ABSTRACT

Armed violence is a contemporary global challenge especially in the developing world. It impacts immigration policies locally and internationally. Uganda experienced a twenty-four year-long civil armed conflict, which the president of Uganda declared ended in 2008. Following government instruction, displaced persons have been returning home since then. Despite this official closure, in the course of resettlement, youth specific needs and concerns have been ignored. Female youth have been the most affected due to the interlocking nature of their undervalued gender, age, and marital and reproductive statuses. Despite the complexity of female youth’s social location, research and frameworks about armed violence have focused on men as the perpetuators, marginalizing the impact armed conflict has on young women. Using the case of northern Uganda, this dissertation draws on feminist and indigenous epistemologies to examine the experiences of formerly displaced female youth. First, I deconstruct the western dominant construction of the stages of human growth and development including childhood, youth and adulthood. In this research, I prioritize local perspectives on human development; emphasizing the ambiguity of the concept youth, highlighting its age and gendered limited applicability to northern Uganda. I also examine the local understanding of armed conflict centering its forms and causes. Further, I explore the challenges female youth face, and the strategies they adopt to cope in situations of distress. I argue that studying formerly displaced female youth from their standpoint is critical since female youth have been marginalized in previous research and programs with gender-neutral perspectives. They thus provide a new perspective to armed violence given their multidimensional standpoint. Female youth have different needs and concerns, which may not
feature in mainstream programming largely informed by traditional male dominated systems and structures. Young women’s experiences thus deserve to be acknowledged if female youth are to benefit from the post-conflict reconstruction phase. To fulfill this objective, I used qualitative methods of data collection and analysis.

Key Concepts: Gender, armed violence, youth, identity, displacement, return, post-conflict, resilience, agency and northern Uganda
DEDICATION

To my mother, Angel Nalubega and father, Gerald MajeraLukwago, for believing in girl-child education and always putting their children’s education as first priority.

I love you both.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation is a result of concerted effort in the form of encouragement, guidance and financial support. I am grateful to the Fulbright program, the P.E.O/IPS and the Nita Heard Women Studies Scholarship, Graduate Education and the School of Social Transformation (ASU) for the financial support. Such assistance made my stay more comfortable and for that I am thankful.

All chapters in this dissertation are based on lifetime experiences of children and youth and general community who have suffered war in northern Uganda. I am grateful for their willingness to share their knowledge and time with me during the research process. The participants’ insightful contributions made this dissertation what it is today.

Eyalamanoinoi!

Putting these pieces of knowledge together was the work of my great committee. In particular I would like to thank my dissertation chair Dr. Karen Leong for all her guidance and support throughout my entire time as a student and especially with this research experience. I so dearly appreciate your effort. My other committee members: Dr. Beth Blue Swadener and Dr. Lisa. M. Anderson also committed time to review, comment on and edit my writing as well as understanding me outside the academic setting. Like I have always said, I had the best committee ever! Thank you so much.

Finally I wish to acknowledge my children Greg and Gaby, and husband David Katende for their unceasing support, encouragement, patience, endurance and love throughout this whole process. You have been a source of inspiration for me. Thank you and keep blessed always! My sisters and brothers, thank you for believing in me and always being there.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIST OF ACRONYMS</th>
<th>ix</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Overview on Internal Displacement</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of Armed Conflict in Africa</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Northern Uganda Conflict</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextualizing the Problem</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous Epistemologies, Methodologies and Violence</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical and Methodological Grounding</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Area</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patterns of Return</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Sample Selection</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Departure From the Field</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 CHILDHOOD AND YOUTHHOOD AMIDST ARMED VIOLENCE</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Overview to Understanding Childhood</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Level Understanding of Childhood in Uganda</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextualizing Childhood in this Study</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contradictions Between Western and Indigenous Constructions of Childhood</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Conflict Vs. Post-Conflict Childhood in Northern Uganda</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextualizing Youthhood in Post-Conflict Northern Uganda</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 A FEMINIST APPROACH TO ARMED VIOLENCE AND WAR</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of Global Armed Violence</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mapping of the LRA Insurgency in Northern Uganda (1986 To Date)</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armed Conflict and War Defined</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causes of Armed Violence</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptualization of the Youth Bulge Theory</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminist Critiques to the Youth Bulge Theory</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt Theory: An Alternative Understanding to Youth Anger and Violence</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 RECOVERY HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND VIOLENCE</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview and Understanding of Humanitarian Assistance</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Context to Post-Conflict Recovery Assistance</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminist Views on Humanitarian Assistance and Violence</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Nature of Assistance Provided to Returning Populations</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural and Institutional Violence</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF ACRONYMS

ADF: Allied Democratic Forces  
GoU: Government of Uganda  
HSM: Holy Spirit Movement  
IDMC: Internal Displacement Monitoring Center  
IDPs: Internally Displaced Persons  
LRA: Lords Resistance Army  
NGO: Non-Governmental Organizations  
NRA: National Resistance Army  
NRM: National Resistance Movement  
NUREP: Northern Uganda Rehabilitation Program  
OPM: Office of the Prime Minister  
PRDP: Peace Recovery Development Plan  
UBOS: Uganda Bureau of Statistics  
UNDP: United Nations Development Program  
UNHCR: United Nations High Commission for Refugees  
UNLF: Uganda National Liberation Front  
UPDA: Uganda Peoples Defense Alliance  
UPDF: Uganda Peoples Defense Forces  
YBT: Youth Bulge Theory
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Armed conflict is a contemporary global challenge with brutal consequences for individuals, communities, structures and systems. Armed conflict results into local, regional and global consequences with the most notable being internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees, violations of basic human rights, and inevitable demand for humanitarian assistance. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC, 2015) emphasizes that intra-state conflicts can result in a “domino effect” on its neighbors. The Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) provides a good example to this, given its active involvement in Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and South Sudan despite its Ugandan origin. Forced displacement is a wide concept that incorporates cross border displacement and displacement from natural disasters. This study, however, focuses on internal displacement caused by armed conflict. The meanings and causes of armed conflict are complex, divergent and at times contradictory. These include religious fundamentalism, poverty, environmental degradation, corporate globalization, struggles for power and social inequalities.

As another cause of violence, recent conflict theorization points to high numbers of male youth in the population, commonly referred to as “youth bulge” (Urdal, 2004). Importantly, resulting from an oversight of gender, most current theoretical approaches to war have inadequately conceptualized what war is, who actors are, the roles they play,
and the gendered values in the making and fighting of wars. Before going into details of this study, it is relevant to explore the global, regional and local perspectives to armed violence. After this I will investigate the theoretical perspectives informing this study, the methodology that the study adopted as well as the limitations encountered.

**Global Overview on Internal Displacement**

By 2013, there was an estimated 33.3 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the world. This number had by end of 2014 increased to 38 million people (IDMC, 2015). Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East highly dominated this population. Specific countries such as Iraq, Syria, DRC, and South Sudan present the highest percentages of IDPs. Internal displacement is largely caused by armed conflicts and human rights violations. According to the IDMC, escalated numbers of IDPs have also been attributed to the changing nature of conflicts worldwide, including economic inequality as well as “protracted displacement”—a phenomenon explaining displacement that lasts more than five years (Ferris, 2012; IDMC, 2015). Populations affected by such long stayed conflicts fail to link return, local integration and peace building. Ferris further clarifies that protracted displacement is not static, since IDPs move from place to place in search for security and livelihood sustainability. In Uganda for instance, returned IDPs encounter protection and resource challenges in their return areas. Returnees are involved in land disputes, marginalization, violence and consequently secondary displacement. The longer the conflict stays the more difficult it is to find sustainable solutions (Ferris, 2012).

Displacement at times can be explained by single factors including struggle for power, disputes over natural and other economic resources and inter-communal violence.
In many cases however, displacement is an outcome of a complex mix of causes (IDMC, 2013). This blurs categorical descriptions of the causes of violence and thus complicates conflict resolution especially for IDPs. IDPs thus present a global challenge relating to humanitarian relief, and protection. Despite the multifaceted experiences IDPs undergo, they do not receive adequate support due to lack of systems and structures specifically targeting such population. The guiding principles on internal displacement have been globally widely recognized. These, however, are not legally binding and no institution is obliged to implement them. As such, nation states, NGOs and humanitarian agencies are not held accountable for the situation of IDPs. Scholars and activists have therefore noted that displacement is a clear representation of a war crime or a crime against humanity (Branch, 2007) to which no one is held accountable.

**Overview of Armed Conflict in Africa**

Africa has nearly five times more IDPs than refugees\(^1\) since IDPs are a large percentage of the civilian population. By 2010, Africa had 2 million refugees as compared to the 11 million IDPs (Ferris, 2012). With limited corresponding frameworks in form of structures and institutions, fragile states are created, which in turn breed violence (IDMC, 2015). Sub-Saharan Africa is home to one-third of the world’s internally displaced persons and by 2013, 12.5 million persons were dislocated within their nation states (IDMC, 2014).

---

\(^1\)A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Most likely, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so. War and ethnic, tribal and religious violence are leading causes of refugees fleeing their countries. [http://www.unrefugees.org/what-is-a-refugee/](http://www.unrefugees.org/what-is-a-refugee/)
Sub-Saharan Africa (largely referring to the region south of the Sahara dessert comprising of forty eight countries) has experienced unceasing intra- and inter-state conflicts that have resulted in the massive internal displacement of people. The increasing number of IDPs is due to the changing nature of conflict especially in form of strategy. The most recent fighting strategy directly targets the civilian population (Dolan, 2009) a majority of whom are women and children (Machel 2000).

One other important key feature of contemporary conflicts is the wide involvement of young people as part of the armed forces either voluntarily or through abductions and forced recruitment (McDonnell and Akallo, 2007; Spitzer & Twikirize, 2013). Conflicts are also characterized by programs’ neglect of gendered perspectives and concerns (Coulter, 2009; Sommers, 2007). In 2008, the International Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers revealed that out of the nineteen countries worldwide where children have been recruited in armed forces (both non state and state armies), eight are African countries, all of which are Sub-Saharan African countries, Uganda being one of them.

On a national level, Uganda has been involved in civil and inter-state armed conflicts since independence from British rule in 1962 (Mutiibwa, 1992). Interstate conflicts include wars with Democratic Republic of Congo, and involvement in Somalia, Rwanda, and Sudan. The civil wars have included rebel groups like the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and the M23. Uganda’s post-independence history has been characterized by civil wars and internal violence. In 1966 Milton Obote, the prime minister at independence (1962) overthrew the president and declared himself the president of Uganda after dissolving the British-preserved Monarchy (Buganda kingdom). He later lost power in 1971 to Idi Amin, the head of armed forces who seized power while Obote was
away on national duty. In 1979, Amin was overthrown in a coup d’état by a joint force between the Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF) and the Tanzanian Army, and Yusuf Lule served as president for two months to be replaced by Geoffrey Binaisa who was toppled within a year. In 1980, Milton Obote following an election won by his party, Uganda People’s Congress (UPC), took on presidency for the second time. This victory, however, was contested and Yoweri Museveni declared a war. In 1985 Obote was overthrown and Tito Okello replaced him. The following year, the National Resistance Army (NRA) overthrew Okello under the leadership of Yoweri Museveni, who has stayed in power to date (Mutiibwa, 1992).

The civil war that has received much international recognition is the one staged by the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) in the northern part of Uganda. The LRA evolved out of the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM) - a rebellion started by Alice Lakwena in the 1980s as a divine mission to deliver the people of northern Uganda from oppression by southern tribes under the leadership of Yoweri Museveni. Joseph Kony took over leadership when Lakwena was exiled and renamed the rebellion the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA).

During this long conflict, both the LRA and the government of Uganda have participated in crimes against humanity and violations of human rights (Branch, 2007; Dolan, 2009). In examining the torture that communities suffered during the LRA conflict, Dolan (2009) compared what happened to communities in the war zones, especially in the protected villages, to that which happens in torture chambers. In 2003 when Jan Egeland visited the region, he described the humanitarian situation in the region as “the worst humanitarian situation in the world” (Dolan 2009. 23), worse off than what was happening in Iraq.
The Northern Uganda Conflict

In 2008 the government of Uganda declared an end to the over two-decade civil conflict in northern Uganda. This followed the 2006-2008 Juba peace talks with the Lord’s Resistance Army rebels (LRA). Since then, government and area operating NGOs have encouraged IDPs to return home or resettle in neighboring districts. Treating conflict in its traditional understanding as an event that has distinct start and end dates has enormous limitations (Sjoberg, 2013). Conflict scholars have expressed concern for possible re-eruption of the supposedly ended conflict (Dolan, 2009). One possible cause for the anticipated eruption of conflict is that the youth who have been labeled a security threat have not received adequate attention in the northern Uganda post-conflict reconstruction phase. In addition, being a protracted conflict, violence continues even in return areas as communities struggle for the limited resources including land (IDMC, 2014).

The rebellion in northern Uganda started in 1986, when the current government, then National Resistance Movement (NRM) government assumed power. In most aspects though, the war reflects the previous conflicts in the country, especially those in the post-independence phase. Earlier conflicts were grounded in power struggles, unbalanced regional development and undemocratic governance (Doom & Vlassenroot 1999; Mutiibwa 1992). The LRA conflict has been described as ethnically initiated and driven, following the overthrow of an Acholi (northern tribe) president in 1986 by a rebel group dominated by the southern tribes under the leadership of the current president. The war also has been politically manipulated (Latigo, 2008) to maintain the northern region underdeveloped in order to limit opposition to the government (Branch, 2007).
Recent scholarship argues that the northern Uganda war is one of the “longest running, most complex and brutal conflicts” on the African continent in recent history (Spitzer and Twikirize 2013:70). The insurgence has resulted in thousands of deaths and hundreds of thousands of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) with enormous human rights violations (Tim & Vlassenroot 2010). The LRA became highly unpopular due to outrageous human rights violations involving maiming of civilians, abduction of children and their recruitment into fighting forces (Branch, 2007). Of critical significance to this study is that the youth (here defined as individuals between the ages of 10-28) heavily suffer the burdens of violence yet enjoy little specific recovery support. In the LRA conflict, the youth have been targeted as recruits into the fighting forces since they are energetic and easy to indoctrinate (Coulter, 2009; Soto, 2009). Female youth in addition to fighting are needed by the rebels as sexual comforters, spies and cooks (Mckay, 2004). In the post-conflict situation these experiences greatly impact the rehabilitation and resettlement processes. This is because youth-specific experiences are under emphasized and less prioritized in reconstruction programming by both government and humanitarian agencies. The youth thus struggle with new roles and responsibilities but with minimal social, economic and political support.

While the conflict started in the 1980s, the LRA atrocities intensified in the 2000s after the rebel group shifted its center to Southern Sudan. Exiting Uganda halted attacks on the LRA from the Uganda government, which provided time for the rebels to re-organize and strategize for more intensive attacks. South Sudan was the ideal place for this reorganization because it borders northern Uganda yet it was engaging in internal struggles and thus could not dedicate resources to fight against a Ugandan rebel group.
This new location facilitated abductions, mutilations and confinement of abductees from Northern Uganda (Soto, 2009). Since they were relocated to new areas, communication and transportation back to Uganda was largely cut off. Chances of escaping were also minimal since abductees were in a foreign land. Adam Branch in his article, *Uganda’s Civil War and the Politics of ICC Intervention*, argues that LRA atrocities intensified due to arrest warrants issued by the ICC following case filing by the government of Uganda (Branch, 2007).

In order to minimize LRA’s atrocities to the civilian population, the Ugandan government forced the local populace into government-established protected villages. Government conceptualization of protected villages is, however, different from the communal perspective as well as some critical conflict scholars. Branch for instance argues that these are “most accurately identified as internment or concentration camps given their origin in forced displacement and continued government violence used to keep civilians from leaving” (2007, 181). In the camps, the population experienced torture on a mass scale by both government and humanitarian agencies, which Dolan termed “social torture”. Over 80% of the local population was concentrated in “rural prisons”, with extremely poor living conditions including restricted freedom of movement and association (Tim & Vlassenroot, 2010, 14). The Ugandan government is thus accountable for imposing structural violence and systematic subordination to the people of northern Uganda (Dolan, 2009). Both national and international humanitarian agencies are also liable for being complicit to this social torture since humanitarian workers operated through the structures of dominance instituted by the government and participated in human rights violations including sexual violence (Dolan, 2009).
With closure of camps, decongestion sites (small settlements protected by the Uganda national army) were formed where people were encouraged to relocate before eventually moving back to their original lands. Decongestion sites provided an in-between zone (borderland) that connected the IDP camps to the return areas, and aided transition. These sites were intended to fulfill the principle of voluntary return. A number of programs, including government programs like Northern Uganda Rehabilitation Program (NUREP) and Peace Recovery Development Plan (PRDP), were put in place to facilitate the return of formerly displaced persons into their communities. Such programs, however, did not specifically address youth voices, needs and concerns. This study argues that limited involvement and participation of youth is a major shortfall among reconstruction programs in northern Uganda and may consequently jeopardize the post-conflict reconstruction and peace building process. By centering the experiences and concerns of marginalized females, this study challenges the structures of inequality that persist in the post-conflict reconstruction process.

In this study I argue that post-conflict programs’ minimal attention to youth specific concerns is a result of operating through dominant western-based conceptualizations and theorizing relating to gender, childhood and violence. Mainstream Western-based theories either do not represent or misrepresent the lived experiences of communities, in this case youth, in the global South. Studying returned formerly displaced youth from their own perspective, with the aim of achieving sustainable peace, is thus of critical importance. It is for these reasons that I grounded this study in feminist and African indigenous epistemologies to explore the gendered experiences of formerly displaced youth, the local understanding of a youth, the causes of armed violence, and the
different roles youth play, as well as strategies towards conflict resolution in northern Uganda. This study was guided by the following questions: What is the local understanding of a child, youth and an adult? What is the community conceptualization of violence? What are the causes of violence from the perspective of the youth? What are the gendered impacts of armed violence and displacement on the youth? What are the gendered roles youth play during conflict and post-conflict settings? How are youth specific concerns incorporated in post-conflict reconstruction programs? And what can be done from the perspective of the local communities to attain sustainable peace?

**Contextualizing the Problem**

There is a lot of research and literature on war and conflict in Northern Uganda (Annan, Brier & Aryemo, 2009; Blattman, 2009; Lischer, 2006; Ocitti, 2011). Much of this writing, however, neglects women concerns and other gender issues (Sjoberg, 2014). When women are included, they are presented as victims-civilians who need to be protected by and from the men, the perpetrators of violence. Associating war entirely with hegemonic masculinity has serious implications for defining and understanding how war dynamics works (Sjoberg, 2013). Rival parties therefore use women to justify war i.e. as a key feature to fight for as well as fight to protect (Moallem, 2005). Scholarly work that has included gender on the other hand additionally has misconceptualized gender to mean only women and femininity (Sjoberg, 2014). It is thus critical to rectify and emphasize the relevancy of gender in studying war and conflict. “Stories of war and conflict often talk about political leaders, militaries and states as if they are sexless and genderless” (Sjoberg,
This creates a misrepresentation of war dynamics to the disadvantage of women and other feminized identities. This is because gender is not only a way to distinguish among people, but also a power relation among people (Sjoberg, 2014). In times of war, gender differentiation exacerbates inequality and marginalization towards women. This study seeks to deconstruct these power dynamics to understand the impact war has on young women as gendered beings. To understand women as gendered beings, feminists ask questions that provide information relating to both men and women during war (Hutchings, 2008; Sjoberg, 2014). This study contributes to this debate by looking at how gender intersects with age to subordinate young women in situations of conflict using the case of northern Uganda.

The omission of gender in the definition, explanation, researching and scholarly writing relating to war is significant because the “causes, practices and consequences of war cannot be fully understood without using gender as a category of analysis” (Sjoberg, 2014, 12). For instance, defining men entirely according to traditional stereotypical gender roles disregards the experiences of men who do not meet these notions of masculinity. In the case of northern Uganda these include civilian men, especially those who lived in internally displaced people’s camps, differently-abled men who may not be able to fight or who might in fact need protection, and elderly men. In the same way, women who do not conform to stereotypical portrayals of femininity are challenged especially in the post-conflict stage, to return back to pre-conflict feminine attributes. An intersectional approach that acknowledges and accommodates the complexity involving non-conforming gender portrayals in relation to other identity markers is crucial to transcending the binary construction of gender.
The gender- and age-specific experiences of youth are also largely neglected in studies of conflict and displacement. A closer examination of literature relating to armed violence, conflict, post-conflict, and peace studies reveals a common focus on women and children’s vulnerability and resilience. While children are understood to be persons below the age of 18 years, in situations of war, focus has been put on infants and children below the age of five (Southhall, 2011). Women and children are in their own way critical categories and deserve special attention. Single categorical concentration on groups by either gender or age, however, has left out the youth and their age-specific gendered concerns. This is coupled with the failure to acknowledge gender concerns (even within the youth category) and the general gender inequality that persists in post-conflict settings which greatly hinders the success of programs. Understanding gender as referring to males and females is thus essential while defining security and war, significant in analyzing causes, outcomes, and solutions especially to violent conflict. Neglecting gendered experiences downplays the importance of social interactions, which in turn neglects the root causes of such conflicts. Gender, however, needs to be examined in relation to other integral identity markers applicable in context specific situations. This study notes that age, marital and motherhood statuses as well as location all worked hand in hand with gender to further complicate young women’s subordination.

This study also challenges the perceived gender neutrality of the concept youth. I reclaim the concept “youth” to refer to both male and female young adults. Drawing on a feminist perspective in relation to globalization trends, McRobbie (1991) points out that
due to “urban romanticism” and “masculinist overtones”, the term “youth” is used as a gender-neutral term though it actually stands for young male. Studying youth with this perspective has consequently insufficient understanding of the impact armed conflict has on girls, their agency and resilience they display during such circumstances. Additionally, large numbers of female youth who have participated actively with military groups are not targeted for return and resettlement programming. Female youths’ lack of participation in planning and implementation of programs explains the neglect of youth specific gender dimensions by political, policy and program approaches.

Another dimension that this study examines is the definition of children, adults and youth based on age. I compare dominant western understandings to local perspectives, identifying these contradictions and the impact they have on humanitarian access and use in northern Uganda. Youth exclusion is compounded further by the community’s failure to realize the gap between a child and youth. The youth are expected to suit either the children or adult categories, yet they concurrently encompass both childhood and adulthood attributes. This has subsumed youth into analyses of children’s post conflict realities, which consequently undermines attention to the youth-specific needs. Youth occupy a borderline position that incorporates children and adult characteristics, a case in point being child mothers. They are below the age of eighteen and thus legally children. Child mothers are, however, socially and culturally expected to take up motherly roles thus functioning as adults. This makes youth a special group demanding a different kind of attention, which they are minimally accorded.

The available literature identifies male youth as actors during conflict, and widely downplays the active role of young women. This not only ignores young women’s agency
but also neglects their specific concerns. Due to belonging to the wrong age and gender, female youth are at a double disadvantage. Female youth specifically embody multiple identities, which results in extreme marginalization. They fit in neither the women’s category nor the children’s category, yet the youth category often is biased towards the male youth. The categorization of female youth is complicated further by motherhood and marital statuses as well as involvement with armed groups.

This study therefore explores two major themes. First, I examine the experiences and voices of the formerly displaced female youth with the aim of demonstrating their active participation, agency and resilience. At the same time, I highlight their marginalization during conflict and post-conflict reconstruction. This contributes to the literature that challenges stereotypical portrayals of female youth as vulnerable, and generates theories that reflect the lived realities of youth in situations of conflict. Overall this study recommends that policy and programs must address the specific situations of female as well as male youth. Presenting female youth as both victims and perpetuators simultaneously also challenges binary constructions of experiences of armed violence based on gender. This study therefore acknowledges complexities in the identity of youth, especially in situations of distress.

Secondly, in this study I question and deconstruct the Youth Bulge Theory (YBT)’s construction of poor African youth as violent by speaking to youth in Uganda about their experiences of conflict, resettlement, and reconstruction. Several scholars have noted that historical, societal and political tensions influence each other and work together to facilitate violence and conflict in the developing world (Kasozi, 2013). High numbers of male youth cannot therefore solely explain such violence as the YBT suggests. In order
to examine the lived realities of communities in post-conflict Uganda, I largely draw on three major bodies of literature; conceptualization and understandings of childhood(s), conventional and feminist understandings of armed violence as well as feminist and indigenous epistemologies and methodologies. Below is a brief elaboration of how I adopt these in this study.

**Feminism and War**

Peace, conflict and security research becomes feminist research if it challenges power relations, heteropatriarchy and works towards social transformation. At the center of all feminist research is a commitment “to correct both the invisibility and distortion of female experiences” (Lather, 1988.571) which this study does using female youth in northern Uganda. Feminist research brings out previously neglected women’s voices and experiences in conflict studies to participate in defining, understanding causes, experiences and consequences of armed conflict violence. Feminist methodological principles are wide and diverse and this research adopted a number of these principles as discussed below.

Acknowledging gender as an analytical category constitutive with other social markers including class, location, and age, which all deserve to be given attention. These identity constructions work together to inform power, difference and inequality. The Intersectionality approach thus greatly informs feminist research in peace and security issues. Feminists agree that no woman is only woman but rather occupy multiple subject positions and several cultural identity categories (Spelman, 1998). This study concentrated on female youth as a way of acknowledging diversity within the category “woman” and the differentiated power relations within it. Looking at young women in
situations of displacement simultaneously centers age, gender and location as well as other identity markers that exacerbate marginalization including motherhood and marriage. This study further avoids single entity analysis by focusing on the linkages between the various forms of insecurity and levels at which they operate including individual, community, and structural levels examining how such linkages influence subordination of youth especially female youth.

Feminist methodologies involve consciousness raising and empowerment in order to deconstruct and challenge knowledge claims by dominant groups in positions of privilege. This includes de-centering dominant knowers (men) by moving “margins to the center” (bell hooks, 1984) and redefining who can know and what can be known. In conflict studies questions relating to what is war, what causes war, who plays what roles during war and the consequences of war as well as solutions are important. This study examines these questions from a perspective that centers the marginalized. By centering the voices of young women, this study contributes to the validation of the lived experiences of young women in Uganda as knowledge worth contributing to understanding armed violence in Africa.

In addition, traditional research on conflict has been criticized for concentrating on the public sphere while neglecting the private and informal sectors in which women largely participated. Feminism thus opens up a space for women and their experiences in peace, conflict and security analysis. Conflict scholars emphasize however, that absence of gender in analyses of wars is not a blind omission but as skew (Butler, 2010; Sjoberg, 2013.). It is thus crucial to learn to look for where gender is claimed as absent since the genderless study of war is a reflection of the real world in which men engage and govern
while grounded in masculine bias. This study thus examined the gendered aspects of humanitarian recovery programs, many of which are claimed to be (gender) neutral and unbiased. The construction of youth as a gender-neutral concept is also problematized concluding that youth has been used to reflect the concerns and experiences of male youth.

Feminist researchers involved in conflict studies also acknowledge positionality and privilege with the goal of minimizing power imbalance between researchers and participants. Conflict feminist research thus acknowledges subjectivity. Harding (1987) highlights that recognition of the researcher as part of the research subjects and acknowledging that the beliefs of the researcher shape the research is crucial for studying women from their perspective. In this aspect feminism recognizes participants as the experts of their own experiences. As a female researcher born and lived all my life in Uganda, I connected with my respondents on various levels. Given my western education and the socio-economic status, as well as coming from the central part of Uganda, I acknowledge the privileges I have in contrast to the study population. I however, made it clear to the respondents that they were the experts since I was documenting their lived experiences. Patti Lather (2007) has recently conceptualized “getting lost” as a way of achieving knowledge by giving up authority, power and privilege by the researcher and going into the research process ready to learn from the participants. I was thus open to learning and participating in some of the activities to which I was invited. I participated in harvesting maize (corn) and in market stalls with some respondents I interviewed at work.
Conflict feminist scholars recognize that emotions are central to process of knowledge building; hence my analysis of anger, feelings and memory as feminist explanations of northern Uganda war. Because I acknowledge that knowledge is partial, I interviewed both male and female youth as well as adult community members including local council leaders, clan heads and workers from NGOs with projects on youth in Soroti district. This study thus bases its analysis on multiple perspectives within local communities.

Feminist research also involves negotiating across the differences within and between categories. Appreciating differences minimizes false universalization, in my study among women and youth. Treating the oppressed/women as a homogeneous group downplays the intra-group differences that may result from age, location, marital status, parentage, and academic levels. In the study of war, women have been lumped together with children in an infantilizing way as people in need of special protection (Tripp, Ferree & Ewig, 2013). This generalization perpetuates the historical disempowerment of women and disregards power dynamics among women. Feminist scholar Cynthia Enloe in 1991 suggested that war stories often group women and children as “womenandchildren”, understanding them to be war’s helpless, non-violent outsiders. The feminized other—“womenandchildren” consequently serve to justify and select the state as the masculine protector (Sjoberg, 2013). Feminist research challenges the totalizing victimization of women by showing how women are at times active participants (Moallem, 2005), yet at the same time can simultaneously occupy both actor and victim positions (Annan & Blattman, 2009; Moser & Clark, 2001). In my study, I critique the concept “womenandchildren” for failing to recognize the age specific
differences among women. The use of feminist perspectives allows uncovering of hidden
gender power relations in categories like “women” depending on age, motherhood and
marital status.

Because “feminist research is not research about women but research for women
to be used in transforming their sexist society” (Cook & Fonow, 1986:13), engagement of
the state and the international community as gendered entities is also crucial for conflict
and security studies. Feminists critique the gendered nature of concepts of state, violence,
war, peace, peacekeeping, militarization and soldiering (Tripp, Ferree & Ewig, 2013).
They have challenged the instrumental use of women as a rationale to go to war and
examined how state foreign policies are influenced by masculinity, heterosexism and the
gendered nature of militarism (Spade, 2003; Puar, 2007; Tripp, Ferree & Ewig, 2013:10).
As such feminists draw attention to the structural relationships between the state power
and masculinity. Women’s exclusions in the security realm are not only related to cultural
and social norms in the national setting, but also are compounded by the importation of a
set of patriarchal values that arrive with international interveners (Fionnnualani, 2013:
34).

In this study I engage a western-framed theory of violence (youth bulge theory)
that labels the developing world as a security threat given its high youth population. This
theory relegates the role the developed world played (colonialism) and continues to play
(neocolonialism and globalization) in Africa’s poverty and continued wars. I seek to
develop a locally informed theory of violence grounded in the lived realities of youth in
the developing world by shifting focus from the individual-level gender differences to the
patterns of socially constructed gender relations (Connell 2002) including the state, co-
operaions as well as international relations, which form the world’s gendered order.

Representation is another characteristic of feminist research. To minimize
misrepresentation, feminist scholars emphasize the perspective from below (Bennhold-
Thomsen & Mies, 2000; Vandana, 2010), one, which is self-defined by the communities
under study. When indigenous communities are viewed through the colonial eye, it
affects cultural specific conceptualizations of gender, thus making the research
unreliable, exploitative and harmful to participants (Tuhiwai Smith, 2010). To avoid
misrepresentation, this study uses a local self-identified understanding of who they are,
what constitutes violence as well as their experiences during conflict. In order to
understand the various aspects impacting violence in Africa, it is necessary to evoke
African indigenous knowledge systems. The following section thus discusses the
indigenous perspectives in understanding and conceptualization of violence especially in
Africa drawing on the specific context of Northern Uganda.

Indigenous Epistemologies, Methodologies and Violence

In this study “Indigenous” refers to African realities prior to European colonization of the
continent. The legacy of colonialism continues to influence structures and systems in
Africa arguably more than it did during the colonial period (Emeagwali&Sefa Dei, 2014).
It impacts armed conflict and its resolution processes, and remains the major cause of
socio-economic inequalities among gendered beings, regions and nations. It is thus
critical to comprehend African indigenous epistemological, ontological and
methodological approaches in order to liberate, decolonize and empower such knowledge
from external mainstream Western negative constructions.
Indigenous epistemologies destabilize individualistic approaches presented by both mainstream feminist and conventional frameworks to violence. According to African indigenous feminist thought, the group has priority over the individual although the individual is appreciated within the group (Chilisa& Ntseane, 2010). Understanding individual experiences in violent situations therefore means examining social relations within and between the communities for African knowledge is communally owned and shared (Njoki, 2013). Communities have elders that store knowledge and are entitled to speak for and on behalf of the community. In this study I acknowledge indigenous communal structures and systems. I conducted in-depth interviews (conversations) with opinion community leaders including clan heads and clan committee members in order to obtain communally acknowledged perspectives in relation to youth and violence. I however, at the same time challenged this absolute truth from elders by presenting youth as knowledge bearers.

Indigenous methodologies also acknowledge that the communities include the departed and non-human (Guy-Sheftall, 2003; Kovack, 2012). This is particularly critical in conflict resolution. In northern Uganda for instance community members that have shed human blood go through a cleansing process in order to be at peace with these spirits. Such understanding challenges the dominant understanding of peace as the mere absence of war. Peace in indigenous knowledge systems involves the spirit and wholeness, and African Indigenous knowledge systems emphasize that the dead are not dead. In this study I recognize the holistic and multidimensional interconnections of the body, soul and spirit as they interface with society, culture and nature. This particularly brings in the aspect of forgiveness and reconciliation as critical for post-conflict
Indigenous epistemologies in addition conceptualize gender as complementarity where all roles performed by men and women contribute to the survival of the community (Rousseau, 2011). This calls for examination of external influences that introduce and sustain hierarchies in gender roles. This study analyses how Western informed frameworks especially humanitarian recovery programs center masculine roles and in turn relegate the feminine roles to a lower position. I also analyze the role of the state in sustaining such constructions. Blaming (young) men for the northern Uganda violence is a pretext to deny the role of history especially colonialism and avoid responsibility of the material effects such history has created. This study therefore values memory and healing as important to resolving violence and conflict since local indigenous knowledge resides in cultural memories. Exploring lived experiences of youth is one way of evoking such memory and thus facilitating healing.

Context is a very important aspect in understanding experiences of indigenous women and communities. As subjects they are agentic and have a voice when analyzed in historically and culturally relevant ways (Chilisa, 2012). In this study I deconstruct dominant constructions and theories that define women and girls in sub-Saharan Africa as totally vulnerable using the case of Ugandan formerly displaced female youth. This study therefore contributes to reclaiming Africa’s indigenous ways of knowing and also situating this knowledge in critical discussions especially in the academy. This, in my view is one way the academy itself can be decolonized and diversified by including alternative ways of knowing as valid.
Theoretical and Methodological Grounding

In order to sufficiently explore the multidimensional nature of the problem under study, this study adopted an interdisciplinary perspective encompassing feminist, indigenous, childhood, and conflict and peace studies. While these are different theoretical frameworks, it is hard to draw definite demarcations due to overlaps with one another. For instance by emphasizing male youth, the youth bulge theory gives a biased gendered perspective, which evokes feminist analysis. Yet by focusing on numeric age categorization, it centers a western construction of adulthood and childhood, which draws attention from indigenous approaches. Due to linkages in the theoretical framework, I draw from all the approaches concurrently.

I employ an intersectionality approach to shift beyond gender analysis, by including age, and location as critical concerns for the northern Uganda post-conflict reconstruction. I center the experiences of formerly displaced female youth in Uganda. Single categorical analysis based on gender or age neglects the experiences of female youth who simultaneously occupy these multiple categories. Intersectionality therefore provides a more comprehensive approach to understanding power, in the domestic and public spheres, as well as within and between groups. A feminist intersectionality approach has four main tenets; exploring complexities for both individual and group identities, centering lived experiences and struggles of marginalized groups as a starting point for developing theory, unveiling the ways interconnected domains of power organize and structure inequality and oppression and promoting social justice and social change by linking research and practice (Dill & Zambara, 2009). I centered formerly displaced female youth in this study in order to develop an alternative theory to the
dominant youth as security threat, portraying how national and international initiatives evoke hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy in discriminating against women and youth.

Drawing from feminist and African indigenous epistemologies, I provide an Afrocentric feminist critique of the youth bulge theory, in order to unravel the complexities in understanding the gendered nature of armed conflict using the case of youth in northern Uganda. I deconstruct foreign western concepts, theories, categories of analysis, and knowledge production about Africa, Africans and African women by prioritizing local knowledge and meanings using the voices of returned formerly displaced youth. Emphasizing lived experience as knowledge, and applying communal and relational perspectives, this study deconstructs dominant discourses (in this case western and patriarchal) that create false universalization and essentialism of women, children and youth while prioritizing context-specific realities.

The Western conceptualization of age as entirely numeric and its use in recovery programs in determining categories of focus individualizes experiences of youth. African knowledge systems, however, note that communities in Africa are relation and organized in collective terms, which makes it impossible to totally single out individuals because ones wholeness is attained in relation to others. Acknowledging that the community influences individual’s conceptualization of reality and knowledge, I prioritize definitions of youth that incorporate lived experiences, focusing on “functionality” and “relationality” to their local communities. This facilitates the community involvement while prioritizing local understanding of lived realities.

Feminist epistemologies acknowledge that reality is always under construction by social actors and is context specific and is thus accommodative to diverse and
contradictory knowledge. This study therefore does not come up with universalizing conclusions but rather draws on decolonizing methodologies to understand the various perspectives of how returning communities make meaning of their lives. I also draw on indigenous knowledge systems to use language that communities identify with and to avoid dominant generalized concepts. In order to promote social change, this research is methodologically positioned in the transformative framework geared towards social justice. I thus analyze the role humanitarian programs (international and local) play in sustaining dominant patriarchal constructions.

This study advances gender analysis as an important methodological framework. The study explores gendered power, experiences, knowledge and values in understanding both war and peace. Cessation of hostilities does not necessarily result in peace for women. Violence continues in the private sphere for instance through domestic violence. Given gender relations and intersecting categories of identity, what is formally called ‘post-conflict’ results in continued threat and violence against women. This study agrees with previous feminist conflict researchers that conflict and violence do not end with the official declaration of end of war but rather continue into peoples’ homes, minds and bodies.

Feminism solely, however, cannot provide a durable solution to conflict if it does not adopt an indigenous perspective to provide context specific meanings. Indigenous methodologies are crucial for understanding traditional conflict resolution strategies that are less emphasized in dominant feminist methodologies. Thus the out of context conceptualization of African culture rather than African culture itself is the major cause of women’s oppression. African culture, however, has its various forms of oppression. I
thus use feminism and indigenous epistemologies to counter check each other using my position as a western trained African feminist. This “outsider within” position provides me with a more objective perception of reality.

**Methodology**

With a clear theoretical grounding, I now turn to the fieldwork. In this section I describe the study area, the study participants, the process of data collection (including justification of methods, tools and criteria used), departure from the field and analysis of the data collected. I also elaborate on the challenges and limitations of the study.

**Study Area**

Soroti is a district in Eastern Uganda. The district has a poverty density of 53% ranking it as one of the districts with the highest numbers of people living under the poverty line (Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBS, 2009). Agricultural production is the main economic activity in the district. Soroti district has experienced the longest conflicts in the region, initially involving the Karamajong cattle rustlers, Uganda People’s Movement/army rebellion, and Alice Lakwena’s movement that later, under the leadership of Joseph Kony, evolved into the Lord’s Resistance Army. With the exception of Lord’s Resistance Army, the other conflicts did not lead to the establishment of internally displaced peoples’ camps and received limited formal attention and media attention. Those earlier encounters nonetheless affected the local communities. Armed conflict in Soroti district later attracted (inter) national attention after the LRA insurgency intensified in 1999, even
though the LRA war in northern Uganda started in 1986. This was because Soroti district
hosted a number of internally displaced peoples’ camps. With the closure of the camps,
the relatively peaceful district has also received a large number of returnees. Research
about post-conflict social relations therefore concentrated on the areas that were affected
by the insurgency earlier on such as districts in Lango and Acholi sub regions that were
directly involved in and severely affected by the civil conflict. That has limited
knowledge production from areas impacted in the later stages of the LRA conflict
including Soroti district in Teso sub region. I thus intended to explore what is at stake for
youth in such regions.

**Patterns of Return**

During displacement, research participants resided in various camps, in and outside of
Soroti district. These included Asianut camp, Camp Swahili, Majengo camp, Nakatunya
camp, Pamba camp, Temele camp, Kagwara camp, Obuku camp and Swairiya camp.
Others had lived at church parishes and at individual’s houses for instance Reverands’
(Church leaders) houses within Soroti town. While these findings can be generalized,
given the varied experiences participants had, I wish to clarify that these findings
specifically apply to IDPs from the above-mentioned camps.

All participants interviewed in the study resided in Soroti district by the time of
the study. These however, varied in specific location since they came from different sub
counties. For some youth, Soroti was their original home (area of residence before
displacement) to which they had returned. For others it was their second or third areas of
settlement. For second area settlements, it was largely dominated by children whose
parents and at times family had perished during the displacement and thus lost contacts to return to their original lands. Third area settlements on the other hand had come from neighboring districts settled in other camps outside Soroti and finally resettled in Soroti by the end of encampment. The various displacement and return patterns influenced their experiences.

There were respondents who did not relocate even at the official closure of the camps by the government in 2008, but rather remained in the camp area. While camps were closed, not all community members were provided for their return. For instance unaccompanied minors who could not claim aid from any family setting largely remained in the camp. They had no connections back to the return area. For others they were born during displacement making the camp their first area of settlement. These were therefore not returning but rather relocating to “new” areas. Many were thus skeptical to shift to new places with limited family networks and resources. This is because social capital is important for one’s security and safety. Staying in the camps though was not an easy decision given that humanitarian assistance had shifted to recovery assistance i.e. following up communities that had returned. The protection and provision of services including food provision, health care and education drastically declined making the camp area a more difficult place for its residents.

While the study focused on returned formerly displaced youth, those that remained in the camp were included because the situation they were going through depicted those who had moved to different areas. In reality, as one field guide commented, “they had returned to nowhere, but taken up their everyday responsibilities with minimal support unlike those who left the camps to other areas”. As such those that
remained in camps after they were closed were in a more disadvantaged position than those who went to other areas since they had received return packages. Communities that remained in the camp areas have not received much scholarly attention since most studies have centered returned populations. In this study I referred to my study population as “formerly displaced” to cater for all these various categories.

Data Collection

Following approval from Arizona State University review board, I initiated contacts with the field area to map out how best I could get to the intended respondents. I largely relied on contacts from previous fieldwork in the region for re-entering the research community. After four years since I had been involved with the community, dynamics change and one needs the guidance of contacts on the ground. I thus enlisted the help of a community organization. Individual respondents were recruited using returnee lists from a community organization (Community Integrated Development Initiatives-CIDI) and local leaders. CIDI has been working in the region since 2003 and it is well grounded with societal and community dynamics. Some of the organization staff are community members making it more trusted by the returnee community.

I went to four sub counties that were considered to have been worst affected by the conflict and had high numbers of IDPs. These were Tubur, Katine, Asuret sub counties and Soroti Municipality. In each sub-county, CIDI community officers introduced me to the area local leaders. Such introductions included meeting with Local Council (LC) chairpersons for permission to research in their area. LCs are government structures starting at the village level (LC1) all through to the district level (LC5). As leaders they have a clear understanding of what is going on in their area.
The choice to go through a community-based organization was strategic, to avoid
the politicization that was going on in the region. The political atmosphere ahead of the
2016 presidential, parliamentary and local government elections was intense. There were
high risks of both local leaders and communities wanting to attribute any research as a
political strategy for competitors to lure supporters. Communities anticipated researchers
to belong to particular political parties and thus identify in “color”. Political parties in
Uganda embrace different colors and political campaigns are conducted through that
perspective. The most common question asked by the respondents was “which color are
you?” To emphasize my political neutrality in relation to research, going through the
community organization that is well known and trusted as apolitical was the easiest way.
This approach definitely had its limitations. For instance; I mainly interviewed
respondents that were receiving services from this organization. In addition, despite my
genuine intention to compensate respondents for their time, the organization was hesitant
to permit it because it would make future research where they have no funding
problematic. I thus did not compensate the respondents besides refreshment and lunch
(not in monetary terms) depending on the time of the interview.

Respondents decided on the venues where the interviews were being held. Given
the suspicions and tension within the region, this encouraged a sense of safety and
confidence among the participants. Choosing the venues for the interview also minimized
power hierarchies between the participants and the researcher. Interviews were thus
conducted in different areas including respondents’ homes, workplaces, under gazetted
trees (where community meetings are normally held), sub-county headquarter offices and
schools. While some chose private spaces like their homes, others chose formalized
settings like sub county offices and schools. On the other hand some preferred being interviewed in public spaces like their places of work. For instance two respondents were interviewed from the shops they tended, while others were found in the market places (at their stalls or their parents stalls). Such youth continued with their daily routine as the interview proceeded. This methodological approach enabled understanding violence from the everyday experiences of the youth, using examples in their familiar neighborhoods and relating to meanings they make out of their socially and culturally embedded experiences.

I did not make any financial compensation to the respondents. I however, provided participants with light refreshments to facilitate the discussions. While all respondents consented to the interview orally, they were reluctant to offer written consent for safety reasons. Individuals expressed a sense of fear and distrust for each other. I promised strict confidentiality to the respondents and no individual identifying information was captured in the interview. For instance no names were taken from the respondents, except out of will to do so. Even then those names are not used in my analysis. All names appearing in this thesis are pseudonyms. All youth interviewed had lived in displacement, that is to say, were at some point in time forced to leave away from their homes for at least one year. These either lived in abduction or IDP camps. The number of years lived in displacement ranged from one to fifteen giving an average of eight years. Some of the respondents were born in displacement and thus had known camps for homes. They thus had minimal experience of life outside the camps. They were not in that sense returning, but relocating.
Participant Sample Selection

In order to gain a context specific and deeper understanding of violence, in total, I conducted 50 interviews with thirty-four females (34) and sixteen (16) male youth. The age range was 10-28 with the mean age being 19 years. Collecting information from both male and female youth provided a gendered comparison of experiences during and after conflict. Youth in this study refer to young people between the ages of 10-35. This age group incorporates both the communal understanding of a youth as a transition from childhood to adulthood and the international formal understanding (i.e. 15-24 years). This range also takes on the national understanding of youth who according to the Uganda National Youth Policy, a youth is someone between the ages of 18-35.

Participants were selected from two youth gender-specific lists until the desired number of participants was attained. I generated the lists from the returnee youth lists, which were provided by the organization I worked with-CIDI, which obtained the names from the local councils. To obtain more in-depth data, and encourage flexibility, and more organic flow, open-ended questions were asked. The reason for using open-ended questions was to ensure deeper exploration on particular issues under study. I preferred Individual face-to-face in-depth interviews because they accommodated further probing and asking follow-up questions (Bailey, 2007, Stake, 2010). They also enabled capturing of non-verbal communication for instance through observation. Interviews also have additional advantages, including instant clarification over unclear questions and responses (Denscombe, 2014).

I recruited key informants using purposive sampling targeting individuals with knowledge on youth in this region especially through interacting with youth regularly.
Purposeful sampling facilitates the selection of ‘information rich cases’ for in-depth understanding (Patton, 2002). Also given the time and financial restrictions, it was prudent that only relevant respondents be selected for this study. Individuals considered were those working directly on projects with a youth component in the return phase. These included staff from non-governmental organizations, local government leaders, cultural leaders and religious opinion leaders.

I also conducted focus group discussions of between eight and ten participants. Six focus groups were conducted in total; two female specific, two male specific and two mixed with both male and female youth. In each group, considerations for out-of school and in-school youth were made. I also gave age variations considerations during the group discussions to facilitate free sharing. In addition groups were gendered in order to encourage free participation by minimizing power and cultural constructions that hinder free female public expression especially in the presence of men. Having compatible gender and age groups encouraged sharing of embodied experiences and clarification of insights relating to people’s understandings of their everyday life.

**Departure From the Field**

Entering the research area had its challenges including skepticism from the local community and the leaders, general insecurity and violence. However, community members who were also staff to a community organization introduced me into the study area. I quickly adapted to the community socialization and was accepted by the study population. Departing from the field however, also presented specific complexities. Communities presented unmatched expectations from the research project asking when a project focusing on youth would start, who would benefit and so on. Answering such
questions as a student is not an easy task. I however, continuously openly explained how I anticipated the research to inform policy for the benefit of the community. It is frustrating to listen to someone explain their problems and then leave without providing any practical viable solution. I promised to share my findings with the NGOs working within the region and hope to have concerns raised by this study included in implementing organizations’ programming.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis is a continuous process that started during data collection using observations and memo writing. When fieldwork ended, I continued the analysis using qualitative analytical methods. We (I and research team) transcribed interviews, coded the data and categorized information according to themes. I observed emerging major themes during data. I chose to let themes emerge organically as a way of coming up with themes that make meaning in participants’ life. I later drew connections within and among themes to understand how various themes inform each other. These themes have formed the major titles under which this thesis has been structured into chapters.

For a clear flow of the chapters, I have presented the themes in a way that draws the connections identified in the analysis. Chapter two describes stages of human development presenting dissonances between the Western and the non-western world using the case of northern Uganda armed situation. This is followed by chapter three in which I prioritize youth voices and their own “self-definition” while examining causes of armed conflict, gendered youth experiences and responses. This chapter critiques the conventional definitions and understandings of armed violence using feminist conflict analyses. This age and gender appreciative approach provides an alternative perspective
that avoids radicalized, gendered and class pathologization of youth from the standpoint of
the developed world’s dominant narratives. Chapter four gives specific focus to the
humanitarian processes, systems and programs in northern Uganda highlighting how
violence against women and girls has been structured and institutionalized. Chapter five
expounds however, that women and girls are not entirely victims but rather resilient and
agentic. In this chapter I discuss the coping mechanisms and strategies women adopted in
situations of displacement and in the return areas. In the last section of the chapter, I
discuss the recommendations and conclusions study participants make.
CHAPTER TWO

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTHHOOD AMIDST ARMED VIOLENCE

Introduction

This chapter centers the complexities involved in understanding various stages of human growth and development namely; childhood, youthhood and adulthood. The main argument I make is that universalistic notions of childhood are limited and based on western definitions. Such definitions do not fit the local experiences of children in less privileged situations for instance war-torn regions like northern Uganda. The same argument also applies to youth and adults. Marginalized regions like northern Uganda demand context specific analysis for a true representation of their lived realities. This is because formal and dominant understandings, largely informed by the developed world have not accommodated how developing countries define childhood and adulthood.

In addition, I emphasize that there is no single, universalized understanding of either children or childhood, but rather various versions grounded in socio-cultural perspectives. I therefore discuss the specific attributes of childhood in Western and non-western settings while highlighting the contradictions that emerge using the case of northern Uganda. I observe that applying a western perspective of population categorization has hindered access to and use of humanitarian aid among returned formerly displaced communities in Uganda. While there are minor overlaps, for a more coherent flow of the chapter, I present these two perspectives (the indigenous/local and the universal/ dominant) as distinct frameworks that largely contradict each other.
Thus, externally imposed perspectives misrepresent the lived realities of communities in northern Uganda. Individuals in post-conflict northern Uganda live multi-dimensional lives that cannot be compartmentalized in restrictive, formal understandings of children, youth and adults. Evidence from findings suggests that these categories of growth and development are interrelated and connected and cannot be fixed in singular categorical descriptions largely grounded in numeric age as the dominant narrative suggests. Despite scholarly criticism over the failed analysis of childhood as an independent category (Cheney, 2011), childhood in northern Uganda is locally understood in relation to adulthood. To reflect local perspectives, I discuss these two aspects in relation to each other with a transitional phase commonly described as the youth.

At the same time, I also observe that universalistic frameworks also have a positive role to play in society. Universalistic frameworks are crucial to guide global childhood standards, a case in point being the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child (UNCRC). Such generalizable standards measure levels of development, enjoyment of human rights and states’ accountability to these standards. However, when such tools are not domesticated during the implementation, it halts their applicability to local settings. As a way of acknowledging the northern Uganda context, I pay specific attention to dominant and local understanding of children, and youth. I question how and what we know in relation to these categories and how these affect access to and use of humanitarian assistance.

By challenging dominant knowledge, in this chapter I apply a deconstructionist and decolonial approach that challenges the imposition of contextually inapplicable
concepts to the post-war reconstruction of indigenous communities in northern Uganda. I provide a counter narrative to the dominant view of childhood and youthhood by making a comparison between the northern Uganda’s understanding of the stages of human development, and the standardized universal constructions that have generally informed the development, reconstruction and recovery processes. To do this, I discuss the contradictions between the two perspectives in relation to their understanding of childhood and adulthood, and youthhood. I further acknowledge that culture is not fixed but rather impacted by external factors including war, globalization and historical processes like colonialism. I, therefore compare the pre-conflict and post-conflict local understanding of childhood examining the impact the war has created for such constructions.

I underscore that, while the concepts “children” and “adult” are applicable and locally relevant to northern Uganda (although contextually different), there is no concrete evidence of cultural applicability of the concept youth. It was therefore hard for the respondents to relate to the concept in culturally relevant ways. However, due to lack of an alternative term, I continue using the concept youth in this chapter to refer to the human phase of development that involves changing over/ crossing over from childhood to adulthood. As a researcher, adopting such an understanding aids my integration of culturally and context-dependent interpretation of social reality in northern Uganda’s formerly displaced communities, while at the same time capturing the universal understanding of growth and development (numeric-age bracket) used by the formal perspective.
General Overview to Understanding Childhood

In academia, Childhood Studies is a recent field that explores the experiences of children (Kehily, 2009). This field of study however, has been dominated by the mainstream Western understanding of childhood (Morrow, 2013). This dominant construction has marginalized alternative forms and constructions of childhoods, especially those in the developing world but also minority groups in the developed world (Human Rights Watch, 2007). Specific childhood experiences deviant from the normalized perspectives for instance in contexts including situations of armed violence have also not received the attention they deserve (Cheney, 2007).

While childhood as a specific field of study is new, the study of children and childhood(s) has been an integral part of other academic disciplines for a long time (Kehily, 2009; Morrow, 2011). Childhood has for instance been emphasized in sociology and cultural studies, while education and psychology have focused on the child/children. Interdisciplinary fields of study including international relations (Sjoberg, 2014; 2013), women and gender studies (Verona, Murphy & Javdani, 2016), as well as research informed by feminist and indigenous epistemologies (Chilisa, 2012; Njoki, 2013; Oyewumi, 1998) have on the other hand drawn attention to more complex understandings by integrating these various aspects simultaneously. This chapter builds upon this complex interdisciplinary approach.

This chapter takes on the sociocultural approach to childhood because it brings out indigenous and feminist paradigms, the two epistemologies by which this chapter is informed. At the same time the sociocultural approach examines how historical events and processes inform policy formulation and implementation, which in turn impact social
relations. The sociocultural approach also acknowledges childhood as a product of culture that varies in space and time (Jenks, 2009), thus having specific socio-cultural meanings (Gier, 2006).

Outside academia, interest in children’s rights also has increased due to overwhelming violations of children’s rights globally (UNICEF, 2004). The issues of concern among both scholars and practitioners are broad and diverse including; child soldiers, child labor, education, health, media (pornography, advertisement and film), child trafficking, child prostitution and the right to play among others. I discuss many of these in this chapter, exploring how they relate to and impact the understanding of childhood in northern Uganda. In addition, I explore how these concerns manifest differently between experiences in the West and non-western countries. I wish to clarify that while I use the categories ‘west’ and ‘non-west’, I am aware that these terms are essentialist (Mohanty, 2003) and do not necessarily depict the lived realities of communities within these regions. No unitary construction of childhood exists in either western or non-western regions, and childhood constructions are informed by context and lived experiences (Morrow, 2013). Kehily (2009) importantly elaborates that western conceptualization of the child subsists to re-affirm power hierarchies between the West and the non-west. In situations of distress, such power relations are manifested through humanitarian aid, conceptualization and categorization of population. With this in mind, I wish to clarify further that “western” in this chapter specifically refers to mainstream dominant constructions of childhood in the developed world.

The major contemporary global debates on childhood within and outside academia are largely constructed in two perspectives, protection and participation (Bardy,
2000). I find it important to elaborate on these because I will use them in discussing the contradictions between Western and northern Uganda childhood constructions later in the chapter. The protection debate revolves around fortification of children, and this focuses on vulnerability, victimhood and innocence narratives. UNICEF (2004) for instance describes childhood as a time for children to be in school and at play, to grow strong and confident with love and encouragement from their families. Children are thus expected to live free from fear, safe from violence, abuse and exploitation. The state and family are responsible for providing such protection for the children and this responsibility is legally binding. Such understanding is evident in both mainstream and indigenous constructions of childhood. One respondent described a child as,

…someone staying at home with their parents or guardians such as aunties, uncles and other relatives, and being taken care of by providing shelter, food, clothes and protection. They cannot make good decisions. They need protection and guidance in all spheres of life. Such a description defines children as entirely dependent on the guardians, parents and elders around them. Though constructed in northern Uganda, such understanding resonates with the “proper childhood” described in the western world (Parter-Brick & Smith, 2000, UNICEF, 2004). Protection narratives disregard the perspectives of children although they are known to be different from those of the adults. In this study, I found it clear that there are important differences in perspectives of children and adults as well as within the broad category of children due to their gendered expectations.

is the central global instrument for the protection of children. This instrument elaborates the UN position on protection of children from, among other things, hazardous activities like child labor and use of children as soldiers. The convention elaborates that children just like other human beings are born with fundamental rights and freedoms but with particular additional special needs due to their vulnerability. States that ratify the treaty are therefore held accountable for the rights of children within their jurisdiction. In article 1, UNCRC defines child to be “a person below the age of 18, unless the laws of a particular country set the legal age for adulthood younger”. This treaty therefore creates room for local specificity as a way of accommodating variances in adulthood. However, I wish to note that given the power relations at hand, most African countries including Uganda have not taken on this condition but instead adopted the dominant understanding and set eighteen as the age of attaining adulthood.

The protection and vulnerability theory is counteracted with the participation theories. These prioritize children’s independence, agency and thus active involvement in all aspects especially those affecting their lives. In situations of armed violence, the child participation framework elaborates on children’s ability to resist and adapt at times better than the adults (Fernando & Ferrari, 2013), make well-informed decisions (Offit, 2008), and take on roles previously conceptualized as adult roles in the pre-conflict setting (Spitzer & Twikirize, 2013). In situations of violence, the participation theory argues that children are not entirely victims but rather at times active participants. They may for instance voluntarily offer to join the armed forces and freely involve in crimes against

---

2UNCRC was adopted by the UN general assembly in 1989 to advocate for the rights of children globally. It is a legally binding agreement, acknowledging the role of parents, families and states and sets the standard for civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of every child, regardless of their race, religion or abilities.
humanity including murder and rape (Cheney, 2007). They thus need to be accorded attention by listening to their concerns and needs to inform resettlement and reintegration within communities to avert future conflicts.

**National Level Understanding of Childhood in Uganda**

At the national level, the Ugandan construction of childhood relies largely on the child protection theories. The 1995 constitution adopted the universal definition of a child as “a person below the age of eighteen years”. In addition, Uganda in 1990 ratified the UNCRC, hence the obligation to implement its tenets. The national understanding of childhood is thus grounded largely in the Western numeric age approach. Other legal tools intended to protect children in Uganda are also based on UNCRC’s age definition. These include laws on marriage, child labor, and political participation. As such both the western and the Ugandan central government models do not fit or even reflect the local context (social and cultural realities) especially in northern Uganda.

Since reconstruction programs and processes’ implementation is grounded in Ugandan central government’s guidelines, the numeric age perspective determines who falls under the categories of children and youth. This excludes some members of the community who do not self-identify as their age suggests. In addition I found out that some members from formerly displaced populations did not know their age. This was however, not surprising to the project implementers. They are aware of this dilemma but choose to follow protocol for the sake of funding. One key informant, an employee with an NGO explains:

Not everyone knows their age but if proposals are to be accepted, especially for funding, clarity over who is targeted is required. The best way to show that is using age groups,
which we transplant from government documents…it is good because it limits duplication of services.

As described above, programs used normalized descriptions that do not necessarily reflect communal organization. They are “transplants” from government documents. Important to highlight moreover, is that government documents are duplicates of the international documents. The government documents reflect the dominant understanding as a way of impressing the donors and receive funding. Smith (2012) notes that Uganda received USD 1.1 billion in humanitarian assistance between 2001-2010. Government therefore prioritizes the funds over the local concerns the communities have.

Communities, therefore organize in different ways that are not reflected by central government documents. This is however, not an oversight but a strategy by the government. The government has for instance adopted the western theorizing of young men as violent. This justifies the spending of big portion of the aid on ammunition as a way of maintaining political stability (Brown, 2007).

In Soroti district, participation narratives were evident. The local community, however, did not use them in describing childhood. Rather protection, which incorporates provision and guidance, was applied in explaining childhood. Given the roles they perform, children who participated actively in important communal activities were locally described as adults. Communities for instance, treated the children who headed households in the same capacity as adults. Humanitarian assistance agencies nonetheless referred to them as child-headed households. The understanding of both childhood and adulthood is in this case reliant on roles and performativity. While scholars have critiqued the understanding of childhood in relation to adulthood, I still found it relevant in this
study although with important limitations. This is because the ability to perform is measured based on locally standardized notions that disregard alternative notions of ability such as those performed by the differently abled bodies. This negatively impacts such bodies that might need care all the time since they would be categorized as inherently dependent and thus infantilized.

Reflecting on both protection and participation theories and the findings of this study, I argue childhood in northern Uganda is complex and cannot be sufficiently discussed in binary constructions. Therefore children need to have autonomy and thus decide on issues specifically affecting their lives. But given their intersectional nature, children also deserve to be treated as a special category facing the material effects of circumstances differently from adults. Children in post conflict Uganda occupy a position that is unique from other children in Uganda due to the war that the national child/adult binary does not necessarily apply. They thus need to be protected legally and socially to avoid further harm. In the post-conflict setting, children are described as adults due to the roles and responsibilities they hold hence the adult/child distinction blurred. However, government interventions are crucial to intervene and minimize the harmful encounters such children might face. I therefore settle with Hanson (2012)’s observation that “children’s rights involve a double claim, including equal rights and special rights (71).” Understanding childhood demands a shift beyond the rights discourse and comprehension of context-relevant social justice as a way of catering for the special needs of children. Since children under the western and national frameworks are not automatically children in the indigenous understanding, rights need to be advocated for with clear understanding of the local construction, which informs children’s everyday experiences.
Contextualizing Childhood in this Study

Because both protection and participation approaches apply concurrently within the returning communities, I have chosen to employ a multi perspective intersectional approach. That is to say, children’s experiences do not have to be understood in specified rigid categorizations of either protection/vulnerable vs. participation/agency. Children’s experiences are rather fluid and complex; at times children experience multiple occurrences simultaneously. Formerly displaced children for instance are both vulnerable and needed protection from sexual exploitation including defilement and rape, and early and forced marriages. Yet, at the same time, they demonstrate resilience by heading households and earning income to sustain themselves and at times their siblings. Children mentioned that they worked (for pay) in both the private and public settings. They are involved in income generating activities e.g. brick lying, casual labor- baby-sitting, housekeeping and watchmen (security guards), hawking, and roadside vending. While they earn some income, children experience harsh conditions including sexual and economic exploitation, bad weather and work related accidents/hazards.

It is children’s right to be given space to voice their experiences and concerns, and where possible be involved in decision-making. But, because they are not fully developed as adults, they at the same time need to be protected from harmful ventures for example harmful child labor, sexual exploitation and child soldiering among other things. It is this that Hanson (2012) describes as recognizing “the differences that make the difference” (72) among the adults and children. Appreciating these differences also involves acknowledging the experiences of individual children within the broad category of children. For instance, while young mothers are universally vulnerable, unmarried
young mothers are locally identified as an especially vulnerable category within the broad category due to lack of basic needs and social support. A single mother of two noted;

When you are married, your husband respects you because your family knows him, the people know you have the blessing of the parents and the clan leaders, they love you and support you in case of anything for instance if a child is sick… just having children (without being married) can however, even lead to misery. Men responsible can neglect their responsibility yet parents are also not happy.

Raising children as single teenage mothers is so challenging that it exposes girls to more exploitation sexually and economically as they try to provide for their children. Single parenting is also socially demeaning since the local community stigmatizes it to imply lack of integrity and self-respect on the side of the girl. Such communal attitudes in turn hinder services and resources available to single child mothers given their special needs.

Contradictions Between Western and Indigenous Constructions of Childhood

There is no single agreed upon understanding of a child that entirely represents the various conditions children encounter. There are also differences in the understanding of critical concepts that define childhood including vulnerability, ability, protection, agency and family. Such differences feature within and between groups. This section explores the major issues that contribute to such contradictions including age, child labor, sexuality and gender as critical aspects of analysis. In conceptualizing childhoods, a dichotomous binary has emerged between the “ideal” developed world childhood and the “other” unfulfilled childhood of the developing world. In this section I highlight the distinctive features that inform this binary construction, examining how they have impacted the reconstruction phase in northern Uganda.

The dominant western and national understanding of childhood assumes a linear progression from childhood to adulthood resulting into normative constructions of ‘right’
and ‘wrong’ ages for children’s participation in ‘adult activities’ including paid and
unpaid employment, and marriage (Morrow, 2010). This understanding has informed
universal declarations on children and childhood that are globally employed to structure
policies and programs targeting children. According to childhood scholar Morrow (2013),
linear constructions of childhood create a sense of failure in cases where children fail to
conform to the expected linear progression. In literature relating to hegemonic
masculinities for instance, boys sometimes turn violent due to failure to live to expected
social and economic standards (Dolan, 2009; Sommers, 2006; Urdal, 2004). I found that
male youth (and men) in northern Uganda have also fallen victim to such theorization,
resulting in them being labeled as violent in relation to female youth and women who are
termed victims. Some informants for instance during this study noted that youth (locally
meaning young men) were idlers and were involved in risky behavior including robbery
and theft. The local community in addition identified young men with rapes of girls and
women, resulting from the use of alcohol and drugs.

The linear progression in stages of human development relies upon numeric age
as a major determinant of childhood, youthhood and adulthood. At the age of eighteen
(18) childhood ends and adulthood immediately sets in, which calls for individual
responsibility legally and financially (Morrow, 2011). Numerical age is understood in
relation to individuals and is highly contested especially from the perspective of (sub-
Saharan) Africa due to limited applicability (Bourdillon, 2006). For instance, both
children and parents “very often, do not know their numerical age, or their date of birth.
They don’t talk in terms of specific numerical age, but what they can do” (Morrow, 2013.
152). In the current study, participants elaborated that adulthood is attained through a
process that involves fulfillment of socially expected practices including construction of a hut at the parents’ house to demonstrate the ability to provide shelter to one’s children. The transition is a process not for the individual solely but rather a family and communal venture. Adulthood in northern Uganda thus involves community endorsement of one’s maturity.

Besides a numeric understanding, the concept ‘age’ also implies “functional and relational age” (Morrow, 2013.151). To varying degrees, children’s status and roles are marked not by numerical age, but by the kinds of everyday tasks they perform and/or are expected to in their respective societies. In India for instance, functional age is demonstrated in how much rice one could cook, while Ethiopian communities look at how much coffee and Injera (bread) one can make (Morrow, 2013). In addition to cooking abilities, in northern Uganda functionality also is determined by how many siblings one can efficiently care for in the absence of parents. Especially significant for this study is the gendered construction of adulthood through the feminization of such division of labor socially. Marriage and childbirth transition such functionality to adulthood. In relation to this, one female respondent explained that,

When a girl can cook especially atapa (a local delicacy meal made from millet flour mixed with boiling water), and does not get burnt, when she can take good care of her siblings- bathe them, feed them and maintain the house. Then she is ready for marriage because she can take care of her own house and children. While performing such roles is crucial, the findings elaborate that ability to perform such functions only means adulthood when combined with marriage as a public display and approval of one’s maturity. Childhood scholars have termed this relationality.

Many communities in northern Uganda rely on relationality to determine childhood. This is entirely reliant on the people the child relates with at a particular time.
For instance relating with mothers and wives in similar capacities, i.e. with children and husbands respectively, elevates young women to womanhood status in the community. In northern Uganda, it is expected that once one becomes a mother, they relate with other mothers for guidance and direction. They thus cease to be or even relate (in the capacity of children) with children irrespective of their numerical age. This clarification came out very clearly during one FGD where the female youth explained,

It is known all over when you get your own (biological) child, then you stop being a child, because a child cannot have a child. You stop to play games with children, and become “decent” and serious with life. If you do not change your conduct, other mothers sit you down. It is like you are shaming them and their position/status in community. It also means you are a disgrace to the child you gave birth to.

Another respondent noted,

When you get a child, your name changes, you are someone’s mother. You now start being addressed making references to your child…the mother of (so and so...) It is a sign of respect from the community. Most women are called by their first born’s names, dead or alive to mark it as a turning point in young women’s lives.

Being hailed in a way that evokes motherhood is a constant reminder to young and child mothers about their new achieved identity as well as consequential roles and responsibilities. Child mothers in this case have to give up their childhood for the motherhood status in order to fit in communally set standards. The local understanding does not reflect the concept of “child mothers” as by humanitarian and other external languages, but only conceives of children and mothers. One cannot be both in the local northern Uganda understanding. Having children automatically and permanently changes a girl’s sense of identity and belonging (even if the child dies) and automatically creates some kind of policing within and among individuals as a way of safe guarding their honor and integrity. This directly links to the understanding of someone who has children as an adult. One male elder explained that,
A child is someone who does not have a child yet, someone who has not yet brought another human being on to this world. Such a person cannot understand some things… The ability to have a child changes who you are- you become related to another family right away, how you think and what you do all change! Being a mother makes you think about the consequences of your actions to the entire community.

This quote identifies demonstrated ability as a determinant of agency and vulnerability. Children are termed vulnerable because they have not yet demonstrated their ability to do some things that are deemed important in society. During the research, several participants emphasized that some circumstances can only be understood and reflected upon when one experiences them, because lived experience is irreversible. In this perspective, the local understanding of vulnerability implicates the body by evoking “feeling” as a critical concept of transition from childhood to adulthood.

Child bearing as a determinant of adulthood heavily applies to women. For instance, women culturally are solely blamed for the inability to have children. While the number of children tells how old a woman is, and thus conveys her expected level of maturity, the same is not true for males because they can have several wives and many children even at an early age. For boys and young men, marriage marks adulthood. The number of women one has paid dowry for and how well he provides for them and their children demonstrates the level of maturity they command in the community.

Additionally, respondents used life events to determine social location within the community. Such events provide landmarks used in telling their life stories and derive meaning out of them. At the same time, humanitarian programs use such events to estimate the numerical age of the particular individuals as a way of categorizing them. Also, events provided a rough idea of people’s ages during general population counting
and registration. This made events such crucial elements in the lives of the returning populations. When asked her age, one respondent pointed to a small girl of about 3 years old and said,

I was about that size when we were moved into the camp. My mother carried me on her back all the way…By that time the rebels had attacked the school taking away many girls who never returned. I remember everything! You don’t know how people died…my dad too. We had no protection but the camp.

Further probing clarified that this respondent referred to the abductions at St. Mary's college boarding school, Aboke, in 1996. The rebels attacked this girls’ school and took one hundred and thirty nine girls. This event was largely publicized in the media. So many stakeholders would easily remember when it was referenced. While such information may suffer limited authenticity due to memory issues, such events help individuals relate with others in their generation as well as normative constructions reflected in age. If the respondent was 3 in 1996 when they moved to the camp, then it could be estimated that by 2015, when this research was conducted, this young lady was 22 years old and thus a youth. Identifying with the same generational cohort also demonstrates ones age and (in) ability to fulfill certain roles. One noted; “when all your child’s childhood friends are married and have children, it triggers you to find out what’s wrong with yours (children)” in case they are not progressing in a similar direction.

Another distinction in definitions of children relates to individualism and collectiveness. Dominant Western constructions define children as individuals that form separate entities as citizens within nation states (Cheney, 2007). In Uganda (as in much of Africa), however, children are understood in relation to communities, tribes, families and clans. Understanding childhood goes beyond the individual children to include the
community in form of parents, leaders, teachers, elders and ancestors (Boyden & de Berry, 2004; Swadener, 2000). Nonetheless, Africa has not been exempted from global frameworks. Interventions by international aid programs targeting orphans (Cheney, 2010; Giese et al, 2003), child soldiers (Cheney, 2007; Wessel, 2009) and the girl child (Kendall, 2010), have transformed traditional family relations towards more individualistic tendencies. In northern Uganda, agencies utilize individualistic approaches in dealing with individual children in schools, and health services. Spitzer and Twikirize (2013) for instance highlight the medicalization of psychosocial support for individual child soldiers that ignore the role of the family and the community with which these children interact. This results in the stigmatization of such children by the community. Study participants affirmed this problem by explaining that former child soldiers were problematic and parents discouraged their children from interacting with them. This stigmatization resulted in isolation, thereby halting former child soldiers’ acceptance back into the community. One way such stigmatization could be avoided is by involving other community members in programs previously intended for child soldiers - for instance providing programs that cater to all community children, the majority who suffer from poverty, malnutrition and disease.

In northern Uganda, the community also upholds collective responsibility for what else where might be construed as individual actions. An entire group may be judged based on the socially and culturally unbecoming acts of one individual. For instance, respondents highlighted that if one (child) mother misbehaves in relation to social expectations, then all mothers are labeled as such by the community. This places significant pressure on individuals to live up to the social expectations due to collective
responsibilities and also collective consequences. As a result, women as a group employ measures to control socially unacceptable behavior among individual women. “Sitting you down” as the earlier quote suggested, is one of the strategies women adopt to safeguard their position in society. It is a serious intervention by socially respected women. These have a good record in marriage with no divorce, have had and/or raised a good number of children in a socially accepted way. Sitting down therefore has women draw on their experiences to rebuke, counsel and at times punish others for misconduct. One participant who emphasized the fact that, “they put sense in you!” The “sense” such elders impart is intended to emphasize the new roles and responsibilities that come with mothering, focusing on change of identity irrespective of one’s age. Therefore, childhood in northern Uganda is not an abstract concept but rather a reflection on particular bodies impacted by gender, feeling and ability. This however, affects the person experiencing or failing to have such experience in relation to other individuals around them.

Both dominant and indigenous constructions of childhood acknowledge location as a critical feature for child development. Children are expected to be in private and not public spaces unless under adult supervision, such as schools. While studies about “street children” have demonstrated that such children are agentic, independent and happier to work and/or live on the street (Hecht, 1998; Offit, 2008), dominant narratives term them vulnerable, promoting the solution that forcing them to leave the streets is a way of protecting them from danger (Kendall, 2010). Contrary to dominant assumptions, my findings in northern Uganda indicate that homes sometimes are not the best places for childhood development given instances of drug abuse and domestic violence especially
after the war. When asked whether he had participated in any form of violence, one 22-year male youth respondent answered,

Yes, I fought with my father when I was sixteen and as I result he chased me from home. I beat him for beating my mother. He used to come back home drunk and fought every night. He always battered my mother and on that fateful night I had gone to stop him, them he turned on me. I felt it was enough. I was more energetic so I managed to control him.

Mothers and their children in such families live under constant fear and abuse and the street, with all its difficulties, seems to provide a somewhat better alternative. While battered women and children in the developed world may have domestic violence shelters (Goodmark, 2008), those in Uganda and many other African states do not have such options. Emphasizing the role of the family and the domestic space in upbringing of children therefore as does the dominant narrative, fails to acknowledge the unique circumstances encountered by children living in less privileged regions of the world like northern Uganda.

Besides physical abuse in domestic spaces, some returned child soldiers suffer rejection from their families and communities and hence find the street, where they work as sex workers and hawkers, more comforting. This shows that the traditionally understood family structure is not always achievable for children in various contexts, especially in fragile and broken societies like those in conflict and post conflict situations. I therefore note that, if children are to be reintegrated successfully, context-specific analysis is critical and necessary. In post-conflict areas like northern Uganda, the voices of the children as well as their experiences must be acknowledged and normative constructions of both childhood and critical concepts like the family deconstructed.
Children’s voices are embedded in the experiences they have. These experiences are however multidimensional given the gender, location, parenthood and marriage statuses among other identity markers hence the need for an intersectional approach to childhood.

Childhood scholars drawing on the socio-cultural perspective elaborate that expectations of attaining adulthood are gendered. For instance “girls are generally considered adults once they reached puberty, while boys are considered adults when they finished school, began to make their own money, left for work or got married” (Kendall, 2010. 32). In such circumstances, gender intersects with social class to impact childhood. The poor who cannot afford higher education attain maturity faster than the average class that stays in school longer. In Uganda, childhood is not only gendered but also regionally determined with the northern part of the country having higher school dropout rates compared to the southern region (UNICEF, 2014). Girls are particularly disadvantaged further due to cultural constructions that breed sons’ preference. In situations of limited resources and services including education and health, preference is given to the boy child. To highlight this, one local leader explains,

We still have a lot of work to do as leaders, as community. Our community needs to value education for all children. Parents just need an excuse to pull the girl out of school. Some are married off, others are sent to Kampala to work as house girls (house maids) and others even keep home to help with housework.

The limited education of the girl child works hand in hand with her involvement in both paid and unpaid labor activities (domestic and public). I thus find it important to elaborate more on child labor as a contrasting feature of childhood between the western and the nonwestern world.
Child labor is yet another point of difference and contradiction between Western and non-western constructions of childhood. Childhood in the “western world has become increasingly institutionalized and the school/work divide has become more sharply drawn” (Morrow, 2010. 437). In this perspective, work and education are termed unharmonious and supports the view that children should not be permitted to work until they finish their education. In northern Uganda however, participants perceived education as a skill children have to acquire in their transition to adulthood. This is because from the local perspective, the knowledge attained from formal education is inferior to the knowledge they require for survival in everyday life (also see Invernizzi, 2003). Children cannot therefore solely pursue education since it cannot efficiently satisfy adulthood requirements in the local northern Uganda context. In addition, there is a crosscutting of roles between the private and the public space for instance a continuation of private roles to schools. A member of the clan committee elaborates,

Going to school is one among other things children here do. School going youth continue to perform chores at school including fetching water for teachers, do gardening at school.

In the context of Sub-Saharan Africa, child labor is a very tricky undertaking. In the socio-cultural perspective, preventing poor children from working is often harmful to them since they work to acquire the basic needs of food and clothing (Bass, 2004) in addition to education fees, stationery and uniforms (Bourdillon, 2003). The local communities in northern Uganda also share a similar perspective. Several respondents explained that children have no choice but to work because they must fulfill school requirements in addition to helping to sustain their families. To underscore this, one child respondent explained that,
It is mandatory to have uniform at school for safety reasons. It is important for monitoring strangers from entering school premises. But, who provides the uniform? It’s the parents or children themselves. Also coming to school without requirements is useless, so we work to buy books and pens.

Besides working for pay, in sub-Saharan Africa, laboring (especially within the family) is a core component of the socialization process (Boakye-Boaten, 2010) and thus a system of initiation to adulthood. In Uganda specifically, child labor has been constructed and socially understood as a family support venture that affirms a sense of unity and belonging. In an indigenous Ugandan paradigm, child labor especially within families is perceived as an ongoing process of vocational training and part of socialization relevant for community survival. Failure of parents to train their children in culturally relevant skills is thus termed betrayal and sabotage in the children’s transition to adulthood. According to one clan leader,

Making your children not to work is the worst thing any parent can do for their children. That’s promoting laziness! Who survives in the world without working? How? Tell me. We all have to work and our children should work right from a young age to develop such skills. The earlier you learn to work, the easier it gets in adulthood.

Another respondent said,

Education is good? For who? The government? I will tell you many of our children don’t go further to qualify for educated people’s jobs. Now if they also don’t train for the substance survival work, they end up in-between and half-baked, unable to do both…The only thing we have control over is our children and we shall continue doing what we believe is right as parents.

Idleness in the camp greatly affected children and youth. Youth in northern Uganda have a difficult time integrating into the community because of the work-free childhood they had in the camp. They now lack the skills to thrive in the rural setting. Emphasizing western notions of childhood thus exacerbates the cycle of poverty in regions like northern Uganda, which rely entirely on agriculture and animal production.
Because youth lack the necessary survival skills, they resort to criminal and violent activities. This in turn reproduces assumptions in theories like the youth bulge theory that define poor young men as violent. Dominant universal frameworks therefore recreate the negative connotations such frameworks have on the developing world and its people.

In addition to working to supplement their families’ survival, children in northern Uganda are in some instances the sole providers. Findings indicate that some children are household heads, which makes laboring inevitable (War Child, 2015). Without a welfare system that can provide child protection centers, coupled with changed communal attitudes towards adoption of children, child labor is a source of survival and livelihood. The need for survival has resulted in the involvement of children in socially, morally and legally compromising activities including prostitution, and human trafficking as a way of obtaining basic needs. Even though community discredits such activities, the lack of alternatives sustains them. Important contradictions therefore arise with international/western child rights frameworks that challenge child labor.

As a way of challenging child labor, some humanitarian agencies asserted that the right to play was as the ideal for children’s proper development and upbringing. In the western context, play is a regulated activity with specified time as well as particular toys marked for specific ages (Parter-Brick & Smith, 2004). The study respondents however, noted that play in the local northern Uganda context does not have to have time allocated and can be performed during work time, especially given the heavy workload returning communities have. One married mother of 7 with two deceased bitterly noted,

What is the importance of playing when you sleep hungry? Or maybe I should say can you play when you are hungry? All the bushes are over grown, we have no food and you talk about play? That’s not our problem… I have not heard, all my life, of a child who
died because of not playing. But I have witnessed children die of hunger. They (NGOs and government) say playing is about exercising but working is too! You just honestly cannot set time aside for play. Children play as they work for instance on their way to the well, they go playing with each other.

Giving children playtime also has gendered implications. Women work with their children to accomplish domestic chores so freeing the children, especially the girls, affects the women. As such, girls who do most of the domestic chores rarely are given playtime. If they were, it would increase workloads for women especially in the domestic sphere.

Childhood is also determined basing on one’s state of vulnerability. According to the protection theorists, all children are deemed vulnerable by virtue of their age. Children’s vulnerability in northern Uganda is however, reflected in the inability to fulfill certain roles and responsibilities, and make important communal networks especially outside the family. Such ability determines the relations particular bodies can forge with others in the society, the social status they attain and the respect and entitlement they enjoy. Unique to northern Uganda is the local community’s belief that children who are cursed, those born to cursed parents or out of unpleasant circumstances, are the most vulnerable. This is because they possess limited social networks and are perceived as being a social threat; they do not need protection from harm as much as others need to be protected from them. One mother desperately spoke about her son born out of rape by a stranger. The surrounding community considered him to have poor personal conduct, which is considered harmful and unacceptable to the community:

…….his rapist father brought [sexual bondage] upon me and my child. It [the curse] is following him. He is only 8 years yet he defiles girls younger than him. All parents around here hate him; they don’t want him to play with their children [both boys and girls]. For boys they fear he will teach them his bad behavior yet for the girls that he
might rape them…. I have tried to help him but elders tell me the curse could have only been broken before the child was born but because of the camp, I could not contact the healers for cleansing. When the child is born, the spirit is free and roaming, that it gets very hard to contain it…

This terribly concerned mother believes her son is bearing a curse resulting from the rape. While she has other nine (9) dependents including young siblings and cousins, none of them has displayed that kind of conduct (i.e. sexual bondage as she terms it) which culturally strengthens her belief. In situations where the rapists are known, the child and mother can be handed over to the rapist or the rapist may be forced to marry his victim as a way of ending the curse. Locally it psychologically relieves the woman and the child of stigma, and improves communal perceptions of and relations with them. This is however, violation of human rights and may result in more violence and abuse for the woman. The best way this can be handled is proper implementation of the law to remove criminals from the public and also create communal sensitization to change attitudes towards sexual violence.

Having a child is traditionally celebrated, but this child to the contrary is regretted and treated as an outcast in the community. This young woman’s motherhood status also resulted in pain instead of happiness because of the circumstances under which it happened. While the position of the mother is regrettable, that of her son is even worse. The eight-year-old boy is deemed unworthy of protection and love due to the circumstances surrounding his birth and if not solved, “he may never be able to marry” the mother highlighted. I wish to emphasize that like childhood, vulnerability is not homogeneous. The local community in some aspects understands vulnerability differently from the dominant view, which brings out vulnerabilities that would not otherwise be
considered important. There exists a need to understand the environment and communities in which affected individuals reside, as well as the past processes and events that have informed their contemporary situations. Universalizing approaches to vulnerability and childhood thus fail to capture experiences like that of the eight-year old discussed. As a result, humanitarian programs fail to generate relevant approaches to encourage reintegration of such individuals.

Legal and punitive measures have been adopted through government institutions like the police and the courts to encourage child education and also minimize child labor. Yet I observed that the local community did not positively view the use of force in frameworks such as the law and the legal system. Threatening the communities with imprisonment due to failure to send children to school for instance contributed to negative local perceptions of the government programs. The local population perceived the government as being against rather working for them hence limiting their cooperation with government programs. It is in my view important for reconstruction programs to work in partnerships with community to reach a middle ground that can be accommodated especially by the local population. Understanding why parents marry off school going children and changing their attitudes in that aspect might provide a lasting solution rather than imprisoning them for doing so. This is because it strains relations between the systems and structures and the local population, yet at the same time affects the children it intends to protect. For instance having parents imprisoned or compensate financially for wrong actions reduces the amount of money available for domestic supplies. Due to the complexities involved, the local conditions in northern
Ugandachallenges imposition of externally framed approaches including the national and the international frameworks.

As the World Labor Organization (ILO) has called for a total end to child labor by 2016 (Morrow, 2010), it is important to reflect on regions like Africa where the ability to perform certain roles permits one into adulthood, creates sense of identity and belonging. Animal rearing and agriculture for instance, according to the ILO, qualify as hazardous to children yet these are a survival mechanism for communities in northern Uganda. Denying children such skills is likely to deny them sociocultural respect, thus affecting their reintegration in the community. Emphasizing education is good, but in Sub-Saharan Africa, it is not feasible given limited access to schools. In addition, formal education does not yield expected returns due to high levels of unemployment (Africa Renew, 2013). In such cases, involving children in informal sectors seems an appropriate strategy to produce job creators rather than seekers.

The preceding discussion elaborated on the important contradictions between the mainstream western understanding of childhood and the nonwestern northern Uganda construction. These are further complicated by the war in northern Uganda which has transformed the traditional pre-conflict perspectives. Building sustainable peace therefore demands acknowledgement of such shifts in among other things forms of vulnerability, child labor, child marriages and other forms of violence especially against children. In the following section, I address the impact war has had on children and local childhood constructions.
Pre-Conflict Vs. Post-Conflict Childhood in Northern Uganda

The war and the long time spent in displacement and encampment definitely have affected local perceptions of both children and childhood. While indigenous traditions still inform the standardized local conceptions of children, practical experiences within the communities do not resonate with traditional expectations. For instance, the guardians, parents and clan leaders traditionally are expected to protect children from harm and mistreatment. Due to economic hardships, however, children are exposed to child labor, prostitution and other forms of exploitation. I explain the context for and provide examples of this transformation in the following discussion.

Because culture is not static, many aspects of childhood in contemporary sub-Saharan Africa no longer meet traditional expectations. This is due to external interactions including but not limited to colonialism and globalization. Scholars have noted for instance that the fragmentation that exists between the southern and northern region of Uganda resulted from British colonial rule (Tornberg, 2012). The British divide-and-rule policy produced ethnic marginalization that disfavored the northern tribes, and specifically women and children. These remained at home while the men were trained to be in the army. The southern region on the other hand took over administrative rule (Mutiibwa, 1992). The current government of Uganda has not done much to change the situation despite its long stay in power since 1986 (HRW, 2005). Scholars have noted that the government has strategically used the northern Uganda conflict as a way of sustaining its power (Dolan, 2009) arguing that, since majority of the soldiers come from the northern region, the only way to avoid their organization and taking over the government is by keeping them displaced and demobilized (Tornberg, 2012). All this has
resulted in the breakdown of social networks and socialization systems, and consequently has hindered reintegration, which in turn has affected the understanding of childhood.

Globalization has played a big role in affecting childhood standards. Some respondents notes that the “children are no longer children” due to the war. In addition, they add the war is externally funded and facilitated. One leader explained,

What can we do with these guns all over the place? The availability of guns is the biggest problem but do we manufacture guns in Uganda? No, they are outsiders who bring these things. There is a connection to the outside that we cannot even explain. Children are not scared of guns, they don’t fear shooting and even killing. When we grew up, we would run if a soldier passed near your house with a gun, it was terrifying… but these children, it (gun) is like a toy.

In addition to uncontrolled availability of guns to the children, other respondents highlighted the consumerism among youth, which I consider an impact of neoliberalism. The demand and consumption of western goods in the form of clothes, technology and food among other things altered and reduced parental control on children’s conduct. Children are involved in a number of activities that parents have no control over. In the evening of a typical day for instance, children and youth move to the town center to watch western movies and access social media sites. Such have exposed children mature sexual content that traditionally was a taboo. Hence disregarding the secrecy and sacredness of sex to children.

In northern Uganda, community responsibility for children has eroded. Despite the dynamic culture that Africa has adopted over the years, scholars have argued that some features have largely remained grounded. Swadener (2000) notes that among East African communities, “it takes a village to raise a child” where villages are contextually defined in forms of extended families, larger communities and nations. The responsibility
of raising a child is the responsibility of everyone, including “brothers and sisters, mothers, co-wives and grandparents” (Boakye-Boaten, 2010. 108). Due to the war in northern Uganda, communal networks that fostered such socialization have broken down yet families that have tried to maintain it are overstretched. This has resulted in lack of support for vulnerable children including orphans and the unaccompanied minors. The post-conflict setting therefore, has identified households headed by children. Due to scarcity of information specific to child headed households, it is hard to come up with actual percentages of such families. Scholars have however expressed concern over breakdown of safety nets for children in situations of armed conflict. Bequele highlights for instance that “the first reports of large numbers of child headed households appeared in the early nineties in Uganda” (Bequele, 2007.2). These numbers have generally increased due to HIV/AIDS and war especially in the northern region.

Erosion of communal support networks is also impacted by generational variances. Adults who lived in settled communities prior to conflicts believe in communal responsibility for child upbringing, children whose life in camps consisted of survival of the fittest focus on individual needs and largely do not share a cultural understanding of communal responsibility. These different generational perceptions partly explain the rebellious tendencies of youths towards elders, especially when it comes to roles and responsibilities intended for sustenance of the community. One male elder elaborated;

These young people will not do anything without pay. Money comes before anything. They don’t see the importance of the community, those services and networks that cannot be paid. All they think about is money for personal needs. We tell them, we need to work and maintain our community but they never listen at all. It is worrying what will happen when we are no longer here.
Furthermore, as a result of the violence, displacement and encampment, traditional emphases on privacy, sacredness and timing related to sexuality has been lost in post-conflict northern Uganda. In the western perspective, parents and state institutions have acknowledged and accepted adolescent sexual desire (Tolman, 2002). In Africa, however, addressing sexuality is dependent on the concept of timing. Scholars have demonstrated that all through history Africans have discussed sexuality issues with their children (Mudhovozi, Ramarumo&Sodi, 2012) but at the right time, in the right setting, among the right people (AwopetuRonke et al, 2013) and in gender-specific fora. From a cultural perspective, sexuality is a part of the socialization process, which is kept sacred and secret until the right time (marriage), which is determined by the community, especially the senior family members (Mudhovozi, Ramarumo&Sodi, 2012; Tamale, 2005). But during and after the conflict, children have been abducted, defiled and raped. This has resulted in pre-marriage pregnancies and births, and “child” marriages. Culturally, this means that children attain adulthood earlier than communally accepted. According to one leader,

In the camp families were given small tents. Parents and children shared such rooms and there was no privacy. At times different families shared housing. With married couples involved, children were exposed (to sexual encounters). Other children witnessed sexual assault in the form of rape and defilement. Culturally here, if you lose your innocence (virginity) then you have lost your childhood.

While in the west the youth may be sexually active and still maintain their childhood status, in northern Uganda one is either sexually active or still a child. Given their experiences of war, many children have lost their innocence and thus childhood. In addition to the impact of the war, the local community attributes sexual activity among children to forces of modernity children embrace resulting from global social
interactions. Local communities, however, to some extent sustain conservative views about adolescent sexual engagement, with studies clearly elaborating that children’s innocence is still valued and protected. This has resulted in communities blaming, stigmatizing and hindering support to formerly abducted child mothers for example. Early pregnancies also provoke punishment since they bring shame to the family (also see AwopetuRonke et al, 2013). Parents thus marry off daughters who are suspected of sexual activity to avoid such embarrassment.

New questions that deconstruct the traditional understandings about the role of family and home likewise have emerged in post-conflict northern Uganda. The standard cultural understanding of the family centers on parents, children and other relatives. In this study, however, participants explained that during the displacement children who were un-accompanied (orphans or children that went missing), were no longer readily adopted as would be traditionally expected. Instead children who were not related by blood came together and formed new families. This created a new understanding of family based not on lineage or blood as culturally expected, but rather on friendship and support for each other. One community leader brought this to my attention when he said,

All through the time of the conflict up to now (post-conflict) there was limited community commitment to adopt unaccompanied and abandoned minors (mainly understood as children). I guess it was due to survival hardships. We had nothing at all after the insurgence. Everyone was struggling to survive. Unaccompanied and abandoned children have had to fend for themselves. Those that had no parents became their own parents to love, support and protect each other.

While such children managed to survive, they found it difficult to access communal resources as well as services. Such children in addition lacked adult guided socialization,
which would have eased the reintegration process. A member of one such child headed family elaborates how their family made ends meet.

We are eight in our family. We remained in the camp area (although the camp was officially closed) because we had no one to go with. After most people had gone, we realized some of us had stayed by ourselves. One of us had a hut and she let us stay. We cried and cried but then realized it was not helping; there was no one to cry for. We agreed to go each morning and look for something i.e. money, food, anything, and bring to our home. That’s how we started our family. It is good because we are there for each other.

This form of community support system differs significantly from the traditional pre-conflict understanding. Children themselves initiate, comprise, and support their own families out of necessity. In these families, there is a more complex system of organization that shifts beyond hierarchical gendered constructions for instance in the division of labor to incorporate age and ability. As such this downplays the hegemonic masculine role of provision and protection for the family and accommodates alternative forms of masculinity and femininity. Child formed households therefore complicate the understanding of a family to challenge both the traditional and patriarchal informed family as well as the nuclear western family perspective.

Because cultural and social networks have been broken as a result of displacement and encampment during conflict, traditional roles of children and elders are changing. This is because children taking on such familial roles challenge the position of elders as centers of indigenous knowledge whose experiences are critical for community knowledge production. The applicability of elders’ knowledge becomes limited since it constructs childhood as fixed, meaning that the experiences of elders can sufficiently apply for all children in that community. Based on my research, childhood instead is a
process, which is dynamic and varies according to the contexts and environment under which children are born and live. Children thus have experiences that prior to conflict would not be heard of, including abductions. For instance, “of the estimated 7500 girls abducted, 1000 conceived children while captive” (Mogwanja, 2006.2). If reconstruction programs are informed primarily by the lived experiences of elders, then, many will not comprehend the needs of formerly captured child mothers. To emphasize this, one female clan executive member elaborated,

Unlike us, our children have never seen peace. I don’t think they can imagine what it can be like living without fear, being ready all the time to fight back and defend yourself. They think no one can survive without hurting others. They don’t know peace.

Although elders can help to create positive images within the memories of children, it is clear that their experiences are different and may not apply to the returned formerly displaced children. Reconstruction programming based on consultations with elders and relying on their experiences, therefore had limited applicability. Reconstruction therefore demands active involvement of children and youth.

I have discussed this far childhood in relation to adulthood. There is however, a transitional phase, youthhood that connects adulthood and childhood. The discussion on childhood cannot take place without tackling youthhood. Participants explained the complexity of this stage while at the same time emphasizing how instrumental it is individually and communally. The next sections explore in detail the concept of youthhood in northern Uganda.
Contextualizing Youthhood in Post-Conflict Northern Uganda

In this section I discuss the understanding of youthhood in the post-conflict phase. I however, wish to highlight that the stages of conflict i.e. pre, during and post stages are more fluid than fixed especially from a feminist understanding. Some features for instance violence run through all the stages although with varying levels of intensity.

In northern Uganda, the differentiation between a child and adult seem to be clear though in various ways different from the western understanding as earlier discussed. However the differences between a child and a youth, and a youth and an adult are blurred. This is because many of the characteristics youth have are used in descriptions of both childhood and adulthood. Youthhood is the intermediate stage where individuals have specific features implicating all the three critical stages. As such a youth can bear both children and adult descriptions. I observed that respondents described themselves in complex ways depicting more than one category for instance “adult youth”, “young adult”. Even though the adolescents have certain development competencies that distinguish them from the children, they, at the same time lack the social, cultural and personal attributes that define adulthood. One respondent explains that, “youth is someone who has not yet had a child yet they are not small children and can take care of themselves. Okay, in other words, youth are grown up children”. A female key informant, working with a local NGO explained;

Culturally when a girl reaches around the age of 12 years, but especially after her first menses, she is tied with a rope around the ankle of the right leg to signify that she can be booked and this shows that she is approaching maturity. This girl is being trained to change from childhood to adulthood… The boy on the other hand is given land to build a house and prepare to marry and start his family.
Until the booking is done or the house has been built respectively, these are still referred to as children i.e. a girl and a boy. This however automatically switches to adulthood when requirements are met. The concept youth is thus not culturally grounded although it is increasingly important with the implementation of humanitarian assistance, particularly in the post-conflict stage. I wish to clarify that while childhood and youthhood are generally described in related terms, there were some specific explanations focused on the youth that were not really applicable to the understanding of a child. Besides humanitarian assistance programs’ description of youth (male and female) in a uniform way, which is drawn from the dominant frameworks, the informal local setting provides other forms of categorization, which inform their understanding of a youth. These form the following discussion.

Culturally in Soroti, youthhood was described as a time in passing from childhood to adulthood, which relied heavily on the body’s ability and readiness to perform adult functions. Like childhood, youthhood is also gendered and applied differently for boys and girls. For instance marriage and procreation were critical for women, while protection and provision mattered most for the men. Youthhood could thus be termed the potentiality stage while adulthood is the actualization phase. If one’s potential is not demonstrated, then that person’s status and identity does not elevate to adulthood. What the respondents described as a youth therefore was:

…for girls when menstruation sets in, that girl is ready for marriage and is considered able to have children… whether she has her first menses at 11 years, it demonstrates her potential to be a mother someday. Menstruation shows that the body is grown and ready.
The boy is able to put up a grass-thatched house, ready to bring in a wife. The house shows ability to head and protect a family. The house should not leak or grass be blown off by wind. It has to be built with utmost care.

While biological considerations are appreciated, these are accomplished by social constructions through performativity and functionality.

Someone who is ready for marriage i.e. one who can have children (potentiality) and one in position to establish his own house but around the parents’ house... every child/youth of reproductive age has a hut at their parent’s home. It’s a sign of your maturity.

This description concurrently draws on both biological determinism as well as socio-cultural narratives. While females are judged on their biological potential, the men are socially determined by protection and provision. I observe that women in this case continue to be valued mainly for reproduction of the community while the men are charged with its development and security. This could explain why humanitarian programming especially for the youth was locally conceptualized as male youth oriented since recovery aid was meant for development purposes. The above quote also clarifies the role of elders in the lives of the youth. While they are permitted to build their houses, these are done in proximity to their parents for continued guidance and direction. This also means access to family land and other resources are reliant on respect to elders and promotion of family ties. It also provides social security for instance in cases of aged parents. This could be observed from what one respondent noted that;

A youth is someone who is energetic and can do any work yet at the same time they have nothing for themselves for instance a house, land, wife and other resources like cattle. They largely depend on their parents and elders to make decisions affecting their survival.
It is locally acknowledged that decisions affecting life are based on lived experience.

What the youth lack therefore is the lived experience to make informed decisions for their individual benefit as well as benefit and safety of the communities where they belong.

When these are attained and demonstrated then adulthood is achieved, which means involvement in public decision-making and leadership. One key informant explained the importance of marriage in Teso culture;

if you are not married, you have no right to speak in public. Even when you are toothless (elderly) but without a family, you cannot say anything sensible, no one listens to you, no one believes in your capabilities. Hhhhhhhhhm if you cannot run a family, what can you do? How can you guide the community?

The family is the smallest yet the basic unit of society. In this unit skills attributed to leadership are attained and demonstrated. One’s ability to sustain a family therefore demonstrates their potential for communal leadership. In the family, skills for resolving conflict, planning and general leadership are taught and learnt. Youth however due to the economic breakdown tend to stay longer in youthhood which affects their active participation in communal activities. Just like childhood, there is a very narrow distinction between a youth and an adult. For instance when a female conceives, she is no longer a potential parent but a “real” parent hence an adult through that performativity.

This can be evidenced from the explanation below given by a 26-year-old respondent.

I am a youth as well as an adult. I am still in the age category of a youth and I say I am an adult because I am above 18 and I have children. What would you call me? Adult youth? I also have other dependents that I care and provide for. I am therefore an adult. But to tell you the truth in the community I am an adult and I like it.

This respondent understands the formal understanding of a youth according to the Ugandan constitution as someone between the ages of 18 and 35. She combines this formal definition with the local adult understanding as someone with children. This
positions her as both yet programs were only considering single categorical identifications. Humanitarian agencies therefore compelled individuals to choose either category in order to benefit from the aid provided. Such a choice is however, not an individual one since such individuals work in relation to the entire community. Individuals thus have to adopt a description, which is communally acceptable. Coming up with a new concept “adult youth” explains how complex categorization can be, as well as the limitations such categories have. Distributing aid through rigid categories like household heads, children and youth hinders access and use by some of the most marginalized community members. Individuals who simultaneously occupy more than one category for instance “adult youth” as reflected above may miss out on both categories i.e. youth and adults, which hinders their resettlement.

Besides performativity, in northern Uganda, youthhood is also understood as an educational concept. Involvement in school provides an important feature for understanding youth in northern Uganda especially for the humanitarian programs. Youth are categorized in two categories i.e. “out-of-school” and “in-school” youth. The programs are implemented in appreciation of the fact that some youth are in while others are out of school. While their age is considered, specific programs are run for these different youth groups. This is based on the fact that out-of school youth have a lot of free time on them so they are more involved. Prior to this categorization, youth-in schools had to choose between school and attending youth development programs, since these programs were run during school hours. Due to immediate benefits out of the programs youth were prioritizing needs over school. Programs thus acknowledge that youth can be out of or in school. This is however, not the case for the local community. They did not
consider those out of school as youth especially if married or having children. Irrespective of their age, locally these youth are adults. However, those out of school but not married are considered to be in transition and have increased access to resources including land to enhance their transformation. This transition stage is however, tricky especially when one stays in it for a long time. This led to what some termed a new construction grounded in individual choice. In this construction, individuals decide what they want to be within the community by not complying with the pre-set communal standards.

Youthhood as a choice: Since youthhood is not recognized culturally as a stage of development, some respondents termed it to be a personal choice individuals can make. It is not a category among the population groups but rather an individual choice. This choice could be made by refuting/challenging/ or not meeting the socially recognized and respected terms of adulthood including childbirth and marriage. To emphasize this understanding, one respondent said,

Someone who does not stay with a man (or woman) i.e. not married or cohabiting with a man, although they have all the features for that, are they youth. They have no reason not to be married but just decide to be single in order to enjoy life; they do not want to work as married women do.

What this means is that one can choose to be a youth all their life. Like in many other choices individuals make, this comes at a cost especially from the community. Grown-ups who do not want to have children are called youth because they fear responsibility, which connotes maturity. Because they do not demonstrate their capability to the society, they are undervalued and under looked, as they believed to front selfish interests over communal ones. While that stands, choosing to be single challenges
generalized local narratives that marriage is the ultimate goal for every woman. This demonstrates that there are women who enjoy being single or sexually active without being married.

In direct contrast to choice is the group of people who cannot meet these societal expectations. Women who cannot have biological children are generally sympathized with since they are considered to be miserable and vulnerable. To achieve public sympathy, however, requires one to demonstrate that they have tried all they can in vain. For instance, someone can be married for a long time without conceiving, seeks advice from other women and elders with no much success. It thus takes a public declaration of one’s biological incapability (infertility) to attain social sympathy. Despite receiving less judgment and prejudice socially, such people rarely get to participate as leaders since they are believed to lack the experiences families provide for public leadership.

Some respondents also explained youthhood as being a foreign concept. In their description of a youth, respondents highlighted it to be culturally foreign. In one of the FGDs they described a youth as,

…someone who likes to wear western fashions (clothes) like jeans, necklaces and chains (jewelry both male and female), and mini-short skirts. They adopt the western culture and way of life including dressing, eating, walking and talking. They go to nightclubs frequently. They hate local food and enjoy chips and chicken (fast food) and speak with swag especially in English-yeah man!, you know,… male youth plait hair in lines too. When you see that, then you know that person is a youth.

The people who live this kind of life are locally referred to as “Nigaas”. The term Nigaa however specifically implies young ‘westernized’ men, which emphasizes the local understanding of youth as young men. There is no specific term to refer to young women who conduct themselves the “modern way” besides being described as loose, and spoilt.
In addition to the impact of the war as a factor contributing to early sexual encounters, some respondents also suggested that sexual activeness among youth could also be explained by this western imported culture since youth tend to interact a lot with limited adult supervision.

Youthhood in northern Uganda was also used with negative connotations especially in the post-conflict phase. The youth were described as drunkards with rotten morals. They do not think about the future and constantly make the wrong decisions. While previous scholars noted that youth especially the male drink out of frustration (Dolan, 2009), in this study I discovered the contrary. Responses pointed to the fact that youth drink as a demonstration of status i.e. economic and personal independence.

...as a way of showing off money and “modernity”, the youth take a lot of alcohol, cigarettes and opium (weed/marijuana) publically... It is also a way of demonstrating their maturity especially among other youth. They also do it to prove that they are now independent and no longer children controlled and guided over their lives.

Despite such conduct, youth were noted to constantly deny all responsibility of their situation and always blamed other persons for their position. One key informant dreaded the continued lack of responsibility by youth noting;

They are people who still get away with blaming others –parents didn’t plan for me but how could they plan in that situation (of displacement), they didn’t protect me that’s why I was raped-(after going to night clubs and getting yourself drunk!). It is all I think due to this government rights for children. The youth live in denial.

This description links back to the protection narratives as well as the rights informed understanding of childhood discussed earlier in the chapter. Youth due to sensitization largely by children’s rights organizations argue that both their parents and the state failed to protect them and thus should be held responsible for the youth’s current situation.
In agreement with the youth bulge theory, some respondents observed that youth are idle and irresponsible. They are not willing and at times unable to participate in activities like agriculture and other economically productive ventures due to lack of both skills and land. Because the youth need money however, especially for drinking they are involved in petty crimes like stealing and selling of animals, and other personal items like phones through pick pocketing. A big number of youth are also involved in gambling activities for instance in sports betting in order to earn quick cash. Instead of working in the gardens, it is more rewarding and easy to keep in the center and play such games. But when they lose, youth resort to stealing and robbing others. Youth are also involved in dubious activities like gun theft, alcoholism and drug abuse. Their frustration also leads to intimate partner violence.

The youth are also easily caught up in violent eruptions—even those that do not concern them directly. Participants mentioned that disgruntled youth call upon others and organize attacks on other people (gang fights). One briefly explained that; “you may find about ten male youth attacking a family in which one family member disagreed with one group member. They attack in weird hours of the night”. The features confirm to dominant theories relating to youth as a security threat. The findings expressed that youth are generally violent. This is because they have for long been marginalized and not given opportunity to freely express their needs yet communities expect them to survive and demonstrate their progression towards adulthood, to which economic empowerment is critical component. Therefore, the energy they would put in productive work is invested in criminal activity.
Conclusion

It is important that children embrace their rights, and use them for themselves. To attain this, rights have to be conceptualized in context relevant ways that draw meaning to children’s lived realities (Liebel, 2012). This is because any attempt to universalize childhood “leads only to a misunderstanding of the world of children, as well as interpretation fallacies” (Boakye-Boaten, 2010, 105). Childhood therefore needs to be conceptualized from ‘below’ to cater for children and childhoods on the margins. Emphasis on numerical age disregards everyday experiences and processes that inform not only childhood but also institutional frameworks, thus limiting applicability. Childhood should be specific to social, cultural, economic, historical and political contexts in which children grow up, and the various meaning and implications these have on children. I concede with Afrocentric scholars over the need to challenge, unpack and deconstruct western concepts and theories as a critical step for the liberation of African culture, beliefs and practices (Chilisa, 2012, Jagire, 2013, Njoki, 2011), and childhoods.

Reconstructing childhood from an African perspective is one step towards decolonization and reclamation of African identity. Boakye-Boaten (2010) emphasizes “the continuous existence of any society depends on the ability of the society to socialize its children in the art of survival and cultural perpetuation” (104). It is this that childhood in Africa should target. The lives of children and young people in situations of conflict therefore need to become integral parts of peace agreements and peace building processes. Above all there is a need to increase the protection of children in armed conflict, ensure their education, their access to humanitarian assistance and to rehabilitation and reintegration. Communities in post-conflict northern Uganda are more
complex both in composition and ideologies grounded in gender, age, and levels of education, marital and parental statuses. All these various dimensions of their lives need to be considered in the humanitarian assistance in order to provide a more holistic approach that reflects the experiences of these communities.

Given the preceding discussion, I acknowledge that numeric age is important for understanding human growth and development. It cannot, however, be used solely to determine childhood, youthhood and adulthood especially in the developing world using the case of northern Uganda. I therefore emphasize that age is one other social variable just like gender, class and ethnicity and should be used along with other identity markers relevant to particular communities to determinant childhood and adulthood. Competing ideas in relation to childhood impact access and use of humanitarian programs and in northern Uganda the youth have been largely negatively impacted.

I acknowledge that the youthhood is a heterogeneous category and should be conceptualized as a complex stage of human development. In situations of violence, these complexities get even more complicated. For further examination of these complex categories, I draw on the feminist views on armed violence. In the following chapter, I discuss the feminist understanding of armed violence in contrast to conventional conflict theories highlighting gaps, omissions and exclusions.
CHAPTER THREE
A FEMINIST APPROACH TO ARMED VIOLENCE AND WAR

Introduction

Scholars understand armed conflict in various ways, as there is no single agreed upon definition. There is a generalized belief that everyone knows and understands what war is. This belief is, however, grounded in the conventional understanding of armed violence, which feminist conflict scholars have found problematic due to omissions and biases regarding gender, race, class, the body and emotions among others. The feminist approach to war therefore provides an eye-opener to omissions and exclusions traditional perspectives take for granted. In this chapter, I discuss these two (feminist and conventional) largely contradicting approaches to understanding armed violence. I examine the conventional understandings from a feminist perspective underscoring their limitations using specific examples from Northern Uganda. I highlight the contribution feminism is making in the study of war and violence.

I ground this chapter in critical review of literature relating to conventional and feminist theorization of armed conflict. I discuss these two perspectives in relation to primary data from northern Uganda. Specifically, this chapter deconstructs the Youth Bulge Theory (YBT) construction of poor young men as violent. I agree with other scholars that several historical, societal and political tensions influence one another to facilitate violence and conflict in the developing world (Kasozi, 2013). This also applies among poor people (Brainard&Chollet, 2007), people of color (Crenshaw, 2012) and
indigenous communities in the developed world (Smith, 2006). The huge numbers of poor male youth cannot therefore solely explain violence as the YBT suggests.

This chapter therefore, based on the feminist understanding of conflict, asserts that youth in the Third world (global south and poor north) have been misrepresented by mainstream conventional western conceptualization as a security threat. For a clear analysis, I examine the tenets of the YBT, highlighting its gaps and limitations, including gendered and racial biases and failure to acknowledge any positive contributions youth bulges have in the population. I then use feminist epistemologies to facilitate a different and positive understanding of youth identity (re) construction, drawing on feminist tenets including gender as a category of analysis, intersectionality and Felt theory. While my focus is on Uganda, I will occasionally implicate youth of color, especially in the US, in order to demonstrate the racist tenets the theory portrays.

Feminists advocate for theorizing based on lived experience. As a way of contributing to this, this chapter prioritizes local voices while examining the definition, causes and experiences of armed conflict. Understanding violence from the standpoint of the youth minimizes imperialistic, racial, gender and class marginalization involved in Western world conventional theories such as the YBT. I have structured the chapter to provide a general overview to armed violence, followed by a specific mapping of the northern Uganda civil war, then definition of armed violence as well as its causes from both conventional and feminist perspectives. Lastly, I go into the most integral component of this chapter – youth bulge theory. I discuss its major assumptions, which I encounter using a feminist critique. Finally I advance the feminist alternative understanding to anger and conclude my discussion.
Overview of Global Armed Violence

Armed conflict is one form of violence with serious consequences (Machel, 2000). Besides claiming human lives, conflict hinders growth and development economically and politically, challenges enjoyment of human rights, and hinders access to social services like education and health. Violence on the other hand is a widely conceptualized concept that virtually affects all facets of human life. It extends beyond the public to impact the private spaces—spaces that are traditionally understood to be peaceful (Sutton, Morgen & Novkov, 2008). Armed violence therefore brings together facets of armed conflict and violence.

Armed violence is simultaneously universal yet specific (Tripp, Ferree, & Ewig, 2013). It affects both the developed and developing world although at different levels and forms. The nature of violence is however dynamic and political conflicts instigated by ideological differences among super powers are of less significance in the contemporary world (Rubenstein, 1996). Wars, however, continue to rage virtually in every part of the globe, between and within nation states (Machel, 2000). Nation states face issues of armed violence internally, at their borders, and in their international engagements (O’toole & Schiffman, 2007). At the same time war is specific in relation to individuals and communities whom it impacts in gender-specific ways through intersecting forms of class, age, gender and nationality (Tripp, Ferree, & Ewig, 2013). The degrees and levels of violence, however, vary depending on social location of individuals within, between and among groups (O’toole & Schiffman, 2007). Youth for instance are increasingly bearing the brunt of armed violence and atrocities (Spitzer & Twikirize, 2013).
Regionally, Africa’s sub-Saharan region has been largely involved in armed violence especially in the twentieth century (Machel, 2000; Orugon, 2004). Countries like Uganda, Liberia, Somalia, DRC, Rwanda, Sudan, Sierra Leone and Angola are some examples of such violence. Conflict scholars have attributed Africa’s unceasing armed violence to the growing young population commonly described as a “ticking bomb” always waiting for a chance to explode. Young people in the developing world have poor education; they are unemployed and generally have poor living standards (Canning, Raja & Yazbeck, 2015). The lower opportunity cost youth have to make therefore encourages their participation in armed and other forms of violence (Urdal, 2007). From this conceptualization, youth have therefore created a security threat for not only Africa but also globally. Scholars have theorized this to be the youth bulge theory (Mesquida & Weiner, 1996; Urdal, 2004).

One key common feature of contemporary armed conflicts is the involvement of children and young people, both as victims and active participants in the armed forces, hence the concept “child soldiers” (McDonnell and Akallo, 2007; Spitzer & Twikirize, 2013). Out of the 19 countries worldwide where children have been recruited in forces (both non state and state armies) 8 of them are African countries (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2008). Uganda is one such country. Uganda has had an internally violent post-independence phase. More than half of Uganda’s post independence period has been marred by civil and armed conflicts in numerous regions of the country (Mutiibwa, 1992; Soto, 2009). These have included the fighting between the government and West Nile Bank Front (WNBF), Uganda Peoples Defense Alliance (UPDA), Allied Defense Forces (ADF) and most recently the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) (Mutiibwa,
Northern Uganda has had over two decades of armed conflict starting in 1986 when the current government took over power. This civil war has lasted over two decades (Mutiibwa, 1992, Soto, 2009) and is described as the “most devastating and enduring” of Uganda’s civil wars (Latigo, 2008. 85) as well as in recent African history (Spitzer & Twikirize, 2013).

Mapping of the LRA Insurgency in Northern Uganda (1986 To Date)

Northern Uganda has experienced a series of historical, structural, and politically motivated civil wars (Dolan, 2009). The LRA armed violence is therefore a climax to these forms of violence (Moser & Clark, 2001; Cheney, 2007; Sjoberg, 2014). This war has had insurmountable effects in the regions involved as well as neighboring countries including DRC and Sudan, and internationally. The northern Uganda conflict is characterized by extreme human rights violations by both the government army and the LRA rebels, including deployment of child soldiers, death of people and displacement of others (Omach, 2002; Soto, 2009) resulting in the need for humanitarian aid and assistance (Gelsdorf, Maxwell & Mazurana, 2012).

The LRA is a guerrilla rebel group that emerged following the collapse of the Holy Spirit Mobile Forces/Movement (HSMF/HSM) initiated by Alice Auma Lakwena (Borzello, 2007). Lakwena was a female self-proclaimed prophet who claimed to have had supernatural powers and fought for the purity of the Acholi people using “Holy oil” as her master weapon (BBC, 2007.p.9). The Holy oil was believed to convert bullets sent to the Acholi during the fighting into water as well as turning the stones the Acholi directed to the enemy into bullets (Borzello, 2007. p. 10). Joseph Kony, the current rebel
leader of the LRA is a distant cousin to Lakwena (Cheney, 2007) who took over from Severino Lukoya (Lakwena’s father) who commanded the movement after Lakwena runaway to Kenya (Borzello, 2007) where she died in Ifo refugee camp in 2007 at the age of 50 (The Telegraph, 2007).

The LRA leaders have all the time, evoked spirituality and divine connection as evidenced from the names the group has held since its inception. From HSMF, Severino Lukoya named it the Lord’s army. In 1994 it attained its current name the Lord’s Resistance Army (Borsello, 2007). The LRA has therefore used divine claims as a strong organizing principle for this long rebellion. Despite its spiritual strategy, the war was motivated by the social, political and economic grievances felt by the Northern Acholi people towards the current National Resistance Movement (NRM) government. Barnes and Okello (2002) argue that the conflict was triggered by NRM’s consolidation of power over the northern region of the country. This explanation settled with local descriptions from the study participants. One respondent said,

It is Museveni (the current president) and his people who are responsible for all the suffering we are going through. This government neglected this region as if we are not government responsibility. Those that travel to Kampala (Uganda’s capital) tell you it is so developed yet for us we see no change. Let it be roads, hospitals, schools everything! It is like we are not part of Uganda.

While the organizing principle is religion, the causes and motivation of the violence can be economically and structurally explained as the above view elaborates.

Scholars describe the conflict in northern Uganda as one of the “longest running, most complex and brutal conflicts” on the African continent in recent history (Spitzer and Twikirize, 2013. p.70). The Government of Uganda response to the war has largely
however, been violent. In 1991 the government launched “Operation North,” a military operation that is said to have greatly weakened the LRA (Chatlani, 2006). With a weakened rebel group, government initiated peace talks that failed due to distrust between the government and rebel parties. The time period spent in talks gave the rebels an opportunity to re-organize and seek support from neighboring Sudan resulting in increased violence and attacks on the civilians. To minimize the atrocities on civilians, the government of Uganda established internally displaced persons camps in 1996 (Dolan, 2009, Tim & Vlassenroot, 2010). With the civilian population confined, the Ugandan government launched in 2002, Ugandan government launched another military attack—“Operation Iron Fist”. This followed improved relations with Sudan and consequential permitting of Ugandan army to cross borders and attack LRA camps in Sudan (Chatlani, 2006). In retaliation, LRA reinforced its operations and violence on civilians, and also expanded areas of operation to neighboring Lira and Soroti districts which districts were prior to that free from violence. Government continued more military attacks in 2004—“Operation Iron Fist II” which also failed. LRA then intensified attacks on the internally displaced people’s camps established by the government using brutal methods like the scotch earth policy involving burning down of villages, body mutilations and increased abductions (Soto, 2009). I conclude from this description that war cannot be used to end war at least for the case of northern Uganda.

The government of Uganda military strategies and attacks were not only futile but also costly to the government in form of war weaponry, and human personnel, which resources would be channeled towards sustainable peaceful conflict resolution. Military ventures by the government in addition worsened the situation for civilians. As described
above, every time the government forces attacked, the rebels retaliated on the civilians. Peaceful resolution processes are thus not only less costly but also more lasting and inclusive for the local community. One clan leader explaining how the war was handled explained,

The government decided on everything. We would only be ordered to follow instructions. We heard on several occasions that the government was defeating the rebels but it has never been materialized. But whenever the war intensified, we would expect more abductions and violence against the lay people (civilians). We’ve always lived in total fear not knowing what to expect the next day.

Another respondent said,

When rebel armies were reduced in number, they would come back for more from us to make up for the deaths. If peaceful methods are used we can all have peace. If force is used, it escalates force on us too. I think the rebels cannot fight the government directly so they look for weaker targets that can pass on the message to the government. I think rebels just want to have their presence felt… Otherwise why cut off peoples’ noses, and lips and ears?

The president worsened this already volatile situation by involving the International Criminal Court (ICC) (Branch, 2007). ICC issued warrant of arrest for Kony and three of his leaders Vincent Otti, OkotOdhiambo and Dominic Ongwen in 2005. These were charged with war crimes and crimes against humanity (ICC, 2015). Branch (2007) notes the involvement of the ICC halted the peace process and increased vulnerabilities for the civilian population especially from the rebel forces. This was because ICC sided with the government to solely blame the rebels for the human rights violations despite evidence that the government also played a big role in these violations (Dolan, 2009). In addition the Ugandan government, though generally responsible, has been provided with a supportive external framework. Scholars including Dolan (2009)
and Branch (2007) note that the international community has also played a role in this state of affairs by turning a blind eye to the misappropriation of resources. Despite donors providing between 49–50% of Uganda’s annual budget, much of which is spent on the military, the president of Uganda has not been held accountable for his actions (or his failure to act) to humanitarian crises in northern Uganda (Diane, 2007).

Scholars for instance argue the local population was forced into camps (Omach, 2002) as a government strategy to halt their support for the LRA (Dolan, 2009, Branch, 2007). Government’s claim for protection through encampment was therefore not genuine and protection camps ended up into torture zones. The camps were over populated and in extremely poor living conditions, in the likes of “rural prisons” (Tim and Vlassenroot, 2010.15). Chris Dolan has referred to the encampment practice as “social torture” and thus holds the Ugandan government responsible for imposed structural violence and systematic subordination in the northern region of the country (Dolan, 2009).

The violation of civilian human rights in northern Uganda raised international concern resulting in search for avenues to end the conflict. Most notably were the Juba Peace Talks (2006-2008), which culminated into a ceasefire period leading to relative peace and thus precipitating the return process. Like the same policy used for encampment in 1996, the government also enforced the closure of various camps in an effort to accentuate confidence in the peace negotiations (Soto, 2009). A number of programs including government programs like Northern Uganda Rehabilitation Program (NUREP) and Peace Recovery Development Plan (PRDP) were put in place by the government to facilitate encourage and aid the return of formerly displaced persons into
their communities. Because they were sudden, these programs had enormous limitations including limited community participation, and neglect of age and gender issues.

Despite the relative peace communities are enjoying, scholars are anticipating an eruption of the conflict if proper strategies are not taken into consideration (Dolan, 2009). Collier notes for instance that civil wars always come to an end but generally over 31% of them restart within 10 years (Collier, 2000). African conflicts however, restart within less than a decade (Bigombe, Collier and Sambanis, 2000) because the root causes of the conflict are never adequately addressed (Hettne and Soderbaum, 2005). The root cause according to the YBT is the disproportional number of male youth in the population. It is thus crucial to sufficiently reintegrate youth to avoid the anticipated re-eruption of armed violence and encourage sustainable peace among the formerly displaced communities.

While the formal declaration of a post-conflict stands, it has not necessarily been followed by peace. This echoes feminist conflict scholars’ observation that violence does not end in the war zone (Beijing, 1995; Butler, 2010) and peace is not just the absence of war (Shepherd, 2008). War is rather carried back to the private spheres including families (Machel, 2000; Shepherd, 2008). As such, war is not an event that ends in the battlefield but a system, which infiltrates various aspects of survival (Sjoberg, 2013). For women, there is nothing “post” about what is formally referred to as “post-conflict” since violence continues in the private spaces (Afshar, 2003). To understand the complexity of war, Gregg Barack recommends a “change in the way we think about violence, nonviolence and the relationship between the two” (2003. 4). It is therefore important to understand the variances between the feminist and conventional understandings of violence, which
forms the discussion in the following section. Before examining the variances, it is necessary to understand what war is which forms the next section.

**Armed Conflict and War Defined**

In this section I define war and give some of its primary characteristics as a way of setting out to discuss its causes. War is largely categorized into interstate and civil wars. Interstate wars are less frequent but are more costly and destructive to humans and economic resources (Levy & Thompson, 2010). Civil wars on the other hand are very common in the contemporary Global South due to poor structural arrangements. Most of the current studies on war focus on either one but not both types of war. Northern Uganda however, incorporates key variables of both types of war making it protracted and destructive at the same time. As such I discuss war in a more complex way to reflect both perspectives.

Conventional theorists define wars to mean, “sustained violent encounters between two political organizations” (Levy & Thompson, 2010. 5). Such confrontations must reach a minimum level of intensity yet at the same time the involved parties show a minimum level of organization (ICRC, 2008). Like earlier explained Kony took over from his cousin Lakwena, which means the conflict was well planned thus qualifying as a war. This understanding was the most common in the local definition of war in northern Uganda. Communities referred to armed conflict to specifically mean the unending battle between the LRA and the government of Uganda. One respondent noted,

*War is the struggle for power by use of guns especially between two disagreeing groups. The government and the rebels are responsible for this war. They have been fighting since I can remember. They have uniforms, weapons and leaders. I don’t understand why they have to keep as suffering.*
While this sounds exhaustive, from a feminist analysis this definition is limited because limiting war to political groups defines war as political (Sjoberg, 2014), which is not entirely true. The power relations displayed in war are political but also ideological, economic and cultural. This understanding of war also, in some aspects reflects the traditional understanding of war as an event (Sjoberg, 2013), which happens between two groups in the battlefield. Such an event has a strategy and is motivated in the case of Uganda by power struggles. The power struggles are however, grounded in economic disparities between the southern and the Northern regions. The LRA therefore struggles for power as a way of changing the poor economic situation. While explaining the motivation for the war one respondent said,

The LRA went to the bush to fight for equality and equal benefit from the country’s resources. Anyone living in this country knows what I am talking about. People from the north are being treated differently from the southerners. For instance, there is no political representation since ministers are either from the west or the south. Museveni went to the bush (1981) due to unfairness yet he has continued to do the same thing.

Basing on this explanation, the battlefield is understood to be the “bush” which is meant to be away and distanced from the residential and private areas of the community.

Conventional scholars also define war based on the number of deaths attained in the battle. “War requires at least 1000 battle deaths among all participating states and an annual average of 1000 battle deaths for wars lasting more than a year” (Levy & Thompson, 2010. 10). Here it is important to understand what “battle” means because it is different for both conventional and feminist scholars and researchers. Conventional understandings explain the battlefield to be a specific place where the armed forces go fight and then return home. In northern Uganda, it is the “bush”. This however, according
to feminist scholars is not the case. In *living room terrorists*, for instance Catherine Lutz explains, “wars always come home, even when it seems safely exported” (2008. 223).

This means the home can become the battlefield as many suffer domestic violence. There is a “continuum of violence running from the bedroom, to boardroom, factory, stadium, classroom and battle field, traversing our bodies and our sense of self” (Cohn & Ruddick, 2003. 7). Deaths relating to violence resulting from effects of war should therefore be included in the numbers at the battlefield, but this does not happen. As such soldiers who are largely understood to be men, count in battle deaths. Butler (2010) in *Frames of War* explains further how certain lives matter more than others noting that the media chooses what to report on while reporting on war.

In addition, due to political involvement, the numbers reported are always consciously cut, making the media a form of violence in itself (Butler, 2010). This is because media “does not simply exhibit reality, but actively participates in a strategy of containment, selectively producing and enforcing what will count as reality” (Butler, 2010. xiii). Denial of information, just like giving false information is a form of violence that works in complicit to sustain other brutal forms of violence, which may exacerbate war. In the northern Uganda war more civilians were tortured and killed more than those at “battle”. Prioritizing the battlefield the conventional way therefore disregards women and other feminized individuals who form the civilian population yet these form majority of the affected. One former child abductee said,

In the bush we are not allowed to kill each other, unless one tries to escape. Then they are killed to teach others a lesson never to try it. When we come to the community, mainly it’s a looting mission and you are supposed to get something. If someone comes in your way, you just kill them and take off. Failing to fulfill a mission calls for punishment so
you do all you can. All the people I witnessed murdered were not members the rebel force.

This response elaborates the limitations of the battlefield number of deaths as well as the understanding that it happens between political groups. Civilians do not feature in any of these categories and thus their lives would not count even though lost at the hands of the fighting groups. While these descriptions are locally used and the users may not identify as feminists, they bring out critical features of feminist understanding of violence especially including power, control and domination. In northern Uganda this control is manifested in two specific ways i.e. regionally and socio culturally- southern dominance of the north and patriarchy respectively hence the intersecting nature of war and conflict on women.

Traditional theorists assert that for conflict to be termed war, both parties to the conflict must be willing and able to fight. Therefore in situations where there is no reciprocity there cannot be war (Levy & Thompson, 2010). From a feminist perspective, this understanding is limited. For instance the attack of Iraq against Kuwait would not be understood as war since Kuwait didn’t have the capacity to fight back and resist the attacks from Iraq (Sjoberg, 2014). Feminist conflict scholars challenge such rigidity that fails to capture the complexities involved in war using practically unrealistic criteria.

Since war is a demonstration of power, if such understanding is used it exacerbates the position of the marginalized and oppressed. In northern Uganda, civilians have been the major targets for both the national army and the rebels (Dolan, 2009). Civilians are not expected to fight back yet they are targeted by armed forces. Traditional scholars have failed to understand the complexity of the war by focusing on government and rebel
forces. Traditionally undefined contexts of war therefore have to be accommodated in the understanding of war in order to bring out the complexities involved.

Conventional studies of violence and conflict are also androcentric and biased in favor of men and male masculinity (Sommers, 2006). One common concern among the various feminist strands is the disregard of gender as an important aspect of war. Feminism notes that violence is both gendered and gendering (Butler, 2010) and one of the “sites where culturally and historically specific understanding of gender as a power relationship are reproduced” (Shepherd, 2008.50). The causes and consequences of armed violence are therefore gendered (Sutton, Morgen &Novkov, 2008). Armed violence affects not only individuals and groups, but also private and public spaces contributing to diseases, hunger, infrastructure damage and environmental insecurity (Sjoberg, 2013; Shiva, 2005). As such, “definitions, causes, practices and consequences of war cannot be fully understood without using gender as a category of analysis” (Sjoberg, 2014.12). I find this approach appealing since it allows room for highlighting gendered power, experiences, knowledge and values at all the various levels. This enables examination of bodies and spaces that were conventionally assumed inherently peaceful including intimate spaces to understand how war connects to broader systems of privilege and oppression if lasting solutions are to be initiated.

The bush is a male space since it is public. Ideally those not involved in fighting should not be affected directly by the war. As such wars are fought in the bushes. This is indicative of the traditional understanding of war as fought and ended somewhere. This however, contradicts the feminist understanding of war, which is known to be a
continuum with fluctuating levels of violence and not a time specific event (Sjoberg, 2014). In addition violence is transferred to the private domain in various ways. One respondent elaborated how former fighters have their private spaces impacted as a consequence of war.

The former rebels (who are understood to be men) are a threat to community. They are so short tempered and can attack everyone in the community. I think the war teaches fighters to give up respect and dignity for human life. The more you have in the village the more worried you are. Even child soldiers intimidate adults.

While former male fighters create a scare for the community, their female counterparts suffer stigmatization for crossing the line in relation to expected femininity. They are thus more vulnerable. One respondent in reference to female soldiers said for instance, “do you consider those women? Who would let their son marry such? They are men dressed like women. Their hearts are not motherly. Which mothers kill?. Women should support life and don’t end it”.

Such girls are therefore rejected from the category women due to roles they performed in abduction. They are however, at the same time also dismissed from the soldier category since it is largely understood to constitute men. Despite having similar or at times worse experiences compared to men, women do not receive the credit and compensation they deserve. Feminists however, realize that people at the margins for instance “individuals outside the halls of elite power are important to politics generally and war decision-making specifically” (Sjoberg, 2013.164). This justifies the need to study female youth in northern Uganda who are multiply marginalized socially, economically and politically. Also, while war is meant to be a public display of power, it
ends up affecting the domestic aspects of community but importantly in gendered ways. To emphasize this, another respondent explained how politics becomes personalized,

Individual politicians and political parties are another problem. This is another problem in this area. For selfish reasons, they divide the community into sects, which hate and constantly disagree with each other. For instance, there are women I know who have been battered by their husbands for voting and supporting the “wrong” leaders.

While wars are traditionally understood to happen between political groups, the above quote demonstrates how political and ideological differences are transferred into the private and interpersonal lives of individuals. Sjoberg (2014) explains using a feminist understanding that war and conflict should include the “clashes of state militaries, but also links to domestic violence, structural violence, economic instability, unemployment, poverty, poor working conditions, the impending threat of war, and/or infrastructural damage” (11-12). It is this understanding that I also adopt in this chapter. This is because respondents explained that war was part and parcel of every aspect of their lives. This notion therefore enables examination of how the causes of war in northern Uganda private, institutional and public simultaneously.

Traditional understandings emphasize the role of groups in wars. In the current study however, respondents also conceptualized war in the form of interpersonal issues. In this case, the two conflicting individuals solicit others to join their wrangles there by resulting into armed violence. Where persuasion fails, force can be used to raise membership. Kony for instance used force in the form of abduction to recruit into his rebel force. A 70-year-old member and leader of the community explained that, …the war affecting people of northern Uganda is a conflict between Museveni and Kony. Kony forces us (local people) to join his side while Museveni uses his position as
One of the respondents even described war to mean intra-personal trouble describing war as “that general lack of peace within a person”. This means individuals can be at war with themselves and when this happens it can result in suicide due to the failure to find a reason for survival. This according to this respondent is the worst form of war because it causes self-hate. Someone with such hate can do anything.

Feminist theorizing calls for an intersectional approach to war. This challenges conventional single categorical analyses largely grounded on only gender or even sex (Baden, 1997). The dominant group approach to violence has enormous shortfalls and the most obvious is the interchangeable use of gender and women (Pratt, 2011; Puechguirbal, 2010; 2012). Where gender is applied, it is emphasized as a binary construction, which exacerbates victimization of women while re-affirming the masculine protective role (Bunch & Fried, 1996). The United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR, 1325) calls for participation of women in peace building initiatives. Due to a focus on only gender, however, young women have been largely marginalized yet according to literature they suffer more oppression due to simultaneous occupancy of the “wrong” gender and age (Ang, 2005; Boyden & de Berry, 2004; Coulter, 2009). Intersectionality is imperative to transgress the stereotypical assumptions that women are either wars’ victims or their agents but cannot be both. The failure to understand for instance the lived experiences of individuals especially women as intersectional beings only partially captures what war is. The essentialist portrayals of women and children as inherently vulnerable and thus victims is misrepresentations of those who participate as active
combatants during situations of armed conflict for instance. Butler (2010) for instance demonstrates that “women make up a third of the militaries in Eritrea, Israel and Nepal, and women represent 11 percent of the US deployed troops to Iraq and Afghanistan, and 3 percent of the battle deaths” (40) yet literature continues to silence women’s presence as fighters. Understanding the intersectional nature of violence brings out new questions and thus knowledge from previously suffocated voices.

However, irrespective of their age and other salient social identity markers, women may simultaneously play the role of activists and parents, perpetuators and victims (Moser & Clark, 2001). Theories thus that emphasize women’s victimhood position miss out the complex picture of violence especially during war. Intersectionality also enables analysis of intra-group power relations and deconstructing homogenizing tendencies in categorizing communities. In northern Uganda, I realized a gap towards the specific interested and concerns of young women who have been lumped up together as women especially due to childbirth. I believe that recognizing and addressing diversity within gendered categories as well as other intra-group differences is vital for establishing more sustainable gender equal societies. Female youth occupy a position distinct from that of adult women, which needs to be appreciated and critically examined.

Feminist scholars shift the boundaries beyond the binary constructions of gender that dominates the conventional analyses of violence to include other sexual orientations and socially non-conforming individuals. Shepherd (2008) argues, “the gender construction that gives rise to violence against women generally result in violence against gays and lesbians as well” (43). This is especially true in situations of armed violence
where sexual minorities are treated as a social danger. In northern Uganda bodies that defy heteronormative social orders for examples youth that chose to stay single or delayed marriage and women who could not or did not what to have children encountered discrimination especially in the post-conflict phase. This at times led to limited access to resources like land given the patriarchal nature of the society where women access resources through male relatives especially husbands.

Indigenous scholars call for community security as a way of challenging western conventional mainstream individualistic approaches that fail to capture violent experiences of most societies. From a feminist perspective however, it is crucial to specify who is implicated in the “community”. This necessitates accounting for cultural norms, group identities, structural violence and how these are connected to gender. (Sutton, Morgen & Novkov, 2008). In northern Uganda it was clear that the female youth were largely neglected in the community. Their views, needs and concerns did not therefore receive the attention they deserved. This culminated into limited access to aid and use of aid meant for reconstruction of formerly displaced communities. Asserting the interests of the community as a whole at times undermines and/or naturalizes gender-based inequalities. For instance in northern Uganda, women and girls that conceive out of rape are in most times encouraged to marry their rapists as a way of encouraging communal solidarity. This greatly violates the rights of the women and encourages male control over women’s bodies and sexuality. Also girls that were abducted and came back with children who are locally termed “rebel children” were stigmatized and discriminated as a way of maintaining unity. It is thus important to build normative conceptions of war that go beyond security as the absence of direct military threat (Shiva cited in Sutton,
Morgen &Novkov, 2008) to acknowledge emotional battles within communities. This demonstrates how peaceful times are war times for particular community members.

In relation to community, feminism further complicates the conceptualization of “woman” in understanding war. The concept woman has all through feminist theorizing proven problematic (Afshar, 2003) and this discussion continues even in situations of conflict and violence. In analyzing policy for instance it is critical to specify which women, at what time and in what gendered way are identified and targeted. The local understanding of a woman also needs to be acknowledged. In northern Uganda, anyone with a child was considered a woman irrespective of her numeric age. While researching women, it is necessary to center experiences of women at the margins in traditional accounts of war making. Northern Uganda equates womanhood to motherhood and wifehood. This disregarded age and other identity markers in this category, as well as inabilities to attain such set standardized notions consequently impacting power relations within the category woman, as well as access to available resources.

Given that violence manifests in complex networks, feminists call for a “gendered approach to human security focused on the linkages between the various forms of insecurity” (Tripp, Ferree, & Ewig, 2013. 15). This challenges dichotomous constructions and emphasizes realization of connections between the private and public, individual and collective, local and international dimensions to human life. Domestic violence for instance increases in situations of armed conflict (Moser and Clark, 2001), and violence against women often continues after wars have officially ended (Baines, 2005) thus undermining the formalized distinction between war and peace that conventional theorizing accentuated. Peace therefore for women would mean, not just the absence of
war but also the elimination of inequality and all possible sources of fear and threat including environmental concerns (Shiva, 2010). For northern Uganda, such peace would mean increased access to resources like land, healthcare and education, as well as protection from rape and other forms of sexual harassment.

The above discussion clarifies that there are important contradictions between the feminist understanding and the conventional elaborations of war and conflict. To complicate what constitutes war in order to reflect lived realities, feminism makes the following contributions to the understanding of war. There are various strands of feminism and thus differentiated approaches to theorizing armed violence. Like war, there is no single feminist approach to war, although all the various strands share a mutual interest for the inclusion of gender. Feminists note that “absence of gender in analyses of wars cannot be simply read as blind omission but as skew (Sjoberg, 2013. 182). It is thus vital to examine those spaces where gender is claimed as absent. The multiple feminist perspectives yield different and at times contradictory insights and at the same time engage with each other and with war analyses that have omitted gender (Sjoberg, 2013). There are thus differences, disagreements and dissonance among feminisms in their study of violence and conflict. This is, however, not surprising since agreeing to disagree is a central feature to feminist epistemologies and methodologies and “insistence on a singular narrative is itself a form of violence” (Wibben, 2011).

With the preceding discussion, it is clear that armed violence is constructed and understood in varying ways in both conventional and feminist perspectives. In the following section I discuss what these different perspectives present as the causes of conflict and war.
Causes of Armed Violence

The consequences of war are clear including death and displacement. What seems to be challenging is the cause of wars, which makes finding lasting solutions impossible. Uganda’s over two decade civil conflict does not for instance have clear theories explaining its occurrence and persistence. As such a number of theories have been developed to explain the phenomenon including greed and grievances, unbalanced regional development, ethnic differences, divergence in political ideologies (Balletine, 2003), environmental change (Shiva, 2010), religious fundamentalism, gendered causes (Moser & Clark, 2001; Sjoberg, 2014) and demographic age variations (Urdal, 2004). Some of these I discuss in detail below.

Gender is both a cause and a consequence of war. Enloe (1993) argues that the political agenda globally is a “patriarchal structure of privilege and control” (73) manifested in gender roles that govern states. This is because social factors shape aspects of national security policy (Katzenstein, 1996) and the choices leaders make reflect systemic gender biases (Sjoberg, 2014). Men are presented has having the responsibility of protecting the women and children within their states. Young described this as the “logic of masculine protection” which is advanced severally by states as justification for war. For instance George Bush used women to justify his attack of Iraq (Sjoberg, 2014). This masculinist construction not only empowers men but also disregards the roles women play in the protection narratives (Sjoberg, 2013). State relationships are also gendered since masculine structures and identities inform state policies. Gendered state identities and gendered strategic cultures serve not only as causes of states making wars
but also as justifications for state war making (Puar, 2007; Spade, 2003; Sjoberg, 2013; Young, 2003) in particular regions.

The feminization of women and other marginalized groups is thus a construction of the state. Feminist conflict scholars have lamented the inherent victimization and infanticization of women in what they term “womenandchildren” (Enloe, 1991; Sjoberg, 2013). Categorization of women and children as a single group “womenandchildren” which is perpetually in danger and need of saving, serves to justify and select men and the state as the masculine protectors. It is thus crucial to link the personal and the international in war theorizing. Butler notes that the category “womenandchildren” is of particular salience since both categories designate presumptively innocent population groups. It is for such reasons that states front feminist agendas as justifications for war and violence to win domestic support. In northern Uganda, both Kony and Lakwena fronted the protection of not only women but also the entire Acholi community who were feminized within the Ugandan state. In addition, some participants expressed being emasculated during displacement by failing to provide among other things protection to their families. One man said,

You cease to be a man when you cannot do anything for your family. We lived in houses (huts) that we had no control over. You could not move beyond the camp or even be out late at night. Meeting with other men was also discouraged since it attracts the rebels. The service providers and the army (which protected the camps) had sexual relations with our women (wives, daughters, mothers and sisters) for money and food. Some were even raped… we knew all this was happening but then what? What could we do?

Due to the gendered construction of the protection narrative, men end up participating in armed violence as a way of fulfilling their socially expected roles and thus attain and
maintaining their masculinity. In this way gender attributes and roles cause and sustain violence.

Greed and grievances also serve to explain armed violence in northern Uganda. Structural inequalities deny certain portions of the population opportunities leading to grievances and wars (Brainard&Chollet, 2007). One of the respondents said,

Its true many youth were abducted but others joined voluntarily with the rebels for reasons including: they wanted free things i.e. looting food and other valuables without toil, killing others especially those with whom they had differences for instance over land and women, some wanted to avenge for the death of their loved ones and loss of property like houses, which were bombarded down.

Another explained that grievances at times resulted into revenge, which escalates into violence.

Some community members don’t let things pass just like that. They have a lot of anger and unforgiveness and thus seek for revenge even for small things. Also poverty plays to this. One day, when we had just returned, a car knocked down a chicken, the owner called upon the neighbors and hit and demolished the car. One elder came and calmed them down.

All theories are important in their own way. This chapter however, focuses on Youth Bulge Theory (YBT) given its gender and age related tenets. YBT points to youth as a security threat due to their huge numbers (bulges), poor economic conditions, age and gender. Such connotations directly point to youth in developing nations especially in the global south. YBT, however, also alludes to poor communities/ regions -“third worlds” within the developed world, many of which are occupied by people of color. As such violence becomes a racialized concept. The youth bulge theory assumes that young men in poor living conditions are disgruntled, which turns them into “angry young men” thereby creating a potential for eruption and sustenance of violence. Such communities are termed to be so poor for peace (Brainard&Chollet, 2007).
Conceptualization of the Youth Bulge Theory

All developing countries population rates are increasing. Africa is however, unique because of the overwhelming young population. With the exception of a few countries in Southern Africa and some island nations, the World Bank, in its 2015 report, notes, “fertility rates and youth dependency rates in Sub-Saharan Africa are among the highest in the world, exposing the region to higher poverty rates, smaller investments in children, lower labor productivity, high unemployment or underemployment, and the risk of political instability” (1). Without economic opportunity and marginalization from politics, violence emerges as a rational and, seemingly, the most effective means for youth to make demands and engage the system. The theory thus suggests that exceptionally large youth cohorts increase both opportunities and motives for political violence, through the abundant supply of youths with low opportunity costs, particularly due to unemployment (Urdal, 2006).

The theoretical conceptualization of the youth as a threat was coined by a number of western based contributors including Gaston Bouthoul, Jack A, Goldstone, Gary Fuller and Gunnar Heinsohn. YBT examines the likelihood of a conflict based on the logic that a large proportion of young men in the population will make a country more vulnerable to instability. Mesquida and Wiener argue, “the most reliable factor in explaining episodes of coalitional aggression is the relative abundance of young males” (1996.p.181). Scholars have also recently asserted that youth create susceptibility to violence more than religious fundamentalism (Urdal, 2011), which was considered a leading cause of violence following the September 11, 2011 attacks (Roger, et al. 2007).
The theory emphasizes that “young men are more prone to violence than either older men or women” (Sommers, 2007.103). Such conceptualization pathologizes young men. In addition to using chronological age to apportion responsibility and blame for violence, the YBT has a gender-biased construction portraying young women as entirely submissive and passive. This victimizing portrayal disadvantages young women in post conflict reconstruction. In situations of peace building for instance, no attention is paid to female youth concerns since they are not expected to amount into instability. YBT has therefore been used to support policy directions that are unhelpful to development, peace and youth (Sommers, 2007). Stereotypes relating to emotions are further emphasized in this YB theory where young men can be angry and demonstrate such anger publically, while young women are not expected to. It is therefore important to understand how the use of age, gender, class and location in defining and theorizing youth can/has affected youth identity formation in Uganda.

The YBT is generally thus grounded on five major arguments including the cohort size, the level of economic growth, education, level of development-urbanization and individual grievances largely rooted in exclusion. The proponents of the theory also suggest possible solutions. They observe that governments can reduce the security risk by providing education to youth and reducing birth and fertility rates. All the suggested solutions however, point to the role of government in controlling the quality and quantity of the population. This in my view underestimates the contribution of the youth and general local perspectives in tackling violence, which are critical for sustainable peace.
The developed world has largely adopted the YBT and it has influenced their foreign policies. John L. Helgerson\(^3\) supported the theory noting that sub-Saharan Africa is the only region where youth bulges were not expected to decrease in the next two decades. Helgerson highly prioritized youth as one of the three major factors affecting global security, the other two being radicalization and religious extremism. These three make “a volatile cocktail of terrorism” directed towards the US and the West thus position sub-Saharan Africa as a security threat. This perception was also upheld by the UN high level panel discussion on security in 2004 in which it was stated that “the combination of a surging youth population, poverty, urbanization and unemployment has resulted in increasing gang violence in many countries of the developing world” (UN 2004. p.24 in March & Erick (eds), 2009). Huntington (2000), specifically argues that “people who go out and kill other people are males between the ages of 16 and 30” (2001.p.10). Youth demographics are thus a big threat to global security from the perspective of the international community.

Besides the international frameworks, individual state structures in Africa also seem to concur with the conceptualization of youth as violent. The Uganda National Youth Policy (NYP) for instance notes that male youth featured prominently in crime figures than their female counterparts and generally youth were more involved in crime than adults as 63% of the inmates were youth (National Youth Policy, 2001). Both international and national standards thus conclude that youth are violent. However, there is a discrepancy in the understanding of a youth. Uganda defines youth to be individuals

\(^3\)Former Chairman of the U.S. government’s National Intelligence Council. He made the comment in his 2002 paper on *The National Security Implications of Global Demographic Change.*
between 18-35 yet the UN considers those between 15-24. What Uganda terms youth according to the international standards are adults.

The youth bulge theory is compelling and has received substantial scholarly support and acceptance practically due to its well laid out tenets as discussed above. It has encountered a number of limitations. The following section draws on feminisms to examine the gaps in the youth bulge theory.

**Feminist Critiques to the Youth Bulge Theory**

In this discussion, I accord emphasis to feminist epistemologies grounded in theorizing from lived experience, deconstructing dominant discourse (in this case western and patriarchal), false universalization and essentialism. I thus call for community involvement and privileging community based understanding of the causes of violence. Youth are members to communities and act in relation to other community members. Shepherd (2008) and Butler (2010) have both argued that violence is relational and intersectional. This challenges YBT’s use of socially constructed stereotypes to draw biologically unproven conclusions (Sommers, 2011). It is thus important to understand men not only as individuals but also as members of a collective-community that relate with others including women, mothers and children. When responding to youth involvement in violence, one male youth assumably in his late teens said,

Youth are the majority in situations of violence but everyone is part of it including women, men, and even children. Even elders in most cases they give instructions especially in case of group attacks, encourage the youth and even bless them to go for such fights. They don’t fight physically but emotionally. They evoke the spirit world and this is very crucial for the youth to know that the spirits are okay with what is going on.
Feminists use relationality to elaborate a critical feature of war noting that individual freedom of action is defined and limited by social relationships (Alcoff, 2006; Butler, 2010). Individual decisions are “never completely limited and never without any limits” (Sjoberg, 2013, 180). As such you cannot explain armed violence relying solely on young men without understating how they relate to other members in the society. Alcoff (2006) notes, “the individual is a construct mediated by social discourses beyond individual control or intervention” (140) since individuals exist in relation to others. Oyewumi (1998). What this implies is that addressing violence should not target specific individuals but rather systems, processes and structures through which such individuals operate. This is a critical observation and has practical implications. Handling war crimes for instance as individual cases has for northern Uganda been problematic. The ICC for instance issued arrest warrants for Kony failing to appreciate similarities between the rebel group and the government groups in violation of human rights.

Looking at the physical fighting and violence is one big limitation of the youth bulge theory. Physical attacks are just a demonstration of frustrations in the community. Roles relating to violence are divided basing on position in society and age. The energetic portion of the population gets involved in the energetic phase. Focusing only on youth therefore fails to understand the organization in the community. In addition, the youth bulge theory is also limited in concentrating on male youth only in the public sphere. This disregards in the private aspects of society yet they continuously influence the public. It is therefore difficult to understand the public place in isolation from the private. It can be argued that the theory’s neglect of private spaces accounts for its neglect of the role of female youth and elders in the case of northern Uganda.
Hendrixson (2004) argues against the theory’s biological construction of violence. The theory, she argues (to which I also agree) creates differentiated biological threats for boys and girls resulting into “a dual threat of explosive violence and explosive fertility” (1) respectively. The boys are extremely violent while the girls are extremely fertile there by increasing the population densities significantly. Hendrixson notes further that the theory “reflects and is reflected in racial, gender and age discrimination” (p.1) and the use of the “power of numbers envisages racial, cultural and gender stereotypes” (p.4). The youth bulge theory implies that young men with constricted options will automatically and necessarily respond with violent rebellion, which may not always be the case. This assumes voluntary participation of the youth yet in situations like northern Uganda, children and youth were forcefully abducted and recruited into armed forces. One former soldier in his early twenties said,

If we could choose, I would never have fought but we were grabbed from our house in the night and taken by the rebels. You have no choice but to fight. It is a matter of life and death. When you are attacked, you either kill them or they kill you. At times we heard some children were taken by the Ugandan army, and returned back home but you never know what your fate is.

Sommers (2007), on the other hand challenges the theory from an African grounded perspective. He emphasizes YBT’s failure to explain why African cities, the centers of the youth concentrations especially due to rural-urban migration are not centers for major violent conflicts. Sub-Saharan Africa’s wars such as the LRA in northern Uganda and Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA) have largely been rural based battlefields (Sommers, 2006).

Butler (2010) carries on this further noting that wars are normally fought among
“ungrievable lives-” those are lives that cannot be lost, cannot be destroyed, because they already inhabit a lost and destroyed zone. It is thus not about numbers but where the people that have no life live that wars are stages. In the context of Uganda, the northern part is this zone. Such zones are ontologically already lost and destroyed which means when they are destroyed in war, nothing is destroyed (Butler, 2010). This is a valid description of how the developed world treats lives in the developing world. For instance the United States justifies violence against ‘barbaric’ countries including Iraq, and Afghanistan to maintain security internally. Uganda’s central government justifies war in the northern region to maintain security and peace in the south.

In addition, Sommers applies a post-colonial approach to elaborate that what youth are blamed for today was a historical creation. In Africa the situation was generally a creation of colonialism. Using the case of Nairobi, Sommers notes that the city has an “overwhelmingly urban population in part because British colonialists recruited men to work in Nairobi while prohibiting them from bringing their families along” (Sommers, 2007.105). Increasing male youth urban population is thus a way of attaining the masculine attributes constructed by the colonizers i.e. earning wage payment.

The solutions the YBT provides also have limited applicability to Africa. While it is very important for development, study findings provide reasons to doubt the ability of education to provide a durable solution for violence as the YBT argues. Like in many other children and youth concerns (including child labor, prostitution, HIV/AIDS) education has not provided a practical solution. In Africa for instance, the youth (including graduates) form 60% of the unemployed (African Review, 2013), which is
indicative of the limited impact education accords youth economic empowerment. If unemployment were the problem, then job creation rather than education would be the solution. Emphasizing formal education therefore becomes a western imposed approach that does not reflect local livelihood demands. Respondents from northern Uganda emphasized the need for practical skills as a way of reintegrating the youth.

For this study, the theory provided a starting point for understanding why post conflict programs and processes in Uganda have focused on male youth, as well as demobilization and disarmament other than social reintegration. The sole application of the YBT however, lacks the explanatory power to understand how female and male youth reintegrate in post conflict settings, especially better understanding of their agency and resilience. It is also insufficient in explaining how the youth rebuild their lives in the post conflict situations. While discussing the civil war in northern Uganda and the impact it has had on girls, De Berry argues that the investigation of victimization requires critical examination of the specific ways in which people are made and become vulnerable in the context in which they live (Boyden & Berry, 2004). This calls for understanding systems, process and structures that have informed the situation in northern Uganda rather than blaming particular portions of the community.

I argue the solutions to solve the conflict problem must be rooted within the community and the best way this can be done is through active community participation. In trying to come up with suggestions targeting long term peace building, some respondents believed in collective responsibility for the sustenance of the northern Uganda war. One leader said,
No one can be blamed for violence. We are all part of it and we all participate but in different ways, some of which are less obvious. Children, youth, elders, women, men, even community and religious leaders. We all have contributed in some way. When pointing at those that are publically known as former fighters, we just need to find someone to blame for what went wrong. Of course our levels of involvement are different but we all did something. If we can stop pointing fingers, we would rebuild ourselves.

Besides critiquing the youth bulge theory, feminist scholars have provided an alternative way to positively understand violence. Feminist scholars have thus theorized emotions and specifically anger. In the next section, I briefly examine how felt theory (Million, 2009) explains and justifies the anger particular communities might have and display.

**Felt Theory: An Alternative Understanding to Youth Anger and Violence**

Felt theory notes that it is critical to explore the reasons leading to emotional demonstrations among communities. One way this can be done is through allowing the marginalized (in this case youth) to voice out their concerns. Such analysis would trigger an analysis of the societal crises, historical constructions and external forces, which elicit violent conflict. This would in turn minimize mainstream white society reading of “other” stories through thick pathology narratives (Million, 2009) like the YBT does. This would also bring out positive contributions emotions permit and challenge “constructing emotions as epistemologically subversive, to obscure the vital role of emotion in the construction of knowledge” (Jaggar, 2008.p.378) especially in the developing world. It is true that the anger portrayed by the “angry young men” in the third world has been grounded in historical events including colonialism and not a natural/biological kind as the youth bulge theory seems to conclude.
In addition treating anger through a negative lens risks obscuring analysis and accountability for historically informed material effects against the people of color and indigenous communities in the developed world. Felt theory therefore makes a counter narrative by presenting emotions positively and therefore necessary to examine the parts of history that are vital for understanding the present. For northern Uganda, understanding anger would implicate the colonial processes and the post colonial unbalance regional development that have negatively affected the northern region.

In her paper, *The Uses of Anger*, Audre Lorde notes that “anger is loaded with information and energy” (280) and it can aid identification of allies and enemies. She argues that anger is an appropriate reaction to racism and when focused, it “can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change” (Lorde, 1997. p.280). In addition, emotions reflect prevailing forms of social life (Jaggar, 2008. p.382). Western conceptions identify knowledge with power, which reflects imperialism, racism and misogyny. Labeling youth of color as “angry young men” is imperialistic and racist and deserves deconstruction since it hinders non-western knowledge production, intentionally to patronize and dominate the third world there by maintaining power hierarchies. I agree with Jaggar that emotions (in this case anger) are socially and historically created and thus stretch beyond nature or biological explanations. Theories based on biology therefore demand a deconstruction in favor of those based on social experiences of communities involved. Theorizing should therefore be done from the perspective of the most marginalized.

Importantly, the feminist approach recommends looking at violence and conflict as sensed. This highlights the felt element of wars (Butler, 2010; Sjoberg, 2013; 2014),
which have been totally disregarded by conventional theories of violence including
development and human rights perspectives. I contend defining war would take on new
dimensions if it were understood as a lived experienced. For me, this is the most
important aspect feminism has incorporated in the study of conflict because it recognizes
that there are physical bodies, feelings and experiences of violence which need to be
understood if peace is to be attained. Conceptualizing war as sensed thus brings on new
questions, perspectives and knowledge to transform studies on violence. Previously
pathologized forms of knowledge including emotions like anger become validated.
Validation of such knowledge breaks silences and gatekeepers in institutions including
academia, religion and research Million (2009).

Sjoberg, (2013) emphasizes that knowledge cannot be separated from its
relationship with the knower which makes it context-dependent, subjective and political
simultaneously. It is thus a glaring oversight for traditional theories to claim
representation of everyone by speaking to the upper class members. Like standpoint
feminists have elaborated, the multiply marginalized provide a more complex and
objective view of reality (Collins, 2000; Harding, 1993) and attending to their concerns,
automatically cater for other members who may be singly or doubly marginalized
(Crenshaw, 1989).

Conclusion

In conclusion, I wish to emphasize that while gender has been integrated in theorizing
violence, it still remains peripheral and has not become a central part of research
programs outside feminist security studies (Sjoberg, 2014). Conflict should be understood
as a system that has tools, agents, structures all of which are interconnected (Sjoberg,
While it disadvantages the marginalized, those with power benefit from it, which makes hard to solve. Connecting the various forms and levels of violence would facilitate understanding outstanding questions like; why conflict results in more women as refugees and the ways in which poverty makes women more vulnerable in natural disasters. Traditional theorizing has looked at war as an event with a specified beginning and end well defined and clearly demarcated. However, “rather than being an event, war is a continuum, a practice and a symbolic politics or performance” (Sjoberg, 2013.39). Critical feminists argue women are always at war in their families and communities and at times with their bodies yet patriarchy, violence is systemic and women at times contribute to such violence. It is thus vital to rethink security and violence as “made and made in gendered ways” (Wibben 2011, 106).

War is not event that is just caused and practiced or performed but also sensed and experienced. Understanding war as sensed and experienced changes not only how it is to be evaluated but rather how it is to be defined and understood (Sjoberg, 2013. 277). For instance violence against women only changes in intensity, form and frequency but is evident in what is formally termed pre- conflict and post-conflict phases of armed violence. Wartime rape, PTSD, forced marriages and pregnancies are some experiences to show that war physically and emotionally affect bodies and thus indeed an experience.

The importance of human agency lies at the heart of a paradigm that recognizes the role of social actors (Moser and Clark, 2001). The experience of violent conflict therefore with social life is and cannot be built upon a single discourse (in this case gender or age). “Individual women (and youth) as social actors improvise alternative
ways of formulating life objectives, despite the restrictive resources, social relations and environment” (Ibid, p.5). According to Alcoff, “the individual is a construct mediated by social discourses beyond individual control or intervention” (2006, p.140). Theories of conflict thus need to refrain from representing young people especially the women as a totally victimized and vulnerable group. Important to acknowledge is that displaced women and girls have resilience and agency (Mulumba, 2010), and even at times cope better in times of displacement compared to the males (Dolan, 2009).

The stereotypical essentialization of women (adult and young) as “victims” and men as “perpetuators” of political violence and armed conflict assumes simplified definitions of such phenomena (Moser and Clark, 2001). Treating both women and men as “objects” denies each their agency associated voice as actors in the process (Parpart and Marchand, 1995). While young women experienced sadness and pain, they at the same time reveal enormous courage during the conflict and remarkable resilience in its aftermath; they dispose high capacities of adaptability and resistance (Sommers, 2006; UNDP, 2006; Wessels, 2009). It is therefore imperative to rhetorically listen to the voices of the young people, and understanding the meaning they derive from their lived experiences if peace and stability are to be attained. Taking young people’s voices seriously means acknowledging their active participation in social life, their engagement within war and their suffering which continues during the post conflict period (Olson in Boyden & Berry, 2004). Alcoff notes that agency is a continuous process that should be assumed not only in the future but as an “ongoing feature of the past” (Alcoff, 2006, p. 145). Women’s Agency is complex since “women consent to, resist and reshape the social relations of power within a complex matrix of domination and subordination”
I would like to note that my intention is not to totally reject western theorization that points to youth in developing countries. I would, however, like to use such theories to deconstruct forms of western domination of the third world, focusing on Africa. The youth bulge provides a case of a theory that is imperialistic, racist and strategically apportions blame to poor youth of color as responsible for global armed violence. Environmental, historical, political and other situational circumstances that lead to anger of youth are thus downplayed which ends up underestimating the material effects these bring for the youth. I would also like to challenge the patriarchal oppression such theories (read youth bulge) and concepts (youth) cause for young women especially in situations of forced displacement.

Western feminist theorizing especially from the women of color has been influential in understanding women’s experiences in the third world through for example standpoint theory and Intersectionality. However, it is critical to emphasize indigenous theories and methodologies if specific experiences of women and girls encountering unique third world experiences that have not been considered in the western world are to be recognized. I agree with Chilisa over the need to “rename the experiences of non-western women from their standpoints” (2012, p. 270).

Youth participate both voluntarily and forcefully to sustain violent conflicts. It is imperative to appreciate that youth are social beings and they do not operate in a vacuum. The anger that young people manifest is a sign of underlying political and social tension usually grounded in class, race, ethnicity, poor economic situations and political regimes
in Africa (UNDP, 2007). UNDP, further notes that societal crisis for instance facilitates easy access to small arms, cultural norms that support use of violence as an acceptable means of resolving conflict, and Africa’s post independence history of severe unrest and poverty. Critical too is the fact that while youth participate in violence, they are not the primary drivers (Hamilton, 2007) but only tools used to attain the intended goals of the rebelling forces.

While not downplaying Urdal’s argument that youth bulges can increase the risk of armed conflict, I emphasize that male youth age and number cannot solely explain violence in developing countries. Youth are only caught up in societal crises due to poor governance, globalization, and other externally influenced causes including power struggles including economic factors, for instance oil production. It is a combination of these that can be explosive. The UNDP (2007) report challenges stereotypical representations of African youth as violent emphasizing that it is the situation and environment created by colonialism, availability of small arms (all of which come from the developed world) and cultural break down that explain the regions unending conflicts. Blaming youth for the contemporary global violence is a way of avoiding to take responsibility of failed systems and structures as well relegating the material effects created by historic events including slavery and colonialism and consequential effects like the creation of patriarchal societies (Smith, 2005).

Class-based explanations of violence are in my perspective also strategically intended to maintain socio-economic hierarchies that sustain white supremacy. Problematizing huge racialized populations creates the white race as being scarcity. I
believe it is relevant to explore and understand societal complexities that influence and inform individual behavior. Such complexities would include why communities continue to have growing populations despite population and fertility control measures globally promoted by the international community, why some youth choose to join rebel groups while others do not, why has unemployment persisted despite privatization and why African countries have kept in poverty despite the various IMF and World Bank policies implemented including the structural adjustment programs. Violence, therefore, in the feminist lens is a web of distinct yet connected structures, systems, processes and practices that marginalize “othered” members (and elements) of community.
CHAPTER FOUR
RECOVERY HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND VIOLENCE

Introduction

This chapter broadly examines the institutional and structural violence encountered by the returned formerly displaced populations. Particularly I focus on humanitarian assistance and how it facilitates violence against young women in post-conflict northern Uganda. In situations of conflict livelihoods are destroyed. This makes humanitarian assistance necessary for survival (Kalin, et al, 2010). Scholars have described Northern Uganda as the ‘world’s worst humanitarian crises’ (Dolan & Hovil, 2006.1). Evident in this crisis was starvation, rape, beatings, detention, arrest and torture of civilians (Diane, 2007; Dolan, 2009). Aid therefore contributes to saving lives by providing the basic human survival needs including food, shelter and medication (Gelsdorf, Maxwell & Mazuran, 2012).

While this study acknowledges this contribution, I also observe that the negative aspects of humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian assistance has its own controversies. At times it initiates and/or sustains violence within and among the population it targets. In northern Uganda, a large portion of the violence landed on women and girls. Harrell-Bond (1986), explains that the perspective of the beneficiaries is very crucial in understanding humanitarian assistance’s limitations. This chapter therefore uses this approach to examine humanitarian assistance in northern Uganda largely drawing on the perspective of the female youth.
Scholars, activists and practitioners acknowledge the inevitable demand for humanitarian assistance as a consequence of armed violence (Dolan, 2009). In the case of northern Uganda, the region escalated into a severe humanitarian crisis due to a simultaneous occurrence of a number of factors. First the war led to thousands of people being killed, others injured and millions displaced (Soto, 2009). Besides the civil war, natural disasters particularly drought and floods also hit northern Uganda exacerbating livelihoods and creating an increased burden towards population vulnerability (Smith, 2012). Additional, famine and diseases equally troubled the region during the decades of the armed violence (Tripp, 2004). A combination of the above resulted in local, regional and global disturbances in the form of internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees, and violations of basic human rights (Branch, 2007; Dolan, 2009; Tim & Vlassenroot, 2010). This explains the acute humanitarian conditions in northern Uganda, described to be the most persistent and deadliest Complex Humanitarian Emergencies (CHEs) in the world (Relief Web, 2006). The desire to end such human suffering and improve survival informs the principles of humanitarian assistance.

While intended to end and/or alleviate human suffering, humanitarian assistance in northern Uganda resulted in and/or perpetuated violence in the return communities. Individual community members are affected differently based on their gender and age, marital and motherhood statuses among other factors. In this chapter, I center my discussion on the experiences of female youth in “post-conflict” northern Uganda, noting that the violence female youth have experienced violence that is structurally and institutionally initiated and sustained. I explore how this violence occurs along a
continuum of cultural, political and humanitarian processes that are implemented in the region and disregard how gender and age intersect to further marginalize the female youth. Female youth marginalized by the aforementioned patriarchal structures thus experience the worst forms of violence in both the private and public spheres.

In order to understand the impact of humanitarian assistance on the experiences of (female) youth, we must understand what constitutes assistance. I first briefly explain the principles underlying this approach to human experiences of distress and how these globally held principles affect local experiences. I then contextualize what humanitarian assistance means in relation to this specific study. To do this I discuss the nature of assistance provided and how respondents conceptualize it, the gendered experiences involved, as well as the socio-cultural dynamics that inform the implementation of humanitarian assistance. I then examine how assistance initiates and sustains violence against young women in northern Uganda. I then acknowledge and discuss the challenges that providers encounter. I specifically focus on the humanitarian programs run by the non-governmental agencies because these dominate the implementation of humanitarian services in northern Uganda. I also examine assistance provided by churches and other community run programs, which are formally not considered NGOs.

**Overview and Understanding of Humanitarian Assistance**

Humanitarian assistance is a survival mechanism for both civilians and armed forces. It is therefore necessary to familiarize oneself with the central principles informing assistance, how it is defined and how it is practically implemented at the grassroots, drawing on northern Uganda experience.
Generically, humanitarian assistance refers to activities aimed at addressing the needs of people affected by emergencies. Such activities involve actions designed to save lives, end human suffering, maintain and protect human dignity during and in the aftermath of disasters, and also prevent disaster re-occurrences (Global Humanitarian Assistance, 2016). Fundamentally, humanitarian assistance has four major principles: humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence (OCHA, 2011). The overarching mandate is to end human suffering irrespective of political, religious, cultural and other varying ideologies particular individuals might hold. While researchers and implementers generally understand and accept aid as such, at the same time humanitarian assistance is dynamic and varies from situation to situation.

Despite situational variances, recovery assistance’s goal is to support affected communities towards management of own recovery. To do this, humanitarian agencies supplement personal, family and community structures that are disrupted during insurgencies (Emergency Response and Recovery, 2010). Assistance is ideally context specific, need-based and locally grounded. While community management of its own recovery is central for reconstruction, scholars have noted that in northern Uganda, returning populations have been treated as “passive victims” (Dolan, 2009. 25) and thus mere recipients of aid provided. Consequently, humanitarian processes and programs have overlooked concerns that are relevant from a local perspective.

Humanitarian assistance in Uganda has been externally informed, funded and implemented, relying on dominant Western concepts and theories to explain the situation, and impose meaning on communities in northern Uganda. Concepts like youth, child mothers, child soldiers, and child headed households are all external constructions used in
northern Uganda. Even the Western understanding of other critical concepts like children, adults, family, and vulnerability are largely grounded in the dominant Western view. This has led to different understandings on the part of the humanitarian programs and the local population.

In its glossary of humanitarian terms, Relief Web describes assistance as aid provided to address “the physical, material and legal needs of persons of concern. This may include food items, medical supplies, clothing, shelter, seeds and tools, as well as the provision of infrastructure, such as schools and roads” (Relief Web, 2008. 12).

Conceptualizing human suffering solely in the form of physical and material effects misrepresents the critical elements of humanity that inform what happens physically, the emotions (Sjoberg, 2013). I thus argue that the non-material needs and effects are just as valid as material ones, and thus both deserve equal consideration during reconstruction for sustainable peace. It is thus crucial to adopt a holistic understanding of humanitarian assistance to include the emotional, spiritual, psychological and environmental concerns of the communities engulfed in such situations. Such an approach would limit violence resulting from and perpetuated by aid especially in the post-conflict phase.

Putting the above definitional limitations into consideration, I rely on a broader definition of humanitarian recovery assistance, which stretches beyond the traditional understanding described above. I include critical psychological, economic and social support aspects of both in the short, medium and long term (Eyre, et al, 2007). According to this definition, humanitarian recovery assistance prioritizes assistance aimed at immediate /short term needs (i.e. during the displacement) and the strategic / long term needs (conceptualized as recovery assistance in the post-conflict stage).
Recovery on the other hand in this study constitutes the “process of rebuilding, restoring and rehabilitating the community following an emergency or disaster, continuing until the disruption has been rectified, demands on services have been returned to normal levels, and the needs of those affected have been met” (Emergency Response and Recovery, 2010. 101). In the case of northern Uganda, however, the historical processes that amounted to unbalanced regional development and political domination by the southern region (Kasozi, 1994), already had disrupted the region. This dual disruption—before and after the conflict, necessitated development-oriented programs for both the formerly displaced as well as the entire populace.

**Historical Context to Post-Conflict Recovery Assistance**

Uganda has had a violent post-independence phase. The nation has thus long been a recipient of humanitarian assistance. Need for assistance further intensified in the 21st century. According to the Global Humanitarian Assistance Organization, Uganda received USD1.17 billion in humanitarian assistance between 2001 and 2010 (Smith, 2012). Since 2006, the United States has been the largest humanitarian aid donor to Uganda, and European Union institutions have collectively been the second largest, giving a total of US$231.5 million and US$178.2 million respectively (Smith, 2012). While this assistance is instrumental, as explained by the humanitarian principle to end human suffering, it has been misallocated and in some instances misappropriated by the government of Uganda. Brown (2007) for instance, observes that the major central government reaction to the over two-decade civil war has been to augment the military budget. Yet this increased military spending has not resulted in positive trends towards peace (Dolan, 2009) but rather in displacement and encampment. Assistance is thus
crucial for formerly displaced persons in northern Uganda as a way of facilitating self-sustenance. In this section I discuss how assistance programs in northern Uganda emerged from universal humanitarian assistance frameworks. Understanding this connection helps to explain the decisions made relating to assistance, as well as how these decisions have affected local contexts and perspectives in northern Uganda.

Because recovery areas have specific issues to handle, moreover, the period of recovery is not bound but varies from region to region and no universal frameworks can be assumed. The recovery phase in northern Uganda will therefore take a long period of time, given the historical (economic and political), environmental and natural disasters as well as impacts of the over two decade armed conflict.

The post conflict phase in northern Uganda started in October 2008 when President Yoweri Museveni ordered the closure of Internally Displaced Persons’ (IDPs) camps (IDMC, 2008). This closure was supported by the local community officials who took on initiatives targeting the IDPs “pushing for returns to be speeded up, including by threatening imminent demolition of huts or leveling of the camp” (IDMC, 2008.155) in case the population did not vacate. Some scholars have noted that such local support was rooted in selfish needs of the leaders who wanted to use the land on which camps had been established due to land scarcity in the region (Kindi, 2010). Oxfam International (2008) explains that local leaders used humanitarian assistance as a tool to mobilize IDPs to leave the camps, despite returnees’ anxiety about insecurity, social services and uncertainty of livelihood in the return areas. One of the key elements of conflict resolution and reintegration is voluntary return/assisted voluntary return. Under this
policy, returnees must be sure that the concerns that caused their displacement have been resolved and the areas of return no longer pause a threat or any sense of fear (International Organization for Migration, 2012). In northern Uganda return process, however, the policy of voluntary return\(^4\) was not followed since local leadership pressured and persuaded IDPs to return to their villages using humanitarian assistance. Scholars have noted that besides the selfish interests of the leaders, the leaders were also pressured by the central government to enforce return of the communities (Dolan, 2009).

Due to government’s sudden closure of camps, return areas were not adequately prepared for the formerly displaced people. As a result, the returning population moved back to areas that were inhabitable. The return areas were insecure for instance to bombs that remained planted in the bushes, domestic violence and rape. Sudden return also worsened the already vulnerable health conditions leading to disease outbreaks like malaria, diarrhea and cholera (Annan et al, 2011). Diseases resulted largely from lack of safe water and sanitation services by the communities. This situation continues and does not show signs of ending any soon, given the enormous destruction rendered during the conflict. As a result, these returned communities live in absolute poverty; institutional operations and services are hampered by poor infrastructure, lack of qualified personnel (SIDA, 2008) and limited self-sustenance within the communities.

\(^4\)Voluntary Return and Reintegration is an indispensable part of a comprehensive approach to migration management aiming at orderly and humane return and reintegration of migrants who are unable or unwilling to remain in the host countries and thus wish to voluntarily return to their countries of origin (International Organization for Migration, http://iom.by/en/activities/assisted-voluntary-return-and-reintegration. While this is focused on refugees, this policy also applies to IDPs who move within national borders.
The assistance provided to post-conflict northern Uganda additionally has been largely funded externally through the government and non-governmental organizations (both national and international). However, since 2008 when the government of Uganda declared a post-conflict phase, donors’ contributions towards humanitarian assistance have steadily declined. Funders have shifted priorities from aid to post-conflict transition programs, and long-term development initiatives such as infrastructure development (Smith, 2012). Although important for community self-sustenance, the shift to long-term programs appears to have been rushed because communities are still struggling to meet daily basic needs. While strategic needs deserve to be targeted, the immediate concerns also need to be addressed. Comprehensive programs attending to be are thus crucial.

Although the funding is largely external, the government of Uganda (GoU) was and is responsible for providing the framework of how such funding is used as a way of ensuring sustainability and development. As such the GoU in 2007 proposed an all-embracing framework for all recovery programs implemented in northern Uganda under the Peace, Recovery Development Plan (PRDP). PRDP sought to streamline the rebuilding of the war-affected part of northern region and consolidate peace and development (OPM, 2007). All development actors including government and non-government agencies are thus obliged to align their interventions in Northern Uganda against the PRDP framework.

Implementation of PRDP was effected in 2009, with a budget of US$600 million for Northern Uganda. The plan had four strategic objectives: “consolidation of state authority; rebuilding and empowering communities; revitalizing the economy and peace-
building and reconciliation (Smith, 2012:14).” PRDP also included programs specific to regions affected by the conflict: Agricultural Livelihood Recovery Project for Northern Uganda (ALREP), Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAf), Northern Uganda Rehabilitation Program (NUREP), Karamoja Livelihoods Program (KALIP) and Northern Uganda Transition Initiative (NUTI). The government also run nation-wide programs that facilitate resettlement such as National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS). Despite these government services, the leading providers and implementers of assistance in northern Uganda are non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that include international, national, and community-based organizations.

Reconstruction programs operate in parallel to local reintegration frameworks largely hindering any possible partnerships. Despite the growing research and awareness on vulnerabilities that civilians encounter, humanitarian responses continue to treat civilians (especially women, youth and children) as mere beneficiaries whose voices and input is not required for planning, monitoring and evaluation among other critical stages of project implementation. In northern Uganda, non-governmental organizations have established structures competing with community-based frameworks, which limit the effectiveness of communal structures (Ochen, Jones & McAuley, 2012). This dichotomization was evident in returnees’ understanding of humanitarian assistance, which they explained to mean foreign assistance provided to people whom the funders thought were in need of such goods and services. One respondent in describing what assistance was, noted,
Assistance is free goods given to people selected by the local leaders\(^5\) in the community, who forward the names of beneficiaries to humanitarian organizations. They decide who will receive a particular kind of aid, how much of it and when, without necessarily seeking our views.

The quote above depicts how recovery assistance programs disregard non-formalized local frameworks. Targeted beneficiaries thus do not identify with the programs being implemented in their areas. While it is clear that programs are free, not everyone can access them. Only individuals that are selected by the leaders, benefit from it. Many times however, such officials apply a pre-set-criteria for identification of the most marginalized individuals within the community. This echoes earlier researchers’ observations that accessing aid is characterized by corruption and favoritism (SIDA, 2008). According to this study, the lack of clear beneficiary selection criteria makes favoritism possible.

**Feminist Views on Humanitarian Assistance and Violence**

Some scholars and practitioners may regard the entirely materialistic definition of humanitarian assistance described in preceding pages as comprehensive. However, analyzed from both feminist and indigenous perspectives, this understanding is limited and biased. Such understanding demonstrates that aid and assistance are constructed entirely in tangible material descriptions, which downplays the role of emotions and the need for psychosocial support among communities in times of distress. This has been a central argument among conflict feminist scholars emphasizing the role emotions play in violent situations (Butler, 2010, Lorde, 2007). Disregarding non-materialistic aspects of

\(^5\)These are government representatives in the community; they earn a salary and largely considered government employees. They are however, in most cases members of those particular communities they serve and reside in the community.
reconstruction has negatively affected women and girls more through violence (physical, sexual, emotional and economic), increased dependency on men and thus vulnerability.

In addition, a large number of community leaders and representatives are older men. As such women-specific concerns risk not being prioritized and thus missing out on assistance. Formal frameworks categorized community members in patriarchal dominant specifications that are normalized to disfavor women and other feminized beings. Secondly, foreign frameworks used, fit program language other than shifting the programs to meet those individuals that are socially identified as marginalized especially from the perspective of women. Focusing on the category and not the processes and elements that constitute the category therefore provided a challenge to implementation of assistance (Oyewumi, 1998).

Generally, thoughts on violence revolve around interpersonal physical violence, including masculine anger, aggression and bloodshed but rarely recognize dependency, vulnerability and insecurity, trust, shame and (dis)respect (Barrack, 2003) as critical forms of violence. While rarely acknowledged, these hardly obvious forms of violence are widely spread and more destructive especially against young women. In this study, I observed that young women are systematically denied access to and use of resources like land, had limited involvement in decision-making, and faced restrictions on freedom of movement. A female member of one clan committee explained that, “girls do not just move anyhow. It is upon us women to limit our availability publically as a way of keeping our integrity high. Otherwise you lose value if you are everywhere.”

She metaphorically referred to girls who frequent public places as “soda on a party” noting, “women are not like soda that they should be on all public events. The
more scarce you are, the more men yearn for you for marriage”. Marriages being a highly respected venture socially, parents are stricter on girl’s movement compared to the boys. The above situation, while intended for good, perpetuates vulnerability, insecurity and dependency on men. Girls are socialized to rely on their male relatives including brothers, fathers and husbands to for instance sell their produce and make all decisions for them. Being confined to the domestic setting also limits girls’ access to information.

This chapter acknowledges all these forms of violence and the various levels at which they occur including the individual, relational, and communal and societal levels⁶. Because these levels are not distinct, it is not possible to provide definitive markers for each. As such, while I do emphasize institutional and structural violence, overlaps should as well be expected in the following discussion.

The Nature of Assistance Provided to Returning Populations

In order to get a clear perspective of humanitarian assistance and the impact it has on the formerly displaced communities, I find it important to examine the characteristics and features of assistance provided. Such analysis is critical to understanding the gendered roles, responsibilities, expectation and entitlements of individuals within communities. It also helps to appreciate how assistance can differ in form, time and space. In discussing characteristics and features, I include aspects to do with quantity, quality and sustainability. This facilitates my acknowledgement of community agency and resilience by analyzing their survival amidst shortage and lack of basic needs among others constraints.

In northern Uganda, humanitarian programs distributed assistance to formerly displaced communities in the form of immediate needs like food items including posho (maize flour), millet flour, and beans. Other immediate needs included household items like blankets, water cans, and mosquito nets. Key informants explained that immediate needs were provided with the intention of solving the daily needs of the communities, for instance to avoid starvation, malnutrition and in extreme cases, death. Three-month startup food packages were given to returning families. The packages were being provided on the assumption that the short term (three-month) crops planted would be ready to continue providing families with food and avoid starvation after the startup food packages were exhausted. As will be noted in detail in the discussion ahead, this assumption did not come to pass. Floods badly hit farms, severely eroding people’s young gardens. Despite this disaster, no follow-up assistance was provided. As a consequence, returning persons found themselves experiencing further vulnerabilities.

Besides the direct food package explained above, humanitarian food assistance was also pegged to individuals who first accessed services such as education, health, and reproductive health. This was intended to encourage use of such services. The conflict in northern Uganda coupled with the prolonged stay in the IDP camps had severely crippled down the systems for access to services such as education, health, and reproductive health that pre existed. Because of changed attitudes and increased levels of hopelessness that displaced persons had developed as a result of the conflict. Individuals were unwilling to access services even when and where they did exist. Food however, required for survival, the settling IDPs would go where it was provided. As such food assistance was distributed in several forms namely; Food for Education (FFE), and Food For Health
(FFH). FFE was distributed in form of food for school-going children with the aim of reducing malnutrition and also as a onetime package at the end of the term (three months of school) depending on attendance. This was intended to encourage regular attendance and thus children’s retention in school. FFH was distributed to pregnant and lactating mothers who attended antenatal and postnatal care respectively. The major aim was to encourage women to seek medical services as a way of reducing maternal and infant mortality rates. All these were good programs but ended up having gendered and age specific limitations, as this chapter will demonstrate.

Besides food aid and other day-to-day needs, assistance also included supplies intended for agricultural sustenance. These were in the form of improved variety seeds for maize, beans, groundnuts, banana plants and pineapples among others. The seeds and plants were to be planted in order to improve food security, through increased food production initially for household consumption but also sale in case of surplus production. Humanitarian agencies also distributed animals especially goats and cattle. The animals were to improve nutrition by provision of milk and also meat as well as sale of products to meet other basic needs. Oxen and ox ploughs were provided for opening the land. While this was a good step to community self sustainability, the recipients noted some limitations. For instance, communities culturally do not consume goat milk, which decreased the nutrition value anticipated by the humanitarian providers. Unlike the local breeds, cross breed goats also were difficult to maintain given the harsh conditions and bad weather. Goats in addition are not valued for dowries, an issue some returnees struggled with. Dowry in northern Uganda largely means cattle and while other animals like goats can be taken for cultural weddings, they are just an addition. The provision of
goats by humanitarian agencies disregarded the cultural inclinations of the local population, which in turn limited the anticipated impact of assistance.

In northern Uganda, cattle being the backbone of their culture in terms of wealth, marriage, farm production through animal ploughing, and nutrition through consumption of cow milk, the locals perceived assistance in the form of improved milk goats as a deliberate effort aimed at destroying the backbone of the local culture. The intended beneficiaries thus put up much resistance to this form of assistance by for instance discouraging one another from receiving such aid or selling it off immediately.

The goats are improved breeds. They are so delicate, require a lot of attention and cannot withstand the drought seasons. Also here we rear goats for meat and not milk. Some people sell them but still the resale value is low.

Respondents highlighted that marriage is a crucial step for resettlement as it created strings and attachments for peace seeking and building. The local population believes culturally that one should avoid as much as possible to have misunderstandings as much as possible with their in-laws hence encouraging peace. One respondent noted,

Women do not have permanent families. When you are married, you join a new family, identify with them and access their resources. Good relations with in-laws widen the social capital of the women’s birth families while shame and dishonor result out of the failure to get along with in-laws.

Another woman said,

Marriage represents your family and a failed marriage brings shame. The woman’s original family is looked at as anti-social and having poor grooming for their children. The inability to get along with the in-laws is one sign of a failing marriage. Failing means returning the dowry presented to your clan.
If girls are raised to appreciate such constructions, then, they will be tempted to do anything to make a marriage work including enduring the worst forms of violence. Cultural institutions therefore work organically to sustain violence against young women and distributing aid through such institutions exacerbated the situation.

Humanitarian assistance also focused on skills training for returning IDPs. Agencies distributed assistance in the form of scholastic materials, and vocational training for school going children and youth. While the previous two categories (food and agricultural inputs) target families, scholastic materials are more individualized to the most marginalized children. The government of Uganda provides free access to primary and secondary education in government-sponsored schools through Universal Primary Education (UPE) and Universal Secondary Education (USE) respectively. However, though the service is free, government does not cater for personal needs and meals at school. Humanitarian assistance therefore greatly facilitated the enrollment, retention and performance of children in schools by providing scholastic materials like books, pens, pencils, uniforms, and lunch for the students considered to be most vulnerable.

Important to note is that the understanding of marginalization was different for both humanitarian programs and the local community. Programs for instance classified former child soldiers and children from female-headed households generally as the most marginalized. While these are highly vulnerable, communities alternately identifies as most marginalized those members with limited community networks, for instance those considered to be haunted by the spirits (psychologically tortured), women (and children) who were denied access to land (widowed or not), barren women and abandoned or unaccompanied minors. While the majority of the haunted (traumatized) are child
soldiers, the communities do not perceive all child soldiers as haunted and thus not in need of special attention. The communities identified the haunted as those children whose hands were stained with human blood and were not in good terms with the spirits and the departed. Given their state of mind, such children were isolated and outcast by the community, hence needing extra support. Yet the program implementers did not take community evaluations into account and thus the communities did not believe the programs facilitated the recovery of the most affected children.

In contrast, some agencies implemented programs in partnership with communities. This ensured sustainability and a sense of ownership from the local community. On top of assistance targeting particular individuals and families, humanitarian agencies also provided communal services through the construction and rehabilitation of schools, roads, health centers, bore holes and water tanks. While earlier scholars noted limited community involvement in programs (Ochen, Jones & McAuley, 2012), in this study, communities partnered with reconstruction programs in various forms. All adult community members were welcome but participated in different ways. Some members provided time and labor during construction of such infrastructure. Others provided building materials in form of bricks, timber and grass. Others on the other hand provided land on which such infrastructure was established.

Community involvement and participation however, had gendered implications. For instance, women highlighted that providing labor at construction sites increased their workload and hours. This was because men did not get involved in domestic chores. It thus meant women had to wake up earlier than usual to finish up the domestic chores before joining the communal commitments. From the local perspective, one is expected
to participate in community roles to be considered a good resident. So, women had no choice but to work triple roles. In their guide to gender-analysis framework, (March, Smyth & Mukhopadhy, 1999) termed roles into three major categories of reproductive, productive and communal roles. Culturally in northern Uganda, construction of houses is a feminine role that involves identification, cutting, carrying and laying of grass and other building materials. However, the role of building in the public space (e.g. of schools and hospitals) is not culturally explained. And since it involved rewards in the form of assistance items including food, men were more vigilant. This is because as Dolan (2009) explains, men had a lot of free time compared to women. In addition, the men control women’s bodies, freedom of movement, as well as their time and how they allocate it.

Men benefiting from programs would not have been problematic if such benefits trickled down to their families. On the contrary some men sold such food items for cash to buy alcohol. Others used the assistance as bait for sex with other women other than their wives. Implementing agencies’ limited gendered analysis of recovery assistance hence ended up benefiting men more than women and other marginalized groups.

The above overview provides a perspective for analyzing the violence instigated and perpetuated by assistance in the following section. The violence ranges from individual to group, private to public, as well as structural and institutional level forms of violence on which this chapter focuses. While different, all these forms of violence are interconnected inform and draw from each other. Before going into detail, it is important to expound on how I use structural and institutional violence in this chapter and why I find this categorization crucial. This forms the following discussion.

**Structural and Institutional Violence**
Understanding institutionalized violence in humanitarian operations opens a framework for examining the privatized violence individuals as well as groups encounter. This is because the private domain inform what gets accepted as formal and normal in implementing humanitarian assistance. The dichotomy between private and public sectors is thus blurred in this analysis since both sectors inform each other to marginalize feminized and other disadvantaged bodies further within specific societies (Menjívar, 2011). I, therefore examine formal and private institutions that participate in humanitarian assistance implementation in northern Uganda.

Conflict scholars have noted that structural violence inevitably initiates, perpetuates or results from war (Christie, Wagner & Winter, 2001). Paying specific attention to humanitarian aid, I take on Galtung’s (1969) description of structural violence as a type of violence which corresponds with the systemic ways in which a given social structure or social institution prevents individuals or groups from meeting basic needs. Specifically, I use the concept “structural violence” to refer to how systems, structures, institutions and processes operate to marginalize young women as a specific group with unique needs and concerns. By failing to acknowledge their unique position, humanitarian frameworks affect young women’s access to and use of resources and services including education and health, and denied them control over their bodies and sexual rights. I discuss local and international organizations, religious and cultural humanitarian frameworks as initiating and perpetuating violence against young women.

Such violence is largely invisible and engraved within the system. There is thus a high risk of structural violence being naturalized, internalized and accepted as the norm especially by the young women. Institutional and structural violence is thus more
invisible than personal violence. It is, however, systematic, widespread and more
destructive than individual violence (Barrack, 2003). For instance limited involvement of
women as leaders results in neglect of women-specific concerns. Such neglect sets the
framework under which most personalized violence (sexual abuse and domestic violence)
occurring in relation to accessing and using assistance.

In addition, systemic frameworks, institutions and structures through which
humanitarian agencies operated also inform the regularity and severity of violence
individuals in northern Uganda face. Such institutions include the police, schools and
health centers. A direct link therefore exists between institutionalized and structural
violence, and violence against women and girls, especially those in situations of armed
violence like northern Uganda. Giving special attention to northern Uganda, Chris Dolan
for instance notes that “there is a crucial connection to be made between state-level
dynamics and micro-level behavior, and the ideas which make up masculinity are a key
connector between the two” (2002. 60).

Academics, activists and policy makers acknowledge the global challenge
presented by violence against women and girls (WHO, 2013). Violence is known to cut
across and transcend geographical, economic, racial, religious and age boundaries. It is
however, more of a challenge in the developing world and may be exacerbated during
situations of humanitarian emergencies such as armed conflict (McKay, 2004; McKay
&Mazurana, 2004). Even when such crises end, complex brutal cultures of violence
against women persist. At the national level, 48% of women in Uganda have experienced
physical violence from a partner, while 36% have experienced sexual violence from a
partner (UN Women, 2011-2012). Critical to highlight is that violence is socially
constructed, accepted and tolerated since it is engraved in normalized structures. Women for instance have internalized and are complicit to such violence. According to the Uganda Demographic Health Survey (2011), 58% of women contended that a husband has a right to beat his wife or intimate partner. Such circumstances are heightened in situations of armed violence where men struggle to demonstrate their masculinity. A respondent from this study compared the pre-conflict situation to the post-conflict explaining heightened violence against women:

Men have changed. Before the war men were peaceful and calm. Now anything can cause anger to them and violence. We can no longer tell what they disapprove of because everything seems to be a problem. Everything… what you say, do, cook…even when you keep quite, you can still be in trouble. When things don’t go well at the center (where they hangout especially in the evenings), the woman pays for it.

Such reflections were common among the married female participants involved in the study. Public failures in the form of unemployment, losing of a political candidate ended up causing violence in the private setting. In analyzing widespread male violence, at the various levels, Dolan (2002) noted that men in war-torn northern Uganda were suffering from what he termed “collapsing masculinity”. He explains using this concept that notions of masculinity reinforce violence against women especially by non-combatant men especially in the domestic sphere. Dolan consequently recommends state promotion of alternative forms of masculinity that put less pressure of male bodies as a way of reducing violence against women. I add that the role of the state needs to be complemented by the change in cultural and religious constructions of masculinity all of

---

7 Uganda was preparing for the February 2016 general elections. By the time of the study primaries were going on the local and district levels.
which work together to marginalize women by for instance encouraging total
submissiveness to and forgiveness of men.

Though not specific to northern Uganda, the government has taken some
important steps to improve the position of women, although a lot still needs to be done. In
the following section I present a brief review of government policies geared towards
gender equality.

Government Mechanisms to Avert Violence against Women and Girls
Before a critical examination of the violence in northern Uganda, I wish to acknowledge
that the Government of Uganda (GoU) has not given a blind eye to violence against
women. Rather, interventions have been taken formally by the state to minimize violence
against women and girls. In her statement, RukiaIsangaNakadama\(^8\) noted that the
Government of Uganda “declared zero tolerance to violence against women” and has
taken on various strategies to commit to its declaration. Among the various strategies are
legal measures like the domestic violence act (2010), the prohibition of female genital
mutilation (2010), and a child and family protection unit at police stations. In specific
relation to armed conflict, Uganda is signatory to UNSCR 1325 and 1820 that call for
ending violence against women and increasing their participation in peace building
initiatives. Awareness creation about these frameworks has been promoted through the
media, schools and communal organizing involving translation of such instruments into
the local languages (UNICEF, 2014).

\(^8\)She is the Minister of State for Gender, labor and social development. She made the remark during the 57th
While the policies and legal frameworks are in place, scholars have noted that implementation and localization (cultural appropriateness) of such frameworks is limited (Cheney, 2007). Through this study, I too found this conclusion valid in post-conflict northern Uganda. Women and girls face several forms of gendered violence intersecting in various ways and on different levels including individual and societal. Describing power imbalances at the family level one respondent said,

Men are the heads of the households. They control whatever happens in that family. They decide on everything and are held accountable to the community. You have to have permission and approval from men before doing anything in and outside the family, including going to shops and hospitals, planting in the gardens or else you get in trouble. Men own the land, and have the final say.

This respondent elaborates how gender equality frameworks are not grounded in the grassroots systems of organizing population hence the maintenance of power hierarchies. When humanitarian assistance is provided using the existing local structures, which was the case in northern Uganda, it perpetrates violence against culturally and socially marginalized group especially young women.

The policies and treaties signed by the central government do not seem to address the specific needs of northern Uganda. Neither are these government frameworks included in the post-conflict reconstruction guidelines, which government calls on all humanitarian implementers to adapt. Where gender is mentioned, it is treated as a binary between men and women, disregarding critical aspects gender relates with including age, as well as intra-group power dynamics particular categories experience. The bottom line to all this is continued violence especially against young women who are intersectionally
disadvantaged by their gender, age, class, marital status and reproductive capabilities among other things especially in the post-conflict setting.

**Post-conflict Conditions Contributing to Violence against Young Women**

In northern Uganda, there is a general lack of resources. This gives an upper hand to area operating NGOs, religious (Christian) and state programs to intervene on their own terms in the lives of the returned communities because the resources they provide are on demand. Lack of resources, in turn affects allocations geared towards protection of women and girls. This was the case for sexual violence in the return areas studied.

Legal frameworks have sustained sexual violence against women. Various sectors involved in maintaining justice largely disadvantage women and girls in northern Uganda. Participants reported that in some few cases where legal procedures were engaged and the culprits were convicted, imprisonment resulted. However, for the culprit to remain in custody before judgment was passed, the complainant was required to cater for the perpetrator’s stay by way of providing food. Otherwise the suspects would be released due to lack of supplies at the police stations. Given the food insecurity in the region, victims often give up on reporting rape cases even when the rapist is known, because they lack the means to support the perpetrators while in police custody. After experiencing terrible frustration related to this, Atim lamented:

> They (police) asked me for food for the prisoner. But we barely had enough for the family. They let him (rapist) go since I could not feed him and the police could not feed him either. I understand they cannot starve someone in custody. But why would I feed that man (rapist)? I think he gave them something.

Food is a basic need that should be readily available but in situations of distress it becomes a significant issue upon which serious decisions are based. Several studies have
focused on the limited reporting of sexual harassment cases (Human Rights Watch, 2005; Refugee Documentation Center, 2010) but this is not the case here. Atim reported with evidence and available witnesses that she had been raped. The police took up the case but later contacted her to feed the inmate if he was to be held till trial. Although a trial ideally will occur within 48 hours according to the 1995 constitution of the Republic of Uganda, this is rarely the case given the backlog in cases. As Atim explains in the above quote, they “barely had enough for the family” and could not afford to feed another person, moreover a rapist for an unstipulated period of time. This is a major structural challenge to which the state contributes. Even though the state is signatory to various intervention frameworks to prevent violence against women, their commitment to implement actual intervention is still lacking. Recovery assistance thus needs to strategically address sexual-and gender-based violence by for instance improving services in such institutional frameworks.

Besides the national structural challenges, the specific state institutions too have particular limitations. Atim in the above quote notes, “I think he gave them something”. This, in the local context reflects a bribe, indicating a common assumption that the police officers prioritize personal selfish ends over social justice. This is not surprising for many Ugandans given the consistent annual rankings of the Uganda police as the most corrupt government institution with a bribery rate of 48% by 2012 (Human Rights Watch, 2013; Namulondo, 2012;). Having recovery assistance directed towards providing services that promote social justice would therefore improve the status of women in northern Uganda.
The lack of specific programs targeting female youth increases their vulnerability and dependency on especially men but also older women. Men exploited such vulnerability and employed intimidation as a way of controlling and dominating women further. Some responses revealed that men for instance threaten to marry another wife if the wives cannot offer sex or have as many babies as men wanted. While adultery and polygamy is common and not a valid reason for divorce according to the Teso cultural socialization, women admit it is hurting and threatening knowing that you are responsible for your husband’s extra-marital relations. Men therefore blame women for their sexual (mis)conduct as a way of justifying it to women, their families and the community. Husbands in such cases are operating in cultural traditions that disregard women’s consent to sexual intercourse and general reproductive justice. Attaching aid to headship of households therefore facilitates male control over women. Women as a result live in fear, suspicion and jealousy of each other, which affects their ability to collectively work together to challenge the obstacles they encounter. Intimidation also involves the use of abusive and insulting language against women. This lowers their self-esteem and creates more dependency on men. One respondent, Acio-a twenty six year old mother of five lived in the camp for nine years and lost all her parents during the war. She had this to say while referring to her husband.

It is like he made a song out of it. He always tells me I am useless, I have no family and the day he will chase me out of his home, I will live on the street. He reminds me of how he helped me when I had nothing and gave me where to stay… this marriage is good for nothing; he says he was just helping me.
Such comments result in young women internalizing marginalization and violence and accepting it as the normal and expected. Culturally it is very important that a person identifies with a particular family and community as social security. In the case of Acio, she is constantly reminded of how she has nowhere to turn to. Not having a family therefore compels Acio and her children to stay with her abusive husband to provide a sense of belonging. As such she is compelled to work towards the approval of the husband and not her own self. She provides another example of how women give up themselves for the sake of the family and children.

Humanitarian agencies apply a language that does not reflect the lived realities of local communities returning from displacement. As a way of categorizing the population, humanitarian agencies have unconsciously labeled and othered some sections of the population. Agencies refer for instance to under-age combatants as “child-soldiers” and under-age mothers as “child mothers”. In the local context, such terminologies have lasting impacts on labeled individual’s entitlement and worthiness. Communities perceive such individuals as unworthy and undeserving of protection, love, and other services as compared to other “normal “community members. One respondent expressed dissatisfaction with humanitarian assistance concentration on what agencies termed the most vulnerable- child soldiers. She said,

Why are they receiving all the care? It is them that have caused harm to us yet they are being favored by the help programs [as she termed them]. We suffered in the camp and now in the return areas. I just don’t think the programs know what those people did.

It is telling that this respondent refers to them as people and not child soldiers. This culturally would mean these individuals can be held accountable for their actions.
According to this respondent these people lost their naivety and they are not children to be protected and provided for like the humanitarian agencies are doing.

Irrespective of the conditions under which individuals get involved in these socially stigmatized practices, for instance through abductions into armed forces and forced prostitution, society judges them. One female youth aged between 23-25 explained the dilemma she encountered upon return to her village.

Yes I was abducted but I was confined and I did not kill anyone. I did not even hold a gun. I was married off and used to cook for others during the abduction… when we came back, people think we are all murderers and heartless. Neighbors mistreated me and no one wanted to talk to me. That’s how I joined some other friends and we went to the center (town center), and later started prostitution for food, money and other needs.

The community labeling this girl as a murderer resulted in her failure to reintegrate and cope due to stigmatization, discrimination and eventual isolation. The search for belonging in post-conflict settings, however, comes amidst limited alternative choices. Prostitution is not a good alternative because it also is undervalued and judged by the community but at least she has friends to support her and can also earn basic needs. This case demonstrates how public communal biases result in individual violence by limiting access to humanitarian access.

Humanitarian agencies need to work with marginalized individuals as relational beings. I want to note that survival in this particular area (just like many other African settings) depends on communal relations. As such, failing to be recognized as an accepted community member highly affects those individuals who are negatively labeled. Consequently, they search for new communities that will accommodate them. Girls therefore end up taking on risky and at times life threatening ventures that marginalize
them even more. Like the quote above demonstrates, for such young women, prostitution is the only available choice for their survival. But while immediate and daily needs are met, survival sex consequently results in long-term consequences including unwanted pregnancies, and sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS. While prostitution enables survival, such sex in the long run decreases one’s chances of survival, especially when coupled with poor health service provision in (northern) Uganda. One respondent - a young woman and mother of four noted:

People think because we get money from sex, we are not good people. But we use that very money to provide for our families, our children. If I cannot acquire basic needs like food for my children, what do you expect me to do? This is the only alternative…Prostitution booms at the end of the month when government employees (soldiers) receive salary… we are criticized for being loose but no one criticizes us for putting food on the table.

These young women sell sexual services not for selfish interests (personal pleasure) as the general community puts it, but rather, as a sacrifice they make for their own survival and their dependents. Foregoing prostitution would mean starvation and probably death for not only these women, but also those under their care including children, elderly, the differently abled and other members of the family. I therefore find it critical to emphasize the selflessness these women portray. They prioritize their families and especially children higher than themselves, to the extent that they involve themselves in economic activities that are harmful to them for the sake of providing for their families. Humanitarian agencies need to front the contribution such individuals make and use it as a basis for their support rather than capitalizing on the negatively perceived communal aspects.
In African feminist epistemologies (Chilisa, 2012), motherhood is a key aspect that comes along with status, as well as roles, responsibilities, obligations and sacrifice. This reflects what African feminist Njoki Wane had earlier observed in her study among Mbu women in Kenya that “African women act: they don’t sit and watch their children starve” (2003. 17). Women’s “acting” in northern Uganda has been hindered by lack of viable alternatives hence offering sex in return for food and money despite communal disapproval.

Analyzed from a gendered perspective, all blame is put on the female youth and not the government soldiers, businessmen and other males in the community who pay for the sexual services these young women offer. This gendered blaming pathologizes young women as moral transgressors. Communities believe that such humanitarian services should only be benefiting “acceptable” or “descent” members of their community. Such perception is extended and applied by the community and their leaders in identifying who merits benefits from humanitarian programs. As such, the needs, concerns and views of the socially “othered” are downplayed since these (mostly young) women are believed to have made the choice to live such immoral lives. The categorizations largely informed by humanitarian programming therefore entrenches the marginalization young women face by creating a cultural conflict with the humanitarian assistance operations.

Besides labeling, humanitarian assistance also perpetuates violence through exclusion and/or omission. In northern Uganda, there is no specific term to refer to young women/ female youth. As a result, implementation of humanitarian assistance programs...
is faced with the challenge of reaching out to and categorization of female youth/young women. Humanitarian assistance programs use the term youth to refer to both male and female. For communities, this term really denotes young men, hence males dominate youth aid groups as both members and leaders. Divergences of understanding who constitutes a youth, hinders young women from accessing assistance leading to sexual exploitation by group leaders and humanitarian implementers in return for inclusion on the humanitarian assistance programs. One girl said, “the leaders favor their girlfriends. They benefit from every project that comes. They are registered first. When you do not offer them what they want [sex], then your benefit is limited”. Another elaborated how “girls fight over those men with connections to aid. Especially if it is the leaders who register us on behalf of the organizations, and the implementers from organizations who work as field coordinators”.

Culturally among the Ateso (the largest tribal community group in the study area besides the Kumam) one is either a child or an adult. Although the concept youth has been adopted it has been locally perceived to refer to young men only, thus leaving out females. As such, even when programs include female youth, the females tend to disassociate themselves with the categorization of youth given the negative attributes attached to it including promiscuity, rebelliousness and violence.

The violence young women experience can be understood and also explained in both feminist and indigenous perspectives. Early adulthood for instance is now culturally perceived as a survival strategy for females in the post-conflict phase. Given the food shortages and the extreme levels of poverty confronting communities, young girls are
persuaded into marriage, which comes along with sexual, physical and emotional abuse. Apio, a 16-year old fourth wife and mother of one helps to substantiate this point.

When we came back (from the camp), we had nothing. Not even food. My mother offered me out for marriage in return for dowry… the man (her husband) has other wives who hate me because I am younger. They give me a lot of work; they say demeaning statements before our husband, such as I being a bad cook.

This quote has significant messages from both feminist and indigenous epistemologies. The above quote elaborates the local indigenous understanding, the above quote elaborates that dowry is important for forging communal relations to obtain security. In-laws broaden the social network; affirm a sense of belonging and also ensure access to resources including land. Marriage is thus necessities for survival. Apio is disadvantaged in this marriage not only because of her age, but also due to her status as the fourth wife with one child.

According to African indigenous feminist thought, the group has priority over the individual, even though the individual is appreciated within the group (Chilisa, 2012). In northern Uganda, the younger generation is socialized to respect elders (including co-wives). If Apio is to pass as a good wife to the husband, other women and the community must also accept her. Even though the war has undermined adult influence, elders still largely oversee the institution of marriage. Childbirth also is about labor, as women are expected to fulfill their domestic chores with the help of their children. Having one small child means that Apiomust do all the chores by herself. Workload according to this marriage is shared among women on scheduled days. Apio therefore is expected to perform her roles just like other women with more children do on their stipulated days.
This arrangement though unfair to Apio, is a culturally expected way for individual women to demonstrate their abilities in a polygamous marriage. Had Apio been the first wife, irrespective of her age she would enjoy a different kind of status that would put her in a relatively privileged position. This case clearly elaborates how multiple identities can intersect to perpetuate various forms of violence against particular bodies in this case, young women. Here, Apio is disadvantaged by her age (16), marital status (4th wife), and number of children (1), as well as being in an inevitable marriage in a war-torn area.

When post-conflict reconstruction programs fail to take into consideration culturally and locally relevant contexts and meanings attached to social categories, they overlook the experiences of particular community members like Apio. This is because such individuals are ideally youth but would not self-identify as such given the people they relate with and the roles they perform in society. Apio specifically relates with other wives, and performs the roles of a mother and wife, all of which qualify her as an adult. Such individuals like Apio self-exclude themselves from youth activities as a way of respecting communal narratives. Programs targeting youth therefore need to include communal understandings if multiply identified female youth are to benefit.

Drawing on a Black feminist perspective, Apio’s case demonstrates how women are complicit to exploitation, marginalization and subordination of other women due to differences in class and status but also age. Humanitarian assistance exacerbates this marginalization by solely emphasizing gender as a critical category of analysis, disregarding the specific needs of young women grounded in age. When the differences are recognized, society categorizes female youth as “young women”. This indicates their subordinate position within the category “women” as relatively immature, which in turn
marginalizes their participation in decision-making and related womanly roles. The elder women thus take precedence in representing the community of women.

Post-conflict returned communities also use humanitarian assistance as a way of maintaining social order at the expense of the women and youth. Various institutions, including religious and cultural, expect women to accommodate violence in order to maintain harmony in the family and community. Such male-dominated institutions enforce social control over and among women and girls. During conflict and displacement, the cultural and religious moral values were greatly affected and disintegrated largely due to generational gaps created by the displacement (McDonnell & Akallo, 2007; Spitzer & Twikirize, 2013). Some aspects however, remained intact for instance all clan leaders are men because culturally women cannot head clans. Besides gendered limitations, in the return areas, there is a clash of ideologies among the older and the younger generation largely due to differences in life experiences. For instance the older generation believes in collectivization in rural settings while the young prefer individualism in the urban areas. One key informant explained this dilemma.

The youth are not interested in agriculture. Yes they do not have the skills but they also do not want to live in the villages. Otherwise, they would learn, life is about learning. They like the towns, the loud music playing all day, the electricity. They want to do business and have money all them all the time.

If elders continue being the exclusive key pillars informing reconstruction processes and programs, youth will continue losing out due to conflict of interests because their concerns are not addressed. Elders wish to return (shape community) to pre-conflict social settings. The youth on the other hand have varying perceptions about how the community should accommodate emerging dynamics resulting from the conflict.
Evidence exists of prejudicial encounters among various community members largely discrediting the youth. This is especially evident in reproductive health issues including use of contraceptives and abortion, which specifically implicates the young women.

Restrictions on women’s movement and use of contraceptives by husbands as a way of maintaining order in their households is also perpetuated by societal structures and institutions such as health centers. Women for instance are skeptical of buying contraceptives since some health workers pass on the information to their husbands. They thus make use of the few women that have permission from husbands and mothers-in-law to use contraceptives to buy the tablets on others’ behalf. This can result in serious medical consequences since such women do not go through the required medical examinations, nor receive counseling prior to use of such contraceptives about side effects and when to seek medical help. Prescriptions are made based on the health situation and history of the women that have permission to use such contraceptives. In these cases the health centers requiring husbands’ permission.

Community members in their various capacities as health workers, school administrators and so on, also create a form of social surveillance, which perpetuates male dominance resulting in violence against women. One female respondent noted, Some reproductive health centers require that men accept our use of family planning [contraceptives], which is not easy… it is however, also not easy to deal with [secretive use of contraceptives] because if you do not have babies the man can find another woman.

By implementing aid through culturally grounded institutions, humanitarian assistances sustains violence by denying women control over their bodies. Generally, contraceptive use culturally is discouraged due to misinformation and negative
connotations attached to it (Asiimwe et al, 2014), the central one being that women who use it are unfaithful. Contraceptive access and use by youth is even more stigmatized and pathologized by families, cultural elders, and community including health workers and religious leaders. Even within marriage unions, contraceptive use is highly condemned, resulting in high numbers of children produced by women. One respondent noted,

I am married. I and some other married women secretly use family planning (meaning contraceptive use). Our husbands do not know because, we do not tell them, as they do not like it. They think (by use of birth controls), we want/intend to sleep around with other men, sure of no conception. We discuss with other women on our way to the water wells about available tablets (the most widely used method). We cannot go to health centers because you need permission [from husbands], and without sickness why would you go to the health center?

In addition to birth control, humanitarian assistance provided in the form of antenatal and postnatal care, further marginalizes female youth. First, health workers encouraged and at times require women (when major decisions were to be made including use of contraceptives) to obtain those services with their husbands present. While this is a government idea nationally as a way of encouraging male involvement in women’s reproductive health, humanitarian agencies tag assistance in the form of “food for health” to fulfill health center requirements. This ended up negatively impacting some individuals, especially the young women. In post-conflict settings like northern Uganda some girls are raped (Holly, 2013; Porter, 2015), others have multiple partners as a survival strategy, and still others are involved in prostitution—where live sex fetches more money (Bricker, 2009). Therefore, demanding a pregnant woman to come with her husband or partner indicates a norm that presupposes marriage before sex and/or pregnancy. For fear of humiliation and stigmatization from the medical practitioners,
girls choose not to participate in tagged humanitarian services. Girls noted that health center staffs display negative attitudes towards not only post-abortion treatment but also contraceptive use by youth and especially unmarried young women. Health practitioners coming from the same communities also share biased attitudes towards youth use of contraceptives and abortion.

Stigma connected to and criminalization of reproductive practices discourages young women from using such services. Young women do not have a practical way to effectively manage sexual activeness. Contraceptive use is not supported socially. Abortion on the other hand is a criminal offence in Uganda. It cannot therefore be administered under professional medical supervision. Despite its criminalization, abortion is still carried out illegally using unsafe abortion methods such as local herbs and detergent soap (omo and nomi). Such substances are used because they are readily and cheaply available. These, however, have serious health effects including internal damage and severe bleeding. Besides health repercussions, abortion is culturally and religiously stigmatized and often results in isolation for the women when identified. The fear for stigmatization hinders women who experience unsuccessful abortions from accessing medical centers even though post-abortion care is provided in government hospitals and health centers. It is in these very centers that some humanitarian services related to health e.g. “Food for Health”, are provided since the infrastructure are already established. A medical worker in a previous study for instance noted that girls came to seek medical help only in extreme cases of unsuccessful abortions including serious abnormal pain and excessive bleeding (Namuggala, 2010). One female highlighted the silence around the practice:
We cannot talk about it (abortion); people think you are a prostitute and a murderer, a traitor who does not support the rebuilding of the community. Even when you don’t do it, thinking about it is enough for people around you to conclude like that you are morally unfit for the community

Humanitarian assistance should therefore be provided in either separate locations or not be tagged to approval from government health centers since these are unwelcoming to young women due to staff judgment and stigmatization.

The criminalization of abortion also results in self-policing among women. Due to policing relating to contraceptive use and abortion, girls and women in most cases are forced to carry unwanted pregnancies including those resulting from rape, which is a common practice (Holly, 2013). In this case the government of Uganda, by illegalizing and criminalizing abortion is complicit with patriarchal cultural frameworks to indirectly propagate sexual violence against women and girls. Humanitarian assistance contributes to this violence in two ways. First by working through government health centers, it hinders women’s participation. Secondly humanitarian assistance, in the form of “food for health” that caters mainly for expectant and nursing mothers, is meant to encourage motherhood but not necessarily foster women and girls’ individual decisions to be mothers. Aid for instance should be tagged also to post-abortion care as a way of encouraging women to post medical health after termination of pregnancies.

Another institution that sustained violence against young women is the school. Humanitarian assistance provided in school including “food for education” and scholastic materials, is reliant on regular attendance of schools including timely arrival (8.00am) when the class roll (locally referred to as register) is taken and late departures when schools close. Given the gender division of labor, girls have domestic chores to complete
before coming for school and thus report late. The portion of food received by the schools is therefore reduced since teachers mark absenteeism when students reported late. Respondents also reported stigmatization in schools, where girls who are identified as having been pregnant or having aborted are dismissed from school irrespective of the circumstances surrounding the pregnancy or abortion. Given the negative portrayals such girls encounter, re-joining school after childbirth is very difficult. A quick comparison with boys, however, indicates that even when they are responsible for the pregnancies, boys continue with their education. This demonstrates how female youth are disproportionately marginalized in access to and use of resources and services provided in northern Uganda’s post-conflict reconstruction phase.

During the study, participants mentioned that dismissal of pregnant girls was done because schools have to maintain a good reputation in the community by eliminating “bad girls” or else it would become common practice for girls to “misbehave” by being sexually active. This attitude is not unique to northern Uganda but rather a nationwide concern. Ahikire&Madanda (2011) highlight the lack of clear policies about how schools should handle pregnancies. There is a dearth of information on dropouts due to pregnancy and whether they rejoin school or not. There is a lack of a comprehensive framework to address cases of pregnancies in schools. Consequently schools take various measures including expulsion.

Communally the girls are rejected and at times sent away from their families as outcasts (Ahikire&Madanda, 2011). Education is a fundamental human right emphasized in the 1995 Uganda constitution and also the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to which Uganda is signatory. Despite these instruments, girls who fall
pregnant are structurally denied the chance to enjoy this right. Schools, community and even families in northern Uganda turned against the girls since they are expected to be sexually inactive until marriage. By tagging aid to education for instance using “food for education” program, humanitarian agencies disregard the children who may not be attending school for various reasons including pregnancies. Young men on the other hand dominate out-of-school programs.

Humanitarian assistance is framed with certain messages that challenge its principle of neutrality. According to the United States Department of State, (2010) an estimated 85 percent of the Ugandan population is Christian. In a majority Christian nation, Christian organizations have been active in post-conflict phase providing aid, but that the message of abstinence and abortion as sin especially harms young women. Religious teachings function to pathologize and discourage abortion and other practices including condom use especially among the unmarried young population. Christians in Uganda have been known to restrict sexual freedom ranging from homosexuality to sex before and outside marriage among other moral attributes. Christian groups, while not formally recognized as humanitarian oriented, are very active in the post-conflict phase providing material as well as psychological aid in form of counseling, encouraging forgiveness and reconciliation as well as preaching to the communities. Most important for this study is that these fail to acknowledge the fact that youth are sexually active. Emphasis is put on abstinence till marriage. While abstinence is the recommended avenue to guard against unwanted pregnancies, HIV and other Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), it is clear that it is practically very difficult for most youth especially those in war-torn regions like northern Uganda where children in camps were exposed to
sex early, and others have been raped (Gates & Reich, 2010). Preaching against abortion as sin however, puts female youth in a double bind, with no easy way out. The practical realities they encounter tend to conflict with the spiritual and moral guidance into which they have been or are being socialized. This denies youth any control over their bodies and sexual rights, which perpetuates their marginalization. The preaching therefore needs to be applied to the experiences young women encounter in order to deal with the practical issues they face. Being idealistic does not seem to provide a lasting solution to especially female youth related challenges.

Humanitarian recovery assistance contributed to young women’s physical abuse especially through domestic abuse in the form of child abuse and wife beating. Some study participants mentioned that due to poverty, men prefer to sell the agricultural inputs distributed as aid for planting as a way of earning quick cash. When women resist, brutal fights ensue that largely victimize women and children in the household. One key respondent explained violence against women as a common occurrence in many families.

…if for instance women refuse to let husbands sale seeds, hoes and sickles, violence would result in most cases, physically injuring the women…Besides that, women that planted the poor quality seeds that didn’t germinate, were blamed by their husbands for either having a bad omen, or accused of having sold the seeds and using germination failure as an excuse.

This quote references a culturally crucial aspect of being labeled as “having a bad omen”. Men use several kinds of failures especially in marriage to accuse and justify women having a bad omen. This identification affects not only the individual woman involved in the relationship but also her family as well as their departed family members. Such
women are rejected and isolated by the community even during group formation because they are considered obstacles to success and progress. They are perceived to be on bad terms with the spirits and demand divine intervention. From an indigenous perspective, such women are more dangerous yet at the same time more vulnerable than the “rebellious/unruly” women. This is because the community believes they are capable of passing on their misfortune to their children and affecting the next generation. Such women thus risk losing their marriages, sense of identity and belonging as members disassociate with them on various levels. This is locally perceived as the greatest form of marginalization. While such beliefs existed prior to conflict, the post-conflict situation exacerbated it since it is characterized by extreme poverty. Failed agricultural production, death of animals and general stagnation economically are locally used to justify possession with a bad omen.

Humanitarian aid also contributes to theft and arson. The criteria used to distribute assistance often times results in disgruntled community members who became jealous. Some members receive more than they needed while others are barely surviving. Coupled with poor storage mechanisms, theft results. According to my findings, youth dominate in this activity. Given the reluctance of the police to investigate cases and hold culprits accountable, communities resort to destroying suspected thieves’ houses (many of which are grass thatched) by use of fire. Burning down one’s house also requires physical relocation where possible.

As the preceding discussion demonstrates, humanitarian assistance provision has facilitated violence, discrimination and marginalization against young women through the institutions in private and public spaces including schools, streets and homes, as well as
political, economic, social and legal institutions (Barak, 2003; Dolan, 2009). While the returned population is seriously challenged by the assistance, humanitarian agencies also face a number of challenges, which affect the operations of their services and programs.

**Challenges Facing Humanitarian Agencies**

Humanitarian agencies face challenges especially in the implementation of their services. These challenges vary from individual employees, to national and international constraints. The most prominent challenge is the insecurity within the northern region of Uganda. Although post-conflict has been declared, some respondents assert that the region is not fully secure. The area still has bombs planted in the bushes. Respondents mentioned that the army had on several occasions discovered ammunition left behind by the LRA rebels. Such ammunition poses a threat to both humanitarian implementers, and the local population as they garden, search for fuel wood and move through the disserted bushes.

Besides intra-community violence, the neighboring Karamajong cattle rustlers who attack communities to grab cattle and other animals including goats provided by the recovery programs. This further perpetuates insecurity and fear among communities. This fear renders resettling communities reluctant to strategically invest in livestock, which is their backbone. Even though the major war between LRA and the GoU has ended, the region still is characterized by insecurity.

In addition to these challenges lingering from the war, the region also is encountering a proliferation of mob justice among community members. Some key participants noted that, due to the long period of violence in the region, communities have given up on peaceful conflict resolution strategies and largely apply violence even
insimple situations. I also observed that insufficient justice frameworks that let criminals like rapists move freely around the area instigate mob justice within communities. Communities have lost trust in institutions like the police and have resorted to handling issues themselves. Mob justice in the form of arson for instance negatively affects efforts of humanitarian projects, while contributing to property reduction. Land wrangles on the other hand have resulted in destruction of gardens, thus affecting the strategic goals of the humanitarian agencies.

Another challenge facing humanitarian implementers is management related. Funders and donors set the mode of operation that at times is not applicable in the local context. One example already explained divergent understandings of the family structure. Funders suggest that family be used as the basic unit for assistance distribution thus relying on the head of the household. Yet participants explain that the structure of the family in northern Uganda is not organized according to the nuclear model that most funders anticipate. Families in northern Uganda reside in homesteads with several families under the leadership of one elder. Focusing on the household heads therefore disregards the other families within the homestead because assistance may not be distributed equally among the families. The families that are marginalized most are those households headed by youth, who are culturally expected to not question the rulings and decisions of the elders (the heads of the homesteads).

Corruption by government officials is another constraint for the recovery frameworks. Government officials in charge of approving programs being implemented in particular regions were described as corrupt by key informants. They demand a fraction of the money meant for the returning populations. This greatly affects the
resources available for the population, which already have been decreased by donors after
the declaration of the post-conflict phase. Referring to government officials, one key
informant jokingly explained;

…these guys must and I am saying must be fed or else your program will never be
approved. Even after initial approval, you constantly feed them on quarterly basis when
evaluations are going on. Short of that your programs get the worst reviews and may be
discontinued…

“Feeding” government officials means being given bribes especially in the form
of money. This informal organizational culture has been established, normalized and thus
expected by both government officials and implementing organizations within the region.
The prime minister’s office (OPM), the office in charge of the reconstruction programs,
has been grappling with a scandal in which at least Sh60 billion meant for Peace,
Recovery and Development Programme (PRDP) for the northern region and Karamoja
Sub-region was stolen (Obore, 2013). This scandal involves politicians and officials in
the Central Bank of Uganda and the Ministry of Finance. Although the government
refunded the Shs33.8 billion which was donor funded as a condition for further donor
support, this greatly reduced funds available for the reconstruction phase in northern
Uganda. Corruption thus starts at the center and spreads down to the district levels of
government. This explains why implementing agencies are constrained and find it
difficult to provide quality service. Another key informant, working with one of the non-
governmental organization stated,

…we are caught between two hard rocks; the donor and the government officials. Donors
demand accountability of all money while the officials take off significant portions that it
is very hard to efficiently come up with budgeted infrastructure and services

168
Natural disasters provide yet another test to humanitarian programming. Drought and floods specifically have confronted Northern Uganda. These natural disasters afflict both implementing agencies and specific families including those of formerly displaced communities. The 2007 floods for instance destroyed gardens and collapsed houses leading to a food crisis and homelessness (IRIN, 2007). The government is not in position to prevent or even contain such calamities, which have continued throughout the years since then. IRIN notes that in 2012, floods had displaced at least 15,000 people from their homes. Study participants also highlighted that such heavy rains and floods result in health risks for both returnees and implementers including water borne diseases like diarrhea, cholera and dysentery. These effects further pressure already constrained health services in the region. Informants also noted in addition that floods cut off bridges and roads making access by humanitarian service providers difficult. The rains and flooding for instance rendered Wera road between Soroti and Katakwi impassable, while completely cut off the Ajeleik Bridge to Amuria District and the Awoja Bridge to Soroti (Northern Uganda Data Center, 2011). From the point of accountability, implementing agency representatives reported that such destructions affect evaluations and eventual funding. One elaborated;

We distributed seeds and encouraged families to plant food. It was however, all eroded, or destroyed by the floods and there was nothing to show to our funders. These floods affected even the construction projects. It sets the anticipated progress back

Humanitarian agencies operate amidst multiple constraints including the unavoidable ones like floods and droughts but also manmade challenges like corruption. It is frustrating that the government institutions that would be working to challenge this kind
of behavior are involved in the habits. Strategies to improve the conditions in northern Uganda therefore have to integrate the various levels under from which the challenges emanate.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that single categorical analysis based on gender or age misrepresents the experiences of female youth who simultaneously occupy these multiple categories. Single level analysis while dealing with humanitarian recovery assistance is not sufficient, and results in violence against young women. This is because informal (social, cultural, religious), and formal (humanitarian and government) structures work hand in hand to marginalize women and girls. It is important to come up with holistic approaches to ensure that humanitarian programs do not entrench patriarchal dominance that harms women in recovery assistance programming in northern Uganda. This demands consideration of institutional and structural violence while acknowledging the interconnections and overlaps such violence has with interpersonal and individual violence.

Finally, centering the voices of the most marginalized is a crucial component in post-war reconstruction. As Alcoff (2008) contends, the problems of speaking for others include misrepresentation, marginalization and exclusion that may ultimately undermine the very assistance humanitarian agencies seek to provide. While the armed violence by Lord’s Resistance Army has been a major contributor, the humanitarian crisis in northern Uganda is also informed by other factors including drought, floods, historical marginalization, poor infrastructure, and diseases. All these factors must be considered if communities are to attain self-sustenance.
Despite the challenges that confront humanitarian assistance, this assistance nonetheless has played a great role in responding to the mandate of ending human suffering in northern Uganda by providing basic needs like food and medical care. Due to limited intersectional analysis relating to gender, age, parenthood and marital status, however, it has perpetuated violence especially against women and girls in the form of sexual harassment, physical abuse and psychological torture as discussed above. This, demands immediate attention. While communities face challenges, implementing agencies also have constraints involving natural disasters and insecurity within the region, administrative hindrances involving funders’ unrealistic conditions as well as corruption especially from the government officials. Improving the conditions of formerly displaced communities in northern Uganda necessitates a holistic approach that brings together the various stakeholders involved including donors, government (structures and institutions), non-governmental agencies, cultural and religious leaders as well as the returning communities to map out circumstances and lay strategies. Stakeholders need to speak to each other if sustainable return and resettlement is to be attained in northern Uganda.

Given the preceding discussion, I call for the implementation of programs to recognize and address the diversity of experiences within the category “women” in order to achieve more equitable societies in the aftermath of conflict. An intersectional approach that examines other factors that inform intra-group gender relations including age, motherhood and marital status is therefore necessary for a peaceful and sustainable post-conflict reconstruction.
CHAPTER FIVE
WOMEN’S AGENCY, RESILIENCE AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONFLICT AND POST-CONFLICT SITUATIONS

Introduction

Women’s experiences of conflict can be both positive and negative for women and society. This chapter focuses on the agency and resilience of women during conflict and in post-conflict situations in northern Uganda. To bring out their agentic nature, I discuss the coping strategies women adopted amidst challenging circumstances in abduction, encampment and in return areas. I explore the capabilities marginalized women in northern Uganda demonstrated in maintaining livelihoods and survival. In discussing resilience, I go beyond the impact of the civil war to include other challenges the region is undergoing. Northern Uganda, besides war and displacement, has encountered many problems including absolute poverty largely explained by unbalanced regional development, food insecurity due to natural disasters like drought and floods, cattle rustling especially from the neighboring Karamajong cattle rustlers, and outbreaks of disease. It is thus important to understand and acknowledge how women have managed to survive through these complex multidimensional challenges. This is one way of decolonizing the conventional understanding of women’s identity in war as entirely victims and thus vulnerable in need of protection from and by men.

For a better appreciation of women’s resilience especially in responding to the effects of conflict, I explain the conditions that result in the use of certain resilience strategies and give a context-specific understanding of agency and resilience. This is
followed by a brief overview of women’s experiences during conflict and post-conflict phases. This sets the foundation for the mechanisms women applied as a way of survival in which I provide a detailed examination of the strategies they organize. After this analysis, I present the conclusions and recommendations of the study.

**Contextualizing Resilience and Agency**

In this study I define resilience to mean “the capacity of communities in complex socio ecological systems to learn, cope, adapt and transform in the face of shocks and stresses” (Mercy Corps, 2015.12). Specifically, I concentrate on how women and youth in Soroti adapt to changing socio-economic situations, and transform their identity and perceptions in order to survive under the changing circumstances during displacement, encampment and return. Resilience specifically involves how women make and maintain important connections and relationships between themselves and with other people in the community. I also analyze the strategies they adapt to engage systems and structures creating their vulnerabilities.

Agency, for purposes of this chapter, is a provisional process of social engagement which is informed by the past, oriented towards the future, and rooted in the present circumstances (Emirbayer&Mische, 1998). I thus conceptualize agency as a continual process involving individuals and groups at varying levels. I examine how women and youth evaluate and reconstruct the conditions they experience in the post-conflict phase while they look back to their pre-conflict and during conflict experiences. I link post-conflict experiences to the historical experiences of the region (including armed conflict and colonialism) while analyzing the impact they have for the future. I examine the various forms of oppression, the power relations embedded within them, and the
simultaneous subordination of women in the social, political and economic structures. I emphasize how women as individuals and in groups intentionally determine their actions depending on available resources to achieve their desired goals.

Unlike refugees (who are displaced outside their home countries and are a responsibilities UNHCR), the IDPs pause a complex situation. They are legally still under the protection and care of their home governments, which at times have contributed to their predicament for instance in the case of northern Uganda. The guiding principles on internal displacement are encouraged to guide how to deal with situations of internal displacement. The protocol is however, not legally binding to any stakeholders. As such nation state governments cannot be held accountable for their actions or failure to act in relation to IDPs. I agree with scholars’ observations that internal displacement is a war crime and a crime against humanity to which no one is held accountable (Branch, 2007) despite the world have 38 million internally displaced persons (IDMC, 2015).

The years dominated by the civil war had profound gendered impacts for communities in northern Uganda but with gendered and age differentials. For instance the war affected women’s self- perceptions, yet at the same time impacted men’s perceptions of women in northern Uganda (Walusimba, 2013). Women returning from armed groups were able to reintegrate socially and were more psychologically resilient compared to men (Annan et al, 2011). This however, does not mean women faced lesser challenges (Soto, 2009). The following section examines women’s experiences and strategies during conflict.
Experiences and Strategies During Displacement

Displacement in this chapter refers to experiences both in the “bush” and encampment. I refer to respondents who lived with the rebels as having lived in the bush, while those who lived in internally displaced people’s (IDP) camps as encamped. In the previous chapters I have discussed more of the experiences in encampment and here I will focus on the experiences of those who lived in the bush. The national army controlled the IDP camps while the Lord’s Resistance Army rebel forces controlled the bush. Respondents explained that “the bush” was a metaphoric concept that meant, “Where the rebels lived”. This was not a permanent physical area of residence but shifted from time to time. One respondent for instance explained that when the rebels attacked, the villages (residential areas) became the bush and all civilians were expected to vacate such areas. Importantly, communities had to come up with strategies to avoid the bush. Most respondents vividly recalled the night shifts, commonly referred to by scholars as “night commuting”/ “night commuters”. One respondent elaborated,

In the night, the villages became the bushes; we ceased sleeping in our houses unless you are ready to be abducted. We moved from villages at around 5 pm, before it got dark and walked to town centers, churches and other public spaces, even streets to avoid abductions. The rebels normally attacked in the night. We would return in the mornings to farm, plant and harvest.

Another confirmed, “everyone moved-children, young adults, women and men. We all moved. If you feared for your life you moved”. In the evenings, families would vacate their houses for town centers, which were perceived to be safer, compared to the villages. Carrying beddings, food and other basic needs for the night, masses would trek out only to return late morning when the rebels are believed to have returned to the bush.
While civilians developed survival mechanisms during the insurgence, those respondents who were taken by the rebels (referred to henceforth as abducted) improvised differently. Over the duration of the war, the LRA rebels attacked villages in northern Uganda to take food and animals but also to abduct people as “recruits” for the fighting forces but also as cooks, servants and wives. These included able-bodied men, women and children. They were restricted in movement and association, and lived under close supervision until they attained the trust of the rebel leaders. Any signs of mistrust from the rebel leaders resulted in the murder of the abducted person. One former abductee explained that pretense was the most commonly used strategy of survival. She elaborated how no one was sincere in the bush. This was because abductees strived to portray loyalty to and acceptance of the beliefs of the rebels. Irrespective of the methods of conscription, survival demanded a public display of voluntary obedience to everything the leaders required, including indoctrination of newcomers. One respondent narrated,

We even said wrong and bad things about our communities to the rebels, all in the name of winning their [rebel leaders] favor, to show that we have really crossed over to their side. We really pretended a lot. Even when you plan to escape tomorrow (the following day), today you keep humble and polite.

As abductees prepared to escape, another strategy automatically came in, which was the hiding of food. Returned former abductees that had escaped explained that if one wanted to survive while on the run, they had to have food to sustain them; the only way to access food was through the commanders and their wives, however, so they would steal and hide the food.

We would hide some of the food from the supervisors. Just in case you have a chance to escape, you have something to feed on. You know, you cannot tell how long you will run
or keep in hiding. Because you don’t even know the route, you just keep running hoping to get to a town or a home and ask for help.

Respondents who were rescued by the Uganda Peoples Defense Forces (UPDF) through ambushes on the rebel camps didn’t have to go through this but rather had to demonstrate to the army that they were abducted and not part of the rebel groups. These had to give out information relating to rebels and demonstrate their urge to return home to the army. Otherwise the army would hold them as war captives.

Change of names was another important strategy used both in the bush and return areas. Respondents explained that to change one’s name helped to forget past memories and create a new sense of identity thereby facilitating reintegration and resettlement. One young woman said,

When people don’t call you by the name under which you killed or suffered, then you can forget as time passes by, that you have shed human blood. You start being a normal human being again.

They explained further that when stigmatized and rejected by their communities, girls would move to other areas where they would take on new names to mark a change in their lives. Such girls would take on names that implied the kind of life they wished to live. Some of the names included Peace, Mercy, Charity and Patience. These names carried a contextually relevant meaning by calling for unity and love among community members. While naming in Uganda is normally gender specific, these names tended to be gender neutral emphasizing the responsibility for all community members to work towards harmony and peace. Proclaiming out loud what they wanted was one way for the participants to get closer to life they desired. These young women desire a peaceful life
where people get along with each other, are patient with one another and are not
judgmental, especially to returnees from the bush. These respondents had expected
returnee areas to be homes yet they continued to be torture zones due to violence,
discrimination and marginalization. When involved in socially unacceptable activities
like prostitution, girls explained that they also used different names to protect their social
identity by disguising as different people. Girls embraced their “community names” when
they participated in socially acceptable behavior. They thus had two sets of names
strategically used according to location and occupation.

The rebels also used name changing as a strategy to control their abductees. While
some young women changed names on their own accord, others had no control over their
names. Some rebel leaders at times changed the names of abductees as a way of asserting
power and also erasing memories of family and community by changing who the
abductees had previously known themselves to be. One respondent explained how she
was “re-baptized” with a new name by one of the rebels upon abduction. She said,

When we were taken, one of the men gave me a name. He re-baptized me. He said your
name is Agnes [not real name] and you will be called like that. When others asked for my
name as we walked, he would turn and look at me and I would respond Agnes. Everyone
thought that was my name and all the time in the bush they referred to me as such.

While this naming was against her will and control, it served Agnes well in the post-
conflict stage. When I asked whether she changed it when she returned home, Agnes
explained, “No I didn’t because people in the village called me by my original name.
They didn’t know that I was also Agnes (the name given to her by the rebel leader on
abduction and she was referred to as such till she escaped). It’s like I had two people in
me”. For this respondent, Agnes remained in the bush while the “original” community
member returned to the village. This helped her overcome some of the trauma and accept her new life ahead.

Rebel leadership in addition rewarded violence, exertion of power and control especially against women. Male dominance and control shifted beyond names to include women’s bodies especially in the form of sexual exploitation through rape and forced impregnation. Instead of protecting women as the logic of masculine protection puts it, rebels encouraged violence against women. Rebel forces considered bravery and fierceness as critical qualities for promotion among abductees.

Respondents mentioned that rebels had something different in relation to seniority and leadership compared to the cultural construction of power and masculinity. While traditionally age (functional and relational) is very important, and men are responsible for protection of and provision to their families, respondents highlighted that violence and commitment influenced seniority and authority in the LRA. As such, young men who demonstrated willingness to kill, rape and burn huts had higher chances of promotion than the older men, many of whom were abducted who did not find pleasure in violence. The rebels termed non-violence cowardice, a sign of limited commitment to the cause of the rebel group. Power dynamics within the bush largely centered on positioning women as objects on to which men’s dominance was manifested. In his discussion of civil war in Sierra Leone, Chris Coulter termed this kind of hierarchical construction “violent meritocracy” (2009. 107) which is common in contemporary rebel/civil war activities.

Tired of constantly being treated as the other by the fighting forces, some women joined armed forces as a survival strategy (also see ISIS WICCE, 2001). In the armed forces, women worked in various capacities as fighters and spies while others became
wives to soldiers. During conflict, securing protection was vital. Protection included security from violent attacks, safety from rape and sexual exploitation, and protection from hunger. One female youth explained,

Some women joined the army in search for protection. For us who stayed in the camp, safety came with being in the company of armed forces. If men came to learn that you have a relationship with the army men, they would not much disturb you. Having a relationship with man in the army was a source of security for many women. Army men give some money and a sense of security. They protect your family too.

While this reaffirms conventional constructions of the masculine as the protector and feminine as the protected, respondents explained that being in the company of the masculine male provided some sense of security. Masculinity was thus crucial for the armed forces, yet it disadvantaged the civilian men. Civilian men during conflict were emasculated through restricted movement that restrained their ability to protect and provide for their families. Women therefore consciously made the decision to be involved with armed forces and used their bodies as the tool for their own safety as well as the safety of their families.

Some women survived by voluntarily submitting to sexual relationships, especially with rebel commanders. They also tried to demonstrate support and volunteer to do activities that were suitable for women. Such activities included serving as intelligence agencies in the form of spies. It also involved mobilization of food, especially in cases where the rebels ran short of food. Women would bring out the food hidden for escape. Women also would offer drugs for the rebels. They planted marijuana gardens around the houses, which they would dry and keep in times of plenty and bring it
out when needed. This would give women privileged positions and reduce their susceptibility to rape and general abuse.

While all the strategies discussed above were important, the respondents agreed that in the bush the most crucial strategy was to escape and return home. Yet escape also was the most risky because if one was caught, they were assured of death. Escape, which demanded teamwork was difficult since abductees were suspicious of each other. In trying to win the favor of leaders, some abductees would report colleagues suspected of planning to escape. When one was caught, the respondents explained that they were treated as traitors and spies who were escaping in order to provide information to the government forces. As a way of discouraging others, rebel leaders punished culprits by killing them publically and at times promoting and/or rewarding the person who reported. In addition, the LRA used violence as a way of disempowering older abducted men by having them take orders from young ones. This greatly impacted the conduct of young men in the post-conflict phase because they were used to being rewarded for what the community considered bad behavior. Hence, the violence that has continued especially against women in return areas in the form of rape and defilement is partly associated to experiences during conflict. A detailed examination of post-conflict experiences follows.

**Experiences and Strategies in Areas of Return**

Prior to conflict, northern Uganda was established as an agriculturally sustained region. Agriculture provided livelihood in the form of food and sale of surplus plant and animal production. Land was communally accessed through lineages. This structure was, however, greatly affected by the war and displacement, which turned communities into dependents surviving on food handouts. As a way of regaining self-sustenance, the
population in northern Uganda returned to agriculture upon return. Prior to conflict, northern Uganda had clear distinctions on the gendered division of household labor, especially in relation to production of food and cash crops. Women mainly concentrated on subsistence food production while the men dominated the growing of cash crops, marketing of produce and trade. This gender structure however, changed during displacement and shifted the power dynamics in the households. Family survival now became dependent on women. In addition, findings revealed that food crops including millet, maize, groundnuts, cassava and sweet potatoes, and vegetables became income-generating crops. This changed blurred the dichotomy between cash crops and food crops hence impacting the gender division of labor in the region.

The shift in crop categorization brought in income. It also, however, negatively affected food security in the household. With food crops now becoming commercial crops, there is no clear-cut line between what is specifically for food and what is for income generation. This has resulted in subsequent conflicts between wives and husbands. On the one side, women want and try to make decisions on what portion of the crops grown should be reserved for subsistence/home consumption. Because the very same crops can earn cash, men want to dictate what should be sold off in the market. Accordingly, conflicts emerge over rationing of crops grown, as well as over money earned from sale of crops and the limited land on which crops are grown.

Humanitarian programs during post conflict have promoted the increased production of food crops, incomes from sale of surplus production and general economic empowerment for households and families. This has led to unforeseen negative implications including food insecurity, economic abuse and exploitation of women,
increased vulnerability of women and increased restraints in accessing and using land. Economic empowerment in the household does not necessarily result in reduced vulnerability for women in northern Uganda. In explaining the effect of commercial production, one key informant explained that environmental degradation in the form of bush burning was on the rise, and land wrangles escalated as the demand for big chucks of cultivatable land increased.

Commercial farming demands big pieces of land. As men take bigger portions of the available land, women and youth chances for use of land get slimmer. Given that the land had grown into bushes, communities use bush burning as a way of clearing the land. This is environmentally not recommended. In addition the practice also destroys unintended plantations.

Commercial farming further reduced women’s access to and use of land, yet it intensified their workload as they produced food crops but for sale under the control of men. Besides domestic challenges, farmers encountered constraints in the form of impassable roads due to floods especially during the wet seasons, hindering marketing of agricultural produce.

Amidst such challenges, gendered identities emerged as an essential organizing principle that worked along with age and other identifying markers especially marital status and motherhood. Women explained that their individual experiences shared a lot of similarities that they started framing such concerns as women’s concerns that necessitated them to come up with strategies to resolve them hence fostering their unity. The coping mechanisms women employed thus varied from individual to group strategies. Individual strategies generally involved the use of the body while group interventions largely used gender-specific group strategies. Women used a number of
strategies to challenge male domination and in the process demonstrate their capabilities and resilience.

**Challenging Victimization**

With a general view of the experiences discussed above, I wish to emphasize that, women and (female) youth generally in northern Uganda challenge victimization grounded in gender but also age. They are agentic and resilient, and devise mechanisms for survival amidst constrained environments. The following section of the chapter centers on women’s agency and resilience in post-conflict northern Uganda.

Some women, especially those with formal education, have participated in initiatives geared towards peace building. At the national level for instance, Betty Bigombe, the then resident minister of northern Uganda, participated in peace negotiations in 1993. At an institutional level, Rev.Sister RacheleFassera, the deputy head mistress of St. Mary’s High School Aboke, on the other hand, met with rebels relating to release of abducted girls (Kalifani, et al. 2008). In spite of such demonstrated ability, women generally are neglected in post-conflict peace building in northern Uganda. While formally unrecognized, this has not stopped women from working towards peace and development at their various levels.

Displacement hindered civilian men’s abilities to provide for and protect their families through confinement that restricted movement and association with other men. This shifted household headship and important decision making responsibilities to the women. In the post conflict, this pattern of male absence from the households has persisted as compared to women’s increased participation. Women have attained a new status that they are struggling to maintain as providers and protectors in the post conflict.
Even in homes where men reside as husbands, women contribute to household survival. One respondent explains women’s positive attitude to this change,

When you have a problem, you are forced to think so hard to find a solution or else you die. It is a matter of life and death. This situation [war] changed everything for the worst; it created a problem, which we had to solve by ourselves. New problems need new solutions.

The conservatives and cultural gatekeepers within the community nonetheless do not welcome “new” solutions. Women’s progressive survival strategies including working for pay outside the domestic spaces, competing with men for work spaces and doing work that the community considers inappropriate for instance sex work. Women working outside domestic spaces have encountered resistance especially through limited support from men and conservative women. Individual women who embrace such changes also confront criticism and pathologization for working to sustain their families. One woman metaphorically stated, “The seeds of the fruit are within the fruit”. This meant that it was upon women to realize their abilities within themselves to step up, provide for and defend their families, especially in the absence of men who were culturally responsible for maintenance of the household. Women therefore sought to fulfill their traditionally stipulated roles in addition to engaging “new roles,” especially economic provision and protection, which originally were understood as men’s roles. Given changing circumstances, women were required to apply new strategies, which often are culturally deviant, such as sex work.

Women risk life and status for the sake of survival for themselves and their families. Sex work is culturally and religiously despised, stigmatized and pathologized. Besides the social negative attitude, prostitution is also a crime in Uganda. Women are
challenging the social construction that frames sex work as “perverted” by using the income earned to maintain socially important aspects like the family.

Besides individual strategies like sex work, women initiated women-specific safe spaces. Women in return areas formed into groups with the objective of improving their living conditions and providing support for each other. Women use such spaces for mutual experience sharing, counseling and guidance over challenging situations. While they do not hold public demonstrations, women encourage each other to keep strong and resilient within their individual spheres. Group formation greatly improved women’s skills in standing up for what they believed in for the survival of their families. While pre-conflict social networks greatly suffered during the war, some central tenets to culture were retained such as collectivity and gender-based group support. Although women acted and experienced situations individually, they realized their experiences were not unique but rather similar with other women’s experiences. This recognition allowed them to collectively develop strategies such as women using contraceptives secretly without the permission of their husbands.

Women-formed groups initiated mechanisms for pooling their resources together and economically supporting each other free of men’s influence and control. One example is the utilization of savings and credit schemes. Women who formed groups normally came from the same village and shared common features including being wives and mothers, as well as being heads of households (husbands available but not providing) who largely did not provide for their families. Shared experiences, challenges and aspirations could result in groups of women with a membership ranging from 10-20 members. Members periodically, mostly bi-weekly, would pool together an agreed upon
specified amount of money. The collected amounts of money would be made available to members, who would pay back the loans with affordable minimum interest.

Humanitarian agencies used such groups as a way of reaching targeted communities with support. That was because such groups were more organized and committed. For example one key informant working with an NGO humanitarian group mentioned,

Tukum women’s group is a success story of such a mechanism where women used the group to improve their welfare as women and families. We are taking lessons from this group to sensitize other women. Women have used the money to improve their gardens, start small businesses like stalls in the open market as well as buying bicycles for easy transportation.

Besides seeking permission, transportation mechanisms reduce women’s dependency on men; owning a bicycle is a big step for women in northern Uganda. The bicycle is the most used type of transportation in the study area. Bicycles are advantageous because they can go through small paths and reach distant areas where open roads do not. Bicycles require no fuel/gas and thus more sustainable for the poor population in the northern Uganda area. A woman owning a bicycle helps with transporting produce to the market, taking children to health centers and making it possible to attend distantly located meetings in time.

Women also have initiated and institutionalized among themselves an unwritten code of ethics and rules pertaining especially to privacy and loyalty in solving women-centered challenges like contraceptive use. Although group formation requires paper work including written guiding principles indicating terms of payment and consequences in case of failure and other group guidelines, women in groups also operate on unwritten informal yet critical organizational culture rules. Given the sensitivity of matters
discussed in the groups, secrecy and loyalty of members is emphasized and nothing is shared outside the group boundaries.

I did not know about family planning until I came to the women’s group. They told me how to use the tablets (pills) to avoid unwanted pregnancies in order to plan for my children. It is also known by every group member that members’ experiences are not discussed with the general public. This is good because you feel safe with the group members.

Groups thus built an alternative complementary option for identity, sense of belonging and support, and a safety net from abuse from the mainstream social organizing frameworks including the family and religion, which are largely male-dominated. To outsiders, women’s groups discuss general concerns such as need for farming improvement techniques, land management, storage and marketing of produce and child protection and development. Such framing of groups was strategic in limiting male intervention and resistance.

Creating group identities also challenges the labeling and blaming of specific individual women. Women noted that working in groups minimized husbands, families and general communities blaming of individual women. One woman said,

When you are alone, your husband is suspicious that you can be cheating. Even family members start giving you funny looks as if you are doing something fishy. You know how someone looks at you; they don’t say anything but then sarcastically smile? That’s how it is. But if you are in a group of other women, no one questions.

Groups were therefore crucial for the reintegration of women. They are empowering to individual women by challenging obstacles faced individually. The collective power of the group provided a ground for women to access and utilize individual rights and freedoms.
Women also organized and forged a group identity that guaranteed them financial independence. Groups broke the collateral barriers that were a hindrance to accessing credit from formal institutions including banks. Despite being largely self-initiated, group formation became a prerequisite for aid by implementing agencies to offer financial aid. Many of the recovery reconstruction agencies, government programs and Civil Society Organizations acknowledged the power of collectivization. Consequently they required returned communities to belong to groups as a precondition for accessing services provided in the form of cash loans, farm inputs and/or trainings. Grouping made accessing, and supervising of communities easier for the humanitarian programs. This approach was highly productive for women, most of whom lacked collateral to acquire loans in traditional financial institutions like banks. Working in groups provided access to such services. Group members served as collateral security for each other since they knew each other and lived as neighbors.

Group formation and participation, however, created some challenges. In a bid to benefit from several different assistance programs, women often belonged to multiple groups simultaneously. Yet the organizations supporting the various groups had different demands for group members. This constrained women financially as they had to contribute to various groups weekly. Women also allocated a lot of time to be able to participate in the different group meetings. Scholars have termed such participation as “over participation” or “burden of participation” (Ahikire, Madanda&Ampaire, 2012. 45). Scholars have also argued that the single most important gender-related challenge in northern Uganda reconstruction is overwhelming responsibilities placed upon the women
(Ahikire, Madanda & Ampaire, 2012). This is complicated because women have placed this responsibility burden on themselves in the need to meet family needs through fulfilling humanitarian assistance demands. Women are creating a bridge between the family and public and thus absorb all the constraints.

While some women complained about over participation, others lamented the exclusions engulfed in the process of group formation. Not everyone could belong to a group given their past experiences and lived realities. Groups also had membership number limitations (at most 20 members), and the formation of new groups required skills including management and accounting that many women did not possess. Secondly, women’s participation was affected by their marital status. Single and widowed women participated more fully and took decisions without any prior consultations with men. This was different compared to married women under the control of men (their husbands) and their in-laws. Due to inclusion and participation hindrances, even the women’s groups marginalized some particular women including sex workers and single mothers. Such individuals resorted to other survival mechanisms including relocation.

Some respondents identified a change of location as a way of dealing with stigmatization and mistreatment by family and community generally. Relocating to new communities that had less information about one’s particular past experiences (for instance former child soldiers, abductees and prostitutes) enabled them to be accommodated and forge a sense of community membership. While they acknowledged to the challenges of entering a new community without social networks, they thought it
was worth trying rather than living in constant torture, blame and judgment. Relocation allowed change of physical location, getting rid of the negative labeled identity, and letting go of past experiences that held certain individuals captive. Relocation in addition also applied to situations where one leaves happening site of active violence. Respondents however, clarified that although relocation reduces confrontation, it does not mean giving up on what one believes. One respondent said,

I walk away to avoid causing a public scene and also show respect to the person accusing me. Since I was a soldier, people in the community think we ‘bush children’ cannot control anger and violence. The people witnessing will know I did not have a problem but if we both shout, then as a woman I lose. I will walk away but continue doing what I believe I need to do to survive.

Walking away works hand in hand with strategic silence. Feminist scholars have elaborated silence as a form of resistance and empowerment for the marginalized groups. Feminisms nonetheless note that silence is not homogenous since it takes various forms, some of which are victimizing. Applicable in explaining strategic silence is what scholars refer to as “engaged silence” (Rowe & Sheena, 2013). Engaged silence is a skill that subordinate groups learn to deliberately control their thoughts and desires. The marginalized consider such thoughts problematic and denying such voice is emancipating. This is what the respondents explained as a strategy they adopted with their colleagues. According to study participants, silence means being able to control one’s tongue permits reflection and allows healing. A formerly abducted child noted that even when insulted, silently “walking away helps you to overcome past negative memories and current outrageous expectations… then when you are alone you can cry”.

Past memories of the former soldiers mainly involved use of violence in resolving
conflicts. Communities continue holding expectations of violence and anger from returned child soldiers. Other scholars have also noted that generally, society expects former child soldiers to be rude and disrespectful as well as hot tempered (Lombard & Twikirize, 2014). From the perspective of the former soldiers, being able to overcome such expectations of being violent is a big step toward being accepted into the community as “normal” people.

Both silence and “walking away” are however, context specific. As African indigenous epistemologies clarify, the position of the elders is highly respected. In northern Uganda, youth are socially not expected to talk back but rather be silent before elders unless asked to speak. Silence in such a context is not a sign of empowerment but rather subordination. Feminist scholars termed this enforced silence, which complies with hegemonic power structures (Rowe & Sheena, 2013). In northern Uganda the young generation is compelled to keep silent and to not talk back to elders. In addition, one is not expected to walk away when elders are speaking, and when this happens punishment may be expected. The context under which silence and walking away are used determines whether these actions connote agency or vulnerability. Where youth initiate the silence they are acting as agentic beings but where social construction does not permit them to talk back then they are vulnerable. Respondents in this study clearly understood the difference and explained how they silence it as an empowering strategy especially with age mates and in situations where they felt they were not obliged to explain anything.

Ignoring and/or adapting (learning to live) under precarious conditions provided another strategy for survival largely from a gendered perspective. Being an ex-soldier,
abductee and female makes girls more vulnerable. Formerly abducted child mothers for instance suffer from gender-based stigmatization due to having children born in the bush. Because the boys that fathered children do not get to return home with them, the community treats the males with less stigmatization compared to the mothers. Respondents noted that child mother stigmatization is so common that girls learn and get accustomed to it.

We [girls] have no alternative but to ignore and think less about the problem. We cannot do anything about it. Being judged and misunderstood hurts and I think would hurt any human being, but you can ignore for your own good. You act like you did not hear what they said. You see them staring at you and murmur! Yet you know you are at the center of their talk about you.

While respondents used ignoring as a strategy, in my perspective ignoring may result in acceptance and internalization of the mistreatment particular bodies endure. Failing to act is in itself an act that continues to negatively impact the marginalized members in the community, and sustains gender and age inequalities.

Returned communities use early marriages as a strategy to deal with the extreme poverty they were experiencing after the war. Poverty is backed up by moral decadency and parents decide to marry off their daughters for dowry and also to avoid premarital conceptions, which lead to social stigmatization, shame and familial dishonor. Parents thus believe marrying off their daughters early saves the girls and the families from possible community stigmatization. The cultural belief in early marriage is supported by broken structures and systems. Infrastructural breakdown has hindered registration of births, marriages and deaths among others. While the state nationally commits to protecting children against harmful practices including child marriages, the grassroots
framework to implement this protection is lacking in northern Uganda. With a lack of formally/legally binding evidence/proof of one’s age, parents continue to determine the right time for their daughter’s marriage. One key informant, a male local leader explained that:

Parents are responsible generally, they think they are doing the right thing though…even when girls know the truth, due to pressure from the family members and community around them, they are compelled to accept such marriages and even at times testify about their legal age or else they face punishment and isolation.

The young women sacrifice themselves for the sake of their families and sense of community belonging. This alludes to differences in understanding between the local and dominant concepts especially age and violence. What is considered violence for instance in the form of child marriages, is locally understood to be normal intended to protect the child and promote harmonious community survival. An early marriage is thus a context-specific strategy, which in northern Uganda is generally communally and individually tolerated for social control and harmony.

Humanitarian assistance has enormous limitations. Some women, nonetheless, take advantage of such loopholes for their selfish ends. Respondents mentioned that some members in the community register nonexistent (ghost) beneficiaries, and receive surplus aid. As household heads, some women report a higher number of dependents, especially children, during the registration process. Others do not report deaths of family members or those who move away from the house. Since agencies consider the size of the household to determine the amount of assistance particular families receive, those with hiked numbers receive more assistance. The excess aid especially in the form of food is sold for cash to buy other basic needs including required items for school-going children.
Another aspect where women demonstrated agency is in family relations, where they challenge the pre-determined privileged male position. Culturally, men are expected to head households and thus make all the important decisions within the family. Women are however, challenging this social construct by refuting some decisions made by men and heading households. Women have become household heads. In Teso women take on the role of protecting their families, organizing for food and protecting their children from rape (Kalifani, et al. 2008). Refuting men’s decisions is thus perceived in two major ways. First, some community members think it is disrespectful and a break from culturally acceptable norms. Others consider such women positively and thus perceive them as empowered to be involved in major decisions affecting livelihood and survival. In whichever understanding women’s resistance is framed, men feel obliged to maintain women in their “normal” position. Making specific reference to decision-making and control over assistance in the home, one clan executive member noted that; Irrespective of who received the assistance from the implementing programs, women are not supposed to challenge men’s ideas on how to use it especially when married. It is their (men’s) house; they decide how the assistance is used.

Women’s improved situation in the post-conflict situation has not been well received especially by their male counterparts. Society thus challenges women’s relative power and wish to maintain women’s pre-conflict social status. One male key informant said for instance,

Women are empowered; I don’t call it that way. They are just unruly and misbehaving. When they treat men as useless! Women think they can survive without men. But in my house, they know I am the head and everyone follows my instructions.

Another respondent said,
We need to work together as men to restore our society to what it used to be [prior to conflict]. Things need to get back to how we were with our great grandparents. Men for instance know how to lead society and everyone knows that. We shall decampaign women who stand against men in the coming elections.

I observed that several leading community opinion leaders, a majority of who are men, embraced such patriarchal perspectives. They consequently encouraged and believed in the subordination of wives, creating a system that works against the empowerment of women. Naturalization and acceptance of male dominance results in the limited representation of women and girls in recovery assistance programs. This can encourage the internalization of oppression by the marginalized and its acceptance as the norm in society. Amidst male-biased institutions, women and girls are compelled to be submissive. Where they conduct themselves differently, women are labeled as rebellious, even when trying to benefit of the family. Irrespective of how society perceives it, some women have maintained their new post-conflict attained social position. It is conversely true that others give in to societal pressure to return to pre-conflict gender expectations.

The preceding discussion has so far examined women’s agency, resilience and strategies adopted in both displacement and return areas. With a clear understanding of the historical and current situation in northern Uganda, I now turn to conclusions and recommendations. My aim in the following section is to make specific indicators that can guide policy formulation and implementation in reconstruction programs. Specifically I provide ways on how area-operating programs can work with the local communities to end insecurity and its re-occurrence as well as re-build communities from effects of past violence. I also highlight areas for further research while linking the study to previous
Conclusions and Recommendations

In this section I offer conclusions largely based on the discussions in the previous chapters. The recommendations target all stakeholders operating in northern Uganda including the state, humanitarian agencies, religious and cultural leaders and the general community. As a way of addressing pertinent issues emerging from the study, specific conclusions are followed by recommendations with an overarching aim of how best to encourage stability, development and sustainability in northern Uganda.

To start with, the Northern Uganda situation confirmed that different communities understand violence, childhood, adulthood, and family among other terminologies to mean different things. Constructs like child and family in war situations tend to acquire new meanings that impact functions and expectations. These, if not contextually explained, can lead to wrong interpretations and conclusions resulting in poor policies and programs. Fixed, formalized dominant understandings largely informed by the developed world disregard local narratives and overlook local understandings and the meanings communities make out of their own experiences. It is important that in resettlement programming, the language used by different stakeholders (humanitarian agencies, central and local governments) reflects both social and cultural understandings of intended recipients. It is also crucial for these stakeholders to form collaborative partnerships with essential partners including traditional and cultural leaders, men and the military. The intention of such partnerships would be for purposes of increasing
sensitization and awareness about the impact of gender-based violence not only on women and girls but also the entire community, and nation at large.

The international community, especially the UN, faces various limitations in relation to the developing world’s local experiences. Universalistic frameworks play a positive role in society and cannot be wholly discarded as inapplicable for the marginalized regions of the world. Dominant frameworks avail global guiding standards for development, human rights and holding states accountable to these standards. Nation states, however, have fallen complicit or even worse in failing to cater for the socially and culturally relevant conditions citizens encounter. Worth noting is how nation states adopt and domesticate global standards to reflect local realities. For instance, in chapter 1, UNCRC (1989) defines a child, “as a person below the age of 18, unless the laws of a particular country set the legal age for adulthood younger”. I find the ending clause particularly important yet the nation states rarely adapt it. Uganda in its definition adopts 18 as the absolute age disregarding the regional context specific conditions children experience, which would cater for conditions of children in war-torn regions like northern Uganda. The state of Uganda has failed to use exceptions to apply global standards to the suitability of Ugandans.

Local understandings, moreover, cannot be homogenized because the cultural context in northern Uganda has altered due to social and economic changes resulting in opposing and contradictory perceptions a case being collectivization. The differentiated views among the local population are linked to their age, length of stay in displacement and experiences during displacement. Most of the older generation interviewed in the study expressed strong commitment to the collective wellbeing of children and the
general community, while the younger generation was more individualistic in expressing the need for survival and the provision of labor. The youth demonstrated greater vigilance when their labor was to be compensated, especially in the form of cash rather than in kind assistance that would sustain the community. There were also youth who preferred to reside and work in the town centers while the older generation was more optimistic about the rural agricultural life. To minimize such differences, reconstruction programming needs to be specific to the demands of the various groups. Youth programs for instance might be located in towns, providing skills for trading, banking, saving and investment instead of forcing youth return to the villages.

Besides generational survival differences, local perspectives on how to deal with former child soldiers also differed. Intervention programs catering for former child soldiers received contradicting community responses. Some members felt former child soldiers should be held responsible for their actions and ought not to receive preferential treatment programs in the reconstruction phase. Others believed however, that such children needed to be re-socialized for peaceful resettlement. In such situations, it is necessary that reconstruction programs sensitize local communities on the circumstances under which child soldiers became involved in the war, as well as the experiences they had and how society would benefit from having former soldiers reintegrated. This might minimize judgment from the community and provide rationale for centering former child soldiers. I agree with Collier’s observation (2007) hat policies must be distinctive in order to decrease the risk of conflict re-occurring and to cater for the differentiated consequences and opportunities within, between and among communities that resulted from conflict.
Another clear conclusion this study makes is that communities in northern Uganda do not feel safe despite the government declaration of a post-conflict setting. The feeling of vulnerability was evident from the beginning of my fieldwork when all the respondents refused to sign the consent forms despite their professed eagerness to participate in the study. They explained that, for their own safety, they were not comfortable signing any documents. Even key informants purposively selected for the offices they held, were reluctant to sign forms. While firearms may be put away, peace has not yet returned to the region and communities continue to live in constant fear and mistrust. This affirms earlier scholars’ observations that absence of war does not necessarily mean peace (Butler, 2010; Machel, 2000; Sjoberg, 2014). Dealing with this kind of insecurity demands appreciating local understandings of peace and incorporating such understanding in programs and frameworks offered by the (government and humanitarian programs) formal structures. The government emphasized disarmament and demobilization of former combatants to limit access to weaponry and discourage reorganization for violent conflict. The local communities however, perceived peace in form of sustainable reintegration, which comes through reconciliation and forgiveness. Being able to trust their neighbor, ending sexual violence against women and girls, and access to land are some major concerns raised by respondents. This shows how non-material effects of war can have lasting impacts for reintegration and resettlement for particular individuals in the community. In addition to disarmament and demobilization, reconstruction programs need to embrace psychosocial frameworks as a way of improving return and reintegration by budgeting, planning and having activities
specifically targeting psychosocial challenges. Communities need to feel and be safe for constructive resettlement can set off in the region.

Related to the above is the conclusion that respondents dreaded the use of force to end violence and recommended peaceful methods including mediation. To the local community, peace between the rebels and the government could not be attained unless peace was locally established. To attain local peace, respondents encouraged mediation between individuals, families, clans and later armed forces. Mediation is a preferred strategy because it avoids revenge and encourages parties to let go of past differences, which have haunted the region for decades. Even in cases where punishment was recommended, it was in the form of asking for forgiveness from the offended party publically and promising never to repeat the offensive actions.

Researchers and scholars can play a role in improving humanitarian assistance in return areas by actively listening to and writing the voices of the most marginalized to represent locally based concerns and needs. Researchers and assistance providers can intentionally build relationships and alliances between themselves and communities. Such alliances must involve self-reflexivity especially on the part of privileged stakeholders. This study managed to capture complexities because it adopted a holistic approach that embraced both local and formal perspectives on peace, war and development. I also acknowledged the community as experts of their knowledge and experiences, from whom I was willing to learn.

Acknowledging the role of the local community and complexities within the return areas, humanitarian agencies might favor locally relevant perspectives instead of emphasizing dominant views and frameworks. It is critical that agencies place dominant
and marginal frameworks in conversation with each other. Both dominant and alternative frameworks offer advantages, which can be adapted, and negatives that can be improved or dropped. The crucial aspect is how these two understandings together might avoid reproducing power hierarchies and impositions that especially burden the local population. One way this can be done is by involving the local communities in humanitarian policy formulation, implementation and analysis.

The findings of this study indicate that the “logic of masculine protection” at least in the case of northern Uganda has not resulted in greater protection of women and girls. Instead of the state providing protection, the state army, Uganda Peoples Defense Forces (UPDF) was involved in rape and sexual abuse especially within the IDP camps (also see Dolan, 2009, Tim, & Vlassenroot, 2010). Furthermore, some women in northern Uganda actively participated as soldiers during the war (Bricker, 2009). Women’s involvement challenges common representations that portray women as entirely vulnerable (Butler, 2010; Sjoberg, 2014; Soto, 2009). Instead of being protected, some women directly participated as protectors for the communities and the nation. Despite women’s active participation as protectors, compensation during post conflict for former fighters was linked to gendered roles and thus biased towards men who socially are believed to have been the active players during the war (Puechguirbal, 2012). In this way the state and its institutions demonstrate their gendered assumptions, confirming arguments of the state as a gendered institution (Dill & Zambrana, 2009, and Tripp, Ferree & Ewig, 2013). It is prudent therefore that during post conflict compensation, government considers roles performed during conflict without gender biases. In addition, dichotomous categorizations of victim vs. perpetrator on the basis of age were challenged in northern
Uganda. Women and young people simultaneously were victims as well as perpetrators of violence.

In post-conflict situations, it is helpful to develop local capacities and initiatives. Local initiatives, for instance “KachopeMandit”, a local conflict resolution initiative in Lango region that involved forgiveness and cleansing, seemed to be more effective since the communities identified with such frameworks (Brainard & Chollet, 2007). This may be due to the fact these initiatives were demand-driven by communally identified needs. For instance, women formed groups to handle challenges they experienced and membership to such groups was based on need for the services offered. Humanitarian and government programs can make a more grounded impact if they worked with the local organizations, building their capacities through providing resources like financial literacy, management and leadership skills. Working through the community-based programs also builds community resilience by rebuilding members’ esteem, unity and sense of belonging. It is also important to understand local power structures and groups of influence. Programs should thus be tailored to suit local circumstances and conditions. It also is important to understand how affected communities conceptualize vulnerability and marginalization, and include it in assistance distribution. Furthermore, the process of recovery is most productive when advanced from a community development perspective and efficient when conducted at the local level with the active participation of the affected community and well-built reliant on local capacities and expertise (Emergency response and recovery, 2010).

It is also critical in reconstruction phases for programs to target those groups of the population who constitute a higher risk for conflict re-eruption and general instability.
within the community. In northern Uganda these are the youth, yet their concerns have not been centered in peace building. Young people constitute a large portion of the population and recently have been involved in armed and violent groups. It is imperative that reconstruction programs avail youth with positive options or else they risk the youth re-joining the violence in the region, or continuing their violent life style in the resettlement areas because they look at violence as a normal way of life. In post-conflict settings, youth need to be economically involved and also socially included in activities and locations that motivate them. Previous research has demonstrated youths can serve as agents of peace both during and after armed conflicts (UNDP, 2007; Schwartz, 2010, Sommers, 2007). Social involvement can be in the form of youth workshops to share experiences and skills in trade, HIV prevention and treatment and peace building. This study confirmed too, that the young generation appreciates peace as evidenced by the strategies (like naming) they adopted on return. Youth therefore double as high risk for violence and high potential for peace hence the need to positively direct their energy.

The foregoing discussion has focused on the individual, interpersonal and community group levels. I now switch to a wider analysis of systems and institutions. This is not to mean that these boundaries are solid. Strategies filtrate across institutional and structural challenges and so do recommendations and conclusions.

**Institutional and Structural Approaches**

Besides community involvement, there exists as well a need to adopt multi-sectoral approaches especially in dealing with sexual and gender based violence in fragile regions like northern Uganda. For example, the legal sector, police, schools and hospitals can
work together to minimize violence against young women by providing a youth friendly environment to encourage access and use of available services and resources for instance contraceptive use.

Violence in northern Uganda has been institutionally and structurally grounded and reinforced by the government and institutions like police, school and hospital through unfair policies and programs. It is thus critical for researchers to explore the relations between interpersonal (individual) and institutional violence if lasting peace is to be attained. I observed that the minority groups doubly experience more interpersonal violence and structural violence. Because violence against women is interconnected and interrelated at different forms and levels, it is very hard to minimize. While I have cited individual cases of abuse to elaborate on some forms of violence, I have attempted to situate such violence to show how institutions and structures reinforce each other to normalize the violence women and girls experience. Approaches to ending violence must be generalizable yet at the same time specific to accommodate the various facets of social life including class, gender, motherhood and marital status.

Peace building in northern Uganda demands structural transformation. Using the case of northern Uganda, I agree with other feminist conflict scholars that war is a system and not an event that happens on the battlefield (Butler, 2010; Sjoberg, 2014). This is because the effects of war, including trauma, violence, food insecurity and disease, continue well into the post-conflict stage (Wibben, 2011). War affects everyone in the community including children, mothers, wives, elders, men and leaders. In my study each of these groups had a role to play in the violence young women experienced. Some
children for instance were involved as soldiers and participated in rape and other forms of sexual assault against women. Theories that focus on individuals as the central factor in causing violence like the youth bulge theory point to young men, undermine this understanding of war as a system (Butler, 2010) that individuals may not be able to control. Individualized approaches also downplay the role of institutions and structures in causing violence (Sjoberg, 2013, Tripp, Ferree & Ewig, 2013). Disregarding such complexities affects peace-building processes.

For sustainable reintegration, it is paramount that program implementation in northern Uganda be built on openness and transparency especially towards the local population. This can be achieved through open public dialogues about policies in locally accessible language and venues. Since the central and local governments set the guidelines for NGOs operation in northern Uganda. Openness and accountability can be incorporated as a requirement for humanitarian agencies operating in the region and communities can be involved in evaluation of humanitarian practices in relation to open public discussions. I argue this is a good strategy because, open discussions can minimize corruption and poor management of programs yet at the same time will center the needs of the community. It can also generate hope for the communities and thus trigger their thinking about the future hence support long-term development projects including education.

Beyond the national level, reliance on country-specific strategies halts efforts to solving complex and protracted war situations like northern Uganda. The war in northern Uganda escalated beyond borders to include neighboring countries like Sudan,
Democratic Republic of Congo and Central African Republic (CAR). I thus recommend that the affected nation state governments work together to come up with regional initiatives to curb the LRA. Each affected state can come up members to form a regional committee to discuss peace with both rebels and local communities. This committee should intentionally include women and feminists as members. In northern Uganda women like Bigombe and Sr. Rachel already have demonstrated that women can be great peace builders. Having feminist representation on the committee would encourage representation of women’s concerns and needs during and after conflict. War as a system has become a regional issue for which nation-centered frameworks do not provide desired results. It is now time to use peaceful regional approaches that bring together various views stretching beyond peace and conflict studies, to other relevant approaches including feminism in ending violence.

Armed violence creates suffering. However such experiences also generate spaces of gendered agency and resilience. Despite contradiction and challenges, women in Northern Uganda have taken on new empowering roles. They have come up with strategies to deal with their situation; for instance, they formed groups in which they share and advise on their experiences. Reconstruction programming needs to strategically support women’s new roles and positions by providing training for instance on saving and investment, marketing of produce and improved methods of agricultural production. Support can also be in the form of community sensitization to change negative attitudes challenging women’s empowerment especially from conservative social frameworks that evoke pre-conflict male dominance. Elaborating on the positive impact of having empowered women can help shape community attitudes for the better.
Final Word

All in all, solving conflict starts with understanding the root causes of conflict, which for northern Uganda include unbalanced regional development and structural injustices rooted in the colonial era, but also tribalism and the struggle for power. Peace building therefore needs to stretch beyond the war to include structural and historical hindrances to regional development and also to address the material effects created by the historical events and processes like colonization. Armed violence is a complex multidimensional process. Its causes and consequences are multifaceted reaching spaces that are traditionally understood to be peaceful. It cuts across various levels including personal and group differences, domestic and public spheres as well as local, national and international frameworks. Armed violence gets even more complex when analyzed using age and gender as critical analytical categories. This research challenges conventional gendered constructions of armed violence and the dominant understandings of childhood. Understanding armed violence requires analysis of local history, identities, social institutions and political and economic relations for the particular areas under study. This is because identities are multiple, fluid and contextual.

Addressing recurrent crises and building resilience requires an integrated systems approach to humanitarian responses and development programming. The relationship between gender, poverty and vulnerability is complicated further by age and location. Gender roles have impacted women’s access to and use of resources including land and other economic activities. Institutions like marriage work to concretize women’s marginalized position by giving men exclusive rights over women’s sexuality, economic earnings and freedom of association and movement.
In closing, I wish to emphasize that while I have discussed the strategies paying attention to specific phases of conflict and levels, no definite boundaries can be drawn between conflict and peace. This also applies to the strategies women used in both stages, as well as on individual and public places. Women in both settings at times used similar strategies, for instance pretense and silence were common for both women relating with their husbands and those in captivity.
REFERENCE


Dill, B & Zambrana, R. (2009). Emerging Intersections: Race, Class and Gender in Theory, Policy and Practice. Rutgers, the State University 1


Isis-WICCE. (2001). Women's Experiences of Armed Conflict in Uganda, Gulu


APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORMS
Individual Adult Interview Consent Form

Study Title: Gender, Age and Armed Violence: Complexity of Identity Among Returning Formerly Displaced Youth in Uganda

Investigator: Dr. Karen Leong

Thank you so much for taking off some time to meet with me today. My name is Victoria Namuggala and I am a doctoral candidate from Arizona State University. I would like to learn from you about the experiences of youth during conflict and in the post conflict phase. I am particularly interested in how the reconstruction processes have or have not incorporated the concerns and needs of returning formerly displaced youth.

This interview is expected to last at least two hours. If it is okay with you, I wish to record this conversation so I do not miss out any of the information. I may also with your permission take some photos. The purpose of this study is purely academic and will not be used for any other purposes. I will be using the data collected to finish my degree requirement to enable me graduate. All data will be confidential and anonymity will be respected unless you choose to have your name appear in the report.

I therefore request you to participate in this study. You can opt out at any time if you find it necessary. And you can also choose not to answer some questions if they make you uncomfortable.
In case you need to contact the research team, please do so at anytime using the contacts below; Dr. Karen Leong (PI)  480 965 6936, Karen.leong@asu.edu
and Victoria Namuggala, 480 270 0900, vnamugga@asu.edu

Do you need any clarification over what I have just explained?

Are you willing to continue with this study?

Is it okay with you for me to record this interview?
Signature Block for Capable Adult

Your signature documents your permission to take part in this research.

________________________________________  __________________________
Signature of participant                      Date

________________________________________
Printed name of participant

________________________________________  __________________________
Signature of person obtaining consent        Date

________________________________________
Printed name of person obtaining consent
Signature Block for Parental Permission for Children

Your signature documents your permission for the named child to take part in this research.

____________________  ________________________
Printed name of child   Signature of parent or individual legally authorized to

consent to the child’s general medical care

☐ Parent

____________________  ________________________
Printed name of parent or individual legally authorized to consent to the child’s general medical care  Date

☐ Individual legally authorized to consent to the child’s general medical care (See note below)

Note: Investigators are to ensure that individuals who are not parents can demonstrate their legal authority to consent to the child’s general medical care. Contact legal counsel if any questions arise.

____________________  ________________________
Signature of parent   Date

____________________
Printed name of parent

If signature of second parent not obtained, indicate why: (select one)
☐ The IRB determined that the permission of one parent is sufficient.
☐ Second parent is deceased
☐ Second parent is unknown
☐ Second parent is incompetent
☐ Second parent is not reasonably available
☐ Only one parent has legal responsibility for the care and custody of the child

☐ Obtained

☐ Not obtained because the capability of the child is so limited that the child cannot reasonably be consulted.

__________________________________________  __________________________
Signature of person obtaining consent and assent  Date

__________________________________________
Printed name of person obtaining consent
Thank you so much for taking off some time to meet with me today. My name is Victoria Namuggala and I am a doctoral candidate from Arizona State University. I would like to learn from you about the experiences of youth during conflict and in the post conflict phase. I am particularly interested in how the reconstruction processes have or have not incorporated the concerns and needs of returning formerly displaced youth.

This interview is expected to last at least two hours. If it is okay with you, I wish to record this conversation so that I do not miss out any of the information. I may also with your permission take some photos. The purpose of this study is purely academic and will not be used for any other purposes. I will be using the data collected to finish my degree requirement to enable me graduate. All data will be confidential and anonymity will be respected.

I have explained this to your parent/guardian and s/he has given me permission to discuss with you. I therefore request you to participate in this study. You can opt out at any time in case you change your mind. And you can also choose not to answer some questions if they make them uncomfortable.
In case you need to contact the research team, please do so at anytime using the contacts below; Dr. Karen Leong (PI); 480 965 6936, Karen.Leong@asu.edu and Victoria Namuggala; 480 270 0900, vnamugga@asu.edu

Do you need any clarification over what I have just explained?

Are you willing to continue with this study?

Is it okay with you for me to record this interview?
If you are ready to continue with this interview, please sign below:

Your signature documents your permission to take part in this research.

______________________________________________     _____________________
Printed Signature of the child                                                         Date

_______________________________________________
Printed name of child

☑ Obtained

☑ Not obtained because the capability of the child is so limited that the child
cannot reasonably be consulted.

_______________________________________________
Signature of person obtaining assent                                                         Date

_______________________________________________
Printed name of person obtaining consent
Focus Group Consent Form

Study Title: Gender, Age and Armed Violence: Complexity of Identity Among Returning Formerly Displaced Youth in Uganda

Investigator: Dr. Karen Leong

Thank you so much for taking off some time to meet with me today. My name is Victoria Namuggala and I am a doctoral candidate from Arizona State University. I would like to learn from you about the experiences of youth during conflict and in the post conflict phase. I am particularly interested in how the reconstruction processes have or have not incorporated the concerns and needs of returning formerly displaced youth.

This discussion is expected to last at least three hours. If it is okay with you, I wish to record this discussion so I do not miss out any of the information. I may also with your permission take some photos. The purpose of this study is purely academic and findings will not be used for any other purposes. I will be using the data collected to finish my degree requirement to enable me graduate. All data will be kept confidential and anonymity will be respected.

I therefore request you to participate in this study. You can opt out at any time if you find it necessary. And you can also choose not to answer some questions if they make you uncomfortable.
In case you need to contact the research team, please do so at anytime using the contacts below; Dr. Karen Leong (PI) 480 965 6936, Karen.Leong@asu.edu and Victoria Namuggala, 480 270 0900, vnamugga@asu.edu

Do you need any clarification over what I have just explained?

Are you all willing to continue with this study?

Is it okay with you for me to record this interview?
Signature Block for Focus Group Participants

Your signature documents your permission to take part in this research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Printed Name of person obtaining consent

________________________________________________________________________

Signature of person obtaining consent
APPENDIX B

DATA COLLECTION TOOLS
Key Informant Interview Guide

Section 1: Personal information

1. Age or year of birth if known
2. Village of residence
3. Position in the community
4. For how long
5. Gender
6. Marital status
   a) Married      b) single      c) divorced  d) widowed

Section 2. Conceptualization of a youth

13. In your/this community do you have a category of people called youths?
   b) If yes, who is referred to as a youth?
   c) If No, what categories of people do you have in your community?

14. In your opinion who do you consider to be a youth? What are the characteristics of a youth?

15. What is the cultural/social understanding of a youth?

16. In your view, are youth benefiting from the programs being implemented in this area?
   b) If yes, please explain how
   c) If no, please explain.

17. How do humanitarian programs define a youth?
18. Is it different from the local understanding?

b). If yes, please explain how?

Section 3. Reconstruction Humanitarian programs

19. Please explain what recovery humanitarian assistance means to you?

20. Besides your organization, do you know of any Humanitarian agencies operating in this area? b) If yes, please name them

21. Do you think the concerns and needs of the youth are incorporated in these programs?

22. Are there challenges (if any) you have encountered as an organization in implementing such aid services? If yes, please explain.

23. Are there any challenges you have encountered as an individual? please elaborate.

24. How do you cope (both as an organisation and an individual) amidst such constraints?

Section 4. Causes of conflict/violence

24. What does armed violence mean to you?

25. What forms of violence are predominant now in the return area?

26. Do you know who the perpetrators are?
27. What measures if any have been taken to redress the violence? Who has taken these measures?

28. What specific measures has your organization taken to mitigate violence?

29. What do you think is the role of youth in causing and sustaining violent conflicts?

30. What can be done to minimise eruption of youth violence?

31. What do you think are the causes of (armed) violence?

32. Do you see youth being as contributing to such behaviour?
   
   If no why?
   
   If yes, to what extent? And why?

33. What other factors can help explain violence?

   Women only section

34. Do you think women have a role in conflict?

35. How about peacebuilding?

38. How can we mobilize, support and demand women’s active involvement in conflict resolution and peacemaking?

39. Are there forms of violence that are specific to women or men only?

40. Do you think female youth encounter particular challenges given their age and gender?

Do you have anything else you would like to say in relation to post-conflict reconstruction in this district? Or generally in the northern Uganda region?

Thank you for your participation
Individual Respondent Interview Guide

Section 1: Personal information

1. Number of Interview

2. Age or year of birth if known

3. Village of residence

4. Gender

4. Marital status
   a) Married   b) single   c) divorced   d) widowed

5. Who do you identify yourself as? Child, youth or adult? Why?

6. Where did you live during displacement?

7. Which IDP camp(s) were you in before returning back?

8. How long did you live in the there?

9. When did you come back here?

10. Is this your home/original area or it’s a third settlement area?

Section 2. Household Information

11. Are you a household head?

12. How many dependents do you have in your household?

b) Please specify how many:
   – Biological children
- Other dependents in the household

13. How many children have you had in your entire life?

14. How many of your children are surviving?

15. Since you came back, how many children have you had?

16. What has been your experience with having children in this situation

Section 3. Reconstruction Humanitarian programs

17. Have you heard about recovery humanitarian assistance?

b) If yes please explain what it means to you

18. Do you know of any Humanitarian agencies operating in this area?

Yes ____________ b) No ____________

b) If yes, please name them

19. Have you ever received any form of humanitarian assistance either during or after conflict?

Yes ________________ b) No __________________________
b) If yes, tell me about the form of assistance you received?

c) If not, please explain why?

20. Are there challenges you have encountered in the process of accessing and utilizing such aid services?

If yes, please explain

21. How do you cope amidst such constraints?

Section 4. Understanding of a youth

22. In your/this community do you have a category of people called youths?

b) If yes, who is referred to as a youth?

c) If No, what categories of people do you have in your community?

23. In your opinion who do you consider to be a youth?/What are the characteristics of a youth?

24. What is the cultural/social understanding of a youth?

25. In your view, are youth benefiting from the programs being implemented in this area?

b) If yes, please explain how

c) If no, please explain.

Section 5. Causes of conflict/violence
36. What does armed violence mean to you?

37. What forms of violence are predominant now in the return area?

38. Do you happen to know who the perpetrators are?

39. What measures if any have been taken to redress the violence? Who has taken these measures?

40. What do you think is the role of youth in causing and sustaining violent conflicts?

41. What can be done to minimise eruption of youth violence?

42. Have you been involved in any form of violence since you returned?

43. If yes please explain how?

44. After experiencing violent conflict for a number of years, what do you think are the causes of such violence?

45. Do you see youth being as contributing to such behaviour?

   If no why?

   If yes, to what extent? And why?

46. What other factors can help explain violence?

   Women only section

47. Do you think women have a role in conflict?

48. How about peacebuilding?

41. How can we mobilize, support and demand women’s active involvement in conflict resolution and peacemaking?

42. Are there forms of violence that are specific to women or men only?

43. Have you personally encountered such violence?
44 What other forms of violence are women/girls experiencing?

Section 6. Constraints and coping mechanisms

Do you have anything else you would like to say in relation to post-conflict reconstruction in this district? Or generally in the northern Uganda region?

Thank you for your participation
Focus Group Discussion Guide

Introductions

Before we begin, I request everyone to introduce him or herself in the way they would wish to be referred to in this discussion. It does not have to be your formal name.

How would one describe a child in this area?

How about a youth?

What is the difference between the two?

How is a youth different from an adult?

What are the causes of violence?

Do you think the youth have a role to play?

How are youth affected by the conflict?

Were female youth affected in any way different from the males?

What roles did they perform during conflict?

What roles are they playing now in the post-conflict phase?

What challenges are youth facing in fulfilling their roles?

What recovery programs are being implemented in the area?

In your view, are youth benefiting from the programs being implemented in this area?

What constraints are the youth facing?

How do they cope with such constraints?
Conclusion

Thank you so much all of you for participating in this discussion. We appreciate your time and contribution. I hope you found the discussion informative and interesting. In case you have any related questions, we are available to answer them.