UNIVERSITY OF TROMSØ UIT

CENTER FOR PEACE STUDIES

THE REINTEGRATION OF FEMALE EX-ABDUCTEES OF THE LORD'S RESISTANCE ARMY OF NORTHERN UGANDA: A CASE OF GULU DISTRICT.

GERALD AINEBYONA

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY IN PEACE AND CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION, UNIVERSITY OF TROMSØ

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DEDICATION

To all the peace agents in Uganda and my dear parents Mr. Kamwaka Aloysius and Kabaandize Blandina.

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DEFINITION OF KEYWORDS

Abductees are people who are forcefully recruited into either armed groups or armed forces against their will for any purposes.

Apartheid is a Dutch word which means “apartness” or separation (Palmisano, 2001:34).

Armed groups are the same as rebel forces who normally fight against state forces.

Bush is a wild area outside the home. In the Northern Uganda context, it came to be known as a place where rebels are based.

Child is defined by *international standards* as a person under the age of 18.

Child in *Acholi context* is any person who is not married no matter how old he or she is.

Child soldier is any person under 18 forcefully or willingly incorporated into armed groups to perform combat activities.

Female ex-abductees are females who were formerly abducted by armed groups for child soldiering or sexual slavery or both.

Gender is a term that shows how men/boys and women/girls are socially determined.

Gender relations refer to relations of power between women and men within and outside households revealed in the division of labour, ideas, representations and decision-making (Agarwal, 1997:1-2).

LRA or Lord’s Resistance Army is rebel movement whose leader is Joseph Kony.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) refers to “an anxiety disorder that can occur after exposure to traumatic event” (American Psychiatric Association, 1994 in Hetzel-Riggin, 2009:46).

Psychological intervention means attention directed to treat mental difficulties.

Reintegration is the process through which persons who have been associated with armed groups or armed forces “enter into meaningful roles and identities as civilians who are accepted by their families and communities in the context of local and national reconciliation” (Paris Principles, 2007:7).

Re-traumatisation is a term used to refer to "re-experiencing of trauma symptoms due to an event or interaction that reminds victims of previous traumatic experiences" (Hooper and Warwick 2006 in Dallam, 1010:4).

Stigmatisation is the attachment or labelling of a specific group of people with negative characteristics (Lucassen, 1990:80) often excluding and viewing them as irresponsible, immoral and unworthy.

Trauma refers to feelings of helplessness, horror or fear, depression, lack of trust and loss of control (Hetzel-Riggin, 2009:46).

Uganda is a landlocked country in East Africa where the Lord's Resistance Army originate.

UPDF is the Ugandan Peoples' Defence Forces-armed forces of the state.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

IDMC: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

IDA: Internally Displaced Persons

LRA: Lord's Resistance Army

DRC: Democratic Republic of Congo

UPE: Universal Primary Education

MISR: Makerere University Institute of Social Research

NRM: National Resistance Movement

UDM/A: Uganda Democratic Movement/Army

UPDF: Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces

CHA: Cessation of Hostilities Agreement

NGOs: Non-Governmental Organisation

NRC: Norwegian Refugee Council

GUSCO: Gulu Support the Children Organisation

ICO: Invisible Children Organisation

EHO: Empowering Hands Organisation

ASO: American Sociological Association

AAA: American Anthropological Association

DDR: Disarmament Demobilisation Reintegration

PTSD: Post-traumatic stress disorder

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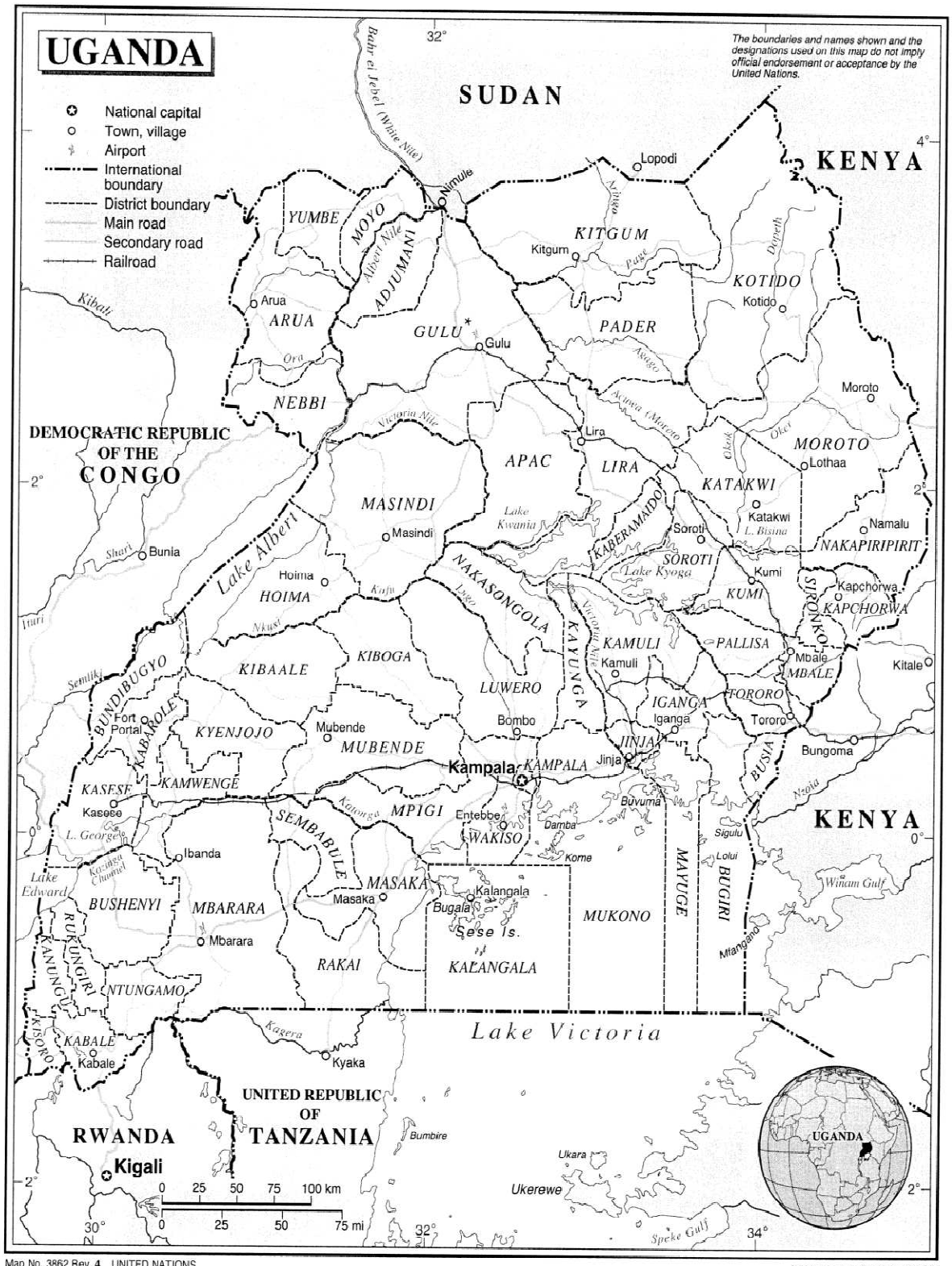

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ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on the reintegration of the female ex-abductees of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). The aim of Reintegration is to transform and empower these women and girls so that they can help themselves and have a successful future. For more than two decades, the war between the LRA and the government of Uganda, included violations of human rights, abductions of children into child soldiering, sexual abuse and forced marriage of young girls and claimed thousands of lives in northern Uganda. The thesis explores female ex-abductees' post-conflict challenges in Gulu, an Acholi area, and how these complicate their reintegration into social life. Through empirical data presentation, I provide a lens through which to understand the gendered challenges to the reintegration of female ex-abductees of LRA. It is widely known that women and girls across the world experience discrimination of some kind at the expense of men and boys. But the situation of female ex-abductees of LRA in Northern Uganda is worse. I argue that these females face specific challenges to the extent that one can use the *apartheid* of gender to understand their situation. The social stigma, rejection and maltreatment they face results in their *re-traumatisation* in the post-conflict setting. Using a gender analysis, the thesis outlines public policy action or suggestions that could be useful in designing and implementing an appropriate intervention programme for reintegrating female ex-abductees of LRA.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Uganda, a landlocked country, lies along the equator between the West and the East African Rift Valleys. It is boardered by Sudan in the North, Kenya in the East, Tanzania in the South, Rwanda in the South West and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in the West. The Joseph Kony (Lord's Resistance Army, LRA leader) and his rebel forces had carried out vicious attacks in Gulu on the Acholi people of Northern Ugandan for more than two decades. This happened from 1987-2009 in the war between them and the government of Uganda as they harboured in the nearby DRC jungles and Southern Sudan.

The horrendous war claimed many Acholi lives, forced displacements into camps and destroyed infrastructures such as schools, hospitals and churches. It was also characterised by widespread violations of human rights such as rapes, mutilations of lips, noses, arms, ears and toes, abductions of men, women, and over 60,000 children to use for child soldering and other purposes, such as the problem of regional and national insecurity. Girls in particular suffered disproportionate gendered violence with an added burden of forced marriage to rebel commanders and forced sex with other low ranking rebels which gravely traumatised them. The recent end of war encouraged the return of many survivors of all ages as indicated in chapter two. But for female ex-abductees, the return brought special challenges. Some mature girls lost their identity, bodily integrity, some returning with children born from captivity and health difficulties and are now living with shame, stigma and re-traumatisation. These horrific experiences pose immense challenges to their reintegration in Northern Uganda as the "Acholi struggle to find directionality in the shadows of a bitter civil war" (Finnistrom, 2009:61). In this thesis, I will explore issues influencing reintegration of female ex-abductees of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) through the lens of marriage among Acholi of Northern Uganda. The general background of armed conflict in this region shall be presented in chapter two.

1.2 Problem statement

It is extremely problematic for female ex-abductees who have returned from LRA abductions to be reintegrated in society, for several reasons. Children abducted by LRA were forced to commit horrific acts which make them extremely traumatised. The community believes that they have a military mentality and can kill one who marries them and that the spirits of those

they killed in the bush can attack the one who marries such a girl. Female ex-abductees are also perceived by society as unmarriageable. The issue of marriageability could be underestimated from the western perspective, because aid agencies do not consider it in reintegration packages. This does not mean that female ex-abductees must get married to be reintegrated, but it means that marriage as a cultural institution is so important that it cannot be overlooked. It is the primary unit of Acholi social and economic security upon which families and communities depend. Unmarriagibility is part of the female ex-abductees' psychological problems. They are also in a more general manner often over-stigmatised and rejected by most community members.

I seek to analyse the situation of the reintegration efforts and options for female ex-abductees, laying out a broad picture but with a specific focus on marriage and the way traditional gender roles influence both women's efforts to be reintegrated and how gender roles inform the community and female ex-abductees' problems. It is my intention also to discuss how they can reconnect to their families or relatives, gain acceptance by the community by allowing them to participate in daily activities in order to regain their normal state, be attractive to their families and members of the community again and become useful citizens of Uganda.

1.3 Objectives of the study

My main objective is to find out how the girls who have returned from the Lord's Resistance Army Abductions can be reintegrated into reproductive, institutional and everyday life in Northern Uganda. Specifically, I seek to:

- Find out how negative attitudes towards female ex-abductees can be reshaped.
- Find out how gender-specific trauma in female ex-abductees can be best addressed.
- Make suggestions on appropriate interventions in the lives of female ex-abductees.

1.4 Research questions

The current situation of reintegrating female ex-abductees seems a very complicated one in which I seek to answer the following questions: How can reintegration occur in these circumstances? Can the NGOs or the community really help reintegrate these female ex-abductees? What measures could inform policy about the appropriate reintegration intervention?

1.5 Relevancy to peace studies

The current discourse about war victims or survivors in Social Sciences targets gender relations in conflict zones. Generally, girls and women in armed conflicts especially in Africa suffer more of the atrocitous acts than their male counterparts and their background has terrible consequences in post-war societies. This is confirmed by feminist practionor's like Goldblatt & Meintjes (1998:38) who argue that although both males and females are tortured in armed conflict, they often have different experiences and "differing constructions of gender shape their experience and treatment" even in the aftermath of war. As I will discuss in chapter four, men and women, boys and girls experience war differently but may also impact their lives differently in the post-conflict setting. This discourse fits well in the situation of female ex-abductees of LRA in the Gulu district of Northern Uganda. Ugandan tradition is culturally constructed, and determines gender roles and influences the dichotomous perceptions surrounding men or boys and girls or women.

1.6 Structuring the thesis

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. In **chapter one**, I have introduced the thesis, topic and outlined the problem statement, objectives and relevance of the study plus the thesis structure. In **chapter two**, I present the background information about child soldiering and review literature on reintegration of ex-abductees, particularly female where I identify and address the gaps. **Chapter three** focuses on methodological issues such as field decision and its justification, choice of study area, data collection techniques and field experiences. **Chapter four** presents gender analysis for approaching and interpreting gender issues. In **chapter five**, I present empirical data, outline research findings and analyse data according to gender analysis. **Chapter six** outlines recommendations and conclusions. My aim is to give the insight and the everyday "social landscape … and the subjective experience" of my informants in the post-conflict Gulu (Christensen, 2007:14-15) throughout the chapters.

1.7 Summary

Having interacted with the female ex-abductees of LRA during my fieldwork in Northern Uganda whose lives are "marked by extraordinary experiences and testimonies" (Mæland, 2010:10), the task now is to look into possible appropriate interventions for their hopeful future. For example, this may include a transition into entering meaningful roles and identities as civilians and be accepted by their families and communities in a context of local and national reconciliation. These will be discussed further in chapter five. My hope is that

this thesis may be used as a guide for policy makers and well wishers in efforts to reintegrate female ex-abductees, not only in Uganda but also the rest of the world.

CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction and Literature Review

The main aim of this chapter is to give an overview of the existing literature on ex-child soldiers, in particular females. It describes the background of war in Uganda. Moreover, it discusses issues and challenges to the reintegration of female ex-abductees in the context of marriage in Acholi, an important cultural institution in Northern Uganda. The chapter identifies and addresses gaps in the current research on these issues and conceptualises it.

Child soldiering has been reported to be a global phenomenon. Empirical facts reveal an estimated 300,000 children in the two-thirds of the world's ongoing or recently settled conflicts who were recruited into child soldiering and other purposes. Two million have died of armed conflict in the 1990s and more than twenty million were displaced while six million got terrible injuries or were disabled (London, c2007:15; see also Singer, 2005 cited in Mæland, 2010:57). As a result, there has been grave human suffering as the darkest consequence of war. Most of the children were abducted but a good number of them may have joined rebel armies willingly either to protect themselves and their families or "in an attempt to overcome, in their eyes a profoundly marginal socio-economic situation" as noted in Liberia by Utas (2005:421).

During wars, girls and young women are affected differently from boys or men. The former suffer from systematic sexual violence including widespread gang-rape and sex slavery no matter why they entered into insurgent forces. This general trend was reported from 20 African countries in the period between 1987-2007 (Bastick et al., 2007 cited in Coulter et al., 2008:18). The main focus of scholarly work has been on reintegration of war affected children. However, this research is still in its initial stages. Reintegration of female ex-abductees has been a challenge to diverse countries in sub-Saharan Africa and other parts of the world where abduction of children or young girls has been commonplace. Published in 2008, Coulter et al., reports how girls or women have been "actively involved in armed conflict in African countries as diverse as Zimbabwe, Eritrea, Mozambique, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Uganda, South Africa and Libya in contemporary rebel insurgencies" … (Bennett et al., 1995; Nzomo, 2002 cited in Coulter et al., 2008:8). It has been documented that "armed groups abducted girls into child soldiering in 28 countries" alongside male abductees between 1990-2003 (McKay and Mazurana, 2004 cited in Wessells, 2006:88). I will explore more of female ex-abductee issues later in this chapter.

2.2 War in Uganda (1987-2009)

Twenty three years of armed conflict between the government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has gravely devastated Northern Uganda. LRA rebels have committed very horrific acts ranging from mutilations, murders, tortures and abduction of children. The LRA of Uganda has been depending largely on child labour; child soldiers are estimated to be 80% of their forces, approximately 30% of which are girls who were forcefully recruited and conscripted into armed combat, and who face an additional burden of sexualised violence (Mazurana 2004 cited in Coulter et al., 2008:9). In the past until late 1990s, female abductees, and their roles in the LRA were not acknowledged by organisations operating in Northern Uganda (Fox, 2004 in Coulter et al., 2008:9).

Uganda experienced more than two decades of armed conflict between the government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebels, since 1987, a year after the current president came to power. This was after defeating the Uganda National Liberation army (UNLA) whose soldiers later began attacking and killing some Acholi people (Behrend, 1999 cited in Berntsen, 2010:41) in northern Uganda. There were estimated to be several underground rebel groups each fighting to overthrow the government in 1986. Some rebel group emerged among the Acholi in the same year under the leadership of Alice Lakwena against the Uganda's National Resistance Movement (NRM) government that had religious dimensions (Behrend, 1998 cited in Berntsen, 2010:41). In her Holy Spirit Movement (a rebel name) Lakwena rallied thousands of Acholi against the Ugandan NRM government. This woman also believed in spiritual power and convinced her followers that enemy bullets would turn to water. Despite her claimed spiritual powers, Lakwena was crushed by NRM in a rebellion of 1987 between her rebels and the southern government of Yoweri Museveni, the President of Uganda (Berntsen, 2010:41).

When Lakwena fled into exile in Kenya, her father took over the rebel group but soon surrendered to the government. LRA was formed in 1987 by Joseph Kony "a self-proclaimed messianic prophet" whose mission has been to "free the Acholi people of northern Uganda by overthrowing the government and installing a system based on the biblical Ten Commandments" (Nambalirwa, 2010:182) after claiming that northern Uganda was being marginalised and exploited by the President of Uganda who hails from the South of the country. Kony took advantage of the fall of Alice Lakwena to rise against the NRM government. He also claimed personal connection to the spirit world. Research reveals that one of his spiritual staff is believed to be "commanding stones to turn into grenades" (Nambalirwa, 2010:182). He spearheaded the Holy Spirit movement and assumed a new

name: Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Religion can be a powerful tool to motivate armed conflicts. Indeed, it has a high social relevance not only in Uganda but the rest of Africa. The contradictory side of LRA is that it breaks the same commandments it claims to preserve, by killing people for no good reason.

During this conflict, children were severely impacted and their rights heavily violated. In the course of the conflict, children (girls and boys) were abducted from their homes during the night and sometimes could be taken away from the surrounding primary and secondary schools in Northern Uganda where these rebels had been operating through "hit-and-run raids" (Finniström, 2006:12). According to the Survey of War Affected Youths (SWAY), there was an "abduction of over 66,000 children by the Lord's Resistance Army to use as soldiers" (SWAY 2006; 2008 cited in Shanahan, 2008:14). In addition to child soldiering, girls were forced into doing multiple and complex tasks like serving as wives as either a primary or secondary role to commanders and low-ranking rebels, porters and food producers (McKay and Mazurana, 2004 cited in Carlson and Mazurana, 2008:17). Those who resisted could be killed or mutilated; mutilations included the cutting away of their arms, lips, ears and other sensitive body parts. These children also experienced psychological torture and are therefore highly traumatised. Others were displaced along with their families, losing parents and family members and their huts burnt to ashes.

According to some sources, the Ugandan army was part of this dangerous problem as related crimes were noted among them ravaging mostly Acholi women and girls' bodies with total impunity throughout the war (Human Rights watch, 2005 cited in Finniström, 2009:62). Although difficult to prove it is in fact true that not only the LRA but Ugandan army was also involved, this increased the vulnerability of females who were thus doubly targeted; this specifically affected the Acholi. Such a situation could have placed the Acholi women into a very insecure and dangerous position.

Peace building efforts were tried by the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI) in 1994 and also 2002 but failed. Several villages were destroyed in Uganda, Southern Sudan and most recently DRC. Rampant HIV, malaria, hunger and violence were worsened by occasional night visits from LRA rebels either to kill or abduct new victims. Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC report, 2009:3) reveals that: "A third attempt at peace talks began in July 2006 and the next month, the government and the LRA signed a land mark Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CHA) which resulted into substantial improvements in security conditions and in humanitarian access to affected populations."

There were return processes from Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps back to transit sites in home areas since 2006. This opened opportunities for further negotiations in 2007 and 2008 but these never succeeded. However, much work needs to be done to ensure that these returnees can live sustainably because displacement left most of them extremely impoverished, and rendered them voiceless, helpless and powerless and deprived of a right to demand basic services as they are labelled foreigners within their country without any capacity to cope with shocks according to the report on Chronic Poverty in Uganda (Peace, Recovery and Development Plan-PRDP, 2007: vi).

More recently, there were occasional attacks on unarmed people in northern Uganda until February 2009 when the rebels were defeated by military coup and hence disappearing to the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) Garamba Forests.

2.3 Post-War Northern Uganda (February, 2009 to date)

A very recent report by Cakaj provides that: "Many former combatants of LRA have given up the fighting during the first two years. They have returned to Northern Uganda making long journeys from Sudan, Central African Republic and Democratic Republic of Congo" (Cakaj, 2011:1). Sources say the LRA are currently scattered in very uncoordinated and disorganised small groups in these jungles with some LRA groups operating "more than 1000 kilometres away from one another with no communication" (Cakaj, 2011:10). This is not to conclude that their political struggle has vanished. On the contrary, the possibility that they may begin re-attacking civilian populations in their operational areas is present and unpredictable.

It is against this background that more ex-abductees of LRA have been continuously returning home since February 2009 though many more have been "reluctant to return to their communities … fearing retribution from the community members they were forced to attack when in the LRA and lacking economic opportunities there." As a result, they remain far away from home even though they are still in Uganda (Cakaj, 2011:2). This poses a reintegration challenge both to the government of Uganda and local NGOs. Most of the Internally Displaced People (IDPs) also returned in large numbers from camps to their villages as shown on the map below. Both male and female ex-abductees have much assistance from humanitarian organisations like Gulu Support the Children (GUSCO), Norwegian Refugee Council and Invisible Children. Although there has been some success in reintegrating boys, the state of female ex-abductees is getting worse. This is largely due to the

IDP Population Movement from Camps, Transit Sites and Villages of Origin by sub region as of 2009

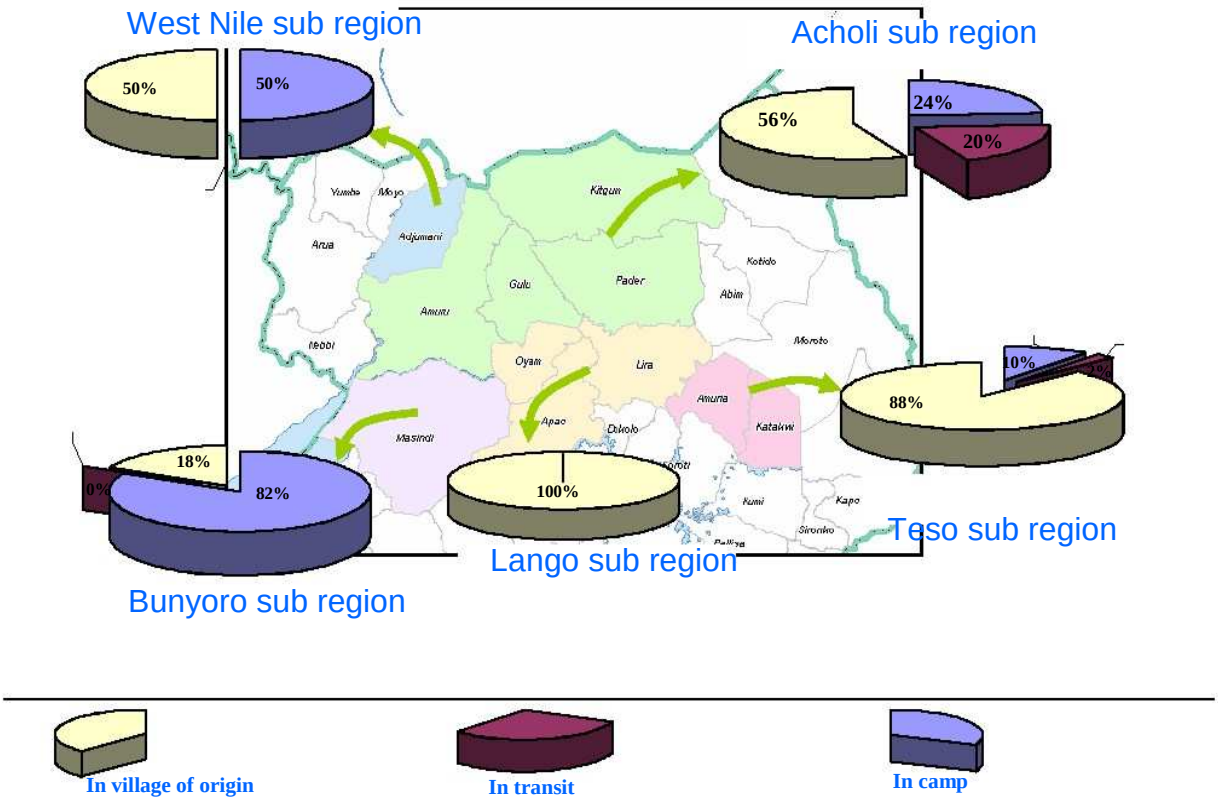

Figure 1. Source: UNHCR July, 2009

negative perceptions of them and continuous stigmatisation by the society in which they live. This is an important aspect of my research.

In addition to ex-abductees' challenges in post-war Northern Uganda, Cakaj reveals that: "The majority of former combatants who survived all the hazards associated with abandoning the rebellion are pressured into joining the Ugandan army to fight against the remaining LRA with no training and no salary" (Cakaj, 2011:1). Although male ex-abductees may stand high risks of being pressured by the government army, this may not decrease or relieve the extremely painful traumatic memories in their female counterparts, but rather increases them. This leaves female ex-abductees of LRA in a frontline situation should the rebels return to Northern Uganda.

2.4 Reintegration of Female ex-abductees in general

Whereas the term 'former child soldier' is used in Cape Town Principles (1997:1) as 'children associated with armed groups; for the Paris Principles (2007:7), it means children associated with armed forces and groups. The Cape Town Principles are strategies which

were designed at a symposium in South Africa for "preventing recruitment of children, demobilising child soldiers and helping them to reintegrate into society" (Cape Town Principles, 1997:1). The Paris Principles refer to international commitments to "prevent the unlawful recruitment or use of children, promote their release from armed forces or armed groups, protect them and support their reintegration" into civilian life (Paris Principles, 2007:5). The former have also obtained international recognition too, and the partners work hand in hand to observe child friendly human rights all over the world. This means that a combination of these two definitions can encourage not only reintegration support to ex-abductees, but also to children born in captivity. There is a vast body of literature on reintegration of ex-abductees in general (for example see Wessells, 2006; Honwana, 2006; McKay and Mazurana, 2004; Coulter, 2009 and Mæland, 2010). "Former child soldiers are addressed within a broader approach of children affected by war" (Tonheim, 2010:15).

When referring to former girl soldiers in general, research reveals several concepts used to describe them which include: forced wives, bush wives, sex slaves, former girl soldiers, forced mothers among others (Tonheim, 2010:15), for my case in Northern Uganda, I prefer to call them *female ex-abductees*, because they were abducted when they were still young generally between the age of six and thirteen. Most of them returned or are returning home when they are much older. Some of them became mothers out of forced marriages imposed to them by the rebels when they were in captivity because even themselves, when they return home they do not want to be treated as children but as adults (see International Labour Organisation, 2003 cited in Tonheim, 2010:16). This could explain part of the reasons why they are rejected not only by the communities, but their families as well when they return from captivity. As noted in the existing literature, war affects child soldiers differently as there are different stigmas attached to girls and boys: "the realities that girls face within armed groups and within their communities do not correspond to the reintegration programmes developed both by international and national agencies" (Tonheim, 2010:18) and as such, this comes with a number of challenges to their reintegration which are discussed later below.

Although reintegration of female ex-abductees describes their terrible vulnerabilities across the world in the aftermath of wars, much less research exists on female reintegration (cf. MacVeigh et al., 2007; Carlson and Mazurana, 2008; McKay and Mazurana, 2004 in Tonheim, 2010:19). This is the gap that my research is filling. The stigma which they encounter in the bush tends to increase when they return home where their life quality gets undesirable as will be discussed later. The United Nations' Integrated DDR standards provide

that reintegration should include "family reunification, mobilising and enabling the child's existing care system, medical screening and health care, schooling or vocational training, psychosocial support, and social and community-based reintegration. Reintegration programs need to be sustainable and take into account children's aspirations (IDDR, 2006:3). Reintegration therefore is part of a bigger programme called Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR). This definition may be a big problem despite efforts to reintegrate female ex-abductees in the Acholi sub-region of Northern Uganda. First of all it emphasizes resettling them in their community of origin yet you may find that some female ex-abductees of LRA prefer to live in different communities where people do not know them in order to avoid being stigmatised.

When female ex-abductees of LRA return home, they are less incorporated in the (DDR) frameworks than their male counterparts. For example, there has been a "huge absence of females in official DDR programmes" (cf. Coulter et al., 2008; Mazurana and Carlson, 2004; Hobson, 2005 cited in Tonheim, 2010:19). DDR practitioners tend to work more on De-mobilisation and Dis-armament which focus more on arms with less attention paid to Reintegration. This could be resulting from the patriarchal tendency to perceive females as weaker and physically unfit to participate in armed struggle but fit for domestic labour.

Whereas male ex-abductees who are enrolled in DDR are often provided with financial, life skills training and material support, this opportunity excludes their female counterparts. This is also confirmed in McKay & Mazurana's research who point out that: "Practitioners and policy makers in the field of DDR often take as a point of departure the narrow and conventional way of defining combatants as young men over the age of 18 in possession of weapons (McKay and Mazurana, 2004 cited in Coulter et al., 2008:24). Exclusion may breed more traumatic experiences in female ex-abductees' lives.

According to some sources, female ex-abductees of LRA are supposed to sign an Amnesty Certificate as part of the reintegration package offered to all returnees including the LRA former commanders by the government of Uganda. However, "by signing this certificate the returnee admits having committed crimes against the state" (Annan et al., 2008 cited in Carlson and Mazurana, 2008:47-48) which sounds very culturally sensitive to the female ex-abductees who may fear being identified as rebels that fiercely participated in slaughtering innocent civilians during the war ignoring the fact that they were commanded to do so by the insurgents. The state may give them pardon but this may not mean that they are forgiven by the community where they live. Such circumstances may force most of them to "self-

reintegrate" which in my view may not heal the invisible wounds in their post-conflict lives in Gulu (cf. Hobson, 2005; Verhey, 2004 cited in Tonheim, 2010:19).

2.5 Challenges to reintegration of female ex-abductees in Uganda:

2.5.1 Fears of the community stigmatisation by female ex-abductees

The female ex-abductees in conflict affected countries in Africa are feared by the communities when they return from captivity. Acholi often assume that: "By staying with the rebels for many years, from the perspective of their families and communities, abducted *females* had become rebels too, whatever the circumstances of their participation" which may lead to higher chances of Post-traumatic Stress Disorders (Coulter, 2009:209). They are looked on with suspicion and distrust. This may explain the reason why the female ex-abductees of LRA are increasingly excluded from community participation and are therefore the most marginalised people in Northern Uganda. Chris Coulter interprets the fear of rebel female and "unwillingness to forgive and reintegrate them into society as a social inability to cope with the woman's deviant war-time and post-war behaviour" (Coulter, 2009:210). Most people are afraid of them because they think what they were doing while in captivity will be repeated in the community and this greatly hinders their reintegration.

In Gulu society for example, most of the female ex-abductees of LRA are perceived as killers which may not be the case. Finnistrom (2008:191) notes that: "A rebel background will obviously have implications for young women if they return home." People may feel conscious of them. It was argued in a research project on Bush Wives and Girl Soldiers that: "Whereas humanitarians may see abducted girls and women as innocent victims, their families perceive them as potentially dangerous" (Coulter, 2009:216). People in Gulu claim that female ex-abductees of LRA behave wildly. Elsewhere, research reveals that "people were more afraid of them than the men because female combatants' temper was very quick" (Olonisakin, 1995a cited in Utas, 2005:405; see also Finnistrom, 2008:191). The 2006 return processes in Northern Uganda registered many returning female ex-abductees of LRA among other war survivors. In early 2009 when the war was over, more female ex-abductees returned home than male ex-abductees. It is assumed that rebels could have released the former not only for the safety of their lives but their children too. Unfortunately in the post-war Gulu and other parts of Northern Uganda, it is not uncommon for female ex-abductees to be stigmatised and verbally and physically abused by their families and communities.

2.5.2 Psychology of the girl abductees (Extreme traumatic experiences)

We know by research, media and accounts of personal experiences that children born and raised in conflict zones are at high risk of dangerous abuse. Many children experience trauma during and in the aftermath of civil wars. There is overwhelming evidence around the world concerning girls who have been forced into sexual abuse by armed groups (see Keairns, 2002; Mazurana and McKay, 2004 cited in Fox, 2004:469). In Mozambique for example, Honwana (2006:84) reveals: "During the day, the girls had many tasks to do. At night the soldiers came to the tent and picked whoever they wished." The LRA of Uganda is not exceptional. For more than two decades of armed conflict between the government of Uganda and the non-state forces or rebels of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), children were both used as weapons of war and targeted as victims where females were heavily exposed as victims of targeted sexual abuse and abductions (Robertshaw, 2004 cited in Utas, 2009:5). This is confirmed in Finnistrom's extensive work in Northern Uganda about 'Living with bad surroundings' that "… female abductees are often subjected to rape and sexual abuse and to exploitation by male rebels of higher rank (see, Amnesty International, 1997; Human Rights Watch, 1997; Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 2001 cited in Finnistrom, 2008:190). Coerced sexual relations may have psychological impact on the victim of sexual violence for example they may get psychiatric problems that may take longer to heal. It has been suggested that young abducted boys suffer sexual exploitation from female commanders but there is no evidence.

Research also reveals that girl soldiers in non-state armies experience gendered child rights abuses which are most extreme while international legal mechanisms have little or no say with the rebels operating outside the rule of law or concern for human rights (Fox, 2004:468). It seems also that the Ugandan Law is currently inefficient about acknowledging issues of forced marriage inflicted upon female ex-abductees by LRA during their time in captivity (Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1996 cited in Carlson & Mazurana, 2008:45). A situation like this may give the female ex-abductees intense feelings that they are unsafe once they get to understand the importance of law. Such an issue combined with their horrific past and the ongoing rejection and stigmatisation may worsen their psychological torture in the post-conflict Gulu and thus hindering reintegration processes.

2.6 Acholi specific cultural issues:

As a point of departure to analysing the complex situation of female ex-abductees, it is necessary to understand what a child means in Acholi culture. A child refers to any person below 18 years of age in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the

Child (United Nations CRC, 1989:1; see also, Paris Principles, 2007:7). A child soldier refers to "any child, boy or girl under the age of 18 who is compulsorily, forcibly, voluntarily recruited or otherwise used in hostilities by armed forces, paramilitaries, civil defence units or other armed groups" (Machel, 2000:9). However in the Acholi context, a child is any person who is not married. I will return to this in chapter five. I have compared these definitions of *child* because both contexts are featured in my thesis. It is important to note that the Acholi contextual definition of child contradicts the international standards' definition. Female ex-abductees of LRA also do not like to be associated with children. Most of them who were wives to rebel commanders may wish to maintain their original status as mature people. However the Acholi culture does not value them.

2.6.1 Acholi culture, marriage, and reintegration

In order to understand the reintegration challenge surrounding female ex-abductees of LRA in Acholi society, it is crucial to look at the marriage traditions. In Uganda and Acholiland in particular, marriage is the most important socio-economic institution whose central role is to unify clans. Traditionally, Acholi lived together in extended families where every aspect of culture was shared for the common good. However, in the context of recent internal displacement, mass killings and abductions by LRA, traditional practices related to marriage have been gravely affected. Extended families crumbled during the conflict, survivors of war are scattered in different parts of Northern Uganda, children are no longer protected and active family or community roles are no longer practiced. Acholi people maintain strict codes of social and sexual behaviour. In Acholi culture, female ex-abductees are believed to be un marriageable because the community believes that marrying a female ex-abductee is a curse and for this reason, clans encourage their sons to marry girls who were never abducted (Bailey, 2009:33). Acholi people in general believe that female ex-abductees returned with misfortune from captivity that may harm the clans. On the contrary however, some Acholi men who were never even abducted often break this social code of conduct and attempt to remarry them based on their own choices. However, the possibility of break up is likely. The consequences of not finding a husband or getting married are perceived as a curse too in the local terms which doubles or triples the already existing trauma in the female ex-abductees' lives.

Marriage in Acholi is a source of wealth to the girl's parents who are paid bride wealth by the family of the man. Bride wealth may be paid in the form of cattle, goats, sheep or cash and the charges may vary from family to family depending on the girl's education level. Finnistrom noted that: "If bride wealth is provided, the woman's position in the social setting

can be secured and made certain" (Finniström, 2008:192). On the other hand, if bride wealth is not provided, the husband cannot be respected in the girl's family and the "woman's loyalties will remain uncertain and have difficulties in establishing herself as an unthreatening insider in her new social context" as argued by Finniström (2008:192). Generally, bride wealth is paid to acknowledge the efforts undertaken for raising her properly. In this case, it should be noted that Acholi parents whose daughters are a product of LRA abductions may not benefit from them since they believe they no longer qualify for a legitimate marriage that is morally acceptable and know they cannot get bride wealth out of them. Female ex-abductees of LRA live in a social dilemma for example; if the Acholi social codes exclude them, if those who returned with children are doubly rejected and stigmatised with them, if the community excludes them based on their horrific past, humiliate and despise them, how will they really be reintegrated into normal life? I will answer this question in chapter five.

2.6.2 Bush wives for LRA movements, and how this distorts traditional marriage

It is not uncommon for female ex-abductees of LRA to be without a feeling of self-worth as long as the community also perceives them as "spoilt or damaged goods and in a sense no longer marketable" (Coulter, 2009:227). It is obvious in the eyes of the community that they were raped by the rebels on top of serving as their bush wives for a long period of time. I will return to this in chapter five. They are thought to have lost their virginity which is highly valued in marriage. It has been argued also that: "Rape as a repression aims not only to create terror but also to damage the deepest values that sustain the victim and those around her" (Ibanez, 2001:125). Using rape as a weapon of war, the LRA might have sought to destroy the social fabric of Acholi. In a report compiled by Save the Children in 2005, it is argued that "if a girl has had sexual contact with a man outside marriage voluntarily or not, she is considered to no longer have value to the society" (Save the Children, 2005 cited in Coulter, 2009:226). However, it may be difficult to differentiate which woman engaged in such sexual activity since behaviours like these may be done in secrecy. Issues of sexuality are perceived differently by local people when comparing males and females. For example, boys may engage in sexual activities for a number of times but will always be praised for their masculinity. The Acholi traditions and religious gender norms maintain that "a girl should be a virgin on entering her first marriage" (Coulter, 2009:226). On the other hand however, many men may not prioritise virginity when searching for a lady to marry. A woman or girl may be married to a man not because of her virginity but beauty. Nevertheless,

rape cases continue to jeopardise the process of recovery of female ex-abductees not only in Northern Uganda but the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa and the rest of the world.

In Northern Uganda, female ex-abductees were thought to be virgins at the time of abduction and specifically targeted for rape (Coulter, 2009:224) by the LRA insurgents. It was also reported somewhere that "high incidence of rape of virgins 'was' being seen as a sexual prize and virgins being conceived of as sexually desirable" (Bambrick, 2004 cited in Coulter, 2009:224). This is a common expression that marrying a virgin is a blessing. It is an Acholi and Ugandan belief that "rape decreases girls' chances of getting married" (Coulter, 2009:224). For female ex-abductees who returned with children, it is a sufficient proof that they were raped by rebels. Those who never returned with children are assumed to have been raped too because some Acholi women are believed to have indigenous knowledge in preventing unwanted pregnancies. Those who may be interested in marriage after a return from captivity stand a challenge of very few prospects of getting a husband. The whole situation leaves some questions of concern: Can female ex-abductees be reintegrated without marriage? Do organisations (NGOs) take the practice of marriage into consideration? I will address these questions in chapter five.

2.6.3 Marriage for female ex-abductees who try to remarry, vulnerabilities associated.

Marriage is a form of security for grown up men and women irrespective of the circumstances they go through over time. In the Ugandan context and the Acholi sub-region in particular, if a man or woman of a marriageable age fails to find a companion, it may be culturally interpreted that s/he been cursed and it may cause him or her discomfort for the rest of his or her life. In northern Uganda, the female ex-abductees of LRA tend to remarry as a way of integrating themselves into normal life of the locality however the Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP) provide that some choose to remain single (JRP, 2006:2). Living a single life for a female ex-abductee beyond the age of 25 may be perceived as an abnormality in the Acholi context. However, this same perception cuts across most Ugandan cultures whose women and girls were never abducted but are unmarried beyond this same age. In addition, female ex-abductees are prone to stigmatisation and exploitation by most people in the community although marriage may sometimes not be a solution to their post-war challenges.

It has also been documented that marriages between female ex-abductees and men who were never abducted occur but do not last because in Acholi culture, they are considered to come from a poor background for either "willingly or not participating in fighting and massacre of

civilians" while with the LRA, and are perceived as "spiritually unclean" and that "marriage with such people could result in misfortunes and illness within their families" who are later abandoned by their new partners, family, relatives and friends (JRP, 2006:6-7). The authors of this report argue that: "Sharing similar experiences in the bush makes marriage between the formerly abducted socially easier" (JRP, 2006:7). The female and male ex-abductees who may happen to remarry may possibly understand each other and their union may be sustainable. On the contrary, some male ex-abductees may not be interested in their female counter-parts whom they had witnessed being indiscriminately sexually abused by countless rebels. According to Mazuran's and Carlson's research findings, even if female ex-abductees of LRA may choose to remarry their former bush husbands some of whom the government of Uganda has granted amnesty, the Acholi customary law does not accord the former legal ability to claim either the children born in captivity or their mothers as wives again (Carlson and Mazurana, 2008:53). Such sensitive circumstances provide little space for resilience and continue to put female ex-abductees in more vulnerable positions and may lead to serious difficulty in their reintegration.

2.7 Summary

It is important to note that, it is not a guarantee that female ex-abductees have to get remarried in order to be reintegrated but as a cultural institution, it should be addressed in the reintegration programmes. Reintegration of female ex-abductees is not only a Ugandan challenge. It cuts across the whole world. Reintegration and humanitarian organisations are working very hard to re-shape the fundamentally broken lives as in the case of Acholi sub-region of Northern Uganda but with many invisible obstacles. My research contributes to the body of knowledge available on the reintegration of female ex-abductees and most importantly highlights their gender and cultural-specific situations both during and in the post-conflict setting, explores the depth of challenges and filling gaps that could be roadblocks towards their appropriate reintegration in communities of return. In the next chapter, I describe how I went about the research.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the qualitative methodological issues employed during fieldwork on the 'Reintegration of the female ex-abductees of the Lord's Resistance Army' in Gulu of Northern Uganda such as: study area, means and techniques of data collection and field reflections.

3.2 Why Gulu?

My motivation to write about Gulu of Northern Uganda was based on my former experience (May, June and July 2009) in the region as a research assistant. I happened to join a team of researchers, conducting research for Makerere University Institute of Social Research on behalf of the Ugandan Ministry of Education and Sports, on the 'Teacher-pupil performance in the Universal Primary Education (UPE) Schools of Uganda focusing on Northern Uganda, Karamoja and West Nile UPE schools'. That was two months after the civil war between the LRA and the government of Uganda. As I was inspecting some of the primary schools in the region, I would find some children, especially girls, sleeping in the bushes surrounding the schools. It kept disturbing my heart for quite long and so while a student at the Centre for Peace studies the following year, when I was considering my research topic for my Master's Thesis, I decided to carry out an investigation on the reintegration of female ex-abductees of the Lord's Resistance Army of Northern Uganda. I focused on Gulu district because it was heavily affected by the LRA more than any other district in the region.

3.3 Fieldwork Context (the Acholi people)

In order to grasp how the Acholi communities receive and support reintegration of female ex-abductees of LRA in Gulu, it is important to know about the Acholi people, where they dwell, their customary leadership, their beliefs and practices. Acholi are an ethnic group of people who inhabit predominantly the districts of Gulu, Kitgum, Pader and Amuru in Northern Uganda as shown in Appendix 1. This region is called Acholi-land. During my fieldwork, I had an informal meeting with one of the Acholi clan chiefs "Rwoti" who told me that Acholi-land is divided into two strong clans, Bwobo and Lamogi, with several clan leaders whose chiefs are referred to as Rwodi (plural of Rwoti). He also said that these two clans have an overall leader to whom they report called the Paramount Chief (overseer of all the clans). The role of the clan leaders is to mobilise the people for cultural ceremonies aimed

at stabilizing and unifying their clans. In the process of reintegrating ex-abductees and females in particular, they have the power to arrange cleansing rituals such as "stepping on eggs." I will return to this in chapter five. This ritual is performed in order to re-accept ex-abductees into the community as a way of appeasing the spirits so that war survivors and clan members can co-exist without bad omen.

The chief also told me that Acholi believe in two types of super natural beings: the "Jok" (spirit or power) and the "Jok-kene" (Supreme Being). The latter is that God who lives in heaven and has nothing to do with the daily lives of Acholi but lives among them. However, the former is the deity who is said to do both good and evil. For example, the horrific past experiences of female ex-abductees such as forced marriage to rebel commanders, sexual violence, forced killings, giving birth in the bush are thought to anger spirits who in turn punish both the abused people and their clans. This context is important to understanding the situation I was researching.

The war gravely devastated Acholi communities, turning populations into Internally Displaced Persons who stayed several years in camps and have recently returned to their villages in large numbers. They are really struggling to survive. Above all, most people in Gulu and other parts of Northern Uganda are suspicious of new non-Acholi black people entering their homeland due to the previous and current political situation. White people coming to Gulu are not likely to be associated with rebel activities but humanitarian aid. It is very easy to identify people of different ethnic backgrounds from Acholi by our physical characteristics which makes it sensitive for black non-Acholi to research about the inhabitants. This situation required me to negotiate my presence there, and it influenced the way I carried out fieldwork. Despite this unfavourable condition, Acholi are very sociable and, are very well known for their great hospitality.

3.4 Data collection techniques:

I worked through four organisations, which are presented in chapter five. The major techniques I used were Participant Observation and Interviews. I also used sampling procedure, explored the advantage of my affiliation status and discussed ethical challenges and methodological considerations.

3.4.1 Participant Observation

Influenced by the work of Spradley James on *Participant observation*, I chose to do an ethnographic field study of gathering data as the best technique for understanding the

complex social arena of the female ex-abductees of LRA from the "native" point of view, or the "emic view" (the insider view of the community) (Pike, 1957 in Franklin, 2009:1). It involves face to face, in-depth interaction between the researcher and the interviewees and therefore gives room for a holistic understanding of the latter. Pike uses two accounts, "emic and etic (outsider) *perspectives* as two ways to view the same thing resulting in two ways to describe it" which are equally necessary in participant observation (Pike, 1957 in Franklin, 2009:1). The native participant has one view, the emic and it may be different from that of the researcher. The 'etic' account is the outsider view and is used by the participant observer to understand behaviour from an outside perspective. The researcher must use the etic or scientific view based on training to interpret or construct meaning to the emic stories obtained from his/her informants. Participant observation means participating in the daily activities for example fetching water, cooking, sharing meals among others. Spradley (1980:33) reminds that:

> "You will begin by broad descriptive observations, trying to get an overview of the social situation and what goes on there. Then, after recording and analysing your initial data, you will narrow your research and make *focussed* observations. Finally, after more analysis and repeated observations in the field, you will be able to narrow your investigation still further to make *selective* observations."

Observation involves only use of the naked eye in studying a social phenomenon. However, observations alone may not breed reliable information if the researcher him/herself does not participate in the daily life of the people he/she is investigating. One must feel their social experience and contextually understand how and why they behave the way they do. As a participant observer, one may interpret the possible 'emic' or subjective narratives of the informants. Participant observation should not only involve observation but participation as well.

I conducted participant observation in the community. During fieldwork, I rented a hut in the community where I lived for two months. Living in the community was also of great importance towards creation of more rapport with the community members. I found that children shared my great passion for music and when I returned from fieldwork each day, I found more than ten children waiting for me at my hut so that I would entertain them with my mouth organ. On weekends, I received many children and youths coming to visit me expressing eagerness to teach me their language. Sometimes, some parents of these children

would invite me for diner and that paved the road to many informal conversations where I gained a deeper understanding of the Acholi social life. Reflecting on my role as a researcher, I resorted to being reflexive in the Acholi communities I interacted with. The argument is that: "To be reflexive, rather than simply reflective about the collective self, one must achieve the sense of distancing from self" (Fernandez, 1980 cited in Ohnuk-Tierney, 1984:584). Researchers from different cultural backgrounds need to balance their conflicting differences whenever they encounter other cultures. I was very flexible and could go along with almost all the categories of people in the community. I finally found myself in a situation where almost each and every person wanted to associate with me.

Spradley (1980:33) suggests that: "By participant observation, you will observe the activities of the people, physical characteristics of the social situation and what it feels like to be part of the scene." A researcher may pay attention to the social details during participant observation in order to acquire firsthand information from the informants. The advantages of the method I chose is that participant observation permitted me to easily enter into the social situation by reducing the resistance of group members. In the two months of ethnographic research in Gulu, I was able to observe the Acholi values, norms, habits and conflicts attributed to the female ex-abductees of the LRA and other cultural aspects associated with them. The technique also helped me to interpret non-verbal communication by observing the body language of my informants and listen to their tone of voice during the conversations. In the last two weeks of my field study in Gulu, several people in the community organised a farewell dinner or lunch for me; invited all their children and the nearby relatives and I set a convenient time for me, for each family invitation. These family invitations ended with a surprise farewell party at the termination of my fieldwork, organised by the community where I lived. I learnt a lot more about their social life during those days.

However, the use of participant observation also had a disadvantage in relation to being an outsider in Gulu. Ohnuki-Tierney (1984:584) argues that: "The ethnographic observation tends to become the 'negotiated reality' between the informants and the anthropologist, at least until the anthropologist's presence becomes less conspicuous." In any research setting, informants may change their behaviour once they confirm that they are being observed. It was obvious and very explicit that my research informants were aware that I was observing them. In the first weeks when I appeared as a stranger, they seemed hesitant to talk to me. To overcome this challenge, I kept a low profile and as time went on, the strange situation became familiar and my informants and I began freely exchange information.

3.4.2 Interviews

Interviewing technique was also used to supplement participant observation because the two methods of qualitative data collection go hand in hand. Polkinghorne (2005:137) notes that the "possible data sources are interviews with participants, observation, documents and artefacts." Although the bureaucratic steps I had to take to gain permission for interviews were time consuming, I managed to interview 24 female ex-abductees of LRA from the age of 15-26; 24 community members aged 28-84 and 7 NGO staff in the age bracket of 26-41. In total, I interviewed 55 people in one-on-one face to face in-depth interviews. I preferred to employ in-depth interviews due to "their ability to evoke unexpected information through probing" (Angucia et al., 2010:225) and they gave my informants a chance to express themselves. Hughes and Baker emphasize that: "if one wants to understand a child's beliefs, perceptions, reasoning ability, attitudes and effective experience that have relevance to the child's current circumstances, it is logical to ask the child to report on these self processes" (Hughes and Baker, 1990 cited in Vermeij, 2009:17). Interviews were focused on individual narratives of my informants.

The in-depth interviews helped to supplement the knowledge I gained from social encounters and experiences of my target groups. During interviews, notes were taken with the consent of the interviewees which provided a trusted interviewing environment. Despite this technique, some people in the community were not willing to reveal some important information no matter how clearerly I presented my project description, aims and objectives for that fieldwork. In a traumatised community, it is expected that some would not want to talk.

It is very important to note also that during my fieldwork, I used both open-ended and closed-ended questions. Kumar (1989:13) argues that it is "a common mistake to ask questions that can be answered by a simple yes or no. … they are inappropriate to key informant interviews." Such questions may not elicit detailed information like open-ended ones. However, I felt that the closed-ended questions were also necessary for traumatised communities to keep our conversation interesting. I was aware of a lot of other questions coming up as I talked to the female ex-abductees, community members and NGOs and I asked them as well. These methods enabled me to access tangible testimonies that will help me in designing appropriate intervention into their lives in Northern Uganda.

3.4.3 Sampling procedure

The sensitivities regarding my study and choice of topic influenced my choice of informants. I employed a purposive sampling strategy of data collection which according to (Patton, 1990 cited in Polkinghorne, 2005:140), means selecting "information-rich cases for study in depth … those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research." People who have experience of particular events can provide relevant information about them. For example, a study about reintegration of traumatised female ex-abductees of LRA would include participants who have been or are traumatised. The choice of selection technique guided me to include only the people who were of interest while those who did not suit the study purpose were excluded. Thus, selecting participants who had experienced the LRA brutality for more than two decades of armed conflict in Northern Uganda and some NGO staff who are reintegrating them.

3.5 Advantages of my status affiliation

My academic affiliation at a Norwegian University motivated reintegration organisations to help me. Most people in Uganda acknowledge Norway's position as "the most peaceful country in the world." Politicians and religious leaders have expressed gratitude to the Norwegian government for its peacefulness on many occasions. They are aware that this foreign government has played a mediatory role in most peace negotiation processes in Africa. Reintegration organisations helped me a lot by allowing me to access internet in their offices and most importantly treated me as one of them because I think they never suspected me to have selfish agendas. I felt comfortable interacting with NGO staff on my Norwegian identity without any questions.

My status as a student pursuing an advanced degree and the relevance of my field study helped me to mingle easily with the organisations, the community and finally the female ex-abductees of the Lord's Resistance Army in Gulu district. Students in my country are respected. People may wish to accord you with the necessary help if you are a student. Most people in the community and organisations were very willing to share their experiences with me freely when I approached them for interviews. Organisations helped me to identify the female ex-abductees whom I was very much interested in. Being a post-conflict environment, most reintegration organisations in Northern Uganda are working on the reintegration of the ex-abductees of LRA. This is a very sensitive issue in my research and poses a great challenge to NGOs when it comes to reintegration of these war survivors into social life. Based on my academic background as a student of Peace and Conflict Transformation, it

could have influenced them to allow me free access to data hoping that I might help them in capacity building and share relevant technical knowledge for the common good of the organisations.

3.6 Ethical Challenges encountered and Methodological Considerations:

Despite the willingness of people to talk to me, there were several challenges associated with this research such as political wariness, being a male researcher interviewing females, gaining access to informants and issues of language and translation. I will discuss these here.

3.6.1 Gaining access to informants

It would not have been easy for me to create rapport very fast and to gain access to the female ex-abductees of the LRA, NGOs and the community. I employed a 'gatekeeping approach' to be able to achieve my mission to guide me in the identification and selection of my informants in Gulu district. Barzilai-Nahon (2005:2) defines "gatekeeping" as "the process of controlling information as it moves through the gate. Activities include selection, addition, withholding, display, channelling, shaping, manipulation, repetition, timing, localisation, integration, disregard and deletion of information." Gatekeepers have the capacity not to reveal information to researchers. I had three contact persons three months before my field trip to Northern Uganda. I had told them about my area of study and interest in Gulu of Northern Uganda and so they were waiting for me in the area. As a stranger in a different ethnic group, it would have been difficult for me to enter into homes or vocational institutions providing life skills to these girls or NGOs and start asking questions however sympathetic I was. This would be seen as an invasion or a police case. Therefore, in order to establish easy access to the female ex-abductees of LRA, I secured a local council one 'introductory letter' to allow me carry out fieldwork in the area and to seek security within the community and to familiarise me with the local people respectively immediately on arrival in Gulu. I negotiated with my contact persons who introduced me to some organisations dealing with female ex-abductees of LRA. These organisations also acted as my major "gatekeepers." They carried out mediation roles by identifying and showing me who to talk to. Barzilai-Nahon (2005:3) also argues that an outsider researcher "can create and produce information independently, as well, without having to pass through a content gatekeeper. But when he creates the information independently, its significance is rather low because of the limited exposure it receives, compared to the information disseminated by the gatekeepers that control most of the audience attention."

Reintegration organisations have great control of the female ex-abductees whom they support. They can also influence the vulnerable communities to behave in certain ways. In post-conflict Gulu for example, a researcher originating from a different cultural background may find difficulties accessing information in the communities or target groups without passing through NGOs. My informants, especially female ex-abductees of LRA and community members, had no reason to trust me, a person from the southern ethnic group considering the politicised perceptions behind the 'north-south divide' of Uganda. However, they associated NGOs with humanitarian assistance which is "a positive force for civilians" as Paluck (2009:45) puts it. They helped me to identify these informants in the age bracket of 15-26 as I requested and introduced me to them through reception centres and their care takers but that was after understanding my project description and objectives. The care takers introduced me to the female ex-abductees directly. For some of the community members, I interviewed them in their homes and others at their work places. Organisations were interviewed last at their office headquarters in Gulu town. In order to create strong rapport with these three categories of informants, I had to hang around and live in the community. I managed to interact with all my informants on appointments in order to "avoid scheduling conflicts" (Kumar, 1989:11).

In trying to make smoother the process of gaining access to the lives of female ex-abductees of LRA through organisations, I became involved in a chain of several bureaucratic negotiations which were time consuming. The project officers were concerned that the study *must* strictly be for academic purposes only because as a new figure in their organisations, they were conscious of whether I intended to use their information for my selfish gains. I made my project description and study objectives clearer to scatter any negative suspicion.

However, the role of some of the NGOs as "gatekeepers" to the female ex-abductees of LRA raises important ethical questions concerning the consent of these informants to participate in my research. I requested them to first ask if they were willing to be interviewed but they told me there was no problem. The major reason they gave me was that these female ex-abductees were already used to researchers from different parts of the world. For those NGOs, there was nothing wrong but deep in my heart I felt it was unethical to interview them without their own permission. They simply invited them one by one for my interviews. But before the interviews started, I sought their permission and they accepted to be interviewed.

3.6.2 Political wariness in post-conflict setting

Doing fieldwork in a different ethnic group and a post-conflict situation created many challenges. Researching the Lord's Resistance Army and ex-abductees in Northern Uganda is a very sensitive area, especially if the researcher is from a different ethnic group like I was. It may arouse suspicion from the people being observed who may perceive you as either a rebel sympathizer or a government spy. The 23 years of armed conflict in Northern Uganda has left the people of Gulu conscious about the current government. In this case, the researcher needs to be very careful; as Holliday (2002:21) suggests, "qualitative researchers must never forget to approach their own actions as strangers, holding everything for scrutiny, accounting for every action – and seeing how they speak and write what they have done as integral to the whole." In the first two weeks of my life in the community, I appeared in a new social setting as a stranger but allowed nothing to be taken for granted and as time went on, I managed to make friends and the new culture became familiar.

Westrheim and Sølvillejord (2007:381) argue that: "When the researcher and informants have different cultural and political backgrounds, it can be extremely difficult to establish a foundation for mutual understanding." In this case, in challenging fields, qualitative interviews may seem so complicated. People at the research site may perceive you as a security threat. I was aware of such assumptions' existence not only before but also after arriving in post-conflict Gulu. In order to dilute or even scatter such assumptions, I worked through NGOs operating in the area and such issues did not show up. They also emphasise that: "Even if you prepare yourself for the unexpected, there will always be situations that are impossible to imagine and for which you consequently are not prepared" (2007:378). For example, most of my informants at one centre were disturbed by male ex-abductees immediately after interaction when they mixed with them again. The latter were suspicious about what nature of questions I was asking the former. One of my informants told me that when they went back to class, their colleagues forcefully ask them what exactly I was asking them during the interview. The fellow students could ask them many disturbing questions like: were you asked how many people you killed in the bush? Under what rebel commander? Which location were you hiding? At this time, I developed a lot of fear in my heart. Such a situation however, required some kind of immediate response from the researcher.

Bettinelli (2004:298) argues: "Everyone's aim, whether NGOs or not, is to reduce this gap by seeking and taking advantage of working methods that provide for analysis, frameworks of intervention and shared planning." Researchers often need to deal with the degree of wariness

towards them from their informants in any research situation. They should also be honest to their research subjects. This will improve trust between the researcher and the interviewees. Gulu is a highly sensitive place where everything you say may be questioned. As a researcher, I thought it was unethical to walk away without any answer to my informants' troubles. I was aware that my contribution in the thesis which I am going to write, may not help in changing my informants' current negative state, but it may help in future reintegration interventions. I advised my informants that 'if you are asked such questions by your fellow students, you simply tell them that he is doing a research which may have a positive impact in our lives.' I think it worked because, since then, I never again experienced a problem of this nature from my next informants at the centre. My previous informants told me the next day they were not disturbed again and most of the students became my friends since that day and the fear ran away from my heart.

3.6.3 Male researcher interviewing females

After gaining access to female ex-abductees of the LRA, getting them to talk with me, a male researcher coming from outside their culture was also another sensitive issue to deal with. Before beginning the first interview each day of my fieldwork, I made some considerations to promote their privacy and the safety of both of us. One was: seeking to hold the interview in open grounds in order to avoid any negative perceptions from staff or fellow students and community members; I also paid attention to the sitting arrangement and organised them in such a way that I did not directly establish eye contact with my informants to prevent them from being shy. Then, I invited them one-by-one for the interview. I dressed in simple clothes every day to appear at the same level with my informants. Each interview took a period of either one hour or one hour and 30 minutes and each informant was interviewed only once.

Kumar (1989:12) argues: "Brief preliminary talks can make the respondent comfortable, especially when the interviewer comes from a different culture." I am aware that very honest dialogue requires the creation of a secure environment for sensitive conversations to succeed. In dealing with this challenge, before I started asking each of my informants, I made sure with the help of my translator that she built trust in me by sharing with her four important things: (1) The major purpose of this study is to enable me pursue my Masters' studies but we hope also the information you will give me may help reintegration organisations to be able to raise female ex-abductees' voices in northern Uganda. (2) The reason for not interviewing all female ex-abductees at once is to avoid possible rumours because one of you might reveal your secrets to her friends or community members whom you may not trust. (3) Keeping your

information confidential is very crucial. It should be only between me, the translator and you. (4) I will make your names anonymous for the purposes of protecting your identity. No one who will read my book should know who said what. According to my observation, these preliminary talks caused my informants to nod their heads and smile. The importance of anonymity is "for preventing hostile authorities or groups from tracing sensitive information to individual sources" (Norman, 2009:81). It must be the researcher's role to protect both privacy and the identity of his/her informants. Immediately after this preliminary talk, we proceeded to the factual questions.

Above all, the type of questions I selected were very simple and not concrete simply because the level of English language understanding of my informants was very low. Being a male interviewer far away from their culture scattered any possible suspicion that I could reveal their stories to the rest of the community members in Gulu knowing I would soon quit the place once my mission was accomplished.

Sensitive issues are not easy to research. "For traumatised individuals and groups, researchers may inadvertently re-open wounds by probing into areas respondents may not wish to talk about" (Goodhand, 2000:14). Research questions may lead a researcher into implicit matters the informants may not be willing to talk about. Opening the wounds of my key informants was an issue of primary concern. It is the same experience from Wessells' view point that: "The sense of difference for the former child soldiers, together with their stigmatisation as "rebels," "bush wives" or "troublemakers" makes transition to civilian life a very rocky road" (Wessells, 2006:182). Research on female ex-abductees may at times re-traumatise them leading to painful memories. It is a researcher's role to know how to deal with the emotions of his/her informants. Norman (2009:84) argues: "Individuals who have been directly involved in conflict as either participants or victims of violence may still be suffering from trauma at the time of research." Painful memories may take longer to heal. All the female ex-abductees I interviewed in Gulu had encountered horrific experiences with rebels during the war. Most of them shed tears when I asked them what their biggest challenge in life was. A situation like this has got psychological implications. In order to bring them back on track, I felt there was a need to provide a perspective for them to regain their grip. I maintained awareness of their fragile state. I was respectful, sympathetic and sensitive but allowed them to cry and show emotions. I responded with encouraging words. In every case, we were able to continue the interview. They seemed to want to continue talking to me at the end of the interview. One of my informants told me after comforting her from crying that: 'At least for

you, you encourage us. I am happy that if this information we are giving you is going to be published, it may send a message to peace advocates all over the world to intervene properly in our lives even if they do not help me.' This was an advantage for me since I managed to capture the sensitive and first hand testimonies from my informants.

3.6.4 Issues of language and translation

Ohnuki-Tierney (1984:585) argues: "The effect of the presence of an anthropologist differs greatly between native and non-native anthropologist". Native anthropologists/researchers may fit well in their communities and understand most their sensitivities hidden from an outsider researcher. Although I was a Ugandan doing fieldwork in Uganda, I was a cultural outsider in Gulu district, Northern Uganda. I did not speak the local language of the area and besides, I was from a different ethnic group from the south western Uganda, Bantu in particular. What is more, this is where the incumbent president who is also unpopular in Acholi-land also comes from. Westrheim & Sølvillejord (2007:376) reveal that: "When the meeting between the researcher and informants entails co-constructing inter-cultural meaning, there will always emerge a zone for deliberation where the researcher and informants struggle to understand each other." When the researcher does not speak the local language of the area, it may become difficult to access information from his informants. For my case, the need for a translator in most interviews was necessary to find out how female ex-abductees of LRA act, feel, mean and think about their experiences in the post-conflict Gulu. Therefore, in order to speak with them, most of whom did not know English, I requested some people in the NGOs to help me identify female translators. I felt that my informants would open up to share with me their sensitive stories more openly with a female than with a male translator. Girls everywhere may have their own private issues which they do not want to reveal to the members of the opposite sex. I did not need a translator to interview either the community members or NGO staff because they could communicate well in English with me. For all NGO I worked through, I emphasised to my translators to translate verbatim (to tell me the exact words of my informants). However, there were some differences in approach. Translation in some cases was/is not without disadvantages.

In organisation A, I identified two female translators because of the setting in which I accessed the female ex-abductees. However, there was a difference in translation between these two translators. One of them seemed to have a previous experience in translating because she would understand my questions and interest very quickly. To the other one, I could work more to explain and simplify my questions and suggestions in order to bring her

back on track. Another difference I observed in translation between them was that one of them would establish eye contact towards my informants (she would look directly into the eye) which made my respondent shy and look down. This affected the quality of data. In order to overcome this terrible situation, I would pause and request her not to look into my informant's eye directly … then we would proceed with the interview. In **Organisation B**, the centre administrator offered to translate for me. In **organisation C**, a co-founder and a receptionist of the organisation translated for me. Reaching informants in **organisation D**, I used complex methods but did not use any translator since female ex-abductees could communicate with me well in the English language. This NGO gave me a list of female ex-abductees to interview and directed me to the schools they studied from and I went there.

At **school V**, I interviewed two informants in different locations. At this congested school, the head teacher arranged for me to use the deputy head teacher's office to conduct interviews from there. Before beginning the interview with one of female ex-abductees, I shared with her the preliminary talks as I have mentioned already, then told her that just in case a staff member or student enters that office, we shall pause until he or she moves out. My observation was that this informant welcomed my conversation with her, with ease.

The second informant was found to be sick and I took initiative to visit her at home. The head teacher assigned me a student, a friend of hers to take me to their home. We walked there, it was more than two kilometres away. I found her brother in a rental place deep in the village who told me they live together. I informed him that I was sent to interact with her by the organisation. I asked her brother to allow me permission to interact with his sister in a few minutes and he did.

School W was a girls' fenced school. I registered in the visitors' book, sought permission from the security guard who allowed me in. I introduced myself, my background and presented a list of my target informants I obtained from the support organisation to the head teacher and she gave me a go ahead. I asked her if she could allow me to interview this informant in an open ground in order to avoid any possible negative comments from the staff and fellow students. She directed me to one end of the congested administration block. Classrooms were very near to the office block and the other students were glancing at us through the open windows. My respondent sat facing the staff room very close to where we sat and the teachers were staring at us. Then, I re-arranged the seats and asked her to sit facing the wall in order to prevent her from being shy and ensure privacy in our conversation.

I also told her before the interview that in case we see a shadow of a human being, we would pause and let him or her pass, then, we would proceed with our conversations. The sun was already setting in the west causing the shadow to appear backwards. At **schools X, Y and Z**, similar methods as in X were used. In these schools, I did not use a translator since my informants could communicate well in the English language.

Kumar (1989:19) notes that "much of the information is lost in the translation process." The interviews may seem insufficient to breed necessary data. It is argued that "… almost any utterance in any language carries with it a set of assumptions, feelings and values that the speaker may or may not be aware of but the fieldworker as an outsider, usually is not" (Phillip, 1960 cited in Temple and Young, 2004:166). I felt some of my translators did not accurately translate the conversation because they tended to summarise or analyse the answers, diverting from my request to translate verbatim. However, I would pause and give them direction as needed. Later on, I felt that learning to speak my informants' mother tongue was important for them to enjoy our conversions. I bought a kindergarten textbook, began training myself in reading and writing; and listened from other people speaking. I was later able to greet in the Acholi language and ask for food in the hotel. My informants together with other people felt very happy when I greeted them in their local language.

3.7 Summary

Gaining access to a post-conflict zone requires thorough preparations before any researcher enters the field. One should know who to contact and the right channels to go through and respect them. Post-conflict researchers should be aware of the possible post-conflict challenges and how they can deal with them. They should understand in advance that without prior understanding of research ethics, they may do more harm than good in the lives of their informants. Sensitive research like the one I carried out in the post-conflict Gulu require the researcher's knowledge of dealing with psychological problems. Gatekeepers must be convinced that the researcher's interest in their information and organisation is not meant for selfish agendas. In this way, a researcher may rest assured that gaining access to post-conflict zones may be possible.

CHAPTER 4: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a framework or a model for approaching and interpretation of gender issues concerning the "reintegration of female ex-abductees of the Lord's Resistance Army in Gulu of Northern Uganda." These females face systematic discrimination based on gender to the extent that one can use the concept of *apartheid* as a metaphor for understanding gender relations. *Apartheid* is an "Afrikaans" or Dutch word which means "apartness" (Palmisano, 2001:34). It was a South African social policy that was invented by their British colonisers [Afrikaans] in 1948 where Africans were excluded from political power, economic power and land ownership on top of being socially segregated yet they provided unpaid labour (Susser, 1983:581). In the South African Apartheid, it was the White settlers discriminating against Black people. This colonial rule created a negative legacy in South Africa, however, in the South African apartheid context, Blacks could confront their challenging situation by sharing their immediate emotional problems within their families and communities. On the contrary, unlike male ex-abductees of LRA, their female counterparts do not have this chance; one might say that they experience even more than the *apartheid* of gender both during and in the aftermath of war. Most of them are systematically stigmatised and maltreated while some of them are not only systematically stigmatised but also completely rejected by the community and their own families or relatives.

4.1.1 Gender analysis

This thesis is, among other things, based on a deep concern for extremely traumatised female ex-abductees of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) of Northern Uganda and that their traumatic experiences and vulnerabilities may not be appropriately addressed by reintegration organisations or the government of Uganda. In order to address the challenges in the reintegration of female ex-abductees of LRA, I have applied a gender analysis to help understand their complex vulnerabilities during and in the aftermath of war.

Gender analysis "seeks to address differences between men and women," girls and boys "including disparities in the roles they play, power imbalances, differences in their need, opportunities and social-cultural realities as well as how such differences affect their lives" (Health Canada, 2000; Reid, 2002 cited in Woermke, 2009:29). Gender gap (inequality between males and females both in public and private issues) exists in most male dominated

countries especially in African communities. There is a gap between females and males and this gap works against the former and against the reintegration of female ex-abductees in Uganda and Acholiland in particular.

Moser (2001:30) notes that "a gender framework recognises that violence and conflict are both gendered activities." Men and women can be affected by conflict in very different and unique ways. In the Acholi context, gender power relations are socially constructed where decision making power is traditionally in the hands of men. This may identify and explain the powerlessness, misery and exclusion, female ex-abductees encounter in almost all aspects of daily life due to their past experience with rebels. Babatunde (2010:1) clarifies this statement by saying that: "Within such landscapes of severe social, economical and political marginalisation and deprivation, women and girls were bound to suffer more than men and boys during and after the wars as a result of long-established and entrenched patriarchal structures and ideologies." The gender-based violence in most African communities is driven by women's and girls' submissiveness to men. Reintegration of the female ex-abductees of LRA needs to include gender analysis to understand the unequal power relations between males and females, the consequences of these inequalities on their lives and well-being; and the ability to apply appropriate interventions based on their different experiences, different perceptions related to stigma and victimisation in their lives.

Mazurana and Carlson remind us that: "Governments and agencies need to construct a gender-appropriate reintegration, based upon acknowledgement of the girls' multiple roles within the armed groups, girls' agency and initiatives, and the skills and copying strategies they have developed" (Mazurana and Carlson, 2004 cited in Tonheim, 2010:18). Indeed the gendered experiences met between males and female ex-abductees need to be approached and addressed differently because they affected the two parties differently. This is my strongest suggestion. Based on the Acholi worldview that influences and shapes their views of war and conflict "with cherished beliefs, practices and social structure that greatly impacts their interpretation of what is good or bad, clean or dirty" (Mpyangu, 2010:104), the social consequences of recent armed conflict may be a burden to most Acholi people. This can have gender-specific implications as discussed in chapter two and will be demonstrated further in chapter five which definitely require a gender-specific attention in the reintegration of female ex-abductees of LRA in Northern Uganda.

4.1.2 Limitations of Gender Analysis

Gender analysis is not without weakness. The argument goes that: "Gender analysis carries the risk of treating all women/girls the same, essentializing sex and gender; overlooking the fluid and changing nature of gender … and other influences that shape and intersect with gender" (Varcoe, Hankivsky & Morrow 2007 cited in Woermke, 2009:31). It assumes that all females are treated homogeneously in the social arena which may not be the case. It makes sense if one realises that "women who live through war and conflict do not fall in the same group *and* not only their experiences differ but also their connections to the conflict, and these experiences and connections determine their position in the aftermath" (Bop, 2001 cited in Meintjes, 2001:5). For example some females may contextually be given some favours at the expense of their colleagues. This framework may therefore mislead most policy makers and may also lead to inappropriateness in the design of reintegration intervention processes.
Woermke (2009:31) points out another weakness within the gender analysis that "less recognition is given to other social variables" which may also be important in reducing the vulnerabilities associated with these females. Other writers have put it that gender analysis fails to "comprehend racial and class divisions among women" (Marchand and Parpart, 1995; Mosse, 1993 cited in Riley, 2004:113). In the Acholi context, racism is not an issue since the rebel leader, Joseph Kony is Acholi and has been killing his own tribesmen. But we could acknowledge that some females may be discriminated against by their male counterparts based on their class, or on facial and other physical characteristic such as attractiveness although the favoured party may have no bargaining power in war gendered violence.

Lastly, the gender analysis framework highlights the unequal power relations and social boundaries between men and women based on the relations of dominance and submissiveness but "fails to provide men with alternatives to superiority" (Sideris, 2001:143). Despite its clarity in unveiling the marginalised position of women and girls in relation to men and boys during and after armed conflict, it does not set the way forward for very sustainable intervention and this may undermine policy measures taken to improve gender relations in any aspect of development.

4.2 Summary

I would like to apply this gender framework not only to inform policy about its strengths and weaknesses but to provide, analyse or interpret gender complexities and vulnerabilities surrounding female ex-abductees of the LRA. While building more efforts to address

inequalities in gender relations during reintegration interventions in their lives, it is important to note that no framework is 100% perfect in addressing complex issues. Policy makers should apply it with caution, and consider how it may bear possible harm to their clients.

The conceptual and empirical measures will help to develop a model by which female ex-abductees could be reintegrated appropriately. Although it is possible that gender framework may lead to harm when applied carelessly, by acknowledging and addressing its weaknesses during reintegration processes, policy makers and implementers may significantly reduce high levels of stigmatisation and extreme traumas in the lives of female ex-abductees not only in northern Uganda but the rest of the world. Gender analysis should therefore inform and guide all interventions in the reintegration of female ex-abductees.

CHAPTER 5: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF EMPIRICAL DATA

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present empirical data focusing on the work of all the four organisations worked with during fieldwork. I have outlined research findings and analysed data according to gender analysis. I discuss both quantitative and qualitative materials. However, my major focus will be on the latter in exploring the depth of the challenges faced by the female ex-abductees of LRA in the post-conflict Gulu district of Northern Uganda. The chapter also suggests possible policy measures that could be appropriate in the reintegration intervention of female ex-abductees in Northern Uganda. First, I will briefly outline the organisations I worked with; their commonalities and differences, and provide a statement of their effectiveness and problems.

5.1.1 Organisations worked through

Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) is the only International Organisation. The other three are local NGOs. NRC provides protection and humanitarian assistance to refugees and internally displaced persons, then reintegration of formally abducted children who have returned to their communities. Its priority areas include among others information, counselling and legal assistance; youth education and education infrastructure; emergency and food distribution and a durable solutions programme by constructing household dwellings, facilitating and monitoring voluntary return.

Gulu Support the Children Organisation (GUSCO) is a local/national NGO funded by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) which promotes the well-being of war affected children through providing psycho-social support, material and medical care, capacity building of communities, supporting basic education, advocacy for return of children from captivity, peacebuilding and family-tracing and reunion.

Invisible Children Organisation (ICO) which is a US funded local NGO provides different levels of education to war affected children in Northern Uganda and works with female ex-abductees in different schools of Gulu. Their areas of intervention are education assistance and are in the form of scholarships, tutoring, school construction and mentoring; and microfinance programs to help returnees and other war affected people in business.

Empowering Hands Organisation (EHO), is also a local organisation in Gulu. It is Ugandan funded, but with other donors like the Carnegie Corporation and the Australian government among others. The NGO was founded by a group of female ex-abductees soon after they escaped from captivity. Their main priority is to establish peer support in the form of counselling and guidance to other ex-abductees who have similar experiences.

5.1.2 Commonalities in the four NGOs

All these NGOs above share something in common. For example all my informant ex-abductees of LRA were incorporated into programs like vocational training and basic education, creative arts such as music, dance, drama and sports activities; and sensitisation on the values of education.

5.1.3 Differences between all the NGOs above

NRC provides information, training and legal support to Internally Displaced Persons and returnees with respect to among other things property rights to help them make informed decisions. GUSCO advocates for the return home of formerly abducted children of LRA, facilitates family tracing and the reunion of ex-abductees and their families, and provides material and medical care.

Invisible Children and Empowering Hands have microfinance programmes for money lending and helping ex-abductees of LRA start small businesses to survive on. The former also has a special department for providing scholarships to ex-abductees of LRA from primary to University education.

One unique difference between Empowering Hands and the rest of the NGOs is that the former was founded by a group of female ex-abductees of LRA while the latter was founded by sound professionals never abducted by armed groups. One interesting issue is that the top administration of Empowering Hands was/is in the hands of un-abducted people who seemed to be well trained. For example, I gained access to them through a Project Coordinator in beautiful office. Psychosocial training was given to the founders of the NGO purposely to help them identify and provide counselling and guidance to their colleagues who underwent similar experiences.

5.1.4 A statement of effectiveness and problems

During fieldwork, I found that these organisations were on many occasions trying their best to ensure reintegration of most of the ex-abductees of LRA into their communities of origin.

They have had success with both male and female ex-abductees. The fact that Empowering Hands was founded by female ex-abductees is a very great achievement. However, in the whole reintegration processes, there have been many challenges. For example, most of these ex-abductees have higher expectations which are not met by the limited capacity of NGOs and many more which will be explored in this chapter.

5.2 Research Findings

This section outlines findings about female ex-abductees of LRA who returned or are returning home from captivity and have been rejected, or who have been maltreated in various and complex ways, summarised in the following list:

1. Female ex-abductees of LRA undergo a certain social stigma that goes with having been sexually abused by rebels.
2. The study reveals that some female ex-abductees whether they returned from captivity with or without children are completely rejected by their families and the community and decide to live on their own outside the community, relocating themselves in nearby cities such as Gulu Municipality. However, a good number of them were received and maltreated by their families and communities which make them re-traumatised.
3. Female ex-abductees who have attempted a remarriage have either been abandoned, or experience continuous maltreatment and are later chased away from the family, a situation that re-traumatises them.
4. Female ex-abductees who did not return with children from captivity and are living a single life but within the community are at high risk of being sexually assaulted. Many cases were unveiled by the study. However, they fear to report such sensitive matters either if the abuser is working with the government of Uganda or some men from the community on the ground that the latter over-stigmatise them while the former would use their socio-political status to block their future opportunities.
5. Although some community members claimed that the marriage of female ex-abductees can be sustainable with men from the same calibre, the study reveals that some male ex-abductees/bush husbands abandon them on return and may marry even girls in the community who were not abducted.
6. It was reported that when female ex-abductees of LRA have any problems or are emotionally down, they prefer not to share their feelings with anybody in the community except those who have gone through the same experiences.

7. Female ex-abductees who returned with mental illness were/are viewed in the Acholi culture as possessed by bush devils and spirits, which they say are haunting them. On the other hand, it was also believed that these spirits can be harmful to the whole clan for generations and generations while most community members were found to fear them.
8. The study also reported that most ex-abductees and in particular female did not go home either for fear of community stigmatisation and retribution or fear of bad spirits from previous mass killing in some places in Acholi-land.
9. The study reported that most ex-abductees who receive psychosocial support in the form of counselling and guidance do not actually heal unless they undergo ritual cleansing. Traditional healing and cleansing activities in this perspective appear to be important aspects in the process of the reintegrating female ex-abductees into the local communities.
10. Some female ex-abductees returned with terrible health difficulties related to physical trauma such as eye problems, stomach pain and sexually transmitted diseases.
11. Some female ex-abductees reported fear of rebel re-attacks in the year 2011 following what most some Ugandans call the “unfair” re-election of the president of Uganda in whose hands most of them were terribly affected by the war, who has also been Joseph Kony’s enemy for more than two decades of armed conflict in northern Uganda.

5.3 Discussion/analysis

Gender analysis is a key to identifying *where* and *what* kind of inequalities exist between men/boys and women/girls with respect to opportunities, access to resources, decision making, rights and participation in daily activities. Empirical facts reveal that women and girls are often at a disadvantage because most communities are male dominated and based upon a patriarchal structure. In Gulu, female ex-abductees of LRA were either completely rejected or received and maltreated at the expense of their male counter parts in the communities of return. Acholi “social norms value men and women differently and expect different behaviour from them” (World Health Organisation-WHO, 2002:18). By virtue of staying with rebels no matter for how long, Acholi people believe that these females adopted rebel characters or they turned into rebels themselves. This past experience combined with forced marriage and forced sexual intercourse to rebel commanders and with lower ranking rebels tarnished their bodily integrity driving them into shame, rejection and stigmatisation in

the aftermath of war which challenges their reintegration. The argument is that, in order to address this *apartheid* of gender, a gender analysis framework should guide and inform policy measures that will define female ex-abductees as citizens and important members of the local communities, and improve their self-esteem.

5.3.1 Quantitative findings

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the post-conflict traumatic experiences surrounding the female ex- abductees of LRA in the Gulu district, and since I have a focus on marriage issues, it is necessary to quantify their ages at different events in their lives. I also draw figures and percentages of the challenging environment in which they live in order to show the magnitude of the problem in post-conflict Gulu. This information is summarised in tables 1-6 below. For example, out of the 24 female ex-abductees I interviewed, 14 (58.3%) were abducted from the age of 6-10 years old; 10 (41.7%) were abducted from the age of 11-14 years of age as indicated in table below.

Table 1-Age at the time of abduction

Age range (Years)	Number	Percentage %
6-10	14	58.3%
11-14	10	41.7%
Total	24	100%

At the time of return from captivity in table two, 9 (37.5%) were ranging from the age of 7-14; 7 (29.2%) from age range of 15-18 and 8 (33.3%) from 19-25 years of age. From above the age of 15 years, many girls are thinking about their future marriage prospects.

Table 2-Age at the time of return from captivity

Age range (Years)	Number	Percentage %
7-14	9	37.5%
15-18	7	29.2%
19-25	8	33.3%
Total	24	100%

At the time of fieldwork, 10 (41.7%) were from the age of 15-18 while 14 (58.3%) from 19-26 years old. Females from the age of 18 and above, who are not in school are likely to feel insecure if they are not married and people in the community may say that there is something wrong with them. I will return to this later.

Table 3-Age at the time of fieldwork

Age range (Years)	Number	Percentage %
15-18	10	41.7%
19-26	14	58.3%
Total	24	100%

Only nine (37.5%) returned without children while 15 (62.5%) returned with children born from captivity. Their children/dependants are also rejected and stigmatised with them as I will discuss in this chapter.

Table 4-Female ex-abductees who returned with children and those without

Category	Number	Percentage %
Without children	9	37.5%
With children	15	62.5%
Total	24	100%

Five (20.8%) live with a man in the form of unsanctioned or illegal marriage and 19 (79.2%) of them, whether with kids or without, live a single life, while none of them has undergone a customary marriage. Girls and women in Uganda who are not customarily married are less recognised in the community. However, customary marriages are considered socially and legally acceptable.

Table 5-Illigally married, legally married and single female ex-abductees

Category	Number	Percentage %
Illigally (unsanctioned marriage)	5	20.8%
Legally (sanctioned marriage)	0	0%
Single life	19	79.2%
Total	24	100%

Seven female ex-abductees (29.2%) revealed that they were received but very maltreated by the community. They were allowed to live in the community with their families or relatives but experience(d) continuous stigmatisation and, denial of material and psychological support. However, 17 (70.8%) reported rejection by the community including their parents up to the present day. They were denounced, never allowed to mix with others and chased away by Acholi community members. I will return to this later in this chapter.

Table 6-Rejected and the received but maltreated female ex-abductees

Category	Number	Percentage %
Received but maltreated	7	29.2%
Rejected	17	70.8%
Total	24	100%

5.3.2 Qualitative findings

The testimonies of the female ex-abductees themselves (most of who are re-traumatised), the community members and the NGO staff revealed high level of stigmatisation experienced in the post-conflict Gulu. Since most of the testimonies share something in common, I will analyse a few stories which are related to one another and delve into the real picture that represents female ex-abductees of LRA in Gulu.

5.3.2.1 Cases of complete rejection and those received but maltreated

High levels of trauma were prevalent in all the categories of female ex-abductees. For example those who did not return with children, those who returned with children and those remarried or unmarried. The cases of rejection are present and affect most of the female ex-abductees of LRA. When they return from captivity, some of them are often received and maltreated. Others are completely rejected (see table 6 above) by the community and sometimes by their guardians or families in post-conflict Gulu. When they were asked whether they are treated equally with boys or their biggest challenge in life, though some did not turn emotional, their faces communicated sadness in telling their testimonies.

Female ex-abductees of LRA who were rejected not only by their families but also the community were found to be living on their own and these cases were revealed in every organisation I interacted with. Sharing similar related stories, one of them told me:

> "Normally people say I am **dwog cen paco** 'an Acholi sacarstic expression which means returnee.' Even if you try to change places, still people follow you calling you a returnee. The problem is that they first welcome you when you have just returned but when they come to know about it they begin to withdraw from you."

All my informants who were completely rejected share this similar story. They are known to have a stained reputation by the Acholi communities. Rejection and stigmatisation of them could be products of their unintended past experiences in captivity. Being gang-raped, forced into marriage with rebel commanders, the forced killing of innocent civilians, forced sexual relations and pregnancies perturb and deeply trouble their communities of origin who reject and perceive them as spoilt. In the sample, 70.8% of the female ex-abductees were completely rejected by their families and communities and were found to be living on their own.

Calling the female ex-abductees ***Dwog cen paco*** and telling them that *they do not understand* are typical ways how they are verbally abused. Others included: telling them nasty words, calling them rebel names and associating them with the spirit world, a situation they said it never used to occur in the bush. These phrases have a lot of local connotations which are so humiliating. For example, Acholi people have a certain preconceived idea of how males and females should be like. Acholi people do not insult female ex-abductees of LRA for nothing, but rather they link their past to the stereotype. If one returns from the bush, he or she is perceived as a killer, bad and a stranger; he or she is not part of or integrated into the culture and this is the source of stigma. Not being accepted by either the community members or one's own parents, as Christensen (2007:77) argues, "expresses a dominant sense of social distance, rejection and loneliness." This was confirmed by my other informant who said, "they keep pointing fingers at me… even if you try to change places, they follow you." Having fingers pointed at one may have psychological implications. For example, if one is walking when people are staring at him/her, if this behaviour persists for a long time, he/she may be stigmatised.

As noted earlier, few of the female ex-abductees in the sample, 29.2% were received in the communities as soon as they returned from captivity. They live with their families or guardians. However, they are very maltreated and denied material care. As pointed out by Meintjes et al. (2001:12), "some women return from war determined to maintain their new found freedoms. They meet with a backlash against their attempts to redefine their rights."

They feel they have no place in their communities of origin and they experience the highest levels of trauma. The violence and exploitation or misery is extreme which makes them re-traumatised. Returning to the community is like returning to another traumatic environment. This is confirmed by one of Maina's informants who was quoted as saying: "For many of the girls, they were wives to commanders, and though their lives may not have been what some may consider luxurious, in comparison to the lives they now live they lived a very privileged life while in LRA" (Okello, 2008 in Maina, 2009:53). For instance, a female ex-abductee described how she eats leftovers when they remain or sleeps hungry in her grandmother's household. Most of them told stories of how they were/are denied all the basic needs and they attempt to survive by fetching water and washing people's clothes for money; cutting grass for thatching the huts of people who promise to pay them money though later alone they disappoint them or pay them less than agreed upon. They suffer psychologically. One can say that these female ex-abductees were dumped in the community for further enslavement.

As noted earlier, female ex-abductees who return with children born from captivity seem to suffer doubly. The latter are openly stigmatised with their mothers in the post-war Gulu because they are thought to have rebel blood and are highly discriminated from other children in the community. Evidence confirms that "exclusion of single mothers means exclusion of their children and thus another generation of unskilled, marginalized youth" (Mazurana and Carlson, 2004 in Coulter, 2009:235). Acholi have a preconceived belief that children born of rebels are troublemakers. Speaking emotionally, an informant said, "they stigmatise my kids." This could lead to perpetual stigma in the children's lives.

It is likely that the problem of reintegrating female ex-abductees can be perpetual and sometimes generational. The stigmatisation is not only affecting mothers but it is passed on to the children. This implies that even if the mother is dead, the children could still be stigmatised. This could explain why the reintegration of female ex-abductees of LRA into normal life has been very difficult. The community seems to have a powerful force of excommunicating female ex-abductees and hence blocking the possibilities for some of them to be accepted by their families. One of them said, "People tell my family that 'you don't stay with that girl'. … her mind has jammed, she can turn against you and kill you any time." Related stories were narrated by some other female ex-abductees supported by different organisations. Despite her being welcome by her family, the community tends to do whatever they can to influence her parents to reject her. The assault on their body (rape/sexual abuse) pushes them into shame and guilt when they return home. If female ex-abductees could be

helped to gain their place as equal members of society, it could lead to their resilience and scatter stigma. I call upon for interventions based on changing the unconscious deep-seated community attitudes that female ex-abductees are useless. This could be effective by sensitising community members and convincing them that these females did not commit any atrocities freely.

5.3.2.2 Ritual cleansing

It was reported how ritual cleansing can be very important for healing the social suffering of ex-abductees in northern Uganda. Some NGO staff confirmed that some female ex-abductees never recovered from mental illness because they had no opportunity for ritual cleansing. In Acholiland, "social suffering is a result of the deliberate attempt to disrespect Acholi culture by targeting symbols of Acholi values and spirituality" (Bernstein, 2009:20). War destroyed the cultural norms associated with Acholi women for example: taking an Acholi girl outside of the community to be slept with is tabooed in their culture. Just as all events have their own culturally specific meanings, treatment for misfortunes can only be offered by traditional healers or ritual elders. A young girl in Acholi culture represents purity. When girls get married, they are seen as both cores of life through the reproduction of clan children, and are seen as a source of wealth through the payment of bride wealth where the whole family life is centred. This is why the sexual violence forced on girls by either LRA or government forces during the conflict were perceived "symbolically as an attack on culture" (Shanahan, 2008:20). It was understood as an abomination or taboo whose harm can be remedied by a ritual elder. The **Cen** 'evil spirits' believed to be haunting female ex-abductees and their children are perceived to be the result of breaking sexual taboos. Acholi believe that **Cen** can return to the person's killer, someone who witnessed the murder or someone who found the dead body and cause terrible harm to him/her and the whole clan.

It is obvious that all female ex-abductees could have witnessed dead bodies in the bush; most of them were forced to kill innocent civilians and other dangerous atrocities that require healing in the post-conflict setting. However, the process of healing emotional wounds of some female ex-abductees of LRA was complicated by the costs involved. One of the victims said, "In Acholi here, if you return from the bush, you have to undergo some ritual but they refused me to participate in the cleansing rituals because I did not have any money to pay them." This experience was disturbing her so much and she was terribly worried that the spiritual leader might send **Cen** to haunt her again. I will return to the notion of **Cen** later below. Le Monde emphasised that "Traditional Acholi ceremonies of purification *were*

necessary ways of helping villagers to accept the return of former *ex-abductees of LRA* in Gulu district of Uganda" (Le Monde, 2009 in Dybdahl et al., 2010:266). The sorrow which results from the deaths of someone must be reconciled or defused through ritual cleansing, but this does not mean that western psychological therapy is unnecessary.

The ritual elders in Gulu tend to commercialise the healing practices. Traditional healing is their source of survival or business. An old woman in the community explained that returning ex-abductees are supposed to step on eggs (prepared by a ritual elder) before reaching the house … to get healed from whatever they could have stepped on while they were in the bush. This may sound illusional to western psychologists but this is one of the rituals that restores inner individual peace in lives of female ex-abductees and makes them feel welcome in their communities. Shaw (2000:30) pointed out that "illness and insanity *do not come from within the mind* but rather are described in terms of invasion from the bush." If mental illness is perceived as coming from outside the body, namely from evil spirits, it strongly opposes western scientific psychosocial notions of an inner mental structure. This can resist the western psychosocial intervention in the lives of Northern Ugandan female ex-abductees of LRA in particular, thus calling for cultural sensitive adaptations. Western trauma healing may be required to supplement ritual cleansing. At the same time, I think if the government or NGOs could help to pay ritual fees to traditional healers, it could help most female ex-abductees to access ritual cleansing in order to aid their reintegration.

5.3.2.3 Remarriage of female ex-abductees who try to remarry and their vulnerabilities

Some of the female ex-abductees who happened to get remarried were also categorised among those that were received and maltreated. Research reveals that when they return from captivity, they "may want to return to what they perceive as the stability of the pre-war arrangements" (Meintjes et al., 2001:6). It is assumed that most of them were familiar with men and may find life without a man a difficult venture in the post-conflict setting. In the Acholi culture, marriage is an initiation from childhood to maturity. Any man or woman who is not married is still a child in the Acholi context no matter how old he or she may be. This is confirmed by p'Bitek, a former Acholi and Ugandan novelist that: "You might be a giant of a man, you may begin to grow grey hair, you may be bold and toothless with age, but if you are unmarried, you are nothing" (p'Bitek, 1966 in Finniström, 2008:234-235). For example, an Acholi woman can gain recognition or social status after getting married and giving birth.This could be one of the reasons why they rush into marriage in order to live the same way other Acholi women live.

I observed that it was mostly those who returned with dependants that preferred to remarry quickly. Why was it so? For example 62.5% of female ex-abductees returned with dependants and since war pushed them into extreme poverty without any resources to support themselves and their children, they may have also chosen to remarry so that men can care for them. It is noted that "marriage was seen as solving the problem of reintegration" for female ex-abductees (Shepler, 2002 in Coulter, 2009:219). A woman I interviewed in the community said, "they like to get married very first because they like to live like the way we live. … when men realise that they were abducted, they abandon them…." Female ex-abductees may feel that by bearing children with men who were never abducted could earn them social status when they give birth which is not always the case. In the eyes of the Acholi communities and NGO staff, it may sound like acceptance when they hear that such a female got a man for remarriage. It is rather the opposite. Empirical evidence reveals that their marriages do not last but breakdown and are commonly abandoned: "on return, I got married and bore two children; we separated on the ground of improper relationship." *Improper relationship* could mean illegal or unsanctioned marriage. They get into it without the consent of either their parents or guardians or the community. Her husband told her that she was not fit to be his wife since she was from captivity and that was the end of it.

Once married, one interviewee was not trusted by anyone in the family. Family members were conscious of her all the time. She explains: "whenever I cook food, they first give it to my daughter to taste. This happened for a number of times and later they began rejecting the food which I cooked." Family members could have thought that she might poison them, which is also assumed to be rebel behaviour. If a woman cooks food and everyone rejects it, it could be an indirect way of chasing her away from the family. Many who were abandoned by their illegal husbands felt completely marginalised: "I recall what happened before. … After they discover that they do not gain anything from you, they abandon you saying that we have **Cen** (evil spirits)," another one explained. Some men in the community may not be interested in them but may be targeting their reintegration packages such as the 300,000 Ugandan Shillings some female ex-abductees receive from NGOs as start up capital to help them re-establish themselves. When this money is spent, these females stand higher risks of being abandoned. These testimonies imply that female ex-abductees in general were/are excluded from participating fully in the life of the community due to their past experiences with the rebels.

Men find it difficult to have sustainable marriages with them. A staff in one of the NGOs also confirmed it saying: “for us young men who are searching for a lady to marry, … we think if we pair with such a girl, she may chop your head off.” Most people seemed to be afraid of them but could not show it openly. Although some NGO staff were not aware of the potential threat of remarriage of female ex-abductees who viewed it as a sign of reintegration achievement, some sources provide that various issues affecting female ex-abductees are largely ignored by local NGOs “though as with externally policy driven agenda *and that* many local staff are well aware of the complexities and contradictions in what they are doing” (Allen & Schomerus, 2006:23). I found that Western/donor policies do not include marriage as development issues. This situation may incapacitate local NGO practitioners from implementing appropriate interventions in the lives of female ex-abductees of LRA.

People in the community believe that female ex-abductees have lost their women manner or values cherished in the Acholi culture and may not be managed. Coulter also noted they were/are perceived as “spoilt or damaged goods and in a sense no longer marketable” (Coulter, 2009:227). It is obvious in the eyes of Acholi that female ex-abductees were raped throughout their captivity, and are known to have lost their virginity, which is highly valued in marriage. Any sexual contact outside marriage is considered to devalue any female. Despite these challenges, female ex-abductees are not left alone; they face continuous stigmatisation and are completely re-traumatised. In a typical Acholi community, marriage between a man and a woman creates complex social bond. For example, contact with an extended family may help to promote social cohesion. Unfortunately, female ex-abductees who remarry are later cut off from the families and they lack psychological needs. They are totally isolated. It is likely that they may commit suicide.

Living in isolation can be unhealthy for anyone. As noted earlier, marriage may not provide any means of integrating female ex-abductees into communities but instead continue to marginalise and expose them to risks ahead. Nevertheless, the issue of marriage needs to be taken seriously when designing reintegration programs. This could be effective by convincing donors and informing policy of the context in which female ex-abductees view the world. They are stigmatised because they lack economic independence. Economic dependence disempowers them, makes them susceptible to violence and disables them from fighting against it. Equipping them with employable skills could be an assured route to their economic empowerment. It is when they begin to earn money that their self-esteem will be elevated while the communities which presently stigmatise them will begin to accept them.

5.3.2.4 Post-conflict sexual harassment

The maltreatment of the received female ex-abductees of LRA was found to be very complex and highly gendered. I found that the unmarried female ex-abductees who live in the community stand higher risks of being re-raped by some men in the same community. On top of being continuously stigmatised, unmarried or single female ex-abductees of LRA are vulnerable to sexual violence. Speaking emotionally, a female ex-abductee revealed: "When they come for love and I refuse, they beat me up. Men normally come to rape me whenever my grandmother is not around because the house where I am sleeping does not have a lock." In all NGOs, most of the ex-abductees shared the same story. It is likely that most boys and men already know these female ex-abductees have lost their self-esteem and may not challenge them in the case of any problem and use it as an opportunity to abuse them. First of all, sexual matters are too heavy to talk about openly by females in Acholi culture. Female ex-abductees may give in, in order to avoid being tainted with rebel behaviours or beaten up because they have no negotiation power. As there are high chances of contracting HIV in northern Uganda, more people are likely to be infected as a result. It is probable that unmarried female ex-abductees may be looking forward to a remarriage as a way of saving themselves from being re-raped which might lead to their being abandoned by their husbands too.

Female ex-abductees may also feel they have no post-conflict security due to this *apartheid* of gender. The shame related to their loss of bodily integrity could have overpowered them. Coulter also reported that "women's bodies were perceived as holding the future, and any breach of the perceived purity of women's bodies in the society could have far reaching consequences" (Coulter, 2009:224). The community does not value them due to their past sexual activities, and the female ex-abductees have no self-worth. They feel they have nowhere to report to in case of situations endangering their life. Even some respectable people in the public service of Uganda are involved in the sexual abuse of female ex-abductees of LRA: "…my worry is that when you report a doctor who is working in the government institution, he will follow you and they delete your name on the payroll," one of them told me. There could be some cases in Acholi-land where some public servants often block opportunities for the younger generation should the latter report their vices to the authorities. This could imply that female ex-abductees know they are not well protected by the Ugandan laws.

Looking at it from the situational analysis "an analysis of the overall situation in which any policy or project is to take place" (WHO, 2002:10), intervention in such a female's post-conflict life should really go beyond the provision of psychosocial support, and involvement in creative arts or education to prevent possible harm.

5.3.2.5 Differences between reintegrating males and female ex-abductees of LRA

During my fieldwork, it was not my intention to interview any male ex-abductees but I learnt from our conversations with most community members and NGO staff that when males return from captivity, the community cerebrates their welcome no matter how much atrocities they may have committed. The concept of *apartheid* of gender does not apply to them; they are not stigmatised and can easily mingle with the rest of the community members as time goes by. It was also revealed that they are more resilient than female ex-abductees. I was told that cases of isolation, experiences of nightmares, loneliness were very common in many female ex-abductees who are blamed for having been raped by insurgents. Acholi people rarely question male's sexual life even if they could have been sexually abused by female rebel commanders in captivity. However, there is no evidence. This is confirmed by Coulter (2009:217) that "men's sexuality was never a sensitive issue in the post-war society" in the Acholi-land. On the contrary, it is expected that it reinforces their masculinity.

When asked the difference between reintegrating male and female ex-abductees, a staff from an NGO said, "the only difference comes when they are getting married. ...when boys get their wives, they settle with them well compared to girls who got husbands here." This means that male ex-abductees can even marry girls who were never abducted which may not apply to any female ex-abductee. "Settling with Acholi wives well" is an indication of success in reintegration of males in the community. Males may engage in sexual activities numerous times but they will always be praised for their masculinity. Rape jeopardises the process of recovery of female ex-abductees.

Although it was said by some community members that marriage of female ex-abductees can be possible with their male counterparts, empirical data revealed that even their former bush husbands may not be interested in them. One of them was abandoned by her bush husband as soon as they returned from captivity. This could imply that some former bush husbands are also interested in females who were never abducted. It also tells us how valued males in general are in the Acholi context. These narratives show clearly that remarriage of female ex-abductees may not be the solution to their reintegration into normal life. Where then should

they go? I have already answered such questions above: For example, through: addressing their immediate needs, empowering them with employable skills, sensitising the community among others .

5.3.2.6 Ongoing fear between the female ex-abductees and the community

One of the troubling circumstances in the lives of female ex-abductees of LRA and community members is fear. Fear is an emotional threat and affects one's mind. It causes depression and trauma. I found from fieldwork that most community members and the female ex-abductees equally fear each other. A religious leader explained: "… they fear the people here and the people fear them because people feel they may kill them. …" As discussed above, the female ex-abductees fear stigmatisation from the community. The latter also believe that the former have a military mentality and are identified as not different from their captors. This was confirmed by one woman in the community who said: "As a parent, I also fear to live with such a girl … there were others who killed their own parents when they had just returned." Acholi believe that 'where there is smoke, there must be fire.' Such incidents may never escape one's memory and can be so terrifying to the witnesses. The trauma in the Acholi sub-region of northern Uganda is a collective one.

Most of my informants were also found to be fearing the evil spirits or the ghosts of the people they were forced to kill by the rebels when they were in captivity. As discussed earlier, and as argued by Honwana, "non-Western societies place spirituality at the centre of life and explain worldly events by referring to actions of spirits" (Honwana, 2006 in Wessells, 2006:147). On the contrally, Western psychologists may advocate for trauma healing by use of scientific medicine. A female ex-abductee explained why she could not go back to the village: "The village has been deserted because a lot of bad things happened there. … people were caught … they were told each to dig his own grave and get there and then their heads were chopped off." What could have led people to dissert the village? Could we assume that all people were killed in that village? In Northern Uganda, beliefs shape people's behaviour, worldview and the understanding of illness and healing which also influences their understanding of war. The Acholi culture tells them that "the spirits of those who died violently or without respect will not rest peacefully until specific steps are taken. **Cen** or the ghostly vengeance of the wronged spirit will cause misfortune, sickness and death on the clan of the perpetrator" (Justice and Reconciliation Project, 2007:7; see also Annan & Blattman, 2006:16). This informant could have feared evil spirits which makes her extremely traumatised. According to my personal knowledge, most war returnees rarely identify

themselves to have participated in civilian killings due to the fear of revenge or rejection by the communities in the post-war setting. This may explain why traumatised female ex-abductees among other affected people experience terrible nightmares that continuously play painful flashbacks causing them intense fear and anxiety (see Herman, 1997 cited in Wessells, 2006:129). In this regard, both male and female ex-abductees who were forced to kill people in the bush may stand a higher risk of being punished by **Cen** if cleansing rituals are not performed for them and it is believed that the spirits will haunt them wherever they go which makes their reintegration a difficult venture.

Fear of rebel return was also among the worst traumatic stressors in the present lives of most female ex-abductees. They were worried so much that insurgents would come back to abduct their children and kill the former in another revolt against the Ugandan government in 2011. At the time of fieldwork, there were rumours that Joseph Kony would re-attack northern Uganda if the Ugandan President whom he has been fighting with for more than two decades would wage fierce attacks on Acholi people in 2011. These female ex-abductees were in deep fear. It is assumed that this year will be a turning point and the most traumatising one if the LRA might launch some of the heaviest human rights violations and attacks on the northern Ugandans.

Presidential elections took place on February 18th, 2011 when incumbent president of Uganda, whom Kony has been fighting with since 1987 won elections for his fourth term, for the highest office in the country. However, the opposition did not agree with the electoral outcomes, claiming that there were many cases related to rigging in the whole country. This raises consciousness not only for change advocates but mostly the Acholi of Northern Uganda. Although this may sound a subjective Acholi thinking without clear evidence, it gives them assurance of possible return of rebels to the region in the near future. Female ex-abductees have a big reason to fear because if Kony comes back to Acholi-land, most of them may be re-abducted in the belief that they disobeyed God's commandments which this rebel leader wants to rule the country with. It is likely that ex-abductees who could have escaped or been rescued by the government forces will be liable to punishment by killing. This is even confirmed in Nambalirwa's article, where one of her informants, a former bodyguard of Joseph Kony was cited recalling that: "The only thing he [Kony] was telling us is that God is going to punish this world because people have left the ten commandments. They don't follow. So times will come when such kind of things which are happening in Sodom and Gomorra will be happening in this world" (Nambalirwa, 2010:185). Those female ex-

abductees who returned with children born from captivity, stand a higher risk of being re-abducted with their children should the rebels resume their mission. It may not be easy to treat trauma that results in such terrible stressor, but continuous psychosocial support and follow-up and monitoring could rebuild confidence in the lives of female ex-abductees of LRA.

5.3.2.7 Psychosocial interventions and physical trauma

There is evidence that psychosocial interventions are found to have many positive effects in other war affected countries; such as Eritrea and Ethiopia among others (Farwell, 2001 and Kooper, 2002 in Dybdahl et al., 2010:226). These case studies may provide some good lessons for other countries to learn from. However, in my fieldwork in northern Uganda, I found that similar interventions such as: providing counselling and guidance, engaging ex-abductees in music, drama and sports were employed and caused substantial improvements in the lives of most male ex-abductees than their female counterparts. Male ex-abductees were found to be more resilient than most females. The relevance of such interventions is really questionable, why is it that these interventions seem less useful in the lives of many female ex-abductees of LRA? Females everywhere need specific attention if one is to shape their lives. Bop's work on 'women's gains and losses in conflict' reveals that "women run serious health risks during the conflict" (Bop, 2001:33). Losses can have long-term psychological effects. Some female ex-abductees suffered physical trauma resulting from rapes most of which concern physical handicaps and disabilities. One of them explained: "When I was in the bush, even when I was still very small, I was used as a wife of a commander, so now my body system was badly affected. When I sit down in public, I feel like defecating all the time." Physical traumas can lead to psychological difficulties. It sounds that she feels uncomfortable sitting in the company of other people. Her physical handicap limits her chances of socialisation. When her health situation is combined with the continuous social stigma from the community, her trauma becomes more harmful. Like the one in the next paragraph, she responds to this difficulty by crying a lot and sharing with fellow female ex-abductees who calm her down.

One's immediate need may block her/him from benefiting or sharing in the collective or available opportunities. It is likely that some donors of reintegration organisations are part of the problem. Some NGOs had special programs for providing scholarships to ex-abductees of LRA which was/is facilitated by Western donors. The scholarship involved a condition that one has to be promoted to the next class if the sponsorship is to be maintained. The female

ex-abductee who thought she was almost losing her sight, described emotionally how painful she feels when she fails to read her own handwriting. She looked very depressed and was worried that her scholarship might be cancelled if she is not promoted to the next class the following academic year. Her emotional expression, portrayed interest in education but can she really meet her needs if no medical care is available for her eyes? This may imply that some donor policies are very unfair. There is need for holistic interventions in cases like these. Policies should give room for flexibility to those who have scholarships. Since most reintegration NGOs depend more on foreign donors, the challenges of reintegration are not likely to end. I thus call upon donor policy reforms in Northern Uganda. This could rebuild the psychology of female ex-abductees in the long run.

5.3.2.8 What can be done? Common patterns of suggestions by the community and NGOs

It has been clear from the testimonies that remarriage of female ex-abductees may not be sustained. Those who have tried it have not been successful. Rather, they stand a higher risk of being abandoned by the husbands and the latter's families. They are equally stigmatised as unmarried female ex-abductees although both were received by their communities. The traumatic experiences of the "received" female ex-abductees were higher than for those who were "completely rejected" but living on their own. The latter could easily share their sensitive stories with less emotion than the former during my fieldwork and talked firmly as if there were already used to the post-conflict challenges. Although all of them said rent costs made them struggle in order to satisfy their landlords, it is likely that they enjoyed some level of decision making over themselves, they worked at their own pace and could do whatever they wished anywhere at any time. Whenever stigmatisation seemed worse, they would change locations in order to be relieved. The "received" or the "remarried" in the communities did not have this chance.

Borrowing ideas from a "bottom-up approach to development" (Niboh, 2008:4) which advocates for community participation for their own development, I found out that most people in the community and some NGO staff had some solutions which could aid the reintegration of female ex-abductees of LRA. For example, **NGOs** acknowledged: the need to recognise them in the community rather than continuously suppressing and abusing them; encouraging them to participate in communal work; giving them some material support; supporting them along their areas of interest such as in education, life skills or business, and taking both male and female ex-abductees as equals. Although these suggestions seem to fit

in the gender framework, they are likely to have been routed in the international problematic definition of reintegration (discussed in chapter two) which has no room for ex-abductees, females in particular who may wish to live outside their communities of origin in order to avoid being stigmatised.

I argue that since current reintegration packages seem to favour male ex-abductees, who are highly valued in Acholi land, reliable interventions should go beyond the margins towards helping female ex-abductees who may not wish to go back to their communities of origin to find places where they feel their life is not threatened. Recognising them in communities where they may feel uncomfortable may not aid their reintegration. "Treating both male and female ex-abductees as equals" contradicts the gender analysis, which provides that males and females should be treated differently to the extent that war affects them differently. Treating them as "equals" in the eyes of NGOs could mean for example that, if male ex-abductees receive counselling and guidance, start up capital of 300,000 Ugandan shillings, a blanket, a hoe, a jerican, ten kilograms of maize flour, admission in a vocational institution among others, their female counterparts should receive the same amount of humanitarian support. This would sound fair if female ex-abductees were not rejected or maltreated by the community or their own parents. As noted earlier, females are vulnerable to being exploited by males or other community members when they receive material goods or money. They need more support than males since the latter stand a higher chance of attaining parental and community care; have rights to property; none of them returned with children who are perceived as a burden to the families and communities; most of them have some power to negotiate for paid work in the locality and are rarely pushed into domestic work like females. Therefore male and female ex-abductees' challenges should not be approached equally but *fairly*. According to my research, there should be no "one-size-fits-all" solution or process to reintegration of all ex-abductees of LRA.

Community members also made their suggestions: **One** of them was the need for traditional leaders/ritual elders to call the female ex-abductees and talk to them so that they feel relieved of the spiritual punishments. This could be a powerful step towards mental healing since Acholi Traditional leaders are believed to have supernatural powers over spirits in Acholi-land and have greater influence in the general organisation of their communities. However, as noted earlier, since ritual cleansing is commercialised, it is likely this suggestion could conflict with traditional leaders' expectations. Money is their problem and they need it from these poor marginalised female ex-abductees on return from captivity in order to access their

spiritual services. The rituals described earlier in this chapter, are thought to restore harmony. Emphasis has been placed on the fact that female ex-abductees have to go through certain rituals in order to be able to reunite with their families and communities (Mpyangu, 2010:101). Denying them ritual cleansing, increases their trauma. Will ritual elders really agree to talk to female ex-abductees without financial intervention of either NGOs or government of Uganda?

The second was the idea of building them houses in a separate area where they could live with their children and was suggested by a man in the community. This could be based on a stereotype. Because of the perceived broken taboos, the community might categorise them as "the cursed" who should not mix with people who were never abducted. This could literally imply that female ex-abductees are not wanted in their communities of origin. Some elements in the community might be thinking that reintegration of female ex-abductees is impossible which may not be the case. However, building them houses where necessary could be a good idea. It may save them from continuous stigmatisation and reduce extreme trauma. It is very likely also that the community too, may be traumatised because I believe that parents and community members who witnessed their daughters being raped before them and the burning of their huts were very hurt. They also suffer psychological pain. Successful interventions should not only target ex-abductees but also the community in order to prepare the latter to accept the former in the locality and make the "impossible" possible.

The third idea was the need for vocational schools to admit many out there whom the community members feel life skills could help them survive. It may not be an NGO intention to keep them out of the school system and support very few female ex-abductees, which inadvertently results in hatred between them, causing harm. However, they may also be constrained by financial challenges which leave some unanswered questions. For example, where will funding come from?

The fourth was that the government should facilitate their integration into security institutions like the police and finds them work as security guards but not the army. This could be based on the view that female ex-abductees returned from captivity with military skills. It is assumed that police and security guards maintain discipline and are more human than the army. Enrolling in these security institutions would help them to earn some income to survive on and make them feel valued. I advocate for NGOs to recognise and utilise female

ex-abductees' reintegration suggestions by the community as part of the basis to design their intervention programs.

5.4 Other suggestions from the author

NGOs should respect the ethical obligation to do no harm at all levels of reintegration interventions. For example, there is a need to establish counselling conditions that encourage female ex-abductees to feel trusted, to be able to open up as they speak out their horrific experiences. Moved by my sympathetic response towards the emotionally-down female ex-abductee informants during fieldwork seemed to have contributed relief in their mental state as one of them asserted that I encouraged them at least. She was delighted and expressed her wish that if the information they were giving me was going to be published, it would certainly send a message to peace advocates all over the world to "intervene properly" in their lives even if they do not help her. This raises ethical questions: Could there be interventional difficulties? What does this informant mean by "proper intervention" in this case? It could be that the instruments and methods used in the intervention programmes are less trusted. Lack of trust of counsellors may hinder recovery or healing from the invisible wounds of war. Social distance between female ex-abductees and their mentors/counsellors may pose a great risk to their reintegration. It is likely that some of the NGO staff lack relevant knowledge on the potential traumatic experiences in the post-conflict lives of female ex-abductees. This is confirmed by Dybdahl et al. (2010:266) who argue that: "Most recommendations for mental health and psychosocial interventions in guidance documents are based on expert opinion rather than research. Consequently, interventions are being implemented without sufficient understanding of their potential benefit or harm." I thus call upon humanitarian interventions based on ethnographic research because this may be the best way to find out how the contextual gendered dilemmas or the apartheid of gender could be approached and addressed in Gulu and other parts of the world.

5.5 Summary

When one is talking to NGO staff in the Acholi sub-region of Northern Uganda about whether their intervention has reduced the traumatic experiences in the lives of female ex-abductees, he or she is likely to be told that there is a general improvement in most of them due to the psychosocial support provided to ex-abductees at reception centres and other reintegration packages although with some challenges. The reality which all NGO staff, Acholi communities and the government of Uganda know is that some ex-abductees are rejected not only by their families but the community as well while others are accepted by the

latter and that male ex-abductees are more resilient than their female counterparts. When they see some of them remarrying or living in the communities with people who were never abducted, attending vocational institutions and schools with the support of NGOs, they may conclude that they have been accepted or well received. Most people in the community who have not accommodated any ex-abductees may be quick to come to the same conclusion as NGO staff. But when you begin to talk to the female ex-abductees about their post-conflict challenges, you immediately capture a more different and undesirable picture about their individual lives in the communities.

During my fieldwork, it was my observation that the traumatic experiences of the so called "received" female ex-abductees were/are even higher than those who were completely rejected but living on their own due to higher levels of stigmatisation from their own communities. Female ex-abductees who have not attempted remarriage, whether "rejected" or "received" stand very high risks of being raped by most desperate men in the region. On the other hand, female ex-abductees who remarry are later abandoned leading to their re-traumatisation amidst continuous stigmatisation.

However the issue of marriage has to be taken into consideration by NGOs, empirical evidence has revealed that remarriage of female ex-abductees may worsen trauma and therefore should not be a solution to reintegration. Gender analysis models remind us that male and female ex-abductees of LRA are not equal due to the existing disadvantages surrounding the latter. Since females suffer the *apartheid* of gender at the expense of male ex-abductees, special conditions need to be created to ensure good quality for all and particularly the most disadvantaged groups (see, WHO, 2002:23). This may prevent social stigma, re-traumatisation and the general *apartheid* of gender. Several conclusions and policy recommendations were made which will be presented in the last chapter.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the conclusion and policy measures that have been recommended which could be useful in aiding the reintegration of female ex-abductees of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Gulu district of Northern Uganda. It is expected that these policy measures could reduce the discrimination of these females and strengthen social cohesion between them and the communities they prefer to live in, when they return from captivity and finally reduce trauma, stigmatisation and re-traumatisation.

Presently, there is no combat war in Northern Uganda, many of the former Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) have returned mainly to their communities of origin. Ex-abductees of LRA, especially females have returned from captivity in large numbers although others are still there. Unfortunately most of them returned to completely nothing. So the struggle still continues. Acholi are now trying to fight wars of trauma, poverty and other related issues. Female ex-abductees are severely stigmatised, re-traumatised, rejected and abandoned by communities and their families of return. This chapter outlines my conclusions, and integrates several recommendations for policy changes that could help to ensure the appropriate reintegration of female ex-abductees of LRA in Northern Uganda.

6.2 Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

There are several concrete ways to address this aspect of returnees' experiences. A number of measures in matters of reintegrating female ex-abductees of the LRA have been identified and are also recommended to inform policy in the intervention process.

The gender analysis calls policy makers and practitioners to be sensitive to gender difference when planning, designing and implementing policies aimed at strengthening socio-economic and political relations of war affected males and females of all ages. It reminds us to see how male and female ex-abductees of LRA are positioned differently, face different experiences during and in the aftermath of war, have different needs, different strength and skills and how these differences have different expressions from other cultures (Cockburn, 2001:28). Interventions in their post conflict lives should therefore be guided by a gender analytical lens with an understanding of the effects of war on gender to help the rejected, abandoned and

maltreated female ex-abductees recover their memories and be relieved from the burden of shame and guilt.

However, there is a possible risk concerning the gender analysis which policy makers should be aware of. Gender tends to be equated with women, where women are differentiated from men. There is a likelihood that the reintegration interventions would ignore most of the male ex-abductees' possible challenges which might re-marginalise them because gender analysis does not provide alternatives to men and boys. This is a gap that needs further research.

Empirical data has proven that the remarriage of female ex-abductees may not be sustainable in post-conflict Northern Uganda. However, the issue of marriage should be taken very consciously and seriously when designing and implementing reintegration programs.

Recommendation: NGOs should 'continuously remind female ex-abductees of the possible risks in getting remarried but also help them to find alternatives to marriage while still recognising the important role marriage plays in the Acholi society.' This could be done through providing them with intensive education or training by empowering them with employable skills but also help them to find jobs if they really need to help them. They may not find jobs by themselves in the Ugandan job market which is so competitive without the hand of influential people who understand the context of their problems such as NGO staff or feminist activists. Achievement of this venture will prevent them from economic dependency which is the main cause of their stigmatisation.

Article 1 of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) condemns "distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose on impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of marital status, on the basis of equality between men and women/*boys and girls*, of human rights or fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field" (Milani, 2001:10). Despite the past challenges while they were in LRA, this convention does not exclude them from protection. NGOs could draw on relevant international human rights convention and use their neutral position to pressure the government to punish abusers of female ex-abductees in Northern Uganda.

Recommendation: Practitioners should advocate for female ex-abductees' secure living conditions. For example if the houses they live in do not have locks, it will keep motivating

desperate men to attack them in the nights for rape. Sensitising them on the value of their rights would surely protect them.

My findings indicate that the Acholi community and families which stigmatise and traumatise the female ex-abductees could still be suffering the psychological pain resulting from the previous war. As part of the process of reintegrating these females, the community members must be prepared to accept them and this would be done through not only sensitising and providing them with psychosocial support but helping them to meet their material needs where necessary. This could aid family reunification processes and prevent stigma and scatter the fears between female ex-abductees and the community and ultimately encourage acceptance and inclusion or their participation in the Acholi daily life.

Recommendation: Continuous psychosocial support and follow-up of female ex-abductees in the communities of reintegration could rebuild confidence and comfort them in case of fear of rebel return.

During my fieldwork, I discovered that each of the female ex-abductees I interviewed had slightly different and specific challenges which seemed NGOs were not aware of, that required individual treatment. Although war affects men/boys and women/girls differently, it affects different females differently which might require different intervention and more individual attention from counsellors. This confirms Jones' observation that: "Even in the face of disaster, children in the same family will respond differently and have different needs" (Jones, 2008:292). It may be a policy mistake to address their different needs generally and may cause harm to some of them.

Recommendation: NGOs should 'address individual immediate needs' as the first step towards implementing appropriate female reintegration processes in Northern Uganda.

Female ex-abductees of LRA, the Community members and indigenous NGO staff in Northern Uganda have confidence in traditional mechanisms. Female ex-abductees who are not initiated into ritual cleansing are not healed by the Western trauma healing services. However, the reintegration of these females has partly been complicated by the ritual leaders' financial demands from female ex-abductees. Failure to pay often denies them the opportunity to be cleansed of the perceived strange and harmful **Cen** 'evil spirits' which makes them extremely traumatised.

Recommendation: NGOs and government should 'help to pay the ritual fees to traditional leaders' and this would motivate many female ex-abductees to participate in ritual cleansing while aiding their reintegration.

Some Western donors are part of the problem of the reintegration of female ex-abductees of LRA. The conditions attached to education funding which terminates one's scholarship if she fails to be promoted to the next class may not facilitate recovery of disempowered victims of war. Rather, they re-disempower them causing their re-traumatisation.

Recommendation: There should be reforms in these donor policies regarding the general activities of organisations they support. Effective reforms in one or two dimensions may not prevent deterioration in another. Donor policy reforms in Northern Uganda should have modest effects on the lives of female ex-abductees of LRA.

Reintegration as it stands according to international standards seems to be a big problem by definition. As discussed, it demands the reintegration of ex-abductees, females in particular to be reintegrated in their communities of origin. It does not give space for female ex-abductees who may wish to be reintegrated into a different community where the local people do not know them in order to avoid being stigmatised. Reintegration policy needs re-definition.

The likely harm in the lives of some female ex-abductees could be that some humanitarian interventions in Northern Uganda are based on limited contextual knowledge in guidance documents based more on expert opinion than research.

Recommendation: Local and International organisations working on the reintegration of females or ex-abductees in general should invest more not in every other research, but ethnographic research, as it provides the best techniques for finding out both implicit and explicit post-conflict dilemmas surrounding their clients in order to address them appropriately.

Recommendation: NGOs should use a bottom-up reintegration participatory process to work with the community and utilise their local resources in finding out appropriate interventions in the lives of ex-abductees and females in particular. Sometimes the community members have better solutions, and if they could be married into the NGO framework, together they would aid the reintegration of female ex-abductees and prevent the *apartheid* of gender in Northern Uganda.

6.3 Summary

It is important to note that since gender relations are socially constructed, they can be changed. The policy reforms I have suggested above are not static. In some contexts, they may be reframed with regard to a gender analysis framework for the purpose of combating the *apartheid* of gender especially in the post-conflict settings. Some changes may as well be made where necessary in the process of reintegrating female ex-abductees of the Lord's Resistance Army not only in the Gulu district, but the rest of the world. An important point I should stress however, is that the reversal of the challenges of reintegrating female ex-abductees of LRA could depend not only on improving their economic conditions but also on the shift of reintegration policies in both local and International NGOs, and donors towards the provision of social services that can meet the care needs of individual ex-abductees. It is expected however that these policy recommendations are very likely to strengthen the process of change in the daily lives of female ex-abductees not only in the whole of Acholi-land in Northern Uganda but the rest of the world.

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APPENDICES

7.1 Appendix 1 Districts inhabited by Acholi in Northern Uganda

7.2 Appendix 2 Type of houses in Acholi-land

7.3 Appendix 3 Acholi Hospitality (Part of Farewell Gifts)

7.4 Appendix 4 Fieldwork Questions:

7.4.1 Questions for female ex-abductees

a) Do you live comfortably with your brothers in your homes?
b) Do your guardians treat you equally with boys in this community?
c) Is there anything you do not like about your neighbours in your community?
d) Are there things you do not like about boys or men in your community?
e) If yes, what are they?
f) Do you have any problem with elders in this community?
g) When you have a problem, who do you tell it to?
h) What are your biggest challenges in life?
i) How do you overcome them?
j) How have reintegration organisations helped you?

7.4.2 Questions for Parents/guardians/Other community members

a) What is your main worry concerning the female ex-abductees in this place?
b) What do you think is the biggest challenge faced by female ex-abductees?
c) How are these girls responding to these challenges?
d) Do you think the reintegration organisations in this region are doing enough to rebuild these girls' hope?
e) What challenges do you face in trying to mother the female ex-abductees?
f) What do you think can be done to help in reintegration of female ex-abductees?
g) Do you know what happened to female ex-abductees during the war?
h) Do you think it is possible for them to be reintegrated?
i) Is there a difference between the experience of male and female ex-abductees?
j) Is it possible that these girls will get married?
k) Can girls live productive lives without getting married?

7.4.3 Questions for NGO Staff

a) What efforts are being made to reintegrate female ex-abductees?
b) What has worked out?
c) What has failed to work out in the reintegration process?
d) What are the biggest challenges to the reintegration of female ex-abductees?
e) How are they responding to these challenges?
f) How can these challenges be productively addressed?

g) How is your NGO handling the problems faced by these girls?

h) Do you think it is possible for female ex-abductees to be reintegrated?

i) Is there a difference between reintegrating female and male ex-abductees?