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Amanda J. Reinke

*University of Tennessee*, [areinke@vols.utk.edu](mailto:areinke@vols.utk.edu)

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# **Gendering Peacebuilding in Post-Conflict Northern Uganda**

**Amanda J. Reinke, The University of Tennessee-Knoxville**

## **Abstract**

Approximately 1.8 million northern Ugandans were internally displaced during conflict between the Ugandan government and Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebels (1987-2006). The ethnographic and qualitative research findings presented in this article illuminate the need to address structural violence, not just physical violence, in the aftermath of conflict, and to pay particular attention to how conflict and peacebuilding processes are gendered. Although gender-sensitive approaches to peacebuilding have increased in recent years, especially among scholars, in practice these processes often still fail to adequately address the myriad needs of survivors and to understand the complex interplay between gender, conflict, and post-conflict rebuilding. Instead, "gendered" peacebuilding efforts focus attention on physical sexual violence experienced by women during conflict as opposed to structural violence pervading conflict and the post-conflict period. For example, findings from research among Acholi and Langi, the two most prominent ethnic groups in northern Uganda, indicate that structural violence stemming from devastated economic livelihoods, poverty, ruptured sociocultural norms, and shifting gender roles exacerbate the effects of violent conflict and disproportionately affect women. Despite the prevalence of and participants' concerns about structural violence, peacebuilders and policy-makers continue to emphasize and prioritize resolution of physical violence, such as rape. Based on primary research, this article explores the link between livelihood, peacebuilding efforts, and gender, and argues that gendering peacebuilding to address economic opportunity, land conflict, and other forms of pervasive structural violence is central to building sustainable peace in the region.

## **Introduction**

Northern Uganda was the site of active conflict between the Government of Uganda (GoU) and the rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) from 1986-2006, when the

LRA and its leader Joseph Kony were pushed out of the country and into neighboring territories. During the conflict, approximately 1.8 million northern Ugandans were internally displaced—thrust from their ancestral lands and communities and placed into internally displaced persons camps. The ensuing disruption to economic, social, political, and cultural life greatly impacted displaced persons and their communities, and continues to complicate the post-conflict recovery period. That men and women experience these impacts differently is widely recognized; however, gendering peacebuilding and transitional justice processes remains problematic. In practice, the gendered assumptions that underpin much post-conflict peacebuilding work creates one-dimensional approaches and practices that homogenize gender groups, rather than empowering them and thus contributing to sustainable peace.

Although women are disproportionately affected by physical violence during active combat, they also bear the brunt of other, more insidious forms of violence. In northern Uganda, land forms the basis of economic livelihood, spirituality and religious belief, and individual and social identity. The disruption of access to land and its economic, social, political, and cultural wealth has impacted both men and women, but in distinct ways. The loss of cattle and land, traditional symbols of power and wealth for men, correlates to increasing rates of alcoholism and domestic violence. Concurrently, women have taken on responsibilities outside normative gender roles, increasing economic activities while maintaining traditional domestic duties. Shifting gender roles and the social and cultural contexts they are embedded in are critical to understanding the myriad needs in post-conflict peacebuilding. As the international community has moved from gender-neutral peacebuilding policies that relied on treating men and women the same in post-conflict recovery strategies, more nuanced policies are emerging to grapple with the myriad identities and experiences of men and women during and after conflict.

Based on qualitative and ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2013, this article presents findings from research in northern Uganda that explores particular understandings of gendered violence among northern Ugandans and the ways in which these understandings are embedded within complex contexts of ongoing structural violence. These findings have implications for appropriately gendering post-conflict peacebuilding and transitional justice processes. Before presenting key findings, this article will present and analyze contemporary theories undergirding gender in conflict and peacebuilding and the particular nature of conflict in northern Uganda.

## **Gender in Conflict and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding**

Women in conflict and post-conflict contexts are often portrayed as victims and are essentialized as vulnerable. These portrayals emphasize women's vulnerability to physical forms of violence, such as rape and defilement. However, this perspective fails to consider the continuum of violence and the myriad ways in which violence manifests, while simultaneously neglecting to recognize women's agency. While women are disproportionately affected by direct violent conflict (Denov, 2006, pp.

319-342; Treacher, Hsiao-Hung, Khalili, & Alldred, 2008, p. 1), practitioners, scholars, and researchers are increasingly recognizing that violence manifests in various ways during and after active conflict (Buvinic, Das Gupta, Casabonne, & Verwimp, 2012, p. 10; Denov, 2006, p. 26). Despite these nuanced approaches to investigating the nature of violence in conflict and post-conflict settings, appropriately gendering conflict and, therefore, peacebuilding practice remain problematic (Moran, 2010).

Women continue to be “systematically sidelined” in transitional justice and peacebuilding processes (United States Institute of Peace, 2012, p. 3). Recognizing the importance of comprehensive inclusion and involvement of women in peace and security for post-conflict societies, the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 was adopted. This resolution recognized the impact of armed conflict and “acknowledged the underestimated and untapped potential of women as effective decision-makers and negotiators” in peace processes (USIP, 2012, p. 2). Women’s role and relationship to conflict is complex, but they are visibly present in a number of roles, including victim-survivors, combatants, casualties, and the displaced, but also as activists against violence and conflict (Annan, Blattman, Carlson, & Mazurana, 2008; Opinia & Bubenzer, 2011, pp. 1-3; Sigsworth, 2008, p. 4; Treacher et al., 2008) or as supporters (Annan et al., 2008; Segal, 2008, pp. 22-23). Despite numerous studies illuminating the women’s diverse experiences during conflict, peacebuilders and policy-makers continue to focus on women as victims of physical violence.

Physical and sexual violence during conflict affects women, girls, families, and the broader community. Rape and sexual violence may be used as tactics of war, creating fear among the population, traumatizing and destroying families and communities, and as a form of ethnic cleansing (Sigsworth, 2008, pp. 4, 10; USIP, 2012, p. 5). However, comparative research across geographic contexts indicates that rape and sexual violence do not necessarily increase during wartime (Cohen, Green, & Wood, 2013, p. 203; Sigsworth, 2008, p. 5), nor does it correlate to every conflict considered to be “ethnic” (Cohen et al., 2013, pp. 3-4). For example, in the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, rape and sexual violence appear to be quite rare despite frequent violations of other laws of war (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 3). Furthermore, sexual violence during conflict is often perpetrated by family members, partners, or acquaintances (Cohen et al., 2013, pp. 6-7), so claims that rape, when it occurs frequently during wartime, is a strategy of war are not always valid (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 9). Importantly, women and girls who are survivors of sexual violence often face rejection and stigma from family and community members (Denov, 2006, p. 336; Opinia & Bubenzer, 2011, p. 3), although this is not always the case (Annan et al., 2008, p. 902). In cases where stigma exists, there may be far-reaching ramifications, including economic marginalization, threat to physical or mental health, and lack of societal support and network (Annan et al., 2008; Denov, 2006, p. 336).

Homogenous understandings of the relationship between gender and conflict and, therefore, gender and peacebuilding, are steadily being replaced by research and practice that investigates and demonstrates the relationship between physical

and non-physical violence. Physical and non-physical post-conflict violence occur in two rounds: first is mortality and morbidity, health impacts, widowhood, sexual- and gender-based violence (SGBV), displacement, and economic loss; and second, how households cope with the effects of the first round, including changes in marital customs and fertility, political and civic participation, reallocation of labor, and human capital of children (Buvinic et al., 2013). Women often respond to first round impacts by altering traditional economic roles, working longer hours, altering fertility, and limiting expenditures on children's education or health (Buvinic et al., 2013; Sigsworth, 2008, pp. 12-14). Although physical violence increases during conflict, other more insidious forms of violence also increase and continue through the post-conflict period. For example, during wartime, women may experience some empowerment by taking on greater economic or social roles. This process has been interpreted as an adaptation to new challenges their family faces and typically entails entering the workforce or taking on roles and responsibilities traditionally allocated to men (Opinia & Bubenzer, 2011; USIP, 2012, p. 7). However, once active conflict has ended and combatants and the displaced return home, conflict stemming from gender role confusion may exacerbate domestic violence rates and women may experience job discrimination or difficulty keeping or obtaining property (Opinia & Bubenzer, 2011). Therefore, despite the presence of greater economic and social opportunities that emerge for women during conflict, gender roles and relations did not fundamentally change in society (El-Bushra & Sahl, 2005; Kircher, 2013, p. 20). As men return home or social institutions are reinstated after conflict, the opportunities afforded women may diminish. The shifting and re-shifting of gender roles is correlated with increased rates of domestic violence, job discrimination, and negatively impacts the ability of women to obtain or maintain property ownership (USIP, 2012, p. 7). This research demonstrates one potential way in which physical and non-physical forms of violence differentially impact genders, requiring peacebuilding processes to be tailored to the gendered needs and experiences of individuals affected by conflict.

In response to these and other research findings, gender sensitive approaches to post-conflict peacebuilding and transitional justice have garnered greater attention. Sensitive approaches that go beyond homogenous notions of violence and masculinity are more prevalent as it is becoming widely understood that such conceptions undermine nuanced understandings of women's participation in conflict, how men are variously impacted by conflict, and the complex processes of peacebuilding (Buvinic et al., 2012; Cohen et al., 2013; Theidon, 2007, pp. 453-478; USIP, 2012). Gender neutral policies developed by policy-makers and peacebuilders in previous decades are steadily being replaced with resolutions that actively engage women in post-conflict processes and recognize their complex roles during and after conflict (Tryggestad, 2010; USIP, 2012). In particular, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1325 in 2000, a document that recognizes the disproportionate impact of conflict on women, who are concurrently underrepresented in peace and security processes (USIP, 2012, p. 2). In 2008, UNSCR 1820 further recognized that sexual violence may be used as a war tactic and barrier to peace. These resolutions and contemporary peacebuilding and

transitional justice practices reflect the growing understanding that women should be active contributors to these processes and not merely perceived or portrayed as passive victims (Tryggstad, 2010; USIP, 2012, p. 11). The development of such practices is supported by researchers charting the importance of women's empowerment to creating and sustaining peaceful societies (Gizelis, 2009).

Despite these successes, problems persist. Gender sensitivity, such as that represented by UNSCR 1820, is often conflated or synonymous with a focus on physical violence, such as defilement, rape, and sexual violence. Women's narratives are valuable only insofar as they narrate these experiences (Theidon, 2007, p. 458). Studies demonstrate that focus on sexual violence during wartime creates categories of victims (Theidon, 2007, p. 462) and fails to incorporate understandings of the role of silence, bravery, and the right to forget (Theidon, 2007, p. 462). Myopic views of violence and gendered experiences obscure other forms of violence that are perpetrated during and after conflict, deny the ability of women to act as perpetrators, and undermine the value of silence and the impact of taboo and community stigma (Cohen et al., 2013, pp. 4-5, 7). Moreover, that international bodies implementing and overseeing peacebuilding are imbued with their own contentious gender dynamics while simultaneously implementing foreign conceptions of "gender" and therefore gendered peacebuilding, is the subject of scrutiny (Hudson, 2012). This article builds on previous research demonstrating diverse gendered experiences of conflict and, thus, needs for peacebuilding and post-conflict rebuilding. Before proceeding to a discussion of the methods and findings of this research project, background information on the particular nature of conflict and post-conflict rebuilding in northern Uganda is provided.

## **Conflict and Peacebuilding in the Ugandan Context**

Contemporary challenges to livelihood and the gendered dynamics of conflict and post-conflict peacebuilding are not new phenomena in northern Uganda, but are situated within deeper political economic temporal and geographic contexts. Yoweri Museveni and his National Resistance Army (NRA) defeated the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) in 1986, violently taking control of the GoU. Out of fear of NRA retribution, many UNLA soldiers fled to the northern reaches of the country after their defeat. Other UNLA combatants fled to southern Sudan (now South Sudan) and joined Joseph Kony's LRA. When a longer view is taken, it becomes evident that Museveni's military coup is but one part of a much longer pattern of cyclical violence a history of Uganda that is rife with attack, counterattack, suffering, and revenge. This pattern is replicated through conflict between the GoU and LRA.

The LRA arose out of previous movements and rebel groups, most notably the Holy Spirit Movement and its Mobile Forces. This lineage is made visible through Joseph Kony's "apocalyptic spiritualism," which mobilizes action by propagating a worldview that depicts an insidious evil residing in northern Uganda. This evil stems from collective societal failures, but can be exorcised through widespread violence and horror. Following this worldview, when the Ugandan People's

Defence Force (the government military) responds to the LRA with violence, they contribute to the violence needed to cleanse the region. The attack, counterattack, suffering, and revenge perpetuated by both sides of the conflict contributes to the strength of Kony's worldview. This, in addition to the LRA's lack of an easily discernible political agenda and their use of terror tactics against civilian populations, has limited their ability to gain public support for their cause (van Acker, 2004).

Several root causes for this particular conflict can be discerned, including militarization of society (van Acker, 2004, pp. 338-341), de-institutionalizing politics (van Acker, 2004, pp. 341-342), a history of violence with impunity (Lomo & Hovil, 2004; van Acker, 2004), and a north-south divide (van Acker, 2004, pp. 342-344). For the purposes of this article, which focuses on structural violence and the impact of conflict and displacement on women, the last two causes are most relevant. As previously mentioned, post-colonial Ugandan politics are rife with violence and vengeance and since independence, violence and revenge have become a normative part of the political process. The "culture of impunity also made recourse to violence the 'easy' and normal method of retaining or gaining access to state power" (Lomo & Hovil, 2004, p. 15). Normalized political violence has created a recurring cycle of violence in the country, where groups perpetuate violence and others respond violently. This history of violence with impunity is often characterized as active conflict and physical violence; however, violence is also perpetuated through structural inequalities constructed along ethnic or regional lines.

The second underlying cause for the GoU-LRA conflict is a north-south division. This regional divide was exacerbated during the colonial period with Britain's divide and rule policy. During the colonial period, the southern region of Uganda and its inhabitants were targeted for economic production, location of the capital and university, and peoples residing in the south were rewarded for cooperation with the colonizer. Conversely, northern populations, many of whom share close linguistic, ethnic, and cultural ties to northern neighbors in South Sudan, were stereotyped as warlike and resistant to colonial incursion (Lomo & Hovil, 2004, pp. 18-19). Post-colonial politics, in which successive leaders have diverted resources to their ethnic or culture group and denied access to resources to other groups, particularly along regional lines, has deepened this divide. The result is escalating feelings of betrayal and mistrust that contribute to and characterize the cyclical violence. Yoweri Museveni, native to southwestern Ugandan, and his conflict with Joseph Kony, a member of the northern Ugandan Acholi ethnic group, is a continuation of this north-south divide. Furthermore, Museveni's placement of northern Ugandans into poorly guarded internally displaced persons (IDP) camps with deplorable conditions has continued to perpetuate the north-south divide and mistrust of the GoU.

Active combat increased in the region during the 1990s as the governments of Uganda and Sudan utilized rebel groups to fight proxy wars. It is at this time that northern Ugandans were displaced by the GoU into IDP camps, termed "protected villages." Despite the name, these camps were poorly protected by the GoU and

were prime targets for LRA operations. Poor protection and deplorable camp conditions (Kindi, 2010, p. 1; Lomo & Hovil, 2004, p. 6), greatly impacted affected communities. Aid and humanitarian agencies flooded the north, providing support to IDPs living in camps. During encampment, many IDPs were unable to continue economic livelihoods, creating aid dependency and deeper poverty. Structural violence is common during and after conflict and is exacerbated by active conflict, displacement, and the unequal distribution of aid (Buvinic et al., 2012; El-Bushra & Sahl, 2005; USIP, 2012). The findings presented in this article supports research indicating that structural violence increases during and after conflict and the far-reaching effects of active conflict and displacement variously affects women and men (Buvinic et al., 2012; El-Bushra & Sahl, 2005; Opinia & Bubenzer, 2011; Sigsworth, 2008; USIP, 2012).

During conflict and subsequent displacement, men in northern Uganda lost access to traditional economic livelihoods and sources of authority and power. In particular, the traditional chief and clan systems degraded in addition to loss of property and cattle, both important sources of social status, economic productivity, and marriage (El-Bushra & Sahl, 2005, pp. 18, 20). While this has disempowered men (El-Bushra & Sahl, 2005, p. 22), it has empowered women. Women have altered traditional gender roles by entering the public workforce, taking on traditional male responsibilities, and working more (El-Bushra & Sahl, 2005, p. 22; Opinia & Bubenzer, 2011; Sigsworth, 2008, pp. 12-14; USIP, 2012, p. 7). However, women who live with their partner are subject to domestic violence associated with these shifting gender roles (Stites, Mazurana, & Carlson, 2006, p. 9). In this context, domestic violence is also attributed to alcoholism, which reputedly increased dramatically during displacement and is correlated with shifting gender roles and livelihood practices (Kindi, 2010, pp. 9-10; Survey of War Affected Youth, 2008, p. 5).

The effects of conflict and displacement are far-reaching. In particular, the loss of property and economically productive livelihoods, lack of adequate education, infrastructure, and social services, along with the breakdown of sociocultural norms are some of the serious problems that continue to pervade the post-conflict period in northern Uganda. Despite recent efforts to incorporate gender-specific and inclusive policies (see Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, 2014), these policies are problematic (see Refugee Law Project, 2014) and there are difficulties in operationalizing and implementing them successfully to incorporate the various experiences and identities of populations while being flexible to the dynamic nature of post-conflict societies. Resulting from previous research, fieldwork conducted in northern Uganda in 2013 sought to illuminate community-defined experiences and the most prevalent forms of gender-based violence, with particular attention to the role of economic violence in the post-conflict peacebuilding process.



## Research Rationale and Methodology

The tendency of women in conflict and post-conflict contexts to be essentialized as universally vulnerable to and victims of physical violence such as rape and defilement is characteristic of ostensibly appropriately gendered post-conflict peacebuilding efforts in northern Uganda. However, secondary research presented in the previous section demonstrates the complex interplay between gender, conflict, and post-conflict experiences, and thus the diverse needs in the peacebuilding process. In particular, qualitative and ethnographic research demonstrates that structural violence in the form of unequal distribution of resources, land wrangling, poverty, and alcoholism are primary causes of gendered violence in post-conflict northern Uganda.

Considering the challenges of gendering peacebuilding processes, this project investigated myriad definitions of sexual- and gender-based violence and how community members perceived gendered violence to manifest, including how they could mitigate such violence. Primary data collection occurred between May-August 2013. Data was collected via field-based focus groups and non-participant observation in five districts of northern Uganda with a total of 10 research sites. Research sites spanned Acholiland and the Lango sub-region; areas in which the Acholi and Lango peoples principally live, respectively. These two ethnic and culture groups are predominant throughout the region and have arguably been most affected by conflict and the rebuilding process. The five districts included in the study were include Gulu, Amuru, Nwoya, Oyam, and Otuke.

Focus group participants were asked to discuss the following topics: to define what SGBV means to them and identify the most prevalent forms of SGBV in their community; what causes violence; describe what happens after an incident; how the community responds; and what types of services or resources should be made available to address prevalence of SGBV. It is important to note that northern Uganda has been saturated with NGOs and humanitarian organizations since conflict and displacement. As a result of these organizations' awareness and educational activities throughout the region, many individuals included in this study utilize the term "SGBV" or "gendered violence." Focus groups were, in accordance with culturally appropriate methods, divided by sex, with separate groups for females and males, and an average of eight participants per group. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 60s. A variety of education levels were represented, from no formal education to senior level. Fifty-two percent of female participants were self-reported Acholi, members of the majority ethnic group in the northern region. Forty-six percent self-reported as Langi and two percent as Aloo. Self-identification was relied upon for all information obtained.

It is common for northern Ugandans to meet, discuss, and share under shade trees in communal areas. This traditional practice is utilized for conflict resolution, story transmission, and for relationship building. In keeping with this tradition, focus groups were often conducted in these familiar spaces. Where this was not possible due to weather conditions or lack of a suitable shady place, focus groups were held inside huts or in nearby community or school buildings. The intimacy

and familiarity of the spaces used for focus groups led to semi-structured discussions that at once answered standard questions for all the communities involved in the research project, but also encouraged an informal tone and deviation from the standardized question list. Thus, findings illuminate structured differences in response by gender or community, but also reveal nuanced experiences and understandings of sexual- and gender-based violence.

In addition to focus groups, non-participant observation was conducted during land conflict mediations—events where conflicting parties and the community convene with a third-party and attempt to resolve the dispute. In addition to physical violence during conflict, individuals often experience a loss of productive assets, including livestock, agricultural land, homes, and lack of social services and adequate infrastructure (Buvinic et al., 2013, pp. 16-17). Before displacement, northern Ugandans practiced agricultural and pastoral livelihoods; these economically productive livelihoods were dramatically impacted during the conflict, subsequent displacement, and now the return process (El-Bushra & Sahl, 2005, pp. 19, 24). That women are often disproportionately affected by economic violence, particularly in the form of land conflict, is well-known. Thus, I included observation of land conflict mediations, especially where they involved female disputants.

Whereas focus groups were divided by gender in adherence to cultural norms, both women and men attend the same conflict resolution process. Many of the cases observed involved the most vulnerable in post-conflict northern Uganda, such as the elderly, widows, and women, who tend to be targeted for land conflict and wrangling. During conflict mediations, researchers walked the fields with elders, mediators, and community members, all trying to discern decades-old land demarcation points which had since grown over and been buried by time and its environmental effects. The process of land conflict resolution illustrates the multiple stakeholders—elders, religious leaders, and all community members—and their need to end community-based conflict between residents. By investigating both land conflict mediations specifically and gender-based violence more broadly, findings indicate micro-level understandings of and needs for sustainable peacebuilding that have the capacity for policy implementation at the international, national, and local levels.

## Findings

Findings from research in northern Uganda demonstrate that affected communities, and particularly women, are deeply concerned about non-physical violence, such as structural violence in the form of unequal distribution of resources, shifting gender roles, land wrangling, and alcoholism. Women are often exposed to structural violence in the form of inequitable distribution of economic resources, including property (El-Bushra & Sahl, 2005, p. 17). Furthermore, as male-headed households transform into female-headed households during and after conflict, structural violence may become more deeply entrenched (USIP, 2012, p. 7). Building upon these findings and based on qualitative research, this article argues that

contemporary gender sensitive approaches to peacebuilding and transitional justice can address non-physical forms of violence, such as structural violence, and that these forms of violence need to be mitigated before sustainable peace can take root.

When asked what the most prevalent forms of sexual- and gender-based violence are in their communities, findings from all five districts reveal that women, despite differences in age or ethnic group, prioritize land conflict and inequitable distribution of resources in the household. Female participants overwhelmingly cite concerns about economic violence before mentioning physical violence. Although males also cite land conflict as a form of SGBV, their responses often focused on physically violent forms of SGBV such as rape, defilement, and assault, rather than the more insidious economic violence. These findings indicate that although men and women recognize structural violence in the form of economic violence as a pervasive issue that has yet to be adequately resolved, women prioritize these concerns before physical violence, while men focus on physical violence with economic violence as a secondary consideration. In particular, the complex interplays between unequal access to resources, poverty, alcoholism, and shifting gender roles in post-conflict northern Uganda are revealed.

## Land Conflicts

When participants were asked to temporally define when gendered violence occurred most often—before, during, or after the war—many emphasized the escalation of violence during displacement and return. For example, an elderly widow from Acholiland stated that SGBV occurred more often during and after the war, because “before the war, people were in original homesteads, but during the war they came to the camps and boundaries were unclear after that time confusing the situation”<sup>1</sup> and causing land conflicts. Many of the younger focus group participants also believed that conflict increased during and after the war. For example, a 29-year-old Acholi residing on ancestral land holdings in Nwoya District, stated that “before the war [SGBV] was there. During, it escalated and after has been added on because of land wrangles.”<sup>2</sup> Land conflicts are a serious concern for northern Ugandans, who primarily rely on an agricultural livelihood. During conflict and encampment, the land became overgrown and elders forgot where one clan’s land stopped and another’s began. In the post-conflict period, many are taking advantage of this and the breakdown of customary law which ordinarily provided safeguards against wrangling land. As a result, “fertile land is often the subject of tenure disputes, especially between indigenous and incoming ethnic groups” from within and outside Uganda (El-Bushra & Sahl, 2005, p. 33). Throughout fieldwork, the researcher attended land conflict mediations, witnessing attempts to rediscover long-forgotten and overgrown property lines. In particular, it became evident early on that women, especially widows, single mothers, and those with no recognized male kin, were targeted for land wrangling more often—they

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<sup>1</sup> Focus group participant, Acholi region, Uganda, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Focus group participant, Nwoya District, Uganda, 2013.

have little political and social capital to stake a claim to territory and few economic resources to follow through on their land claims.

### **Distribution of Household Resources**

Unequitable distribution of resources in the household was also a prominent concern among female participants, with only a few male participants recognizing this as a serious concern. A 43-year-old Acholi woman in Gulu District, explained SGBV with the following example: “during planting, the man and woman work together, but when food is in the house, the man gets violent.”<sup>3</sup> Women overwhelmingly stated that the harvest season is when rates of SGBV are the highest in their community. The same story was told in several focus groups: when the harvest occurs men are expected to sell the products of the household labor, but should wait to sell until they can get the best market price. However, they often sell earlier than they should so they can subsidize a drinking habit or pay brideprice for another wife. Participants in the same focus group stated that conflict occurs after the harvest when men try to use the money for alcohol instead of school fees, clothing, or other household needs. Importantly, women were not contesting the traditional allocation of gender roles. Men are traditionally responsible for helping with the harvest and taking the fruits of their labor to the market to sell; it is a commonly held belief that men will get a better price for their goods than women. Instead, many of the women suggested that men need to actually fulfill the entirety of this gender role—not just taking goods to market for sale, but working to get the best price and then providing for their family instead of squandering joint resources on alcohol or frivolous spending.

### **Alcoholism**

For both female and male participants in all communities, across ethnic group affiliation, religious practices, and age and education levels, alcoholism was the primary cause of SGBV. A man from Gulu District defined the cause of SGBV with the following statement: “for me the cause of rape and defilement in society like in our area here, mostly it is drunkenness, and excessive power.”<sup>4</sup> In Oyam District, the entire women’s focus group agreed that alcohol was the root cause of SGBV in their community. Despite this root cause, however, women are also blamed for provoking violence when their partner is intoxicated. A woman who confronts her partner about how household resources are allocated also bears responsibility for inciting the violence that ensues. Males echoed concerns about inequitable distribution of resources to a lesser extent overall, but one middle-aged participant from a district in Acholiland stated, “maybe a woman in the house does not consent

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<sup>3</sup> Focus group participant, Gulu District, Uganda, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Focus group participant, Gulu District, Uganda, 2013.

for the things to be taken to the market to be sold and the man comes and takes it by force and that's how it becomes SGBV.”<sup>5</sup>

## Women's Rights

Some participants cited the shift towards women's rights as a contributor to high incidence rates of SGBV during and after conflict. This was particularly associated with the massive influx of non-governmental organizations, humanitarian aid, and the presence of international actors during displacement and subsequent return. According to an elderly widow in Gulu District, “women's rights brought a lot of problems; women are not respectful.”<sup>6</sup> Similarly, a man from Otuke believed SGBV is caused by the “excessive use of rights, like the children's rights and the women's rights.”<sup>7</sup> This finding appears to correlate to age, rather than just gender. Older women and many men despite age, tended to emphasize the negative effects of women's and children's rights, whereas younger women were likely to disagree with their elders on this matter. Although findings indicate that younger women are more likely to uphold and support women's rights as opposed to their older counterparts, there is not enough data to say for certain.

## Poverty

Poverty is also a common cause of violence in communities. Referencing displacement and aid provided by international groups, an Acholi man from Amuru District believed that the war increased SGBV in his community because of poverty:

[T]he situation where they were put through was really very bad. Yes somewhere in the bush somewhere sleeping for one week, without eating . . . And someone living on beans only for the whole of his life, and people were in the camps and you find that people eat beans and *posho* and then there is no salt, even there is no money . . . And the UN they used to give beans, *posho* [a dish of cornmeal cooked with water to a dough-like consistency] and some salt and some blankets, but not everything. Even firewood was not there, so it increased the what? The poverty.<sup>8</sup>

These findings align with other research that indicates structural violence, such as poverty, land conflict, and unequitable distribution of resources, is a pervasive issue during and after conflict (Buvinic et al., 2013; El-Bushra & Sahl, 2005; USIP, 2012). In the context of northern Uganda, poverty and rising rates of alcoholism have caused women to take on more than their traditional gender roles typically allow. Encampment restricted males' abilities to access the basis of their gender identity: cattle and land. As a result, many lost their livelihood, income, leadership,

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<sup>5</sup> Focus group participant, Acholi region, Uganda, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Focus group participant, Gulu District, Uganda, 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Focus group participant, Otuke District, Uganda, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Focus group participant, Amuru District, Uganda, 2013.

control over resources, and their ability to provide for their family (El-Bushra & Sahl, 2005, p. 27). Consequently, women have taken more control over resources, are in paying jobs, and are engaged in livelihoods typically reserved for men (El Bushra & Sahl, 2005, pp. 27-28). The lack of two productive spouses contributing to the health and economic stability of the household is considered a major causal factor for poverty and, therefore, gendered violence. Thus, for a man in Oyam District, SGBV occurred “when the bread winner from the home is not providing the basic needs and likes fighting everybody, even the wife.”<sup>9</sup> The breadwinner is identified as the husband, but despite his rightful place as breadwinner, he is not fulfilling his gender role and leaves all the work, including paid employment, household labor, and agricultural duties, to the wife. Both male and female participants noted this shift, with women laughingly stating that drinking alcohol is the man’s primary role in their communities.

The issue of poverty as a main force contributing to gendered violence clearly links with other factors, such as resource allocation, shifting gender roles, and alcoholism. Poverty, exacerbated during displacement when individuals were often separated from their livelihoods, continues to pervade the post-conflict period. The result is that women increasingly engage in non-traditional market based activities and alcoholism continues to be a predominant issue. Addressing the structural inequalities such as land conflict, unequal distribution of resources in the household, poverty, and substance abuse are key to building peace in the region.

## Conclusion

Post-conflict peacebuilding processes have shifted from gender-neutral policies towards recognizing the important and myriad roles of women and men during and after conflict. In particular, UNSCR 1820 and 1325 both recognize the importance of women’s participation in such processes and move towards more nuanced understandings of the role of gender in conflict and peacebuilding processes. Similarly, researchers and practitioners are also examining the nuances of post-conflict reconstruction processes, emphasizing the importance of recognizing silence, resiliency, and the variable needs and vulnerabilities within communities affected by violence and rebuilding.

The result is increasingly scholarly recognition that the relationship of gender to conflict and peace is varied and complex. Although sexual and physical forms of violence disproportionately affect women in conflict and post-conflict societies, inordinate focus on these issues may obscure the importance of addressing more insidious forms of violence. In northern Uganda, one of the results of protracted conflict and subsequent displacement and return is gendered structural violence. Findings indicate that this violence is most concerning as it affects economic livelihoods, including access to land and household resources and the exacerbation of poverty. Concurrently, rising rates of alcoholism—a direct result of displacement, aid, shifting gender roles, and poverty—is another central concern

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<sup>9</sup> Focus group participant, Oyam District, Uganda, 2013.

among both men and women. Alcoholism is also part of both the structural and physical violence and was a main concern among both men and women in every community. This pervasive issue leads to domestic violence, inequitable distribution of household resources, and poverty, and exacerbates an already often tense gender role allocation within families.

These findings are reflective of larger findings in recent research on gender in conflict and post-conflict rebuilding processes. Researchers working in post-conflict sites around the world cite the need to include women as active participants in peacebuilding and transitional justice processes rather than maintaining “gender-neutral” approaches. Whereas gender-neutral approaches obscure difference and, therefore, important gendered needs in conflict resolution and rebuilding processes, active participation and inclusion illuminates the need for international and national actors to address more than just physical violence. Utilizing a gender sensitive framework that is based on illuminating difference, rather than obscuring it, reveals micro-level peacebuilding needs, such as the disproportionate impact of alcoholism, poverty, and resource allocation. If international, national, and local policy, law, and actors can effectively address both structural and physical forms of violence in nuanced, culturally-specific, and community-based ways, peace in the region is more likely to be sustainable.

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