimensions will not be examined equally. The social and economic mechanisms will be examined at a local level within the communities that the ex-combatants are reintegrating into. The political mechanisms will be examined predominantly at a national level since national processes influence mechanisms at a local level. The framework utilized in this thesis is limited to these three areas in order to condense the scope of information gathered to assess in greater detail the post-conflict experience of women returnees. This thesis concentrates on how each of the three dimensions encompasses processes that influence the returnees' ultimate goal of social acceptance and economic self-reliance.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 29

Figure 1-2: Gender Responsive Reintegration Assessment



Social

Returnses' success in social, economic, and political dimensions facilitate successful reintegration. Each involves processes that suggest social acceptance and/or economic self-reliance based on the experience of the returnee in comparison to the rest of their community. Social mechanisms include the processes that facilitate community acceptance. To assess the needs of women in the social and cultural context, IDDRS recommends that data be gathered on gender roles and division of labor, as well as traditional practices that oppose the rights of women. Both of these areas encompass a number of factors that contribute to women's social reintegration, such as: the public image and self-image of women and men; the public and private/domestic roles of women and men; and the public perception of gender-based violence.⁴⁸ By comparing women returnees to women community members and men returnees this assessment indicates whether they have been accepted socially or not based off of the status of others within the community.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 21

Economic

Northern Uganda has high rates of poverty and unemployment, and women often find it more challenging than men to reach economic success. Therefore, a comprehensive examination is needed to determine if failure in the economic aspect of reintegration is a consequence of being a woman, being a returnee, or merely due to the poor economic environment. Because of the specific needs and concerns of women, this thesis follows the strong recommendations from IDDRS that data gathered within the economic contexts covers the areas of the socio-economic status of women, and women's access to and control over resources.⁴⁹ The socio-economic status of women includes a comparison of women returnees' education, income, and employment levels to the rest of the community. The comparison is repeated in the data presented on the access to and control over resources to determine if women returnees are any more disadvantaged than other women. The purpose of this mechanism is to measure women's economic reintegration failure against the economic climate of the community as a whole.

Political

The political mechanisms examined in this thesis identify how women returnees and community members are engaged in the political process. Women involved in the political processes and long-term peace and security initiatives indicate social and economic reintegration success. The purpose of this mechanism is to evaluate whether initiatives in place are meeting the needs of women in the post conflict setting. It highlights where the gaps are in assisting women during their reintegration process. As well, it indicates the participation level of women in the discourse around the issue of the conflict and the outcome of their participation.

The purpose of this framework is to facilitate an assessment of women's reintegration with a gender-responsive objective. This means that the objective of this framework is non-discriminatory; it is to benefit women and men equally and seeks to identify gender imbalances.⁵⁰ This thesis approaches the framework with perspectives gained from the

⁴⁹ Ibid. 29

⁵⁰ Ibid. 25

discipline of feminist security studies in order to explore gender dimensions within the conflict and post-conflict setting. Feminist approaches and theories allow the focus of this analysis to remain “on the ways that gender – the social construction of masculinity and femininity – organizes political, personal and intellectual life.”⁵¹ It provides the means to apply a gendered lens to the mechanisms facilitating the reintegration process. The importance of a gendered lens is that it reveals situations and constructs appearing to be gender neutral, but in reality are not.

A gendered understanding of conflict and post-conflict environments describes the reintegration experiences for men and women. It provides a visualization of gender hierarchies that shape ways of thinking, knowing, and doing. By understanding gender hierarchies, this thesis conceptualizes the social construction of masculinity and femininity in the context of Northern Uganda. This information is then used to assess the reintegration experience of women returning from the LRA.

Field Study Description⁵²

During the months of June to August 2011, I conducted a field research study titled “*Community Reintegration in Northern Uganda: Challenges Facing Females*”. The study employed the use of focus group discussions (FGD) to provide participants with a support group in a familiar setting and with a familiar group of people. This created a level of comfort for participants because members of these groups experience high levels of trust with one another. Questions in the FGD were presented to the group as a whole. FGDs were conducted through the use of a woman translator who was known and respected in the community. All participants were women who once were members of the LRA (time in the force was not a factor) and, at time of participation in the study, were over the age of eighteen. In consideration of the fact that many participants were illiterate, the method of verbal consent was employed.

⁵¹ Aolain, *On the Frontlines: Gender, War, and the Post-Conflict Process*. 4

⁵² Refer to appendix 3 for details on the research findings and method of obtaining consent.

Findings from this research revealed that the majority of participants view reintegration as a process that begins when an individual returns from the fighting force to her original village and resumes working once again. They believe reintegration involves a woman being able to return to the home she lived in before joining the LRA, and being connected to her parents or the people who used to take care of her. Having the love and support of her family and friends regardless of the time she spent in the LRA and the things she may have done, is an important part of a woman's successful reintegration. Returning to what they consider "normal" life is what the study participants described to be their end goal after the LRA. The objective of reintegration for both this thesis and the participants see a returnee's end goal to be social acceptance and economic self-sufficiency.

Reintegration failure

"Before I went into the bush I was married with three kids. But when I returned, my husband didn't want me. I was not welcome by him. Since I had three kids with him the members from my side and his side spoke to my husband. They said, "Since you already have three kids, just bring her back and see if she'll start behaving like those people from the bush." I never did act like those people, but my husband still fears me. He fears that I'll change and become a different person. Even today."

- CRNU participant speaking on being rejected by her family.⁵³

The above quote represents a challenge to reintegration many women returning have as a result of being unable to return to life as it was before the LRA. For many women, such as the one referenced to in the above quote, family (or community) rejection, stigmatization, and economic struggles is the source of their inability to return to a life that they anticipated. For the majority of participants, this translates into what they consider to be reintegration failure.

⁵³ Focus group (11 July 2011), Bungatricia, Gulu

The participants described that life after returning from the LRA is not what they envisioned. Many spoke about how they expected to return to their community and find family members, lead a happy life with a husband and children, or return back to school. Unfortunately, for many this did not happen. Many participants described that instead they are faced with the struggle to find social and economic support. This is what some considered being reintegration failure. Few of the participants said they were happy with their lives after returning from the LRA, and said they had few or no complaints. These participants did differentiate between the hardships they experienced during and after conflict, and many said that despite these hardships at least they at least had their freedom.

The findings on reintegration failure from this study offer a stark contrast to the prevailing literature on gender and conflict that presents women as passive participants or victims. While male ex-combatants are targeted in post-conflict initiatives out of fear that their reintegration failure will increase the chances of they return to violence or rejoin the fighting force, women are not. The study revealed that women are in fact at risk of returning to the force, with many participants questioning at one point following their return if they made the right choice. Two participants even stated that they still wish they were in the LRA.⁵⁴ Many more stated that upon their initial return they had debated whether leaving the LRA was the right choice. What is concerning however, is that reintegration initiatives still cater to men because of the assumption that they are at a greater risk of returning to conflict.

Causing reintegration failure

“When you are back and you find out that all of your family members have died you find that you are not given your land, even though it is yours. It belongs to your family so you must own at least some plot. But then (the people who are now on the land) say your parents have died and you have no one here so you don’t own anything here. You have to pack your things and go. Then you start thinking I should never have

⁵⁴ Focus groups (20 August 2011), Koro Pancwala, Gulu

come back. This happens to many women. Because their parents are not there and they don't know where their family is they have to face those challenges of land."⁵⁵

- A CRNU participant speaking about the challenges to land access that women face and what that means for reintegration.

When discussing successful reintegration, participants emphasized the importance of emotional and tangible support (such as clothes and household supplies, land, and money). Reflected in the above quote, according to the study, the most important support to ensure successful reintegration is access to land. Participants explained that land is important for returnees as it gives them the opportunity to grow crops and to build a small structure to live on without paying rent. Other factors they identified to be key in reintegration success includes: participation in reception centers (the centers that ex-combatants enter into to receive initial support after leaving the LRA), family and community support (such as showing the returnee love and providing assistance in their reintegration process), education (providing the returnee with basic literacy and numeracy skills), and financial support (for example; to assist the returnee with start-up capital for a small business for financial independence). Other noted factors that increase the chances of reintegration success include community sensitization, government support (i.e. in assistance rebuilding homes destroyed by government forces), self-determination, traditional healing, water access (the war destroyed the water wells in many communities), and experience in the LRA. Appendix 3, Table 2, expands on the factors that the participants identified that would help in the reintegration process. The participants argued that without these factors efforts to reintegration are challenged; however, when the participants were asked about failed reintegration their responses differed from those contributing to reintegration success.

⁵⁵ Focus group (11 July 2011), Bungatria, Gulu

Participants identified a number of factors that contributed to unsuccessful reintegration. After assessing the findings from the study, three general themes emerged to encompass the variety of factors contributing to reintegration failure: gender issues, lack of support, and stigma. Refer to Appendix 3, Table 3, for a more detailed description of the key aspects raised in the discussion on what participants identified as causing women to be unsuccessful in her reintegration. This table also reveals that some participants felt that failing to reintegrate is no different for men than women. Other lesser factors include the returnees' personality, fear of being re-abducted, fear of the rebels returning and unique experiences with the LRA. Only two participants said that ex-LRA members faced no reintegration challenges.

Limitations

Limitations of this thesis include the accuracy of the quantitative data and statistics available on reintegration. There is a large debate on the accuracy of the estimates pertaining to the number of individuals within the LRA and the number who have reintegrated. While there is data on rates of abduction, this research will not solely rely on such findings. Tim Allen, in his book "Trial Justice", noted that there is a challenge when interpreting the data on abductions, and that accurate data on the abductions into the LRA are simply not available.⁵⁶

Data may be inaccurate due to low estimates of returnees because not all returnees reported their return to their local council or police and due to some families keeping abduction a secret. Alternately, estimates may be too high. There is no minimum length of abduction that is stated as a requirement for reintegration support. Also, data on abduction is unclear as to whether individuals were "recruited" into the LRA more than once.⁵⁷ Finally, data on women's abduction is often inaccurate since they are more likely than men to return directly back to their community and not report that they were abducted. This thesis utilizes quantitative data and reports in the analysis, but the numbers

⁵⁶ Allen, *Trial Justice: The International Criminal Court and the Lord's Resistance Army*. 60

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 61

are unnecessarily tentative. To make sense of the problem despite the gaps numbers or statistics used in this thesis will be a point of reference for any assessments and analysis.

Main Argument – Neglect of agency and women’s reintegration failure

Feminist scholars critiques of the conventional approaches to the study of war suggest neglecting the wartime agency of women is due to the assumption that women are limited to traditional gender roles during conflict. They criticize conventional studies of war for being gender blind and neglectful of wartime experience.⁵⁸ According to Aolin, Haynes and Cahn in their book titled “On the Frontlines,” the limited research on women combatants is caused by the deeply gendered social and political dynamics of armed conflict.⁵⁹ Applying a gendered understanding to the elements within the reintegration process reveals that women are failing to reintegrate in a different way than men returnees. The research identifies that embedded gender biases categorize women as “victims” and men as “perpetrators” of armed violence, which results in the systematic exclusion of women in the post-conflict reintegration process. This causes reintegration services to reflect gendered perceptions when providing post-conflict services; however, when the gender images do not match with wartime experiences of men and women the reintegration process is undermined.

Wartime image of women

Gendered imagery essentializes the wartime experience of men and women, which causes the experiences of those who do not “fit” within traditional gendered divisions to be overlooked by those outside of the conflict. The traditional image of men in conflict reflects the masculinized nature of war and conflict.⁶⁰ For example, images of men in conflict often include young men with automatic weapons.⁶¹ In contrast, images of women in conflict exhibit a feminized notion of peace or non-violence, such as: a

⁵⁸ MacKenzie, "Women, Gender, and Contemporary Armed Conflict."; Cynthia Enole, *Does Khaki Become You? The Militarization of Women's Lives* (London: Pluto, 1982); J. Ann Tickner, "Introducing Feminist Perspectives into Peace and World Security Courses," *Women's Studies Quarterly*, no. 23 (1995); Cynthia Enole, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

⁵⁹ Aolain, *On the Frontlines: Gender, War, and the Post-Conflict Process*. 42

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 40

⁶¹ Jeannie Annan, and Christopher Blattman, Dyan Mazurana, and Khristopher Carlson, "Civil War, Reintegration, and Gender in Northern Uganda," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (2010). 1

refugee, a widow, a mother who experienced the loss of her children, or a victim of rape or other forms of violence.⁶² To assist in the discussion on gender imagery present throughout this thesis, this section identifies the three general categories women are associated with – passive participant, victim, or aberrational woman.

This is in part described the *passive participant* as an image perpetuated by the argument that women by nature are peaceful and united against war.⁶³ According to MacKenzie, the high presence of women in peace movements, and the low participation rates in irregular armed groups, is often used as evidence to argue that women are essentially different from men.⁶⁴ This reinforces the idea that women choose to be passive or inactive participants in war, whereas men actively choose to be involved. Challenging the perception that women are inherently peaceful, Enole draws attention to the patriarchal structures associated with war and conflict. She argues the historically low enrolment of women in militant groups is an indication of the patriarchal nature of military institutions, rather than the inherent nature of women.⁶⁵ It is the increased numbers of women as active participants that disrupts this traditional image. This argument consequently discredits the assumption that low enrollment of women in the fighting force is due to the inherent nature of women. Instead it encourages an investigation into how patriarchal structures form gender perceptions. The increased presence of women in irregular armed forces demonstrates that women may be neither the passive participants nor the victims that they are so often assumed to be.

Outside observers to conflict continuing to view and treat women as *victims* in conflict causes them to be overlooked as aggressors. Perpetuating this tendency can be partially explained by the high level of sexual violence many women in conflict experience. According to Chris Coulter, since rape and sexual violence is part of the daily life of these women, it is not possible to write about the abducted women's experience in war without

⁶² Aolain, *On the Frontlines: Gender, War, and the Post-Conflict Process*. 40; Annan, "Civil War, Reintegration, and Gender in Northern Uganda." 1

⁶³ MacKenzie, "Women, Gender, and Contemporary Armed Conflict." 7

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Enole, *Does Khaki Become You? The Militarization of Women's Lives*.

acknowledging these issues.⁶⁶ Unfortunately, because of the need to address the abuses experienced in wartime, the literature inadvertently places women into the category of victim. Increased incidences of domestic violence, coupled with sexual and physical violence during the war, makes the experiences of violence against women a factor that cannot be ignored.⁶⁷ The need to adequately address sexual and physical violence against women causes post-conflict services to cater to that need, while overlooking the experiences of combatants. This causes the role of women between victim and aggressor to be blurred, resulting in shortcomings within reintegration programs and services (both formal and informal). Shortcomings in reintegration programs emerge as services treating women who have returned from a fighting force as victims first and as ex-combatants second, if at all.

Contrasting the wartime images of women in war being victims and passive participants is the image of *aberrational women*. As combatants in patriarchal societies, these women are considered to have deviated from cultural gender expectations – giving them the appearance of being particularly aggressive. This departure is often unwelcome in societies rooted in customary cultural beliefs and practices; however, women ex-combatants do not necessarily view their experience as undesirable. According to MacKay, by carrying arms in conflict women can gain a sense of power, status, control and even pride.⁶⁸ By taking on the role of a combatant and the qualities that comes with it – strength, independence, courage, and persistence – these women are labeled as deviants once they return to their community. Coulter explains this by noting that these characteristics are not highly valued for women and girls in many traditional African societies, which instead often promotes a woman’s submission, servility, and willingness to endure and accept their subordinate position.⁶⁹ Deviating from such a “passive” image adds to the appearance of these women being “aggressive” combatants. As a result, these women are more susceptible to being stigmatized for their participation in conflict after they leave the force.

⁶⁶ Chris Coulter, *Bush Wives and Girl Soldiers* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2009). 125

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Chris and Mariam Persson Coulter, Mats Utas, *Young Female Fighters in African Wars* (Stockholm: Sweden Elanders Sverige AB, 2008). 15

⁶⁹ Ibid. 14

Why agency matters

To overcome the stereotypical wartime images of women their agency must be addressed. This is because agency an issue manifested in periods of both war and peace. And within each period is rooted the same general problem of women's agency being essentialized (meaning to attribute "natural" or "essential" characteristics to members of a defined group). Aolain, et al. cautions that essentialization creates the assumption that there is one fixed action or perception that encompasses the experience of all women. These assumptions, however, subsequently cause observers outside a conflict to view women as victims and to overlook their agency within an armed group.⁷⁰ This is important, because women consequently do not receive appropriate services for their active involvement. This is particularly evident in reintegration services and packages, which are almost exclusively catered to meet the needs of men, and neglect that women are also involved in armed forces.

In conceptualizing the term "agency," this thesis first integrates the work of Norman Long and Anthony Giddens with feminist theory. Long describes agency as social actors being both knowledgeable and capable within the limits of information, uncertainty and other constraints that exist. Individuals are capable of processing social experiences in order to devise ways of coping even under the most extreme circumstances.⁷¹

Giddens refers to agency as the individuals' capability to carry out an action, rather than simply having the intention to do so.⁷² While the individual may not possess the intention to carry out an act, the capability to do so demonstrates agency. Agency does not translate into the combatant agreeing with, or accepting, the LRA's operations. It is merely the capability to cope and devise ways to survive. Individuals have agency even in extreme circumstances, such as life in the LRA, where some actions may have been carried out through force or coercion. Ignoring the agency of individuals within the LRA belittle the

⁷⁰ Aolain, *On the Frontlines: Gender, War, and the Post-Conflict Process*. 42

⁷¹ Caroline and Finona Clark Moser, "Introduction," in *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors? Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence*, ed. Caroline Moser and Finona Clark (London: Zed Books, 2001). 5

⁷² Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

difficult decisions or actions that they had been forced to make or take on. When individuals are seen as not acting from self-determination, it prevents them from being able to recount experiences or seek forgiveness for any wrongdoings.

Just as men and women are social actors with agency during conflict, they are also social actors with agency during post-conflict. Caroline Moser and Fiona Clark articulate that women as social actors are able to devise alternative ways of completing an objective, regardless of limitations.⁷³ To complete an objective (even if they do not want to) social actors must draw from aspects within their environment, such as social, cultural, political, or economic dynamics. The survival of women and girls who experienced, witnessed, or conducted brutalities and violence in the LRA reveals their agency. Yet, the women and girls' ability to cope in violent and dangerous circumstances in the LRA should not be equated with their acceptance of the force or their pursuit of empowerment. Instead it reflects that these women and girls acted according to their own agency, and "did what needed to be done" as a means of survival.

While discussion around women's wartime involvement is limited, there have been some advancements in formalized policies attempting to be more inclusive of women and girls in conflict, such as with the adoption of Security Council Resolution (SCR) 1325.⁷⁴ However, in spite of normative advances for policies to be more representative of women in armed conflict there are still glaring omissions of women's involvement with armed forces in security studies. These gaps are even the source of many critiques towards the SCR 1325 and its ability to assist women in their quest for equal participation in security issues. Soumita Basu participated in this critique by asserting that the elements of SCR 1325 used in subsequent Security Council resolutions were those that focused on the

⁷³ Moser, "Introduction." 5

⁷⁴ SCR 1325 was the first international policy instrument to recognize the gendered nature of war and peace. The resolution addresses the gendered nature of war and peace by encouraging attention to be given to concerns pertaining to women and girls in armed conflict. This includes specific wording in the resolution that calls for the special needs of women combatants and women associated with a fighting force to be addressed in the reintegration process.

“protection” aspects of the Resolution.⁷⁵ She described that instead of resolutions addressing the participation of women in conflict as combatants, they embody the elements of SCR 1325 that focus on sexual and gender-based violence against women. This is because components centered on the idea of protection are more compatible traditional thinking of the SC than those calling to recognize the agency of women during and after conflict.⁷⁶ Reflecting on the aspects that have been neglected within SCR 1325, Basu remarked, “the patriarchal biases of the SC did not go away with the passage of SCR 1325.”⁷⁷ In a similar view, according to Tickner, “gender systems of domination and subordination are not fixed but, rather, are constructed through socialization and perpetuated through unjust political and economic structures.”⁷⁸ It is the embedded gender biases within power structures that reinforce the idea of the public powerful man and the private woman victim resulting in the wartime agency of women to be overlooked.

The neglect of agency is connected to reintegration failure because of masculine and feminine concepts in the public and private sphere perpetuating gender biases and gender exclusion in various institutional structures and systems of power. The public and private dichotomy reinforces the perception that women have no power or political agency. This dichotomy makes women appear to be dependent upon existing political structures.⁷⁹ Amal Rassam noted, “implicit in this dichotomy of public/male, private/female is the assumption that power, viewed as belonging to the public-political domain, is a male monopoly and that women, confined to the domestic sphere, are powerless.”⁸⁰ Simona Sharoni argues that the assumption that women are powerless is evident in the

⁷⁵ Soumita Basu, "Security Council Resolution 1325: Toward Gender Equality in Peace and Security Policy Making," in *The Gender Imperative: Human Security Vs State Security*, ed. Betty Reardon, and Asha Hans (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010). 288

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 288

⁷⁸ Tickner, "Introducing Feminist Perspectives into Peace and World Security Courses." 54

⁷⁹ Simona Sharoni, "Rethinking Women's Struggles in Israel-Palestine and in the North of Ireland," in *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors? Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence*, ed. Caroline Moser, and Fiona Clark (London: Zed Books Ltd., 2001). 86

⁸⁰ Ibid., 86.

representations of women as victims in conflict. Being portrayed as victims, women's power and agency is subsequently disregarded.⁸¹

Chapter Outline

Chapter 2, Background to the LRA, is structured around providing an overview of the LRA and women within it. It begins by describing the history of Uganda leading up to the origins of the LRA. This background provides a necessary understanding of the deeply rooted ongoing grievances between the north and south of the country. The chapter then progresses to describe the LRA and the effect that the force has had on the northern communities during its operations in Uganda. The chapter concludes with a description of the experience of women in the LRA, from their entry to exit, leading into the subsequent chapters discussing their reintegration.

To establish a connection between the outcome that women ex-combatants are failing to reintegrate and the explanation being a result of a gender biases that neglects the agency of women in combat, the following three chapters examine the social, economic, and political mechanisms found in Northern Uganda. These mechanisms are the processes that link the explanation to the outcome ("X leads to Y through steps A, B, C").⁸² The data gathered for the assessment of each of these mechanisms is outlined within the Gender Responsive Reintegration Assessment (Figure 1-1).

Chapter 3, Social Mechanisms, describes the gender roles and division of labor along with traditional practices that oppose the basic rights of women. While examining those components, the experience of women returnees is assessed in comparison to men returnees and women who were never in the LRA. The chapter concludes by linking social mechanisms to neglect of agency and reintegration failure. It does so by describing how the agency women employed in the LRA influences their ability to meet gender images post-conflict, which in turn greatly influences their reintegration experience. The chapter also presents the argument that neglecting women's roles as social actors in

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Alexander George, and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, Bcsia Studies in International Security (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2005). 141

conflict perpetuates the association of women with victimhood. The oversight of agency causes their grievances post-conflict to be overlooked, impeding the chances of successful long-term reintegration.

Chapter 4, Economic Mechanisms, assesses the socio-economic status of women returnees, women community members, and men returnees. It then conducts an analysis of women returnees' access to resources in comparison to community members. The chapter concludes by examining economic mechanisms in relation to the neglect of women's agency and reintegration failure. It introduces a debate on whether economic processes are influenced by the neglect of agency, or if they are ultimately influenced by other factors, such as the environment and gender biases.

Chapter 5, Political Mechanisms, focuses specifically on the processes that engage women in civic and community life. The chapter first examines the participation of women at national and local levels of government. It identifies and assesses the processes enacted to engage women and how the processes influence their sociopolitical status. The chapter then addresses the processes that are present in Uganda to facilitate long-term reconciliation and reconstruction. This includes how women returnees are engaged in the areas of traditional justice and reconciliation, peace talks and negotiations, and the Amnesty Act of 2000. Using the data gathered, the final section of Chapter 4 illuminates how political mechanisms link the neglect of agency (whether in conflict or in long-term reconciliation and reconstruction initiatives) to the reintegration failure of women.

CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND TO THE LRA

“(You Acholi), I’m going to put you in a bottle like (a) grasshopper. You see if you put a grasshopper in a bottle, and I will block that bottle, you will see outside and not be able to get out. You will look for food and not get it. So you start eating yourselves.”

-Ronald Reagan Okumu (Ugandan MP, Forum for Democratic Change) repeating what President Museveni told the Acholi people when Museveni took power in 1986.⁸³

Background to the Conflict

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly when the conflict in Northern Uganda began, but the present north/south divisions can be traced back to colonial times in the late 1800’s, during the period that has been coined the “Scramble for Africa.” It was during this period that the European thirst for African resources motivated colonization, and subsequently triggered the exploitation of the African people.⁸⁴ Since colonization, Uganda has made strong efforts in reconstructing its political and economic systems. The northern part, however, has been delayed in these advancements in part due to its history of conflict.⁸⁵ This history created a debated notion of a divide between Uganda’s north and south. It is also used to support the argument that Kony was leading the LRA in a northern rebellion against the ruling south.⁸⁶ Although debated, this history is critical to understanding reintegration efforts since it has affected how services are perceived by, and brought to, the war-affected people of the north.

This chapter begins by briefly reviewing Uganda’s political independence following independence. The remainder of this chapter describes the LRA and the gender differences within it. It describes women’s involvement in the LRA in order to provide a

⁸³ Pete McCormack, "Uganda Rising," (Canada: Mindset Media, 2006).

⁸⁴ M.E. Chamberlain, *The Scramble for Africa*, Third ed. (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2010). 3

⁸⁵ Oliver Furley, "Uganda: The Struggle for Peace," in *Ending Africa's Wars - Progressing to Peace*, ed. Oliver Furley, and Roy May (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 115

foundation for a later assessment of whether the services and support for women returnees are appropriate matches to their experience in the LRA.

A newly independent Uganda

In 1962, Uganda received its independence from the British and Milton Obote, who was from the north, became Uganda's first prime minister. However, Obote's reign was not without opposition. On 25 January 1971, Idi Amin (then deputy commander of the Ugandan armed forces) led a military coup against Obote's government, subsequently seizing power.⁸⁷ Although a northerner, Amin was neither Acholi nor Langi⁸⁸ (the ethnic groups that made up the majority of the army under Obote). During Amin's period of political power, he massacred thousands of Acholi and Langi people who he considered enemies. Some believed that Amin targeted these two ethnic groups to ensure that they remained divided, and so they could not regain power and influence in Uganda.⁸⁹ Others proposed that the Acholi and Langi were targeted for their assumed allegiance to Obote. Whatever the motivation, Amin's regime effectively waged a war, with the rest of Uganda fighting the Acholi and Langi people.⁹⁰

Throughout the 1970's, resistance militias began to form inside and outside of Uganda with the goal of overthrowing Amin.⁹¹ In 1979, large numbers of Acholi and Langi exiled rebels, along with the Tanzanian army and Museveni's Front for National Salvation (FRONASA), effectively ousted Amin from office. Tito Okello, Amin's successor, obtained power for one year until Obote once again resumed the presidency in 1980. The return of Obote to power was not without critics: politicians such as Yoweri Museveni (a southerner) openly criticized the elections as being rigged.⁹² Museveni, in opposition to Obote, retreated into the bush to form the rebel National Resistance Army (NRA).

⁸⁷ David Gwyn, *Idi Amin: Death-Light of Africa* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1977). 3

⁸⁸ Refer to *Appendix 1 Ethnographic Map of Uganda*

⁸⁹ Gwyn, *Idi Amin: Death-Light of Africa*. 88

⁹⁰ Amii Omara-Otunnu, *Politics and the Military in Uganda, 1890-1985* (New York: St. Martin's Press Inc., 1987). 104

⁹¹ McCormack, "Uganda Rising."

⁹² *Ibid.*

Rise of Museveni and the north/south divide

Museveni began forming rebel movements out of the desire to remove Amin from power. He established the National Resistance Movement (NRM) on the platform that the NRM was fighting for the aims of the whole country, and that it was a democratic movement. In 1982, the NRM joined two other opposition groups, Uganda Freedom Movement (UFM) and Uganda National Rescue Front (UNRF), under the banner of the Uganda Popular Front (UPF) in order to attack government institutions around Kampala.⁹³

In March of the same year, the NRM gained control over an area north of Kampala, named the “Luwero Triangle”, which became the base of Museveni’s guerrilla campaign.⁹⁴ This area has since gained significance as the setting for the civil war between the NRA (the army wing of the NRM) and Obote’s army, Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA). During the war, it was the rebel strong hold in the Luwero Triangle that the UNLA targeted for massive population removal. Under Obote’s direction, the UNLA killed approximately 100,000 civilians.⁹⁵ Civilians from the Luwero Triangle were accused of being rebel supporters and experienced human rights atrocities committed by the Obote government as a consequence. These atrocities, carried out by the Acholi and Langi dominated national army, have greatly contributed to ongoing ethnic tensions in Uganda.

On 25th January 1986, Museveni seized power. This meant that, for the first time, socio-economic, political and military powers were all concentrated in the south. In addition to Museveni’s presidency, the NRA became the national army and has since been renamed Uganda’s People’s Defence Force (UPDF). The concentration of power in the south caused Uganda’s north-south division to intensify. The NRA began to commit human rights abuses in what they considered to be potential rebel areas populated by Acholi and Langi. These abuses included rapes, abductions, confiscation of livestock, murder, and the destruction of schools and hospitals. Some of the soldiers justified their actions by

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Refer to *Appendix 2 – District Map of Uganda*

⁹⁵ Tor Kristian Birkeland, "Sanctioning of Individuals: The International Criminal Court, the United Nations Security Council, and the Case of Northern Uganda" (American University, 2008). 31

claiming that they were quelling a potential northern rebellion. Others openly acted out of revenge against the Acholi and Langi people for the Luwero atrocities.⁹⁶ This caused thousands of Acholi and Langi soldiers to flee back to the north out of fear of retribution for past atrocities at the hands of Museveni's NRM/A. This, in turn, reignited the northerners' feelings of mistrust and suspicion towards the central government. It was in this environment that rebel groups opposing Museveni's government in the north began to emerge.

A movement of Holy Spirits towards a Lord's resistance

Several rebel groups formed in Northern Uganda in opposition to Museveni's presidency. The two rebel movements of particular notoriety included the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM) and the LRA. Both movements encompassed a religious component and a level of mysticism that is deeply engrained within Acholi culture.⁹⁷ The leaders from each group claimed to be Acholi spirit mediums and possessed by a guiding spirit. Because of these similarities and that the LRA was formed following the collapses of the HSM, there is often an assumption in the literature that the LRA was created in response to the HSM. A notable difference is that the HSM had a degree of legitimacy as it was composed of adult soldiers who had already fought with the UNLA and the UPDF. In contrast, the LRA primarily relied on abduction for new members as it lacked support by the community.

The origins of the HSM and the LRA fit into the cycle of brutality between Uganda's north and south. During 1986, many Acholi and Langi soldiers fled north to escape being targeted by Museveni's army. The Acholi and Langi mistrust of the government intensified as a result of increased tensions and brutal treatment by government forces. Questions were raised as to whether or not the government was purposefully sending militias to the north to "make them (the northerners) pay" for the past actions of Acholi

⁹⁶Phoung Pham, and Eric Stover, Patrick Vinck, "The Lord's Resistance Army and Forced Conscription in Northern Uganda," *Human Rights Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (2008). 45

⁹⁷ The Acholi are Luo people from the northern region in Uganda (see Appendix I). Acholi traditional practices and social processes are deeply rooted in customary culture and reflective of their strong beliefs in ancestors and spirits. It is a patriarchal based society, which influences the social, economic, and political mechanisms found within communities. More details on Acholi culture will be revealed throughout the analysis of this thesis.

soldiers.⁹⁸ In 1986, Alice Auma emerged as someone who wanted to heal the wounds of the Acholi people and bring redemption for their past sins. As an Acholi spirit medium, as well as a diviner and a healer, she became leader of the HSM.

In 1985, Auma converted to Catholicism just prior to announcing she was possessed by the spirit of a Christian Italian army officer who died near the source of the Nile in World War I.⁹⁹ She began acting as a medium for this spirit, named Lakwena (“messenger” in Acholi,) and subsequently became known as Alice Lakwena. Within the HSM, Alice is known as Alice Lakwena¹⁰⁰ in reference to the name of the spirit that possessed and guided her. In promoting the HSM, Alice utilized the ingrained sense of communal shame that the Acholi people felt they had brought onto themselves for their actions in past conflicts. In doing this, she magnified feelings among the Acholi of being hated everywhere reaffirming the need of the Acholi to be redeemed.¹⁰¹

In 1986, Alice received a message from the spirit of Lakwena that the work of healing the Acholi for past sins was fruitless if the Acholi were to only be killed by the NRA. The spirit of Lakwena then went on to direct Alice to form an army to fight against this “evil” once and for all. The army, according to Lakwena, was to be called the ‘Holy Spirit Movement Force’ (HSMF).

The HSMF truly appealed to the grievances and feelings of shame imbedded within the Acholi people and further deepened the north-south divide within the country.¹⁰² Even though women traditionally are not involved in combat, it was the belief in Alice’s spiritual abilities that gave confidence to members of the HSMF.¹⁰³ Alice guided the

⁹⁸ McDonnell, *Girl Soldier*. 77

⁹⁹ Ibid. 80

¹⁰⁰ To prevent confusion between Alice Lakwena and Alice Auma, this thesis will now on refer to her simply as Alice.

¹⁰¹ McDonnell, *Girl Soldier*. 82

¹⁰² McCormack, "Uganda Rising."

¹⁰³ Although there are differing opinions about specific details regarding Auma’s personal life, one aspect that is agreed on is on her inability to bear children. The reason that this factor is of importance is because in Acholi culture for a woman not to be able to bear children is considered a tragedy. However, at the same time, this ‘tragedy’ gave her a level of credence in her role as a spirit medium and giving a level of respect. McDonnell, *Girl Soldier*. 83

HSMF in accordance to the messages she claimed to have received from the spirit Lakwena. Justifying her actions as being part of a spiritual movement, she would boldly announce to the government forces where and when the HSMF would attack. True to her word, the HSMF would come through the bush with branches, trees, AK-47's, and singing hymns.¹⁰⁴ These brazen actions made the government forces uneasy and contributed to a number of military successes for the HSMF. In October 1987, the movement ultimately met its defeat just north of Jinja by Museveni's government forces. Alice subsequently retreated to Kenya, marking the end of the HSMF.

Following the defeat of the HSMF, the LRA, led by Kony, emerged within Northern Uganda as the main rebel force in the rebellion. Like Alice, he claimed to be possessed by spirits that guided him in a war against the government. Kony also provided his army with lists of actions to be carried out before and after battle to ensure success. The similarities between Alice and Kony contribute to assumptions that the LRA was a splinter group from the HSMF, but this is not the case. Kony, who was once shunned by Alice, was never able to gain the level of legitimacy that was held by Alice in the HSMF.¹⁰⁵

A popular hypothesis regarding Kony's original motivation for creating the LRA is that he saw it as his role to both cleanse the Acholi people and to fight for their rights. It is also proposed that he also envisioned a government in Uganda based on the ten biblical commandments. Yet the LRA's brutality against the Acholi people, coupled with the LRA no longer residing in Uganda, raises questions of whether these motivations still influence Kony and the LRA's actions. What is clear is that this is not a rebellion with an obvious endpoint. Because of this uncertainty surrounding the LRA, and the fact that Kony has not been captured, a level of fear remains in the northern communities that the LRA will return.

¹⁰⁴ McCormack, "Uganda Rising."

¹⁰⁵ McDonnell, *Girl Soldier*. 96

The LRA

While the LRA is still in operation, when referring to LRA operations this thesis focuses on the time period beginning with the origin of the LRA in 1987 and ending in 2009. This is because by 2009 the LRA was only composed of an estimated 500 combatants and operating in mobile units that have been difficult to trace.¹⁰⁶ The data used in this thesis from the fieldwork has been gathered from women and girls who returned from the LRA in 2009 or earlier.

LRA influence on the community

Without the support of the population the LRA quickly came to rely on abduction as a means to maintain its ranks, making it a central component to the conflict and destabilized the northern region. The LRA targeted rural centers that were surrounded by the bush in which they were operating. Targeting rural communities in order to abduct children increased to the point that children became “night commuters:” just before dark, children would leave their rural villages by foot to seek nighttime refuge in the protected urban centers. Human Rights Watch (HRW) estimated that there were 5,000 new abductions of children during the period of June 2002 to March 2003 alone.¹⁰⁷

While abduction has been recognized as the primary means of entry into the LRA, there is a question of whether this is the only means of entry into the fighting force. There have been rare accounts of an individual actively seeking to join the force, but most documentation of this is at the beginning of LRA operations.¹⁰⁸ As the LRA became more active, data on individuals joining the force out of self-determination is limited. This does not include individuals who returned to the force because of failed reintegration experiences.

In late 1996, the Museveni government ordered hundreds of thousands Acholi and other northern communities to be forcibly moved into internally displaced persons (IDP)

¹⁰⁶ "Uganda," Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, <http://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/>.

¹⁰⁷ "Initiatives to End the Violence in Northern Uganda: 2002-09 and the Juba Peace Process," in *Protracted conflict, elusive peace*, ed. Alexander Ramsbotham (London: Accord, 2010). 8

¹⁰⁸ Allen, *Trial Justice: The International Criminal Court and the Lord's Resistance Army*. 61

camps.¹⁰⁹ The government justified this by stating that the rural communities were at risk of LRA raids, and the community members were at risk of being raped, maimed, killed, and abducted. By 2004, 1.5 million people were internally displaced in Northern Uganda.¹¹⁰ Forced to relocate to IDP camps, individuals were living in dire conditions. The camps lacked basic necessities, such as food and security, and even faced attacks from the LRA. The squalid and often dangerous conditions of the IDP camps deepened Acholi mistrust and suspicion of the government. The IDP camps were in such poor condition that the World Health Organization estimated that 1000 people a week were dying due to living conditions.¹¹¹ According to James Otto (former director for Human Rights Focus) these camps essentially turned into “one-stop centers” for looting property, abducting children, and raping women by the LRA.¹¹²

The Acholi’s mistrust of the government remained after the LRA left northern Uganda. People often returned from the IDP camps to find their land and livestock destroyed, which was not solely a result of the LRA. There is a sentiment in the northern communities that Government forces were responsible for destroying land and raiding villages after people were forced into the IDP camps. In addition, the apparent lack of reconstruction support from the Government contributed to suspicion of the Acholi people that the government was behind the violence or had no interest in stopping it.

Gender Differences in the LRA

Gender differences in the LRA are present in everything from abduction to time spent within the force. This section explores the specific experiences of women within the LRA from entry into the force until leaving the LRA and the beginning of reintegration. In line with the discussion in the previous chapter on gender imagery, the experiences of men in the LRA is addressed as well; however, it is not the primary focus of this section. A slight comparison between men and women in the LRA is provided here to disrupt the prevailing gender assumptions that fuel the neglect of women post-conflict.

¹⁰⁹ McCormack, "Uganda Rising."

¹¹⁰ Allen, *Trial Justice: The International Criminal Court and the Lord's Resistance Army*. 53

¹¹¹ McCormack, "Uganda Rising."

¹¹² Ibid.

Entry into the LRA

Men and women, boys and girls, were all targeted in LRA abductions, but there are differences in their experiences. Men typically were abducted at an average age of just over sixteen years, whereas women were abducted at a younger age. Studies suggest that the primary age of abduction for girls was sixteen years or younger, with very few being abducted at an age of twenty or older.¹¹³ The difference in age at abduction between boys and girls is because of characteristics that the LRA desired them to have. For instance, boys were targeted at ages to become combatants within the force, whereas girls were abducted at a younger age to assist in maintaining the camp and to become wives when they were of appropriate age. The LRA abducted these girls at a young age to ensure that they were free of sexual diseases once they were of childbearing age. Girls who came from educated backgrounds and who were considered to be physically beautiful were targets for abductions as they were deemed to be more desirable as potential wives.¹¹⁴

The LRA's desire to abduct "suitable" girls to become wives and mothers was the basis for the infamous targeted abduction of the "Aboke Girls." In 1996, LRA rebels raided St. Mary's College, an all girls' Catholic boarding school in the Apac district of Northern Uganda. The rebels broke into the girls' dormitories at night and abducted a total of one hundred and thirty-nine girls. These girls were specifically targeted because they were educated and came from a highly religious background. The deputy headmistress of the school, Sister Rachele Fassera, followed the rebels who had the girls into the bush. She negotiated with the rebels for the release of the girls. Through these negotiations, one hundred and nine of these girls were released.¹¹⁵ The remaining thirty remained with the LRA and warned that if any one tried to escape the other twenty-nine girls would be killed.

¹¹³ , and Aki Stavrou, "The Status of Lra Reporters," ed. Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program Secretariat (Washington, DC2008). 2; McKay, *Where Are the Girls?* 28

¹¹⁴ Jeannie Annan, and Christopher Blattman, Dyan Mazurana, and Khristopher Carlson, "Women and Girls at War: "Wives", Mothers, and Fighters in Uganda's Lord's Resistance Army," (2009). 9

¹¹⁵ Kathy Cook, *Stolen Angels* (Toronto: Penguin Group, 2007). 12

The case of the Aboke girls provides valuable insight into the gendered aspects of abduction and experience within the LRA. The story of the Aboke girls garnered a high degree of international attention to the roles of girls as active armed combatants as well as attention to the insurgency itself. Countless books and videos have been created to describe their story. The accounts provided by the thirty girls taken into LRA captivity introduced the international community to the fact that girls were forced attack their own community. The girls described how their captors sometimes forced them to kill or harm their own community members to ensure that any sense of solidarity with the community they were abducted from was broken.¹¹⁶ Their experience also provided valuable insight describing that women and girls, like men and boys, received military training to fight and kill.¹¹⁷ The accounts of the Aboke Girls, and from other women and girls who have escaped LRA captivity, demonstrate that there is not a clear division between the victims and aggressors in the conflict.

Experience of women within the LRA

Men and women, boys and girls were all subjected to intensive abuse and torture in order to cut bonds with their community and to form new bonds with the LRA. Killing quickly became a new aspect of their lives with the LRA. Abductees faced the threat of being beaten or killed if they did not comply with orders, such as raiding, beating, or killing.¹¹⁸ Of particular interest here is how gender influenced the training and duties held by those within the LRA.

The high level of sexual violence committed against women makes gender an important factor in assessing the wartime experience of those within the LRA. Girls and women were forced into marriages, becoming sexual slaves. They were to serve the sexual needs of their husbands, regardless of their own wishes. Polygamy within the LRA was common, with returnees suggesting that most women had at least one co-wife, with many

¹¹⁶ Raymonde Provencher, "Grace, Milly, Lucy... Child Soldiers," (Canada: National Film Board of Canada, 2010).

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

women having four or more co-wives.¹¹⁹ Through marriage and sexual abuse, many women within the LRA become pregnant, leading to the label of “girl mother” for those who returned to their communities after the conflict. Findings from Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program’s (MDRP) “LRA Study”,¹²⁰ and Aki Starou, revealed that eight out of ten women who returned from the LRA had at least one child while in the LRA. More than four out of ten women had two or more.¹²¹ The same study identified that more than two-thirds of women who participated in the survey identified themselves as having been sexually abused.

Women in the LRA were not the only victims of forced marriage and sexual abuse. Men and boys in the LRA also experienced this;¹²² however, it was not as prevalent as it was against women and girls. The number of men who reported sexual abuse is extremely low, but the taboo of homosexuality in Uganda must be taken into account. There are dire ramifications for being identified as a homosexual or victim of homosexual rape in Uganda. This means that men who were victims may not come forward – there may be far more victims than are identified at present.¹²³ Men and boys were also forced into taking wives that they did not want. The MDRP study discovered nearly half of the men who took part in the study said they were forced to marry. Although the study did not provide an explanation, one reason could be that men who were lower ranking commanders or fighters had limited choices of partner. This phenomenon shows that sexual violence and forced marriage is not an experience restricted to either gender.

In the LRA, women were active combatants in addition to engaging in traditional gender roles (such as cooking, cleaning, or being a “wife”). The predominant roles taken on by

¹¹⁹ , "The Status of Lra Reporters." 2

¹²⁰ , Denmark prepared the “LRA Study” for the MDRP Secretariat in November 2006. It involved the participation of 2000 men and women returnees from the districts of Gulu, Pader and Kitgum.

¹²¹ MDRP, "The Status of Lra Reporters," in *Dissemination Note* - , "The Status of Lra Reporters." 2

¹²² Helen Liebling-Kalifani et al., “Violence against Women in Northern Uganda: The Neglected Health Consequences of War.” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 9, no. 3 (2008). 178

¹²³ Until recently there were death penalty provisions under Uganda’s Anti-Homosexuality Bill. As of February 2012, death penalty provisions were removed, but attempts to criminalize consensual sexual activity between same sex partners remain.

women in the LRA, in descending order include: porters, food producers, and fighters. But women and girls were not limited to one role. McKay and Mazurana's book identified "fighter" as the most common secondary role held by women and girls.¹²⁴ When the LRA shifted their bases to South Sudan, nearly all women had been trained in basic combat and had the ability to fight if needed. Data from the CRNU project on the experience of women in the LRA reaffirmed that women did fight alongside men. Almost all of the participants said they were trained in basic combat skills. Most participants said they would often remain at the base to take care of children, but if they were childless they would go to the front line to fight.¹²⁵

Women were not limited to support or defensive tasks when in combat. Women returnees described that in the LRA women indeed held positions as captains, with some leading the massacres carried out by the LRA. One participant in the field study identified herself as an ex-member of a fighting unit called "Gilva".¹²⁶ She spoke confidently about the missions that she had the responsibility of carrying out. Gilva was one of a number of specialized fighting units that would receive orders from the top commanders (such as Kony, Otti, Ongwen and Kwoyelo) telling them to go on a particular mission and carry out an identified task.¹²⁷ As well, others spoke about how fighting units within the LRA, such as Gilva, were headed by "killers" and were dangerous groups. They identified that women did in fact lead some of these groups. According to one participant, when asked if women ever led these groups she stated, "Yes there were so many. Those women who headed those groups were even worse than men. They are merciless. They are heartless. You can't even call them women because of what they do."¹²⁸

The strategic value of women and girls made them important entities within the LRA structure. Women typically endured much longer stays within the LRA than did men.¹²⁹ One explanation is the many roles for which women and girls were responsible. Women

¹²⁴ McKay, *Where Are the Girls?* 73

¹²⁵ See *Appendix 3 – CRNU Findings*

¹²⁶ Focus groups (20 August 2011), Koro Pancwala, Gulu

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Focus groups (21 August 2011), Kasubi, Gulu

¹²⁹ McKay, "Reconstructing Fragile Lives: Girls' Social Reintegration in Northern Uganda and Sierra Leone." 22

and girls were involved in the raiding and looting of villages, attacking their own families and neighbors, abducting children, and even killing civilians. They also performed support roles within the military bases, including raising crops, fetching firewood and water, selling goods, preparing food, carrying loot, stealing food, livestock, and seed stock, carrying out reconnaissance missions, transporting ammunition and weapons, defending the camp, and fighting during ambushes.¹³⁰ McKay proposed that because of women's various and diverse roles, and their value in supporting the functioning of the force, women and girls may be the last to be released from a force.¹³¹

Women and girls in the LRA taking on roles that diverge away from traditional gender expectations, however, is not a unique phenomenon. Women and girls are recognized as combatants in irregular armed forces spanning the globe, including: Sri Lanka, Nepal, Chechnya, Palestine, Columbia, Liberia, Eritrea, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, and Uganda. Between 1990 and 2003, it was estimated that women and girls were part of 38 conflicts in 13 African countries, 7 countries in the Americas, 5 European countries, and 5 Middle Eastern countries.¹³²

Within these armed groups, similar to the LRA, women and girls are not limited to assumed gender roles. For example, in Asia, the Tamil's of Sri Lanka recruited girls into the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) from the mid-1980s until their defeat. The LTTE even employed a highly trained, organized, and disciplined women's military wing. While the exact number of women combatants in this wing is unknown, it is estimated that women made up 20 percent to one-third of the core combat strength.¹³³ In Columbia, estimates are that women comprised 30 percent of the armed militant group Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de*

¹³⁰ Susan McKay, "Girls as "Weapons of Terror" in Northern Uganda and Sierra Leonean Armed Groups," in *Female Terrorism and Militancy: Agency, Utility, and Organization*, ed. Cindy D. Ness (New York: Routledge, 2008), 390.

¹³¹ McKay, "Reconstructing Fragile Lives: Girls' Social Reintegration in Northern Uganda and Sierra Leone," 22.

¹³² Susan McKay, "Girls as "Weapons of Terror" in Northern Uganda and Sierra Leonean Armed Groups," in *Female Terrorism and Militancy: Agency, Utility, and Organization*, ed. Cindy D. Ness (New York: Routledge, 2008), 170.

¹³³ Miranda Alison, "Cogs in the Wheel? Women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam," *Civil Wars* 6, no. 4 (2003): 39.

Colombia) (FARC).¹³⁴ The “Black Widows” in Chechnya, as of 2008, were estimated to have been involved in 81 percent of suicide attacks involving Chechen rebels.¹³⁵ In Eritrea, many young girls joined the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF) because of the EPLF’s ideology surrounding women’s liberation and new alternative roles for women. Within the EPLF, women made up at least 30 percent of the fighting force during Eritrea’s war for independence in 1973-1991.¹³⁶ Finally, in Liberia, it was a woman, Colonel Black Diamond of Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and head of Women’s Artillery Commandos (WAC), who spread fear and gained respect at the time of LURD’s final advance on Monrovia.¹³⁷ These cases demonstrate that the involvement of women as actors in irregular armed forces is not a new or rare phenomenon. And unfortunately, the involvement of women in conflict being overlooked and misunderstood is a global problem, not limited to the women in the LRA.

Returning from the LRA

Methods of leaving the LRA for men and women, girls and boys, generally were through escape or capture by the UPDF. After their escape, women and girls returned to their communities to begin their process of reintegration. Most men who returned from the LRA registered at the UDF barracks or at their local council (LC)¹³⁸ then proceeded to a reception center. Women, in contrast, generally returned directly to their home.¹³⁹ The CRNU study identified that approximately half of the participants returned to their community through a reception center, while the other half returned directly to their community.

¹³⁴ Kimberly Theidon, "Transitional Subjects: The Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration of Former Combatants in Columbia," *The International Journal of Transitional Justice* 1(2007): 75.

¹³⁵ Karla Cunningham, "The Evolving Participation of Muslim Women in Palestine, Chechnya, and the Global Jihadi Movement," in *Female Terrorism and Militancy: Agency, Utility, and Organization*, ed. Cindy Ness (New York: Routledge, 2008).

¹³⁶ Chris and Mariam Persson Coulter, Mats Utas, *Young Female Fighters in African Wars* (Stockholm: Sweden Elanders Sverige AB, 2008).

¹³⁷ Mats Utas, "West-African Warscapes: Victimcy, Girlfriending, Soldiering: Tactic Agency in a Young Woman's Social Navigation of the Liberian War Zone," *Anthropological Quarterly* 78, no. 2 (2005). 404.

¹³⁸ Local Council's are the locally elected government structures in the districts of Uganda.

¹³⁹ McKay, *Where Are the Girls?* 34.

Reception and rehabilitation centers are where returnees go to receive immediate support following their return from the LRA. The returnees are welcomed into the center by others who had returned before them singing and clapping.¹⁴⁰ While in the center all returnees receive appropriate medical care, psychosocial support, and hygiene and material assistance. They are taught how to pray and given social skills intended to help their social reintegration. By the mid-1990's, twelve centers were established to receive returnees¹⁴¹ - including those operated by Caritas, World Vision, and Gulu Support the Children Organization (GUSCO). These centers would carry out Uganda's informal DDR process. This DDR process involved ex-LRA members reporting to these centers to subsequently be granted amnesty and receive basic counseling, skills training, family reunification, and the opportunity to be part of the Ugandan military. By 2010, the reception centers were basically non-operational due to the extremely low number of individuals returning from the LRA. Centers still in operation, such as the services provided by World Vision, conduct mainly outreach projects. One outreach service I had the opportunity to take part in was with representatives from World Vision. I accompanied them out to a rural community where they spoke to community members about the psychosocial support services they offer to children who were abducted or lost a parent because of the LRA.

Participants in my field study who reintegrated through the reception centers said that they received services that helped them immensely in dealing with these memories or dreams. Those who did not go through the reception center (which was over half of the study population) said that they had that support and training. Both were asked if they were currently receiving services to help overcome these debilitating memories and they said no services were available so they instead turn to their faith. Participants said that while in the center men and women were treated equally. This is in contrast to the dominating sentiment in the FGD that women receive less support services than men. However, this thesis will not focus on the experience of women in the reintegration

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 83.

¹⁴¹ Pham, "The Lord's Resistance Army and Forced Conscription in Northern Uganda." 405.

centers since many women in Uganda (more specifically in the study) did not take part in reception centers.

Returning directly home, and not registering with the LC or UPDF, is known as “spontaneous reintegration”. Many women preferred this method of reintegration because it was seen as a means to avoid the stigmatization associated with those returning from the LRA. McKay and Mazurana describe spontaneous reintegration as a largely hidden process, by which girls assimilate directly back into their communities.¹⁴² The unfortunate result of this process is that many women and girls reintegrating were left without DDR or social assistance to aid in their reintegration process. For the FGD participants who returned without going through the reception centre, the majority stated that this occurred because reception centers were not available to them. Other explanations for why individuals did not take part in a reception center include not being aware that centers existed. Some said they tried to return directly home but family members would often send them to their village’s local leader, or to the local council leaders. Those leaders would then connect the returnee with the Ugandan army who then connects the returnee to a reception center. Regardless of whether or not reception centers were available for returnees, the majority of returnees state that they would like to have benefited from services offered through reintegration programs.¹⁴³

In summary, the civil strife in northern Uganda has led to the violation of the rights of many members of the Acholi tribe, especially in the northern districts of Gulu and Kitgum. Both government forces and the LRA rebels have committed these violations. The violations are due in part to the cycle of violence that has been carried out between the Nilotic speaking people of the north, and Bantu speaking people of the south. This ongoing divide within the country since colonialism has peaked with the LRA conflict. Although the LRA is no longer in northern Uganda, communities are fearful of the return of the LRA, and such fear influences how returnees are received in the reintegration process.

¹⁴² McKay, *Where Are the Girls?* , 34.

¹⁴³ Appendix 3: CRNU Findings

The political and historical components addressed in this chapter illustrate the deeply rooted historical grievances that contributed to the origin of the LRA and the present day political environment. The LRA conflict appears to have started in opposition to the Museveni government (which is still in power), and initially claimed to have the goal to cleanse the Acholi people of their past sins. While this thesis is concentrating on the reintegration of women from the LRA, the background and nature of the conflict cannot be ignored as they both contribute to the challenges of reintegration. The men, women, and children returning from the LRA are returning into a community that is suffering from a state of displacement and government mistrust. Such challenges are coupled with the tenuous economic and social environment post-conflict, which makes reintegration for these individuals even more difficult.

The following chapters take into account these environmental challenges while assessing the processes in the social, economic, and political context of the LRA-affected areas in Uganda. Acholi culture is deeply rooted in history and customary practices. As the next chapter addresses, these customary practices shape the social processes found in present day Acholiland, which subsequently creates a ripple effect on how women returnees experience the economic and political processes as well. Chapter 3 begins the assessment on the reintegration of ex-LRA women through examining women returnees in social processes in comparison to men returnees and women community members who were not part of the LRA.

CHAPTER 3: SOCIAL MECHANISMS

Social mechanisms in Northern Uganda's Acholiland are interactive processes, between returnees and their community, in the social context of the community's post-conflict environment. They are the gender roles and gender divisions of labor, and are the traditional practices that influence the way individuals' act and experience situations. Assessing how women returnees experience these processes in comparison to others within the community is an indication of whether or not they have been fully accepted back as community members.

This chapter answers the research question by outlining how women who returned from the LRA suffer disproportionately when compared to other Ugandan women through assessing the social mechanisms in Northern Uganda. Comparing these two groups reveals that the social processes – those that dictate gender roles and division of labor, and the practices that oppose the rights of women – connect the neglect of women ex-combatants' agency to their failed reintegration. While making this link, this chapter also introduces a challenge that arises as a result of gender expectations in the social realm. It addresses that although women maybe perceived as victims of war by outside observers, their community does not necessarily view them that way. Assumptions by community members that women returnees have deviated from gender expectations contribute to these women being stigmatized upon their return. The connection of these assumptions, which emerge as women's agency being neglected, to the reintegration failure of women is the outcome of this chapter.

Gender Roles and Gender Division of Labor

In traditional Acholi society the ideal man protects and provides for his family, makes household decisions, and is a hard worker. He is strong and aggressive in nature. The ideal woman stays at home, takes care of her children, obeys her husband, cooks, and cleans.¹⁴⁴ She is a respectful woman who is inherently peaceful. These images represent

¹⁴⁴ Equality and Transformations Project GREAT: Gender Roles, "Summary Report: Preliminary Formative Research Findings," (Washington, DC: Institute for Reproductive Health, 2011). 6

gender expectations to be met in Acholi traditional society, but the current roles of women and men expand beyond this “ideal” image.

The roles and division of labor for men and women are separate with some areas overlapping. Labor roles typically held by women include: hawking goods in market places (fabric, fruits and vegetables), agriculture, brewing and distilling alcohol, sex work, and bead making.¹⁴⁵ According to SWAY, the labor roles of women are modest with the highest involvement being in brewing and distilling alcohol, and in agriculture and herding.¹⁴⁶ For men occupational labor (in descending order of numbers of people engaged in each occupation) includes: manual labor (brick-making, construction, charcoal, quarry, firewood, and casual labor), farming and agriculture, hawking, professional/business, “boda boda” (motorcycle taxi), and repairs.¹⁴⁷ The primary difference between men and women in division of labor is the participation in manual labor for men and alcohol brewing for women.

Both genders are heavily involved in agricultural roles. Acholiland is an agricultural based society with ground crops being the main source of subsistence and commercial activities. Men traditionally were involved with the clearing, planting, and harvesting of these crops. This is no longer the case. Women are more involved with maintaining the crops than they traditionally have been. Presently, women are responsible for digging, planting, and harvesting, same as the men. Participants in my field study reaffirmed this shift in gender roles post-conflict. They stated that as a result of husbands being unable to work (participants blamed alcohol abuse as the cause), or by being unmarried, they had to take on roles that they traditionally were not involved in.¹⁴⁸ Some said that they are taking on roles that their husbands should be carrying out, but because of alcohol these men are

¹⁴⁵ Kaari Betty Murungi, "Bearing Witness: Girl Mothers of Gulu District," (Kampala, Uganda: The Uganda Association of Women Lawyers (FIDA Uganda), 2011).12

¹⁴⁶ Jeannie Annan, and C. Blattman, D. Mazurana, and K. Carlson, "The State of Female Youth in Northern Uganda," ed. Survey of War-Affected Youth (Survey of War-Affected Youth, 2008). 13

¹⁴⁷ Jeannie Annan, and Christopher Blattman, Dyan Mazurana, and Khristopher Carlson, "Making Reintegration Work for Youth in Northern Uganda," (Survey of War Affected Youth, 2007). 37

¹⁴⁸ Focus group (11 July 2011), Bungatria, Gulu; Focus group (28 July 2011), Acet, Gulu; Focus groups (10 August 2011), Lapinyolo, Gulu; Focus groups (12 August 2011), Koro Pancwala, Gulu; Focus groups (20 August 2011), Laroo, Gulu; Focus groups (20 August 2011), Koro Pancwala, Gulu; Focus groups (21 August 2011), Kasubi, Gulu; Focus groups (25 August 2011), Acet, Gulu

no longer reliable. One participant reflected how these added roles challenge her reintegration because now she is responsible for fulfilling her duties as a wife and mother, but also filling in the financial gaps that her husband has left her with.¹⁴⁹

Within the markets in Northern Ugandan communities, men and women are hawking goods and running small food, clothing, or miscellaneous goods stands. In the area of trade, men are primarily responsible for labor-intensive activities (such as breaking rocks within the quarry) and transporting goods for trade (particularly transport to Sudan). Women participate in labor-intensive activities as well, but in a different capacity. For example, in rock quarry's men have the job to break away large pieces rock from the quarry. Large rock pieces are then given to women who are responsible for breaking down the rocks into smaller pieces to then be sold for construction. In this context, both men and women can be involved in labor-intensive activities and well as trade signifying a breakdown in the gender division of labor.

When comparing the roles and division of labor between returnees and community members there is no discernible difference. There is a difference in employment between the groups, but that will be addressed further in the subsequent chapter. These gender roles and divisions of labor are social constructions, which reflect the gender expectations that people are expected to meet – such as the dutiful wife and mother. Although the gender division of labor is not divided as it once was, labor expectations remain to be reflective of the earlier mentioned “ideal” image of men and women. These expectations are no different for those who have returned from the LRA and those who were never part of it.

Traditional Practices that Oppose the Human Rights of Women

Traditional practices found within Acholi culture that oppose the human rights of women are comprised of any practices that deny women equal rights to men. This section restricts its scope to the examination of sexual and domestic violence, and land ownership. These areas were chosen because each influences the viability of the reintegration process for

¹⁴⁹ Koro Pancwala, Gulu; Focus groups (20 August 2011)

women. The discussion in this section focuses on how the two areas oppose the rights of women and if there is a difference between community members and returnees.

Sexual and domestic violence

Sexual and domestic violence is a concern facing many women in Acholiland. These acts of violence are often linked to alcoholism and struggles over land, money, water, and food.¹⁵⁰ Some men and women justify the abuse out of the belief that a level of violence is necessary to maintain traditional roles in the family structure. For example, some men and women in Acholiland still hold the belief that if a woman does not carry out her traditional roles she should be forced to do so, even if it is at the hand of violence.¹⁵¹

There is a wide range of sexual and domestic violent acts present in Acholi communities. Violence ranges from direct physical violence to verbal or emotional abuse. The many forms of violence experienced with the communities are articulated within a summary report for “GREAT: Gender Roles, Equality and Transformations Project.” The report encompasses findings from a study conducted in Northern Uganda with the objective of identifying the opportunities to promote the formation of equitable gender norms and attitudes. Table 3-1 reiterates the report’s findings and reflects the acts of violence that specifically affect women in the Acholi communities. Since the LRA is no longer operational in Uganda, violence caused directly by LRA members is not included in the below table.

¹⁵⁰ GREAT: Gender Roles, "Summary Report: Preliminary Formative Research Findings." 10

¹⁵¹ Adam Branch, "Fostering the Transition in Acholiland: From War to Peace, from Camps to Home," (Gulu, Uganda: Human Rights Focus, 2007). 30

Table 3-1: Descriptions of Violence in the Community¹⁵²

Type	Place	Perpetuator	Victim	Cause/Reason	Consequence/ Outcome	Response
Forced Sex	-Homes -Community	-Husband -Adolescent boys -Older men -Older women	-Wife -Mostly young girls (some-times boys)	-Lack of women's rights -Women viewed as husband's property -Boys' "sexual" urges	-Physical injuries -Domestic disputes -Woman accused of not fulfilling gender role -Early pregnancy	-Clan leaders called to mediate -Family punishes boys
Forced Marriage	-Community	-Parents	-Mostly girls (some-times boys)	-View/norm that girls should be married by a certain age	-Early pregnancy -Lack of opportunity for girls	-Not viewed as a problem by most people in community
Fighting	-Bars -School -Water wells	-Young people (mainly boys)	-Anyone	-Alcohol -Land disputes -Stigma -Fighting over water	-Physical injuries -Death	-Those fighting are broken up and depending on the outcome of the fight they are taken to the police and or hospital
Poisoning/ Witch-craft	-Everywhere	-Older people	-Anyone	-Hatred -Jealousy -Revenge	-Physical injury -Disability -Death	-Nothing due to fear of perpetrators
Rape (committed by an individual not known by the victim)	-Near road -Isolated places -In the bush -At home when parents are away -Discos/Bars /lodges	-Men	-Mostly women and girls (some-times boys)	-Alcohol -Men's "uncontrollable" sexual urges -Drug use	-Abandonment (by husband) -Girl viewed as spoiled -Infection with HIV -Unwanted pregnancy -Damaged reproductive health system	-Perpetuator and survivor gossiped about (stigma) -Community feels pity toward survivor -Community (especially women) feel animosity toward perpetrator -Vigilante justice carried out by young men toward perpetrator -Survivor taken to hospital -Perpetuator taken to police
Domestic violence toward women	-Home	-Husband	-Women	-Perceived authority of man -Alcohol -Lack of food -Arguments over how to spend money	-Physical injury -Separation/ divorce	-Mediation by clan leader -Survivor taken to hospital in cases of serious injury

Table 3-1 identifies the type of violence occurring, where it is occurring (in the private or public sphere), the instigators and victims, the consequences of the violence, and the responses to it. The types of violence experienced are laid out within the table to show the

¹⁵² Equality and Transformations Project GREAT: Gender Roles, "Summary Report: Preliminary Formative Research Findings," (Washington, DC: Institute for Reproductive Health, 2011).

range of gender violence found in the communities. The predominant cause/reason for sexual or domestic violence, as can be seen in the table, is the perceived authority and right of men over women. Another notable finding from the chart is that even in the circumstances where a woman is the victim, she is often reprimanded because of cultural norms. In the example of forced sex the cause was identified as the wife being the husband's "property." The consequence for the woman not having fulfilled her duties as a wife is forced sex.

Women are the primary victims of domestic and sexual violence. The sexual violence committed against women and girls during armed conflict has been widely documented in the literature on gender and conflict.¹⁵³ The above table showcases common causes and reasons for an act of violence to be committed against a woman. While the abuses against women are generally a consequence of gender norms and expectations, there are unique triggers behind violence committed against women returnees. For example, the verbal quips and stigma associated with being involved within the LRA are aspects of violence unique to returnees.

Women who experienced sexual violence and forced pregnancy in the LRA are often considered to have deviated from their traditional gender roles, and become stigmatized for this. Stigmatization occurs because the image of the ideal woman is deeply entwined with the value placed on a woman's chastity in Acholi culture.¹⁵⁴ Since the community is aware that many of the women and girls in the LRA were subjected to some level of sexual violence, the value of chastity holds a particular challenge for women returnees in their reintegration. Experiences of sexual violence and forced marriages are often a source of stigmatization against returnees. There is the perception women returnees' chastity has been blemished and they are in possession of *cen* from their involvement with the LRA. These perceptions that the women from the LRA have deviated from the "ideal image." This consequentially impedes the ability for women returnees to get

¹⁵³ Susan McKay, and Dyan Mazurana, *Where Are the Girls?*, ed. Rights and Democracy Women's Rights (Montreal: International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, 2004). 58

¹⁵⁴ Grace Maina, "Questioning Reintegration Processes in Northern Uganda," in *Conflict Trends* (Accord, 2009). 27

married within their community; which even further distances them from the “ideal woman”.

Land ownership

Since land ownership is passed through the paternal lineage, women are often denied access to it. The customary tenure system in Acholi society gives women the right to benefit and utilize family land, but not to “own” land.¹⁵⁵ This customary practice opposes Ugandan law that recognizes women as possessing the same rights to land tenure as men do, as outlined within Section 27 of the Land Act 1998¹⁵⁶ (see Text Box 3-1). But how does women’s marginalization in land ownership in northern Uganda influence the reintegration process for women returnees?

Text Box 3-1

Section 27 of the Land Act 1998

- “Any decision taken in respect of land held under customary tenure, whether in respect of land held individually or communally, shall be in accordance with the customs, traditions and practices of the community concerned, except that a decision which denies women or children or persons with a disability access to ownership, occupation or use of any land or imposes conditions which violate articles 33, 34 and 35 of the Constitution on any ownership, occupation or use of any land shall be null and void.”

Land access is a traditional practice that opposes the rights of women regardless of whether they are LRA returnees. That is not to say there is no difference between the two groups. Women returnees face additional challenges compared with women community members. The belief that women returnees have *cen* is a reoccurring reason cited when explaining why a family rejects them. The families are fearful that *cen* will cause women to act out and potentially inflict harm onto a family member. Another cause for the rejection of women returnees is they are often forced to choose between their children

¹⁵⁵ Gareth McKibben, and James Bean, "Land or Else: Land-Based Conflict, Vulnerability, and Disintegration in Northern Uganda," (International Organization for Migration 2010). 27

¹⁵⁶ McKibben, "Land or Else: Land-Based Conflict, Vulnerability, and Disintegration in Northern Uganda." 28

and family. Discussion with returnees revealed that when they returned to their community from the LRA their family accepted them but did not accept their children. In not wanting to abandon their children they, in turn, are rejected by their family. The rejection of children born within the LRA by family members is due to the perception that the children do not belong to a clan, particularly when the location of the father is unknown.¹⁵⁷ If a woman is not accepted by her family or husband's family she is then faced with the decision to either fight for her right to land, get married to access his family land, or move into an urban center and rent a place to live.

The issue of land dominated the discussion of reintegration challenges during the field research. Participants identified land conflict as a large contributing factor to reintegration failure. They explained that since women traditionally do not own land they are dependent on their family or husband for access to it. But many women who were in the LRA face extreme challenges accessing land, because of family rejection, the death of parents, or an inability to work their land because of injuries sustained in conflict. When asked if the men returnees had similar problems accessing land, there was a general consensus they did not. This is because men had the right to land, even if they were soldiers returning from the LRA.

The land tenure practice hinders the reintegration process for women because it denies women the opportunity to land that they can use and benefit from. My field research identified that no access to land was the primary obstacle to reintegration success. Those who were rejected by their family or husband upon their return from the LRA stated that no land to live and farm on is the source of their current troubles. Land is a necessity for sustenance farming allowing women to have basic food eat and sell. It provides a place to build a home where they do not have to pay rent, which takes away from the income they need for their children school fees, as well as to buy food and other basic necessities.

¹⁵⁷ McKay, *Where Are the Girls?* 53

“Where there are issues of land conflict and when you don’t have somewhere to stay, then reintegration becomes unsuccessful. You have been brought back from the centre and your mom's people may say "no you have to go away." Then you go to your dad's people and they say, "no go away, you can't stay here because you are from the bush and you did bad things." You find it quite difficult because with no land you find that you can’t even construct a small house that you can live in.”

- FGD participant reflecting on the challenge of land access in reintegration¹⁵⁸

Social Mechanisms, Neglect of Agency, and Reintegration Failure

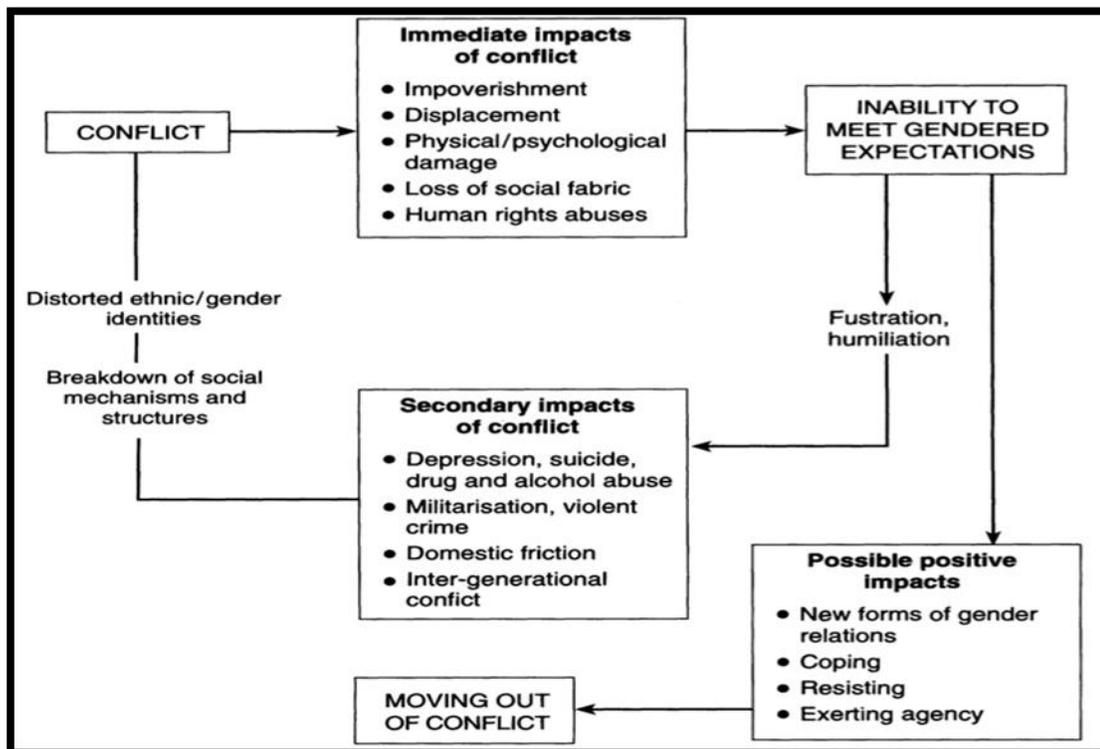
Identified thus far in this chapter is that Northern Uganda is greatly influenced by a paternalistic culture. This disadvantages women in various aspects within their society, irrelevant if she is a returnee or not. The chapter also identified that women returnees differ from other women in regards to the perception that is placed on them by outside observers to the LRA, just by virtue of being once part of the armed group. Through examining the social processes identified in this chapter, the link between the differences of women returnees to the rest of the community to their reintegration failure is made.

Returnees’ reintegration experience is shaped immensely by societal constructions that form the social mechanisms in Northern Uganda. Reflecting back on the cultural importance of gender roles and the gender division of labor, there is a large expectation that upon returning from the LRA individuals will regain such gender norms. This makes the ability to fulfill these gender expectations critical in the process of achieving social acceptance and therefore social reintegration. The inability to match gender expectations creates conflict between the returnee and the community, which emerges in the form of

¹⁵⁸ Focus group (10 July 2011), Kasubi, Gulu

physical violence or verbal (such as stigmatization). El-Bushra describes that gender identities and conflict are intrinsically linked (see below Figure 3-1). She explains that the immediate impacts of conflict can lead to the inability to meet gendered expectations, which then either leads to secondary consequences of conflict or positive experiences.

Figure 3-1: Gender identities and conflict – a tentative model of possible links¹⁵⁹



In applying this flow chart to the context of Northern Uganda, the displacement and breakdown of Acholi social structures can be considered as an immediate effect of the conflict. The effects of the mass displacement of Acholi people, breakdown in traditional Acholi social conventions, and the overall humanitarian atrocities have made it difficult for men and women to continue with their traditional gender roles and divisions of labor outlined at the beginning of this chapter. Yet some individuals thrive with stepping away from the traditional gender expectations post-conflict and are effected in a positive way as

¹⁵⁹ Judy El-Bushra, "Fused in Combat: Gender Relations and Armed Conflict," *Development in Practice* 13, no. 2/3 (2003). 262

a result. For example, many women in Northern Uganda are benefiting from being small business owners and being actively involved in the peace-making process, practices that women were traditionally not involved in. Unfortunately, for many others, the inability to meet gendered expectations causes frustration and humiliation. This tension then leads to secondary effects of conflict (see Figure 3-1) and consequentially breeds new conflict. The ability to meet these expectations facilitates the returnee's homecoming to her community with greater ease. This is because traditions, roles, and division of labor are all deeply linked to cultural gender expectations. When an individual deviates from these expectations, or is unable to meet them, the societal structures become disrupted and conflicts emerge as a result. But how does the neglect of women's agency by observers outside to the LRA influence the ability of women returnees to meet gendered expectations?

Victims, perpetrators, and "spoiled goods"

The ability for women to successfully reintegrate is greatly dependent on their capability to meet gendered expectations (such as in roles and labor) when returning to their community. All returnees, both men and women, are stigmatized for their experiences in the LRA. But women's experience with stigmatization is heightened because of their perceived deviation from societal expectations. This is despite their actions being guided by their own ability to calculate and devise means to cope in such extreme circumstances.

The shame associated with deviation from gendered expectations is wrapped tightly around cultural beliefs. These cultural beliefs are so intense that they overshadow the ability of women to exert their own agency. Despite returnees surviving and returning from the LRA, community members often perceive women returnees with negative attitudes. This is because of issues such as forced marriages causing women returnees being viewed as "untouchables" and their forced loss of virginity.¹⁶⁰ In Acholiland, the term often associated with the forced loss of virginity is "defilement".¹⁶¹ With that term comes the assumption that these women are now "spoiled goods." Even though these

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. 37

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

women were raped, language such as defilement gives the assumption that these women do not meet gendered expectations. It associates women returnees with an image that opposes the “ideal” representation of a woman. This subsequently causes them to be treated as pariahs in their society (see the below quote).¹⁶² Out of fear of this labeling, many women and girls choose spontaneous reintegration to avoid being identified as a returnee. For others who are labeled as such, when stigmatization becomes too intense they are either rejected by their family or choose to migrate elsewhere.

“There are few women who reintegrated successfully, but the majority haven’t because there is still a lot of stigmatization, finger pointing etc. People may pretend to accept you, but in case of a fight or disagreement they say ‘you see it’s because she lived in the bush and that’s why she is behaving like that.’ And if they see you carrying something they think you are going to kill them, they think you are going to do something bad to them even though that’s not the case.”

-A CRNU participant speaking on how stigmatization shows that while returnees have physically returned, they are not necessarily accepted.¹⁶³

This stigma creates difficulties for those who are seeking husbands, because their “ex-LRA” status often makes them undesirable as spouses. The participants described that the struggle to get married causes in many women to marry “bad men”, and further ensure their reintegration failure. One participant reflected on her own experience with “bad men”. She spoke about participating in a reception centre immediately after she returned from the LRA, and receiving a package of basic goods (such as blankets and pots) for her and her child that she gave birth to while in the LRA. When she returned to her community she found a husband and she described feeling extremely happy. One day, she overheard her husband speaking about her being a “rebel” and how he married her for the

¹⁶² Vahida Nainar, "In the Multiple Systems of Justice in Uganda Whither Justice for Women?," (Kampala, Uganda: The Uganda Association of Women Lawyers (FIDA Uganda), 2011). 11

¹⁶³ Focus groups (12 August 2011), Koro Pancwala, Gulu

resettlement package she had. He ended up leaving her and took her package. She was left with no one to help support her, her child from the LRA, and the unborn child of the man who just left her. At the time of the focus group discussion she had since remarried and was carrying a child from her new husband. Without family support or economic self-sufficiency, she finds herself completely reliant on being married in order to have her – and her children’s – basic needs for survival met. This example represents a challenging affecting many women after they leave combat – that they are viewed to be victims, perpetrators, and “spoiled goods” all at once. From this emerges a contradiction between the way services providers and community member come to view and treat women returning from the LRA, which undoubtedly influences how these returnees receive post-conflict support services.

Neglected agency during conflict, neglected grievances post-conflict

This chapter has outlined how hardships and suffering endured by women in combat can create difficulties in the reintegration process. But it is also important to recognize the agency women have in combat that can *also* negatively affect their chances of successful reintegration. Data gathered from the field research suggests it is the lack of support to reflect women’s agency in conflict that is a substantial obstacle to reintegration success. Participants connected their challenges to reintegration success to gender biases shaped by assumptions that women are powerless and should meet the “ideal” image of women in their community. They described how the assumption of being powerless left them without the resources that men benefit from. In addition, the desire of many to simply return to life as it was before the LRA caused many participants to say they did not seek support or additional services that would identify them as LRA returnees.

Inherent gender biases are drivers to the gendered-barriers preventing successful reintegration. But what must be remembered is that women have developed new ways to process social experiences. New experiences influence their ability and desire to conform to gender expectations. Some women gained a higher level of authority in the LRA than they would have had outside of it, and upon returning they realize they no longer have that power. A CRNU participant stated, “my co-wife was a commander. We had a

husband who died, and then she got a younger husband. Because of her authority she could choose her husband and so she chose a younger one.”¹⁶⁴ This is an interesting comment because of the woman’s role as commander and in her ability to “pick” her own husband. This was a luxury not even available to all men in the LRA. Although this is not a common experience amongst women returnees, it goes to show that women cannot be assumed as powerless in conflict.

The importance of women to irregular armed groups is a reason why they are often kept longer than men, if they are released at all.¹⁶⁵ Despite the power and authority exhibited by women (even if it was in a supportive capacity), outside observers to the LRA overlook this fact. This neglect undermines long-term reintegration efforts for these women because by assuming they are powerless in war, when that is not the case, means their grievances and experiences are not recognized. This can then grow into frustration, resentment, and future conflict. Women, like men, have learned positive and negative lessons in the LRA. But it is the experience of women that is ignored in favor of meeting the desired gendered expectations. When a woman’s wartime experience is acknowledged, she instead is typically recognized as a victim or stigmatized for her roles, again taking her away from the ideal gendered image. Women disregarded as combatants means they do not receive relevant counseling or support to assist in their reintegration.¹⁶⁶

A consequence to women missing out on counseling and support post-conflict is that they miss out on learning essential tools to assist in their ability to cope with their life outside of the LRA. This contributes to what participants described as lack the will to succeed in their life after the LRA. For some participants their reintegration is undermined by fear that the rebels will return to re-abduct them, and by the memories of their experience in the LRA. Participants, who are affected by memories of their time with the LRA, display symptoms that mirror those often experienced by people with post-traumatic stress disorder. The women described that when they are cooking or in open areas they fear

¹⁶⁴ Focus groups (20 August 2011), Laroo, Gulu

¹⁶⁵ McKay, *Where Are the Girls?* 121

¹⁶⁶ Kaari Betty Murungi, "Bearing Witness: Girl Mothers of Gulu District," (Kampala, Uganda: The Uganda Association of Women Lawyers (FIDA Uganda), 2011). 37

bombs and attacks similar as to what happened when they were in the bush. Others described that they continue to see the spirits of those who they had killed in battle. Reflecting back on experiences or memories in the LRA can also produce favorable memories, which hinders chances of their reintegration success. Some field study participants identified that they wanted to return because they no longer feel that they belong in their community. One even expressed that while in the force she felt that she was someone, but now since she has returned she is no one.¹⁶⁷ While discussing this feeling of being “no one”, the participant revealed a level of resentment towards her community for her social status.

This chapter described the societal constructs of men and women, and identified traditional practices that oppose the rights of women. One finding from this chapter that emerged is the influence social processes have on the economic processes. This next chapter builds on this to examine women’s socio-economic status and their access to, and control over, resources. It identifies how gender expectations and traditional practices influence the participation of women in the economic processes within their community. The crux of this next chapter is the experience of women ex-combatants in comparison to the two other vulnerable groups within their community – men ex-combatants and women community members.

¹⁶⁷ Focus groups (20 August 2011), Koro Pancwala, Gulu

CHAPTER 4: ECONOMIC MECHANISMS

The economic aspect of successful reintegration relies on the ability of ex-combatants to become less reliant on humanitarian assistance or State Aid and more self-reliant, thereby contributing to the economic life of their community. The challenge is, however, that the economic activity in Northern Uganda is stifled by the limited economic opportunities and weakened micro-economy caused by the conflict. The consequence of this is that men and women, returnees and community members¹⁶⁸, are struggling to acquire a reliable and sustainable income.

This chapter presents data that reveals how the economic mechanisms present in Northern Uganda's Acholiland link the neglect of women ex-combatants' agency to their reintegration failure. This connection becomes evident through the processes that influence women's socioeconomic status and their access to and control over resources. To convincingly make the case that women from the LRA suffer disproportionately compared to other Ugandan women and ex-LRA men in these processes, this chapter compares the experience with these mechanisms between these three groups.

Socioeconomic Status of Women

Socioeconomic status is commonly conceptualized as the social standing, or class, of an individual or group. It encompasses social and economic positions in relation to others in the community based on income, education, and occupation. According to the American Psychological Association (APA), "[e]xaminations of socioeconomic status often reveal inequities in access to resources, plus issues related to privilege, power and control."¹⁶⁹ Data is gathered to reflect the socioeconomic status of women in order to understand the inequalities in access to resources for women, and the gender hierarchies found within the present social structure.

A limitation to this section is that the time period of the data reflecting the economic status of men and women, returnees and community members, is predominantly from

¹⁶⁸ Individuals identified as "community members" are those who were never abducted into the LRA.

¹⁶⁹ "Women and Socioeconomic Status," (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2012). 1

before 2010. This is because from 2009 and earlier, the majority of individuals were living in or just leaving from IDP camps. Therefore, many of the available reports are not reflective of the current socioeconomic state of returnees and community members. Since recent quantitative data is limited, current qualitative data will be used to support any quantitative findings. To examine women's socio-economic status, this section draws from the 2011 Transitional Demobilization and Reintegration Program (TDRP) report, commissioned by the World Bank, titled "Uganda Demobilization and Reintegration Project: Beneficiary Assessment" by Finn, et al. The strength of this report is that it employs a gendered understanding of the reintegration experience of men and women, returnees and community members. It also offers an assessment of the socioeconomic status of individuals in Northern Uganda to complement the multitude of studies carried out prior to 2010.

Income

The ability of ex-combatants to generate income increases their potential for successful reintegration as it facilitates them becoming self-reliant and financially independent. In regards to income, the social and economic position of women ex-combatants in relation to others in the community is relatively equal. While income for women is on average extremely low, their wages are comparable to men's.¹⁷⁰ When comparing the daily wages of women returnees and that of those who were never part of the LRA there is little difference in daily wages.

Although there is a relative equality between women and men when comparing their socioeconomic status based on wages, the limited opportunity for women (returnee or not) to gain income-generating employment must be accounted for. In Northern Uganda, women engage in few economic activities other than household chores, such as cooking, cleaning, collecting water, washing, and caring for dependents.¹⁷¹ This is true for women community members and women returnees. These domestic responsibilities limit the amount of time women have available to participate in income generating projects.

¹⁷⁰ Jeannie Annan, and Christopher Blattman, Roger Horton, "The State of Youth and Youth Protection in Northern Uganda," ed. Suvey for War Affected Youth (UNICEF Uganda, 2006). 7

¹⁷¹ Ibid. 9

Because of this, employment is not synonymous with income generation. Non-income earning forms of employment include: fuel collection, animal care, and subsistence agriculture.¹⁷² Since non-cash earning activities can be considered as employment, wages may be relatively comparable between men and women, but it does not mean that overall income over all members of each gender will be.

Employment

Present employment patterns between community members and returnees, men and women, show minimal differences. These patterns suggest that the employment gap between returnees and community members had been closing prior to 2011¹⁷³. The most striking evidence supporting this is that at the end of LRA operations in Uganda 6.2 percent of community members were unemployed compared to the present 5.1 percent. For returnees, the shift was substantially larger with unemployment decreasing from an estimated 30.0 percent to present 9.2 percent.¹⁷⁴ The substantial decrease in the unemployment rate for returnees reaffirms the assertion that the employment gap between returnees and community members.

While there are minimal gaps between men and women returnees and community members in employment, this should not be mistaken for an absence of differences. *Table 4-1: Employment Patterns* displays data from a recent TDRP study. The table outlines the different economic positions of employment for returnees and community members. The data from Table 4-1 shows there is minimal difference among the majority of categories. It shows that 5.5 percent of women community members are enrolled in some level of schooling, compared to only 2.0 percent of women returnees. In the informal economy, approximately 5.5 percent of women community members are employed, compared to only 3.0 percent of women returnees. For the public sector, 5.5 percent of women community members are likely to be employed with only 2.0 percent being women returnees. The area in which women returnees were more likely to be employed than their

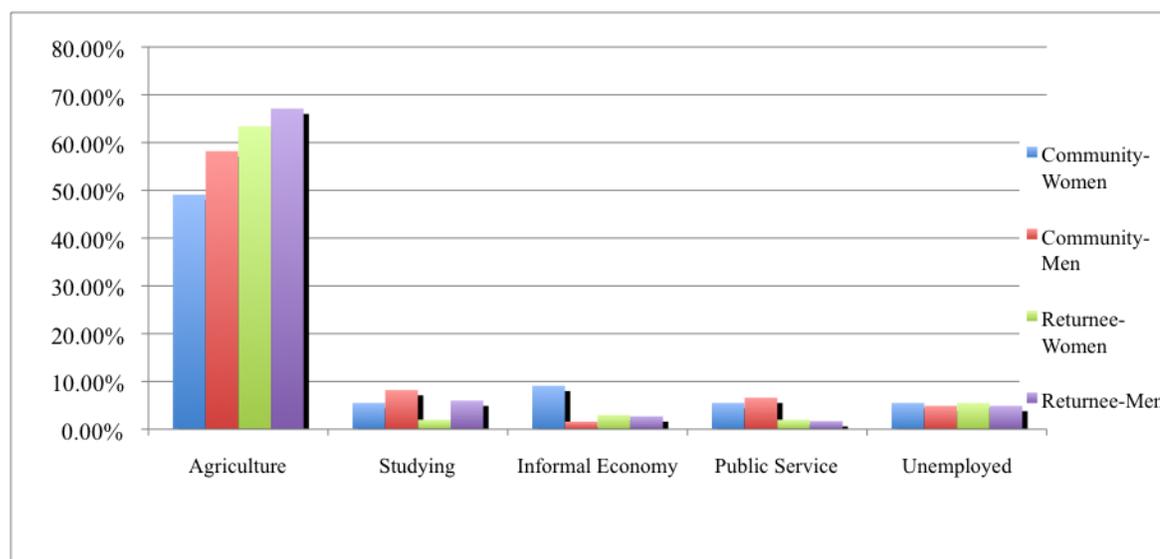
¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ The most recent report drawn from in this thesis was published in 2011.

¹⁷⁴ Anthony Finn, and C. Jeffereson, S. Vusia, D. Yiga, "Uganda Demobilization and Reintegration Project: Beneficiary Assessment," (Washington, DC: Transitional Demobilization and Reintegration Program (TDRP), 2011). 107

community member counterparts is in self-employment within the agriculture sector. From the study, 63.4 percent of women returnees were self-employed in agriculture as compared to 49.1 percent of women community members. Interpreting this data, it appears there is relative equality in patterns of employment regardless if a woman is a returnee or community member. The main difference is education, which will be discussed in the succeeding section.

Table 4-1: Employment Patterns



The majority of returnees and community members identify that it is more difficult for returnees to obtain employment, which supports the higher unemployment rates for returnees.¹⁷⁵ In the TDRP study, community members and returnees identified the main challenges they perceived for a returnee seeking employment. The same study revealed that community members and returnees identified five main categories restricting the ability of returnees to gain employment: “(i) no or low qualifications (65.6% of females and 52.2% of males compared to 47.0% of reporters); (ii) stigma or negative attitudes towards reporters (12.5% of females and 7.5% of males compared to 16.9% of reporters); (iii) that reporters are afraid and their own fear prevents them getting employment (31.0% females and 7.5% males compared to 2.5% reporters); (iv) lack of education (0.0%

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. 108

females and 9.0% males compared to 12.8% reporters), and (v) bad attitude of reporters (6.3% females and 6.0% males compared to 1.25% reporters).”¹⁷⁶ The findings revealed that community members and returnees all identified little, or no, qualifications being the biggest barrier to returnees obtaining work. The table also reflects the argument addressed in Chapter 1 – that explanations of reintegration failure are sought at the community or individual level. Returnees felt stronger than community members that stigma prevents them from gaining employment. In contrast, the community members argued it is the individual who prevents himself or herself from gaining employment.

While the lack of a skill set is a dominating obstacle to women gaining employment, it does not translate into them being unable to gain an occupation. *Figure 4-1: Main Occupation Outside the Home: Females Aged 14-35 not Currently Enrolled in School* reflects data gathered from a 2008 SWAY identifies that unskilled or low skilled labor is the prevailing type of labor taken on by women in the community. Participating in skilled work was near the lowest percentage for women’s labor. When examining the economic position for employment between women returnees and community members, findings presented here show there is little to no difference. While lack of skills may be an inhibiting factor to employment, the data shows most women are not involved in skilled labor. Field study discussions with returnees revealed that the lack of skills is one of their largest obstacles to gaining employment. These women said they lack education and vocational training that they want to benefit from. The women said that training in literacy and numeracy to make them more effective in the market and in managing micro-credit loans to make them competitive in the market economy.¹⁷⁷

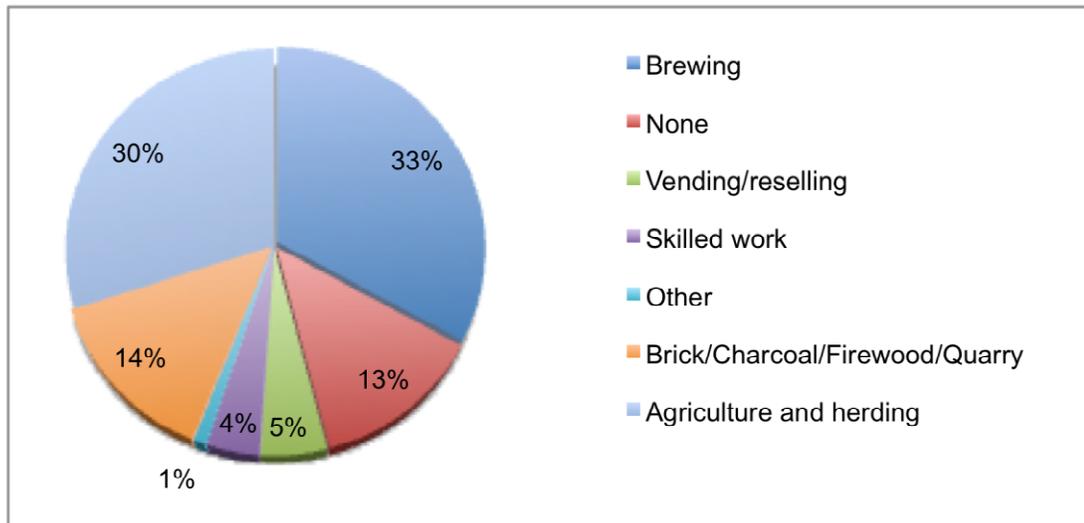
When women returnees do access vocational training it is typically as a tailor. This has resulted in an oversaturation of tailors in the market environment, and lack of sewing machines available, which causes many women to be unable to use their skills. The overabundance of women returnees being trained in this vocation has the unfortunate consequence of it being labeled as a “rebel” profession, and becoming a source of

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ See *Appendix 3 – CRNU Research Findings* for descriptions on factors that assist in reintegration.

stigmatization.¹⁷⁸ A result of this unintended consequence of stigmatization has policy recommendations calling for training programs to provide additional resources for literary and high-earning skills training for women and girls. Skills training should remain to be culturally appropriate, but the effort needs to be made to not restrict women to “traditional work.”¹⁷⁹ If vocational training does not match the market demand, it restricts the ability of returnees to diversify their livelihood strategies. This consequentially increases dependency on the subsistence agriculture, creating risks to food and income security and ultimately contributing to long-term poverty.¹⁸⁰

Figure 4-1: Main Occupation Outside the Home: Females Aged 14-35 not Currently Enrolled in School¹⁸¹



Education

Women and girls in northern Uganda have lower education levels and professional training.¹⁸² They also tend to be in skilled jobs that earn less money than their male peers. Embedded gender roles that prevent women from accessing education (for example, the responsibility to care for dependents) and the inability for programs to meet the specific

¹⁷⁸ Provencher, "Grace, Milly, Lucy... Child Soldiers."

¹⁷⁹ McKibben, "Land or Else: Land-Based Conflict, Vulnerability, and Disintegration in Northern Uganda." 75

¹⁸⁰ Finn, "The Drivers of Reporter Reintegration in Northern Uganda." 21

¹⁸¹ Annan, "The State of Female Youth in Northern Uganda." 13

¹⁸² Ibid. 18

needs of women (such as providing child care while in class) often explain the education differences between men and women.

Literacy statistics in Northern Uganda between community members and returnees suggest that community members on average are at a higher level both in reading and writing, and in either reading only or writing only.¹⁸³ Across the comparative groups the differences are striking, with approximately two thirds of women community members being fully literate in comparison to only one third of women returnees.¹⁸⁴ Comparing women returnees to men returnees, women remain the lowest in literacy levels with approximately two thirds of men being able to read and write.¹⁸⁵ The lower rate of women completing primary school partially explains this gap.

According to SWAY, “[a]mong youth who completed their first grade, 45 percent of females failed to complete seventh grade compared to 19 percent of males (excluding those youth currently enrolled).”¹⁸⁶ A comparable study by MDRP identified that approximately half of men returnees and over 80 percent of women returnees had not completed primary school, with one in ten having no school at all.¹⁸⁷ This is in contrast to the SWAY report that identifies one in every five women having no education and only one in every three functionally literate.¹⁸⁸ Since reading and writing are developed in the later primary grades, it is unsurprising that those abducted are lagging behind community members in literacy levels. Missing out on key educational years and the lack of access to adult literacy or education are two critical barriers preventing returnees from being equal to their community peers in this aspect.

Findings from the field study reaffirm the importance of education for successful reintegration. Many of the participants from the field study were abducted as school-aged children; thus, they were never able to complete their education. Participants said that

¹⁸³ Finn, "Uganda Demobilization and Reintegration Project: Beneficiary Assessment." 9

¹⁸⁴ Annan, "The State of Female Youth in Northern Uganda." 19

¹⁸⁵ , "The Status of Lra Reporters." 5

¹⁸⁶ Annan, "The State of Female Youth in Northern Uganda." 19

¹⁸⁷ , "The Status of Lra Reporters." 5

¹⁸⁸ Annan, "The State of Female Youth in Northern Uganda." 18

receiving education, more than just the primary education they already have, would allow them more professional opportunities. Moreover, as many of the participants were illiterate (which itself holds a level of stigma) having educational support would improve their literacy and help with this aspect of their social reintegration.

Further examination into education statistics between community members and returnees suggests that abduction is an unreliable predictor of under-education. There was a high level of community displacement as a result of the conflict, which caused many children to miss out on educational opportunities even if they were not abducted. In the reception centers, returnees had opportunities to receive some form of educational or vocational skill training as part of the reintegration process. The MRDP study revealed that, surprisingly, nearly three-quarters of respondents claimed to have resources to access education or training opportunities. The resources available to access education come from a variety of sources, including family members, government organizations and civil society organizations.¹⁸⁹

Resources, motivation, and abduction therefore appear to not be serious constraints to accessing education. But why then is there a significant number of returnees (specifically women and girls) who are not back in school? Gender biases permeating throughout the education system is suggested as a cause for girls to drop out of school. For many women and girls, in the absence of childcare their responsibility is to look after and care for dependents. Mothers who were rejected by their family or community are faced with no support network to help with their children. As a result of this, many girls who return from the bush are unable to go to school, or to join any vocation-teaching centre.¹⁹⁰

Participants within my field study indicated that the largest impediment to women accessing education is an emotional barrier. The women spoke about resources and training services available to them when they initially returned from the LRA. Following their return from the LRA, when they were taken to education or vocational training the

¹⁸⁹ , "The Status of Lra Reporters." 5

¹⁹⁰ Maina, "Questioning Reintegration Processes in Northern Uganda." 29

women said they were not mentally ready: “when I was in there (with the LRA) I thought that when I came back I'd be back in school. They (my family) took me, but I failed to keep up. My parents then took me to tailoring school and that is what I'm doing now.”¹⁹¹

Others said that physical, mental, and emotional wounds prevented them from being able to focus. Many of the women said that they have been able to work past these experiences and have now become educated and working in a vocation.

Access to and Control Over Resources

Access to and control over assets and resources is a driver of success in the social and economic aspects of reintegration. It does so by influencing the ability of returnees to gain access to one or both of the following: 1) family assets such as land, informal credit/livelihood strategies; and 2) personal assets from prior to time in the bush such as land, savings, and business.¹⁹²

Access to family assets through kinship networks significantly improves the immediate reintegration process for returnees. Kinship networks facilitate the access to land for returnees. This assists with immediate reintegration needs because of the opportunity for land to be utilized for subsistence farming and income generation.¹⁹³ Kinship networks are also significant in the immediate process of reintegration as they are a source of informal credit for potential livelihood strategies. It gives returnees the capacity to diversify beyond agriculture, which often gives the appearance that they are better reintegrated than those who do not.¹⁹⁴ If a returnee is able to gain informal credit through their kinship networks, it signifies they have attained a degree of social acceptance.

The access to family assets by returnees in comparison to community members exposes subtle differences between the two groups. Appearing in literature on post-conflict reconstruction is that the community members are on average less concerned about capital than returnees. This implies that community members experience fewer challenges

¹⁹¹ Focus groups (20 August 2011), Laroo, Gulu

¹⁹² Finn, "The Drivers of Returnee Reintegration in Northern Uganda." 2

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. 3

in accessing credit.¹⁹⁵ For returnees who do not benefit from family assets through kinship networks, they become caught in a state of “catch-up” with their community members.¹⁹⁶ They often do not benefit from established economic practices possessed by those within the community who already have established networks. With no access to and control over resources within the familial structure, returnees need to at least have access to personal assets from prior to time in the bush such as land, savings, and business. Yet access to personal assets relies on the individual being self-reliant prior to experience in the LRA. Since many LRA members were abducted during their youth, not all are able to benefit from personal assets obtained prior to their LRA experience.

Women face additional challenges compared to men in accessing family assets due to paternalistic customs culture that influence inheritance rights and land access.¹⁹⁷ All women, regardless of whether they are returnees or not, experience these challenges. Women returnees, however, experience intensified and different challenges. When faced with these challenges, they must devise their own means of access to and control over resources. For example, women join together with other women to combine skills for some economic purpose.¹⁹⁸ The aim of these groups is to earn money to support their families and supplement their income. Women lead support groups, such as micro-finance groups, to build up the confidence of women to be contributing members within the community. This includes economic confidence, which has been damaged by time in the bush and shaped by perceptions of traditional gender roles. As well, the support groups give women the confidence to break away from traditional gender expectations, providing them with the opportunity and strength to be heard in economic and development debates, as well as to access top development opportunities.

For women who are unable to gain credit or assets from kinship networks, many decide to migrate in hopes of better opportunities. Decisions to migrate are influenced by push/pull factors. Push factors for migration are any factors that cause a living situation so

¹⁹⁵ Finn, "Uganda Demobilization and Reintegration Project: Beneficiary Assessment." 13

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Finn, "The Drivers of Reporter Reintegration in Northern Uganda." 14

¹⁹⁸ Finn, "Uganda Demobilization and Reintegration Project: Beneficiary Assessment." 56

untenable that returnees feel that they must leave their community. Push factors identified by a study conducted on the migration of ex-combatants in Uganda (in descending order of frequency) include: extreme stigma, economic challenges, no access to land, violence or threats from family or community members, loss of all material possessions, nothing to return to (in cases such as death of family), fear of re-abduction, mistrust of government, long-term injuries, and bad memories associated with the environment.¹⁹⁹ In contrast, pull factors are the factors that make a living situation in a different environment so enticing that the returnees decide to leave their community for new opportunities elsewhere. Pull factors (in descending order of frequency) include: hope for economic opportunities in larger cities, assistance through housing, employment or monetary support by family or community, less stigma against returnees from the LRA, anonymity in larger cities, access to land, marriage prospects, increased security, and additional available support services.²⁰⁰

The push/pull factors of migration are clearly identifiable with the phenomenon of women returnees turning to commercial sex work in Kasubi parish within Gulu district. A 2012 report carried out by the IOM identified there are 200-300 women ex-LRA commercial sex workers in Kasubi parish. Many of these women still struggle to reintegrate despite having received amnesty packages, or being afforded short-term assistance, including skills training and counseling upon immediate return.²⁰¹ With no access to family land and community and family rejection for some, these women have nowhere to live so they migrate to Kasubi. Unable to secure employment, they turned to prostitution as their only means of reliable income. The majority of these women would like to find other means of sustaining themselves and their children, but they do not know how or where to go. According to the IOM study, over three-quarters of the women participants stated that they often feel sad, lonely, and angry.²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ David Baxter, and Alexandra Burrall, "Ex-Combatant Migration and the Implications for Ddr: A Case Study of Uganda," in *Conference Consolidating Peace After Conflict: The Future of DDR* (Washington, DC2012). 3

²⁰⁰ Ibid. 3

²⁰¹ McKibben, "Land or Else: Land-Based Conflict, Vulnerability, and Disintegration in Northern Uganda."

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²⁰² Ibid. 24

The IOM study is important as it shows the effect on reintegration when women returnees are unable to have access to and control over resources. The study illustrates how women can be tempted by the push/pull factors of migration, especially when they do not have access to or control over resources in their original community.

“To be successfully reintegrated that person should at least have a source of income because sometimes when you come back your parents are gone and no one is there to take care of you, or your parents are there but they don't love you. Then, as a woman, you feel that a man will give you comfort so you go with the man. If you come back with a child that man will not like that child so you might again give birth with a child with that man but then he leaves you. So then you find yourself again alone with no money and no one to help you. If you at least can access resources or have skills you then don't have to seek refuge in a man or husband in order to survive.”

- A returnee reflecting on what she felt to be the greatest barrier to reintegration and the most significant factor to success in reintegration.²⁰³

Economic Mechanisms and the Reintegration Process

Northern Uganda has the highest rates of poverty in Uganda (64 percent in rural and 40 percent in urban areas²⁰⁴). Men and women, returnees or not, are all struggling to be economically self-sufficient due to their community's poor market economy. Further assessments into the experience of each of these groups are challenged by data available on the current socioeconomic status of returnees being limited. The economic environment is dramatically different than it was before 2010 when the majority of reintegration studies were conducted. The clearest example of the change in economic environment is by the shift in unemployment of returnees from 30.0 percent at the end of the war compared to the present 9.2 percent in 2011. In approximately three years there has been a decrease of over 20 percent in unemployment for returnees.²⁰⁵

²⁰³ Refer to *Appendix 3 – CRNU Findings*

²⁰⁴ Sabina Alkire, "A Conceptual Framework for Human Security," Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity, CRISE (Oxford: Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford, 2003). 15

²⁰⁵ Finn, "The Drivers of Reporter Reintegration in Northern Uganda." 63

Primary and secondary sources of data gathered suggest that the socio-economic status of women ex-combatants is comparable with the rest of the community. This is in part due to the region's population as a whole suffering from low income, employment, and education. However, the socio-economic status of women returnees does differ in comparison to women community members and men returnees in the level of education, and income-earning employment. The data from this chapter identified that women (returnees or not) are limited in access to and control over resources. The embedded gender biases in Uganda's inheritance laws and land tenure system causes women community members and returnees to struggle for economic self-reliance. Women returnees face additional obstacles accessing resources by virtue of returning from the LRA because of the stigmatization and rejection that is often present. This phenomenon subsequently highlights the influence of social mechanisms on the economic. For women in the study, successful reintegration means that a returnee has been able to return to her family and resume working once again. Social processes inadvertently have a direct consequence on the economic mechanisms. As shown in Chapter 3, these processes lead to the stigmatization and rejection of women returnees by kinship networks limit and restrict access to resources (land, financial and other basic goods) and support services by service providers.

Gender biases and economic mechanisms

The data gathered on economic mechanisms suggests that it involves processes heavily influenced by social mechanisms, which leads to the reintegration failure for women. For women returnees, limited or no access to resources appears to be the biggest influence in the assessment of the economic mechanisms of reintegration. Reasons for women returnees not having access to land or assets are determined by social mechanisms. Traditional practices that oppose the rights of women, and unfulfilled gender expectations, prevent women from benefitting from these resources. For returnees unable to access kinship assets, personal assets would make them more competitive in the market. But as described earlier in this chapter, many returnees missed the opportunity to

develop personal assets because of being abducted at a young age, as well as being absent for a substantial length of time.

Women are denied or restricted from access to and control over resources as a result of gender biases coming from the perceived experiences in the LRA by outside observers. Women and girls were forced to kill just as men, yet women have a more difficult time gaining access to resources through family acceptance. In this context, the patriarchal biases that shape the society favor the men and boys. Women returnees have deviated from the ideal image of a woman, even if it was for their own survival, and suffer the consequences of it. This economic disadvantage is heightened further for women returning from the LRA with children. Returning from the LRA with a child often leads to rejection by the woman's family.²⁰⁶ A CRNU participant describes her experience coming home with children from the bush: she returned to her community with children from the LRA and married a community member who was not abducted. With pressure from family and community, her husband eventually left her and took the supplies she gained from the reception center along with him. She found herself completely alone, a mother to two children from the LRA and two children from the failed marriage, and having no place to live. The woman is now married again and pregnant with her fifth child. She says she is now reliant on the support of men for somewhere to live and grow food for her and her children to eat.²⁰⁷

In relation to economic mechanisms, reintegration services in this aspect are often criticized for the lack of attention to the special needs of women returnees, especially those who come back with children. Without kinship networks for access to recourses, the women returnees struggle to find alternate means of social and economic support. These returnees quickly find themselves stuck in a cycle of poverty. The longer they remain in this cycle the more difficult it is to get out. Without the embedded gender biases and needs of women and girls being addressed by policy makers, women will remain to struggle with their socio-economic status and be reliant on others for resources. While

²⁰⁶ McKay, *Where Are the Girls?* 87

²⁰⁷ Focus group (23 June 2011), Laroo, Gulu

women returnees are not helpless they do need support in bettering their socio-economic status and access to resources.

Limiting economic self-reliance

Outside observers neglecting the agency of women is an extension of the experience of women in the LRA being overlooked. This creates a missed opportunity for them to utilize skills they gained while in the LRA, which ultimately influences how these women approach and cope with situations post conflict. This is especially the case for those who experienced a level of power that they would not have had outside of the force. Being forced back into traditional roles they are unfamiliar with, or resist against, can result in these women being isolated from their civil-society, or being involved in post-conflict violence as aggressors or recipients of aggression.²⁰⁸ Although outside observers to the LRA neglect the skills and experiences of women returnees, it does not mean that the returnees themselves have forgotten. A participant from Pancwala spoke about how in the bush she was someone, but now back in her community she is no one. She does not wish to return to the LRA, but she expressed that her midwifery skills could be used in her community. She wants to be able to use this skill set in her life, since she sees it as a way that she can make money and contribute to her community. But she does not have the educational skills to gain a certificate necessary to utilize her skills as a professional.

In addition, women returnees have gained skills in the LRA that they may wish to use to gain income. Unfortunately, programs available to utilize such skills are essentially non-existent. Since the information on women being involved in the LRA is limited, so is the knowledge on the skills they may have gained. This limits program developers' ability to provide socio-economic assistance to meet the needs of the returnees. To give returnees some income-generating skills, program developers in reintegration assistance created vocational training opportunities, but these opportunities are gender specific. Women are typically bead makers and tailors, which have resulted in an overabundance of women trained in these vocations. This limits their opportunity to make a profit because the

²⁰⁸ Chris and Mariam Persson Coulter, Mats Utas, *Young Female Fighters in African Wars* (Stockholm: Sweden Elanders Sverige AB, 2008). 32

market demand is not present for the mass number of women trained in the same vocation.

This chapter has identified the societal constructs of men and women, and has identified the effect of cultural practices on the socio-economic status of women returnees. It has described that while women in general are disadvantaged in the economic processes, women returnees face additional challenges unique to missed opportunities as a result of being in the LRA. To continue with the “Gender Responsive Reintegration Assessment,” the next chapter draws from the findings gained from the examinations into social and economic mechanisms addresses the final aspect of the framework: the political mechanisms. This final assessment takes the discussion to examine how women returnees are engaged in their community in comparison to women community members and ex-LRA men. It pieces together the importance of understanding the involvement of women ex-combatants in social and economic processes for their involvement in their community post-conflict – a critical aspect for preventing renewed conflict resulting from unmet grievances.

CHAPTER 5: POLITICAL MECHANISMS

Political mechanisms are the structures and processes that allow ex-combatants to participate in their civic and community life. Ex-combatants need to be able to participate in defining their community's new post-conflict social contract in order to identify their grievances through the appropriate channels rather than taking up arms again.²⁰⁹ With faith in the state, ex-combatants are more likely to be actively contributing members in their society thereby enabling long-term and sustainable reintegration.

The political mechanisms in Northern Uganda make the final connection identified in this thesis between the gender biases that neglect agency of women ex-combatants and their reintegration failure. This chapter discusses the political participation of women ex-combatants and community members and how they are engaged in justice and reconciliation efforts. This comparison indicates that women ex-combatants are suffering disproportionately in comparison to other women because their roles in conflict remain to be inaccurately recognized.

Political Participation of Women at National and Local Levels

At present, 30 percent of Uganda's 332 parliamentarians are women. This percentage is up from 18 percent in 1995. The visible presence of women within the government has made Uganda a model for women's political participation in Africa.²¹⁰ Showing a dedication to encouraging the political participation of women, the Ugandan government has committed itself to policies supporting women's empowerment. The Government has done so through the Constitution of Uganda (see Text Box 5-1) and international commitments which include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Nairobi Declaration, Paris Principles, Goma Declaration, and UN SCR 1325&1820.

²⁰⁹ "Concepts, Policy and Strategy of the Iddrs," in *Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards* (United Nations 2006). 6

²¹⁰ Josephine Ahikire, and Christine Ampaire and Aramanzan Madanda,, "Changing Fortunes: Women's Economic Opportunities in Post-War Northern Uganda " *Investing in Peace*, no. 3 (2010). 29

In Uganda, constitutional provisions have led to advances in women's political involvement. The Constitution states that there is to be one woman representative in Parliament for each district.²¹¹ Furthermore, the Local Government Act of 1997 calls for women to represent one-third of the council at all levels.²¹² But very few women are running for regular constituency seats besides the seats allotted for them. For the 2011 elections, women represented only 3.6 percent (46 out of 1270) of the total candidates.²¹³ One explanation for the limited political representation of women are political parties do not provide equal opportunities for women to represent parties in leadership positions. As well, few women are able to campaign for these positions individually because of their typically low incomes.²¹⁴

In Northern Uganda, few women hold positions in the region's local government beyond the mandatory positions set aside in local councils by the Local Government Act, which is a result of voting influencers. Voting is influenced by the patriarchal ideology that men are "natural leaders" and involvement in political office is a role reserved for men. Yet some voters prefer to cast their ballot for women. Many women believe having women in office will be better representatives for their rights and needs.²¹⁵ The challenge is that there are few women actually standing for office, and women who are running tend to be from the NRM, which has a very low popularity rating in the north. This makes it possible that the reason for limited political involvement of women in Northern Uganda is a result of political allegiance and not necessarily a consequence gendered biases.²¹⁶

At a national level, the political involvement of women in Uganda is limited. In the 2011 elections, women represented only 3.6 per cent of the total number of candidates.²¹⁷ Information was not provided in the statistics on the percentage of candidates to identify the percentage of former combatants (if any at all). Despite this limited information, the

²¹¹ "Final Report on the Ugandan General Elections, 2011," (Kampala, Uganda: European Union Election Observation Mission, 2011). 32

²¹² Ahikire, "Changing Fortunes: Women's Economic Opportunities in Post-War Northern Uganda ". 29

²¹³ "Final Report on the Ugandan General Elections, 2011." 32

²¹⁴ Ahikire, "Changing Fortunes: Women's Economic Opportunities in Post-War Northern Uganda ". 28

²¹⁵ Ibid. 29

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ "Final Report on the Ugandan General Elections, 2011." 32

low representation of women in politics appears to be first and foremost an issue of gender. Ultimately, this is because women candidates running for office need financial means and social acceptance. Therefore if an individual were successfully reintegrated, man or woman, then presumably they would be as capable to run for office as anyone else is.

Text Box 5-1: Constitution of Uganda, 1995: Rights of Women²¹⁸

33. Rights of women.

- (1) Women shall be accorded full and equal dignity of the person with men.
- (2) The State shall provide the facilities and opportunities necessary to enhance the welfare of women to enable them to realise their full potential and advancement.
- (3) The State shall protect women and their rights, taking into account their unique status and natural maternal functions in society.
- (4) Women shall have the right to equal treatment with men and that right shall include equal opportunities in political, economic and social activities.
- (5) Without prejudice to article 32 of this Constitution, women shall have the right to affirmative action for the purpose of redressing the imbalances created by history, tradition or custom.
- (6) Laws, cultures, customs or traditions which are against the dignity, welfare or interest of women or which undermine their status, are prohibited by this Constitution.

Acholi sociopolitical context and involvement of women

The sociopolitical context in Acholiland is based on Acholi customary culture. The Acholi people are organized around ancestral practices of paternal clans and village lineages. The sociopolitical context emerged to consist of multi-village chiefdoms (political groupings). The groupings are larger than paternal clans and bring together a number of lineage-based village settings under one leader.²¹⁹ Conversely, the Acholi

²¹⁸ "Constitution of the Republic of Uganda: Article 33," (1995).

²¹⁹ hhas, and Tonka Eibs, "Women Empowerment: Claiming Rights - Promoting Peace," in *Claiming Rights, promoting peace: Women's Empowerment in conflict affected countries: Second Learning Conference* (Vienna, Austria: Austrian Development Cooperation, 2009). 36

cultural institution has evolved to be presided over by a Paramount Chief.²²⁰ The Chiefdoms, in addition to the social order, help to shape the present institutional framework within which traditions in Acholi have been maintained and sustained.²²¹

The institutional framework that shapes and maintains Acholi traditions is deeply entrenched with gender biases. The gender biases oppose the participation of women in leadership and decision-making roles, and perpetuate the traditional gender expectations of women. These biases are reflected in the gender hierarchy present in the power structure in Acholi culture. For example, there is a traditional belief that women should not stand before men and elders and speak, for it would be seen as an act of disrespect.²²² Resistance to the involvement of women in the sociopolitical context is also based on gender perceptions, such as women being too emotional and weak to be effective leaders or strong decision-makers.

Despite the limited involvement in local politics, women are becoming increasingly involved in decision-making in the public and private sphere of their communities. Women are involved in marketplaces with many beginning to take on leadership positions in market organizations.²²³ Women are also a visible presence in NGO-run workshops and training courses on topics such as leadership, advocacy, income-generating projects, and human rights. They are more engaged in decision-making and leadership positions when they utilize skills from those opportunities. Participation increases women's economic power, which subsequently drives them into leadership positions.²²⁴ By increasing the presence of women leaders the gender assumptions that plague this patriarchal society are being broken down. With gender biases broken down, women (returnees or not) are more likely to be engaged in peace and security initiatives.

The sociopolitical status of women returnees is slightly different in comparison to those who were never part of the LRA. This is mainly due to the returnees' social position

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid. 38

²²³ Ahikire, "Changing Fortunes: Women's Economic Opportunities in Post-War Northern Uganda ". 26

²²⁴ Ibid. 28

being undermined by the numerous accounts of rape and forced marriage and their economic position being limited by access to resources and education gaps. These circumstances consequentially cause women returnees to struggle in gaining positions of leadership and responsibility.²²⁵ The negative implications must be mitigated if women returnees are to be engaged in the post-conflict setting. The community needs to be educated on the importance of involving these women in the peace process. To achieve this, community sensitization is needed to alleviate the stigma that prevents women returnees from speaking openly on their experiences in the LRA. The desired outcome is to advance awareness on the experiences and needs of women returning from conflict to then bring awareness to the need of women being involved in post-conflict aspects peace and security. While women returnees are benefiting from advancements to better their sociopolitical status, any advances for these women is unsustainable if the society (particularly men) is not educated on the importance of engaging women in post conflict discussions.²²⁶

Encouraging Long-Term Reconciliation and Reconstruction

Another mechanism critical in reintegration is the process of community reconciliation and reconstruction. This includes processes that take place in a war-affected community during the transition from conflict to peace. Making up this transition are various forms and processes of justice. Formal processes involve the International Criminal Court, and the existing legal system of the Government of Uganda. Alternative forms and processes of justice are known as *transitional justice*. These alternative mechanisms for justice include: truth commissions, ad-hoc tribunals, hybrid national courts, amnesty agreements, people's tribunals, constitutional amendments, and traditional systems of justice.²²⁷

Traditional justice and reconciliation

The two dominant mechanisms for justice in Northern Uganda follow formal and traditional systems. The formal processes involve the state structured courts, police,

²²⁵ Maina, "Questioning Reintegration Processes in Northern Uganda." 32

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Vahida Nainar, "In the Multiple Systems of Justice in Uganda Whither Justice for Women?," (Kampala, Uganda: The Uganda Association of Women Lawyers (FIDA Uganda), 2011). 5

prisons, and local council courts. But there are criticisms to the formal processes of resolving the conflict. One source of criticism is that the formal mechanisms designed by the Government does not reflect Acholi customary culture. Formal mechanisms are also deemed inadequate to deal with the vast atrocities committed by individuals who were themselves victims of abduction. Some feel that the formal retributive justice of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and Ugandan courts contradict the Amnesty Act, which gives blanket amnesty to ex-rebels. Many Ugandans in the north instead prefer traditional forms of justice. Some consider traditional forms of justice as a better process than formal mechanisms operated through the Ugandan legal system or the ICC. The idea stems from the belief that traditional mechanisms are more adequate to deal with restoring relations between the perpetrators and survivors of the conflict.²²⁸ The traditional practices involve components of justice, reconciliation, and cleansing for those who have committed wrongdoings against the community that they are reintegrating into. Yet the ability of traditional processes to resolve the conflict is not the focus of this section. Instead, to be assessed is the involvement of women in this critical process of justice and reconciliation for those returning from the LRA.

The *Ker Kwaro Acholi* (KKA), formalized in 2002, is the Acholi traditional institution that is recognized as one of the actors in transitional justice. The KKA has the Paramount Chief (“His Highness”) heading the structure. Below him includes his Counselors, who are the Chiefs. They are attached to the Ministries and select one *Rwot* (local chief) to report to the Council. There is also the Minister who reports to the Prime Minister, who then reports back to the Paramount Chief.²²⁹ The *Rwot Kweri* oversees the functioning of the clan and families within it. He is the central point for conflict resolution and he conducts cleansing and returning ceremonies for LRA returnees. The head of the women is called *Rwot Kwor*; however, they are limited in responsibility to only women’s activities and problems.²³⁰ While the inclusion of women gives the appearance the KKA is gender responsive, there is no space for women to take on any key leadership roles. This includes leadership in the traditional justice mechanisms.

²²⁸ Ibid. 29

²²⁹ Ibid. 29

²³⁰ Ibid.

The KKA administers traditional justice to promote reconciliation. Traditional justice is often favored in dealing with the LRA abuses since it is a process that is more concerned with life of the war-affected after the conflict, which retributive justice fails to do. One primary means of reconciliation administered for LRA returnees is by *mato oput*, which traditionally was used in respect to a murder between clans. The process involved uniting the two clans then encouraging the killer to confess to the crime and seek reconciliation and forgiveness.²³¹ Mato oput is not an ideal method to bring justice to the victims of the LRA. It is not capable to deal with rape, mutilations, abductions, etc.; nor is the perpetrator from the LRA always knowledgeable of the clan of their murdered victim (which is a critical part of the process). But as a means of reconciliation, mato oput has more to do with the psychosocial reintegration for the offender than providing a means of justice. This psychosocial component is critical to the reintegration process as it can help alleviate the level of stigmatization from the community, such as cleaning the returnee from cen.

Women and men returnees both are able to go through traditional justice and cleansing ceremonies when re-entering their communities. The roles of women are limited though when it comes to the implementation of these processes. Traditionally, in carrying out mato oput there has been resistance to the participation of women. Reasons behind the resistance are rooted in the belief that the participation of women goes against Acholi culture. Some men and women hold the belief that women should not be involved in the process because it is the “man’s role”.²³² Other arguments are that women are too emotional to be able to competently mediate the ceremonies.²³³ Male elders traditionally are responsible for carrying out Acholi ceremonies and often perpetuate the belief that women have no authority and no agency.²³⁴ Women traditionally were involved in these ceremonies, but only in a supportive role. Typically women are involved in roles such as

²³¹ Ibid. 31

²³² Jessica Anderson, "Community Perspectives on the Mato Oput Process," in *Mato Oput and War Related Offenses in Acholiland* (The Mato Oput Project, 2009). 29

²³³ Ibid. 29

²³⁴ Joanna R. Quinn, "Gender and Customary Mechanisms of Justice in Uganda," in *Confronting Global Gender Justice : Women's Lives, Human Rights*, ed. Debra Bergoffen, and Paula Ruth Gilbert, Tamara Harvey, and Connie McNeely (Florence, KY: Routledge, 2010). 254

“cheering up the elders and giving happiness”, preparing for the ceremony (such as cooking food, fetching water, cleaning afterwards, and preparing alcohol), and passing on the knowledge of the ceremonies to the next generation.²³⁵ The exclusionary practices of traditional ceremonies prevent women from being involved in their own justice by obstructing them from being involved in a process that they are directly influenced by. These processes are structured and carried out by male elders, but many women’s groups question the elder’s ability to be representative of, or sensitive to, the needs of women.²³⁶

Women are pushing against the traditional perceptions that oppose their participation in ceremonies and practices. Women, both formerly abducted and non-abducted, are becoming increasingly visible in local peacemaking practices vital for long-lasting peace in the region.²³⁷ This is facilitated through the active involvement of women led peace groups. These groups counter the traditional practices and perceptions that exclude or limit the participation of women in ceremonies and practices. Women led peace-focused groups train women as negotiators and mediators, how to carry out psychosocial training, and on the process of reconciliation.²³⁸ These groups showcase the ability of grassroots organizations to encourage and support women in post-conflict discussions. These informal systems give women a venue to discuss bringing justice and reconciliation to individuals affected by the war, and a forum for women to have their justice demands heard.

Engaging women in peace talks and negotiations

Despite the policies and commitments for gender equality by the Ugandan government, there is a lack of women engagement in local and national initiatives pertaining to the LRA. This is partially explained by cultural perceptions, especially held by Acholi elders, opposing the involvement of women in negotiations because women are believed to be too emotional. This was the sentiment held by many people in the north when Museveni appointed Betty Bigombe to lead LRA negotiations. Supposedly this was a power move

²³⁵ Anderson, "Community Perspectives on the Mato Oput Process." 29

²³⁶ Nainar, "In the Multiple Systems of Justice in Uganda Whither Justice for Women?." 31

²³⁷ Quinn, "Gender and Customary Mechanisms of Justice in Uganda." 256

²³⁸ Ibid. 257

by Museveni who appointed Bigombe to this role to show his power over Acholi masculinity, and was intended to be deliberately provocative.²³⁹ Bigombe's entering into the LRA negotiations with reluctant protection from the NRA showed she possessed a level of strength and courage more than anyone imagined.²⁴⁰ But despite the resolve she showed and other women-led examples of peace negotiations, women were poorly represented at the subsequent Juba Peace Talks.²⁴¹

The Juba Peace Talks began July 2006 in Sudan.²⁴² The Peace talks consisted of a series of negotiations between the LRA and Government of Uganda. These negotiations effectively ignored the involvement of women in the war. Despite the local peace initiatives by women and their suffering throughout the war, negotiators at Juba were exclusively men.²⁴³ There was no effort to include women at the negotiating table either.²⁴⁴ At that time Uganda had not ratified UNSCR 1325, which calls for the recognition of women in conflict and their involvement in peace negotiations. Eventually through protest, the women's group, Uganda Women's Network (UWONET), gained observer status and four women were added to the Ugandan Government's team.²⁴⁵

On the 29th of June 2007, the LRA and Government of Uganda signed the Agreement on Accountability and Reconciliation in Juba. This Agreement calls for a gender sensitive approach to be applied in the process of accountability and reconciliation in Section (10) and (11). Specifically, Section (11) – (ii) and (iv) – states that the parties to the Agreement must ensure and encourage the participation of women and girls in its implementation. But the Agreement never came into full effect due to obstacles in the negotiations between the LRA and the Government of Uganda. By December 2008, the Juba Process officially ended and failed to have any significant effect on the LRA.²⁴⁶

²³⁹ Tim Allen, "War and Justice in Northern Uganda," (London: Crisis States Research Centre Development Studies Institute, 2005). 20

²⁴⁰ Ibid. 20

²⁴¹ Ahikire, "Changing Fortunes: Women's Economic Opportunities in Post-War Northern Uganda". 4

²⁴² "Initiatives to End the Violence in Northern Uganda: 2002-09 and the Juba Peace Process." 25

²⁴³ Maina, "Questioning Reintegration Processes in Northern Uganda." 30

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid. 32

²⁴⁶ "Initiatives to End the Violence in Northern Uganda: 2002-09 and the Juba Peace Process." 26

Since Juba, there have been no direct peace negotiations between the LRA and the Ugandan government. But a positive outcome from the Juba is response by the Government to women's groups calling for the inclusion of women in discussion on peace and security. The Ugandan Government has created the National Action Plan that encompasses the goal to advance the rights of women and end gender-based violence.²⁴⁷ The Plan promotes the involvement of women in the promotion of peace and security through commitment to the UN SCR 1325&1820, and the Goma Declaration. The Resolutions and the Declaration provide a framework to prevent and fight against sexual violence. This commitment means little if women are not actually being engaged.

Despite normative advancements by the Government to engage women in aspects of peace and security, women remain neglected. The experiences of women and girls in armed conflict have not been correctly assessed because of policy makers and agencies that continue to lack a gendered analysis.²⁴⁸ A key finding from FIDA's 2011 publication is that the majority of community members in Northern Uganda feel the security situation has improved considerably. Women from the LRA, however, do not share the same sentiment. The women stated that they continue to experience poor health, and sexual and other gender based violence in private and public settings.²⁴⁹ Another criticism is that the Government has failed to establish a reparations regime to address the unique needs of women and girls socially and economically.²⁵⁰ The Government has fallen short of its commitments to engage women and girls in aspects of peace and security. This is evident by women remaining to be hesitant on speaking about their experiences in the LRA. Ultimately, if women are not engaged then their needs will continue to be overlooked as their roles and experiences will remain to be inaccurately addressed in peace talks and negotiations.

²⁴⁷ "The Uganda Action Plan on Un Security Council Resolutions 1325 & 1820 and the Goma Declaration," ed. Labour and Social Development Ministry of Gender (2008). 6

²⁴⁸ Murungi, "Bearing Witness: Girl Mothers of Gulu District." 4

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid. 5

Amnesty Act 2000

The Amnesty Act of 2000 is another aspect critical to reconstruction and reconciliation process in Northern Uganda. Uganda's parliament passed the Amnesty Act in 2000 as a way to peacefully end the conflict in the north by granting a blanket amnesty to anyone who has been involved with an insurgency from the inception of the Act on 26 January 1986 until its expiry on 24 May 2012. For individuals who came forward during that period, the Act provided "a pardon, forgiveness, exemption or discharge from criminal prosecution or any other form of punishment by the State"²⁵¹ This was to recognize that most rebels are victims themselves. It was also seen as a way to encourage rebels to leave the LRA without concern of being charged with their actions committed while in LRA captivity. During the period of Amnesty, over 26,000 former combatants received amnesty.²⁵² Despite women being recipients of amnesty, there was a notable absence of their participation in structuring the Act. This absence is a source of contention for many women's groups.

One point of friction for the lack of woman involvement in the Amnesty Act is that the Act did not adequately consider the needs for women and girls with reinsertion payments and packages. Reinsertion packages and payments were offered to individuals who had newly returned to their community and had gone through the formal reintegration process. The intention of these reinsertion packages and payments were to meet immediate needs of the returnee and their dependents, and to help establish a longer-term income generating activity.²⁵³ Unfortunately, the packages and payments fell short for meeting the specific needs of women.

For the reinsertion packages, men and women received the same items regardless if they returned with a child.²⁵⁴ This means all returnees who came forward for amnesty were suppose to have received reinsertion packages with the same tangible benefits like basins, mattresses, money, and blankets. Some participants in the field study claimed that they

²⁵¹ Ketty Anyeko, "The Amnesty Act and Reintegration of Women and Girls in Northern Uganda," *Voices* 2012. 10

²⁵² *Ibid.* 19

²⁵³ "Introduction to the Iddrs." 2

²⁵⁴ Anyeko, "The Amnesty Act and Reintegration of Women and Girls in Northern Uganda." 19

received no package, which they believed was because packages were prioritized for those returning with children or for men.²⁵⁵ For the women who did receive the resettlement packages, they said the packages did not meet their needs. If more women were involved in the process presumably women with children would have been given more substantive packages to adequately support them and their children.

Aside from the packages, the Amnesty Act has been criticized for its perceived interference with justice. Some individuals are unhappy with the Act because it does not hold the Government accountable for its participation in atrocities, nor for the lack of the Government's will in protecting the people from the LRA. Other criticism against the Act is that victims of sexual violence feel that blanket amnesty grants impunity to the perpetrators of such acts. They argue that amnesty exempts those who committed sexual violence from punishment, which prevents the access to legal justice for victims.²⁵⁶

If the Act is to be renewed in the future, or if another version is to take its place, these concerns need to be remedied with a gendered understanding in mind. Reinsertion packages and payments need to be reflective of the unique needs for women and girls, especially those who return with children as a result of rape. Future Acts must be developed in line with other transitional justice programs to ensure that victims have the ability to express grievances and seek reparations.²⁵⁷ As well, any future programs must be developed in a way to breakdown the preconceived notions that women were merely "wives" in the conflict. While these women may be reluctant in speaking on their experiences, programs must take this into account in order to counter the prevailing stereotypes and ensure the justice and reparation needs of women are adequately met.

Political Mechanisms, Neglect of Agency, and Reintegration Failure

Gender equality in the sociopolitical context is not achieved by merely increasing the presence of women in public office. International Alert Uganda's (IAU) *Investing in Peace* briefing paper series identifies that "many women MPs display a lack of concern

²⁵⁵ Focus group (10 July 2011), Kasubi, Gulu

²⁵⁶ Anyeko, "The Amnesty Act and Reintegration of Women and Girls in Northern Uganda." 20

²⁵⁷ Ibid. 21

on gender issues; and others stand accused of corruption and other abuses of office.”²⁵⁸

Many women activists complain about this saying that political-party manipulation prevents women from following their own agenda.²⁵⁹ The inadequate implementation of policies on women’s rights gives the impression that there is a limited commitment of women’s advancement by political bodies. The fact that there are still gaps in politics and policies to encourage women’s empowerment, despite the presence of women, shows that women in office do not necessarily indicate the presence of gender equality. However, how does this shape the reintegration experience of women returnees?

For political mechanisms to have a positive influence on the reintegration process of women returnees, long-term peace and reconciliation measures must divert away from the patriarchal biases that shapes them. The findings from this chapter suggest that there have been recognizable efforts by the Ugandan government to include women in the political process, although their efforts appear to be limited at best. As for the involvement of women in long-term reconciliation and reconstruction initiatives, women appear to be paving their own way for involvement. Women-led peace initiatives are gaining momentum and are increasing their ability to involve women in empowerment initiatives. The political mechanisms influencing reintegration are not inclusive of women’s agency, which is evident by the limited engagement of ex-LRA women in political processes. Women’s agency being neglected in the political mechanisms prevents their unique needs in the reintegration process are not addressed.

Participants in the field study were more concerned about their participation in local cultural practices than in the formalized political processes. Some spoke about being overlooked in the justice process as a result of being a woman, but it was not a main concern. However, the lack of engagement of women at this level was a higher concern with service providers and individuals involved in the justice and reconciliation process. Analysis of the data shows there are connections between political mechanisms and reintegration failure, even if the participants do not. For instance, many felt that

²⁵⁸ Ahikire, "Changing Fortunes: Women's Economic Opportunities in Post-War Northern Uganda ". 29

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

resettlement packages did not adequately meet their reintegration needs. None of the participants said they had taken part in the development or implementation of any reintegration services. Many described the processes meeting the needs of men because men were considered combatants and not women. Participants criticized local government officials neglecting women when providing reintegration support. They said that the officials instead supported the men or else would take the support for their own use. Appendix 3, table 4, provides a description of gender that influences the way that women receive services.

Neglected agency in post-conflict discussions

Discussed in this chapter is the criticism that women are invisible in post-conflict reconstruction, rehabilitation and justice processes. One explanation for women being overlooked is that they are not perceived as a threat to long-term security as men ex-combatants are, therefore women are not engaged to the same extent.²⁶⁰ Women are typically treated as victims and powerless wartime participants who are unable to make decisions out of their own self-determination. Outside observers associating women with these perceptions cause their roles held in the LRA to be ignored. By ignoring their roles, women are not appropriately engaged in the processes that allow a venue for ex-combatants to express their concerns or grievances in post-conflict discussions. Women left out of these discussions support the position that they are not engaged in their community, which is an indicator of successful reintegration.

The tendency to overlook women returnees in political mechanisms also emerges through the gaps in policies for women empowerment and the lack of women engagement in peace and security discussions. According to Sarah Kihika, a Program Associate for the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) in Uganda, a gender-sensitive approach needs to be adopted in the implementation of transitional justice.²⁶¹ At present the focus has been on the physical harm, neglecting the socio-economic dimensions of

²⁶⁰ Raymonde Provencher, "Grace, Milly, Lucy... Child Soldiers," (Canada: National Film Board of Canada, 2010).

²⁶¹ Sarah Kihika, "Engendering Reparations" (paper presented at the What Became of Reparations? A Dialogue among Civil Society Actors on the Future of Reparations for Victims of Conflict in Northern Uganda, Soroti, Uganda, 2011). 7

harm – such as being denied access to land as a woman. Kihika argues that to move forward with the implementation of transitional justice, information needs to be gathered that reflects the variety of roles held by women during conflict.²⁶² This will only happen once women are looked at as social actors capable of acting with their own agency. This will thereby move discourse beyond the dominant tendency to address women as victims or powerless. On the topic of transitional justice Judge Kasule, in an interview with FIDA, stated that the first step towards transitional justice is rehabilitation, compensation and reintegration of all war-affected people. He criticized the current process since men who were part of rebel groups have reached agreements with the government and now live relatively normal lives; however, discrimination remains against women returnees. He described that women, unlike men, remain treated as rebels with nothing to look forward to.²⁶³ Expressing a similar position were discussions that came up within the CRNU study. Women spoke on how men are treated more as fighters, even though they were all trained to fight.²⁶⁴ This causes men to benefit from services when they return, and women not to the same extent.

The neglect of agency in political mechanisms affects the reintegration of women by causing women to not be involved in policy developments for rehabilitation, reconstruction, or justice. Women returnees not being engaged in these discussions ensure the specific needs of women and girls are not addressed. For example, amnesty packages that are given to support returnees do not reflect the needs of women. Women often are the primary caregivers for children, yet the reinsertion packages they receive are the same as everyone else (man, woman, with child or without). The simple package often fails to meet the basic needs for a woman with children, such as health, shelter, and education.²⁶⁵ Publications by FIDA-Uganda put forward an argument that the negligence in creating support services for women and girls is due to a lack of political will, institutional failures, a lack of resources, and oversight by state and international actors.²⁶⁶ The gaps

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Nainar, "In the Multiple Systems of Justice in Uganda Whither Justice for Women?." 26

²⁶⁴ Refer to *Appendix 3 – CRNU Findings*

²⁶⁵ Ketty Anyeko, "The Amnesty Act and Reintegration of Women and Girls in Northern Uganda," *Voices* 2012. 19

²⁶⁶ Murungi, "Bearing Witness: Girl Mothers of Gulu District." 42

that exist in post-conflict assistance offered to women and girls may stem from issues of agency embedded in concepts of masculinity and femininity. Although agency is defined as the ability of social actors to devise ways to act, even in the most restrictive circumstances, the gender biases at a cultural and institutional level ignore this agency. Instead women are subsumed into the category of victim or passive participant. Placing women in categories based on gender biases assumes that they do not need the same reintegration support services as men.

Combining the ways in which neglect of women's agency as combatants by outside observers of the LRA reflected in social, economic, and political mechanisms the closing chapter reflects on how neglect of women's agency in the LRA within each mechanisms influences their reintegration. Using the data gathered following the Gender Responsive Reintegration Assessment Framework (Figure 1-1), this thesis concludes by evaluating the argument of the thesis: *the primary cause for the failure of women to reintegrate is the neglect of their agency as combatants by outside observers of the LRA.*

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

“Some of the women, out of frustration or lack of money, want to go back (to the LRA). For example, my cousin came back with her brother, but the government gave her brother a lot of support but not her even though they were all serious fighters, even the girl. My cousin ended up telling them (the LC) that if they don’t support her, she is going back.”²⁶⁷

-A woman ex-LRA member speaking about gender biases in the reintegration support she received after returning from the LRA.

This thesis began by describing how women have failed in their reintegration and offering potential reasons why. It described the origins of the LRA and the involvement of women in the armed group to then assess of the reintegration experience of those women. It also discussed the reintegration experience of women ex-combatants, in comparison to men ex-combatants and women who were never in the LRA, by presenting data in accordance with the framework of a gender responsive reintegration assessment. Data gathered within the framework identified a definite gender bias throughout Ugandan society at cultural and institutional levels, and revealed that men and women are both struggling in their reintegration, but in different ways. It also identified that both women community members and returnees face similar post-conflict struggles. But unlike community members and men ex-combatants, women ex-combatants experience challenges associated with being a woman and an ex-combatant.

The Ugandan community as a whole is suffering economically and socially as a result of the lengthy conflict in the region. Analyzing women’s reintegration experience in the social, economic, and political context reveals that their reintegration failure stemmed from the neglect of their agency in the LRA. Men involved in irregular armed forces benefit from reintegration services and packages designed to increase the chances of successful reintegration. Women, in contrast, are overlooked as social actors in the LRA

²⁶⁷ Focus groups (12 August 2011), Koro Pancwala, Gulu

and therefore not engaged as such. This is unsurprising though, since if women are neglected as actors with agency during conflict then how can it be expected that they receive appropriate services to meet their needs post-conflict?

Neglect of Women's Agency and Reintegration Failure

Data gathered from the study suggests that neglect of agency is a cause behind reintegration failure. The preceding sections identified that the dominant sources of reintegration failure are gender biases, lack of support, and stigmatization. These are all related to neglect of agency and social, economic, and political mechanisms. The sources of the challenges the participants spoke about relate back to gender biases shaped by assumptions that women are powerless and should meet the “ideal” image of women in their community. Social, economic, and political mechanisms are all intrinsically linked to a woman's agency, and are connected to structures of power in the public and private sphere. The notion of the “public male” and the “private female” as described by Rassam emerges in the case of northern Uganda when examining how outside observers assist men and women in conflict and post-conflict settings. For example, the assumption that women are limited to the domestic sphere gives the image that they are powerless, therefore causing their power and agency to be neglected. The mechanisms explored in this thesis encompass a variety of processes that perpetuate this public and private dichotomy. Because of the relation to the structures of power, these processes ultimately facilitate the ability of women returnees to be once again accepted as community members, economically self-sufficient, and able to express any grievances or concerns they may have through appropriate channels.

The representation of women as powerless, and restricted to the domestic sphere, reinforces the power structures that disregard women's agency in conflict. This gender bias consequentially has a negative effect on the social, economic and political mechanisms of reintegration. This negative effect, unfortunately, has resulted in the unsuccessful reintegration of women. Many women have not been fully accepted or engaged as community members, nor have they reached a point of economic self-reliance. The data gathered also suggests that reintegration failure is explained by the

gender biases embedded within cultural and bureaucratic power structures. But reintegration failure is not solely caused by gender biases. Shown in examinations of the social, economic and political mechanisms, is that women hold a dual role of victim and perpetrator. This duality challenges the reintegration experience of women and girls because there is a tendency for outside observers to treat women and girls as victims, overlooking that they were actively involved in the conflict. This causes their wartime experience to be inaccurately addressed in post conflict programs that are intended to facilitate the reintegration of ex-combatants.

Women remain “victims” of inaccurate statistics that cause them to be disadvantaged in demobilization services and receive reintegration packages that are almost exclusively catered to men.²⁶⁸ Targeting the needs of men (and then giving women the same services) results in women being denied adequate or relevant counseling and support to address their participation in the LRA as actors with agency.²⁶⁹ Social mechanisms do not fully consider the experience of women in conflict and how those experiences may have shaped their ability to meet traditional gender expectations. Women are consequentially more at risk of social rejection or stigmatization, which is evidence of reintegration failure. While economic mechanisms tend to disadvantage women (regardless of status), the neglect of agency misses opportunities women could benefit from. Outside observers overlooking the agency of women in the LRA means that any skills the women may have gained that could be used to earn an income are ignored. In addition, because women are perceived to be “powerless” in the LRA they miss out on support that men benefit from political mechanisms perpetuating the image of women as either passive participants or victims in war ensures that they are only engaged as such post-conflict. The consequence of this is that they miss out on appropriate channels to have their concerns or grievances met. This neglect also means that women are excluded from discussions on how reintegration programs can be developed to assist returnees perpetuating the neglect of women in post-conflict discussions.

²⁶⁸ Murungi, "Bearing Witness: Girl Mothers of Gulu District." 37

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

A key-contributing factor to the reintegration failure of women comes down to the perception that they are powerless actors in conflict. They receive services that are shaped by gender biases present within their community and possessed by the policy makers and developers who create reintegration services. More sensitization is needed for outside observers to challenge the recurring image in the literature on conflict of the “young man with the gun” and the “woman fleeing from violence.” Without challenging these gendered assumptions, reintegration initiatives are at risk of perpetuating the gender inequalities that cause women to miss out on programs that would benefit their reintegration. However, if the war images were irrelevant (and men and women were recognized equally in conflict) would women be successful in their reintegration?

Recognizing the War Experience of Women and Men Equally

This thesis argues that the primary cause behind reintegration failure is the neglect of the agency of female combatants by outside observers to the LRA. These outside observers were identified as those holding Acholi cultural beliefs, the Ugandan government, NGOs, community and family members, and other policy developers and analysts. Through the Gender Responsive Reintegration Assessment Framework, a gender-sensitive approach was taken to assess the reintegration status of women returning from the LRA. From the assessment it became clear that the root of reintegration failure comes down to embedded gender biases that result in the neglect of women’s agency. But before concluding this thesis with this position, it must be asked: what would reintegration like for a woman if her ability in the LRA were to be recognized as it is for a man? Would women be successful in their reintegration, or would they continue to struggle and fail?

If the agency of women and men were recognized equally, presumably women would still fail to reintegrate, but just in a different way. This assumption is based on the fact that Northern Uganda is experiencing the highest levels of poverty in Uganda, the social fabric has been disrupted, men and women both experience stigma as a result of being in the LRA, and there is a deeply rooted cycle of conflict between the north and ruling south. All of this has made the reintegration virtually ineffective for all ex-combatants and has even disrupted the daily life of those who never were part of the LRA. Unique to

women ex-combatants are the traditional gender biases interfering with their social and economic aspects of reintegration. If men and women ex-combatants were all viewed the same and considered to be active participants, they should all be struggling as ex-combatants. The difference between this scenario and reality is that although women would struggle with reintegration, they would not miss out on reintegration support. Women would receive support from services that reflect their needs and experiences and is included in post-conflict and rehabilitation discussions.

If women's wartime experiences were recognized equally to men's, would there still be high levels of unsuccessful reintegration? This thesis argues that yes, there would be. Women from the LRA reintegrate into a patriarchal society. The services women received are shaped by structures influenced by traditional masculinities found in Ugandan society. Women who returned from the LRA have taken on roles that are overlooked in favor of the dominant wartime image of women in conflict. If the agency of women in wartime were accurately recognized by outside observers, then presumably services would meet their needs. The experience of women in the LRA would no longer be blurred by gendered biases that portray them as powerless participants, although challenges that face the community as a whole would still be present to undermine the reintegration of ex-combatants.

This thesis described how social mechanisms (the processes that dictate gender roles and division of labor, as well as traditional practices that oppose the rights of women) connect the neglect of women ex-combatants agency to their reintegration failure. These processes were identified to contribute to reintegration failure because of the unattainable gender expectations they place on women ex-combatants when they return from conflict (review Figure 3-1). Consequentially, women are stigmatized for their actions in the LRA (as a result of acting as a combatant and being subjected to sexual violence) while being simultaneously labeled as victims, perpetrators, and "spoiled goods". If the agency of women ex-combatants were to be appropriately recognized, potentially they would not experience the same level of frustration and humiliation that they do when they are unable to meet gender expectations (review Figure 3-1). This means that women

presumably would not experience the same degree of stigmatization or community rejection, which are indicators of reintegration failure.

Economic mechanisms – by the processes that influence socio-economic status, as well as access to and control over resources – are the second way that this thesis connects the neglect of women’s agency to their reintegration failure. If women who returned from the LRA were to be recognized as social actors, both capable and knowledgeable to devise their own actions within the armed group, then any skills they gained in the LRA could be used to benefit them economically post-conflict. Ideally reintegration and resettlement programs would be more likely to develop skills gained while in the force to, such as in the earlier example of the women who was a midwife within the LRA. In addition, drawing a connection to social mechanisms, there would be more opportunities for economic self-sufficiency since women ex-combatants would not be struggling as a result of lack of resources or assets due to community or family rejection.

The final aspect connecting neglect of agency to reintegration failure is by the political mechanisms that influence the participation of women in civic and community life, as well as in justice and reconciliation measures. Critiques of post-conflict initiatives made in the political realm are criticized for lack of women engagement, which is in part due to the earlier addressed wartime images of women. Therefore, it can be assumed that if their agency were to be recognized, women would be engaged in post-conflict initiatives in a similar manner to men. And subsequently, they would then be more represented in post-conflict support services – something at present they are not.

Future Direction for Policy

Future direction for research stemming from this thesis is in the area of security and stability of the region. Future policy needs to be cognizant of the potential consequence to Northern Uganda’s long-term peace and security if women continue to be categorized as passive participant or victims. This direction is based on the argument that gendered perceptions stunt any success in assisting women with reintegration back into their communities. Since these women are the primary caregivers for children, presumably the

effects of reintegration failure will cause unintended negative consequences for the generations that follow.

If women ex-combatants remain overlooked they also become a destabilizing factor to the long-term security of the region. For example, if women do not successfully reintegrate then their children suffer similar challenges. The children, like their mothers, suffer the consequences of no education, land, kinship networks, and, if born in the LRA, many are even stigmatized of being a “bush” or “rebel” child. This all causes these children to be particularly vulnerable to future rebel groups who are offering chances to “better” their life.²⁷⁰ Service providers and returnees have expressed concern that challenges facing the returnees will be transferred to their children. Akello describes that if women returnees remain overlooked it is not just their generation that will be effected; it is going to be several generations lost because these women raise the child of the following generation.²⁷¹ With limited economic options, missing kinship network, and the inability to express grievances or concerns at a political level, makes this next generation appear particularly vulnerable to future conflicts.

As ex-combatants, women and girls’ capability to act according to agency during conflict is often overlooked at cultural and institutional levels. They have challenged cultural and institutional assumptions about armed conflict by participating in the LRA. These assumptions include the feminine image associated to peace and non-violence, and the masculine image associated to war and combat. Gendered assumptions associated with women in conflict have caused many analysts to overlook the fact that women were combatants. It has created a flawed analysis that has lead to inaccurate statistics and disadvantages for women and girls in demobilization and reintegration services.²⁷² The lack of acknowledgement of women’s roles as combatants has also meant they do not receive proper counseling or support.²⁷³

²⁷⁰ See Appendix 3 – CRNU Findings

²⁷¹ Provencher, "Grace, Milly, Lucy... Child Soldiers."

²⁷² Murungi, "Bearing Witness: Girl Mothers of Gulu District." 37

²⁷³ Ibid.

Conclusion

“You can be successful when you come back if your family and community shows you love and support. They give you capital to start a business with. But you personally have to work hard to see that you use what you have been given.”

- An ex-LRA member describing how successful reintegration ultimately comes down to the self-determination of the individual to succeed.²⁷⁴

Women returnees are not helpless. They have experienced, witnessed, and conducted many atrocities. They have been victims of rape and forced into marriages. They have led massacres and watched people be killed. Women provided the necessary support to the LRA for it to remain operative. Yet, post-conflict services and discussions to cater to men in the conflict. This thesis focused on women in the LRA and their reintegration in order to fill in the gaps in the literature on women and irregular armed forces. Using a gender responsive assessment, data gathered has shown that the population of Northern Uganda is experiencing ramifications of an economy and society disrupted by a two-decade long conflict. It has shown that women, returnees or not, are disadvantaged social and economically by deeply entrenched gender biases. It also identified that returnees face additional challenges in their life after conflict due to involvement in the LRA. But from assessing the reintegration experiences of women using the gender responsive framework (Figure 1-1), women returnees are shown to struggle with their reintegration in different ways than others in their communities.

Unsuccessful reintegration is not merely a result of gender biases, but is also a result of biases coupled with neglect and oversight of their experiences in conflict. Neglect of experience creates ignorance to the fact that when women leave the fighting force and come back to their communities; they suffer from their experiences too. To rehabilitate women it must be recognized they were trained like men. Women need special attention

²⁷⁴ Focus group (5 July 2011), Bungatiria, Gulu

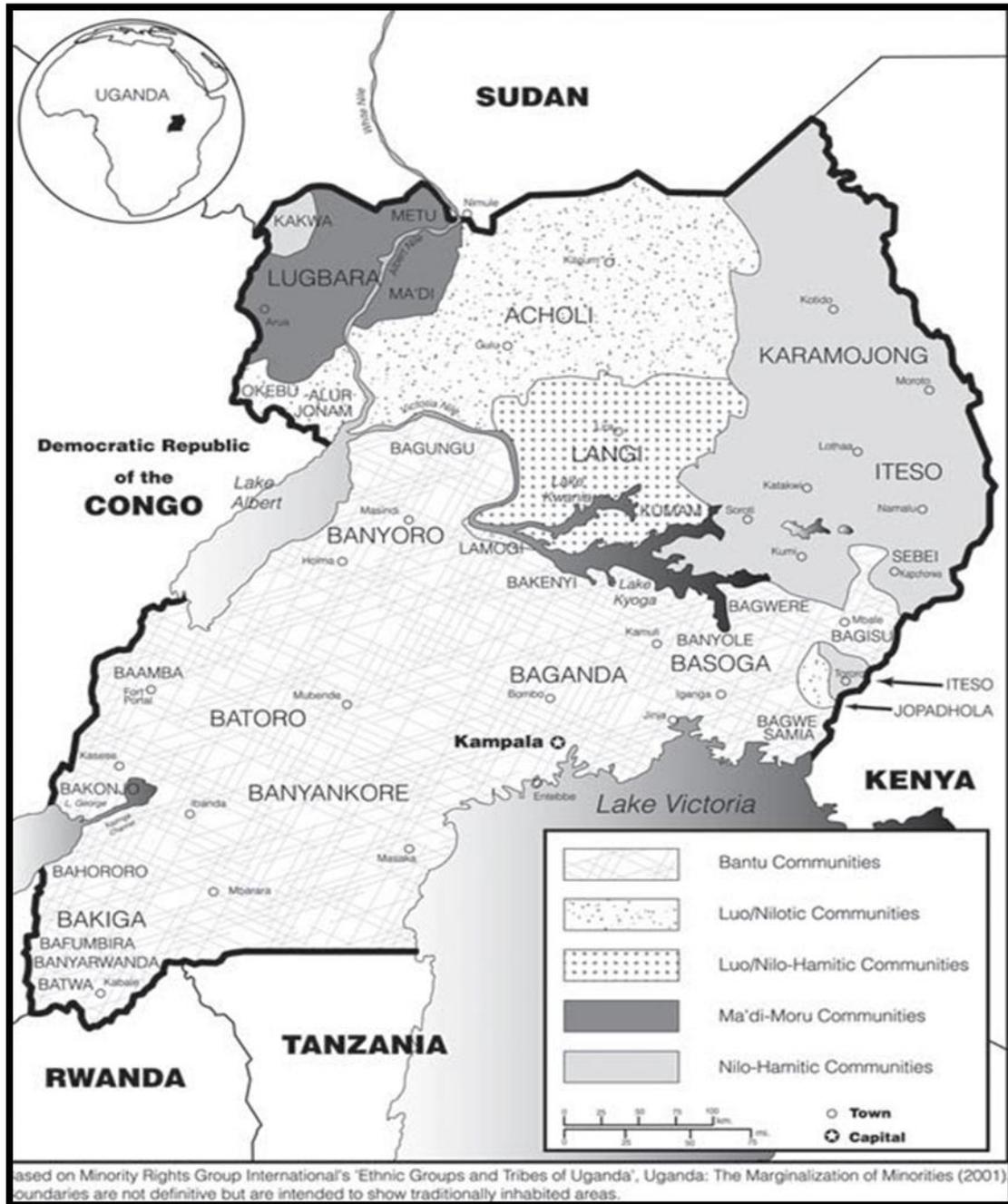
because they do not speak openly about their experiences. They need to be encouraged to speak so they can overcome feelings that what they experienced is not as important as what men have experienced.²⁷⁵ The opportunity for women to speak freely on their experience is a necessary step to seeking forgiveness, shedding shame, and admitting any wrongdoing. Knowing the truth and coming forward with their experiences will help women recover their dignity and heal any wounds physical or emotional.²⁷⁶

Outside observers need to expand the discussion on the roles of women in fighting forces, and not just in Uganda. Despite proof otherwise, programs and perceptions often still cater to the popular stereotypes of women in conflict. The perceptions are that while in fighting forces women are limited to traditional gender roles and are powerless participants. The perceptions that neglect women's agency greatly diminish the chances of long-term success for reintegration because their unique needs and experiences are not addressed. Women in the LRA have been able to devise ways survive on their own, in spite of the dangerous and undesirable conditions they were exposed to. They are not powerless or helpless and they should not be treated as such. Otherwise, women will still continue to struggle with reintegration.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Murungi, "Bearing Witness: Girl Mothers of Gulu District."18

APPENDIX I: ETHNOGRAPHIC MAP OF UGANDA²⁷⁷



²⁷⁷ "Ethnic Groups and Tribes of Uganda," Minority Rights Group International, http://www.c-r.org/sites/c-r.org/files/accord_11_2Map_2002_ENG_SS.jpg.

APPENDIX III: CRNU FINDINGS

“Most women have big challenges with reintegration, making only few to be successful.”²⁷⁹

- A participant speaking on reintegration experiences.

FGD participants identified reintegration as being able to return to life as it was before being in the LRA. Participants described that individuals should be able to return back to the home where they lived before the LRA and benefit from a support network of family and friends. When the participants were asked if they returned to life as it was before the LRA, the majority of participants said no.

The majority of participants felt that women have been unsuccessful in their reintegration. Below are some anecdotes taken from the focus groups discussions. Women participants spoke about what they thought their life would be like after they left the LRA and what it is like in reality.

5 July 2011	“I struggle because I was injured in the LRA. When I’m overworked I feel pain. But when I go to others for help, no one responds. I continue to feel pain when I work, but I have no option. I must work, live, do everything alone.”
10 July 2011 Kasubi	“In war so many people were being killed, so there many evil spirits around. For example, I am at my home making a fire and then I see someone busy around the fireplace. But I know that I’m alone at home. The spirits disturb so many people, which is why some people even fear to return to their home.”
	“Reintegration is easier for men because a man can do whatever he wants and not care about what he has or what he doesn't have. He can just ignore problems. Like he doesn't have to mind that he has children, but a woman will always have to think of that. Women will always have to worry ‘I don't have a home’, ‘I can’t make this’, or ‘I can't make that.’ I always have to worry where I can stay with my

²⁷⁹ Focus group (28 July 2011), Acet, Gulu

	children.”
	“Life after the LRA is not good because there is a lot of stigmatization. A man can approach you and say ‘I like you,’ but the moment he is told that you were formerly abducted he immediately leaves. Most men are not willing to marry formerly abducted women because of the evil spirits. Even if these women can get married the marriage in the end is broken because of all the pointing and talking from people in the community.”
	“Men take away the money that you have worked for to provide for the family and he drinks it away. Some men even beat you so bad that causes deformities making it hard to work. Men make your life so hard.”
5 July 2011 Bungatria, Gulu	“Before I went to the bush, I was married with three kids. When I returned my husband rejected me. But since I had three children with him the family members from his side and my side talked to my husband. They said, ‘since you already have three kids, just bring her back and see if she'll start behaving like those people from the bush.’ I never did behave that way, but my husband still fears me – even today.”
11 July 2011 Bungatria, Gulu	“When you are back and you find out that all of your family members have died, you find that people are not giving you your land even though it is yours. But then your family members say your parents have died and you have no one here (in the community) so you don’t own anything here. So you have to pack your things and go. You start thinking I should never have come back. It happens to many women. So many people are complaining about being back but their parents are not there and they have no family to support them.”
28 July 2011 Acet, Gulu	“Some community members do not associate much with the girls who are from the bush. When you try to relate with a man, and he is interested in you, the community quickly advice him to leave you. They say you are possessed with the spirits from the bush and that anytime in the middle of the night you can easily kill. Yet that normally doesn't happen.”
12 August 2011 Koro Pancwala, Gulu	“The majority of women have not been successful in reintegration because there is a lot of stigmatization and finger pointing. People pretend to have accepted you then in any case of disagreement they say ‘oh that's because you are from the bush.’ And if they see you carrying something they think you are going to kill them, they think you are going to do something bad to them, yet that is not the case.”
	“I thought I would be living as how I did before. Now that I’m back at home, and I have all these people around, I don’t have to do all those bad things that I used to do.”
	“Life now is bad and hard, but I can’t go back. At home here it's peaceful.”
21 August 2011 Kasubi	“When I was returning I thought that I'd go back to school. But they abducted me when I was very young. I was only 9 years old and

	<p>spent a long time there so my mind was not prepared for studies. When I came back I found that my family was already destroyed. There was no one who could support me. I had to struggle and find my way. Life is so hard. I have to look after children I came back with. I feel bad when I see my classmates (from before abduction) because some of them are working, they are doing something, and the world is now changing. Things are on the side of people who have gone to school.”</p>
	<p>“I thought that I’d be coming back home and would find my family members and lead a happy life with a husband and live happily with him. But when I came back she found all of my family to be dead, with an exception of my mom and younger brother. I then met a man who I had a baby with, but he is in prison now. With him in prison my life is a mess. All I have is church.”</p>
	<p>“When I first came back I felt like my life was still in the bush. I met a man who was also formerly abducted. After one year he started living with a machete under his bed. Every night he would threaten to kill me. My life became worse than it was in the bush.”</p>
	<p>“I thought I’d find all of my family members were gone, but to my surprise my parents were there. I find that the life I’m living is good because when I left I was just expecting a better life than in the bush because it was coupled with very many hardships.”</p>
<p>25 August 2011 Acet, Gulu</p>	<p>“Despite what I went through with my husband (domestic abuse) I never wanted to go back. What goes on in the bush is much more harsh [<i>sic.</i>] than whatever goes on here.”</p>
	<p>“The type of hardship the person is going through and the type of rejection they receive from family members influences if she wants to go back. Because in the bush everyone is equal if they fight for fighting, everyone fights. If they fight for eating, everyone eats. If they fight for doing something, everyone does it. But here if your family rejects you have nothing else.”</p>
	<p><i>Participants in this group knew of 3 women who went back. They were all wives of Kony. One was told to come back (to leave the bush) because Kony claimed that she had contracted some kind of disease and he was worried that she would infect him. As for the other two that returned, one came back but the other never did. The participants said that there are lots of women, maybe because of the hardships, that say they want to go back. But they only knew of these three women who actually went back.</i></p>

Table 2 – Factors to a successful reintegration	
Land access	Land to build a house on, conduct subsistence farming, grow crops to harvest for income
Family and community support	Support to assist the returnee and her children, having the feeling of being welcomed, to live peacefully
Education	To improve employment options and improve literacy skills
Financial support	Having a capital to start a small business with, money to rent a house when family land is unavailable, to buy food for their family, and pay for their children’s school fees
Participation in reception center	Reinsertion packages, support services, follow-up support, vocational training, benefiting from health services, psycho-social support, taught how to pray and forgive,
Other factors	Community sensitization, government support, personality, traditional healing, water access, experience in the LRA, opportunity to gain employment, one participant stated being a woman makes reintegration successful since they are “naturally peaceful”

Table 3 – Factors to a failed reintegration	
Gender Biases	Family or husband problems, restriction to land access, gender biases causing women to rely on men upon return, challenges for women are not addressed, struggle to support dependents in addition to their own needs, lack of follow-up by local leaders for women, services target men
Stigma	Grudges against returnees that community members cannot overcome, discrimination for being in the LRA, constant jokes reminding the returnee of their experience, perception that the returnee is possessed with “cen”
No support	“Nothing to lean on”, being in a position where you are dependent on a husband, no education, no support to help access cultural healing, not receiving skills from reception centers, no follow-up care
Fear	Fear of being re-abducted, open spaces, or loud noises
Personality	Failing to live well with your family, “personality can make you fail to use opportunities”
Experience	“You fail to reintegrate because of what happened in the bush,” the community associates you with an act you carried out in the LRA, experience of troublesome dreams
No problems	
Gender is irrelevant	“Everyone struggles the same.”

Table 4 – Women in the LRA and categorizations after the LRA		
Women were fighters	28 July 2011 Acet, Gulu	“You are forced to kill someone. Otherwise you are the one who is killed.”
	10 August 2011 Lapinyolo, Gulu	“Women were only trained to be defensive.”
	20 August 2011 Laroo, Gulu	“Because of my co-wife’s authority she could choose her husband. Was a second lieutenant in Sudan.”
		<i>All participants in this group described that some women in the LRA held commanding roles and that lower ranked men would report to those women.</i>
	20 August 2011 Koro Pancwala, Gulu	“I was among the bad killers in the LRA. I was in a group of 30 called Gilva. We were the worst. We were a team of 15 men and 15 women.”
		“There were very many women that were captains, but none of them are talked about because they always talked/reported to the bigger ones (like to Thomas Kwoyelo. ²⁸⁰ Men took all top commanding spots and under them were women. So many massacres were led by women, but none of them are talked about.”
		The participants all began to discuss about how they were fighting. “Even if you were carrying a child on your back and it shout and dies, you don’t cry or say anything. You continue to fight. And if you are leading some people, like a battalion, you don't stop any fights. You just keep on fighting until the end. You take them until you reach where you are going, and until you get there that is when you tell them you are carrying a dead body. Even if one of your members is shot you don’t leave them behind.”
		“There are perceptions that women do not fight, that they cannot fight that is why they are called child mothers. People assume that it is only the men who can fight, yet men and

²⁸⁰ Kwoyelo is a former LRA Commander. During the time of this FGD Kwoyelo began his trial before the International War Crimes Division (ICD) of the Uganda High Court making him a recurring name in many conversations.

		women all fight the same.”
		“Traditionally everyone knows that a woman cannot on her own wake up and start a war. She cannot wake up and start killing people. Naturally women are sympathetic, they are passionate. So they cannot wake up and do all these bad things. But some of the bad things that they do they are forced to. So women do not do most of those things out of their own will. That is why people don't recognize what women do. It is because the men interjected and forced the women to do all what they have done.”
	21 August 2011 Kasubi, Gulu	“Men and women were subjected to torture equally. But it was the women who suffered more than the men because when it came to doing things women were never consulted, they were just told to do this or that. If you didn't then you were caned or had other beatings. Men at least had some authority.”
Men and women in the LRA	28 July 2011 Acet, Gulu	“Men and women suffered equally because when it came to death, everyone dies equally. When it comes to beatings everyone is beat equally. If you did any wrong thing, all were subjected to similar punishment. They don't see that this is a man or this is a woman”
		“Men didn't want to go through the war either. They should be treated equally. They are victims too.”
		“Men contributed greatly to the war. The majority of fighters were men despite the fact that there were also those women who also fought. People don't call women combatants because most women went without kids but had them when they came back. People don't really recognize women's roles so much; mainly they recognized the men's. People said that men contributed more than women so they were called former combatants.”
		“Some of the women, out of frustration or lack of money, want to go back (to the LRA). For example, my cousin came back with her brother, but the government gave her brother a lot of support but not her even though they were all serious fighters, even the girl. My cousin ended up telling them (the LC) that if

		they don't support her, she is going back.”
		“Sometimes when women come back they get lucky and get a husband and have children. The women then to stay back in their community because of the children. If they go back (to the LRA) then their children will suffer. Because if the husband takes another wife, the children will suffer. Some women who don't have children have that intention of going back.
Gendered names	28 July 2011 Acet, Gulu	“If someone coming for research, the names young mothers or formerly abducted it is fine because it is easily to identify them. Where it becomes bad is by the people in the communities. They tend to look at you like you are someone who is not normal, who can't do anything good. Someone who can do anything bad at any time.”
		“People fear that the women can turn aggressive or do something bad if they are treated like men after the bush. So that kind of fear makes them determine to call the women the way they do because they feel women can just take being called in anyway.”
	20 August 2011 Koro Pancwala, Gulu	“The fact that women come back with children and the men don't have children makes them not bother about what kind of other support women are given.”
		“People tend to respect men by recognizing that they are the main ones that have been fighting.”
		“People assume it is only the men who fight, yet men and women fight the same. There should be a name where they can all be called equally. Maybe say ‘people affected by war’.”
		“One reason women are called child mothers is because by the time they were abducted they were young and they didn't go with children. But they happen to come back with children. However, while in the bush, both men and women preformed similar activities.”

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