REINTEGRATING FEMALE EX-ABDUCTEES OF THE LORD'S RESISTANCE ARMY OF GULU DISTRICT IN NORTHERN UGANDA

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Abstract: **This paper 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, 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.**

Keywords: **Reintegration, female, ex-abductees, resistance, army and Gulu.**

1. INTRODUCTION

Uganda, a landlocked country, lies along the equator between the West and the East African Rift Valleys. It is bordered 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.

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.

The general objective of this paper was to state how the females who have returned from the Lord's Resistance Army Abductions can be reintegrated into reproductive, institutional and everyday life in Northern Uganda. Specifically, I sought to; describe the negative attitudes towards female ex-abductees can be reshaped, analyse gender-specific trauma in female ex-abductees can be best addressed and determine appropriate interventions measures in the lives of female ex-abductees.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Apartheid of Gender:

This section 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.

2.2 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 dominate 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.

2.2.1 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.

3. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

3.1 Study Area:

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. Four local and International organisations helped me to interact with female ex-abductees, linked me to the community and were also part of the research participants.

3.2 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.

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.

3.3 Research Design and Methods:

Qualitative methodological issues employed during fieldwork. Participant observation and in-depth interviews were the methods I used to capture all the field reflections.

3.4 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.

3.5 Demographic Information:

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%

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 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, "express 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.

4.2 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.

4.3 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.

4.4 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.

4.5 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.

4.6 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 contrary, 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 wins presidential elections 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.

4.7 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.

4.8 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.

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. CONCLUSION

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.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

❖ 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.

❖ 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.

❖ 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.

❖ 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.

❖ 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.

❖ 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.

❖ 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.

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