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Re-imagining Subversion: Agency and Women's Peace Activism in Northern Uganda

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DRAFT for discussion

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“Re-imagining Subversion: Agency and Women’s Peace Activism in Northern Uganda”

By Yaliwe Clarke and Dr Constance O’Brien

This chapter provides an analysis of the micro politics of women’s community peace initiatives in Northern Uganda. It also interrogates the extent to which women peace activists addressed structural violence within an existing liberal peace building framework. A key question that emanates from the findings presented is whether women’s agency in community peace building subverts patriarchy. Data from sixteen in-depth interviews with people who have worked in community peace organisations in Northern Uganda (between 1998 and 2011) reveals the gendered, socio-political and economic effects of the war. Research showed that shifts in patrilineal family networks enabled women peace activists to become important nodes of material support during and after the war in Northern Uganda. Furthermore, critical insights are offered as to how women’s peace building efforts replaced men’s (previous) dominant role as material providers and protectors of the family. It would seem that women’s peace building efforts with its accompanying economic and political shifts provided them with an opportunity to contest various patriarchal spaces.

Neo - Liberal peace building and Feminism– a framing argument

The Beijing Conference on Women in 1995 and the ratification of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court has resulted in an increase in the public profiling of women and women’s organisations working for peace. The Beijing Platform for Action of 1995 included sections on “violence against women” and “women and armed conflict”. In each section there is explicit mention of forms of sexual violence that take place during armed conflict such as “...murder, systematic rape, sexual slavery and forced pregnancy.” It included a call for these kinds of violence to be prevented or addressed in broad efforts for peace and security, especially in relation to the rights of women.¹ This was followed by the passing of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in October 2000 and a furthering of international pressure (largely rhetorical) to include ‘women’ in formal peace processes. These international instruments focus on the prevention of violence against women during war as well as on women’s efforts to bring about peace.

In her 2008 book 'From Where We Stand', Cynthia Cockburn argues that *"The sex – and gender-specific experiences of women in war is often neglected, misrepresented or exploited in the media, by politicians, and the anti-war movement."* Other studies draw on 'women's peace work' and theorise gendered meanings of peace (Barry, 2005; Cheldlin and Eliatamby, 2011; Moser, 2001; Pankhurst, 2003). This analysis was preceded by feminist critiques of neo-liberal interpretations of peace and armed conflict in the early 1990's emanating predominantly from a political science perspective (Steans, 1998; Tickner, 1992; Whiteworth, 1994). According to Zaum (2012: 121):

"liberal peacebuilding has been used to describe external peacebuilding interventions that share several characteristics: first, they are conducted by liberal, Western states; second, they are motivated by liberal objectives such as responding to large-scale human rights violations or being conducted under an international responsibility to protect; and third, these interventions promote liberal-democratic political institutions, human rights, effective and good governance, and economic liberalization as a means to bring peace and prosperity to war-torn countries."

This contemporary definition of liberal peace is derived from a combination of realist and liberal thinking dominant in international relations and policy frameworks in international development organisations such as the UN and World Bank (Campbell et. al, 2011; Heathershaw, 2013; Pugh et. al, 2008; Richmond, 2006; 2012). Even though it aspires to broad goals of human security common amongst feminist theories of peace, there is a narrow focus, in positivist terms on basic security constructed as physical security dependent on strong states and international intervention based on homogenised western ideas of democracy (Richmond, 2006). There is little reflection on the kinds of states, peacebuilding interventions have created with limited meaningful engagement with local culture and welfare needs that are in contradiction with neoliberal economic prescriptions.

Nevertheless, there has been some shifts away from liberal peacebuilding which has attempted to apply ahistorical, local, cultural adaptations to particular situations. This has been framed in terms of the indigenous community's own approaches to building peace that go beyond judicial processes and ideas about legality and rights as framed in universal human rights discourse. Heathershaw (2013, 280) refers to this as a liberal-local hybridity that still maintains a competitive rather than co-constructive relationship. He argues that there is yet to be an alternative theoretical approach to peace building where *"...political authority is reconstituted across multiple geographical scales."*

Feminists (Hendricks, 2011; Hudson 2012; Scully et al, 2010) on the other hand highlight the fact that neo-liberal peace does not address patriarchal structural violence that is embedded in the very idea of the state. Race, class and gender are modes of exclusion and domination which form part of the

development of capitalism with its categories of difference and inequality. For the global south, histories of colonialism cannot be separated from the formation of the state and versions of development expressed in national development plans, including those of post conflict reconstruction and peace building. Confortini (2010; 4) argues that even “... recent restructurings of capitalism, often termed ‘globalisation’ have meant further intensification and rationalisation of modes of domination, subordinating peoples and lands on a transnational scale and realigning social relations to better meet the needs of capital.”

Despite considerable knowledge about the centrality of deconstructing patriarchy, a liberal peace framework still prevails. Often such a framework condones a set of very basic predominantly masculine security needs.(Campbell et al, 2011; Heathershaw, 2013). For example, Doyle and Ikenberry’s comprehensive survey of scholarship on war and peace conducted in 1997 contains six gender-related index entries but devotes only about one-tenth of its survey to gender. The words ‘women’ and ‘gender’ occasionally showed up as a passing note. This scant attention to women’s standpoint is reflected in UN peace processes :- out of 21 major peace processes held since 1992, only 2.4 per cent of signatories were womenⁱⁱ. Furthermore, no women have been appointed Chief or lead peace mediators in UN-sponsored peace talks. So far, only one woman has joined the African’s Union mediation team (Graca Machel was one of three mediators in the AU team during the Kenyan crisis in 2008). Olonisakin and Okech’s edited book on “Women and Security Governance in Africa” published in 2011 states that peacebuilding efforts in Africa have struggled to take women’s lived realities of (in)security into account.

One has to note that a mere inclusion of ‘women’ in the discourse and in the practice of peacebuilding, does not necessarily mean a disruption of neo-liberalism. Pratt and Richter-Devroe (2011: 498) state that:

“The liberal peacebuilding agenda that is privileged by the UN and gender advocates working at /through the UN represents a limited strategy for those women’s movements engaged in a more radical agenda of social and political transformation. Women’s ‘resistance’ to global capitalism and forms of colonialism (rather than peacebuilding per se), for example, is not supported by the 1325 agenda, although women might find their involvement in such initiatives empowering, perhaps even more so than participating in the 1325 gendered peace agenda.”

A review of UN documents 10 years after the passing of 1325 revealed that critiques of militarism, military budgets and military priorities were curtailed and reformulated into positive calls for women’s participation and a gender perspective on peace and security (Gibbings, 2011: 532). This is a worrying trend given

“... that African militarism has generated more insecurity than security, often terrorising rather than protecting local populations, dominating the political sphere, blurring the boundaries between civilian and military, and thereby undermining all non-military forms of political and institutional authority and accountability.”(Mama and Okazawa-rey, 2012). SPELLING!!!!

According to Mama and Okazawa-rey (2012), mainstream security discourse and practice pays minimal attention to “...the contradictory ways in which women are affected by the complex relationship between gendered capitalist processes and militarism, and the manner in which women negotiate their lives through both”.¹Besides militarism, the vestiges of colonialism and the politics of ethnicism continues to bedevil the possibilities of peace.

The politics of colonialism, ethnicity and militarism

Since independence in 1962, Uganda has experienced contested peace (in central Uganda and some parts of Southern Uganda) alongside armed conflict in the West Nile, the northern districts of Gulu and Kitgum and some parts of the Apac district (Sathyamurthy, 1986; Saul, 2004). Local populations have suffered extreme violence at the hands of rebel groups, government military, and policing forces. The roots of the war can be traced back to the early 1900's when the British colonial administration signed an agreement with the Bagandan kingdom - a move that gave one ethnic group political and economic leverage over other ethnic communities and kingdoms (Karugire, 1986; Sathyamurthy: 1986).

According to Branch (2011) British colonial interpretations of ethnic identity pitched dominant ethnicities in the North against those in the South. The British colonial method of indirect rule fostered negative stereotypes about certain ethnic groups which in turn fuelled extreme political tension. In fact, the colonialists supported the development of the Acholi as a homogenous ethnic identity and appointed chiefs in the north to advance British administrative attempts at centralization. As Branch (2011: 52-3) aptly states:

“The national dimension of an Acholi political identity was thus formed in the dynamic relationship between the educated Acholi class and British administrative strategies in the context of processes of state formation in the Uganda Protectorate....From the beginning, therefore, Acholi political identity had two dimensions: an internal dimension based around competing claims to an authentic tradition and leadership within Acholi society, at first fought out between the appointed chiefs and the lineage-based rwodi-moo, elders, and others; and a

¹Amina Mama and Margo Okazawa-Rey, “Militarism, conflict and women’s activism in the global era: challenges and prospects for women three West African contexts”, *Feminist Review* 101 (2012), pp 102 (check this!)

national dimension, as Acholi represented themselves as Acholi on the national political stage in order to compete in Uganda's tribalized national politics".

In contrast to these male dominated ethnically polarised chiefdoms, women's missionary initiatives were multi-lingual, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious. For example, the Uganda Women's Council (formed in 1946) was established by "...African, European, and Asian women who wanted to create an organisation made up of women of all ethnicities, races, religious backgrounds, and political affiliations to take up issues of mutual concern" (Brown, 1988: 20 and White, 1973:47 in Tripp, 2004: 143). This was in contrast to tribally defined political parties that were largely set up through socio-political networks that tried to resist the British system of indirect rule. It is thus likely that the local elite in the north comprised of mostly men in chiefdoms and political parties with a few women who held leadership positions in religious and small-scale community organisations at council and municipal levels.

Amone and Muura (2014) state that there was significant investment in education and infrastructure in the south of Uganda (considered the productive zone), with little or no such investment in the north of Uganda (considered the labour zone). This meant that the demand for labour in the south stimulated a flow of migrant labour from Kitgum, Gulu and parts of West Nile to the central region. With hardly any education and low literacy in English, they were often employed as casual labourers or low-ranking personnel in government, private companies, army or police. Migrant labourers were closely monitored so that their tribal origins were not lost. With the passing of the Vagrancy Ordinance law in 1925, migrant workers who had no work were required to return home to their 'tribe' (Amone and Muura, 2014). Thus the north had become little more than a reserve for migrant labour and military recruitment. This form of militarised and ethnicised rule depended on a burgeoning male elite comprised of colonial administrators, missionaries, parish priests, and (British appointed) chiefs. They were mostly men, with varying degrees of conformity and resistance to British rule. Women were also part of this elite, albeit in a less central way.

Thus the structural features that define contemporary Acholi society and politics are historically rooted in this uneven regional development of Uganda. Lopsided patriarchal economic expansion strategies and state structures of indirect rule under colonialism resulted in deep regional disparities. At independence, the British handed over the country to a politically divided society in which the king of Baganda (representing southern communities) formed a weak alliance with Milton Obote (who was politically aligned to communities in the north), (Mutibwa, 2008; Saul, 2004). In 1966, Obote broke away from an alliance with the Buganda Kingdom and assumed political authority of the whole country.

During his first presidency, Obote relied heavily on the state army in which one commander, Idi Amin held political sway (Ngoga, 1998). With Amin's military takeover in 1971, all ministers were sworn into the army as officer-cadets making them subject to military discipline (Decker, 2015: 43). Mutibwa (2008) and Saul (2004) describe Idi Amin's Presidency (1971-78) as a period in which militarism was further institutionalised through the merging of the government and the army.

With this rising militarisation of the state grew a new socio-economic "class" made up of military men and their female companions (Decker, 2015: 43). Due to previous colonial recruitment practices, most soldiers were from ethnic communities in the north, coming from the West Nile, and were known as 'Nubians'. Those who were not part of this class struggled on the margins of a militarised political economy. In Decker's (2015:87) study, women who lived in Kampala explained that their husband's salaries were too low to support their families. In addition, their men mysteriously disappeared (taken by the secret police) or went into hiding leaving women to fend for themselves through income-generating activities.

With the takeover of state power by the National Resistance Movement in 1986, political power shifted back to the south. This intensified the leadership crisis in the north that had begun during the 1970s and 1980s and later developed into a profound social crisis (Branch, 2011:56–62). For 20 years, between 1986 and 2006, the Acholi region suffered from the war, with subsequent rebel groups, most notoriously the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) taking up arms against the government and attacking the civilian population. At the same time, government troops were guilty of gross human rights violations. It is estimated that more than two million Acholi were living in camps for internally displaced for several years of the conflict.

The political economy of Ugandan women's 'emancipation'

By the time Uganda became a British Protectorate in 1894 there were several voluntary women's associations started by Christian missionaries and wives of colonial administrators and business men (Tripp, 2004). Formal education for girls was their initial focus. This early investment in education (the first school was established in 1898 and the second in 1905) resulted in women entering diverse spaces of influence beginning with leadership within churches and later in the civil service (Tripp, 2004). "By the 1930's women were sitting with men on Church Councils and were being elected to Diocesan Educational Boards , and to the Church Synod and various other bodies" (Allen in Trip, 2000: 34). In fact the earliest national women's association was the Protestant Mothers Union founded in 1906 in Budo by British Missionary wives. In 1908, it was opened up to Ugandan women who were

wives of male students at Kings College in Budo. By 1930 women were represented on all committees of the Native Anglican Church. Another large organisation was the Girl Guides that was formed in 1921 by Foster Smith of the Church Missionary Society. The Uganda Women's League was formed in 1938. In 1939 the Uganda's Women's Emergency Organisation was formed in response to the consequences of the war. The Catholic counterpart of the Mothers Union was established much later in 1959. After the second world war, there was an increase in female missionaries and civil servants, especially in the field of education and community outreach. This included assisting the Department of Community Development in 1946 to set up community development clubs (Tripp, 2004: 127).

Despite a clear public political commitment to gender equality after Museveni took over², in 1989, legal reform and quota systems for women in parliament and government did not directly address the ways in which the war destabilised women's socio-economic reliance on subsistence agriculture, particularly in rural areas. Forced displacement, the threat of abduction of sexual violence (mostly) experienced by women, impacted on women's ability to grow crops. This inadvertently reduced women's activity in subsistence agricultural work, particularly crop production which forms the basis of the economy in Northern Uganda.

Most female workers in Uganda are either unpaid family farm workers (accounting for 80 per cent of all unpaid workers) or self-employed in the informal sector. According to the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS), a government programme to support agricultural production, men tend to concentrate on the production of cash crops (coffee, cotton, tobacco, and lately cereal production), while women concentrate on the production of food crops, mainly for consumption, while simultaneously providing much of the labour for cash crop production (Ellis et al, 2005). These 'gendered' socio-economic uses of land underwent significant changes during the war and these shifts have not been sufficiently documented in mainstream accounts. In urban centres, women found it difficult to obtain formal work and hence increasingly resorted to informal trade and entrepreneurship as a means of survival. At the same time, there were also shifts in men's economic influence, especially amongst men in rural areas of the north who were either displaced, had lost their cattle, and/or had reduced access to land.

²He encouraged the creation of Uganda's first set of gender policies in 1989. The Ugandan Gender Policy established a policy framework for gender quota's to be included in political party structures. The National Resistance *Movement* (formally referred to as National Resistance *Army* that over threw Idi Amin) was the first to implement a fairly successful quota system for women (Tamale, 1999).

The micro-politics of Ugandan women's peace building efforts

According to Tripp (2000: xiii) "The women's movement in Uganda made an unexpectedly swift and visible entrance onto the political scene shortly after Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Movement took over in 1986." She describes the women's movement as a relatively autonomous political force in the country that challenged "...clientelistic (i.e., ethnic and religious) bases of mobilization that have plagued the country since independence". Women's activism around issues of legal rights, peace, reproductive education and health issues, credit schemes, disabled women and land rights became established and grew exponentially after 1986. According to Mulumba (2002: 113-4) "Women's involvement in peace efforts in Uganda's most recent history dates back to 1985 when Tito Okello seized power in a coup. At this time the National Council of Women organized over 2,000 women to demonstrate on the streets of Kampala for peace and against the mistreatment of women by the military."

A government led formal peace negotiation process³ to address the conflict in Northern Uganda started in 2006 after twenty years of armed rebellion. The peace talks between the Government of Uganda (GoU) and the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) took place in Juba, Southern Sudan, with the support of the Government of South Sudan (GOSS). Women such as Betty Bigombe, a former Minister of State in charge of Northern Uganda Reconstruction Programme, undertook initiatives to end hostilities as early as 1995. She went into the bush for face-to-face talks with Joseph Kony (Leader of the LRA) on peace (Lapot in Musoke, 2012). In December 2004, Betty Bigombe mediated talks between the Government and the LRA rebels. In 2008, these talks stalled when the rebels withdrew within a few days of signing the cease fire agreement (Quinn, 2009).

In 2006 women's organisations formed a coalition aimed at ensuring that women's perspectives and demands would be taken into consideration during the talks. This process was called the 'Juba Peace Caravan'. According to Musoke (2012: 12)

"In November 2007, the Coalition ran the Women's Peace Caravan through the districts of Kampala, Luwero, Masindi, Kona Kamdini (the meeting point for women peace groups from Teso, Lira, Pader and Kasese), Gulu and Kitgum. With over 100 women activists at the start of the journey, the caravan aimed at raising awareness and mobilizing Ugandans to support the peace process and to strengthen solidarity with the war-torn communities of Northern Uganda".

³Peace process here refers to a formal state-led negotiation and reconciliation process that is paralleled by a number of other mechanisms to address the conflict, including the Amnesty Law, International Criminal Court, the African Traditional Mechanism of Mato Oput. Since these mechanisms are parallel to the peace negotiation process, it is important to mention them as each mechanism largely affects the progress of the other.

Various authors attest to the fact that women's peace work has not been taken too seriously especially when one considers their exclusion or peripheral status at government-led peace talks (Atim, 2008; Apio-Julu, 2004; Ocheri, 2011; Okot, 2010). According to Selle (2008: 3) government-led negotiations were headed by Dr Ruhakan Rugunda the then Minister of Internal Affairs in Uganda. The chief mediator was Riek Machar, the then Vice President of Sudan. The government negotiation team of 2008 comprised only of men with one or two women members of parliament who acted as observers of the process. There were only two female LRA representatives who had a limited role in the negotiation process (Selle, 2008).

According to Okot's (2010: 43-6) research on women and peacebuilding in Gulu District, women tend to be involved in traditional peace building at clan level. They prepared food for gatherings, provided traditional beers, and sang and danced (all prescribed feminine roles). Some elderly women were accorded the opportunity of providing words of wisdom in settling disputes and/or giving blessings to the 'returnees' or 'ex-rebels' (Selle, 2008; Atim 2008; Apio-Julu, 2004). Other women's groups were formed as a response to immediate livelihood needs that were caused by the armed conflict. Ocheri's (2011) doctoral research on formerly abducted child mothers revealed the complex questions of 'rehabilitation' that face militarised societies in which both women and men were active participants in the war. According to Ocheri (2011) these young mothers re-constructed their own framing of their 'post-bush' life and livelihoods.

In response to an increase in widows and orphans the National Association of Women's Organisations in Uganda (NAWOU) started a child care centre and assisted in the resettlement of women ex-prisoners of war. Uganda's Women's Effort to Save the Orphans (UWESO) also sought to respond to the need of children orphaned by the war. UWESO began in Luwero district, and is now working in about 36 districts in Uganda.

Thus it is clear that women undertook various peacebuilding strategies which conscientised communities and provided much needed services. From the perspectives of women peace activists who were interviewed in as part of the lead author's doctoral research, their peacebuilding roles may not have been sufficiently interrogated in terms of patriarchy and liberal peace building.

Researching Women's Peace Activism in Northern Uganda

Part of the lead author's doctoral research focussed on founding members and staff of six women's community peace organisations in Northern Uganda. The findings provided insights on political-

economic shifts in femininities and the concomitant gendered changes in power that occurred in selected community led peace building efforts.

DRAFT for discussion

Table 1: Women's Peace Organisations: interviews and focus groups' informants

Organisation	Locality	Year Est.	Individual Interviews- key informants	Focus Groups FGs	Number of informants per Organisation
Women's Peace Initiative - Uganda (WUPI)	Lira	2003	3 founder members 1 Staff member	2 focus groups consisting of 39 beneficiaries	43
Women's Advocacy Network (WAN)	Gulu	2011	1 Founder member who was also a staff member	1 focus group consisting of 9 beneficiaries	10
People Voice for Peace (PVP)	Gulu	1995	1 founder member	Non	1
Kitgum Women's Peace Initiative (KIWEPI)	Kitgum	1999	2 founder members 4 staff members	6 focus groups consisting of 29 beneficiaries	35
Kitgum Concerned Women's Association (KICWA)	Kitgum	1998	1 Founder member 2 staff members	Non	3
Live Again	Kitgum	2006	1 Founder member who is also a staff member	Non	1
Total number			16 individual interviews	9 FGs	93 informants

Individual interviews were held with 16 key informants of this study who were founder and staff members. Nine of these key informants were women who lived in towns and founded peace groups during and just after the war. All except one, were working as teachers or civil servants at the time of founding the organisation and lived in a house (or owned land) near or within a town that people fled to for refuge. Almost all of them are active (and hold fairly high-ranking positions) in faith-based organisation such as: Mothers Union; Catholic Church, or Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative.

The average age of the key informants at the time the data was collected (December 2013 to February 2015) was 40. All spoke of either having witnessed or experienced various forms of violence such as: abduction, forced marriage, rape, beatings by their husbands, economic neglect from husband and/or extended family members. Nine focus group discussions of between nine to twenty people were conducted as a way of corroborating the narratives gained from founder members and staff members.

Some organisations did not have a large membership (e.g., WAN) or they no longer held regular activities in the communities (PVP and WOPI- U) and therefore it was not easy to access beneficiaries. Organisations that were relatively functional (i.e., had offices, employed staff and had regular contact with communities) were WAN, KIWEPI, WOPI-U and KICWA. All of these organisations were deliberately founded to respond to the needs of the communities.

In order to further substantiate data from focus group discussions, a third source of data was collected from five staff members of various organisations that worked with the six womens' peace organisations that formed the sample group of this study.

Table 2: Staff from organisations that collaborated with Women Peace Organisations

Name of Organisation	Location	Informants
Amnesty International – Kitgum Office	Kitgum	1 female staff member
Uganda Association of Women Lawyers (FIDA)	Kitgum	1 female staff member
Uganda Women's Network (UWONET)	Kampala	1 female staff member
Isis-Women's International Cross Cultural Institute (WICCE)	Kampala	1 female staff member 1 former male staff member
Total number of informants		5 Informants

The following sections highlight some of the key findings of the study which are presented according to four main themes, namely:

- Shifts in Patriarchy: *Abduction, Displacement and the erosion of family structures;*
- War as an opportunity for women's agency and the subversion of patriarchy?;

- Subverting economies of patriarchy: micro-credit and land;
- Women's agency in re-socialising masculinities.

Shifts in Patriarchy: Abduction, Displacement and the erosion of family structures

Most informants explained that women founded various organisations because the war destabilised men's (hetero-normative) dominance over social and material stability. A combination of forceful recruitment of men into fighting forces, rape and forced marriage of girls and women, and looting of cattle and other property, contributed to a destabilisation of masculine identities amongst the Acholi and Langi societies (Dolan, 2009, 2002; Esukur, 2011; Kizza et. al, 2012). Harris's (2006, 2012) research on family structures and gender-age systems and social change in Northern Uganda suggests that before the war men held "...explicit power as occupiers of the superior position in the gender hierarchy..." while (older) women held implicit power within households and the patrilineage as mothers, aunts, and sister-in-laws. Men's power was associated with their role as fathers, uncles, and elders of patrilineal clans. Ownership and control of land was central to this power. Boys and young men were relied upon for lineage continuity as well as social and economic support in old age. With displacement, violence, and loss of livelihoods, these dominant masculine roles were significantly destabilised (Dolan, 2009).

This history of the war was recounted by both female and male informants (bearing in mind the relatively few males that were part of the study). All referred to having witnessed the high recruitment of men by fighting forces. They also pointed out that more men than women were likely to be killed if they refused to adhere to the demands of the fighting forces. Others reported that more men stayed in rural areas to protect their land and cattle. For example, a founder of WOPI- U explained that many men stayed behind in rural areas in an attempt to fulfil their role as protector of land and property, while women moved into towns with their children to seek protection:

"If you moved along the road as people are being displaced and running, you see a woman running with a mattress on her head, with a saucepan, a child on her back and others she's holding their hands. At times you would look around and not see a man with her. She's travelling for the protection of the children and where she is travelling now she has to look for how to feed the children. Most men first remain back in the villages...And that is one of the reasons these women are carrying this responsibility than the men..." (Key Informant J, founder and board member, WOPI-U, December 2013),

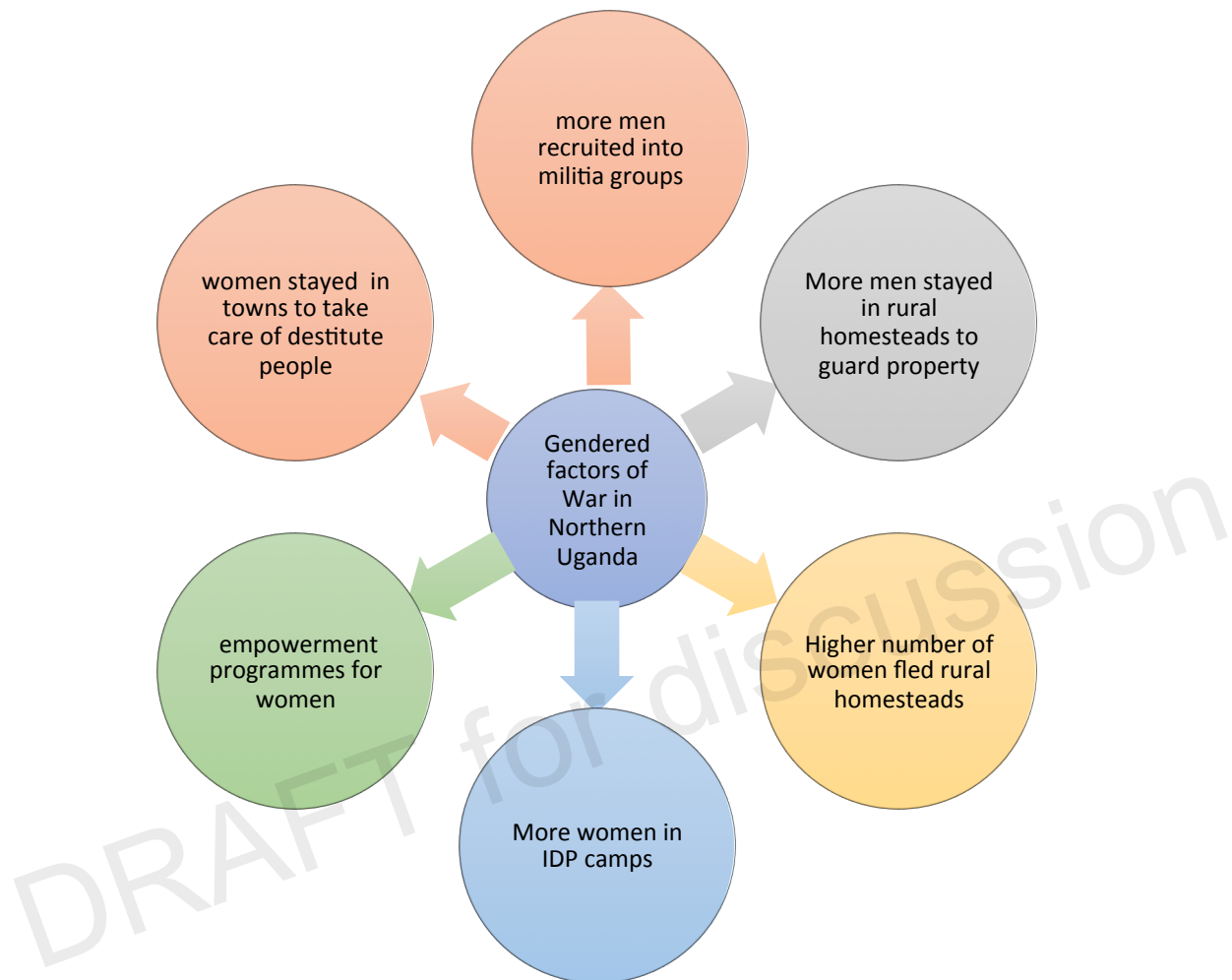
Mass violence and displacement caused substantive changes in both men and women's economic and political spheres of influence. Research undertaken by Dolan (2009, 2002), Finnstrom (2006) and

Harris' (2012) indicate that the National Resistance army of Museveni, the Lord's Resistance Army, as well as the Ugandan government's army were known to steal cattle, loot property, rape, abduct, and/or kill and maim people. The mass loss of cattle and the abduction of (mostly) boys and young men further resulted in the destabilisation of masculine authority (Blattman and Annan, 2010; Dolan, 2002). Masculine authority was also undermined when (in the mid-1990's) the Ugandan army forced approximately 2 million people in rural Acholiland into 'protected villages' i.e. IDP camps. Government army officials used this as an opportunity to further victimise Acholi communities and prevent them from supporting the LRA (Finnstrom, 2006 in Harris, 2012). With no land to till or cattle to herd, most men resorted to excessive consumption of alcohol and gambling (Dolan, 2002).

Kizza et al's (2012) research on suicide rates amongst men in IDP camps in Northern Uganda revealed that most suicide cases were as a result of men's sense of lost dignity and social worth. Older men felt they had been made redundant while younger men attempted to reinstate their status by abandoning school, opting for early marriage and struggling to provide for their families. *"They were trapped in an identity vacuum in which they were neither men nor children – a dilemma they tried to solve through risky social behaviour"* (Kizza et. al, 2012:10). Their self –esteem was further impacted upon when they realised that their wives and daughters were selling sex to survive. Some were forced to witness their women and daughters being raped by government soldiers or by the LRA. In some instances, men were further humiliated when they themselves were raped by government soldiers (Dolan, 2002: 74-5). The following diagram illustrates the displacement of men and women as a result of the war in Northern Uganda. The subsequent effects of abduction, and the erosion of family structures mobilised women to collective peace efforts.

DRAFT for discussion

Diagram 1: Gender Flux – Displacement of Men and Women



War as an opportunity for women's agency and the subversion of patriarchy?

Findings from this doctoral study indicates that there was some slight expansion of women's power largely due to the fact that the war radically transformed the social conditions that shaped gender norms amongst (predominantly) Acholi and Langi communities. There was a broadening of (older) women's (previously) implicit power as mothers, aunts, and sister-in-laws, or diviners. Widowhood, forced marriage, and an increase in the number of orphaned children meant that women suddenly experienced a widening of their material and maternal responsibilities, inadvertently increasing their sphere of influence in the clan. This expansion of a material (as opposed to discursive) power occurred within and beyond their fathers or husbands' lineage. The study specifically revealed ways in which the

war affected women's loci within extended families especially with regards to their abduction and the children born in captivity:

- Women and girls abducted and/or separated from their families for several years were forced to marry members of militia groups whose children they bore from rape;
- Children born in captivity faced various possibilities, namely:
 - Those who lost touch with their biological fathers or were rejected by their step-fathers were taken in by their mothers paternal clan;
 - Those who got separated from their families and/or were rejected by their mothers' paternal clan, ended up being supported by other women

All women who founded community peace organisations referred to an urgent need to assist large numbers of destitute children within their families /communities in which they lived. One founder member 'adopted' eight children':

Right now I have eight. My one has now left, she has now matured and she's doing her own thing. But my dependents I have four grandchildren I picked from my sisters I am helping them with. Then one son from my brother and then other non-relatives I just picked and just got them on board. I have currently eight. (Key Informant J, founder, Women's Peace Initiative-Uganda, Lira, December 2013)

In 2003 the aforementioned participant was supporting 36 persons.

Yes, that was beside the normal family members I had 36 members and then the land where I am staying now, I had already bought it but I had not yet developed it so I pushed them, 3 other families to stay there. So it was a difficult period because one was to feed and maintain these people and two was to reassure them that things would settle in time. People again get emotional. And so people were worried. You've left part of the family there, half of them is here, that was a bit of a difficult time and as people they lost their properties...(Key Informant J, founder, Women's Peace Initiative-Uganda, Lira, December 2013)

Thus many women replaced men's (previous) materially dominant role as provider and protector of the family. By looking after orphaned children, grand-children and children of other members of the extended family (brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles) their maternal role expanded at a time when there were minimal socio-economic resources available. In addition to this, the everyday chaos of overcrowded IDP camps meant there was an inevitable mixing of clans and sub-clans within a confined space resulting in shifts in patrilineal ties as well as a general loss of social control. Women somehow managed to support families from handouts from international humanitarian organisations, small group

saving schemes, petty trade, and food from abandoned fields or small gardens in and around towns where people settled. It is important to note that they took on this role in the midst of continued sexual and gender based violence:

And so you have all these responsibilities of caring for children, caring for the sick, fetching water, fetching firewood, doing all that and the war is disturbing you, is distorting all the arrangements for you to do this work because the expectation at the end of the day is that if food is to be brought to the table it is you who is to bring it, ...And for the women because life became so difficult in the camp they had to move back home to see if they could get the left over cassava or potatoes or whatever and in the process they were raped and in the process they were hit by the land mines. All these women suffered it was in the process of trying to make their families survive ... to have food. And so for us as women that is something which is unique and I think that is so for every woman. (Key Informant K, founder, Peoples Voice for Peace, Gulu, December 2014)

One particularly vulnerable group of women were those who were abducted and returned with children born during captivity. According to Annan et al (2011: 883) up to 26 per cent of female youth (aged 14-35) were abducted during the war. They were mainly recruited to become “wives” of men in LRA and mothers of abducted children, some of whom were not their own. Those who were forcibly married (up to 25%) experienced coercive sexual relationships “...characterised by shared domicile, domestic responsibilities, exclusivity, and sex carried out under threat” (Annan et al, 2011: 884). The longer the time in captivity the higher the chances of repeated sexual and gender based violence in the form of rape and forced marriage. Of the six organisations included in the study, the Women’s Advocacy Network (established in 2011) was solely founded by women who were formerly abducted. Eight informants shared the following information about the year they were abducted and the number of children they bore during captivity:

Table 2: Formerly Abducted Women : years in captivity and the children they bore

Informant	Year abducted	Number of years in captivity	Children born in captivity	Number of children in household
1	1994	11	3 (returned with 2)	6
2	1992	9	3 (one died)	4
3	1992	12	1	Miscarried twice
4	1995	11	2	No data
5	1996	8	2	4 (one died)
6	1992	12	3 (one died)	3
7	1995	9	3	5
8	1993	7	2 (one died)	4 (one is her sisters)

Source: Focus Group Discussion, Gulu, December 2013

When these women returned from the “bush” they had to endure further trauma of being stigmatised, ostracised and subjected to violence by their own families and the larger community.

I do remember that before WAN began, life was very difficult because people did not like us in the community. First of all if you came back from the bush people thought that you are the one who committed the crimes that LRA did. People in the community blamed us or all the crimes that the LRA committed. (Focus Group Discussant 1, founder, WAN, December 2013)

*The children we came back with were not allowed to play with other kids. If the kids fought when playing they said the *cerⁱⁱⁱ* from their fathers’ disturbed them and that is why they beat other kids. When I was abducted I was given to a sick man. When I came back I was not fine. I kept on suffering from sickness until when I began to take medicine. That was when I felt better. I was so sad. When the child was insulted and on the other hand I looked at the problem I was going through. I was sick and could not do anything. It was painful. (Focus Group Discussant 8, founder, Women’s Advocacy Network, Gulu, December 2013)*

Thus the boundaries of the clans, families, communities became porous within the war context. The war economy relied on abductions to both literally and figuratively reproduce child soldiers for the war.. Patrilineage ties became diluted and disrupted as a result..

The women's ability to found peace groups in the midst of such stigma, violence and social flux reveals their resilience/capacity in crafting individual and collective options for themselves and the communities around them.

This ability to navigate through a precarious situation is a form of agency (Vigh 2003:136 in Utas, 2005). From a feminist perspective, agency also implies subverting or contesting patriarchal social configurations and framing "...a sense of oneself as one who can go beyond the given meanings in any one discourse, and forge something new, through a combination of previously unrelated discourses, through the invention of words and concepts which capture a shift in consciousness that is beginning to occur, or through imagining not what is, but what might be." (Davies, 1991: 51).

The study found that a form of re-imagining occurred in the way women activists dealt with the trauma of men's displacement and loss of property. Women took on new social positions that contested men's power and shifted certain patriarchal constructs of femininity. Further subversion of patriarchy occurred in women's ability to provide for the material wellbeing of their families and the broader communities.

Subverting economies of patriarchy: micro-credit and land

One prominent way women were able to support communities was through micro-credit schemes and small-scale income generation activities. In the early stages of formation of the peace groups, peace building efforts began with collection of food from friends and family. This later moved into more institutionalised approaches such as the establishment of small businesses like juice making, tailoring, trading in food stuffs, rearing of animals, wine making, mushroom growing and bee keeping. Some of these businesses later developed into saving or micro-finance/credit schemes that allowed women to work in groups, save collectively, and share financial risks.

We had cases of women who wanted to do market vending, we started with them. And then those who were able to grow what little income they got, they moved to certain higher levels and they were able to earn better income. And later on they were able to tell us, now I am settled, my husband has come back, my children are now going to school. And from this I get a turnover of like this higher interest if I was getting a 5% interest now I'm getting like 20 % and something like that. We had some women who were doing well who actually impressed us. (Key Informant J, founder member, PVP, December 2014)

They described the expansion of their ability to provide for people around them as contributing towards peace. Several organisations in Kitgum (KIWEPI, KICWA, and others who were not core to the study) combined the income generation projects with savings schemes often termed 'Village Savings and Loan Associations'(VSLA's) that were (mostly) funded and coordinated by CARE International. VSLA's formed part of a broader programme called the Sustainable Comprehensive Response for Vulnerable Children and their Households (SCORE). As of 2013, CARE had helped facilitate the establishment of 27, 222 VSLA groups in rural Uganda representing over half a million people. The report states that up to 52 billion Ugandan shillings (about \$19 million) had been saved (Lowicki-Zucca et.al, 2014). On the one hand the international donors role in facilitating numerous projects for the most vulnerable, is highly commendable but on the other hand it also furthered patriarchal economies.

Nevertheless, the doctoral study found that the benefits of income generation were linked to the alleviation of poverty as well as longer term benefits of capacity building, empowerment and consciousness-raising which went beyond mere survival.

... at least when a person is economically stable she is able to do many things... and that gives us a peace of mind. You are not worried about what to eat tomorrow, what to wear and what to do, you are settled. And then other individual, some other people need to be able to have peace of mind to be able to think positively, because if I am not sure of what I am doing the next minute or what would happen the next minute to me then why should I go ahead and plan for that? That also interferes with what one is able to do. (Key Informant J, founder, WOPI-U, December 2013)

The women explained that the benefits were evident in changes to their social positioning. They had an enhanced capacity to take care of their families; and deal with the trauma of displacement as well as other psycho-social impacts. Women's involvement in these peace collectives shifted their status in a positive way both socially and economically. Thus their involvement in income generation was perceived as a practical attempt to address the ravages of war, in ways that addressed the various needs of women.

And then right now, in those days we also initiated some income generating activities we trained women on making bread, making wine, wine from the local resources available at home and then tailoring and getting to and then training them tailoring and some aspects of life skills that can sustain them and mushroom their growing, those things they can do at home within their compound. Ja, but then as people went back home from the camps we changed our vision actually changed, we were looking at the development aspect, women out there should be empowered because we were working directly with the women affected by the war, ...we've given them goats and then this training on tailoring has also continued and then there's the aspect of human rights, training on gender based violence which affects women. Ja, and then

there is also a component of reproductive health. (Key Informant W, founder, WOPI-U, December 2013)

Overall, it seems income generation projects and saving schemes nourished local forms of association. The extent to which they fostered associational life that recognised and transformed oppression through collective consciousness and resistance, is difficult to assess. Amina Mama (2014:37-8) is rather sceptical as to whether women living in war contexts or the aftermath of war can actually address the broader structural roots of oppression, yet this study gives credence to the fact that some shifts had occurred. The attempts at micro-credit schemes played a vital survivalist role which was essential for their livelihoods. With regards to land ownership women were still denied access and ownership. They generally do not inherit land from their fathers since when they marry they take on their husbands' clan names.

In the Acholi sub-region, land acquisitions are particularly sensitive, occurring in the wake of long-standing displacement of the majority of population and the resultant confusion about boundaries. Their resettlement has been further complicated by speculation about the presence of oil (Sjoberg, 2014). The vast, fertile and possibly oil-rich land in Acholi has attracted the attention of prospective investors, willing and able to take advantage of an impoverished population. In addition to the many local land disputes the region has recently witnessed an increasing number of controversial purchases, leases and allocations. All of this has fueled anxiety and tension.

In this study, land ownership still remained a major issue for women even during the post-conflict context:

At the time that we opened the office, women were generally been denied land. Widows, unmarried women, married women. We heard a lot of women being thrown off their land ...because they were staying in the camps so they did not know where their husbands came from. At the time we opened the office, there were very many women who say "I am looking or I was told that my husband comes from this area". And I have gone there and no one is giving me land. That becomes an issue because one, you have been married, probably you got married within the camp. You do not know where this man comes from so we have issues of demarcation. You married the man, he died, he was buried in the camp, so now you trying to trace his roots. (Key Informant M, staff, FIDA, February 2015)

Abducted women had major difficulties in reintegrating into the community since no land was allocated to them. Women's experience of looking after child-mothers who were abducted was that many of them had difficulty integrating into the community since no land was allocated to them. Child mothers who did

not know (or could not find out) the clan of the father of their child could not inherit land. They were also not easily integrated into their fathers' clans:

The land conflict, we realised that as we visit them the issue of land here is a very hot issue in the sense that traditionally the women do not have access or control over land, you can only control land through your husband or through a brother or somebody but not directly as a woman. So we were trying to appeal to the clan leaders to sympathize with the child mothers and try to portion them land ... And we were trying to appeal to them to portion some of the land to the child mothers so that they could do some of their farming from home. Because, traditionally they are supposed to farm from where they are married and not from home and at times they have clashed over land (Key Informant Z, founder, KICWA, February 2015)

One respondent (a staff member of FIDA) who has worked with many women's peace groups in Northern Uganda expressed the imagined possibility of shifting land ownership to women.

To start with children that were born in captivity there's need for a shift, the mothers must also be allowed to have ownership, to be seen as valued stakeholders of the land and as valued parents and therefore can actually pass on their clan to their children and that is really fundamental in Africa. So patriarchy is alive and kicking and so you need to have a shift where people will say, "Let's create some exceptions" and have these children who were born probably out of rape and out of abduction and these are not children who chose to be born like this and the mothers would have loved to have a clan and the reality is that they don't know who the father is. (Key Informant V, former co-director, Isis-WICCE, February 2015).

The study found that with the destabilisation of masculine dominance,⁴⁴ spaces of partial power for women opened up in the way family structures became reconfigured. Thus the tension between agency and structure is once again evident. Agency is constantly being subverted by structural realities that may give the impression of shifting at the surface level but remains deeply immovable and ingrained at other levels.

...as women if you leave home to go to you don't have your share of land at home, you are expected to have a share at your husbands' place, now you actually - you only access the land you don't have any ownership over that land and then as soon as your husband dies it's either your children who can take over that land but not you, you can go and then the children have that land. Now while the children grow somebody maybe an uncle of the children, a brother-in-law is always in control of that land. (Key Informant W, founder, WOPI-U, December 2013)

⁴⁴ Here we use Pierre Bourdieu's (2001) theory of masculine dominance that defines it as a social world that lends itself to objectification that is entirely constructed around an androcentric world view – an archaeological history of masculine unconscious "...which constitutes women as symbolic objects whose being (esse) is being-perceived (precipi), has the effect of keeping them in a permanent state of bodily insecurity, or more precisely, symbolic dependence." (66)

Thus it would seem that intractable patriarchal norms relating to land is still non-negotiable. Women however, made several attempts to address new possible masculine roles. Of interest is the way women addressed the post war situation of vulnerable men. In an agentic manner, they initiated projects that affirmed and valorised non-abusive masculinities. At the same time the findings reveal an unconscious re-inscription of dominant masculinities.

Women's agency in re-socialising masculinities

Acholi men, like all others, have been socialised into dominant patriarchy. According to women in the study, building peace at community level requires an examination and eradication of oppressive gender norms:

For someone to realise about peace two things [gender equality and peace] should go together...If they don't go together then I don't think things will not go well. That is why on this land things are not going well because in culture they say a woman is under a man so must always be under a man and a decision must always be made only by a man. And a man is ever right, when he says something it must be taken so automatically that one does not bring peace because a man might say something which depresses a woman.... But when you say a woman is given time to actually express ourselves and her decision is also taken into account that is when we say ok I think there is peace. A woman talks, the husband talk, or men talk and women talk ...But here culture is still tying us down. It's tying us down. (Key Informant Y, founder, Kitgum Concerned Women's Association, Kitgum, February 2015)

There was an awareness of both patriarchal (structural) and cultural oppressions beyond that which the war either reinforced or (re)created. Some women activists argued that the roots of violence in the community are linked to Acholi customs of manhood during and after the war. In this regard one peace group in Lira (Women's Initiative for Peace – Uganda) implemented a community based awareness project on gender based violence called SASA. SASA (which means 'now' in Kiswahili) was actually designed by two Kampala-based organisations– Raising Voices and the Centre for Domestic Violence Prevention (CEDOVIP).

They trained a larger number of men (compared to women) using a methodology that aimed at creating "...a critical mass committed to and able to create social norm change" (Abramsky et. Al, 2014). A founder member of the women's peace group referred to the benefits of including men in the project:

In our recent SASA project the majority of our community activists are men and I want to say it is wonderful because if you want to address SGBV approach it from the men who are the perpetrators...I want to share an experience of one of them giving a testimony. Of how the SASA training alone has transformed him, he used to be a drunkard, very violent and every

time he reaches home everybody including the woman runs for the hills but every evening but during the two weeks training, we gave them 50 Sawa out of pocket so in the next meeting with them, he gave a testimony that for the first time he gave the 50 thousand to the wife but before that he used to not give money to his wife and the woman asked him, "What is this for?" And to make sure that he was telling us the truth, the brothers came to find out how their brother got transformed, "Who are these people who have transformed our brother?" And so basically and this is just to elaborate, much as the women, the men are difficult people but when you bring them on board they are very resourceful and they are really dependable people. And you know since they are more outgoing they reach out to the community more than the women, that's what I see (Key Informant S, Lira, December 2013).

The SASA initiative points to an actual change in violent masculine behaviour of a community member that the peace group worked with. Whether or not such change can or will be sustained is dependent on a variety of factors. The SASA project is fairly new and not all informants were directly involved in the project.

According to Abramsky et al (2014:3) *"The central focus of the intervention is to promote a critical analysis and discussion of power and power inequalities - not only of the ways in which men and women may misuse power and the consequences of this for their intimate relationships and communities, but also on how people can use their power positively to affect and sustain change at an individual and community level"*.

Two other groups – Kitgum Women's Peace Initiative and Women's Peace Initiative – Uganda – established projects aimed at changing masculinities in the domestic sphere through men-only projects that valorised men who perform 'peaceful' masculinities. At the time of the study, the programmes aimed to transform certain 'irresponsible' masculinities that the war seemed to have (re)created or reinforced. For example, in 2009 KIWEPI began a project titled "Male- Engage". It grew out of a women's empowerment project. According to a (male) staff member who coordinated KIWEPI's women's empowerment programme at the time of the study, KIWEPI's core management team realised that women's empowerment would not be complete if men were not 'brought on board' (interview, December 2013). He gave an example of KIWEPI's village saving scheme in which it was useful to have both husband and wife in the same saving scheme. This ensured that men were aware of the principles of saving and therefore could not easily undermine his wife's efforts to save. Apart from deliberately inviting men to join saving schemes, KIWEPI partnered with Care International and began 'educating' the community, and especially men, on the importance of women's empowerment programmes and men's role as partners with women in the home and community. In conversation with communities they worked with, KIWEPI's interpretation of 'peaceful' masculinities included five themes:

men who were not violent in the home; men who do not abuse alcohol; men who financially support the family; men who assist with household chores and men who allow their wives to make some decisions in the home. Community members were able to vote for men who demonstrated that they lived up to all of these five core themes.. They were awarded special recognition through an award ceremony in which they were officially named as **Lacor Makwiri** – role model men:

Lacor Mawkiri should be of the following qualities. One, his children should all be attending school, there should be nothing like school drop out. Two, the, his household should not experience food insecurity, food should be enough in that household. Three, he should not be a person who is violent each and every time battering the woman, and all that is, those are some of the things they came up with. He should also should not drink irresponsibly, like coming back home at midnight. Lachor makwiri is not like that.... They should have the necessary health facilities, the latrine should be there at home, the rubbish pit, the shelter for bathing, the shelter for animal and poultry should be separate from the human, from the human habitat. That is how, he is defined, the role model man. Then afterward, they nominated names after the campaign, the community went into secret ballot voting, that is how the 39 role model men were selected, ya. [Key Informant D, 19 December 2013, KIWEPI]

It would appear that women's attempts at re-socialising masculinities was constrained or circumscribed to their immediate experiences of gender based violence and lack of material provision.

Conclusion

This paper highlights the complexities that undergird womens' peace initiatives in Northern Uganda. These women displayed a sense of agency and resilience in their efforts to establish community support groups and organizations that addressed the socio-economic and psychological impact of the war with very little resources at their disposal. Whilst one has to concede that there was some 're-imagining of their realities' which can be traced through the narratives, there is little evidence of a deeper conceptualisation of their 'peace efforts'. One could argue that these women were in a crisis context and reacted to the immediate needs with great effect and that to expect a deep-grained analysis of their situation would be unrealistic. The fact that women in this study did not address the ethnic tensions but focused on addressing the economic and psycho-social fallout of the war may well have been a 'modus operandi' of choice given the situation they found themselves in. They chose to adopt the features of a 'coping economy' (Peterson, 2008) operating in a survivalist mode. Ethnic divisions was a major source of conflict that could not be easily be resolved whilst helping with the re-configuration of families; renegotiating ethnic/clan boundaries; developing peaceful masculinities, savings and income generation projects to provide for the material needs of families and caring for the most vulnerable were options that these women more readily address. Women's ownership of land still remained a non-negotiable according to clan systems and customs. Thus whilst they made some gains in occupying previously masculinized spaces such as being material providers they were blocked from

shifting power dynamics inherent in land ownership. Further analysis would be needed to show intersections between patriarchy, Uganda's neo-liberal political economy as well as entrenched ethnic divisions between Northern Uganda and the rest of country. As Confortini (2010: 4) says, there is need for more "feminist curiosity" about how

"patriarchy in all its varied guises, camouflaged, Khaki clad, and pin-striped – is a principal cause both of the outbreak of violent social conflicts and of the international community's frequent failures in providing long-term resolutions to those violent conflicts."

DRAFT for discussion

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ⁱⁱSee copy of the Beijing Platform for Action, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/violence.htm>

ⁱⁱ'Facts and Figures on Peace and Security', UN WOMEN website, http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/women_war_peace/facts_figures.html, accessed on 25th February 2013.

ⁱⁱⁱGhostly vengeance

DRAFT for discussion

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